

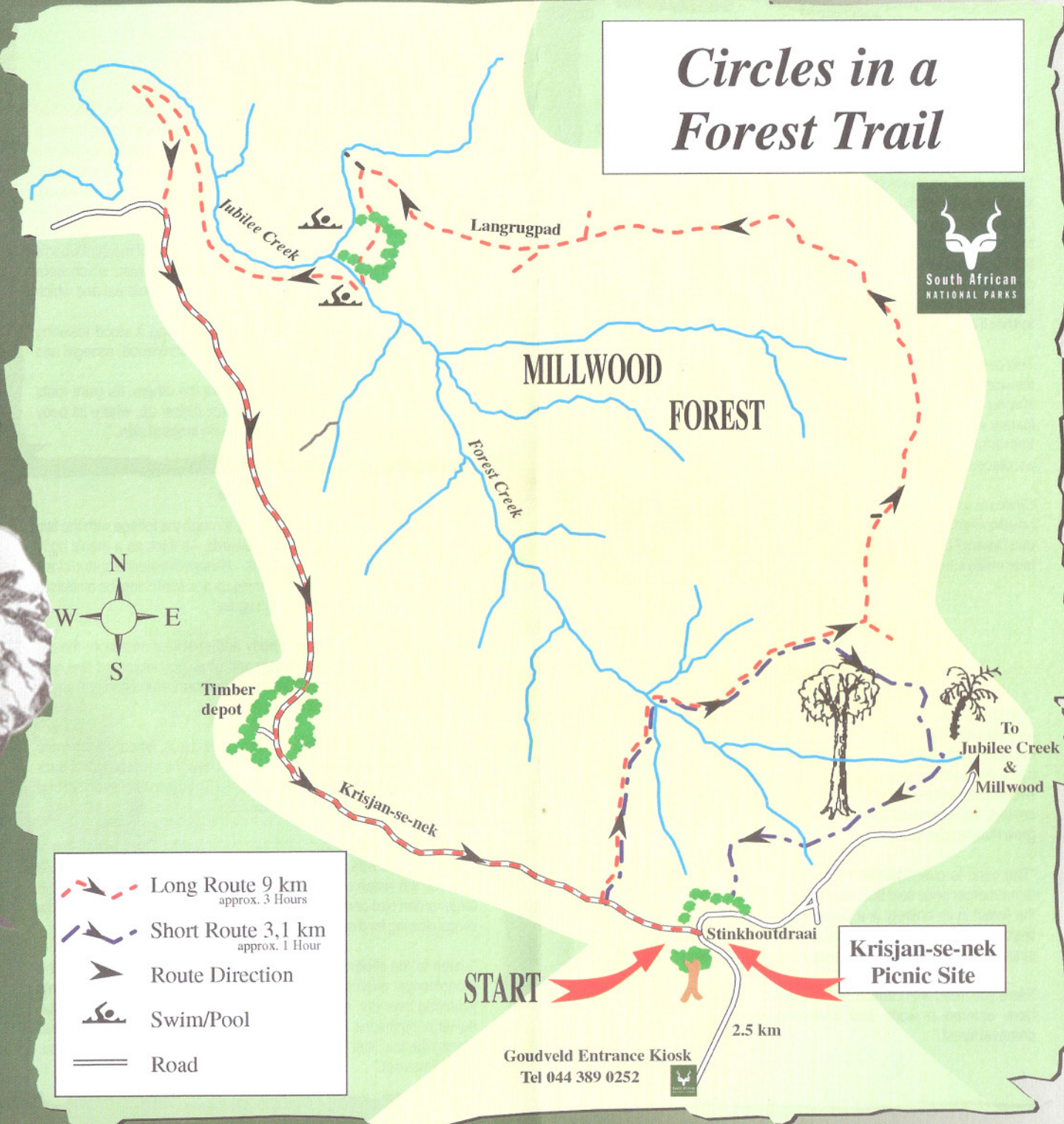
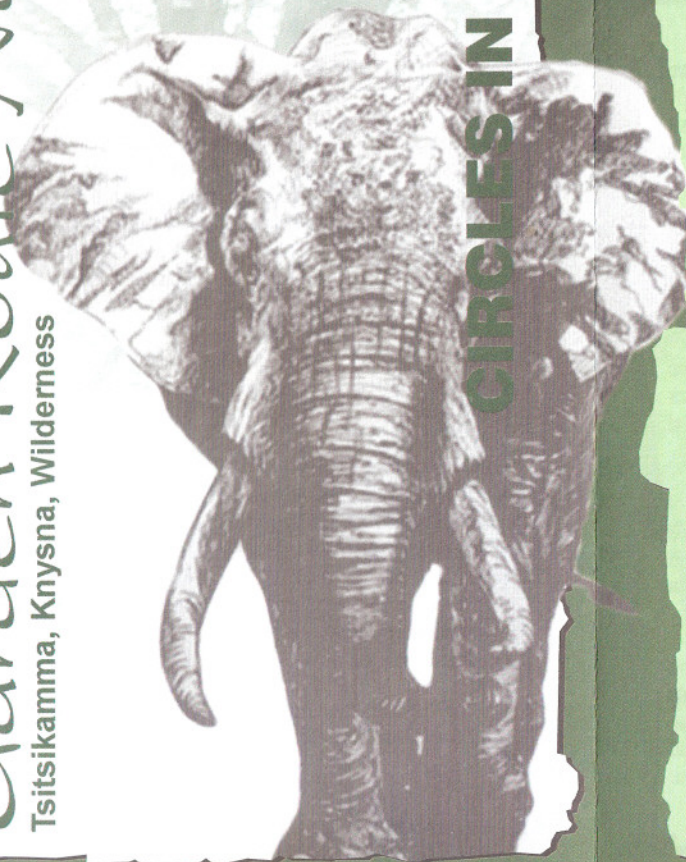
# Garden Route National Park

