



On Foot with Shangani Trails!!

November 2020

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Bronze Winged Courser, Makuleke Concession, KNP. Largely nocturnal, this beautiful bird is often seen on the roads at night feeding on Insects. Photo: Chito Y Malay Kentucky USA



Shangani Trails Covid19 Update

After many months of frustration for the Tourism Industry as a whole in South Africa, the movement to Covid19 Level 2 Lockdown Restrictions meant a welcome lifting of the ban on Inter-Provincial movement for leisure purposes, thus allowing Shangani Trails to host our first Trail of the walking season for South African Guests...in late August!!

The South African Government then went further to announce a lowering of the Lockdown Restrictions to Level 1 from 21 September 2020 including, most importantly, the re-opening of South African international borders for incoming tourism travel from the 1st October 2020! There were, however, several underlying conditions ranging from stringent prior to arrival Covid19 testing regulations for foreign tourists to a "Country Blacklist" indicating which countries were, at the time, considered too Covid19 high risk by South Africa to accept their travellers into this country.

Under considerable pressure, the South African Government have now finally scrapped the “Blacklist”, thus opening international travel to and from all countries no matter the level of Covid19 risk, subject obviously to certain Covid protocols be satisfied by the travellers. Once these final conditions have been released we will update you accordingly and any changes that may occur as we progress into 2021.

In terms of Shangani Trails and the Makuleke Concession, the two Trails Camps are now sadly closed for the season although we were lucky enough to conduct three trails between late August and the end of October 2020 for South African Residents. The Trails Camps will once again open on 1 April 2021 with the season running through to 31 October 2021. However, the luxury Pafuri Camp Lodge and the Self-Catering Baobab Hill House remain open throughout the Festive Season and into 2021 to cater for any Walking Trails that may be required.

The First Trail of 2020! Exploring Mashashiti Spring

The day dawned cool but clear as everybody gathered for coffee, rusks and fruit before driving out for a walk into Mashashiti, a beautiful 3-tiered natural spring! An Elephant Bull greeted us in the Ana Tree Forest on Luvuvhu West but we didn't linger too long and left him to his own devices! Nyala, Impala and the odd Warthog kept us company before we reached the Airstrip where we found a pair of Black Backed Jackals warming themselves in the early morning sunlight! Breakfast certainly wasn't a priority as they lounged and yawned, one falling asleep amid some Elephant dung!



The Black Backed Jackal sleeps in the Elephant Dung! Photo: Shangani Trails

We continued on to the main tar road, after which the Group spotted a pair of African Hawk Eagles to our right. One apparently had dropped some prey as it flew off while the other settled on a low branch, looking down searching for the lost breakfast menu item!

Moving on, we discussed the Red Billed Buffalo Weavers' and Red Headed Weavers' nests in a large Baobab at the 4km marker while a small herd of Zebra was the only other highlight of a quiet..ish drive to our jump-off point for the walk. The safety brief complete, we headed initially west, then cut south to negotiate a small sandstone ridge. On the way Johna Turner, my co-lead guide for the Trail, and I pointed out numerous excavations where the elusive nocturnal Aardvark had sought after a meal of termites and ants! Reaching the ridge, I stopped the Group to point out the path that had been worn into the sandstone rock by countless Elephant and Buffalo over the millennia, we were indeed walking in the footsteps of giants! As we picked our way along the rocky path, we admired a mature Baobab bearing the scars of many a battle fought with Elephant over the centuries before identifying a Pod Mahogany and Sjangbok Tree.

Several alarm barks of a Kudu suddenly echoed around us, probably emanating down in the valley near the still unseen spring. We finally emerged at a scenic look-out point allowing us views from high above the valley below all the way to the Luvuvhu River to the south.

From this vantage point we managed to see the small herd of Kudu which had been alarming as we had approached the viewpoint. Savouring the picturesque scene below us, we had time to admire an excellent example of a small leafed Rockfig and sample the very pungent "Los my Uit" and Lavender Croton wild herbs growing freely in and amongst the colourful lichen strewn rocks at the look-out!

Fresh Elephant tracks were evident on the path we followed to descend into the valley below. We took the opportunity to discuss the Elephant Tracks in terms of the direction in which the animals were heading and why. A great deal of Hyena activity was also seen with tracks leading down a different path which we decided to follow being interested to see where we came out! We were rewarded by a few sightings of a large Female Hyena, the amount of activity pointing to a possible den being in the vicinity. I was pleased to identify some very clear Sharpe's Grysbok tracks in the middle of an Elephant track, this

diminutive antelope's presence not being seen too often. We continued on towards the three Baobab trees guarding the entrance to the Mashashiti Spring, Johna and I checking the wind as we neared these iconic trees.

