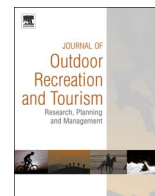




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Who are wild enough to hike a wilderness trail?



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ABSTRACT

Wilderness trails differ from other hiking trails in South Africa in that there are more risks involved. These types of trails are also becoming more popular. The purpose of this study is to 1) identify the motives of wilderness hikers in Kruger National Park (KNP), 2) cluster wilderness hikers based on their motives, and 3) identify key management aspects that contribute to a high quality wilderness hiking experience. Results indicated that wilderness hiking is a niche market and that there are different clusters of wilderness hikers. Hikers were asked to evaluate the critical success factors that contribute towards a memorable hiking experience. From the memorable experience factors, six factors for developing and managing wilderness trails were identified, and the paper proposes a 3A-typology of wilderness hikers, namely admirers, adventurers and amateurs. The significance of this research supports the importance of market segmentation of the nature tourist as well as the importance of recreational activities within protected areas, which, if managed correctly, create a memorable visitor experience.

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

The article addresses marketing and management implications since the 3A-typology provides a clear profile and describes the motives which may be used for marketing campaigns. Aspects pertaining to the memorable experiences provides trail managers with insight into what wilderness hikers regard as important. Subsequently wilderness hiking trails differ from other types of hiking trails, enabling management and park authorities of assessing which factors will likely result in positive word-of-mouth or revisit intention. Furthermore, the six memorable experience factors contribute to the current knowledge-base of this niche market and pinpoints specific areas where management can intervene for sustainable trail promotion.

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1. Introduction and research rationale

Many ecotourism products centre on some form of nature-based activity, which correlates well with wildlife or adventure tourism experiences (Hill & Gale, 2009). Among the variety and diversity of ecotourism activities, hiking is one of the most popular and enjoyable ones (Fromme et al., 2007; Rodrigues, Kastenholz & Rodrigues, 2010). According to Lynn and Brown (2003), the most rapidly developing activities are associated with trail use, resulting in many natural areas providing outdoor recreational opportunities such as hiking trails. The popularity of hiking is due to the variety of choice when undertaking a hiking expedition, in the sense that the hiker is directly in control of various aspects of the walk, such as the type of trail, the level of fitness required and the

pace of the walk itself (Ewert & Hollenhorst, 1997). Furthermore, the wilderness experience provided by activities such as hiking embodies aspects such as autonomy, spontaneity, solitude, freedom of action, challenge, risk, spiritual values and aesthetic appreciation (Lynn & Brown, 2003). The locality of hiking trails makes it one of the most accessible activities to partake in, whether set in an urban fringe or a natural, pristine or wilderness background (Hugo, 1999). Wilderness areas are commonly found in national parks or protected areas and integrating wilderness trails into national parks is beneficial in diversifying product offerings, making the experience accessible and attracting a more diverse market (Saarinen, 2013; White, 2009).

According to Wells (1996), South Africa has one of the best-managed protected area systems in the developing world, and the first African country to establish wilderness areas as part of the national protected area system. 'Wilderness' comes from the English word 'wild(d)earnes' or 'wil(d)deer', indicating 'deer' or 'wild animal' (Wall-Reinius, 2012). 'Wilderness' has an etymological origin,

