

## **Media Release - 15 September 2003**

<< back >>

### **MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS FROM OLIFANTS CAMP - KRUGER NATIONAL PARK**



Justin Fox, a journalist who once visited Bateleur Bushveld Camp on assignment, wrote an article about the camp, it's facilities and activities. I took him on various guided bush walks in the region, and one evening told him all about new projects in the Kruger National Park (KNP). He wrote in his article (*Getaway Magazine, Sins of the Sons, August 2002, p. 78*), jokingly accusing me of one of the forth-sighted sons of the KNP, with new ideas and fresh plans to take Eco tourism in the KNP one step further. I didn't agree with him then, but when this dream of Mountain Bike Trails in the KNP materialized, I knew what he meant.

In 1999 the idea was to start Mountain Bike Trails in the Kruger National Park. I started this project and it was initially going to be launched at Bateleur Bushveld Camp, in the Far-Northern region of the Kruger National Park. I was transferred to Olifants Camp in the Northern Region, and reassigned the project with me. Finally, after many proposals, the KNP Executive Committee approved the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment, also approved by DEAT). The Conservation Committee of the Board (SANParks) at Groenkloof in Pretoria awarded the final endorsement.



For the first time in the history of the KNP, we took 5 paid guests (USA) out on a Morning Mountain Bike Trail from Olifants Camp on 4 September 2003. The Mountain Bike Trails at Olifants Camp was officially opened. Since last week we have had numerous requests from the public and tour operators. As far as New Zealand and America, guests and travel agents are inquiring about the MTB Trails.

At this stage reservations can be done directly with Olifants Camp, 2 days in advance by phoning the camp at (013) 735 6606 / 7. It can also be reserved directly with our central reservations office in Pretoria at (012) 428 9111 from 1 October 2003.

The procedure for MTB Trails is very similar to the guided bush walks. There is place for a maximum of 6 participants per trail. Two qualified and armed field guides will lead the trails. Olifants Camp will supply the mountain bikes (sponsored by Mazda Wildlife Fund and Fritz Pienaar, South African Mountain Bike champion). Backpacks, water bottles, bicycle helmets and snacks will also be provided.

Departure times for the Mountain Bike Trails from Olifants Camp must be confirmed with reception. Times vary depending on the season. We offer Morning and Afternoon Mountain Bike Trails. These vary from 3 to 4 hours, depending on the route taken. Full Day Trails are also available. Reservations will have to be made for all 6 participants for the latter trail. Please note that the full day trails will only be for very fit and experience cyclists.

The tariffs for the Mountain Bike Trails are as follows: R300.00 per participant (including children older than 12 years of age) per trail (AM or PM). For the Full Day MTB Trail, tariffs are R600.00 for about 7 hours. No persons under the age of 12 years are permitted on the MTB trails.

At this stage 3 different routes (trails) can be reserved. Please contact Olifants Camp for the days on which routes are conducted. The trails are graded according to difficulty and technicality. The grading / difficulty of the Mountain Bike Trails vary from green to black (green = moderate length and terrain, black = very technical and strenuous). The recommended trail for beginners and the not-so-experienced rider, is the Hardekool Draai trail (green rating). Olifants camp is situated high on a rocky outcrop, overlooking the Olifants River. This is the base camp for the OLIFANTS RIVER HARDEKOOL DRAAI MTB TRAIL. Travel with your guide, in an open game-viewing vehicle, in a western direction on the main road (H1-5) for 12,1 km. A dedicated Mountain Bike Trailer (manufactured especially by VenterSA) carries the bikes behind the vehicle. The MTB trail starts at Hardekool-draai (the name originated from a huge Lead Wood tree, *Combretum imberbi*), on the banks of the Olifants River. This is a long trail and a certain degree of fitness is necessary. The trail leads through Mopane veld, with the occasional view of the Olifants River. There are many "wild high ways" crossing the road. These "high ways" are game paths, constant used by hippo and other general game, walking to and from the river. After about 5 km cycle, it is time to walk a "wild high way", designed by wild creatures. The bikes are left and a short walk down to the river will have any wildlife enthusiast excited. Remember to wear comfortable walking shoes, a pair of binoculars and your bird reference book in your daypack. The guides are armed and have excellent knowledge of the area's fauna and flora. The MTB trail continues over rocky terrain, superb for mountain biking for a further 5,7 km where a small hippo path turns to the south, towards the Olifants River. Enjoy sumptuous snacks under a huge Sycamore Fig tree, overlooking grunting hippo wallowing in the Olifants River below. There are plenty of crocodile, elephant, buffalo and general game in this area. The bird life along the river is also outstanding. Return the 10,7km back to the game drive vehicle and remember the unspoiled wilderness encountered by foot and mountain bike. The cycle distance of this MTB trail is 21,4 kilometres.



