



Bushveld basher. At Mateke 4x4 Trail you will get intimately acquainted not only with wildlife, but also with the Bushveld terrain.

PHOTOGRAPHS: GEOFF LEVEY

Mateke 4x4 Trail

It's game time!

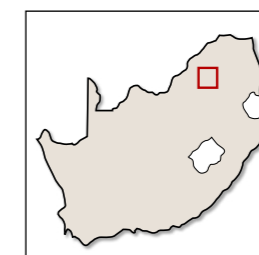
Vast, peaceful and incredibly beautiful, the Waterberg's ancient lands jealously guard their secrets, Mateke Game Farm is one of them. **Geoff Levey** recently explored the region (and Mateke).

If you had to Google "Bushveld escapism" with "game viewing" and "challenging", yet non-invasive off-roading", your browser would likely spit out the following answer – Mateke Game Farm.

For this is the special mix that sets apart this secluded

2000-ha Bushveld game farm in the world renowned Waterberg Biosphere.

Having already established itself as a popular hiking destination, this game farm just 65km north of Thabazimbi and about two and a half hours from Johannesburg has only



recently established itself as a serious off-road terminus.

Unlike most game farms, the trails of which are built primarily for game viewing, Mateke's trails are rather unusually co-ordinated to challenge.

Without sacrificing the pristine surrounds, it cleverly uses >

the natural flow of the terrain to create a technically challenging course where the environment is king and game can be seen at just about every turn.

That said, Mateke's trails are not just about challenging the driver. One of the two trails, a softroader- and 4x2-friendly alternative to the challenging 4x4 trail, is dedicated to the pursuit of sensory pleasure.

Leisurely spanning the farm, it lazily traces a river before heading skywards towards the most panoramic lookout points.

The perennial Mamba River only feeds this indulgence. Running the entire length of the farm, it fuels a hive of activity.

In winter and early spring it provides rich game spotting opportunities, while in summer and autumn it supports prolific birdlife and is the source of a magical floral display.

Rocky Horror and White Knuckle

The 4x4 trail is a challenging outdrive that makes a good day's outing. The trail traces the folds of the mountains, criss-crossing the Mamba River. The steep, rocky terrain makes low

range and high ground clearance essential.

Among the deceptive grade 4 sections, Rocky Horror is an innocent-looking climb over loose rocks that can trap the less attentive drivers in a nasty cross-axle.

White Knuckle is another – a steep descent that is guaranteed to have you gripping the steering wheel and clenching your teeth in concentration.

That's why you have to walk the section before attempting it – because there's no turning back once you've started. Don't attempt it alone or without a navigator.

The trail is well maintained, clearly signposted and accompanied by a comprehensive map and tree list. So if you drive carefully and proceed with caution you shouldn't lose any vehicle parts en route.

The trail stops intermittently at picnic stops alongside the river as if by way of apology or as respite from the adrenalin-inducing ride. Encased in Cape box trees and scattered along the length of the river, these stops offer great game viewing opportunities.

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Dependable source. The perennial Mamba River will be your constant companion on Mateke's challenging trails.

Unusually for a game park, quads are welcome, but only with standard exhausts and under strict management control.

Starry starry night

An exceptionally well run destination, Mateke holds its own among the self-catering bush camp fraternity. Equipped for large and small groups, it offers a diverse selection of accommodation alternatives.

Bush Camp has three chalets, sleeping four each. River Camp has four smaller, thatched tree-houses, equipped with bunk beds. It also sleeps four each. Each has a private boma and a mini kitchen area.

For larger parties, Tree Camp has two large cabins on stilts and features separate ablutions facilities. Likewise, Kudu Camp with its big waterside thatched lapa is also ideally suited for bigger groups. Its two adjacent chalets accommodate 10 persons each.

All cabins have a boma where fires can be made with the supplied wood. All camps, except Tree Camp, have electricity. Bush and Kudu camps also have refrigeration, and are

fully equipped with cutlery and utensils. Camping can also be arranged at Tree Camp.

Drive Out says: Any visitor

to Mateke cannot fail to be impressed with the unspoilt nature, the challenges offered by the 4x4 trail and the opportunities to relax and

What you should know



WHY SHOULD I GO?

It's a well-rounded, value-for-money package that offers a challenging 4x4 trail in beautiful surroundings, with fantastic game-viewing and bird-watching opportunities.

EN ROUTE

How long are the trails? The two trails total 23 km.

How long will I be driving? 4-5 hours

Maximum number of vehicles: 8

Do I get a map? Yes

Will my car get scratched? Not if you drive carefully.

Should I remove the running boards? It depends on your vehicle's ground clearance – you'll have to if it lacks in that department.

Should I take a compressor? Yes

Can I turn around halfway? No

Can we have a braai en route? No, picnicking only

THE SURROUNDS

Best time to go? All year round

Can I take my family along? Yes, definitely

Just for the day or the weekend? Both

Are there ablution facilities for day visitors? Yes

Can I see game? Guaranteed – it's a great game and birding destination.

The nearest town? Thabazimbi (65 km)

The nearest fuel? Thabazimbi

How do I get there? From Thabazimbi take the R510 towards Ellisras and follow the Mateke signboards.

WHERE CAN I STAY?

Mateke offers a diverse selection of accommodation alternatives for individuals and large groups. For a comprehensive review of options visit the website at www.mateke.co.za

WHAT ELSE?

What else can I do there? You can fish, swim, mountain-bike, hike, hike and hike.

Should I take anything special? Binoculars and bird books are essential. Bicycles are necessary if you plan on doing the mountain-bike trails. Also take swimming gear, sunscreen, hats and hiking shoes.

COST?

Trails: R150 per vehicle for the weekend

Accommodation: **Camping:** R50 pppn

Bush Camp: R190 pppn

River Camp: R110 pppn

Kudu Camp: R190 pppn

Tree Camp: R80 pppn

CONTACT?

Theresa Meintjies ☎014 779 0719; ☎073 703 4636; ☎086 647 0919 (fax); ✉theresa@mateke.co.za; 🌐www.mateke.co.za



Hold on tight. Some steep descents (above) will have you clutching the steering wheel on the trails laid out around the Mamba River (this photograph). Tree Camp (below) features two cabins on stilts.

