The Gold Nugget cycling route was launched in Goudveld (an old mining town in the middle of the forest) during September. Goudveld is a popular hideaway, 22 kilometres from Knysna, in Bibby’s Hoek to be exact. It is part of the Garden Route National Park’s afromontane forests, the largest continuous indigenous forest in South Africa. It is located on the lower slopes of the Outeniqua Mountains with a magnificent variety of fynbos, birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammal species.

Speaking at the event, Garden Route National Park Manager, Paddy Gordon, said “We’re finding creative ways to make people feel more welcome in the Park during SA National Parks Week. If cycling is the new golf, then we have found ways to upgrade existing trails to suit the entire family.”

The Park’s motto is ‘Adventure is in our nature’ which is in line with the SANParks mandate of connecting society to national parks. There are already 10 trails in the park, mainly in Harkerville, for experienced riders. The Gold Nugget, meanwhile, is geared at junior riders as well as beginners. It’s scenic and beautiful and set in the middle of the forest with ocean backdrops and fynbos.

Ranger in Goudveld, Dominique du Toit, says Goudveld is fascinating for its biodiversity and its rich history. “Back in 1876 gold was discovered by James Hooper along the Karatara River. Later, in 1887, more discoveries were made in the nearby Millwood area. Millwood in those days had hotels, a church, a shop, a surgery, a bank, school and a post office. The two remaining houses from that era are used as a museum to showcase the area’s cultural history as well as a restaurant (Materici or Mother Holly). The goldfields are also still visible.”

This area is where most of the woodcutters lived until they were removed from the forests in 1939. Renowned author, Dalene Matthee, also wrote much about the lives of woodcutters.
Addo Elephant National Park

- The young lady named Jessica at Addo main camp gate – what an asset to SANParks! Beautiful smile, cheerful, friendly and informative! Hope you go up and up the ladder, Jessica!
- There is a new face at the gate from the main camp to the game viewing area. Her name is Jessica Domingo. We have seen her on our last few visits and from far away as you approach you can see the broad smile. A very lovely, friendly and helpful young lady which is certainly an asset to SANParks.
- I want to thank you for the restrooms that are always so clean and the staff so friendly. EK, with a smile of Jeannette en heer span baie dankie sv. I am in Addo every week with a group of Germans/Austrians/Swiss and they often come and congratulate me on the cleanliness, which has nothing to do with me but all to do with Jeannette en heer span en al die ander mense wat daar werk! Baie dankie aan almal van julle.
- Matyholweni Rest Camp does us proud. We love the place. It is neat, tidy, private and the staff members are friendly. Keep up the good work and well done.
- A BIG ‘Thank you’ to the following staff who have gone the extra mile to make our stay unforgettable at Addo Main Camp: the game viewing, collection of dustbins, the Reception staff and our housekeeping lady – all of them always smiling and friendly. There are just too many to mention. ‘THANK YOU’
- ‘Thank you’ to Nolubabalo, Lulama and Dillin for spotless toilets to use at Main Camp, as well as their friendly faces.

Camdeboo National Park

- Huge praise for the staff members keeping the camp sites clean. They were spotless and beautifully raked. Somebody takes great pride in their job! Well done and thank you!
- Look forward camping there again. New viewing platform an excellent idea. Congratulations to the staff of Camdeboo!
- The personnel were extremely efficient. On reporting a broken toilet cylinder and fused lights, they did not hesitate to fix the problems immediately. The central cooking facilities were excellent and the equipment provided top class.
- The attendants at the camp site were very helpful and professional.

Karoo National Park

- Patricia helped us at Reception. She was very friendly and helpful with our booking arrangement.
- We have had the privilege of visiting Addo and Karoo National Parks this past few weeks. It has been a remarkable experience and very enjoyable. The treatment received and circumstances are of the best.

Jungle gym fun for children in Diepwalle

The murder of 27-year-old Felicia Oktober in August, who was an environmental monitor for SANParks, brought shock to the small community of Diepwalle in the Garden Route. This had been the first incident of its kind, and will thus take time for the closely knit community to feel safe again.

