

NEWS REPORT - 5 September 2003

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SILVERMINE LAUNCHES WHEELCHAIR-FRIENDLY BOARDWALK

PEOPLE with physical disabilities are now able to enjoy the scenic beauty of the Silvermine Dam with the opening of the new boardwalk by the Cape Peninsula National Park (CPNP).

The 650 meter long, elevated wooden boardwalk traverses the popular hiking trail around the reservoir and features several picnic spots and braai areas.

"This is one of the finest achievements of the Cape Peninsula National Park as it celebrates its fifth anniversary," said Maxwell Moss, wheelchair-bound member of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Environmental Affairs & Tourism, who officially opened the boardwalk today (September 4, 2003).

"By promoting universal access to our national environmental treasures, SA National Parks has paved the way for other tourism facilities to follow their shining example. Mobility impaired visitors can now also enjoy Silvermine which is regarded as one of most spectacular fynbos paradises in the Cape Floral Kingdom," says Moss.

According to Gavin Bell, CPNP Area Manager for the Southern Section, almost 900 species of fynbos have been recorded at Silvermine, including large numbers of proteas, ericas and restios.

"A large number of these plants are rare and endangered and some are found nowhere else in the world," says Bell.

Remarkable specimens of the protea family include the bottlebrush or *Mimetes hirtus*, the Waboom or *Protea nitida*, the King Protea or *Protea cynaroides* and the Kreupelhout or *Leucospernum conocarpodendron*.

"Since the January 2000 fire, the Park's concerted effort to clear alien vegetation from Silvermine has allowed the natural biodiversity to return in all its glory - a wonderful reward to all who worked so hard to achieve this," says Sandy Barnes, Chairperson of the Friends of Silvermine.

With its spectacular scenery and wide variety of nature-based recreational activities, Silvermine attracts an average of 53 000 local and overseas tourists each year.

With pocket indigenous forests such as Spes Bona and Echo Valley, the area is home to grysbok, lynx, baboon, dassie (hyrax), porcupine, genet, tortoise and Cape clawless otter, as well as a variety of reptiles, insects and amphibians.

Bird species include the orange breasted and malachite sunbirds, Cape sugarbirds, rock kestrels, kites, buzzards, peregrine falcons, fish eagle and sometimes even the Black Eagle.

"Following the wildfires of three years ago, Silvermine has emerged from the ashes even more beautiful than before - a natural beauty strewn in all her fynbos finery," says Brett Myrdal, CPNP Park Manager.

"The Silvermine boardwalk enables us to share this magnificent facility with an even wider community and forms part of our commitment to make this truly a park for *all*, forever," says Myrdal.

CPNP's introduction of boardwalks at the Boulders recently earned the park an honourable mention as part of the Rob Filmer prize awarded to SA National Parks for providing access to people with disabilities.

The Silvermine Reservoir boardwalks were built by Michael Andrews of Lotus River and Wandile Mtshiza of

Masiphumelele, who also constructed the Silvermine River Walk and eco-friendly viewing decks at Olifantsbos and the Buffels Bay Visitor Centre in the Cape of Good Hope section of the park respectively.

According to Myrdal, the CPNP is creating hundreds of opportunities for emerging contractors with regard to the construction of footpaths and boardwalks.

"We are really impressed with the upgraded facilities, rehabilitation of paths and new signage at Silvermine," says Anwaaz Bent, co-ordinator of the Hikers Network.

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