

Tintswalo rises from ashes

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By Helen Bamford

Cape Town - When the raging Cape Peninsula wildfire gutted most of the five-star Tintswalo Atlantic hotel on the shore below Chapman's Peak earlier this year, it also burnt all the vegetation around it, including a milkwood grove which was more than 300 years old.



GOING GREEN: A donation of 750 trees will be planted at the Tintswalo Atlantic Lodge, which burnt to the ground. Picture: Henk Kruger.

(Credit: INDEPENDENT MEDIA)

But on Thursday, there was more than a hint of greenery when a truck pulled up loaded with over 750 trees, around half of them milkwoods, which were donated by a tree company in Paarl.

The owners of the lodge, which is on the beach in the Table Mountain National Park, have a 20-year concession to operate in the reserve.

Table Mountain National Park area manager Gavin Bell said the milkwood grove was one of only a few on the Peninsula so they were keen to get it reinstated.

“While the concessionaire has a 20-year plan, ours is a lot longer. But a few of the original trees were saved, so we are actually enhancing the grove by planting more.”

Bell said they also had a rehabilitation programme in Silvermine and Tokai.

He said Silvermine would open a lot sooner. “The recovery was quicker than in previous fires because a lot of the aliens had been cleared.”

He said Tokai, having been under pines, would take longer.

The lodge itself is also slowly rising from the ashes with builders hard at work to an October 31 deadline.

Melissa Durand, who manages the lodge with her husband Ryno, said they had a wedding on that date and didn't want to disappoint the bride.

She still recalls watching the fire roar down the mountain and jump across the road. "We thought the lodge had survived but it burnt down the next morning."

They had to evacuate guests, including one couple, who initially were content to take their chances and jump into the nearby sea if the fire got too close.

Durand said they had managed to keep all of their 35 staff on even though the lodge was not operational.

"We've started a herb and vegetable garden and we are involved in community work in Hangberg and Mandela Park."

Some of their staff will use the time to undergo training while others have had opportunities to work at their other lodges in Joburg and Kruger National Park.

She said everyone, from guests, staff and ordinary Capetonians, had been incredibly supportive following the fire and many would be invited to help plant the trees.

Carl Pretorius, managing director of forestry company Just Trees, which donated the trees, said they had a policy to donate one tree for every 20 they sold.

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