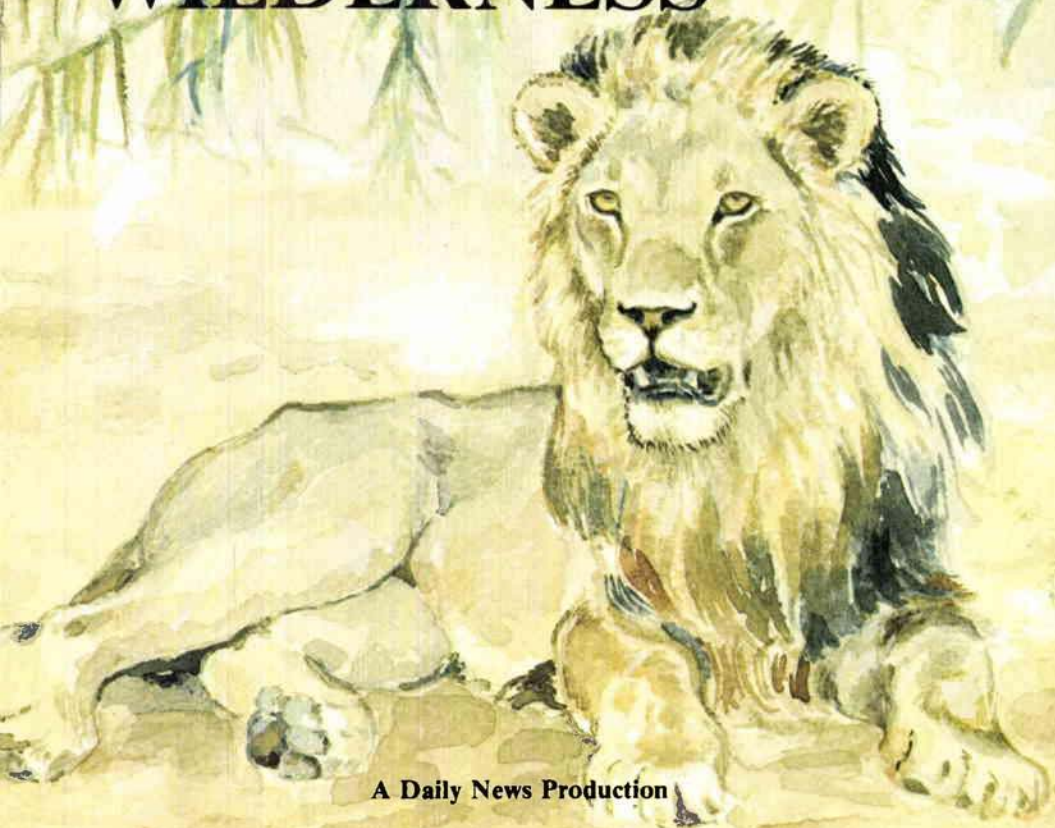


IAN PLAYER'S

**MORE FROM
THE
WILDERNESS**



A Daily News Production

Ian Player's

More From

the

Wilderness

**Proceeds from the sale of this booklet will go to
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DEDICATED TO THE OLDER MEN:

*Harry Player, Magqubu Ntombela,
Jack Vincent, T. C. Robertson,
Sir Laurens van der Post, Douglas Mitchell
and Frank Broome.*

**WHO HELPED AND GUIDED ME
IN THE LIVING WORLD.**

Harry Player

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IAN PLAYER AND MAGQUBU NTOMBELA

Zoos needn't be hellholes

ZOOS: are they good or bad? This is a question guaranteed to start an argument amongst people concerned about the diminishing wild lands and wild creatures of the world.

Zoos go back 4 500 years in antiquity and provide for some city folk the only opportunity of seeing rare and exotic creatures from other lands. But if the zoo is not run properly it can quickly become a hellhole for its unfortunate occupants and a source of easy money for unscrupulous dealers.

In 1964 I made my first journey to America as a guest of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to publicise a film they had made in Umfolosi game reserve. I saw many zoos. The ones maintained by city councils were usually the epitome of mediocrity unless there was a strong director prepared to fight the bureaucracy. But when I walked through the gates of San Diego Zoo and saw the brilliant display of flamingo, the well-groomed keepers and neat grounds, I knew this was a different kind of zoo.

Years later when San Diego established its new open zoo of 2 000 acres at San Pasqual I made arrangements for them to have 20 white rhino which were among the first to breed in captivity. This was so successful, San Diego would now be happy to sell some back to Natal.

At San Diego I met Sheldon Campbell, at that time a stockbroker deeply involved



in conservation affairs. He later gave up his profession to become an outstanding writer of books on natural history and a devotee of the Zoo. His latest book, *Lifboats to Ararat*, tells the story of the zoo world and San Diego Zoo in particular. It is a fascinating, sometimes sad, sometimes horrifying and at other times hilarious account of animals and people.

There is the tale of a well-known veterinarian who on his first job responded to a call from a nearby zoo. He passed a caged female baboon with enormously swollen, tumescent, dark pink buttocks. As any field man knows

this is the signal of the female's readiness to acquiesce if any male baboon cares to respond.

To the vet who had never before seen the phenomenon the condition was one of "gross contusion requiring immediate surgical intervention". Needless to say, the old-time zookeepers scornfully related the story of "the durned scientist and the baboon" to anyone who would listen. San Diego is one of the best zoos in the world and it was paid a great compliment in its bicentennial year when Australia sent six koala bears there. They are now the only koalas outside of Australia.

Sheldon Campbell's account of the illegal trade in birds, reptiles and animals makes terrible reading. As animals and birds become more rare so the prices rise. Scarlet tanagers, birds no bigger than a mossie, could be bought ten years ago at 10 dollars each. On today's market they cost 150 dollars each. The one-horned Indian rhino has risen from 15 000 dollars to 45 000 dollars; the Javan and Sumatran rhino are beyond price.

In one instance a Japanese gentleman offered a list of 500 animals, such as the snow leopard, the lowland gorilla,

the Malayan tapir and the okapi. Many of these are banned from sale under international convention. He was asking 158 000 dollars for one okapi. Sheldon Campbell says, "Since at the time he didn't have any okapi he was willing to make what stock traders call a short sale, probably in the hope that he could pick some animals up in Zaire, where they reputedly could be had for 100 000 dollars a pair and turn a tidy profit of 216 000 dollars in the process.

