|  |
| --- |
| **Table Mountain** |
| *Huriǂoaxa**Tafelberg* |
| Table Mountain DanieVDM.jpgView of Table Mountain and [Cape Town](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Town) seen from [Bloubergstrand](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloubergstrand%2C_Cape_Town). Table Mountain is flanked by [Devil's Peak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil%27s_Peak_%28Cape_Town%29) on the left and [Lion's Head](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion%27s_Head_%28Cape_Town%29) on the right. |
| **Highest point** |
| [**Elevation**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Summit) | 1,084.6 m (3,558 ft)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-1) |
| [**Prominence**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topographic_prominence) | 1,055 m (3,461 ft) |
| [**Listing**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lists_of_mountains) | [List of mountains in South Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mountains_in_South_Africa) |
| [**Coordinates**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system) | https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/55/WMA_button2b.png/17px-WMA_button2b.png[33°57′26.33″S 18°24′11.19″E](https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Table_Mountain&params=33_57_26.33_S_18_24_11.19_E_type:mountain_region:ZA-WC)[Coordinates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geographic_coordinate_system): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/55/WMA_button2b.png/17px-WMA_button2b.png[33°57′26.33″S 18°24′11.19″E](https://geohack.toolforge.org/geohack.php?pagename=Table_Mountain&params=33_57_26.33_S_18_24_11.19_E_type:mountain_region:ZA-WC) |
| **Geography** |

Table Mountain

**Table Mountain** ([Khoekhoe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khoekhoe_language): ***Huriǂoaxa***, [lit.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literal_translation) 'sea-emerging'; [Afrikaans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrikaans_language): ***Tafelberg***) is a flat-topped [mountain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mountain) forming a prominent landmark overlooking the city of [Cape Town](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Town) in [South Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Africa). It is a significant [tourist attraction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tourist_attraction), with many visitors using the [cableway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain_Aerial_Cableway) or hiking to the top.[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-2) Table Mountain [National Park](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_park) is the most visited national park in South Africa, attracting 4.2 million people every year for various activities. The mountain has 8,200 plant species, of which around 80% are [fynbos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fynbos), meaning fine bush. [[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-3) It forms part of the [Table Mountain National Park](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain_National_Park), and part of the lands formerly ranged by [Khoe-speaking](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khoe-Kwadi%22%20%5Co%20%22Khoe-Kwadi) clans, such as the *!Uriǁʼaes* (the "High Clan"). It is home to a large array of mostly [endemic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endemism) fauna and flora.

Features



Table Mountain seen from [Lion's Head](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion%27s_Head_%28Cape_Town%29) with low-lying cloud cover over Cape Town.



Cape Town under the clouds

The main feature of Table Mountain is the level plateau approximately three kilometres (2 mi) from side to side, edged by impressive cliffs. The plateau, flanked by [Devil's Peak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil%27s_Peak_%28Cape_Town%29) to the east and by [Lion's Head](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion%27s_Head_%28Cape_Town%29) to the west, forms a dramatic backdrop to Cape Town. This broad sweep of mountainous heights, together with [Signal Hill](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Signal_Hill_%28Cape_Town%29), forms the natural [amphitheatre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amphitheatre%22%20%5Co%20%22Amphitheatre) of the [City Bowl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/City_Bowl) and [Table Bay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Bay) harbour. The highest point on Table Mountain is towards the eastern end of the plateau and is marked by [Maclear's Beacon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maclear%27s_Beacon%22%20%5Co%20%22Maclear%27s%20Beacon), a stone cairn built in 1865 by Sir [Thomas Maclear](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Maclear) for trigonometrical survey. It is 1,086 metres (3,563 ft) above sea level, and about 19 metres (62 ft) higher than the [cable station](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#Cableway) at the western end of the plateau.

