

MOLETADIKGWA TRAILS

Eight well-marked trails traverse a variety of habitats and terrain on Moletadikgwa. Two trails, the **Waterbuck** and the **Duiker** Trails, begin at Mokabi Lodge and together form a circular route, meeting at a view site. Also taking off from the view site is the **Klipspringer** Trail, which offers a third alternative route back to the lodge. Trails are marked in both directions with green and white signs that bear the spoor of the animal for which the trail is named. The short **Warthog Trail** also leaves directly from the lodge and can be used to join up with the much longer **Zebra Trail**, which can also be accessed from the road that passes the House Dam or by crossing over the small hill south of Mokabi Lodge on the **Kudu Trail**. The **Leopard Trail**, which incorporates a very steep section, provides a scenic link between the Zebra Trail and the Duiker/Waterbuck/Klipspringer Trails. Another route, the **Bushbuck Trail**, has been laid out in order to give access to the dense vegetation in the valley below the look-out points. It provides a link between the Leopard and Waterbuck Trails.

All trails have panoramic views of different parts of the Waterberg. The well-known landmark Hanglip (30km to the east) is visible from the Zebra Trail and, on a clear day, it is possible to get a good view of Aasvoëlkop (90km to the west) from both the Zebra Trail and the start of the Waterbuck Trail. Refer to the accompanying map for easy reference to the trails. Most of the trails can be combined in a variety of ways to provide walks of differing scenery, length and difficulty.

The trails described below have been laid out so as to provide the visitor with a range of easily-accessible routes that typify the landscape of Moletadikgwa. They are maintained as far as possible in a condition that allows for relatively easy walking, the grass being kept cut so as to minimise the risk of encountering ticks.

You are of course most welcome to walk (or cycle) anywhere on the property, in which case you should always take a copy of the map with you (a field copy of the map and these notes is enclosed in the brochure) and apply the tick repellent provided. Note that the boundary fence is electrified; if you should come up to it, avoid touching the wires, for they deliver a memorable shock! You may see that we have inserted some old car tyres into the base of the fence in some places, to allow the free movement of small game such as hyena, warthog, cats and jackal.



Tree agama



Cloud Emperor moth



common river frog



Armoured ground beetles



banded mongoose

The Duiker Trail

Time: Half an hour to one hour, depending on stops along the way (the route is approximately 2km return).

Difficulty: This trail is easy and meanders through woodland on almost flat terrain.

Description: The trail begins in front and immediately to the east of Mokabi Lodge (right of the swimming pool). Follow the green signs with white duiker spoor. The trail winds through open savanna woodland where *Faurea saligna* (boekenhout) and *Burkea africana* (red syringa) shade the path. From December to February the *Pterocarpus rotundifolius* (round-leaved teak) trees on this trail are a mass of yellow bloom. There are many labelled trees on this trail to help you familiarise yourself with them.

If you are quiet and soberly dressed you may see the duiker pairs that live among the scrub of *Combretum* (bush willow) and *Vitex rehmannii* (pipe stem tree). The duiker is easily recognised by its characteristic grey coat, black blaze on its muzzle and tuft of hair on its forehead. Only the male has horns. Along the path you will see some open clearings where impala stag parties have left their middens. Giraffe also enjoy this area.



Pterocarpus in flower



Tafelkop from view site



Giraffe near Mokabi



Impala ram



Duiker

The trail ends at a clearing on a vehicle track. Take the time to cross the track on to the path marked “View Site/Klipspringer Trail” and enjoy the view from the top of the cliffs. There is a picnic table with benches nearby. You will see Tafelkop and distant Waterberg hills. You may either retrace your steps back to Mokabi Lodge, or return via the Klipspringer Trail, which begins at the view site. Two other trails also start from the clearing: proceed down the steep hill on the Leopard Trail (see description below), or turn north for a few metres to join the Waterbuck Trail, which also makes its way back to the lodge (see description above).