In the United States the course of desperation reached its nadir with the incredible

tale of the Philadelphia Reptile Exchange, a story international in scope, both ludicrous and appalling, replete with its own small version of Watergate, and with a multiple death that had it happened to people instead of snakes and lizards would have been considered a most monstrous and reprehensible crime."

To learn more of this reptile Watergate you will have to read Mr Campbell's book. You will not be disappointed. *Lifeboats to Ararat** is a most important book. It is easy to read and informative.

*Published by Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London.

Sun, snow and sage in the Sierras

IN RENO, Nevada recently I was invited to talk on a programme at a radio station. My friend Bob Dill, a Korean war veteran and a man who knows the history of Nevada, drove me to the station. It was beyond the city limits on the edge of the desert.

We arrived early and Bob Dill suggested taking a walk. We followed a path that led to the hills. The wind blew from the snowy tops of the Sierra mountains and swept through the desert in gusts and eddies.

I could hear it sighing and souging across the hills amongst the green juniper and Ponderosa pines and over the rocky passes. By the time it reached us in the dun coloured sage lands it had lost none of its bite and I was glad of my overcoat.



In the distance there was a snowstorm howling across another part of the desert. It seemed incongruous that in a place so dry and in the summer so hot, snow could fall. On other sections of the Sierras the sun shone brightly with the snow glinting on the high peaks.

Before we had walked more than a few hundred metres Bob pointed out animal and bird tracks that led across the main path. Some were deeply rutted from the continual passage of field mice, jack rabbits, quail and deer.

I crushed a twig of dry sage and as the scent lingered in the air I reflected just how much romance there was associated with the word sage. It conjured up the saga of cowboys and Indians, the Pony Express and the covered wagons moving forever westward.

I remarked on this to Bob Dill and as we rested he talked about the history of Virginia City and how the silver mined from it virtually financed the construction of San Francisco.

He spoke too about the Paiute Indians who had lived in this part of Nevada for thousands of years. Their way of life had been shattered and the psychic shock of the white pioneers' technology was so disastrous that it was a relatively short time before the

whole fabric of the Paiute Indian existence fell apart.

But not before they had inflicted a major defeat on the whites.

In May 1860 a group of whites had been murdered at a place named Williams Station. Without bothering to determine the reason for the Indian attack, which was in retaliation for the stealing of squaws, white miners rode out for vengeance.

Carson City, Silver City and Virginia City all sent volunteers and 105 men in four companies were marshalled under Major Ormsby. The

men followed the Indian trail towards Pyramid Lake which today is a sanctuary for the pelicans that nest on an island.

The Paiutes knew the men were coming and they were prepared to meet them. As Ormsby's men advanced a thin line of braves appeared ahead riding along a ridge just out of rifle range. Ormsby ordered a charge and knew within minutes he had been lured into an ambush.

Paiutes rose from their hiding places and counter charged screaming and yelling, firing rifles and getting in close with tomahawks.

Ormsby was thrown from his horse and an arrow in the chest killed him. His men panicked and shrewdly the Indians exploited the rout and the whites were slaughtered.

As we walked back to the radio station for my interview I remembered the words of a Red Indian named Crowfoot: "What is life. It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is a breath of a buffalo in the winter time. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset."

Bush life in the suburbs

"YOU'LL never last in Durban," my friends said. Not only do we last but we have the best of two worlds, Stainbank Nature Reserve during the week and Karkloof in the weekend. Our tiny cottage is appropriately named "Emoyeni" after the wind that sighs through the bamboos and pockets of indigenous forest, a constant reminder of the wilder lands in the north where we once lived.

Bushbuck, the glorious animal of shadows and the night display themselves in open fields within a few metres of the road. Cars, trucks and motorcycles pass and people stand and stare but the bushbuck take no notice and move from one grazing patch to another, showing the startling black and white colouring under their legs. They are so tame that I have to think hard to remember when I last heard



one giving its dog-like bark of alarm, like those wary ones in Umfolosi when they scent a hunting lion or leopard.

One morning I stood watching a family group of buck, doe and infant when to my astonishment I saw Indian mynahs clambering all over them and acting as oxpeckers do, removing ticks. Parks Board officers found that this was indeed the case and it was not only the bushbuck that were deticked by these alien birds, but the zebra and impala too.

There are still remnants of cultivation on the old estate, pineapples, paw-paws and just beyond our front door a small field of mealies. The fruit attracts all sorts of birds, louries and starlings and black collared barbets whose characteristic call reminds me of long cool avenues of fig trees in the Zululand game reserves. Then English sparrows arrive, but their loud chirping is soon lost in the monotonous frog-like calls of the crested barbet.

Sitting outside the cottage one day I watched tiny frets swooping with a whirr of wings near the mealie field. A grey flash darted into the mealies and a vervet monkey emerged with a cob in its mouth. It ran off on all fours paying no attention to the outraged yell of a solitary African hoeing nearby.

In the summer the yellow-billed kites use the long bamboos on the entrance drive as roosting perches. There are moments in the day when the traffic noises are minimal and I hear the melodious whistle, the "inhloeeaaa" which gives them their Zulu name, ringing about the stone courtyard outside my office. Once three circled overhead, call-

ing and casting long shadows on the ground and at the same time a jet from Louis Botha came roaring overhead drowning out the kites' whistling, but the shadows of the jet and the birds ran together for a few moments, symbolic of man's imitation of birds for his knowledge of flight.

In the windless winter nights I can hear the zebra munching kikuyu grass and their deep yodelling calls mingle with the sirens of trains hurrying to Chatsworth. There are sounds too of surf pounding beyond the bluff and bushbabies screams rising to a crescendo. On

moonlight nights the nightjar calls "Good-Lord-deliver-us" in the tall trees, competing with the steady song of the crickets. There is a scent too of wild and cultivated plants, of animals, wood-smoke and mown grass. The giraffe that were recently introduced are settling down and I saw one briefly against a background of buildings.

All this should be incongruous but it isn't, it is a blending of the wild with the suburb, a subtle adaptation. This priceless gift of the Stainbank family to the people of Natal can never adequately be paid for.

As old as time itself



FOR 22 years while I was in the Natal Parks Board I kept a journal. Sometimes I cursed it because it demanded so much of my time. Famous authors have varied opinions about diaries.