The cliffs of the main plateau are split by Platteklip Gorge ("Flat Stone Gorge"), which provides an easy and direct ascent to the summit and was the route taken by [António de Saldanha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ant%C3%B3nio_de_Saldanha%22%20%5Co%20%22Ant%C3%B3nio%20de%20Saldanha) on the first recorded ascent of the mountain in 1503.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-bootsnall-5)

The flat top of the mountain is often covered by [orographic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orographic_lift) clouds, formed when a southeasterly wind is directed up the mountain's slopes into colder air, where the moisture condenses to form the so-called "table cloth" of cloud. Legend attributes this phenomenon to a [smoking](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tobacco_smoking) contest between the [Devil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil) and a local [pirate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pirate) called Van Hunks.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-CTinfo-6) When the table cloth is seen, it symbolizes the contest.

Table Mountain is at the northern end of a [sandstone mountain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain_Sandstone_%28Geological_Formation%29) range that forms the spine of the [Cape Peninsula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Peninsula) that terminates approximately 50 kilometres (30 mi) to the south at the [Cape of Good Hope](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_of_Good_Hope) and [Cape Point](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Point). Immediately to the south of Table Mountain is a rugged "plateau" at a somewhat lower elevation than the Table Mountain Plateau (at about 1,000 m or 3,300 ft), called the "Back Table". The "Back Table" extends southwards for approximately 6 km to the [Constantia Nek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantia_Nek)-[Hout Bay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hout_Bay%22%20%5Co%20%22Hout%20Bay) valley. The [Atlantic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Ocean) side of the Back Table is known as the Twelve Apostles, which extends from Kloof Nek (the saddle between Table Mountain and [Lion's Head](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion%27s_Head_%28Cape_Town%29)) to [Hout Bay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hout_Bay%22%20%5Co%20%22Hout%20Bay). The eastern side of this portion of the Peninsula's mountain chain, extending from [Devil's Peak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil%27s_Peak_%28Cape_Town%29), the eastern side of Table Mountain (Erica and Fernwood Buttresses), and the Back Table to [Constantia Nek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantia_Nek), does not have a single name, as on the western side. It is better known by the names of the conservation areas on its lower slopes: Groote Schuur Estate, [Newlands Forest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newlands_Forest), [Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirstenbosch_Botanical_Gardens), [Cecilia Park](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecilia_Park), and [Constantia Nek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantia_Nek).

Geology[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Table_Mountain&action=edit&section=2" \o "Edit section: Geology)]

*Main article:*[*Cape Peninsula § Geology*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Peninsula#Geology)

*Main article:*[*Cape Fold Mountains*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Fold_Mountains)

*Main article:*[*Marine geology of the Cape Peninsula and False Bay*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marine_geology_of_the_Cape_Peninsula_and_False_Bay)



Geological structure of Table Mountain. Compare with the map in this section.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-compton-7)



Geology of Table Mountain in relation to the geology of the rest of the Cape Peninsula.

