

Angus Begg and Alison Hofer

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Oranjezicht
CAPE TOWN
MOBILE
+27 (0) 82 451 3828

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Lesser Spotted Africa...

“This is *indigo hedyantha*,” said my guide, rubbing its leaves between his fingers, “known as the haemorrhoid bush”. Surname Gutteridge, first name Lee, our guide is an encyclopaedic type, probably more so than any I’ve yet met. “Apart from treating this nasty condition, it’s also got an indigo blue dye in its roots”.

Not following any paths, we were hiking one of South Africa’s lesser-known wilderness locations, the Waterberg mountain range in the country’s north-west province. We’d taken an hour to move just one kilometre over the rocky, sandy and high altitude terrain.

It was a walk on which we were to learn much about the things our eyes often gloss over when in the bush. Relative trivia like *brown hyena paste* - an insignificant-looking bit of white stuff attached to a grass stem that serves as a notice-board to other brown hyenas (shy, nocturnal types of long, shaggy, brown hair); and *lichen* - a fungus/algae combination found on rocks and trees that tells us the surrounding air is clean). And ingenious insects that disguise themselves as wispy bits of detritus. That apart from tracking the hyena itself - which should explain why the walk took us an hour.

Gutteridge is a confident, engaging type who runs a bush-guiding school on Entabeni Safari Conservancy in the Waterberg. He has the knack of making a wild apricot tree seem as interesting as a one-legged lion.

More of a home to farming than conservation since it was settled after the end of the Anglo-Boer War, the Waterberg has remained a little off the tourist radar. Only after severe droughts forced many farmers off the land in the early 1990s was much of it returned to the wild - reborn as game reserves and wilderness areas, where wildlife could once again flourish instead of being shot!

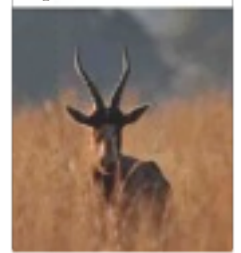


Entabeni mountain from the wooden deck at Kingfisher Lodge. Yum for romance.



Our hike with Lee brought us here - beers and G'n T to follow. Here Lee looks across to the Extreme 19th tee.

Blesbok on the plains up the mountain. Not found in Kruger.



He has the knack of making a wild apricot tree seem as interesting as a one-legged lion.





Pete Richardson and Alison - the other half of African Storybook - on the 18th hole. It's a stunning course. The 19th tee is above and to the left of Alison's right hand.



Hanglip Lodge down below, with the plains game and predators. Ali is attached to her shot of a lioness on the scent of warthog



Entabeni is one such reserve. An area that rises a sharp 600m provides literal new horizons - welcome cooler nights and the bird and animals species that inevitably come with the change in landscape (Big 5 included, for those interested). Having tracked wildlife and guided for most of his life in the Greater Kruger Park area, Lee says he couldn't be happier.

With my little family I was staying up on the mountain - at the Kingfisher Lodge of huge bathrooms and beds - on a dam just below the signature Entabeni mountain. It's a world of hippos, fish eagles, wooden walkways and significant views. A helpful world too, where staff was on hand to help with baba Fynn (providing Alison and I with latitude).

Once we had finished exploring with Lee we inched our 4x4 down a steep handmade road - carved out by seven Pedi women nine years ago - through thick ravine vegetation. It was so steep and tight that when we met a vehicle coming down one night someone had to reverse. Needless to say a bit of tight manoeuvring was called for. And they say elephants make the journey...? Down on the Lower Plateau, at Hanglip Lodge the next day we were met by a change in subject as dramatic as the change in environment.

I had only a rough idea of what we were to see. Pete Richardson, a UK golfing-consultant with a Yorkshire accent, filled in the blanks. 'Eighteen holes, each designed by a top international golfer', said Pete as he drove the golf-buggy around the holes. But the cherry on top was waiting, just a few kilometers away.

The 19th tee is just below Entabeni mountain summit and reached by helicopter. 'Then you tee off 400m out and down onto a green shaped like Africa'. This was the Legends Golf Estate - a world of golf and cutting edge development.

We were driven around designer residential accommodation and the skeleton of a sophisticated sporting complex. Although I have a disconcerting habit of trying to keep track of everything happening everywhere all of the time (Chechen rebels to the disappearance of glaciers), I had no clue any of this was here.

The construction of the large estate - which includes a museum *within* the newly-constructed walls, and a performance amphitheatre - is inspired by the stonework of the 15th century Monomotapa civilisation. I was honestly searching for parallels with Sol Kerzner's Sun City.

From there we visited white lions at a breeding centre across the road from Entabeni and the Gold Estate. Wrestling one of them inspired the British Lions to victory, said the centre manager. Yet while Ali found the experience enchanting, with little Fynn on her hip she murmured something about feeling a bit like a zebra with a tiny foal.

Of course we appreciated the lions, rhino and variety in birdlife. And yes, it has the rest of the Big 5. But it is Entabeni's relatively less-visited aspect, and varying ecosystems that we enjoyed most.

Afterwards it was sundowners on the deck. With a family of hippos grunting and our nephew rubbing his feet from the morning's hike with Lee, it was almost stage-managed. Idyllic? Unexpected, even a little even exciting...and so near Johannesburg.

