



Tracks of Giants expedition to highlight human-animal interface in Southern Africa

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Contact: Siyathetha: Claire Warneke: 041 373 0293/ info@sa.wild.org

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Six countries, 5000 kilometres and a small team of devoted conservationists will undertake an epic, 20 week journey in the “Tracks of Giants” highlighting the successes and failures of the human-animal interface across Southern Africa and the importance of corridor and trans-frontier park conservation.

The TRACKS field team is multi-generational, multi-racial, and gender diverse. Leaders Ian McCallum and Ian Michler are joined by Lihle Mbokazi & Mandla Mbekezeli Buthelezi of the Wilderness Leadership School. Other conservationists –“conservation giants” working locally to protect and sustain wilderness and wildlife and reduce conflicts with rural communities - -will join TRACKS as it passes across Southern Africa.

Tracks of Giants is a project of the Wilderness Foundation and The WILD Foundation, and supported by Avis and other sponsors. Conservationists, Ian McCallum and Ian Michler will be doing the entire journey and will be joined by other team members on various stages of the expedition. TRACKS is a regional demonstration of the global conservation initiative, [Nature Needs Half](#).

Ancient migration routes of elephants were chosen as the general route indicators as elephants are a keystone species and play a vital ecological, social and economic role in many Southern African countries as they anchor conservation initiatives and attract tourists to protected areas. They also address the question “If we can’t effectively co-exist with and protect something this important, how can we effectively protect and promote the sustainability of other wild life and wild places?”

“We will be travelling on foot, using mountain bikes, mekoro’s (traditional dugout canoes) and kayaks,” says Ian McCallum. This will emphasise the connection and interdependency that man has with nature from a grassroots perspective. “The route that we are taking follows ancient elephant clusters and migration routes through six countries including Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa.”

The expedition begins on May 01, 2012 on the Atlantic coast of Namibia, and is expected to end in early September, 2012 on the KwaZulu Natal coast of South Africa. Along the way, highlighting the various successes and problems relevant to the human-animal interface, they will involve local government, conservation agencies as well as the local ‘giants’ of conservation in each country. National Geographic is a digital media partner and will document the trip via extensive coverage on multiple digital platforms. The trip will also be closely monitored on dedicated social media sites, all drawing from the TRACKS Media Centre (www.tracksofgiants.org).

“In order for us to build a sustainable future, we need to ensure that humans and animals can co-exist,” says Michler. “This journey will help to identify successful partnerships through various land-use options, and will also offer us insight into what doesn’t work. Through an effective public communications programme, the project will educate governments, conservation agencies, tourism entities and the general public about building a mutually beneficial, sustainable relationship with their natural heritage.”

Michler and McCallum also believe that corridor and transfrontier conservation are two of the most vital strategies for reversing the loss of life-supporting biodiversity. In the past, wildlife was free to travel from place to place and naturally adapted to seasonal and ecological changes however, the use of many of their migration routes is now impaired or completely blocked due to fences, villages and other human encroachment. Human-animal conflict in rural southern Africa is further exacerbated by growing populations and climate change. “We believe that many of the issues can be addressed by the establishment of ecological corridors, and so doing, to foster a greater

understanding of the benefits to both humans and wild animals of a positive human-animal interface,” says McCallum.

Andrew Muir, CEO of the Wilderness Foundation is supports the expedition because “There is a need to increase awareness about the effects of climate change in the region, and what comes with it - human health and displacement issues, deteriorating security, and decline in natural resource resiliency.”

Adds Michler, “If we cannot embrace this thinking at every level, then conservation will be doomed to intensive management of ever-smaller and isolated reserves.”

Influenced by climate change, Africa’s landscape will be altered substantially by 2020, and it is projected that between 75 and 250 million people will experience increased stress from poor water supply.. Conservationists predict that by 2020, yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50 percent in some regions. Agricultural production and available food may be severely compromised. “This crisis will create even more pressure on wildlife and natural resources in southern Africa,” says McCallum.

Ecological and wildlife corridors are a direct response to this situation, but are often not fully understood or acknowledged by leaders concerned with human well being. Listening to the stories and suggested solutions from communities directly affected by these issues, the Tracks of Giants expedition will explore various models that include ecological thinking and implementation, bridging the gap between the needs of humans, wildlife, and the changing environment.

Notes:

Tracks of Giants’ goals are: to promote a greater awareness of corridor and transfrontier park conservation; to advocate a greater understanding of the human-animal interface; to highlight sustainable human-animal relationships across Southern Africa; to encourage a review of education and research perceptions concerning current environmental issues; to provide an ongoing platform to feature southern African conservation challenges, potential long term solutions, and the ecological leadership required to address them.

Ian Michler: Ian Michler is a top specialist wilderness guide, photojournalist and naturalist, and has lived and worked across Africa for the last 22 years. His feature articles, diaries and blogs documenting the major conservation challenges facing Africa are well known to readers of the award winning magazines, Africa Geographic and Africa Birds and Birding. He is also the author of seven natural history and travel books on various African countries, does ecotourism consultancy work for both the private and government sectors, and has worked as a researcher and field coordinator on various natural history television documentaries for international broadcasters. Prior to his life in the wilderness, he spent almost eight years practicing as a stockbroker in Cape Town and Johannesburg. Ian is presently based along the Garden Route in South Africa where he is co-owner and manager of Invent Africa www.inventafrica.com, a specialist safari company that runs trips to 15 countries across Africa.

Ian McCallum: Ian McCallum is a medical doctor, psychiatrist, writer and a specialist wilderness guide. A co-founder of the Wilderness Leadership School in the Cape of Good Hope in 1983, he has subsequently written two anthologies of wilderness poems, Wild Gifts (1999) and Untamed (2012), a novel – Thorns to Kilimanjaro (2000) and more recently, the award winning Ecological Intelligence – Rediscovering Ourselves in Nature (2005). An adjunct professor at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, he is the writer/poet for the Dylan Lewis Untamed Exhibition currently on display at the National Botanical Gardens in Cape Town. He is presently a director of the Wilderness Foundation where he heads up the Academic and Leadership projects portfolio. He is a former rugby Springbok fullback.

The Wilderness Foundation: The Wilderness Foundation believes in sustainable social intervention projects, and the power of the wilderness to dissolve ethnic and economic inequalities and forge one path toward social and environmental sustainability. The Foundation is a project-driven conservation and leadership organisation, which aims to encourage, plan and protect wild lands and wilderness, uplift the knowledge and lives of citizens and stimulate an environmental ethos among current and future leaders. The Wilderness Foundation envisages a world that has sufficient intact natural ecosystems and wilderness areas that are valued and effectively protected for the benefit of all species.

