

NEWS FROM ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

Eastern Cape, South Africa

April / May 2008



About this newsletter

This is a general newsletter – sent out on a bimonthly basis - about the latest happenings and developments in the Addo Elephant National Park. Please see contact details at the end for further enquiries

ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK HOSTS ONLY 100-MILE TRAIL RUN IN SA

The only 100-Mile Trail Run in the country was hosted in Addo Elephant National Park in the Eastern Cape on 2 and 3 May.



Michael Hendricks crossing the Zuurberg

Designed to test trail runners both mentally and physically, the trail tracks the mountains and valleys of the Park. Runners are challenged to run primarily on tracks within the park itself as well as some stretches of gravel roads.

With an early start in the town of Kirkwood on Friday morning 2 May, the 100-Miler attracted 14 entrants, among them Mimi Anderson and Edward Chapman from the UK and Kelly Lim from Singapore.

Trail runners followed the route over the mountains in the Kabouga section of the Park, into the Sundays River

Valley and then across the escarpment of the Zuurberg Mountains, to finish at the Addo Elephant Park Main Rest Camp.

A 50-Mile Trail Run - covering a section of the 100-Mile route - attracted 59 entrants including Han Frenken from the Netherlands and Christine Deroo of Belgium.

Although runners did not have to watch out for any of the Park's well-known elephant herds, the route covered areas that are home to wildlife such as eland, mountain reedbuck, red hartebeest and the endangered Cape mountain zebra as well as warthog and ostrich. The very elusive leopard also roams the area, as do troops of baboons.

Local runners took top places in the 50-Mile with Michael Hendricks of Kirkwood finishing first in a mere 8 hours and 14 minutes. Aaron Benzi and 'Sampies' Mbulelo, also of Kirkwood, took second and third places respectively.



Michael Hendricks finishes 1st in the 50-Mile

Hendricks, Benzi and Mbulelo's participation in the trail run was made possible by a joint sponsorship from the Addo Elephant National Park and the Kirkwood Wildlife Festival. Another two local runners were also sponsored in this manner.

The first woman to cross the finish line – and take fifth place – was the Western Cape’s Miema Murray.

100-Mile competitors slogged it out into the night with Bruce Arnett of Johannesburg taking first place in 19 hours and 34 minutes. Arnett previously won the trail run in 2005 and 2006. Cape Town heart surgeon AO Okreglicki, who won the 100-Miler in 2007, took second place in 21 hours and 44 minutes.

Jo McKenzie of Sedgefield in the Western Cape was both the first woman and third place winner with a time of 22 hours and 48 minutes.

Many of the trail runners remarked on the incredible scenic beauty of the course which takes place in some of the remotest parts of Addo Elephant National Park.

INTRODUCING THE REVITALISED ALEXANDRIA HIKING TRAIL

This two-day and 36-kilometre circular hiking trail in the Woody Cape coastal area of Addo Elephant National Park is perfect for a weekend getaway and boasts desert-like dunes, lush indigenous forest, dune cliffs crumbling into the sea and spectacular untouched beaches. Recent upgrades to the overnight huts make this a must-do for hikers who walked it many moons ago as well as for those who have not yet had the opportunity to try it out.

Day One The first section of the hike travels through magical forest where ancient yellowwoods and spectacular coral trees can be seen. The “Waterboom” – a gigantic yellowwood named for the reservoir of water held at the base of its trunk - provides an interesting stop. After crossing the open fields of Perdekloof, the trail moves onto the beach where the stark sandy beach ecosystem and dramatic dune cliffs provide breathtaking scenery. Six kilometres of untouched coastline stretches out in front of the hiker before a climb up a wooden ladder to reach the dune fields. Southern right whales can be seen just off shore in certain months and dolphins are often spotted in the waves. The wreck of the Nidaros, an old steamer, can be investigated at low tide.



Hiking through forest: day one

After a walk through aromatic coastal fynbos, hikers will find the Woody Cape hut nestled in thick coastal forest with a view of Bird Island - home to the largest Cape gannet breeding colony in the world - in the distance.

