

TABLE MOUNTAIN



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TO THE SUMMIT

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The visitor to Cape Town desiring to get “on even terms” with Table Mountain has the choice of a large variety of routes—some 70 in all—though some of these are little more than variations of others. He may enjoy a simple walk up the Newlands or Constantia slopes or up one of the most frequented ravines, or he may essay a rock climb in all degrees of difficulty. The latter course is not suggested unless in expert company.

Platteklip Gorge (Town Side).

To the ordinary visitor, the time-honoured Platteklip Gorge will probably commend itself as simplest and safest. The route is from upper Buitenkant Street to the right of the wash-houses, and a stranger cannot well get lost, even in mist, as the sheer walls on either side of the gorge forbid egress.

Arrived on the top an unfailing spring of water will be found a few hundred yards down the Fountain Ravine on the right. This latter ravine, however, can not be descended. The view, looking downwards through the portals of the Platteklip Gorge, is impressive, but in other respects is less commanding than that on other routes, being shut in by the Devil’s Peak and by the deep walls of the gorge itself.

Stinkwater Ravine (Camp’s Bay Side).

The routes of ascent on the Camp’s Bay side are now much facilitated by taking the tram to the Kloof Nek and walking thence along the pipe track. The first of the easier routes is the Stinkwater Ravine, which is not frequented as much as one might expect. Water, wood and shade are abundant, and there is just sufficient scrambling to suit those who do not care for actual climbing. A path clearly indicates the route and at the point where the ravine contracts just below the waterfall, which after heavy rains is in itself well worth seeing, the view looking upward is a very fine one with the precipitous walls supporting the Stinkwater Needle towering above one on the right. The waterfall, which should not be attempted, is outflanked by a path leading up the slopes on the south (right) side. Higher up some easy rocks occur, but may be avoided by quitting the bed of the stream.

Kasteels Poort and Slangolie (Camp’s Bay Side).

Proceeding further along the pipe track one reaches Kasteels Poort, which is perhaps the most popular route with non-climbers on the sea front of the mountain. This route requires no description and is easily identified by the standards which formerly were part of the aerial gear erected for use during the construction of the mountain reservoirs.

At the head of Kasteels Poort is a rough shelter, and the Mountain Club hut is the building on the extreme left. The Water Works Cottage with telephone are close at hand. A favourite walk from the head of Kasteels Poort is to cross the lower reservoir wall and descend by the Skeleton Ravine to Newlands.

Further along the pipe track is the Slangolie Ravine, from the head of which one can proceed down Orange Kloof or up the famous Disa Gorge, which before the construction of the reservoir was one of the chief beauty spots of the mountain, and is even now well worth a visit.

Skeleton and Nursery Ravines (Suburban Side).

Of the ravines by which the suburban side of the mountain is fluted, virtually only two are feasible without indulging in a certain amount of rock scrambling. These are the "Skeleton" and the "Nursery." Access to the former is obtained through the gate at Kirstenbosch, bearing a little to the right but keeping throughout on the left-hand side of the water-course. The Nursery Ravine lies immediately to the south of the Skeleton, and is also reached from Kirstenbosch, bearing to the left. In both cases some humpy ground is traversed before actually getting into these ravines. Both are interesting walks, bringing one out opposite the Cape Town reservoirs on the lower plateau of the mountain. But while Nursery is less frequented and may commend itself on that score, the Skeleton is the more direct route to the plateau, and is the finer of the two ravines. It is the route most favoured on the suburban side; but traffic, fire and vandalism among the ferns have all spoiled its charms in the upper reaches. From the top a path diverges to the right up to the head of the Window Gorge and the Table, the main track continuing a little way through the first round the south side of the reservoirs, whence one may either cross the lower side of the wall to Kasteels Poort or continue in a southerly direction past the Wynberg reservoirs down the Diamond Spring route, or still further south down the Bridle Path to Constantia Nek.

Bridle Path.

The Bridle Path from Constantia Nek has become dethroned as a ladies' route owing to the much greater familiarity of the fair sex with other ways of descent. It is no doubt easy to feeble knees, and is certainly not lacking in 'definition,' while its scenic charms are indisputable. But those resident north of Wynberg will find it a terribly long way to and from the upper Table contrasted with, say, the Saddle Face route, by which a mountaineer will easily descend from the summit edge to Newlands Avenue within an hour.