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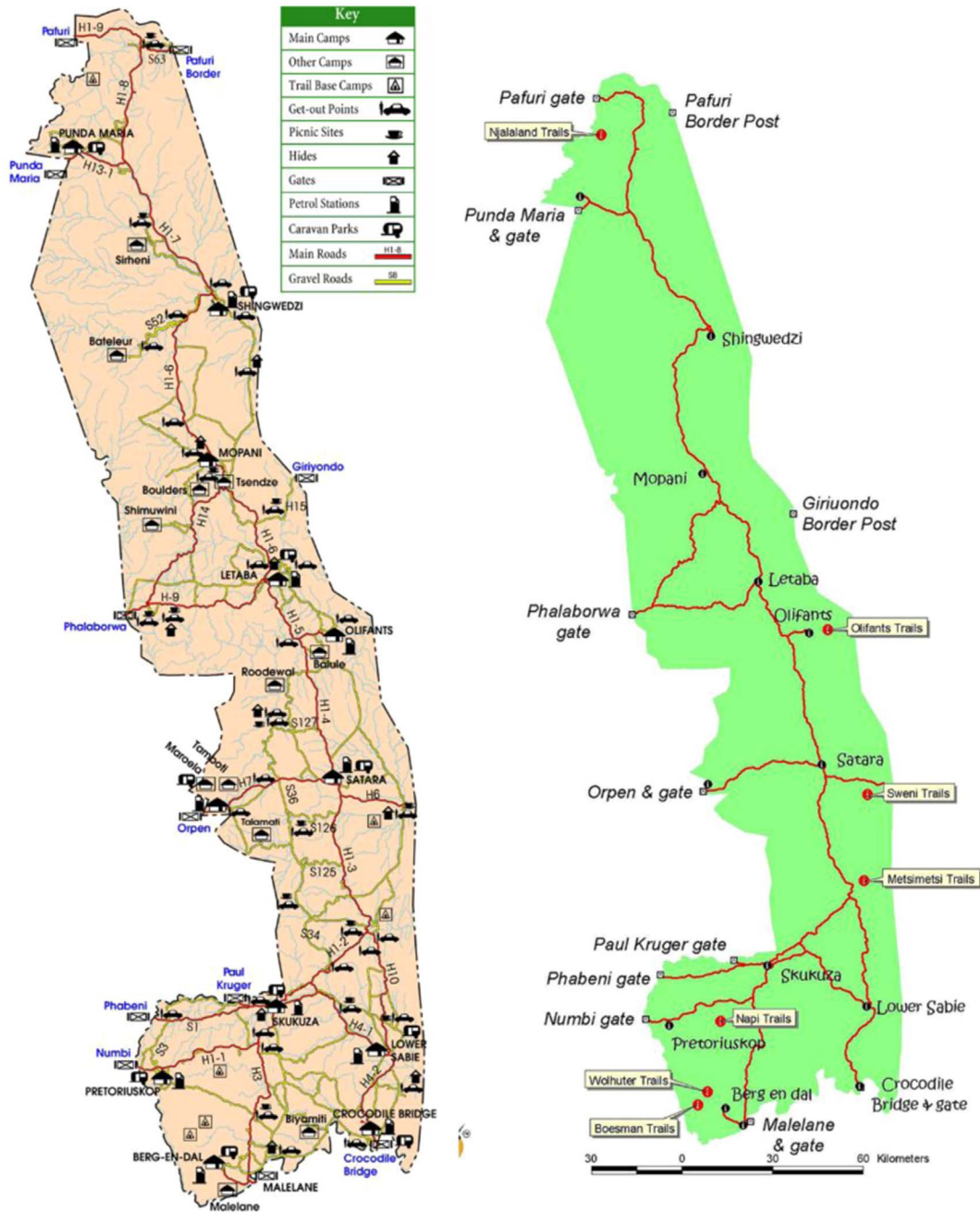


Fig. 1. Maps of the Kruger National Park. Source: SANParks (2016a, b)

meaning land that is uncultivated and inhabited by wild animals only (Mels, 1999; Wall-Reinius, 2012). The Kruger National Park (KNP) in South Africa offers the most wilderness hiking trails. The role of these types of trails is to provide tourists with an authentic African and bush experience, outside the confinement of a vehicle and in proximity to nature (SANParks, 2014). In 1975, the KNP in South Africa identified five main area categories, namely (1) botanic priority areas, (2) wilderness areas of minimal human influence, (3) rare antelope priority areas, (4) elephant priority areas, and (5) general wildlife areas (Freitag-Ronaldson et al., 2003). Subsequently, 49% of the KNP was zoned as wilderness areas, categorised into four areas of diversification, namely *limited motorised*, *semi-pristine motorised*,

primitive hiking and *pristine hiking*, the latter being the focus of this paper. According to Freitag-Ronaldson et al. (2003), the Recreational Opportunity Zoning Plan defines the limits to which the wilderness zones are developed, ranging from pristine wilderness trails/areas to well-developed rest camps. Notably, the KNP stretches over two-million hectares (larger than Israel or The Netherlands), confirming the significance of land bespoke to wilderness areas. The KNP Wilderness Trail Programme (KNPWTP) comprises seven different wilderness trails that are scattered throughout the KNP, as shown in Fig. 1 (SANParks, 2016a, b).

The map on the left displays the rest camps, while the map on the right illustrates the trails. Table 1 supplies a brief description of

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