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#192

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February/March 2024

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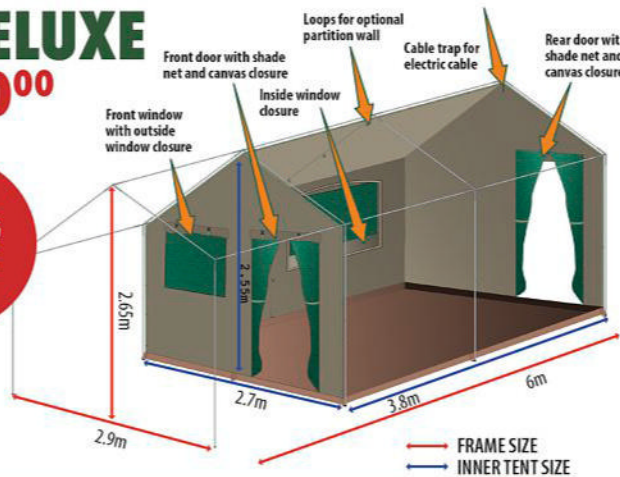
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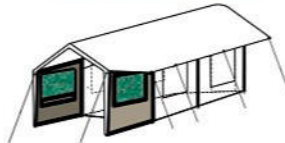
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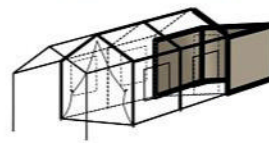
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RONEL STEYN

My wild wish list

The process of creating a new issue of *go!* (and reading it afterwards) always takes me on two journeys. One goes into the past as I reminisce about the things I've seen, the people I've met and the places I've been to on my travels; another takes me into the future as I compile a wish list of where I want to go next.

Take the prize-winning underwater photo of a hippo and her calf in Kosi Bay (p 70) as an example. They might be the same calm creatures that surfaced close to our boat when I visited last year. That road sign near Onseepkans that Toast describes so poignantly (p 126)? I saw that exact sign on an Orange River paddling trip a few years ago. I also remember finding shelter behind the colourful Muizenberg beach huts (p 129) on windy afternoons during the summer holidays of my youth. There are so many stories in each issue that spark memories like these.

But I've never hiked for five days in the high Drakensberg like Grant Christie did (p 54). That looks awesome! So too does reader Ian Tyrer's Africa – Wild & Untamed expedition on the shores of Lake Malawi (p 118). Maybe 2024 is the year where I go to Malawi to open a new *go!* office – even if it's just for a month!

It makes me appreciate how fortunate we are to live at the southern tip of Africa, in striking distance of so many adventurous and pristine destinations.

I hope this issue takes you on the same journeys – the nostalgic ones that get you thinking about people and places, and ones that inspire you to explore new horizons in the future. •

Happy travels!

Pierre

PIERRE STEYN
PSteyn@media24.com

DON'T MISS OUR NEXT ISSUE!

The Apr/May issue will be on sale at your retailer from 22 March 2024.



TYLA DEE NURDEN

BEHIND THE SCENES

The final instalment of **Ian Tyrer's** rollicking Travel Journal is here – see page 118. Ian's wife **Mandy** was an integral part of the team's madcap mission: She supported the expedition from their farm in Richmond, KZN.

Mandy, what's it like to have your husband set out into the "unknown"? I love Ian's adventurous spirit – it's what attracted me to him 20 years ago. I don't worry about Ian when he's away. The more that goes wrong, the better the story he gets to tell afterwards! He can cope with most curveballs, but should he ever be in real trouble, I'm also generally calm in the eye of a storm and I know I'll be able to sort out a rescue plan.

I've been on my fair share of crazy adventures with Ian, like in 2019 when we backpacked through Mozambique and Malawi. I've been known to climb down the outside of a ferry to get off the boat quicker, and once in Mozambique I even slept in a brothel because there was no other kind of accommodation. Basically, I've done everything your mama told you *not* to do!

Ian, why this trip? And what gear would you consider essential? I'm fascinated by Africa and I enjoy exploring the continent using various modes of transport. On this trip we used everything from taxis to ferries to trains.

In terms of gear, I always take malaria pills, a good tent and backpack, and smaller things like earplugs, in case someone snores or you have to sleep in a noisy place. Tupperware containers are also super useful – you can use them to pack anything from medication and toiletries to your phone and wallet.

What's next on the travel wish list?

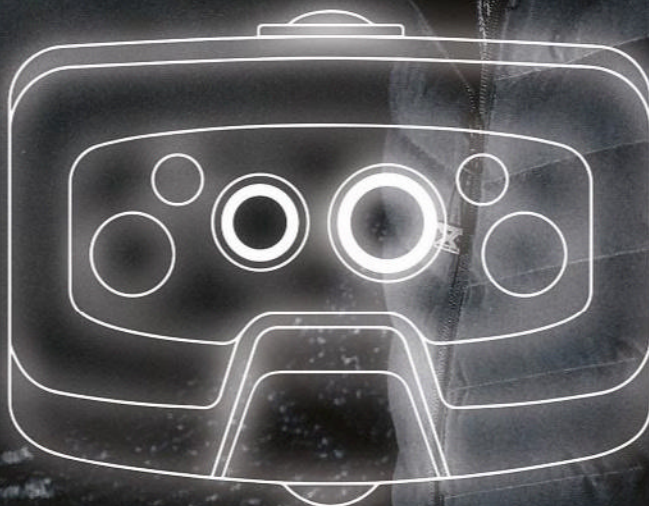
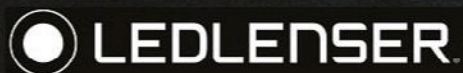
Ian: We have a "gentle" trip in mind for 2024, to Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi – we'll eventually finish in Gabon. The year after that, I'm feeling Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and the Amazon...

Mandy: Dream places for me would be Madagascar or the Seychelles. I love the sea, but also forests, waterfalls and mountains... Variety feeds my soul.

What are some of your favourite destinations in your own backyard?

Mandy: We live on the most picturesque farm, with indigenous forests and a treehouse where guests often sleep. Sometimes we even pitch tents in the garden. We also love to hike along the Wild Coast.

Ian: The Wild Coast, for sure, especially the section between Mnyameni and Mtentu. At Mtentu there's a beautiful fishing shack run by Kelly Hein (📞 mtentu-ramble.co.za). When we need a bit more luxury, there's the Salt Rock Hotel (📞 saltrockbeach.co.za) just north of Ballito – it's an hour's drive from our farm.



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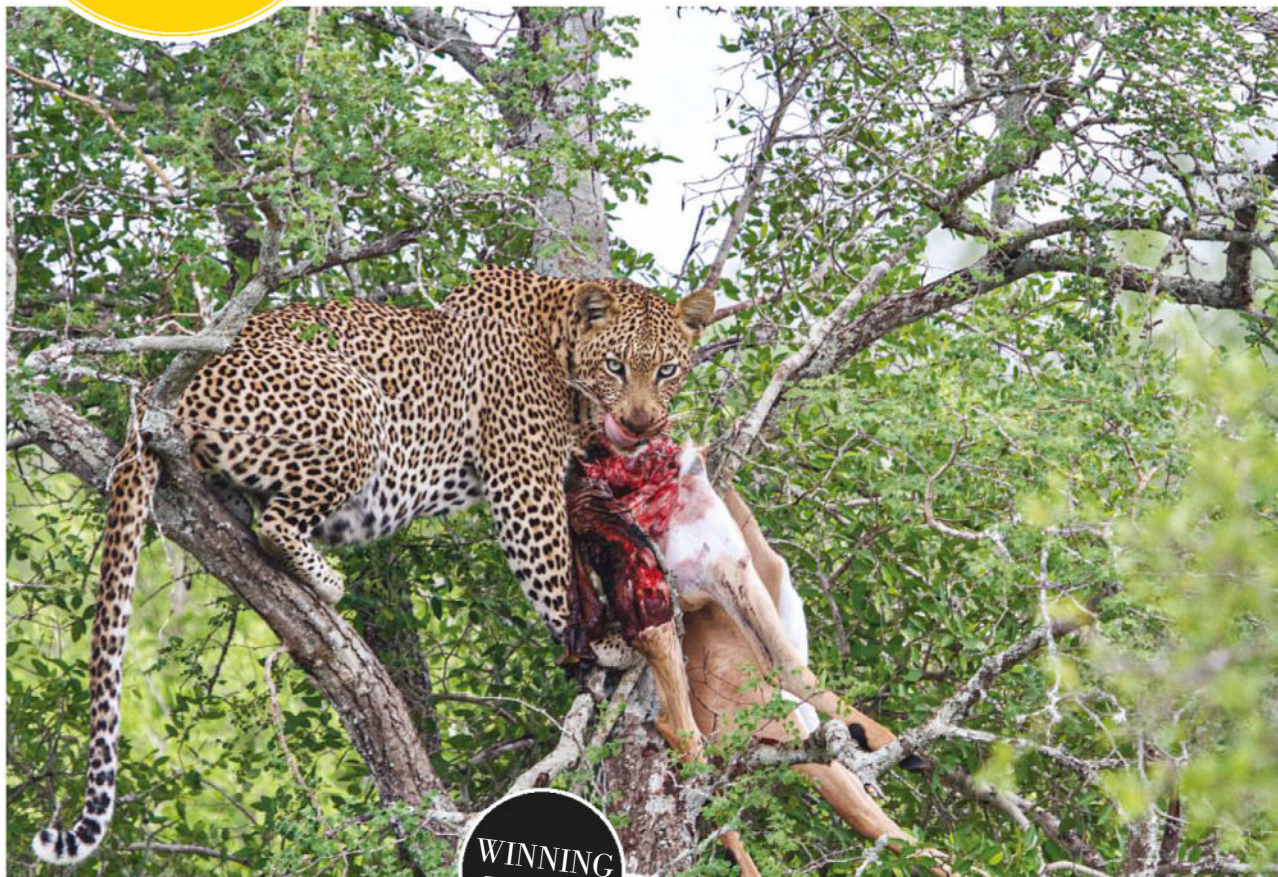
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Where have you been? What have you seen?
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COMPILED BY MARTINETTE LOUW



WINNING
LETTER

📌 It's all mine!

In November 2023, we visited Sand River Bush Camp in the Kruger Park. It's near Skukuza and run by the SANParks Honorary Rangers.

One afternoon we came across this leopard with its catch outside the camp. Hyenas were waiting for scraps below the tree and the impala's lamb was hiding in a bush nearby. We took photos from the safety of our vehicle until the leopard left – look at that intense stare!

We returned to the scene the next morning on one of our guided walks and only the impala carcass was left. What an amazing experience!

EMILL HABIG, Vereeniging



WRITE TO US & WIN!

Emill wins a Zartek ZA-476 LED spotlight worth R2 350. This rechargeable spotlight delivers an impressive 6 300-lumen beam over a distance of up to 1 100 m. It has a run time of 2,5 – 40 hours per charge depending on which of the five lighting modes you use.

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➤ Spring is in the details

Most photos taken in Namaqualand in spring show fields and fields of yellow, pink and orange flowers. But anyone who has actually stood there in a field of wildflowers will tell you it's something that no wide-angle photograph can capture.

That's why I like to take close-ups of flowers – it helps me see details I can't observe with the naked eye. And sometimes the simplicity of a single flower appeals to me the most.

I photographed this *Karoosatynblom* with a beetle covered in pollen at Matjiesfontein Guest Farm near Nieuwoudtville in August 2023.

ADRI DU TOIT, Lutzville



⬆ Bicycles are best

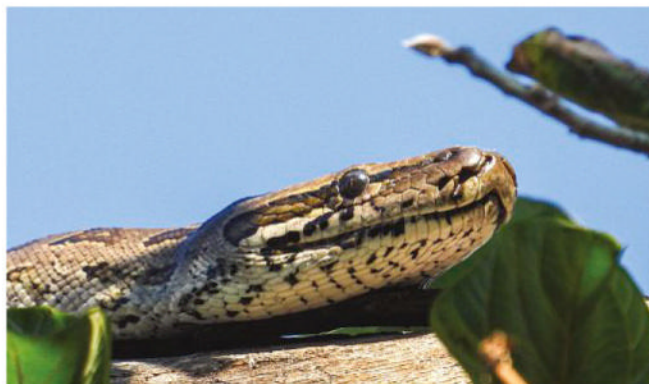
My wife Frieda and I try to explore a different part of South Africa every two years. In October 2023, we cycled up the West Coast, visiting towns like Yzerfontein, Langebaan and Jacobsbaai. We took it really slowly and rode about 320 km over 11 days – this pic was taken near Van Riebeeckstrand with Table Mountain in the background.

The book *Full Tilt: Ireland to India with a Bicycle* by Irish author Dervla Murphy sparked our interest in cycling. Our first tour was in Europe on the EuroVelo cycling network: We explored the canals, forests and cycling culture of the Netherlands and Germany. Next we did a route through the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley near Hermanus. (Check out bicyclesouth.co.za for some great local route ideas.)

We enjoy cycle touring and experiencing nature with all our senses – the smells, colours, rain and wind. When you're on a bike, you're not in an air-conditioned bubble like in a car; you can take your time and look closer at your surroundings.

There were several highlights on our coastal route. We cycled through the West Coast National Park surrounded by daisies; we were enchanted by the Fairy and Pixie Village in Jacobsbaai; and we celebrated the arrival of our first grandchild with a draught and chips at Lulas Food in Yzerfontein.

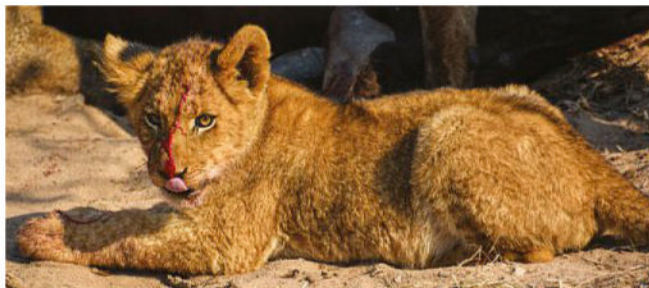
CHRISTO PRETORIUS, Pretoria



⬆ A clo-s-s-e-up

In July 2023, we were driving along the S147 near Balule satellite camp in the Kruger Park. I asked my husband Peter to stop, as I'd spotted a bird. As we pulled in under the tree, he said, "There's a snake." I looked and looked but couldn't see it. I zoomed in and eventually saw this python sunning itself. It was so long I couldn't get its head and tail in frame!

ALEX MORRIS, Scottburgh

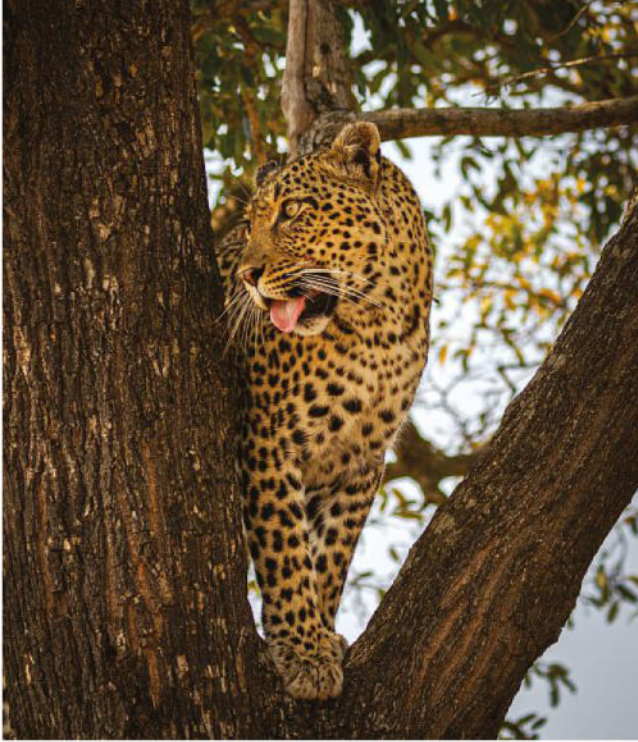


⬆ Good job, Micaela!

My family and I recently took a trip to the Thornybush Game Reserve next to the Kruger Park. While we were there, the resident pride of nine lions brought down a buffalo.

My 10-year-old daughter Micaela has inherited my old Nikon D5200 camera. She took this photo of one of the cubs. He approached the kill to join the feast, but one of his aunts decided he had to wait his turn and swatted him away, covering him in blood. I think Micaela's photos are incredible for someone so young!

TERRY BRETT, Illovo



▲ Up a tree

A leopard sighting is always thrilling, but even more so when you can get close. One morning in September 2023, we were travelling along the H2-2 near the Afsaal picnic site in the Kruger. We noticed a hyena under a tree with an impala carcass in the branches. After a few minutes, the hyena set off and this beautiful female leopard stepped out of the grass and climbed the tree. We watched her for more than an hour and I managed to take some photos despite all the adrenaline coursing through my veins!

KARIN VAN ZYL, Brits



▲ On the hunt

I visited the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in July 2023, where I saw this black-backed jackal hunting Burchell's sandgrouse at the Cubitje Quap waterhole. The sandgrouse were aware of the jackal's presence and dived in quickly for a sip of water. The jackal waited nearby and launched several attacks.

It was interesting to see the jackal stalk its prey. It used the high edge of the waterhole to hide its approach and would suddenly appear when the sandgrouse landed in the water. The jackal caught two birds and ate them both within minutes, so there was no chance for other predators to steal its prey.

LIZE-MARI WIGGILL, Bellville

▼ Ready for take-off

Early one evening, I took my horse out for a walk on the Ken Forrester wine farm between Stellenbosch and Somerset West. From a distance, I saw this jackal buzzard flying from pole to pole in the vineyards. It would stay perched every now and again to scan the ground.

It swooped down and I went closer to see what was going on. A few seconds later it flew up to a pole again with what looks like a mouse in its claws. I've noticed a young jackal buzzard in the area, still learning how to hunt. Maybe this adult was feeding its chick?

HANNEKE FOURIE-BENEKE, Strand



▲ Pink sky country

I took this photo of a sunset over the Orange River in July 2023. We camped at Waschbank River Lodge on the lower reaches of the Gariep Dam, opposite Norvalspont. The lodge has rooms, self-catering units and a campsite – it was a great spot to camp with our caravans. It's always a fun stay, in a tranquil environment. You can swim in this pool on the riverbank, hike, fish or ride your mountain bike.

I took this photo with my Samsung Galaxy A42 cellphone, I didn't fiddle with any settings – the scene didn't need it!

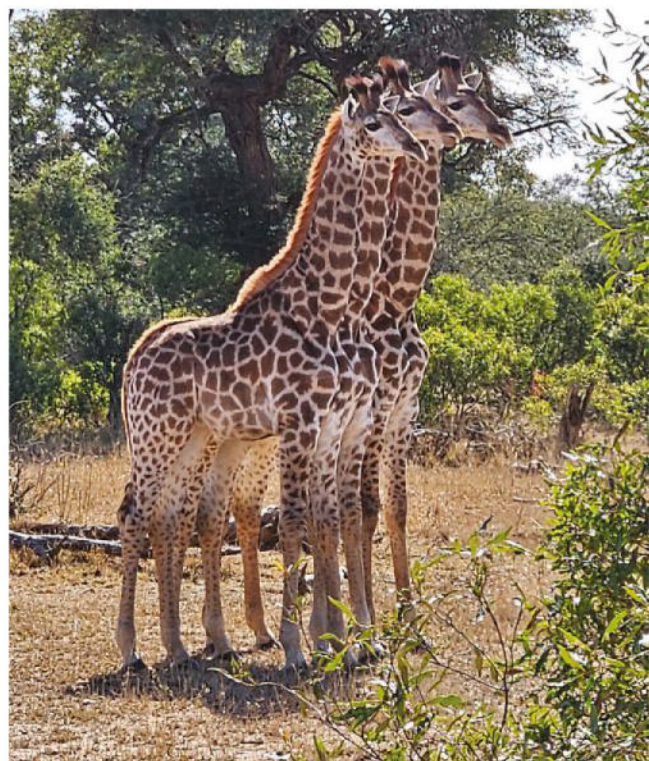
FRANS STARBUCK, Bloemfontein



📍 Be like a windmill

I photographed this windmill on our family farm in the Schweizer-Reneke district. It made me think: Even when times are hard, the windmill still pumps water from deep under the earth. It fills our dams and waters the fruit trees in our orchards. A windmill provides water to so many animals, plants and birds; it's a beacon of hope in difficult times.

LETTIE PIETERSE, Schweizer-Reneke



📍 Get in formation

These giraffes struck the perfect pose when I visited the Kruger Park in July 2023. We were driving along the Timbavati Road (S39) when we noticed the herd. After a while, one giraffe moved closer and came to a standstill. Another followed and stood beside it. When a third giraffe joined them, I couldn't believe my luck! I took a few photos before they broke formation.

BERTIE FOURIE, Bothaville



📍 A lion to call my own

Everybody who visits the Kruger Park wants to see a lion with a great big mane feasting on its catch. But often, especially when the park is busy, you have to share your sightings with other visitors and you miss out on that perfect picture.

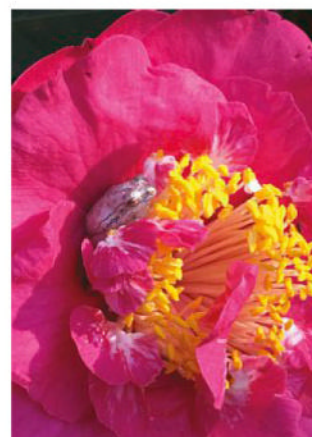
I'm one of the lucky ones – I had a lion all to myself! We drove south on the H1-3 to the Tshokwane picnic site to have a roosterkoek; along the way we saw this lion on the side of the road. It wasn't in the bush or behind a tree – it was in the short grass right next to the road! It was just us there and we could position the vehicle to take photos from every possible angle. I took hundreds of photos – this one is my favourite.

TRACEY THOMSON-DULLISEAR, Krugersdorp

➤ Pretty in pink

Every year around September, the gardens at Vergelegen Wine Estate near Somerset West have the most amazing camellia display. The farm has a collection of about 550 cultivars that flower in pink, red and white. Last year, while visiting the farm to view the blooms, I was privileged to see a little frog nestled in a pink camellia.

TANIA AUBY, Somerset West





▲ Beach day in black and white

We're fortunate to live 15 minutes from Wilderness on the Garden Route – we often spend time on the beaches there.

It was sunny when we left home in April 2023, but when we began descending Kaaimans River Pass towards the sea, we were enveloped in morning mist that hadn't lifted yet. I took this photo before the mist cleared – an eerie moment!

EDWARD ILLINGWORTH, George



◀ Quiet time

This is one of my favourite waterbuck photos. We were in the Kruger Park in March 2023, after the heavy summer rains and floods. The bush was green and dense, which made it difficult to see wildlife.

We were parked somewhere near Olifants when this waterbuck caught my attention. It was standing so still and the scene was so tranquil.

MONIQUE SMIT, Durbanville



▲ A winning smile

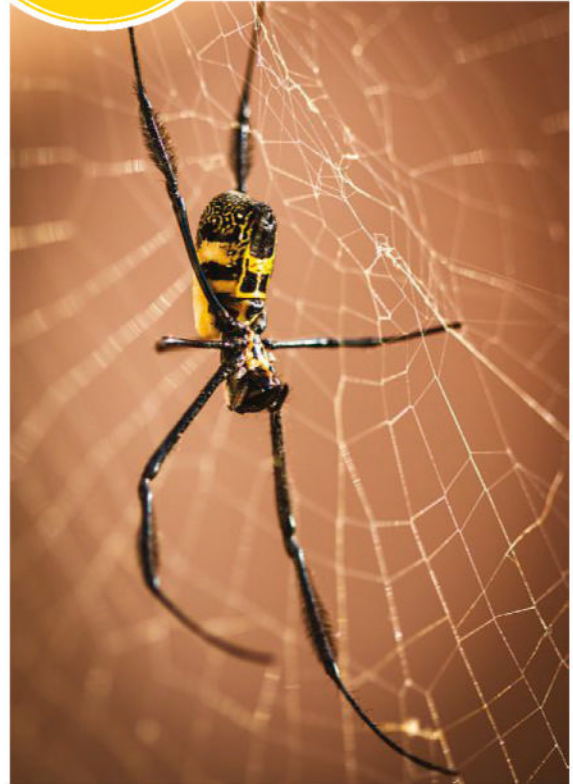
My friend Arno Snijder and I recently spent a weekend in Marloth Park next to the Kruger Park. We visited the park on a day outing.

There's usually action at Sunset Dam near Lower Sabie, so that's where we went. This young crocodile, about a metre long, was basking in the sun next to the dam with its jaws open. I was fascinated that a crocodile so small could already have such big teeth!

ARCO KLAPWIJK, Pretoria

Q&A

Every month our experts answer your questions about birds, bugs and beasts. Send your photos and queries to editor@gomag.co.za



▲ The secret life of spiders

ANET CLAASSEN from Hartenbos writes: This spider lived in our garden for a long time but disappeared after a spell of heavy rain. We watched as it grew from a tiny spiderling to an adult. What kind of spider is it?

Entomologist DUNCAN MACFADYEN says: This is a hairy golden orb-weaving spider. It's a species of nephilid spider commonly found in South Africa.

The males are much smaller than the females and typically only mate with one female in their lifetime, partly because they don't always survive after mating! It's a freaky but fascinating process: The males have two modified tubular organs called pedipalps that they place in one or both of the females' two genital openings. They then break the pedipalps to deliver the sperm and also to act as a plug that blocks other males from mating with the female until she's laid her eggs.

The females also sometimes kill and eat the males during the mating process – the males have adapted and can self-amputate their legs to get away.

This spider likes to make its web where prey is plentiful, often in open wooded areas between tree branches, shrubs, tall grasses, and even around light fixtures. They're not known to be aggressive towards humans, only biting out of self-defence if touched; and their relatively harmless venom has a low toxicity.



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SCAN ME

CHECK THIS

February heat getting too much? Chill out with this group of chinstrap penguins on an iceberg off the coast of Antarctica. Chinstraps eat fish, krill and squid and can weigh up to 5 kg. Females lay two eggs in early summer, which hatch after about 37 days. By the end of summer, chicks have moulted and are ready to brave the ocean. This photo was taken during an expedition on board the *MV Ushuaia* with Pangolin Photo Safaris.

PICTURE TOAST COETZER





IN BRIEF

COMPILED BY KYRA TARR

RUVAN BOSHOF



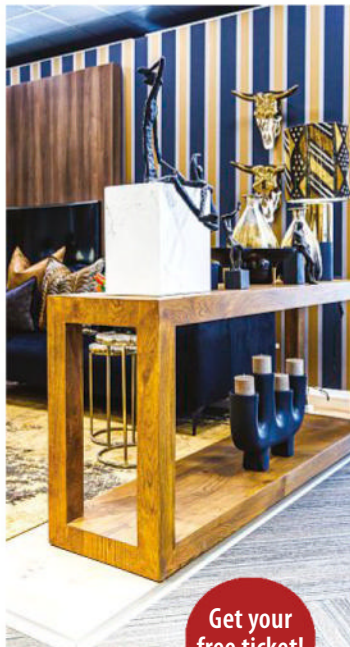
Fish app makes SA proud

ABALOBI is a South African smartphone app that connects small-scale fishing communities with their customers. It's used by restaurants and private individuals alike, enabling the buyer to get fresh fish directly from the person who caught it. The fisherman gets a fair price and reaches a larger market than he or she might previously have had access to.

It's a game-changing concept and the app was duly rewarded when it was selected as a finalist for the Earthshot Prize at a ceremony in Singapore at the end of 2023. ABALOBI was named in the "Revive our Oceans" category of this global environmental awards ceremony, which was founded by Prince William in 2020.

The data collected by the app is also useful for scientists. Tabs are kept on what kinds of fish are caught and whether or not their populations are threatened. Today, more than 90% of the fish logged on ABALOBI are from resilient fish stocks.

Find out more: abalobi.org



Johannesburg HOMEMAKERS Fair

If you're into DIY and decorating, then you best get to the Johannesburg HOMEMAKERS Fair, which will be held at the Kyalami Grand Prix Circuit from 1 – 3 March. The event will feature more than 300 exhibitors showcasing everything from furniture and furnishings to new building materials.

There are 20 double tickets up for grabs for *go!* readers (40 tickets in total). Send an e-mail with "go magazine" in the subject line to info@purplepine.co.za – the first 20 mails will receive their tickets.

More info: ☎ 086 111 4663
📧 homemakersonline.co.za/jhbfair

Get your
free ticket!

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Fred Mouton & Bazoo Art Exhibition

Visit the Oude Leeskamer in Stellenbosch for an art exhibition that honours the memory of celebrated South African illustrator, Fred Mouton (1947 – 2022).

"Bazoo Se Wonderwêreld" is centred around one of Fred's characters, Bazoo the leopard tortoise who lives with his friends in Fynbosville on Table Mountain. Your children might have come across Bazoo on their reading journey, but even if they haven't yet, the exhibition is sure to enthrall. There will be interactive installations, a reading corner and a crafts section where kids can build characters from Bazoo's world.

Illustrations will be available to purchase.

Where? Oude Leeskamer, 182 Dorp Street, Stellenbosch

When? Until the end of March 2024

More info: ☎ 021 001 8829

📧 oudeleeskamer.org





JAC KRITZINGER

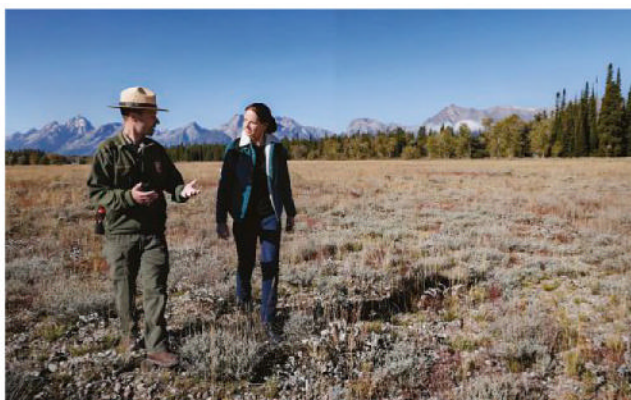
Travelstart relaunches their car hire service

Travelstart is a popular online flight booking platform that allows you to compare rates and routes across various airlines. Now they've relaunched their car hire service to make your travel planning even easier.

