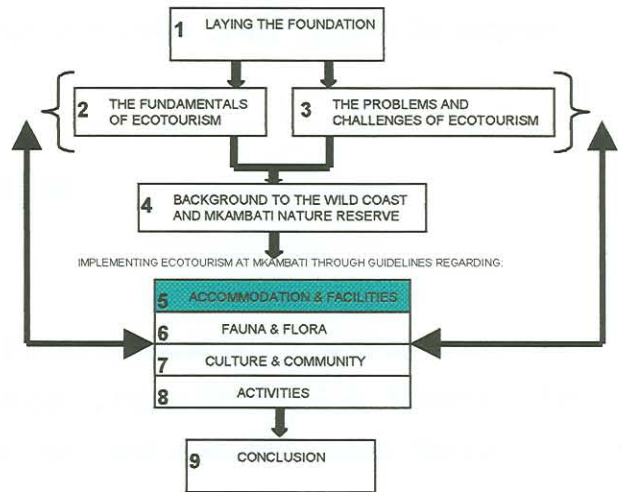


Chapter 5

Implementing ecotourism: accommodation and facilities



5.1 Introduction

The theoretical base set is now put into practice by determining guidelines for the implementation of ecotourism at Mkambati Nature Reserve in Chapters 5 to 8. The proposals involve all four fundamentals of the ecotourism tetrahedron operating in balance. The first aspect of focus is the accommodation and facilities at Mkambati. This chapter deals primarily with the fundamental of the ecotourism industry. Their approach in respect of activities and facilities impact on the enlightening experience of the tourist, and should incorporate local community input and culture.

Mkambati Nature Reserve falls into an ecotourism zone on the Wild Coast (Section 4.2). Not intentionally intended for ecotourism, Mkambati offers a range of accommodation that can be developed to reflect the reserve's cultural heritage while being appropriate to the environment and catering for different tastes and income ranges. This is in keeping with the requirement for ecotourism zones as stipulated by the Wild Coast Tourism Development Policy (Section 4.2).

At present, the reserve has approximately 90 beds. The accommodation includes a colonial style Lodge, the Gwe Gwe rondavels, family orientated houses/cottages, a large isolated Riverside house, and Point Cottage near the beach. This variety of accommodation provides management with the ability to, with minimum effort, provide a reflection of Mkambati's rich cultural heritage, while blending into the environment.

Appendix 1 shows the position of existing accommodation units. In the current proposal these will remain predominantly the same, with the additions of a proposed camping site and additional cottages at the Main Complex, a bushcamp at Four Falls, a bird hide and treetop walk in the forest at Riverside, and an up-market development at the Mkambati Gates. The position of these is also indicated on Appendix 1, as well as all other structures mentioned in this chapter. Each site is discussed separately below. All accommodation developments have been planned in

accordance with the zoning and instructions prescribed in the Wild Coast Tourism Development Policy described in Section 4.2.

5.2 Present accommodation and facilities

5.2.1 *The Lodge*

The Lodge (Figure 5.1) is a charming sandstone single storey house with a panoramic sea view. In the days of the leper colony, this was the superintendent's home (Section 4.4). It contains five en-suite double rooms, a large formal lounge, dining room, and a second smaller lounge. The Lodge has a large kitchen, ideal for catering for big groups. It has its own swimming pool and easy access to the beach. The 'Biggy Best' décor reminds one of Mkambati's colonial past.

The Lodge is currently hired out as a single unit, and visitors must therefore pay the tariff for a full house, even if the rooms are not all in use. Mkambati's current charge is R44.00 per person per night. The Lodge, which sleeps ten, is thus R440.00 per night, and is reserved by families and groups.

Figure 5.1 The Lodge



5.2.2 Cottages

The Main Complex near Reception contains six self-catering houses, accommodating approximately 30 people. The cost is R44.00 per person per night. Two of them are built of sandstone, in the same theme as The Lodge. The other four units do not fit in with the colonial theme and little thought was given to style, layout, or the appropriateness to the environment. Most of these units were not built for tourism, but as staff accommodation during Mkambati's period as a hospital. The term 'Main Complex' refers to the area containing Reception, Executive Flat, Clubhouse, Loft, and the six cottages. A road of approximately 200m leads from Main Complex to The Lodge.

5.2.3 Point Cottage

This is a single unit, close to Main Beach, accommodating six people. It has two bedrooms, a lounge, dining room, and open plan kitchen. The cost is R44.00 per person per night.

5.2.4 Riverside

Riverside is a large thatched L-shaped house on the banks of the Gwe Gwe River. It has five large bedrooms, three bathrooms, a kitchen/dining room, and a separate lounge. It accommodates a maximum of 20 people. As with The Lodge, Riverside must be booked as a whole at R528 per night. Figure 5.2 shows the position of Riverside (on the left) relative to Gwe Gwe (on the right), which is described in the following section.

Figure 5.2 Riverside and the Gwe Gwe Rondavels



5.2.5 *Gwe Gwe Rondavels*

Gwe Gwe (Figure 5.3) consists of six rondavels, each equipped with two beds, a shower, toilet, hand basin, small gas fridge, hotplate, and wash up sink. There is a seventh rondavel, which acts as a lounge and contains a communal fridge. Each rondavel is hired out at R88.00 per night. Due to the current run-down state of Gwe Gwe, visitors are allowed to sleep three in each rondavel at no extra cost.

