

**WILDERNESS MANAGEMENT TRAINING FOR THE WESTERN CAPE
NATURE CONSERVATION BOARD STAFF HELD AT THE VROLJKHEID
NATURE RESERVE - JUNE 2003**

The Wilderness Action Group (WAG) presented two wilderness management courses during June. These courses (a basic and an advanced level) were made possible by a grant from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). The grant covered the costs of the courses due to the current financial constraints of most formal nature conservation agencies in South Africa. The courses are accredited by the Centre for Environment and Development (CEAD) of the University of Natal and are part of the Centre's Masters Degree short course programme. This accreditation is made through a partnership agreement between WAG and CEAD.

Before the courses commenced in the Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve near Robertson in the Western Cape, officials of the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board (WCNCB) took the Training Team to a number of the wilderness areas and reserves under its control. The tour was rewarding as the core team members, (Drummond Densham, Bill Bainbridge and Mike Reid), were able to acquaint themselves with these areas and to discuss wilderness management issues with the staff on the ground. The scenery of the Western Cape and the Cape Floristic Kingdom was quite different to the areas in KwaZulu-Natal that the team members are used to working in.

The basic course introduced the participants to the history of wilderness conservation, its concepts, definitions, legal aspects, values and benefits to society and the principles of management, both from a conservation and visitor control perspectives. There was a session on the uniqueness and importance of conserving the Cape Floristic Kingdom and the threats that this biome is facing. The participants were given case studies, all South African and from real situations, to work through in small groups. The training team and participants enjoyed the discussions during the group work sessions and at the plenary session. The participants raised many important issues and shared ideas and experiences during these sessions. The course concluded with sessions on the need for wilderness education and an examination of the relevance of wilderness conservation in South Africa and how wilderness conservation can help in conserving the threatened Cape Floristic habits.

The advanced course built on the aspects covered in the basic course but then introduced the participants to the role wilderness plays in the category of protected areas and the principles of wilderness area planning and zoning. The concept of "Limits of Acceptable Change" and its application in the planning and management of wilderness areas was also covered. The participants were asked to apply these principles in course work to the wilderness areas they work in. They were given a day and half for this exercise to help managers understand the need for the proper planning and management of wilderness areas to effectively protect the wilderness resource of solitude and naturalness. Their subsequent presentations showed that they not only grasped the principles but had started to wrestle with the real issues that many of them had not realised before the course. This was the first advanced course where participants had high-tech computer planning capabilities. The course concluded with a session on the challenges facing wilderness areas and solutions.

The participants were WCNCB Field Rangers and Reserve Managers. Seventeen people attended the basic course, 13 of which stayed on to attend the advanced course. This was the first time that WAG has presented the courses in the Western Cape. The feedback from the participants was that the courses were relevant and informative giving them the tools and skills to improve their management of their wilderness areas. They enjoyed the way the courses were presented allowing them to challenge the wilderness topics and discuss management issues. The courses developed a high sense of commitment in each of them to improve the way management of their wilderness areas is being conducted. The participants and the training team learned a great deal during the two weeks. They all agreed that wilderness conservation is an important option for the protection of the Cape Floristic Kingdom. However, the financial constraints that the WCNCB is experiencing will hamper them. However, the need to seek alternative conservation approaches is appreciated by them and they are all committed to doing just this.

WAG will strive to seek the sponsorships and continue to provide wilderness management training in this region for the many staff and people who live in the communities adjacent to the wilderness areas.

WAG and CEAD wish to express their appreciation to CEPF for the grant funding that ensured that the wilderness courses could be held. WAG / CEAD wish also to thank Trevor Sandwith of C.A.P.E and Andrew Muir of the Wilderness Foundation (South Africa) who supported our funding application to CEPF. Our thanks are also extended to Piet Van Zyl and his staff at Vrolijkheid for all the assistance given while the courses were being held in the Reserve. We wish to thank Guy Palmer, Marius Brand, Pierre van den Berg and Chris Martens of the WCNCB and Teri Kruger of the Wilderness Foundation for helping in the planning and organisation of the courses and for hosting the core training team before the commencement of the courses. Lastly, we thank wish to thank Monica Tiras and her family for looking after the catering arrangements throughout the courses.

Drummond Densham
Wilderness Concepts and Practice Course Convenor &
Chairman of the Wilderness Action Group

July 2003

BACKGROUND

Wilderness Action Group

Vision

The Wilderness Action Group fosters the enduring wilderness of Southern Africa and elsewhere for its value to the present and future generations together with people.

Mission

The Mission of Wilderness Action Group is to promote and advocate the wilderness concept throughout southern Africa and elsewhere, on public, communal and private land through a range of activities.

Centre for Environment and Development

Vision

Through our competence, commitment and innovation we are internationally recognised for excellence in action-based learning to engage the challenges of environmentally sustainable development in an African context.

