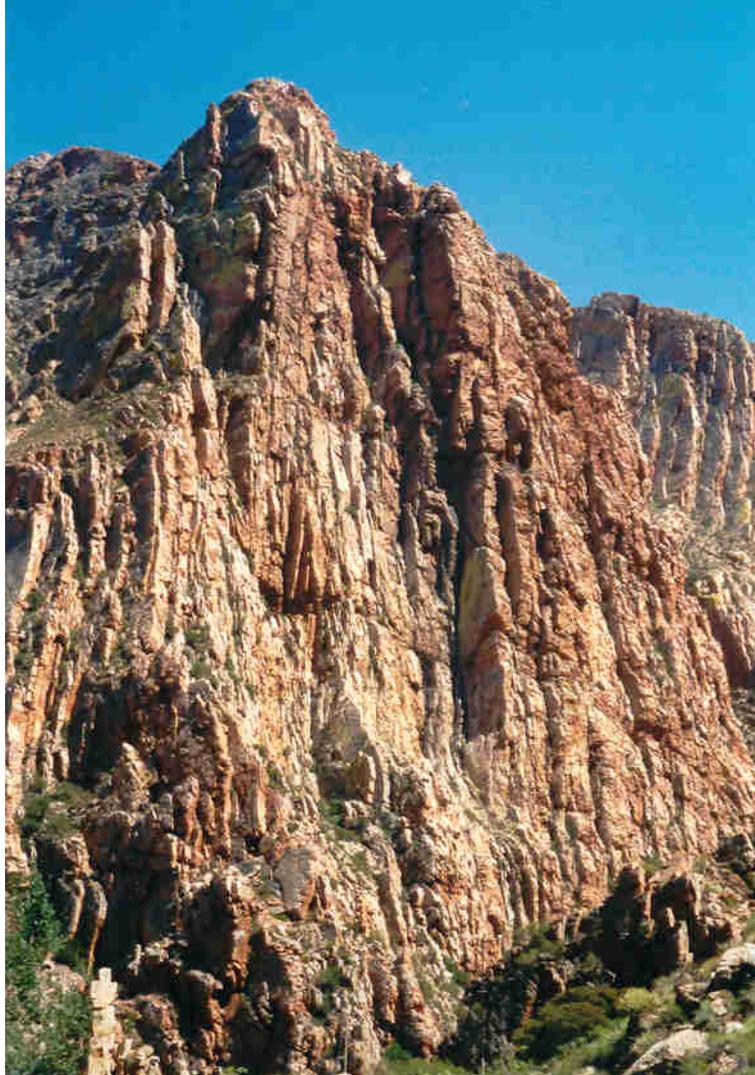


SWARTBERG PASS



Route Guide for Rock Climbing
Prince Albert
Western Cape

By Gareth Frost

INTRODUCTION

In the 1982 MCSA Journal, there is a route recorded in the Swartberg Pass called "A Stack of Chimneys" which did not give a very good image of the climbing on the Horlosiekloof in the Swartberg Pass. Although the main wall is 300m high with very direct looking crack lines to follow, the rock tends to be frail and the cracks off-width on much of the face. Despite these poor qualities of the area, some good routes have been opened on this very impressive rock feature.

The sheer dimension of the main Horlosiekloof wall is enough to make you want to climb it. When you approach it from the Prince Albert side you don't expect to find much worth climbing when seeing the contorted landscape of the Swartberg mountain range. A pleasant surprise awaits you as you turn the first sharp bend heading into the gorge and stare directly at the monster wall up ahead. Opposite it is also a great section of rock that produces some shorter climbs that are just as good to climb if the main wall is too intimidating.

In 1991 Deon Nortje, Paul Hugo and Arthur Kehl opened a number of short routes in the kloof. Their routes are also included in this guide.

DIRECTIONS

The best route into the kloof is from Prince Albert, which is situated to the North of Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape. This saves you from driving over the entire Swartberg pass if approaching from Oudtshoorn. From Oudtshoorn take the N12 passing through De Rust. Then turn left on the R407 to Prince Albert. Just before Prince Albert turn left onto the road into the Swartberg Pass. The kloof is a couple of km's along this road. There are a couple of pull offs in the kloof to park your car and some are under trees for shade.