Waterbuck Trail

Time: one to one and a half hours return, depending on stops along the way (it is approximately 4km return). It is possible to join the Duiker Trail at the end of the Waterbuck Trail to return to Mokabi Lodge and this will give a total trail distance of 3km. About two thirds along its route from the lodge, the Waterbuck Trail is joined by the Bushbuck Trail, which then descends into the valley in the north-east of the farm and eventually joins the Leopard Trail.

Difficulty: the trail requires some boulder-hopping and uphill walking, but it is not difficult.

Description: the trail starts in front of Mokabi Lodge (right of the pan). It sets off across a low rocky ledge before turning west on a sandy stretch with *Vitex rehmanni* (pipestem tree) among low shrubs. The trail then makes a sharp turn to the right and eases downhill, crosses a vehicle track, and heads north along a contour that flanks a canyon. This canyon, which follows a major regional fracture, was known by the old timers as *Skrikkloof*, because of the way oxen and horses would shy and stumble nervously as they went along it, apparently due to the scent of the many leopard that used to live there.

Follow the green signs with white waterbuck spoor. The route is well-wooded and is the home of timid waterbuck whose heart-shaped spoor you will certainly see, even if you are not fortunate enough to spot their owners. You will also see waterbuck droppings that look like bunches of brown grapes. The rose-pink-breasted Jameson's firefinches love this trail and dart unconcerned among low bushes. Honey badger, dwarf mongoose, rock hyrax, monitor lizard and large spotted genet have all been seen on this trail.

The dappled shade on the trail is provided by a profusion of trees that includes *Burkea africana* (red syringa), *Lannea discolor* (live-long tree), *Diplorhynchos condylocarpon* (horn-pod tree) and *Pterocarpus rotundifolia* (dopperkiaat). In autumn the east-facing slope of the canyon is a blaze of red and russet *Kirkia wilmsii* (mountain syringa) foliage and in winter tall *Aloe marlothii* hold orange torches to the sky. There's also a fine (labelled) specimen of *Albizia tanganyicensis* (paperbark false-thorn) next to the trail.



View site



Aloe marlothii



Waterbuck

A steady ascent leads to the first of several rewarding view-sites where you will see impressive cliffs and distant hills and valleys. The valley floor lies 120 metres below you. From here on there are imposing views all along the ridge; you can leave the trail to explore some of these on your own. The lichen-covered sandstone rocks provide convenient benches for enjoying the vistas. Towards the north-east, the volcano-like peak of Mogoshi (1780m) appears between nearer ridges. It lies 60km away, to the west of Polokwane (Pietersburg). Most view-sites include Tafelkop (1523m) which, as its name suggests, is a flat-topped mountain. Its sheer, red sandstone cliffs are not unlike the plunging rocks below you, so don't go too close to the edge! If you walk on the ridge in the late afternoon, you will almost certainly alert the troop of baboon that scavenges or roosts here each evening and may be lucky to spot members of the two species of dassie that live among the rocks.

The Waterbuck Trail ends at a vehicle track and clearing, which is a junction of four trails. You may return to Mokabi Lodge by crossing the vehicle track to join the Duiker trail, which provides a short, easy return; or, by following the sign marked "View site", you can return via the scenic Klipspringer Trail, which follows the ridge behind the lodge. Or, of course, you can use the old vehicle track itself: turn left towards the hill to go back to the lodge. If you're feeling energetic, you can turn east from the clearing and go down the very steep slope on the Leopard Trail, which will lead you all the way around the hill to the south and on to the Zebra Trail, the open plain and eventually, back to Mokabi Lodge.

The Kudu Trail

Time: About half an hour, depending on stops along the way (the route is approximately 1.5km return).

Difficulty: This trail climbs the hill south of Mokabi Lodge, but the climb is gradual and not particularly arduous. The top of the hill is rocky underfoot. The descent to the plains below needs to be negotiated with caution in wet weather.