Somerset Maugham said that it was worthwhile periodically because it retained the freshness of the moment. I agree with him. A journal or

a diary is like a mirror too. It gives you an opportunity to release the creative juices as well as the vanity and spitefulness within yourself and re-reading it years later, you see the other part of yourself and you are pleased or horrified.

I was re-reading an old Umfolosi entry last week about a white rhino that was

dying on Mpila hill just below the present rest camp. I was glad of the record because it brought the whole scene back with great vividness. The rhino was a young bull that had been in a fight with an older bull. Magqubu and I went down to see what we could do. But the animal was dying.

The horn of an angry rhino can be a dangerous weapon. The young bull had deep gashes on the back legs and along the flanks but the brisket wound was the worst. Tortoise-shell ticks crawled all over the back and those in the soft flesh were horribly bloated.

As we stood watching its breathing became slower and more irregular but when the wind changed, carrying our scent towards the prostrate beast, it reacted immediately and knocked its head on the ground in an effort to get up. The grass had been flattened for metres around as it had rolled and struggled during the night. Rain started to splatter down, strengthening the smell of the dying beast. There was the odour of wet dung but with it was the faint smell of death, unmistakable to those who have once smelt it.

We discussed shooting the animal to put it out of its misery but something stopped me. Perhaps it was because I realised that under natural conditions this is how it would have died. Its fight with the other rhino and everything that led up to it was a perfectly natural incident.

For thousands of years long before man appeared on earth, ancestors of this animal were fighting and dying like this one today. Who were we to come along

and hasten its end. Man has interfered with everything in nature. This was a game reserve and this rhino had a right to die as its ancestors did.

As we stood in contemplative silence a monkey chattered loudly in the valley and a puffback shrike whistled. The wind grew stronger and roared through the trees and around the rocks, bending the red themeda grass.

The rhino died at sunset. We walked across the few metres separating us to look at it. It must have been in a momentous battle for its jaw was badly fractured too.

As we left I thought how in the darkness the hyena would lift its head and smell the decaying flesh. So would the jackal. They would come padding silently out of the

bush, slipping like shadows past tall trees to feed on the toes and other soft parts of the body.

The next day as the sun rose it would be the turn of the vultures, taking off into the thermals and circling until one spotted the inert form. Then they would swoop lower, circling and circling, casting moving shadows on the ground, their primary feathers swishing in the wind.

But the pied crow would already be there, strutting on the carcass and picking out the eyes. Later it would be the turn of the insects who would come to the feast and lay their eggs and a vast cycle would begin again, and continue along a path that man is only beginning to learn about.

Thoughts on a glorious morning

I HAVE recently returned from another visit to the Philippine Islands in connection with the conservation of the tamaraw, a diminutive wild buffalo on the endangered species list. One clear morning I flew with two senior officials to the island of Mindoro looking for areas where the tamaraw might still be surviving.

It was like putting parts of a jigsaw together. We landed on a flat ledge on one of the volcanic mountain peaks. It was a good feeling to be up there with country stretching in all directions and in the distance the shimmering dark

blue of the South China Sea. I was reminded of the poet — Blake I think — who wrote: "Great things happen when man and mountain meet, that do not happen when jostling in the street." It was a Sunday and a fitting moment to give thanks to the Creator just for being alive.

I could hear the "tintinriok" bleating song of a grass warbler and the deep bubbling call of the coucal. Pacific swallows flew low above the grass tops hawking insects, and down below in the depths of a green forest an animal screamed. These few moments of being on top

of the mountain was the kind of experience one treasures in the mind for a long time.

I thought how it was by the strangest set of circumstances that I had come to be in the Philippines involved in the tamaraw conservation. Old Magqubu once told me, "You do not take a step in life that the spirits are not with you." Who could then deny that on this glorious morning with a view that encompassed grasslands, forests, streams and rivers, that the spirit of General Lindbergh, the man who did so much for Philippine conservation, was not there watching our progress with the tamaraw. So in traditional Zulu fashion I thanked the spirits too.

Then the sound of human voices drifted down from above and I saw the tiny figures of the Batangan mountain people watching us. After a short while they began descending with enviable agility and grace. My companion Oscar Trinidad talked to them.

They were members of a group of about a hundred people who lived in the nearby mountains and there were others watching us, but afraid to come down. The three that we spoke to were a family group of father, mother and son. The man's name was Igme. He said they never went beyond "there", and he pointed to the next valley, a distance of no more than ten kilometres.

They gave us much information about the tamaraw and where we would be likely to find them. I enjoyed just looking at these people with their lithe well muscled bodies. They smoked tiny pipes and carried a smoulder-



ing log. When we left them and took off in the helicopter they huddled close together and waved to us. Soon they were tiny specs on the landscape.

I thought what an enormous gap there was between their culture and ours. Who were the happier people? Our ultimate weapon was the hydrogen bomb, theirs was the bow and arrow. We built enormous cathedrals to the glory of God and spoke to him only on Sundays. They were aware of God's presence all the time.

As we build bigger cities so more people want to go back and experience nature. Even the most urbanised city dweller clings to the earth.

You only have to look at the pot plants in the humblest dwellings in Manila, London or New York to see how we do not want to lose our roots.

As Olaus Murie said: "What if a generation comes along that does not know about original country, no longer experiences the yearning for wild country, for deep primeval forests, wilderness canoe country, high mountains, the wide expanse of desert?"

The concern for endangered species — the tamaraw for example — is also the concern for that wild part of our own nature. If we ever succeed in eliminating everything wild in the world, it will not be long before we too disappear.



accommodate visitors and the auxiliary services, the restaurant, self-service cafeteria and supermarket shut out the wilderness that people once came to see, hear and smell. The Kruger National Park is still a great place but thank God they have started wilderness trails because the big camps will soon become small towns.

We in Natal have until recently been able to look down our noses at this sort of development. But the bush

telegraph tells me that Hluhluwe game reserve is going to be re-built. I believe that all but essential staff should be outside the reserve, and so should any new rest camp. Let's leave the interior of our Natal parks free of suburban development.

Colonel Stevenson-Hamilton, the man who really built the Kruger National Park, wrote the following in his last report when he retired in 1947. "Posterity will know whether this generation used

its power to conserve this one remaining piece of unspoiled nature as it has always been, or whether it permitted it to be turned into a glorified zoological and botanical garden, dotted with scientific experimental stations of every kind, hotels and public recreation grounds, preliminaries to the liquidation of the last vestige of wildlife."

