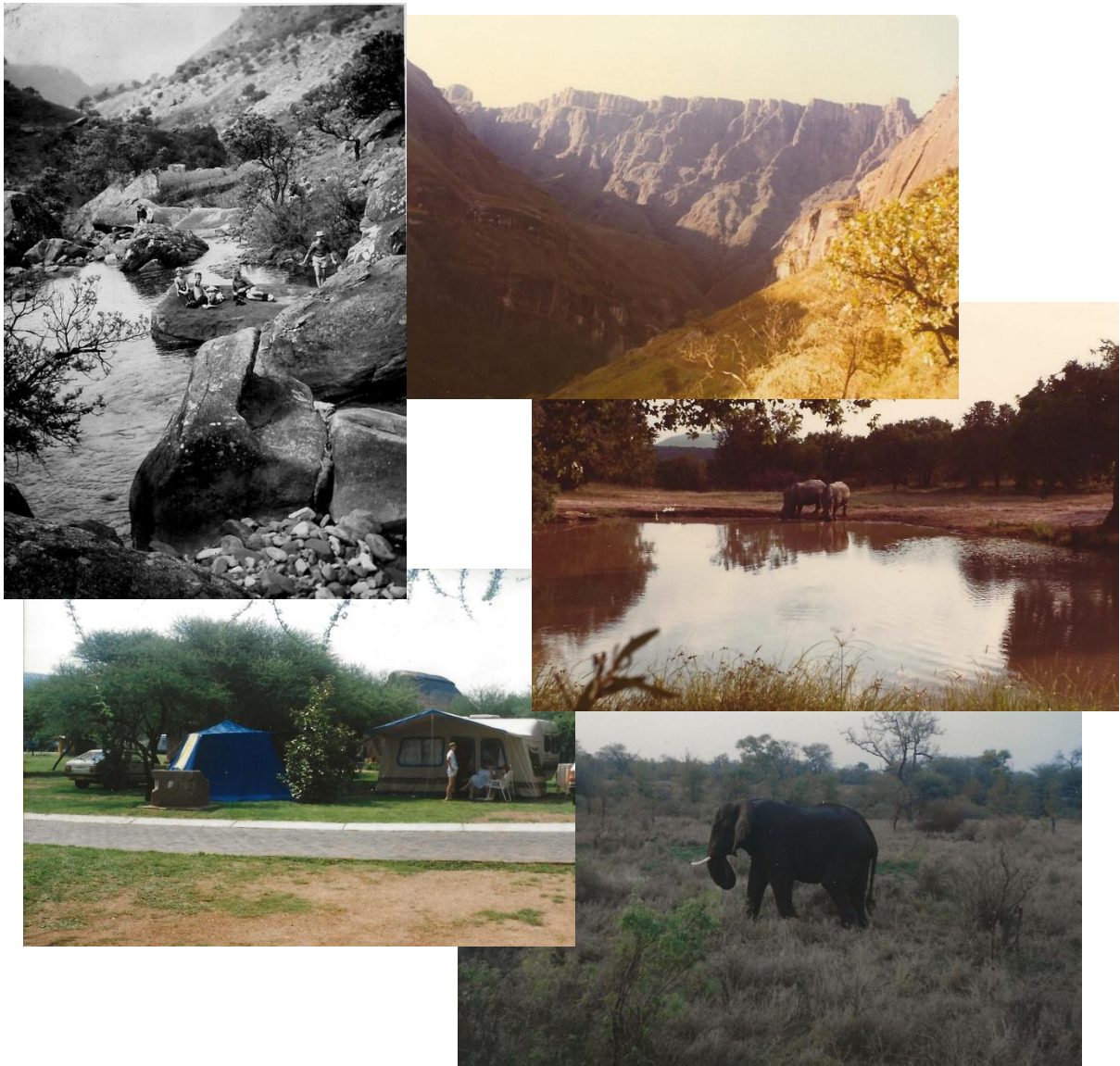


Visits to South African game and nature reserves 1960-2020 including Rhodesia 1972



Michael Pierre de Villiers

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Title page: Clockwise from top left: Kamberg Nature Reserve, Royal Natal National Park, Umfolozi/Hluhluwe Game Reserves, Kruger National Park and Pilanesberg Game Reserve.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Pierre de Villiers was born in Durban, South Africa. He was trained to World Meteorological Organization class one meteorologist and multi-discipline weather forecaster in the South African Weather Service where he reached the rank of Director. He served on a weather ship in the South Atlantic. He served on World Meteorological Organization expert teams and was World Meteorological Organization rapporteur for the Africa region. He was also a commercial pilot and flying instructor. More recently he was a weather forecaster in the United Arab Emirates, then in England. Now retired.

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2025-05-17

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INTRODUCTION

We moved from the Bluff across the bay to Glenwood at the beginning of 1962 and rented a house in Nicolson Road. It was a short walk from the school in Manning Road. Later we moved higher up the hill to Chelmsford Road, where we lived next door to Perla Siedle Gibson, the Lady in White. So called because she used to wear a white dress while singing to the troops, using a megaphone, at the harbour entrance when they sailed from and arrived in Durban on troopships during the Second World War. At the time when we lived next door to her, she was getting on in years, but we would still hear her singing to herself in the house. Once again, we did not stay long and moved to the house my father had bought at 250 Evans Road, still in Glenwood, still close to the schools for the three children.

It was about this time, in 1962, that I became interested in nature and wild life, of the four legged or feathered kind and joined the school Geographical and Outdoor Society. Apart from lunchtime meetings to talk and watch nature films, there were also weekend day hikes. Whenever possible and when not playing sport on a Saturday, such as cricket, rugby and later hockey, we would go on the day hikes in the countryside inland of Durban. I would be dressed in a khaki shirt and shorts with thick light brown long socks and veldskoene, equipped with my small hessian type rucksack and water bottle with a combined knife and small axe in a sheath attached to my belt. The handle end of the axe had flat screwdriver as well as a notch for removing bottle caps. Packed in the rucksack would be lunch and a knife, fork and spoon combination. Veldskoene (veld shoes) were walking shoes made soft rawhide uppers stitched to a leather footbed and rubber sole. They were very comfortable.

We would meet early in the morning in Pine Street, behind what was then Payne's retail shop (I think it became a Game store much later) and catch the Intertown Passenger Service bus (Durban to Pinetown) to Westville where Mike Cottrell would meet us. He lived there with his wife. We would pile into his car, a Volkswagen Variant station wagon, as well as the cars of the one or two other teachers who accompanied us. We would go to places like the Valley of a Thousand Hills (including Little Table Mountain), Inanda, Nagle Dam, Kloof Falls and hike for the day. Always a circular route back to the parked cars, navigating by map, mostly following our own pathway, occasionally using local footpaths. In those days one was really in the middle of nowhere. Looking at recent satellite maps all these areas are still sparsely populated, although kraal settlements are bigger. At lunch we would stop at a suitable spot by a river and cook our lunch. Usually braai (barbeque) some meat and cook potatoes, onions, etc, by wrapping them in aluminium foil and placing them in the fire.

Mike Cottrell while at school, taught me geography all the way through high school. He had a good and at times wry, sense of humour. Although South African born, he spoke with a posh English accent. Whenever mildly annoyed with us he would call us a bunch of T.A.Gs., but would never say what it meant, because, as he put it, he would get into trouble with our parents. Finally, at the end of the year when we reached our last year at school (Matriculation, or Form 6), he told us it stood for Thick Arsed Gorillas. Probably an insult to gorillas. During school holidays he would organise longer away trips. Parents had to pay for their child to attend. I was fortunate to go on one of them to the Kamberg Nature Reserve and the next year to the

Umfolozi Game Reserve.

I saw Mike occasionally after I left school, because he was then a teacher trainer at the Natal Provincial Administration Teacher Training College and he used to bring trainees to see the Durban weather office, where I worked. He was one of those dedicated teachers who made a difference and are remembered.

