

Brunsvigia bosmaniae

viranatura
tours 

**MARCH IN THE
WESTERN CAPE 2023**

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Day 1 16 March Arrival & Lion's Head

We all met up after various arrival times, at our comfy B&B, had a bite to eat for lunch and then drove out towards Lion's Head to look for flowers. Normally, we would expect to see *Amaryllis belladonna*, but this year they had flowered very early and we only had one plant to look at. No matter, on the walk there was a pale blue *Salvia* sp., slender *Polygala garcinii* and then the other reason for visiting; *Leucodendron argenteum*, the silver tree, which is now quite a rare plant in the region (having been ruthlessly overexploited during the early years of settlement in Cape Town). There were a number of decent sized trees, as well as some young plants with striking silken-silver foliage. Taking a lower path we also found a good population of *Protea neriifolia* in good flower. There was time to drive on to one more location and after a steepish walk up we reached a level path where we found a number of dainty shell-pink *Gladiolus brevifolius*. Various other plants were in flower too with *Erica nudiflora*, *Heliophila juncea*, *Tritoniopsis triticea*, *Lobelia pinifolia*, bobbly *Brunia nodiflora* and the hairy-leaved *Leucospermum conocarpodendron*.

Dinner was candlelit Italian, at least until the lights came back on.

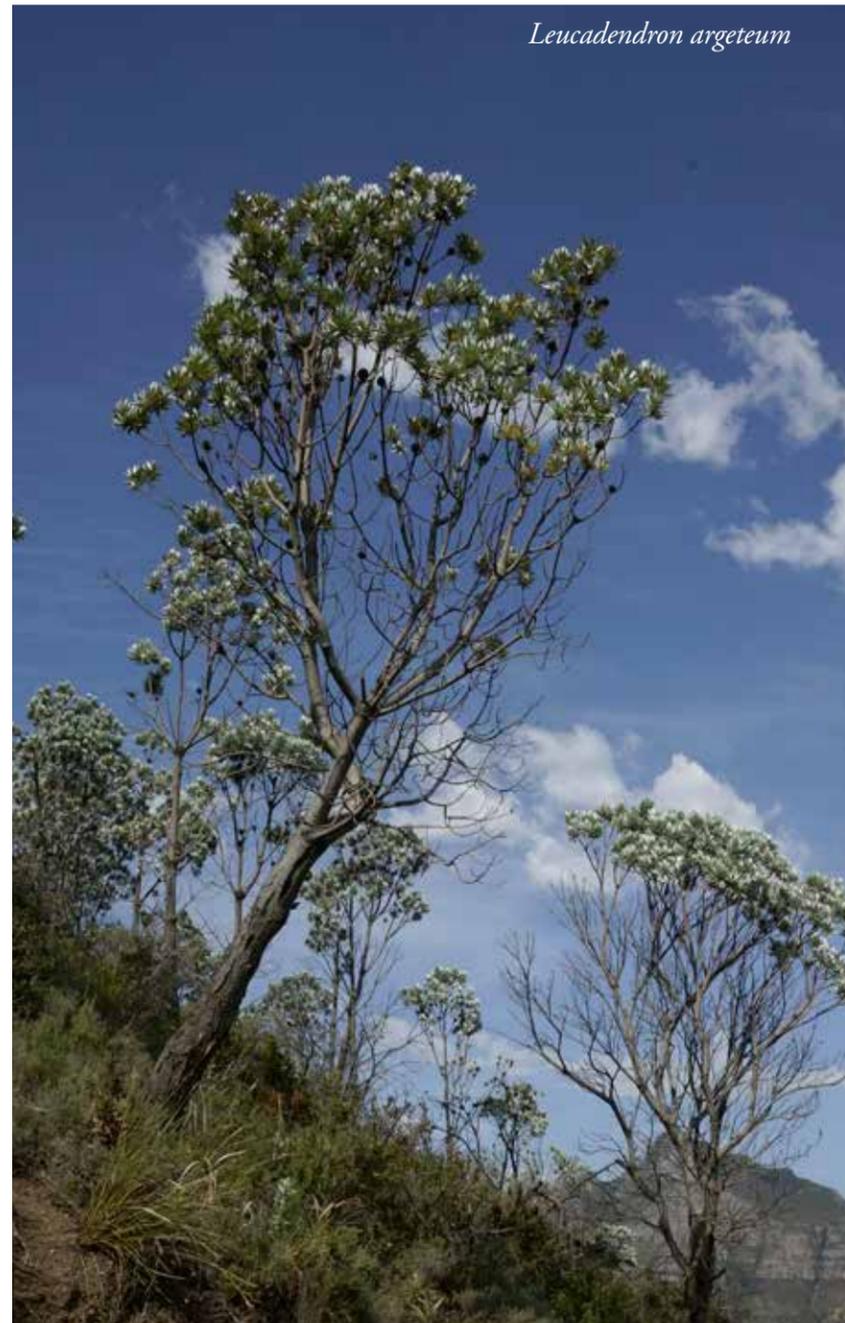
Day 2 Table Mountain

Thanks to coronavirus, I was out of action today, but the group went up to a misty Table Mountain, finding *Disa ferruginea*. Another fiery flower was the highlight of the afternoon too; *Brunsvigia marginata*, a stunning scarlet amaryllid.

Day 3 Kirstenbosch & Silvermine

The group visited the extensive gardens that nestle at the base of Table Mountain and then visited Silvermine to search for the elusive blue disa. Alas, the orchid was not found but the hike was productive with a superb *Protea cynaroides*, various interesting *Erica* such as green *urna-viridis* and pink *taxifolia* and some excellent well-placed specimens of *D. ferruginea*.

I spent the day checking various locations.



Leucadendron argenteum

Day 4 Cape Point