Let Natal take note: Peripheral development should be the order of the day.

The "father" of the board

I SAW Terry Wilks's biography on Douglas Mitchell so I bought a copy and took it to Southbroom for the old man to autograph. He is now 84 and the years have taken their toll but his arms are still strong and he goes into the fields every day.

When he speaks about world affairs and South African politics he is the equal of any of our politicians. His icy blue eyes bore into you as he expounds upon a point and his voice is as powerful as I have ever known it. He has a memory that younger men would envy.

Most South Africans know him as a controversial politician; a man who led the United Party in Natal, but there are other sides to Douglas Mitchell. He is a conservationist par excellence.

For the 22 years I was in the Natal Parks Board I saw Douglas Mitchell guide the progress of the organisation

that was his creation. Very little escaped those keen blue eyes. If he was in doubt about anything that was going on in the reserves he would get into his car and make an inspection in loco.

Once I took him out in a boat on Kosi Bay and he remembered an entrance to the top lake that I had long forgotten. Another time when he was over 70 he climbed onto a horse and rode with a group of us across Umfolosi game reserve to see for himself some disputed terrain.

He never drank or smoked and he has tremendous stamina. I remember in Ndumu game reserve when he was taken gravely ill and a doctor feared for his life. We radioed for an aeroplane and I flew out with him for Durban but we were forced to land at Hluhluwe village.

I got a car and drove him to the game reserve. He was semi-conscious but when we had travelled a short distance

inside the reserve he asked, "Where am I now?"

"Hluhluwe game reserve, sir," I said.

It gave him new life, he began a miraculous recovery and by evening he was sitting up and regaling us with tales of trading days on horseback in Pondoland. The stories were interspersed with hilarious snippets in Zulu which showed his sound understanding of the language.

In the book there is a story about Douglas Mitchell bringing the Prime Minister J. C. Strijdom and Paul Sauer and Blackie Swart to Umfolosi game reserve. Let me add the following to Terry Wilks's story.

Jim Feely and I met the party at the newly built Mpila rest camp.

"I want the PM to see white rhino," Mr Mitchell said in a stern voice.

"There has been a fire on Mtunzini and many rhino have left the reserve," I replied a little uneasily.

"Well get them back," was his curt command.

My heart sank and I said to Jim Feely, "Who the hell does he think I am, the bloody Pied Piper?"

We had game guards running all over the country and at the end of a day had shown the Ministers 80 white rhino. That evening Mr Mitchell took me aside and said kindly, "Sorry you had to be a rhino herdboys but we made some good friends for the reserves."

We had our disagreements and I fought back, arguing my point of view. In the board room it was an unequal

struggle but in the field where there was time to talk we seldom disagreed. He was one of the few Board members who understood why we wanted a wilderness area in Umfolosi. It was a concept that fitted in with his own philosophy.

In 1964 when I became Chief Conservator, Zululand, he backed me to the hilt and in 1970 against the objections of most of the Board he insisted that I go overseas to sell white rhino. I was suddenly a game ranger turned salesman. I was determined not to disappoint Douglas Mitchell

and in two months sold more white rhino than had been sold in the previous ten years. When I came back all he said to me was, "Good work Ian." From him it was high praise.

Finally another story told in the book which I'm sure Douglas Mitchell still chuckles about. Addressing a meeting in his constituency, he told his audience that while he was a man of peace, destiny had decreed he should constantly become involved in serious discord. "I must say," a voice mused loudly from the back of the hall, "you co-operate rather well with destiny."



Take to the trees

WINTER is with us in the Karkloof and when the sun goes down it gets cold very quickly. I had helped Magqubu bring our few cows from the field and then sat talking to him in his kitchen. He cooked an evening meal of pumpkin mixed with putu.

As he stirred the three-legged pot with a wooden spoon he regulated his fire as well as any housewife with an electric range, then with everything to his satisfaction we got talking about his early days in Zululand and some of the dangerous animals, such as black rhino.

"Obejane. They are not animals you take any chances with," Magqubu said with feeling.

"You don't think they would actually kill people?" I teased him, knowing his reaction would result in at least one good story.

"Hau. Your memory is short," he snorted. "I do not remember you standing still when we were chased at Mpafa or on the Manzimbomvu, and there was that night patrol at Nqoloti when we went to listen for the first roars of the lion in 1958."

He leaned back against a bag of mealies which he had grown and reaped himself. "Of course they have killed and injured people. But the black rhinos that become really dangerous are the ones that have been injured by people like poachers who wounded them with the old muzzle loaders," he said.

He described how these black rhino crossing a footpath and smelling a human would actually follow the scent and pad quietly along behind the unsuspecting victim. "They have good hearing too," he said and explained that was why he strongly disliked people talking on trail.

A really *kwaai* black rhino might lie in wait and charge at the last moment giving the trail party no time to get behind a tree let alone climb one. But the majority of black rhino would run from the scent of humans, or if they charged, a loud enough noise would make them turn.

"But if it keeps on coming," Magqubu smiled, "you had better be up a tree."

Then he told me a story about a black rhino in the Hluhluwe game reserve in the early 1920s that had given him and the head game guard Mali Mdhletshe a lot of trouble. He said it used to come almost every night to their camp just as it was getting dark and charge them, scattering pots, blankets and clothing. They reported it to Vaughan Kirby the game

conservator at that time, who pooh-pooed the story and accused them of exaggeration.

Magqubu and Mali Mdhletshe got so tired of being chased that they built a platform in some trees and a rickety ladder to climb up to it every night. Then on one of his periodic patrols to the reserve Vaughan Kirby walked to the camp they now called "iStairs."

In the afternoon Vaughan Kirby pitched his tent, put up his stretcher and prepared to settle down for the evening. As it got dark the two game guards climbed the ladder to their platform. Vaughan Kirby rejected their invitation to join them with a laugh and a reference to panicky old women.

"We had no sooner laid out our blankets when we heard ubejane snort across the valley," Magqubu said. Slowly the black rhino came towards the camp, pushing over saplings and feeding on snapped branches.

"Mfoholoza was now in the tent and we heard him lie down. We warned him again

but he just laughed." Magqubu said. "When the rhino was about 30 metres away it realised that Mfoholoza's tent was there. For a few minutes it was quiet."

