



GILL YOUNG (2)

multi-hued green mountain

It's not only the big and bold that captivate, concluded **Leni Martin** when, on a hike across the Green Mountain, she witnessed the post-fire rebirth of some of the continent's most delicate – and colourful – plants.

'SNAKE!' CAME THE CALL FROM up ahead, and I hurried forward to see what my companion hikers were looking at. Bent over, they were peering at a small, scraggly fynbos bush at the side of the path. Draped across its spiky twigs was indeed a snake, all 50 or so centimetres of it beautifully mottled and coloured in shades of brown. Our guide Christopher September identified it as a young *skaapsteker* and, as if to compensate for the apparent insignificance of this specimen, went on to tell us of the puff adder that one sunny afternoon had taken up guard duty outside the dining room where we'd breakfasted a few hours before. But I for one was content to admire the subtle coloration and lithe grace of this diminutive snake as it glided down from its perch and disappeared among the plant stems.

We were hiking on the Groenlandberg, or Green Mountain, which lies between Theewaterskloof Dam and the Houwhoek Pass in South Africa's south-western Cape. Although only an hour's drive east of Cape Town, we were in another world: below us to the right the waters of Theewaterskloof shone in the

early-morning sun; to the left, fynbos-clad slopes gave way to orchards and vineyards, and they in turn to the blue ocean beyond.

Some 10 months before, flames had swept across the Groenlandberg, turning its green slopes into a black-and-grey vista of charred stems and piles of ash. The south-easterly winds of summer had barely had time to disperse the ash before plants, many stimulated by the fire, began to bring colour to the scene: the reds of fire lily and candelabra flowers, pink of March lilies and orange-yellow of red-hot poker. Now, after winter rains had drenched the soils, the mountain was turning



green once more, but other colours studded it too. Yes, the bold yellow of wachendorfias stood out, as did the saturated blue of aristeas, but a closer look revealed how smaller, fragile-looking plants added their delicate pinks, purples, creams and pale blues to the palette.

It takes four days to walk the 60-kilometre Green Mountain Trail, from Porcupine Hills (of puff adder fame, and also the nesting site of a Verreaux's eagle pair) on the northern side of the mountain all the way to Bot River, where a congratulatory lunch is laid out at the final stop, Beaumont Wines. Between those points, there's more than enough time to savour not only the scents and visual wonders of the surrounding fynbos – the trail passes through part of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, a World Heritage Site that celebrates the diversity of the Cape Floral Kingdom – but also the produce of a number of wine farms en route.

On the final day, as guide John Hartnick related how European pioneers dragged their cumbersome wagons over the mountain on the route we were following, we marvelled at the resilience of men and women three centuries ago. It's a quality that fynbos plants share. **AG**

Thanks to Alison Green (www.wildekrans.co.za) and Murray Weiner (www.porcupinehills.co.za), as well as Christopher September, John Hartnick and Steve Bolnick.

ABOVE The Green Mountain in white and yellow guise, thanks to *Lanaria lanata* and *Berkheya herbacea* respectively.

BELOW *Tritonia undulata* adds a subtle shade of pink to the blackened landscape.

WAY TO GO

The Green Mountain Trail is a slack-packing route on which hikers stay in four-star accommodation overnight and get the chance to enjoy local food and wines. For more information, contact Alison Green at tel. +27 (0)28 284 9827 or info@wildekrans.co.za, or go to www.greenmountaintrail.co.za.

The trail is an element of the Green Mountain Eco Route, a 27-member cooperative committed to nurturing the natural environment while promoting the social upliftment of communities and the sustainable development of businesses in the region. To find out more, visit www.greenmountain.co.za