

Exploring Hoedspruit:

THE LONG TOM TOBOGGAN

by Hitekani Mbatsana

HOW TO GET THERE

Fly with CemAir directly to Hoedspruit

The Long Tom Toboggan is situated at Misty Mountain Lodge, on the R37 Long Tom Pass, 24 kilometres from Sabie and 31 kilometres from Lydenburg on the Panorama Route in Mpumalanga.



The safari truck is filled with anticipation as it climbs the mountain slope near the Long Tom pass in Mpumalanga. On it, excitement builds at the thought of the upcoming thrill-seeker quest. As it veers inwards, we catch a glimpse of the red monorail winding its way down the mountain, and the bright yellow carts that are about to shoot us along the Long Tom Toboggan.

The view from the starting platform is mesmerising and for a moment I forget why I'm up here. A little nervous, I sit in the cart firmly strapped in as the instructors reiterate their commands, *'Lean into the bends,' 'push the brake lever down and don't stop till you see the sign,' 'let the momentum carry you,'* and *'have fun'*.

After a firm push, the cart slowly moves along the rail. As I round the first bend, the path dips slightly and gravity kicks in. Soon I'm whizzing down with the wind in my face, winding and turning through wild flowers, over a little bridge and forest, the impressive mountains looking on.

The Long Tom Toboggan was brought to life by James and Lisa Sheard. The idea was sparked when a friend sent them a message, *"Why don't you?"*, along with a video of a toboggan run in Austria. Struck by how similar the scenery is to that of Misty Mountain, they began researching the concept. After testing various products, the planning and building of the toboggan commenced.

“The environmental footprint is very small. The only power it uses is gravity, no battery or electricity.”



The Long Tom Toboggan is built on the principles of a European model, known as an 'alpine coaster' or 'sommerrodelbahn'. At 1.7kms from the top to the bottom, the Long Tom Toboggan is the longest run in Africa. The exhilarating ride can drop you down the mountain at speeds of up to 45kms per hour, at which point an automatic braking system kicks in.

It's a three-minute adrenalin rush, but a ride that is safe and simple to operate.

The toboggan is set on a South African Natural Heritage Site and as a result required careful planning to ensure that the previously undeveloped mountain and scenery were not adversely impacted. The rail is placed there with minimal effect on the environment and has concrete supports. *"The only power it uses is gravity, no battery or electricity,"* says Lisa Sheard. *"We didn't disturb any natural vegetation. The whole point is if we had to move it tomorrow, all we'd have to do is fill the holes."*

The area is renowned for its adventures and adrenalin-pumping activities in nature. This amazing addition to the Panorama Route has been very well received by adventure-seekers, with both young and old participating in this beautiful outdoor roller-coaster.

HIKING IN THE CONCRETE JUNGLE

WHERE TO HIKE IN JOZI

by Hitekani Mbatsana





HOW TO GET THERE

Fly with CemAir to Joburg
Reach all walking trails by car.
Visit websites provided for details.



A day away from the hustle and bustle of the city is a great way to relax, get some fresh air and exercise. You don't have to venture too far to enjoy a touch of Mother Nature in unspoiled areas with great views.

There are plenty of options in the heart of the jungle.