Magqubu cocked his head and imitated the rhino slowly sniffing the air. Then it came. *We mame*. The feet pounded on the footpath and Mfoholoza heard it crashing towards him."

Magqubu giggled as he described Vaughan Kirby's ungraceful exit. The rhino stopped at the tent and with quick movements of its head uprooted the pegs, smashed the poles and ripped the canvas.

"What about Mfoholoza?" I asked.

"He was hiding behind a tree swearing at the ubejane," Magqubu said wiping tears from his eyes as he laughed remembering Vaughan Kirby's language. "After that we had no trouble because whenever Mfoholoza was in doubt about anything we told him, we reminded him of the ubejane at iStairs."

A lesson in my own backyard

MY neighbour Ian Forrester 'phoned me one weekend from Durban and asked me to take a message to his induna. It is always a pleasure to go to "Ehlatini". I believe it is one of the finest houses in Natal.

It is a stone and thatch house situated on a small

plateau in the Karkloof forest and was originally built for Punch Barlow then bought by Ronald Butcher and is now owned by Ian Forrester. No trees have been cut down for "the view", a most unusual phenomenon nowadays. In spring when the azaleas are in bloom there is a marvellous

display of colour against the dark green forest. Every American friend I have taken to see the house has immediately wanted to buy it.

I took Laurens van der Post there and he sat silently near the guest house staring across the valley to the forest. Two male nsimango monkeys were giving their booming calls and the sound echoed all around us. Vervets chattered in the distance and Cape robins sang. Laurens said it was like listening to a symphony concert only more moving because of the greater variety of sound, and with the forest acting as a huge amplifier.

As I went to my car Magqubu greeted me. I suggested he came with me, and he agreed but said we should walk not ride. "You see nothing when you drive," he said with undeniable logic. So we began walking. I was busy with my own thoughts and took little notice of the old man until I realised I was missing out on a remarkable natural history lesson.

"Look at this," Magqubu said pointing at a tiny trail across the road. "These are ants. They have found something dead." He searched in the grass and there was a dead shrew swarming with ants.

"You see that plant," he said. "We Zulus in the old days used to make tea from the leaves."

We reached the bottom of our drive and he stopped for a few moments and listened. "Do you hear the nhlava — the honey guide?" he asked.

"No," I said.

"Well he called so there must be a hive near here." He looked around and pointed



into the sun. "Nango. There they go," he said.

I stared in the direction he pointed but saw nothing. Patiently he kept on pointing until I too saw a bee flash past and go into a tiny hole in an old gum tree. Magqubu took me closer and said, "Now smell." Sure enough there was the heavy scent of honey. He sang out the praise names of the honey guide.

"You are the bird that calls a person to accompany it to honey. You also call the honey badger" (and here Magqubu imitated the hissing clicking call of the ratel.) "Inside the honeycombs are the grubs that you like and we and the honey badger help you to get them." The old man sang a little then danced

and stamped his feet and shouted out, "We know that if we take all the honeycombs, the next time you will lead us to a black mamba or a black rhino."

He smiled and we walked on, he pointing out the delicate spoor of a grey duiker that had crossed the road the previous evening and the wide marks in the sand of a passing puffadder. When we reached the forest we walked in silence until he saw a tree which he said was an important one. "This is the tree that fulfils the same function as the mpafa tree in Zululand. It is with a branch of this tree that the local people go to fetch the spirits of their relatives who have died away from home."

Further along the path I heard a brushing sound and I stopped. Magqubu said without hesitation, "It is the nsimango monkeys moving through the forest." "But how do you know?" I asked. "Well they are heavier than the nkau," he said. He saw

the doubt in my eyes so he motioned me to sit and we waited until the forest was still. Then there was a slight sound and Magqubu nodded his head towards a big tree. I watched it carefully until a dark grey tail flicked. It was the nsimango. The old man

just smiled when I shook my head in amazement.

I delivered the message and we walked home with Magqubu humming a song he used to sing as a herdboys. I had been given a lesson in my own back yard.

Why I don't allow lamps

ON trail when night falls I am often asked "Why don't you have any lamps?" and I tell the following story.

This is a wilderness area where man should only walk, canoe or ride on horseback away from the sights and sounds of human installations. It is our job to try to keep it as wild and primitive as possible — hard work in this twentieth century where the battle cry of humanity is development.

Now if I allowed a storm lantern in the camp it would mean having to carry paraffin in every time we came. People would soon become irritated and ask why a drum could not be brought to the camp. So a 44 gallon drum would be rolled down the river and everyone would be happy for a while. But when it was empty another one would have to be brought and people would say, "How silly it is to roll it down the river, why don't you construct a small road, just a track, and bring it in by vehicle."

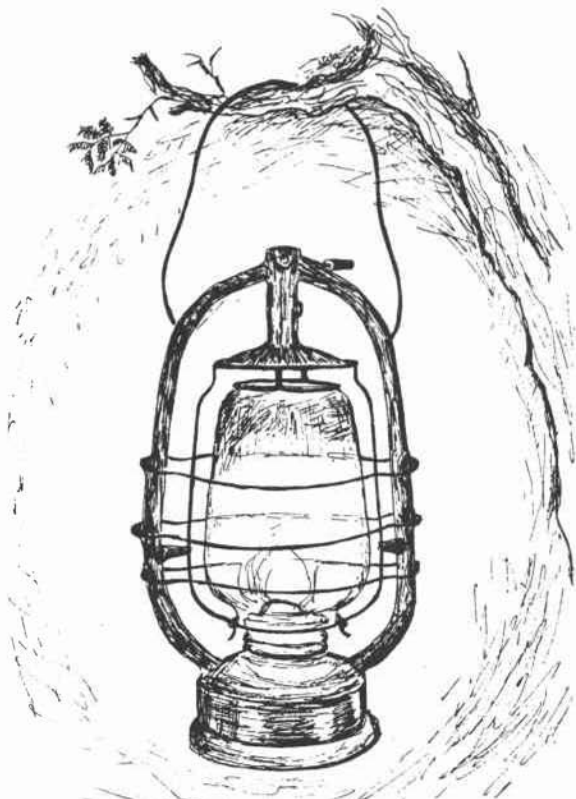
So this would be the next step.

Then someone would ask, "These storm lanterns don't give much light and seeing there is ample paraffin why don't you have a little engine,

with just enough horsepower to light six electric bulbs?"