Tsitsikamma, Knysna, Wilderness



South African  
NATIONAL PARKS

## CIRCLES IN A FOREST TRAIL



## Welcome to the Circles in a Forest Trail

The Circles in a Forest Trail was so named as a tribute to the world renowned book, *Circles in a Forest (Kringe in 'n bos)* penned by acclaimed South African author, Dalene Matthee.

*Circles in a Forest* is a South African novel about the extermination of the elephants and the exploitation of woodcutters in the Knysna forest. Dalene Matthee conveys a strong message of conservation through this novel that has reached millions of people worldwide, highlighting the important issue of indigenous forest loss. The four years of meticulous historical research is evident throughout the storyline. Readers are left with a sense of familiarity to a time and place that will forever live in their hearts and minds.

This pamphlet is an invitation to explore this enchanted world through the words of Dalene Matthee. Her love of the Knysna forest inspired a lifelong commitment to its conservation, which is reflected in her literary works from 1978 onwards. Her works have been translated from Afrikaans into fourteen languages and won numerous literary accolades.

*Circles in a Forest (Kringe in 'n bos)* was followed by three more forest novels; *Fiela's Child (Fiela se kind)*, *The Mulberry Forest (Moerbeibos)* and *Dream Forest (Toorbos)*. *Fiela's Child* and *Circles in a Forest* were later made into feature films.

## Forest

"You stand in the understorey with its apparent chaos of diversity, ferns overtopping your head, orange bracket fungi as large as plates decorating an old trunk, delicate green moss in each shadow. Young trees exceeding ten, twenty, thirty years in growth crowd the understorey in the sheltered shadows of giant parent trees. Only their crowns, the oldest and the tallest, may stand in full sun. Some of them grew hundreds of years to reach the canopy."

"The mind is overwhelmed by the complexity of this wonderworld. Schauburger once said that each green leaf is in reality a tiny factory – the forest in its entirety is a powerhouse that radiates its energy far beyond the limits of its margins. The forest is a biosphere – a self-sustained world from the high canopy down to the deepest roots."

"Here you tread with caution and speak with a subdued voice, for you have entered a world that transcends human understanding – primeval forest."