Now much recovered I re-joined the group for the first two locations. We began with the remarkable cryptic stars of *Orbea variegata*, finding first a small group on a ledge and then a much larger colony with more flowers, including four in a row. There were great views across the rocky bays and coastline. The same could be said for our next location where the stunning fibre-optic spheres of *Brunsvigia orientalis* were scattered across the coastal heath and dunes. Alongside them were intense scarlet torches of *Haemanthus coccineus* and they made an effective duo. Time was spent enjoying these in a fine scenic setting before moving on to the national park.

Inside the park were lots of *Leucodendron xanthocodon*, white *Erica mammosa*, and in one area of low heath, scarlet *E. cerinthoides*. These grew not far from stand of tall orange *Leonotis leonurus* and where a herd of handsome bontebok grazed calmly, quite unconcerned about the human intrusion. *Tylecodon grandiflorum* was scattered across the sandy flats as were the peculiar fleshy mounds of *Euphorbia capet-medusa*. Various other heaths occurred in the park too; from yellow or pink forms of *Erica plukenetii* to bright pink *E. abietina*. Some took the long walk to Cape of Good Hope, with a few *Brunsvigia orientalis* scattered in the shrubberies.

There was time on the return to view the African Penguins in the rocky bays near the hotel.

Day 5 To Nieuwoudtville

We had to leave early for various reasons; traffic, potential protests and the fact that Nieuwoudtville was a long way north. It was raining, so we opted for a revitalising coffee and light breakfast once we had cleared the city. The rain had eased by the time we had finished and we had time to stop for superb



Haemanthus coccineus



Aloe dichotoma

clumps of *Amaryllis belladonna* that grew in an open area. A short drive away and an area of dunes had many more superb *Brunsvigia orientalis* as well as a colony of vivid *Haemanthus pubescens*. A variety of things needed sorting out, involving me going to the airport to collect a car with Chris and John and everyone else waiting while tyres were changed on the van. Regardless, we all drove north, the car stopping for more *Brunsvigia orientalis* (being eagerly pollinated by malachite sunbirds) and then pushing on to Nieuwoudtville and the superb displays of *Brunsvigia bosmaniae* that were laid out across rocky slopes near the town. We all convened here in time and enjoyed the spectacle before driving on to our very comfortable farm house accommodation and the excellent dinner that arrived.

