

Cape Cross Seal Reserve



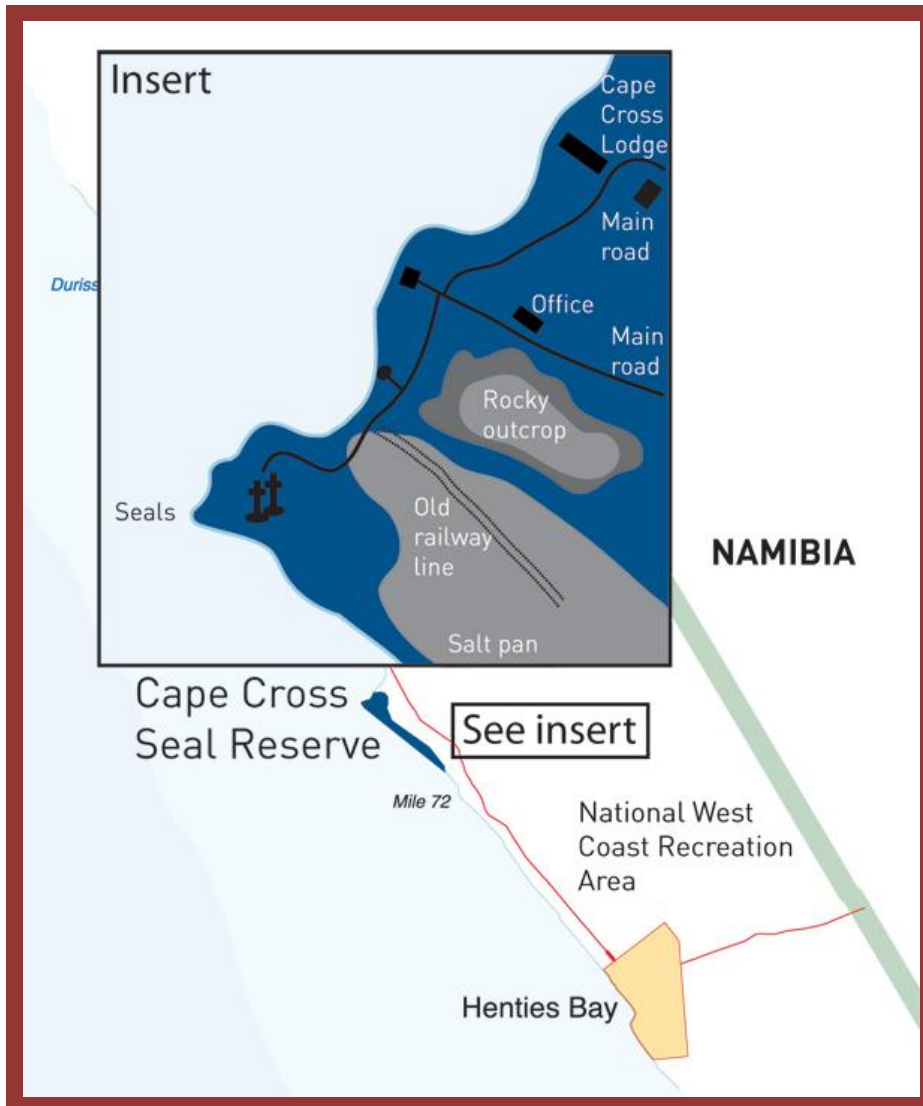
Cape Cross has both historic and biological significance and is a popular tourist attraction. The Portuguese navigator, Diego Cão, landed here in 1486 on his second expedition south of the equator and planted a stone cross (*padrão*) to mark his journey. A replica is visible here today. Together with a second replica, the area has been listed as a National Heritage Site. In the late 1800s, thousands of tons of guano (dried excrement of fish-eating birds used as fertiliser) were collected and exported to Europe. Cape fur seals were also harvested. About 100 workers lived at Cape Cross and a police station, customs and post office were established at the settlement, while a railway – the first in the country – was built to cross the saltpan and transport workers. Many men lost their lives due to the harsh conditions on the Skeleton Coast.

This reserve is a sanctuary for the world's largest breeding colony of Cape fur seals, with up to 210 000 seals present during the breeding season in November and December. Sustainable seal harvesting takes place in the reserve annually under the auspices of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, which also sets the quota of animals to be harvested.

FACT FILE

Park size:	60 km ²
Date proclaimed:	1968
Natural features:	Rocky bay, sandy beaches, salt pan
Vegetation:	Central Desert in the Namib Desert biome. Vegetation: Sparsely vegetated, with dollar (<i>Zygophyllum stapfii</i>) and pencil bushes (<i>Arthroa leubnitziae</i>) dominating. A variety of lichens.
Wildlife:	Brown hyaena, Cape fur seal, black-backed jackal. At the guano platforms, greater and lesser flamingo, grey phalarope, Damara tern, Cape teal, Caspian tern, black-necked grebe and African black oystercatcher.
Tourism:	One of Namibia's most visited parks. New facilities include a walkway enhancing viewing of the seals, information signs along the walkway, renovated picnic areas, five campsites with fireplaces, and timber-plastic wind shields. Accommodation available at a private lodge bordering the park; camping available at Mile 72 and Mile 108. Gateway to the Messum Crater and the Brandberg Mountain to the east and Skeleton Coast Park to the north. Bird platforms in the south of the park are closed to the public. No angling is allowed.

Map



Conservation successes

The coastline of southern Africa is the only place in the world where you will find Cape fur seals (*Arctocephalus pusillus pusillus*), and Namibia's Cape Cross Seal Reserve is home to the largest breeding colony in the world.

Based on aerial photographs taken during the breeding season, there are up to 210 000 seals at Cape Cross. Inside these pictures, is the story of fighting, mating, breeding and fishing that exposes the facts of life and death in a seal colony.

The cold Benguela Current generates a wealth of marine life and produces fog which supports an intriguing variety of desert adapted animals and plants, including over a hundred species of lichens. Providing stability to the fragile desert environment, vast lichen fields occur at Mile 30 south of Henties Bay and north of the turnoff to the Cape Cross Nature Reserve.

Endemic to Namibia, the Damara Tern, a small swallow-like bird, breeds during the summer months in shallow scrapes on the gravel plains near the coast. Though protected, the terns' nesting grounds and lichen fields are under continual threat from thoughtless off-road driving. Please do your part for conservation and DO NOT drive off-road.

Key management issues

Management discourages visitors from leaving the walkway or wandering beyond the wall between the seals, as the animals take fright and can trample pups during the breeding season. Off-road drivers, whose tracks leave long-lasting scars, easily destroy lichens found on the brittle gypsum crust. Visitors are not permitted to enter the reserve from Mile 72 – only the entrance gate from the C34 may be used.

Future plans

Several partnerships with Namibian associations are envisaged to further upgrade facilities. An updated information display is planned for the office. The historic graveyard will be renovated and signage is to be replaced.