So an engine — only a little one — would be brought in and there would be more light in the camp.

Before long another person would say, "It seems so silly sitting on logs around the campfire, what harm would a few deck chairs do, as long as they were green and fitted in with the environment. We



would be able to read in comfort late into the night and not have any of this keeping watch alone. And we could have a guitar and sing songs around the fire. It would help to drown out the noises of the lion and the rhino — which can be jolly frightening.”

Later, someone would say, “Only bringing seven people on trail is a bit mean. Why don’t you double the number and all those who can’t walk too well could be brought by vehicle, along the little dirt road, offloaded a hundred metres from the camp so they have to walk the last bit and be in keeping with the wilderness atmosphere.”

The pace starts to quicken.

“You can’t have people going behind trees and bushes, it’s very unhygienic and also the thorns scratch which makes it uncomfortable. Why not a little pit drop latrine with a wooden seat to fit into the environment.”

So a lavatory is erected. Soon there would be complaints about the smell and a nice red brick building would arise in the bush, plastic seats, white walls and waterborne sewerage.

“Well, seeing that we have a lavatory,” a newcomer will say, “why on earth do we have to sleep on the hard ground, with smoke blowing in our faces and all those ants and other nuns running over us in the night. It’s dangerous, snakes could come too, why can’t just two little rondavels be built, one for the men and one for the women. Very simple in style with camp beds and some nice rugs to add colour to the drab bush. A radio and gramophone should be installed because people are getting tired of guitar music and songs around

the campfire. Now, there should be no television set, that really would be carrying things a bit far.”

Years pass and there is a big camp with restaurants, supermarket and swimming pool. It boasts of sleeping a thousand people a night and tarred roads have been constructed so no one is bothered by dust.

Now comes the final act. Someone says the camp is too big and sprawling, and it costs a lot of money to maintain. Buildings should go upwards and not be spread around. So plans are drawn

up and thought is given to the birds and the animals and the wilderness atmosphere. At last the big announcement and headlines in newspapers: a 40 storey building is to be built and in order that it should be in keeping with the wild atmosphere it will have a thatched roof to preserve the rustic appearance.

This I explain, is the reason for not allowing lamps.

Is all this improbable? Wildly exaggerated? Not on your sweet nelly it isn’t. A skyscraper with a thatched roof is planned for the north coast. How soon before it’s the game reserves?

Happy settlers Down Under

AT THE end of the World Wilderness Congress in Cairns I flew to the Northern Territory with Roger Whiteley, a former MEC in Natal.

Soon after taking off the dense, lush rain forest where clean streams cascaded down into the deep blue of the Pacific Ocean gave way to the hard leaf forests of Northern Queensland. These spread like a green sea dotted with rising kranztes that glow red in the morning and even- ing light. It is under the overhangs of these kranztes that a wealth of aboriginal rock art lies, much of it yet to be seen by white men.

We flew for hours without seeing a sign of human habitation then Roger clutched my arm in great excitement. “Look,” he said. I looked out

of the window and saw the thin brown ribbon of road. “The road?” I asked. “No, no,” Roger said. “There’s a car on it.”

Australia is a big country.

In the early 1800s a few Indonesian buffalo were introduced into the Northern Territory by passing Asiatic fishermen. It was a release into an ideal habitat, a hot, humid land of riverine forests, wide rivers and swamps that stretch from horizon to horizon. It was peopled by scattered tribes of aborigines, by the wallaby, the kangaroo and the dingo, and there was nothing to stop the increase of the buffalo. In the swamps, billabongs and rivers, the giant saltwater crocodile that grows to a length of 10 metres took a few animals but it was insignificant predation.

Today no one knows exactly how many buffalo there are but the estimate is a million or more. Over 15 000 are shot each year and the meat is used mainly for pet food. From the air, parts of the landscape look like craters of the moon because of the huge wallows made by the buffalo in the dry periods, when they move in their hundreds of thousands to the shrinking pools of water.

It is the policy of the government to wipe out the buffalo because of the damage they are doing to a fragile ecosystem, but when I looked at the vastness of the country I wondered if it would ever be possible to eliminate them altogether.

Everything in the Northern Territory is on the macro scale. A young policeman I spoke to said that he personally was responsible for 4 000 square kilometres with only two aboriginal trackers to help him. In one aboriginal reserve of over 2 000 square kilometres there are only 60 people.

The aboriginals are a gentle, spiritual people still immersed in their history, called by the poetic name of "dreamtime." Many of their myths and legends are strikingly similar to those of our bushmen and African people. Fire is said to have been discovered by a bird or an animal who knew its value and hid it from all the other creatures.

Eventually it was taken by trickery and then a huge runaway bushfire spread from one side of the land to the other. In this way the use of fire by man became universal. Because the dead have no fire, it is in the darkness that the spirits live and aboriginals



will not walk in the night without a fire stick.

The country is much like parts of Africa so it was not surprising to find an ex-Rhodesian, Rob Mann and his wife Wendy running a hunting safari 400 kilometres south of Darwin. To begin with the local Australians laughed at their efforts but now hunters from all over the world come to bag one or two buffalo. What the Australians regarded as a pest, Rob

Mann has turned into an economic asset. Germans, Swiss, Scandinavians and Americans are jetting in and paying over 4 000 dollars for a week's hunting. No more than 75 buffalo are taken off the land in a year, but it brings much needed money into the territory.

The Northern Territory government is backing Rob Mann and a new industry, an African export run by white Africans, has taken root.

A great drought

THE other evening I sat beside the fire talking to old Magqubu about drought. Our water supply has dwindled to a trickle and the soil in the fields is baked hard by the sun. For the Karkloof this is most unusual. Magqubu spoke about the great drought in Zululand of 1931-32.

"It was so dry," he said, "the cattle of Chief Mtubatuba were brought from the eastern shores of Lake St Lucia to the Ongeni hills between Hluhlwe and Umfosi game reserves."

This is where Magqubu's family had their kraal. His father and grandfather were born there and it was where Magqubu had hunted, or herded goats as a young boy. He knew it intimately.

"But what about nagana, the tsetse fly?" I asked.

"It was there," Magqubu said matter of factly. "Chief Mtubatuba had the choice of letting the cattle die of hunger at the Lake or taking a chance with nagana." He then gave a lengthy resume of the history of cattle in the area from the rinderpest of 1897

to the time when successive nagana attacks wiped out his family's herds and they were reduced to getting goats.