The upper approximately 600-metre (2,000 ft) portion of the one-kilometre-high (0.62 mi) table-topped mountain, or [mesa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesa), consists of 450- to 510-million-year-old ([Ordovician](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordovician)) rocks belonging to the two lowermost layers of the [Cape Fold Mountains](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Fold_Mountains).[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-compton-7)[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-McCarthy-8) The uppermost, and younger of the two layers, consists of extremely hard [quartzitic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quartz%22%20%5Co%20%22Quartz) [sandstone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandstone), commonly referred to as "[Table Mountain Sandstone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain_Sandstone_%28Geological_Formation%29)" (TMS), or "[Peninsula Formation Sandstone"](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Fold_Belt#Table_Mountain_Group) (as it is known as at present), which is highly resistant to erosion and forms characteristic steep grey crags. The 70-metre-thick (230 ft) lower layer, known as the "Graafwater Formation", consists of distinctively maroon-colored mudstones, which were laid down in much thinner horizontal strata than the Table Mountain Sandstone strata above it.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-compton-7) The Graafwater rocks can best be seen just above the contour path on the front of Table Mountain, and around [Devils Peak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil%27s_Peak_%28Cape_Town%29). They can also been seen in the cutting along [Chapman's Peak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chapman%27s_Peak) Drive. These rocks are believed to have originated in shallow tidal flats, in which a few Ordovician fossils, and fossil tracks have been preserved.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-compton-7)[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-tankard-9) The overlying TMS probably arose in deeper water, either as a result of subsidence, or a rise in the sea level.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-compton-7)[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-tankard-9) The Graafwater rocks rest on the [basement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basement_rock) consisting of [Cape Granite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Granite). [Devil's Peak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil%27s_Peak_%28Cape_Town%29), Signal Hill, the City Bowl and much of the "Cape Flats", however, rest on heavily [folded](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fold_%28geology%29) and altered [phyllites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phyllite%22%20%5Co%20%22Phyllite) and [hornfelses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hornfels%22%20%5Co%20%22Hornfels) known informally as the [Malmesbury shales](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marine_geology_of_the_Cape_Peninsula_and_False_Bay%22%20%5Cl%20%22The_geological_structure_of_the_region%22%20%5Co%20%22Marine%20geology%20of%20the%20Cape%20Peninsula%20and%20False%20Bay). The Cape Granite and Malmesbury shales form the lower, gentler slopes of the Table Mountain range on the Cape Peninsula. They are of late [Precambrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precambrian) age, pre-dating the "Graafwater rocks" by at least 40 million years.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-compton-7)



A west-east (left to right) geological cross section through Table Mountain on the [Cape Peninsula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Peninsula), the Cape Flats (the isthmus connecting the Peninsula to the African mainland) and the [Hottentots-Holland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hottentots-Holland) Mountains on the mainland. It indicates how the Cape Fold Mountains have been eroded in this region, leaving what was once the bottom of a valley to form Table Mountain with its flat table-top structure.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-compton-7)

The basement rocks are not nearly as resistant to weathering as the TMS, but significant outcrops of the Cape Granite are visible on the western side of Lion's Head, and elsewhere on the Peninsula (especially below Chapman's Peak Drive, and The Boulders near [Simon's Town](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simon%27s_Town)).[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-compton-7)[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-uct-geology-10)[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-geology-11) The weathered granite soil of the lower slopes of the Peninsula Mountain range are more fertile than the nutrient-poor soils derived from TMS. Most of the vineyards found on the Cape Peninsula are therefore found on these granitic slopes of the Table Mountain range.

The mountain owes its table-top flatness to the fact that it is a [syncline](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syncline) mountain, meaning that it was once the floor of a valley (see diagram on the right). The [anticline](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anticline), or highest point of the [series of folds that Table Mountain was once part of](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Fold_Belt), lay to the east, but that has been weathered away, together with the underlying softer Malmesbury shale and granite basement, to form the "Cape Flats", the isthmus that connects the Cape Peninsula to the mainland. The fold mountains reappear as the [Hottentots-Holland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hottentots-Holland) Mountain range on the mainland side of the Cape Flats.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-compton-7) What has added to the mountain's table-top flatness is that it consists entirely of the very hard, lower layer of the [TMS Formation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain_Sandstone_%28Geological_Formation%29). Originally this was topped by a thin glacial tillite layer, known as the Pakhuis Formation (see the diagram above, left), above which was the upper layer of TMS. Both these layers, but especially the tillite layer, are softer than the lower layer of Table Mountain Sandstone. When these softer layers eroded away, they left a very hard, flat erosion-resistant quartzitic sandstone platform behind which today forms Table Mountain's top.



Satellite image of Table Mountain, surrounded by Cape Town

Table Mountain is the northernmost end of a 50-kilometre-long (30 mi) and roughly six-to-ten-kilometre-wide (4 to 6 mi) Cape Fold Mountain range that forms the backbone of the Cape Peninsula, stretching from the [Cape of Good Hope](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_of_Good_Hope) in the south to Table Mountain and its flanking Devil's Peak (to the east) and Lion's Head and Signal Hill (to the west) in the north. Table Mountain forms the highest point of this range. The range runs parallel to the other Cape Fold Mountain ranges on the mainland to the east.