I also went on numerous inspection trips while working in the South African Weather Bureau's (SAWB) in the Durban office's Natal jurisdiction. The office was at Louis Botha Airport, later Durban International Airport. The SAWB in the Department of Transport was moved to the Department of the Environment and many years later became the South African Weather Service (SAWS). The inspection trips were to check and maintain observation equipment assigned to lay observers that recorded climate data for us and provided synoptic reports. Ad hoc trips were made to establish new observation sites and transfer, or close, sites. I managed to see quite a bit of Natal, including the Drakensberg and numerous game and nature reserves, such as Hluhluwe, Umfolozi, uMkhuze, St Lucia, Ndumo, Tempe and Kosi Bay, all paid by the government.

With the family and friends, we also visited the Spionkop Nature Reserve and the Royal Natal Nature Reserve. After moving to Pretoria, we made a number of visits to the Kruger National Park and a visit to the Pilanesberg Game Reserve.

A word of warning. the photographs are definitely not professional standard. Cameras in my possession at various times were far from ideal for wildlife photography. Some of the photographs are of rather poor quality due to being captured in great haste (use it or lose it), or at maximum zoom. Scanning the photographs from age faded prints and different quality photograph paper also had an effect on the resultant image. While not remembering all the cameras possessed after a first early teenage Kodak Brownie Box Camera, cameras ranged from the popular automated Kodak Instamatic with its plastic 35mm film cartridge that included the spools and film feed with square photographs, to a more sophisticated Yashica Minister D with manual wind on 35mm film and manual adjustment of the lens rings for focal length, light exposure and shutter speed (it was stolen when our house was burgled after moving to Pretoria sometime after 1985), to a cheaper, but highly efficient and well liked 35mm wind on spool film Pentax ESPIO 738G with zoom lens, built in flash, red-eye reduction, autofocus and light sensor.

KAMBERG NATURE RESERVE

The then Natal Parks Board Kamberg Nature reserve is a three-hour drive from Durban on the N3 to Mooi River where one turns off to the west via Rosetta to the reserve. Mooi River strictly speaking should be Mooi Rivier. Mooi River is a part translation from the Afrikaans meaning Pretty River. The road there was very different from now. The main road from Durban to Mooi River and on to Johannesburg, now known as the N3, was a tarred winding and single lane each way with a dirt road most of the way from Mooi River passing through the small village at Rosetta.

Nestled in the foothills (about 1700 metres above sea level) of the Drakensberg Mountains of Natal, now KwaZulu-Natal, the Kamberg Nature Reserve it is not too distant from the Giant's



A distant mountain, possibly Kamberg.



Kamberg guesthouse.

Castle peak at 3315 metres. The photograph on the left shows the view from our base and a distant mountain.

The group, consisting of two teachers and if I remember correctly, eight scholars from forms 3 and 4 at Glenwood High School, travelled in three cars during a school holiday break during 1963. I was therefore in standard 8 or form 4. The cars were driven by adults, either parent or friends of the teachers, who returned to Durban then back again about 5 days later to collect us. The motor car in the photograph on the left is a Ford Zephyr Mark II in production from 1956 to 1962. The one on the right is a Renault Dauphine in production from 1956 to 1967. The third motor car is obscured. We were busy unpacking at the time. In the background is our base house. It was self-catering in the sense that we had to provide our own food, although the Zulu caretaker was also our cook who prepared our meals.

From our base we would go on day hikes. These included navigation by map reading, identifying landmarks, aided by the use of

and use of a compass and the art of contour hiking. As well as basic mountain climbing to the top of smaller peaks and a night navigation hike to a small mountain and back. A midday rest site and preparing lunch was always found next to a small stream. Two photographs show some of us at a lunch site with Mike Cottrell dozing on a rock. The third is of us at a viewpoint overlooking a ravine with two small Drakensberg foothills mountain peaks in the distance.



Lunch break and a brief rest at a view site. Two teachers and seven scholars.

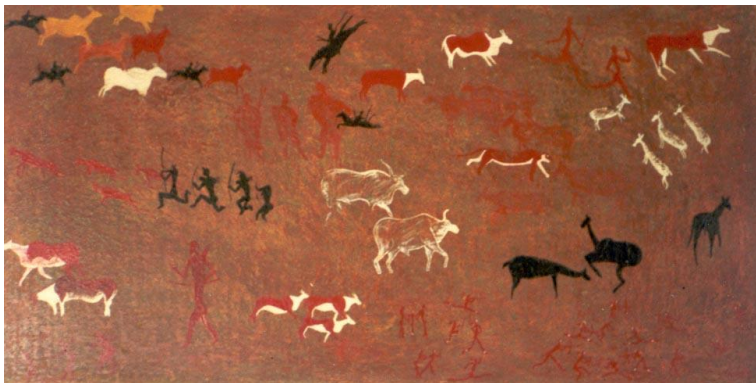
In the hilly area with smaller mountain peaks and numerous ravines and area are numerous small caves and rock shelters with Bushman rock paintings. The rock paintings are believed to have been created up to 4000 years ago, some sources even longer ago, 15 to 20 thousand years



Bushman paintings inside a rock overhang in the Kamberg area of the Drakensberg.

ago. It is very difficult to date rock art. These days the Bushmen are referred to by their indigenous name, San people. At the time there were still many undiscovered sites. Today there are over 600 known sites. The San would conduct raiding parties to the lowlands to steal cattle from the settlers then hiding them in the valleys among the hills. A tactic resorted to because the spreading of settlers had appropriated their land. They were therefore no longer able to live their traditional hunter-gatherer lifestyle. The San people no longer live in the region.

The black and white photograph, taken with my Brownie Box camera, does not do justice. The colours range from brown ochre to black and white. The images cover the middle strata and the one below. The bright area at the top of the photograph was the reflection of artificial light.



Years later in the late 1970s I created a pastel painted representation of the art based on this one photograph. The rock effect was created by layered different colours being allowed to dry then gently ribbing with a damp cloth.

UMFOLOZI GAME RESERVE



Base camp.

The other trip was the following year to the Umfolozi Game Reserve. Transport to the game reserve was the same as to Kamberg. The road similarly one lane each way. The further north along the north coast from Durban the road less wide, occasionally dipping to cross a stream or river on bridges that clearly looked like they would be under water at times of heavier rainfall. If not impassable, certainly a case of fording one's way across. Then it was the usual dirt road once leaving the main road.

We spent the first and last nights at the camp in small chalets. It was also self-catering, although with Zulu cooks available to prepare our meals. Otherwise, we camped in canvas tents in the bush. This was a new initiative by Dr Ian Player (brother of the internationally famous South African golfer Gary Player) to get people, especially the young, involved in nature. We were on one of the earliest expeditions.



Returning to our tented camp after a hike.



The cliff.

We were accompanied to and from the camp and on our daily hikes by a game ranger and a game guard. It was great, interesting and informative. The only drawback was that the game ranger, as far as I was concerned, was a young superior pain in the arse. Generally reserved and gave the impression that he would rather elsewhere. The first morning after sleeping in our tents I went to wash my face and brush my teeth at a canvas bag basin on a wooden tripod. Having finished I began to tip the water out, as one would let the water out of a basin at home. The game ranger shouted at me to stop wasting the water in a most abusive manner. The teacher Mike Cottrell did not look happy, but said nothing.

Our campsite was next to a river with a cliff on the opposite side. It was interesting to see the plants clinging to the upper side of the cliff had long roots that extended down to the ground and water. One evening, when back at camp, there were Chacma Baboons at the top of the cliff. One of us began imitating their calls. A baboon, probably the male leader of the pack began getting most vociferous in response, until he was told to stop annoying them.

Apart from seeing plenty of game close up, including a lone male Cape Buffalo, which are known to be ill tempered, we saw a large African Python sleeping off a meal. Most probably a small buck. We could see this bulge about halfway along its body.

On one occasion we were charged by a Black Rhinoceros. The generally solitary Black Rhinoceros, although smaller than the White Rhinoceros known for its aggressive behaviour. It is most easily identified because it has a pointed and hooked mouth, which is ideal for plucking leaves and twigs from shrubs and small trees. It also has a smaller head and more rounded ears.



A python sleeping it off and the Black Rhinoceros before it charged.

