

**Tourism for Tomorrow Awards
People Finalist 2014**

SA College for Tourism - Tracker Academy



The traditional skill of tracking is an indigenous art form which evolved for reasons of human survival. The skills have, for various reasons, been lost over time. However, the Tracker Academy, opened in 2010, has revived this art form, recognising the need for tracker training not just in South Africa but across its borders too. Because the Tracker Academy was born out of The Peace Parks Foundation (or Transfrontier Conservation Areas), an organisation set up in 1997 to support the creation and conservation of cross border protected areas. And so, just like the founders of the Peace Parks Foundation, the Tracker Academy believes that sustainable tracking, guiding and indeed safaris need to think beyond political borders in order to survive.

The importance of The Tracker Academy is a division of the South Africa College for Tourism (SACT) and is the only specialist tracker training school in the country with its training program fully accredited by CATHSSETA (Culture, Art, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Education and Training Authority). This is the first time that a South African education authority has formally recognised an indigenous skills training course.

Although highly respected, it is far from elitist. SACT is a non-profit organisation seeking to train young, unemployed individuals from marginalised rural communities living adjacent to wildlife areas in these traditional skills. SACT offers full bursaries to sixteen students for a one year tracking course which comprises modules in tracking, birding, guiding, animal monitoring and wildlife protection.

The ultimate aim of the Tracker Academy is not just to gain skilled employment but to ensure that southern Africa continues to deliver authentic, safe and exciting safari experiences. Thanks to generous funders it employs four full time employees, including the Academy's principal trainers, Karel Benadie and Renias Mhlongo, two of the most highly respected, expert trackers and naturalists in South Africa today. The curriculum draws on their indigenous knowledge and covers a range of subjects such as bird alarm calls, animal behaviour, plant medicinal purposes, tracking techniques, presentation skills, life skills, animal monitoring and wildlife protection.

To date, 97% of graduates have been successfully deployed in permanent jobs earning a monthly wage of R4500 US\$465 including food, uniform and accommodation. This is double South Africa's minimum wage and proves that there is a genuine demand for these graduates. Each one is a source of pride for Renias Mhlongo: "My father taught me how to track, and I am very happy he taught me as I can now help other people. We have a dream to find people who are not educated, bring them into the bush and teach them about nature and tracking." As sustainable tourism organisations as far afield as Brazil are now tracking down their specialised graduates, not only has the dream to educate come true, but the vision to become cross border ambassadors for and custodians of Africa's wildlife has too.