Day 6 Nieuwoudtville

Breakfast was a huge affair, set out on a beautifully laid table in a large airy room, with course after course of fruit, yogurt, eggs, toast, jam, coffee, etc.

Setting off for plants afterwards we made slow progress, stopping for some suspect brunsvigias (that turned out to be depauperate *bosmaniae*) and delicate *Pelargonium alternans*. A little down the road and there was a fine stand of Bulbine aloides as well as *Gomphocarpus frutescens*. Continuing onto the town we stopped just outside for *Crosyne flava* and then made our way into the botanical reserve to a different area of the *Brunsvigia bosmaniae* colony.

Heading a bit further north we were definitely entering drier country and more karroid habitat. An area dominated by slender stemmed *Euphorbia mauritanica* and the gangly forms of *Tylecodon paniculata* also had a dry stream bed with many dried clumps of *Crinum variable*. Normally these would all be in flower but despite this being a wetter season, for some reason there was just one (fine) spike in flower, the bicolored purple and white flowers ageing and attractive pink. Sprawling *Aloe perfoliata* grew on the rocks, but annoying the baboons had chewed off the flower spikes.

An altogether more impressive aloe was the main event in the afternoon; Quiver trees (*Aloe dichotoma*). We spent a few hours exploring the impressive stands of this quintessential succulent. There was a good age structure to the plants with youngsters vying alongside venerable trees with thick trunks wrapped in crinkled golden bark. As the afternoon wore on the light got better and better and the trunks warmer-toned. A few *Hoodia gordonii* were scattered about and in the sandy flats there were the white cups of *Codon royerii* and a few Karoo violets; *Aptosimum indivisum*. Back at the farmhouse, Laura had returned early and found the delicate afternoon-opening *Morea pseudospicata*.

Day 7 To Clanwilliam

Another immense breakfast dawned, this one embellished with a delicious marmite cake! Afterwards, we visited the nearby canyon, stopping along the way for slender *Brunsvigia striata* that were bursting straight from the deep sand. The canyon was an impressive defile, with sheer cliff walls and a lake nestled at the base of one section of the ramparts. Above here we found little *Empodium namaquensis* in flower, shrubby *Pelargonium scabrum* and *Anisodontea bryoniifolia* too. Another beautiful thing was found, which I cannot mention.

Returning for lunch at our very pleasant farmhouse accommodation we set off afterwards on the journey south. It was impossible to resist another large population of *Brunsvigia bosmaniae* spread out with a fine landscape beyond. They were all in perfect condition with scarcely a spent flower. A bit farther along and we found good specimens of *Aloe falcata* in flower. Then taking a side road we rumbled through the dry fynbos until the diminutive scarlet torches of *Haemanthus crispus* brought us to a halt. There were many scattered throughout the dry scrub, some in fine condition. Nearing Clanwilliam there was a population of Clanwilliam aloe (*Aloe comosa*).

Fortunately, the power cuts fell at the right time and I managed my zoom talk to a group in Ireland. The wonders of modern tech!