ACCOMMODATION

The best option is to stay at a guest house in Prince Albert as there are quite a few to choose from. You could also camp in the pass but you would have to take in water because I would not vouch for the quality of the water in the river.

WEATHER

The summer months are a nice time to climb but it can get very hot. Autumn and spring are best and the winter can also be good but it has been know to snow there when big cold fronts come through. The area is pretty dry with most rain falling in the winter and spring seasons. I have found it to get a bit chilly at nights when camping in the kloof even in the summer.

ETHICS

The routes opened here have so far been trad climbs and I don't believe the nature conservation guys would look to kindly on bolts being placed in this area. I would however like to see some rap-anchors placed to make the descents safer.

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MAIN HORLOSIEKLOOF

TO GET THERE

Park on the pull off next to the road under the big Blue Gum trees. Walk across the road towards the main cliff and scramble up to the crag at the easier section below the prominent open book up on the cliff.

DESCENT

From the top of the climbs, scramble to the left following ledges and short gullies around the arête of the mountain. Continue on to where some gullies and steep ramps start heading downwards. Don't be tempted to go directly down but continue heading diagonally downwards towards to bottom of the main valley.

INDEX TO ROUTES

This guide makes use of route photos and written descriptions.

CODE	ROUTE NAME	GRADE	KEY
RA	RELENTLESS ADVENTURE	22	☺
NBD	NUBILE BELLY DANCERS	18	✳

KEY:

- ✳ Recommended routes with good to excellent climbing.
- ☺ Adventure routes with average to good climbing.
- ☠ Poor to average routes or routes with inadequate protection.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

It is suggested to climb with 60m ropes on these routes.

RELENTLESS ADVENTURE (22)

APPROACH

This route is found on the main Horlosiekloof wall towards the left hand side of the highest section. Here there are a series of cracks in the red coloured wall high above, just to the right of the arête. The route actually goes around to the face left of the arête and climbs the series of pillars seen near the top of the cliff. Directly below the arête there is a gully which is climbed to gain access to a large ledge system below the steeper cliffs above.

1. 30m (14)
After scrambling up the gully as high as safety allows, climb up the easy face to below an open book with a crack in the right hand face. There is a small overhang at the bottom of the corner.
2. 40m (21)
Start below the open book then pull through the overhang. Move right to the crack in the face. Climb the steep crack until it ends close to the corner higher up. Continue up on easier ground to a belay on the right hand side.
3. 30m (15)
Don't climb the obvious off-width that is seen higher up on this pitch but climb the crack on the left.
4. 45m (22)
Climb the square groove moving left higher up to a thin pillar. Climb the pillar then move left to below a steep crack in the face. Climb the crack until it ends below a steep face. Climb the face exiting left to a small stance on the exposed arête.
5. 35m (20)
Climb a steep corner above the stance passing a series of overhangs. After the third overhang, below a steep blank face, traverse left around the arête to a crack. Climb the flake diagonally left to a tree then up to a niche below an overhang. Climb the ramp on the left, traversing to a narrow ledge below a steep face and belay where first good gear is found.
6. 25m (14)
Traverse left to a vague corner with vegetation. Climb up to a good ledge and belay.
7. 45m (19)
Climb the grey face to an open book above. Climb up the centre of three open books using a flake. Continue up to a tree below a splitter crack in the face above. Traverse right below the crack and overhang to an open book crack. Climb this crack to a short leftwards traverse to a tree below a chimney. Continue up to the top of the crag.

Note: The protection on the crux section of pitch 4 is somewhat sparse.

FA: K. Thrash, G. Frost

2002/5/18

NUBILE BELLY DANCERS (18)

APPROACH

The route follows a fairly direct line climbing the obvious corner to the right of the really dominant open book system in the middle of the cliff. Pitch lengths are estimated.

1. 40m (18)
Start at the break in the steep face directly below the prominent open book above. Climb up to a ledge just above a small tree and belay.
2. 45m (15)
Climb up on easier ground following the broken face to another small ledge.
3. 45m (16)
Continue up following a series of breaks and chimneys to below the big open book.
4. 30m (16)
Follow the corner to a small belay stance about half way up the corner.
5. 30m (17)
Continue up the corner exiting rightwards below the overhang to gain a small ledge. Continue up on the slabs to the big ledge below the huge roof.
6. 15m (16)
Climb the first chimney on the right of the ledge then follow the break to a ledge on the right.
7. 50m (16)
Continue follow the break and crack lines to a wide crack that is climbed to gain a sloping ledge. Climb the corner at the back of the ledge to gain a larger ledge.
8. 55m (15)
Follow the crack system and broken faces to the summit.

