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Wild

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in Kruger's far north

UNDER THE
SPELL OF
THE ELUSIVE
Cape
LEOPARD



SAVING RHINO WITH A FEARLESS VET | BIRDSONG DECODED
KAROO HIDEAWAY: FOLLOW A 4X4 TRAIL TO SOLITUDE

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Wild
AUTUMN 2011

KARIN SCHERBICKER

WILD COVERS

Which one did you get?



SEYMS BRUGGER

The regal adult leopard adorns the cover of the 80-page bumper issue, mailed exclusively to members of the new Wild Card.



GALLO IMAGES / GERALD HINDE

The adorable cub is on the cover of the 64-page promotional issue, produced to introduce you to the Wild Card.



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In the north of Kruger the bush becomes a lush landscape of fever trees and baobabs where myriad birds and rare antelope shelter.



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Pel's fishing owl hunts over quiet stretches of water.

“Leopards were everywhere but nowhere, behind every bush but always, frustratingly, just out of sight.”
ANDREW BAXTER,
page 36

ED'S LETTER



PARADISE FOUND

If this is the first time you get to read a *Wild* magazine, you will soon see why *Wild Card* members are so wild about it. To let you experience some of the thrilling aspects of the *Wild Card* parks (and there are more than 80

of them, countrywide) this special promotional issue contains a selection of stories from the current *Wild* magazine, which is sent free to all members of the new *Wild Card*.

We always make an effort to explore out-of-the-way destinations and, with *Wild* as your guide, you too will discover stunning hideaways you're likely to have all to yourself. In this issue we feature Embizweni Cottage for 4x4 enthusiasts in the Karoo National Park, the Cederberg Heritage Trail for hikers and Mvubu Bushcamp in Goukamma Nature Reserve for families.

We also take you to the extreme north of Kruger, to Lanner Gorge. This gem gets my vote as the most dramatic vista in Kruger and took my breath away when I was up there researching the story. The canyon lookout is accessible only to guests of the two private lodges in the Makuleke contractual park, but anyone based at Punda Maria can enjoy the greater Pafuri region. Though birders have long known about its lush appeal, the forests along the river banks merit exploration by anyone who dares to go where the crowds don't.

Wild is all about our natural heritage. By purchasing a *Wild Card*, you make a contribution to conservation. You join a community of nature lovers who experience what others dream about and you get the pick of accommodation offers. Plus you get a year of free access to every *Wild Card* park (go to www.wildcard.co.za for a complete list).

Do enjoy this special issue of *Wild*. May autumn inspire you to travel off the beaten track and may we soon welcome you as a member of the *Wild Card* community!

Romi



Wouldn't you love to read all the stories in every issue? *Wild* magazine is mailed free to members of the new *Wild Card*, four times a year!

LETTERS

* WINNING LETTER



MOTHER LOVE

This has got to be my favourite picture of all times. I took this on a very hot and humid day last year at Addo. We were sitting at Hapoar waterhole and the ellies were cooling themselves down in the mud. I took around 200 photos but this one best defines the love of a mother elephant. I'm entering this in the hope I get a new card for my efforts.

Rose Douglas, email

What a touching picture! Unfortunately, our photo competition has drawn to a close but we are rewarding you with some CAPESTORM gear for your efforts. - Ed.

WE BRAKE FOR BEETLES

Since signing up in December, my wife and I have used our *Wild Card* membership to visit Kruger National Park on six different occasions and to walk in Robberg for the first time since visiting the Plettenberg Bay area annually for 30 years! We have several parks firmly in our camera sights for this year.

We were in the Pretoriuskop/Skukuza area this weekend and were concerned that vehicle drivers do not seem to be aware that dung on the road is full of activity, with industrious dung beetles working hard to prepare a suitable 'nest' for their eggs. We were saddened to see how many had been flattened unnecessarily and immediately felt we should let you know. Please spread the word that cars should dodge dung!

Philip and Roz Wood, email

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The good doctor



The battle against poaching of rhino and other big game continues. Scott Ramsay spent a frenetic week with the vet at the centre of it all, Dave Cooper.

& his wild patients



THE TEAM Dr Dave Cooper (right) and Dumisane Zwane of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife discuss tactics before rescuing an orphaned baby rhino. PRICELESS An old rhino in iSimangaliso Wetland Park ... now more valuable than ever.