5.2.6 *Executive Flat and Reception*

The Executive Flat is a small flat adjacent to the Reception area. It accommodates five people. Reception is situated between the Executive Flat and the Clubhouse.

Figure 5.3 **Gwe Gwe Rondavels**



5.2.7 *Shop*

At present there is a small rural cash store at Main Gate. It is run by a community member and sells milk, bread, and basic groceries. Both locals and tourists make use of this facility.

5.3 Proposed accommodation and facilities

5.3.1 The Lodge

The Lodge is ideal as a guesthouse with its en-suite rooms and large kitchen, and will take minimum effort to convert from its current self-catering status. Due to its previous days as a small hotel, the kitchen is already equipped to handle high volume food production. The dining area can seat 20 people, which will give guests not staying in the lodge the opportunity to enjoy meals in such a lovely setting. Guests can also be seated outside on the large stoep. Dinner, bed and breakfast should be served. Guests should be able to book for the meals they want, and to get picnic hampers for the days when they will be out during meal times, bearing in mind that guests will not always want to hurry back for a meal.

The interior of the house should be restored to the 1920s colonial theme to incorporate the reserve's history. Current décor fits in with the theme but is in need of a revamp.

Attractive notices should be placed in each room explaining Mkambati's past, and specifically the history of The Lodge itself. Information on Mkambati's cultural heritage should also be strategically placed. Mention must be made of the fact that the palm tree next to The Lodge is one of the Mkambati palms, from which the reserve derives its name. This palm was planted outside The Lodge, whereas those up the Msikaba River are natural.

The information provided should only give a brief introduction to the reserve and its history, enticing guests to find out more about this topic, and encouraging them to visit the Gwe Gwe Cultural Village (referred to in Section 5.3.5). Information posted up in accommodation units is supplementary to, and in some cases repetition of what is in the Mkambati guide booklet.

5.3.2 Cottages

The recommendation is to keep these as self-catering cottages, but to recondition them to an acceptable standard. The future success of Mkambati depends on whether the accommodation can be run as a profitable business or not. The main driving force behind this profitability lies in guest satisfaction. It is thus crucial that the cottages be maintained, for example, painted regularly, and that an uninterrupted supply of electricity is ensured, supplies of toilet paper in the cottages are adequate, refuse removal is regular, and animal-proof dustbins are installed.

Once the reserve makes a reasonable return, it is suggested that the four cottages not built of sandstone should be replaced with houses of sandstone to blend with the environment and the

colonial theme. If cost is a limiting factor, normal brick structures can be built in the same style as the two existing sandstone houses, and covered with artificial sandstone slabs.

Eleven more self-catering units, each sleeping five, can be built at the Main Complex in the same theme. Once the small staff houses between the tourists' accommodation are removed, there is ample room for additional units, while still retaining space around each one. There must, however, be some staff accommodation at the Main Complex.

It is essential to plant indigenous vegetation between the cottages in order to add privacy and shade. Extensive use can be made of coast silver oak - *Brachylaena* Spp., forest num-num - *Carissa* Spp., wild blue plumbago - *Plumbago* Spp., and Cape honeysuckle - *Tecomaria* Spp.

At present the only unit being serviced is The Lodge, yet guests staying in the other accommodation units pay the same price. All the cottages at Main Complex should be serviced on a daily basis, as well as Point Cottage, Riverside, and Gwe Gwe Rondavels. The cost thereof can be included in the overall price. Visitors on holiday do not want to be concerned with house cleaning and washing dishes. There is an ample supply of staff maintaining the grounds, some of which can be delegated to the up-keep and servicing of tourist accommodation.

5.3.3 Point Cottage

Point Cottage is currently dilapidated and needs to be restored. A small thatched lapa should be constructed. The strength of Point Cottage lies in its ability to attract multiple markets. It lends itself to family holidays (being able to sleep six), but is also an ideal honeymoon spot, due to its isolation and tranquillity. Special emphasis should be placed on its allure by marketing it in, for example, bridal magazines.

5.3.4 Riverside

Riverside can remain a venue for large groups (20), and can also be used to accommodate parties of school children. As one of the historical buildings of the reserve, it should be restored and upgraded.

5.3.5 Gwe Gwe Cultural Village

Mkambati currently reflects very little of the indigenous culture. Gwe Gwe has the potential to offer visitors a unique ethnic experience in the Xhosa culture. Most overseas, as well as domestic tourists are very interested in, and want to experience indigenous culture (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 1999). It is therefore suggested that Gwe Gwe be

upgraded to provide a true ethnic Xhosa experience, that guests from all over the reserve could visit on specified evenings, for example, once or twice a week. Places such as the Lesedi Cultural Village and the Khaya La Bantu Xhosa Village can be used as benchmarks for the development and management of the new Gwe Gwe Cultural Village. The Eastern Cape currently has several of this type of venture, but the uniqueness of a traditional Xhosa experience in a coastal wilderness environment should distinguish Gwe Gwe.

This section has clear linkages to Chapter 7 on culture and community, but the accommodation and cultural aspects need to be described together in this case.

