



SEDIBA NEWSLETTER

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Welcome & General

Hi Sediba readers,

Welcome to our September/October edition.

Our thanks to all members who attended the AGM and special thanks to the committee for the sandwiches!

The year is barreling along and before we know it, Christmas will be upon us. But before we gear up for that crazy time – here is the latest update on FOPS. The workparty updates are very informative thanks to Kevin and Paddy

John Bennet has supplied us with an interesting roundup of the Fossil excursion which took place at the end of October. We also have the next chapter of his informative geological sites, and a little meander down memory lane!

We've added some info from abroad about the plight of frogs and how this impacts on the delicate balance of nature.

Please remember to send any pics and stories to me online at sediba@fops.org.za

Happy trails

Jacqui

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MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL :

Membership renewals are due in July/AugustPlease submit your proof of renewal payments to : secretary@fops.org.za. If you pay on-line, please quote your surname and membership number as the reference. If you deposit money into the account, please fax the deposit slip to: 086 644 2477

Please remember: R110 individual membership; R140 for a family membership with children UNDER 18years old.

TENTS:

FOPS Tents are R150 per night, available to current paid up members only. Please CALL Lindy on 082 8900534 to book. Please have your membership number handy when calling.

January Workparty Dates

January 2010 work party date: Friday 8th January - Sunday 10th January 2010. Should you have any queries on dates for the 2010 calender please contact Fiona via SMS 079 517 4475 OR email secretary@fops.org.za

Our Committee

Title	Name	Contact numbers	Email
Chairman	Errol Blecksley	082 920 9211	ebleksley@wol.co.za
Treasurer	Mark Viljoen	082 773 8855	mark@jvms.co.za
Special Projects – Pilansberg	Paddy Coombe-Heath	082 459 4339	lindys1@worldonline.co.za
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Secretary (Membership renewals, applications & queries)	Fiona Chapman	079 517 4475	secretary@fops.org.za
Sediba Editor	Jacqui Higgins	082 385 4444	Sediba@fops.org.za

NEW MEMBERS

Thanks to all members who have renewed their membership and a warm welcome to the following new members:

Patrick & Beverley Hannah

Sonia Kramer

Janny & Corni Kramer

Prof Lownie

John Tyrer

Gareth Lehmkuhl

John Grover & Fransina Roos

Megan Enslin & Grant Cresswell

Louise Naylor

PILANSBERG WORKPARTIES

September 2009 (by Kevin)

Hi All

We didn't have too many hands on deck, except for the dedicated few die-hards. It seems the warmer weather has inspired us all to get those odd jobs done around the home which we put off during the colder winter months.

The Pitjane trail was the focus of our attention this month. Having not completely finished the trail over the top part of the hill during last month's workparty, we tackled the final bit with great enthusiasm. What a change in the weather, in particular the heat factor. It got hot, really hot and the temperature quickly soared deep into the 30's (Deg C) by about 11'o Clock.

It was just reward once we got to the top of Pitjane hill, the view as always is spectacular from that vantage point. We took a well deserved break, sucked in the beautiful view and headed down the other side of the hill to finish off the last little bit of trail "rock shuffling". At least working downhill seemed to go faster than the uphill part.

PILANSBERG WORKPARTIES

We took the lunch-time siesta to let the day's heat pass. In the cooler hours of the afternoon, we put together a new parking area for the Moretelle river trail and then started "shuffling" the rocks back in line that once was the Moretelle river trail. The floods experienced on this part of the trail over the years had buried or removed several of the trails marker stones. It was hard work gathering rocks and carrying them some distance back to the trail. If we had never experienced a hard work-out in a gym, this was pretty close to the real thing. With the remaining trail still to be completed, we hit the showers, started the bushveld "tv" and raised a toast to our progress and the privilege of spending another awesome day in beautiful Africa.

PS: Welcome back Mark and Annette Morris – Glad to see you back in the FOPS family after your break of 15 years.

October 2009 (by Kevin)

With several extra hands this month, we could tackle a number of other tasks that we needed to get to. One task we were all hoping to see the end off was the walking trails, but that would have to wait until Saturday. Tonight was a night of celebrations. Two birthdays occurred this week, and what would a birthday be without a decent cake or two!

Happy Birthday to the "Old Man" and the "Youngster".





The second birthday cake, specially made by Oliver and Lela turned out to be quite a surprise in more ways than one. After blunting the cake knife, only a chisel and hammer would successfully slice the special cement cake they made. Nice one you jokers!!

