



*I felt relaxed for the first time in ages, the slight challenge ahead enough to distract me from pressing thoughts. I'm pulled into the present, which, as it turns out, is rather a nice place to be. Lots of space, fresh air, sea, country-side and sun fill my senses. Even the hint of wind and rain in the air feels right. It is a little hard to*

*believe I'm only an hour or two up the West Coast from the bustling City of Cape Town. I feel free as I stride along the path carrying only my daypack - no luggage, watch, phones, keys, cars or lifts to worry about, they are someone else's concern for the next few days.*

*"Is that a whale?" my young cousin calls out. We scramble round the rocky bay to get a closer look. Heath and I are eye to eye with the whale that rises up in front of us, near enough to touch, Reid stares down the blow hole from the rocks above. The experience soothes away any awkwardness the group may have felt - we're bound now. John points out some fossils buried in a dune to the trainee guides. He tells their story and I see the guides eyes widen as they realize there is more to the trail than meets the eye, a story hidden in the landscape. Ivan, our leader, gently encourages the guides to move on, advising that it is important to stop and look but also to keep an eye on the time. I watch them digest the importance of keeping the balance right - I reflect that it is a good lesson for me too. A huge owl flies up out the bushes in front of me. Thembinkosi explains they nest on the ground. I ask why but he doesn't know the answer. Ivan explains that it is okay to not have all the answers, they will see if they can find out and let me know - I smile encouragingly at Thembinkosi and he looks less flustered. It feels good to know my presence on the trail is helping the guides (and me) to grow and learn.*

*"Just one more bowl", Kleynhans insists dipping his ladle into his seafood "potjie", another "brood rolletjie" offers Pikkie pulling them from the Skipskebys outdoor oven - a popular get together spot for some of the locals. It seems to me that just about everyone in the village has brought a local dish to sample. Pleasantly full, I contemplate what it must be like to be Mr Murray whose first act every morning is to throw open the window to watch the ocean, eager for a sign that the fish are running. Equally pleasant is the thought of the lovely guesthouse where I'm staying, a warm shower and comfortable bed would go down very well - "maagie vol ogies toe" as the saying goes.*

*Add in a mix of wine and olives from local farms, contemporary culture at Darling's Peron and a tasteful glimpse into an age-old culture at the !Kwha Ttu San photo gallery, and you get the feel of the CWCBR exploratory trail experiences. Lovely scenery, a hiking, cycling or canoe challenge by day, warm hospitality by night, good food and a comfortable bed, all coupled with rich human interactions.*

*Reflecting on my experience I realize while the hiking and canoeing was great, it was these interactions that made the exploratory trails special for me. Yes, I'd had to be a little patient with the rough edges - like when the driver's idea of Trekoskraal and Ivan's didn't coincide - yes the guides had much to learn - but this would all improve with practice and this was what the exploratory trails were about. I just loved being a part of it all and I'd recommend the exploratory trail experience to anyone with a love of the outdoors and of people. It is a great way to relax, enjoy, help people and the environment. What you receive in return for your patience and input is well worth the reduced price you pay.*