

All you need to know about the KNP Wilderness Trails

What the trails are all about

A small percentage of South Africa is classified as real wilderness areas. In the Kruger National Park 49% of the surface area of about 2 million hectares are zoned as wilderness and it is in these areas that the KNP conduct wilderness trails.

There are thousands of wildlife destinations on the African continent but few of them offer an authentic wilderness experience to tourists. Driving around in an open game drive vehicle the whole time and staying in a luxury lodge is not necessary the real thing. Staying in a rustic, primitive camp and experiencing the African bush on foot is much closer to an ultimate wilderness type of recreation. That is what we offer the more adventurous tourist – wildness, remoteness, tranquillity, peace and a big bonus: no other people!

Although the KNP conduct trails in big five areas the main aim of these trails is to have a wilderness experience. The KNP Wilderness Trails cannot compete with other expensive luxury destinations as far as guaranteed game viewing and service is concerned but we can offer vast open spaces and a special kind of atmosphere that very few other destinations can match. Everybody nowadays offers big five as part of the package. Few can offer an experience of real bush exclusivity. KNP Wilderness Trails sees dangerous animals as part of the bigger picture and not the whole picture.

There are so much more to see and to experience and we focus not only on the big aspects of nature but also on the smaller things that most people miss when they only drive around. Being on foot makes you feel part of the environment and not removed from it when you spend your time in a vehicle. It tunes you in to all facets of nature because you can see, smell, hear, touch, feel and even taste wild things. Driving is a visual experience – walking is a sensual experience.

Wilderness ethics and philosophy are very important aspects of the KNP's presentation on trails. It is a sad fact that there are so few real wilderness areas left to the human race on earth and our mission is to create this awareness amongst our clients. The more people worldwide that stand up for our natural heritage the more we and future generations will benefit.

It is never the same people that we say goodbye to than the people that we've met. Simply because in a few days' people relax and enjoy it so much that they forget their problems and the outside world where they came from to such an extent that they become rejuvenated and recharged.

General Information

Wilderness Trails History

There are currently 7 wilderness trails in the Kruger National Park. The first trail, **Wolhuter**, was established in July 1978 in the south western part of the KNP. These trails were so popular that almost immediately two others were opened namely the **Olifants** (November 1979), along the eastern side of the Olifants river, and the **Nyalaland** (July 1980) between Punda Maria and Pafuri in the far north of the KNP.

Bushmans (July 1983) is situated in the southwestern corner of the KNP and neighbours Wolhuter trail. **Metsi Metsi** (August 1988) was built north of Orpen dam on the eastern side of the well-known Tshokwane picnic site.

Both the **Sweni** (October 1990) and the **Napi** (October 1991) are donor camps and are situated near Nwanetsi and Pretoriuskop respectively.

Duration of the trail

Wilderness trails starts on either a **Wednesday** afternoon to a **Saturday** morning or a **Sunday** afternoon to a **Wednesday** morning.

It is a **three-night** trail with the two days in between spent walking.

Trailists arrive and book in at the reception of the rest camp from where the trail departs.

The trail ranger meets the group at **15h30** in a designated parking area in the respective rest camp.

At this point trailists must be ready and equipped as well as all last minute shopping done before the trail departs which only comes back after the three nights in the wilderness camp.

What to bring

Clothing should be comfortable and durable. Neutral colours such as khaki are preferable. Light or bright coloured garments should be avoided. T-shirts are not recommended as they provide little protection against the sun on the neck. A hat and an all-weather jacket should be taken along. A tracksuit, either woollen or lightweight depending on the season, is a useful garment.

Footwear should be worn in prior to the trail, have thick soles and provide good ankle support. Sandals can be worn in camp.

Cameras, binoculars, walking sticks, sunscreen lotion and reference books are optional.

A good quality torch is essential for moving around camp at night. Lighting is provided in the form of kerosene lanterns, as there is no electricity.

Malaria prophylactics are essential. Consult your chemist. Insect repellents can also help to avoid getting bitten by mosquitoes or other insects.

Catering

The trail provides simple but wholesome meals prepared by a cook on either an open fire or a gas stove. Trailists with special dietary requirements must please realize that although the trail can cater for some (e.g. vegetarians) it is very difficult to suit every individual's special need. Prior arrangements in this regard are essential. We will help if it is in any way possible.

Trailists provide their own liquid refreshments in the form of alcohol or any other cool drinks. Drinking water is provided as well as coffee and tea with a fruit juice as part of the bush breakfast. There are limited cooling facilities in each camp. Alcohol abuse will and cannot be tolerated.

Wilderness Atmosphere

The camps are situated within a wilderness trail area and far away from normal tourist activities.

The reason why people come on these trails are to get away from modern day living. We request all trailists to respect the environment that they are in and to keep the atmosphere wild even when in camp.

