

The Story of Storms River Village

Storms River...the very name conjures up images of mystery and suspense, adventure drama and romance. Of primal forests where the ghosts of woodcutters and long gone elephants roam. Where, on a moonlit, star filled night, one may hear the ring of a pick on rock in salute to long dead road builders. Of ladies in Victorian dress and men in hunting jackets preparing for the buffalo hunt.

Storms River...a little village set in the heart of the forests and in the foothills of the majestic Tsitsikamma mountain range. Centuries ago, long before the Village was ever dreamt of, herds of elephants traversed the land on which it now stands. Every year, for thousands of years, they would migrate across this area en route to the drier lands north east of the now Port Elizabeth to return at the turn of the following season to the cool tranquility of the coastal forests. Living in total harmony with these gentle giants were the San, hunter-gatherers who periodically lived in this area and at the coast, migrating, like the elephants back and forth as the seasons dictated.

And so life went on down the centuries, observed silently by the giant trees of the forests, gently nodding their green heads in the soft Tsitsikamma breezes.

Then one day a strange new sound was heard in the forests...the ringing of an axe on hardwood and the thunder of the shot of hunters. The modern era had begun.

In 1879 the now famous pass builder Thomas Bain first surveyed the area known as Zitzikama and found it to consist of almost impenetrable forests eastwards of Plettenberg Bay. By 1884 the pass through the Storms River gorge was completed and the village of Storms River surveyed and laid out. Labour for this arduous task was provided by convicts ...the graves of some may still be seen on the outskirts of the Village. In order to easily traverse the imposing gorge, Thomas Bain followed, in many places, the trail of those ancient elephants that had centuries earlier navigated a way across the abyss. Today we can still in places see the remains of these ancient trails and admire the fortitude of the elephants and the dogged

determination of Thomas Bain and his convicts in blazing a trail and leaving us their wonderful legacy for us to explore.

As the years went by, and the forests of Storms River began to take a heavy toll via the axe of woodcutters, the state decided that the time had come to step in and begin the preservation of these beautiful trees. The woodcutters were pensioned off and at last the axes fell silent and the few remaining forest giants could breathe a sigh of relief that they had been spared. The coastal area south of Storms River Village was proclaimed a National Park and so a new era in Storms River's history was ushered in: The Time of the Tourist.

For some years a handful of folk had made Storms River Village their home...starting with the Duthies of Knysna who built a hunting lodge here in the mid 1800's and the Barnardos whose forbear was Thomas Bain's right hand man. Mainly retired folk or forestry workers, they found the Village a haven of tranquility in which to settle. Soon Duthie's hunting lodge had been transformed into a hotel and it is still there today, The Protea Village Inn, owned and run by the Du Rand family, bigger, brighter and more modern but still with the unmistakable spirit and charm of a bygone era.

Gradually travelers began to discover Storms River Village and with this increase came the development of more tourist facilities, adventure experiences and further growth of the Village as more people succumbed to the unique character of the town and decided to call it home.

Today Storms River Village has become a bustling little town with a very special ambience and feel, a Village where one may wander through the streets where elephants once roamed, walk down the old pass where convicts toiled at the rock face, admire the giant forest trees where once weary woodcutters rested in their shade, have a cool drink where old buffalo hunters told tales of daring and dash.

And although the Village is a bit more modern now, with electric light, paved roads and the like, I think somewhere the spirits of the San, the elephant, Thomas Bain, the long gone convicts and the Duthies would look down on our Village and quietly nod in approval.

Written by Johan Brink