A major hurdle to be overcome regarding Gwe Gwe is its problematic status from an environmental perspective because of its proximity to the shoreline¹². With the law prohibiting any new permanent structures from being built within one kilometre of the coastline, the reserve is reluctant to demolish this existing structure, since it cannot be replaced on the same site. It is therefore essential that an EIA be done to determine how the negative effects of Gwe Gwe can be mitigated.

A further constraint is that Gwe Gwe is far from the Main Gate, making it difficult for locals to get there. As is done at Lesedi Cultural Village, it is suggested that two or three families run the venture and live on site. The existing accommodation for the Riverside caretaker can be used for this purpose. These families will be responsible for everything, from servicing rooms to entertainment at Gwe Gwe Cultural Village, as well as servicing Riverside.

The entire 'village' should be designed around the culture of the Xhosa people. The six sleeping huts can be restored to house two people each, including the small bathroom and kitchen. The self-catering approach is suggested because Mkambati Gates Lodge (Section 5.3.7) and The Lodge already offer full services. It remains important to provide adequate accommodation for the self-catering market. The rondavels should be painted in the traditional two-tone mud and white paint colour scheme, with the doorways facing east, as described in Section 4.1, and shown in Figure 5.4. The main colour scheme used by the Pondo for blankets and decorations such as beadwork is blue, turquoise and white (Mertens & Broster, 1987). This colour scheme should be used inside the huts, the interior of which can be luxurious.

¹² Personal communication with Mr. D. De Villiers, Regional Manager, Eastern Cape Nature Conservation, Mkambati Nature Reserve, 19 July 2000.

The cattle fold/*kraal*//*boma* is another important part of the culture of a Xhosa *umuzi*/ homestead, and is a sacred place where ceremonial occasions take place such as ritual slaughter and burial of chiefs (Iafrika, 2000). This can be constructed using sticks matted together, and can be used for storytelling, traditional dances, music performances, Xhosa stick fighting, and the explanation of the use of medicinal herbs by traditional doctors. In the storytelling and dances, the emphasis should be on the relationship between the Xhosa people and their environment.

Locals clothed in cultural dress should serve traditional cuisine here. Dishes such as *umfino* (turnips; potatoes; and wild leaves from bean plants, beetroot, and sweet potato), *umbhako* (baked bread served with tripe or tea or coffee), *umnqusho* (samp and beans), and the staple diet of *pap* (porridge) can be served (Ndukwana *et al*, 2000:14).

Figure 5.4 Traditional Xhosa huts



Continuing with the cultural attributes, traditional beer stools can be made for the visitors to sit on in the *boma*. These low, small stools are made by Pondo men, and decorated with geometric designs burnt into the wood with hot wires (Mertens & Broster, 1987). Not only should the guests sit on these at night, but they should also be for sale. Visitors can also try their hands at making a stool, as a souvenir from Pondoland.

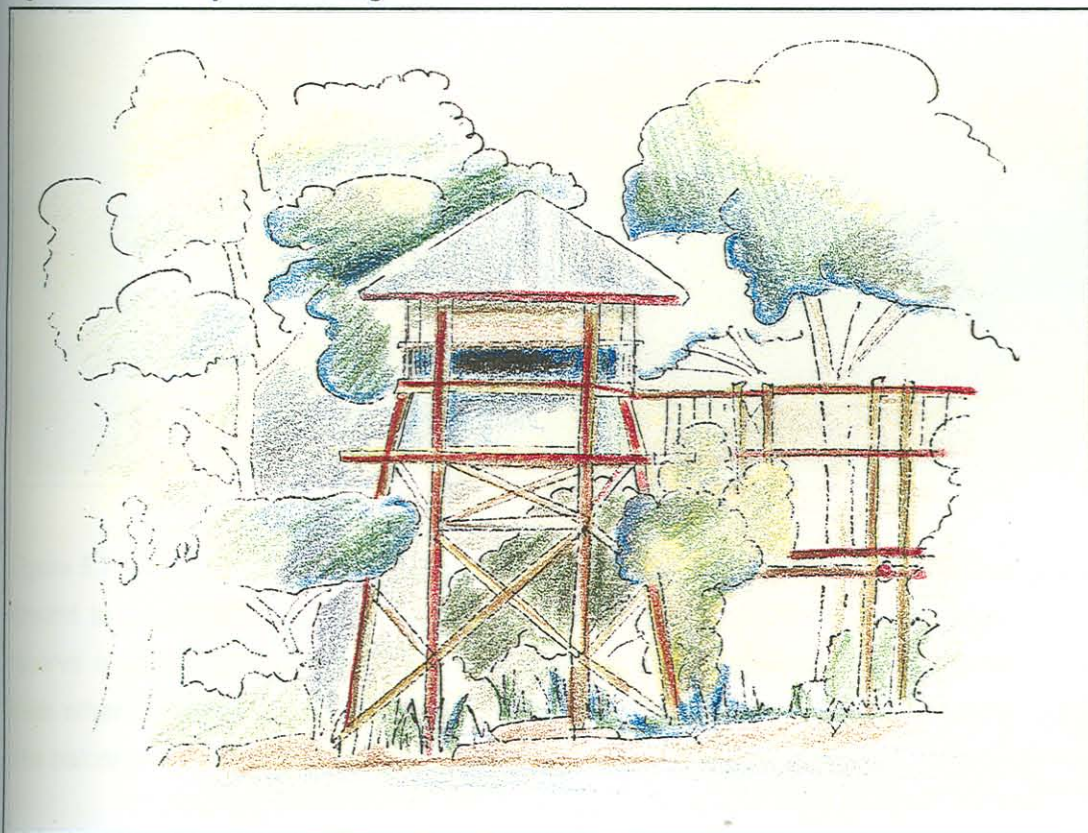
A vital part of ecotourism is that guests are made aware of these aspects of homestead layout, decoration, and purpose as part of the interactive and enlightening experience. This can be communicated via plaques/posters/wall hangings etc. explaining the history and folklore behind these aspects, such as the reason for the colours of huts both inside and outside, and other aspects of the décor where the purpose thereof is unknown to the tourists. The Mkambati guide booklet should also have a section dedicated to Xhosa culture. Another wonderful way of communicating culture to tourists is through storytelling by local people.

