



On Foot with Shangani Trails!!

Newsletter December 2013

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*Buffalo Herd, Chichacha Pan
Photo Anina Kuenzli
(Zurich, Switzerland)*



An Overview of the Year

2013 was certainly an eventful year that before we knew it, the months had flown by in a flash. It seemed only yesterday in January that we were seeing the Makuleke under water, enduring floodwaters far more destructive than those seen in 2000. Gabe and Ricky Tyler from Nelson, Canada found themselves in the thick of the endless rain, ending in our party having to be evacuated out of the Pafuri Camp to The Outpost as the waters of the Luvuvhu River steadily rose around us.

Gabe and Ricky Tyler on the Luvuvhu Bridge, the water would ultimately reach a level well over the top of the sign!! Photo: Shangani Trails



The Wilderness Adventures, Pafuri Camp would ultimately be largely destroyed by the floods and be closed for the remainder of the year, with the faces of well known look-out points such as Mangala, Crooks Corner and large portions of the Luvuvhu River course being changed forever. Roads were severely damaged or, as in the case of Luvuvhu West, merely ceased to exist as large amounts of silt were deposited and river banks washed away.

Notwithstanding Mother Nature seemingly having turned her watery back on the Concession, the months following the floods saw the Makuleke recover remarkably quickly with the burgeoning vegetation and the abundant surface water attracting large amounts of plains game, buffalo and elephant. Kudu, Zebra and particularly Eland have been seen in large numbers throughout the year while the Nyala, Bushbuck and Warthog populations have increased steadily as the year progressed.



Nyala and Impala now often seen together in the Makuleke. Here a mixed herd is seen on the flood ravaged airstrip.

Photo: Francois Schulze (Zurich, Switzerland)

The numbers of elephant and buffalo have been phenomenal and quality sightings on foot have been common throughout the year.

Once again, we have given the numerous elephant breeding herds great respect, particularly on foot, but nevertheless we have enjoyed some amazing sightings from safe positions on these great herds.



Elephant Breeding herd on the Luvuvhu River. Photo Greta Engelbrecht (Johannesburg, South Africa)

With the floods having claimed the old Pafuri Walking Trail tented camp site, a new site near the Luvuvhu River and the pump house was established with the Camp now becoming self sufficient and all food being prepared on-site.

With daily visits from both elephant and buffalo, not to mention a territorial leopard skirting the camp on a nightly basis, the Pafuri Walking Trails have become a 24/7 Big 5 experience with some great sightings happening in and around the camp between walks. After dark, the calls of the Wood Owls, the loud shrieks of the Thick Tailed Bush Babies and the loud barks of roosting Baboons alarming at the wood sawing grunts of the patrolling leopards, invariably serenaded us to sleep after dinner.

For those wanting a little more comfort, The Limpopo Trail operating out of The Outpost has also produced some incredible walks and close encounters on foot. The staff at the lodge have, as usual, continued to produce some amazingly high, consistent standards of service and food in a wonderful luxury lodge environment.



The Last Walk, Palm Springs. Bill & Sophie Caton, Gary & Elaine King, Jim & Gail Wiseman (All from Alberta, Canada) and Luke Street of Shangani Trails. Photo: Shangani Trails.

The Magic of Elephants- Pafuri Walking Trail- October 2013

In the company of Anina Kuenzli, Adriana Schlapfer, Damaris Danner, all from Zurich, Switzerland and Timothy Jackson (British Columbia, Canada), we set off for the final walk of the Trail looking for rhino tracks while elephant and buffalo are always frequent visitors to the area in which we intended to walk. We parked the vehicle under overcast cool skies, going only a short way before we came across elephant bull tracks. Alan McSmith, assisting me on the Trail, went about explaining how to calculate the bull's shoulder height and then in conjunction with the stride length to roughly draw the elephant on the ground next to the tracks, giving a good indication of his enormous size.

While doing so, we heard branches breaking to our North East which, after Alan had finished his work of art, prompted us to decide to try and find the elephant(s) responsible. What a good call it turned out to be!! We quickly came across fresh bull tracks which we immediately followed. On the way we came across a termite mound against which 3 bulls had slept the night before.



Each separate sleeping space was visible around the termite mound, clearly showing the impressions of trunks, ears and legs.

The Termite Mound where the Elephant Bulls had slept. The impressions on the ground are clearly visible. Photo Tim Jackson. (BC, Canada)

Setting off on the tracks again, Tim soon spotted the bull walking off to our left. We swung around to approach the bull to establish his direction of travel then walked hard to get ahead of him. We eventually outpaced him and turned to face him, lowering our profile by sitting on the ground. Eventually he saw us and continued to approach, ears out but silent.



The Bull approaches. What more is there to say!! Photo Tim Jackson (BC, Canada)

He approached to within 10m stood tall at his full height and surveyed us with a mixture of uncertainty and curiosity. "Sit absolutely still" I breathed to everyone!! With a silent shake of his head, the Bull then turned away and continued his walk to the south east.