"We planted our mealies and mabela in September 1931 and there was no rain. By January 1932 the ground was bare and the cattle dying. People began dying too because of starvation, they did not have the strength to fetch water or even wood to make a fire. Then there was a plague of fleas. They came in their millions — you could not walk anywhere. They swarmed over the ankles and bit deep into the flesh. In the night we had to be careful when we slept that they did not crawl into our mouths."

"What about the game?" I asked.

"They died out," Magqubu said. "Waterbuck, buffalo, warthog and white rhino suffered most. I saw thirty dead white rhino and many more horns were brought from Umfolosi to Mtwazi (Captain Potter) at Hluhluwe. Mountain reedbuck and common reedbuck survived on



the hills because there was grass. It was at this time that some white rhino moved from Umfolosi to Hluhluwe game reserve. They came along the hills from Sitole to Ntabamhlope and Nombali."

The old man was quiet for a few minutes then he said, "Other things happened too. In January or February 1932 I was preparing my breakfast at Hluhluwe and was about to put some meal into a pot of boiling water when it suddenly rocked violently

and the cat ran out of the hut." He imitated how he had staggered out of the hut and seen people falling and groping on the ground, yelling and shouting. "The trees were shaking and water in the Hluhluwe river moved backwards and forwards. There was a loud clicking sound under the ground and the game ran everywhere, calling frantically."

This was the great earthquake that left many reminders on our Natal landscape.

"In December 1932 it rained," Magqubu said. "But there were no cattle left to plough the lands, so the people used hoes. Mealies and mabela were planted and by March they had ripened well and we all spoke of a good harvest."

Magqubu was silent and he stared into the fire as though it would bring back the hard memories of those days of the 1930s.

"Yes," he said slowly. "We spoke of a good harvest. Then the locusts came."

Where are all the young men going?

LIKE thousands of other parents in South Africa we welcomed our younger son back for his first leave from the army. The days passed all too swiftly and then it was time for him to go back.

I sat with him in the old market square in Pietermaritzburg while he waited for the bus that would take him to his camp. We laughed and joked about his experien-

ces and compared them to my own, but the pain of parting was unspoken. I thought of him as a tiny child as he toddled on the banks of the White Umfolosi trying to imitate warthog. His first schooldays were in a rondavel at Hluhluwe. Outside was an erythrina tree with bright red flowers that the bushbuck and duiker came to feed on, a sight the children never tired of watching.

I remembered him going to prep school, excited yet afraid, then it was high school. Each time he returned bigger and with more confidence. Now he was in the army.

The bus came and I watched him walk across the square, his uniform fitted his tall frame and in the short time he had been away his shoulders had broadened. Soon he was out of sight but beyond him I saw in silhouette the war



monuments of the Langalibalele, the Anglo-Zulu War and two world wars, stark reminders of our history.

I sat for awhile by myself and asked the question that parents have been asking since time began. How many more generations before there is true peace among men?

All that evening I asked myself the question. Why do we kill each other, when will there be no more wars, when will there be real peace?

From this same Market Square my great-grandfather had left in 1856 with a troop of Natal Carbineers to chase after the unfortunate Bushmen in the Drakensberg. A great uncle had also left from here on the Langalibalele rebellion expedition

in 1873 and had ridden with the Carbineers up the Hlatimba pass and along the berg trying to stop Langalibalele from escaping to Basutoland.

My grandfather had been here too in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 and gone north to Fort Pearson and then to the battle at Inyezane. He was here again in the South African War. My mother's brother had been killed when he was 19 in the mud of Flanders in the 1914-1918 war, and cousins had died in the Western Desert and Europe in 1939-1945.

I had gone myself at 17 to Italy and seen cities ruined, people starving and thousands of white crosses in war cemeteries of young, wonderful soldiers full of the zest for life who did not return to the beloved homeland.

Generation after generation has marched against each other armed with stones, then spears, then bows and arrows, then guns, then cannon and now the ultimate, nuclear warfare. Even this is no deterrent and we continue with our small wars. Once we hoped that when women became rulers there would be peace. But has this too proved to be an illusion?

In 1941 when Europe was burning and the armies of the world were locked in desperate battle, Carl Gustav Jung wrote the following from his home in the high mountains of Switzerland: "One must never look to the things that ought to change. The main question is how we change ourselves."

Here, I felt, was the answer to my question.

coiled and a frieze of mysterious hooded figures.

In the nearby cave on the eastern side the Parks Board has constructed an excellent exhibit of a bushman family.

One stares, expecting the composition of figures to move or talk at any moment. All the artefacts of their life are here, the bows and arrows, the digging sticks and a scraping tool to soften the skin of an animal kaross. The experience is heightened by sound recordings and a good commentary on a tape recorder.

The anthropologist Elizabeth Marshall called the bushmen "the harmless people." They made little impact on the landscape and left behind a few artefacts and their lovely art as reminders of their presence. When white and black men encroached on their hunting grounds, the bushmen were forced to retaliate. They stole cattle and horses. Expeditions were led against them, they were called savages and were hunted and murdered ruthlessly.

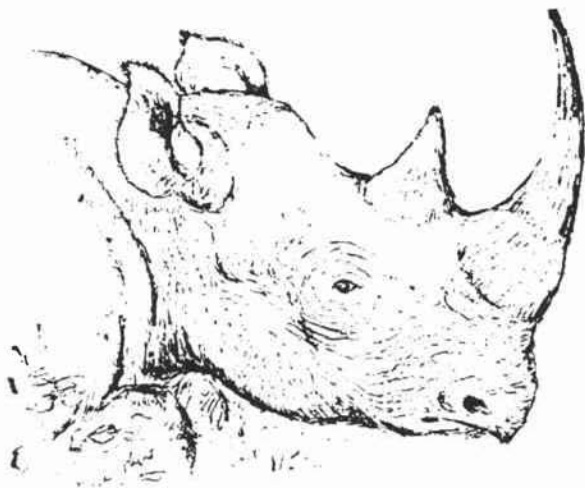
They had lived in this land for centuries, a hunter-gatherer society, singing their songs and dancing their dances and the artists amongst them painting. Sir Laurens van der Post, the author, is one man who looked deep into the soul of the bushman and he wrote, "He and his needs were committed to the nature of Africa and the swing of its wide seasons, as a fish to the sea. He and they all participated so deeply of one another's being that the experience could almost be called mystical."