The development and management of this village should be tendered-out to the local community. This initiative could be 'sold' to the private sector body awarded the tender, as a flagship project. For a successful joint venture of this nature, financing, training, and mentoring are critical aspects.

5.3.6 Treetop walk and bird hide

As is shown in the aerial photograph in Figure 5.2, Gwe Gwe is close to the forest. A short treetop walk into the forest on a raised walkway is therefore suggested. This could incorporate a bird hide over the Gwe Gwe River. Figure 5.5 shows the proposed design of the bird hide, which blends into the surroundings. Bluegum timber can be used for the construction of both the bird hide and walkway. Selected trees should be marked with nametags on the level of the walkway.

Figure 5.5 Proposed design of the bird hide



5.3.7 *Mkambati Gates Lodge*

Whereas Gwe Gwe will form the cultural hub of Mkambati, the proposed exclusive Mkambati Gates Lodge will focus on the natural environment and its sustainable use. The site chosen is on the Mkambati River above Horseshoe Falls, where the river enters a steep gorge formed by the two 'gates'. Figure 5.6 shows the proposed position of the lodge, nestled sympathetically into the western side of the gate.

It is suggested that five chalets be built, each accommodating four people. This limits the number of lodgers to 20. If families are larger than four, luxurious sleeper couches can be used, as is done at accommodation establishments of the same level. The chalets must be built with utmost consideration to the natural environment. Natural features, such as trees and rocks, should be included in the chalet's design wherever possible, thus minimising disturbance to nature.