FA: G. Frost, H. Pringle, A. Grant 2001/01/02

RIVER CRAG

TO GET THERE

Park on the pull off next to the road under the big Blue Gum trees. Walk across the river to the crag on the other side.

DESCENT

On the left hand side of the crag a series of steep ramps leads down to the bottom of the cliff. Take extreme care in following this route as some of the ramps are slippery.

INDEX TO ROUTES

This guide makes use of route photos and written descriptions.

CODE	ROUTE NAME	GRADE	KEY
SFC	SMILE FOR THE CAMERAS	17	*

KEY:

- * Recommended routes with good to excellent climbing.
- ☺ Adventure routes with average to good climbing.
- ☠ Poor to average routes or routes with inadequate protection.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

It is suggested to climb with 60m ropes on these routes.

SMILE FOR THE CAMERAS (17)

APPROACH

This route is found on the smaller cliff opposite the main Horlosiekloof wall, just next to the river. There are a series of sandwiched, vertical rock bands that form faces and wide crack lines going up the crag. On the highest section near the top of the crag a large face with a prominent crack line in the middle can be seen. Basically the route takes the most direct line up to the prominent crack in the wall higher up. Start in a corner below a cracked face on the sandwich layer up-stream of the prominent crack in the wall higher up. Pitch lengths are estimated.

1. 25m (15)
Climb the face up to a bushy ledge.
2. 30m (12)
Climb up the easy ramp to a belay below a steep corner.
3. 30m (15)
Climb up following a series of corners to a belay at a small tree just above and to the right of the prominent crack.
4. 55m (17)
Move left using a slanting rail to gain the crack. Climb the crack up to an overlap. Move left to an open book and climb up to a small ledge. Continue up in the broken recess on the right to the top of the face.
5. 20m (scramble)
Scramble over blocks to the top.

FA: H. Pringle, G. Frost, A. Grant 2001/12/31

ROAD SIDE CRAG

TO GET THERE

Park on the pull off next to the road under the big Blue Gum trees. Walk downstream along the road to where a short section of crag, at right angles to the main HorlosieKloof wall, is seen right next to the road. The road makes a sharp right turn here and then a sharp left turn around the corner to where Deon Nortje opened some routes.

DESCENT

From the top of the routes scramble around to the right of the blocks to the top of a steep recess. You'll need some cord here to set up an abseil down to the bottom.

INDEX TO ROUTES

CODE	ROUTE NAME	GRADE	KEY
BSM	BLUE SKY MINING	16	*
BBB	BABY BOY BLUE	16	*

KEY:

- * Recommended routes with good to excellent climbing.
- ☺ Adventure routes with average to good climbing.
- ⚠ Poor to average routes or routes with inadequate protection.

BLUE SKY MINING (16)

APPROACH

To the left of the right hand arête two crack lines can be seen going up the face with a small roof in between and a large ledge above. This route takes the left hand crack line.

1. 40m (16)
Climb the face to the crack. Follow the crack to the break on the left of the small overhang. Climb up then move right to the ledge.
2. 15m (14)
Climb the corner at the back of the ledge up to another blocky ledge.

FA: H. Pringle, G. Frost, A. Grant 2002/01/01

BABY BOY BLUE (16)