Giraffes are tricky to dart as they're very sensitive and can die because of the trauma. This one lived.

1 Capturing a giraffe to remove a snare.

2 Dumisane Zwane watches Dr Cooper take off in a helicopter to dart a baby rhino ahead of rescue.

3 The capture team move the baby rhino to the safety of a boma.

4 The mother of the calf, shot dead by poachers.

T

HE GIRAFFE HAD BEEN LIMPING BADLY FOR SEVERAL DAYS. A wire snare had cut deeply into the flesh of its right hind leg, just above the ankle.

"Poachers probably set that snare for an antelope," veterinarian Dave Cooper said. "Then they would have come back a few days later to see what had been caught."

When any animal steps into a snare, usually tied to a tree trunk, the noose tightens as the creature tries to pull itself free. An antelope may not have the strength, but an adult giraffe would be strong enough to rip the snare from the tree, eventually. The noose, however, remains embedded in the raw flesh, tightly bound around the limb.

A team of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife rangers isolated the giraffe from its herd in the iSimangaliso Wetland Park and Dave darted it with a drug that made it very dozy. Restrained with ropes by the rangers, the intoxicated animal toppled over onto its side.

"Please, whatever you do, *do not* let the giraffe raise its head off the ground!" Dave implored the team of rangers. He said it again as he walked up to the prostrate giraffe: "You *must* keep downward pressure on its head!"

Giraffes are peculiar in many ways, possessing the longest legs, longest tail, longest neck and biggest hearts of land mammals. But one of the stranger things about them is that if their head is held down *firmly* on the ground, it's impossible for them to get up, even if no other part of the body is restrained.

The key word is *firmly*. Despite their undoubtedly elegance, giraffes are powerful animals and without sufficient downward force on the head, things can go wrong quickly. As the two rangers assigned to holding down this giraffe's head were about to find out.

As Dave reached to cut the snare off its leg, the animal stirred from its drug-induced dreams and shook

its head free of the rangers' grip. It raised its head like a huge periscope. Alarmed, everyone backed off, dodging the flailing legs. A well-aimed kick could crack a man's skull. It seemed the giraffe might get away, the snare still on its ankle.

But the experienced veterinarian had other ideas. Like a Springbok rugby flank, he ran and dive-tackled the giraffe's neck as the six-metre giant was getting to its feet. The giraffe swayed in the air with Dave hanging on desperately, his arms and legs wrapped tightly around the animal's neck. Bizarre and courageous in equal measure.

After several interminable seconds, the giraffe crashed again to the ground. The rest of the team came running back to help. This time the contrite rangers made sure the giraffe's head stayed down.

Dave finally managed to cut the stout snare with wire cutters. It had torn into the animal's leg for so long the skin had started to grow over the noose.

Antibiotic ointment was applied and an antidote to the darting drug injected. Everyone backed off again. The hungover giraffe stood up, walked a few paces and turned to gaze at us with its big eyes and long eyelashes.

"He'll be fine from here," Dave said, sweat trickling from his forehead. "But I could do with a cold beer right now!"

Although bruised and lacerated from his altercation with Earth's tallest animal, the vet still smiled from ear to ear. "Phew! It's nice to be able to work on a live animal for once. I've seen too many dead rhinos this week."

Dave had just endured one of the busier weeks of his 16-year career at Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. Four post-mortems on white rhino killed by poachers, one baby rhino rescued and now a giraffe desnares. "And I was supposed to be on holiday at the moment!" he laughed.

Dr Dave Cooper is the sole veterinarian in a conservation organisation which manages wildlife areas

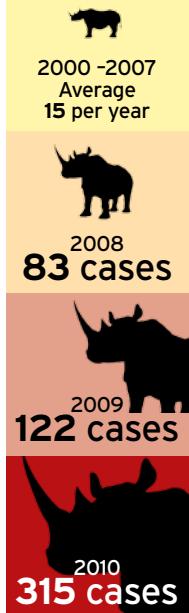
1 Giraffes are powerful animals and things can go wrong quickly.

1

2



RHINO KILLINGS IN SOUTH AFRICA



According to the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa.

whose total size exceeds that of some small countries. Besides giraffe and all the other iconic wildlife species, these game reserves are also home to the world's second-largest population of rhino, the most commercially valuable land mammal on the planet. Last year was the worst for rhino poaching in the organisation's history, with more than 30 rhino killed by poachers for their horns. Dave performed postmortems on most of them.