Figure 5.6 Proposed position of Mkambati Gates Lodge

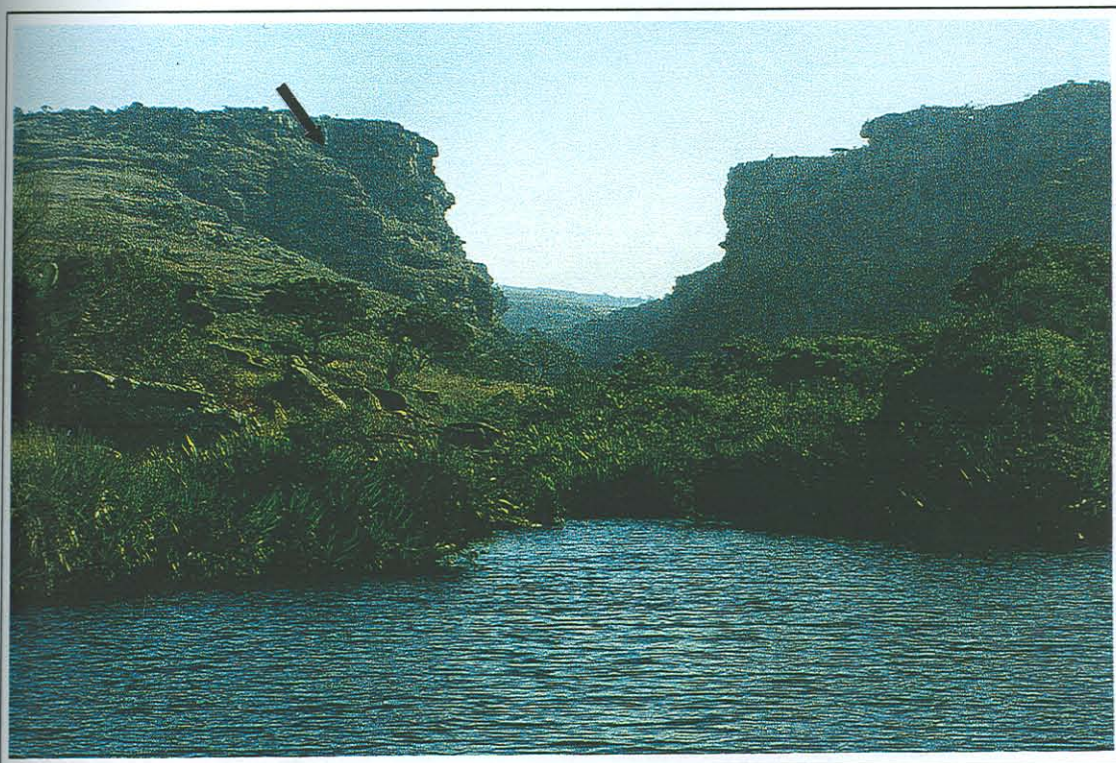
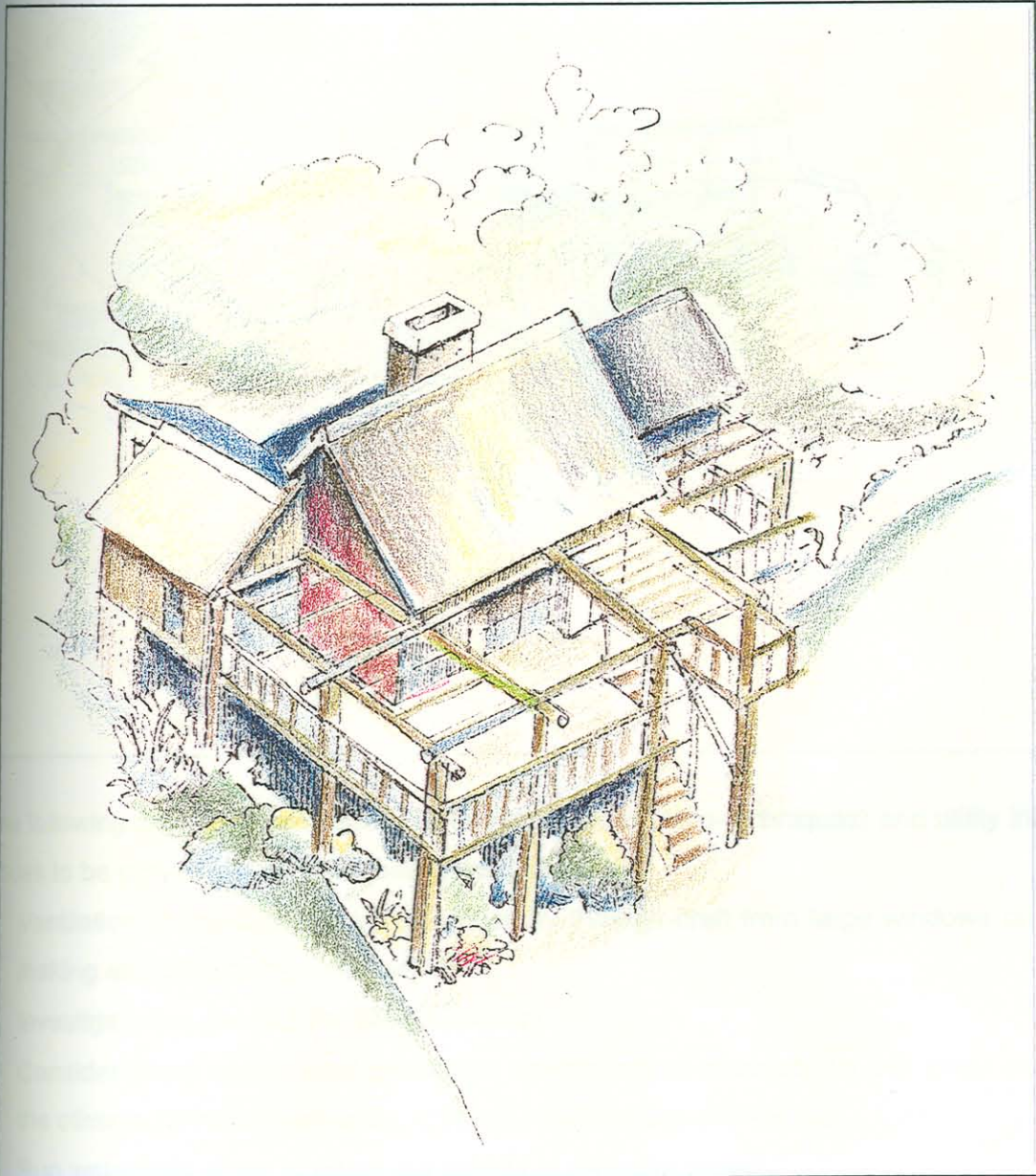


Figure 5.7 indicates the proposed design of the chalets. These structures should be raised off the ground to minimise disturbance to the vegetation, and be built out of the bluegums that the reserve is currently eradicating. With the absence of tall vegetation to screen the chalets from each other, privacy must be ensured by placing the five chalets on different levels of this slope. The balcony of each chalet will open up onto the view of the river below.

Figure 5.8 is a representation of the main building at Mkambati Gates Lodge. This building will be situated just beneath the highest point of the gate, with a magnificent view down and across into the Wilderness area. It will house a kitchen, dining and lounge area, and ladies' bar on the deck. It can also be constructed from bluegum timber. These draft designs must be discussed with the local community, with opportunity being afforded for their inputs. For all new structures, local labour should be used in the construction thereof.

