



IHRE Orientation Program Tshulu Camp, Hamakuya Village, Limpopo Province



photo: Susan Harrop-Allin

As a member of the June 2008 IHRE group, you will be spending five days in a relatively remote rural area of northern South Africa. This place, called Hamakuya (“the place of Makuya”) is notable both because of the strength of its community organisation, and for the substantial contradictions it experiences-- contradictions relating to poverty, refugees from neighbouring Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and the proximity of the vast Kruger National Park, South Africa’s largest wilderness area.

It is a perfect place for an initial orientation to issues of rights, citizenship, and the post-apartheid South African state.

What is Tshulu, and who are the Makuya People?

After a brief stay in Johannesburg, you will be driving north to rural Venda, where you will spend 3 nights staying in a community-run research camp called Tshulu camp, one night in the Kruger National Park, and one night in a homestay in a rural village.



Tshulu Wilderness camp is a rustic camp in a remote area, built and managed by the HaMakuya community in the Vhembe district of northern South Africa.. The camp is part of a larger rural development project, and is mainly used as a research, training and education site and a place for developing partnerships between students, researchers and the community. Although it is not primarily a recreational camp, Tshulu Wilderness Camp is extraordinary beautiful, and it is both a wilderness area and a place associated with the lifestyles and lifeways of the BaVenda people.

The Hamakuya district is in the far north east of Limpopo Province on the boundary of the Kruger National Park and close to the Zimbabwe and Mozambique borders.