A killing in heaven

A dark cold front had pushed up over Zululand from the Indian Ocean, thick cloud casting a gloom over what is usually South Africa's most tropical province.

Dave got a call that the carcass of a white rhino had been found at Opathe game reserve outside Ulundi, the capital of Zululand.

Opathe is a relatively small, 8 000-hectare reserve on the edge of eMakhosini, The Valley of the Kings where seven Zulu chiefs are buried. It's also near iMfolozi game reserve, once the exclusive hunting grounds of King Shaka. While antelope, buffalo and even elephant were hunted, the ancient Zulus left black and white rhinoceroses alone. It was an unspoken decree, and transgressors were severely beaten. Times have changed. These days Opathe and iMfolozi have seen a big increase in the poaching of these prehistoric giants.

"I've lost track of how many rhino have been killed," Dave said as we drove the hundred-odd kilometres to the reserve. "We thought 2009 was bad but 2010 has been way worse. The Chinese and Vietnamese syndicates control the rhino horn market through cartels. I think their stock is starting to run low, so they're looking for more supply, and where do you find it? Mostly south of the Limpopo River,

because everything else in Africa has been wiped out."

"It may be the most valuable commodity in the world at the moment," Dave emphasised. "More than gold, diamonds or platinum. There's just too much money involved for some people."

We met up with a group of local rangers and police officers at the side of Opathe's main internal road. The carcass was located several kilometres from there. Dave grabbed his kit and the group set off on foot.

There's a good reason why the Zulu kings are buried near here. It's a beguiling landscape of mist-belt grasslands, valley bushveld and riparian forest. Rocky outcrops, umbrella thorn trees and sandy river beds decorate the canvas, befitting of the meaning of the

Zulu word: 'heaven.' The aroma of bushveld and symphonic chorus of cicadas seemed to lull the conversation of the walking men. But the men were soon knocked from their reverie by the sickly stench of death.

The female white rhino lay on its side. Legs stiff, the face hacked apart to remove the horns. No-one said anything.

Instead, the men stood and gazed as if at a funeral. What came next was a shock to Dave. "She had a calf," one of the rangers said. "Probably nine-months old."

The rangers had seen the calf lying near its dead mother the previous day, but now it was nowhere to be seen. Baby rhinos sometimes stay near their dead mothers for several weeks, refusing to leave their side. Some even try to suckle milk from the carcass.

"You'll probably find that while the poachers were butchering its mother, they had thrown stones at the baby to chase it away," Dave said, his frustration thinly veiled. "Once we've done the postmortem, we've got to do everything to find that calf, otherwise it will die out here."

After the police had done a quick inspection of the surrounding area, Dave set about the postmortem. ▶

Baby rhinos sometimes stay near their dead mothers for several weeks, refusing to leave their side.



Chantal Dickson feeds the rescued rhino before its release into the boma, where it will be nursed until it's old enough to survive on its own in the wild.



Dr Ian Player on rhino poaching

“The conservation authorities are doing their absolute best. I believe that it's very important that the public become aware of what is happening, that they report anything that is suspicious.”

Read more about Dr Player's views on www.wildcard.co.za

“Two bullets. Look, here's the first hole.” Dave pointed to a bullet wound just behind the jaw bone, where maggots were starting their decomposition work. “It would have caused massive concussion, but it wouldn't have killed the rhino.”

The first shot having stunned the animal, the poachers had enough time to walk up to it and shoot it a second time at close range. “Here's the second bullet wound,” Dave said, pointing to a hole midway between the ear and the eye.

The rangers cut the head from the body so the post-mortem team could dig out the bullets from the back of the skull. Dave quickly found the first bullet, which had been flattened on impact with the bone.

After half an hour of looking, Dave couldn't find the second bullet: “It's deep in the brain cavity.” So two rangers put a pole through the decapitated head and carried it back to the truck. Every head from every rhino killed by poachers is boiled and cleaned, then tagged and the DNA is taken. It's all stored as future evidence.

“I think I've become hardened to these killings,” Dave said despondently, walking back to the cars, clearly worried where it would all end.

