

BOVLEI VALLEY

Discovering Wellington's hidden little gem

BOVLEI VALLEY MUST BE WELLINGTON'S BEST-kept secret. We've often passed through Wellington on our way along the Bain's Kloof Pass but this is our first time in this valley. Surrounded by the Groenberg, Limietberge and Hawequa mountains, we come across many surprises.

I'm here to go cycling with 2010 Cape Epic masters champion Shan Wilson. When I shake his hand he is decked out in cycling gear revealing a lithe physique. Who am I kidding? I'm just an urban cyclist. Shan helped design the Welvanpas mountain bike trails and he knows them intimately. I need an excuse to stall so ask him about the wild boars I've been hearing so much about on this trip.

On the way into the valley we had been wine-tasting. "They're gigantic monsters with huge heads and teeth, and they chase the dogs, eat the grapes and guavas and dig up the lawn," said James McKenzie, owner of Nabyegelegen Private Cellar. With Dixie the dog standing at his heels, snoring on her feet, he told us that male boars weigh up to 300kg while females reach 100kg.

□ **Lazanou Organic Vineyard's open day.**

"Wellington produces 80% of South Africa's *stokkie* requirements," James explained. "*Stokkies* are the disease-resistant vine cuttings used for root stock and grafts of grape varieties," he elaborated.

With country hospitality he led us into a long, bottle-lined tunnel beneath the cellar to his private wine collection. It was like being in an adventure movie and I expected him to pull out a covenant. Instead, he told us about Lady Anna Lategan, who built the cellar in 1740 and may have been a witch. She was 15 when she married. Her husband died soon afterwards leaving her to look after his seven children from his previous marriage. She remarried twice, owned three farms and released her slaves long before the abolition of slavery. "Unheard of at that time," remarked James.

"She cured people with herbs and that's why people thought she was a witch," James explained, before admitting that he sometimes sees her ghost in his lounge, and so does his neighbour.

He also told us that the valley is a thousand years

old and ancient tools have been found there. It was known as Val du Charon, Valley of the Wagonmakers, because it was thick with trees that were used to make the wagons.

Pouring a glass of Scaramanga, James told us the wine goes well with hind leg of boar. On this note we went to Dunstone Winery for more tasting. "They're a menace. They're aggressive and territorial and there are thousands of the nasty animals," is how wine consultant Ian Nie-Page described the wild boars that roam the farm. The restaurant serves wild boar burgers.

In need of exercise, we went to the end of the valley and Doolhof Wine Estate. Although we were searching for their river walk, we ended up in the original 19th century wagon house, tasting more wines. "Doolhof was named in 1709 by early settlers because of the surrounding hills and vales," explained Hillary Wadenstroom. "A *doolhof* is a labyrinth and that's exactly what this is – there's only one way in and out," she said.

We checked into the stately Grand Dédale Country House where manager Angelo Casu gave us a tour of the five-star accommodation. The exterior maintains its traditional gabled Cape Dutch design while the interior is a blend of Rococo and Baroque with antique items shipped to South Africa by its British owners. Crystal chandeliers, china, Asian objects and flower prints are echoed in enormous gilt-framed mirrors.

Early next morning I explored the River Walk, a meandering path that crosses the picturesque Kromme River, bypassing picnic sites. As the morning mist lifted from the surrounding vine-covered slopes and paddocks, we were reluctant to leave.

We were going on a game drive at Bontebok Ridge Reserve. Mist was still shrouding the road as we drove through the reserve, listening to Tom Turner explain his past and his vision for the farm. He pulled up on a hilltop, beneath a tree glittering with cobweb crystals, and we warmed up with a tot or two of local brandy. "On a clear day you can see Table Mountain and Riebeek-Kasteel," said Tom.

Having successfully translocated over 30 000 animals, from elephants to springbok, and worked in nature conservation in Zambia and Malawi since 1996, Tom admitted that vines and cattle are not his passion. Instead he is doing game drives, growing grass for the nearby municipalities and breeding wild boar. Tom told us the reserve is part of Cape Nature's Conservation Stewardship Programme because the land has been identified to be a critical habitat >>



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□ **James McKenzie, owner of Nabyegelegen Private Cellar, uncorks another bottle for us to taste.**

□ **Nabyegelegen Private Cellar, sometimes haunted by the ghost of Lady Anna Lategan.**

□ **Tom and Katja Turner of Bontebok Ridge Reserve.**



>> fragment with rare and threatened flora species. The farm is also a member of the Renosterveld Conservancy and part of a quagga breeding project. Other game includes bontebok, eland, wildebeest and springbok.

