



The thrill of exploring South Africa - on foot

By Kalpana Rangan one of our Walkers

Get out your walking shoes and find health and contentment

What should you do if you want to keep fit and also understand your surroundings? The simple answer is you should walk and explore the place.

However, walking alone is no fun. Also if you do not know your city well, it is difficult for you to explore. So how should you satisfy your wandering urge and itching feet? The solution is to join a local group that is both health conscious and desirous of unraveling the marvels of the environment. That's what we did a few months after arriving in Joburg!

When we arrived in Joburg, we were given a list of places to visit that included Gold Reef City, Montecasino, Lion Park and Bruma World.

A COUCH POTATO

“Don't walk alone, be cautious of your surroundings and watch out while driving at night,” we were warned. A

Memorable Meanders **The Newsletter of** **The Braamfontein Spruit Trust**

walking enthusiast, I couldn't sit inside the house and become a couch potato! Nor could I just look out of the window of a car while being driven to a place.

“Why do people shy away from walking?” I asked my hubby and also friends. “It is not safe to walk,” most of them said. I decided to talk to people and find out. “Surely there ought to be people in the city who feel the need to exercise their limbs out in the open” I felt.

And that is how I got to know about the Braamfontein Spruit Trust (BST) and its walking trails!

“We need a concerted effort to deal with the challenges facing our open spaces. The BST has as its mission the conservation of ridges and rivers of the Gauteng area,” states Val Kleyn, a devoted member of BST.

WALKING TRAILS

To encourage walkers to visit the Spruit, the Trust has made efforts to clean the surroundings and mark walking trails. The Spruit, a 25 km long river course with several tributaries, rises in Hillbrow, meanders north to flow into the Juskei river and finally joins the mighty Limpopo!

The BS trail follows rocky ridges and willow fringed rivers, past dams, waterfalls, golf courses, through bird sanctuaries, botanical gardens and nature reserves!

Yes, we discovered the secrets of nature after becoming a member of BST and joining its walking trails! When our guide pointed out on a trail, "Look that is the Protea tree and those are its orange flowers," I was happy I had seen the national flower of South Africa!

In the past year we have visited a number of places that are treasure houses of fauna and flora. Walking Melville Koppies both on the Western and Eastern section was a revelation!

ARTIFACTS OF THE STONE AGE

Walking the rough stretch with your walking stick and reaching the highest point to view the city of Joburg or the Magaliesburg mountains was rewarding. We couldn't agree less when our walker friend remarked, "On a clear day you can see forever!"

It was a joy discovering that the "Kingfisher Reserve", situated within the suburb of Fourways and laid out on 20 hectares of natural bush, was home to several granite outcrops and artifacts from the Stone Age!

At the "Faerie Glen Nature Reserve," 4.8 km from Pretoria, happily we became aware of bird life like the Crested Barbet, Cardinal Woodpecker, Cormorants and some Canary species!

MYSTERIES OF NATURE

It was thrilling to explore the mysteries of nature walking along Kloofendal Nature Reserve, Klipriviersberg Reserve and Delta Park to Craighall falls.

Walking on narrow paths carefully to avoid wet patches, brushing past long grass blades, listening to the chirping of birds, touching calm waters of the streams, feeling the shower of the falls and observing locals religiously performing Sunday morning rituals, were unique experiences we gained only by walking the trails!

Even walking to and fro (down and up as well!) 7.2 km to the Tswaing Crater was more exciting and less tiring as we shared the scenes and information along with our group of energetic walkers!

220 000-YEAR-OLD CRATER

Looking at 70 plus enthusiastic walkers, we were only inspired to get the best of our walk! Yes, we could appreciate the 220 000 year old meteorite crater all the more after the steep climb down. Sipping a bottle of orange juice sitting around the bowl shaped crater was a fitting finale to the visit!

What more could we ask for? My hubby's cholesterol level and weight are very much in check. My blood pressure is in control. We both are looking fresh and healthy!

Also whenever we meet our Indian friends we have stories of our adventures to tell and recommendations to visit the

unknown treasures of their province!
Aren't we richer walking and exploring!

Melville Koppies Walk 29th January 2006

If you take a walk in the veld, enjoy the twittering of birds and the rustling of grass in the breeze, brush against indigenous shrubs, listen to the natural quietness, walk on a path cut out of a rocky hilltop ... just five kilometres from the city centre. Sound impossible? Well, it's not, it's Johannesburg's rather wonderful Melville Koppies.

Just a suburb or two from the city centre, when you walk through the grand gates, entrance to the Eastern side of the Koppie in Judith Road, you are stepping back half a million years into Johannesburg's history, when stone age man left his tools at the top of the ridge.

About 20 of our group met on the western side of the Koppie on January 29th to walk this island of natural beauty.



View towards Emmerantia Dam taken from the west side of the Koppie.

