

# LESHIBA WILDERNESS HIKING TRAIL DESCRIPTIONS

**Walking at *Leshiba* is a unique and wondrous opportunity to experience the bush and all it has to offer at your leisure and without a guide.  
ENJOY IT!**

**NOTES:** We ask that you please read through the following pointers before you head out on one of our trails. These guidelines are for your safety.

## **WILD ANIMALS**

We have over 70 different mammal species on *Leshiba*. These range from the smallest elephant nose shrew to rhino and giraffe.

All wild animals are potentially dangerous and need to be treated with respect. We have White rhino (square-lipped) and although not aggressive like their hooked lip counterparts the Black rhino, they like to keep a fair distance away from people and vehicles.

It is best to keep talking to a minimum when hiking if you want to see game. If you come across an animal, keep very still and quiet. Wild animals (except for giraffe) do not usually have good eyesight. They rely on their senses of hearing and smell. This goes for the rhino especially and they like to be on the right side of the wind to be able to smell or hear you.

It is a good idea to notice your surroundings and know where there are rocky ridges to climb up or trees to stand behind. These are not suggestions to make you nervous but rather precautionary for the more cautious in your group. If you do encounter a rhino at close quarters and feel intimidated, clap your hands and shout and back away. The rhino will realize where you are and run in a direction away from you. In what would be an unusual circumstance, should the rhino come towards you, climb a tree, try get into a thicket or move up a rocky ridge if possible.

There are a number of snake species that occur at *Leshiba*. Snakes are seldom seen because they feel you coming and move off. However, if you do come across one, the best thing to do is to stand dead still. Snakes have bad eyesight and rely on movement to detect their prey. Try notice the shape of their heads and distinctive markings as well as their thickness and length. We have excellent identification books and it is always interesting to discover the species you saw.

## **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

- **Please ensure you fill in the trail register before you leave on any trail. This is our only way to find you in an emergency.**
- **T1, T2 and T3 all leave the Venda Vilage from the same point, down the stairs in front of the deck.**
- **T5 leaves from the north side of the camp behind 'Lemon Tree' hut.**

- T4 is for experienced hikers and people who are unafraid of heights. This trail can be tackled from the top of the mountain where T3 takes you or from the middle of the mountain where T2 takes you. T4 is an adventurous descent of the mountain down Duluni gorge and is not recommended for the elderly or young children.
- We have used a kudu spoor as the marker on our trails. The marker acts as an arrow. Please note which way each arrow points as this indicates the way the trail turns. You should always be able to see the next marker unless the trail is through an open area with an obvious well cut path. There are many game tracks on the property. If you walk for over 100m and do not see the next marker, please backtrack and check you have taken the correct direction.
- We have attempted to put markers on larger objects that rhino and baboons will leave alone. On occasion, these do get pushed over. If you find yourself off the trail, please backtrack and pick up the most well-worn track.
- Before leaving on any trail take note of where you are starting from and pick up the mountain points around you.
- Please note that our trails do not cross any fences. If you reach a fence, please backtrack to pick up the markers.
- **NB: The trails cannot be followed backwards. Please note on your map which way the trail goes.**

## VENDA VILLAGE / DULUNI VALLEY TRAILS

### T1 Vulture Cliffs ± 2½ hours

Beginning at **The Venda Village Lodge**, this trail heads east and then south through **Duluni Vlei**, across the wetland, up the ridge, over the landing strip, across the main road and in amongst the **Burkia Afrikaner** and **Kiaat** trees up onto the cliffs. **Five viewpoints** give you an opportunity to marvel at a view that truly stretches forever. Watch **Cape Vultures** flying in to nest on the opposite ridges and catch thermals that take them ever higher into the deep blue skies. Meander along the **cliff edge** until the trail turns and takes you back across the main road, through the **sandveld** and down into Duluni valley. Heading west you once again cross over the vlei and pass by the "**Skinny dip pool**". Follow the water line upriver, crossing a concrete weir and then following the road for a short stretch before the markers take you back through a beautiful forest area, look out for red duiker. The trail crosses the river for the last time and takes you back up the hill. At the top of the hill look out for the Soutpansberg Euphorbia, an endemic to the Soutpansberg and pick up the well-walked trail through the grass that brings you back to the Lodge. **Easy to medium walking.**