Flora[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Table_Mountain&action=edit&section=3" \o "Edit section: Flora)]



A [king protea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protea_cynaroides) growing in [Peninsula Sandstone Fynbos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peninsula_Sandstone_Fynbos) on Table Mountain



[Silver trees](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leucadendron_argenteum) (*Leucadendron argenteum*) only occur naturally on the granite and clay soils of the Cape Peninsula, surrounding Table Mountain and the Back Table.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-manning3-12)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-13) A few tiny patches, possibly planted there early in the Cape Colony's history, occur near Stellenbosch, Paarl and Somerset West.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-manning3-12) This photo was taken on Lion's Head, looking towards the Twelve Apostles.



The *[Disa uniflora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disa_uniflora%22%20%5Co%20%22Disa%20uniflora)*, also known as Pride of Table Mountain, is a showy orchid that blooms under waterfalls, along streamlets and seeps on the top and upper slopes of Table Mountain and the Back Table, in January–March.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-terry-14)



[Indigenous forest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Afrotemperate_Forest) on Table Mountain, with Devils Peak visible in the distance

Table Mountain and the Back Table have an unusually rich biodiversity. Its vegetation consists predominantly of several different types of the unique and rich Cape [fynbos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fynbos). The main vegetation type is endangered [Peninsula Sandstone Fynbos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peninsula_Sandstone_Fynbos), but [critically endangered](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critically_endangered) [Peninsula Granite Fynbos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peninsula_Granite_Fynbos), [Peninsula Shale Renosterveld](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peninsula_Shale_Renosterveld) and [Afromontane forest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afromontane) occur in smaller portions on the mountain.

Table Mountain's vegetation types form part of the [Cape Floral Region](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Floral_Region) protected areas. These protected areas are a [World Heritage Site](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Site), and an estimated 2,285 species of plants are confined to Table Mountain and the Cape Peninsula range, of which a great proportion, including many species of [proteas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protea%22%20%5Co%20%22Protea), are endemic to these mountains and valleys and can be found nowhere else.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-manning1-15)[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-maytham-16) Of the 2,285 species on the Peninsula 1,500 occur in the 57 km2 area comprising Table Mountain and the Back Table, a number at least a large as all the plant species in the whole of the United Kingdom.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-manning1-15) The [Disa uniflora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disa_uniflora%22%20%5Co%20%22Disa%20uniflora), despite its restricted range within the [Western Cape](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Cape), is relatively common in the perennially wet areas (waterfalls, streamlets and seeps) on Table Mountain and the Back Table, but hardly anywhere else on the Cape Peninsula.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-terry-14)[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-manning2-17) It is a very showy orchid that blooms from January to March on the [Table Mountain Sandstone regions of the mountain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Peninsula#Geology). Although they are quite widespread on the Back Table, the best (most certain, and close-up) place to view these beautiful blooms is in the "Aqueduct" off the Smuts Track, halfway between Skeleton Gorge and Maclear's Beacon.

Remnant patches of [indigenous forest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Afrotemperate_Forest) persist in the wetter ravines. However, much of the indigenous forest was felled by the early European settlers for fuel for the lime kilns needed during the construction of [the Castle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castle_of_Good_Hope).[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-Dan-18) The exact extent of the original forests is unknown, though most of it was probably along the eastern slopes of [Devil's Peak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil%27s_Peak_%28Cape_Town%29), Table Mountain and the Back Table where names such as Rondebosch, Kirstenbosch, Klassenbosch and Witteboomen survive (in Dutch "bosch" means forest; and "boomen" means trees). Hout Bay (in Dutch "hout" means wood) was another source of timber and fuel as the name suggests.[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-Dan-18) In the early 1900s commercial pine plantations were planted on these slopes all the way from the Constantiaberg to the front of Devil's Peak, and even on top of the mountains, but these have now been largely cleared allowing fynbos to flourish in the regions where the indigenous Afromontane forests have not survived, or never existed.