Escarpment view, Nieuwoudtville

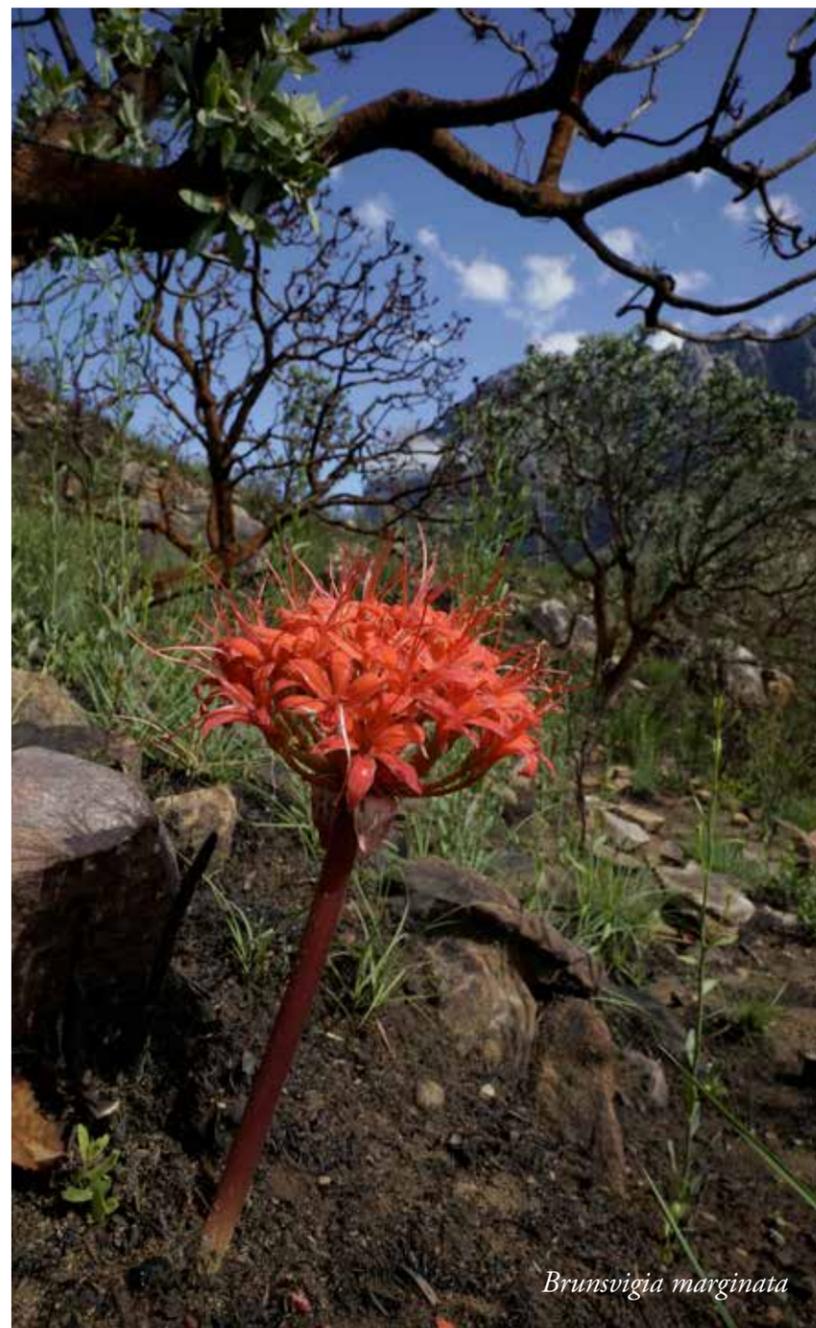
Day 8 To Ceres

A quick drive out to the Clanwilliam aloe site passed a population of *Brunsvigia bosmaniae*. Not long after we had arrived at the aloes there was a sudden (cold) heavy shower that sending us scrambling back to the vehicles. It passed quickly, but did rather set the tone for the day. Driving south we turned off the main and stopped by a small burn where were found several new plants alongside the more familiar *Brunsvigia orientalis*; with the rather sombre *Tulbaghia capensis* (?) and a white *Chlorophytum* sp and quite a number of fiery *Haemanthus sanguineus*. Stands of soft lilac blue *Salvia chamelaeagnea* had also responded vigorously to the burn. All around were brooding grey skies and the odd bolt of lightning. The rain began to threaten more whe we stopped for a flowering shrub of *Protea laurifolia* and picked up a bit more when we found a fine *P. nitida* with several pale yellow flowers. Despite the inclement weather we continued to find some good plants with a red *Erica* sp (*discolor*?) and the dazzling *Nerine sarniensis*, wedged into crevices above the road. A cliff face farther along the road was plastered in many intense scarlet flowerheads. The landscape was craggy and complex the blocky rock stacks punctuated with the grey forms of *Protea nitida* and it all would have made for some fine landscape photography, but that was not to be today.

