

ROAD TRIP

SOUTHERN AFRICAN ROUTES WORTH TAKING



And was there good sport
for her husband?

Built in 1840, Penhill Manor has been painstakingly restored to its former glory. Real Lady Anne fundis should stay in Pepper Tree Cottage (on the same estate) which dates back to 1750.

WITH LADY ANNE BARNARD'S JOURNALS ON HIS LAP, **NICK DALL** RETRACES HER 1798 WAGON TOUR THROUGH THE WESTERN CAPE, SPELUNKING NEAR GANSBAAI, BUT NOT SHOOTING FLAMINGOS AT SALDANHA. NOT THAT THESE TOWNS EXISTED BACK THEN...

Justin Fox



LEFT These days Nguni cattle graze beneath the Sonderend Mountains on The Oaks estate. Back in 1798 it would have been bontebok.
BELOW The Vineyard Hotel in Cape Town was once Lady Anne Barnard's home.



'Her party fired a gunshot at the cave's entrance to frighten off "tigers"; we open a padlocked gate'

Lady Anne was referring to, before giving me a tour of the house which also provided shelter to the *Birkenhead* survivors in 1852.

Irene runs an antiques shop from the front few rooms of the house, stocking porcelain dolls, Beatrix Potter books and a great selection by and about Lady Anne Barnard. She also offers self-catering, but was re-wallpapering when we visited.

From Brand's house, the Barnards made a gruelling, day-long round trip to a cave near Gansbaai. It involved two teams of oxen, 'mounds of sand above the axle tree' and an 11pm return. How times have changed. After 15 minutes on good tar, I meet up with guide Gareth Newton. Lady Anne nearly died trying to find the cave's entrance, her sheepskin coat snagging on the fynbos as she descended the steep slopes to the seashore, but we have the benefit of a spiral stone staircase. Her party fired a gunshot at the cave's entrance to frighten off 'tigers'; we open a padlocked gate.

Gareth explains how the Drup Kelder Cave was formed, gets me up close and personal with two different bat species and persuades me to take a dip in crystalline (and chilly!) pool fed by a freshwater spring – Gansbaai's backup reservoir.

Since Lady Anne's day, he tells me, many of the largest 'mites and 'tites have been harvested for their limestone and the miners deepened the cavern to make way for their wheelbarrows. We've got powerful LED torches but Lady Anne had to make do with 'wax Candles which had been packed up after my last party in Grosvenor Square ... Their tops had the honour of shining upon some of their Royal Highnesses [but] their bottoms should next illuminate the Drup Kelder [dripping cellar] at the Cape of Good Hope.'

Once they'd recovered from their spelunking endeavours, the Barnards headed inland. The Moravian mission station at Genadendal left an especially

strong impression. 'I doubt much whether I should have entered St. Peters at Rome with a more awed impression of the deity and his presence than I did this little Church of a few feet Square, where the simple disciples of Christianity dressed in the Skins of Animals knew no purple or fine linen, no pride, no hypocrisy.'

The original church was replaced two years after Lady Anne's visit (it's still standing – a white building next to the old bell structure) but the feeling of humble authenticity is just as pervasive in the much larger 'new' church. On an icy, misty morning we check out its pipe organ (the oldest in the country, apparently), do a whistle-stop tour of the museum, and enjoy an incredible lunch of home-baked chicken pies (R15 each!) in the gift shop.

Present-day travellers to the region stay in Greyton, but this charming Overberg gem was only established in 1854. Instead, the Barnards continued eastwards on the Ou Kaapse Weg. Although the rutted wagon track is long gone, the meandering Greyton to Riviersonderend road follows its path and its spirit closely. After 10 kilometres of gorgeous gravel we come to The Oaks estate, our home for the night and – most likely – the Barnards' base too. Although the gable on the majestic manor house is dated 1813, the oldest building on the werf dates all the way back to 1737. Amid these surroundings, we imagine ourselves back in 1798.

All too soon we find ourselves on the N2. The back road to Stormsvlei offers some respite, but then we're back on the black stuff all the way to Swellendam. This is all forgotten when we check into the Bontebok National Park. 'Bonte bock' occurred throughout the Cape in 1798 and the Barnards were one of the first we can blame for their near extinction. Lady Anne describes eating one 'stewed in its own gravy ... the flesh a mixture between Venison and beef'. >



Who was Lady Anne Barnard?