## Plants

"And as the old bull elephants teach the young bulls, his father had taught them the things of the forest. About the trees. The difference between a kalander – the Outeniqua yellowwood – and an upright, the real yellow-wood. He taught them to know a white pear, a wild alder, red alder, white alder, about the assegai and hard pear, ironwood, candlewood, kamassi... Some you know by the bark others by the leaf. At the beginning a stinkwood tree and a saffron looked alike until you learned to look for the two hard buds near the stem of the stinkwood's leaf. They came to know the shrubs of the underbush: which were medicine and which were not. Which berries you could eat and which not."

"The Kalander (Yellowwood) - "Like a mighty king it stood towering above the white alder and mountain saffron, stinkwood, assegai and hard pear.

As if God had planted it there long before the others. Its giant roots anchored it to the ground like giant arms; higher up, where its body caught more sun, the grey bark hung like dry strips of skin."

## Animals

"Like a huge, grey rock moving slowly through the foliage with the two massive tusks curving gracefully upwards. As thick as a man's body where they bulged from their sockets... He saw the elephant stop close by the stinkwood tree, his trunk coming up and searching the air before he disappeared into the underbush again."

"The bushbuck with its brown body and speckled necklace; the old rams become almost black-brown and when you wounded one, you had to watch out for he would storm at you from behind and hurt you in a most uncomfortable place..."

"You got to know the grysback of the cripplebush, where all the trees had been felled. And with that you got to know the most beautiful buck of all, the little blue buck of the underbush. So tiny, so nimble of foot that you seldom found their dotted tracks..."

"Soon the calls of the forest birds become familiar. The kok-kok-kok of the great lourie was a tease, because it remained a disembodied call until you sat watch one day with your eyes on the forest roof and the large, green bird came gliding down silently, the scarlet feathers of its wings glowing for a moment in the spatters of sunlight..."

"Listen to the clicking of frogs resounding through the forest, or the monotonous chorus of cicadas in summer. Hear small rodents scurrying over dry leaves. Keep a keen eye open for the wary blue duiker or bushbuck. See the tracks of a bushpig imprinted in the mud among the leaf litter. Sometimes you sense that the forest trusts you. Sometimes not."

## Woodcutters

"The swing of an axe, the sound of a saw had been rooted into them too deeply for generation after generation that was all. Hardship had become like breathing to them."

"Woodcutters were woodcutters. They were a different kind of human being. Unholy two-legged oxen with a different kind of intelligence in their heads. And only when it suited them. They were mysterious as the deepest forest gorge where few dared to venture, they could converse with one another in a secret code so that one of them could quickly drag away the bushbuck – under the keepers' noses – that lay strangled in an illegal snare. They admitted their deepest fears with the frankness of children, shared their last piece of bread or sweet potato with each other; took the axe from a weak one's hands and hacked his wood for him. They climbed the highest cliffs in the foothills of the mountains to reach a beehive for a little sweetness – or to brew some honey beer for a little gaiety."

## Conservation

Many indigenous forests around the world are under threat due to over exploitation or inappropriate development. In the Southern Cape, all indigenous forests are legally protected, most (40 500ha) as part of the Garden Route National Park.

"Those who have experienced the forest in all its moods return home enriched. They do so in the knowledge that should man destroy the last of the forests, some of his inner peace, freedom and joy will be lost forever. The enchantment of the rainforest transcends its physical presence, leaving the human soul touched in mysterious ways that even science cannot fathom."

### References and further reading

- *Circles in a Forest (Kringe in 'n bos)*, Dalene Matthee (1984)
- *Fiela's Child, (Fiela se kind)*, Dalene Matthee (1985)
- *The Mulberry Forest, (Moerbeibos)*, Dalene Matthee (1987)
- *Dream Forest, (Toorbos)*, Dalene Matthee (2003)
- *The Knysna and Tsitsikamma Forests, Their History, Ecology and Management*, Izak van der Merwe (2002)
- *Cape Library*, internet, March/April 2005

Please contact the People & Conservation Department with any comments, suggestions or queries:  
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