

## Ndumo Game Reserve

(words and photos – Ralton Bentley)

My wife and I had a few days off from the rat-race, and decided it would be really nice to go on a wild African off-road / camping getaway, but at the same time not travel too far.

Ndumo Game Reserve is right up on the KZN / Mozambique border. It's the oldest of the KZN Wildlife parks, and is quite special in that it isn't a very popular destination, and therefore still rather wild. The campsite (and they have chalets too) is un-fenced, with plenty of signposts around, warning you of the dangers that lurk around you!



I decided not to take a trailer, but to pack everything into and onto the Land Rover. That way we wouldn't need to worry about the road condition warnings that we'd read! We left Durban at sunrise and drove straight up the N2 to Nkonkoni, where we turned right toward Jozini. There's some wonderful scenery along this part of the route around the Pongolapoort Dam! Finally, our well signposted turn-off to the left, and about a 20km drive along badly corrugated road to the main gate. This road was quite treacherous three days later after 48 hours of torrential rains!, and certainly not recommended for sedans!



The campsites are nice and casually laid out, not crammed on top of each other. We picked a site on the edge of the area, and pitched our tent and kitchen facing the bush. The ablutions at Ndumo are extraordinary!, very neat and clean and tidy. The welcome and service was also an absolute delight.



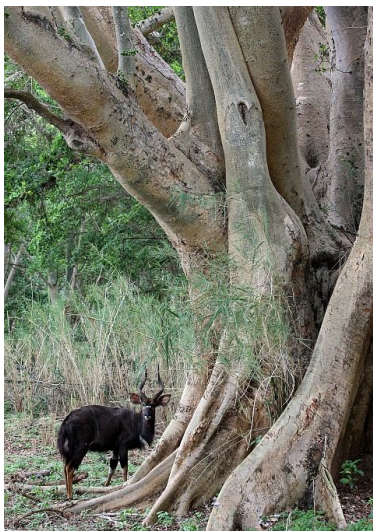
After a light lunch and a few beers (it's hard work setting up camp!), we set off for our first look around the reserve.

Ndumo is a bird watchers paradise! We weren't out for long and saw a Palmnut Vulture and three types of Kingfishers! Three hours later we returned to camp and had seen Hippo's, Crocs, Giraffe (more about those later), Nyala, Warthog, Crested Gineafowl, Impala, Fish Eagle, Vervets, to name a few.



That was enough for the first day..., lit the fire, poured some wine and listened to the sounds of the wild night.

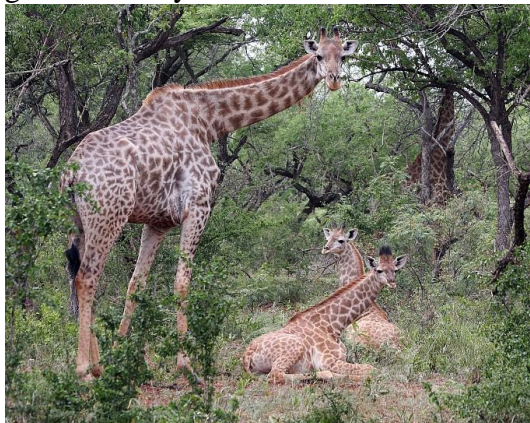
The next day we tried the 4X4 route. An extremely scenic and wild drive. Not very challenging, but a lot of fun. The Sycamore Fig forests are breathtaking, as are the Fever Tree forests!



The lookout point and picnic site at Red Cliffs makes for a good resting place. A nice picnic lunch, and an hour or so just watching the birds and staring off across the river into Mozambique.



The giraffe in this reserve are such crazy animals. They gather around the roads, and then just stand there and watch you when you approach. You have to slowly and carefully move closer and closer before they move off. It's a little intimidating because when you're that close you realise just how big they are, and how easily a good kick to your vehicle will cause extensive damage!



Ndumo is a special place. Don't rush..., there is so much life here, so many small animals to see as well, and many interesting animal tracks and signs to follow and identify.



The next day saw us taking a long slow drive down to the bottom end of the park and back along the Matandeni route. This part of the park isn't regularly visited and we came upon a large herd on Buffalo at a water hole. These animals were very skittish and somewhat threatening, before they finally retreated into the bush. There are a variety of landscapes in this area, which leads to a wide selection of animal types. And it started to rain...



In the late afternoon/evening we decided to visit the hide at the Nyamithi Pan. You park your car and then walk about 500 meters to the hide. About half way there was a sudden noise in the bush nearby with the shocking sounds of snorting and grunting of Rhino! We had no-where to go! One in the bush, and suddenly one on the pathway in front of us too! Frightened, we carefully retreated and then ran back to the Land Rover! That evening we decided to try and visit the hide again early in the morning...

So, there we were, just after 5am, pouring rain, driving along the muddy sand track toward the hide, when I saw a tick bird sitting on a large brown rock... Decelerating so that I could look at the bird... and suddenly, obviously badly frightened, the rock turned into a Rhino and, with the most incredible agility and snorting and grunting, charged straight at us!, and, being in the wrong gear, accelerating away wasn't working too well! This beast just kept charging, and slowly but surely we drew away from him! At this stage we were driving at breakneck speed along the jeep track! Arriving at the parking lot of the hide, badly shaken, pale, unable to push my foot on the clutch pedal for shaking too much, we just sat in silence while we calmed down. There was simply no way we were going to get out and walk to the hide after that, so turned back and raced past where the Rhino was and returned to camp. We decided to pop into Tembe for the day instead. It was now so wet!, it had been raining hard for nearly 24 hours!

Tembe is only about 20km down the road from Ndumo, but due to the amount of rain and the subsequent road damage, it took us a good hour to get there. The roads were extremely muddy! Tembe requires a 4X4 due to the sand roads (it is strange to drive through the sand forests, lush African bush, but "sea sand" on the ground). Although Tembe is an awesome place to visit, we were slightly disappointed at only seeing one elephant after driving around for hours (and the guy at the gate was drunk when we arrived at about 10am). We did, however, come across a huge, inquisitive herd of buffalo, and some interesting species of antelope, like the Reedbuck and Tsessebe.



The one elephant we did see provided some great photographic opportunities as he rubbed himself against a tree..., and then grew a bit irritated with us and came stomping towards us!



It continued to rain all night, and finally, on our last day, we awoke to sunshine (and extreme humidity). We spent the day relaxing, sipping wine and talking about the wonderful experience we'd had. That night treated us to the sounds of hippos mating and Hyenas laughing, for hours....

We took the long way home, driving on toward the coast (Kosi Bay), and then driving south past Lake Sibaya and Phinda Game Reserve, turning back onto the N2 south at Hluluwe...

A wonderful, wild and highly recommended trip!

Important information:

GPS co-ordinates: Main gate: S26 54 44.4 E32 15 46.1

Malaria: Yes, high risk.

Safety: Yes, safe from people. Be aware of animals!

Road/Vehicle: Good ground clearance is recommended. 4X4 essential for Tembe.

Other: Can get very wet!