We quietly discussed some Porcupine tracks before we continued on past the Baobabs pausing to listen for any activity in and around the area! Silently, we made our way into Mashashiti, Johna and I once again relishing the tranquillity of this the central hub of the Concession. As we approached the second tier of the Spring, I sensed rather than saw movement down below at the main pool, Buffalo! Johna quickly organized the Group as I led the way to an excellent vantage point that overlooked the main pool below.



Part of the herd of Buffalo at the Mashashiti Spring! Photo: Shangani Trails

As we neared, I realized that it was a sizable herd, some drinking others lying down chewing their cud! A small herd of Kudu, including a statuesque large Bull, was also present. The Kudu either heard or smelled us, running off thus alerting the Buffalo who also ran but not far, milling around in some confusion. We took up our position to view them but not for long as individual animals were soon spooked enticing the entire herd to bolt away to the south in a cloud of dust. Normally we try to avoid the Buffalo stampeding away but as they had already watered, Johna and I weren't too concerned.

With that, it was an ideal time to enjoy coffee, tea and rusks before descending down to the main pool. I explained that a Makuleke belief was that if you do not utilize the spring water in some manner during your visit, the next time you arrive it will be dry! With all rituals complete in the Buffalo muddied water, we turned and made our way up to the second tier, noting the pleasing strong flow of water emerging from the underground vents!

Although always reluctant to leave Mashashiti, we picked up the paths heading north east towards a saddle in the ridgeline beyond which lay the vehicle and the promise of the ladies' much vaunted Brunch awaiting at camp! We identified Ant Lion tracks while Johna's constant observations revealed Leopard tracks which were then compared to the Group's existing knowledge of those of the Hyena. Further up the same path, a fairly well used African Civet's midden was seen, the exoskeletons of numerous Millipedes and insects strewn all around while the seeds in the midden confirmed the Civet's omnivorous status! We followed the well-worn paths up through the saddle in the ridge before stopping in shade for a short break.

As I looked up a Hyena was walking from our right to left in the treeline about fifty metres away. A brief but good sighting for the Group on foot!



The Hyena peers through the thickets! Photo: Shangani Trails.

We covered the short distance back to the vehicle, taking time to savour another amazing walk to Mashashiti Spring! So good to be back!

Looking to 2021

Annus Horribilis is the only way to describe 2020 for everyone throughout the world but let's hope we can now look forward to 2021 being a year of regeneration and living successfully within the demands of the new normal! The majority of guests who booked for trails in 2020 chose to postpone to 2021 rather than cancel and for this Shangani Trails is extremely grateful!

We look forward to those trails and I will be in contact shortly with these Groups to discuss any changes that may be necessary.

As indicated earlier, any Covid19 resurgences aside, both the Trails Camps will re-open on 1 April 2021 to 31 October 2021 with bookings now being taken! In conjunction with Return Africa, we will be offering discounted prices on all 3 forms of accommodation available on the Concession, Pafuri Camp Lodge, Baobab Hill House and both the Pafuri Walking Trails' tented camps, until the end of March 2022. Remember, that Shangani has conducted many a successful Walking Trail out of the Pafuri Camp Lodge and Baobab Hill House throughout the year! Please feel free to phone, email or go through the website to request quotes and availability details at any time.



You never know who might drop in for lunch! Photo: Glenda Neill, Cape Town, RSA

Alternatively, don't forget that Shangani Trails is highly active on FaceBook and now also on Instagram, " @shanganitrails_ ", so if you are on any of these Social Media platforms please look us up and like/follow using the link below! Many thanks!

In addition, Shangani Trails is also now active in the Southern and Central Kruger National Park conducting Privately Guided Safaris by vehicle through these areas for those who may not want to be as close to Mother Nature as we would be on foot or perhaps to link these with the Walking Trails in The Makuleke gradually winding our way from south to the north through the Kruger.

These Safaris have proved to be extremely successful in 2019 and the early part of 2020 prior to the Lockdown. Please see the website and/or contact us for more details!



Shangani Trails wishes you a safe and healthy remainder of 2020 and we look forward to you once again joining us.....,

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

Don't hesitate to contact us at: 027 83 7071329 or....

rhodes@shanganitrails.co.za or www.shanganitrails.co.za

Rhodes Bezuidenhout,

Shangani Trails