### T2 Kudu trail ± 2 hours and T2 / T4 Duluni Gorge option ± 2 hours

At the Venda Village Lodge, follow the T2 marker. This trail turns to the east. Follow until you see a large marker board where you take T2 and T3 left. The trail turns up and over a small ridge, then crosses over a small waterline and begins to head up the ridge. ± 700m along, the path takes an upward turn northwards to the start of "labour hill". Continuing upwards the trail levels out. You then head through a network of open areas and Venda village ruins. **T2 and T3 split up.** T2 turns north west and T3 east. The path works its way through a set of rocky outcrops on the edge of a large open plain. This area, "**John's Plain**" is one of the only areas on the mountain where water is available. Many species of **animals** including the **rhino** congregate here. The trail then brings you to a waterline. In the summer months this gorge has fantastic **rock pools** for swimming in. To head back to the Lodge, there are two options: Carry on along T2 and take an easy descent down a rocky path back to the camp or experience Duluni Gorge taking **T4 straight down**. Short, Quick and Steep, Please see NOTES above. This path requires teamwork. Not advisable for young children. **T2: good exercise and great views. T2/T4 exhilarating and demanding in places.**

### T3 Full Day Hike ± 6/7 hours and T3/T4 Mountaintop trail ± 5/6 hours **NB NB (NOT MARKED AT PRESENT SO NOT RECOMMENDED)**

T3 is the most **demanding** walk on the farm, being a 6 to 7 hour hike at least. It departs from the Venda Village Lodge and takes you to the highest point of Leshiba, down to **Hamasha camp** and returns along the road back to the Village. **T3/T4 is a shorter option.**

Where T2 splits off to the west, T3 heads northeast up onto the top of the **highest ridge** on Duluni side. From the top of the mountain, Zimbabwe is visible on the horizon, across the Limpopo River to the north. There are **resident herds** of wildebeest and zebra on the top as well as the rarely seen **mountain reedbuck**. Here you can find **proteas** and various succulents. The path proceeds due west along the top of the mountain for a while, past the **vulture drinking pools** and then T3 and T3/T4 split. T4 heads directly down the ridge to the south. It travels parallel to a waterline. Halfway down this top section of the gorge is a path to the right leading directly to "**the grotto**". This pool, with its Waterberry tree (*Syzgium cordatum*), is a perfect **rest point and picnic spot** and holds water all year round. Continue down the gorge to "John's plain" where you have the option of coming down T2 or the last section of T4. **Demanding but well worth the effort. Can't beat the views! NB NB! From the point where T2 and T3 split, T3 has been temporarily marked with a round black marker, these are visible but do not indicate the direction. Follow the map.**

### T5 Game walk ± 3 ½ hours

This trail begins at the **Venda Village** and heads northwest. Initially crossing some open grassy areas the path then works its way up the ridge. Here there are **beautiful viewpoints** and the opportunity to sight **game** on the plain down below. The trail continues up and eventually levels off on the ridge **plateau**. Heading due west, parallel to a road on the right, the path goes along and then down the ridge, joining onto the road at the bottom. The **yellow kudu spoor** markers lead down and across the road until you are heading south. The game walk then follows a **natural path** made by the rhino for ± 1km. Keep talking to a minimum as this area is known for close encounters of the 'rhino' kind. However, there are many ridges and forested areas should you need to retreat. You begin to turn west up the ridge on the right. A short, steep path, which has been terraced, takes you to a beautiful viewpoint, Bob's Rock, which **overlooks the valley**. The trail continues west along the contour then doubles back along a lower ridge. As the trail descends on to the **valley floor** you cross through a set of rocky outcrops where there is an **open well** which was used by the **Bushman** and is now frequented by thirsty **klipspringer and rhino**. Almost home, the last part of the walk goes east and down into a **cool, dry riverbed**, a great **birding** spot. Follow the dry watercourse into the centre of the plain where the markers will lead you along a line of **Cape Ash** (*Ekbergia capensis*) and **wild fig** trees until you reach the village. **Amazing for game viewing and not too demanding. Easy to cut the trail short and head home.**

## HAMASHA CAMP TRAILS

### T7 Tolkien's Forest trail ± 3 ½ hours

This trail starts at the large **Coral Tree** (*Erythrina lysistemon*) in the driveway of Hamasha Camp. It heads east and after about 80m turns south-east. It then crosses through a deep waterline with huge **Cape Ash** (*Ekebergia capensis*) trees all around. Once you have crossed through the deep gully, the trail carries on south-east towards a beautiful cliff face ahead of you. The trail heads towards the mountain but skirts its western side along the base and through a set of old African ruins. At this point, T8 diverts to the east up a very steep incline and T7 meanders south. There is a long stretch that the **giraffe and kudu** favour until you meet the road which the trail crosses over. There is then a short steep climb up on to the top of a small rocky ridge. Pause here and enjoy the views and the **magnificent flora**. On the top of the ridge, the trail goes southwest through a magical set of boulders, into a gully and then heads south. You come out of the dense bush into an open grass chanel where you will turn right to the west. The trail follows an old road right down the ridge. Keep your eyes and ears open for **Black-headed Orioles, Purple-crested Turaco** as well as **Olive Woodpeckers**. At the bottom of the ridge, the trail leaves the sandy road and enters a thicket. Follow