The walking trails were tackled by three groups. Belinda and Carmen headed for the Pitjane trail to add a couple of new “rock painting” directional arrows. Annette and her crew went to re-align the top part of the Noka Trail while the “newbie’s” headed out with me to tackle the river part of the Noka trail. Mark and Oliver went up to the Park’s garage to service the Grader. Has this Grader ever been serviced before? We considered sending the old filters to a museum as extremely old late “iron age” artefacts.

The kids (varying in age from 5 to 11) were all armed with paint brushes, and sent with adult supervision to start oiling the bird hides at Gadinonyane. I’m not sure what the other kids looked like after that job, but my two (Brevin and Garren) had ruined a set of perfectly good cloths. Thank goodness it was an old set of clothing, but at least they had thoroughly enjoyed the “work”.

John “The Boss” headed for Sefudi and replaced the walk-way planks that were in need of desperate repair.

Hip-hip hooray – The Borakalalo trails have been re-routed where needed and completely re-vamped. All 22,000 stones are back in line and with just a few finishing touches required and signage still to be installed, the trails are looking stunning again.

Please give them a try when next in Borakalalo.





Then on Sunday– (byDoug)

“On Sunday, tragedy struck. We woke up to find a young Kudu bull at the entrance to the camp with a snare around its neck. It had collapsed and was badly dehydrated. We removed the snare, checked its neck (no outward injuries) tried to get it warm and gave it some water. Over a period of about hour we tended it and finally got it onto its feet (we had previously kept it in a “resting” position) only to have it collapse & die at this point.

This was not good and changed the mood in the camp so much that a snare patrol was hastily put together and a group of us went off to walk the game trails looking for & removing snares. Poaching is rife at Bora, in fact, probably its single biggest headache. After much walking, the last lot being a stiff walk up and down a VERY rocky koppie, we headed back to camp to pack up and head off home.”

Besides ending on that rather sad note, we still enjoyed the workparty very much and meeting all the new folk was awesome.

Hope to see you all back very soon.



FIRE FIGHTING TLOU DRIVE AND MOTLOBO DRIVE

Sunday the 6th of September



HAIL STONES ON HIPPO LOOP

Saturday 7th Nov



PICKING UP OLD BARBED WIRE FENCING FROM THE FARMLANDS



WORD FROM ABROAD

SAVE THE FROGS

Frog Extinctions and the Chytrid Fungus

Dear nature lover,

The chytrid fungus is quite possibly the deadliest organism on the planet (after humans!), and it is decimating amphibian populations worldwide. The fungus has likely driven 100 amphibian species to complete extinction, and nowhere is the effect of the chytrid fungus more pronounced than in Panama and Costa Rica, where many rainforest streams are now nearly completely devoid of frogs. While the chytrid fungus is one of the most significant threats to biodiversity in the 21st century, few herpetologists have any background in the laboratory techniques necessary to detect the fungus, and training classes are rare. Without the ability to diagnose infections, we stand little chance at managing chytridiomycosis, the disease caused by the chytrid fungus.

The chytrid fungus is being rapidly spread around the world because humans ship nearly 100 million amphibians around the planet each year, for food, pets, bait, and for use in zoos and laboratories, usually with a thorough lack of disease testing or quarantine regulations.

SAVE THE FROGS! is preparing a massive campaign to stop the chytrid at its source.

This means:

- 1) Getting frog legs off the menus of large restaurant chains. At least 5 million bullfrogs enter the United States each year from farms around the world, and a recent study showed that up to 62% may be infected with the chytrid fungus. On top of spreading their disease to native US frog populations, these bullfrogs often escape their rearing facilities overseas, and likely spread diseases to those frog populations as well.
- 2) Working with large pet frog distributors to encourage or force them to either halt their sales of frogs or to require disease testing and certification of disease-free status.

You can read more about what SAVE THE FROGS! is doing to stop the chytrid fungus at: <http://savethefrogs.com/chytrid/actions.html>

THE FOPS GEOLOGICAL SITES – A WORLD FIRST

CHAPTER ONE – CHAPTER 3 - SOME HISTORY

First came the work parties and when the attendees began to operate as a well oiled, reliable, hardworking construction crew the park personnel, acknowledging that they had hit the jackpot with this set up and on the off chance that this success story could be repeated with another group of people, requested that we try to establish a volunteer police force (H/O's) to assist the park staff in controlling the ever increasing number of tourists who were visiting the reserve over weekends.