We know she climbed Table Mountain wearing her husband's trousers, but who was this intrepid traveller? Anne was a Scottish noblewoman and an accomplished writer and painter. She accompanied her husband Andrew (12 years her junior) to the Cape in the late 1700s when he became colonial secretary to the governor, Earl Macartney. As official hostess of the earl at the Castle, Lady Anne earned quite a reputation as a socialite, and her journals have given us a fascinating glimpse into life in the Cape Colony in the late 18th century.

Britain had just gained control of the Cape when the Barnards rolled out of Cape Town in a wagon bound for the interior, in 1798. Lady Anne was under strict instructions to 'write how you found cultivation, what fare and accommodation you had in your tour into the interior, if there was good sport for your husband, and whether he and you think the Colony worth the keeping.'

They opted for fast horses rather than slow oxen and packed essentials including 'a pair of mattresses, two pair of blankets, sheets, pillows &c, in case we should find a want of beds at any of our nightly quarters'. My family and I are following the same brief 221 years later – in a similarly overloaded vehicle.

The Barnard's first obstacle was the gruelling pass at Hottentots-Holland Kloof. Here – and in many other places – they were forced to hire a team of oxen to temporarily replace their horses. Even then, 'the path was so perpendicular and the Jutting rocks so large in the middle of the road, that we were astonished how it could be accomplished at all'.

During our swift passage over Sir Lowry's Pass – which was completed in 1830 and is less than a mile away from the old pass – we make a point of stopping at the viewpoint to 'enjoy the wide prospect we were leaving, where Bay succeeded to Bay and Hill to Hill'.

Resisting the urge to pick armloads of 'the most brilliant everlasting flowers' in Houw Hoek, we push on to Stanford. Its stone church and Georgian houses seem old but when Lady Anne visited there was only one house in the entire valley. After checking into The Blue House and learning how to stop the *leiwater* (Stanford's still-working canal system) from flooding the lawn, we walk the block-and-a-half to the 1785 home Lady Anne stayed in.

Christoffel Brand, the farmer, wasn't home when the Barnards visited, but they still enjoyed a slap-up meal and 'an excellent sleep in one of the tallest Beds I ever saw' – despite the fact that the 'shabby folks had shoved it into the corner of the room' in an attempt to 'save two curtains'. Current owner Irene Tomlinson shows me the exact corner she thinks

Gallo Images/Alamy, Nick Dall, Achmat Bookey



OPPOSITE TOP This was as close as the Dalls got to an ox wagon; Nick puts on a brave face in the Drup Kelder, a freshwater spring in a coastal cave at Gansbaai.
OPPOSITE BOTTOM Genadendal Museum is housed in an 1838 building that was South Africa's first teachers' training college; the bell at the Castle of Good Hope was cast in 1697 in Amsterdam. It still rings twice a day (at 10am and noon) – despite a massive crack, which makes it sound awful.



Reading List

- *In the Footsteps of Lady Anne Barnard* by Jose Burman (1990).
- *The Cape Journals of Lady Anne Barnard, 1797-1798*. Edited by Robinson, Lenta & Driver (1994).
- *Defiance: The Life and Choices of Lady Anne Barnard* by Stephen Taylor (2016).

Nick Dail

Bontebok stew may be off limits nowadays, but there's nothing to stop you from recreating her picnic at the mouth of the Breede River. Once you've followed the gravel meanders of the R324 to Witsand, you'll need only a 'sail cloth for [your] damask', some 'spitted fish, salted, peppered, buttered and roasted before a clear fire'. and 'a moderate Sip of Madeira'. The forerunner to Obies, I presume.

From Swellendam the Barnards took what can only be described as the scenic route back to Cape Town. The back roads to Robertson are some of the wildest and most inspiring of our trip and the final thirty clicks to Penhill Manor in the picturesque Nuy Valley are the best of the lot. As far as I can tell Lady Anne didn't stay in the (beautifully restored) 1750 farmhouse that is our base for the night, but she would surely have approved of its dramatic location and lush accommodations.

