

BERG WINDS

Berg Wind, a traditional Afrikaans colloquial term for the weather phenomenon we often experience in the Western Cape of warm air flowing in from the interior. The word is very descriptive and explains exactly what it is – a “wind off the mountains”.

Berg Winds in the Overberg occur mainly during autumn and early winter, but may also occur periodically during summer.

What causes a Berg Wind:

Berg Winds, as we often find in the Overberg, occur when we have specific climatic conditions that are associated with 2 high pressure cells working in tandem. High pressure # 1, with its anti-cyclonic air movement, occupies the interior plateau/central interior of the continent and high pressure # 2 (Indian Ocean high) exists south or south-east of the country. This produces an outflow of air across the coastal regions of the Western Cape. As air in a high pressure cell not only rotates anti-clockwise, (anti-cyclonic) around a high pressure it also descends and warms up as it descends and therefore it stands to reason that the off-shore winds will be warmer. Air temperature rise by as much as 10 deg. C as it flows from the interior to the lower lying coastal regions. This was experienced today with temperatures in Villiersdorp being considerably lower than the day temperature in Hermanus. A Berg Wind condition may last for a few days at a time.

The Berg wind is also usually associated with an approaching frontal system out of the south west, in the absence of this, a coastal low could develop along the coast. Whilst the offshore flow ahead of the coastal low is usually north-westerly the wind behind the coastal low is on-shore and usually north-easterly to south-westerly. In contrast to the offshore, the on-shore flow is cool and moist giving rise thick fog along the coast, as was experienced in Hermanus last night.

The climatic condition is also associated with a drop in the relative humidity and higher temperatures. This has a significant influence on Fire Danger Rating (FDR) count, which in turn creates conditions that are conducive to runaway veld fires in the region.

