

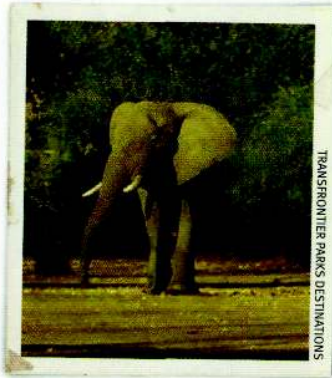
# *The other side*

Since Limpopo National Park's absorption into the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, there have been massive changes afoot – animals have been making their way in, and people have been making their way out. We sent **Geoffrey Dean** to shed light on the latest developments.

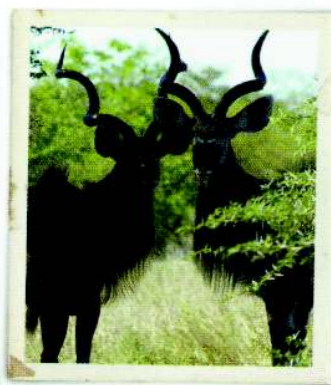
TRANSFRONTIER PARKS DESTINATIONS



DAKTARI SAFARIS / WWW.DAKTARI.SAFARIS.DE (3)



TRANSFRONTIER PARKS DESTINATIONS



**Geoffrey Dean** is a travel correspondent with a special affinity for southern and East Africa. He has written on the national parks and game reserves of Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

**T**here can be no doubt that the Limpopo National Park (LNP) – or Parque Nacional do Limpopo as it is known in Mozambique – offers something totally different to its neighbour, South Africa's Kruger National Park.

The two are joined together at the hip, separated only by a national border, and form the bulk of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. But whereas the well-developed Kruger is visited by hundreds of thousands each year, the much less regulated Limpopo plays host to around 16,000 people per annum. With rolling hills, thick forests and an extensive sandveld area, it is still largely pristine wilderness. And it is big too, covering over 11,000 square kilometres. A sleeping giant, this colossus of a national park has huge potential.

Unless you want to undergo a rugged five-hour drive from the Mozambican coast, the most obvious way into the park is through the Kruger via the service town of Phalaborwa, which is linked to Johannesburg by road and air (flights are daily, but overpriced). I chose to make the journey to Phalaborwa by vehicle – a straightforward six-hour drive via Polokwane – and spent the night at the competitively-priced Sefapane Lodge, an ideal launching point for the LNP. While it's possible to drive yourself through the Kruger and into Limpopo at Giriyondo Gate's passport control, I left my vehicle in Phalaborwa and got a transfer to the LNP's only top-end camp, Machampane.

I was fortunate enough to spend my five days in the LNP with Johan Kriek, one of Machampane's co-owners. A down-to-earth Afrikaner, he has not only explored much of the park but he is also well acquainted with its warden and project manager. Through Johan I was able to meet both and build up a picture of the park's interesting history and the plans for its future.

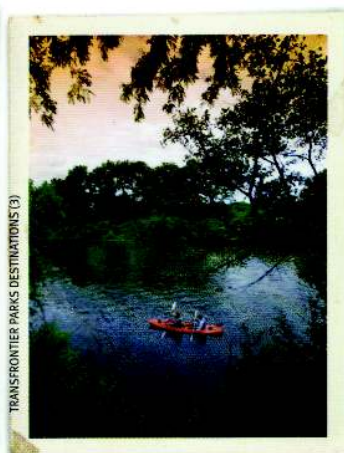
The area proclaimed as Limpopo National Park in November 2001 was actually a former hunting concession, known rather blandly as Coutada 16. Wildlife was devastated here between 1977-1992 – not by hunters, but by the bloody civil war. As early as 1938 the linking of Kruger with the lands that would become Coutada 16 and Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe had been mooted, but it was the World Bank-funded feasibility studies, that, many decades later, finally facilitated the three entities formally merging into the Great Limpopo Transfrontier >