They insisted that all potential applicants for the posts had to possess, at the very least, a rudimentary knowledge of various aspects of the park's eco system, fauna and flora, geology, goals and history which they could pass on to any inquiring visitors that they might deal with. and so – next came the education and training course and the original student body consisted mainly of workparty personnel, a few fops armchair members and less than a few wilderness leadership school people who had earned inclusion rights simply because of the invaluable assistance that they gave to many of the workparty projects. A course was put together in one helluva hurry by a fops armchair member who was an educationalist by trade—Val Howard. Val and her team did a credible job at such short notice and I fondly remember the course with warmth and amusement. Subsequent fops courses seem to be such serious do or die and intense affairs. Ours was a relaxed casual scene; a couple of the lecturers for the various modules actually came out of our own ranks.

John Keates had an above average layman's knowledge of geology and so he was asked to gen up on Pilanesberg's geology and he took that module. We surrounded him at "G1" and he began his talk—hesitantly at first but as he proceeded he gained in stature and confidence and the information began to roll off his tongue effortlessly. We—his audience—were most impressed with his performance. However, puzzlement set in when he stooped down to point out some feature on a big brown rock lying at his feet. He became very quiet and as he wordlessly examined two or three more big brown rocks he somehow managed to become quieter than quiet. The park personnel had sited "G1" in the wrong place. The rocks at his feet were not the target of his lecture. We thought this was very funny indeed and chortling, all us students, re-embarked onto the game drive vehicles which proceeded to travel down Dithabening very slowly with John peering into the grass lined verge until he found the "tuff" that he was he was looking for. There were no more mishaps on his expertly put-together module and when it was over we were all quietly confident that we would be able to deal with any tourist's Pilanesberg geological questions.

Bob Dehning, another workparty man, was asked to do trees, 24 off of the main trees, that was enough. Old Bob, boy when he gets the bit between his teeth there is just no stopping him. His presentation was so professional (full of Latin nogal) that we all decided that he was actually a world renowned tree expert in fops "workparty attendee disguise". One of the irreverent clowns (about 6 of us) in the group (you always get them) knew that Kew Gardens was advertising for a tree expert and after surviving the Bob experience decided that he would apply for the job.

Park personnel handled the other modules and an army man – full of medals, maps and snazzy looking instruments was called upon to teach us orientation or how not to get lost in the bush. Following his military type barked instructions (in Afrikaans and translated into English) to ignore the very large windmill in full view we set off and most of us promptly got lost even though one of the many tarred roads surrounding the park was easily visible (but at least we did ignore the windmill).

When all the modules were done, we wrote exams and, as far as I know, we all passed. Those of us who sort of swell a bit when decorated with epaulets, badges, shiny brown shoes and meticulously pressed khaki apparel chose the H/O route. Others, who did not find the prospect of spending a weekend changing gear and driving round and round in circles at all appealing, picked up our shovels and went back to digging holes and filling them up with concrete. (I suppose—when you detail the two disciplines close together like I have just done, the one choice was as bad as the other). Some of the successful students chose to do both disciplines and it was out of this group that our next geologist appeared.

Steve Davey - Steve and I shared a brief heart thumping, adrenalin charged interlude with a bad tempered old black rhino at full tilt. I learnt how to run straight through an assortment of Acacia bushes and Steve learnt how to shimmy at least 3metres up the branchless trunk of an old Marula tree. I remember us survivors standing under the tree looking up and wondering just how he had managed to get up there, whilst he, sitting on a branch, was looking down at us trying to work out how to get back down to earth.

One of the perks of H/O duties was to be able to take walks around a kopjie in the Mankwe dam region. It was a good choice for amateur led walks - couldn't get lost circling a hill. The fact that it was an area in which the elusive Pilanesberg buffalo were frequently encountered added to its attraction and hoo boy---it was also black rhino territory.

To add interest to his walk-talks Steve had had 5 or 6 little stones cut and polished and he used them to illustrate the hidden natural works of art that lay beneath the brown surfaces of some of the various types of rocks that were encountered during these walks. Further more; his geological expertise enabled him to explain the ageless geological processes that had produced the beautiful interiors on display.

I'm talking 1990 here but I can still quite clearly remember standing behind him seated at a table in the library at Manyane centre, watching and listening to him giving his geological spiel to all the other H/O's who were attending a meeting in the park. I was absolutely spellbound and flabbergasted at this revelation that was unfolding on a table in front of me. I was being introduced to a new world that I knew absolutely nothing about. I can quite clearly remember thinking, very adamantly, "Stevie boy---- this idea is not going stay in that little leather pouch of your's --- that's for sure."