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travelstart.co.za



ANOTHER SEASON OF CONSERVATION ADVENTURES

In issue #183 we interviewed South African filmmaker and television presenter Bonné de Bod, who told us about her TV series *Bewonder & Bewaar* that she created with writer and director Susan Scott. *Bewonder* is about the people who work closely with wild animals to further conservation efforts in various parts of the world.

After a successful first run, fans of the show can look forward to another jam-packed season in locations like Namibia, the Kruger Park and Yellowstone National Park in the USA.

Each episode introduces new animals from each habitat (wolves, bears, buffalo, giraffes, geckos...) and gives the viewers insights into their behaviour from those who understand them best: researchers, scientists and vets, to name a few.

The second season features subtitles to make the show more accessible to English speakers.

Tune in! The second season premieres on kykNET on Sunday 24 March at 8 pm. New episodes will be screened weekly until 16 June 2024.

NIGHT WATCH



STELLARIUM.ORG

Lights out

The moon moves relatively quickly across the night sky, covering the distance of its own diameter every hour.

A good time to observe the moon's journey is when it passes a bright star – a phenomenon known as an occultation. It's a bonus when the moon moves across an entire group of stars, which is exactly what we'll witness in February 2024 when the moon passes the Pleiades, also known as the "Seven Sisters".

The moon is quite bright compared to the sisters, but on the evening of 16 February 2024 it will only be half full. The exact time of the occultation and which of the sisters will be involved depends on where you live, but stargazers should be ready and waiting from around 9.20 pm. The show should be over by around 11 pm.

The moon's dark side will lead the way, which will make the disappearance of the sisters particularly obvious. Still, a pair of binoculars will help. The moon is not big enough to cover the entire Pleiades group: The first stars will reappear on the moon's bright side before the last ones disappear on its dark side.

Take note of how quickly a star disappears behind the moon – it literally looks like a light being switched off. This is because the moon doesn't have an atmosphere that causes light to bend and scatter, which would make the starlight fade more gradually. Instead, the moon is almost like a razor blade that instantly cuts off the light – a star being a point source of light.

– Willie Koorts



LEOPARD LOUNGE

Part 1: Studying secretive cats



LITTLE KAROO



OVERBERG

Leopards are by far the most elusive of all the big cats. There are a few places where they've become habituated to safari vehicles, but for the most part they do their best to stay out of sight.

Researchers wanting to study leopards must resort to different methods of gathering data, and this is where technology has made a huge difference. Remote-sensing field cameras (camera traps) are becoming increasingly popular. Wildlife enthusiasts, researchers, game rangers, farmers and even anti-poaching units all make use of these effective and unobtrusive tools to see what animals (and sometimes people) get up to.

Initially, remote cameras were only used to photograph animals for aesthetic reasons. The first basic models date from the late 1800s: They used a baited tripwire system where the target animal would bite and pull on a lure that would mechanically trigger a film camera set up nearby.

A century later, in the 1980s, camera trap technology evolved rapidly – mostly driven by deer hunters who wanted "game cameras" to scout choice hunting sites.

Today, camera traps are used in various ways: for biological studies, to monitor human-wildlife conflict, for law enforcement, citizen science initiatives and education drives to name a few. Indeed, the camera trap has become an invaluable tool for scientific research, conservation and land management.

There are pros and cons. Cameras are at risk in the wild, subject to animal and environmental damage, theft and vandalism. If they malfunction, a significant amount of data can be lost; and setting them up wrong can have costly consequences. Each camera also samples a relatively small area.

But the benefits are legion: Camera traps are non-invasive; they have a negligible effect on animal behaviour and they have no observer bias. They can function for months without requiring attention, they work for species that can't be studied using "traditional" means and they provide robust data. They're like permanent fieldworkers, on duty day and night, come rain or shine. They're non-selective, capturing everything that moves, thus allowing scientists to gather data about other species, too.

An added bonus is the educational and promotional value of the images they gather, which can be used to great effect by organisations and researchers.

– Jeannie Hayward

Part 2 will be published in the April/May issue.

Follow the Cape Leopard Trust on Instagram: @capeleopardtrust

JEANNIE HAYWARD



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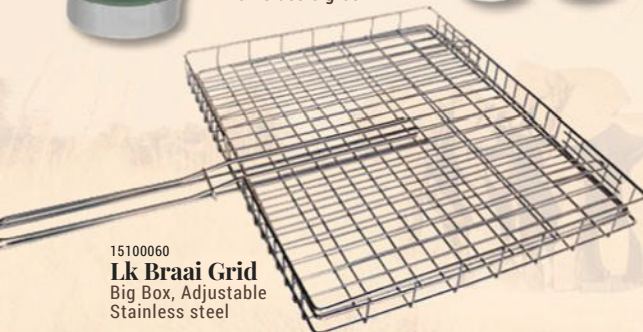
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Wanderlust in the park

All great cities have great parks, writes **Dara Kell**: spaces where you can exhale and slough off the stress and grime of urban life.

ILLUSTRATION **NICOLENE LOUW**

A walk in the park clears the mind and gives the eyes a break from concrete. Johannesburg has Zoo Lake, Cape Town has Kirstenbosch, Copenhagen has Fælledparken and London has Hyde Park.

New York City – where I lived for 20 years – has more than 1700 parks! The two I visited most often were Central Park in Manhattan and the lesser-known Prospect Park in Brooklyn. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux

were the architects of both parks, and it is said that they preferred Prospect Park, which they built second, over a period of 30 years between 1865 and 1895.

Central Park is slashed with roadways and encircled by skyscrapers. In Prospect Park, you're more likely to forget that you're in a city. At just over 2 km² in size, it's small – roughly half the size of Kirstenbosch – but there's plenty to do: Prospect Park boasts an ice rink, a zoo, bike paths, botanical gardens and a concert amphitheatre with free music shows in the summer. But it also

has pure, untrammelled wilderness, and that's what I was after during the pandemic of 2020. Cooped up in my tiny apartment and unable to escape the city for the Adirondack Mountains to the north or the beaches to the south, I had to make do with what was right on my doorstep.

I decided to set myself a challenge of a “hike” in the park every day. The first thing I noticed was the birds. During my initial forest forays, on a woody bend next to a slow-moving river, I was stopped dead in my tracks by a flash of

*There is comfort in
walking the same path
each day. Taking the time
to learn the position of
the sun, the shapes and
shadows and smells
at every turn, is itself
an act of love.*

red, an electric figure against the deep green foliage. It was a northern cardinal, a male, showing off his bright red cape.

Almost 300 species of birds have been recorded in Prospect Park and it's a pit stop for hundreds of migrating birds each year. As I marched across the open meadows, I would look up at the sky and sometimes see a flock of geese, recalling the famous Mary Oliver poem "Wild Geese". It's the only poem I know by heart, and whenever I'm feeling lonely, I remind myself that I belong, in her words, to the "family of things". By which she meant all living beings: trees, forests, animals – and us.

I made friends with the ducks, and also the turtles. I looked forward to seeing "my" bale of turtles – or terrapins as they'd be called in South Africa – sunbathing on a rock close to the lakeshore, their necks craned towards the sun, with what looked like smiles on their faces. I would follow suit and lie down on the grass, feeling a kinship with the reptiles and marvelling at their strange prehistoric beaks. They were red-eared sliders, about the size of a hand – sadly an invasive species and popular pets. During the dark days of the pandemic, I longed for a pet of my own and developed a bad habit of asking random dog owners if I could pet their pups.

The most elusive animal of all was a solitary swan that I came to yearn for. I loved catching sight of his striking white neck and egg-yolk beak, his graceful curves and the way he slid across a glassy stretch of water. He was a dose of calm during a time when the world was in turmoil and the future was unclear. I sought out Mr Swan, disappointed when I didn't find him, thrilled and entranced when I did. He never acknowledged me, like a handsome man who was playing hard to get.

Over time, my walks revealed even more wildlife, like raccoons who loved to gorge themselves on the contents of rubbish bins. I overheard a woman

warning her dog, which was rushing up to a raccoon wanting to play: "You do *not* want to tangle with a raccoon! You will lose!"

Slowly and carefully, I explored the nooks and crannies of Prospect Park. The park's designers purposefully made the paths more meandering than they needed to be, to create the illusion of space.

I learnt the routes to my favourite trees, like the crooked Camperdown elm, which has branches that grow parallel to the ground giving it the appearance of a giant bonsai. It was damaged in the 1960s, prone to vandalism and infested with rats and ants. It was almost torn down. The poet Marianne Moore rallied public support to save it, writing a poem that called it our "crowned curio". The tree was given crutches and a fence, and today it stands hobbled but noble, like a wise and dignified crone.

There's an invisible boundary in Prospect Park, where you cross over from manicured walkways and cute, moss-covered bridges populated with couples and picnicking children, into the wilderness. As I got braver, I started to explore off the paths I knew, into unknown territory called the Ravine. The deep forest held an allure that drew me in as much as it scared me. In a city where the streets are mostly governed by a strict grid system, it was liberating to surrender to the path and trust that I would find my way home eventually.

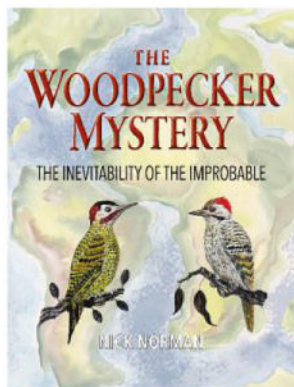
Over the course of that summer, Prospect Park became like a trusted friend to me: someone with whom a conversation is still a delight; comforting and surprising. In *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, the author Rebecca Solnit writes that "when you give yourself to places, they give you yourself back; the more one comes to know them, the more one seeds them with the invisible crop of memories and associations that will be waiting for you when you come back."

There is comfort in walking the same path each day. Taking the time to learn the position of the sun, the shapes and shadows and smells at every turn, is itself an act of love. Loyalty has its charms, once the excitement of novelty fades.

In 2021, after two decades away, I made the difficult decision to leave New York and return to Cape Town, my heart's true home. Here, I fell in love with Newlands Forest, a 10-minute drive from my house in Observatory. Wilder and less manicured than Prospect Park, there's not much to do other than walk and have a picnic or give your dogs a splash in the streams that flow through the woods.

But once more, I've become a park monogamist. I've found a path in Newlands Forest that makes sense to me, and I mostly stick to it. I know the shape of the gnarled roots near the beginning (and can avoid tripping over them) and I've learnt to predict how the forest will smell – musty and earthy or pine-filled and sandy – depending on how much rain fell that week.

I have found a tender joy in noticing something new whenever I visit. As if, by forcing myself to take the same route each time, I can test the boundaries of my attention. And even though the forest is full of pine trees and invasive species needing constant beating back, nature has taken over and made it a place worthy of a spot in the great, grand family of things.



The Woodpecker Mystery: The Inevitability of the Improbable

by Nick Norman,
The Franschhoek Press
R295 in bookstores

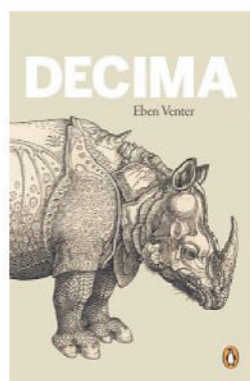
While working on a mining project in Brazil in the 1970s, geologist Nick Norman noticed something peculiar in southern Bahia: a woodpecker that bore a striking resemblance to those he knew back home in South Africa.

During later visits to South America, he saw more and more similar birds and trees. How did they come to be here, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean? This book is his attempt to explain the mystery, delving into a range of topics like continental drift, plate tectonics and ocean currents.

Norman is best known for his books about geology, including *Geological Journeys: A traveller's guide to South Africa's rocks and landforms* (co-written with Gavin Whitfield; 2013) and *Box of Rocks* (2015). He does a great job of making complicated concepts easy to understand.

He also turns to the field of biology for answers, unpacking Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection, Gregor Mendel's genetics research and Rosalind Franklin's contribution to the discovery of DNA.

It's an interesting take on natural history, geology and birding, with great bird illustrations by Jeanne Hugo van der Merwe.



Decima

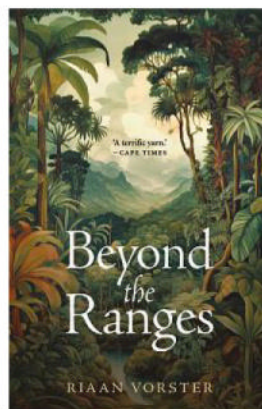
by Eben Venter, Penguin Random House South Africa
R290 in bookstores

Decima, a black rhino cow and matriarch of her crash, is the main character in this novel by acclaimed author Eben Venter. Part autobiographical fiction, part wildlife crime mystery, the novel explores how humanity's greed has contributed to the

plight of the rhino over centuries.

Decima's story is told by various voices: The main narrator, Eben, is a writer from Australia doing research about rhinos and poaching syndicates while visiting his ageing mother in South Africa. We also see the rhino through the eyes of the poachers who set out to kill her, the researchers who study the use of rhino horn in traditional medicine in Hong Kong, and the game warden tasked with keeping her safe in a reserve in the Eastern Cape.

Venter tackles themes like conservation, motherhood and loss in an eloquent tale that will draw you in from the very first page.



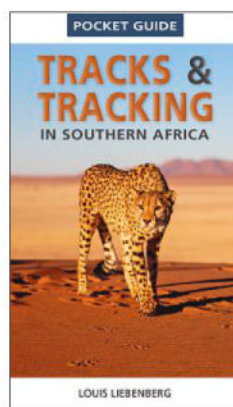
Beyond the Ranges

by Riaan Vorster, self-published
R375 in bookstores

Riaan Vorster knows a thing or two about adventure: He regularly accompanies hikers and climbers up Table Mountain as a guide (his book *Lines of Least Resistance* is a compilation of 101 vignettes about the many routes on the mountain) and he's done several expeditions to the forests of Brazil and Venezuela.

Beyond the Ranges is his first novel. He self-published the book in 2009 and it's now in its second edition. *Ranges* tells the story of tame and timid Mathew Travis who tires of his dull life in 1920s Cape Town, where he services trawlers in the harbour. He rediscovers his childhood dream of being an explorer, and when he can no longer deny his yearning for a more exciting life, he travels to the Amazon. There, he meets a German historian and an American guide, and together they set off into the rainforest in search of a rumoured emerald mine...

This book is the definition of "action-packed". If you like your protagonists thrown into impossible situations in a hostile landscape, this novel will keep you on the edge of your hammock this summer.



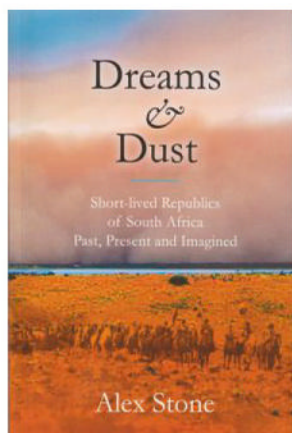
Pocket Guide: Tracks & Tracking in Southern Africa

by Louis Liebenberg, Struik Nature
R230 in bookstores

No lions? No problem! Learn how to read the signs of the veld and you'll soon unearth a wealth of information about animal behaviour that will make even the quietest day in a nature reserve exciting.

This revised guide, first published in 2000 as *A Photographic Guide to Tracks & Tracking in Southern Africa*, will introduce you to the basics of tracking. It covers 105 species found in our region, including reptiles, amphibians, ground-feeding birds, mammalian predators and herbivores. Each entry is accompanied by an illustration of the spoor of the species in question (forefoot and hind foot if four-legged), a description of its habitat and habits, and other signs it might leave behind.

There's also a short section about insects – now you'll be able to tell if a dung beetle trundled past earlier!



Dreams & Dust: Short-lived Republics of South Africa Past, Present and Imagined

by Alex Stone, Footprint Press
R450 in bookstores

In this unique book of historical writing, Alex Stone turns his attention to the smaller, lesser-known polities formed within the borders of South Africa over centuries, starting with Graaff-Reinet in 1795. He writes about dreams of independence and self-governance, and how groups like the Afrikaners, Griquas and Basters attempted to set up their own self-declared republics – and how quickly their aspirations turned to dust. (He doesn't discuss any British attempts except for one – Queen Adelaide Province – because they were all part of the Imperial project.)

A chapter is dedicated to each state and everything is presented in chronological order – there are more than 50! Some of the republics were formed for the groups themselves to strike out on their own; others were created to segregate and control, like during apartheid. It's a detailed, well-researched book that deals with some heavy subject matter, but Stone still manages to write in a humorous, conversational style.

And hang on, what's this? In the final section, Stone also examines 20 fictional states and how the concepts of "South Africa" and "Africa" live in the imagination of the world. Among others, he discusses Bapetikosweti, the made-up homeland created by satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys for his character Evita Bezuidenhout; Wakanda, as featured in the Hollywood blockbuster *Black Panther*; and Fook Island, a fantasy land conjured up by artist Walter Battiss.



Field Guide to Fynbos Fauna

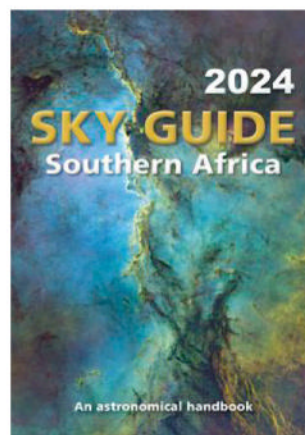
by Cliff & Suretha Dorse,
Struik Nature
R350 in bookstores

When you think about the fynbos biome, it's only natural to focus on the plants. But what about the birds, beasts and slithery

things that also call the biome home?

This guide gives 420 species of fynbos fauna a chance to shine. It's divided into four chapters (frogs, reptiles, birds and mammals); each section opens with an overview of the local species diversity and includes handy tips for viewing wildlife. The species accounts describe key identification features of each animal, as well as its habitat, call, conservation status and level of endemism.

Next time you're exploring the fynbos regions of the Western and Eastern Cape, pack this guide to enrich your experience. Look, a bontebok!



**Sky Guide Southern
Africa 2024: An
astronomical handbook**
by Astronomical Society of
Southern Africa, *Struik Nature*
R170 in bookstores

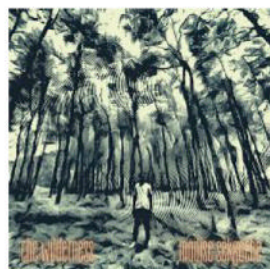
"Man must rise above the Earth – to the top of the atmosphere and beyond – for only thus will he fully understand the world in which he lives."

If the words of Greek philosopher Socrates resonate with you, keep an eye on the sky in 2024 with the latest edition of *Sky Guide Southern Africa*.

This is the 79th edition and the guide has been refined over the years to offer something for everyone, whether you're a beginner and still figuring out how to tell Venus apart from Mercury, or a pro looking for more technical data.

The guide contains highlights to look forward to in the upcoming year, a celestial almanac with star charts for each season, and information about the sun, moon, planets, asteroids, comets and meteors. There are also sections about stars and constellations, deep-sky astronomy and where to go stargazing.

Coverage has been extended to select places in Botswana, Madagascar, Mozambique and Namibia, so you can check on cosmic events while travelling.



ROAD MUSIC

The Wilderness

by Modise Sekgothe
Available on streaming platforms

Modise Sekgothe is a spoken-word maestro. I've seen him in action: He can hold an audience spellbound with his hypnotic voice, which magically finds rhythm and melody in the deeply affecting words of his poems.

The Wilderness is a mesmeric ride into his inner world. Guided by soundscapes (chilled beats, bleeps, hums and some soulful singing), Modise's words transport you to a spiritual realm: "Tell them I've become a hermit somewhere near the height of the Himalayas," he says in "The Whereabouts of the Wind". Sometimes his words are dust particles; other times they're the wind that sweeps away the dust.

The title track storms spookily into a landscape we think we know – ourselves: "In the wilderness you shout in a million different directions, nothing speaks back..."

Or, in "Divine Ear": "...allow the hungry night to devour me and spit me out on the other side of the map..."

This is midnight driving music, cat's eyes flicking past, the silhouettes of koppies against the stars. A beautiful, moving record.

– Toast Coetzer



Hugh Chittenden is in his element in uMlalazi Nature Reserve near Mtunzini, KwaZulu-Natal. (If you're wondering, he uses a pair of Swarovski 10x42 binoculars.)

A life through binoculars

If the name **Hugh Chittenden** sounds familiar, it's probably because you see it every time you use your *Roberts Bird Guide* – he's one of the co-authors. He lives in Mtunzini on the KZN coast and birding is as much part of his day as a cup of coffee.

WORDS & PICTURES **TOAST COETZER**

Two dark birds fly with heavy wing flaps from the almost waist-high grass. "There go two of them. There!" Hugh Chittenden says, dropping his binoculars and pointing to where the birds have now alighted in a small tree.

It's a muggy, overcast morning in February and we're in a marshy grassland in uMlalazi Nature Reserve adjacent to the town of Mtunzini. The birds are black coucals. They might be widespread in wetlands in other African countries, but they're one of the rarest birds to see in South Africa thanks to their specialised habitat needs. This piece of otherwise nondescript veld is one of their strongholds, and Hugh has observed them here for many seasons.

Once I've carefully stalked nearer to get a close-up photo, we slowly make our way back to Hugh's white Hilux double-cab. The bakkie is rigged for birding: Through the middle of the cabin, from Hugh's left elbow towards the back rest of the rear seat, he has installed a home-made camera holder made from blue irrigation pipe cut in half to accommodate his Canon D-SLR and 500mm lens.

We soon stop again where a few ruffs are busily feeding in knee-deep water. (Knee-deep is about 4 cm if you're a ruff!) "These are some of South Africa's

longest-flying migrant birds," Hugh says. "From here, they fly up the east coast of Africa then veer to the east, around the Himalayas to northern China..."

His train of thought is interrupted as he grabs his camera and gets out of the vehicle to photograph the ruffs. Both our cameras click away.

Hugh gets back in the car. "Anyway, a ring from one of these ruffs was handed in to a Chinese birder. Unfortunately, the ring was only recovered after the bird had been shot. That's the usual story there. They often gather a ring from the bottom of the pot after eating the bird... Ah, here's a purple-banded sunbird!"

Before we leave the reserve, we drive down to the beach and watch a palm-nut vulture taking a bath in a freshwater stream.

After all this birding excitement we drive to Hugh's house, not far from the reserve entrance. His wife Loueen makes us more coffee (we had coffee from a Stanley flask earlier) and serves a breakfast of yoghurt and fruit, toast and marmalade.

Above the kitchen sink are three still-life paintings done by Loueen – lemons, figs and onions. "I only started painting in my sixties," Loueen says. "My mother always told me I couldn't paint and now I've decided to prove her wrong! It gives me enjoyment. But let me tell you, one

Hugh's photographic records include just about every breeding bird ever recorded in South Africa. (The only ones he's not interested in are pelagic birds because he gets seasick.)

Opposite page, clockwise from the top: Hugh on the beach at Mtunzini, where he and Toast saw a palm-nut vulture. This illustration on page 475 of *Roberts Bird Guide* includes a coral tree flower originally painted by Hugh's father. Hugh points to detail in a painting of a coqui francolin done by master bird artist Ingrid Weiersbye. Hugh and his wife, Loueen, at their house in Mtunzini. The black coucal is a polyandrous bird, and the male does most of the nest building, incubation of the eggs and the raising of the chicks. Hugh's office is filled with bookshelves and paintings of birds. A ruff feeding in the shallows in uMlalazi Nature Reserve.

thing I'll never paint is a bird..."

She and Hugh have a good laugh at this.

Loueen was born in Nigel in 1949 but she grew up in Phalaborwa. She later came to teach at a convent school in Eshowe. She met Hugh at Entumeni, a sugar farming area west of Eshowe. They got married in 1984 – both have children from previous marriages.

"I'm a Bosveldier," she says. "He's a Natal boy."

Hugh was born in Pietermaritzburg in 1947 and spent his formative years in Swaziland before his parents moved to Umhlanga. He had always wanted to be a farmer.

"My mom and stepdad – my biological father died before I knew him – were city people and thought I had rocks in my head when I told them I wanted to go farming," Hugh recalls.

While we're talking, Loueen manually toasts one slice of bread after another in a pan on the gas stove – the town is experiencing load-shedding.

After school, Hugh worked as a farm manager on a tomato farm next to the Blyde River, near the Strijdom Tunnel. "That area was extremely rich in birdlife, which made it an ideal place to learn about bird identification," he says. "Nightjars were regularly killed on the road so I'd collect dead specimens and learn how to identify them from tail and outer wing feathers. Today, I probably know nightjars better than any other bird family; I've photographed every species and subspecies of nightjar in our region. But I'm not what you'd call a twitcher, I don't run around with a list ticking off birds. I'm more interested in the biology."

The remarkable thing is that Hugh never trained as an ornithologist. All his knowledge comes from countless hours of observation in the field. The only formal qualification he has in the field is an honorary doctorate from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which he received in 2014 to acknowledge his contribution to ornithology in South Africa.

"I think Hugh has always been respected by ornithologists," Loueen

adds, finally done with the manual toasting. "They know that *he* knows what he's talking about, because of his fieldwork."

Hugh moved back to KZN in 1977 and settled in the Eshowe area where he started an agricultural nursery – growing seedlings in trays. "At the time it was quite a new thing in South Africa," Hugh recalls. "Eventually, I was producing 30 to 40 million seedlings per year – mainly trees for the forestry industry, but also vegetables. When I was 56 my son took over the business and Loueen and I bought this house in Mtunzini and moved here in 2014."

Loueen and Hugh often travel around South Africa (and occasionally elsewhere in the world) to photograph birds in new habitats. "It's interesting for me to understand why a bird occurs in a specific habitat and in another place in a completely different habitat, with a gap in their geographic distribution. That kind of thing is mind-blowing to me."

Hugh's photographic records include just about every breeding bird ever recorded in South Africa. (The only ones he's not interested in are pelagic birds because he gets seasick.) "I haven't photographed a Knysna warbler yet, and that buttonquail you get down in the Cape – the fynbos buttonquail... That irritates me!"

The first book Hugh produced was called *Top Birding Spots in Southern Africa* (1992) but his future job as author of the *Roberts* guide came through a fortuitous series of connections.

"Because of my work, I used to attend nurserymen meetings. One day I sat next to Patrick Niven, whose mother was Cecily Niven, one of our legendary ornithologists. After Austin Roberts passed away – the author of the first *Roberts* guide – Cecily saw to it that his legacy, and the book he'd created, didn't die. She got Geoff McLachlan and Richard Liversidge involved, for example. They were the next two authors. I got to know Cecily and I joined the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund, which is the trust behind the book. That was a great honour for me. I eventually became chairman of the trust and stayed for 25 years.

"I've been privileged to work with





HUGH CHITTENDEN READING LIST

Roberts Bird Guide: R320 📄 jacana.co.za

*Roberts Bird Guide – Kruger National
Park*: R175 📄 jacana.co.za

*Roberts Geographic Variation of
Southern African Birds*: R220
📄 jacana.co.za

More about Hugh:

📄 hughchittenden.co.za

bird artist Ingrid Weiersbye on the *Roberts* guide, among other projects. I really believe Ingrid is one of the best bird illustrators in the southern hemisphere. Two thirds of the illustrations in *Roberts* were done by her, which is remarkable. She lives near Pietermaritzburg, but we used to meet at the Durban Museum and go through bird skins [skins are like taxidermied birds] while working on a book.”

He explains how they would sift through up to 50 specimen samples before selecting the two or three that Ingrid would take home with her to paint. She would also use photographs of the birds to get their “jizz” right – birding lingo for how they act and appear naturally in their environment. Ingrid, Hugh tells me, is a complete

perfectionist who would often collect her own specimens and keep them in the deepfreeze just in case someone wanted a picture of, say, a Cape longclaw.

Hugh and I move to his office. Loueen excuses herself – she has a church meeting to attend. The office is neat and tidy, although Hugh does admit that he cleared up a bit in anticipation of my visit. (If only he knew what my desk looked like...) This is clearly the place where “the magic happens”. The walls are covered with bookshelves, and where there are no shelves, they’re adorned with framed bird paintings. His computer sits on his desk: The screensaver moves from a pelican in flight to some type of lark, to a close-up of a marabou stork. Next to it are copies of *African Birdlife* magazine, a scanner, camera gear and battery chargers. In a corner: a Swarovski spotting scope on a tripod and some walking sticks.

Hugh points to a painting of a reedbuck ram, gazing at us quietly from inside a simple wooden frame. It was painted by Hugh’s father, also Hugh, who was a policeman in Swaziland during the 1940s and died in a shooting incident two months before Hugh was born. Hugh’s mother gave him the painting when he was a boy.

For his 12th birthday, she also gave him his late father’s copy of the very first edition of the *Roberts Bird Guide* (1940). In the front is a simple dedication: “To Hugh, from Dad.” This is actually Hugh’s grandfather dedicating the book to Hugh Senior, but it might as well be a message from Hugh’s dad to himself.

Later, when Hugh was involved with the most recent *Roberts* guide (2016), he managed to sneak in a small part of the dad he never knew. “I wanted more flowers on the page with the sunbirds,” he says, turning to page 475 and pointing at the grey sunbird, painted by Ingrid Weiersbye. “Back in the 1940s, my father did a painting of the flowers of a common coral tree. I scanned the painting and cut out the part we needed, then we added it to the layout. Those are the flowers the sunbird is sitting on...”

Help preserve the future of conservation

SANPARKS EMBARKS ON A NEW EXPEDITION: VISION 2040!

SANParks has started a process of co-creating and re-imagining the future of national parks and the management authority that will govern them – the Vision 2040 initiative. This pioneering project will redefine our journey towards a thriving tomorrow. In 2026, SANParks will be 100 years old and as we move towards our centenary it is clear this vision must extend beyond traditional conservation. It has to be a collective effort to foster community, healing and inspiration across South Africa, while taking key issues such as environmental resilience, sustainability and climate adaptability into account.

The SANParks footprint spans an impressive 4 million hectares of diverse ecosystems. It boasts an extensive network of national parks, each with its unique charm and appeal. Whether you're a seasoned hiker, a birdwatcher, a wildlife enthusiast or an adventurer, our parks offer a range of opportunities to be explored. If you wish to completely escape and just sit quietly, breathe in fresh air and watch the sun set – there is a park and place for you as well. The adventure is yours to shape.