I took a photograph on my Brownie Box camera before it charged. We were told that in the event of there being trouble to get behind a tree and keep still. Do not try and climb straight up. It will simply help you on your way. Rhinos do not have good eyesight, so it is best to keep still, preferably behind something solid like an army tank. When it charged, we scattered. Unfortunately, there was no tree near enough for me, so I simply fell flat behind a small shrub. When it came thundering passed, I felt as if I was bouncing on the ground. It circled around and again stood facing us and pawing the ground. Eventually it lost interest and wandered off.

Little did I realise that some years later, I would be back in the area in an official capacity.

AN INSPECTION TRIP TO RESERVES IN THE NORTH OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Circa 1978, I was ordered to go north again to visit a number of smaller reserves in the north of KwaZulu-Natal Namely, St Lucia Nature Reserve, Mkhuze Game Reserve and Ndumu Game Reserve, plus go to the Kosi Bay Nature Reserve area and visit a few sites maintained by public volunteers at farms and small towns.

What I was not told was that malaria was endemic in this northern region. As far as I was aware I associated malaria with the Transvaal Lowveld, now the Mpumalanga Lowveld.

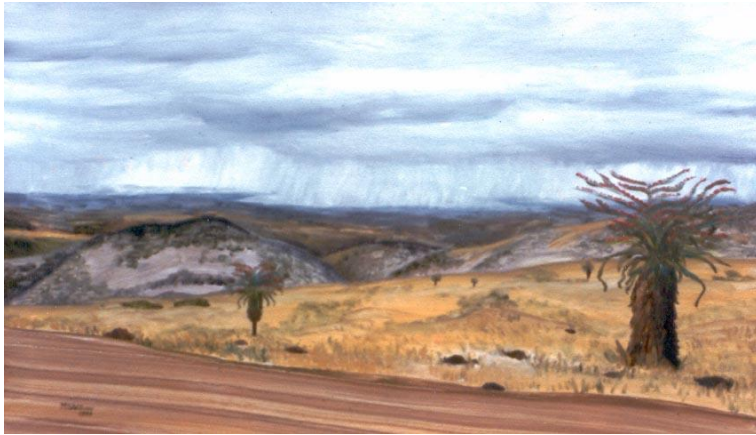
Unfortunately, this trip coincided with the period when I used slide film. The slides were stored in plastic containers in a cupboard in the sub-tropical Durban climate and neglected. Unbeknown, they developed a fungus and had to be discarded. Few survived.

For this trip I was given a Ford Cortina mark V station wagon produced in South Africa between 1979 to 1984. The logic was that this was simply to inspect/replace/repair rain gauge sites, so a bigger vehicle was not deemed necessary. I was not impressed. No problem with the vehicle. It was simply not suitable for the area to which I was going in the far north. The Makhathini Flats in Maputaland area is a particularly sandy the area south of the present Tempe Elephant Park to Kosi Bay and a marshland when wet. Like a long stretch of low coastal sand dunes when dry with a dirt road that stretches of very loose sand in places. I protested and asked the boss to order a four-wheel drive vehicle, such as a Land Rover, from Government Garage. It was refused.

The first stop was St Lucia Nature Reserve situated at Lake St Lucia on the northern KwaZulu-Natal coast. It consists mainly of wetland with the emphasis on wild bird life, although with numerous hippopotami and crocodiles. It is also a turtle egg laying area. At the time there were also small buck species, including the bigger Nyala. It was very much an underdeveloped reserve. Apparently, it is now classified as a game reserve with Black Rhinoceros, buffalo, Waterbuck, Kudu and other antelopes are presently being introduced.

The stop was brief with very little in the way of wild life seen. Birds only. After one stop to recover a rain gauge that was no longer wanted by a volunteer, it was on to Mkhuze Game Reserve, not too distant north of St Lucia. At the time it also had smaller buck species, including Nyala. As well as numerous wild bird species, hippopotami and crocodiles. The reserves has also since been stocked with a wide variety of bigger buck and bigger mammals, such as black and white rhinoceros and elephants, as well as cheetah and hyena.

I spent the night here in the usual self-catering accommodation eating a cold dinner. Prior to turning in for the night I did a short drive in the reserve. Saw a Nyala. Did not see hippopotami or crocodiles.



I then headed north to Ndumu Game Reserve. On the way I know I did stop to take photographs in the Ubombo area north-west of Mkhuze and south of Jozini that is south of the Pongolapoort Dam. Although I no longer have the photographs, I do have an oil painting created in 1979 from a photograph, as shown on the left with a rain shower in the distance.

Ndumu Game Reserve is in Maputaland in the far north of KwaZulu-Natal along the Mozambique border. Maputaland is not to be confused with Maputo the capital of Mozambique. There was also a small village or settlement named Maputa in the Kosi Bay area also in the far north of KwaZulu-Natal along the Mozambique border. I think Maputa is now called Emangusi.

Ndumu Game Reserve is a relatively small reserve compared with others in the area. Once again, at the time of my visit it had mainly small antelope, plus hippopotamus and crocodile. Especially wild bird species. Ideal for bird watching. Including many migrant birds. Now I learn it has Black and White Rhinoceros, Cape Buffalo, Giraffe, Lion, Leopard and Hyena.

Over a cup of tea, the game warden at Ndumu explained the situation to me. During the civil war (from 1977 to 1992) a large number of elephants migrated southward across the international border from the Maputo Elephant Reserve to avoid the and widespread poaching. The area from Ndumu eastward along the border toward Kosi Bay was monitored and informally managed by him. In 1983, the Tempe Elephant Park was established in 1983 to protect the elephants. It was opened to the public in 1991. Now there are also white rhinoceros and leopard.

As it was getting on in the day and not aware of any accommodation at Kosi Bay, I returned to Jozine to spend the night at the Jozini Hotel and head to Kosi Bay the next morning. Prior to this, I went to the nearby Pongolapoort Dam wall where there was a rain gauge site to inspect.

Breakfast was amusing. I looked at the menu and selected the bacon, eggs and toast breakfast. The waiter informed me there was no bacon. It was frozen. I said alright. I will have the eggs and toast. I was told there were no eggs. I finally had porridge, toast and tea.

Sure enough, when approaching Kosi Bay I encountered sandy patches. I found I had to approach these sandy areas at speed and hope that momentum would carry me through while gently juggling the steering as I slipped and slid through. On two occasions I had to be kindly towed out by drivers of passing four-by-four Land Rovers. On each occasion they said I should have a four by four. On each occasion I explained the situation.

The Kosi Bay Nature Reserve is the Kosi Lake system extending to the Mozambique border in the north and to the Indian Ocean in the east. The coastal area is popular with anglers, ski boat fishers, snorkellers and scuba divers. In the summer months turtles come ashore late at night to lay their eggs on the sandy beaches within the reserve. Animal life consists of small buck such as the Bushbuck, Duiker as well as Vervet Monkeys with many bird species, including the Fish Eagle.

Having said this, I did not see much of the reserve, because my mission was to visit the South African Police Station where a rain gauge was located. The policeman (about my age) allocated to me took me out in a police vehicle to see some of the area. Their job was mainly to police the border and the border post on a dirt road between South Africa and Mozambique.

To my amusement, he pointed to a motor car standing with its doors open, saying that it is owned by another policeman who asked a local factotum to wash his car. He not only turned the hosepipe on the outside of the car, but the inside as well. It had already been standing for a few days with the doors open to dry.

A bonus was that he invited me to stay the night with him and his wife in their small bungalow and attend the braai (barbeque) that evening, there being another guest a dominee (clergyman).

After again negotiating the sand traps the next morning, it was an easy approximately 5 hour drive home.

ROYAL NATAL NATIONAL PARK

It was while we lived near Durban's Greyville Racecourse that we became friendly with neighbours and through them, friends with another family, which continued when we moved to neighbouring Cowies Hill in Pinetown. We would sometimes go away together for weekends. Most notable was a trip to the self-catering Tendele Camp at the Royal Natal National Park, in the Drakensberg during the weekend of the 6th and 7th September 1980. On this trip we were accompanied by another family. All told, 14 of us four families including children. About a four and a half hours trip from Durban. We travelled independently from Durban Friday afternoon.



Views of Tendele and the amphitheatre. The chalet on the right is nearing completion.