The nature reserve is a treat: over 200 birds have been recorded there, a range of small mammals have made it their home - mongooses, genets, civets, hares, hedgehogs, shrews - as well as various lizards, geckos, chameleons and

tortoises. And hiding in over 50 varieties of grasses, are snakes: among them the deadly rinkhals and puff adders.

We did not meet any snakes but did see some of the wild mammals. The rock formations are fantastic and take you back to the time Africa was under water.

Wendy Carstens, a volunteer guide at the Koppies, did a magnificent job of taking us round the koppies and was extremely informative about the wild life. The information contained here came from Wendy

The area is ancient - the oldest rock on earth, greenstone, at 3 000 million years, is on the hill but overlaid by granite. Otherwise, the stony ridge consists of quartzite and shale. It is estimated that the quartzite ridges are believed to be 2.9 billion years old.

An Iron Age furnace was uncovered on the Eastern side in the 1960's and the nature reserve became a national monument.

"This year the reserve has a lot of shrubbery and spring flowers because we had a lot of early summer rain. 95% of the shrubs can be used for medicinal purposes," explained Wendy. There are eight plant communities on the Koppies - from several different grasslands to shrubland to woodland.

Trees flourish on the Koppie. Some of them only grow on quartzite ridges - the Transvaal Milkplum and Wild Apricot. There are other wild varieties: the Wild Peach, the Wild Olive, Common Wild Currant, Common Wild Pear, Wild Elder, Wild Gardenia, Wild Medlar.

"We do have a problem with exotic trees and shrubs, usually the seeds of which are dropped by birds flying over," adds Wendy. Weeds also spring up easily, their seeds being carried in the same way. They are pulled out individually or sprayed if growing in a larger outcrop

The walk took about 3 very enjoyable hours and we then had our picnic in the garden of Marsha Slabbert's house. Thank you to Martha who also allowed us to park our cars outside her house.

Altogether a very enjoyable and informative ramble

Visit to Miss Love's Victorian Cottage 19th February 2006

The visit to Miss Love's authentic Victorian house was a delight from the moment we arrived outside her house in Auckland Park - to be met by a genuine Victorian lady.

There were about 20 of us in our party and Katherine Love gave us a short talk about the area. She then proceeded to take us around the local streets and pointed out architecture of the various houses. A number of these were designed and built by Sir Herbert Baker.

Among the most prestigious were the four houses built for Sir Julius Jeppe. One for himself, one for his son, one for his daughter and one for his butler!

After our walk, which lasted about 90 minutes, we eventually were taken into Katherine Love's Victorian (or more probably Edwardian) residence. She looks the part of an elegant Edwardian lady.

The house was built by Sir Herbert Baker at the beginning of the 20th century. Here the family collections of Victorian heirlooms grew to fill the house, the product of an interest shared by Miss Love and her mother who passed away just a few years ago.

As you enter the house you are transported into an "a bygone era" except this has gone nowhere. It is a real lived-in house.

Every item is scrupulously authentic to the period. The house has 22 rooms with approximately 9 of which are furnished and decorated in Victorian style. Nothing in her collection is by itself priceless but what makes it priceless is that it is all in one place.

The dining room is staggering, replete with walls of deep red, the colour most suitable for aiding digestion according to the Victorians. A 10-seater dining table is covered with a damask tablecloth which once belonged to British Prime Minister George Canning. and two lovely, massive, sideboards provide room for a variety of crockery and glassware as well as a small cupboard which holds a chamber pot for the relief of the gentlemen (after the ladies had withdrawn) who therefore did not have to miss any part of the strictly male conversation.

The guests, when having a meal, normally about 10 courses, (recipes by Mrs. Beeton), would speak to only one

person to the right or left of them at each separate course but never across the table. The hostess would indicate, by a turn of her head, when it was time to address the person on the other side.

The kitchen is as the last Irish maid left it .The only modern intrusion is an old gas stove.

The book lined library has a map-table, designed by Herbert Baker as a centrepiece, a roll-top desk and a fireplace decorated with magnificent peacock feathers. The library also houses a collection of 2000 78rpm recordings of classical music, as well as a great variety of sheet music.

Beyond this is the music room containing a “Beethoven” piano, a vast collection of fans and period dresses..

And then an elegant main bedroom. Beside the bed are some wooden steps for ladies to use to get into the bed. This also conceals a commode for night use. The other bedrooms were those of the husband, adjoining the bedroom of his wife (with an outside door for easy after hours movement without disturbing his lady) and the typical bedroom of a young man.

We all had a lovely tea in her front garden with delicious sausage rolls, scones with cream and jam and custard tarts all of which were homemade by Katherine.

The house consists of 22 rooms as well as carriage houses, which will be opened to the public at a later stage.

Altogether, a highly rewarding and informative walk and tour.

