



Walk the Rim of Africa !

A new mountain passage explores the terrain of the Cape Mountain Leopard through a unique rite of passage walk from the Northern Cederberg to the foothills of the Outeniqua Mountains in the Garden Route.

“Although we have climbed and walked many of the Cape’s great mountains, this was something else entirely. For days now, we had been following a mountain ridge with no path. As evening fell and we sought a reasonable and sheltered site for our tent, we scouted flat spaces amongst the boulders of a rocky outcrop. Suddenly, looking down, we froze. Scattered against the rocks at our feet lay the remains of recently caught prey; we realized then, that where we stood was actually the lair of a leopard. We turned slowly and silently and made our way out of the maze of rock to seek a more appropriate place to camp.” Galeo Saintz – Rim of Africa May 2008

The Cape Fold mountains that run in an unusual arc from the northern Cape all the way to the Eastern Cape and onwards towards the southern escarpment of the Drakensberg mountains are filled with a wildness of spirit and wildlife. Our encounter on that day when we realized where we stood observing all the evidence of leopard activity, was a small reminder of the wild that still thrives in some of the more remote areas of these mountains.

Hikers and those who love the Cape’s great outdoors for decades have dreamt of creating a hiking route that would link a number of trails in South Africa to create a single

walking experience to stand alongside the world's other mega-distant trails, such as the Appalachian Trail in the USA and the Camino de Santiago in Spain or the Sendero de Chile in South America.

Now that dream is slowly becoming a reality with the establishment of the Rim of Africa Mountain Passage. This trail experience is attempting to create a linked walk from the far northern Cederberg all the way along the Grootwinterhoek mountains towards Ceres and from there across the Hex river valley and its myriad secrets, linking onto the Langeberg and following the southern Cape's ridge of mountains all the way to the start of the Outeniqua range in the Garden Route.

The route of the Rim of Africa, when finally complete from end to end, will be close to 700km of mountain walking, but this a walk of no ordinary proportions for it also encompasses a strong element of ritual and intention. Its association with rites of passage and ritual came about when co-founder Ivan Groenhof was originally drawn to walking this particular route in 2004 as part of a personal journey as suggested by a local sangoma in Cape Town. Ivan was told he needed to go for a long walk. Little did he realize at the time just how long that walk would be.

“Well, to cut a long story,” he says, “in February 2004, joined by various friends and a lover on route, I went for that walk. It took a month out of my life but gave me a new one. There was a lot of time to think, a lot of time to sweat, a lot of time to reconnect with myself. I rediscovered the scale of my ever present life support system from the wind blowing against my face to the narrow little path that allowed me to cross to safety and to continue the journey.”

There were many discussions held under that big, sometimes congenial sky but the dominant theme was the lack of positive, culturally recognized rite of passage events that adequately heralded the mark of time in individuals' lives, especially for men in their modern context. It was very obvious to me that I was going on my own, self styled rite of

passage but what was less obvious was the role that the exposure to wilderness played as medicine, facilitator, or container within which I needed to be immersed.”

By 2005 Ivan had finished his walking journey as intended. The experience left him clean but scared. It had stirred something deep within, a barely perceptible but persistent butterfly feeling suggested he had unfinished business there, saying: “You haven’t even scratched the surface my friend”. He knew he would be back.

At the same time and unknown to each other, another mountain man and rock climber, Galeo Saintz, was busy completing a solo recce for another long walk on the far eastern end of the Cape’s mountains. He was scouting a route that would eventually become known as the Eden to Addo Mega-Hike, a 400km and 18 day hiking experience. Saintz was walking for a different reason to what had drawn Ivan into the landscape. He was tasked by the Eden to Addo Corridor Initiative, a visionary conservation programme attempting to create linkages between the three main conservation areas of the region, to find a walkable route that would possibly follow ancient elephant pathways all the way from the indigenous forests of the Garden Route outside Knysna across the Baviaanskloof wilderness and onwards towards the Addo Elephant National Park. Little did Galeo know that his walk too would end up changing his direction in life in unimaginable ways.

“My insight’ in working with Eden to Addo and creating this one-of-a-kind trail experience”, says Galeo, “is, that what we face in the world today is not only the threat of extinction of species, but the extinction of experience. Without direct experience of the natural world, wildlife and wilderness we loose capacity to care about its protection. Hence these trails I am part of are so vital in communicating the narrative of the elephants in the Knysna forests and that of the leopard along the Rim of Africa route. Walking in nature is a sure way to prevent the extinction of experience as direct experience enlivens us and gives meaning to our lives.”

In 2006, Galeo and Ivan were introduced to each other through a mutual friend at the Table Mountain Fund. Immediately the magic began to work and they set about turning the route that Ivan had walked into that long held dream – a unique mountain passage with a rite of passage element, that may one day become South African's flagship walking experience.

And so the Rim of Africa initiative was born out of a need to walk and reconnect, to re-enliven ritual and to follow a mountain passage that tracks the territory of the solitary Cape Leopard and crosses the ancient pathways of the San people of the area. This is a tough hiking experience, yet at its core it is a simple walk towards a new and personal freedom.

In essence the Rim of Africa stands as the backdrop to your personal choices regarding freedom. It is there that you will find yourself closer to yourself than you ever expected, and liking it very much.

It is therefore with great pleasure that we can announce our intentions to support others who wish to walk a mountain passage of no ordinary proportions. In close association with the Cape Leopard Trust, the Rim of Africa traverses the territory of the icon of freedom - the Cape Leopard. As the trails choice of totem, the Cape Leopard asks us to walk with personal integrity and impeccability. How do we approach our lives with compassion and where do we find within ourselves our individual human potential and act accordingly.

As Ivan says: "Freedom is an ever changing dimension of consciousness, like the wind, it blows past you, cools you, raps around you, and is gone before you know it. Walking roots you to the wind."

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