After a snack or two in the vehicles we continued downhill, stopping for superb flowering plant of *Aloe perfoliata*. A colony of *Brunsvigia striata* followed and then a rather wet creamy-white form of *Protea repens*. it was now time to drive on directly to the hotel the heavy rain preventing more stops. There was time after we had checked in to try an burn area near the town, but unfortunately the hoped for *Disa salteri* was nowhere to be found.

Day 9 Worcester circuit

Our route took on three passes and passed through some stunning mountain scenery, which looked wonderful with morning clouds and mists drifting off of the rugged, blocky cliffs and sunlit dancing across the peaks. Arriving at the first burn we could see a couple of fiery specks on the higher slopes, but these seemed too far to bother with. Our next stop delivered the goods with a decent population of intense scarlet *Brunsvigia marginata* illuminating the charcoaled stems in the burn. Time was spent exploring the burn and trying in vain to avoid covering our clothes in soot streaks.



Brunsvigia marginata

Afterwards a 'quick' coffee seemed a good idea, so we pulled into a large restaurant, sat on the pleasant balcony and ordered. Not much happened, then after forty-five minutes two coffees arrived! This was clearly a mistake so we paid for what had arrived and left. The road now climbed to the Du Toit's Pass and there was an abundance of heaths in flowers. We stopped first for *Erica pinea* and then at the pass the fynbos was swathed in pink *E. subulata* and *E. nudiflora*, as well as sulphurous *E. parilis* a little higher up where it grew near the scarlet spire of *Tritoniopsis triticea*. There were attractive red-edged *Leucodendron salignum*, *Stoebe spiralis* and the yellow spikes of a stout *Bulbinella* sp too. The restio stands were especially soggy after the rain the previous day!

We drove for a bit to make our way around to Bainskloof, the road winding up into the hills clad with stands of *Protea laurifolia* and dense stands of shimmering restios (*Elegia* sp). Lunch was with a fine views and then we drove through the lovely gorge landscape beyond, stopping to look at the native conifer *Widdringtonia nodiflora*. From here we completed the remaining couple of hours of driving through pleasant rolling countryside to Napier.

Day 10 Napier

Day of the *Erica*. Although we saw a great many plants today, heaths were probably the standout feature with a tremendous array of different species and forms. The first stop was for an abundance of *Erica vesicaria*, growing with a white form of *E. plukenetii* and flowering shrubs of *Mimetes cucullatus*. There was also a scattering of the handsome everlasting daisy *Phaenocoma prolifera*, whilst masses of a deep blue *Lobelia* sp. carpeted the ground in recently burned areas. There was also the occasional orange-red *Erica cerinthoides*. A longer stop was had for a colony of deep red-pink *Tritoniopsis pulchra* growing in a burn with toothbrush fern (*Schizaea pectinata*). The *Erica* in the adjacent unburned part were varied with inflated pink *E. irbyana* and greenish-tubed *E. sessiliflora*. there was the odd patch of a *Drosera* sp. too. Nearing the end of the road yellow *Erica coccinea* became very common, growing in a mosaic with *Nebelia paleacea* and a taller *Bezelia* sp. These formed large stands and the first part of our walk went through them. It was windy and although we had planned a long walk it was clearly not the best course of action. We did push



Erica coccinea

on for a mile, finding some good *Protea cynaroides*, the unusual spicate *Erica grisbrookii*, *Disa ferruginea* and a solitary *Kniphofia uvaria* growing on a cliff. Robert photographed a young puff adder on the return leg too.