Fynbos is a fire adapted vegetation, and providing fires are not too frequent, regular or intense, they are important drivers of fynbos diversity.[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-19) Regular fires have dominated fynbos for at least the past 12 000 years largely as a result of human activity.[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-maytham-16)[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-kraaij-20) In 1495 [Vasco da Gama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasco_da_Gama) named the South African coastline *Terra de Fume* because of the smoke he saw from numerous fires.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-pauw-21) This was originally probably to maintain a productive stock of edible bulbs (especially [watsonians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watsonia_%28plant%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Watsonia%20%28plant%29))[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-pauw-21) and to facilitate hunting, and later, after the arrival of [pastoralists](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khoikhoi),[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-22) to provide fresh grazing after the rains.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-pauw-21)[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-kraaij-20) Thus the plants that make up fynbos today are those that have been subjected to a variety of fire regimes over a very long period time, and their preservation now requires regular burning. The frequency of the fires obviously determines precisely which mix of plants will dominate any particular region,[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-Mary-23) but intervals of 10–15 years between fires[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-manning1-15) are considered to promote the proliferation of the larger [Protea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protea%22%20%5Co%20%22Protea) species, a rare local colony of which, the *Aulax umbellata* (Family: [Proteaceae](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proteaceae%22%20%5Co%20%22Proteaceae)), was wiped out on the Peninsula by more frequent fires,[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-Mary-23) as have been the silky-haired pincushion, *Leucospermum vestitum*, the red sugarbush, *Protea grandiceps* and Burchell's sugarbush, *Protea burchellii*, although a stand of a dozen or so plants has recently been "rediscovered" in the saddle between Table Mountain and Devil's Peak.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-pauw-21) Some bulbs may similarly have become extinct as a result a too rapid sequence of fires.[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-Mary-23) The fires that occur on the mountains today are still largely due to unregulated human activity. Fire frequency is therefore a matter of chance rather than conservation.

Despite intensive conservation efforts the Table Mountain range has the highest concentration of [threatened species](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Threatened_species) of any continental area of equivalent size in the world.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-manning1-15)[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-24) The non-urban areas of the Cape Peninsula (mainly on the mountains and mountain slopes) have suffered particularly under a massive onslaught of [invasive alien plants](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invasive_species) for well over a century, with perhaps the worst invader being the [cluster pine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maritime_pine), partly because it was planted in extensive commercial plantations along the eastern slopes of the mountains, north of Muizenberg. Considerable efforts have been made to control the rapid spread of these invasive alien trees. Other invasive plants include [black wattle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_wattle), blackwood, [Port Jackson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acacia_saligna) and [rooikrans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rooikrans%22%20%5Co%20%22Rooikrans) (All Australian members of the acacia family), as well as several [*Hakea*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hakea) species and [bramble](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bramble).[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-manning1-15)[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-Mary-23)[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-25)[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-26)



Dassies (rock hyrax)

Fauna[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Table_Mountain&action=edit&section=4" \o "Edit section: Fauna)]

The most common mammal on the mountain was the *[dassie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dassie%22%20%5Co%20%22Dassie)* (the South African name, from [Afrikaans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrikaans), pronounced "dussy"), or [rock hyrax](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock_hyrax). Between about 2000 and 2004 (no one is certain about the exact year or years) their numbers suddenly plummeted for unknown reasons. They used to cluster around the restaurant at the upper cable station, near areas where tourists discarded or (inadvisably) supplied food. The population crash of the dassies may have been responsible for the decline in the [Verreaux's eagle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verreaux%27s_eagle%22%20%5Co%20%22Verreaux%27s%20eagle) population on the [Peninsula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Peninsula), which is believed to have consisted of 3 breeding pairs during the period 1950 to 1990, with only 2 pairs, maximally, ever having been reported to fledge a chick each in any given year.[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-27) With the commencement of formal monitoring in 1993, two breeding pairs were recorded on the [Cape Peninsula Mountain Chain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Peninsula) in 2004: one below the upper cable station at the western end of Table Mountain, in Blinkwater Ravine, the other on the cliffs below Noordhoek Peak.[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-28) The nest near the cable station was abandoned in 2006, leaving only the Noordhoek pair, which continued to fledge chicks reasonably regularly till 2013, at which point one member of the pair disappeared. From 2013 till January 2017 only a single Verreaux's Eagle, presumed to be a female, remained on the Peninsula. She continued to maintain the nest under Noordhoek Peak, but seemed unable to attract a mate. But in early 2017 a pair of eagles was seen by at least 7 independent observers during the course of 10 days (27 January - 5 February). It remains to be seen whether they will breed later in the year. Dassies are an important part the Verreaux's eagle's prey on the Peninsula.[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-hockey-29) (See Foot note[[nb 1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain%22%20%5Cl%20%22cite_note-30))

