

# Shangani Trails

OUR DREAM,  
YOUR EXPERIENCE

## ***On Foot with Shangani Trails!!***

***March 2018***

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*African Hawk Eagle in flight, Hutwini Gorge, Makuleke Concession.*

*Photo: Sem Jones (The Netherlands)*



### ***Makuleke Concession Update***

*Once again the Rain Goddess, Mujaji, has smiled upon the Concession with good rains being recorded in February and March of 2018, filling the pans (natural waterholes) and creating a beautiful lush bushveld that would warm any Jumbo's heart! Some areas did, however, receive more than others with the Limpopo Fever Tree Forests and Floodplains in particular becoming difficult to walk after the concentrated downpours.*

*The 2017 Trails season was indeed a busy one with the Trails Camps being treated to consistent visits by Elephant and Buffalo while increased feline activity saw a number of excellent Lion sightings and frequent vocalizations being experienced during the night.*



*We were also blessed by a prolonged visit by a trio of Cheetah for the first time in ten years, their presence changing the lives of the resident Warthog community forever!! As usual the guttural grunts and clear tracks of the resident territorial Leopards were frequently heard and seen respectively but, as per usual, these majestic cats remained as elusive as ever visually!!*

*We were particularly spoilt in 2017 by the wetland areas of Reedbuck Vlei, Nyala and Benini Pans remaining full of water deep into the Trails Season, only surrendering their last pools in late September. The birdlife in and around these wetlands was indeed rich while frequent appearances by Elephant Bulls, large herds of Eland and Buffalo seen against the backdrop of the Fever Tree Forests bathed in the soft light of the amazing Makuleke sunsets made for some amazing experiences for Guests and Guides alike.*



*A large herd of Eland on the periphery of Reedbuck Vlei with the Fever Trees being brushed lightly by the late afternoon sunlight. Photo: Shangani Trails.*

*We once again welcomed guests from all over the world including the UK, the USA, Canada, Germany, France, The Netherlands, India, Australia and New Zealand while Africa was well represented by visits from Zimbabwe, Ghana and, of course, the vibrant local South African market, many of which were repeat visits. A heartfelt thanks to all who joined Shangani Trails in 2017 and trust that you will return to our beautiful Concession in the very near future.*

*We were indeed fortunate to enjoy many unbelievable trails with some exceptional and unique sightings and experiences. As usual, I thought it would be fitting to include an insight into one such Trail with Francois and Hannelie Duvenage and their close friend Corni van der Merwe. I hope you enjoy the walks as much as we did on the actual ground at the time!*



### ***An Amazing First Afternoon Walk! July 2017***

*Arriving at the Trails Camp, we were warmly welcomed by the ladies with cold drinks and warm facecloths before unloading the luggage and allocating tents. Delaying conducting the camp safety brief somewhat, I quickly led the Group down to the river bank as I was sure that the Elephant Breeding Herd we had seen earlier driving in, would be in the area. Sure enough, as we emerged from the undergrowth, we saw the herd slowly moving upstream on the opposite bank with some in the water to our right.*



*The Breeding Herd to greet the Group on their arrival! Photo: Shangani Trails*

*With the Camp safety brief complete and sundowner orders on ice, we drove out for the first walk of the Trail to the Mayangani pans just off Rhino Boma Road. As we passed Pumphouse Look-Out, I saw some fresh droppings on the road. Further investigation revealed fresh female Leopard tracks accompanied by the scat! No doubt she was still in the area but the chances of finding her were minimal with the bush in Ambush Alley being so thick. Right place, wrong time!*

*Reaching the airstrip, we were greeted by Zebra, Nyala, Warthog and some handsome Kudu Bulls. Arriving at our jump-off point on Rhino Boma road we walked south towards Mayangani pan, the intention being to loop around it and then back north to visit another pan nearer the road. With the wind unfortunately against us, blowing from our right to left towards the pan, we saw a large herd of Eland as we approached the drainage line leading into Mayangani. Knowing that there was a small ridge overlooking the drainage line just to our west, I made for that looking for a clear view of the herd, a treat to see indeed!*

*Nearing the top of the ridge, a small herd of Buffalo then appeared walking towards the pan to enjoy their late afternoon drink! This created somewhat of a dilemma as we had the wind direction against us with a large herd of Eland moving away from the pan and a herd of Buffalo moving into the pan. Both sets*



*of animals being notoriously sensitive to the wind and our presence! We moved into a position where we could see both herds at the same time, the albino Eland Cow Hutch and I had seen in the past, now being clearly visible. Both herds stopped below us, instinctively knowing someone was there but not smelling anything, our wind fortunately being blown away from both herds!*