Day Two On the second day the trail traverses sand dunes of the largest coastal dune field in the Southern Hemisphere. Early morning provides hikers an opportunity to investigate the signs of animals, such as jackals, duikers and the endemic hairy-footed gerbil, left on the dunes from the previous night. Tall posts guide hikers through the shifting dune fields. Fascinating ancient middens sites, evidence of the strandloper people who wandered these shores in early days, can also be seen. The last five kilometres of the trail winds once again through indigenous forest.



Crossing the dunefield: day two

The first day is approximately 19.5km, while the second day is about 16.5 km. Hikers will require a moderate to good level of fitness, especially for the dune crossing on the second day.

The Langebos Huts, situated within the forest, are the base huts for the trail and it is recommended that hikers stay at these huts the night before leaving for the first day. The huts are equipped with 12 beds with mattresses (six each in of two huts), a hot water shower, toilet and a braai area. Hikers are welcome to spend the night at the Langebos huts at the end of the second day's hike and the huts are also available for hiring separate to the trail experience.

The Woody Cape hut is situated at the end of the first day's hike, overlooking the sea and Bird Island. This hut is equipped with 12 beds with mattresses in two bedrooms. It has a rainwater tank for drinking and cooking water only and toilets. No shower is available. A gas two-plate stove and basic utensils, cutlery and crockery are provided. No fires may be made at this hut.

A minimum of three hikers (for safety reasons) and a maximum of twelve hikers are allowed on the trail per day. The trail will not be booked exclusively for one group, unless they are twelve in number.

How to get there The trail starts from the Woody Cape rangers office of the Park situated near the town of Alexandria on the R72 to Port Alfred. The R72 is accessed off the N2 between Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown, just after the Nanaga interchange.



The Langebos huts

Just before the town of Alexandria, follow the signs towards Addo Elephant National Park, Woody Cape section through an automated boom gate and down a gravel road, taking two left turns (signposted) before entering the Park office grounds to your right.

For Alexandria Hiking Trail bookings, contact: Matyholweni Reception, Tel 041 4680916/8 or Email: matyholweni@sanparks.org

FRONTIER REGION ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS HONOUR EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE



From L to R: Paul Daphne, Piet Booyesen, Lucius Moolman

An awards ceremony was held on 22 May to honour staff achievements in the four national parks in the Frontier Region: Addo Elephant, Mountain Zebra, Camdeboo and Karoo National Parks.

Field ranger, Piet Booyesen, from the Darlington section of Addo Elephant National Park received the Frontier Region Shield for Bravery Award for his actions in apprehending illegal divers and suspected abalone poachers on Bird Island at the end of January this year. Booyesen was also chosen as the Region's Best Field Ranger for his enormous contribution in terms of the skills – especially tracking wounded animals and apprehending suspects – which he has brought to the ranger core and for his excellent work ethic.

Karel "Pokkie" Benadie was the recipient of the Lifetime Contribution Award for achieving 30 years of service in Karoo

National Park and for being one of only four people in South Africa to have achieved Master Tracker status. Benadie has become a legend – not only among the staff in the Park, but also in the nearby community of Beaufort West - for his excellent tracking skills and his medicinal knowledge of karoo plants.

Addo's Narina Bushcamp, which has become a popular scenic getaway spot at the foot of the Zuurberg Mountains, received a Merit Award for Best Performing Camp for providing both excellent service to guests and a well-maintained camp despite limited resources available. In addition, 99% of customer feedback has been positive, commenting on both staff service and the infrastructure, and occupancy grew by 2.4% over the last financial year.

Mountain Zebra National Park scooped the award for Best Performing Park for excellent performance in all three core business areas of SANParks: Conservation (such as the introduction of cheetah), People & Conservation (such as more than doubling the Park forum members) and Tourism (such as the 10.5% increase in visitor numbers) as well as for outstanding financial performance, special works projects and communications efforts. This Park also achieved Best Performing Camp, Reception of the Year and Gate of the Year Awards.

Regional Manager, Lucius Moolman, highlighted some of the achievements in all four parks and commended staff on their dedicated performance throughout the year. He encouraged guests to take home the message of commitment to excellent performance to those who could not attend the awards ceremony. Paul Daphne, Executive Director: Parks, spoke on the SANParks' successes over the past few years as well as the need to grow tourism to Parks for financial support.