Vision 2040 will be the long-term strategic blueprint for our organisation to ensure that, while opportunities expand and grow in line with the demands of our future visitors, we also promote better conservation practices together with all South Africans and the rest of the world, who look to us to help meet international conservation objectives.

To reach our aim of co-creating and re-imagining the future of SANParks with all who live here, we spent the past six months travelling the country, soliciting input from various stakeholders. These included seasoned academics with specialist expertise, our park neighbours, government and private sector partners, and youth groups. The support and input received was amazing and our thanks go to all those who contributed thus far.

We invite everyone to come and join discussions about national parks and what the future holds. We have to ensure that national parks not only survive, but also thrive as places of inspiration and healing.



SANParks is committed to developing a new vision for conservation



YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT OUR NATIONAL PARKS AND THE

FUTURE. Take part in Vision 2040 and make a lasting contribution that will help shape South Africa into an international icon of biodiversity and cultural heritage for generations to come.



WEBSITE



VIDEO

OUR THOUGHTS SELF V





The Kalahari remembers

The Kalahari is a place of magic and heartache, where drought is an ever-present threat. Drive a loop from Upington to the Kuruman River and discover soulful landscapes, brilliant skies and resilient people who never give up.

WORDS & PICTURES **WILLEM VAN DER BERG**

The land you walk over will never forget that you were there. And what happened when your feet touched the sand. Every time you return, it gives your memories back. Feelings, too, that filter up from the ground and into your chest. That's why some places make you feel claustrophobic and others give you air to breathe.

Whenever I go back to the Kalahari, I vanish into red dunes and old emotions. I lived in the Kalahari for about five years while I was growing up and I always feel a little unsettled when I arrive back in Upington. I love this desert and its camel thorn trees, sociable weavers and bat-eared foxes, but I also know its droughts and its melancholy...

Dunes shouldn't be red

There's a nice restaurant at the Orange River Cellars tasting centre in Upington. It's called Die Kerkmuis, and it didn't exist in 1999 when my family would drive the 250km dirt road from our rented farm near Van Zylsrus to Upington to buy groceries.

I sit down with my friend Japie Kruger and we order food and wine. I didn't drink wine back then – my dad was a dominee and taught me that it was sinful – but now I'm a bit of a snob about the whole thing.

Luckily the wines produced by Orange River Cellars have steadily improved over the years, with names as evocative as the contents inside the bottle: Omstaan, Sterkstaan, Regopstaan.

Japie and I head north the next morning. Our plan is to camp on the pan at Koppieskraal Kameelplaas. It's basically right next to Hakskeenpan, the enormous white

expanse where the Bloodhound car got up to 790 km/h in 2019. If you look at a map of the Kalahari, Hakskeenpan is right in the north-western corner, next to the vertical border with Namibia.

But first we drive around Upington for old times' sake. There's Die Eiland Resort, where the Orange River bakes in the sun and where I held a girl's hand for the first time at the Rosyntjiefes. And there's the Isuzu dealership where my dad bought his KB 250 double-cab. It had purple stripes on the side and I drove it for many years after my dad passed away, eventually selling it with 717 000 km of adventures on the clock.

We also head down Anton Lubowski Road, with its repair shops and co-ops like the KKK, where we'd load up on sheep feed, mineral lick, bales of wire and parasite treatment. I once reversed the Isuzu into a pole at the fuel pumps there because I couldn't see over the feed bags in the back.

The black ribbon of the R360 unspools in a tight line to Askham, straight through the dunes that get higher as you go. About 30 km before Askham, we turn west onto a white dirt road.

"I thought the dunes would be more... red?" Japie says.

"It's only the tourists who want red dunes," I explain to him. "A red dune is a bare dune, and a bare dune means drought. If you tell the farmer at Koppieskraal that you want the dunes to be redder, he'll invite you to come and visit when the wind has buried his dead cattle in the sand."

We arrive at Koppieskraal and Hans Knoesen concurs: Visitors always want to know why the dunes aren't a deeper red.

The camels on Koppieskraal are descended from animals that were used by police to patrol the Kalahari in the early 1900s. In 2015, during a relentless drought, the owner of Koppieskraal, Hans Knoesen, realised the farm could generate additional income by producing camel milk.





Opposite page, clockwise from top left: In the dark, Koppieskraal pan seamlessly merges with space, while the Milky Way glitters overhead. By sunset the Kalahari sand cools down under your feet and the sun loses some of its fire. Dirk Grobler's take on life will have you pondering questions long after you've left Dregghorn. A gemsbok greets the day on the dunes of Dregghorn.

“If they’ll pay for the animal feed, I’ll make the dunes red for them!” he says.

Koppieskraal is an interesting farm. The Knoesens have a caravan of camels – the farm produces camel milk powder, which is distributed nationally, and a range of skincare products also made from the milk. The landscapes are varied: red sand, limestone ridges, a vast pan and blackened dolerite boulders stacked in towers.

The Canadian tightrope walker and explorer, William Leonard Hunt, who performed under the name Guillermo Farini, travelled through the Kalahari in 1885 and apparently found piles of boulders he believed to be the ruins of an ancient city. However, after many investigations over the years, it's still not clear whether Farini really came across a lost city or if he just made the whole thing up. Chances are he camped where Koppieskraal is today, and it's true that the landscape seems to come alive when the stars streak across the sky and the jackals call in the dark.

You can camp here, too, and listen to those forgotten stories on the wind. Japie and I head to the pan and pitch our tents. We sail through the dark with the Milky Way and wake as Venus rises the next morning.

We're off the pan early, before the sun gets blinding, and we make tracks to the restaurant at Kgalagadi Lifestyle Lodge outside the transfrontier park. Black Mane Butcher & Grill is an oasis, with cold beers and an equally refreshing swimming pool.

The lodge is about 50km past the turn-off to Dreghorn Kalahari Game Farm, where we'll set up camp later, but it's worth the drive if you want to lie low during the uncomfortable hours of the day.

Dreghorn borders the Molopo River (and Botswana) and offers the small mercy of shade under camel thorn trees. I go for a drive late in the afternoon, past gemsbok, roan antelope, springbok, wildebeest and even a few giraffe. I pull over on a high dune. The sun is the same colour as the Kalahari, sinking into the sand. Barking geckos call, thankful for dusk and the reprieve from the heat. A splinter of a moon hangs in the deep blue sky like a silver eyelash.

There were nights on the farm when I sat and wondered why I wasn't happy when everything around me was so beautiful. In high school, there were only two things

I wanted to be: a cricket player or a writer. Our move from the Free State to the Kalahari withered my dreams of becoming a Protea, and my dad's decision that I would farm after school meant that words would have to make way for sheep and cattle.

It was only when I was 23 that my old high school teacher from Olifantshoek helped me get into university. Mevrou Aucamp was the one who had introduced me to Antjie Krog, JC Steyn, Bart Nel, Saul Barnard and Raka in that dusty, faraway town.

I join in when barking geckos send their simple prayer up to the heavens: *Dankie-kie-kie-kie-kie-kie....*

Along dry riverbeds

Dirk Grobler, farm manager of Dregghorn, has invited us to a braai. He's a man with a plan and he has a solution for every problem; the kind of guy who can service your bakkie then cook you a delicious curry. I have a bit of a head cold, which is immediately treated with a hot Stoney ginger beer infused with Med-Lemon and a dash of brandy.

"I don't want to do just one thing," Dirk says. "Life is too short for that. I want to fix brakes *and* bake bread."

Dirk can talk about music, books, trucks, cheesecake – anything. He knows “the peloton of human weakness” and tries to steer clear of it.

"We have a generation of people looking for followers, not for a job," he says. "Soon no one will know how to handle a spade or a pipe wrench. *En dan is ons in ons tjops in.*"

With heads full of Dirk wisdom, we travel up the course of the Molopo the next morning. Far away to the east, between Lichtenburg and Ottoshoop, clear water bubbles from the ground where this ancient river originates. But the water only flows for a few kilometres before the Molopo becomes a dry, white ditch all the way to Augrabies.

The riverbed is the border line between South Africa and Botswana, and an ordinary farm fence in the middle separates the two countries. We're on a dirt road but I often see Land Cruisers speeding along a tar road on the opposite side. I usually prefer dirt to tar, but the border road becomes severely corrugated and we're forced to take a connecting road south to the R31, which



Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Lorraine de Bruin works hard as a farmer but she has a soft touch with her animals. Samuel Willemse will happily share recipes, stories and laughs when you stay over at Kalahari Erfenis. The first waters of the Kuruman River in January 2021, pictured here between Van Zylsrus en Askham. The water eventually reached Askham. You will appreciate the luxury tents at Kalahari Erfenis even more after a tiring drive through the Kalahari or Botswana. When the Kuruman River came down in spate, the Van Zylsrus co-op had a front-row view of the water. Someone even rode their motorboat from Kuruman to Van Zylsrus.

links Askham and Van Zylsrus. But the R31 is equally terrible – it's enough to make me long for tar.

This district road runs parallel to the Molopo along another dry Kalahari river, the Kuruman. About 40 km before Van Zylsrus, we pull over next to a wooden cross on the road shoulder. On a winter night in 2002, Warren Symcox – cousin of former cricket player Pat Symcox – passed away here in a car accident. The next morning, the *haakbosse* on the roadside still cradled his Pajero, as if they had tried to stop its doomed trajectory.

A few hundred metres further is the turn-off to Mokalanen, where we farmed from 1999 to 2005. The property stretches from the Kuruman to the Molopo. During our time there, we'd heard lots of stories of how the Kuruman came down in spate in 1974. But those stories were difficult to believe, especially when vultures circled our cattle every day and dust storms hid the sun.

Fifteen years after we left the farm, in December 2020, it poured over Kuruman and Vryburg. That January, the Kuruman rose from its slumber and Facebook was abuzz. I drove all the way from Bloemfontein to float in the water among sheep droppings and camel thorn pods. It felt like a miracle – one I now know is possible.

After the Mokalanen turn-off is the farm Leeupan. Here you'll find another miracle and her name is Lorraine de Bruin. She and her husband Flippie were our neighbours, but Flippie, like Warren, died in a car accident on the R31 in 2013. Lorraine stayed on and started farming by herself. She even bought another farm.

The only giveaway that a woman is at the helm on Leeupan is the fact that their prize bulls have names, not numbers: Queensland, Rambo, Pieter Kotze, Draadspringer...

"My son Gerhard wanted to go on a rugby tour to Australia but I had to buy a bull for the farm. There wasn't any money left for his tour and he couldn't go, so we named the bull Queensland as a reminder of the sacrifices we had to make to keep the farm going."

Lorraine also changed the farm's name. I remember it as Leerdoos...

"Dit was a vreeslike naam," she says. "Out here, the name of your farm becomes a part of your own name – I didn't want to be known as Lorraine Leerdoos!"

You can follow the Kuruman River from Van Zylsrus to Hotazel, but we choose the comfort of the R31, which becomes tar and cuts south-east between the towns. Kalahari Erfenis is our destination, just beyond Hotazel. It's a wonderful place to stay. There are luxury rooms, self-catering chalets and safari tents with real beds. Everything has been done with great care and an eye for detail.

"*Ja-nee*, we don't want people to think they have to drive all the way to Tswalu if they want comfort in the Kalahari," says Samuel Willemse who is in charge of the food at Kalahari Erfenis.

"I'm the kind of guy who would rather have a steak at a bush pub than nibble on something gourmet served on a camel thorn pod," he says with a laugh. "But we also make beautiful and fancy dishes here, and we make sure people have enough to eat."

Samuel grew up in Kuruman and came to Hotazel in 2012 to work at the mine as a mechanical engineer. "Ai, I should have been involved with food from the start," he says. "But 'engineer' sounds more impressive than 'chef'."

Samuel never wants to leave the Kalahari. "These are my people," he says. "They're *skuins bedonnerd* and they eat and drink a lot. But they have big hearts."

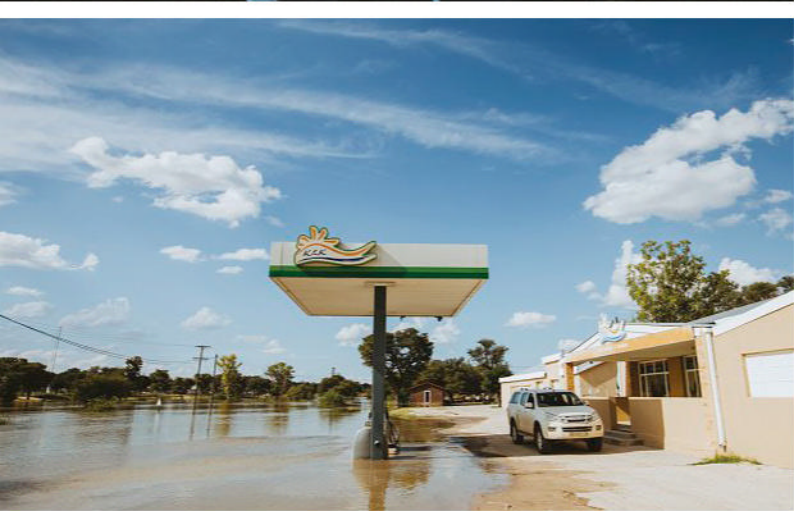
Kalahari forever

To get to Upington from Hotazel, most people would drive to Kuruman and then west along the N14.

But we decide to loop back to Askham via Tswalu Kalahari Private Wildlife Reserve. (Just to look, Samuel!) Tswalu conserves an incredibly scenic part of the Kalahari and its animals, but it's impossible to access unless you're a guest.

Then we're back on the wild corrugations and dust holes of the R31, where two graders are hard at work to improve the road. They're helping, but they also expose sharp rocks on the graded surface, one of which punctures our reverie and we're forced to change a tyre.

Askham is small but it offers a lot. There are nice places to stay in town and the Diamond T Coffee Shop serves delicious food. You can refuel and buy supplies at the Agrimark and KKK, and pick up almost anything else you might need at the Askham Trading Post. This



KALAHARI

Clockwise from right: Loch Maree's lookout dune is a great spot for some quiet time and a braai, while the sun sets behind you on the expansive salt pan. Oom Pietie takes it easy when dogs Lilly and Pepper have the wind in their whiskers. When he's on his way to Upington, however, it's windows closed and pedal to the metal. There's something for everyone at the Diamond T Coffee shop – even water for wandering goats.

is where I meet Oom Pietie van der Westhuizen and his five dogs.

"Ek kom soek vleis, manne. That's all I do these days: I rest during the day and braai at night."

Oom Pietie has earned it. He spent years farming in the heat of high summer, now he relaxes at his house in town with Pepper, Lilly, Jackie, Emma and Jesse.

"Don't you want to retire somewhere cooler, like at the coast?" I ask him.

"No way, people are too *gevrek* there. We can still do stuff here. And if I need anything I can drive to Upington. It's only an hour away."

"An hour? It's 180 km!"

Pietie laughs. "I used to drive it in 48 minutes in my Mercedes. People say I'm getting old now – I've slowed down to 120 km/h..."

On our last night in the Kalahari, we stay at Loch Maree Guest Farm, 45 km south-west of Askham towards Noenieput. The view is special from the farm's lookout dune: a salt pan to the west and more dunes to the east, rising and falling all the way to the pink-blue horizon. There's a braai waiting for you tonight – you just need to light the fire.

Maybe that's why Oom Pietie will never move away. And why those who have been to the Kalahari always return. No matter what happens to you here, the chambers of your heart will always be filled with red sand.







KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

DIE KERKMUIS

This is the restaurant at the Orange River Cellars tasting centre. You can get anything from breakfast to dessert. Do a wine tasting and order a snack platter, or sit down for the Regopstaan pork ribs... They're open from Monday to Saturday, 9am to 9pm.

Where? 158 Schröder Street, Upington

Contact: 079 594 1339

orangeriverwines.com

KOPPIESKRAAL KAMEELPLAAS

Camp on the pan or among evocative black boulders. There are no facilities, save for a pit toilet on the pan. If you want to see the camels up close or watch them being milked, make arrangements with the owners. Braai wood is available for R100 per bag.

Where? 223 km from Upington; 120 km from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

Rates: Camping from R200 per person.

Contact: 073 367 6803

kameelplaas.co.za

DREGHORN KALAHARI GAME FARM

The four campsites are surrounded by dunes and far apart from each other. Each stand has a beautiful camel thorn tree and its own bathroom and kitchen. There are five self-catering chalets with a communal braai area on the other side of the dune. The accommodation options are about 1 km from the farmhouse, where there's a bar and swimming pool.

Where? 210 km from Upington; 65 km from the Kgalagadi



Transfrontier Park.

Rates: Camping R500 per night for two people; plus R80 per extra person. Chalet accommodation R550 per person.

Contact: 072 351 5395

dregghornfarm.co.za

KALAHARI ERFENIS

This is a great overnight spot if you're travelling from Gauteng to the Kgalagadi or Botswana. It adds a touch of luxury before or after your bush experience. There are luxury rooms, self-catering safari units and luxury tents. The tents have beds and are pitched under an awning with a braai area. The tents share bathrooms and a kitchen.

Where? 350 km from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and 130 km from the McCarthy's Rest border post.

Rates: Luxury tent R750 per night for two people. Luxury rooms and safari units R1 100 per night for two people.

Contact: 073 178 8156

kalahari-erfenis.co.za

LOCH MAREE GUEST FARM

Have a braai at the lookout point on a high dune. You can also tackle their scenic 4x4 route. The field camp has three huts and a campsite with 10 stands. The communal braai and *kuier* area is

well equipped and has power. You can also camp wild in the veld. There's a toilet and shower and you have to stoke a donkey boiler for hot water.

Where? 195 km from Upington; 85 km from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

Rates: Camping R150 per person. Hut R450 per person (the three huts sleep 17 people in total). Firewood is included in all accommodation rates. There's also a self-catering house next to the owners' farmhouse: R700 per person B&B (the house sleeps six).

Contact: 082 351 1834

lochmareeguestfarm.co.za

KGALAGADI LIFESTYLE LODGE

The lodge is a stone's throw from the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and offers a range of accommodation options, from camping with private ablutions in the dunes to luxury self-catering chalets. The Black Mane Butcher & Grill is open from 7 am to 9 pm.

Where? 6 km south of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

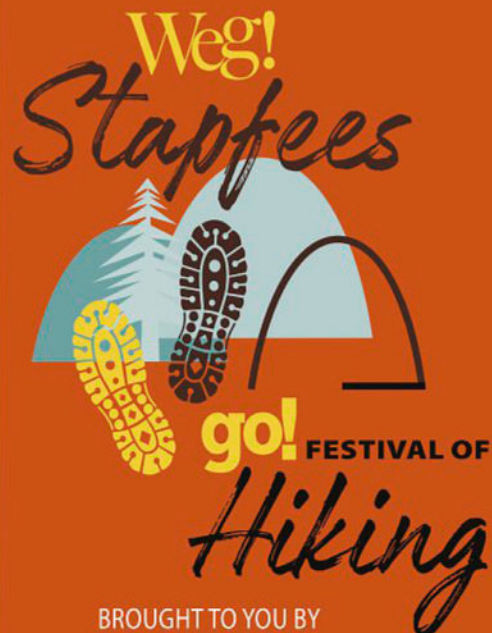
Rates: Camping R550 per night for two adults and two children; R100 per extra person (max six people per stand). Self-catering chalets from R550 per person.

Contact: 054 325 0935

kgalagadi-lodge.co.za

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Your next weekend away

A self-catering house in the Tankwa, a campsite next to the Orange River, a guest farm near the Drakensberg... **Toast Coetzer** travelled a lot last year: Here are six of his favourite places to stay if you're planning a road trip or weekend escape.





WESTERN CAPE

Karmedo River Lodge

A full dam in the Tankwa Karoo? Yes! There's a weir across the Doring River on the farm Brakfontein (owned by Francois and Nicolette van der Merwe). When you stand on the stoep of the spacious thatched-roof house at Karmedo River Lodge, you look out over water. The Cederberg towers to the west and you can make out the Roggeveld Mountains to the east.

This seven-sleeper self-catering house has solar panels for power points, lights and a fridge, and you can cook on gas inside or braai outside among the rocks like a dassie.

Karmedo is pet-friendly and even big dogs are welcome – you can explore the veld in almost any direction. (Look closely and you might find tools dating from the Stone Age.) The landscape might be ancient but Karmedo is certainly not behind the times: There's good Wi-Fi so you can hide away for a week and work remotely in the lovely silence of the Tankwa.

Where? Next to the R355, about 160 km north of Ceres and 120 km south of Calvinia. (Visit the website for directions.)

Rate: R1 200 per night for the house.

What else? The entrance to the Tankwa Karoo National Park is 124 km away so you can do a day outing from Karmedo. You can also swim in the dam, paddle your own kayak (or hire one) or fish for black bass and Clanwilliam yellowfish.

Contact: 📞 072 476 0437; ✉️ nicolette@hantam.co.za; 🌐 karmedo.com



NORTHERN CAPE

Red Rock River Camp

Red Rock is a great place to camp near Onseepkans on the Orange River. This section of the river is not as well known as the section further west towards Vloosdrift because it's so remote. Owners Roché Schoeman and Adelaine Breedt offer paddling outings (R750 per person per day) that allow you to explore the mountainous desert landscape downstream.

The spacious camp has lawns and shade and there are braai facilities, hot showers and flush toilets. You also have access to a communal kitchen (with power points if you need to charge something) and a deck with a view of the river. Birders will enjoy the deck – you might see the rare Orange River white-eye or a goliath heron in the shallows.

I stayed here because it's so close to the Onseepkans-Velloorsdrif border. It's a quiet crossing where you can enter and exit Namibia with ease.

Where? Next to the Orange River, 500 m downstream from the Onseepkans border post.

Rate: Camping R200 per person.

What else? Fly-fishermen like this stretch of the Orange because it has largemouth and smallmouth yellowfish.

Contact: 📞 083 660 7798 (Adelaine); 🌐 redrockrivercamp.co.za





EASTERN CAPE

Ganora Guest Farm

It feels like a homecoming when I drive into the Steynbergs' farmyard. JP and Hester (pictured) strike the perfect balance between professional service and a farm atmosphere. The rooms are well equipped and the meals are fantastic – during my winter stay, dinner consisted of a soup starter, lamb for mains and malva pudding for dessert. Campers can pitch their tents near the farmstead.

Here in the Nieu-Bethesda district, every stone tells a story. You can see this first-hand in Ganora's comprehensive Fossil Museum – almost all the fossils and stone tools were collected on the farm by the Steynbergs. You can also see rock art near the farmstead on a guided tour – there are San paintings and more recent engravings dating from the Anglo-Boer War.

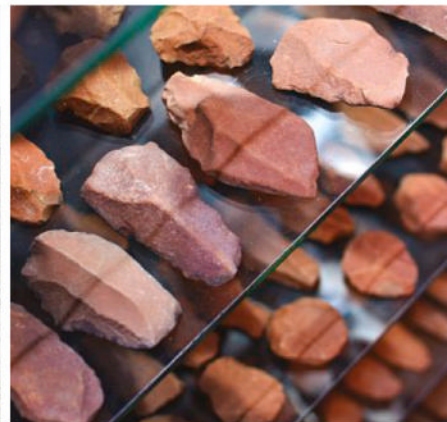
There are hiking trails on the farm that range from a short leg stretch over a hill after breakfast to a full-day hike into a water-rich kloof.

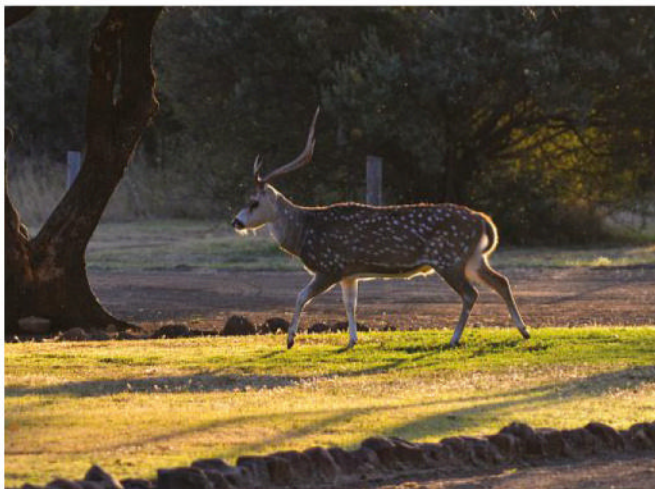
Where? About 7 km east of Nieu-Bethesda.

Rates: B&B from R650 per person sharing, or R830 per person sharing in a bigger room. Camping R360 per night for two people. Dinner R210 per person (two courses) or R240 (three courses); lunch R120 per person.

What else? A visit to the Fossil Museum, which includes a talk by JP, costs R70 per person, and the short walk to the rock art sites costs R110 per person. Other excursions are also available.

Contact: ☎ 082 698 0029 (Hester); 🌐 ganora.co.za





FREE STATE

Amanzi Private Game Reserve

No, the Free State isn't flat! Amanzi Private Game Reserve is near Brandfort, among koppies covered in wild olive trees. It gives you a glimpse of what this area must have looked like centuries ago. On a guided game drive, you'll see animals like buffalo, waterbuck and giraffe.

Amanzi offers a variety of accommodation options, from camping (with power, braai and ablution facilities) to guest rooms and luxury chalets.

Brandfort is easily accessible from the N1 – I broke the long journey from Cape Town to Gauteng here – but Amanzi is also a great destination in its own right, where you can hang out for a weekend. There are facilities like a hall and a boma if you want to host a big birthday bash with your friends and family.

I spent a morning in the restaurant under the watchful eye of a taxidermied giraffe, with good coffee and breakfast, and free Wi-Fi. The restaurant is open to day visitors if you want to drive through from Bloemfontein for an outing.

Where? 12 km north of Brandfort next to the R703 dirt road.

Rates: Camping R170 per adult; R85 per child under 12. Guest rooms from R880 per night for two people; cottages from R1 650 per night for up to three people; bigger guesthouses from R1 850 for up to five people. See the website for more info.

Restaurant opening times: Monday to Thursday from 7.30 am to 4.30 pm; Fridays and Saturdays until the last guest leaves; Sundays until 2 pm.

What else? A game drive costs R280 per person (for three or more people); mountain biking R170 per person; archery R170 per person; paintball R220 per person. The hiking trails and swimming pool are free for guests.

Contact: 083 631 6538; amanzigame.co.za





GAUTENG

OuKlip Game Lodge

If you live in Gauteng and you get withdrawal symptoms when you haven't seen a warthog for a while, Dinokeng Game Reserve is a little slice of heaven. You can hear a zebra snort an hour after you've left home – you might even see one of the Big Five.

OuKlip Game Lodge in the reserve has 14 four-star tented units that sleep up to four people each, plus a farmhouse for bigger groups of up to eight people. Small antelope roam the fenced area so you don't have to wake up in a cold sweat wondering what stepped on a twig outside your tent – probably just a sleepwalking springbok. The dangerous animals are kept out.

Each tent has a small boma to braai in with a view of the bush. The units are equipped for self-catering – the kitchen (with fridge, microwave, stove etc.) is on the covered stoep.

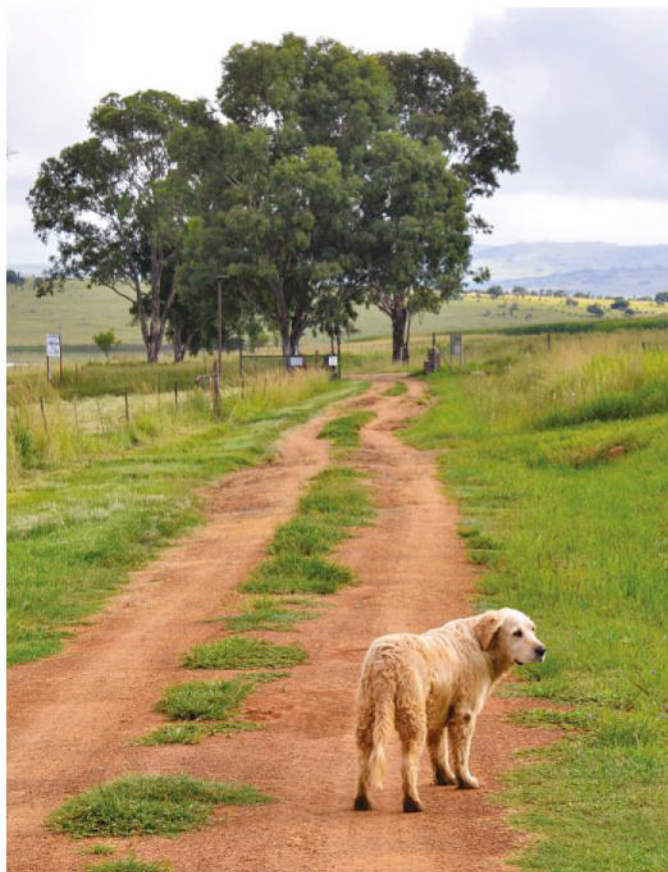
Where? Dinokeng is about 45 km north of Pretoria next to the N1 – see the website for directions from the reserve gate to OuKlip.

Rates: Safari tent R850 per adult sharing; R350 per child under 12. The farmhouse costs R4 500 per night for the exclusive use of up to eight people.

Take note: You have to book for a minimum of two nights over weekends. They sometimes have special discounts for visits during the week – enquire when you book.

Contact: 071 313 5380; ouklip.co.za





KWAZULU-NATAL

Dalmore Guest Farm

Dalmore is in the triangle between Bergville, Winterton and Spioenkop Dam Nature Reserve. You can easily visit the Drakensberg from here – Cathedral Peak (60 km) and the Royal Natal section (60 km) of the Maloti-Drakensberg Park are both about an hour's drive west.

But you'll probably just want to kick off your shoes and relax. The lawn and sprawling garden will slow your breathing and loosen that knot in your shoulders. There's a playground for the kids – you can sit and watch them from your stoep. Later you can go for a walk, past some sheep maybe, accompanied by a farm dog or cat. (Because they have several pets, they don't allow guests to bring their own pets along.)

The cottage and other accommodation options are separate from each other in the big farmyard. Some units sleep up to eight people while others are suited to couples.

Where? About 15 km north-east of Bergville and 20 km north-west of Winterton via the R74.

