

Episode 53: Walking Safari

Summary

Nick and Wendy recently did a walking safari in South Africa. In this conversation they talk about what they saw and learned while walking among the animals.

Transcript

Nick: Wendy and I are continuing our adventures in Southern Africa and today we're talking about taking a walking safari in Kruger National Park in South Africa. But before we begin, a reminder that you can get a special discount with italki by going to <http://go.italki.com/englishin10minutes>. italki is a convenient and affordable way to reach fluency in English. You can learn from home or while you travel with the italki smartphone app at a time that's convenient for you. Right, so getting onto our walking safari. That was a unique experience for us.

Wendy: It was! We've been on a safari before, uhh, where - a more typical safari - where you're inside some kind of vehicle like a jeep or a car or a van. But this time we weren't in any vehicle, we were walking. And we were actually there, part of the landscape, right there, face-to-face with the animals, and it was a completely different experience.

Nick: Right, so Kruger National Park is one of the most famous parks in all of Africa. And so one of the things that they offer as an activity is what's called a Wilderness¹ Trail, and that's what we did. And so on the Wilderness Trail you have a ... it's a three-night trip, uhh, with two full days and then parts of two other days. And the point of it is to walk around the park, and like you said, that's different from driving around the park, uhh, in a lot of ways. And so we just thought that would be something a little bit different. Umm, as everybody knows, we really like walking and hiking, and so we just thought this would be a unique way to experience the park, to interact with the animals and it was really fabulous. It was something that we're really glad that we did.

Wendy: Definitely. There are so many small details that you can't see from a car. Uhh, you can only really see them when, you know, you get down on the ground and you're walking there on the savannah. So, yeah, just the plants, the insects, the bones of some of the animals who have died there. Umm, the dung² of the ...

¹ wilderness: the wild, a place far from civilisation. Note that the pronunciation of the *i* in *wilderness* is not the same as in *wild*.

² dung: animal poo

that the animals have left behind, which doesn't necessarily sound like something you want to see, but we had wonderful guides who explained all of this stuff to us and it was fascinating and we learned so much.

Nick: Yeah, so what they tell you at the beginning, when you're starting to walk, is that it's not about seeing the big five, which is what everybody wants to do when they go on these game drives. Umm, it's about, you know, learning about the way that the animals live and the way that the ecosystem operates. Umm, and so it's true that you don't see as many animals when you're walking as you do when you're driving, but when you do see them, you're on a level playing field³ with them, because you're walking and they're walking. And so somehow I think it's more thrilling to see them, even if it's from a further distance, than it is when you're in a jeep or one of the safari vehicles like you mentioned, uhh, because when you're in a vehicle, there's always that kind of barrier.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: That you're looking out at the animals, and, you know, it's nothing like a zoo but it does have a tiny bit of that feeling. But when you're just on foot, and they're on foot, and you're looking face-to-face with them, it's really thrilling.

Wendy: It is.

Nick: Umm, but like you said, it's not just about seeing the animals. It's about all the things you learn along the way. And so, yeah, when you're in a vehicle, it's just about looking. You look, you take your photos, you move on, you look, you take your photos, you move on. Umm, but here, when you're walking, yeah, you have more time. If you have good guides like we had, and they explain all this stuff to do, and, yeah, it's a really different experience and a really great experience I think. So there's a few interesting examples that we can talk about. You mentioned the dung. Uhh, you wouldn't think that would be interesting, but it was. And so one of the first, umm, piles of dung that we saw was from a rhinoceros, and then, uhh, Julius, our guide, explained all sorts of things to us. So the rhino, the alpha male rhino, will dig this hole, and deposit his dung in the hole. And it's a way to mark out his territory. And then what he does is he steps on the dung after he's done it, and he has these cracks in the bottom of his feet, or his, uhh ...

Wendy: Hooves⁴.

Nick: Hooves. And then as he walks away from the dung, basically the dung gets lodged⁵ in these cracks, and as he walks away and walks around that area, some of it falls out and that's a way that he can extend the marking of his territory. And so there's a lot of battles, apparently, between different groups of rhinos or

³ on a level playing field: equal, with no advantage one way or the other

⁴ hooves: the feet of certain animals, which are divided into two halves. The singular is *hoof*.

⁵ lodged: stuck, tightly wedged in

different, umm, adult male rhinos and this is one way that you can mark your territory, and so that was really fascinating just to understand all of this information just from looking at a pile of rhino dung.

Wendy: Yeah. Umm, I don't know how long you want to keep talking about dung, but, uhh, one other dung that I thought was really interesting was the hyena dung. And it's very distinctive, you can recognise it right away, because it's a bright, white colour. And of course, most dung is a much darker colour, but this really is bright white, and that's because of all the bones that they eat, because hyenas are scavengers⁶, so they will eat the carcasses⁷ that have been left behind by the lions and leopards and other predators. So they eat bones, which have a lot of calcium in them, and then that goes out in their dung. And then the dung has a lot of calcium in it, and other animals will come and eat the hyena dung because they know that it has calcium and that that's a nutrient that they need, so I thought that was fascinating.