Despite plenty of rhino killings in KwaZulu-Natal, there have been no convictions of rhino poachers yet.

Police inconsistency and budget deficits make effective prosecution difficult, while a litany of social ills such as murder, rape and child abuse has placed dead rhinos well down the list of the national law enforcement's priorities.

“Now we have to find that baby, that's the only positive thing that can happen now. But we need a helicopter. We won't find it on foot at this stage.”

Tracking down baby

For the next two days Dave was flown over the reserve in a private helicopter, courtesy of World Wildlife Fund. The rest of the iMfolozi game capture team waited on the ground with trucks, ropes and a big dose of concern for the baby rhino. Several highly trained and dedicated rangers are at the heart of this elite group. Dumisane Zwane is Dave's right-hand man and runs the ground crew while the vet is airborne. Chantal Dickson looks after all the animals at the iMfolozi bomas, keeping them fed and happy.

The first day yielded no results. The umbrella thorn trees had grown thick with the summer rains, and the baby rhino was probably hiding from the noisy helicopter. The second day the Opathe rangers spotted the calf, but by the time the helicopter had arrived from Richard's Bay, they had lost sight of it.

PLANT POACHERS

It's not only antelope and rhinos getting poached in KwaZulu-Natal's parks. More than 800 plant species are used for medicinal and muti purposes. Steve McKean has been the resource ecologist for the Drakensberg for 19 years, studying the illegal harvesting of plants. He calculates 7 500 tonnes of plants are collected from the wild every year in KZN. “That's 7 500 bakkies piled high with plants!”

High up on the endangered list are species such as wild ginger *Siphonochilus aethiopicus* which is now extinct in the wild. “The ginger is actually very effective at treating colds,” Steve said, “but most of the plants don't have much medicinal value.”

“Our rangers caught some poachers at Garden Castle with 70 mealie sacks full of plants. Yet the

magistrates throw cases out of court because the victims claim they didn't know it was illegal.

“The plant poaching is much bigger than a conservation issue,” Steve added. “People are doing this because they have no choice. There's no employment for them. It's an economic issue, a job creation issue and healthcare issue.”

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is starting to propagate threatened plant species to reintroduce these into the wild. Plans are afoot to supply seed to the market. “But we're not going to let people go into our parks and dig up plants,” Steve stated emphatically.

If you see evidence of the poaching of plants in any of the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife parks, email Steve McKean steve@kznwildlife.com

Gamkaberg Nature Reserve



Family Activities



Eco Lodges



Bush Camps

Gamkaberg is an isolated mountain range in the Little Karoo, lying between the Swartberg and Outeniqua Mountains. The name Gamka is derived from the khoi-khoi ('Hottentot') word gami, meaning lion. The reserve was established in 1974 in order to conserve a local population of endangered Cape mountain zebra and their natural habitat. The terrain is rugged, with mountainous plateaus incised by deep ravines.

One of three luxury accommodation options (Tierkloof, Sweet thorn or Fossil Ridge Eco-Lodges) built from thatch & reed and Safari style comfortable tents could be your hideaway. Each one of the eco lodges has a lapa braai area and splash pool.

You could also decide to stay in the Stables. This is the ideal spot if you don't want the hassle of pitching your own tent. There is electricity and water on tap but remember to bring your torches. A sheltered lapa/braai area is situated just in front of the Stables. Tents may be pitched in the dedicated areas by the shelter if you prefer.

Ou Kraal is a remote campsite located at the top of the mountain plateau and is ideal for 4x4 and hiking enthusiasts. It consists of a basic but quaint stone shelter and a hearth, the location provides spectacular views over the Outeniqua and Swartberg mountains. The campsite is only booked out to one group at a time thus ensuring complete privacy. Guest going up by 4x4 must please arrive no later than 15h00. Keep your eyes open for the elusive and endangered Cape Mountain – zebra's

Nearest town: Oudtshoorn – 33km South-west; Calitzdorp – 32km South-east.

Region: Klein Karoo

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Rhino care-taker Vusumzi Simelane and guard Sibusiso Mthwethwa comfort a rhino.

Eventually the patrolling rangers saw it again and Dave flew overhead to dart it, while the game capture unit drove off-road through the bush to the hovering chopper. The big truck with the rhino crate followed slowly behind.