Description:

The trail begins from the access road at the Mokabi Lodge sign close to the Lodge. It is well marked with kudu spoor signs that lead diagonally up-slope in a south-westerly direction. The trail can also be done in reverse at the end of the Zebra Trail. About 50 metres up the Kudu trail is the start of the Klipspringer Trail, which then makes its way along the ridge to the view site where it joins the duiker, waterbuck and Leopard Trails.

In addition to providing quick access to the Zebra Trail (see below), the Kudu Trail can be used very successfully for early morning and particularly late afternoon game-viewing from the ridge, which offers a splendid view of the plains. Although the ridge affords reasonable cover for game-viewing, it is still necessary to be quiet if you hope to see game because they are remarkably sensitive even to distant noise.

At the crest of the ridge, you might want to make the rocky, unmarked, but very rewarding scramble eastwards for 15 minutes along the crest to the beacon at the highest point of the farm (1479m), where a family of dwarf mongooses has been known to nest. From the beacon, it is possible to descend through the bush to the Klipspringer Trail on the north side of the hill, and

thence back to Mokabi.



Game on the grassy plain below the Kudu Trail

Another way home is to continue southwards on the Kudu Trail to the road at the bottom of the southern, steep slope of the ridge, turn west (right) along the road and follow it all the way back to Mokabi, passing the House Dam on your left and the farmhouse on your right. Before the dam, you could turn left down another road that will take you to the tranquil little cemetery under a fig tree, where graves of four former Waterberg residents are located - and described in the brochure.

The point is marked on the map. Alternatively, before going home you might like to cross the plain at the foot of the trail to the prominent fig tree immediately south (near the start of the Zebra Trail), where a tree platform offers a vantage point for birdwatchers and excellent views, particularly in winter.



Kudu in dense bush on the Kudu Trail

Unlike most kudu, the Waterberg variety like to come into the open in the early evening and as many as 25 kudu (including eleven mature bulls) have been seen on the plains at one time. Other common plains visitors include families of warthog whose piglets play like puppies on open ground, impala, wildebeest, red hartebeest and zebra. Occasionally, a visiting secretary bird may be seen stalking through the grass. Aardwolf, serval, and jackal have also been spotted from the ridge. All are essentially nocturnal, but can sometimes be seen in the late afternoons in winter. The giraffe family frequents the *Acacia* trees dotted across the plain. Early in 2010, a cheetah was encountered on the plain near the fig tree.

The Zebra Trail

Time: Two to two and a half hours, depending on stops. The walk is approximately 6km in total from Mokabi.

Difficulty: This trail is fairly easy, but is longer than the others and requires a greater level of fitness. Take some drinking water with you. There is a picnic table and benches at a view site about half way along the route.

Description: The Zebra Trail is located in the southern part of the farm and is a good way of viewing this area, which is where most of the game tend to live. It describes a crescent arcing to the south, and can be accessed via either of the arms of the crescent, using any of three routes.

- The simplest and shortest is to climb the hill behind Mokabi on the Kudu Trail, which leads down to a vehicle track on the far side. From there, you can either follow the track across the grassy plain to a prominent fig tree, where you will find the western arm of the Zebra Trail; or you can turn left up the track, keeping next to the ridge and climb towards a saddle until you come across a sign on the right that marks the eastern arm of the crescent-shaped trail. The description below starts from this point.
- Opposite this point is the southern end of the Leopard Trail, another way of getting to and from Mokabi. The other end of this trail is at the view site at the end of the Duiker and Klipspringer Trails. (However, the best way to walk the Leopard Trail is from south to north, ending with the ascent up to the view site).
- The third route from the lodge is to follow the road down past the main house and house dam, keeping to the left until you've rounded the western end of the ridge and are on the grassy plain mentioned above.