Long Kloof, Hout Bay Nek to Platteklip.

To those not afraid of a long day's walk, no finer outing can be recommended than to cross Constantia Nek and make for the Long Kloof, the last high ravine this side of Hout Bay Nek. The river is best crossed near the Homestead in order to avoid possible difficulties. In the Kloof itself, where by the way the yellow disas grow, climbers may amuse themselves on quite nice bits of waterfall. Others may avoid these by going up on the righthand side. The Kloof is not so long as its name implies, and is distinctly interesting. From the top, heading a little north-west, one soon strikes a path by which the whole mountain may be traversed virtually from end to end. It passes the Slangolie buttress on to Kasteel's Poort, immediately across the head of which the path continues up a well-watered little valley and close to the western edge of the mountain, crossing the head of Porcupine and Stinkwater ravines, past the Grotto and on to the high Table, whence there are splendid views looking back towards Hout Bay, Chapman's Peak, Hangberg, etc. Proceeding, the path lands one at the top of Platteklip Gorge, down which, or alternatively down one of the preceding ravines, the descent may be made.

Saddle Face (Town or Suburban Side.)

The most popular of all the climbing routes up the mountain is that by the Saddle Face. It is an easy rock scramble, quite within the capabilities of the average goer possessing a cool head; anyone accustomed to rocks would readily find the way, which is up a well-defined path, while the pieces of rock work encountered offer interesting variety. For scenic effect the Saddle Face is hard to beat, and as an almost direct route to and from the highest point of the mountain it is the one usually chosen by regular climbers as their quickest means of descent. On the suburban side the shortest way is by the path leading from the "Forester's Arms," in the Newlands Avenue. For a newcomer this is not quite easy to follow, owing to the various intersecting paths and bushcutters' tracks. In summer the mountain is shut out by the foliage in the woods; but the central of the three gullies leading up to the Saddle is the one to make for when it can be seen. A screen of stones on the slope affords a good landmark, the path running up immediately on its right. Arriving on the Saddle itself, the track leads sharp up to the left.

From the town side the simplest route is from Mill Street, past Nazareth House, whence the path will be seen leading up under a line of firs cresting a fold of slope. On striking the track leading round the face of the mountain, turn a few hundred yards to the right, when a path will be found leading diagonally up to the Saddle. Follow this across the Saddle, until it joins the one from the Newlands side already referred

From this point the most interesting part of the route commences. First up rather a steep slope to what is known as the "Knife Edge," a narrow ridge whence there is an imposing view overlooking on the one side the suburbs, False Bay, the Cape Flats, and the mountains beyond. On the north side Cape Town lies in the hollow, and the view extends along the coast line as far

north as Saldanha Bay, Dassen Island on clear days being also distinctly visible. Proceeding along the 'Knife Edge" the path turns north-westwards along the first of three main ledges, which are the feature of the Saddle Face route. From the first rocks it leads back again along a minor ledge and up by further easy rocks until the second ledge is gained where the first serious climbing pitch begins. Here, either by a narrow crack or by a little face work, a narrow rock ledge is reached. Following this to the right the climber finds himself just below a small chimney, access to which is afforded by a high hand hold to the right. This accomplished, there is no difficulty in scaling the chimney and reaching the third and uppermost ledge, on which beneath an overhanging rock wall is a welcome and never-failing spring. From this point one traverses the broad ledge, again in a north-westerly direction, until confronted above by a huge wall protruding at a right angle. Just short of this the summit is gained by a kind of natural staircase up either a piece of open face work or a narrow crack on its right. This route can not be classed as a climb up which anyone may indiscriminately be advised to proceed, but, as a rock climb and to those who have had a little experience of actual rock climbing, its difficulties are very small.

Visitors contemplating trips of this kind are recommended to furnish themselves with the pocket map of the mountain, issued by the Mountain Club, on which all the leading routes and paths will be found delineated. These maps may be procured from any of the leading stationers.