APPROACH

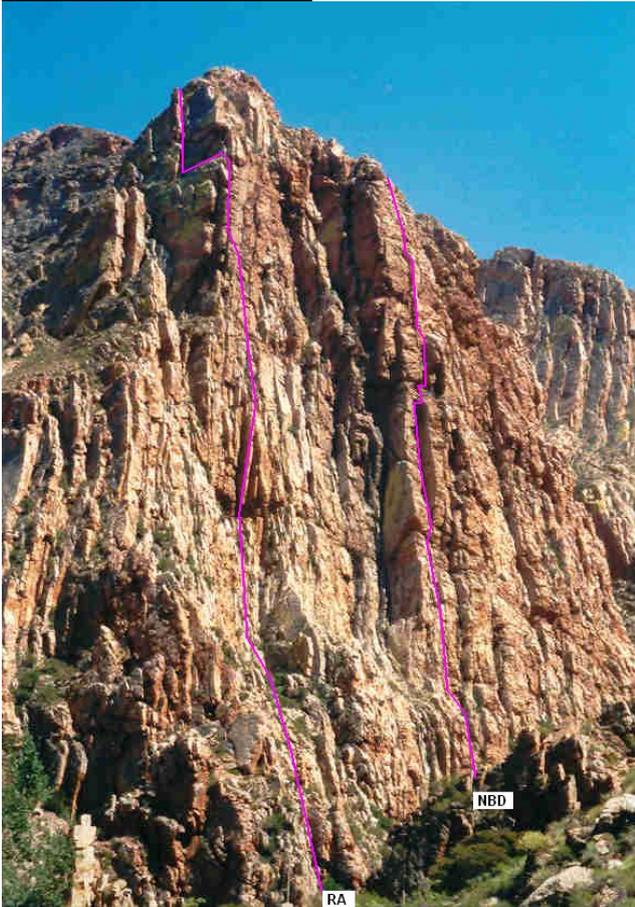
To the left of the right hand arête two crack lines can be seen going up the face with a small roof in between and a large ledge above. This route takes the right hand crack line.

1. 40m (16)
Climb the face to the crack. Follow the crack to below the overhang. Traverse leftwards to the break on the left of the overhang. Climb up then move right to the ledge.
2. 15m (14)
Climb the corner at the back of the ledge up to another blocky ledge.

FA: A. Grant, H. Pringle, G. Frost 2002/01/01

CRAG PHOTOS

MAIN HORLOSIEKLOOF



RIVER CRAG



ROUTE DESCRIPTIONS FROM DEON NORTJÉ

HORLOSIEKLOOF (Swartberg Pass)

CRAG-HOPPING IN THE KLEIN KAROO

It was during the summer of 1990 that I teamed up with Paul Hugo after meeting him while both of us were working in Oudtshoorn. Paul with climbing experience from the Drakensberg, and me, an old-student from Stellenbosch soon rushed off into the nearby Swartberg range to explore future climbing possibilities.

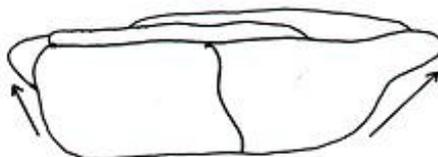
During February 1991 Arthur Kehl joined us and between the three of us the following routes in the Swartberg range were opened.

Firstly there is the Swartbergpass area:

Take the road out of Oudtshoorn towards the Cango Caves. Turn off to the Swartbergpass enroute to Prins Albert. (Notice: Swartbergpass inaccessible for caravans!)

Just on the other side of the mountain is a big boulder on the lefthandside of the road, just opposite a plaque next to the road. Two sport routes on the boulder were opened by Arthur:

Elegy (19).
Up the overhang onto good jugs.

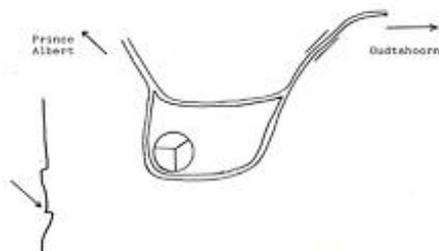


Pop goes the weasel (18). Pull through the roof to the top of the boulder.

Continue all the way down the pass. Just past the Eerste Water-bridge is a turnoff left up to a cement slab. Stop at the slab and look directly north towards the big rock face.

Auberge (19) climbs the layback through the open book.

