

Media Release – 30 March 2000

Life in Kruger National Park Returns to Normal

South African National Parks (SANP) are happy to report that life in the Kruger National Park has become normal again after the most devastating floods in the history of the Park since it was opened to tourists in 1927.

Most of the damage to the infrastructure of the Park has been repaired. Priority was put on restoring access and services according to a well-planned schedule and we are happy to report that all priorities have been met thanks to the dedication of all involved.

To date, the high level bridges over the Sabie River (at Kruger Gate and between Skukuza and Satara) have been repaired. The Skukuza restcamp is fully operational, except for the riverside chalets and huts that are still to be repaired. The old Selati Restaurant site, situated on the platform of the old train station building next to the old steam locomotive, has been turned into a rather attractive restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. Groups are requested to book for meals. A limited cafeteria menu is available next to the service station in the camp. The Skukuza Main Restaurant is undergoing repairs and will be remodelled before it opens to the public.

With the exception of Biyamiti, Jakkalsbessie, Shimuwini, Boulders, Balule, and Roodewal Bush Camps, all other camps in the Park are open and fully operational.

The Crocodile Bridge gate remains closed as the low-level causeway is still submerged. Also, because the road leading to Kruger Gate from Hazyview is full of potholes, it is recommended that visitors to the south of the Kruger use the Malelane Gate to enter the Park. The Pafuri Gate in the northwestern corner of the Park is open as of today 30/3/2000.

In the north the high level bridge across the Letaba River has been reopened. However, the low water bridge on road H14 remains closed until further notice.

The tar road linking Phalaborwa to Mopani is still closed due to serious damage to the Letaba low level bridge and guests wishing to use this camp are requested to travel via Letaba Camp.

The state of all the gravel roads in the Park is regularly monitored. Currently access to gravel roads is restricted to the few passable ones but, if weather permits, many more will be opened for traffic in the following week.

Many people have called to inquire about the effects of the floods on nature itself. Here are some facts.

The total number of rainy days during January and February 2000 in the whole of the Kruger National Park was a whopping 30 and an average 490mm of rain in February alone. This figure represents 570% higher than the normal February average of 86mm.

Scientists and Rangers in the KNP say that the heavy rains have been a boom for the natural environment. The floods have cleared the waterways of years of silting resulting from damming. They have also cleared away the build-up of dense vegetation along the rivers. Invasive alien plants such as lantana and water cabbage have been washed away. In places where waters have receded, it looks as though a giant mower has moved along the rivers, uprooting trees and covering them with soggy vegetation. But already, there are signs of new growth on banks and islands.

Rangers say this is the best time for game viewing because impalas, blue wildebeests and zebras do not fancy tall grass and therefore tend to hang around on roads. Sightings of lions, giraffes and bull elephants congregating on roads have also been reported. The reason for this "unusual" behaviour in these animals, according to rangers, is that heavyweights such as bull elephants tend to sink in the mud and therefore find tar roads more comfortable.

A detailed record of the floods is being kept so that the impact of these floods can be documented. As nature operate in cycles, the chances of the same scenario occurring again are there. So are chances of severe droughts in future.

There is keen public interest in visiting the "Kruger After The Floods" to see the damage and the changed landscapes of the areas adjacent to the Sabie River. The good news is that accommodation is available at most of the camps in the Park and people interested in booking are welcome to contact our reservation offices at the following numbers: Pretoria Call Centre: Phone: 012-3431991; Fax 012-3430905; E-mail: Reservations@parks-sa.co.za. Skukuza Reservations Office: Phone: 013-7355159; Fax 013-7355154.

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Please Note:

The fundraising campaign to help rebuild the infrastructure of the Kruger Park is still open. The SANP invites members of the public as well as organisations to participate generously. The details of the bank account for the campaign are as follows:

*Kruger National Park Disaster Fund
First National Bank
Bank City Branch
Branch Code 250805
Account Number: 6201 4877 156*

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