Each family was accommodated in a whitewashed mud/clay brick and thatch chalet. More commonly referred to in South Africa as daga (Afrikaans) or udaka (Zulu or Xhosa). Set well

up in the mountains the camp faces the 5000 metres (3 miles) long Amphitheatre with an around 1000metres (3300ft) cliff face. At its highest point it is 3000metres (9842ft) above sea level. Behind it is the source of KwaZulu-Natal's biggest river, the Thukela River. The English/Afrikaans spelling was Tugela). The river plunges in a 950metres (3100ft) waterfall into the Thukela Gorge. The camp also serves as a base for mountain climbing to the top of Mount-Aux-Sources and the Amphitheatre. The last climb to the top of the Amphitheatre is via two chain ladders. There are also spectacular hiking trails, or walks, for family groups.

If one is alert, Bushman rock paintings can occasionally be found under overhanging rocks and in small caves protected from the weather. Bushmen, now known as the San people (in south-eastern South Africa) and Khoi (Hottentots of the south-western part) were the first known inhabitants of South Africa. Collectively, they are often known as Khoisan due to broadly similar biological and cultural origins. This broader part of the Drakensberg has thousands of Bushmen paintings. The best preserved are in more sheltered areas and newest creations, generally assumed to be 4000 to approximately 800 years ago. The area is also home to the rare and large Lammergeyer (or Bearded Vulture), which can be seen gliding on thermals. It is often incorrectly called an eagle.

The routine always consisted of evening braai (barbeque) and brunch on skottles then late morning/afternoon walks. A skottle looks like a large wok. It was originally supported over a fire, now they are mounted on a short pole on a gas canister for ease of cooking at about waist height, which are dismantled for ease of transport. With judicious use and timing one can cook sausages, bacon, eggs, tomatoes, fried toast, etc., so that all ingredients are ready to eat hot at the same time.

As with all mountainous areas one has to be wary of the weather, which can change unexpectedly and quickly. On the Saturday we went for a walk into the mountains, during which we saw a shelter with Bushman rock paintings. We also noticed smoke and fires higher up in the mountains in the vicinity of the Lesotho border. It was a hot, dry and sunny day with a berg wind (the local name for Föhn winds). At one point, Adrian, who was nearly 4 years old at the time, sat down and refused to walk any further. Hugh and Colin tried to coax him to carry on. He refused and called them Mulligans. Where he got it from, we do not know. Needless to say, Hugh and Colin packed up laughing.

When we arrived back to the camp, we found the Natal Parks Board people extending the fire break around the camp by burning outward toward the direction of the fires coming down the mountainside. In Kwa-Zulu-Natal, it is compulsory for farmers and forestry areas to burn fire breaks prior to the beginning of the dry winter season. The end of winter, around September, being the most critical time for runaway veld fires. They said the fires were likely caused by carelessness on the Lesotho side. We offered to help, which was kindly refused. So we had the ridiculous situation of them burning widening fire breaks to prevent the camp from burning while we made a fire inside the camp for our braai. The speed of the veld fire was amazing. I watched the fire, fanned by the north-westerly berg wind, leap about 300 metres (~1000 feet) up a steep slope to our camp in a matter of seconds. The camp became surrounded by fire. Escape, if we wanted to, via the only road was impossible.

Sunday morning it was much colder and began to snow. The morning walk was quite strange. There was the stark contrast between blackened and smouldering ground, dotted with patches of slowly accumulating light snow. In the afternoon on the drive home and now distant from the mountains we could see the Drakensberg becoming covered with snow.



Out walking in the mountains after the fire and Tendele camp in the distance right.



Driving home with snow on the distant Drakensberg. Notice the brown and dry veld.

The preceding berg winds reached speeds of up to 30 knots (~56 kph ~35 mph). Lower down in the Bergville area the veld fire swept across several farms, burning crops and at one farm, killed numerous Brahman stud cattle. Some buildings at the edge of Bergville were also destroyed. Since the premature ending of the region's summer rains, the interior of the province became very dry, which exacerbated the situation. Following the snow came heavy rainfall along the coast later on Sunday and through the night into Monday with flooded rivers and flooded properties. Farmer's initial relief

at the rain turned to dismay when the heavy rain and cold began to take toll of cattle undernourished and too weak after the drought to withstand the sudden cold. This was a classic case, for the time of the year, of berg winds preceding a trough system, being aided by the passage of a coastal low along the coast, followed by a coastal south-westerly buster. The process was discussed in de Villiers (1996b). In this instance, there followed a cold front with snow and heavy rainfall associated with an upper air cut-off low and surface high pressure ridging eastward south of the continent.

HLUHLUWE AND UMFOLOZI GAME RESERVES

During May of 1981, I was in the Umfolozi Game Reserve that was last visited when I was at school, but this time at the primarily in the neighbouring Hluhluwe Game Reserve. The trip was at the request of the Natal Parks Board. It was a venture of mutual benefit to the Parks Board and the Weather Bureau. The Weather Bureau always needed a good observational network and the Natal Parks Board wanted the data for operational use and environmental studies. I was sent to install rainfall measuring sites and maintenance work on the already established instrument camp. In return, along with the reports from the instrument camp, monthly reports of daily rainfall measurements would be sent to the SAWB. I took the opportunity of taking my wife and my 4 years old son with me. A similar shorter account of this trip written by me, originally appeared in the SAWB Newsletter No. 387 June 1981.

Umfolozi game reserve is situated between the northern Black Umfolozi River and the southern

White Umfolozi River with the smaller Hluhluwe to the north of the Black Umfolozi. The two reserves were originally separated by a corridor inhabited by indigenous Zulu people. This was the situation when I visited the Hluhluwe game reserve.

The parks were the birthplace of rhinoceros preservation. In the early 1960s the Natal Parks Board, at the Umfolozi Game Reserve led by senior warden Dr Ian Player, initiated Operation Rhino. It was the beginning of an ambitious operation that was to get World attention. The Hluhluwe and Umfolozi game reserves had been steadily increasing the number of very endangered White Rhinoceros in the reserves. White Rhinoceroses were moved to other wildlife protected areas in South Africa, the country. Apart from reintroduction in areas already lost to the rhinoceros, breeding at other reserves would be a safeguard against possible extermination at the sole two reserves due to disease, for example.

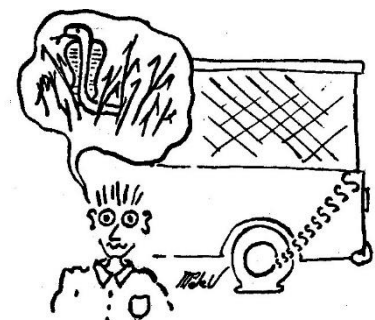


The Ford parked next to our accommodation at Hluhluwe.

For the trip Government Garage provided me with a 2.8 litre Ford truck. A beauty to drive. Good forward visibility and powerful with excellent acceleration. By now the roads were much improved.

We roughed it Natal Parks Board style in self-catering thatched-roof rondavels with a gas fridge, separate ablution and outdoor cooking. Except our food was prepared by cooks in a separate kitchen and brought to us. It was very economical though. By the way, a rondavel is a circular African dwelling with a conical thatched roof and mud wall.

We did not have a good start. While waiting for our guide Rodney, a senior ranger, at the entrance to the Hluhluwe reserve, I heard a hissing noise. It was a sheared tyre valve. Some labourers nearby volunteered to change the tyre. No sooner finished than our guide arrived and took us to the nearby first site. This was where the same labourers who had changed the tyre, were putting the finishing touches to specially designed camp. It had to be strong and high enough. It had an outer square of thick cables to keep the rhinoceroses out and an inner higher square of fencing to keep other game out, such as buck.



.... hissing noise, like a snake slithering

All went smoothly and we managed to finish a further three sites that day. One ideally exposed site on open flat ground with no trees nearby was spoilt by not having a square poled camp. It was more like a parallelogram. The ranger was not impressed.

At another site I was told the game guard had been missing for a week. It was believed that a crocodile in the nearby river took him. His replacement refused to work there alone. He said his predecessor's spirits would resent him taking over the job. So, temporarily two guards were stationed there.



At the weather instrument site at Hluhluwe camp and an example rain gauge enclosure.