Rates: Most of the units start at R730 per person sharing self-catering; R880 with breakfast and R1 120 with breakfast and dinner. There are also three budget rondavels from R580 per person sharing (no meals). Discounts for children aged 13 and under; kids under 4 stay for free.

What else? You can fish in the farm dam – they have carp, black bass and catfish.

Contact: ☎ 082 344 0159; 🌐 dalmoreguestfarm.co.za

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Big mountain magic

On a clear day, as you approach the Cathedral Peak Hotel, it happens involuntarily: You start to grin. You'll be standing up there soon, gazing over this valley, and the scuttling of ground-level life will seem irrelevant. Join us on a five-day adventure into the heart of the high Drakensberg!

WORDS & PICTURES **GRANT CHRISTIE**
(UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

The hikers approach the imposing walls of Cockade Pass.



Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Clouds gather as the hikers make their way to camp on Day 1. Chen Xie gets a helping hand crossing the Mnweni River. Darkness descends on Ledges Cave. Scott Ramsay pauses to capture the majesty of the Mnweni Pinnacles and Hanging Valleys.

DAY 1

Mnweni Cultural and Hiking Centre to Mnweni Valley (11 km)

It's a 90-minute drive from the Cathedral Peak Hotel to the Mnweni Cultural and Hiking Centre. I'm guiding a small group: photographer Scott Ramsay and honeymooners from the USA, Felicia Hsu and Chen Xie. At Mnweni we meet Leonard Hlatswayo, the manager of this community-run tourism initiative, my co-guide Caiphus Mthabela and our porters Sabelo Zwane and Ntokozakhe Hlongwane.

We settle our permits and make final adjustments to our packs before loading them onto a roof rack; we've arranged a lift on a bakkie part-way up the road to shave a little distance off the day.

After about 15 minutes we're dropped off in the foothills. Starting low in the valley, the path weaves between homesteads. Friendly faces peer out from rondavel doorways; smiles accompanied by enthusiastic waves. Cattle gaze as we shuffle along. They're at home here; we're still settling into our stride.

Soon we pass the last rondavel. The Mnweni River is ahead, with the Mnweni Pinnacles beyond. These basalt-black needles stand apart from the cliffs of the main escarpment. Straining for the sky, they hint at the severity of tomorrow's ascent.

Dark clouds are gathering above the pinnacles, but for now we enjoy the sunshine and gentle inclines of the lower slopes. It's late summer; the grass is psychedelic green, the river rushes past and the air is hot and humid.

Around five hours after our first steps we down our packs for the day. We pitch our tents on a patch of level ground near a stand of protea trees. Time for an early dinner. Caiphus, Sabelo and Ntokozakhe gather around a pot of pap while the rest of us prepare our "high tech" freeze-dried meals. Soon everyone retires to their tents: A good night's rest is needed before tomorrow's climb.

If this mountain were a real dragon, we've only tickled its toes.

DAY 2

Mnweni Valley to Ledges Cave (10 km)

Today is the big day – we're heading up to the spine of the dragon! From the foothills of the Berg, we have to slug it out over 1 200m to the top of the escarpment and

into the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho.

The first 3 km section is similar to yesterday's walk, except for one thing: The escarpment grows exponentially larger ahead of us. Some ruins and a line of cairns mark the entrance into the Mnweni Cutback – a massive natural bowl. We're now almost encircled by cliffs.

Caiphus shows us some ruined dwellings that were apparently once used by Zulu sentinels to keep watch for Basotho livestock raiders coming down from the mountains. As the path kicks up, I contemplate the desperation required to drive a herd of unwilling cattle up these slopes in the dark, while being pursued by angry foes...

We leave the Mnweni River and turn up towards Mnweni Pass. The path zigzags steeply but it's a futile attempt to reduce the gradient. Step by step, we creep our way closer to the top, stopping frequently for photos (and to catch our breath). We pause midway up the climb for lunch and another photoshoot. The Hanging Valleys behind us create a backdrop worthy of a Windows screensaver.

As we go up, the clouds start coming down, as if we're both racing to the summit of the escarpment from opposite directions. The clouds win. We push hard and reach the top of the pass as an icy wind cuts across the plateau. Raindrops quickly turn to hailstones; there's no time to celebrate our ascent.

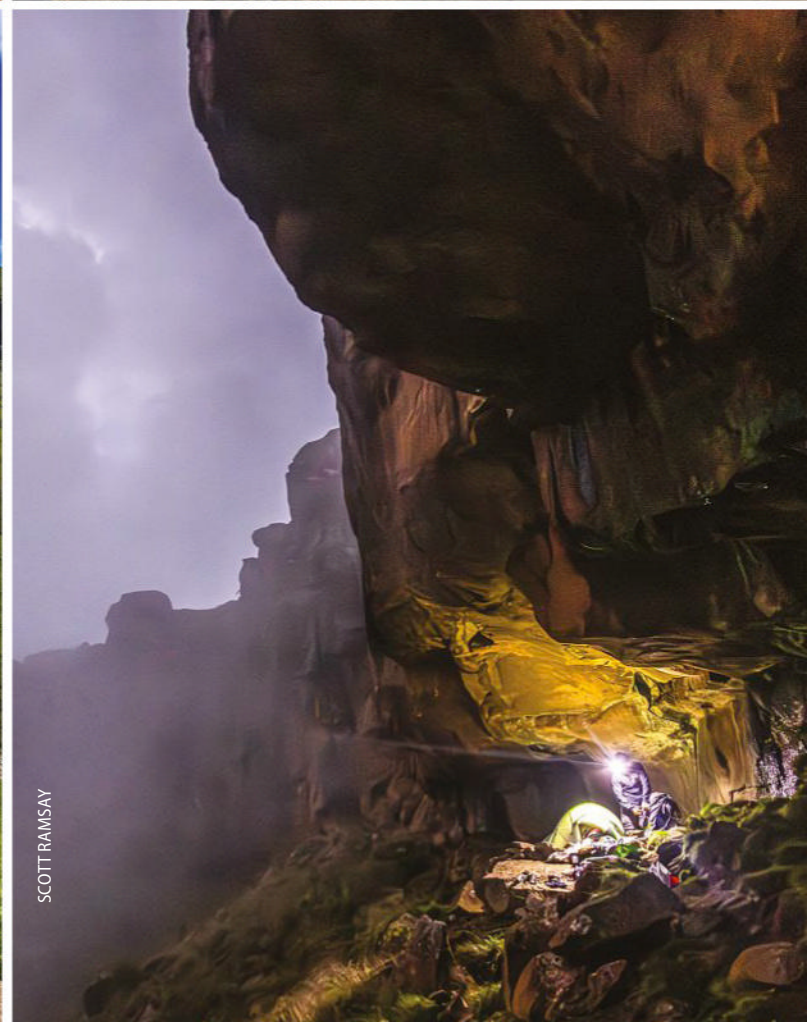
We pull on our rain gear and hurry north towards Ledges Cave. We trudge along a marshy field where water oozes from the soggy ground and gathers into trickling streams.

This is the source of the Orange, or the Senqu in Lesotho: southern Africa's longest river (2 200 km). The escarpment edge is the border between South Africa and Lesotho and also the watershed between southern Africa's eastern and western coasts. Two raindrops landing millimetres apart might spill into separate oceans a continent apart.

But this is no time to contemplate grand geological perplexities. We need to fill our bottles and get to shelter!

Ledges Cave is a relatively shallow overhang just beneath the escarpment edge. To access it, you need to make a brief descent via a well-hidden slit in the plateau.

Using the GPS co-ordinates I marked on my phone's navigation app (Avenza) I spot the large cairn that indicates the path. It feels like we're walking off the edge of the cliff, especially since we can barely see through the mist. Thankfully it's a short climb down and we take refuge in the grotto, putting up tents.



SCOTT RAMSAY

Opposite page, clockwise from the top: Chen Xie and Felicia Hsu admire the sunrise from Ledges Cave. Porters Sabelo Zwane and Ntokozakhe Hlongwane are all smiles despite the cold, misty conditions. On Day 3 they made camp along the Kwakwatsi River. Grant gives the group a summary of the day's route. Lunch "with a view".

As quickly as the weather arrived, it vanishes. Everybody stops what they're doing and sits down to look. The mist lifts to reveal a view of the valley we traversed yesterday. Sunbeams penetrate the clouds and illuminate the foothills.

Only after sunset, once the chill begins to set in, do we manage to tear ourselves away and finish making our beds for the night.

DAY 3

Ledges Cave to Kwakwatsi River (15km)

It's 5 am! My alarm wakes me from a deep slumber, the kind you only get after a big day on a big mountain. It's nice and snug in my sleeping bag and I'm reluctant to stir. But a sunrise in the Berg is one of the most beautiful things you could ever hope to see, so I force myself to sit up and unzip my tent door.

I gasp at the sight. Above, the sky is just starting to glow with pre-dawn light. Below, a sea of cloud obscures the valley; only the mountaintops are visible above the shroud. I snap some quick pics before waking the others. We spend well over an hour marvelling at the view. Everything is relative: Your perception of a cloud depends on whether you're under it, in it or above it.

True to its capricious character, the Drakensberg soon changes tack. By the time we're packed up and ready to go, the clouds have risen and swallowed us whole.

We return to the plateau via the same path we descended the night before, to collect water at the source of the Senqu. We discuss the plan for the day. Considering that we can barely see 20m ahead, I urge the group to stay close together. We walk past the top of Rockeries Pass and the Cape vulture colony near North Peak – two of this trail's major highlights – and see nothing but white.

Apparitions appear in the mist from time to time: herds of sheep and feral horses. We keep moving to stay warm as the temperatures are in the single digits, but eventually we must take a break. Lunch is quick – at a spot I previously marked as "Lunch with a view". From here we should have been able to see classic summits like Cathedral Peak, the Bell, Inner Horn and Outer Horn... Not today.

After lunch, the undulating plateau gifts us a mostly gradual downhill to our camp

spot along the Kwakwatsi River, adjacent to Mlambonja Pass.

A light rain nudges everyone into their tents. I'm restless so I stay outside, walking around and taking photos. The soft, sifting drizzle is actually quite peaceful. The rain eventually stops but the clouds remain low. I check in with everyone through their tent walls before settling down to eat my chicken curry in a bag, alone, lost in thought.

DAY 4

Kwakwatsi River to Tseketske Hut (11 km)

After our nightly pupation, we emerge to blue skies. Thank you, Berg! We use the opportunity to walk 500m up to the head of Mlambonja Pass to take in the view. From here, you can access Twins Cave and get onto the Bell Traverse, or use Mlambonja Pass itself (one of the more popular and gentle routes) to descend to the Cathedral Peak Hotel. But our plan is to spend one more night on the escarpment and hike down Organ Pipes tomorrow.

We head back down to camp, pack our gear and hit the trail. We skirt Xenia Pass, where shaded surface water has turned to ice, then we climb adjacent to the Elephant, reaching the highest point on the trek at about 3155m.

The big views are back, making up for yesterday's cloudy claustrophobia. We even catch a glimpse of the rare bearded vulture and the charismatic Drakensberg rockjumper.

By late morning we reach the top of Cockade Pass; a narrow, boulder-strewn path flanked by stark cliffs. The sky has darkened again. There's just enough signal to check the weather forecast and it's bleak. The high altitudes are in for a cold and wet afternoon and evening.

We discuss our options. Felicia and Chen are keen to get to a lower altitude sooner rather than later. Scott, Caiphus and I agree. Cockade Pass is an option, but the route is vague and the pass is very steep and rocky. Not fun if it's wet. Our other option is Tseketske Pass, where we could shelter in the hut should things get nasty. We abandon our plans for an Organ Pipes descent and set our sights on Tseketske.

Our timing is perfect. The wind picks up and rain starts to fall. But as we drop down, the temperature rises, the wind slows and the rain dissipates. The clouds make for a dramatic backdrop and I find myself looking back



SCOTT RAMSAY



SCOTT RAMSAY



SCOTT RAMSAY



Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Because of the wet grass and rocks, descending the steep slopes of Tseketshe Pass was slow-going. Ntokozakhe contemplates a swim. The team after Day 5's final storm: At the back from left are Chen, Felicia, Grant and Caiphus. In front are Ntokozakhe, Sabelo and Scott. Leaving Tseketshe Hut was a bit of a scramble.

frequently to take it all in. I can't decide if I prefer standing on the escarpment and taking in the vast views, or standing below and looking up at the awe-inspiring mountains.

The 900 m descent is painstakingly slow. We struggle over the wet grass and rocks. It takes us five more hours to reach the hut.

Tseketshe Hut is a round corrugated iron structure with a soft earth floor. It's big enough to shelter all of us, but we grant exclusive rights to Chen and Felicia. I shove my tent under the canopy of a nearby mountain bottlebrush. With the change in altitude offering more friendly conditions, the hardy alpine grassland yields to pockets of trees, cycads and ferns, which in turn sustain birds and insects. It's dead quiet on the plateau, as if the living creatures up there are too busy surviving to chirp or croak. Here, lower down, the hum of life returns.

I join Scott for one last freeze-dried supper. I've saved the best one for last: beef lasagne. But a bright flash and a mighty crack ends our dinner party. The cliffs above are being pelted by lightning.

"Thank goodness we're down here," I chuckle nervously as we both scramble for our tents.

DAY 5

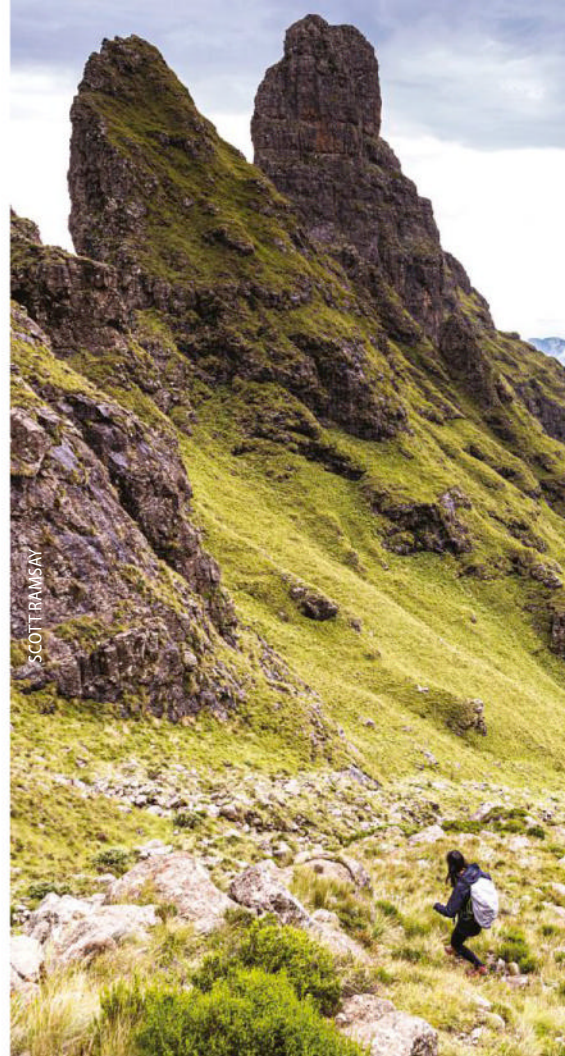
Tseketshe Hut to Cathedral Peak Hotel (9km)

The forecast was right: We wake up inside a cloud. Soon after starting our descent to the hotel, the rain sets in. First, we scramble along the wet boulder field of the Tseketshe River, then we contour beneath the Camel and down towards Ribbon Falls. The wind drives sideways rain into my cheeks. I long for a cup of hot chocolate in the warm hotel lounge.

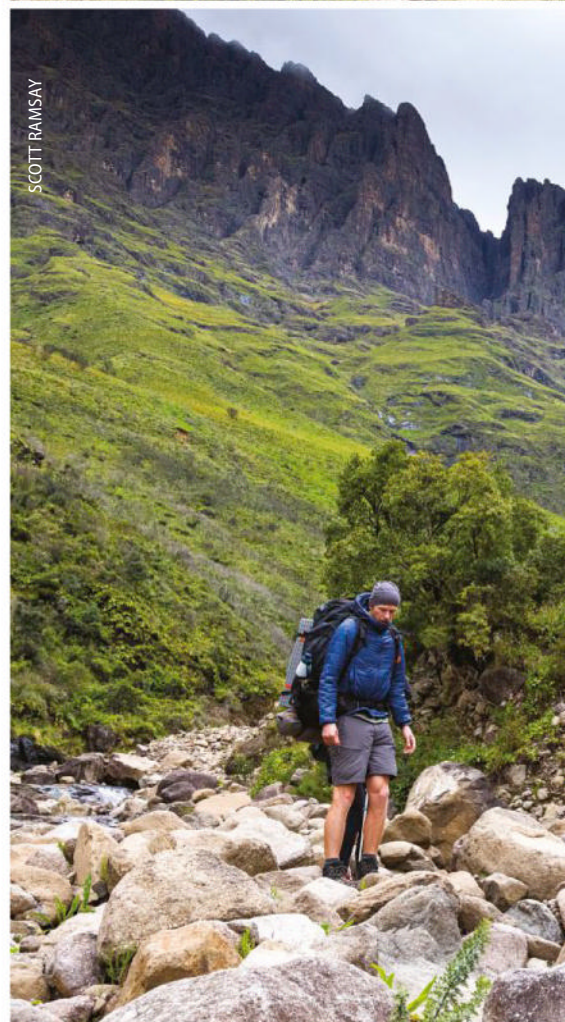
After nearly two hours, the heavy rain relents. This blessing is soon followed by another: a herd of eland galloping along a nearby ridge. They pause at the top and look back at us before disappearing down the other side.

Late morning, the hotel comes into view. Soon we're peeling off layers and by the time we reach the restaurant, we're bathed in brilliant sunlight. Instead of hot chocolate at the fire, we kick off our muddied boots and share a round of beers on the terrace.

Beyond the hotel rooftops, Cathedral Peak stands aloft. We missed her from Day 3's "Lunch with a view", but there she is, teasing us to come again.



SCOTT RAMSAY



SCOTT RAMSAY



SCOTT RAMSAY

DRAKENSBERG



Cathedral Peak Hotel finally comes into view in the valley below.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

How does it work? The Maloti-Drakensberg Park is a wilderness area. There are no marked routes – paths are made by hikers, herders and animals and often lead in a multitude of directions. Study the maps beforehand and decide on a route. There should be at least one person in your group who has hiked the escarpment before, or even better, go with someone experienced who knows the routes.

Facilities? This route (as with any hike in the high Drakensberg) is a self-supported wilderness hike. You must carry everything you need, including food and shelter, and you also have to carry all your rubbish down. Water can be drawn from streams.

Permits: If you start the hike in the Mnweni Valley, get your permits from the Mnweni Cultural and Hiking Centre: R60 per person per night. There's camping and backpacker accommodation at the centre. Contact Leonard Hlatswayo: 079 615 5941

Maps: The relevant Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park maps are: *Hiking Map No. 1 Royal Natal (Rugged Glen – Mnweni)* and *Hiking Map No. 2 Cathedral Peak (Culfargie – Monks Cowl)*. They're available at major bookstores, at the Cathedral Peak Hotel and at Witsieshoek Mountain Lodge. Or get the Slingsby *Drakensberg North* edition, also available at major bookstores and from shop.tracks4africa.co.za (R225).

Parking: Hikers can park at the Cathedral Peak Hotel or the Mnweni Cultural and Hiking Centre. Both establishments can arrange for a shuttle transfer between the start and end.

What else? No matter the season, you should always be prepared for any weather. Things change quickly up there so make sure you have quality gear.

Readers can contact Grant for guided options and porters: grant@itchyfeetsa.co.za



*After nearly two hours,
the heavy rain relents.
This blessing is soon
followed by another:
a herd of eland galloping
along a nearby ridge.*



Another year lies ahead, full of photographic adventures! Send your best snaps to **Toast Coetzer** and you might see them on these pages. ✉ takeyourpic@gomag.co.za



**WINNING
PHOTO**

▲ EDDIE COOMBES

Canon EOS 7D Mark II
Canon 70 – 200 mm

EDDIE WRITES: In September 2023, we had a marvellous seven-day trip to the Kruger Park.

Early one morning we travelled south-west from Satara towards the N'wanetsi picnic site. Just before reaching the picnic site, we decided to take the turn-off to the Sweni Bird Hide. About a kilometre before the hide we encountered a pack of 15 wild dogs!

It was an incredible sighting – the pack consisted of six adults and

nine youngsters. For the first 15 minutes we were the only people at the sighting. Three other cars eventually arrived and we all shared the sighting for the next 15 minutes.

I took lots of photos – this is my favourite. My shutter speed was 1/4000 second, aperture f3.5 and ISO 800.

What a privilege!

TOAST SAYS: Wow, Eddie! Seeing the elusive wild dog in its natural habitat is such a rush. Often a

sighting like this can be fleeting, and even a tad disappointing – a dog dashing across the road and then disappearing in the mopani trees before you manage to get your lens cap off. But to spend 30 minutes with a relaxed pack including youngsters – that's as rare and special as the Proteas making the semi-final of the Cricket World Cup! (*Hang on... – Ed.*)

A wild dog's big, round ears make it instantly recognisable, even if you only see its silhouette. For example, think of how different the

outline of a black-backed jackal is, which has pointy ears.

There isn't much action here, but it's still a striking shot thanks to the ears of the other animals we can see lower down. I'm assuming they're all lying down in a slight dip just beyond. The rounded shapes of those other ears are like a visual echo of the main subject's ears.

This is a subtle but classy photograph that makes you look twice – and that's why Eddie wins the *go!* camera bag this time. Congrats!

➤ **ANKER GOUWS**

Samsung A12

ANKER WRITES: I saw this Cape sand frog (*Tomopterna delalandii*) on a mountain path outside Franschhoek. I walk there almost daily and this time the frog appeared from the sand as I approached. It made my day!

TOAST SAYS: If someone asks why this species is called a sand frog, just show them this photo... The eyes are the only part of the frog's body not covered in sand. It looks a little sheepish, like it just woke up from a long nap...

Had Anker taken the photo while standing, it wouldn't have been as interesting. Instead, he put in the effort and crouched or sat down to get a photo from a lower angle. The camera is almost at eye-level with the frog and allows us to enter its world.

Your cellphone camera is an advanced piece of technology, but you have to know how to use it. Get a few basics right and your shots will improve instantly. Make sure your focus is right, for a start. On most phones, you can simply tap the part of the frame you want the camera to focus on. This works well most of the time unless you're too close to your subject or if the light is poor. Take the time to check your focus and try again if necessary.

Thanks, little frog, you can get back under your sandy blanket now.





< COEN OELOFSE

Nikon D7100

Tamron 90 mm lens

TOAST SAYS: Coen lives in North Riding, Randburg, and photographed this yellow crab spider on a canna flower in his garden. It's the dark-coloured prey of the spider that catches your eye first because it's not camouflaged like the spider is.

If this were a photo of a lion clamping down on an impala's neck, you'd immediately see the lion. But the spider is a master of camouflage and only "appears" from the background after a second or two, once your eyes have worked through the scene.

You can't go to the Kruger or the Pilanesberg every weekend. Get yourself a good macro lens (or use your smartphone – many models have good macro capabilities) and do a "game drive" in your garden. Stick your nose into flowers and look under leaves and you'll find lots of creatures to photograph. Be like Coen!

> JAN STRYDOM

Nikon D700

Nikon 24–70 mm lens

JAN WRITES: In August 2023, my friend Herman Fourie and I camped on Breekbeenkolk between Calvinia and Brandvlei in the Northern Cape for two days. A dust storm hit the pan on the first afternoon and we were forced to pitch our tent under an awning on a neighbouring farm for the night, where we braaied a *staanrib*.

That's where I took this photo. I put my camera on a tripod and used a shutter speed of 15 seconds. The aperture was f3.2 and ISO 400.

We saw no other people or vehicles for two days, just a scrub hare and a jackal.

TOAST SAYS: This part of the Northern Cape is filled with pans, *kolke* and *vloere*. A pan we know – like Verneukpan – and the word

vloer (floor) also makes you think of something flat, like a pan. But what is a *kolk*? When you look at a map of the area, you'll see names like Granaatboskolk, Verdorskolk and Skerpioenolk. I suspect a *kolk* is like a pan or a *vloer* when it's dry, which is 99% of the time. But when it rains, water *kolks* (pools/eddies) there.

Whether you're on a pan, *vloer*, *kolk* or just plain in Bushmanland, it's a landscape that speaks to you in a different way to the Bushveld or the Cederberg, for example. It's a place for introspection, for getting closer to yourself.

Jan's night photo captures this energy. It feels like I'm huddled around the campfire too, with the squeak of a windmill in the background and the stars humming peacefully overhead.





▲ **NAZREEN ESSACK**

Nikon Z 6II

Nikon Z 24 – 200 mm lens

NAZREEN WRITES: I took this photo early one morning in the Namib-Naukluft National Park in Namibia. I was on an organised photographic tour – we started our day at Dead Vlei to photograph the famous petrified camel thorn trees. Just then, a family of gemsbok walked onto the pan and started climbing the adjacent dune.

I pressed the shutter button just as one gemsbok reached the crest. The morning light was still coming over the dune, making for this abstract silhouette.

My camera settings: shutter speed 1/1 000 second, aperture f6.3 and ISO 200.

TOAST SAYS: Dead Vlei (next to Sossusvlei) is one of Namibia's most famous destinations because of the dead trees that create otherworldly photo opportunities.

The great thing about the trees is that they're always there, rooted to the spot, so to speak...

Gemsbok are different – they move around and they're actually seldom seen at Dead Vlei. To capture a gemsbok on a dune is a classic Namib shot, but it's not easy! There's some luck involved because your timing has to be right, but you must also be ready when the moment arrives.

Nazreen's graphic shot hits the mark. When going for an animal silhouette, you ideally want to see all the limbs and other identifying features clearly, because it makes recognising the animal easy and obvious. With those horns, this is unmistakably a gemsbok.

I love the diagonal line of the dune crest, which strengthens the composition. The hoof in mid-air adds some extra sprinkles. Great job, Nazreen!

TAKE YOUR PIC



▲ WAYNE BISSET

Canon SX540HS

TOAST SAYS: Wayne photographed this scene at sunrise on the beach at Muizenberg near Cape Town. It looks like this man is holding a metal detector; he's probably looking for buried treasure – or that R5 coin that fell out of your pocket when you went for a dip the other day...

This shot is all about the light. The pinks and oranges of the breaking dawn reflect on the sea and the wet sand where the waves have just pulled back. The silhouetted figure stands out beautifully against that part of the frame; I also like the surfers a bit deeper in the shot.

One thing, Wayne: Keep an eye on the horizon. It's slightly skew here. A wonky horizon is easy to fix using editing software, as long as it's not too far out of whack. But even with the slightly skew horizon line, this is an inspirational shot that should encourage us all to be up for sunrise every day!

▼ STU BOWIE

Canon EOS 1D Mark IV
Canon 300 mm lens with
a 2x extender

STU WRITES: We were in the Kruger Park, on our way to check in at Olifants, when we came across two giraffes standing next to the road. There was a juvenile yellow-billed oxpecker on this tall fellow, going about his business looking for ticks. He was all over the giraffe's face – I managed to capture him when he was perched on one of the giraffe's ossicones. *(The proper name for a giraffe's "horns". – Ed.)*

I had plenty of time to put on



my 2x extender and get some closer shots of the bird. My settings were: shutter speed 1/1 000 second, aperture f7.1 and ISO 640.

TOAST SAYS: This is such a cool shot! The head of the giraffe almost becomes an abstract landscape feature; a stage for the real star of the show – the bird. The ossicone looks like a rock turret that the oxpecker is clinging to.

Despite the bird not being brightly coloured, it still stands out clearly because of the dark

background in that part of the photo. This also helps to make its eye pop from the page like an orange Smartie.

Stu would have had several compositional options here. He could have included the giraffe's whole head, for example, but that would have relegated the bird to a secondary role. He could also have zoomed in even more and cropped out the giraffe's eyes, but then we would have lost too much of the giraffe.

I reckon you got it spot on, Stu!



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World of wonder

COMPILED BY **LYNNE FRASER**

Each year, the World Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition somehow gets more spectacular. Just when you think you've seen the best landscape, macro and animal images that could possibly be captured on a camera sensor, the winning photographers somehow manage to raise the bar. They get closer, more creative and more inventive than ever before.

Indeed, the 59th edition of the competition is truly inspiring. The amazing images highlight the natural world in all its complexity and wonder and remind us again about the importance of conservation.

If you're lucky enough to be in London, go see the winning images at the Natural History Museum until June 2024. A touring exhibition will also take the winners to countries like Germany, Canada, New Zealand and Singapore. South Africans will have to feast their eyes on these pages, or head to the website to see all the other winners.

Find out more: [nhm.ac.uk/wpy](https://www.nhm.ac.uk/wpy)

Hippo nursery

Mike Korostelev (Russia)

Mike Korostelev travels the world photographing some of the most charismatic animals in underwater habitats, including swimming elephants in India's Andaman Islands, brown bears in the streams and bays of Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, and this hippo mother and calf in Lake Kosi in northern KZN.

At the time, Mike had been visiting Kosi Bay's hippos for more than two years and they were accustomed to his boat. He only spent 20 seconds underwater with this pair – enough time to get his shot from a safe distance and avoid alarming the mother.

Judge Celina Chien remarks, "I love that it reveals the hidden side of hippo life – the tender and bashful family cradled by dreamy hues and cloudlike textures. It reminds me that there's always a new way to see the world, if you have the courage."

Mike's photo was the winner in the Underwater category.

How Canon EOS 5D Mark III; 17–40 mm lens; shutter speed 1/320 second; aperture f7.1; ISO 640; in a Seacam housing.

PORTFOLIO

Last breath of autumn *Agorastos Papatsanis (Greece)*

Long fascinated by fungi, freelance nature photographer Agorastos Papatsanis headed into a forest on Mount Olympus in search of his muse, despite the rain. He used a silver photographic umbrella to keep his camera dry and covered his flash with a plastic bag. The colourful touches come from refraction of light passing through the spore-laden air currents and rain.

This is a parasol mushroom, which releases its spores from gills under its cap on a dark, damp day. Billions of tiny spores travel (usually unseen) in the air; some will land where there's moisture and food, enabling them to grow new networks under the forest floor.