Table Mountain is also home to [porcupines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_porcupine), [mongooses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongoose), [snakes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snake), [lizards](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lizard), [tortoises](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tortoise), and a rare endemic species of [amphibian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amphibian) that is only found on Table Mountain, the [Table Mountain ghost frog](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain_ghost_frog). The last [lion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion) in the area was shot circa 1802. [Leopards](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopard) persisted on the mountains until perhaps the 1920s but are now extinct locally. Two smaller, secretive, nocturnal carnivores, the *rooikat* ([caracal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caracal)) and the *vaalboskat* (also called the vaalkat or [Southern African wildcat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_African_wildcat)) were once common in the mountains and the mountain slopes. The rooikat continues to be seen on rare occasions by mountaineers but the status of the vaalboskat is uncertain. The mountain cliffs are home to several raptors species, apart from the Verreaux's eagle. They include the [jackal buzzard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jackal_buzzard), [booted eagle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Booted_eagle) (in summer), [African harrier-hawk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_harrier-hawk), [peregrine falcon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peregrine_falcon) and the [rock kestrel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock_kestrel).[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-hockey-29)[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-31) In 2014 there were four pairs of [African fish eagles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_fish_eagles) on the Peninsula, but they nest in trees generally as far away from human habitation and activity as is possible on the Peninsula. Their numbers in 2017 is unknown.

Up until the late 1990s [baboons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chacma_baboon) occurred on all the mountains of the Peninsula, including the Back Table immediately behind Table Mountain. Since then they have abandoned Table Mountain and the Back Table, and only occur south of Constantia Nek. They have also abandoned the tops of many of the mountains, in favor of the lower slopes, particularly when these were covered in pine plantations which seemed to provide them with more, or higher quality food than the [fynbos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fynbos) on the mountain tops. However these new haunts are also within easy reach of Cape Town's suburbs, which brings them into conflict with humans and dogs, and the risk of traffic accidents. There are now (2014) a dozen troops on the Peninsula, varying in size from 7 to over 100 individuals, scattered on the mountains from the Constantiaberg to Cape Point.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-32)[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-baboon-33) The baboon troops are the subject of intense research into their physiology, genetics social interactions and habits. In addition, their sleeping sites are noted each evening, so that monitors armed with paint ball guns can stay with the troop all day, to ward them off from wandering into the suburbs. From when this initiative was started in 2009 the number of baboons on the Peninsula has increased from 350 to 450, and the number of baboons killed or injured by residents has decreased.[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-baboon-33)



Rau quagga in the animal camp on the slopes of [Devil's Peak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil%27s_Peak_%28Cape_Town%29), above Groote Schuur Hospital.

[Himalayan tahrs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himalayan_tahr), fugitive descendants of tahrs that escaped from [Groote Schuur Zoo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groote_Schuur_Zoo) in 1936, used to be common on the less accessible upper parts of the mountain. As an exotic species, they were almost eradicated through a culling programme initiated by the [South African National Parks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_African_National_Parks) to make way for the reintroduction of indigenous [klipspringers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klipspringer). Until recently there were also small numbers of [fallow deer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fallow_deer) of European origin and [sambar deer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sambar_deer) from southeast Asia. These were mainly in the [Rhodes Memorial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodes_Memorial) area but during the 1960s they could be found as far afield as Signal Hill. These animals may still be seen occasionally despite efforts to eliminate or relocate them.