But a deep donga blocked the 4x4s from driving closer. "Run, run, run!" came the call over the two-way radios from Dave, amid the thwump, thwump, thwump of the helicopter's blades. Adrenalin surged and heart rates rocketed. The crew sprinted several hundred metres over rocky terrain. "Come on!" Dumisane urged the rest of the team. "Let's move it!"

The first ranger saw it: the rhino calf! No higher than a man's waist, yet still weighing several hundred kilograms. Blind in one eye, "from a rock that the poachers threw at it", Dave confirmed later. It was shaking, leaning against a tree. A ranger looped a rope around the back leg, then placed a blindfold over its eyes to calm it down. Then ropes were tied around its horn.

Dave jumped out of the chopper and ran to administer the antidote to the darting drug. "He probably hasn't eaten for several days," he said. "But he's not dehydrated fortunately. He looks like he's been drinking."

Then came the hard part: jogging the rhino back to the crate. Convincing a recalcitrant rhino to move requires two things: a powerful electric cattle prod to get it moving and a lot of muscle to keep it moving. And so five people pulled and four people pushed the calf back down the donga, and up again, its short legs sometimes stumbling on the rocky terrain.

"Come on boy," Chantal urged. "Come on, almost there." The calf collapsed near the truck, exhausted.

Dumisane reluctantly gave it a few mild shocks with the cattle prod, and it moved into the crate, which was then raised onto the back of the truck.

The truck arrived back at the bomas late in the evening. The fatigued calf was placed in a boma with plenty of food, formulated milk and a goat.

"A little rhino will get lonely," Dave said, "just like a human. The goat will keep him company."

The game capture team headed home, but Chantal stayed for a while, still concerned. Then security took over the night-shift, keeping watch at the boma until Chantal returned to monitor the baby.

Over the next few days, three more white rhino were found dead in iMfolozi. Unlike at Opathe, where amateurs had hacked the horns off, these poachers were experts.

"You can see they've done it a few times before," Dave said. The lower horns had been cut off at their base with minimum of damage, and the upper horn was neatly cut from the flesh. The rest of the carcass had been devoured by hyenas and vultures, even though Dave estimated the kill was only two to three days old. At iMfolozi there are plenty of scavengers to do the clean-up work.

The bullets were found and photos taken. There wasn't much more to do, except take DNA samples in case the police find the horns and can match them to the carcass.

"That giraffe and baby rhino we saved, that's what makes my job rewarding. I couldn't do anything else." Dave looked away, then said, "But we have to stop the rhino poaching. There's so much to do."

Quietly he added, "I think I'm ready for my holiday." It had been a long week, at the end of a long year. ♀



A guard watches over iMfolozi's rhino bomas at night.



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THE ROUGH ROAD TO THE SOUL OF THE KAROO

**An exclusive cottage accessible
only along a rugged 4x4 trail is a
passport to the splendid isolation
of a hidden corner of Karoo
National Park. By Geoff Dalglish**

The scrublands of Karoo National Park invite 4x4 adventurers - and big game like eland and rhino.

SITTING ON THE STOEP OF EMBIZWE-NI COTTAGE, WHICH STANDS PROUDLY ALONE IN A REMOTE SECTION OF KAROO NATIONAL PARK, IT'S EASY TO DAYDREAM AND TO DREAM BIG. How could it be otherwise if you are inspired by vast landscapes beneath even bigger skies? Exhilarated by a total isolation from the sights and sounds of civilisation?

The renovated farmhouse is one of the park's well-

kept secrets, tucked far away from the main tourism routes and more than 30 km from the busy N1 highway linking Gauteng and Cape Town. Embizweni (which means 'where people gather' in Xhosa) sits on an elevated rise offering views deep into the soul of the Nama Karoo. South Africa's largest biome is renowned for its aridity and harshness, seeming to be a vast emptiness until you take time to explore it slowly. It is a place to be a pilgrim rather than a mere tourist, recog-



MARIO MORENO

nising the divine in all around you as you drink in the sense of space and timelessness.

If you were able to step back in time a couple of centuries, you'd witness the spectacle of hundreds of thousands of springbok congregating in preparation for their regular migration to the Kalahari Desert, following a route imprinted in their DNA aeons before. Those vast herds have long since disappeared, although their descendants remain, sharing the plains

beneath the wind-sculpted koppies and peaks of the Nuweveld Mountains with no fewer than 60 other mammal species. Among them gemsbok, kudu, eland, klipspringer, black rhino, the boldly striped Cape mountain zebra and the more familiar Burchell's zebra.

