

MEDIA RELEASE - 30 December 2002

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TOURIST DIES IN TRAGIC FREAK ACCIDENT

A day visitor to the Kruger National Park died in the early morning of Sunday 29 December 2002 when the vehicle they were travelling in was swept off a causeway over the Bume River between Crocodile Bridge and Malelane in the south-eastern corner of the Park. Johan Steyn (50) together with his wife, Petro (48), his son Jaco (24) with his girlfriend, Elana van Wyk (20), who were staying at Ngwenya Lodge, were crossing the Bume causeway at about 07:00. Due to a heavy downpour in the Bume and Nwatimhiri catchments at around daybreak, the Bume rose very rapidly and before Jaco, who was driving the vehicle, could cross, the family realized that they were in trouble. Jaco tried to start the vehicle but the water rose so rapidly that the family had to get onto the top of the vehicle. The strong and rising torrent started to sweep the vehicle away, forcing the four destitute tourists to try and swim to the safety of the bank. Mrs Steyn managed to swim to the eastern bank while Jaco and Elana managed to reach the western bank safely. Johan could not be seen and was reported missing. Kruger National Park staff, from nearby Biyamiti and Crocodile Bridge were brought in to try and find him and later search parties comprising KNP rangers, SAPS and SANDF staff desperately combed the banks of the Bume Crocodile Rivers to try and locate the missing Mr. Steyn. A SANParks helicopter as well as one from SAPS joined the search and spent hours assisting the search effort. At about 15:30 the body was spotted from the SAPS helicopter in the Crocodile River (near the mouth of the Bume River), about 3km downstream from the causeway. The badly damaged vehicle was found about 300 metres from the causeway.

Another guest who was also staying at Ngwenya Lodge, Keith Muloongo with his family, had just crossed the causeway prior to the Steyns and it was still bone dry. He witnessed the entire incident and desperately attempted to assist the Steyns in bringing their vehicle across. Johan tied a rope to the vehicle and tried to throw it to Keith but the water rose so fast that they did not have the time.

It is always a great tragedy for the Kruger National Park, if a guest loses his/her life, especially under such freak circumstances. To end the year on such a note is quite sad. Guests are urged to be very careful during the rainy season when very localized downpours do sometimes occur and can bring the smallest stream or normally dry rivers down in a torrent without warning. We at South African National Parks would like to express our heartfelt sympathy to Mrs Steyn and family.

For more information on this release please contact:

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