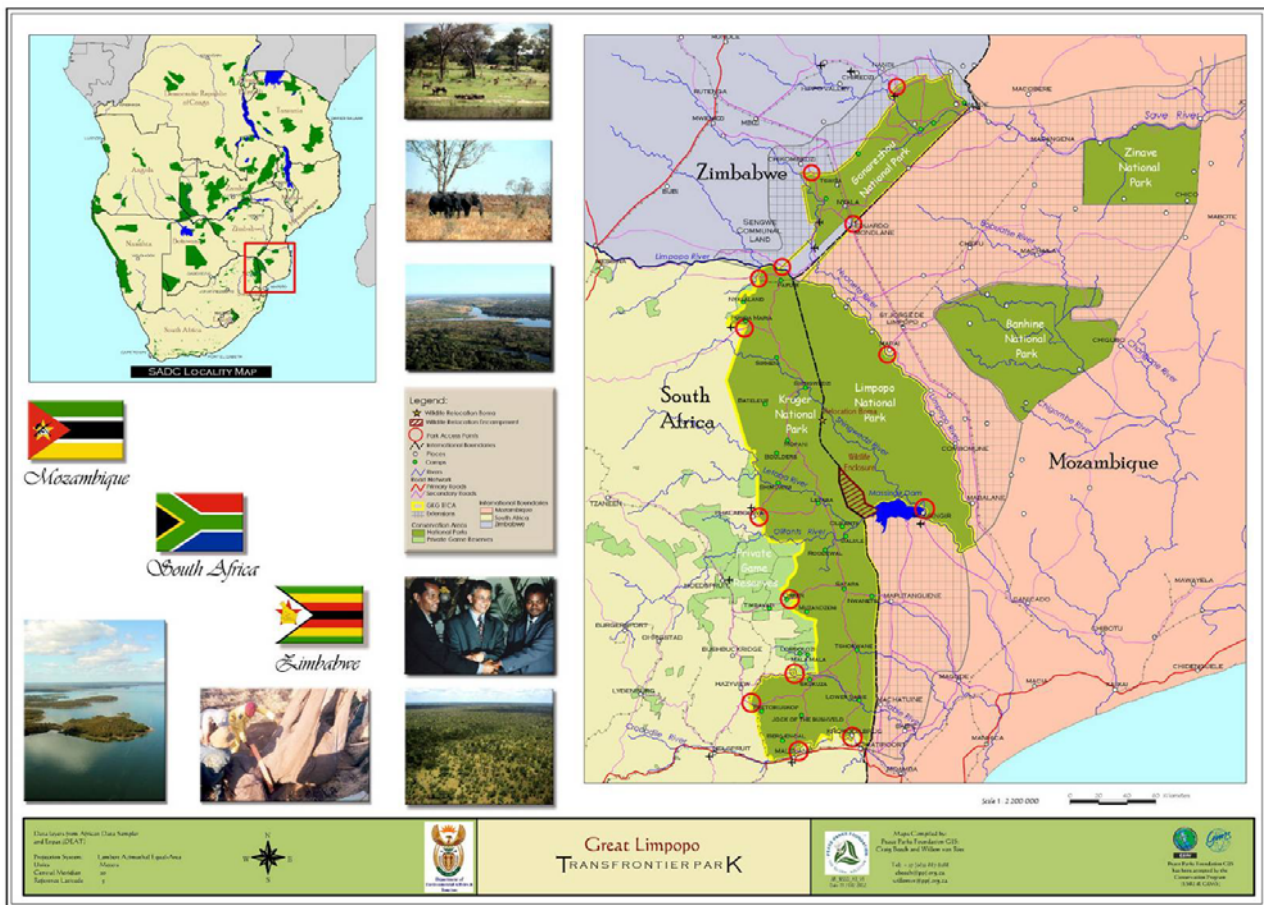


Figure 1: Danie Pienaar, Peace Parks Foundation

People in the area speak many languages but their first language is called tshiVenda (or “Venda”), one of the smallest of the eleven official language groups in the South Africa. It is the only language that has no cognates to the south: its closest relative is Shona, the majority language of Zimbabwe to the north. Though their roots go back many centuries, the current community has its origin in a group that split off and migrated to this area in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The early stone walling and hut floors of this first migration can still be seen on mountain tops dotted around the area, sites also associated with rainmaking rituals and sacred leadership.



A Brief History of the Project

All profits from Tshulu Camp are administered by the Tshulu Trust, and used exclusively for community development projects in HaMakuya.

The camp grew out of a group of associated Arts and Heritage, Ecotourism, and Agritourism projects designed to achieve broad-based empowerment through capacity building and job creation in the poverty node of the rural Hamakuya community in South Africa's Province.

For the past five years, a team lead by Professor David Bunn and Professor Lara Allen undertook the first phase of the project as a community outreach programme of the Wits School of Arts. Funded by the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund (NLDTF), in this phase the tourism potential of Hamakuya was researched and a niche market (educational tourism) was identified. The initial infrastructure--a wilderness camp on the banks of the Mutale River--was also installed. An Environmental Impact Assessment survey was conducted and permission to build the camp was granted by the community and by Limpopo Provincial Government.

Phase Two is being jointly funded by

- The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC): the Tshatai Arts and Cultural Heritage Tourism Programme
- Limpopo Agribusiness Development Academy (LADA), co-funded by the Limpopo Department of Agriculture and the Flanders International Cooperation Agency: the Hamakuya Agrotourism Development Initiative.

The two programmes are contributing in different ways to the establishment of six small business enterprises: Tourism (comprising the camp, and cultural and environmental guides); Building and Maintenance; Catering; Baking; Sewing and Material Design; and Metal and Wood Design. These business units are administered through a central administration office, which will also provide marketing and procurement through a cooperative.

Principles driving the project

- Women and youth are prioritized in the employment programme, and capacity building and skills training are central to the project design.
- The tourism programme and the products produced through the collectives are of excellent quality and we are working towards Fair Trade accreditation.
- There is a very strong emphasis on achieving a sustainable balance between utilizing and preserving the environment.
- We are interested in evolving a best practice model of productive relationships between agriculture and tourism. In particular we are exploring two possibilities: the purchase of agricultural produce by tourism service providers; and tourism as a secondary economic activity for agriculturalists, specifically the hosting of tourists through homestay programmes.
- Wherever possible, product development and capacity building service providers are from previously disadvantaged communities. As much as possible local service providers and local materials are used in order to promote local economic development.