**Main image:** Looking over over its namesake, Machampane camp is at the epicentre of Limpopo National Park's revival  
**Above:** While large numbers of big game have been moved into the park (111 elephants to date), thousands more will undoubtedly migrate in from Kruger National Park when the fences come down; not confined by physical boundaries, birds of all descriptions already reside in Limpopo National Park

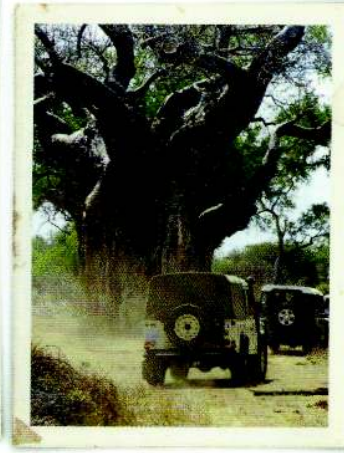
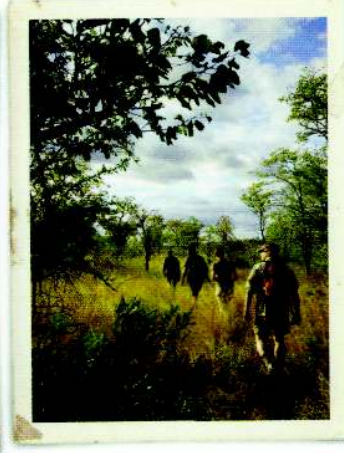




JACQUES GOOSEN / PEACE PARKS FOUNDATION



TRANSFRONTIER PARKS DESTINATIONS (3)



Above: The rugged landscape of Limpopo National Park is one of its greatest attractions; classic game drives are not yet available, but kayak trips, walking safaris and 4WD eco-trail expeditions are all already on the menu  
Below: Limpopo National Park management are hoping that many of Kruger's 35,000 buffalo will stick their heads into Mozambique

▷ Park in December 2002. This amalgamation was crucial to the LNP's regeneration, for it opened the way not only for game to be relocated there from Kruger but also for the dismantling of man-made barriers between the two. With new corridors for wildlife to move along, the natural flow of animal traffic could resume.

To date, however, not all the fences between Kruger and the LNP have been taken down. This is due to the latter still having a significant human population, many of whom were moved in during the civil war to boost Frelimo numbers. An estimated 1200 families, together with their livestock, inhabit the park. Concentrated in eight villages, these people are due to be resettled under strict World Bank criteria, mainly into a southerly corner of the park where a buffer zone will separate them from much of the wildlife. This is not an easy business, requiring both considerable capital and time. The process, funded so far by German and French development agencies and the Peace Parks Foundation, should be complete by 2014, but will require further donations. Two of the villages cannot be moved, and will have to be enclaved.

The LNP's project manager, Antony Alexander, is heavily involved with this resettlement. "There is still a conflict of needs between local people and conservation,"

he said. "It's a complex puzzle to be sorted out. They must get an improvement in their livelihood through their move, and it must be sustainable. As far as the animals are concerned, we can't take down all the fencing along the border with Kruger until all the people are moved and the potential for human-wildlife conflict is reduced. However, in two or three large sections, over 50km of fencing has already come down. Since Limpopo became a national park, nearly 4000 animals have been translocated from Kruger, and we're planning one final major translocation in 2011. Kruger's wildlife population is very healthy, with buffalo numbers at 35,000, the highest they've ever been, and we hope to get some."

Alexander was able to provide very specific details of the translocation numbers thus far: 111 elephants, 12 white rhino, 98 buffalo, 759 wildebeest, 1730 impala, 1024 zebra, 61 giraffe, 48 waterbuck, 25 roan antelope, inter alia. Assessing existing numbers, however, is very difficult according to the capable park warden, Baldeu Chande. "There's been no proper census yet, so I can't say whether or not numbers are recovering well," Chande told me. "I'd be guessing. All the species are represented, and there's excellent birdlife thanks to our rivers and dam. Animals are getting used to humans, but maybe they're the ones originally from South Africa. If you go further into the park, they won't wait for you. We can never achieve zero poaching as people will always view wildlife as a natural resource. In the whole of last year here, I saw just two rhinos."