Agorastos's photo was the winner in the Plants and Fungi category.

How: Nikon D810; 105 mm lens; shutter speed 1/40 second; aperture f36; ISO 500; with a Godox flash and trigger and a Leofoto mini-tripod.





The art of courtship

Rachel Bigsby (UK)

Rachel Bigsby frames a pair of gannets against guano-painted sandstone cliffs in Noss National Nature Reserve in Scotland's Shetland Islands

From her boat in turbulent sea swell, she realised that achieving her vision of showcasing gannets set against the cliffs would be tricky, but as the boat aligned with the rocks she spotted this pair, "isolated on a lower ledge, intertwining their necks and framed by streaks of guano".

Each summer, the Isle of Noss hosts more than 22 000 northern gannets that return to breed on rock ledges carved by the elements. Usually mating for life, returning pairs will greet each other, stretching out their wings, knocking their bills together and bowing.

Rachel's photo was the winner of the Natural Artistry category.

How: Nikon D850; Sigma 60 – 600 mm lens; shutter speed 1/1 600 second; aperture f11; ISO 5 000.







Golden horseshoe

Laurent Ballesta (France)

French underwater photographer and marine biologist Laurent Ballesta was awarded the overall prize for this otherworldly shot of a tri-spine horseshoe crab accompanied by a trio of golden trevallies, in the waters around Palawan in the Philippines. The trevallies were poised to dart down for edible morsels ploughed up in the crab's wake.

Laurent is the second photographer in the competition's history to be awarded the grand prize twice; he also won the overall prize in 2021.

The tri-spine horseshoe crab is the largest of the living horseshoe crab species. Despite their name, horseshoe crabs are not true crabs or even crustaceans. They're chelicerates, more closely related to arachnids like spiders and scorpions. Their bright blue blood contains immune cells that are very sensitive to toxic bacteria. Since the 1970s, scientists have been using the blood of horseshoe crabs to develop tests that check new vaccines for contamination. Great for human health, but it means that thousands of crabs are harvested each year, putting pressure on their already dwindling populations.

Editor and Chair of the Jury, Kathy Moran says: "To see a horseshoe crab so vibrantly alive in its natural habitat, in such a hauntingly beautiful way, is astonishing. To understand that what we're looking at is an ancient species, highly endangered, and critical to human health... I'm amazed. This photo is luminescent."

How: Nikon D5; 13 mm lens; shutter speed 1/25 second; aperture f22; ISO 800; in a Seacam housing with two Seacam strobes.



Sweet & juicy!

Apricot chutney

This issue's recipes all include lush seasonal fruit like nectarines, plums and apricots. Enjoy!

RECIPES & STYLING JOHANÉ NELSON
PICTURES SHELLEY CHRISTIANS



Chicken with nectarines,
honey and parsley

Chicken with nectarines, honey and parsley

Serves 4

Preparation time 30 minutes

Cooking time 45 minutes

You need

- 4 chicken quarters (drumsticks and thighs) or 8 thighs
- 1 teaspoon mild curry powder
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 celery stalk, chopped
- 3 leeks, white parts only, chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, chopped
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 1 cup orange juice
- 2 ripe nectarines, stoned and each cut into 8 wedges
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 2 tablespoons flat-leaf parsley, chopped

Here's how

1 Make deep cuts about 1,5 cm apart into each piece of chicken. Rub the curry powder and salt and pepper all over the chicken, including under the skin.

2 Heat the oil and butter together in an overproof pan and fry the chicken until browned all over. Add the paprika, celery, leeks and garlic to the pan and fry until flavourful. Add the stock and orange juice and slowly simmer for 30 minutes or until the chicken is cooked through. Baste the chicken regularly and turn the pieces over as needed.

3 Preheat the grill element. Arrange the nectarine slices on top of the chicken and drizzle over the honey. Grill until the nectarines are caramelised – it takes about 5 minutes. Turn the nectarines over as needed and don't let them get charred. Scatter over the parsley and serve with steamed white rice.

Summer salad

Serves 6 as a side dish or appetiser

Preparation time 25 minutes

You need

- 1 – 2 heads of crisp lettuce (like baby gems or cos)
- 1 packet (80 g) rocket
- 200 g cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 small cucumber, thinly sliced
- 100 g black olives, pitted and sliced
- 200 g creamy feta, in blocks
- 30 ml dukkah
- 6 thin slices of smoked ham (I prefer prosciutto crudo)
- 3 ripe nectarines, stoned and cut into wedges

FOR THE SALAD DRESSING

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons sherry or apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 spring onion, chopped
- 1 small clove of garlic, finely chopped
- ½ cup basil
- salt and pepper, to taste

Here's how

1 Add all the ingredients for the salad dressing, except the salt and pepper, to a jug. Blitz with a stick blender until thick and smooth. Add salt and pepper to taste.

2 Separate the lettuce heads into loose leaves. Toss the lettuce together with the rocket and a splash of the salad dressing. Arrange on a serving plate. Add the tomato, cucumber and olives.

3 Roll the feta in the dukkah and arrange it on top of the salad.

4 Cut the ham into smaller pieces and wrap them around the nectarine wedges. Arrange them on the salad. Add freshly ground black pepper and serve with the extra salad dressing.

Upside-down apricot tart with almonds

Serves 12

Preparation time 40 minutes

Baking time 35 minutes

You need

- ¾ cup soft butter
- ¾ cup castor sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla essence
- 2 eggs
- 1½ cups almond flour
- 3 tablespoons cake flour
- pinch of salt
- 20 apricots, stoned and cut into wedges
- 1 roll (400 g) puff pastry, thawed
- 3 tablespoons apricot jam
- vanilla ice cream, to serve

Here's how

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C. Beat the butter, sugar and vanilla essence together until light and creamy. Beat in the eggs and then the almond flour, cake flour and salt until creamy.

2 Line a rectangular baking sheet with baking paper and grease with cooking spray. Spread the apricot wedges out on the baking sheet in an even layer. Scoop spoonfuls of the batter over the apricots and carefully spread it into an even layer.

3 Unroll the pastry on a clean work surface and use a rolling pin to flatten it into a rectangle the same size as your baking sheet. Prick the pastry all over using a fork and drape the pastry over the apricot layer. Fold the edges around the filling like a blanket.

4 Bake the tart for 30 minutes or until the pastry is golden brown and cooked through.

5 Remove the tart from the oven and unmould it onto a chopping board with the pastry facing down. Preheat the grill element. Slide the tart back onto the baking sheet with the apricot layer facing up. Dot the apricots with spoons of jam and bake for 5 minutes or until the jam has melted and the top of

the tart has browned. Serve warm with vanilla ice cream. Add fresh mint for garnish.

TIP The tart can be cut into 12 slices, but it's quite rich so you can even serve it in smaller portions.

Scones with plum compote

Serves 12

Preparation time 30 minutes

Cooking time 20 minutes

You need

- 3½ cups self-raising flour
- 1 cup cream
- 1 cup lemonade
- pinch of salt
- milk for glazing (optional)

FOR THE PLUM COMPOTE

- 2 cups finely chopped plums
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 5 ml rose water or vanilla essence

Here's how

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C. Mix 3 cups of flour with the cream, lemonade and salt. As soon as a dough forms, turn it onto a work surface dusted with flour. Use the remaining flour to knead the dough until smooth and not sticky, but don't knead it for longer than necessary.

2 Shape the dough into a flat disc – about 2 cm thick – and cut out 5 cm circles. Arrange the scones on a greased baking sheet. (You can also use baking paper.)

3 Combine all the leftover dough and cut out more scones until all the dough has been used. Brush the scones with a little milk and bake for 15 – 20 minutes or until golden brown and cooked through.

4 Prepare the compote: Add 1 cup of plums, the honey and lemon juice to a pot over a medium heat. Bring the mixture to a boil and then simmer for 5 – 10 minutes or



Summer salad



Upside-down apricot tart with almonds



Apricot chutney



Scones with plum compote



Granola cups with yoghurt and fruit

until the sauce has thickened and reduced to taste. Remove the pot from the heat and add the rest of the plums and the rose water. Set aside to cool down slightly – you can serve the compote lukewarm or cold.

5 Allow the scones to cool down before you cut them in half. Serve with butter or mascarpone and a spoonful of compote. The compote is lighter than jam and has a sweet-and-sour taste.

TIP The compote can be stored in the fridge for up to a week. It's also great with plain yoghurt or ice cream.

Apricot chutney

Makes 4 bottles, about 1,3ℓ

Preparation time 40 minutes

Cooking time about 1 hour

You need

- 18 apricots (700 g), stoned and sliced
- 200 g dried apricots, shredded
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1½ cups light brown sugar
- ½ cup raisins or dried cranberries
- 2 cm piece of fresh ginger, peeled and finely grated
- 1 teaspoon mild curry powder
- 1 clove of garlic, chopped
- 1 teaspoon whole peppercorns

- 2 cloves
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups white vinegar
- 1 bay leaf, fresh or dried

Here's how

- 1** Add all the ingredients to a heavy-bottom pot and stir over a medium heat until the sugar dissolves. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer gently for about an hour until the mixture thickens and the colour deepens. If there is too much foam on the surface, skim it off and discard.
- 2** Transfer the hot chutney to sterilised glass bottles and seal

immediately. Let them cool down before storing them in the pantry for a few weeks to marry the flavours and soften the taste of the vinegar. Store in the fridge after opening.

Granola cups with yoghurt and fruit

Serves 9

Preparation time 25 minutes

Baking time 15 minutes

You need

- ½ ripe banana
- 1½ cups oats, toasted
- 1 teaspoon sesame seeds
- ¼ cup honey
- 3 tablespoons soft butter
- 1 tablespoon desiccated coconut
- 1 cup plain yoghurt (double cream is delicious)
- 1 cup sliced fresh fruit (we used plum and strawberry)
- a few mint leaves

Here's how

- 1** Preheat the oven to 180°C. Mash the banana with a fork and mix with the oats, sesame seeds, honey, butter and desiccated coconut to form a batter.
- 2** Cut baking paper into squares and line the cups of a shallow muffin pan. Grease with cooking spray. Put spoonfuls of batter on top of the baking paper and press down to form cups. Bake for 10–15 minutes or until golden brown. Unmould the cups and place them on a cooling rack. If the cups lost shape, use the back of a spoon to mould them while still warm.
- 3** Peel off the baking paper and fill the cups with yoghurt and fruit. Garnish with mint and serve.

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Jimny goes to gym

The short-wheelbase, three-door Suzuki Jimny isn't just cute, it's an affordable and very capable 4x4. Now they've made it practical, too, with a five-door version! But is it still as lovable?

BY PIERRE STEYN



Like in any happy and healthy relationship, I love Suzi Quatro despite her imperfections. Suzi is my jungle-green Suzuki Jimny. She's not practical – just three doors and a tiny boot, which is only usable once you've folded the little back seats flat. She's not particularly fast either. You have to plan an overtaking manoeuvre on the highway weeks in advance, and anything faster than 110 km/h feels exhausting. Suzi is as aerodynamic as Ox Nche – and I'm sure Ox's heart beats stronger than the 1.5-litre engine under the Jimny's bonnet.

But once you get down and dirty with Suzi, she takes no prisoners. Dancing through thick sand, over dunes and rocky jeep tracks is a joy. And as a city car, she's quite versatile, zipping along narrow streets with ease and sliding into tight parking spaces while huge Land Cruisers have to keep circling like whales.

The news that Suzuki was releasing a "more practical" five-door Jimny didn't fill me with much excitement, and I definitely didn't feel any envy. I had no intention of liking the bigger version. In my mind, a longer, heavier Jimny with exactly the same engine would not only perform worse off-road, but it would be even slower on the highway.

Then I went to the launch in the Tuli Block, Botswana, and drove the five-door along sandy riverbeds and through mopani forests. After two days, I was forced to change my mind: Suzuki is going to sell thousands of these five-door Jimnys, way more than the three-door.

Even though the height, width and ground clearance (210 mm) of the Jimny remains exactly the same, the car has been stretched by 340 mm (or just longer than a ruler) so that two passengers in the rear now have proper seats, plus a decent amount of leg- and headroom. And when you fold the back seats down, luggage space increases from a puny 211 litres to 332 litres. I would have liked for the back seats to fold completely flat, but that would have compromised their comfort, according to Suzuki.

Even though the approach angle (36°), ramp break-over angle (24°) and departure angle (47°) are all slightly less than the three-door, and it weighs 100 kg more, the off-road ability of the new Jimny is still formidable. The same 4x4 AllGrip system, low-range gearbox, ladder frame chassis and solid axles make it very capable when the going gets rough.

The big surprise for me was the improved stability of the longer, heavier Jimny at highway speeds (well, in its happy place at 110 km/h). I also prefer the manual transmission to the four-speed automatic, although the auto is easier to use off-road on sand and over rocks, so you'll have to decide which one suits your lifestyle better.

The cheapest five-door (GL manual) costs R430 000 and the most expensive version is the GLX Auto at R480 000. That's a premium across the range of about R40 000 compared to the three-door, with the added value of a reverse camera and rear parking sensors.

I love Suzi far too much to trade her in for a newer model. My kids have flown the nest and the extra space for gear is why I have ammo boxes on the roof rack. But if you have young kids and if you love exploring far off the beaten track, this isn't a difficult decision to make.



SUZUKI JIMNY 5-DOOR 1.5 GLX 4AT

Engine	1 500 cc petrol
Power	75 kW@ 6 000 rpm
Torque	130 Nm@ 4 000 rpm
Transmission	four-speed automatic
Consumption (claimed)	6,7 ℓ per 100 km
Ground clearance	210 mm
Maintenance plan	4 years/60 000 km
Service intervals	1 year/15 000 km
Warranty	5 years/200 000 km
Price	R480 000

Sun sense

Summer's here and it's time to play in the sun. With these cool products, you can maximise your time outdoors and minimise the risk to your skin.

BY PIERRE STEYN

GALLO/GETTYIMAGES.COM



◀ **NORTH FACE MULLET BRIMMER**

On a long hike, the line between having a *jo!* and having a 'mare is often determined by your gear. Things like your backpack, boots and socks can make a world of difference.

The same goes for a comfortable hat with a wide brim, right? It's actually not that simple. I was chatting to Sophia van Taak recently, the editor of the *go! Hiking* guide, and she pointed out how frustrating it is when the back of your wide-brim hat constantly bumps a full backpack. She searched high and low for a hat with a wide brim in front only, and a legionnaire's flap at the back.

North Face seems to have come up with the solution. It might look like the dubious hairstyle of an Australian rugby player, but it's made from recycled nylon, it weighs next to nothing and it has an SPF (Sun Protection Factor) rating of 40+.

R799 🛒 superbalist.com



▲ **SPORTBRELLA PREMIERE**

If you're the kind of person who can't decide between the umbrella or the gazebo for your beach day at Ballito, the sportbrella might be the solution. It's a big, tent-like umbrella that solves plenty of beach dilemmas at once; it's also perfect if you need to take a nap next to the school cricket field while you watch your youngest field for 35 overs.

The umbrella section (SPF 50+) stretches over 2,5 m and there are side windows covered in mesh that can be opened to let the breeze through. The centre pole is 1,25 m long and can be tilted at an angle when you need to anchor the side panels with the supplied tent pegs. Everything, including eight pegs and three tie-down cords, fits into a handy carry bag.

R2 200 🛒 takealot.com





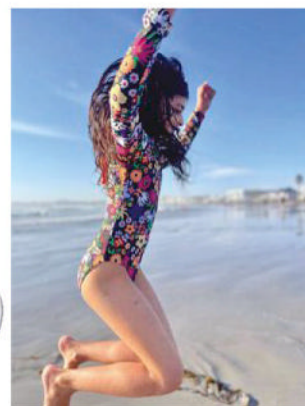
◀ **CIOVITA BOTANICA SUN SLEEVES**

If you're into outdoor activities like hiking, running, cycling or paddling, you don't want to leave the house without sun sleeves. It sounds counterintuitive, but wearing these keeps your arms cool – and you don't have to keep reapplying sunscreen.

The SPF 50+ material is breathable so you don't overheat while exercising; elastic seams top and bottom keep the sleeve firmly in place even when you're moving vigorously; and you can easily stow them in the back pocket of your cycling jersey or in a pants pocket while hiking.

CIOVITA is a proudly South African company that makes quality gear. These funky sleeves will brighten up even the dullest running shirt. Don't worry if you're as fashion unconscious as I am – there are more muted colours to choose from, too.

R349 📞 ciovita.co.za



◀ **OGGI ACTIVEWEAR EVE SWIMSUIT**

This Cape Town company uses locally sourced material where possible to make a variety of exercise clothing across a wide span of disciplines – from bikinis to burkinis, yoga pants and ballet shoes, to rash vests for surfers and cool swimsuits for kids (and adults).

The "Eve" is an SPF 50+ long-sleeve swimsuit that comes in 11 different patterns and colours, with a zip and a pull tag at the back that makes it easy to put on and take off. The secure fit makes it suitable for all kinds of watersport, from body surfing to stand-up paddling.

From R322 📞 oggiactivewear.myshopify.com



🔥 MUNGO KIKOI

There's a lot to experience in Plettenberg Bay, but a visit to the Mungo Mill next to the N2 at Old Nick Village should be high on your to-do list. Just make sure your credit card is fully loaded... It's too easy to blow your Christmas bonus on their beautiful bedding, tablecloths and towels, all made by master weavers using organic textiles.

I bought a kikoi here years ago and it's been on three trips down the Orange River and several beach holidays. I drape it over my legs while paddling, and in summer I wear it around my waist after I've had a swim. It's made from pure cotton and the seams have been stitched over so they won't fray.

My kikoi has been worth every cent I paid for it. You can pop it into the washing machine and it can be ironed with a warm iron. Mine is the "Sunset" design, but there are six other colours to choose from.

R545 📞 mungo.co.za

👉 30 SOUTH SUNGLASSES

Now that your body has been slathered in sunscreen and you're wearing a hat, you need protection for your eyes. This KZN-based company sells a range of excellent sunglasses for athletes, yachties, paddlers and just about anyone else who enjoys being active outside. The lenses are tough and scratch-resistant, and they do a great job of filtering out all the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays.

Another huge selling point is that the frames (which come with a lifetime guarantee) are made from plastic and fishing nets that have been recycled from the ocean. There's a wide range of designs to choose from, as well as lens and frame colour combos. The "Original" is a personal favourite.

R1 075 📞 30south.co

BACK 2 NATURE ACTIVE ZINC (SPF 50)

Given what we now know about the harmful effects of the sun and the damage it can do, it's almost unthinkable that we'll spend hours outside without protecting our exposed bits with sunscreen. But don't just grab the first or cheapest bottle off the shelf: Many sunscreens contain harmful sulphates and a chemical preservative called paraben, which is absorbed by your skin. If you're active in the water, these chemicals will also end up in rivers and oceans – they're especially damaging to coral reefs.

This sunscreen from Back 2 Nature is made in South Africa from natural minerals, waxes and oils that contain no toxic ingredients. It's water- and sweat-resistant and it comes in biodegradable packaging.

R265 📞 faithful-to-nature.co.za

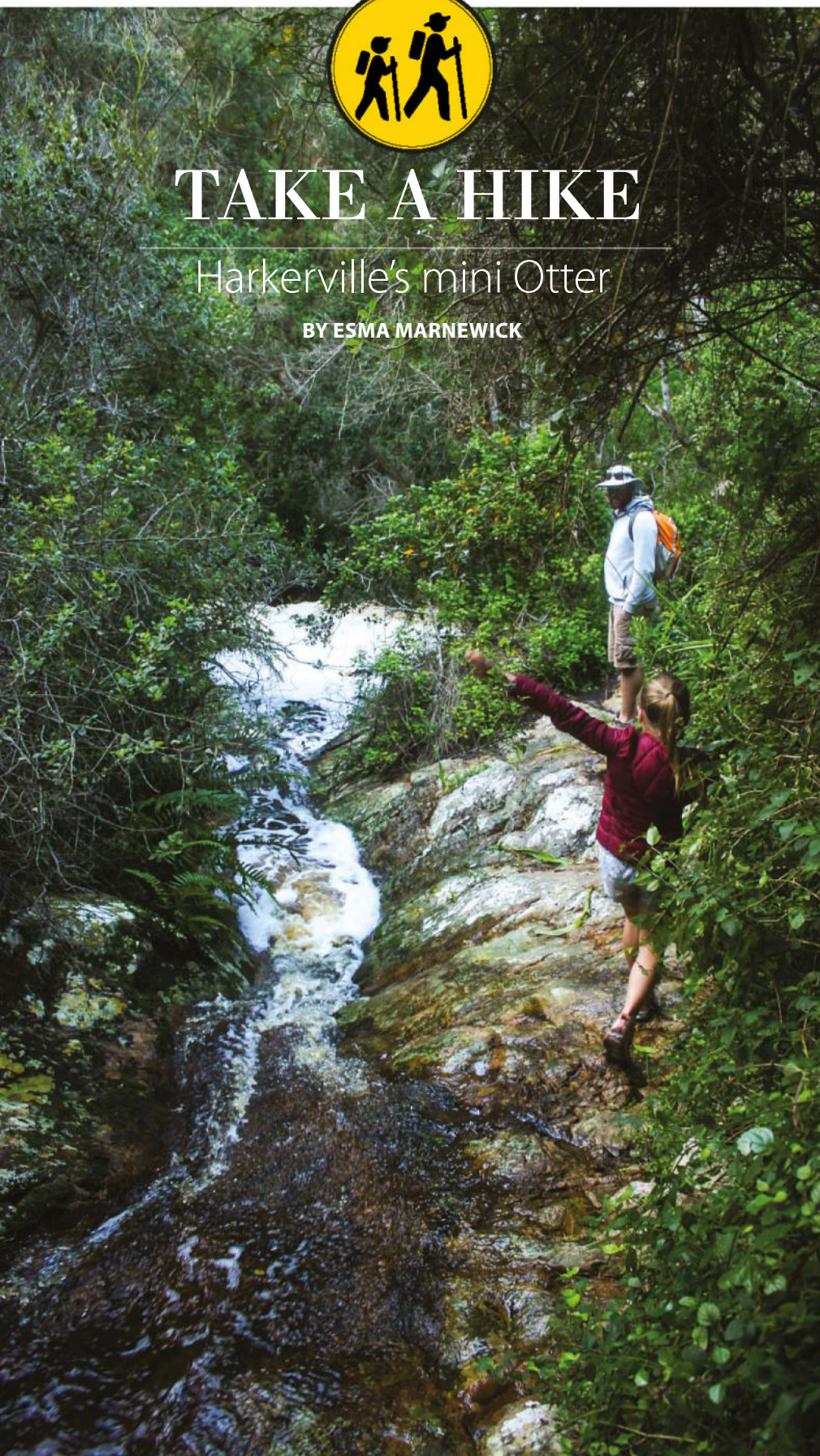




TAKE A HIKE

Harkerville's mini Otter

BY ESMA MARNEWICK



Wheeee! A scream pierces the canopy. I narrow my eyes and see a thin line strung across a kloof. A small figure dangles below – one of the guides from Knysna Ziplines testing the cable before the first tourists arrive. It must be dizzying up there. I'm grateful to be anchored to the soft forest floor!

The Kranshoek Coastal Day Walk is perfect for hikers who want an Otter Trail experience in one day. The 9 km circular route runs through the Harkerville section of the Garden Route National Park and gives you scenery reminiscent of the Tsitsikamma coastline on the Otter. It's also a great way to hide from the holiday crowds in Plett and Knysna.

For the first 1,5 km, you go slowly through Kranshoekbos down the side of a cliff. You'll soon notice that the surrounding vegetation is not like the lush Knysna forests. The steep, eastern slope is exposed to the hot midday sun, which means rainwater is not easily retained, resulting in this "dry forest". It becomes characteristically green as you descend. In the kloof at the bottom, you cross tributaries of the Kranshoek River. Ferns tickle your legs and every stream is the colour of golden syrup. Linger in the coolness. Sit on a rock and drink it all in.

About 2 km from the start of the trail, there's a narrow opening in the coastal fynbos. It's early morning and the coast is still in shade. The sky is hazy, as if the forest breathed out.

On the other side of the gap is a pebble beach. It's not a typical Garden Route beach, full of people, umbrellas and cooler boxes. This is a wild spot. You might see a dassie or an African oystercatcher at most.

We follow the path, past jagged rocks that reach up to the sky all along the coastline. According to an information board, these rocks were part of the cliff overhead thousands of years ago. During the previous Ice Age, erosion accelerated and the huge fragments broke off, forming their own mountainside.

And it's up this very slope you now begin to climb...

When you search "Kranshoek Trail" online, words like "amazing", "magnificent" and "spectacular" appear in almost every comment. But also "challenging" – and we've reached that part now.

The slope is loose and full of scree, and it's a steep climb. You'll feel unsteady on your feet but take a moment to look up. The view here is pure

Otter: orange-brown cliffs, green coastal forest and deep blue sea.

We climb, leap and slide over the rocks for about a kilometre until the trail starts to drop and we reach level ground again on another pebble beach. We each find a rock to sit on and listen to the ocean for a while. The kids look slightly traumatised, but it's nothing a few cheese wedges can't fix.

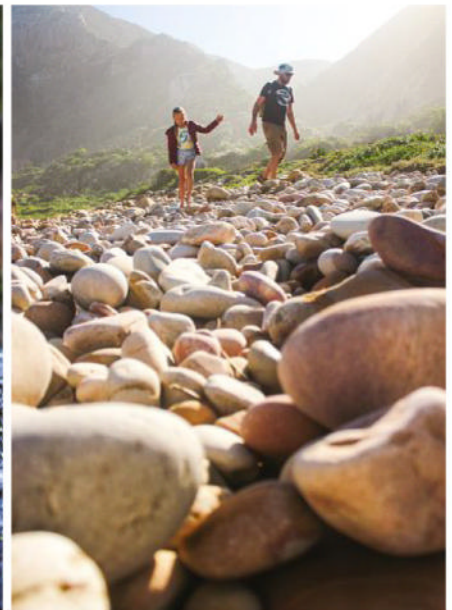
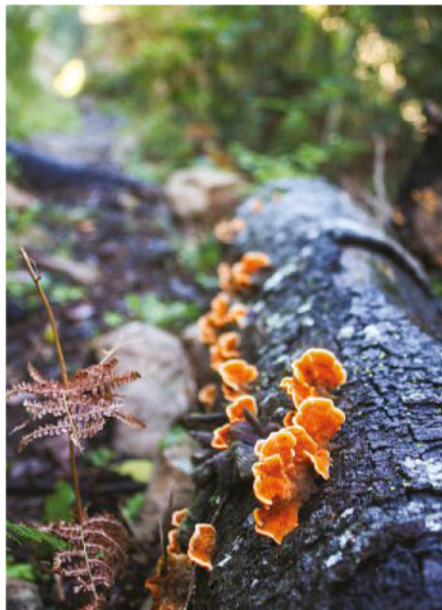
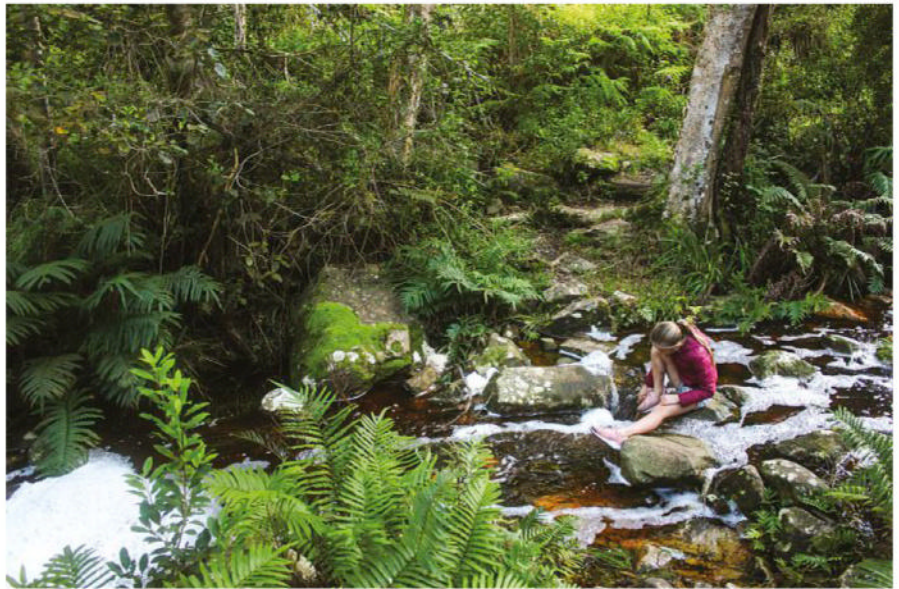
From here, the trail is mostly at sea level (thank goodness!) through coastal fynbos and along rocky sections, to a cave where it looks like someone has moved in...

On the other side of the cave, a footprint shows that we should turn inland. We slowly cross the bay where the Crooks River empties into the sea. According to the SANParks' map, this is a safe place to swim.

I feel a bit panicky walking away from the ocean. It looks like a very steep climb back up to the plateau through a section of forest called Toegroeibos. Luckily I'm wrong – the worst part is over within 15 minutes and we're soon at the top. The sun is blinding; it's 1 pm and very hot. The fynbos on the plateau looks like a shaved head after the forests along the coast.

After about half an hour along a jeep track, we reach the Kranshoek viewpoint and look at the sea. A little further away is a wooden platform with the zipliners who have all arrived for their adventure.

If only they knew how much more adventure awaits below...



Starting point? The trail starts at the Kranshoek picnic area, roughly midway between Plett and Knysna. Turn off the N2 at the Harkerville sign. The dirt road takes you to the permit office. From there, it's about 4,5 km to the picnic site.

Distance: It's a 9 km circular route.

Cost: R93 per adult; R47 per child; free with a Wild card.

Contact: 044 302 5600; sanparks.org

What else? There's an emergency exit from the first beach (about 1,5 km from the trailhead) that ends at the Kranshoek viewpoint. From there, it's about 700 m back to the picnic area. This shorter trail is about 3 km in total.





THE TIPSY HORNBILL, MTUNZINI

Subtropical Mtunzini is hard to beat for a sneaky weekend away. It's only 130 km from Durban and 200 km from Pietermaritzburg – you can leave home after work on a Friday and be in paradise by early evening.

