

Trailing tales and the tellers

THE KZN LITERARY Tourism Project, now in its tenth year under the leadership of Professor Lindy Stiebel, researches writers and places, and creates tourism products from this research.

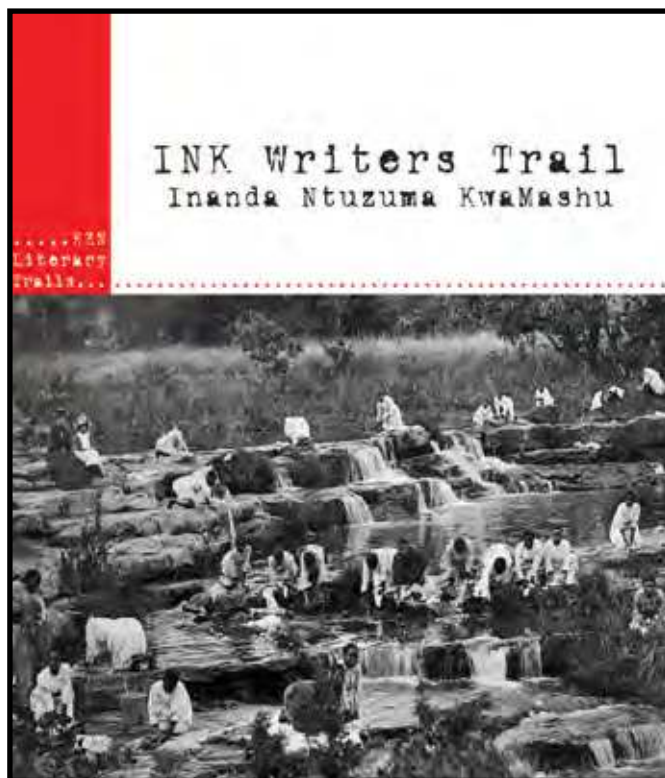
By Niall McNulty

Initiated as a National Research Foundation funded research project in 2003 and based at the Programme of English Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the project has since received funding from the National Arts Council and partnered with various municipalities to continue its work.

Literary tourism, popular in the United States and the United Kingdom, deals with places and events from fictional texts and the lives of the authors of those texts. This could include following the route a character charts, visiting settings from a story or tracking down the haunts of a writer. Literary tourists are specifically interested in how places have influenced writing and at the same time how writing has created place. In order to become a literary tourist, you need little more than your favourite text and an adventurous spirit.

KwaZulu-Natal has a rich but under-researched literary heritage. Popular writers include Alan Paton, Rider Haggard, Lewis Nkosi, Mandla Langa, John van de Ruit and Wilbur Smith. The province is also home to many lesser-known writers, often publishing in the vernacular. The KZN Literary Tourism Project's initial goal was to research these writers and spread this information. This entailed the development of an authors' database, consisting of a number of author profiles (currently at 113) and made available through the project's website. Each profile includes a short biography of the writer, an extract from their work and a bibliography. Where available, multimedia elements are included.

In the past five years, the project has focused its attention on developing writers' trails around individual artists and literary areas. There are now six area-based trails (Midlands Writers, INK



Writers, Cato Manor Writers, Grey Street Writers, South Coast Writers and the North Coast Writers) as well as two stand-alone writer trails (Haggard and Paton).

The most popular of these has been the INK Writers Trail, which is closely linked to the established Inanda Heritage Route. Inanda is located about 25km inland from Durban and along with Ntuzuma and KwaMashu (INK) collectively forms part of an urban regeneration programme initiated by the government. Notable residents include Mohandas Gandhi, John Dube and Isaiah Shembe. The trail features writers such as Mandla Langa, Sita Gandhi family, Mewa Ramgobin, Herbert I. E. Dhlomo, Ellen Kuzwayo and Angelina Sithebe, with stops including the Phoenix Settlement, Ohlange

Institute, Inanda Seminary and Kwa Mashu.



Above: The INK map of writers' trails



Left: Alan Paton's study