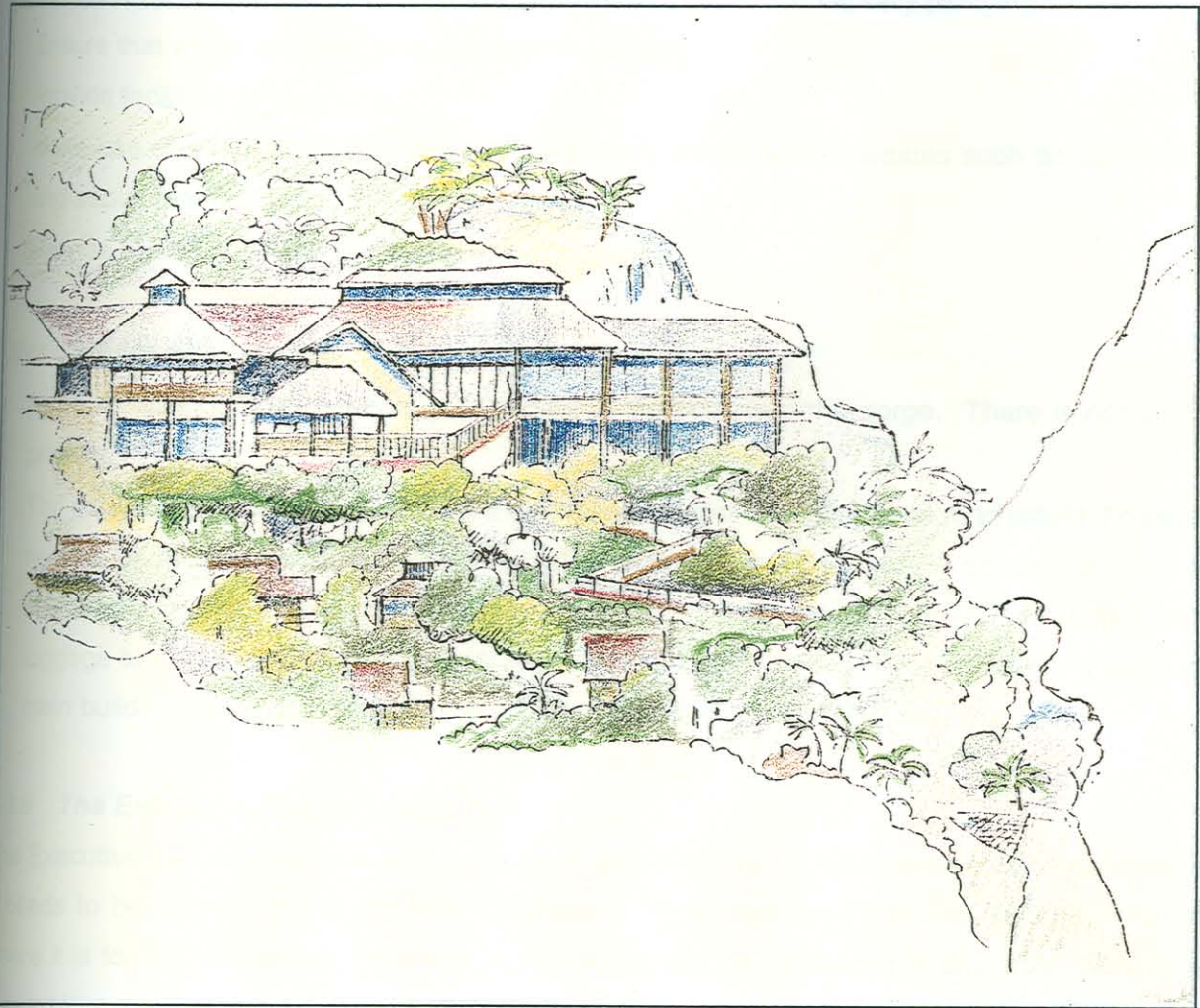
Figure 5.7 Proposed design of individual chalets for Mkambati Gates Lodge



This type of accommodation can cater for two very distinct markets. On the one hand, tourists interested in ecotourism will enjoy experiencing the sustainable use of the natural resources, whereas the opulence provided will attract tourists from the higher income bracket, which can

include the latter as well as hunters. As with The Lodge, three meals a day will be provided, but guests must have the option of a picnic hamper should they be out during a mealtime.

Figure 5.8 Proposed design of main building at Mkambati Gates Lodge



The following are guidelines regarding energy resource (eco-techniques) and utility infrastructure issues to be considered at Mkambati Gates Lodge.

Ventilation of facilities can be enhanced by through draft from large windows on two sides, making air conditioning unnecessary.

Investigate the use of solar energy sources.

Consider photo voltaic/wind generation and storage of electricity for this lodge as well as for the other accommodation units, buildings, and facilities at Mkambati.

Run waterlines along or under the chalets to minimise impact.

Waste management is becoming an area of severe concern for managers. The following pointers drawn from Andersen (1993) should be followed to ensure that it is effectively handled.

- Provide ecologically sound restrooms, for example, enviroloo's (such as those provided by Amadiba Adventures at their campsite on the Mtentu river) or naturally purifying toilets.
- Ensure that waste disposal units are animal-secure.
- Provide facilities for recycling.
- Make use of appropriate technology for the treatment of organic wastes such as composting and septic tanks.
- Provide ecologically sound rubbish disposal facilities.

Other considerations at Mkambati Gates Lodge are the following:

- A proper walking path must be constructed to the bottom of the gorge. There is not one at present.
- The existing road goes very close to the proposed lodge. A new access road would, however, need to be made so that tourists can drive up to the lodge. The parking space should be as secluded as possible, and must not be situated next to each chalet. Porters can carry guests' luggage to their chalets. Only footpaths should be allowed between the chalets and up to the main building, so as to enhance the experience of being in nature.

