



WILDERNESS BUSH CAMP

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN A WILD, RAVING BEAUTY GETS A HOLD ON YOUR HEART AND SIMPLY WON'T LET GO? IF YOU'VE GOT ANY SENSE, YOU DO WHAT JOHN PFAFF DID – THANK YOUR LUCKY STARS AND RESIGN YOURSELF TO YOUR FATE.

BY DAVID MUIRHEAD

Back in 1975, young John took a break from surfing at Victoria Bay, put his board on the roof and drove his old minibus a short way further along the coast. Crossing the Kaaaimans river, he found himself in Wilderness. It's one of those places that many folk zoom through on the N2, cocooned in their cars, eyes peeled for speed traps, intent on getting to somewhere else. For John, there was nowhere else – one good look and he'd been captured. The result, over 40 years on, is Wilderness Bush Camp.



When you wind up the steep road to the summit of the hill and get out of your car, it's easy to see why he fell so completely under the spell of the place. Wherever you choose to sit or stand, you see the kind of views the gods try to keep to themselves – a vast swathe of surf-swept beaches, endless sea, forested headlands and a lazy lagoon. The bushes and trees around you team with birds, including the famed Knysna turaco, flashing scarlet and green as they weave through the branches.

I woke on the first morning, sat up in bed and looked blearily out of the

window; there, perched on the veranda fence, silhouetted by the rays of the rising sun, were two turacos. It was a dawn of creation moment, the kind of thing that's only supposed to happen in paradise. But notwithstanding the angelic choirs singing in my head and the beatific feeling of contentment, at some point I still had to roll out of bed, make coffee for the wife, and fix breakfast.

Besides, there were a lot of things to get through. Sadly, John Pfaff died in 2010 but he thoughtfully left a Must-Do list for guests to follow. The first item is "Be loving to your girlfriend or wife". A pat on the bum and a quick

peck on the cheek and that's sorted. What's next? It's actually quite a long list, as you'd expect from the avid surfer, nature lover, bon vivant, not to mention the doting father and husband, John clearly was. There are a lot of things to do and see and drink and eat, in and around Wilderness, and you can read the full list on the bush camp's website.

The first thing we did was drive up a neighbouring hill to have a look at the Map of Africa. You eventually get to a view site and - blow me down - spread out far below, there really is a map of Africa, or rather a colossal forested natural replica of one carved out by the



Kaaimans River and the Silver River. The two meet in rippling turmoil, the one salt and the other fresh, at a make-believe Cape Aghulas.

We found ourselves sharing the top of the hill with paragliders. That's another item on John's list, so we ambled over to watch the arrivals and departures and to make enquiries. It turns out you can trustingly sit in the lap of a professional and float out into the very wide blue yonder for about R750, weather permitting. It looked surprisingly effortless, assuming you're not pulling the strings, and we could finally understand how Georgina Harwood, an old family acquaintance, had managed it on her hundredth birthday.

Back down in the valley, we moved on to the Ebb and Flow Camp of the Wilderness Section of the Garden Route National Park and hired a canoe to explore the river and lagoon. I generally sit at the back on such occasions, making realistic splashing noises while my wife propels us along. It's a system that works well until she suspiciously looks over her shoulder. We followed the expedition with a light lunch in a village restaurant and then headed back to our cosy log

cabin to find out what the turacos had been up to in our absence.

You might be misled by the name "bush camp". It certainly is in the bush, and we even saw a bushbuck, but you don't sleep under canvass. The flagship is Aloe House, which accommodates six, in three en-suite bedrooms, and eight if you add on the adjacent Aloe Suite. The luxurious house has its own private pool, capacious lounges and vast verandas so that you can get the full benefit of the views. The rest consists of four log cabins, with either a sea or lagoon view, each accommodating four people in two bedrooms or two people in one bedroom in the case of the well tucked-away Honeymoon Cabin. They are all fully equipped for self-catering and all have stunning views.

John passed the torch on to his children, David and Kim. One of the charms of the place is that you can immediately feel that it's a family affair. The communal lapa, replete with braais and a pizza oven, and festooned with old photographs and surfing memorabilia, is a living testament to a good time had by all, in a place that's just about as good as it gets. **W**

FACT TRACKER

Wilderness Bush Camp

Getting there: Wilderness is in the heart of the Garden Route, approximately 15km from the centre of George and 22km from George airport. Wilderness Bush Camp is situated just off the N2, the first left turn as you enter Wilderness from George, high on a hill overlooking the village. Check the website for detailed directions.

Accommodation: All units are self-catering and include fully equipped kitchens and braais.

Indicative Rates: Aloe House (sleeps 6) Low season R1500 (for 2 + R250pp), High season R2750 (for 2 + R250pp); log cabin (sleeps 4) Low season R650 (for 2 + R100pp), High season R850 (for 2 + 100pp).

Activities: Surfing, paragliding, canoeing on the river, nature walks, biking, birding, beaches. The camp is perfectly situated to explore all the attractions of the Garden Route, an easy drive to Knysna and other places of interest.

Contact: Tel: 044 877 1168 or 082 552 2617

Website: www.wildernessbushcamp.co.za