the tight trail through the thicket where you will come to a main road. The trail turns left on to the road for a short distance and then turns right, heading west for a brief section.. At this point the trail starts heading back towards Hamasha Camp. You will see Hamasha gorge in the distance and the trail starts heading north again. Go down a rocky hill with an old stone wall on your left. Near the bottom, the trail breaks through the stone wall and heads northwest. You follow a wide grassy channel for about 250m down to **Tolkien's Forest**. There is a **bench and a swing** in the forest and the chance of spotting **Samango monkeys** plus **wetland birding** in Tolkien's dam. You exit the forest, heading northwest, skirting the dam. Once past the dam, the trail follows the edge of Hamasha Plain and it is a place to walk silently and keep a good look out for **rhino**, who love to sleep in the sandy areas underneath the Terminalia trees. The trail goes past a massive Cape Ash tree at the base of Leshiba mountain and heads north down the valley along a meandering path back to Hamasha camp. The trail meets a road, where you turn right on to the road for a short section, then left on a rocky path back home. **A perfect hike to begin with from this camp. Easy to Medium walking and if too long, simple to cut short and follow a road back.**

### **T8 The Falcon Trail ± 3 hours**

This trail starts at the large **Coral Tree (Erythrina lysistemon)** in the driveway of Hamasha Camp. It heads east and after about 80m turns south-east. It then crosses through a deep waterline with huge **Cape Ash (Ekebergia capensis)** trees all around. Once you have crossed through the deep gully, the trail carries on south-east towards a beautiful cliff face ahead of you. The trail heads towards the mountain but skirts its western side along the base and through a set of **old African ruins**. At this point, T8 diverts to the east up a very steep incline. Follow this **challenging route** on to the top of the mountain. The trail then proceeds north along the top of the mountain. Keep your eyes open for various bird species that frequent these cliffs, notably **Verreaux's Eagle hunting dassies, African Hawk Eagles, Lanner Falcons**. (Guests have reported sightings of Taita Falcons?). This is a wonderful place to sit and appreciate the most incredible bird's eye view of Hamasha valley, Leshiba mountain opposite you and **spectacular views** to the north into Zimbabwe and Botswana. The trail turns east and starts a slow descent through beautiful open **Protea bush and grassy fields**. When you get to the edge of the plateau, the trail goes down a rocky and windy path down into a channel between the mountains. Once you are down, the trail goes northwest skirting the mountain you have just come down. Then you enter into a **beautiful ravine** underneath a canopy of trees that takes you all the way down slowly working its way back to Hamasha. You come out of the forest and follow the markers down the grassy rocky ridge heading west straight back to the camp. At the bottom of this mountain slope, you get to a road where you turn left and follow the road for a short section of approximately 100m and then turn off to the right, meandering through the bushveld, down through the same gully you started the trail on and back up the hill to the camp. Please note that T3 from Duluni side joins on to this trail in the final stages. The markers will alternate between white and yellow, please don't let this worry you. **One strenuous uphill, otherwise moderate walking. Take binoculars!**

### **T9 Baobab Trail ± 1 ½ to 2 hours**

T9 and T10 head out from Hamasha at the same point as T7 and T8. T9 and T10 split away, heading northeast through a deep waterline. When you come out of the deep gully, turn left to the north and about 30m down the path, T9 separates from T10 heading east. The trail wanders through a **grassy Thornveld area**, turning north. The trail heads down into the gorge with a big mountain on your right and Hamasha gorge in front of you. Keep following the path until you come to a large **rocky shelf**. The trail turns northwest along the rocks with a big **Wooden Banana tree / Mountain Mahogany (Entandrophragma caudatum)** on your right. The markers then take you down sets of rocky shelves, heading straight for the opening in the gorge. Once you are in the bottom of the gorge, T10 rejoins your trail and both trails enter the **gorge**. There is beautiful flora and a waterline with rock pools to enjoy. Please note that both T9 and T10 exit the gorge on the same track. When you get back to the crossing point at the river, T10 does a sharp right before the waterline and T9 crosses back over the waterline and bears right. Look out for the wooden markers that indicate the correct path to take. **T9 heads up the gorge** and after the first rock shelf, you will get to a flat open grassy area with about **9 baobabs** on your left. This is a **Mapungubwe site** dating back 800 years. Stop and hug a tree! Follow the track back up one more rocky shelf and back to the camp. **A moderate walk down with a bit more of a work out on the way back up. The easy route down into the gorge for a quick dip!**