Section Ranger, Oupa Chauke (centre) accepts Narina Bushcamp's award

The awards ceremony was attended by 60 people: staff members of the four national parks, as well as a number of concessionaires and Honorary Rangers associated with Addo Elephant National Park.

The venue was a cosy conference centre at the Zuurberg Mountain Village, a stone's throw away from the boundary fence of Addo Elephant National Park. After a buffet dinner, guests had great fun boogieing the night away on the dance floor.

GIRLS WILL BE URGED TO "CHOOSE THEIR FUTURE" ON 29 MAY

Addo Elephant National park will host 20 girl learners from Nkululeko Secondary School in Uitenhage for "take a girl child to work day" on 29 May.

The theme for the day is "Choose Your Future" and the girls will listen to a motivational speech on the importance of education and on how to respond to peer pressure. They will then spend the majority of the day shadowing staff members in the administrative centre of the Park at Addo rest camp to expose them to the working environment in a national park.

Careers on offer in the park include conservation, tourism, people & conservation (working with stakeholders such as local communities around the park, as well as environmental education), technical services (responsible for maintenance and construction), administration and finance.

The Park will sponsor lunch and refreshments for the girls while Cell C arranges transport and stationery packs.

Five girl learners from Ukhanyo Secondary School in Alexandria will take part in a similar programme at the Park's Woody Cape coastal section.

The Park has participated in the "take a girl child to work day" campaign since 2004.

LATEST DEVELOPMENTS & UPCOMING EVENTS

- Construction of the new Interpretive Centre at Addo restcamp has commenced. The centre will house interactive information on all aspects of the Park including history, cultural heritage, fauna & flora and ecosystems.
- A tender for the operation of Canoe Trails on the Sundays River between Darlington Dam and the Park's Kabouga area has been advertised. The Sundays River is home to between 15 and 20 hippo.
- Construction of a new jetty on Bird Island is almost complete. This will make it easier for the Park's two boats to moor on the island when conducting marine patrols.
- A webcam sponsored by donations from SANParks web forum members will be installed at the Addo restcamp's floodlit waterhole. Currently trenches for cables are being excavated.
- A new bird list for Addo Elephant National Park has been compiled from records collected during the Birding Bonanza 2007, as well as Bird Atlas records and observations of local birders. Find it on the Park's website.
- A mountain bike race is to be held in the Kabouga area of the Park during the annual Kirkwood Wildlife Festival which runs from 27 to 29 June. The race offers three routes of 20km, 40km and 55km and takes place on Sunday 29 June.
- The annual Addo Golf Day organised by the Honorary Rangers will be held at Humewood Golf Club in Port Elizabeth on 6 June. The golf day aims to raise funds for conservation and tourism projects in the Park.

News from South African National Parks...

Dam Day at Camdeboo National Park



The Midlands Hospital float

Saturday the 8th of March saw a hustle and bustle on the Nqweba Dam shores in Camdeboo National Park, Graaff-Reinet as hopeful competitors in the "Anything That Floats" Competition made final adjustments to their floats.

Entries were invited in three categories: Schools, Corporate and Open with 12 groups signing up. Floats had to be home-built and human-powered. Contestants were expected to negotiate obstacles on the 1500 meter course around four buoys, with the SANParks raft as a turnaround point.

There was much excitement when the start gun fired and floats of all shapes and sizes took to the water. Some were quite efficient while others struggled to keep afloat. A few of the contestants

seemed far more intent on hampering their competitors with water bombs than on completing the course.

Some very inventive ideas were put into practice: Midland Hospital used crutches as paddles and an old hospital bed as a base while Profcon Brokers simply strung together tyre tubes and then dressed themselves up a bit.

The overall winners were Karoo Engine Works with their very efficient and speedy pedal-powered float, followed by the Department of Roads & Transport's Mech-Tanic – a smart yellow float, fitted with a customised water-bomb-dispensing catapult.

L'Ormarins Estate (Welgevonden Farm) won the Best Float category with their smart white creation with a blue sail. Best Recycled Float went to Build-It for their innovative use of recycled plastic bottles which ensured they floated all the way.

SANParks was impressed by Profcon Brokers team efforts and awarded an on-the-spot Best Team Effort prize to them.