Driving back down there were additional *Erica* species seen, *Gladiolus brevifolius* and then *Protea susannae* growing with the very attractive *Bezelia albiflora*. From the town we sped on through the extensive agricultural belt, which has converted the vast majority of the botanically-rich renosterveld into wheat fields. Fortunately, some reserves remain and we were heading to one, stopping for five cape zebra along the way. It was rather windy (in fact it had been all day) as we set out to look for the delicate *Nerine humilis*, finding first a few flowers and then a fine clump with many perfect spikes. Various other plants were around including the leaves of *Massonia pustulata*, little yellow *Empodium plicatum* and a hairy yellow pea *Xiphotheca guthriei*. Lower down the slope Campbell tracked down a few dainty *Gladiolus vaginatus*, though photographing them in the gusting winds proved a challenge.

Day 11 Agulhas & Shaw's Pass

Driving out towards Cape Agulhas we stopped for some fine spikes of *Kniphofia uvaria* growing in damp roadside ditches, with quite a number scattered along a section of road. Not much farther on there was a short stop to photograph blue cranes in a field with some very well rounded sheep. At Africa's southernmost point we spent some time walking along the scenic rocky coast with waves breaking constantly on the battered reefs and weathered outcrops. The ground was covered in sprawling bushes of *Polygala myrtifolia*, *Limonium peregrinum*, *Cotyledon orbicularis* and various other maritime shrubs pruned short by the wind. Popping up through all of this were plentiful *Haemanthus coccineus* and although many had already finished this season there were still some fine fresh specimens with foaming breaker backdrops. The large map of Africa seemed to have a curiously distorted geography! As we left town there was another fine display of *Haemanthus coccineus* on an open grassy area.

We drove back to Napier for lunch in the café next to the guesthouse, capuchinos, croissants and cheesecake. Then it was off to Shaw's Pass where an area of fynbos was worth the effort pushing through with some pristine spires