### T10 African Python Trail ± 3 to 4 hours

**T9 and T10** head out from Hamasha at the same point as T7 and T8. T9 and T10 split away, heading northeast through a deep waterline. When you come out of the deep gully, turn left to the north and about 30m down the path **T10 goes straight north**, past a concrete dam weir, skirting it on the right and drops down off the front of the weir into the gorge. This is where the fun begins! The trail heads straight down the gorge going in and out of the waterline, taking you into a ravine with the most awesome Fig trees and other forest species. The protected **African Rock Python** is commonly seen on this hike and is a wondrous spectacle to behold and not to be feared. Watch out for **stinging nettles** in this waterline. If you encounter them, take a stick and knock them flat before proceeding. Should you be stung, meat tenderiser or vinegar works well to stop the stinging. Scrubbing the area with sand can also help. **Narina Trogon, the Black-headed Oriole and Purple-crested Turaco** are some of the bird species you may encounter. Extremely rare sightings of **Samango monkeys** have been reported. Please let management know and take pictures if possible should you be lucky enough to see these long haired, dark gray primates. As with T9, the trails join up at the bottom of the ravine and heads into the gorge. They return on the same path and **T10 splits to the west** before the waterline, whilst T9 crosses straight over. Heading west, the trail follows the waterline upstream for about 1 to 1 and  $\frac{1}{2}$  km's. There are great places to swim, sunbathe and have a picnic, even in the winter months. At the top of this waterline, there is a boundary fence. If you reach this, turn back a short distance and pick up the marker on a large rock in the middle of a flat rock shelf that indicates the trail going up in a southerly direction. A long, meandering, rocky, grassy track takes you back to the camp. Just before you reach Hamasha, you will see some beautiful **tree aloes (Aloe angelica)**, an endemic to the Soutpansberg. Please note that these are a protected species and we ask that no cuttings are taken, with fines up to R10 000 issued if caught with this plant. **This is our jewel in our trails. Easy to make into an all day outing. Take along a picnic and sunscreen and marvel at the best Leshiba has to offer. Fairly long and challenging in places. Please note all running water is drinkable.**

#### NOTES for T9 and T10:

- These trails can be combined in the following ways:
- Down T9 and up T10 for a longer walk.
- Down the first gorge section of T10 and up T9 for a quick and challenging hike.
- Note that you cannot follow the trails backwards.
- We do not recommend taking T10 down the gorge if there has been heavy rainfall and the water is flowing strongly. Take T9 down and continue with T10.

## LUVHONDO (IKC) TRAILS

### T11 Old Cattle Trail ± 3 hours

**T11 and T12** leave from the southwestern point of the accommodation area at the IKC. The trail heads in a **southwesterly** direction. It meanders along **old cattle trails** towards the mountain on your right. At the base of the mountain, the trail begins to climb through a beautiful forested area with large boulders. When you reach the top of the mountain there is a sign where **T12 splits from T11**. **T11 goes west** through a plateau of grassy fields and bushy ridges. The trail starts to descend in a northwesterly direction through a **magical channel** with a huge variety of tree species. This path eventually comes out at a narrow grassy area. Follow the markers until you reach a road. Follow the road to the right all the way down until you see a bluegum pole post indicating the path turning back into the bush in a northerly direction. The path then wanders through old **Venda ruins, remnants of stone walls and large Marula (Sclerocaria birea) trees**. A tight bush path brings you out at a road. Cross over the road and turn right in an easterly direction for the return journey. The trail goes up the hill and once again crosses the road following a narrow trail through very long grass towards the ridge on your right. The markers hug the ridge as this is the '**rhino highway**' between the two

valleys. Stay on the sandy path and if you have any close encounters, head up the ridge. At the end of the sandy path you will notice the main road on your left and here you stay on the track and follow the markers off to the right and into thick bush on a narrow trail back to the IKC. **Medium walking, fairly long. An Awesome trail!**

### **T12 Klipspringer Trail ± 2 hours**

**T11 and T12** leave from the southwestern point of the accommodation area at the IKC. The trail heads in a **southwesterly** direction. It meanders along **old cattle trails** towards the mountain on your right. At the base of the mountain, the trail begins to climb through a beautiful forested area with large boulders. When you reach the top of the mountain there is a sign where **T12 splits from T11**. The trail heads northeast through open **grassy areas and rocky ridges**. Look out for **Cape Vultures** catching thermals above. When the trail comes off the plateau it starts heading north. It follows an old waterline with spectacular views of the farm. With binoculars you may spot many species of **game on the plains** below. After descending to the base of the mountain, the trail **rejoins T11** going in a southeasterly direction straight back to the camp. **Easy to medium. A shorter hike than T11 but just as lovely.**