



Losing count in **BETTY'S BAY**

By Nick Dall

Nick Dall has been visiting this Overberg town all his life and he's long since given up counting species.



the scene, and was astonished to realise that these were not dolphins but orcas.

Just as the curves of Clarence Drive start getting a bit too much to bear, about an hour from Cape Town, the road spills up and over the saddle at Rooiels, and onto the fynbos plateau behind Hangklip. The town is spread out over 13km. The fact that it is so sparsely built up makes the topography of the place even more obvious. Steep mountains ring a marshy plain which features three lakes. Lower down, the coastline curves in a gradual arc from the mountainous dunes of Blesberg in the west all the way to the active fishing village of Kleinmond in the east.

Betty's Bay's real drawcard is the Harold Porter Botanical Gardens. One of very few reserves worldwide which encompasses an entire river from source to sea, it is also home to 1600 species of plant: by far the most of any reserve in Southern Africa, making it a botanist's paradise. The information centre is fascinating, and ever-changing, and the nursery gives visitors the chance of taking a little bit of the reserve home with them.

For the unadventurous, the newly-built tea room is a pleasant shelter, but the walk to the Disakloof waterfall is flat and well within most people's abilities. In January and February the rock-face is emblazoned with red disa flowers which glisten in the mist. Leopard's Kloof is a more



My parents met in Betty's Bay. My dad was playing with his dinky cars in a pile of sand at the bottom of the drive when my mom rode past on her tricycle. Their respective sets of parents had built two of the first holiday houses in the village, less than a block apart. It wasn't quite love at first sight, but my folks were an item by 16.

I first went to Betty's when I was two-weeks old, and I spent 20 Christmases in a row there. Needless to say, it's a special place for us. But you don't need years of family history to enjoy an escape to Betty's.

Getting there, along Clarence Drive, is an attraction in itself. Lots of car ads are filmed on this road and it's easy to see why. On the one side, sinuous curves and views all the way to Cape Point; on the other rugged sandstone kranses and glowing leucadendrons. The road itself is wonderful too. A real RDP success story, it features retaining walls built from local rock, and tarmac as smooth as a billiards table.

From June to December it provides great vantage points for whale-watching. Spacious parking areas have been built on all the major promontories. One Monday morning, as I was rushing to make it into town for another work-week, I spotted what looked like a school of dolphins jumping and diving in the bay. Work could wait: I pulled over to enjoy



strenuous walk, but the effort is rewarded by great views and a pristine series of pools and cascades. The Oudebos Trail is Betty's Bay's real challenge: it runs from the Palmiet River near Kleinmond, all the way back to the Harold Porter Gardens, passing through some untouched indigenous forests on the way. It's best to leave early, and you'll have to arrange for someone to drop you at the starting point – unless you're extremely energetic!

The beaches in Betty's are good too, and warmer than those in Cape Town. Main Beach, just round the corner from what was once HF Verwoerd's holiday house, is best for swimming and surfing. If you float out beyond the breakers, you can see only the mountains – not a house in sight.

Silversands is perfect for long blustery walks. Oyster catchers abound and in the breeding season determined locals cordon off their nesting areas.