Garden Route National Park Manager, Paddy Gordon, says smaller steps to make the community feel at home in Diepwalle have included counselling sessions by the Human Resources unit. As a step to support the community’s children manage the trauma better, it’s important to allow them to play freely again. Regional Human Resources Manager, Marionette Scholtz, Head Ranger for forest areas in Knysna, Klaas Havenga and teams built a jungle gym to encourage the kids to play freely.

Felicia was found murdered in her parents’ home at Diepwalle, Knysna on 25 August. Both her parents work for the Diepwalle section in Knysna. A specialist SAPS unit was deployed from Cape Town. Within hours the police tracked down her alleged killer, her boyfriend, and arrested him.

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The response to the therapy/counseling sessions and jungle gym for the children is overwhelming. Local women came out immediately to play with their children, most of whom live in the staff village in Diepwalle.

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The Knysna forests, managed by South African National Parks as part of its Garden Route National Park (GRNP) makes up around 42 000 hectares of land across the coastal stretch from George to Tsitsikamma in the east. The forests, which were formerly managed by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, include Farleigh, Diepwalle and Tsitsikamma. The forests were exploited prior to 1939, when government decided to close them to the woodcutters’ system. Thereafter, between 1940 and 1964, government focused largely on plantations.

With an estimated 400 elephants walking the Knysna forest in 1876, over 280 species of birds and a population of woodcutters living in the forest, how much can we learn from recorded and oral history?

The GRNP team worked closely with the Knysna Historical Society and other stakeholders to establish a historical route in one of SA’s largest individual forests. Through a self-drive route, launched in June, visitors to the Garden Route can now drive to 10 marked historically significant locations in the Knysna forest. The route comes with a map of the 10 areas dubbed ‘Rooted in time’ – with signage at all 10 spots detailing historical accounts at each one.

The Knysna Historical Society’s Phillip Caveney, introduced various key players and events in recorded colonial history as: 1864-1868 Thomas Bain and the Uniondale Road, 1882 and the Deep Walls Forest, Sawmills at Deep Walls, James Henry Templeman, the Building of the Stone Cottage at Deep Walls, the Early occupants of the stone cottage, Oudebrandpad and the naming of the King Edward VII Tree and the South Western Railway.

Area Manager for Knysna, Johan de Klerk says this is the first of many products to be launched in Knysna. The GRNP team is planning to facilitate a workshop with various stakeholders to include African history in existing recorded work.

This is the first leg of a bigger route to be launched in the GRNP to run from Wilderness to Knysna to Tsitsikamma. SANParks Head of Socio-economic development, Paul Daphne, says the organisation prioritises historical/cultural assets because history accounts for happenings and events in the past to be able to understand the future.

Scientists did their bit to educate and inform learners and citizens during this year’s SA National Parks Week. Grade 7 Natural Science learners from Chris Nissen Primary School in Knysna, the Working on Coast team and environmental monitors were given lessons on biodiversity and the importance of conservation and research by scientists Melanie De Morney and Diba Rikhoto. They also performed various invertebrate sampling techniques and taught the learners how to use insects to measure environmental health.

Addo Elephant National Park is one of the new landmarks on the newly-launched Monopoly Mzansi boardgame, which is South Africa’s very own version of the international best-selling game. The board game, launched at the end of October, now comes with 22 proudly South African locations.

Toy company Hasbro launched the popular board game showcasing local attractions and city highlights at Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton, a key location on the local board.

More than a billion people worldwide have played Monopoly since it was devised 81 years ago but this is the first official South African version.

Earlier this year, South Africans voted for their favourite South African location, street attraction or destination on board to be part of Monopoly history. To-date the game has licenses in 103 countries, with Monopoly Mzansi being the latest addition.

The special localised Mzansi edition features four transport hubs and 22 landmarks. Addo Elephant National Park and St Francis Bay are the only Eastern Cape attractions to make it onto the board.

Scientists do their bit during open week

Navigating South Africa’s largest individual forests

Mountain Zebra National Park’s Senior Field Guide, Charl Lyell, is not just a fundi on terra firma. He’s equally at home on the water, as he proved when he participated in the 2016 Hansa Fish River Canoe Marathon again this year.