The next day we went to the town, Hluhluwe, to close a no longer maintained rainfall station. On the way back, just outside the game reserve, passing over a low concrete bridge, I saw a large Monitor Lizard sunning itself on a rock next to a small stream about 3 metres below. While backing the truck to the spot, I explained to the others what I'd seen. I was not aware that we were going slowly off the road. We came to a halt with the two left wheels off the edge. We had to gingerly exit the truck through the driver's doorway. I walked to the nearby entrance gate where the guard radioed for help. Fortunately, the radio had been replaced the day before, because it had been knocked out by lightning sometime previously. The game guards at first misunderstood the explanation. They thought I tried to avoid riding over the lizard. They found this very funny. They said and indicated by a splat action of the hands what they would have done. Well, the same labourers as before arrived in his large lorry, said "not bad", hitched up a tow cable and pulled us back onto the road. Of course, my wife and son never saw the monitor lizard.

While still at Hluhluwe we were shown where they were breeding brown hyenas for release into the reserve where they were rare. The Brown Hyena with a long shaggy coat is smaller and weighs about 20kg less than the spotted hyena. It is primarily a lone omnivorous scavenger, its hunting success rate is poor, whereas the Spotted Hyena in a pack successfully hunt antelope and zebras.



Brown Hyena breeding area and Burchell's Zebra at the camp that caused concern.

One early morning we went outside and saw two Burchell's Zebra grazing near to our rondavel. My son was standing close behind one of them. I had a vision of him being kicked and called him away. Apparently, they were tame and used to humans. The Burchell's Zebra is a common species. Readily identified from the rather rare Mountain Zebra by its shadow (brown) stripes

on the white stripes, it is bigger, has a more prominent mane, does not have a dewlap on the throat and does not have a grid iron pattern of black stripes on the top of the rump (or rear back). It is also a plains animal, whereas the Mountain Zebra inhabits rugged and mountainous terrain.

One trip to a site that two hour drive from the main camp. It entailed a circuitous route out of the reserve to re-enter at another entrance. I suggested to my new companion game ranger Martin that we use my vehicle rather than load their Land Rover. I soon found out why he



The two white rhinoceros seen from the open Land Rover.



Our escort is just visible on the far side of the river beginning to wade across.

waded to the other side. While crossing, with the water level up to the top of our legs, I kept a lookout for crocodiles. My ranger was armed with an automatic pistol. Not very effective I thought. He said it was necessary because he has a cash box with staff month's wages at Makhamisa. The other ranger was

insisted on using their vehicle on a much shorter route and not the Government's 2.8 litre Ford truck. We set out in their open, four-wheel drive, short wheel base, Parks Board Land Rover. The road at times was a game trail and one river bed depression was only slightly wider than the length of the vehicle. We also crossed a small swamp full tilt in four-wheel drive.

On the way I photographed two White (or Square Lipped) Rhinoceros. The White Rhinoceros is bigger than the Black Rhinoceros and more sociable and can occur in family groups. It is also more even tempered, although still dangerous, particularly when a young calf is present. It is a grazer. Its easily identified wide square mouth is ideally suited for eating grass, which it can crop to one centimetre in length. An ideal lawn mower. Apparently, the name White Rhinoceros was is a corruption by the English of the Afrikaans wyd meaning wide, but being incorrectly interpreted as white.

Finally, we reached the banks of the White Umfolozi, bruised and slightly cut from overhanging branches, but, in the heat, thankful for the open Land Rover. On the far bank a ranger with bearers from our destination, Makhamisa, was waiting for us. They waded across the river to us. The bearers

gathered all the equipment and we



.... kept a lookout for crocodiles.

armed with a rifle which was more sensible, but he said that he had it because they'd seen lions just up the river. I thought maybe they liked their food washed first. Once on the other side I could see them. They were not more than about a hundred metres from where we waded into the river. When we exited the Land Rover they were obscured by a bend in the river.



The two Impalas were part of a group of about ten. The Giraffe's colouring suggests it is not an older bull. They tend to have darker blotches.

Impala are the most prevalent antelope seen in South Africa. It is related to the Springbuck and often confused with the Springbuck by the general public. Like the Springbuck it can leap very high when taking fright and bound away in long leaps. A very sociable primarily grazing animal it is often found in large herds. It is the prey of Lions, Leopards, Cheetahs and the Cape Hunting Dog.

The Giraffe is a browser, that is, they eat from trees. Mostly found in herds of a few animals to around twenty. They are very silent animals. Even though it has no vocal cords in the larynx, it can at times produce sounds. Sometimes, they will snort, sneeze, cough, grunts, and bellow when attacked. It has a powerful kick. Males fight by swinging their necks at each other and wrapping their necks around each other. The loser is the one pushed off balance. Serious injury is very rare. They can run up to about 55kph for short distances.

Otherwise, our stay was uneventful. I got a good photograph of two male Impala buck and a departing Giraffe. A lone buffalo did menace us on one occasion, the truck refused to start once in the middle of nowhere. I flooded the carburettor.

The rather common Impala, usually found in groups, is readily identified by three vertical black stripes on its rear and the its lyre shaped horns. A favourite target for Leopards. Giraffe can maintain speeds of up to 50kph and short sprints up to 60kph. The Afrikaans name is rather apt, Kameelperd. The literal translation is camel and horse (perd). However, the name is from 1600s Dutch, derived from Latin camelopardalis, meaning camel leopard. A camel with Leopard's spots.

Subsequent to the Hluhluwe/Umfolozi trip I was sent north-westward to the Drakensberg Underberg area in the 2.8 litre Ford truck to transfer an instrument camp from one farm to another nearby. The farmer no longer wanted to do the observations. The wife of a farmer at another farm agreed to take over the responsibility. This was a five-day job. Transferring and installing the equipment and resetting the barometer with adjustment of readings reduced to sea level from the changed altitude did not take long. Then the observer had to be trained.

SPIOENKOP DAM NATURE RESERVE



A view of the Spionkop area. Not specifically Spionkop.

Another interesting trip was to the Spionkop Dam Nature Reserve near Ladysmith in KwaZulu-Natal and close to the Drakensberg, where my mother attempted to blow me up, unintentionally of course.

The English translation of Spioenkop is spy hill or peak, usually written in English as Spionkop. As the name implies, the reserve is at the foot of the Spioenkop Mountain, the scene of a bloody battle during the Anglo-Boer War in an attempt to lift the siege of Ladysmith. It was a disaster for the British. In particular a Lancashire regiment. The Kop a stand at one end of the Liverpool Football

Club Anfield stadium is so named to commemorate those soldiers that fell at the battle.



Our accommodation was the left half of the thatched chalet on the right.

It was the usual routine; chalets, unpack, walks and communal braais/brunches. My mother accompanied us this time. Saturday morning, never having done so before, she unsuccessfully tried to light the gas stove to boil water for tea and called me for assistance. Like an idiot, I did not check for gas. Turned on the gas switch and lit a match. There was an explosion, I was knocked across the kitchen. I distinctly remember seeing the kettle lift off the stove, hit the shelf above and knock items off the shelf. I spent the weekend with a sunburnt face minus eyebrows.

The Eland is the largest of the largest of the antelopes. The cow is smaller while the bull has longer thicker horns. It is a very docile animal and easily tamed. In the past, it was proposed that it should be domesticated, because it is better adapted to the South African climate and natural vegetation than imported cattle breeds.



Eland at Spioenkop. More like large cattle. One could walk close to them with no reaction from the animals.

A more secure area that takes up most of the reserve, was established later, stocked with large game, such as White Rhinoceros, Giraffe, Kudu, Blue Wildebeest, Burchell's Zebra, Waterbuck, Blesbok and Warthog.

KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

While living in Pretoria from 1985, the family occasionally visited the Lowveld and the Kruger National Park. When we lived in Durban going away on holiday was not such a big deal. We lived in a sub-tropical climate next to an ocean with warm water and sunshine (when it was not raining). The KwaZulu-Natal coast was one long beach. Less than 150 kilometres inland were the Drakensberg Mountains to which one could retreat for a weekend, plus nature reserves and the Royal National Park. It was the same to the north inland of the coast in Zululand, numerous game reserves, Umfolozi, Hluhluwe, Mkuzi, Ndumu. Why would one want to go away? Living in Pretoria it was different. Everyone wanted to get away, either from the summer heat, or the winter cold and frankly, Pretoria was boring. Before and after school holidays it was normal to hear people ask are you going away, or did you go away?