Next morning we hightail it to the 'Brant Fly' hot spring, located in the grounds of the Brandvlei Prison. Both Lady Anne's assertion that 'the water is infinitely hotter than at the other Baths' [in Caledon], and her scepticism at its reputation for being 'perfectly equal to boiling a Chicken to pieces' have been backed up by science. At 64°C, the spring is the hottest in the Cape, but if I can dip my hand in it, I'm sure a chicken would live to tell the tale. The water still 'issues out of the Earth at the bottom of the Mountains', but instead of being diverted to a thermal bath it is now used to feed the showers in the prison. Lucky sods!

Looking to maximise their month's leave, the Barnards headed north, passing through valleys which would later host the towns of Worcester and Wolseley. Strangely, she doesn't mention Tulbagh – despite traversing the Roodetzand Pass ('a very long and very bad pass which we were obliged to walk') into the Obiqua Valley. They then cut across to the coast, passing through barren country and marvelling at 'the sagacity of a particular Species of black beetle as large as a small mouse who will

roll a ball of dung for hundreds of yards till he gets it to his hole'.

Lady Anne instantly recognised Hutches Bay (Saldanha Bay) as 'a place where Ships in all winds and weathers may ride most securely sheltered'. Instead of staying in the scruffy port town she so accurately predicted, we overnight at The Farmhouse Hotel on the shores of the Langebaan Lagoon. Unlike Lady Anne we content ourselves with merely looking at the flamingos and pelicans. 'At dinner I had the

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pleasure of finding the Son had shot me two Flamingos ... one was dead, the other had lost only the tip of his wing and I formed a hope of his living to be the wonder and delight of all my Friends in old England.' Andrew

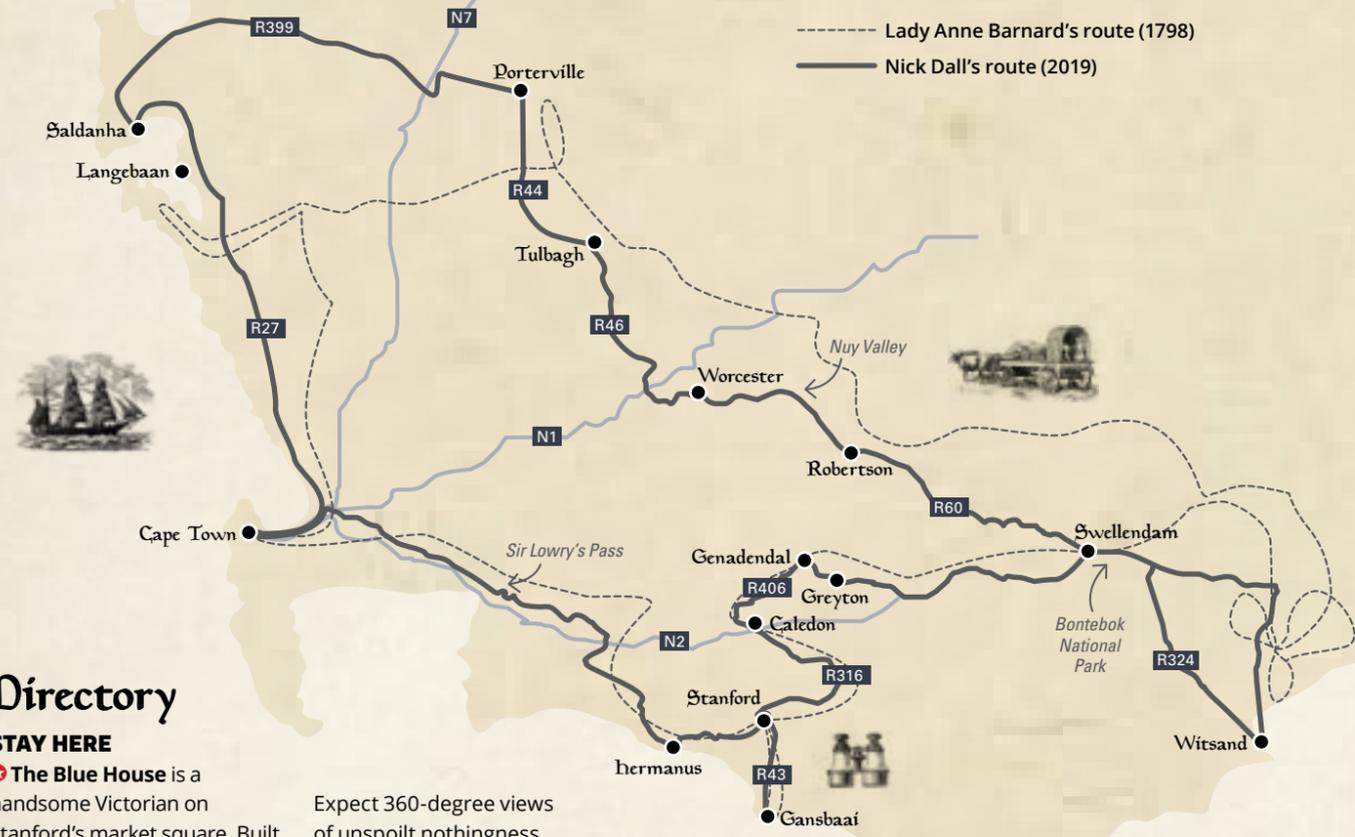
would have none of it, and she was forced to leave the bird in the farmer's care.

