

A close-up photograph of several bright yellow flowers with prominent stamens and some red buds. The background is a soft-focus green. A white graphic element consisting of several curved lines is visible in the lower right corner of the image.

**// What you love, you'll
want to protect //**

Meet Linda Fletcher, the newest member of the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve (GCBR) team in South Africa. With a corporate background, Linda brings a fresh new perspective and energy to the GCBR which immediately resulted in a spontaneous eco-tourism project.



Meet the Action Team in charge of restoring the Sleeping Beauty hiking trail in the GCBR

[from left to right:
Bertus Hayward (Hessequa Municipality, special planning division),
Phillip Hendricks (Hessequa Municipality), Thobani Mbonane (Cape
Nature), Linda Fletcher (GCBR), Riaan Malan (Hessequa Municipality),
Christen Davids (Cape Nature), Adrian Fortuin (Cape Nature) and
Tielman Roos (Voortrekker leader and avid hiker).



Project

Jobs for Carbon in South Africa.

Goal

Increasing the socio-ecological resilience and sustainability within the biosphere by developing a robust and healthy corridor of 100,000 hectares.

Partner

Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve (GCBR).

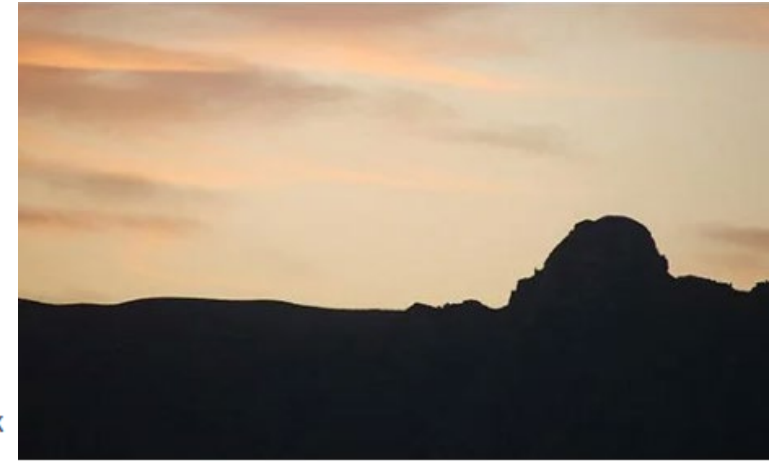
"I believe you should always start from where you are, so I looked around and there really wasn't very much going on from a tourism perspective in Riversdale where our offices are based. Yet the area is rich in natural beauty with the magnificent Langeberg Mountain Range and the wondrous diversity of Fynbos that covers the landscape. I began our tourism project by conducting a survey to get a good sense of where the people and businesses are in tourism.

The Survey

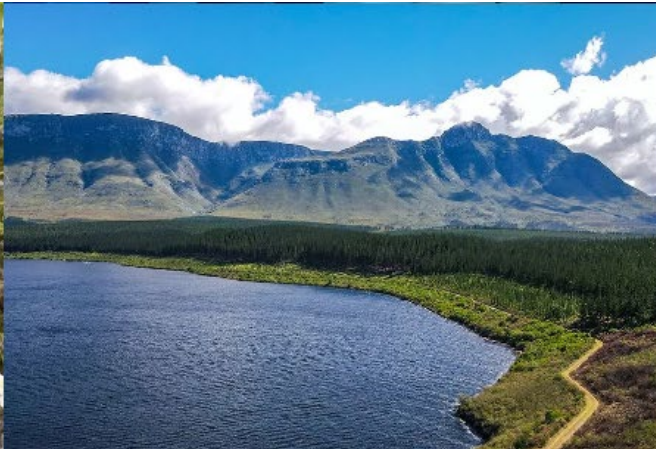
Linda began by engaging with the owners and managers of all of the B&B's, guest houses, guest farms and lodges in the area. Linda, "I wanted to find out what makes their business tick, what motivates them to do what they do and what is their ethos. I wanted to learn from their collective knowledge, find out how they market themselves and how they promote our area to tourists. I also assessed their environmental affinity, from the little things they do in their own space, like recycling and composting, but also bigger things like what they do to conserve their land or take action to control invasive alien plants. It was during these surveys that I was able to identify the reasons why no one was utilizing our area's incredible mountain hiking trails as a draw card for ecotourism. The issues were trail and cabin maintenance, poor signage and accessibility to maps and information about the trails – I knew that if we could solve these concerns that we could really give local ecotourism a boost."

Impromptu task force

In just a few weeks' time, Linda had gathered a task force to revive the hiking trails in Riversdale. With key people from the local Hessequa municipality, Cape Nature (governmental nature conservation organization) and a local community member who is the leader of the Voortrekker Organisation (South African version of Scouts) and experienced hiker on these trails. This impromptu task force rolled up their sleeves and set out to work.



Sleeping Beauty trail. The views during the 8 hour hike are breathtaking.



Creating environmental consciousness

The task force's short term goal is to rejuvenate the iconic Sleeping Beauty Hiking Trail, a 12 kilometer, 8 hour trail that traverses the scenic landscape, crosses 3 ravines, forested areas and is renowned for its fynbos which include rare, endemic species. They started by clearing the trail, have installed a picnic table, are producing maps and signage with information about the flora in the area, and are even creating "selfie moment" spots for tourists. The relaunch of this iconic trail is on 16 December 2022, just in time for the holidays.

Linda: "These mountains are absolutely breathtaking and I am convinced that when people start visiting and experiencing this extraordinary place in nature, they can't help but appreciate it and fall in love with it. And when you're in love with something, then surely you want to protect it. This is really all about environmental consciousness through environmental connection."

The task force also established a long term goal to revive and connect several Riversdale trails to create a four day circular route. It is Linda's hope and aspiration that it will have spin offs for nature based enterprises like tour guides or mountain bike tours thus stimulating the local green and tourism economies. Linda's example shows that the fact that there isn't tourism yet, doesn't mean that a region is not interesting for tourists. You just have to see its possibilities, believe in its potential and make a start!



"The flowers are typical of the Fynbos (/ 'feinbɒs/; Afrikaans pronunciation: ['feinbɒs] meaning fine plants). Fynbos is a small belt of natural shrubland or heathland vegetation located in the Western Cape and Eastern Cape provinces of South Africa."

Linda about eco-tourism