The following description commences from the eastern end of the Zebra Trail, in the saddle. The trail starts among a stand of *Acacia karoo*. After a short climb the path emerges onto a bald plateau of sandstone, fringed with low resurrection bush (*Myrothamnus flabelifolius*). This bush looks completely dead in winter, but the first spring rains will resurrect the dry and shrivelled leaves that have persistently clung to their branches. From this plateau you will get a good view of Tafelkop to the east, as well as the volcano-shaped peak of Mogoshi (1780m), about 60km away. To the west, on a clear day, you will see the 2085m peak of Aasvoëlkop, exactly 90km away, in the Marakele National Park, overlooking Thabazimbi. Aasvoëlkop, as the name implies, is an important vulture nesting site; it is easily recognised because it has several beacons on its summit. Stop to look at the bedded strata in the sandstone and conglomerate that is exposed on this part of the path. Its history is explained in one of the articles in the folder at the lodge.

From the plateau, the trail heads downhill and joins an old vehicle track for a few metres. *Faurea saligna* (boekenhout) thrive in this area. At the end of the stretch of open grassy woodland is a bare earth patch where warthog love to wallow in the wet season. The path skirts the mud wallow and goes to the right up a natural rock staircase that leads to a southerly path through open woodland. The path then takes a sharp westerly turn to the head of a "hidden valley". Zebra spoor are often clearly visible on this part of the trail. Kudu bulls seem to like this area and a family of bush pig has been spotted several times in the shady valley - where a pangolin has also been seen.



View east past Tafelkop



Xerophyta (Bobbejaanstert) in flower

After skirting the valley and resuming the southward journey there are sweeping views across distant Waterberg ranges. The path passes one of the few specimens of *Rothmannia capensis* (Cape gardenia) found on the farm and then goes through a grove of *Pterocarpus rotundifolius* (round-leaved kiaat; dopperkiaat), which produce a mass of sweet-smelling yellow flowers in early summer. As the path turns west again, pause at an open point and look across the valley to see the jutting, red cliffs of Hanglip, 30km away, on the Entabeni reserve. The path then heads up-slope and crosses a vehicle track. Features of the open woodland in this area are the fields of *Xerophyta retinervis* (bobbejaanstert) that resemble knee-high dead or burnt stumps in winter. In spring, the *Xerophyta* is transformed and is crowned with bouquets of lilac, lily-like blooms. In late summer, if the rains have been good, these areas can become quite wet and spongy, but are filled with numerous species of flowers.



The huge fig tree on the plain.



A zebra on its trail

From this point, the trail starts arcing back towards the north, crossing several vegetation zones much favoured by the wildebeest and zebra in winter. After crossing another old vehicle track and descending across another spring line with *Xerophyta*, the trail ends at a giant fig tree, *Ficus thonningii*, with a *Celtis Africana* (white stinkwood) growing among its roots. The tree has a bird and game viewing platform built in it and there is a picnic table with benches in its shade. Birds (especially the green pigeons) love the succulent figs and many birds can be spotted from the platform. Be cautious if you do climb the tree: although sturdy and recently renovated, the platform is eight metres above the ground. From the fig tree it is an easy stroll on a vehicle track back to Mokabi Lodge. The vehicle track passes several anthills, where an aardwolf has occasionally been spotted feeding in the early evenings.

The Leopard Trail

Time

About an hour, depending on stops along the way. The walk is about two kilometres.

Difficulty

This is the most difficult of all the trails in that it ends in a stiff climb (or begins with a severe descent, depending on which way you walk) on a steep slope at the saddle where the Duiker Trail ends. The rest of the trail is fairly easy going. Numerous wooden steps/erosion barriers have been placed along the steeper parts of the route to make it easier.

Description

The recommended route is from the saddle at the start of the Zebra Trail. The trail is marked with leopard spoor signs. Apart from the specimen released in the saddle in 2009, leopards have not been seen here yet, but their spoor – and that of the brown hyena - has been identified on numerous occasions on the track at the base of the hill. Both carnivores have large territories and visit our farm from time to time as part of their circuits. The only other leopard seen on the farm since we've lived here was spotted (ha!) on the Duiker Trail, close to Mokabi Lodge. And a brown hyena has been seen a couple of times near the top dam.