Please comply by the following rules:

1. No cell phones
2. No radios or tape/cd/mp3 players
3. No private vehicles out to trail camps
4. No generators

Routine

Trailists arrive at the trail camp late afternoon after a slow drive from the individual restcamps. Upon arrival guests are orientated or introduced to the camp and then given time to settle in and relax. The trail leader will give the trailists a full briefing on the camp rules, routine for the next couple of days, what to expect, safety aspects and will answer any questions.

After a wholesome meal the guests have the opportunity to sit around the fire, socialise, listen to night sounds and marvel at the stunning night skies. The mornings start before the crack of dawn with a cup of coffee, tea and a rusk after which the walk will start from camp or a drive might be taken out into the wilderness area to a point from where the morning walk will commence. We return late morning and after a well-deserved brunch a siesta is a welcome treat till mid afternoon. The afternoon activity consists of a short walk and traditional “sundowners”. We return to camp where once again a well cooked meal is served to restore body and soul. The second day is a repeat of the first day’s activities. The last morning trailists have the opportunity to enjoy the early morning bush chorus from the camp as no walking takes places. Guests are then returned to point of departure after a small breakfast.

☀ Take Note

- A maximum of eight persons between the ages of 12 and 65 years may participate per trail. To derive the optimum benefit and enjoyment from a trail adventure, it is recommended that a group comprises persons of a similar age, with common interests and the same level of fitness.
- A reasonable level of fitness is required as up to 20 km may be walked per day. The distance is covered at a leisurely pace, however, to afford trailists an intimate encounter with the wilderness. Due to the terrain covered and the safety factor, handicapped persons should not participate in these trails.
- All participants have to complete an indemnity form before embarking on a trail. Minors must be in possession of a form signed by a parent or legal guardian. These forms should be handed to the trail ranger before departing on the trail.
- The general rules and regulations of the Kruger National Park also apply to trailists.
- Trailists depend on the trail ranger for their safety and for guidance. The trail ranger should therefore be obeyed at all times. Failure to co-operate in this respect could lead to the immediate cancellation of the trail.
- For safety and ethical reasons liquor may be consumed at the trail camp only. **Excessive consumption of liquor is strongly discouraged.**
- Trailists provide their own liquor and soft drinks.
- Limited space is available in a communal refrigerator.
- MALARIA PROPHYLACTICS ARE ESSENTIAL. PLEASE CONSULT YOUR CHEMIST.

☀ Infrastructure

The trail camps are rustic and spartan. There are no electricity or power generators. Accommodation consists out of A-frame huts or tents, as is the case at Napi camp. There are four units that sleep two each. Ablution facilities are communal except the Napi tents where it is on suite. All linen and towels are provided.

Ablutions consist out of flush toilets and gas geyser showers.

There is a communal social area (lapa) with thatched roof or open campfire area.

Cooling facilities consists out of a fridge with limited space.

The cook prepares all meals in a very basic kitchen with washing up basins and storing facilities.

A fence surrounds the camp but it is basically only to tell animals and people where the camp boundary is.

Water for washing gets pumped from boreholes close to camp. Water should not be wasted unnecessarily – especially in dry times.

Individual trail information



Bushmans Trail

Situated in the south western corner of KNP this wilderness area is characterized by deep quiet valleys and high rocky outcrops with spectacular views. These secluded valleys exclude trailists from the outside world.

These high lying outcrops are accessed early in the morning to enjoy the vastness of the landscape as well as to search for game, with surprisingly good results. The broken terrain is ideal for unusual but safe close encounters with big game. The heavy presence of elephant and rhino has resulted in a well marked network of natural game paths and allows for structured and comfortable walks.

Night sounds are unique. Guests can hear a great variety - specifically freckled night jars as well as spotted eagle owls.

White rhino are plentiful as well as other game species. Typical to the terrain are antelope species like kudu, klipspringer and mountain reedbuck.

Plantlife is very diverse especially in the higher lying areas – this area is also classified as a botanical reserve within KNP and unique trees only to this area occur.

The high altitude of the area accounts for unusual bird sightings from time to time including redthroated wryneck and jackal buzzard.

Bushman paintings are a big attraction as well as other cultural and historical sites. Trips to these sites are a regular feature of the trail routine, the aim of which to educate trailists on San (Bushman) culture and their art.

The camp is uniquely hidden between a series of massive granite kopjes providing a very pleasant atmosphere.



Metsi-Metsi Trail

This wilderness trail is situated in the eastern side of KNP along the Nwaswitsontso river near Tshokwane picnic site. The departure point is Skukuza restcamp.

The Lindanda plains with masses of game at certain times of the year offer hikers a chance to walk amongst high densities of plains game. Black rhino are well represented in this area as well as the more common white rhino. Predators such as cheetah and lion are also fairly common. Away from the plains the Nwaswitsontso river can be accessed which provides for spectacular scenery. This river is very important in dry times and attracts game and birds in large concentrations.

Birds unique to plains habitats such as ostrich, kori bustard, lappet faced vultures, secretary birds and black coucal can be seen.

Vegetation is homogeneous and knobthorn and marula trees dominate.

The large open camp is situated on an tributary of the Metsi Metsi river at the foothill of the imposing Nwamuriwa mountain.