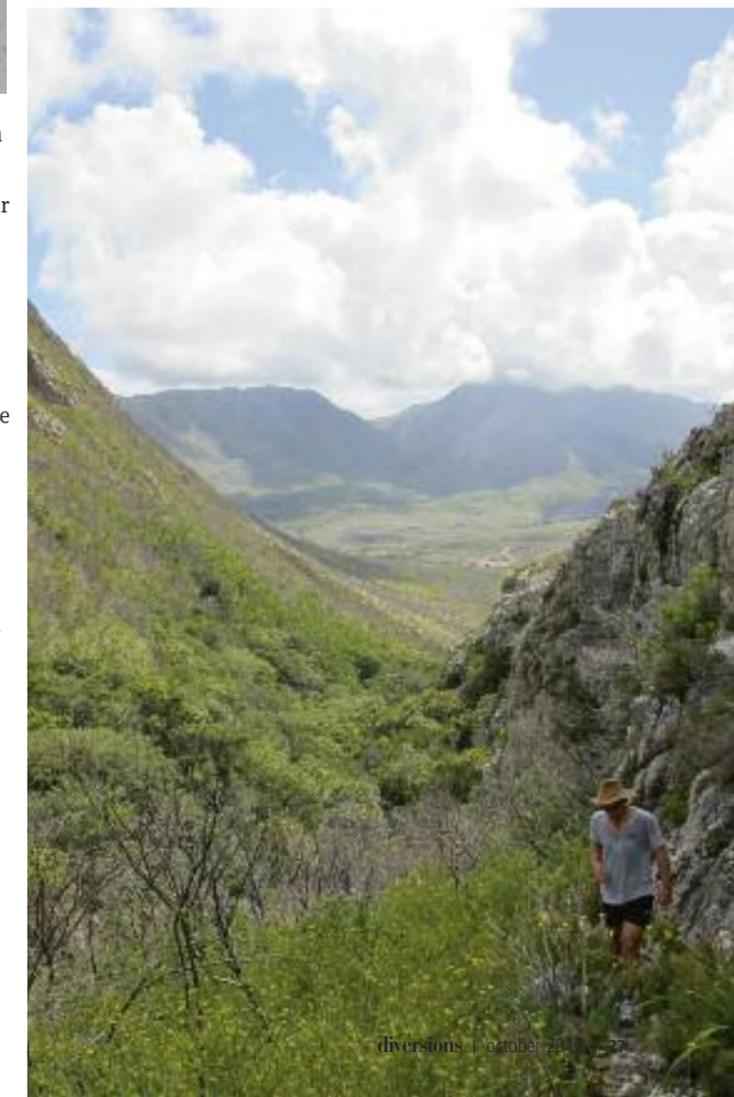
Jock's Beach is a secluded cove where families with young kids can paddle and play. I remember one morning being joined by a Cape clawless otter which held a tennis ball in its front paws as it tumble-turned. My parents have told me that many years ago three brothers hit golf balls into the ocean from the dunes above Jock's Beach. On a calm day, with some goggles, you can still find balls on the seabed.

Another place which is steeped in local lore is Stony Point.



It was home to a Norwegian owned whaling station at the turn of the last century. If you visit today, you can still see the concrete troughs which were used to boil the blubber, and the now defunct lighthouse. The wreck of the Una – a ship which was deliberately sunk by the whalers to provide the slipway with protection from ocean swells – juts from the bay. My parents have black and white pictures of the whaling days: moustached men in bowler hats atop giant corpses, with women in frocks looking on.

The whalers have long since left, though, and have been replaced by African penguins. The penguins just arrived one day in 1982, from Dyer Island 60km to the





“To SANCCOB, in Table View. The vet there will stitch him up, and he’ll be sent back when he’s better.”

When I first went to Betty’s Bay, we brought our groceries from Cape Town and our newspapers from Kleinmond. We relied on gas for lights and hot water, and on nature for entertainment. Things have changed. Not only have we now got Eskom and ADSL, but there are also quite a few decent places to eat.

Hook Line & Sinker in Pringle Bay is famous for both its seafood nights and its steak nights, where chef Stefan and his wife Jacqui serve gourmet meals cooked over eucalyptus flames.

east, forming one of only two mainland colonies in the country. Scientists think that before then the penguins were unable to live on the mainland due to high predator numbers.

And with good reason. In 1986 a leopard got into the colony and killed more than 50 penguins. There was a public outcry, but nature is often cruel. A fence was built for the penguins and, a few months later, the leopard was shot dead by a farmer in Pringle Bay. People weren’t happy about that either.

I once witnessed park officials catching an injured bird – probably the victim of a seal attack – with a long-handled net. At times the chase threatened to descend into an escapade worthy of Laurel and Hardy, but eventually they managed to get the bird into a purpose-made cardboard box.

“Where’s he going?” we asked.

Harbour Road in Kleinmond has been gentrified, and now boasts clothing boutiques, bric-a-brac shops and second hand bookstores. The best restaurant by a long way is Alive-Alive-O, the ‘shellfish bar’ overlooking the harbour which serves all things marine, including made-to-order sushi and ocean-fresh linefish.

On a windless day, Betty’s Bay has something for everyone. But when the wind is blowing – the nagging southeaster or the ominous northwester – novices can be scared off. This only leaves more for us locals, wrapped up in front of our log fires, as the rain channels in through the kloofs.

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Harold Porter Gardens:

<http://www.sanbi.org/gardens/harold-porter>

Hook Line & Sinker: 028 273 8688

Alive-Alive-O: 028 271 3774

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