The Topsy Hornbill is a cosy annex next to a bigger house, good for a couple or a single traveller. (It has one king-size bed.) It's owned and run by local couple Jeremy and Diana Kirkwood – if there's anything you're keen to do while in town, they'll happily give you some pointers. The property is big and lush and Jeremy and Diana live nearby, so if you need anything they'll be with you in minutes.

You can park securely and under cover almost right in front of the unit, and the swimming pool is just a towel-flick away. When it's hot and steamy (it's KZN after all) this is where you'll want to be. Well, either in the pool or in your room, with the aircon on and cricket highlights on the TV...

There's Wi-Fi if you need to catch up on work admin, and when Eskom goes on the blink (you know it will) a back-up battery will keep you online. If you want to swim in the sea, the closest beach is about 4 km away – you drive there via the Umlalazi Nature Reserve.

The Topsy Hornbill is named after the trumpeter hornbill, a ubiquitous bird species in these parts (pictured left). They tend to hang out in the big tree overlooking the pool in the late afternoon and make for great photographs.

The unit has a luxurious feel and is fully equipped for self-catering, with a fridge, kettle, toaster, mini oven and two-plate stove, crockery and cutlery – there's even a Nespresso machine if you want to pretend it's George Clooney bringing you coffee in bed.

– Toast Coetzer

Where? 43 Mimosa Drive, Mtunzini

Rates: R900 per night for two people; R750 single.

What else? Jeremy is captain of the local golf club. The course itself is beautiful and you can get tasty, affordable meals in a relaxed setting at the clubhouse. Talking about food, if you like to eat out, Mtunzini has loads of options. I had an excellent Portuguese dinner at Vista Lagoa (40 Hely Hutchinson Road), and great coffee and breakfast at FOMO Café (22 Hely Hutchinson Road).

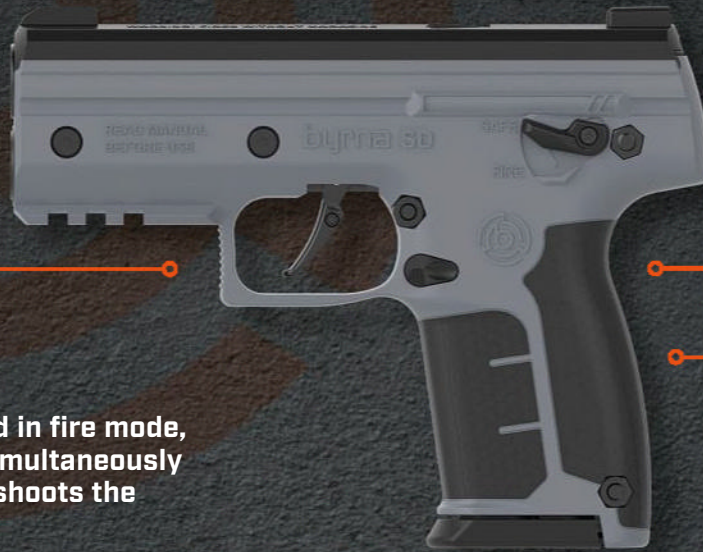
Contact: 083 632 9642; jeremykirkwood@gmail.com



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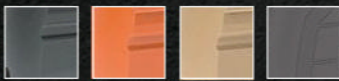
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A river runs through it

Sabie is on the Drakensberg escarpment along Mpumalanga's famous Panorama Route. Want a weekend away surrounded by forests and waterfalls? Here's what you need to know.

WORDS & PICTURES **MIA LOUW**

Drive the dirt road across the Sabie River to get to Bridal Veil Falls, Coopers Creek's horses and the start of the Fanie Botha hiking trail.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Visit the Forestry Museum in 10th Avenue (open from 8 am to 4 pm on weekdays; 8 am till noon on Saturdays; closed on Sundays) to learn more about the logging history of the area. Barend Nel with one of the rescued horses, Emma, at Coopers Creek. Hancu Louw takes in the view of the Drakensberg around Sabie from a picnic spot on the R532. The Panorama Route with all its waterfalls is popular among motorcyclists. The Loerie circular trail (5,5 km) starts in the parking lot of Bridal Veil Falls and leads deeper into the plantations and patches of natural forest. Merry Pebbles offers activities like fishing for the whole family.

PANORAMA ROUTE

The Panorama Route starts at Long Tom Pass, between Mashishing (Lydenburg) and Sabie, and winds its way north for more than 160 km to Echo Caves near Ohrigstad. It goes through the towns of Sabie and Graskop, follows the Blyde River Canyon and includes many attractions like Lisbon Falls and Berlin Falls, Pinnacle Rock, God's Window, Bourke's Luck Potholes, the Lowveld viewpoint and the Three Rondavels viewpoint.

Happy voices mingle with clinking beer bottles and music on the stoep at Sabie Brewing Company. In the street outside, a motorcycle revs behind a fully loaded logging truck. Yup, this is forestry country and from the brewery you can see how the northern Drakensberg wraps around the town – every hill is covered in green plantations or indigenous forests.

Earlier this morning I visited the Forestry Museum and read that plantations are only established in areas where the annual rainfall is higher than 800 mm – so mostly on the upper reaches of catchment areas where there are also lots of rivers. Lots of rivers at high-ish altitudes mean trout, and almost every restaurant in town has it on the menu: smoked, fried, rolled...

But first, more about the beer. I take a sip of Glynn's Gold Ale, named after Henry Thomas Glynn who bought one of the first farms in the district. According to legend, a stray bullet hit a gold reef during a hunting expedition led by Glynn in 1871. A new mining settlement followed, which led to demand for firewood and building poles. A man called Joseph Brook Shires saw an opportunity and started the first plantation here in 1876.

But long before Glynn and Shires came along, the Shangaan people called the Sabie River *ulusaba*, which means "fearful", possibly in reference to the hippos and crocodiles that once thrived in the river.

These days, mining activities have largely ceased and Sabie is surrounded by one of the biggest manmade forests in the country. And the river, filled with rapids and waterfalls, is a source of great fun.

On the first weekend in February, more than a thousand people float down on inner tubes as part of the Sabie Tube Race. "The race is 48 years old – I've been here for 37 of them," says Joy Comley. The Comley family owns Merry Pebbles Holiday Resort, where the race ends.

"My husband Leon's parents bought the land next to the Sabie River 55 years ago. There was nothing here. Chalet 20 was the only building. Now there are 35 chalets and 180 camping stands along the river."

It's not only the tube race that draws people to Sabie – several adventure competitions are hosted here. Noon 2 Moon is an endurance mountain-bike relay race that takes place on the first weekend in December. And the first Sabie Forest Festival will be held at the end of April 2024.

Yes, things are happening in Sabie and it's

clear that the residents care about their town, their environment and animals. The PRIDE project helps keep the streets clean, and at Coopers Creek, horses are rehabilitated.

Coopers Creek is on the Ceylon Plantation, about 5 km from Merry Pebbles along the Old Lydenburg Road. Shannon Lawson lives there with her dad Grant, and with Barend Nel who is herding the horses home as we arrive.

"All the horses here were either rescued or donated," Shannon says. "We give them a second chance. Vania is still afraid of men – she was abused in her previous life. And look at Jasmine's front legs – she can't be ridden. Her owners wanted to put her down but now she's our mascot."

Another person who arrived in Sabie in search of a new life is Tiger Goss, owner of The Bookman's Corner.

"I often say that the only reason I look stressed is because I couldn't perfect my golf swing this morning," he says with a laugh. "My business does well and the town is quiet and safe."

Tiger worked in finance in Johannesburg and says he didn't go on a single holiday in more than a decade. He moved here 14 years ago: "Sabie and this bookstore changed my life," he says.

Tiger collects his second-hand books from 60 different sources around the country. He loves history books, but his focus is the work of popular authors.

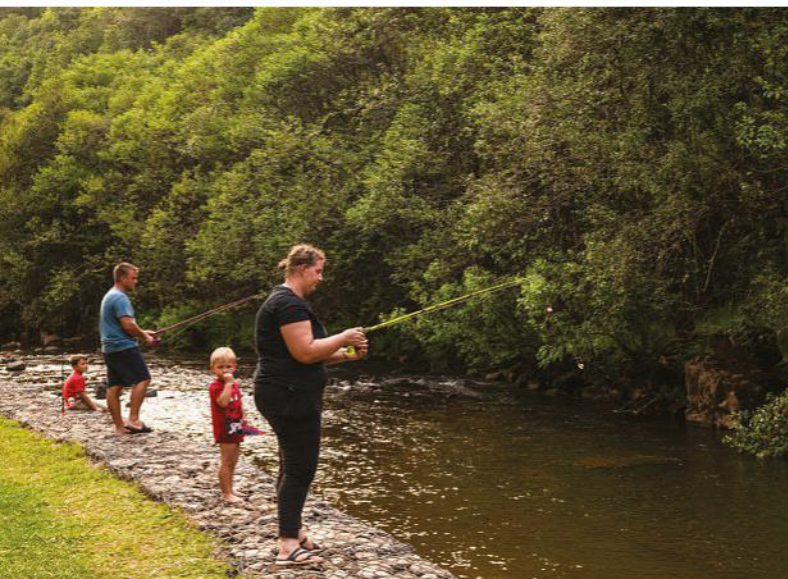
"The books fly off the shelves. Two weeks ago I had 50 books by Tony Park – now I have only two left!"

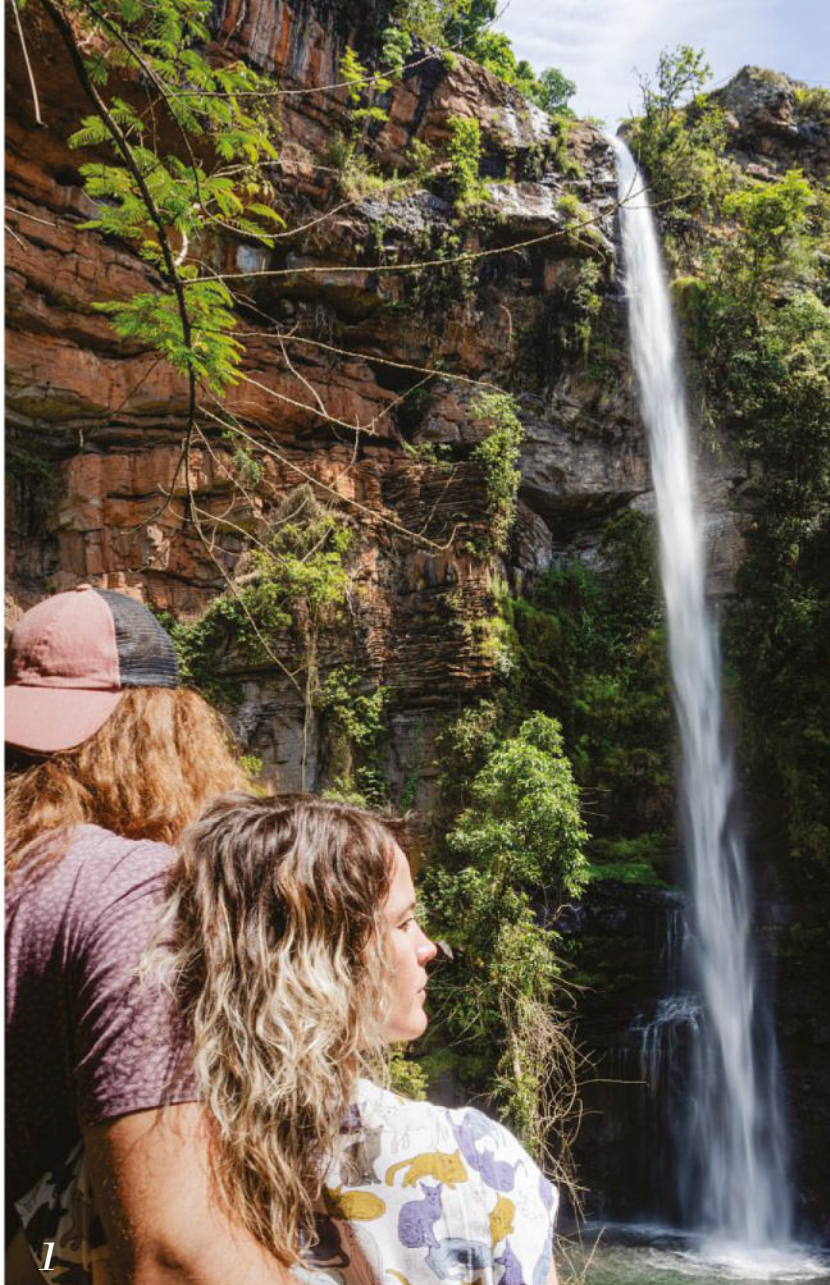
In the coffee shop at the back, I tuck into a slice of carrot cake baked by Tiger's wife, Helen. "One day, a couple from Los Angeles came by – apparently other Americans had recommended our carrot cake as the best near the Kruger Park," he says.

I wash down the cake with a cup of coffee and say goodbye to Tiger with a stack of books in hand. It's Sunday afternoon and time to return to Joburg – the place Tiger fled.

It's quiet in the car. We drive out of town up the R532 and pull over at a viewpoint for one last look at the green curves of the Drakensberg, not really wanting to leave.

But just before the Sunday blues set in, my husband Hancu remembers that Tiger wants to retire soon and sell his bookstore. Hancu looks at me from the corner of his eye and asks: "How about a house on the Sabie River?"





7 things to do

1 Walk to a waterfall

Sabie is on the Drakensberg escarpment where the Highveld falls away to the Lowveld. It's a high-rainfall area with lots of waterfalls – there are four near Sabie.

SABIE WATERFALL

This is the closest waterfall to town: It's to the left of Main Road and just after the bridge that takes you over the Sabie River as you leave town in the direction of Graskop. There are three different viewpoints from above the waterfall.

Entrance fee: Visitors are asked to make a donation.

BRIDAL VEIL FALLS

This waterfall is 6,5 km outside town – a tributary of the Sabie River wafts over a cliff like a bride's veil. You can buy fabric, art and plants in the parking area. You have to walk up a trail of about 500 m to get to the base of the waterfall. The Loerie circular trail (5,5 km) starts in the parking, and takes you into the forests and plantations above the waterfall and back down again.

Entrance fee: R20 per person to see the waterfall; R45 per person for the hiking trail. You have to pay with a card.

Contact: 083 677 0904; csieling@safcol.co.za

LONE CREEK FALLS

Lone Creek is 8,8 km from town and the highest nearby waterfall at 68 m. Some renovation work was done in 2019 to make the area safer: There are fences to keep visitors out of the pool and a wooden frame has been erected where you can take photos. Unfortunately, these structures overpower the scenery. The waterfall is close to the parking area and there are also craft stalls.

Entrance fee: R45 per person.

Contact: 083 677 0904; csieling@safcol.co.za

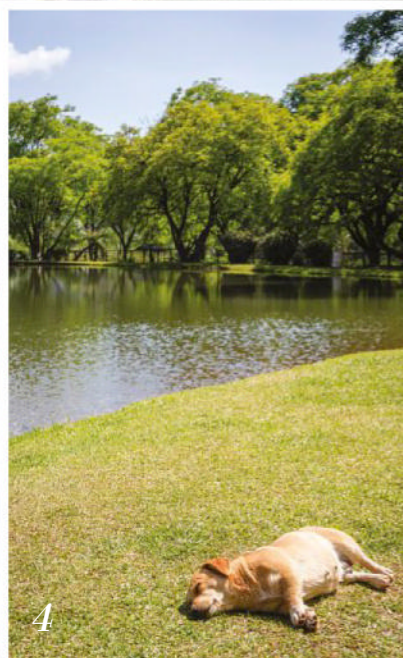
HORSE SHOE FALLS

The smallest and furthest from town (10 km), but Horse Shoe is my favourite. Rocks split the waterfall in two – it looks like an upside-down horseshoe. It's privately managed and you can dip your toes in the pool.

Entrance fee: R20 per person.

Contact: 078 127 2005

Watch out! Bridal Veil, Lone Creek and Horse Shoe are all next to the Old Lydenburg Road. Be careful because there are lots of potholes – some are so big that you have to drive on the road shoulder to pass. If you take it slow, you can reach all of them in a sedan.



Want to see more waterfalls? There are five around Graskop about 20 km further: Mac-Mac Falls, Maria Shires Falls, Forest Falls, Lisbon Falls and Berlin Falls.

2 Buy books

Order coffee and carrot cake and browse more than 40 000 second-hand books at The Bookman's Corner. I bought photographer Obie Oberholzer's coffee table book, *Southern Circle*, for only R80.

Where? Corner of 6th Avenue and Main Road.

Contact: ☎ 083 467 6307 (Tiger)

3 Go horse riding

Sabie has two places that offer horse rides. Coopers Creek is a rehabilitation centre with a bohemian atmosphere where you can do a riding lesson or go for an outride. The activities generate income to look after the animals.

River Stables is more upmarket – they also offer lessons and rides, plus picnics and accommodation (see p 101).

Where? Coopers Creek is 5 km outside town via the Old Lydenburg Road, near the Ceylon hiking hut.

Cost: From R350 per person for an hour.

Contact: ☎ 071 897 8572; 🌐 cooperscreek.org

4 Catch (and braai) trout

You and your kids can cast a line at Horseshoe Trout & About. You don't need fishing gear or experience – you can hire a rod and they'll clean the trout for you. You can also rent a lapa or picnic site next to one of the two dams and braai your catch right there.

Opening times: Daily (except Tuesday) from 8 am to 4.30 pm.

Where? 10 km outside town on the Old Lydenburg Road.

Cost: Entry fee R100 per adult; R50 per child; from R30 per fishing rod. Trout costs R179 per kilogram. Cleaning R5 per fish. Lapa R350 per night (cutlery can be provided).

Contact: ☎ 084 531 3376; ☎ 083 780 0250 (WhatsApp; book beforehand); Facebook "Horseshoe Trout&About Sabie"

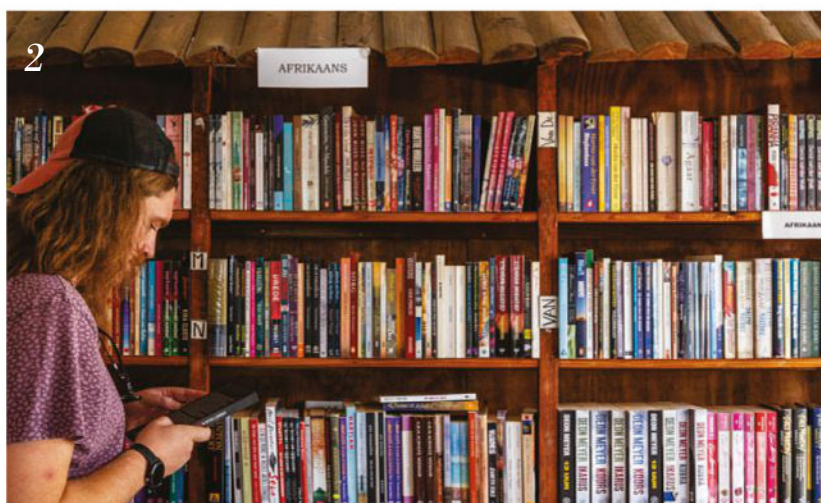
5 Get your heart rate up

Kestell Adventures has been offering adventures around Sabie for 14 years. Float over river rapids on a Gecko tube, climb down a waterfall, explore a cave or drive a 4x4 trail through the forests to a secret waterfall.

Where? Corner of Louis Trichardt Street and the R536.

Cost: Gecko tubing R590 per person.

Contact: ☎ 072 351 5553; 🌐 kestelladventures.com



6 Learn how to ride a motorcycle

The mountain passes on the Panaroma Route are popular among motorcyclists. Can't ride one? The Sabie Valley Rider Academy will show you how. They offer tours and courses on tar, dirt and sand. You can also hire a bike and go on your own adventure.

Where? 53 Main Road

Cost: From R1 950 per person for a one-day course for beginners (own motorcycle).

Contact: ☎ 072 133 215; 🌐 rideracademy.co.za

7 Take a hike

The legendary Fanie Botha Hiking Trail, established in 1973, starts in Sabie and ends in Graskop five days and 75 km later. Too long? You can also hike shorter trails, like a 32 km circular route that starts at the Ceylon hut about 5 km outside Sabie.

Cost: R203 per person per day.

Contact: ☎ 083 677 0904; 🌐 csieling@safcol.co.za



Bookings, Tours & Info Office is a private tourism office that covers accommodation and activities in the area. You can also book a horse carriage ride or hire a bicycle here.

Where? On the corner of Louis Trichardt Street and Main Road (between Petena Pancakes and Sabie Brewing Company).

Contact: ☎ 082 836 7360

📧 mysabieinfo.co.za

📞 carriage.co.za

Facebook "Bookings, Tours & Info Office Sabie"



EAT HERE

The Woodsman Pub & Restaurant

There's Cypriot heritage here, so try the shawarma with lamb, chips and salad (R115). I had the Trout Trio for R78 – trout served in a variety of ways.

Opening times: Monday to Sunday from 7 am to 10 pm. The kitchen closes at 8.45 pm.

Where? Corner of Louis Trichardt Street and Main Road.

Contact: 📞 013 764 2204; 📞 071 271 3357; Facebook "The Woodsman Pub & Restaurant"

The Wild Fig Tree Restaurant

Enjoy South African dishes like ostrich, warthog, snoek, biltong, wildebeest and bobotie out on the stoep with a view of the garden. Or go more conventional with a margherita pizza (R90) or a ploughman's platter (R150) with cold meats, cheese, pâtés, pickles and bread.

Opening times: Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from noon until 9 pm. Friday to Sunday from 9 am to 9 pm (until 8 pm on Sunday). Closed on Tuesday.

Where? Corner of Louis Trichardt Street and Main Road.

Contact: 📞 013 764 2239; Facebook "The Wild Fig Tree"

Sabie Brewing Company

The man with all the plans here is Vincent le Roux; he took over as brewer in September 2023. It costs R80 to taste seven beers – Glynn's Gold and Monkey Apple Ale were my favourites. If you're after a meal, the hake fried in beer batter is popular with the locals.

Opening times: Thursday to Saturday from 10 am to 8 pm; Sunday to Wednesday from 10 am to 5 pm.

Where? 45 Main Road

Contact: 📞 076 177 7919; 🌐 sabiebrewery.com

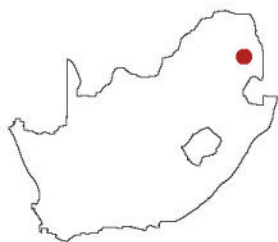
Merry Pebbles Restaurant

The resort restaurant is open to the public. The rump steak (R150 for 300 g) and trout with almond flakes and lemon butter (R175) are popular dishes.

Opening times: Dinner: Monday to Sunday from 5.45 pm to 8.45 pm. Lunch: Friday to Sunday from 11.45 am to 1.45 pm.

Where? 1,5 km outside town on the Old Lydenburg Road.

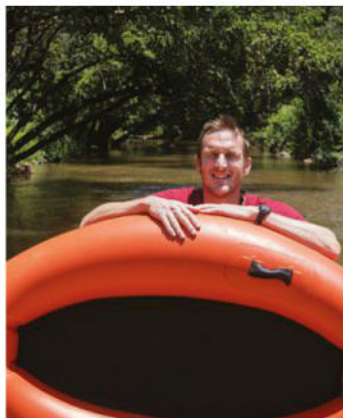
Contact: 📞 073 236 2088; 🌐 merrypebbles.co.za



HOW TO GET THERE?

From Johannesburg: Follow the N4 and Schoemanskloof (R539). Turn off to Sudwala Caves on the R539. This road will take you to the R37 to Sabie and is in a good condition.

From Hazyview or the Kruger Park: Do your homework – at the time of going to print, the R536 was closed due to a big sinkhole that opened up during the floods of February 2023. The best route is an 83 km detour via the R40 and R537.



IN OTHER WORDS

Kestell Barnard,
Kestell Adventures

"I recently joined an enduro motorcycling group in the area. We ride technical routes with smaller and lighter motorcycles. Bring your bike and come join us."

Contact 📞 066 385 9487



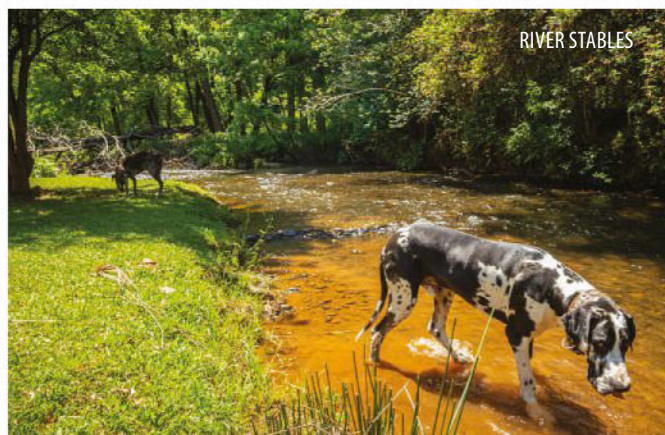
HORSESHOE FALLS



MERRY PEBBLES



SABIE STAR



RIVER STABLES

STAY HERE

Merry Pebbles

This three-star resort is neat, safe and load-shedding free. There are 35 self-catering units (sleeping two to eight) and 180 camping stands with power and braai facilities (bring your own braai grid). The campsite is dog-friendly. The resort has a shop, liquor store, laundry, restaurant, playground, tennis courts with lights, and three swimming pools – one is heated and two have slides. Bring your own inner tube and fishing rod for the river – you can catch trout for the braai. **Rates:** Camping from R200 per person; chalet from R800 per night for two people. **Where?** 1,5 km outside town on the Old Lydenburg Road. **Contact:** 📞 073 236 2088 📧 merrypebbles.co.za

Sabie Star

The 15 self-catering units (sleeping two to six) are spread

out in a lush garden along a tributary of the Sabie River. There's a swimming pool, boma and play area for the kids. A highlight is the birding trail next to the river – you can see 105 species including specials like Knysna turaco, African fish-eagle and western barn owl.

Rates: From R495 per person; breakfast from R85 (you have to book beforehand).

Where? 3 km outside town on the R536 to Hazyview (far from the sinkhole – see "How to Get There").

Contact: 📞 079 387 1868 📧 sabiestar.com

Horseshoe Falls

I was hesitant to share this great place with the world. This cottage – it's like a hiking hut – is about 200 m downstream from Horse Shoe Falls. You have to bring your own bedding, towels, toilet paper and

dishwashing soap, but it's nice and secluded, and safe. There's power, a fridge, stove, cutlery and cooking utensils.

Rate: From R200 per person.

Where? 10 km outside town on the Old Lydenburg Road.

Contact: 📞 078 127 2005 (WhatsApp)

River Stables

In December 2022, after managing a lodge in the Kruger Park for many years, Jaco and Jens Reverchon took over this property next to the Sabie River where they offer accommodation for horse enthusiasts.

Rates: Horse ride from R300 per person; picnic spot next to the Sabie River R400 (max eight people); River Suites from R1 850 per night for two people.

Where? 3 km outside town on the Old Lydenburg Road.

Contact: 📞 073 226 2533

Facebook "River Stables Sabie"

FOR YOUR DIARY

Sabie Tube Race

Enjoy the concert and food stalls after you've raced down the river. Funds raised go to charity organisations.

Where? Castle Rock Resort

When? First weekend in February.

Cost: Weekend ticket R550 per person (includes the concert and tubing, no accommodation). Tubing only, R200 per person.

Contact: 📧 sabietubrace.co.za

Sabie Forest Festival

In 2024, Sabie will celebrate its centennial with the Sabie Forest Festival. Expect competitions of all kinds – mountain biking, fishing, golf...

When? 27 April to 5 May

Contact: 📞 083 678 3937



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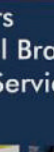



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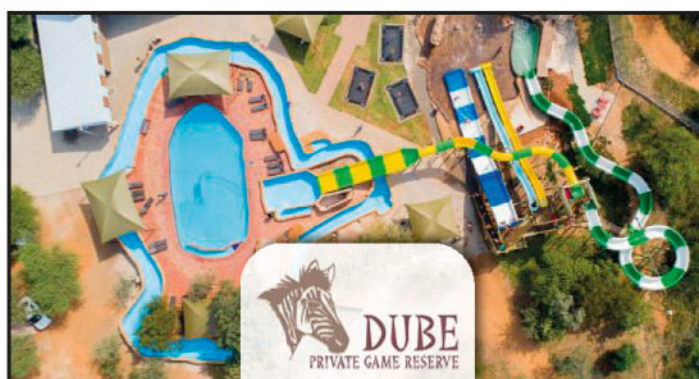
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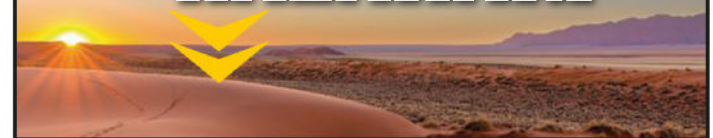
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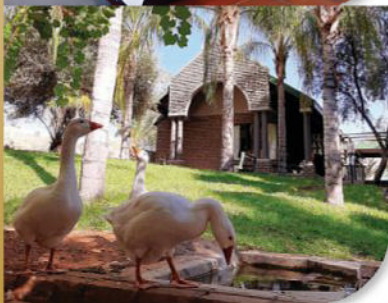
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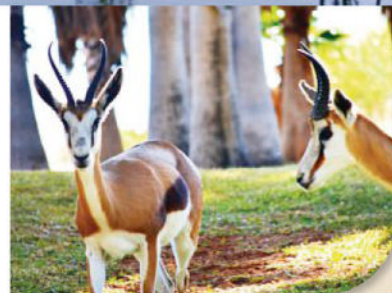
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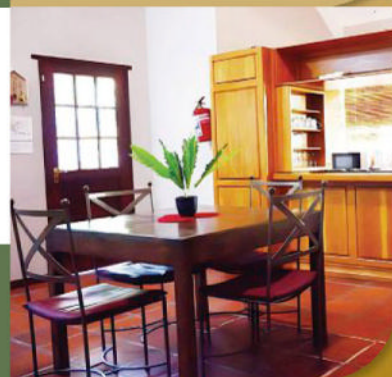
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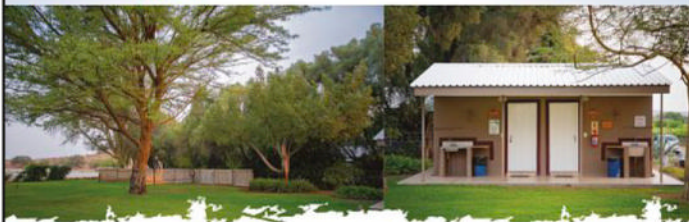


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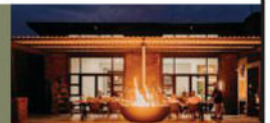
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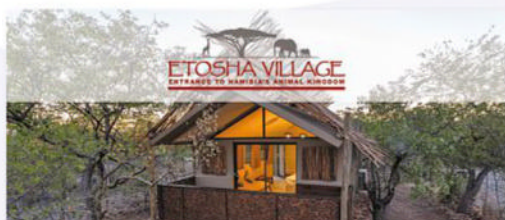
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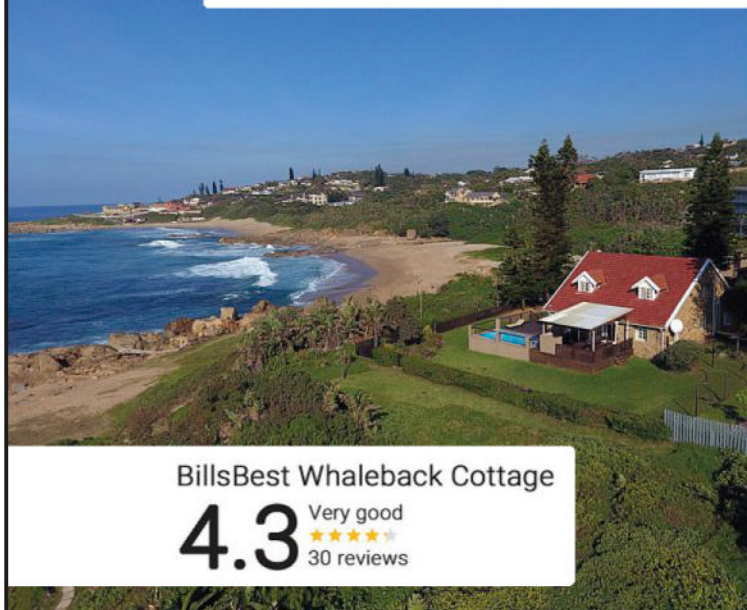
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And the bird of the year is...