Your Itinerary: What to Expect and How to Prepare

Friday 27 June

At 6h30am, the whole sleepy group will be ladled into 5 minibus vehicles, and you will be driven from Johannesburg to Hamakuya. This is a long, difficult, and fascinating drive, straight north on the freeway to Zimbabwe. You will stop for brunch in Polokwane (*your own cost, so bring cash*), one of the larger cities on the way, and head about an hour further to a town called Louis Trichardt. (By now, you may become aware of some of the political contradictions at play in the various place names: towns named after Afrikaner leaders are being resignified with African names.)

Branching off the main highway, you then head east, through beautiful agricultural lands where tropical fruits like mangoes, guavas, papaya, and bananas abound, until you reach the major city of Thohoyandou. The name, in tshiVenda, means “head of the elephant”, but it is also the name of one of the most important leaders in Venda history. Most crucially though, this was also the capital of the old “homeland” of Venda, created as a result of apartheid’s racist Balkanization of the country. You will immediately see the legacy of apartheid in poor infrastructure and visible rural poverty, which continues to this day.

After another hour or so, your convey will meet me, and I will guide you on the much rougher road to Hamakuya village.

Hamakuya is more of a district than a village. There is a central area, where the chief lives and where central services like the clinic and police station are located. Then there are 17 sub-villages, all remote, picturesque, and poor, and without electricity or running water. In fact, this is one of the poorest areas in the country. We will stop at the Tribal Office (a name that goes back to the early history of British informal empire in Africa), where I hope we will be able to meet the traditional leader Chief Makuya, and the head of the Tribal Council, an extraordinary man named Rendani Lalumbe, who is both a political activist and schoolteacher.

After some brief ceremonies, we’ll set off in convoy again. Half an hour of appalling dirt road later, we’ll branch off west to the camp, travelling slowly through a small village called Guyuni. This will be your first close look at rural South Africa, and you are going to find it deeply intriguing. For most of you, it will also be your first encounter with baobab trees, the iconic giants of Africa that are so important in rural economies in this region. Dodging children, goats, and Nguni cattle, we’ll continue slowly west, testing the poor vehicles to their limit, and passing through mopane woodland, through a second village, called Tshiandzwane. You’ll notice here too the very characteristic Venda architectures that derive from ancient Iron Age settlement patterns: adobe huts, with painted adobe courtyards, ceremonial plinths around trees, and cattle and goat enclosures.

In the late afternoon, we’ll eventually arrive at Tshulu Research Camp. Tshulu is named after the first leader of the Makuya people in this region, a woman who established the village in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. The camp itself consists of quite luxurious tents on platforms, overlooking the Mutale river, together with several huts and other accommodation structures, 6 simple dome tents, and a large, thatched platform with a kitchen and bathroom and shower. It is here that we will have our meetings and classes.

You will be assigned to tents and huts and given some time to explore and freshen up. There are hot and cold running water showers, and flush toilets, and we will brief you on energy saving. There is no electricity in the camp, and it gets very dark very quickly, so keep your flashlight at the ready.



Before you disperse to your tents, we will give you a short briefing about the camp and its various delights and dangers. The delights include the people who run it, the exquisite setting, and the benign wilderness experience it offers; the dangers include, amongst other things, malaria, and the presence of scorpions, snakes, and crocodiles in the river, but there is no need to fear for your safety.

Dinner will be prepared for you by community caterers. After dinner, I will give the first of two general lectures. This one is called

“Permeable borders, Game reserves, Human rights, and Neo-Liberalism in the Post-apartheid Moment”

After these academic escapades, there will be time to relax, enjoy the spectacular southern night skies, and the bushveld night sounds.

Saturday 28 June

*At breakfast time, we will divide the whole party into two groups of 30, hereafter referred to as **Groups A and B.***

After breakfast, you will be given a packed lunch to take with you, and we'll leave in the minibus vehicles and drive for about two hours before entering the northernmost gate of the **Kruger National Park.**

Kruger is a gigantic game reserve, originally 300 kilometres long in its South African section, but now stretching across two international boundaries, into Mozambique and Zimbabwe. This northern section is the wildest and most remote, and there are not that many tourists. Our purpose in visiting Kruger is not really game viewing, though that will be a pleasant secondary interest. This section of the national park has been one of the most significant zones of permeability, for migrant mine workers, refugees, and poachers, and it is still crossed by thousands of “illegal” migrants. We will study the politics of this area, and the massive problem of rights exemplified by those who are forced through this geographic chokepoint.