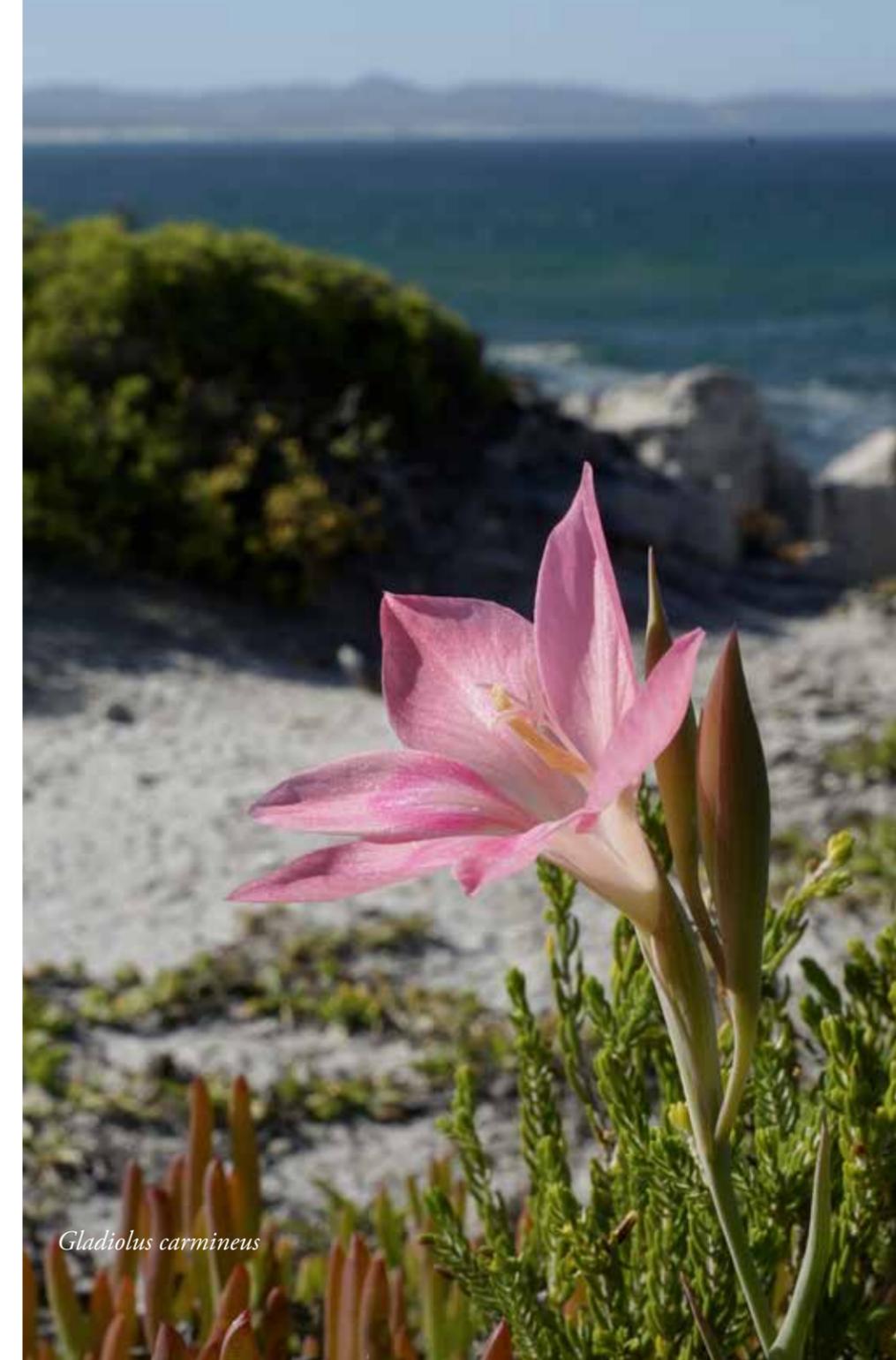
Nerine humilis

of flaming orange *Tritoniopsis burchellii* alongside the attractive proteaceae *Aulax umbellata*, pink flowered *Saltera sarcodes* and the unusual prostrate *Protea sp.* a large area next to this had been burned and we spent time looking in this too, with all of the same shrubs in their charcoaled state and seed capsules split open in interesting dried forms. Around the base of the burnt shrubs was lots of furry *Otholobium fruticans* and a smattering of the delicate asclepiad; *Aspidoglossum heterophyllum*. There was still time in the day to drive onto Hermanus and check in, before taking a pleasant late afternoon stroll along the cliff top where there was plenty of *Gladiolus carmineus* in flower as the breakers roared in below. Both *Pelargonium captitatum* and *P. cucullatum* were found in flower and the colony of *Orbea variegata* in bud. It had been a pleasant coastal day with the fresh air of the ocean very much in our faces.

Day 12 Hermanus & Fernkloof

Our last morning was spent revisiting the cliff tops for more *Gladiolus carmineus* photos in different light and there were many fine fresh flowers on show. Next we went the short distance to Fernkloof where we enjoyed an interesting walk in the rich fynbos there, finding a good number of *Tritoniopsis laxa* in fine flower, as well as the odd *Leucospermum cordifolium*, *Protea cynaroides*, two species of sundews, stands of the golden-buff restio; *Elegia persistens*, green flowers *Erica viscaria* subsp. *macrosepala*, some superb shrubs of pink *Phaenocoma prolifera* and a perfectly poised Cape sugarbird, that perched at length on top of a bare protea. There was the chance to see the stunning silvery-leaved *Mimetes hottentoticus* growing in the gardens at Fernkloof, a plant that is confined to Kogelberg peak in the wild. Lunch was in the shade and then it was off to Cape Town where Chris, John and Marilyn left us for their flights home.

Robert, Laura and Pontus had opted to stay on for three extra days with me and we drove on to our comfy B&B for the night.