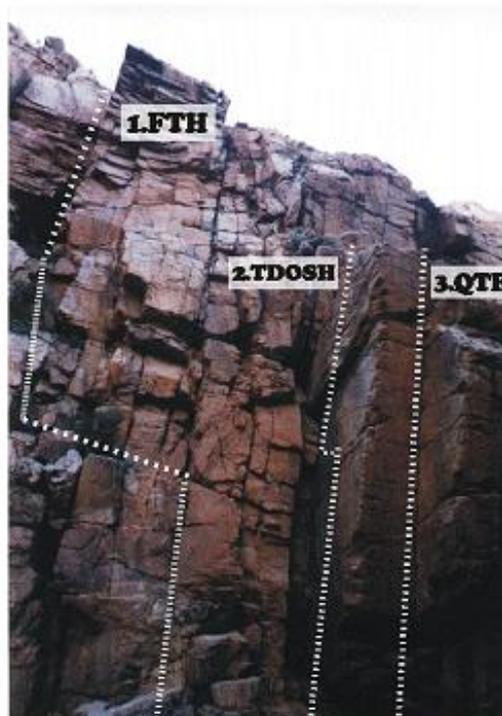
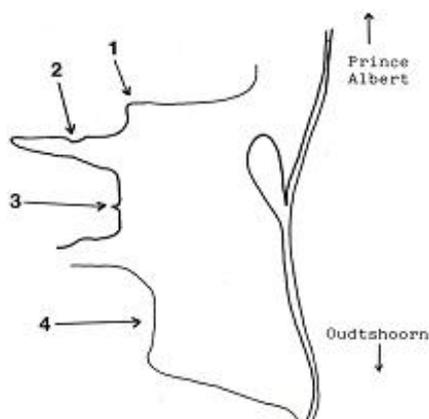
OP: D. Nortjé; A. Kehl.



Deon Nortje on Auberge (19)

About 600 metres further on the left of the road is a turnoff spot. Park at this turnoff. The following routes were established in this area:

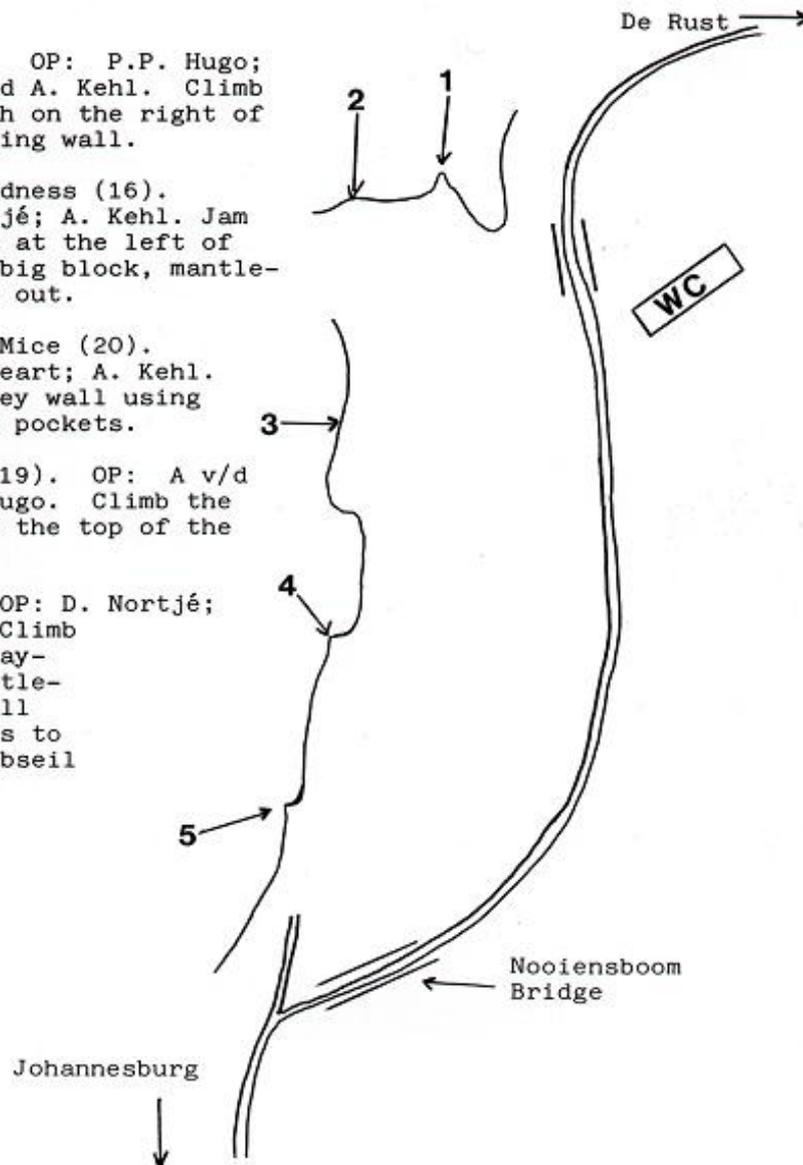
1. Quim the Eskimo (19): Jam through the small roof with the oil stain onto a layback finish.
OP: A. Kehl and D. Nortjé.
2. The Desert of Shattered Hope (20): Six metres to the left of Quim the Eskimo is an unevenness laced with one-finger pockets, and a traverse on a crack system to a thin vertical system. Follow this line and pull through a small roof to the top.
OP: D. Nortjé and A. Kehl.
3. Farewell to Hugo (18): This is a multipitch route about 25 metres left of Quim.
 - a) Start at a layback crack and continue diagonally left to a belay spot at a tree.
 - b) Climb the recess above to a small cave-like hole underneath an overhang.
 - c) Continue up the chimney above to a layback finish.
OP: D. Nortjé and P.P. Hugo.
4. Corporal Clegg (19): Another multipitch route, but much higher than "Farewell to Hugo."
 - a) Climb the double crack system to a small ledge on the left.
 - b) Climb the open book above that leads up to a big ledge.
 - c) Climb the crack system above for about 20 metres to a gully that takes the last 10 metres to the top.
(Take along 3 accessory cords which is to be left behind as abseil points.)
OP: D. Nortjé; P.P. Hugo; A. Kehl.