We will also be examining the one of the most significant successful land claims in the post-apartheid moment: the return of the northern section of the reserve to the Makuleke community.

We'll enter at Pafuri gate, and drive slowly along the Luvuvhu river, a tributary of the great east-west flowing Limpopo. It is possible, too that we will be able at this stage to go on an early morning expeditionary walk to the mountain top Thulamela Iron Age site for a collective, **outdoor seminar.** For this walk please wear sturdy shoes or boots, and a hat; apply bug spray and suntan lotion, and carry water and a snack.

We will have lunch at the Pafuri picnic site, and then **Group A will leave us and go back to Hamakuya.** The rest of us will drive to “Crook's Corner,” where the borders of three countries converge: Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Mozambique, and then down to the Shingwedzi research camp in the bush in Kruger, where we will spend the night.

Group B, in other words, will be spending the night in a major game reserve in a research area. You'll be sleeping in large tents, in comfortable beds, and there is an ablution block with showers and toilets. We'll go on a late afternoon game drive, hoping to find some of the large herds of elephant along the river loops. I'll give you a basic introduction to the wildlife and landscapes of northern Kruger, and if we are really lucky we'll see a selection of larger mammals and birds. In the



evening, around the fire, and probably to the distant sound of hyenas and lion, I'll give a second lecture on "*Land Rights, Restitution, and the Makuleke Precedent*".

When Group A (led by my colleague Susan Harrop-Allin) returns to Hamakuya, you will divide up into 5 groups and then proceed to the five different homestay villages where you will spend the night.

The Homestay Experience

This brief encounter will be an introduction to the rhythms, lifestyles, and concerns of poor rural districts. Conscious always of the implicit dangers in ethnographic tourism, we hope you will be able to meet local people terms of relative equality.

We'll divide you into five groups of six students and a staff member and assign a translator to each group. Each group in turn will then be driven to a separate rural homestead where you will be met by the host community. We'll leave you there for that night, with a sleeping bag, and fresh water. What you do will depend on your interests, and what the community wants to show you.

For the most part, even in this all-too-limited experience, we are going to be concentrating on questions of rights: rights and the environment; rights and "traditional" authority; rights and issues of rural health; women and asymmetrical gender roles; environmental rights, and the like. Each of your homestay villages will be chosen for its ability to reflect on one of these themes. Thus, for instance, in one of the villages there is a group of women who are traditional healers, and those of you interested in questions of gender and health will be placed there. In other villages, there is a strong emphasis on the maintenance of "traditional" Venda culture, dress, and music, and those of you interested in issues of minority culture could choose to go there.

The point of the exercise is to get to know something of the texture of daily life, and the pleasures and contradictions of rural life, with very welcoming communities. We want you to enjoy yourselves, and to document your experiences in a manner that will be useful to future researchers and community members working with us on long-term projects. Without being a nuisance, try to join in the daily events: gathering firewood and water, or learning how to cook local food. Your family hosts will prepare a simple evening meal for you. You'll sleep on the floor in a sleeping bag, perhaps on a sleeping mat, and you don't have to feel afraid.

Food will be simple, and graciously prepared. You can expect to be served pap (cornmeal) and moroho (spinach relish) as a staple, but you might also be offered chicken, prepared pumpkin flowers, wild fruits and melons and mangoes. More exotic delicacies like mopane caterpillars or toasted flying ants might also be on offer! Please be assured that you won't offend people by not eating every dish; this is a complex and subtle community, one that understands individual tastes and is not surprised by vegetarianism.

