

MBOTYI 4X4 TRAILS

KHOTO'S LEGEND: THROWING THE BONES AT MBOTYI

The Transkei coast is usually renowned for its wrecks, but we found tons of other things to do in the area, including a visit to a local sangoma via a challenging 4x4 route. Involvement with local communities has sparked a range of activities at Mbotyi River Lodge, and we explored the area.

“You are some of the first visitors I have had from eThekweni,” said the Pondo sangoma via the interpreter. We were seated on rough benches in a darkened hut, a candle burning at the back of the room, our shoes in a pile outside. “I will bless you and wish you a safe trip back,” he said. “Thank God for that” I thought as it grew darker outside and we still had a hazardous twenty minute drive over rough terrain and river crossings back to Mbotyi River Lodge and the sun had already set behind a bank of ominous looking clouds. We had picked up our guide (SATSA registered) at the lodge and driven the 4x4 track over several hills along the spectacular coastline to the sangoma’s hut. He, together with his wife and acolytes, had performed a dance for us, shown us the room in which they brewed their various medicinal herbal concoctions, and consulted with the ancestors. It was all very interesting but I was hoping for some hints of the future, perhaps a lucky lotto tip, or a tall dark stranger about to cross my threshold. Perhaps that cost more than the R50,00 each we had to fork out for the visit. Anyway it was a fascinating glimpse of local culture and would appeal greatly to overseas visitors. However he was not the first famous sangoma in the region. In the middle 1950’s a famous herbalist Khotso Sethunsa lived in the area. He is said to have been beaten by his employer and cursed him publically. Soon afterwards a tornado wiped out the farmer’s land and Khotso’s reputation grew. He was also implicated in the disappearance of the Gray children in 1967 who had been playing on the beach near his kraal. Although the father and elder brother were close by, their bodies were never found, and their spirits are said to haunt the beach in front of Mbotyi River Lodge.

And of course there is the historical wreck of the Grosvenor, an English vessel returning from India in 1782. She ran aground and sank off a rocky little bay that can be visited by 4x4. Only 14 of the 150 people drowned. When news of the disaster reached Cape Town a search party for survivors was mounted, but only 12 people were found. For many years rumours of the castaways living with local tribesmen persisted until in 1790 a colony of white people were discovered living on a tributary of the Mngazi River. It was rumoured that the Grosvenor had been carrying great riches and a number of absurd and costly recovery schemes were launched, but only two cannons and several coins were ever discovered from the wreck and she lies today with her secrets intact.

But Mbotyi is not just about the past. In the late 1980’s a concrete road was built and at the same time, Mbotyi River Lodge, now renowned in the area for its luxury accommodation and fine dining. Although a little overpriced (a fotostatted map of the surrounding places of interest costs R10,00) it is the ideal place to base yourself to explore the area. There are five 4x4 trails in the immediate vicinity; Waterfall Bluff – a drive down to Lupatana then an hour’s scenic walk to a waterfall that spews into the sea; Goss Point – a picturesque spot for a picnic; Point Grosvenor – the site of the wreck; Mbotyi View Point – a rough ride to a scenically magnificent spot; and Montshe to Mzimpunzi beach which is an ideal spot for sundowners and takes you to the sangoma’s kraal. All trails are suitable for most 4x4’s with high clearance and low range is only required on one trail. Diff-lock is not needed and soft-roaders should cope reasonably well. Some of the tracks are very steep and boulder strewn and care should be taken not to damage the undercarriage of the vehicle.

Mbotyi River Lodge has become very involved in the local Pondo community through horse trails, nannies to watch the children, porters and guides for hikers, and river rangers that will assist you with flyfishing. Other activities include birding in the indigenous forest that clothes the steep gorge into Mbotyi, canoeing

on the estuary, swimming, and a games room and library. There are also various waterfalls in the area that can be reached by 2x4. The staff at Mbotyi River Lodge are friendly and always at hand to cater for your every need. Be warned however, that everything comes at a price and the services of a local guide will set you back R150,00, be it for a 20 minute ride to the sangomas hut or a day's walk along the beach. However it is commendable that the Lodge is involving the local community to such a degree and should be supported. When you next feel like some luxury is a superb setting while putting your 4x4 through its paces, visit Mbotyi River Lodge, you won't regret it.

TRAVEL PLANNER

WHAT IT COSTS

Tariffs range from R435,00 – R830,00 per person per night inclusive of all meals depending on the season and type of room. Enquire about off-peak rates. Lunch packs are provided on request but you will have to pay for all beverages. Children under two are free, 3-11 is 50% of the adult rate and 12 years and older – adult rate. Single supplement is subject to a 50% surcharge of the applicable rate.

WHERE TO BOOK

Mbotyi River Lodge Tel: (039) 253 8822, E-mail: mbotyi@pondoland.co.za Website: www.mbotyi.co.za

GPS WAYPOINTS

Just follow the signs to Mbotyi River Lodge from just past the Total Garage past Lusikisiki on the road to Port St Johns. The route is clearly signposted. A map with all the points of interest is included in your information pack in your room and if you want one to travel around with, the cost is R10,00 from Reception.

LIST OF CAPTIONS

1. Cathedral Rock
2. Angel Falls is an easy drive from the Lodge
3. The bar at Mbotyi River Lodge is the meeting place for all the guests
4. The service in the dining room is excellent
5. Magwa Falls is reached by a good gravel road
6. Washday on the road to Lupatana
7. The lush grounds and pool area of Mbotyi River Lodge
8. The Pondo sangoma goes through his ritual
9. The Pondo sangoma goes through his ritual
10. The wooden panelled rooms at the Lodge
11. The sangoma blesses the money he has been given
12. All the verandahs at the Lodge overlook the estuary
13. The Pondo sangoma goes through his ritual
14. A bird's eye view of the Lodge and its surroundings
15. Local sunworshippers
16. Southern right whales are a common sight near Mbotyi