Secondly there is the Meiringspoort area:

Meiringspoort is situated on the road from Oudtshoorn to Johannesburg about 6 km's away from the small town of De Rust. All the routes are next to the road and easily reached. Stop at the first set of toilets at the left of the road for Marlyn and Swarms of Sadness and continue 1,3 km on with the road for the rest:

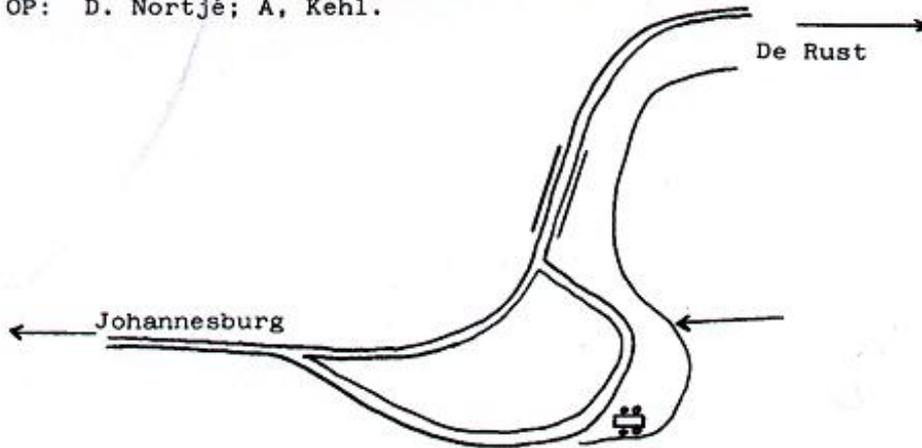
1. Marlyn (18). OP: P.P. Hugo; D. Nortjé and A. Kehl. Climb the off-width on the right of the overhanging wall.
2. Swarms of sadness (16). OP: D. Nortjé; A. Kehl. Jam up the crack at the left of Marlyn to a big block, mantle-shelf to top out.
3. Three Blind Mice (20). OP: J.P. Theart; A. Kehl. Climb the grey wall using small finger pockets.
4. Centreface (19). OP: A v/d Berg; P.P. Hugo. Climb the big crack to the top of the rock mass.
5. 9038 (19). OP: D. Nortjé; P.P. Hugo. Climb the obvious lay-back and mantle-shelf to small tree which is to be used to abseil down.



Carry on with the road for another 8 km's and pull off to a picnic spot on the left of the road.

The Maleviction (20) climbs the crack system on the overhanging wall to an interesting layback finish.

OP: D. Nortjé; A, Kehl.



The climbing in the Swartberg is special in it's own way. The weather is always good and the climbs can be reached by car and a quick 2 minute walk-up.

The routes in Meiringspoort is a must for those people travelling between Johannesburg and the sea resorts at Mosselbay and Plettenbergbay.

Feel free to contact Deon or Arthur for further information on routes and access.