Nick: Right, it's kind of almost like chalk.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: You can pick it up and it just kind of crumbles⁸ in your hand like that. Uhh, so, yeah, lots of interesting stories about dung. Umm, like you said, you also see bones and you can also hear the animals. A couple of times we heard lions. Uhh, we didn't see any lions while we were walking, umm, but we did see quite a lot of other things, especially on the second day of walking, we saw some more things. We were very close to some rhinos, uhh, and we were close to some elephants. And, so, yeah, as I said, that was really amazing to be so close on foot. Uhh, obviously, the guards are armed - or our rangers - we had two rangers who were with us and they were armed, just in case, uhh, something happened. But nothing bad happened, we didn't get chased by lions or anything like that. Umm, but they're there for safety. And so what we thought was, on the two full days, we would have a walk in the morning, and then you come back for lunch, and then you have a walk in the afternoon. Uhh, but it turns out that they offered us a chance to do a normal game drive in the afternoon to kind of complement the walk, and so that's what we did on both of those days. So we walked for quite a long time in the morning - the first day we walked for about five hours, the second day a little bit less, maybe three-and-a-half hours. And then they took us on a game drive in the afternoon. And so this combination of these two things was really perfect.

Wendy: It was, because, yeah, as we said before, you don't usually get as close to the animals when you're walking as you do when you're driving. Yeah, ironically, they are more afraid of you when you're on foot, uhh, even though you probably

⁶ scavengers: animals that don't hunt food but eat the remains of food that other animals have left

⁷ carcasses: dead animal bodies

⁸ crumbles: breaks apart easily

feel much more protected when you're in a car. But, uhh, they don't really see you as a human when you're in a car, they just see the car itself, and in their experience, cars don't hurt them, whereas humans on foot have hunted them for hundreds or thousands of years. So they've learned to be afraid of humans on foot and not afraid of cars. So, yes, there are definitely advantages to both - to walking and to going on a game drive or safari drive - and, yeah, to have that combination really gave us the complete picture and the full package.

Nick: And on the first afternoon of the drive, we saw everything. It was unbelievable. Umm, so the big five, which everybody talks about, uhh, in Africa, are lions, leopards, rhinos, elephants and buffalo. And so we saw all of those five very close up, all five of them very close. Umm, we had a lion walking right alongside our, uhh, jeep, which was just incredible - literally⁹ two metres away.

Wendy: Yeah, he was staring right into my eyes. That was something I will never forget.

Nick: And then the other amazing experience that afternoon was the leopard. Because we had heard - you know, because the guides are on the radio or when they pass other cars they might ask people what they've seen - and so there was this rumour that was a leopard somewhere nearby and that he had eaten an impala and taken an impala up a tree, because that's what leopards do. And so we saw the carcass of the impala and the leopard was in the distance resting, having just eaten a big meal. And so we went ... we saw it from a distance, but not really. And so we went on our way¹⁰ - we saw the lion - and then we ... by the time we came back it was nighttime, and the guide said, 'Oh, let's just, uhh, shine a light into the trees here where the leopard ... around where the leopard was and see if we can see it.' And suddenly the leopard was just right there, standing on a branch maybe fifteen, twenty metres away from where we were, and, uhh, that was really something as well.

Wendy: It was. We had never seen a leopard that close before. As I mentioned before, we have been on safari in Kenya, several years ago, and we did see a leopard up in a tree, but very far away, and this time it was really close.

Nick: Right, so that was our great animal experience, uhh, in South Africa and, uhh, now we're moving on to Swaziland.

Wendy: We are!

⁹ literally: in actual fact, not an exaggeration.

¹⁰ we went on our way: we continued moving after a pause

Comprehension Questions

1. According to Nick, how does the male rhinoceros (rhino) mark his territory?
2. Why is hyena dung interesting, according to Wendy?
3. What were the two notable animal sightings that Nick and Wendy experienced on the first afternoon of their game drive?

Exercises

Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.

1. In India, cow _____ is used as fuel for fires. It is moulded and dried before being thrown onto the fire.
2. I had _____ just woken up when my landlord knocked on the door. I knew it was going to be a long day.
3. We got up early to start our long drive. After a quick coffee stop, _____.
4. At Easter time, some kids turn into _____ because they look for chocolate Easter Eggs that their parents have hidden around the house.
5. Sometimes you see animal _____ on the roadside. If people are driving in the dark and an animal tries to cross the road, they sometimes kill the animal accidentally.
6. The team of older kids played the team of younger kids and the older kids won easily. The teams weren't _____ because the older kids were bigger and stronger.
7. If you go into the _____, you have to bring food, water and first-aid supplies with you, because you won't be able to find these things out there.
8. The sesame seed got _____ between her teeth, and she had to use a toothpick to remove it.
9. Every day the children build a sandcastle, and every day the sandcastle collapses and _____ into the sea when the waves hit it.
10. Pigs and goats have _____ for feet, but cats and dogs have paws.

Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. What's your favourite African animal (lion, zebra, giraffe etc)? Why?
2. Would you prefer to do a walking safari and learn more about the animals and the environment, or a driving safari where you see the animals closer but don't learn as much? Why?
3. Do you think the number of tourists to places like Kruger should be limited so that the animals aren't disturbed? Why or why not?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. He marks his territory by spreading his dung around the area.
2. Hyenas eat bones and their dung therefore has a lot of calcium in it, and this dung is in turn eaten by other animals.
3. They saw a lion right next to their vehicle and a leopard in a tree at a very close distance.

Exercises

1. dung
2. literally
3. we went on our way
4. scavengers
5. carcasses
6. on a level playing field
7. wilderness
8. lodged
9. crumbles
10. hooves