Whatever the wildlife levels are in Limpopo, (a census is due this September), and no matter how skittish the animals, it is still a special place to visit. The attraction for visitors is largely in the scenery, the birdlife, the unique environment and the fact that it offers something Kruger cannot: untouched, untamed wilderness.

It must be said that Machampane Camp is also a highlight. Set in a fabulous location, close to the Lubombo Mountains that form a natural barrier between LNP and Kruger, Machampane's four beautifully-crafted tented chalets are perched right over the river that gave the camp its name. Johan explained that this area was untouched through the civil war years. "That's why they chose to let the translocated wildlife loose around here,"



WWW.DAKTARI-SAFARIS.DE

▷ he added. From the camp, there are no game drives as such, but walks with a guide and one of the park's 70 rangers are a must. Birdlife is prolific around Machampane – around 225 bird species have been sighted in its vicinity.

There are also a couple of excellent camps – Campismo Aguia Pesqueira ('Fish Eagle Camp') and Campismo Albufeira – where you can either pitch a tent or rent a chalet at a very reasonable cost. On my first night in the LNP, Johan and I had Campismo Aguia Pesqueira and its stunning views over the huge Massingir Dam to ourselves. On another side of the dam, which is fed by the Letaba and Olifants rivers, Johan and his partners are planning to build a new luxury lodge by early 2011. The park has two much more basic camps – Nhampfulle and Sandalo – on the route towards the Pafuri Gate in the park's north. In addition to those, Johan also knows a number of remote, secluded places to camp in the bush where he takes self-drivers on the Shingwedzi 4WD Eco Trail. It was at one of them, Mbona Kaya, that we spent our second night. On an escarpment 30m above an S-bend in the Shingwedzi River we had a magnificent vantage point from where we could observe wildlife coming down to drink. Regaled by noisy birdsong, I felt as if I had a small but spectacular corner of Africa to myself. 🦋



Above: Waterways are a great option to explore this park's undeveloped wilderness  
Left: Machampane camp and the Machampane River

## Plan your trip

### Getting there

British Airways ([www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)), Virgin Atlantic ([www.virgin-atlantic.com](http://www.virgin-atlantic.com)) and South African Airways ([www.flysaa.com](http://www.flysaa.com)) offer regular direct flights between London and Johannesburg. Kenya Airways ([www.kenya-airways.com](http://www.kenya-airways.com)) has regular flights to Johannesburg and Maputo via Nairobi. To reach the park's South African gateway town of Phalaborwa by air, South African Airways and Airlink ([www.saairlink.co.za](http://www.saairlink.co.za)) both have scheduled flights. To reach Phalaborwa by road, it's a six-hour drive from Johannesburg via Polokwane. The drive to the park from the Mozambique coast is a bumpy five-hour journey.

### When to visit

The late dry season (July–October) offers visitors the best chance of seeing larger safari wildlife. During the early rainy season (November–December) is better for bird sightings. Nights are cold in June and July.

### Visas

Most visitors require visas to visit Mozambique. Single-entry tourist visas are available from Mozambique's embassy in London for a fee of £40. If flying into Mozambique, they can be arranged upon arrival for US\$25. If planning to enter overland via Kruger National Park, you must have obtained a Mozambique visa before attempting to cross the border.

### Books

Lonely Planet's *Mozambique* (3rd edition, 2010) by Mary Fitzpatrick  
Bradt's *Mozambique* (4th edition, 2007) by Philip Briggs and Danny Edmunds

### Find out more

Machampane Camp & Wilderness Trails ([www.dolimpopo.com](http://www.dolimpopo.com))  
Peace Parks Foundation ([www.peaceparks.org](http://www.peaceparks.org))  
Sefapane Lodge ([www.sefapane.co.za](http://www.sefapane.co.za))  
Limpopo National Park ([www.limpopopn.gov.mz](http://www.limpopopn.gov.mz))