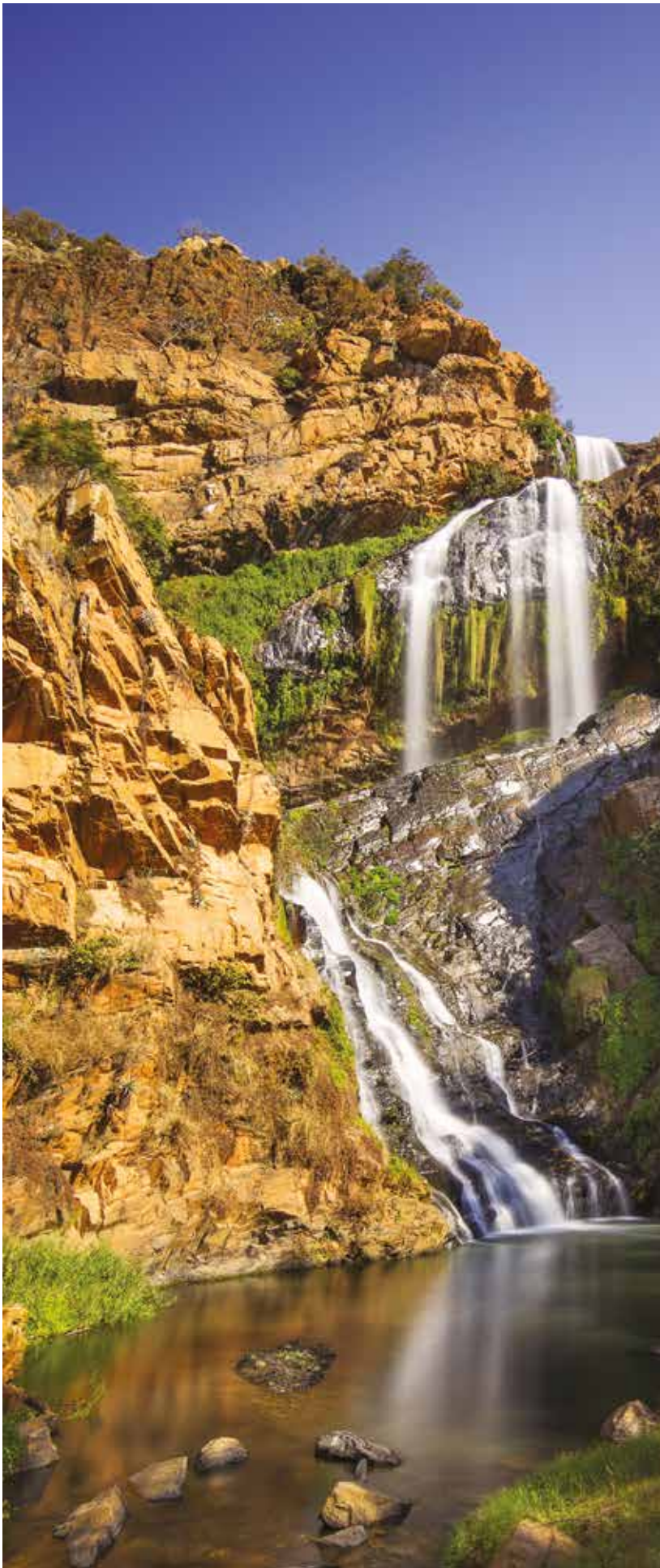
The Melville Koppies Nature Reserve lies in the middle of the city. It is an important geological and botanical space with rocks dating back three billion years, ruins from the Stone Age and Iron Age, and it has entirely indigenous vegetation. While the city looks on in the margins, birds and small mammals run through the vegetation, church congregants praise and local visitors to the Koppies take in a deep breath of nature with a 360-degree views of the iconic Johannesburg skyline.

The reserve is divided into three sections, two of which are open to the public for daily walks. The central section has controlled access for those interested in organised tours and hikes. The Friends of Melville Koppies lead guided walks (4kms) and hikes (10kms) that take you through the Koppies with knowledgeable guides pointing out the rich fauna and flora in the reserve, the archaeology and history of the space, and the conservation efforts afoot.

For a combination of archaeology and nature, the 680 hectare **Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve** in the south of Johannesburg boasts sweeping veld (open grass areas) and hills with a rich archaeological history. Visible artefacts dating back to the Stone age are evident in the reserve. It has a range of walking trails with varying distances. Take an easy 30-minute walk along the small stream or traverse the reserve's impressive hills on a longer 3-hour hike.

The Melville Koppies offer guided walks and monthly bird tours to experience its unique fauna and flora, or to spot one of the reserve's 150 recorded bird species and roaming wildlife such as blesbok, wildebeest, zebra and duiker.

The park is also open from sunrise to sunset every day for walks that you can take on your own.



The Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens has long been a popular place for a day-outing and activities. It is an ideal location to get back to nature in Gauteng. There are walking trails throughout the garden including the popular Waterfall walk, which leads to a lookout point with views of the gardens and surrounding cliffs. A breeding pair of majestic Verreaux's Eagles (Black Eagles) nest alongside the waterfall on the rockfaces. Take a morning hike and then in the afternoon, spend time relaxing in the gardens with an abundance of wildlife, birds and vegetation.

The Hennops Hiking trail is a short 40-minute drive from Johannesburg where you have 3 hiking options: the **Krokodilberg trail** (10kms), **Zebra trail** (5kms) and the **Dassie trail** (2,5kms). Even as a novice it's a good place to start! The trails ramble along the banks of the Hennops River and then rise into the hills, which are characterised by dolomite formations and caves, as well as incredible panoramic views of the Magaliesberg mountains and Hartbeespoort dam in the distance.

The entertainment is heightened with fun ways to cross the river. One option is a rope suspension bridge and pulley-system cable car.

The car seats two people and uses momentum to get you close to the other side of the river, and you pull the rest of the way. The farm also has a picnic area so it's well worth making a family day of it. It makes a great break from the hustle of the concrete jungle.

Hennops Hiking Trail

www.hennopstrails.co.za/contact-2/

Klipriviersberg Nature Reserve

www.klipriviersberg.org.za/contact/

Walter Sisulu Botanical Garden

www.sanbi.org/gardens/walter-sisulu/garden-information/garden-maps/