

# Western Cape

For five days and nights in February 2006, the fire blazed a 50-mile trail from the outskirts of Cape Town down towards Africa's southernmost point. Then, unexpectedly, the wind changed direction, mining workers and fire staff at the Grootbos's Private Nature Reserve stood no chance against the flames. Conference guests had to be evacuated before the lodge complex was completely engulfed. Three apartments were destroyed, and the five-star restaurant's collection of Western Cape wines was reduced to a mountain of twisted glass. So how come Grootbos's chief botanist, Sean Privett, is smiling as he recalls that dramatic night? "Hey, they were just buildings, they could be rebuilt". he says with a grin. "But, that fire was also a whole new opportunity for rare plant species to germinate and flourish. We found something like 70 new species here in the months after the blaze." Then, like a proud parent, he opens his arms to the dense shrub land around him: "With the exception of our ancient milk wood forest, which is fire resistant, you can say that all the plants here were born on the same day: 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2006". Sean, we discover, is not the only person around here who is fanatical about flowers. This beautiful stretch of South Africa's Western Cape, known as the Overberg, may be a prime spot for watching whales and great white sharks, but for many of its landowners the priority is protecting the proteas, orchids, ericas and carnivorous sundew plants which make up the fynbos and shrub land. Grootbos's conservation efforts began 20 years ago, when Heiner Lutzeyer and his son Michael bought the original 123-hectare farm, and Heiner started photographing and documenting its indigenous flora.

These days, the reserve stretches to some 1,750 hectares. And while the guests are treated to the height of five-star luxury, including what may be the world's finest view direct from a bathtub, it is clear that conservation, including a strong commitment to educating and employing workers from the poorest local communities, remains the primary concern in what the Grootbos website calls this "botanic wonderland". A stunning mountainous coastline, certainly, had greeted us, but it was not quite the explosion of floral colour I was expecting. Rather, it is unadorned and a green moorland like the typical of parts of Scotland. Can we really be in the heart of the smallest but most precious of the world's six designated floral kingdoms, species far outnumbering those found in the entire Amazon rainforest? Fortunately, in addition to beach horse riding and whale watching, Grootbos also lays on a trademark "flower safari" to introduce guests to the most striking flora on the reserve. And today we are lucky enough to have Sean and his battered old jeep guiding us. By the end of the safari, I have lost count of how many weird and wonderful species we have encountered, from spectacular crimson candelabra flowers that detach and roll along with the wind, to the orange-flowered and not at all potent wild marijuana plants. In danger of joining the ranks of the florally obsessed, I wonder aloud why there should be so many different species of plant here. Almost everyone, it seems, understands the fragility of the ecosystem here, and with good reason. One recent report counted the Cape Floristic Region as among the 10 places in the world most threatened by climate change: a predicted temperature rise of 1.8C over the next 40 years would spark a dramatic increase in the number of wildfires like the one that did much damage in 2006. The eco equation says it needs fire to flourish, but not too often, or it will be wiped out entirely.

**Q. Write and learn the spellings of the underlined words from the text.**

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2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

11. \_\_\_\_\_

12. \_\_\_\_\_

**Q. Write the meanings of the following words in the spaces provided.**

a. fanatical \_\_\_\_\_

b. indigenous \_\_\_\_\_

c. unadorned \_\_\_\_\_

d. fragility \_\_\_\_\_

e. dramatic \_\_\_\_\_

f. encounter \_\_\_\_\_

**Q. Answer the following questions based on the text 'Western Cape'.**

a. What event took place on February 2006?

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b. Was there any damage caused by the fire?

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c. Why was Sean Privitt so optimistic about the whole situation?

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d. What is the Western Cape famous for?

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e. What does the writer during the 'flower safari'?

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f. What is the writer's opinion about his experience? Is he fascinated by the end of his journey? Explain your answer.

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g. Is the Cape Floristic Region currently under threat? Explain why.

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