5.3.8 *The Executive Flat and Reception*

The Executive Flat can continue to be utilized as accommodation. However, as with the cottages, it needs to be upgraded and regularly maintained. It is suggested that the Reception remain where it is for the time being. However, a more light and airy character is desirable, with visual presentations and interpretation on the reserve as a welcoming and stimulating first point of contact for the visitor. As more interpretation is provided in this venue, the Reception may need to expand or relocate to become more of a visitor centre.

5.3.9 *The Loft*

The Loft should be utilised as a Games Room for children and an Environmental Education Centre. Children and scholars' groups, as well as other interested guests, can be enlightened on aspects of Mkambati such as Xhosa culture, fauna, and flora. This is dealt with in more depth in the activities chapter (Section 8.3.6). The Environmental Education Centre can also be used for audiovisual presentations and group discussions when required.

5.3.10 *The Clubhouse*

The existing structure of the Clubhouse is ideal for use as a small bar and centre for light refreshments. Although the interior is in need of maintenance, it is generally well laid out and can be used very effectively.

The décor of the Clubhouse should also reflect the history and cultural heritage of the reserve. This could be accomplished by using posters and photographs to relate the history of Mkambati and the whole of Pondoland. Beading, woodwork, and local woven ware can be utilised to convey the lifestyle of the traditional Xhosa's.

A main consideration of running such an establishment in a fairly small reserve with seasonal demand is the matter of covering overheads. This includes the cost of keeping it operational during low seasons. To overcome this problem, it is suggested that the Clubhouse be run on a forecasted time schedule. The reserve should make use of casual labour and, on a weekly basis, project the occupancy for the following week and organise staff accordingly. This will be difficult to implement while tourism at the reserve is state run with permanent positions awarded. Once the accommodation and tourist facilities are privatised, this suggestion will be more feasible.

As part of the same structure it is strongly suggested that a shop be opened for basic goods, including fresh produce, so that guests will not have to travel up to the existing shop at Main Gate.

5.3.11 *Camping*

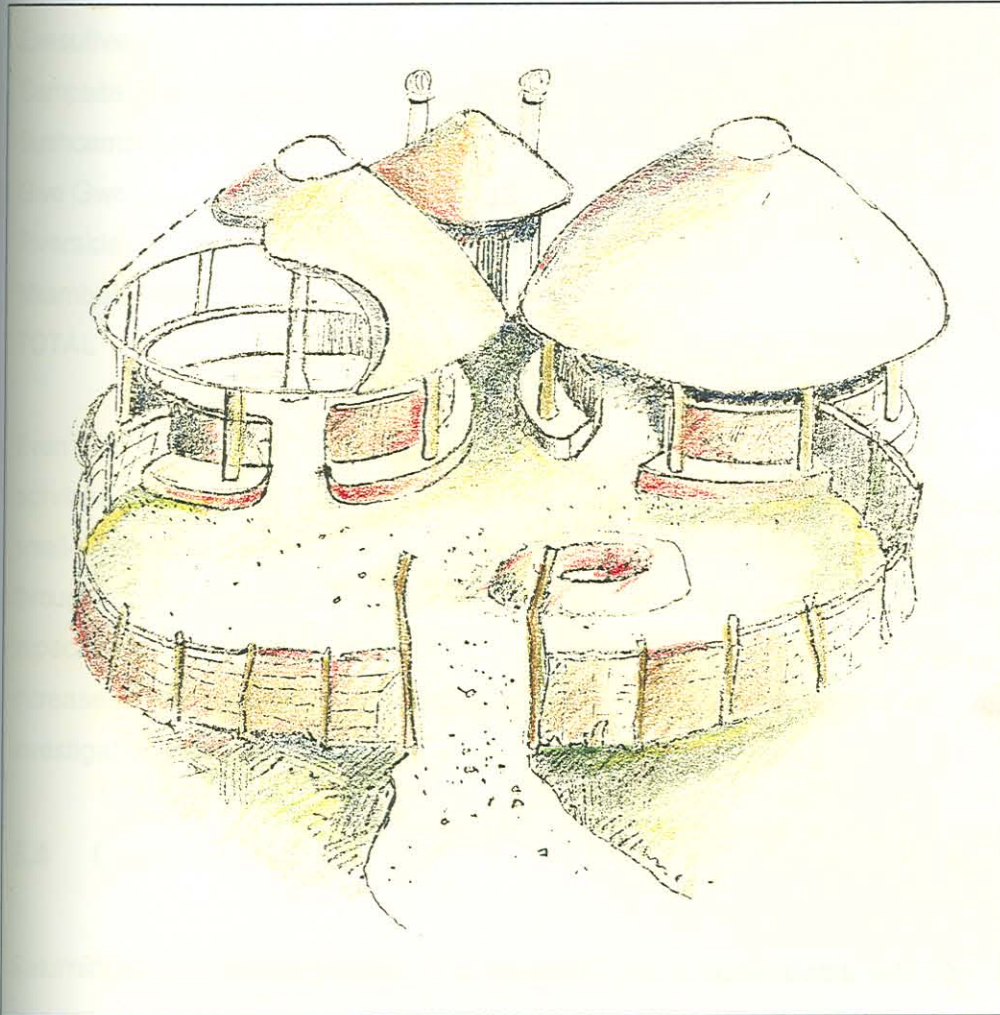
To diversify the market for Mkambati, and to ensure that it is accessible to various income groups, a campsite is proposed for the area just outside the main complex, behind the lining of bluegum trees (see Appendix 1). These will act as screening between the proposed campsite and the rest of the accommodation. Once these bluegums have been eradicated, it is essential that they be replaced by indigenous species to maintain the privacy. This camping area should have eight campsites for approximately four people each, as well as ablution facilities.

