

## A LITERARY GUIDE TO KWAZULU-NATAL

by NIALL McNULTY and LINDY STIEBEL

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I WAS both pleased and surprised to be handed this book to review. I was pleased because I am a fan of literary tourism, and it is a great boost for KwaZulu-Natal authors and tourism, giving interested readers a guide to tracking down the birthplaces, homes and book settings of a wide variety of authors who have written about various parts and aspects of KwaZulu-Natal. I was surprised, because I had written the second literary trail pamphlet myself, on Alan Paton, when I worked as the librarian at the Alan Paton Centre (APC). As I have now retired from the APC, I was unaware that this book had been planned.

The authors of this book were initially involved in the creation of eight literary trail pamphlets, prior to the writing of this literary guide book. The first trail pamphlet was written by Stephen Coan on Rider Haggard. The second was written by me at the request of Lindy Stiebel, who is now Professor Emeritus of English Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Niall McNulty arranged the very attractive layout of these pamphlets, and of this book, as he is a digital publishing specialist.

The original literary trail pamphlets were handy for holding onto as one navigated the tour route. However, pamphlets tend to get lost, and go out of print, so it is better to have all the information published together as a single book, which can then be used for exploring all the trails. The book is well presented and attractively laid out,

with many colour photographs. These images are of the authors of books about KwaZulu-Natal, many of their book covers and some of the key sites on the trails. One can access further information on the KwaZulu-Natal Literary Tourism website, which is described in detail in the introduction to the book.

Lindy Stiebel started the KwaZulu-Natal Literary Tourism Project in 2002, and this book marks fifteen years of this project. Literary tourism is popular in various other countries, such as Britain, where one can go on guided walks through Dickens's London and Wordsworth's Lake District, for instance, but until this project got underway there was little opportunity to do this in South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal is home to a wide range of writers, black and white, male and female, who write in English and Zulu, about a wide range of topics and cultural experiences. This has enabled the creation of a number of fascinating trails.

The book has been arranged by region – first an overview of KwaZulu-Natal, then Durban and surrounding areas, Pietermaritzburg and the Midlands, the North Coast, the Battlefields and Northern KwaZulu-Natal, the South Coast, and finally the Drakensberg and Southern KwaZulu-Natal, thus covering virtually the whole of the province. The eight literary trails that have so far been constructed, are included in these chapters. An effort has been made to include both older, well-known authors of prose and poetry, such as Alan Paton,

Rider Haggard, B.W. Vilakazi and Bessie Head, as well as more recent authors. Some of these are still currently writing, and some are already very well known, such as Gcina Mhlope, Marguerite Poland, Aziz Hassim, John van der Ruit, Craig Higginson, John Conyngham and Imraan Coovadia.

As explained in the introduction to this book, many readers go on literary trails as a pilgrimage, to pay homage to the authors they have read and admired. They would like to see where their favourite author was born and lived, and the places in which each wrote their stories, to be inspired by the same scenery and thus feel closer to the author.

Although the trails can be followed independently by visitors, it is probably advisable to go with a trained guide in some areas. Trained community guides are available to accompany tours run by the relevant local municipalities on three of the tours: the Cato Manor Trail, the Inanda, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu (INK) Writers Trail, and the North Coast Trail, which includes the Albert Luthuli Museum at Groutville. The other five tours are self-guided. However, KwaZulu-Natal Literary Tourism, in conjunction with the municipalities, is making an effort to train guides for more of these routes.

Maps have been provided for all the trails, except for the Paton's Pietermaritzburg Trail. This is a pity, as it is not that easy for a stranger to the city to find all the houses and schools, and

to negotiate the one-way traffic system without a map. However, the main site, the Alan Paton Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, is fairly easy to find and could probably give a visitor a copy of the map and directions, and conduct a tour for a group if this was requested in advance. The map is also available on the website [www.literarytourism.co.za](http://www.literarytourism.co.za), where one can find typed versions of each of the trail pamphlets.

A recommendation could be made for a list of contact details to have been included for places on the trails. Places such as schools, for example, may require an appointment to be made in advance. Looking at the two literary trail pamphlets which I own, I see that the contact details were available at the back of each, but they seem to have been left out of the book. They have also been left out of the trails on the website, except for the North Coast Writers Trail and the Grey Street Writers Trail. It will therefore be necessary for any prospective literary tourist to track down the contact details themselves, on the Internet, or to contact the local tourism office for help with this.

This book contains a great deal of interesting information about the authors, their books and the areas of KwaZulu-Natal in which the stories took place. It is a must-read for any prospective KwaZulu-Natal literary tourist, as well as for armchair travellers.

JEWEL KOOPMAN