The path follows the contours of the hill, initially through acacia, blou-gwarrie (*Euclea crispa*) and boekenhout woodland. On slightly higher parts of the trail the vegetation changes to include *Cussonia* (cabbage trees), wild olives and the beautiful *Schotia brachypetala* (weeping boer-bean). Much of the trail traverses the dolerite sill that runs along the base of the hill for most of its length. You can recognise this very hard rock by its smooth, brownish weathered surface and dark, fine-grained texture when a fresh face is exposed. The dolerite gives rise to the red soil that characterises the valley and which is favoured by the wild olive (*Olea europea* subsp. *Africana*).

This well-forested trail is ideal for bird and tree enthusiasts and you will find species not seen elsewhere in the sanctuary. In the summer months, the valley echoes to the calls of the redchested cuckoo, or piet-my-vrou, the yellow-bellied greenbul and several shrikes. Bushbuck, bush pig, klipspringer and mountain reedbuck also inhabit this secluded part of the farm. Flowers are plentiful here after rains: there are purple gladioli, white and blue daisies, yellow *Hypoxis* (African potato), red *Crossandra* and “hedges” of purple *Plectanthus*.



Dassies on the Leopard Trail



Gladioli



Plectanthus



Kirkia wilmsii in autumn foliage above the trail



View across the valley

There are good views across Tafelkop and distant hills.

At the base of the cliff, just before the trail begins its ascent, you will see a turn-off to the Bushbuck Trail, described below. The steep climb to the top of the cliffs passes through forest of completely different vegetation that includes *Brachylaena huillensis* (lowveld silver-oak), *Strychnos usambarensis* (blue bitterberry), large *Kirkia wilmsii* (wild pepper tree, or bergsering), *Berchemia zeyheri* (red ivory) and *Maytenus albata*. In autumn, the slopes above the trail are ablaze with the fiery foliage of the *Kirkia*.

Mind your footing on this ascent, which can be slippery when wet, despite the many steps that have been installed. The Duiker, Klipspringer or Waterbuck Trails can be used for the return to Mokabi Lodge.

The Leopard Trail can be used as a means of lengthening these trails or walked together with the Zebra or Bushbuck Trail (see below). It is possible to do the trail in reverse (and it is marked in both directions), but this is not recommended unless you are sure-footed because the descent from the top of the cliffs to the contour path is uneven and precipitous in places.



Diderick cuckoo



steppe buzzard



European bee-eater



scarlet-chested sunbird (f)

The Bushbuck Trail

Time

About an hour.

Difficulty

The north-western end of this trail is quite difficult, because it has to ascend the cliff to the Waterbuck Trail, albeit less steeply than the Leopard Trail. Although it can be walked in either direction, the trail is best started where it leaves the Leopard Trail at the base of the cliff, rather than from where it joins the Waterbuck Trail.

Description

The following description starts from the point where the trail leaves the Leopard Trail, at the base of the cliff in the northeast of the farm. The start is clearly signposted. Immediately after you have left the Leopard Trail, note the very large – and very old – olive trees (*Olea europea* subsp. *Africana*) on the right, growing on a large anthill. These, together with the several *Schotias* nearby, make this an excellent place to look for birds. The grey-headed bush-shrike and yellow-bellied greenbul are local residents. A few metres further on is a fine example of an *Elaeodendron tranvaalense* (Bushveld saffron), followed by a copse of *Dombeya rotundifolia* (wild pear), which look magnificent in early spring. On the way, you might notice that the rock around you has changed from sandstone to dolerite, as you walk downhill and cross the sill that has intruded horizontally into the hillside. This rock weathers to the deep red soil in the area.