Miss Dam Day, Christine Buckle, handed out the fantastic prizes, including weekend getaways to Addo Elephant, Mountain Zebra and Karoo National Parks and Wild Cards granting free entry to National Parks for a year.

The festival is accompanied by other activities such as live music, a beer tent and much braaiing on the sidelines. So committed are the inhabitants of Graaff-Reinet that Dam Day was held one dry year despite the fact that no water was to be found in the Dam. Competitors simply carried their floats around the course. This was the first year that SANParks has sponsored and organized the "Anything That Floats" Competition on the 1050-hectare Nqweba Dam in the Camdeboo National Park.



Best team effort: the Profcon float

SANParks Tourism Income Breaks the Half-A-Billion Rand Barrier

At a Media Briefing, during Tourism Indaba 2008, SANParks announced that its tourism infrastructure upgrade programme is on course.

"SANParks continues to implement effective strategies to deal with the management and conservation of the environment and the development of a flagship national parks system which is the pride and joy of all South Africans and the world", said Glenn Phillips, Managing Executive: Tourism Development and Marketing.

In our efforts to attain the highest standards of tourism delivery, we have for the past financial year engaged in major infrastructure upgrade, which has included among others the revitalisation of key facilities in the Kruger National Park, such as our Conferencing Facilities, the replacement of accommodation facilities and the establishment of a new restaurant.

Our upgrade project has also included the revamping of facilities in Mapungubwe, Tsitsikamma, Agulhas, and Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. SANParks has also established the Mokala National Park, and plans are afoot to develop this facility to a key national attraction.

SANParks has for the past three years received grants to the value of R 528 million towards Infrastructure Development Programmes. The funding focused on the upgrade of existing facilities, but some new tourism infrastructure was put in place. The following deliverables were achieved:

- Facilities with 402 beds were upgraded in various national parks
- 33 new tourism accommodation units were constructed. in Addo, Table Mountain, Bontebok and Tankwa Karoo National Parks
- 133km of tourist roads were constructed
- 154 upgraded and new staff accommodation units were put in place in various national parks
- 340km of game fences was constructed around parks.

As part of our quest to develop local entrepreneurship, most work in the projects was done by local contractors and people from neighbouring communities to the parks. SANParks has implemented a contractor development programme and played a major role in the development and mentoring of 40 independent construction contractors.

Part of the organisation's empowering strategy also included the adoption of labour intensive construction methods, which included the manufacturing of material such as bricks, tiles and timber on site. As a consequence of this approach and strategy, 8,500 people were employed with over 1,4 million person days worked. 550 SMME's were used in the programme, while 280 new SMME's were created. Tourists visiting the parks will in all probability stay in a unit that was either upgraded or constructed with labour from local communities.

Some of the new products that tourists can look forward to include a world class interpretive center in Mapungubwe National Park, rest camp at Agulhas National Park, a TFCA Entrance Gate at Kgalagadi that will allow access to South Africa and Bostwana and finally the opening of the Basotho Cultural Village Rest Camp in Golden Gate Highlands National Park.

Phillips announced that un-audited financial statements indicate that the organisation's tourism income has surpassed the half-a-billion rand mark. SANParks tourism figures were also improved in the last year with unit occupancies rising by 1.4% from 69.5% to 70.9%, guests to parks rose from 4,587 million to 4,720 million. The highest unit occupancies were realised in Addo Elephant and KNP with 85.1% and 76.1% respectively. Table Mountain National Park registered 2,477 million visitors and KNP with 1,396 million.

Growth in black visitors was also impressive, having increased from 18% to 20.8%. Though the number of international visitors grew by 0.2% the ratio as compared to local visitors decreased from 26.2% to 24.7%, while SADC visitors increased from 0.6% to 0.8% and South Africans from 73.6% to 74.5%.

On 27 November 2008 SANParks announced that it was introducing Realtime Reservations on line and we are happy to report today that in just four months SANParks has received over R8 million in revenue, despite deliberately not marketing the facility until we were comfortable that we could handle the volumes.

SANParks has also committed to review the gate control mechanisms for KNP during pick periods in order to ensure a better visitor experience.

Enquiries:
Megan Taplin
Tel: +27 (0)42 233 8609
Email: addoenquiries@sanparks.org

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