



**BY BUDDY CUNANAN**

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South Africa: I took advantage of the long Easter holidays to return to South Africa and spend time in the Cederberg Wilderness Area, one of the most beautiful places in the Western Cape.

The Cederberg, which derives its name from the rare and once near-extinct Clanwilliam cedar tree, is a vast area characterized by a rugged and stunning mountain range. This fascinating landscape is blessed with amazing rock formations, waterfalls, crystal clear streams and rock pools, caverns, overhangs, peaks and perilous ravines. The Cederberg was once home to the San and Khoi, a mysterious, nomadic people, who have long disappeared but have left thousands of unique rock art and cave paintings, which depict life in the bush 20,000 years ago. Southern Africa has the richest legacy of rock art in the world, and the Cederberg has more rock painting per square kilometer than anywhere else in the continent.

Wildlife in the Cederberg is prolific and comprises some 30 mammal species such as klipspringer, steenbok, leopard, wild cat, caracal and the elusive bat-eared fox. It's also a paradise for bird-watchers and a number of raptors, including the black eagle, black sparrowhawk and rock kestrel, fill the skies. The diversity of the Cederberg's terrain is so varied and promises to reveal untold wonders to nature lovers, hikers and mountaineers.

A truly special place in the Cederberg, which I find myself repeatedly drawn to every year, is the Gecko Creek Lodge, which is owned and developed by my South African friend Linton Pope and run by his hard-working German manager Ingrid Diallo. The camp offers self catering accommodations on a sprawling 517-hectare private nature reserve, with simple but very comfortable chalets, camping areas, and adequate cooking and ablution facilities.

Life in Gecko Creek is quiet and unhurried and one can literally spend days soaking up the breathtaking countryside. Nights are best enjoyed around roaring campfires, under a blanket of stars, and exchanging stories with other lucky souls who have discovered this unspoilt oasis of calm and solitude. It's the perfect place for reflection and savouring the beauty of nature. For those coming to South Africa for the World Cup games in June, I strongly recommend a few days' stay at Gecko Creek, which is just three hours from Cape Town. One of Lonely Planet's top picks in South Africa, Gecko Creek is the Western Cape's best kept secret. Visit [www.geckocreek.com](http://www.geckocreek.com) for more details.

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