Cast your eyes heavenwards and you could also be richly rewarded. The park boasts one of the highest densities of Verreaux's eagles in Africa, with around 20 breeding pairs making this their home. And now, for ➤





MARION MORENO

Since lions were released into the park at the end of last year, visitors can get out of their vehicles at view points and picnic sites only.

the first time in nearly 170 years, you have a chance of spotting lion or hearing the roars and calls that are one of the most evocative sounds of the wilds.

In November last year, two magnificent black-maned males, two females and four of their young offspring were released after being translocated from Addo Elephant National Park. Originally of Kgalagadi stock, they were chosen for their disease-free status and genetic similarity to the lions that would have occurred in the Cape.

For staff such as senior section ranger Johan de Clerk, it is the realisation of a long-cherished dream to see the return of a species that naturally occurred in the area and to re-establish a healthy predator-prey balance. "We felt proud that an important target had been met after a time of intense activity, which included erecting a 170 km cordon of electrified, predator-proof fencing around the park's perimeter and visitor areas."

Park manager Mzwandile Mjedu recalls mixed emotions: "It was a glorious moment when they were released. I got goosebumps as they crossed the line to freedom, becoming the first wild, free-ranging lions in the Great Karoo since the last one was shot at the nearby settlement of Leeu-Gamka in 1842. It was a thrill but I reminded myself that this would get us out of our comfort zones. We now need to be more careful."

All four adult lions are wearing tracking collars which provide a fix on their positions every four hours. For now the two females and four cubs have been enjoying the vicinity of the main rest camp, while the males have been establishing their territory and roaming up to 16 km away. At the park's headquarters there's a buzz of excitement that wasn't there before as staff and visitors eagerly follow the progress of the lions,

with successful hunts and a number of good sightings.

For the moment Embizweni is beyond their territory although it is possible their domain will eventually extend to all of Karoo National Park's nearly 90 000 hectares. By 2012, it is hoped cheetah will also be re-introduced, with these legendary speedsters likely to be at home in the vast, open plains.

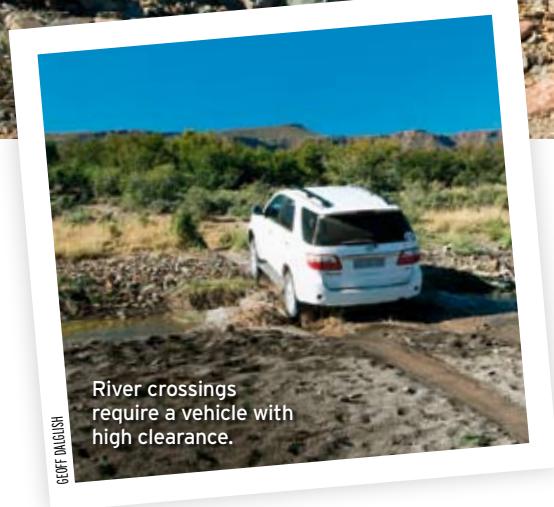
A bonus with the arrival of the lions is that free guided walks are offered three times daily through a landscape littered with ancient reminders of how it was, fossilised remains of plants and creatures dat-

ing to around 250-million years ago. Of course, you don't have to be an ecologist, geologist or historian to appreciate the recently opened Nuweveld Eco Trail or the wonderful vastness it is an entry to.

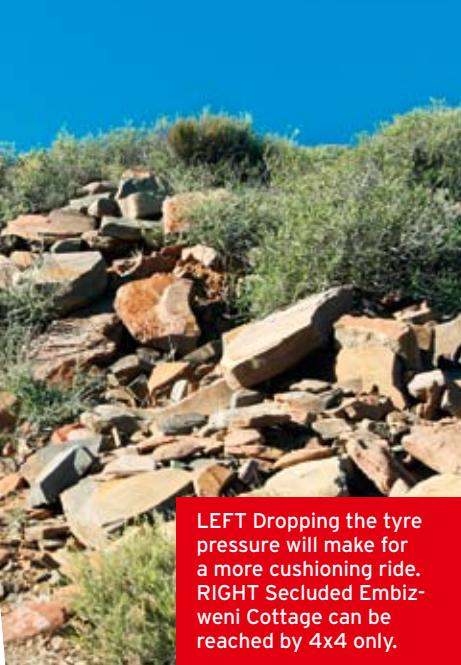
Use of the 4x4-only trail is free and normally it is a two-day, 100 km excursion that starts and ends at the main rest camp. The 4x4 section totals 56 km, with 20 km the first day and 36 km on the return trip. Of course, if you are so driven, you could do it all in a day but then you'd be missing out on the main event: the overnight cottage.