BirdLife South Africa chose the beautiful bateleur to be the 2024 Bird of the Year. There are less than 1 500 of these special eagles left in South Africa – let's learn more about them!

COMPILED BY SOPHIA VAN TAAK

WHAT DOES A BATELEUR LOOK LIKE?

The female (left) and male (right) look similar, but there are some differences.

The bateleur belongs to the snake-eagle family and occurs in the northern parts of the country – in the Kalahari and the bushveld regions. They're scavengers but they also hunt birds, small mammals and reptiles, especially snakes like mambas and puff adders. They love bathing in waterholes.

The male's wings are entirely black, while the female has a light grey panel below a greyish-brown shoulder.

Bright red legs.

Pitch black head and neck.

The red facial skin and yellow bill are very striking.

Back and tail feathers are a rusty brown.

Shoulder feathers are a greyish brown.

When perched, the eagle's long wings stick out far below its short tail.



LOOK AT THE DIFFERENCE!

Bateleur chicks and juveniles look very different to their parents. Their feathers and feet are a light brown, their face is a light blue, and the cere on the bill is a greyish green. Their tail feathers are also much longer than those of the adults.

As the bateleur grows, its tail gets shorter. Its feathers also gradually get darker, its face gets redder and its bill gets yellower. A bateleur only has its characteristic colours by the time it's six years old.



By the numbers

HEIGHT: 63 cm

WEIGHT: 2,2 kg

WINGSPAN: 1,8 m

Stretch out your arms and ask a friend to measure the distance from the fingertips on one hand to the fingertips on the other. Now compare your wingspan to the bateleur's!

FLIGHT DISTANCE PER DAY: 400 km

That's very far! Bateleurs spend more time in the air than most other raptors. They fly around all day looking for prey or carrion.

FLIGHT SPEED: 50 to 80 km/h

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The bateleur's scientific name is *Terathopius ecaudatus*. It means "marvellous face without tail" in Greek and Latin.

In Afrikaans, the bateleur is called a *berghaan*, which means "rooster of the mountains". The colours of the bateleur's feathers resemble those of a rooster, and when it puffs up the feathers on its head, they look like a cock's comb.

The name *bateleur* comes from the French word for tightrope walker. The French explorer and ornithologist (what you call a bird expert) François le Vaillant visited southern Africa in the 1780s and studied thousands of birds. He was so impressed by the way the bateleur flew that he exclaimed in French:



François le Vaillant

That eagle is as agile as an acrobat in the circus!



Bateleurs in flight

A bateleur will remain perched when it's cloudy, but it likes to fly around on hot days. As it flies, the tips of its wings curl up and it rocks from side to side – like it's walking on an invisible tightrope.

You can see a clear difference between the sexes when the bateleur is in the air. The flight feathers of the female are mostly white, with a narrow black band along the edge, whereas the male has a broad black band along its underwing.



What is BirdLife South Africa?

This organisation aims to protect bird species and their habitats. Visit gobirding.birdlife.org.za for a map of birding sites in South Africa. Each birding site is marked with a flag: You can see which bird species are found there; how to get there; and whether there's a local bird guide in the area who can show you around.

Sources: birdlife.org.za;
birding.krugerpark.co.za;
Roberts Bird Guide; *Uit Die Geskiedenis Van Die Naamgewing Aan Plante En Diere In Afrikaans*



BIRDS

BY FAANSIE PEACOCK

SCHOOL'S OUT

What did you do for your matric holiday? Make mistakes? In Pretoria, where I went to school, most matriculants set off for the coast with beer

and a swimming costume. Ballito, Umhlanga or Margate. My friends and I continued this centuries-old tradition and drove down in two vehicles: a *kanniedood* red Golf and an ancient green BMW I'd inherited from my mom. It was all part of my cunning plan to split from my friends after a week of mistake-making and go on a solo birding mission.

First on my agenda was the magpie mannikin. At that time, birders went to a specific town on the KZN South Coast to look for this species. Park Rynie? Pennington? I can't remember – it was more than two decades ago.

Either way, I was driving around until I ended up in a suburb with big trees. I parked on someone's lawn and stood around with my binoculars. A woman who drove past must have been used to this sight because she stopped and asked if I was looking for the mannikins.

"Yes ma'am," I mumbled.

She smiled and beckoned me to follow her. Ten minutes later, I was seated in her kitchen drinking tea while magpie mannikins frolicked in the bird bath outside.

From there, I headed inland to Oribi Gorge (mountain wagtail, Barratt's warbler, Knysna woodpecker) and onwards to the slippery pathways of Weza-Ngele Forest near Harding. I'd hoped to see the endangered Cape parrot. It was pouring rain and I saw nothing. I was irritated on the day, but later in life I learnt to make peace with the fact that it rains frequently and heavily in forests (duh).

Near the town of Franklin, I stopped at a farmhouse to ask if I could look for Eurasian bittern in their vlei. The owner gave me permission and offered me a shotgun to take along.

"What's it for, oom?" I asked.

"For the birds!" he said, as if I were a moron.

It took a few minutes more to explain that I only wanted to *look* at the birds. . .



DYLAN VASAPOLLI

That night, I camped in Mount Currie Nature Reserve near Kokstad. I had just lit my fire when I heard a deep whistle in the mist. A striped flufftail! I briefly considered going up the mountain in the dark on my own but decided against it. It was torture to hear them calling throughout the night.

You can try find these shy birds during the day, but it's easier to carefully walk to where they're calling from at night with a torch. So, late the next afternoon, I tracked down the caretaker and his wife and asked if they would come and look for me if I hadn't returned by 10 pm. They were clearly a little worried but they agreed. They also lent me an extra blanket and gave me an enormous slice of Peppermint Crisp tart. I went up the mountain and searched and searched but came down empty-handed.

I then drove all the way back to Durban and camped at Hazelmere Dam. I ate Smash for dinner and read a book I'd bought in Verulam for R2. The next morning, I drove to a river mouth where I ticked off my first little tern. Then I weaved through sugar cane taller than the BMW until I reached an irrigation pivot. I scanned the wet soil until I found my target: a beautiful western yellow wagtail. A few noisy collared pratincoles flew overhead.

I walked through a strip of coastal forest to look for green malkoha, but the mosquitoes won that battle.

It was time to hit the road again. Instead of

stopping at an Ultra City like a normal person, my plan was to have an apple for lunch at a pig farm. Specifically, the Cedara piggery near Pietermaritzburg, which was *the* place to see rare red-headed quelea. After begging and joking around with the guard at the gate, I was let in.

I didn't know where to go next, so I aimed downhill – hopefully there would be a stream or a vlei somewhere. I saw a sign with the outline of a pig on it, and right next to the sign, a quelea perched on a reed with its blood-red head. It was the best apple I'd ever eaten.

My last destination was Midmar Dam. On the evening of 15 December 2000, I pitched my tent on a lawn with a view of the water. After a chip roll (fine dining for a teenager), I listened to the frogs and read more of the R2 book until I fell asleep.

I was too excited for my own good and woke up early. Before sunrise I came across a stately Denham's bustard, and a cuckoo finch led me further along the jeep tracks.

After some time I realised I hadn't checked the fuel gauge in the car for a while. The orange light stared back at me. But I wasn't too worried. As the song goes: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." I barely made it to a fuel station and used the last of my money to fill the tank.

As I drove back to Gauteng, I made plans for the year ahead. I had two priorities: to grow my hair and see as many birds as possible. Ah, to be young again!

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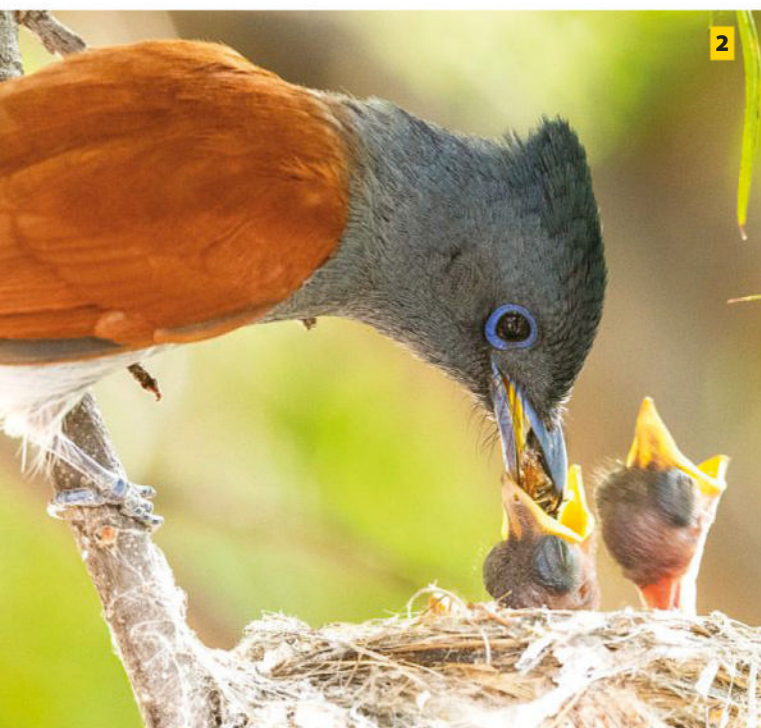
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When **Tony Edmunds** from Windhoek noticed that African paradise flycatchers were building a nest in his garden, he immediately set about documenting the process.



In October 2021, two African paradise flycatchers started building a nest in a southern silky oak tree on our property in the suburb of Klein Windhoek.

I watched in awe as the birds carted building materials in their bills: rootlets, spiderweb, fine pieces of bark, dried leaves... The shallow, open-cup nest quickly took shape. To finish it off, they carefully camouflaged and reinforced the exterior. The nest was built in a fork at the end of a branch, in such a position that I could easily photograph the process. **1**

I shoot with a Nikon D850 and most of these images were taken using a 500 mm lens, which enabled me to get up close without disturbing the flycatchers.

The male started defending the immediate surrounds, chasing other birds away. Soon the courtship began: The male crouched with dropped wings and fanned, then he raised his tail and quivered his wings while calling softly. The female observed him attentively and then approached.

The male also impressed the female with flying passes. During these displays, he would call with his bill wide open to expose the bright yellow interior of his mouth. This carried on for a day or two.

By 24 October, three eggs were laid and the incubation period began. Mom and Dad both took turns to sit on the eggs.

On the morning of 12 November, I saw the male flying towards the nest with an insect in his mouth. Three chicks had hatched and a feeding frenzy began. The male and female fed the chicks with a variety of small insects like butterflies, bees and moths. **2 & 3**

The male was just as active as the female in the upbringing and care of the young. I noticed him removing faecal sacs from the chicks (little "poop bags" produced by the young of some bird species) and dropping them into a pond beneath the nest.

One afternoon, I heard the flycatchers cause a huge commotion in their tree. A European honey buzzard sat at the top of the tree and was showing an interest in the nest and chicks. **4** The male launched some ferocious attacks and the buzzard soon left.

A couple of days later, I noticed that there were only two chicks left in the nest – I never found out what happened to number three.

By 24 November, the two surviving nestlings could be seen standing on the edge of their nest and even venturing out onto branches nearby where they practised flapping their wings. **5** It took a few days before I saw them flying short distances.

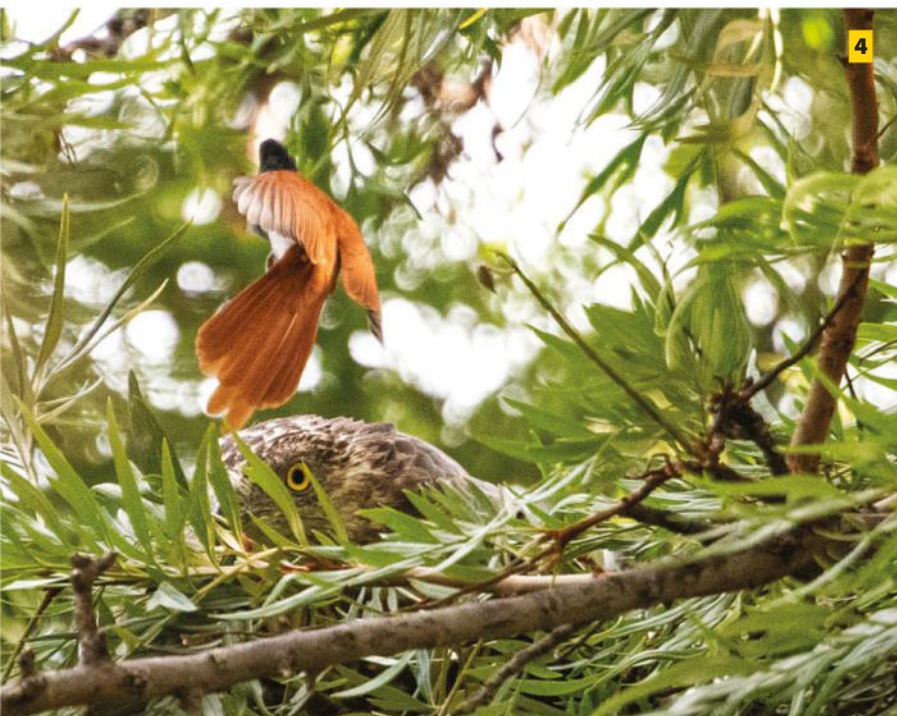
The whole family stayed in the area for about two months and could be seen and heard flitting between the trees. Then they were gone.

Within a month of them leaving, a windstorm broke the branch holding the nest and the nest fell to the ground.

We were so pleased when the flycatchers returned in October 2022 and started building a new nest in another tree nearby!



3



4



5



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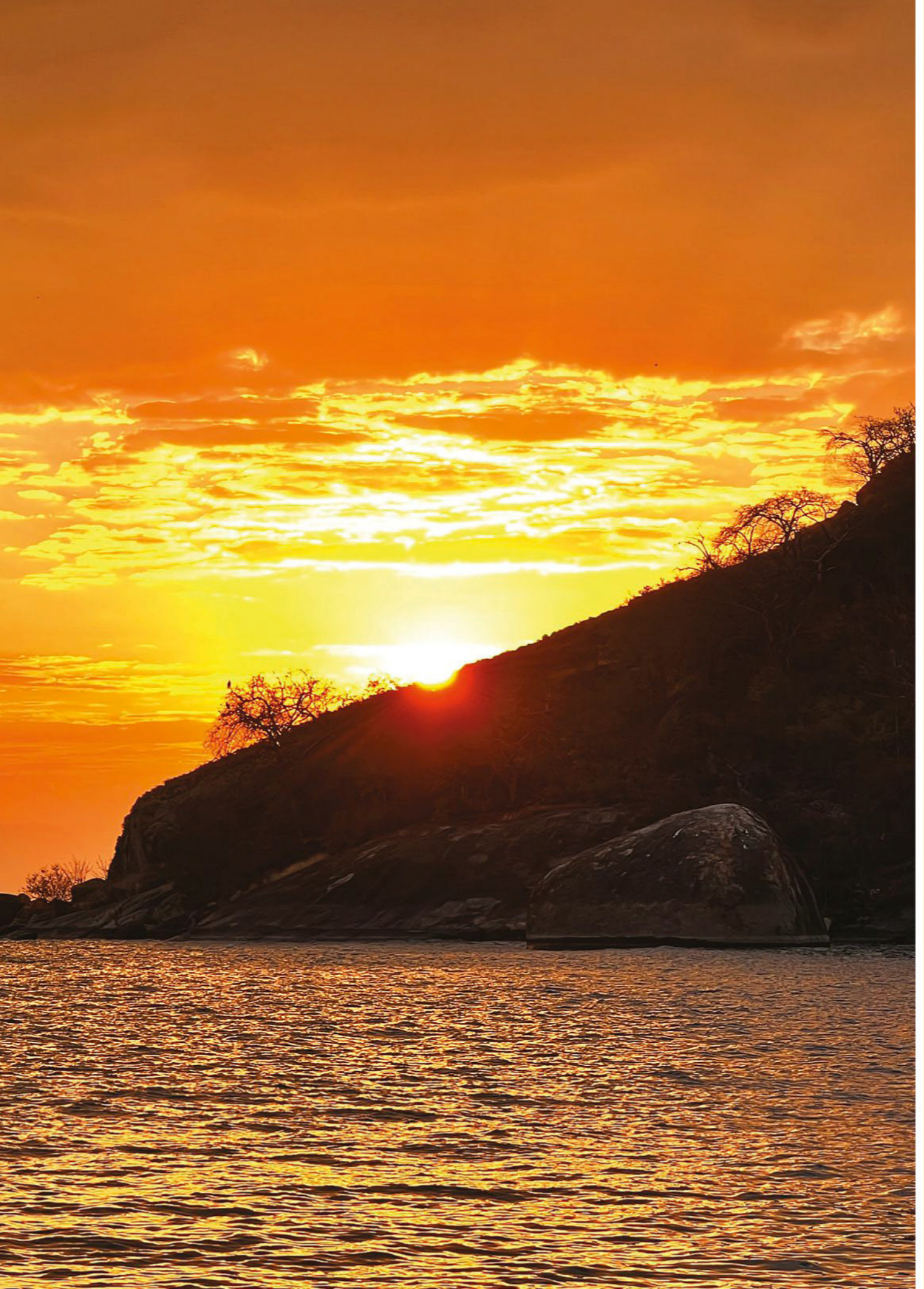
TRAVEL JOURNAL

The wilder shore

The final leg of a 30-day trek across East Africa sees **Ian Tyrer** and the Africa – Wild & Untamed crew explore both shores of Lake Malawi. Get ready for an overloaded ferry, a croc attack and being surrounded by elephants...

PICTURES **PETE MEYER**

The sunrise over Lake Malawi at Cape Maclear, as seen from Mufasa Eco Lodge, where the Africa – Wild & Untamed crew stayed over.





Above: When Ian and his friends arrived in Nkhata Bay, they spent three nights at Soul Rebel Lodge & Backpackers, but also popped in at Butterfly Space Eco Lodge (pictured), right next to Lake Malawi, for pizza and some drinks.

Opposite page, clockwise from the top: The crew approach the overloaded ferry in a smaller launch at Nkhata Bay. Paul Kalil stretches his legs during the taxi ride from the Tanzanian border to Nkhata Bay. The bar counter at Mango Drift on Likoma Island is built out of an old fishing boat. The group boards a working fishing boat at Likoma Island with guide Francis Makawila.

We used a succession of different taxis to get from the Malawi-Tanzania border at Songwe to Nkhata Bay on the shore of Lake Malawi. This 315 km leg of our journey took 12 hours. Our drivers regularly got pulled over at police roadblocks and told to pay some sort of fine, apparently because of the five *zungus* in the car... Each delay cost us about 20 minutes and R20 before we could continue our journey.

I was travelling with my son Ryan, friends Pete Meyer and Paul Kalil, and Paul's son Josh. In Nkhata Bay, we stayed at Soul Rebel Lodge & Backpackers, where we caught our breath for three nights, flattened a few medicinal rum and Cokes and did our laundry. Our first night was noisy – the village dogs were celebrating something. Another example of why I always pack earplugs...

The sweet-as-can-be sunrise over the lake the next morning made up for the restless night, and by late afternoon we'd recovered sufficiently to appreciate what we'd achieved so far. Our so-called Africa – Wild & Untamed adventure had started 22 days previously, when we flew from Durban to Ethiopia. In the weeks that followed, we whizzed through Rwanda and Uganda before heading to Tanzania (first to Mafia Island and then inland to Mbeya) and now here, to Malawi. (See *issues #190 and #191* – Ed.)

The lads – i.e. the two youngsters in our ranks, Ryan and Josh – had heard there was a party happening at nearby Butterfly Space Eco Lodge on our last night at Soul Rebel, so off they went. The festivities apparently carried on late into the night...

The next day we were on the hop again. Our plan was to sail from Nkhata Bay to Likoma Island. From there, we'd go ashore on the Mozambican side of the lake at the town of Cobue. We'd mapped out a wilderness hike with a local guide south of Cobue.

There were two ways of getting to Likoma Island: express boat, which would cost US\$450 for the five of us; or the much slower *Lamani* ferry, which would cost US\$6 per person. On a budget trip like this, the ferry was a no-brainer.

We were told that the ferry would depart at 6 pm and we should be on the dock at 5.30 pm. We said a sad goodbye to Soul Rebel Backpackers and walked 2 km to some smaller boats that would take us into the harbour to where the *Lamani* was anchored. The little boats were paddled by young boys who took no prisoners. Once we'd been almost forcibly pushed onto one of their boats, there was no going back.

As we closed in on the ferry, I heard someone say: "Maybe we should have rather taken that speedboat?" Too late, she cried!

The sagging *Lamani* was clearly a coffin on water. It was already packed with people and luggage, with seemingly no place to sit. There were supposed to be two ferries going that night but one had broken down, so we were all squashed onto the *Lamani*.

Oh, boy...

A ferry bad idea

Once the last sardine was crammed in, the captain stood up in the wheelhouse, picked up a megaphone and started to pray! He prayed and prayed and prayed. Upon "Amen", the engines powered up and the ferry did a lap around the harbour – presumably to check that it wouldn't capsize.

Then the captain prayed some more, and this time we joined in!

We were told that the 67 km crossing to Likoma Island would take about two and a half hours. The sun was setting – this would be an overnight voyage as the lake is calmer at night. This trip was definitely out of our comfort zone, but for the many locals on board it was just another commute.

At first there seemed to be standing room only, but as the crossing continued we all managed to find a small spot to curl up. Ryan and I positioned ourselves near the anchor at the prow, Pete was lying parallel to us, and Paul and Josh half-sat, half-squatted nearby.

I was dressed warmly, anticipating the cold on the open water. The others only wore light fleece tops and suffered. It was an uncomfortable, long night. Were we scared? I don't know. We discussed a plan in case we capsized: Kick your shoes off, leave your backpack, regroup 20 m from the boat, find something to hang onto. And then swim to shore or wait to be rescued...

On the previous leg of our trip – travelling from Uganda to Tanzania – we had considered taking a ferry across Lake Victoria. That time, we rather opted to fly and heard later that the same ferry had sunk because of overloading, with many people drowning.

In the early hours, we briefly stopped at Chizumulu Island where some passengers disembarked while others boarded via the same dreadful little boats. Shortly after dawn, a full 10 hours after we'd set out, Likoma Island came into view. It felt like we'd dodged a bullet. The captain said that the delay was due to the overloading; he had to go slowly for safety reasons.

There are always dangers on a trip like this. A train can derail, a bus can crash, a ferry can sink. I like the adrenaline rush that comes with the territory – this isn't an outing to the mall. You can't be totally irresponsible, though. It's a balancing act that starts by recognising danger when it's staring you in the face.

From Likoma Island, we could see the distant lights of Cobue, Mozambique, about 7 km across the water. We'd get there later. First, we aimed for Mango Drift, a backpacker lodge on the other side of the island. We found some rather drunk motorbike taxi drivers and clambered onto the backs of their bikes. It's not like there was an Uber to call. In front of the bike I was on, I watched as Ryan, Paul, Pete and Josh raced off into the night, taillights burning.

The dirt track was treacherous. All I could think of were plaster casts and stretchers... Never mind the 10-hour ferry, this trip was crazier! The riders would have put some Dakar Rally guys to shame. We arrived at Mango Drift coated in dust but all in one piece. I let out a huge sigh of relief – getting here felt like the hardest part of the entire journey.

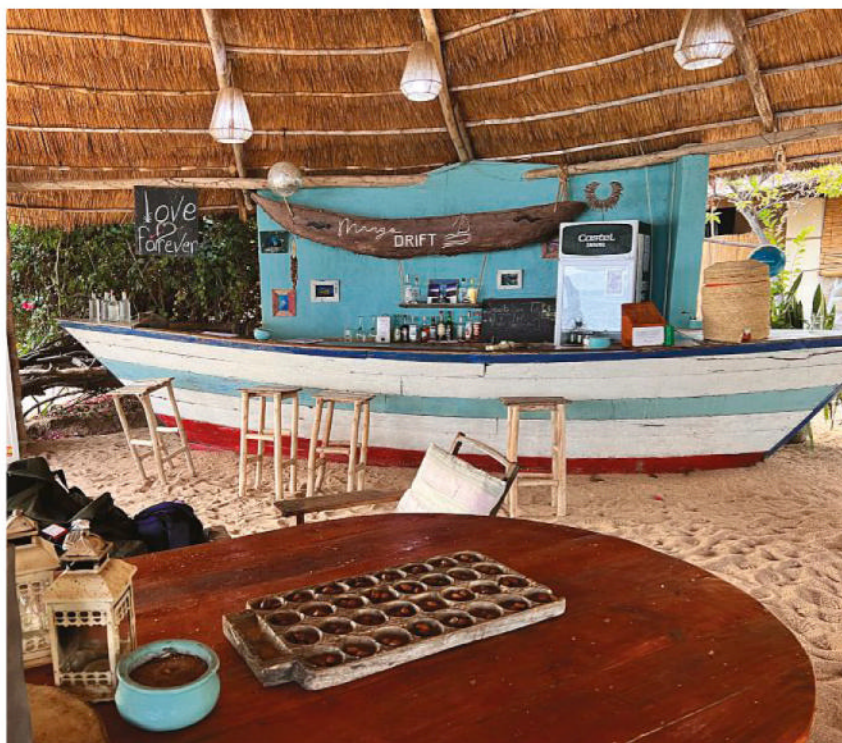
The sun was now properly up and we dragged ourselves to the bar area where some couches (old fishing boats strewn with cushions) offered a place to crash. The boys, barely alive, slept hard. In fact, so hard that no one snored.

We were woken by the barman a while later who kindly offered us coffee. In bed, by default. Life was good!

Mango Drift was only our home for one night, so we didn't have much time to look around. Still, I managed to get out onto the lake in a kayak. About a kilometre away down the shore, I saw two fish-eagles perched in a baobab and decided to paddle closer. As I approached the tree, I felt the bottom of the kayak scrape a rock. Or hang on, was it a rock?

I couldn't get off whatever it was and I was slowly being pulled down and turned. I started to worry that I was being attacked by a croc! I paddled frantically and went nowhere – it felt as if I was stuck in a whirlpool.

Eventually, somehow, I managed to get away. I paddled for my life, constantly looking behind me. Paul





Above: The view from Fat Monkeys, Cape Maclear.

Opposite page, from the top: Ryan Tyrer follows a footpath on the Mozambican side of Lake Malawi. Ian and his friends endured mozzies and sand fleas while wild camping on a beach in Mozambique. During the bus ride from Metangula to Lichinga, the minibus ran out of petrol and everyone got out to wait while the driver raced off on a motorbike taxi to find fuel.

and Josh paddled towards me. I was almost in tears when they reached me.

I told them about the harrowing experience and we decided to investigate. As we approached the “rock”, we saw a shadow lurking below the murky water. It moved towards us, so we spun around and raced off again!

I tipped the kayak over back at Mango Drift – there were bite marks in the hull. In almost 40 years of travelling through Africa, this was the most frightening experience I’d ever had!

A walk on the wild side

The following morning, a guide called Francis Makawila collected us by fishing boat to take us to Cobue. I had met Francis years before when he owned a small fishing lodge, which sadly had to close during the Covid pandemic. It was great to see him again and to support his new tourism venture. *(Since he returned, Ian has raised some money to help put Francis back on his feet. – Ed.)*

As we approached the ramshackle little harbour on Likoma Island, I took a picture of some beautiful dhows and the fishermen who were getting ready for the day. Suddenly, out of the maze of humans, an irate immigration officer appeared. He explained that I’d broken the law by taking a photo of a government official. I showed him the panoramic photo. He zoomed in and zoomed in and zoomed in until he saw a face that possibly resembled his, among the hundreds of fishermen.

Paul, Pete and Ryan let him have it, but I just kept quiet. There was a four-way screaming match until it

dawned on him that he recognised us from the ferry. Yes, we were the five *zungus* on board! Suddenly all was forgiven and we were great mates again.