Charl’s love for the outdoors and water got him hooked on canoeing in 2000. After this year’s event, he said that although it was his first time paddling with his partner, that he was happy with their performance. Asked what the best thing about the canoe marathon was, he said the fact that it helps the local communities, creates jobs and puts Cradock on the map.

MZNP staff also manned a stall at the marathon, and was also a prize sponsor.

Addo Elephant National Park

MZNP’s Charl more than just an ace guide

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Samuel Section Ranger, Samuel Tompies, was promoted to Senior Section Ranger at Richtersveld National Park at the end of September.

The Otter Trail Run is a run through the well-known hike in a few hours. Last year’s record holder, Marc Launstein, beat his own time in less than four hours on 15 October. Robyn Owen smashed the ladies’ record, finishing in 4:49:50 and finishing fifth overall.

The Garden Route National Park had its own team enter the race - Park Manager, Paddy Gordon ran a 10km race (the Dassie), while Bheki Maphanga, Kyle Smith and Marco Barrado entered the Retto (42.5km). Organising company Magnetic South’s Mark Collins honoured the Park’s trail team with an award for their constant maintenance of the trail. Victor Cunningham received the award for the team.

Speaking after the event, Paddy said “We are proud of the race and its injection into the economy of not just the park but other conservation organisations, young people and local businesses.”

Otter African Trail Run 2016 a huge success

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Information for guides operating in Addo

All guides (individuals or staff members of organisations who bring guests into the park on guided game drives) will have to write an examination based on a new manual in order to qualify for accreditation to act as a nature/field/tourism guide.

Exams will be held at Addo Elephant National Park (AENP) three times a year and will take the form of a multiple choice questionnaire with an 80% pass required in order to receive accreditation.

The aim of this manual is to provide information for nature/field guides operating in AENP. This will help to clarify facts about the AENP and will hopefully allow guides to give the correct information to tourists about various aspects of the park.

The manual will also be useful to students, members of the public and new employees of the AENP as part of their orientation.

Naturally, as new information becomes available and as certain facts about the park (for example, the status of the elephant population) changes, this manual will need to be updated.

Addo Elephant National Park is still a developing park. New developments occur regularly. It is thus in the nature guide’s interest to make an effort to keep up to date on new developments.

Every effort has been undertaken to ensure the accuracy of the information in the manual. In addition, this manual does not claim to contain all information about all aspects of the park. Some sections are more detailed than others. Animal numbers are not included as these are in a continual state of change.

It does also not include all the knowledge needed by nature guides, such as detailed information about animal behaviour, ecology etc. This type of information can be obtained from other books/reference material. A list of recommended reading is given at the end of the manual.

The document can be downloaded from the website: https://www.sanparks.org/parks/addo/conservation/guides.php

As part of its Wellness Programme, Karoo National Park established its own soccer team, named the “Sylvester Legends”. Sponsored by the Human Capital Department (Manager: Marionette Scholtz) in the Frontier Region, the team was able to purchase their own soccer kit and gear. The team practices twice weekly and has played a number of friendly soccer matches against local teams – having won five of their eight matches to-date.

Snippets from the Karoo

There’ve been a lot of goings-on at Karoo National Park outside Beaufort West over the last few months. Here are couple of snippets:

Baby Boy!

Technical Department’s Paul Olivier and his wife, Tourism Department’s Sanet Olivier, were blessed with their fifth son, Wesley, on 29 July.

Anna

Rest Camp Supervisor, Anna Kamfer, retired after 38 years of service to SANParks on 30 September. Anna, a well-known and much-loved staff member, will be sorely missed. We all wish her good health and prosperity during her well-deserved “permanent vacation”.

Anna was replaced by Joey van der Westhuizen, effective 1 November. We wish her well in her new position.

Students

Karoo National Park would like to welcome Patience Manjingolo and Wendolene Pieterse, who are both South African College of Tourism students from Graaff-Reinet.

Soccer

Lena

Another newcomer to Karoo is Hut Attendant, Lena van Wyk, who has transferred from Mokala National Park to replace Joey. We trust Lena will be happy here.

Samuel

Section Ranger, Samuel Tompies, was promoted to Senior Section Ranger at Richtersveld National Park at the end of September.