A further suggestion is to create an overnight bushcamp for hikers and horse riders near the Four Falls, providing visitors with a small-scale, rustic, and remote experience. Utmost care should be taken to minimise environmental impact when establishing this camp, since the proposed site is in the Wilderness Area. Minimal permanent structures should therefore be erected. In keeping with the theme of the Xhosa huts at Gwe Gwe, two 'huts' can be built with low walls, and an opening between the roof and the wall. The envisaged design is shown in Figure 5.9. The cross section

on the left hut shows the interior. Each hut will sleep five people on mattresses, thus accommodating ten altogether.

It is important that this should be a low maintenance site, offering basic facilities only, as no vehicles will be able to service it. Basic cooking facilities must therefore be provided in a separate open air cooking area/boma as is indicated in Figure 5.9. For tourists on guided trails, food can be pre-prepared at the Main Complex by staff of The Lodge or Mkambati Gates Lodge, depending on from where the tourist departs. Enviro loo's are situated behind the 'huts'.

Figure 5.9 Proposed design of bushcamp near the Four Falls



5.3.12 Learning Centre for locals

An unused education centre is situated near the Main Gate of the reserve. It is proposed that this become a Learning Centre, which can be used as a teaching hub for the locals to learn skills such as craftwork, to learn about conservation, and where guides, room attendants, and waiters can be trained.

5.3.13 Visitor carrying capacity at Mkambati

Mkambati currently accommodates 90 people. The Natal Parks Board proposed a carrying capacity of 200 for Mkambati¹³. Conservationists who have worked in Mkambati and know the area well support this¹⁴. The recommendations are therefore in accordance with this number.

The following indicates the allocation of visitors to the various accommodation units.

The Lodge	10
Cottages	85
Point Cottage	6
Executive Flat	5
Campsite at main camp	32
Bushcamp near Four Falls	10
Gwe Gwe	12
Riverside	20
Mkambati Gates Lodge	20
TOTAL	200

Even with 200 people in the reserve, concentration in one area is unlikely due to the numerous activities proposed in Chapter 8, and the many places of interest. The ecotourism will still be small-scale and private due to the fact that the different types of accommodation are spread throughout the reserve. The reserve can start with this carrying capacity and evaluate the visitor impact over a period of time. This monitoring will reveal whether visitor numbers should be increased or decreased. A comparative analysis could also be done on a reserve of similar size, investigating its carrying capacity and impacts.

5.4 Conclusion

Returning to the fundamentals of ecotourism, this chapter deals with the ecotourism industry's responsibility to provide environmentally sound accommodation and facilities that complement the natural environment. Furthermore, local culture and materials should be incorporated, as well as using local peoples ideas, skills, and labour in the process. In so doing, ecotourism

13. Telephonic communication with Mr. D. Prinsloo, Eastern Cape Nature Conservation, 6 November 2000.

14. Personal communication with Mr. D. De Villiers, Regional Manager, Eastern Cape Nature Conservation, Mkambati Nature Reserve, 19 July 2000; telephonic communication with Mr. D. Prinsloo, Eastern Cape Nature Conservation, 6 November 2000.

accommodation becomes a window to the natural and cultural environment, drawing on its character and providing the tourist with a unique and enlightening experience.

Implementing ecotourism:

Interesting aspects regarding the design and management of facilities should also be communicated to tourists, for example, the use of local building materials and ideas, the reason for above-ground construction, recycling programmes run by the reserve, etc. It is clear that many tourists are interested in measures the industry are taking in order to be sustainable. Management should volunteer such information as part of tourist enlightenment.

Introduction

Through the accommodation and facilities, the ecotourism industry should be moving the resource base, tourist, and local community to a point where the environment is improved, the tourist is enlightened, and the community are partners, giving their inputs and incorporating culture as a crucial element of design (Figure 2.3).

The natural resource base, although the fundamental of the ecotourism industry, local community, and tourists are also involved due to their influence on the resource base.

It is currently much easier, for the sake of tourism, to introduce the 'Big Five', into the area (Parks & Wildlife). The Wild Game Tourism Development Policy suggests that the area be developed using its natural beauty as a basis, rather than artificially creating 'Big Five reserves or restoration-based tourism' (Fisher et al. 1998). The proposed guidelines aim to achieve this. This chapter reveals the suggestions made for the management of fauna and flora, so that it complies with the fundamentals of ecotourism and is appropriate to the environment at Mkomazi. This is in keeping with the mission statement and goals of the reserve (section 4.3), which deal primarily with the fundamental that the natural resource base should be sustainably used at an appropriate level. However, the community, tourists, and industry (including Eastern Cape Nature Conservation) have a role to play in this. Conservation of fauna and flora is a major part of implementing ecotourism, and already receives considerable attention at Mkomazi in spite of the constraints faced. Certain recommendations are made which build on existing proposals concerning the conservation aspects, namely, numbers and reduction of game, reserve expansion, and invasive species. Recommendations regarding aspects which link with the fauna and flora, are also given in this chapter, namely, hunting and the use of Geographical Information Systems.