But it was the wild boar that we wanted to see. Tucking into a treat of persimmons and using a scratching pole, Tom said the boars are happy as a pig in the proverbial! "Occasionally they break out and they go for the pinotage, the most expensive grapes," he laughed.

From boars to buffalo. At Buffalo Ridge we met Wayne Rademeyer, a lawyer turned cheese-maker who hung up his robe to focus on his first love – cheese.

With names like Rudolf, Valentino, Don Juan and Casanova, Wayne told us there's a lot of pressure on the water buffalo bulls to perform. "But they've stepped up to the challenge well," he laughed.

The dream began when he and wife, Michelle, were living in Johannesburg and became frustrated at not being able to source Caprese Mozzarella.

The dream became reality on Women's Day, 2006, when they flew in 23 Indian water buffalo from Australia. Today they have a herd of 100 that produces authentic, handcrafted, pungent and stretchy buffalo mozzarella. Wayne also produces yogurt and crème fraîche and is constantly experimenting with new products.

Finally it is time to go to Lazanou Organic Vineyard, and another reason for our weekend in Wellington. Having heard how difficult it is to book for Lazanou's Open Day, we were thrilled to have gotten two places.

Owner of Lazanou, Josef Lazarus, has dreamt of owning a farm since childhood and is now living his dream. Having met him at the Old Biscuit Mill in Woodstock, promoting his organic wines and hearing him describing his lifestyle, I wanted to find out if it was true. He and his young family are self-sufficient as well as producing award-winning wines. "I'm indeed very lucky and very grateful," says Josef.

He met interior designer Candice Stephanou in 1996 and they bought the farm in 2002 when it was operating as a wholesale plant nursery. Since then they have converted the 8,48ha, of which 5,54ha are under vineyards, into an organic wine farm.

Candice makes cheese, prepares meals for their open days, tends the vegetable garden, ducks and chickens, while raising Noah (7) and Hannah (5), and Josef oversees the vineyards, wine-making and marketing while continuing his consulting work as strategic development advisor with the Hospice

Palliative Care Association of South Africa. Leaving the trestle tables next to the dam, we pass through cow pastures, olive groves, and a fruit orchard. There in the vineyards, mounted on haystacks, are bottles of wine on ice, ready for tasting. And taste them we do

When the Shosholozza rattles past, we tuck into delicious food carefully prepared from home-grown produce by Candice.

On our way home we stop at the Anglo-Boer War Blockhouse built by the British to protect the railway line from Afrikaner commandos and the most southerly relic of the war that devastated the country at the turn of the 19th century.

What a weekend it has been! And as for my cycle ride. I did it. Starting from Welvanpas Farm and using the honesty box, I braved a short ride circumnavigating Groenberg. Although, I have to confess, most of it was on tar road. □

Map reference F2 see inside back cover



ACCOMMODATION

Grand Dédale Country House 021 873 4089, www.granddedale.com
Bontebok Ridge Game Reserve 082 576 9657, www.bontebokridge.co.za

WHAT TO DO

Lazanou Open Day
 083 265 6341, www.lazanou.co.za
Welvanpas Mountain Bike Trails
 021 864 1239, wlvnpas@gmail.com
River Walk at Doolhof Wine Estate
 021 873 6911, www.doolhof.com, office@doolhof.com

FOOD

Buffalo Ridge
 082 375 0977, buffaloridge@iafrica.com, www.watermozzarella.co.za,

WINE FESTIVALS AND TASTINGS

Wellington Wine Harvest Festival
 17 – 18 March, 021 864 2479
Bain's Best Food and Wine Market
 12 September, Hanlie Laubscher, 021 873 6911
Bovlei Winery 021 864 1504, www.bvr.co.za
Doolhof Wine Estate 021 873 6911, www.doolhof.com, office@doolhof.com
Dunstone 021 873 6770, www.dunstone.co.za
Lazanou Organic Vineyards 083 265 6341, www.lazanou.co.za
Nabygelegen Private Cellar 021 873 7534, 082 829 1189, www.nabygelegen.co.za
Welvanpas Family Vineyards 021 864 1239



□ The exterior of Grand Dédale Country House maintains its traditional gabled Cape Dutch design.

□ Tina and Angelo Casu of the five-star Grand Dédale Country House.

□ Lawyer turned cheese-maker Wayne Rademeyer of Buffalo Ridge, tending to his first love – cheese made from the milk of Indian water buffalo.

□ Cycling in the Bovlei Valley needn't be too stressful.



- Tom Turner using a 'scratching pole' while his boars tuck into a treat of persimmons.
- Candice Stephanou prepares meals for open days at Lazanou Organic Vineyards.
- The honesty box at Welvanpas Farm.
- Josef Lazarus has dreamt of owning a farm since childhood and is now living his dream.