After about 50m, you'll come to the vehicle track that follows the farm boundary. Immediately across the track is a fine specimen of *Combretum hereroense* (russet bushwillow), whose small reddish-brown pods can be used to make a tasty, rooibos-like tea. Turn left and follow the road down the hill, noting the very red soil that is derived from the dolerite all around you. Below the concrete strips, there is a prominent group of trees on the left of the track: they include *Pappea capensis* (jacket plum); *Ficus ingens* (red-leafed fig); and *Cussonia transvaalensis* (grey cabbage tree/kiepersol), all growing on another of the many prominent termite mounds in this area. A bushbuck ram has often been found dozing in the shade of these trees. Keep a look-out too for the shy mountain reedbuck. On top of the prominent hill in front of you, is a reminder that the real world is never far away - an MTN tower that ensures good cellphone reception at Mokabi!

About 100m later, two anthills on the left side of the track again support a variety of large, old trees: *Schotia brachypetala* (weeping boer-bean / huilboerboom), whose densely clustered red flowers are striking in early spring and attract a wide variety of birds, especially sunbirds; several olive trees and *Acacia robusta* (enkeldoring); and some more specimens of *Cussonia*. From October to April, the valley echoes to the call of the red-chested cuckoo (Piet-my-vrou).

After following the track next to the fence for about another 200m, the base of the dolerite sill is reached and the rock outcrop ends. Immediately afterwards, the trail leaves the track, turning left through the grassy thornveld; note the wide variety of trees in this area, not only acacias, but many evergreen and deciduous species too. Several examples of sekelbos (*Dichrostachys cinerea*) may be seen here, notable for their beautiful red lantern flowers in early summer. Sekelbos can become a serious invader in overgrazed land, but this is its natural habitat. This is the lowest part of the farm, at about 1300m above sea-level.



Bushbuck



Mountain reedbuck

Shortly, you will come to a vehicle track; turn left and within a few metres, the trail passes a watering trough and feeding station. Note the magnificent specimen of *Pappea capensis* behind the trough. We keep the trough filled in winter, and supplement the natural vegetation with salt and molasses licks, in order to attract game to this corner of the farm. The giraffe are frequent visitors, being especially partial to the high concentration of acacia in the area; but kudu bulls, bushbuck, klipspringer and mountain reedbuck are also seen frequently here, especially in the middle of the day. The cliffs above are often occupied by baboon, who will insist on announcing your presence, no matter how quietly you've walked!

Beyond the feeding station, the trail begins an oblique ascent of the cliff slope. After stepping over a dead tree trunk, you can see another large *Schotia*, together with a saffron tree, on the left. And do have a look at the rocks at your feet: they are fragments of conglomerate, with innumerable rounded pebbles of many different rock types, cemented in a sandy matrix. As you climb, so the vegetation begins to change again. Most noticeable are the fine specimens of *Kirkia wilmsii* (wild pepper tree / bergsering) growing on the slope. The track passes over a branch of one *Kirkia* specimen and then under some others, as you make your way up the steepest part of the walk. At the top of the escarpment, where the track turns left, look back down Skrikkloof, the long straight, narrow valley that heads north-east towards the distant Lephalale River.

Now you'll walk through a forest of low *Ochna pulchra* (peeling plane / lekkerbreek), together with the *Burkea*, stamvrug, kudu-berry and hornpod trees that are typical of the north-facing rocky slopes. There are also several specimens here of the beautiful *Albizia tanganyicensis* (false thorn paperbark), whose striking creamy-white, papery trunks characterise these north-facing slopes throughout the Waterberg – but you'll have to look for them among the dense vegetation. There is a labelled specimen on the Waterbuck Trail, which you join shortly, after a few more turns between trees and rocks. Once you reach the Waterbuck Trail, which is also clearly marked, you can either turn left towards the view site that overlooks the valley through which you've been walking, and go home via the Duiker Trail; or turn right along the Waterbuck Trail and follow it directly to the lodge.

The Klipspringer Trail

Time

About half an hour from viewsite to lodge. A round trip out on the Duiker Trail and back along the Klipspringer Trail via the two view sites, could occupy an hour.

Difficulty

A straightforward walk, with a gentle climb and a few rocks on the path.