I spoke to him the other day (he lives in Cape Town) he was telling me that he had seen some polished rocks on display somewhere in the Barberton area and this had given him the idea for his little collection. A good idea that has travelled well!

That takes care of the introduction to the "G" site project. The following chapters will detail the many highs plus trials and tribulations that came about whilst we were busy turning a dream into a reality.

Side Track

Ivan le Roux

Did you pick up on that bit about "meticulously pressed khaki apparel"? a fair number of the H/O's that I see on duty now and again now-a-days could do with an Ivan le Roux shot in the arm when it comes to "spruced up". Some of the original H/O's (I kid you not) used to take their irons with them on weekend duties so as to avoid the resultant explosion if he found any of them with so much as a single wrinkle anywhere. What a tyrant of a boss man he was!

The poor old H/O's had to drive at attention. Get caught slouching behind the wheel and life was not worth living. The guillotine was good, yep--the guillotine was a far easier option than having to put up with a slouch bomb blast. We loved the guy --- you could not help but love him and he used to embarrass the living daylights out of me sometimes. Whenever fops had a do the H/O's had to form a guard of honour and I (you better believe it) had to inspect them on my way to the podium. I mean --- come on, there they stood, ramrod straight --- not a hair out of place, glinting and sparkling away (shoes, badges, belts and teeth) then there was me---dripping concrete, slouching along while trying desperately (and failing miserably I'm sure) not to look too stupid while I checked out these pillars of military bearing on either side of me. At one event we were limited for space and so the one line of guard of honour had to stand on a step. I checked them out from buffed shoes to their knees - didn't feel like peering up their noses.

Till the next chapter

be happy

John Bennett

Hi there my dear friends at FOPS,

It was Fiona's suggestion that every once in a while I write a short article for Sediba to keep in touch and let you know what's happening in my life here in East Africa.

I arrived in Dar es Salaam on 23rd October, spent a couple of days in this buzzing African city with friends. We had meetings with consultants, architects, etc. and time flew by until I finally left for Mwanza - a medium sized city on Lake Victoria. When I say 'city', you mustn't compare it with a city in South Africa, maybe with a city somewhere remote in the Free State but as far as I am concerned - typically African. It is a very clean city however and it is amazing to see many people kept busy throughout the day cleaning the roads etc.

Mwanza has seen better times during the colonial period and it was once an important trading hub for all the countries bordering the lake. There were ferries crossing the lake more or less on a daily basis, now however, these ferries only make port in harbors on the Tanzanian side. General economic deterioration in Africa during the last century consequently also saw a drastic economic decline in Mwanza.

Our climate is good. We are currently in, what they call here, the short rainy period, which lasts from November to January and I can tell you it rains, buckets full. The roads can turn into rivers with water 30cm high in less than 15 Minutes - I have experienced it, but it remains warm and the sun is out again very soon after these rains. We will then go into a dryer period during which it is hot, not as hot, as in our bushveld because the humidity from the lake makes a big difference.

I have started "my project", which is about 50km outside of Mwanza on the road to Musoma/Serengeti. The 82ha area is totally undeveloped and I'm starting from scratch. A nine hole golf course, two lakes, channel through the property to the lake, hotel, bungalows, etc. Currently busy getting the contracts out for the necessary earth movements - building and planting of fence poles, buying truckloads of plants so that we can start planting the bushes and hedges along with the progress on the fence (2.5 km). Once the basic earth movements = leveling are done then the golf course designer will mark the design of the fairways, greens and so on, which we then have to shape with soil accordingly. Next in line is the irrigation (US\$60.000) and again a lot of digging and compacting. Planting and seeding grass on 82ha - what a job! is next and so it continues. By March/April I will have all the basics done, which is very fast as per local standards, but I think you remember my pace of work!

Housing/accommodation is a big issue. A reasonable furnished house goes for \$1200 - \$2000 having said that, the cost of living is extremely expensive. The US dollar, which is the second currency next to the Tanzanian Shilling (Tsh), has "disturbed" the value of the Tsh significantly. An employee in a hotel makes about Tsh 120.000 = US\$75, an expatriate US\$6000 and more. This is a wide and very unhealthy gap because the local economy, hotels, restaurants and up market business are orientating themselves on the US\$ which leaves the majority of locals begging.

So, now you have a bit of an overview where I am and what I'm doing. I hope my short report finds all of you in good health and good spirit!

Mpaka tukutane tena(until we meet again)

Jorg