

Discover the Karoo's rivers

Rivers in the Karoo? **Bruce Jenkinson** found a magnificent trail just outside Laingsburg boasting just that.

In the heart of the Great Karoo between the towns of Laingsburg and Ladismith en route to the Seweweekspoort, lies Wagendrift. Entry to the farm is across the Buffels River, over a low-water bridge fed by the Floriskraal Dam. Before you leave home, be sure to check the status of the river. Access to the trail is not a problem, but if the river is at full flow sections of the trail become a challenge.

Once you are checked in and settled, have completed the formalities and received the map, you are free to hit the trails.

The Wagendrift 4x4 trail has two sections – the River Trail and the Zebra Mountain Trail.

The River Trail

Graded 3 to 4, the River Trail sets out from the camp site and crosses the Buffels River which, depending on the leiwat, can be fast-flowing, strong and deep. The seriousness of the



Daunting. Don't be intimidated by this view after entering the second river crossing. Look out for the trail path to the right of the river.

water-crossing will depend on the amount of water released from the Floriskraal Dam, just as in the case with the Buffelspoort 4x4 trail downstream.

Should the water levels be too high to allow easy crossing, the trail can be accessed by turning left or due south at point no.6 on the map provided.

Alternatively, should you choose to cross, it is imperative you know your vehicle and have some wading experience. This serious albeit short 10m-wide crossing can be deceptive and should always be walked first. Take a strong stick with you for support just in case.

At the time of our visit, the

Buffalo was flowing fast and strong, and ran an estimated 1.1m deep. Deeper than most off-road vehicles are able to wade – even with a snorkel.

Once through, 500m further, a second river-crossing awaits. This one's longer, but less serious. Don't be intimidated. On the face of it, the second river crossing looks far worse than the first; rest assured, it's not.

The trail doesn't actually cross the full breadth of the river, but turns right towards an exit located mid-stream on the opposite side, roughly 20m into the crossing – look out for it!

Aim for the entrance of the road opposite the river. If you miss this turn and head straight across the river you'll land in trouble.

With the second crossing behind you, the river route continues. It crosses a farm road and 1.4km on converges with a dry river bed coming from the north.

(Note: Turning left at the aforementioned farm road, will take you to the Buffalo River bush-camp marked no.3 on the map).

The trail descends into the river bed tracing its course for approximately 3km. The river bed provides lots of 4x4 action. It's scattered with huge rocks so drivers are forced to proceed with caution as they clamber up and over the huge boulders.

With cross-axes aplenty, progress is slow. You may find you need to walk certain sections first. Good traction and good ground clearance are most definitely a requirement for this section of the trail.

The trail criss-crosses the river bed, climbing in and out at intermittent points. At one stage it exits out and up a daunting dune face. Here it's advisable to rather err on the side of caution.

Once progress becomes easier, it's almost the end of the trail. Keep an eye out for the markers on the river's edge. When you reach point no.6 you've reached the end of the River Trail.

Off you go. The Zebra Mountain Trail provides opportunities to spot game such as giraffe, zebra and antelope.



Time to chill. The Wagendrift Lodge is excellently appointed. It's the perfect spot to take your wife as she can relax here if she doesn't feel like tackling the 4x4 trails with you.

Zebra Mountain Trail

The Zebra Mountain Trail is a circular grade 2 trail that rewards drivers with exceptional vistas and excellent game-viewing opportunities. It offers a mostly easy mountain driving experience that provides loads of fun.

Entry to the trail is between the cottages and the lodge, signposted "Entry B" on the map. Points 1 to 10 are fairly straightforward mountain climbing.

The only exception is point 4, an unexpected tight 90° turn on the top of the mountain. It will need to be walked first to ensure the correct line of entry is selected. Wider vehicles may struggle here.

After that, the only moderately difficult section that remains is between points 11 and 13, where the trail cuts into the side of the mountain up a narrow dry river bed. This short 2.8km

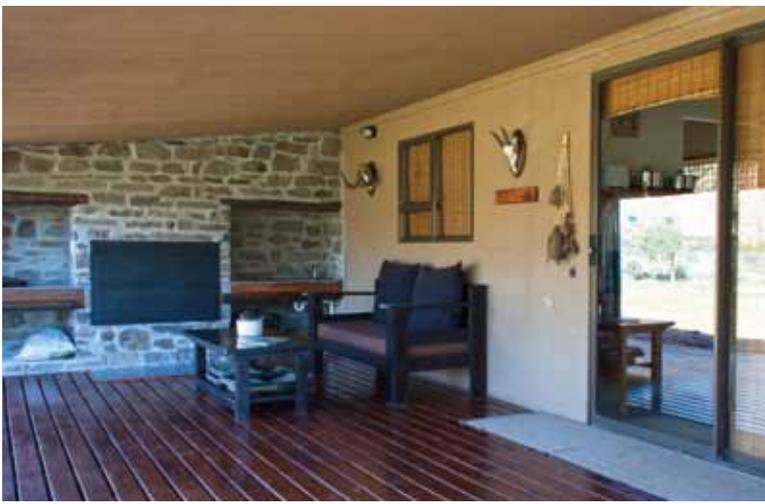
section is both technical and surprisingly beautiful. As the trail winds its way up the dry river bed towards the four-way junction at point no.13, it morphs between tight, controlled sand driving and rock climbing.