Description

The trail can be walked in either direction, but this description starts from the view site at the end of the Duiker Trail, which is also close to one end of both the Leopard and Waterbuck Trails. After leaving the view site, which is under the shade of a large, gnarled *Elaeodendron transvaalense* (bushveld saffron), the trail follows the crest of the ridge for a short distance before curving away to the right to avoid some difficult rock climbing. The vegetation consists mainly of stamvrug (*Englerophytum magaliesmontanum*) and *Combretum*, but there are also some fine specimens of *Ochna pulchra* (peeling plane, or lekkerbreek), including a very large one right next to the path.



Ochna pulchra



Klipspringer



Ficus ingens – rock fig

All along this section of the trail, there are lovely views across the rolling hills towards the north-west, and even Melora, the flat-topped hill – on which an important Iron Age site is located - at Lapalala, some 30km distant, can be seen quite clearly. Eventually, the trail finds its way up to near the crest of the ridge once more, and there's a short detour to another viewsite, which looks out towards the southeast. Admire, but beware of the large specimens of mountain nettle (*Obetia tenax*) – trees rather than shrubs - that grow along the cliff immediately below and to the side of the view point, and which produce remarkably attractive greenish-white blooms in early spring. There's a fine example of a *Maerua caffra* (bush-cherry) nearby. Also in spring, this view site is a marvellous place to watch birds feeding on the scarlet blossoms of a large *Schotia brachypetala*, (weeping boer-bean, or huilboerboon) growing on the slopes below the cliff.



View to north-west



Mokabi Lodge from the trail

From the view site, the trail descends gradually along the northern slope of the ridge until it joins the Kudu Trail just behind Mokabi Lodge, which can be seen for much of the way. The trail passes next to a small fig (*Ficus ingens*) which has wrapped its roots around a loose rock on top of a rock outcrop; and a little further on, beneath a large *Vitex pooara* (Waterberg pooara-berry), which is unique to this area. Much of this last section follows a seep line in the rocks, with the result that after rain, numerous ferns, succulents, *Xerophyta* and *Elephantoriza* plants may be found alongside the trail.



Vitex pooara (Waterberg pooara-berry)

The Warthog Trail

Time

About 30 minutes from the lodge to the Big Fig Tree on the plain. Return either over the Kudu Trail, or along the road, about 15 minutes, making 45 mins in total.

Difficulty

The easiest of the trails, with no climbing and almost no rocks along the way.

Description

Although the trail can be walked in either direction, this description commences from Mokabi Lodge. Turn left between the pool deck and the pan and follow the warthog spoor signs down a

long remnant wetland towards the Eskom lines and our generator room. As the trail leaves the wetland, it passes through a grove of *Faurea saligna* (Transvaal boekenhout), which appear to mark a moisture-laden fracture – although a borehole sunk here many years ago was dry and filled in. After crossing the entrance road, the trail continues down-slope past “House Dam”, where you might find game drinking, or birds like grey heron, hamerkop, Egyptian goose or even black duck taking refreshment.



Oosthuizen and Barnes family graves

Continue down the open ground, cross a road and then turn left into open woodland, characterised by the typical Waterberg trees boekenhout, wild seringa (*Burkea africana*), raasblaar (*Combretum zeyheri*) and dikbas (*Lannea discolor*). At the end, the trail bends into a heavily wooded copse, which is dominated by a very large fig tree (*Ficus thonningii* or *burkei*). Beneath the tree are four graves, marking the last resting places of former tenants or owners of the property, and whose details have been written up in a section of the lodge brochure.

The trail now turns sharply west away from the fig tree and heads through a thicket of tinderwood (*Clerodendrum glabrum*, now re-named *Volkameria glabra*). Just beyond this, on the right, is one of very few specimens of an important and pretty tree, the violet tree, krinkhout or *Securidaca longipedunculata*. This tree has a rather spartan form, with a pale grey bark and branchlets often with ill-formed spines. The flowers (August-November) are pea-like, in profusion in dense flower heads at the ends of branchlets and in leaf axils; and are purple to pink in colour with a violet scent. The fruit is distinctive: an almost round nut, encased in a single membranous wing that may be purple when new, drying to a pale reddish brown.



