

The Perfect Campsite... Until It Wasn't

There are some campsite discoveries that feel like a win before you've even finished pitching the tent. You know the kind, perfect spot, just enough shade, a good view, and that quiet sense that you've chosen well. And then there are the other ones... the ones that unravel very, very quickly.

This was one of those.

We had just moved from Satara Rest Camp down to Berg-en-Dal Rest Camp, a decision shaped largely by circumstance. The floods had come through the park not long before our trip, and while everything felt alive again, the reality was that many of the roads around Satara were still closed. We had planned two full weeks there, but after one, we had driven just about every accessible route we could. It started to feel like we were circling the same ground, knowing there was more out there, just out of reach.

So we shifted camp.

Berg-en-Dal has a very different feel. It's one of those camps that feels more settled, more structured. Neat campsites, clear boundaries, electricity points all where they should be. It gives you that quiet confidence that things are in order. Or at least, that's what we thought.

My great aunt and uncle were busy setting up their trailer, and Mom and I were doing our usual routine with the Oz tent. There wasn't space right next to them, so we had to look a little further down the line. Not ideal, but nothing out of the ordinary. Two campsites down, we found what looked like the perfect spot.

Right on the fence. A beautiful tree. Proper shade. The kind of place that immediately feels right.

We got to work.

Ground sheet out, pegging it down, everything going smoothly. The soil was soft, almost too perfect, the kind where pegs slide in without resistance. We positioned the tent carefully, thinking about where the sun would fall, making sure we'd have as much shade as possible through the heat of the day. It was one of those setups where you pause for a second and feel quietly pleased with yourself.

And then something moved.

At first, it was subtle. A tiny shift on the ground sheet that you almost ignore. I looked closer and spotted a small worm inching its way across the fabric.

I called my mom over.

We noticed a few more, maybe three or four near one corner. Nothing alarming. After rain, a few worms here and there are expected. But then we kept watching.

More started appearing.

Not just on top, but coming up from underneath, pushing through the tiny gaps in the ground sheet. Thin, thread-like worms, constantly emerging, constantly moving. It was no longer a coincidence. It was a pattern.

We both paused.

Where were they coming from?

I looked up.

The tree above us, which had seemed like such a bonus moments earlier, suddenly told a very different story. It was a fig tree, and the ground beneath it was scattered with fallen fruit. Some fresh, some already soft and breaking down, others fully fermented into that sticky, sweet, slightly sour mess that only figs can become.

And it was alive.

The worms weren't random. They were everywhere.

Those fallen figs had created the perfect environment. Food, moisture, shelter, everything they needed. What we were seeing on the ground sheet was just the surface of something much bigger happening underneath.

Hundreds turned into thousands. Thousands felt like hundreds of thousands.

And we had just pitched our tent right in the middle of it.

There wasn't really a decision to be made. This wasn't something you adjust to or work around. This was a full relocation.

The problem was, we had already committed. The ground sheet was down, pegs were in, gear had been moved, and it was properly hot. The kind of heat where every bit of effort feels heavier. There's always that moment where you stand still, knowing exactly what needs to happen next, but wishing, just slightly, that it didn't.

No such luck.

We packed up.

Everything had to move. Not just the tent, but the entire setup. Plugs, cables, the works. And because we were now moving further from the power point, it meant pulling out extension cords and figuring out how to make everything reach. What should have been a simple setup turned into a full logistical shuffle.

Eventually, we found another spot further down. Still shaded, still good, just without the unexpected underground population. We went through the entire pitching process again, this time with a slightly more cautious eye on both the ground and the trees above.

But the story didn't end there.

Every time a new camper pulled in and started eyeing that original “perfect” spot under the fig tree, we knew exactly what was coming. You’d see the excitement, the same feeling we had, and before they could get too far, we’d step in.

“No, don’t camp there.”

There’s a certain urgency in that kind of warning.

“There are worms. A lot of them.”

Some people laughed, thinking we were exaggerating. And then they’d walk a little closer, look down, and immediately understand.

Plans changed quickly after that.

Looking back, it’s one of those moments that sums up time in the bush perfectly. You can choose what looks like the best campsite, you can do everything right, and still be completely surprised.

Because nature doesn’t run on neat layouts or tidy expectations.

Even in a place like Berg-en-Dal, where everything feels organised and predictable, the wild is still doing its own thing. That fig tree wasn’t a bad campsite. It was a thriving system, working exactly as it should.

We just happened to land right in the middle of it.

Not every perfect-looking spot is the right one.

And sometimes, the stories that stay with you the most are the ones that forced you to pack up and move.