



Grootbosch Nature Reserve (4625ha) was established in 1988. This includes the Woodbush and Grootbosch forests plus a number of isolated forests in the district, including the Swartbos Forest. The Department of Agriculture manages the reserve.

The Swartbos Forest is an excellent example of northern mistbelt forest which occurs primarily in east-facing fire refugia, usually moist sheltered kloofs. The Swartbos Trail allows rare access to a mist belt forest.

In a natural forest, each plant community plays an important role. The top level is a high canopy formed by the crowns of the giants: large, mature trees which are often festooned with liane. There is a sub canopy of smaller trees and large, leafy shrubs while below them all a wonderland of smaller plants and ferns, all closed in by the dense forest margins. Orchids grow in the rich humus of the forest floor, on moist, moss-covered rocks and on tree stems.

An indigenous forest creates a special microclimate and circumstances which cause it to function as a sponge. You will always find trickles of water, increasing in strength to merge and become streams in forests.

There are a number of sawpits in the forest; look out for the one indicated on the map.

If you are quiet, you might see Bushbuck and Bushpig. A deep booming call indicates that a Samango Monkey has spotted you and is warning the troop.

Birds to see in Swartbos Forest are Cape Parrot, Black-fronted Bush-Shrike, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Orange Ground-Thrush, Buff-spotted Flufftail, African Olive-Pigeon, Tambourine Dove, Lemon Dove, Black Cuckoo, African Emerald Cuckoo, Narina Trogon, Olive Woodpecker, Grey Cuckooshrike, Yellow throated Woodland Warbler, Brown Robin and Green Twinspot

A little bit of history relating to the forest:

An extract from Googoo Thompson's interesting description of her life follows:-

On several occasions we were told by Mr Brits about the Sekhukhune campaign and its connection with the first settlers in the Woodbush. On the 2nd of December 1879 the British Army under Sir Garnet Wolseley routed and captured the Pedi Paramount Chief. Sir Garnet used a big contingent of Swazi soldiers, together with the 94th regiment and the 13th Light Infantry from Perth.

When the campaign was over, five soldiers from the 13th Light Infantry deserted and found shelter in the Woodbush. The names of these original five woodcutters were Woodward, Smith, Schnell, Ruthven and Taylor.

They earned a living by felling timber which was badly required for railway sleepers, building houses and wagons. There was a great demand from the fast-growing town of Pretoria. The timber was also sold in Pietersburg and to a lesser extent on market days at Houtboschdorp.

The word of untold timber resources soon spread as far afield as Knysna, and not long afterwards the village was teeming with ox wagons, sellers and buyers. These arrivals swelled the number of white settlers, who had to buy sugar and material for clothing, but otherwise managed to live entirely off the land.....

..... Theodor Hermann Wangemann*, the Director of the Berlin Mission Society, came to the Woodbush in 1884 to visit the Missionary Knothe's Station "Mphome". He records in his book "Ein zweites Reisejahr in Sudafrica", (1886), that there were about forty families of woodcutters living poorly in little wooden dwellings either in the village of Houtboschdorp or in isolated locations throughout the forest."

From: Between Woodbush and Wolkberg. Googoo Thompson's Story.
B Wongtschowski

Swartbos Trail

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