*Part of the Eland herd. Note the flock of Red Billed Queleas in flight. Photo: Francois Duvenage*

*Thankfully, the Buffalo never caught our scent and slowly moved off in the direction of the pan. The Eland, however, now easily fifty-odd strong, weren't going anywhere fast and had seen our movement. After having enjoyed a good view, I asked Hutch to lead the Group out to a large Leadwood behind us leaving the herd to its own devices, undisturbed. A great sighting of these, the largest Antelope in Southern Africa! However, with the Buffalo now drinking at Mayangani and the Eland blocking our intended route, we decided to investigate another pan to the east and take in a good sunset at the same time.*

*We crossed the open plain and were nearing the Fever Trees that guarded Mahzongana pan when Hutch hissed in my ear "Elephant!!!" The Bull was slowly making his way to the pan from our south west and rear. I quickly led the Group back in a loop to come up on his flank giving us a great side-on view with the sun behind our backs. He passed us, stopping to feed every now and again, still heading intently towards the pan. Back tracking on my original loop, I moved the Group to the edge of the pan itself, finding the Bull again feeding on a fallen Fever Tree, showing his strength by easily picking up the largest of branches to get at the favoured green bark.*

*We watched the big mature Bull in some wonder, his soft eyes confirming his tolerance of our presence at a respectful distance. With the light fading, we reluctantly turned for the vehicle, souls greatly enriched by the encounter.*





*The Bull feeding off the Fever Tree. A big Boy!! Photo: Francois Duvenage (Pretoria, RSA)*

*On the way, a few Jackals began their characteristic wailing calls, very close but unfortunately not showing themselves. The sundowners tasted particularly good after an excellent first afternoon's walk!*

### ***Morning Walk of some Wonder July 2017***

*With the ever elusive Pels Fishing Owls' call still rolling through the camp from the river, we completed the wake-up, enjoyed coffee and a light breakfast before heading out to the Fever Tree Graveyard area for the morning walk. We*



*immediately enjoyed a good sighting of a Bushbuck Ram in ambush alley while as we drove onto the Pafuri Camp access road, we came across a further pair of Bushbuck, the female allowing Francois a good photo opportunity.*

*While watching the Bushbuck, Guinea Fowl started alarm calling, causing some consternation to the Bushbuck pair!!*

*The Female Bushbuck looks intently at the area where the Guinea Fowl were alarm calling! Photo: Francois Duvenage*



*Further on we identified some Porcupine and Hyena Tracks on the road while just before the Fever Tree Forest a very cold Four Toed Elephant Shrew sat in the morning sun in front us desperately seeking some warmth.*



*The Four Toed Elephant Shrew. Cute little guy!  
Photo: Francois Duvenage*

*We drove on and through the magical Fever Tree Forest which took on a mystical look as the youthful sun penetrated the canopies, the individual rays searching their way through the gaps to the undergrowth below.*

*We parked at Nyala Pan, conducting the safety brief before spending a short time on the banks identifying Great White Egrets, a Goliath Heron, a number of Green Backed Herons and an African Darter spreading its wings to dry after a sortie into the water for breakfast! With that we turned to the east towards the Fever Tree Graveyard to commence our walk.*

*Nearing the Fever Trees we were entertained by a Bearded Woodpecker flyby while persistent high shrieks eventually led us to a Brown Headed Parrot in an unusual position halfway up a mature Leadwood.*



*The Brown Headed Parrot in the Leadwood!  
Photo: Francois Duvenage*



*As we entered the Fever Trees I caught sight of 4 Elephant Bulls moving to our right but some distance off and very mobile towards the river. At that pace we had no chance of closing the gap but were soon rewarded to see four beautiful Eland on the rocky edge of the Graveyard to our front. Having enjoyed a good view of these beautiful antelope, we finally swung to the north and into a Baobab wonderland.*



*Walking amongst these giant icons of the Lowveld was indeed an amazing experience, each bearing the scars of many battles fought with Elephants over decades past.*

*Enjoying part of the Baobab Forest, an amazing place! Photo: Garth Kingwill Cape Town RSA*

*Another small herd of Eland crossed the open plain in front of us before we gingerly picked our way down the kopje on which we had stopped for a short break before making our way through the ridges to the west heading towards the Fever Tree forest and beyond to complete our wide loop back to the vehicle. As we made our way through the beautiful forest we picked up the call of the not too often seen Scaly Throated Honey Guide, his elongated shrill call allowing us to pinpoint his position high up in the Fever Tree canopy. We then turned south east towards the Luvuvhu River for coffee and rusks. On our approach to a very picturesque spot on a bend in the river, we spied a young Elephant Bull downstream of us on the Kruger Bank. As we distributed our coffee and rusks, we saw him begin to cross the shallows onto Makuleke soil and I remember remarking that we may pick him up on our short remaining journey back to the vehicle. Little did we know at the time the significance of this sighting!*

