



On Foot with Shangani Trails!!

Makuleke Concession, Northern Kruger National Park, South Africa

Newsletter May 2012

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Update for 2012

*The highlight of the year thus far has to be the introduction of **The Pafuri Walking Trail** into our portfolio. This very rustic tented camp provides the guest with an extremely wild Big 5 experience in a great setting on the Luvuvhu River Floodplain.*



Coffee on the go at the camp on The Pafuri Walking Trail.



The camp is literally in the middle of the Elephant and Buffalo highways to the banks of the Luvuvhu River allowing great walks from the camp itself while also providing close proximity by vehicle to other wonderful walking areas. Trails run thus far have been eventful to say the least with the guides probably having more wide-eyed fun than the guests!!



Just before lunch at the camp on the Pafuri Walking Trail

The Pafuri Walking Trail has a duration of 4 days, 3 nights commencing on either a Friday or Monday afternoon. The camp is unfenced so nature is very close to say the very least!!

Accommodation is in 2 man dome tents with toilet attached. Bucket showers are provided with hot water to clean off the dust of each day!!

Walks are conducted either from camp or driving to another area parking and walking to and from the vehicle, thus allowing great flexibility depending on the weather and movement of the Game.

Going into winter this Trail is going to be a must for anyone wanting the complete bush experience!!

Check out the website, www.shanganitrails.co.za for more details or contact rhodes@shanganitrails.co.za for a booking availability.

Elephant Encounter- Pafuri Walking Trail- April 2012

Notwithstanding the early wake-up call, the group struggled to get their act together but eventually we managed to get the walk going under grey cool skies!! Our intention was to head initially north towards the ridgeline and the pan just up from Hutwini Gorge then follow the ridge back west and around northwards to Mashashiti Spring. As we walked, the movement of the two elephant breeding herds we had encountered the previous evening was very clear with the tracks indicating that they had also headed towards Mashashiti Spring for the night.

We came across the droppings of an African Civet and took the opportunity to discuss the habits of the animal. Further ahead Willem, my back-up guide, indicated the scattering of feathers of an emerald spotted wood dove on the ground. We discussed the differences to look for to identify what had killed the dove from the state of the feathers being either plucked off for birds of prey or bitten off by jackals or cats. The pan, however, appeared to be quiet and accordingly we moved off following the ridge around to the spring.

The fresh elephant breeding herd tracks heading to the spring remained very clear and together with the still quite dense acacia thornveld, we decided to push further west to some clearer areas before swinging north to Mashashiti. We stopped frequently to listen but nothing apart from Baboon alarm calls was heard. Progressing to the small kopje we often use as a navigation marker on the way to the spring, we came across some leopard scat and discussed the various ways to identify scat as opposed to dung of other animals we had seen.

This conversation was still going on when Willem looking up the path ahead, as all good back-ups should when the lead is engaged in interpretation with guests, urgently hissed “Elephant”!!! The big bull was ambling towards us but we wasted no time in gaining the safety of the higher ground of the small kopje about halfway up.



Enough to get the adrenaline flowing!!

The bull continued down the path to our front, stopping to feed every now and again. We moved lower down to get a better view and all crouched down to watch as the bull would pass in front of us. Directly to our front, about 40m away, he caught our scent and turned towards us, standing tall, trunk up and ears out. The tension within the group was tangible as he continued to advance on us, no thoughts of photos or video as everyone concentrated on the bull now closing quickly below us.

Still with the safety of the slope in our favour but the bull continuing to loom large in front of us, I allowed him to get to about 20m before I stood up cradling my rifle and spoke to him in a firm voice. Shifting his attention to me, he shook his head, trumpeted once, stopped and turned to his left, his sudden movements raising dust all around. Not

happy with me and this intrusion into his day, he turned to advance again. Still standing and talking to him, I raised my voice and again encouraged him to move on. With a final defiant shake of his head; he walked away, audibly grumbling to himself, around and away from the kopje.

The sudden nervous burst of chatter was indicative of the tension of the group during this great sighting which I am sure will stay with my guests from Switzerland Simon, Desiree, Philipp and Anina for a long time to come.

Buffalo!!! Limpopo Trail- Hlangahluwe Pan - March 2012

Having left Outpost Lodge before sunrise, we parked the vehicle and walked in to the northern tip of the pan in the cover of the treeline, the two hippos chilling out in the water in the early morning sunlight were great to see. Sarah MacMaster, my guest from Darwin, Australia, and I made our way close to the water's edge as the two hippos suddenly looked away to their left with a grunt. At the same time I heard the splash of water and the ox-peckers' calls as they flew up. I whispered to Sarah to follow me to look around the Lala Palm thickets and immediately my clenched fist warned her of the close proximity of the buffalo herd at the waterline previously hidden by the lala palms. We back tracked into the cover of the small knob thorns on the higher ground and viewed the herd for a while, all coming down to drink.

With the opposite bank of the pan providing a good viewing platform with the benefit of the high ground of a kopje overlooking the pan, we backed out of the sighting and walked north following the water's edge until we came to dry ground and could cross the open flood plain. From the vantage point of the kopje opposite to the bank we had just walked from, we counted at least 40 buffalo who had moved south after having watered.



Hlangahluwe Pan viewed from the Kopje. Our initial approach was from behind the tree line on the opposite bank.

With time moving on, I wanted to get around the kopje to see what was in the flood plain to the south of us. Walking up the kopje to gain more height, the Limpopo Floodplain was breathtaking in the early morning sunlight. It was, however, quiet, and moving down the kopje slopes with the intention of re-crossing the flood plain back to the vehicle to have tea/coffee at the Limpopo River at Mangeba Look-Out, we re-traced our steps back onto the wide elephant path along the bank of the pan.

Sarah's sharp eyes spotted a beautiful Goliath Heron waiting patiently in the shallows for its prey to show itself and as we turned to move on, my clenched fist again indicated the presence of buffalo!! While we had been on the southern side of the kopje out of sight, a huge herd of buffalo had moved into the flood plain from the north out of the Fever Tree Forest and the high grassland on the plain.

What a sight! The flood plain was alive with buffalo all heading down to water. I motioned to Sarah to walk with me up onto the kopje

slopes again and then along the ridge to the northern edge to view the full extent of the herd.



Part of the buffalo herd emerging from the Fever Forest and grassland at Hlangahluwe, moving to the pan. The photo was taken from the northern slopes of the kopje. Photo Sarah MacMaster

We sat down on a good vantage point and watched wave after wave of buffalo emerge from the tall grass onto the plain below us. No hope of reaching the vehicle for the time being!! I stopped counting at around 150 so it was likely that we had over 200 buffalo on the plain below us.

With the vehicle on the opposite side of the floodplain, we could do nothing but wait for them to water then move back into the grass and forest areas. This they eventually did with some continuing south, others going back the way they had come. Once all the buffalo had left the pan and our crossing point was clear, we ventured out to cross back to the vehicle. A small herd was still in the plain but was some 300m off and although a few large bulls sniffed the air expectantly and looked at us quizzically, we safely crossed with no problem. Another wonderful day in Africa!!

Some happy moments from our featured Guests:



Simon, Desiree, Philipp and Anina enjoying sundowners on The Pafuri Walking Trail.



Sarah MacMasterat Palm Springs the final walk on The Limpopo Trail out of The Outpost Lodge.