

"I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees..."

In love with FORESTS

Great trees bring great peace, as you'll discover when you visit these indigenous forests, all on Wild Card properties.

By Nick Dall

GROOTVADERSBOSCH NATURE RESERVE

"I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees..."
Every time I read the American naturalist Henry David Thoreau's words, I think of Grootvadersbosch, the largest enclave of indigenous forest in the Langeberg and a dank, dark, musty place even in the heat of summer.

Amazing though life under the canopy is, it is the sight of Grootvadersbosch from above which is forever seared on my retina. Because the forest is on such a steep slope, looking down on it isn't too hard to achieve. The hills behind Scolopia cottage provide the best overview, but the bird hides built high up in the trees themselves offer the most atmospheric vantage points.

You must look up, too. Sit on the mulchy floor and try to make out where the leaves end and the sky begins. Sit still and wait for a narina trogon or a bushbuck to break your reverie. Stand at the base of the giant redwoods planted by well-intentioned foresters in the last century (perhaps they too were inspired by Thoreau) and know that they will still be there for your great-grandchildren.

FIND IT Travelling on the N2 from Swellendam towards Mossel Bay, take the Heidelberg turn-off. Drive straight through the town and continue on the R322 for 14 km before following park signs to the right.

SLEEP THERE Ten grassy campsites overlook the countryside (R300 for 1 to 6 people). Scolopia cabin sleeps 6 and overlooks the forest, from R890 for 1 to 4 people, R200 an extra person. Prices are off-peak rates. CapeNature 021-483-0190



KNYSNA FOREST
GARDEN ROUTE NATIONAL PARK

Mere mention of the word Knysna evokes images of gargantuan trees and mysterious elephants, delicate frogs and hard-living woodcutters. The Southern Cape coast receives year-round rainfall and giant yellowwoods, stinkwoods and white pear trees have thrived in its moist soils for centuries.

There are quite a few so-called 'Big Trees' in the area, but for raw emotive power it is hard to beat the Dalene Matthee Tree. This 880-year-old, 40-metre-high Outeniqua yellowwood is marked by a small plaque: *"Like a mighty king it stood above the white alder and mountain saffron, stinkwood, assegai and hard pear. As if God had planted it long before the others. Its giant root anchored it to the ground like giant arms."*

The text comes from *Circles in a Forest*, the first of Matthee's four 'forest novels' which bring to life the myths, history and ecology of the area. The Circles in a Forest Trail is a one-of-a-kind day-walk that uses the beguiling beauty of Matthee's words to breathe new life into the forest and its fungi, ferns, brooks and loeries. I caught myself thinking I was one of the woodcutters walking home after a long day's toil only to come across an elephant bull: *"like a huge, grey rock moving slowly through the foliage"*.

FIND IT Travelling on the N2 from George, take the Rheenedal turn-off 15 km before Knysna. Just past Rheenedal take the Goudveld turn-off and follow the signs to Krisjan se Nek. 044-389-0252

SLEEP THERE Camp out on one of the 'forest timber camping decks' in Diepwalle, R170 base rate for 1 or 2 people. Or splurge on the luxurious tree-top chalet (R1300 for 1 or 2 people). Book with the park on 044-302-5606.

KARIN SCHEMBROEKER



SPES BONA AND ECHO VALLEY FORESTS
TABLE MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

There's more to Kalk Bay than beach, beer and bric-a-brac. Cape Town's quaintest fishing village has quite a bit of mountain up its sleeve. Spes Bona and Echo Valley, also known as Kroon se Bos, are two of the largest pockets of indigenous forest on the Cape Peninsula. Both can be taken in on a short walk which starts and ends on Boyes Drive.

These 'afrotemperate' forests are funny, nestling in the valleys and depressions between buttresses so expertly that they can barely be identified as forests from without. But there's no denying it once you're inside them, with gnarled yellowwoods, Cape beech and assegai trees forming a twisted canopy.

There are lovely wooden benches in the forest. Pack a thermos flask so you can enjoy a cuppa as you relax.

These are peaceful places where Rameron pigeons, lichens and mosses thrive. The splendid serpentine boardwalks which wend their way through both forests are not just for our comfort, they make sure that walkers don't wander aimlessly among the trees. Sitting just above the forest floor they allow leaf litter to accumulate and ensure that the seedlings which are indispensable to the forests' future are not trampled.

NIKE DALY



FIND IT Park on Boyes Drive at the track labelled Ou Kraal. After a gentle ascent of about 1km you'll reach a junction. From here you'll do a loop that goes up through Spes Bona, reaches its peak at the Amphitheatre and descends through Echo Valley.

SLEEP THERE The best forest accommodation in the park is the tented camp at Orange Kloof near Hout Bay. It can be enjoyed as part of the Hoerikwaggo Trail or on its own. Safari tent R465 a night for 1 or 2 people. SANParks Central Reservations 012-428-9111

LUVUVHU RIVER FOREST KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

Unlike most forests, there is quite a bit of light in the Luvuvhu. It's filtered through the leaves of the jackalberries and fever trees, suffused with a rich green usually the preserve of pond algae and pea soup.

Historically it's not only the light in this remote subtropical forest that is murky. Wedged up against the borders of both Southern Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa, the area was such a popular hideout for brigands, ivory poachers and slave traders, it earned the nickname Crooks' Corner.

These days it's not quite as shady (forgive the pun). Graceful nyalas and small family groups of elephants meander through the trees almost as languidly as the river itself, while crowned hornbills and greyheaded parrots seek refuge among the foliage. Because leopards and the occasional lion lurk beneath the canopy, visitors aren't allowed to leave their vehicles, but the winding road has numerous viewpoints over the river. The drive to the lovely, forested picnic area may just be the most relaxing thing I've ever done in a car.

FIND IT Situated in the uppermost corner of North-Eastern Kruger, the Luvuvhu River Drive (S63) is accessed from the Pafuri Gate or from Punda Maria camp

SLEEP THERE Punda Maria has camping from R190 a night for 1 or 2 people, bungalow R800. SANParks Central Reservations 012-428-9111

WOODY CAPE

ADDO ELEPHANT NATIONAL PARK

Addo is known for its elephants and lions, but the Woody Cape section of the park near the small coastal town of Alexandria has no dangerous game and is a walker's paradise. Although it's not far from the Tsitsikamma and Knysna forests, the Woody Cape has an entirely different feel to it. The soil is sandier, the climate is drier and the trees are different. True, there are some magnificent yellowwoods, including the Lekkerboom, a gigantic specimen named for the reservoir of water held at the base of its trunk, but it's the splash of orange provided by the coral trees, which flower in winter and spring, I remember most clearly.

This is a coastal forest in the truest sense of the word. To fully appreciate the diversity of this section of the park, you need to hike the two-day Alexandria trail which teases you with glimpses of the ocean, before spitting you out onto the deserted beach in all its glory. Here dolphins and whales outnumber humans. Meanwhile the enormous Alexandria dune-field stands, desert-like, in perfect contrast to the fecund biodiversity of the forest. 🐾

FIND IT Travelling on the N2 from Port Elizabeth to East London, take the R72 towards Alexandria. Just before Alexandria, take the gravel road to the right and follow park signs.

SLEEP THERE The Langebos huts lie at the start of the trail. The spectacular Woody Cape hut can be reached only on foot. Both R130 a person a night. Book with the park on 041-468-0916