Wilderness Concepts and Practice Course Contents

The programme involves lectures, discussions, and group case study work. All participants are required to complete all group work assignments and to submit an essay.

BASIC

This course is designed to give participants an understanding of the concepts of wilderness, benefits and values, wilderness management principles and the appropriate use of wilderness areas by visitors.

Course Content

Wilderness Concepts and Historical Perspectives
Definitions of Wilderness and Wilderness Legislation
Wilderness Management
Wilderness Use and Visitor Management
Field visit
Managing the Wilderness Experience
Educating People about Wilderness
Relevance of wilderness to South Africa

ADVANCED

The Advanced level course is only open to those who have completed a basic course. The course is structured to take participants through a wilderness planning process. The aim is to equip them to initiate planning exercises in their wilderness areas.

Course Content

Wilderness Role as a Protected Area Category
Wilderness and You
Philosophers in Wilderness
Principles of Planning
Wilderness Planning Exercise
Field Visit
Challenges facing Wilderness Conservation

Training Team Facilitators

Bill Bainbridge – Vice Chairman of Wilderness Action Group
Drummond Densham – Chairman of Wilderness Action Group
Malcolm Draper – Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Social Science, University of Natal –
Pietermaritzburg Campus
Teri Kruger – Environmental Consultant and Member of Wilderness Foundation
Mike Reid – Member of Wilderness Action Group.



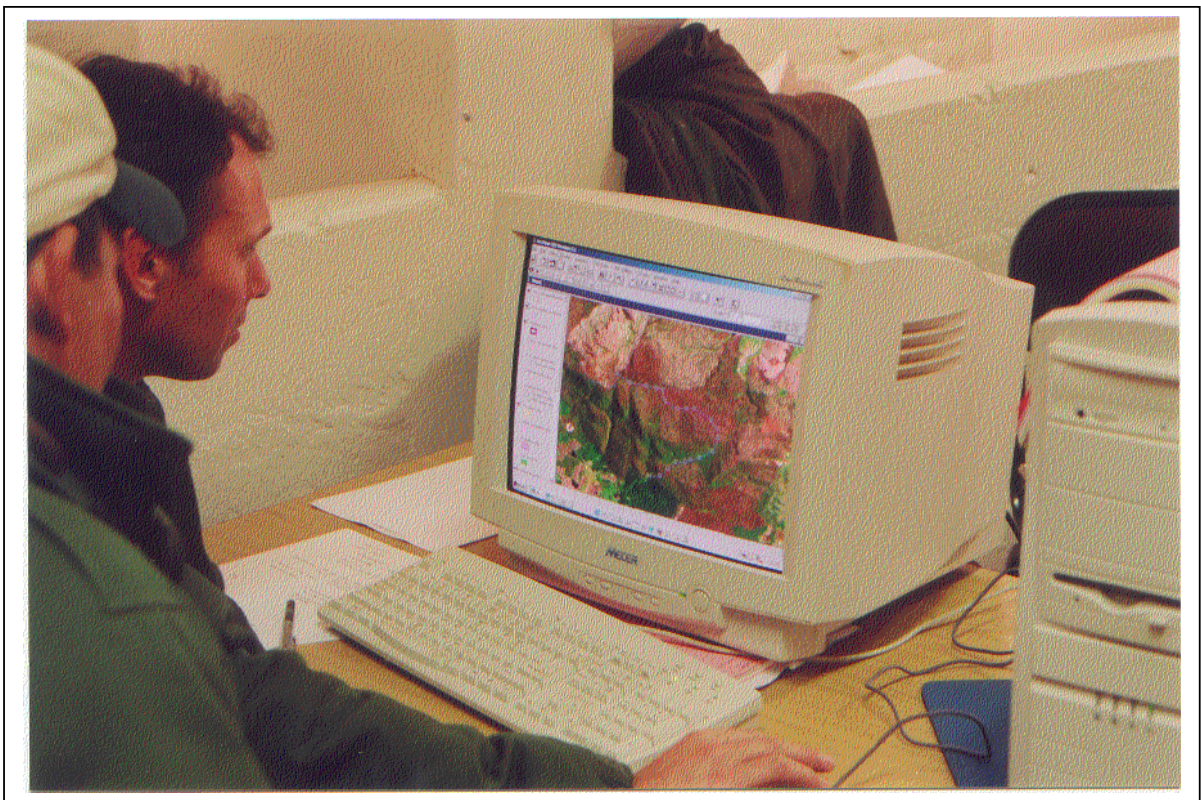
Drummond Densham (left), Marius Brand (centre) of Western Cape Nature Conservation Board and Bill Bainbridge (right) discussing wilderness conservation issues on tour of wilderness areas



Group photo of facilitators and participants – Basic Course at Vrolijkheid Nature Reserve
June 2003



Participants on case study group work during Basic Course



Wilderness planning exercise in the Advanced Course