

Bushwise Newsletter Semester 1 - 3 August 2007.

Introduction

The students arrived, all safe and sound with not to many problems other than that the long drive through the mountains was a bit taxing and two unlucky students had somehow left their luggage at Heathrow air port. But other than that I'm glad to report on the happenings of the past four weeks. It's been a shock to the system as the start in the mornings are early and the activities are long but according to the common consensus around camp most definitely worth it.

Picture this, the winter has hit south Africa in full force, the instructors are walking around with long pants and jackets, what is the first thing the students do as they feel the warm South African rays... They jump in the pool!

This is how it all started for the second intake of Bushwise, cooking students and freezing instructors.

There were all smiles around camp awaiting the students arrival, the bus eventually pulls into camp at 7pm and 15 exhausted students stumble out they are greeted by Ester and Rosemary singing welcome praises. We got all the students settled into their rooms and met shortly after in the dining area for a well deserved home cooked meal. Before they could enjoy it they had to sign their indemnities and find out about possible dangers around camp. They were briefed by the instructors on who exactly George and Mildred are, and surely enough our two resident ostriches walked past to make their appearance.



ARRIVAL OF STUDENTS.

The following day was spent in the classroom where a full day was spent on the Health and Safety. The students received their course outline as well as their files. Everything they needed to survive and eventually pass this course is in that file.



HEALTH AND SAFTY WITH MARK

That evening once the shock and realization had set in we all settled down around a campfire for a good old South African braai. The time was well spent with a proper introduction where the students told everyone about themselves and the instructors explaining how they got here and what their role would be in the students lives for the next six months.

The next important step was overcome when half of the students got to go to our closest town, Hoedspruit where they spent the day trying on and collecting their uniforms. They officially look like guides now. Whilst the other half was enjoying sightings of elephant, rhino, hippo and lion on Makalali Game reserve.



STUDENTS AT A HIPPO SIGHTING AT MAKALALI

Mark ended the week with a lecture in vehicles, how to use them how to fix them and how they work, a 4x4 DVD was shown in the lecture area, and the next day it was up to the students to show the instructors just how its done. The obstacles varied from easy to moderate.



STUDENT (Samantha) DOING 4X4 DRIVING

Navigation and survival was made fun by Sean and Rika a brief theory lecture was done and then it was off to the bush to try and test their new skills. The group was split into 3 and they all had to gather water and food from the bush and the final challenge was making fire not using any implements other then sticks, sun and good old human strength. It proved that they needed a lot more patience then originally thought. The fire challenge was moved to the following day due to bad light...

The water sills were checked early in the morning where the winning team collecte an outstanding 12 ml of water.



TEAM THAT WON THE WATER COLLECTION SURVIVAL CHALLENGE.

(Karin, Nick, David, Steven and Lucas)

Town trips and learner licenses test was the next big step, the students wrote their tests and passed, congratulations to all of them they are now legal learner drivers in South Africa.

The Saturday was spent with a reserve project that involved cleaning up an area on the reserve which is part of the reserve management component of the course, where reserves formally cattle farms have been left throughout the years with rubbish, plastic and wire lying around. All the students and instructors present had cuts and scrapes from a role of wire that had be there so long a tree had grown through the middle. This was by far the most challenging mess to sort out that day, if you know what Barbed wire looks like imagine a role of that around a proudly south African Thorne tree, hence the gloves came were handy. After this time consuming and strategically planned exercise at the end well worth the effort when we saw what we had managed to clear.



AN EXSTATIC NICK THAT PASSED HIS LEARNERS LICENSE.



RESERVE CLEAN UP AND REHABILITATION.

The semester ended off with a trip to Mica, yet another small town close to camp where the students learnt about rifle safety and got to fire a rifle, the girls no doubt had the best scores and the students made all the instructors proud, dressed in their uniform and handling themselves as professional guides would do.

The highlight was to come, Kruger National Park.

The group was yet again split into 3 groups where 5 got to spend 14 hours in the Kruger while the 5 other students had a game drive on Makalali and 5 got to spend some valuable time one on one with an instructor and even more valuable time studying for the big test that was knocking on their door. Here the students could apply their newly acquired knowledge on animal behavior thanks to a combined and insightful full day lecture by Sean and Rika.

The highlight by far was the group that went to Kruger on the Thursday, the day started off slow but an abundance of elephant bulls and every hippo in the park outside water. There were no sightings of tooth and claw i.e. lions or any other cats but on their approach to the gate, they were blessed with a wild dog sighting out of this world. Six wild dogs came towards the vehicle and we noticed that they were stalking something. So Rika turned the vehicle around and followed them for about 10 meters where they then rushed into the long grass and persisted to successfully kill a warthog. O wow what a sighting that was!

On return back at camp the rest were so jealous that they refused to believe the story of the 'so called wild dog' the students then showed them their amazing photos much to their delight but completely disappointed the rest that hadn't seen these amazing, most successful hunting animal in Africa. However the other groups has equally interesting sighting on their turn in the park.



WILD DOG SIGHTING IN KRUGER NATIONAL PARK.

The semester is now over and I cant believe how fast time had gone by, on behalf of the instructors and the rest of the Bushwise team I would just like to thank the students for their ever smiling faces and for making our jobs worth while.

Kind Regards.

Rika Venter and the Bushwise team.