*Some rather large Crocodiles had been on the riverbank to greet us, sunbathing on the water's edge, initially scrambling back into the water on our arrival but*



*by the time we left they had once again assumed their position in the sun! This time seemingly unperturbed by our presence as we bade them farewell.*



*Large they were indeed!! Photo: Francois Duvenage*

*With time moving on and breakfast beckoning, we turned in the direction of the vehicle making for the ridgeline that would lead us back to Nyala Pan. We were nearing the road and the first Baobab-strewn ridge when I picked up a young Elephant Bull off to my right. Thinking that it was likely the one we had seen in the river earlier, I turned the Group back towards him to gain a better position. However, as we moved closer more of the area opened up giving me a view of a young Elephant cow mock charging some poor Impala that had no doubt ventured too close to the Breeding Herd of Elephant that was now becoming more visible with each step we took! “Take them up the ridge, quickly” I hissed to Hutch, who without hesitation swung to his left, crossed the road and headed up the small ridge into the Baobabs closely followed by the very disciplined Group.*

*In the interim, I had let the Group pass by and tagged on at the end of the line keeping my eye on the Breeding Herd, many of whom were now standing tall, ears out, keenly aware of us not fifty metres away. As we neared the top of the first ridge, a loud trumpet from the Matriarch saw the herd, probably around twenty strong, turn around as one and head back into the riverine forest towards the river. Once onto the second ridge, I stopped the Group and we all excitedly discussed the brief, unexpected but adrenalin-filled encounter before making our way down to the back-end of Nyala pan and the vehicle.*

*The return journey to camp saw a great sighting of an Elephant Bull reaching high up into a Nyala Berry tree, no doubt looking for the berries now in abundance in the canopy!*





*More Eles were seen but the thick foliage did not allow a great sighting. Stopping off at the Luvuvhu Bridge we were lucky enough to enjoy the company of a male Giant Kingfisher in one of the Sycamore Figs near the railing while Pied Wagtails busily patrolled the sandbanks in the river.*

*The Giant Kingfisher at the Luvuvhu River Bridge. Photo: Francois Duvenage.*

### ***Into 2018- Trails on Offer***

*The Pafuri and Hutwini Walking Trails Tented Camps are both situated within one of most scenic landscape areas of the Makuleke Concession. Enjoy imposing sandstone ridges and exquisite Riverine Forest while being in the middle of some very busy Big 5 routes with the Luvuvhu River being on your doorstep. The walking trails run seasonally from 1 April to 31 October usually on a 4-day, 3-night basis with no set departure dates.*

*Accommodation is in spacious walk in, two-person tents with ensuite, enclosed toilets (porta-loos as provided in caravans or boats). Spring beds and warm bedding are provided.*



*Four bucket type hot water showers, available twice a day, are provided to wash the days' dust away. All meals are prepared on site in a gas driven kitchen including a hearty "Brunch" on return from the morning walk and a sumptuous three course dinner to end the day after the afternoon activity and night drive back to Camp.*



*Our flagship product offers a complete bush experience covering on foot views of incredible diverse landscapes, tracks and sign, birding while the Big Five are, of course, never far away! (Photo: Garth Kingwill, Cape Town, RSA)*



***The Pafuri Camp Lodge*** offers a *Luxury Walking Trail* using the lodge and all its trimmings as a base. Accommodation is in luxury tents on platforms each with a river front view while other amenities include swimming pool, bar and three high class lodge meals a day. As with the tented camp option, a game drive vehicle would be dedicated to the Trail to drive to and from the area in which you would be walking. The duration of the Trail would normally follow the tried and tested 3 nights/4 days but having no set departure dates it would allow one to extend or reduce this to your own requirements





*The Wilderness Back-Packing Trails offer between 3-5 nights sleeping under the stars, carrying your world on your back for the duration. You will not get closer to Nature than this, experiencing amazing topography and wildlife while immersing yourself in the spirituality of the African Bush.*



*Baobab Hill House offers a self-catering, fully fenced and serviced 4-bedroomed house with all amenities including solar power and back-up generator, swimming pool, fully fitted kitchen, outside lapa and braai area.*

*Shangani Trails wishes you a very successful 2018 and we look forward to you joining us.....;*

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

***Don't hesitate to contact us at:***

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