Eager to get home in time for King George III's birthday, the Barnards made the journey back to Cape Town in three short days. We complete the same distance in under two hours, but the unmistakable silhouette of Table Mountain floating above the horizon hasn't changed a bit. Then, as now, it's a reassuring symbol of home after seeing 'the face of 700 miles of Africa'. >

Lady Anne's Cape Town

Lady Anne Barnard made the most of her five years (1797 to 1802) in the city – and left her mark. Within a few weeks of her arrival, she'd climbed Table Mountain via Platteklip Gorge, and spent a night camped at the summit. She initially lived at the Castle, but spent many happy weekends at Paradise, a tiny cottage on the slopes of Table Mountain. Its ruins can still be found deep in Newlands Forest. She later built a permanent home in Newlands – the grounds and part of their house are now incorporated into The Vineyard Hotel, a Southern Suburbs landmark.

ROAD TRIP WESTERN CAPE



Directory

STAY HERE

★ **The Blue House** is a handsome Victorian on Stanford's market square. Built circa 1910, it has wood floors, tree-loads of fresh guavas and a wood-burning stove. R2 500 a night (sleeps eight). 082-893-2282, overberggems.co.za

The Oaks outside Greyton is a sprawling property of farmlands, waterfalls, fynbos and magnificent Cape-Dutch architecture. The Zonderend Farm House is R2 400 a night (sleeps six) or loft rooms in the manor house are R900 pp sharing B&B. 028-254-9710, theoaksestate.co.za

★ **Bontebok National Park** is one of my favourites. We stayed in the modern chalets, from R1 342 (sleeps three), but the riverside campsite with half-tame bontebok is also a winner, from R227 a night (max six people). 028-514-2735, sanparks.org

Penhill Farm in the Nuy Valley has a manor house that was built in 1840 and lovingly restored a few years ago. However, Pepper Tree Cottage pre-dates it by some 90 years.

Expect 360-degree views of unspoilt nothingness. From R3 750 (sleeps four). 021-790-0972, penhill.co.za

★ **The Farmhouse Hotel** is an elegant Cape-Dutch property, built in 1860, overlooking Langebaan Lagoon on the West Coast. We stayed in the Frank Wightman Cottage, from R1 600 (sleeps four); B&B rooms from R476 pp sharing. 022-772-2062, thefarmhousehotel.com

DO THIS

Pop in at Valey House at 14 Church Street in Stanford, the original Brand farmhouse where Lady Anne stayed. While not a museum, owner Irene Tomlinson will gladly show you around. ★ Self-catering units from R400 pp. 028-341-0048

Swim in the Drup Kelder in Gansbaai, on a one-hour guided tour with Padloper Trails. R120 pp. 083-611-0351

Visit Genadendal's historic town square, which includes the Moravian church, an old

watermill and museums. Entry R10 pp. 028-251-8582

See the hot spring at Brandvlei Prison, near Worcester. Arrange a visit by calling 023-340-8000.

Admire Lady Anne's art in the

gallery at The Vineyard Hotel in Cape Town. Stay for tea in the Garden Lounge or a fine dinner at Myoga or The Square. Rooms from R1 493 pp sharing B&B. 021-657-4500, vineyard.co.za **G**



Lady Anne Barnard's art works, depicting her time at the Cape, are on display at The Vineyard Hotel in Cape Town.

Achmat Boohey/Courtesy of Balmiel Collection