If you take your time and proceed with caution, even a standard 4x4 should make it through without too many problems. A passenger spotter comes in very useful here. >



Go to www.tracks4africa.co.za/wegrydriveout.asp for more detail.

TRACKS 4 AFRICA



Entertainer's dream. The built-in braais at the Wagendrift Cottages make them the ideal venues to relax with friends.

The rest of the trail, from 14 to end, is easy-going grade 2 scattered with various points of interest. At 12 and 17 you'll be rewarded with breathtaking panoramic views across the Buffelspoort and Seweweekspoort mountains.

Points nos 3, 5 and 15 are braai spots. Braaispot no.5 (at the bushcamp) and 15 (at the open air boma) both offer good shelter from the wind, but no shade. Braai spot no.3, at the main camp site, offers shade and spectacular views of the Buffels River.

Journey's end

The facilities at Wagendrift are exceptional. The fully equipped large stone lodge offers five luxury double rooms with en-suite bathrooms. There is a swimming pool, a fully kitted entertainment area on the stoep, a large fully equipped kitchen and open braai and built-in fireplace. And the views across the surrounding mountains are spectacular.

Three self-catering cottages lie next to the farmhouse, comfortably accommodating two adults and two children each. In total there are sleeping facilities for up to 22 people. The lodge and/or cottages can be rented for exclusive use.

For those in search of a little less luxury, there are two camp sites. The main site offers 12 carefully laid-out sites on the banks of the Buffels River. They are well-sized, sandy raked sites located beneath well-established thorn trees.

Each site has its own power point, rubbish bin and braai facilities. The ablutions are spotless, with electric geysers offering hot and cold water, showers and flush toilets. They are regularly serviced.

The second site is also located on the banks of the Buffels River and is for serious campers only. Designed with the completely self-sufficient in mind, it has no facilities at all.



Under your own tree. Camp sites are cleverly laid out amongst thorn trees and offer a good degree of privacy.



What you need to know



WHY SHOULD I GO?

Excellent trails and excellent accommodation.

EN ROUTE

How long is the trail? 35 km in total

How long will I be driving? 2-6 hours

Maximum number of vehicles? 10

Do I get a map? Yes.

Will my car get scratched? It shouldn't

Should I take off my running boards? Only if you plan on tackling the grade 4 sections.

Should I take a compressor? Yes

Can we have a braai en route? Yes

THE SURROUNDS

Best time to go? All year, but cooler winter months are best.

Can I take my family along? Yes, Mom can relax at the Lodge if she isn't that keen on the 4x4 activities.

Just for the day or the weekend? Make the most of it and stay over.

Are there ablution facilities for day visitors? Yes

Can I see game? Yes, baboon, kudu, klipspringer, duiker, steenbok, zebra, fallow deer, giraffe, ribbok and lots of snakes. Keep an eye out for Verreaux's eagle, buzzard, sugarbird and fish eagle.

The nearest town? Laingsburg (31 km)

How do I get there? From the centre of Laingsburg, take the Ladismith R323 turn-off from the N1. Proceed on the tar road for 28 km. Turn right at Wagendrift Lodge Entrance. Travel 3 km down the dirt road that eventually becomes a dry river bed. Follow the signboards to the Lodge.

The nearest petrol station? Laingsburg (31 km)

GPS? S33.38000 E20.94267

WHERE CAN I STAY?

Wagendrift Lodge boasts five luxury double rooms with en-suite bathrooms. The Lodge is fully kitted out. Three additional self-catering cottages lie alongside the main lodge, sleeping four persons each.

For campers, there are 12 carefully laid out sites on the banks of the Buffalo River. **Bush camping** is also available on request.

WHAT ELSE

Must I take anything special? Quad biking and mountain biking allowed. No hunting/shooting. You can buy extra wood and ice on the farm.

What else can I do there? Take a walk, do bird watching, go swimming. Visit the Floriskraal Dam and Laingsburg Museum. Take a drive through the Seweweekspoort. Play a round of golf at the Laingsburg Golf Club.

COST

Wagendrift Lodge: R500 per double room, per night – includes 4x4 trail.

Wagendrift Cottages: R500 per 4-sleeper, per night – includes 4x4 trail.

4x4 Trail: R150 per vehicle.

Camping: R50 pppn, maximum 4 persons per site.

Bush camping: R50 pppn plus R150 per vehicle for the trail.

CONTACT

Bookings: Attie Barnard ☎0861 000 564; 072 2003 121;

✉info@wagendriftlodge.co.za; www.wagendriftlodge.co.za