



To this day, nobody has seen these strange fish again in the river.

Bulungula History

The Bulungula idea was born and grew during years the founder, Dave Martin, worked in the townships and informal settlements around Cape Town, as well as during his trans-Africa backpacking travels. The plan was to use backpacker/independent tourism as a tool for rural development in a remote African community while simultaneously being an example of sustainable living.

The Transkei Wild Coast is one of the few parts of South Africa that retains the traditional, relaxed, rural African atmosphere so it was the natural choice as the regional location.



2002-2004

A two week exploratory walk along the beach from Kei Mouth to Port St. Johns launched the project. 100 kms into the hike, Dave and his buddy crossed the Bulungula river carrying on their way when some women back across the river began shouting and pointing at large, strange-looking fish in the river mouth. As Dave turned around to see what was going on, he saw a derelict building (which he later found out was an abandoned, illegal fishing cottage). **It was love at first sight.** Dave and the community of Nqileni village agreed together to start the Bulungula Lodge at the Bulungula river mouth.

May-August 2004

After two years of detailed negotiations with government, building was finally approved.

The Lodge was built using local skills and techniques only, with 40 members of the community working on a weekly rotational basis to ensure that everyone got a chance to earn an income. In just 3 months, everything was complete, and the Bulungula Lodge was open for biz.



The land is owned by the local community, which had also owned 40% of the Lodge since its inception. At the end of 2014, 100% ownership and management of the Lodge was transferred (for R2) to the community. All profits are used to improve life in the village. Over the years, the community has bought a tractor, trailer, and large funeral tent with their share of profits.

All staff are selected by our community to ensure that jobs go to those who need them most (e.g. widows), as well as to ensure that there is a fair distribution of jobs amongst the various clans/families in the village. The Lodge has created 18 permanent jobs, and supports a further 15 people through various community tourism businesses.



2007

Once the Lodge was established, we soon realised that our community would never escape the grinding poverty trap if we focussed only on income generation through tourism. Without a school, without clean water, without access to basic health care, our community will not have the minimums needed for living happily and with dignity.

This led to the establishment of the Bulungula Incubator ("BI"), a Non-Profit Organisation, which is currently working on a large number of innovative projects in partnership with our village, and three neighbouring communities. You can visit the BI during your stay!



2020

On March 15th, President Ramaphosa announced the National State of Disaster for COVID-19. Ten days later, we fully converted the Lodge into an isolated safe home where all of our elderly & most vulnerable community members lived for four months during the National Lockdown. Nobody contracted the virus, and we pulled it off so well that those who stayed will tell you how much they loved and miss the COVID lockdown days. It is a legendary community achievement.