*The bull turns away, realising we are no threat.
Photo: Tim Jackson (BC, Canada)*

Once he was some distance away, we stood up and re-lived the fantastic experience before turning in the direction of a nearby pan, picking up the elephant again to our right. The pan turned out to be dry and after a short ablution break, we crossed the drainage line with the intent of looping around to the south and then swinging north again back to the vehicle. The intended route took us past the elephant bull again who was feeding, unconcerned, to our front giving the Group a final sighting of this magnificent creature.

What the New Year Brings!!

While the 2013 Trails year will be a hard act to follow, we are looking forward to another season of great walking in this truly special area of the Kruger National Park. We are currently waiting with some trepidation for the rains to commence in earnest and the effect they will have on the Concession, bearing in mind the heavy rains earlier this year.

The Pafuri Walking Trail

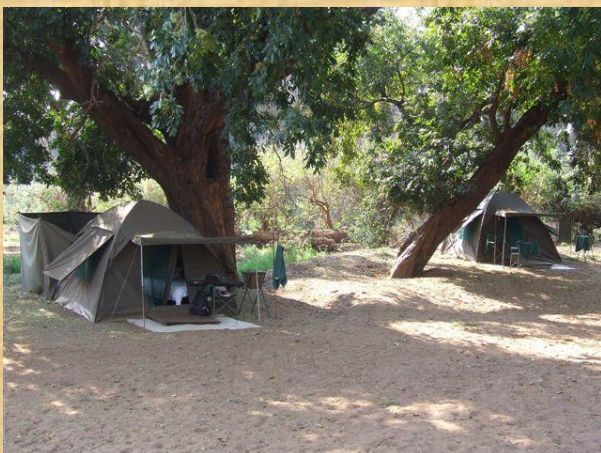
The Pafuri Walking Trail (PWT) proved to be very successful in 2013 with its excellent new location and ability to prepare meals on site being key to its popularity. The new PWT season starts in late March 2014 and goes through until the end of October 2014 with trails being conducted over 3 days and 4

nights, commencing each Friday and Monday afternoons. Morning walks are usually 4 hours in duration while those in the afternoon are not likely to exceed 2 hours. Depending on the Group, the afternoon walk could be replaced by a game drive with short walks into pans or rivers.



The Pafuri Trails Camp: The communal rest area with the 4 outdoor showers in the background.

Photos: Shangani Trails



The sleeping quarters, simple but comfortable.



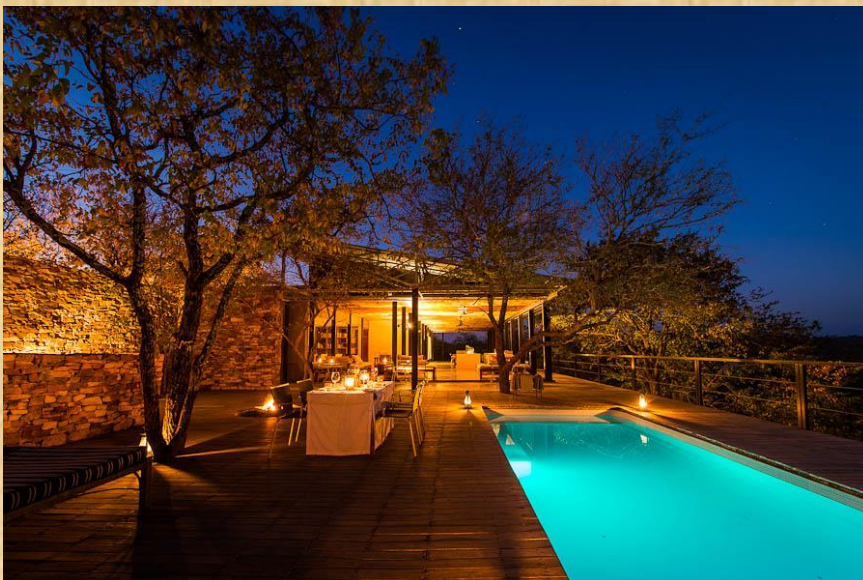
The game viewing is not bad either!!

The Limpopo Trail

Situated on the side of a sandstone ridge overlooking the Luvuvhu River valley, the 12 room Outpost Lodge provides the perfect environment for those who want to combine walking in this very special area of the Kruger National Park with all the trimmings that this luxury lodge can offer.



There are no set departure dates for the Limpopo Trail with the guests deciding on the length of their stay but morning and afternoon walks follow much the same pattern as with the Pafuri Walking Trail in both duration and locations.



In terms of our Hutwini Trail, we are still awaiting a re-opening date of the Wilderness Adventures, Pafuri Camp but will keep you up to date with developments over the course of next year.

We are also offering the 5 night back-packing Wilderness Skills Course in the Makuleke Concession through EcoTraining. For more information on this amazing back to nature experience visit our website at any time.

A very big thank you to all our guests from all over the world who have joined us over the last 12 months, your support has been very much appreciated and trust that you too have been touched by the beauty of our wonderful Concession.

Most people call it Africa but we are privileged to call it home!!

All the very best for Xmas 2013 and we wish you a great 2014 when we hope you will.....

Join us ...On Foot... with Shangani Trails in the Makuleke Concession, Northern Kruger National Park.

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