Deon Nortje (JHB)

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e-mail: deon_nortje@hotmail.com

or

Arthur Kehl (Oudtshoorn)

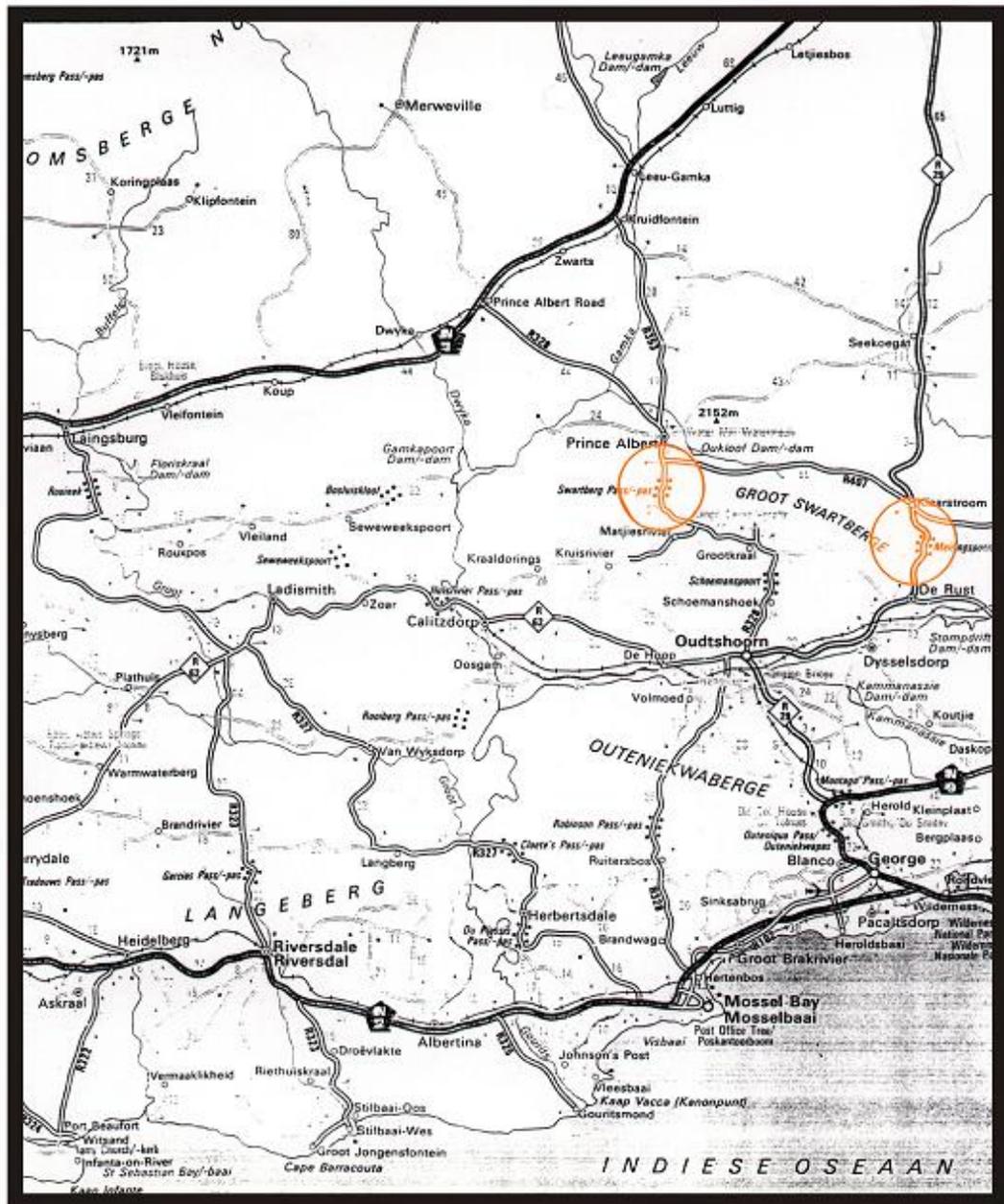
Cell: (083) 328 6150

e-mail: ackehl@mweb.co.za

* Also see enclosed map of area.

MAPS FOR SWARTBERG PASS AND MEIRINGSPOORT

Map of the Klein Karoo area :



CONTOUR MAP FOR SWARTBERG PASS