Gladiolus carmineus

Day 13 Bontebok National Park

Next day we began by driving directly out to Swellendam and checking into a rather swish hotel. Then we were off to nearby Bontebok national park where we had a productive few hours. Touring the area slowly we stopped in various areas of stony fynbos for *Pelargonium dipetalum*, *Tritoniopsis revoluta*, the twinning stems of waxy pink flowered *Microlooma sagittatum* and *Oxalis depressa* as we searched for the cryptic colours of *Gladiolus emilae*. Eventually, Campbell spotted the first, with yellowish-brown narrow trumpets that were a devil to photograph in the breeze. A second was found nearby and we had lunch overlooking a small lake with cape zebra mooching about. A prize specimen with five good flowers was found before we hit a areas with new heaths including a tall, pink colour form of long-tubed *E. prolata*. A couple red hartebeest were seen well, black-shouldered kites perched on dead trees and black harrier coursed across the open landscape as we drove.

There was a little time left to try for another area which yielded the pretty *Tritoniopsis ramosa* as the light began to fade.

Day 14 Tradouw Pass & Karoo

An interesting and varied day saw us climbing into the fynbos-clad slopes of the Tradouw Pass, where the red form of *Erica discolor* was very common. Alongside it in one area was the lovely red-pink *E. vestita* together with the odd *Protea lepidocarpodendron* (?). Irregular masses of *Aloe arborescens* hung from the rocks and the much rarer *Aloiampelos juddii* was seen with *Clematis brachiata*. We left the relatively lush pass and descended into the Karoo, however with the good rains this year this was really quite green. Passing landscape was one of rocky ridges and slopes divided by scrub speckled flats. A big population of an *Aloe* sp. dominated one slope and then we reached an unfenced area where we could wander. What looked at first glance to have little kept us busy for the next two hours. On the rocky slopes we found a fascinating mix of plants and the first that caught our eye were the stunning tufts of Karoo violet; *Aptosimum indivisum*, each brimming with lovely mauve flowers. Scouring the slope we also found among the



Aptosimum indivisum

plentiful orangey bushes of *Crassula rupestris*; spiny columns of *Hoodia pilifera*, the succulent spotted leaves of *Adromischus maculatus*, spiralled, equally fleshy *Cotyledon orbicularis* var. *spuria*, densely packed bronzed leaved *Haworthiopsis viscosa* and the sprawling stems of spiny pale yellow *Monsonia crassicaule*. After lunch and that much farther along the road we stopped again for pretty white and yellow *Bulbine alba*, which was growing with *Blepharis capensis*, a superb flowery *Monsonia crassicaule*, the wonderful, inflated seedpods of *Lessertia frutescens* and various other Karoo colour. Moving on the landscape did not change much though we did find a solitary *Brunsvigia striata* and rocky slopes with lots of shrubby *Crassula arborescens*.

Reaching a second pass we climbed it the greenery and stopped where a sidetrack led towards the fynbos. Up on the slopes were a quite a few lovely *Tritoniopsis revoluta*, much larger and showier than those we had seen elsewhere. They grew with *Protea repens* and across on the other side of the gully we could see the impressive stars of *P. aurea*. These were reachable and after photographing these and orange-breasted sunbirds we completed our circuit, passing blue cranes and stands of *Aloe ferox* (some in flower) as the light levels dropped and sunbeams burst through the cloud base.

Day 14 Cape Point & flights

We had gotten word of a population of *Nerine sarniensis* in flower so all willingly agreed to depart very early to make it to Cape Town in time to see these. The drive went smoothly enough and we had time for a quick coffee before setting off up a slope clad in proteas and leucospermums climbing into the rock-studded scrub where we soon found the first of dozens of stunning, fiery *Nerine sarniensis*, some with a wonderful backdrop of the ocean waves playing across the sweeping bay. Descending we also picked up flowers of the local endemic form of *Protea nitida*, *Gladiolus brevifolius* and *Bulbine sepacea*.

A perfect finale. All that was left to do was to change clothes for the journey and go to the airport for our various flights home.



Nerine sarniensis

Amaryllis belladonna

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Minulus naiandinus