[Himalayan tahr](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Himalayan_tahr) in Skeleton Gorge on Table Mountain.

On the lower slopes of [Devil's Peak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Devil%27s_Peak_%28Cape_Town%29), above [Groote Schuur Hospital](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Groote_Schuur_Hospital) an animal camp bequeathed to the City of Cape Town by [Cecil John Rhodes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecil_John_Rhodes) has been used in recent years as part of the [Quagga Project](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quagga_Project).[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-34) The [quagga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quagga) used to roam the Cape Peninsula, the [Karoo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karoo) and the [Free State](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_State_%28province%29) in large numbers, but were hunted to extinction during the early 1800s. The last quagga died in an Amsterdam zoo in 1883. In 1987 a project was launched by [Reinhold Rau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reinhold_Rau) to [back-breed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Back-breeding) the quagga, after it had been established, using [mitochondrial DNA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitochondrial_DNA) obtained from museum specimens, that the quagga was closely related to the [plains zebra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plains_zebra), and on 20 January 2005 a foal considered to be the first quagga-like individual because of a visible reduced striping, was born. These quagga-like zebras are officially known as Rau quaggas, as no one can be certain that they are anything more than quagga look-alikes. The animal camp above Groote Schuur Hospital has several good looking Rau quaggas, but they are unfortunately not easily seen except from within the game camp, which is quite large and undulating, and the animals are few. The animal camp is not open to the public.

History[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Table_Mountain&action=edit&section=5" \o "Edit section: History)]



Table Mountain from [Capt. Cook](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Cook)'s ship [HMS *Resolution*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Resolution_%281771%29) by [William Hodges](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Hodges) (1772)



De Villiers reservoir, just to the left as the Bridle Path reaches the top of the Back Table

Prehistoric inhabitation of the district is well attested (see for example the article on [Fish Hoek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fish_Hoek)). About 2000 years ago the [Khoe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khoe-Kwadi%22%20%5Co%20%22Khoe-Kwadi)-speaking peoples migrated towards the Cape Peninsula from the north. This countryside was before that occupied by nomadic [!Ui](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuu_languages) speakers (who were foragers). The [pastoralist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastoralism) influx brought herds of cattle and sheep into the region, which then formed part of a larger grazing land that was seasonally rotated. It was the !Uriǁʼaekua ("Highclansmen", often written in Dutch as *Goringhaiqua*) who were the dominant local people when the Europeans first sailed into Table Bay. This clan is said to be the ancestral population of the !Ora nations of today (so-called "Korana" people).

These original inhabitants of the area so-called "[Khoekhoen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khoikhoi%22%20%5Co%20%22Khoikhoi)", called Table Mountain Huriǂ'oaxa – "ocean-emerging (mountain)".[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-35)[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-36)

[António de Saldanha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ant%C3%B3nio_de_Saldanha) was the first European to land in Table Bay. He climbed the mighty mountain in 1503 and named it **Taboa do Cabo** (*Table of the Cape*, in his native [Portuguese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_language)). The great cross that the Portuguese navigator carved into the rock of Lion's Head is still traceable.

In 1796, during the [British occupation of the Cape](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_South_Africa#British_at_the_Cape), [Major-General Sir James Craig](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Henry_Craig) ordered three [blockhouses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blockhouse) to be built on Table Mountain: the King's blockhouse, Duke of York blockhouse (*later renamed Queen's blockhouse*) and the Prince of Wales blockhouse. Two of these are in ruins today, but the King's blockhouse is still in good condition.[[36]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-fsg-37)[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-38)[[38]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-39) and easily accessible from the [Rhodes Memorial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodes_Memorial).

