Wild Coast



Report by :

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Wild Coast Region, Eastern Cape

The Wild Coast is a section of the coast of the Eastern Cape, a province of South Africa. The region stretches from East London in the south to the border of KwaZulu-Natal in the north. It is the traditional home of the Xhosa people, and the birthplace of many prominent South Africans, including Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. The Wild Coast is crossed by the N2 National Road.

# Why is it called the Wild Coast?

Historically the name “Wild Coast” is an exceedingly accurate appellation as well; in that the area where it is geo-politically located; the Transkei (which literally means across the Kei River) never really succumbed to colonial rule.

The infamously dangerous 300km coastline between East London and Port Edward known as the Wild Coast has been described by experienced seafarers as South Africa's own Bermuda Triangle; where ships disappear without a trace.

Freak waves which frequent this notorious coast have plunged untold ships to the bottom of the Indian Ocean, or sent them crashing onto the shore. The most famous victim was the SS Waratah, which vanished a hundred years ago, on the 29th July 1909, with all 211 passengers and crew aboard.



WC 1

The last ship to tragically sink with all her crew was the Indian-registered Cordigilera, which disappeared without a trace on November 13 1996 in the vicinity of Port St Johns. Seven months later, on the 9th of July 1997, the Romanian cargo vessel, the Calarasi, perished in similar weather conditions about five nautical miles from the site where the Cordigilera went down. In her case, however, twenty of her 21 crewmen were airlifted to safety from this treacherous Transkei coast.

The eastern seaboard of Southern Africa is notorious for its ferocious coast, and modern-day maps still warn of possible 20m freak wave phenomena. Factors in (the disappearance of vessels certainly) the formation of freak waves may be that in some parts (near Port St Johns, particularly) the continental shelf is extremely close to the shore. Scientists have theorized that the deep (3000m) and swiftly flowing Agulhas current, which moves in a south-westerly direction, is accelerated further by strong winds from the north-east which can increase the surface speed of the water to over 7 knots. Subsequently, counter winds then form enormous waves which are extremely dangerous.



So, there is little or no dispute as to how the Wild Coast originally got its name; yet it is appropriate, too, for its untamed splendor and sheer spectacular cliffs which, in two places, feed waterfalls directly into the ocean. Amongst the small handful of waterfalls on Earth which exhibit this rare elemental combination, two are located within the Pondoland Centre of Endemism (PCE: an internationally acclaimed Biodiversity Hotspot) between Port St Johns and Port Edward. The northern perimeter of the PCE, the Xolobeni region, is threatened by strip-mining for its heavy titanium bearing minerals; apparently the 10th largest deposit on Earth.

Perhaps there is some connection between the mineral wealth and the savagely beautiful landscapes and unique flora along this mystical, legendary wild coast.



WC 3

Historically the name “Wild Coast” is an exceedingly accurate appellation as well; in that the area where it is geo-politically located; the Transkei (which literally means across the Kei River) never really succumbed to colonial rule. Even until today the Transkei Wild Coast remains one of the last unspoiled frontiers of South Africa, and a cultural crucible for the amaXhosa people:

Archaeological evidence dates the presence of hunter-gatherers in the region from 150 000 - 500, 000 years ago, whilst agro-pastoralist settlement in the fertile coastal valleys dates back to the late 7th century AD.

# History

The Wild Coast from the Great Kei River to the Mtamvuna River was part of the former homeland of the Transkei during the Apartheid era.

# Geography

Many rivers empty into the sea along the Wild Coast. In the southern-most parts of the region, where the hills are lower, the rivers tend to be mature and are characterized by wide floodplains. But in the rugged north, where young rivers find their path to the sea blocked by massive cliffs, many, like Waterfall Bluff, leap over the rocky crags into the surf below.



WC 4

Small sandy bays and long stretches of open beaches are often found near the mouths of large rivers, such as the Kei, Mthatha, Mbashe and Mzimvuba. There are also many smaller rivers which, owing to their protected sources in the coastal forests, have much less siltation than the larger rivers, which drain vast tracts of land where poor farming practices are in place. Estuaries, bays and headlands are plentiful, whilst rocky shores predominate, be they smooth wave-cut platforms with jagged and un-even surfaces or precipitous cliffs that plunge into the sea.

About half the coastline comprises indigenous forest and many forest species that were previously unknown to science have been discovered in places such as Umtamvuna and Mkambati. About 900 forest and grassland species from the Wild Coast region have been identified as having commercial, traditional or homeopathic value.

# Climate

The average daily temperatures along the coast vary from 17 °C to 28 °C in January and 9 °C to 21 °C in July. (Placeholder1)

# Tourism

The scenic beauty of the Wild Coast, coupled with its rich cultural heritage, make the region ideal for the development of a strong tourism industry. In fact, tourism has been identified as one of the cornerstones of the proposed Wild Coast Spatial Development Initiative. But the virtual collapse of local administrations and environmental threats like the proposed Xolobeni mine dune mining project and the proposed N2 Wild Coast Toll Road are some of the major issues that will have to be tackled by this initiative. The challenge will be to bring about much-needed investment and development that will benefit local communities and the region as a whole without compromising the rich natural resource base.



WC 5

The Wild Coast Jikeleza Route near East London is host to the 100 km² Inkwenkwezi Private Game Reserve. The nearby coastal village of Cintsa is also a popular tourist destination. Other popular tourist towns and villages along the Wild Coast include Port St Johns, Coffee Bay, Hole-in-the-Wall, Qolora Mouth, Kei Mouth, Morgan Bay, and Haga Haga.

(Adapted from www.wildcoast.com/shipwrecks for more info.)