But he wasn’t done with his tirade. He turned on poor Francis, who took the abuse silently, knowing that he hadn’t stamped his own passport into Malawi that morning.

After this little hiccup, Francis took us on his fishing boat, directly to Cobue (about 7 km) to the Mozambican border control, to stamp our passports into Mozambique.

Admin done, we returned to the fishing boat and continued south along the lake – called Lago Niassa in Mozambique – towards a small village called Ngoo. (The name means “point” as it’s on a sharp promontory jutting into the lake.) Here, we’d follow footpaths – guided by Francis – for about 30 km along the shore to the bigger port town of Metangula.

I had unfinished business on the Mozambican side of the lake. Back in 2012, I planned to hike from Metangula to Cobue with my two other sons, Chad and Bryn, aged 21 and 17 at the time. (Ryan was working in Qatar back then and couldn’t join us.) Unfortunately, Chad injured himself early in the walk and we ended up taking a boat instead. (Actually, more of a dinghy with a sail made of fertiliser bags...) Long story short: I wanted to complete the walk I never finished back in 2012!

The 30 km voyage from Cobue to Ngoo was amazing. We hugged the coast and were treated to an abundance of fish-eagles. We mostly sat in silence, in absolute awe as our little boat putt-putted along the wild coastline. Every now and then we passed a seasonal fishing village, inhabited by just a few souls. Although we passed massive crocs sunning themselves on the beaches, we stopped for a swim at a spot Francis deemed safe.

Ngoo, like many of the other fishing villages here, can only be reached on foot or by boat – you can’t drive here in a car. I love places like this, where you’re far from regular tourist routes and it feels like you’re on a proper adventure. This is what our Africa – Wild & Untamed trip was all about!

When we got out on the beach at Ngoo, it was just us and our backpacks and two fishing rods, and a couple of villagers who came to check us out. (The plan had been to feed ourselves as we went along, but we never quite caught enough fish...)

Fit as a fiddle, Francis got the pace going, but we eventually had to ask him to slow down as us silverbacks were lagging. We walked through villages, stopping to chat to the kids (*zungus* were definitely a rare sight), rest a little and fill our water bottles from the local borehole. The villagers were always happy to pump water for us.

At sunset, having covered a blistering 10 km in two hours, Francis found us a beautiful beach to roost for the night. Pete, Ryan and Josh pitched tents but Francis, Paul and I opted to sleep in the open.

The gang was dying of thirst and we were all a little peckish. Francis headed off into the darkness and came back with six cans of Fanta and packets of Marie Biscuits! Because of a recent cyclone, the lake level was very high and aggressive waves were pounding onto the beach. Still, we slept like babies despite being covered in mozzies and sand fleas.

We rose at first light and Josh cooked pasta, which we wolfed down. The route that day would be tough. We had 20 km of sandy tracks to cover while carrying our heavy packs – mostly along the shore, or close to it.

We rested at the halfway point, buying warm cans of Fanta and packets of Ghost Pops at a tiny spaza shop. Kids again appeared out of nowhere and gathered around us like we were aliens, which I guess we were.

We passed more villages, resting briefly before moving on. After walking for almost eight hours, Metangula came into view, positioned beautifully on a peninsula, and we were saved by a small restaurant that served cold Cokes, 2M beers and chicken and chips. Our meal stop was brief and soon we caught a ride in a minibus to the main taxi rank about 10 km further.

Our driver took intermittent swigs from the quart of beer between his legs and even made a pit stop at his house to attempt a refill. His wife refused to give him one – thank goodness – but this made him mad. Off he raced, at what felt like 100 km/h, dodging children, ducks and donkeys. Paul and Pete were stuck in the back somewhere, screaming at the driver. The more they screamed, the faster he went.

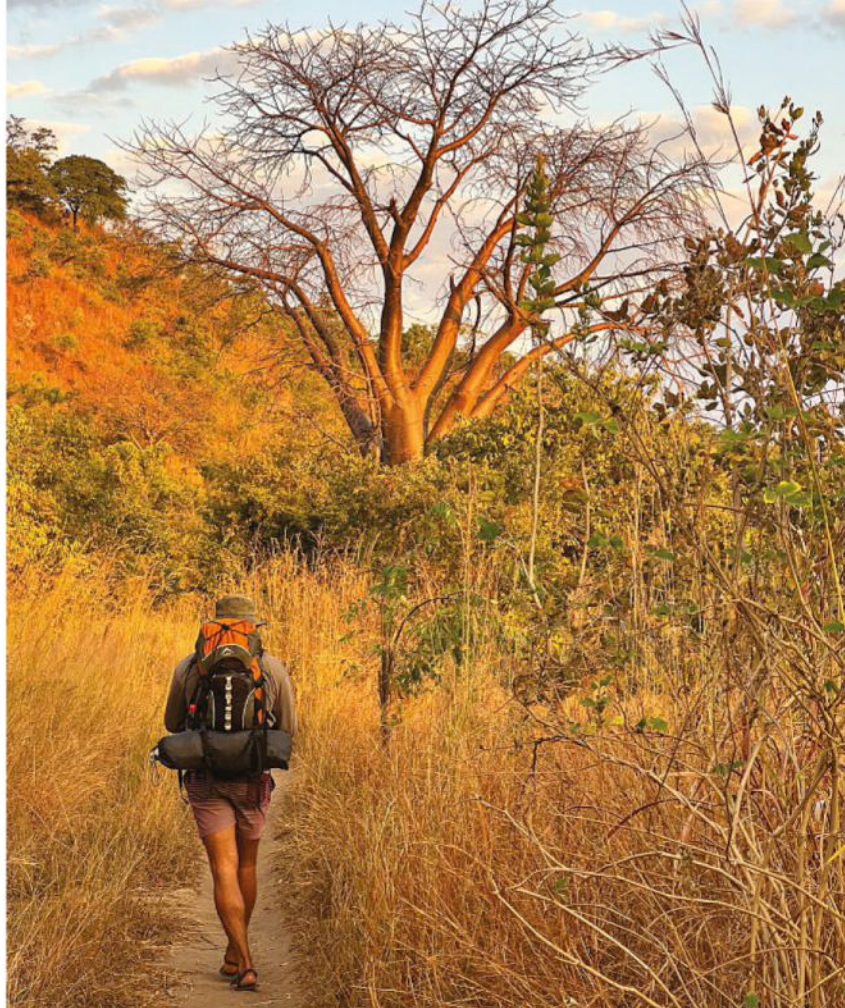
We got to the taxi rank in record time – it turns out the driver raced because he knew the last bus departing for Lichinga was about to leave. We boarded a 16-seater minibus that “only” had 26 people in it, so there was “plenty” of room for the five of us and our massive backpacks. At this point we said goodbye to Francis as this was as far as he needed to take us.

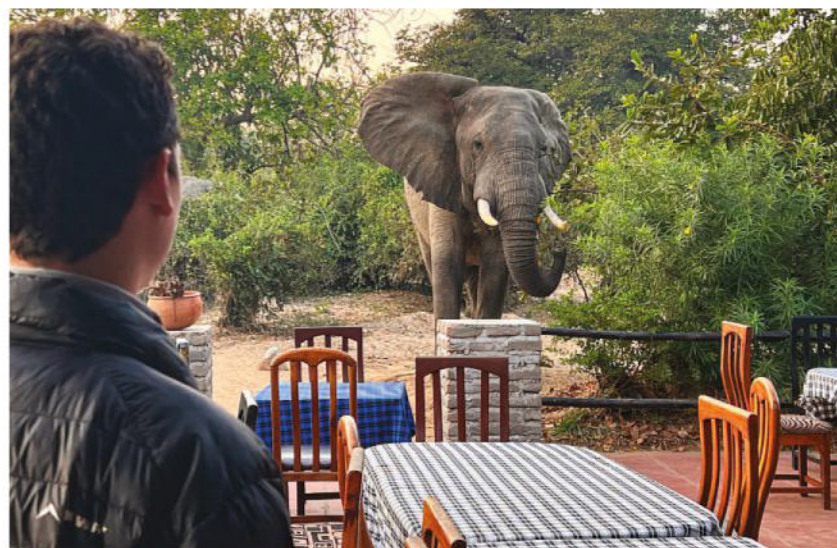
Paul muttered something about there being no space but jumped in and disappeared into the mass of bodies, with Josh close on his heels. Now packed with 31 passengers, we headed off. Lichinga was more than 100 km to the south-east, away from the lakeshore.

After two hours of side-stepping potholes, we abruptly stopped. The driver got out, jumped onto a motorbike taxi and zoomed off. I asked a passenger where he was going and he casually pointed at the petrol gauge. Empty! Half an hour later the driver returned, grinning widely. He refuelled nonchalantly and said: “Let’s continue!”

We arrived in Lichinga at sunset and headed to the home of Kevin Kremer, a friend of a friend. Kevin works for a forestry company and had kindly offered to host us. We enjoyed sleeping on beds for a change and tucked into a hearty breakfast the next morning.

From Lichinga, we now had a two-hour taxi ride south to the border crossing at Mandimba (154 km), where we had a bit of a palaver on the Mozambican side with the officials not being very friendly or helpful.





From the top: The Africa – Wild & Untamed crew: Pete Meyer, Josh Kalil, Paul Kalil, Ian Tyrer and Ryan Tyrer. Their final destination was Liwonde National Park where they went on a game drive. Elephants roamed freely around Kutchire Lodge's camp in Liwonde National Park. Josh cautiously watches an ellie that charged at Pete earlier.

Back in the warm heart of Africa

The Malawi side was better and it was a joy to see the delightful grin of Blessings Trymore, who would be our guide from here. Blessings is the owner of Sunshine Tours in Cape Maclear and we'd previously used his services on other Malawian excursions. He drove us to Mufasa Eco Lodge in Monkey Bay (118 km) and we arrived at sunset in time for a Carlsberg lager and some tasty grub.

We watched the sunrise the next morning with breakfast and coffee. Blessings fetched us by boat later and took us to Cape Maclear, four hours away. We stopped to jump off massive rocks and feed the fish-eagles. In some places, the bulbous rocks were decorated with wild fig trees.

We were happy to arrive in Cape Maclear and check in at Fat Monkeys, which has been our family's favourite lodge in Malawi since the first time we stayed there on a backpacking trip in 2007.

Ryan and I pitched our tent and Pete, Paul and Josh slept in the dorm. Our three days at Fat Monkeys were relaxing and always ended with spectacular sunsets.

From Cape Maclear, Blessings drove us 148 km (three hours) south to Liwonde National Park, where we'd booked a night at Kutchire Lodge. We took a sundowner boat ride on the Shire River, which was teeming with hippos, crocs and ellies. Ryan was in his element as the birdlife was incredible. By now, he'd clocked up 335 species on the trip, including 110 lifers.

All night we could hear elephants rummaging in the lodge garden. As we rose, 15 of them were grazing around our chalets.

I wasn't feeling very well and stayed behind while the rest went out on a game drive. Before they were even out of the gate, the vehicle broke down. The guide fetched another vehicle but sometime later, that one also wouldn't start. The gang got out and gave it a push. The game drive produced very little game, other than the game of push-starting the vehicle!

Meanwhile, back at Kutchire Lodge, I was still surrounded by elephants. I couldn't leave my room to get to the restaurant area so I sat back, chilled and absorbed the experience.

In a way, the elephants were a fitting final chapter to our journey. Later that day, we'd hop on a transfer to Lilongwe (239 km) and fly back to Joburg and then Durban. After an epic 30-day adventure, their graceful presence offered me a soothing farewell.

It had been a trip to remember.



COUNTRY GUIDE



MALAWI

Capital: Lilongwe

Languages: English, Chewa, Tumbuka and others

Population: 21 million

IAN SAYS: *We saw the devastating effects of logging in many places, and fish stocks in the lake have plummeted. It's going to be a rocky ride going forward for what is a wonderful country to visit as a tourist.*



MOZAMBIQUE

Capital: Maputo

Languages: Portuguese and others

Population: 34 million

IAN SAYS: *Although there are areas in Mozambique that are no-go zones, Lago Niassa is one of the greatest places on earth. The remoteness of the Mozambican shore, and the sincerity of the people, will always call me back.*

TRIP COSTS

ACCOMMODATION

- **Soul Rebel Lodge & Backpackers:** US\$30 – 50 per person, depending on the room (excluding meals). "SoulRebel.MalawiLodge" on Facebook
- **Mango Drift:** Camping cost US\$8 per person, dorm beds were US\$15 per person.

📧 mangodrift.com

- **Mufasa Eco Lodge:** Camping cost US\$8 per person, dorm beds were US\$15 per person. "Mufasa Eco Lodge" on Facebook

- **Fat Monkeys:** Camping cost US\$8 per person, dorm beds were US\$15 per person.

📧 fatmonkeysmw.com

- **Kutchire Lodge:** US\$30 per person.

📧 kutchire-lodge.business.site

TRANSPORT

- Ferry ride to Likoma: US\$6 per person.
- Motorbike taxi to Mango Drift: About R20 per person.
- Taxi to Metangula bus terminal: MT50 (about R15) per person.
- Bus from Metangula to Lichinga: MT600 (R175) per person.
- Transfer from Lichinga to Mandimba border: US\$100 for the group.

GUIDING

- **Francis Makawila** (Mozambique): We paid US\$100 for his guiding services, and the fishing boat cost US\$200 to hire for the group.

☎ 00 265 888 713 745

📧 francismakawila@gmail.com

- **Blessings Trymore** (Malawi): We paid US\$150 per person, which covered the transport from Mandimba border to Monkey Bay, the boat trip from Monkey Bay to Cape Maclear, the transfer from there to Liwonde National Park, and the transfer to Lilongwe at the end of our trip.

☎ 00 265 992 609 589

📧 sunshinetoursmalawi@gmail.com

MEET THE AUTHOR

Ian Tyrer (62) and his wife Mandy live on a farm near Richmond, KZN. Ian has always loved travel – back in the early 1980s he spent three years traveling the world while working as a handyman on a Unicorn shipping line cargo ship. This took him to countries like Colombia, Panama, the USA, and all over Europe.

In the 1980s he also represented South Africa as an adventure racer in events like the Raid Gauloises and the Eco Challenge. Adventure racers had to be competent in many disciplines ranging from sea kayaking and horse-riding to orienteering and abseiling. As an adventure racer he competed in countries like Ecuador, Argentina, and Vietnam.





On a dusty signboard in the middle of nowhere, **Toast Coetzer** learns about the lives of travellers gone by.

On long road trips, I often pull over at places where people stand or sit while waiting for lifts. In the leafier parts of our country, these are always under a tree. In the Northern Cape, however, there are no such luxuries. Here, the best a hitchhiker can hope for is a road sign that might provide a slice of shade.

In June last year, I crossed the border from Namibia at Onseepkans and drove south along a dentistry-busting road into the dry expanse of Bushmanland. About 7 km south of Onseepkans, my eye caught a dusty, sun-bleached road sign indicating that Pofadder, Springbok and Bitterfontein were ahead. Noticing the board was covered in graffiti as high as a person could reach, I pulled over.

I now got to see the other side of the sign, the side a motorist would see if they were driving back the way I had come. “Suidwes-Afrika” it read, despite Namibia having been renamed 33 years ago. To be fair, there was a new board to the side that did say “Namibia”, so why wasn’t the old one removed? Maybe because it’s more than just defunct infrastructure; because it captures something about Onseepkans that no website can ever tell you. It’s like an archaic Facebook wall where entries are a little harder to delete.

I approached the dusty hieroglyphics, squinting in the bright sunlight. The first epitaph I read gave me a reality check: “Amigo was here to follow the living of suffering – 16 Oct 2022.” It immediately put my own air-conditioned journey into perspective.

Next to Amigo’s words, a certain Paulus “Mighty D” wrote that he was heading to the “Goudstad” (City of Gold) in search of peace and money for his “gemoedsrus” (peace of mind). I wonder how things turned out for Paulus in Joburg?

I guess once you’ve walked the 7 km from Onseepkans to here, you’ve already made up your mind as to where you’re hitching to. The sign is at the turn-off to Kakamas. From there you can head to Upington and beyond, or you can continue straight to Pofadder, where you’ll hit the N14 and go west to Springbok, Port Nolloth or all the way to Cape Town.

So many souls waited here: The dates go back to the 1980s. Jaco was here, Anker was here, and Dancing Shoes, too. Bernadine professed her love for Shakes, and Beranice for Jaya. Mr Xhoebenzee was headed for the “Mas” – local slang for Kakamas. On 10 May 1991, Ding Dong waited here for a lift to “Upington for a court case”. Someone was aiming for distant Durban; someone else for nearby Pella.

Quinton, Khoi, Chips, Dapman, Wolla, Bloodstone, Elvis, Storm, Bisto and Spanner – they were all here. Milla, Albertus, Nombes and Bra Sticco were regulars: Their names appeared several times.

So too someone called B’land. One of his inscriptions read: “B’land was hier op pad na sy meisie in Pofadder. My oë is vol tranen ek verlang na my meisie.” (B’land was here on the way to his girlfriend in Pofadder. My eyes are filled with tears and I miss my girl.)

The people of Onseepkans (sometimes abbreviated to O.S.K.) who waited here shared surprisingly personal details. “Christo van Wyk is op pad, op soek na die meisie van sy drome.” (Christo van Wyk is on the road, searching for the girl of his dreams.) Some words were scratched out below, as if there was a sudden change of plan.

Elsewhere, someone wrote: “Don’t forget Christo.” Was this the same Christo?

Another hitchhiker wrote, “Lovey don’t worry” with no attributed name. Maybe this person (I’m assuming it was a man) knew his wife would come looking for a message on this signboard. If she ever found it, it would have offered scant reassurance that he was okay and all was fine.

A certain Morolla wrote that he (or she?) was here, “*honger en dors op pad na Kaapstad op soek na ware liefde*” (hungry and thirsty and heading to Cape Town in search of true love). It’s as if the quest for *ware liefde* became the default reason for many a hitchhiker’s departure from Onseepkans. Or maybe it was just a mantra repeated by each person who washed up here at this lonely crossroads, looking for a reason to continue.

In the year 2000, Manaka, also known as Menchin, wrote a short but profound millennial mantra: “Let us give, let us forget.”

With these words tucked into my heart, I get back behind the wheel. Soon, I’ll fill up in Pofadder and push through to Verneukpan where I’ll camp for the night.

Let us give, let us forget.

*I approached the dusty
hieroglyphics, squinting in the
bright sunlight. The first epitaph
I read gave me a reality check.*



TOURS

Pondoland paradise

Experience the untamed beauty of the Eastern Cape coastline on a guided self-drive tour with *go!* and Bhejane 4x4 Adventures.

DAY 1: We meet at Mbotyi River Lodge, where we will spend the next two nights. The lodge is a nature lover's delight and the perfect place for relaxing away from the everyday stresses of life. The facilities include a swimming pool, mountain bikes, canoes and plenty of sunny decks.

DAY 2: After coffee and rusks there will be time to walk along the beach or go for a paddle on the Mbotyi estuary. Our day trip will take us to a Cape vulture colony, where more than 170 birds nest on the cliffs of a gorge. We'll stop for a picnic lunch along the way. After our visit to the vulture colony, we'll follow meandering jeep tracks along the coastline. (Please note, we will only make use of existing tracks and will never drive on the beach.) Next up is a visit to the *Grosvenor* shipwreck. Over the years, people have attempted many treasure-hunting tactics to get to her alleged bounty. We return to the lodge in the late afternoon in time for sundowners on the beach.

DAY 3: After breakfast we make our way to beautiful Coffee Bay and our next lodge, Ocean View. Our route takes us into the heart of the rural Wild Coast as we drive through a number of spectacular river gorges. Today is a fairly long drive and we will enjoy a picnic lunch en route. After a day on the road, Ocean View will be a welcoming home for the next two nights.

DAY 4: Today is more laid-back. We enjoy a late breakfast and some time on the beach, then head out to the mouth of the Mthatha River. Weather permitting, there's time to go for a short canoe trip or cast a line. Lunch is at the White Clay restaurant, known all along the Wild Coast for its good food. After lunch, you can relax some more and enjoy the Coffee Bay area before dinner at Ocean View.

DAY 5: After breakfast, we pack up and head out down the coast to our last destination, The Haven Hotel. Along the way, we'll visit the popular and iconic Hole-in-the-Wall landmark. We'll again stop for a picnic lunch somewhere and then enter Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve. The Haven is on the beach within this protected area.

DAY 6: Today we'll enjoy the nature reserves on foot. There are a number of hikes you can do depending on your level of fitness. The Bhejane guide and staff from the hotel will be able to assist. Other activities at the hotel include horse riding and canoe trips. Our last day is celebrated with a seafood banquet!

DAY 7: After one final breakfast together, we say our goodbyes. It's about a 90-minute drive back to the N2 near Mthatha.

DATES AND RATES

When? 26 April – 2 May 2024

How long is the tour? Seven days, six nights

Accommodation: Beach lodges and hotels

How much? R16 250 per adult sharing; half-price for children under 10 sharing

• For 300 years the amaXhosa have been the custodians of this wild part of our country. The area is still very rural and traditional, with a basic road network. It is on these roads, and many kilometres of legal jeep tracks, that we will explore the rugged coastline, shipwrecks, estuaries and waterfalls.

• Your tour leader is an experienced nature conservationist and adventure guide. He will be in radio contact with you at all times and impart a wealth of biological, cultural, historic and four-wheel-drive knowledge. This is not a very technical 4x4 trip, but should you experience any difficulty, the Bhejane crew have the know-how and recovery equipment to assist with any off-road problems.



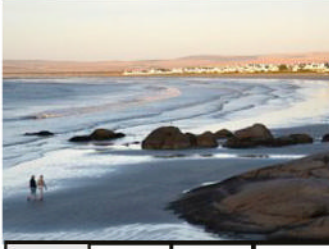
For a full itinerary and to book your place,
contact MJ at bookings@bhejane.com or 082 724 0442



CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY GERDA ENGELBRECHT

SOLUTION ON PAGE 102

			Endemic rodent (6,8)	Choose	Took a plane	Generations, eg	Edible mushroom (6,7)			
					Nothing new under the ...					
Cutting tool								Barking up the wrong ...		
Alternative										
Conse- crate	Wande- ring singer	Gentle golf stroke			Pismire			Blood vessel	Priest	
	Excavate	Cold						Stuff	Onion relative	
				Astatine (symbol)	Frame- work for a climbing plant					
Liquid fuel			Maths symbol			Ogled				
Imply			Fathers			Incision				
					Serious	Knitted top				
						Iridium (symbol)				
Horse- drawn carriage	Nobody (2-3)	Attentive		Tower for grain				Garden tool		
				Group of three				Town in Mozam- bique		
Perform		Dwell				Turbo Diesel Injection (abbr)				
Pillager		Oolong or Pu-erh, eg								
				Radium (symbol)		China (internet domain name)				
				Eye part						
Unfailing						"I see!"		Starred	Ventilate	Manga- nese (symbol)
Larger						Smell				
					Company emblem	Silver (symbol)		River in England		
					Hot tub					
			Purple				Smooth glossy fabric			
			Payments asked							
			Thus		Less taxing					Con- clusion
			Sanctuary		Utilise					
				Each (abbr)			Pistol		Strange	
							East side (abbr)		Selenium (symbol)	
Town along the West Coast								Lend a hand	Tin (symbol)	
Polonium (symbol)	First vowel	Slide on snow			Nickel (symbol)	Flew				

TOAST COETZER; SOPHIA VAN TAAK; JON MINSTER

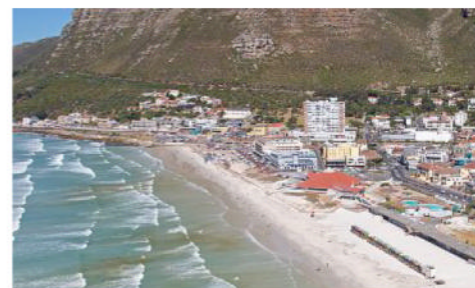
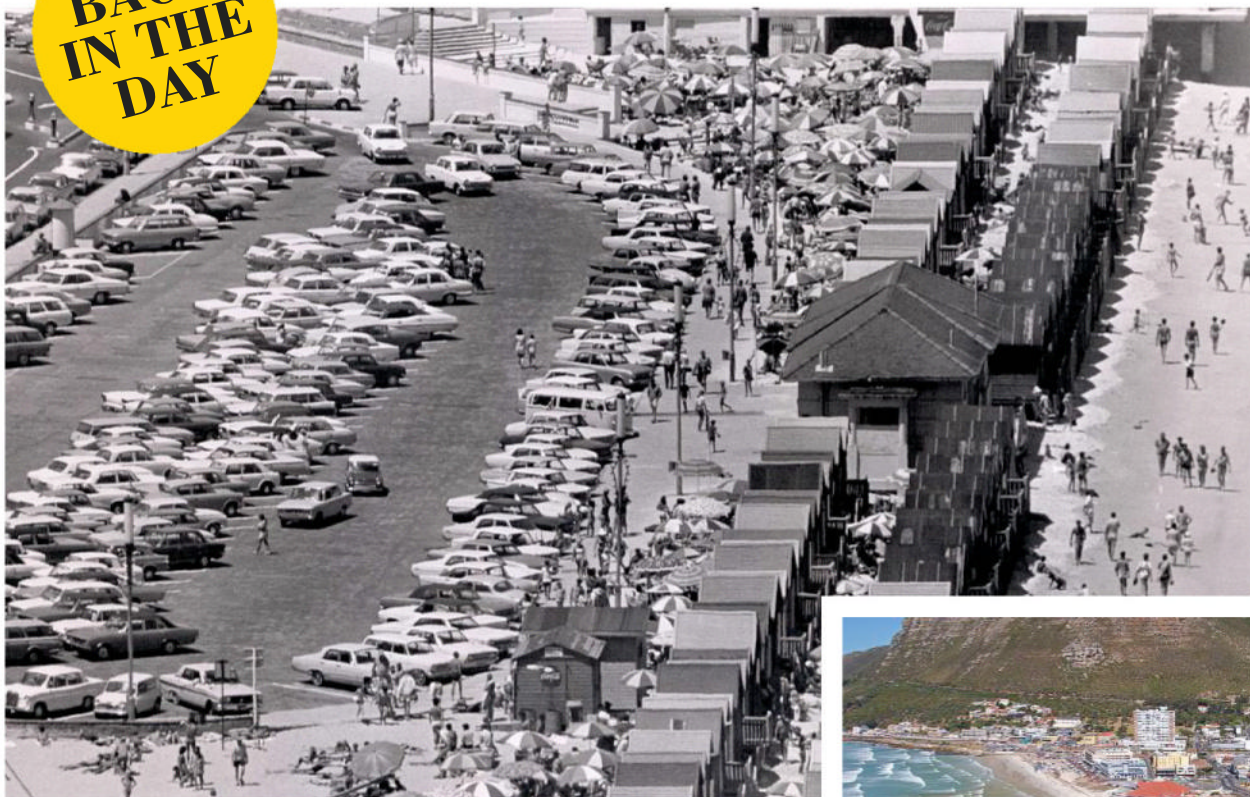


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MUIZENBERG BEACH HUTS

The crayon-coloured huts on Muizenberg Beach are an iconic Cape Town landmark, but where do they originate?

In the late 1800s, Muizenberg was a holiday town for the wealthy who had made their fortunes on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand. But after the turn of the century, the town's character began to change. Surfing began to take root in South Africa. Situated on the edge of False Bay, Muizenberg became famous for its consistent, even break and started a fever that developed into a culture that defines the town's character to this day.

The Muizenberg huts, which were built in the early 1900s, are located at Surfer's Corner. There are 63 of them, if you include the ones further down the coast at St James.

To understand their place in Muizenberg's history, one must remember that Victorian ideals of bathing etiquette loomed large in that era. You'll sometimes hear the huts referred to as "bathing boxes" or "beach boxes". They're actually the more progressive cousin of a contraption called a bathing machine, which was used in English seaside resorts during the latter half of the 1800s. If you've watched the regency-era show *Sanditon*, you'll know that a bathing machine was a wagon-like apparatus that allowed ladies to swim without compromising their modesty. It had two doors: One where you'd enter in your regular clothes and another on the other side. After changing into a chin-to-ankle bathing suit, you'd emerge directly into the ocean after the bathing machine had been wheeled into the water.

The Muizenberg huts are static versions of bathing machines and were simply built for modesty's sake at a time when people arrived at the ocean fully clothed and needed a place to change.

Beachgoers could also store their belongings inside the huts and use them for shade.

Over time, the huts became less functional and more decorative, with visitors opting to take shelter from the wind by sitting on the sand behind them, as seen in the image.

There was a brief period in 2017 when the huts were almost removed after falling into disrepair.

Muizenberg residents protested, arguing that the huts had become an important part of the area's heritage. Thanks to the efforts of the community, we can still enjoy these brightly coloured reminders of a bygone era.

Top: The area behind the Muizenberg beach huts (where the umbrellas are crammed in at the top) was known as the "Snake Pit" because of how crowded it became in summer. This photo was taken in the 1950s.

DID YOU KNOW?

Agatha Christie, the famous whodunnit author and playwright who created the fictional detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, visited South Africa in 1922 and often went surfing at Muizenberg.

— Kyra Tarr

Sources: enrichingpursuits.com; capetown.travel; agathachristie.com; iol.co.za; southafricasurftours.com



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AFRICA AT ITS BEST

Alda and Sassie Fick from Caledon enjoy the unspoilt expanse around the wild campsite at Xai Ais in Namibia's Palmwag Concession. Desert-adapted lions sometimes visit the nearby waterhole. Only permit holders may enter this area, and a 4x4 is essential. You must carry your own drinking and washing water, plus fuel and food.

Or leave the logistics to someone else by going on a guided adventure with Heuningland Tours. Their next tour to this area is from 26 May to 7 June 2024. See heuningland.com for more details.

PICTURE TOAST COETZER



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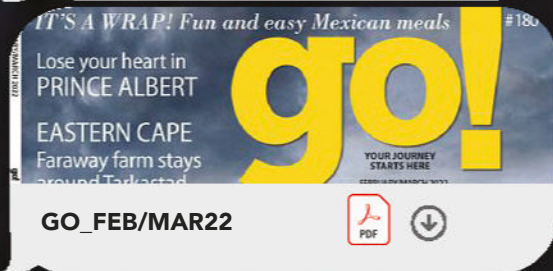
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