Securidaca longipedunculata (violet-tree or krinkhout) on the Warthog Trail

The tree has numerous reported medicinal uses, mainly related to the poisonous methyl salicylate that occurs in its roots and which smells of wintergreen. It is considered to be an effective aphrodisiac (“Bushveld Viagra”), but guests are requested not to remove any parts of the tree for

experimentation. A decoction of the root is used by the Sotho for treating coughs and by the Tswana for chest complaints. Others use strips of bark to treat headaches, fibrositis and rheumatism; and the root, if inserted rectally or vaginally, is (or was) widely used across Africa as an acceptable (though from reports, extremely unpleasant and prolonged) way of committing suicide. The bark can make a soap; and yields a reasonable rope.

Just beyond the krinkhout stands a fine specimen of the mountain karee (*Searsia* (formerly *Rhus*) *leptodictya*). After a short grassy patch containing many mint-like *Lippia javanica* plants, the trail winds on across a red-soiled area that may once have been a small early settlement (some grindstone fragments were recovered here). This section is shaded by another suite of typical Waterberg vegetation: *Pterocarpus rotundifolius* (dopperkiaat / round-leaved teak); *Vitex rehmannii* (pipestem-tree), *Combretum zeyheri* and *C. nelsonii* (Waterberg bushwillow). See if you can identify the sole specimen of the spindly *Searsia* (*Rhus*) *keetii*, Keet's slender currant bush, next to the trail. (Hint: look for the distinctive tri-foliolate *Rhus* trademark.)

The trail then enters a low rocky knoll, which is densely wooded with a remarkable variety of tree and shrub species, dominated by some impressive figs. A very large *Euphorbia ingens* (candelabra, or naboom) may be found at the eastern end of the knoll, which is well worth rambling across before moving on. Almost 30 species have been identified here so far, including some that are uncommon on the farm, like *Rothmania capensis* (Cape gardenia), *Erythrina lysistemon* (coral tree) and the *Vitex pooara* (pooara berry). A short circular walk has been created on the knoll and over 40 tree labels installed. Birds of course love the diversity of fruits and berries and this is a good place to stop for a while to watch for them. Several animals, the impala herd in particular, are fond of resting in the shade of the wooded knoll, so don't be surprised if you disturb them. Vervet monkeys are also occasional visitors, especially to the *Rothmania*, whose label they seem to enjoy removing!

The trail emerges from the southern side of the knoll onto a grassy plain, home of many of the warthog families living on Moletadikgwa and which stretches across to the Big Fig Tree at its eastern edge. As you move slowly and quietly out of the forest edge onto the road that passes here, you might be lucky to see what game is out grazing before you: zebra, wildebeest, hartebeest, waterbuck, impala and kudu are commonly present and may not have noticed your approach.

In crossing the plain, you will notice the faint undulations that are a reminder that this was once ploughed land (for groundnuts); and you'll also see a number of burrows. Most of these are, or have been used by warthog, although they may originally have been excavated by the aardvark that wander around here looking for termite mounds to mine. In the winter of 2014, for example, almost 20 late afternoon sightings were made of an aardvark on this section of the plain.



The grasses on the plain are quite varied: although thatching grass (*Hyparrhenia hirta* and *Hyperthelia dissoluta*) and the highly desirable couch / kweek (*Cynodon dactylon*), a small finger grass, are predominant, several other species may also be seen.

The trail ends on the road opposite the start of the Zebra Trail, a few metres

before the Big Fig Tree, offering several options to continue or return to the lodge.

Note how the fig tree (*Ficus thonningii* / *burkei*) appears to comprise two separate plants; and yet on inspecting the trunk, only a single tree can be distinguished, apart from a *Celtis africana* (white stinkwood), which is intertwined with the fig at the ladder going up to the platform.