The Lowveld, between 150 and 600 metres (500 and 2000 feet) above sea level, form the eastern part of Mpumalanga Province bordering Mozambique, arguably it extends further north to the Northern Province. A rather rural area, the Lowveld has a sub-tropical climate consisting of a mainly green grass and bush clad plane. However, in the dry winter months the grass turns a russet colour and the trees lose a lot of their leaves. The thorn trees look particularly stark. Winter is the best time to view game, there being less place to hide. Although, the russet grass makes it more difficult to spot camouflaged lions. Winters are most definitely mild, particularly when compared with the Highveld while summers are hot and humid, nearly as humid as the KwaZulu-Natal coast.

The Kruger National Park (relaxing and peaceful out in the bush, heaven) occupies the largest part of the Lowveld. It was proclaimed in 1918, although the Sabie part has been in existence since 1898. The park is among the largest game reserves in Africa, 19,600 square kilometres, roughly 65 kilometres east to west and 360 kilometres south to north passing through two provinces, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. We thoroughly enjoyed our trips.

For trips to the Lowveld, we would usually book at one of the smallish self-catering places in the countryside near to Nelspruit. Usually, small cabin style quite rustic accommodation, sometimes classier, with the basic necessary facilities. This would be our base for day trips into the park at the Paul Kruger Gate, or in the extreme south at the Malelane Gate into the Lower Sabie area. On one occasion we stayed at the main camp, Skukuza, for a few days. On another occasion we started at Skukuza then travelled in stages over five days northward to the Satara and Letaba camps. All in self-catering accommodation in thatched mud huts, or rondavels.



Two examples of basic self-catering accommodation near Nelspruit.

One has to stock the car with all the provisions needed for the trip. Occasionally we would top up locally. For example, milk, bread and of course petrol. Also included were anti-malaria tablets. The sub-tropical and humid Lowveld is home to 9 or more Anopheles mosquito species. The females transmit malaria. When Europeans first came to the area there was still ignorance as to what caused malaria. It was believed that it was caused by the fever tree, so named because it was found in damp and moist areas where people were infected by malaria. Oblivious to the fact that this was ideal mosquito habitat. The malaria parasite was discovered in 1880. In 1894 it was suggested that malaria was caused by mosquito bites and finally proven in 1898.

Skukuza, was not my favourite camp. It is really a small town and the administration headquarters of the reserve, complete with shops, restaurants, post office, bank, police station, museums, a library, minor motor repairs, two swimming pools and now a nine-hole golf course. There is an airport 5 km away with a 1550 metres (5085 feet) tarred runway. It is limited to 10 arrivals and 10 departures per day between the hours of 09:00 and 15:00 with specific arrival and departure routes to minimise noise in sensitive natural areas.

One spends a lot of time in the car travelling slowly. This sometimes frustrated the children. No one is allowed out of the car except at safe designated viewing sites. One cannot leave camps before sunrise and must arrive back before sunset. There is a fine for arriving late. This is important when staging from one camp to another.

There is an incredible amount of game to be seen, although one has to be vigilant and gets to know where to look. The best viewing times are early and late in the day. During our visits we saw most of the large game to be seen. All the big cats (lion, cheetah and the elusive Leopard, once), Elephant, White Rhinoceros, Giraffe, Wildebeest, Burchell's Zebra, Kudu, Impala, Cape or African Buffalo, Waterbuck, Spotted Hyena, Cape Hunting Dog (or Wild Dog), Hippopotamus, African Crocodile, Warthog, Porcupine, Chacma Baboon and Vervet Monkey and many birds.



Egg laying Southern Tree Agama.

While staying in Skukuza camp we were fortunate to watch a female Southern Tree Agama (lizard) laying eggs. Between 135-165mm length, the shorter female typically lays five to fourteen oval, soft-shelled eggs in a hole dug in moist soil that hatch after 90 days. Breeding males have a cobalt-blue head with a dull bluish back and bright blue back spines changing to straw-yellow toward the tail. They were fairly common in our garden and my grandparents neighbouring garden on the coastal Bluff in Durban, Natal, where we

lived in my early teens.

On one occasion we witnessed idiots, including children, leaning out of a car very close to lions. The pride of lions in the photograph were sheltering from the heat of the day. They usually hunt between late afternoon to early morning (when hungry). They do not expend unnecessary energy. Also saw an elephant easily flattening a large tree by pushing against it with its head to get to the leaves. My tendency to get too close to elephants happened again. This time a baby tried to escape up a steep bank, which it could not and panicked. Mother not impressed came at us. I reversed quickly. Fortunately, she stopped next to the baby. I could

never have reversed faster than the speed of a charging elephant. It happened previously in Wankie Game Reserve (now called Hwange National Park) in the north-east of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1972. See Rhodesia below.



Lions resting in the shade and my favourite mammal, the elephant.

The African Elephant is the largest land mammal. People often have difficulty identifying the difference between the two. The African elephant is larger than the Asian, or Indian, elephant. The African elephant has much larger ears with a convex forehead whereas the Asian elephant has a concave area between two bumps. The back of the African elephant is concave while the Asian version is convex. Less noticeable is at the two nostrils at the end of the trunk. The African elephant has two finger-like protuberances fore and aft of the nostrils. The Asian has one only on the forepart. Both elephant species use the trunk to scoop objects against the underside of the trunk. However, the African elephant is able to grasp very small objects between the two fingers.



The two wildebeest (one partially in view on the left) are Blue Wildebeest, although they look like anything except blue in the photograph. They are what can be best described as a silver blue grey colour, whereas the Black Wildebeest has a dark brown to black colour. The Blue Wildebeest is also considerably bigger with a black tail and sideward curving horns, whereas the

Black Wildebeest has a white tail and forward curving horns. Not particularly noticeable in the photograph are characteristic darker vertical stripes in the neck and forequarters, which the black wildebeest does not have. The Black Wildebeest was hunted almost to extinction. It has subsequently been introduced to the Kruger National Park.



The photograph of the male Kudu does not do it justice. It is a truly beautiful animal. The horns are magnificent and immediately identify the Kudu. The smaller female does not have horns. Predominantly browsers, they feed on shoots and leaves of shrubs and trees. Hence they are found in bush areas. They occur in small family groups of up to around ten animals, while males may be solitary or in small male groups of up to six.

When in flight from danger the tail curves upward showing a white underside.

I was fortunate to get two good photographs of the Spotted Hyena. One where it appeared from the bush on the left of the car and another when one walked across the dirt road in front of the car. Most fortunate, because it is considered to be a nocturnal animal. At best in the early morning or late afternoon, overcast weather. It is essentially a scavenger, mostly feeding on the remains of lion kill. Although, they successfully bring down medium and large animals, for example, impala and zebra, particularly when operating as a clan. They have been known to drive cheetah away from a kill. Their bite is more powerful than a lion, being able to chew through large bones. Some believe their jaws are more powerful than any living mammal.



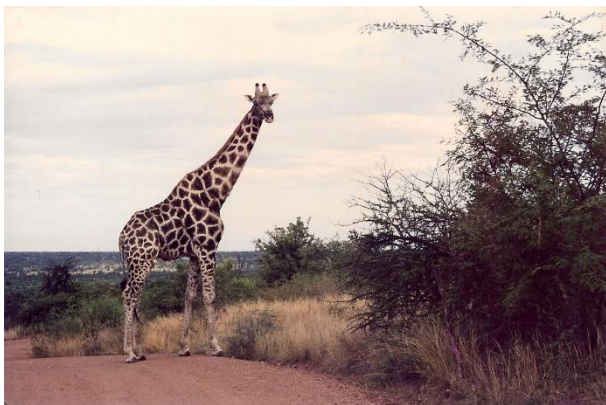
The Chacma Baboon is widespread in the game reserve, often in large troops. It used to be widespread throughout South Africa, but the spread of civilisation has reduced its numbers to less locations. It is omnivorous, feeding on almost anything edible, including roots, grass, fruits, seeds, insects and scavenged flesh of small mammals. They are not liked by farmers. They create a lot of damage to crops and orchards. Where they border settled areas they can become pests, damaging gardens and aggressively dangerous. The two photographs show a troop of baboons and a female carrying a baby. When the baby gets a bit older it will sit on the rump end of the mother's back, until eventually going its own way. The baboon is possibly the Leopard's favourite meal along with Impala which are also numerous in the game reserve.