The second Mountain Bike trail is the Olifants / Letaba River Confluence Mountain Bike Trail. Drive by guided game viewing vehicle from Olifants Camp to the Vutamolelo road, north-east of Olifants Camp, not accessible

by anybody unless you are a participant on this unique OLIFANTS / LETABA RIVER CONFLUENCE MTB TRAIL. On the S44 gravel road along the Olifants River, beyond the Olifants river view point, a small unmarked 2-track road 10.3km from camp, leads to all excitement and the ultimate MTB trail in the world. The vehicle is left here and the bikes are saddled. This route passes the best scenery in the KNP. Cycle between the Letaba River on your left and the Olifants River on your right. For 6.1km along the rocky outcrops of the region, one can expect elephant, buffalo, lion, nyala, water buck, giraffe, zebra, klipspringer and impala to name only a few species of mammals. The area is rich in bird life and will also have any botanist enthusiastic (large Baobab trees, *Adasonia digitata* en-route). Enjoy your breakfast packs on the banks of these two rivers while watching some of the biggest crocodiles in the world feasting on fish in the rapids below. The melodious call of the fish eagle just make you feel more at home in Africa than any other place in the world. The occasional snorting and grunting of hippo announcing their presence make you realize this is how God created it all. Enjoy an hour or two with your armed guides along the rivers on short walks before you start the 6-km cycle back to the game drive vehicle. The trip is not a race and not strenuous taking into account the time frame. It is advisable to be an experienced rider if you want to enjoy this trail to it's full potential (grading = black rating). Loose rocks and branches allow you to make sure that you have to concentrate on the riding condition. The cycle distance of this MTB Trail is 12,2 km.



The third Mountain Bike Trail is the longest of the three MTB trails from Olifants camp. Only 22,2 km from the camp, is the Mozambican boundary. You can look on a map and wonder what does it look like at the international border between South Africa and Mozambique, or you can join us on a morning out in the wilderness on a mountain bike. At around 9,8 km from the camp, in a northern direction on the S44 route, past the Olifants River view point, the guides will take you with a game viewing vehicle to the start of the KLIPKOPPIES MOZAMBIQUE BORDER MTB TRAIL. Cross the Letaba River on a fire break road, straight east. The vehicle is left and final preparations on the mountain bikes are done. Cycle early morning, straight into the sunrise for 9,6 km through fantastic scenery of the Kruger National Park. Game encountered along the MTB trail can include buffalo, water buck, zebra, elephant, kudu and impala and many more. At a fork in the road, the guides will lead you southeast for 2,8 km to the border between South Africa and Mozambique. Enjoy your snacks on a hill, overlooking the Olifants River in the distance with Mozambique to the east. Be daring and put your hand through the fence to touch foreign soil before you take the trail back to the vehicle. Cycle down towards the Letaba River, enjoying the wonderful vista of unspoiled wilderness. The cycle distance of this MTB trail is 24,8 km.

A fair level of skill and fitness is required for all the Mountain Bike Trails, especially the Border Trail (full day trail, extended to the Gorge).

Please remember appropriate comfortable bush clothing, insect repellent, binoculars, camera, correct footwear, hat, sun block lotion and personal medication. The guides carry a first aid kit and a hand held radio for communication with the base camp in cases of emergencies.

The two fully trained and skilled field guides will lead the trails. It is not a race and full bush interpretation will be done on the trail (interesting nature signs and wild life sightings).

All safety drills and aspects regarding the trail will be demonstrated and communicated by the guides prior the trail. It will be compulsory to wear cycling helmets during all Mountain Bike Trails (supplied by Olifants Camp). Indemnity forms will have to be completed before the trail (makes the trail and the expectations more adventurous).

Should participants want to utilise their own personal Mountain Bikes, prove of a recent service by an accredited Bicycle Shop will have to be supplied. The participants will then be required to take their own equipment i.e. puncture repair kits, tools, spares, tubes etc.

Since this is a new Adventure Activity offered by SANParks, we reserve the rights to change any procedures, tariffs and routes without prior notification.

*As some clever guy, sometime in history stated "We set our lives by the images we get, but we get our lives by the imaginations we set"!*

These Mountain Bike Trails was an image of an imagination, and is now reality created from a dream. Come and join us, and live the dream to cycle amongst wildlife inside the world-renowned Kruger National Park. It will be the best thing you have done in your life.

This Adventure Activity will generate much needed income for conservation and South Africa as a whole. The project might extend to other camps in the KNP, with Mopani Rest Camp and the 5 Bushveld Camps as possible venues.

To avoid disappointment, make a reservation today.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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***(Compiled by Hein Grobler, Hospitality Service Manager at Olifants Camp)***