Most of you will have a political queasiness about **taking photographs**. Here I think it's necessary to lose a little of the Liberal guilt: most people love photographs, and the agency involved in the drama of posing, but they also like to see the results. So perhaps the politics of the encounter resides in your taking the trouble to send a selection of photos back to them, and to write to the heads of households where you have stayed.

Above all else, remember that you are entering someone else's home in their trust. What might sometimes appear to you to be difficult or awkward encounters are, for the most part, attempts to make you welcome and to offer gifts that such families can ill afford. Be generous and flexible.

We'll collect you in the late morning of the next day, say goodbye to your hosts, and head back to Tshulu Camp.



Sunday 29 June

Returning from their various expeditions, both groups converge on Tshulu Camp for lunch. The rest of the day will be free for walks in the ravine, exploring, visiting neighbouring villages, and working on your field work rights projects.

Monday 30 June

On Monday, the roles are reversed: Group A will be collected by me to be taken to Kruger, with a drive to Crook's Corner, and perhaps a walk across the border into Mozambique. This group now overnights at Shingwedzi research camp, and has an evening game drive and lecture. Group B goes into the homestay experience.

Tuesday 1 July

Rising early, Group A travels north again, perhaps to visit the Makuleke area of Kruger, and then returns to Hamakuya. Group B returns from homestay. After lunch and showers (living in a homestay village is a dusty experience!), you will continue working on your thematic field projects. There will be visits to the local clinic, to the Tshikondeni Mine, to the holding cells at the local police station, to home based HIV/AIDS groups, and so on.

Closer to the time, we will provide you with detailed field project guidelines, including advice on how to conduct brief interviews and gather information relating to attitudes towards rights.

In the evening, the whole group gathers for dinner at Tshulu. There will be **report backs and evaluation of the Hamakuya experience** by the various groups.

Wednesday 2 July

At 10h00, you say your farewells to rural Venda and leave for Johannesburg via a different route. We hope to have you back at your residence at about 18h00.

I know that you will enjoy this unique orientation stay. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at dbunn@mweb.co.za.

Professor David Bunn



Study “Streams” at Hamakuya

For the purposes of this exercise, we have identified five broad, rights-based areas of research that can be conducted in Hamakuya. Think in advance about which of these interests you the most.

Group 1: Traditional Forms of Governance

Here you may be able to sit in on a Tribal Council meeting, have interviews with Council members and Tovhele Makuya, and interact with youths from the ANC Youth League.

Group 2: Primary Health Care

This may involve meeting and interacting with workers at the Clinic, with home-based care volunteers, and “health club” meetings. We hope too that you will be able interview traditional healers at Fandani village.

Group 3: Women and Gender Roles in the Community

We have in mind that you will observe a day in the life of a rural women; or join women in church groups, women’s groups, and stokvels (“burial societies”); and that you will have a chance to inquire about the pressure of witchcraft beliefs, and “hlonipha” (respect) laws, as well as traditions surrounding dress, the use of space, and agriculture.

Group 4: Environmental Rights

This might involve discussion of conservation issues, water rights, and fuel use. You will have a chance to explore the way the Chief’s authority is used to control firewood collection and brush cutting. We hope some of you might be able to spend a day monitoring resource use by individual women, visit the local municipality and see how it handles water, river rights, and sanitation projects. You could perhaps walk with environmental guide Phatwane, looking for snares and river netting, and find out about indigenous knowledge and property rights with respect to plant use.

Group 5: Minority Language and Culture

This group will visit several sites associated with the preservation of “traditional” culture, including the chief’s homestead. You will explore, with Susan Harrop-Allin, how villages work to preserve musical traditions like tshikona and marende, drumming and drum making, and the making of mwenda cloth. With luck, we will be able to visit musician Obed Ramashia, for an interview and performance at his homestead.

Land Rights, Citizens, and Refugees

Other major issues of rights will be dealt with in the general lectures and the Kruger visits: these will include land claims and grave sites, rival claims to “archaeological” heritage, and the catastrophe of refugees moving through the permeable border zones, and the Kruger National Park, in their thousands, only to be met by xenophobia.