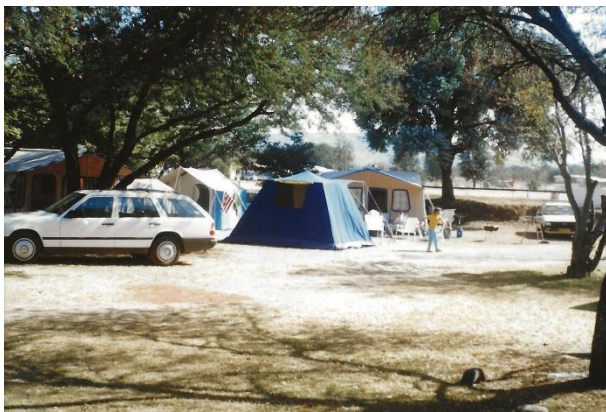
The photograph below of vultures, at a carcass, are difficult to identify. They are most likely White-backed Vultures, the most numerous in the game reserve. Alongside is a good photograph of a male Impala. Notice the different vegetation colour. The photograph of the vultures captured during the wet summer season while the one on the right is later in the dry winter season.



PILANESBERG GAME RESERVE



An unconcerned Giraffe in the reserve, possibly an older male.



Nearer to home north-west of Pretoria was the Pilanesberg Game Reserve. The game reserve and Sun City complex, is about two and a half hours drive from Pretoria. Sun City is an opulent microcosm of Las Vegas in the African bush. Luxury hotel, gambling, water sports, such as the Valley of Waves and world renowned golf course, all malaria free. We visited Sun City briefly, simply to see the place.

The game reserve is situated in the geologically ancient crater of a long extinct volcano with typical bushveld vegetation, grassland and thorny trees. Containing all the usual dangerous wild animals, the same rules outside the camp apply as at other game reserve, such as the Kruger National Park.

On one of two camping trips to the Pilanesberg Game Reserve, we were caught in an overnight thunderstorm, which flooded our tent, shown on the left. Wife and youngest son spent the rest of the night in a friend's caravan, while eldest son and I spent the night in the car with a back seat lowered to make a makeshift bed. I discovered later the place had 74mm of rain in the storm.

White-fronted Bee-eaters seen in an aviary. They are indigenous to eastern Natal (KwaZulu-Natal), the old Transvaal (now Gauteng, Mpumalanga and Limpopo provinces) and northward to Kenya and the Congo. Found along streams and dried rivers.

Tends to have favourite perches from which it hawks. Typical birding nomenclature, named after the least visible plumage. The Afrikaans name is slightly more apt, namely Rooikeel-byvreter (Red-throat Bee-eater). Same obtuse naming practise is evident with the Black-collared Barbet that frequented our garden in Cowies Hill, near Durban. Its easily most noticeable feature is its red head, yet it is named black-collared. A member of the woodpecker family, the Afrikaans name is apt, Rooikop-houtkapper (Red Head Woodpecker).

RHODESIA

The first trip to Rhodesia, previously Southern Rhodesia now Zimbabwe, was a honeymoon trip in February 1972, returning eight months later in October. My old passport stamps indicate we entered Rhodesia on the 7th February departed prematurely on the 12th (see below), returned on the 15th October departing on the 24th.

There was strict foreign exchange controls. One had to have the amount stamped in the back of the passport by a bank, in this instance the Standard Bank and certified. On both occasions I converted R228.84 to R\$200 traveller cheques. This would have been about £150. After Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 the country adopted the Rhodesian Dollar. This was enough for accommodation, food, petrol, etc. Hard to believe ow.

The first trip was a disaster. We drove there in two stages over two days, reaching Wankie Game Reserve (now called Hwange National Park), in the north-west of Southern Rhodesia not too far from Victoria Falls, in the early afternoon. After a quick visit to Victoria Falls and short drive in the reserve, we returned to the camp and our rondaval (a traditional circular African hut/small house with a conical thatched roof) type chalet. It was a self-catering camp, although there was a restaurant.

We had decided to have a braai (barbeque) and I went to start the fire. Because the fire was not doing well, even though I knew one should not do it, I took the can of petrol from the boot of the car (on long trips and scarcity of petrol garages, this was normal) and sprinkled petrol on the fire. Flames travelled rapidly up the stream of petrol. I flung the can aside, petrol splashed onto the back of my legs and I was now on fire. I knew there was a tap about 30 metres away and ran to it, quickly realising I need to do something sooner. There was a sandy patch at hand and rolled in it, putting out the flames. I returned to the rondaval. Sandie, who was in her last year of training as a nursing sister, took one look, filled the bath with cold water and told me to get in and stay there. She then went to a nearby rondaval where, by coincidence, there was an already trained nurse from her hospital and her husband whom we had met earlier. She gave Sandie a tranquiliser tablet and painkiller saying "here take this" meaning it was for me. She promptly swallowed the tranquiliser. It was the only one. So, I spent the night in considerable pain and apparently delirious while She was quite calm about the situation. Burns like this are not fun. The pain is considerable. The next day, the blisters on legs were swollen like balloons. Via the disinterested camp officials, Sandie managed to contact the local district nurse who came to see me. She decided to lance the blisters. I found out some time afterwards that this was not the done thing. Sandie knew this. I asked why she did not say something. She said it was not professional etiquette. We could laugh about it later. Anyway, my wife decided that my legs needed attention. At the time she could not drive. I managed to drive to the nearby hospital at Dete. The doctor (from Johannesburg) wanted me hospitalised. I said no and please do the best for me, we are going to drive back to Durban. He cut away dead skin and bandaged jelonet gauze dressings on my legs and we went back to the camp.

About five the next morning, we left for the drive back to Durban. If I remember correctly, we had to stop to refuel three times, plus stop at the border control, first on the Rhodesia side of Beit Bridge and then on the South African side. Each time, I had great difficulty walking. It was also difficult changing gears, because the bandages prevented me from bending my leg sufficiently to operate the clutch with my left leg. Each time I had to shift the left side of my body backwards to get my foot far enough back to reach the pedal before depressing it. We were well passed Pietermaritzburg and nearing Durban, when on the car radio we heard, for the first time, Arlo Guthrie's Alice's Restaurant. The radio station played the whole song, about 18 minutes long. We were interested and very amused, to the extent that, even though tired and sore, I drove slower to make sure we did not get home before the song ended. We reached home about midnight.

Then began the healing process. For weeks I was largely confined to bed, only going out to get my bandages replaced every few days by our local doctor. Initially, he thought skin grafting may be necessary. For a few years afterward I had very sensitive skin that would break at the slightest bump and routinely treated with prescribed Ponds Vanishing Cream. For many years afterward I had scars, which, even now over 50 years later, are still faintly visible on the rear of my ankles and legs.



Kariba Dam with Ford Escort ND 155 466 in the foreground.

Eight months later, in October, we did manage to do the Rhodesia holiday, travelling via Bulawayo to Wankie and Victoria Falls, then via Bulawayo to Salisbury (now Harare) and on to Kariba, before going east to Umtali (now Mutare) and Birchenough Bridge, then back to the Beit Bridge border post and home. October has the nickname suicide month in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. It is the hottest month and at the end of the dry season. At Kariba and the dam, we were waiting to refuel at a garage that was closed for an hour lunch

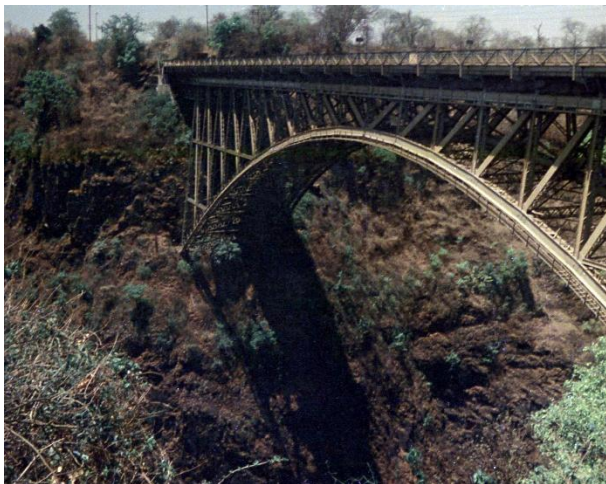
break, I noticed what seemed to be an oil leak under the engine of the Ford Escort. It was so hot that grease and gunge on the engine was melting even though the engine had been off for some time. Birchenough Bridge was designed by the same designer of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, which it closely resembles, but is only two-thirds the length of the latter.