Napi Trail

This wilderness area is situated on the undulating granitic landscape between Pretoriuskop and Skukuza restcamps. Both the Mbyamithi and Napi rivers flow through the area and offers scenic walks along the riverbanks with stunning large trees.

Vegetation consists mainly of broad leaf woodland and tamboti thickets. Large open sodic patches are pleasant to the eye and host unique plants such as the summer impala lily.

Seasonal pans in these areas allows for lots of big game sightings. Both white and black rhino are regularly seen wallowing in these pans.

The camp is fantastic for night sounds and amongst others giant eagle and barred owl give the night character. The Mbiyamithi river is one of the best habitats to view thick billed cuckoo because of the prevalence of it's parasitic host the redbilled helmet shrike.

The camp consists out of four safari tents with on suite ablutions and a large veranda from which to view the surrounding bush and the Mbiyamithi river below the tents.



Nyalaland Trail

The most remote and out of way wilderness trail camp of all is situated between Punda Maria and Pafuri with the spectacular gorge of the Levuvhu river a big attraction. Punda Maria restcamp is the departure point for this trail and is only 540km or a 5 hour drive from Johannesburg. The area is one of the best in the country for bird watching and various localized species such as Verraux's (Black) eagle, Pel's fishing owl, grey headed parrot and mottled spinetail can be seen. The last mentioned roosts inside a giant baobab in the trail camp and can be watched at leisure whilst in camp.

The area is botanically very rich with scarce sandveld and dryland vegetation communities. The real drawcard to this spectacular wilderness area are large concentrations of giant baobabs.

There are no large concentrations of game but unique animal species occur such as nyala, Sharp's grysbok, eland, roan antelope, yellow spotted rock hyrax, elephant shrews and red rock rabbits. Elephant and buffalo are regularly seen.

Important cultural sites occur representing Zimbabwe stone culture and San rock art. One of these sites is situated on a high hill right above the Levuvhu river, which is easily accessible with a spectacular view. Fossilized remains of two types of dinosaur can be seen, making this area unique.

The camp is hidden in a secluded spot on the Madzaringwe river with towering cliffs of the Soutpansberg in the background.



Olifants Trail

The departure point is from Letaba restcamp.

Situated on the banks of the Olifants river this wilderness area is very popular as it offers remote valleys and gorges where the river flows through the Lebombo mountains as well as flat open plains with good game viewing potential. The river is a big attraction especially as both the Olifants and Letaba rivers join before flowing into Mozambique. These rivers are the focal point of the trail experience as it has a lot to offer. Large concentrations of hippo and crocodiles are dominant features. The day is incomplete without the call of fish eagles, ever present on the rivers. Birding as well as a divers plantlife are a big plus for this popular wilderness trail.



Sweni Trail

Satara restcamp is the departure point for this trail.

The biggest attraction on this wilderness trail is the Sweni river surrounded by open flat thorn tree savannah where large herds of game concentrates at certain times of the year. This in turn attracts large concentrations of predators and the biggest drawcard of the trail experience is to be part of

this predator/prey relationship. Hearing lions roar at night occurs frequently as sound travels far in this open landscape. Birds typical of plains landscapes occur. The Sweni river accounts for frequent sightings of the shy nocturnal white backed night heron. Mozambique night jar and scops owl are dominant night calls from camp. The flatness and remoteness of the area offers excellent star gazing opportunities. The camp is situated on the Sweni river and is surrounded by open plains. A covered lapa allows one to view the surrounding plains and associated game through out the day.



Wolhuter Trail

The first of all the wilderness trails is situated roughly between Berg-endaal, Ship mountain and Afsaal picnic site. It was named after one of the first rangers that were appointed in the establishment of the Sabie Game Reserve in those days - 1902. Harry Wolhuter later in his career killed a lion single handedly with his hunting knife while out on patrol on horseback.

It is a spectacularly scenic wilderness area characterized by high granite outcrops with deep valleys as well as a flatter undulating landscape.

Wilderness qualities are high as the trail area is far removed from the boundaries of the Kruger National Park.

Culturally, Wolhuter Trail was a very active area in days gone by and a lot of relics of the past can be seen everywhere. Evidence of Bushmen and stone and iron age people can be found on the higher lying areas and rocky outcrops.

The famous Jock of the Bushveld and his master Sir Percy Fitzpatrick were also criss-crossing this area on their adventurous hunting trips and transport driving routes.

Plantlife is very diverse especially in the higher lying areas – this area is also classified as a botanical reserve within the KNP.

Birdlife is good with a lot more species to be seen in summertime when all the summer migrants return.

White and black rhino can be found in the Wolhuter Wilderness area with the former very concentrated. Elephant and buffalo are also regularly seen as well as sable, mountain- and common reedbuck can be seen.

Other more common species include zebra, giraffe, kudu, waterbuck, blue wildebeest and warthog.

Wolhuter Wilderness Trail's biggest plus point however is to sit on a granite outcrop and to stare into the distance and experience a wild feeling in a wild land amongst wild creatures.