The main bedroom boasts a double bed and glass doors that open onto big views, while there are bunk beds for four in the second bedroom. There's also a bed in the lounge area which doubles as seating during the day. Add solar lighting, a gas-heated bath and shower, a well-appointed kitchen, fireplace in the lounge, braai area on the stoep and you have the comforts of home without the intrusion of television or traffic noise.

Although off-roading is a passion for many, it is quiet time at the cottage that will probably be cherished the most. Traditionally Karoo National Park has been an overnight destination, but two nights in the cottage, followed by a stay in the rest camp, would be a perfect tonic for Big City refugees.



GEFF DAWISH



LEFT Dropping the tyre pressure will make for a more cushioning ride. RIGHT Secluded Embizwini Cottage can be reached by 4x4 only.



GEFF DAWISH

THE 4X4 ROUTE

NUWEVELD ECO TRAIL

The route consists mostly of management tracks and former farm roads that have fallen into disrepair. The challenge comes from negotiating some rocky outcrops and threading your vehicle between thorn bushes and over riverbeds. High clearance and low range gears are a definite advantage.

Normally the river crossings are dry, but visitors need to be alert to the danger of brief flash floods in summer, when it might be necessary to wait a few hours for the waters to subside or to detour. Much of the first day's 20 km section lulls you into thinking you could drive the route in a 4x2 bakkie or a 4x4 without low range, but some of the rocky and sandy parts of the 36 km second day made me really appreciate my rugged Hilux 3.0 D-4D.

I'd dropped my tyre pressures to 1.5 kPa and would suggest running on 75 per cent of the recommended road pressures, or a little lower. Watch for protruding rocks that could damage a sidewall and remember to increase the pressures again at the rest camp where a compressor pump is available.

Because there is little or no cell signal away from the main camp, it is safest to travel with two vehicles and to pack extra food and water.

River crossings require a vehicle with high clearance.

TRIP PLANNER

GETTING THERE

The rest camp of Karoo National Park is 12 km from the town of Beaufort West in the Western Cape, and 6 km from the N1. Cape Town is around 500 km south, and Gauteng nearly 1000 km to the north. It also easily accessible from George (260 km), Port Elizabeth (480 km), Bloemfontein and Kimberley.

WEATHER

The climate is typically that of the arid Nama Karoo with high summer daytime temperatures and cold winter nights when the mercury can drop below zero. It is a low rainfall area characterised by clear skies and starry nights.

ACCOMMODATION

Cosy comfort The rest camp offers fully equipped Cape Dutch-style chalets and cottages for between two and six people. Prices, including breakfast, range from R810 for two people to R1225 for four people. Additional adults pay R220 each and children (under 12 years old) R110.

A site under the stars A camp site for two costs R165 a night. It's R54 for each additional adult and R27 for each child.

Seclusion at Embizwini

R700 a night for the first four people. R175 for each additional adult and R88 for each child (maximum seven people). Book through the park's reception.

ACTIVITIES

Wildlife viewing options include scenic drives on Lammertjies-leege, the Klipspringer Pass and Potlekktjie Loop, while a bird hide near reception overlooks a small wetland and reed bed. The 300-metre Fossil Trail offers a chance to see fossils found entombed in the Great Karoo landscape.

New are free guided walking trails, organised three times daily. They range from the 800-metre Bossie Trail, which focuses on learning about the medicinal and cultural use of plants, to the Pointer Trail which features two route options, one of 4,9 km and the other of 11,4 km.

For 4x4 enthusiasts, the Nuweveld Eco Trail is a 100 km round trip with the possibility to overnight at the self-catering Embizwini Cottage.

CONTACTS

Bookings: Park 023-415-2828, karooreservations@sanparks.org, www.sanparks.org/parks/karoo