**FISH RIVER CYCLING TRAIL**

**Day One** Arrive at **Mount Melsetter**, settle in for the evening, with drinks at the Saddlebum, and dinner.

**Day Two** After breakfast at Mount Melsetter, you will sort out the bikes and do some riding around the farm, and to a neighbouring farm for lunch – essentially a warm-up ride to iron out any bike problems, get your bottom accustomed to time in the saddle, returning in the afternoon to Melsetter. At Melsetter there is the opportunity to relax, explore, watch the blue cranes if they’re flying in to roost in the evening, enjoy the ambience of the Karoo, its wide open spaces, colourful sunsets before drinks and dinner in the evening.

**Day Three** The main ride begins, some 60 odd kilometres to **Lowlands Country House**. *(There is cell phone reception along most of the route to Lowlands).*

1. Set your odometer to ZERO in front of Mt Melsetter homestead.
2. Proceed towards tar road (R56) which is 1.6km from the house.
3. Turn left towards Steynsburg and travel for 3.9km before turning right towards Schoombee station, on what is known as the old Colesberg road. Continue past the Schoombee Trust School on your left, cross the railway line, continue and cross the line again a km or so down the road.
4. Continue on this road, passing the turnout to Hofmeyr (7.3km) on your left and then the Temple Farm turnout (15.3km) on your right, followed by the Beaconsfield turnout (18.9km) on your left.
5. Cross the **Teebus River** after 21.5km with the sign to Karoo River Rafting a further 400m on your right. The De Keur homestead emerges immediately to your right (22.3km). Look for Lions Hill in the distance, approx south-east from the road. The farm Doornberg is adjacent to the road on your right and you are more than likely to see white springbuck grazing on the plains – thought to be the original home of this rare, recessive white gene found amongst SA’s springbuck herds.
6. At the 31.8km mark you will come to a crossroad – left to Hofmeyr, right to Conway and Middelburg and continuing onwards in a due south direction to Cradock. The remnant of Soetfontein Inn, surrounded by a few pepper trees, is on your left. Soetfontein once served as an outspan and watering point on the wagon trail between Port Elizabeth and the Kimberly diamond fields. It formed part of the farm Woolwyn (as did Lion’s Hill), owned by my maternal grandfather, Herbert Gilfillan. My mother, Cynthia Southey (nee Gilfillan) was born at Soetfontein!
7. Continue in your southerly direction, passing the farm Ouderberg (Hough) after 37.8km. At the crest of the ridge you will have your first sight of **Grassridge Dam** off to your right. This is the start point of the Fish River Canoe Marathon and fed by a constant flow of water from the Orange River via the Orange/Fish tunnel. This is your tea/water-break point in a quarry next to the road.
8. Continuing your trail, you will cycle past a high game fence on your left (do not feed the lions!). You could see rhino, white blesbuck, springbuck , other antelope and if you are very lucky, even lion. After 42.4km pass the entrance to Grassridge Dam on your right and then commence a gentle 3km climb.
9. After 46km, and cresting the rise, look down to your right for your first sighting of the Fish River Valley. To your left in the distance you will spot Speelman’s Kop – a landmark in the area.
10. At the 49km mark turn right onto the road marked **Fish River**, leaving the Old Colesberg road which continues to Cradock. You now have a 10km descent to Lowlands Country House.
11. Pass a stone wall on your left (55km) and then turn left into Lowlands (57.8km). You might be interested to see the low-level bridge over the Soutpans Drift Rapid, one of the major rapids, and viewpoints, on the Fish River Canoe Marathon, which is just 200 metres beyond the Lowlands turnout. Once you have taken the Lowlands turn you pass through irrigated lands, and then take the left fork (58.1km) to Lowlands. The road becomes coarse and bumpy – continue past irrigation pastures on both sides before encountering a 3km incline in the road. You will pass a sign to Katkop (Collett) – one of the farms which features large in the late Professor Guy Butler’s autobiographical “Karoo Morning”.
12. At the 61.2km mark turn right to Lowlands, continuing past labourers’ cottages, crossing over the grid on your left and arriving at **Lowlands Country House**.

**Day Four** is spent at Lowlands, where your hosts Dave and Anne Bowker will direct you on interesting routes in and around Lowlands and neighbouring farms, with a variety of levels of complexity to suit your own cycling.

**Day Five** is the ride into **Cradock**.

1. Again, set your odometer to ZERO when leaving Lowlands Country House. Continuing your journey past groves of walnut and pecan trees, you cross the Fish River after 1.3km.
2. After 4.3km you cycle past the farm’s second residence, Lowlands Manor House where some of you might have been staying. Proceed through the gate and climb the steep 300m from the homestead before turning left at the fork (5.6km), continuing through the Highlands Glen gate (6.7km), crossing the Fish once more. Turn right after the Highlands sheds. (There is no cell phone reception at this point).
3. At the 11.8km mark you rejoin the Old Colesberg road, turning right towards Cradock. (You will be given the code for the lock on the gate – if you find it locked please make sure you lock it behind you).
4. Cycle through the Kwaairivier drift, past the sign to Kwaairivier/Hofmeyr at the 16km mark and continue to Cradock. Pass the sign to Baroda weir (another canoe marathon landmark). At this point the road becomes fairly corrugated.
5. Pass a pecan tree plantation on your right (28.2km) and cross the bridge at the 32.6km mark. You will cycle past the turn out and sign to Marlow Agricultural College (34.7km), turning right onto the tar road leading into Cradock (36.8km).
6. Cycle past the Cradock Golf Club on your right. Continue over the stop street looking out for the sign to **Tuishuise and Victoria Manor**.
7. Continue past Cradock High School on your left and then turn right into Victoria St (44km), turning left into Hospital St and passing the Cradock Hospital. Turn right into Voortrekker St and turn left into Market St. The reception to the hotel is immediately on your right.

**Day Six** transport collects you at the Victoria Manor, your luggage and bikes are loaded on to the bike trailer, and you are driven back to Mt Melsetter and your vehicles, from where you commence your homeward journey.