Today none survives in Natal. What of the land with which they had once lived in such harmony?

Forests plundered and rivers running red with mud. Hillsides scarred and eroded. Sewerage pipes pouring into a sick sea. Square buildings and acres of concrete. Mickey Mouse figures on beachfronts. Animals and birds behind bars in zoos. Sea

creatures incarcerated in concrete pools performing like trained clowns for audiences who have had little chance to know anything better.

The bushmen would be entitled to ask, "Who are the savages?"



What have WW2 black market cigarettes and ageing oriental gentlemen got to do with the price of white rhino horn?

I WATCHED the TV news item of the burning of rhino horn at Pilansberg Game Reserve and wondered, like many thousands of other people, what was the purpose. The official explanation was that by depriving the market of rhino horn, the rhino would be saved in Africa.

I disagree. Let me tell you why.

A long time ago I was a 17 year old soldier in Italy with the 6th South African Armoured Division. We were often lectured by very senior officers on the evils of the black market and the severe penalties we would incur if

we indulged in it. We were even threatened that our pay books would be looked at to make sure we drew money. None of my mates or myself fancied DB but those of us who did not smoke or eat chocolate or had access to silk stockings from girl friends in the Naafi said to hell with the penalties, and we traded freely.

I remember seeing one of the senior officers who lectured and threatened us about the black market doing a little deal one evening in the Galleria in Milan. Later when I saw the girl he was with I realised that economic pressures forced him to break his own regulations because that girl obviously had most expensive tastes.

So we poor troopers went on dealing, selling cigarettes, buying eggs and one or two other things. Everything continued to go well until cigarettes came on the open market for the Italian public. Our sales dropped and soon we had difficulty giving

those old fat strong Springbok cigarettes away.

Some guys turned to taking petrol but hiding a four gallon jerry can in the back pocket is a little more difficult than hiding a packet of cigarettes or two silk stockings. But then petrol became more available too and by the time I left Italy the golden days of trading were over. It was back to the pay books and getting 400 lire to the pound instead of the true rate of 800. This was a sore point with the troops which was expressed politically in 1948. The black market was my first real lesson in life about supply and demand.

But back to the rhino horn.

Burning it is not going to save any rhino. It is going to condemn them to death. The answer is to flood the market with rhino horn and if some wide boy can manufacture a substitute and mix a little fly with it so that his product sells faster to ageing oriental gentlemen, well more power to his elbow. In the mean-

time establish a legal market and sell every rhino horn possible and encourage game farmers to buy more rhino.

All the techniques for immobilising the animals are at our disposal and the horns can be cut off from time to time because they grow again. That R12 000 (it was a lot more really) that we saw go up in smoke could have been a nice down payment on a bit of land and more room for rhino and more horn on the market.

I remember a time when white rhino were extremely expensive on the zoo market. A pair from Uganda sold for R20 000. We in Natal led the way and sold white rhino everywhere. It didn't take long for the price to drop when big zoos and drive-in parks had the animals.

I know because I went to Britain, Europe and America selling them, and to begin with it was like selling cigarettes on the black market in Italy in 1944.

Nature drama

MAGQUBU came to me. "There is a big snake in the bushes near the vegetable garden," he said.

"Did you see it?" I asked. "No, I could smell it," the old man said. He saw the sceptical look in my eye and smiled his patient smile. "Have you forgotten those mambas in the bush near Mpisaneni hill in Umfolosi?" he asked. I looked blank. The old man smiled again, with a trace of irritation this time.

"It was that hot day when

we were chasing the cattle from those squatter people on the Hlungwana and Mtunzini. We passed the anthills in the bush where the mambas live and you said you could smell them. Of course you were much younger then," and he laughed.

Now that the old man reminded me I remembered the mambas in the anthill holes. In the early morning or late evening one could be almost certain to see them, the long black bodies slithering so

ominously and so effortlessly that it was difficult to stop the little shiver and tingling in the scalp that a snake can evoke. Somewhere in the long past of man he must have had some bad moments with the reptiles.

Magqubu stood patiently looking at me. He knew I was thinking and the politeness so characteristic of his race now forbade him to speak. I remembered a dank smell about those anthill holes and the bush.



"Yebo Magqubu. I remember now — there was a smell," I said.

"Good," the old man replied. "That's how I know there is a big snake near the vegetable garden."

Months went by and occasionally Magqubu spoke of the big snake but no one ever saw it. My wife heard it late one evening moving through the branches.

Puffadders and night adders are common in the spring but are generally harmless, and only once did we have a dog bitten. Boomslangs frequently made raids on birds' nests in the orchard and on one occasion I surprised one about two metres long passing through from the orchard to the wattle plantation. It stood up, curious and suspicious, to look at me. I kept my distance and marvelled at its grace when it dropped and slithered off. I told Magqubu about the encounter and he said: "Ah that's a small one. Wait until you see the big one."

Then one morning in the early spring when the spotted

weavers had begun to make their first nests, I heard the frantic call of a toppie. I said to my wife, "The toppie has spotted a snake."

There is an urgent ring in their call that is unmistakable. Other toppies began calling insistently. Then I heard the high pitched chatter of a sunbird, another sure sign of a snake about. Birds began calling from all parts of the garden and two red winged starlings landed on the kitchen roof and sat giving their throaty alarm calls. By the time I had washed and dressed and started the water boiling for my coffee in the kitchen, all hell was let loose and birds were coming in from every direction. Drongoes, paradise fly catchers and weavers were going mad. There was something special happening.

I got my field glasses and walked outside. Our small group of Africans had already gathered and they pointed to the top branches of the tree near the vegetable garden. With birds coming in like attacking spit-

fires I found the snake in my first sweep. A black headed oriole sat screeching at it from a few centimetres away and a tiny sunbird swooped in, its wings brushing against the body of the snake. It really was an enormous boomslang, as thick as my wrist and it looked three metres long. This was undoubtedly Magqubu's "nyoka nkulu."

We watched the natural drama for most of the morning and it was more exciting than any TV spectacular. My African friends eventually asked when I was going to help the birds and shoot the snake. The thought had crossed my mind and I was tempted. But I took no action and by evening it had gone and the birds were quiet.