VICTORIA FALLS NATIONAL PARK

Victoria Falls, the smoke that thunders. Incredible. Really is worth seeing. Situated on the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia, it is about 1700 metres (5577 feet) across and height 108 metres (354 feet). It is the world's largest curtain of water. The noise of the water falling into the gorge can be heard kilometres away and the rising spray when one nears the still out of site falls. The falling water creates a downdraft of air with the spray rising in the compensating updraft turning into a mist at a higher level. Popularly known as thundering smoke or the smoke that thunders. Extremely impressive.



At the time one simply arrived, parked and walked a short distance to the view site and the amazing bridge downstream across the deep gorge. Now it is a 24.5 square kilometres national park mainly populated by baboons, Warthogs, monkeys and on the very odd occasion, one may see a Leopard, hopefully from a safe distance. It also has a self-catering rest camp where one has to provide one's own accommodation in the form of a tent.



The road and railway bridge across the gorge is immediately downstream from the falls. The gorge forms the border between Zimbabwe and Zambia. Hence, the border posts at each end. Cecil Rhodes was the instigator for the bridge. It is close enough to the falls that passing trains experience the spray. Construction began after his death. Prefabricated sections were built in England. Completed in 1905 it took 14 months to assemble. August 1975 the bridge, aboard a South African Railways train halfway across the bridge, was the location for Victoria Falls Conference between Rhodesia and Zambia. Zambian delegates sat in the end of the coach that was in Zambia while the internationally unrecognised Rhodesian delegates sat in the half in Rhodesia. Thereby solving the argument as to which country should host the conference. The conference failed to produce agreement, breaking up on the day it began.



The bronze statue, opened to the public in 1954, commemorates the explorer David Livingstone who visited the falls in 1855, naming them after Queen Victoria. Dr David Livingstone was a Scottish physician, Christian missionary, anti-slavery crusader

and explorer.



Most impressive is this unusually large Baobab tree photographed a few kilometres from the falls. The circa 1970 Ford Escort provides an indication of the size of the tree. Sometimes referred to as the upside-down tree because it looks like the roots grow upward instead of into the ground. Also known as the tree of life due to its ability to store water. Some sources say it is about 2000 years old based on its girth. However, it appears to be made of three, maybe four, trunks. Therefore, possibly much younger, although still hundreds of years old. The fence is to keep people away that wish to carve names, or take a piece of the tree as a souvenir, etc.

HWANGE NATIONAL PARK

Situated in north-West Zimbabwe, near Victoria Falls, it is big, covering 14,650 square kilometres with a number of self-catering accommodation camps. The main camp where we stayed had a restaurant.

Wankie is close to the Kalahari Desert with little water and sparse hardy vegetation. It is mostly savanna grasslands and teak and mopane woodlands. Although, summer rainfall, mainly in the form of tropical showers and thundershowers result in wetlands. The reserve is home to over 100 mammal and over 400 bird species.



As usual, the camera in my possession was not suitable for wild life photography. The photograph record of the visits is limited. Suffice to say we saw a lot of the larger game. Elephants were abundant.

I annoyed a bull elephant by positioning the car where I could see that the bush track it was following would cross the road (see the photographs below).

It spread its ears and trumpeted. My fault. I was too close. I backed off quickly. Crucially, I kept the engine running. Do not turn off the engine, unless when at considerable distance. I disobeyed other rules

when observing elephants in the wild. Do not position opposite the path of elephants, which I did, also do not position behind, at least not close. Rather be some distance ahead so that one can make a quick getaway. One cannot reverse fast enough to outpace a charging elephant that can reach 40kph.

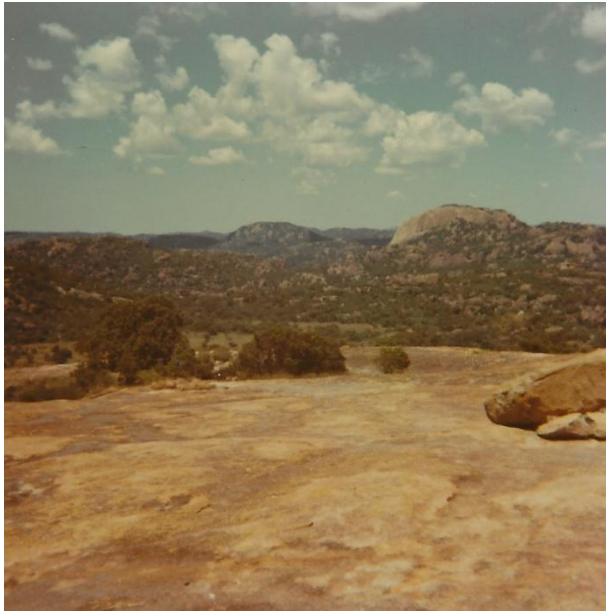


I did take a reasonably good photograph of Burchell's Zebras, only because they were close to the road and a distant photograph of a Warthog traversing what appears to be a dry salt pan suggesting this was during October, also the clear and dry blue sky. The short shadow suggests around midday. Warthogs are easily identified by the pair of wart-like lumps on each side of the face and the pig-like snout with an upturned tusk on each side of the mouth. Warthogs are diurnal by nature, that is, active during daylight. Usually seen in pairs or family groups, sometimes solitary. When alarmed they run with the tail vertical. This one was therefore not alarmed. Another peculiarity is that they have a habit of kneeling on the front knees while feeding and foraging in a small local area. They also sleep in burrows entering tail first.



MATOPO NATIONAL PARK

When we were there in 1972 it was simply known as the Matopos Hills, although its official name was the Rhodes Matopos National Park. It was an undeveloped view site with no facilities whatsoever, no entrance fee and looked after by two guards who showed no interest in our presence. Now it is a well developed national park and tourist site with a rest camp covering 424 square kilometres and stocked with game, many bird species and protected flora. Matobo National Park is situated lies in south-west Zimbabwe 30 kilometres from Bulawayo.



The area was known for its range of balancing rock formations created by erosion of the granite plateau. The imposing granite rock formations have, through millennia, have been shaped by splitting of the rocks by the process of heating and cooling, wet and dry and the wind. Its claim to fame was that it is the burial site of Cecil Rhodes, business man, explorer, politician and founder of the former British colony Rhodesia. The grave was carved into the summit of Malindidzimu, also known as World's View. On the grave it simply says "Here lie the remains of Cecil John Rhodes."

We could savour the peace, quiet and view from our elevated position. Apparently, there are old Bushman rock paintings to be found in the area.

GREAT ZIMBABWE NATIONAL MONUMENT

The ruins, a four-hour drive south of Harare on the road to Johannesburg, are located in the south-east. Spanning just over 7 square kilometres (about 3 square miles), construction began in the 11th century to the 15th century, abandoned and fallen into obscurity during the 16th century. It was the home to cattle-herding people who were also accomplished metalworkers.

The more accurate name is Great Zimbabwe, because there are many smaller ruins known as Zimbabwe. The name Zimbabwe is apparently a contraction of the Shona word meaning large stone houses. Inexpertly restored in places, it is nevertheless an impressive and thought provoking place.



The size of the dry-stone walls, that is no use of mortar, were increased with time. Newest

walls being double the height and width on the oldest, reaching 11 metres (about 35 feet) high and 250 metres (820 feet) in extent, such as in the Great enclosure. In places the walls merge with enormous boulders. The granite walls with towers, platforms and sculpted stairways were apparently not for defence, rather a display of engineering skill. Unravelling the mystery of the ruins has been hampered by looting and pillaging during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, poor reconstruction later and uncontrolled and overused trampling by visitors.

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