

# Travel treasure troves in the trees

By [Dr Ronald Heath](#)

4 Dec 2019

We've all driven past them on the way to Durban, and the Kruger National Park. Tall towers of brown and green, swaying in the wind as they mesmerise us with the timber tunnels they create.



Hansm via [Wikimedia Commons](#) - Blyde River Canyon, Mpumalanga, South Africa

South Africa is home to 1.2 million hectares of sustainably managed commercial timber plantations. As the source of a number of everyday products, these plantations are also home to the unexpected.

You will be surprised how many things are made from wood and the South African commercial forestry industry farms the trees to provide the raw material. These trees add value to our economy by providing timber for construction, for the production of pulp, paper, packaging and tissue, for cellulose products such as sponges, viscose fabric and the ever-versatile microcrystalline cellulose. The industry also provides employment and supports communities, especially in rural areas.

Sustainably managed commercial trees (along with the products made from them) are renewable. Saplings are planted in the place of mature harvested trees – contrary to images and myths that harvested trees equate to deforestation.

Add in timber's carbon storage capacity of nearly one tonne of carbon per cubic metre of wood, even after harvesting and processing, and you have an industry that delivers in more ways than you can imagine.

Around 30% of forestry-owned land is not managed for timber production and is set aside for biodiversity conservation ... vast swaths of grassland, riverine habitats, wetlands and indigenous forests. Together with plantations, these areas present countless recreational options.

## **Fun in the forests**

Our Forestry Explained recreational map highlights various activities and attractions found on forestry-owned land that is open to the public.

It showcases the eco-activities offered by forestry companies and private individuals in one user-friendly recreational guide. Its interactive nature allows you to explore what's on offer, along with important information for the perfect forestry day out.

## **Take the trail less travelled**

For the energetic and adventurous, there are kilometres of trail running, hiking and mountain biking tracks.

For a more sedate option, you may prefer bird watching or a picnic, while taking in spectacular views or the sounds of waterfalls.

## **Forestry fun bucket list**

If you've not yet planned your December break, here are five things to add to your bucket list ahead of this festive season and going into the new year:

1. Mpumalanga's waterfalls – many of the famous 'Panorama Route' waterfalls are actually situated on forestry land. These include Berlin, Lisbon and Mac Mac falls and pools; Bridal Veil, Lone Creek and Maria Shires Falls.
2. Mountain biking getaway – take a long weekend and explore the plantations, indigenous forests and open grasslands of Karkloof and Howick in KwaZulu-Natal. Enjoy the incredible scenery, amazing biodiversity and the 100km plus of biking trails.
3. 'Big 4' forestry hikes in four provinces – the famed Fanie Botha and Tsitsikamma hikes, as well as the beautiful Magoebaskloof and Jonkershoek trails offer breathtaking views, diverse scenery and a wealth of biodiversity. These fantastic forestry trails are a great way to explore the distinctly different landscapes of four provinces.
4. Kaapsehoop scooters – take a two-hour scooter adventure through the Kaapsehoop plantations, over streams, beside magnificent rock formations and waterfalls. If you are really lucky, you might get a glimpse of the wild horses for which the town is renowned.
5. Trail running triple – forestry-owned land hosts three of South Africa's best trail running venues, with routes to suit all levels of experience and fitness. Jonkershoek's Red Phoenix presents even experienced runners with a challenging descent, while the 20km Karkloof trail and 21km White River long route are great tests of endurance. All three have a number of great short trails that are perfect for those wanting to take their first steps in the sport.

The South African forestry landscape is far more complex and diverse than simply rows of planted trees.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Ronald Heath, is Research Director at Forestry South Africa.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>