Between 1896 and 1907, five dams, the Woodhead, Hely-Hutchinson, De Villiers, Alexandria and Victoria reservoirs, were opened on the Back Table to supply Cape Town's water needs. A ropeway ascending from [Camps Bay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camps_Bay) via Kasteelspoort ravine was used to ferry materials and manpower (the anchor points at the old top station can still be seen). There is a well-preserved steam locomotive from this period housed in the [Waterworks Museum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterworks_Museum_%28Cape_Town%29) at the top of the mountain near the Hely-Hutchinson dam. It had been used to haul materials for the dam across the flat top of the mountain. Cape Town's water requirements have since far outpaced the capacity of the dams and they are no longer an important part of the water supply.

Arguments for a national park on the Cape Peninsula, centred on Table Mountain, began in earnest in the mid-1930s. Following a big fire in 1986, the *Cape Times* started a 'save the mountain' campaign, and in 1989 the Cape Peninsula Protected Natural Environment (CPPNE) area was established. However, environmental management was still bedeviled by the fragmented nature of land ownership on the Peninsula. Following another big fire in 1991, Attorney General Frank Kahn was appointed to reach consensus on a plan for rationalizing management of the CPPNE. In 1995, Prof. Brian Huntley recommended that SANParks be appointed to manage the CPPNE, with an agreement signed in April 1998 to transfer around 39,500 acres to SANParks. On 29 May 1998, then-president Nelson Mandela proclaimed the Cape Peninsula National Park. The park was later renamed to the [Table Mountain National Park](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain_National_Park).[[39]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-40)

Fires are common on the mountain. The [most recent major fires](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Table_Mountain_fire) include those of January 2006, which burned large amounts of vegetation and resulted in the death of a tourist (a charge of arson and culpable homicide was laid against a British man who was suspected of starting the blaze), and March 2015.[[40]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-41) There was a [major fire in April 2021](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2021_Table_Mountain_fire) that affected the [Rhodes Memorial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodes_Memorial) and the [University of Cape Town](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_Cape_Town).[[41]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-bbcnews_18apr21-42)

In November 2011, Table Mountain was named one of the [New7Wonders of Nature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New7Wonders_of_Nature%22%20%5Co%20%22New7Wonders%20of%20Nature).[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-new7wonders.com-43)

Cableway[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Table_Mountain&action=edit&section=6" \o "Edit section: Cableway)]



Table Mountain "Rotair" Aerial Cable Car (1997)

The [Table Mountain Aerial Cableway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain_Aerial_Cableway)[[43]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-cableway-44) takes passengers from the lower cable station on Tafelberg Road, about 302 metres (991 ft) above sea level, to the plateau at the top of the mountain, at 1,067 metres (3,501 ft). The upper cable station offers views overlooking [Cape Town](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cape_Town), [Table Bay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Bay), [Lion's Head](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion%27s_Head_%28Cape_Town%29) and [Robben Island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robben_Island) to the north, and the [Atlantic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_ocean) seaboard to the west and south.

The original construction was awarded in 1926 to the former world-renowned cable way company Adolf [Bleichert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bleichert%22%20%5Co%20%22Bleichert) & Co. of Leipzig, Germany,[[44]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Table_Mountain#cite_note-45) taking more than two years to build the Table Mountain Aerial Cableway, due to infrastructural works, official opening was on 4 October 1929.

The Table Mountain Aerial Cableway has been refurbished three times since its first inauguration in 1929. The first refurbishment occurred in 1958, the second in 1974, whereas the third, latest and most important reconstruction has been started in 1996, which began operation in 1997 and included a "Rotair" panorama gondola manufactured by the Swiss company Garaventa AG - CWA ([Doppelmayr Garaventa Group](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doppelmayr_Garaventa_Group%22%20%5Co%20%22Doppelmayr%20Garaventa%20Group)).

Many improvements have been introduced since 1929, with new and bigger gondolas that increased capacity from 20 up to 65 passengers per gondola. However, both the valley and mountain station buildings are original, even they have been extensively upgraded. The new cable cars give a faster journey to the summit, and rotate through 360 degrees during the ascent or descent, giving a panoramic view over the city.

The top cable station offers viewpoints, curio shops, a restaurant and walking trails of various lengths.