

Ian Player



***Man and the
Wilderness***

Man and the Wilderness

To:

Dr Gloria Gearing, whose practical Jungian interpretation of my dreams led me to appreciate that the inner wilderness is as valid as the outer wilderness I have long explored.

IAN PLAYER

Illustrations by Nola Steele

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Man's mindless destruction of nature in focus

I WALKED behind my Zulu friend and mentor Magqubu Ntombela a few weeks ago, following a rhino path that led from Amatshenyama to the Black Umfolozi river then through the themeda grasslands on the slopes of the long ridge coming down from what was once part of Dingiswayo's kraal on Amatshemhlope.

Now 86 years old, Magqubu still walks uphill at the same pace as downhill. His calves and thigh muscles are as strong as ever and in his haversack he carries everything he needs. He just laughs when I plead to him to slow down a little as I trip over roots.

"You are thinking too much, you must look where you are walking. You are still young, Madolo." (My Zulu name, The Knee). "Do you realise that I was walking along this same path with Vaughan Kirby and Roden Symons and Captain Potter?"

I keep him talking so that I can rest my weary bones a little. I have walked many thousands of miles behind him over the past 30 years never ceasing to marvel at his uncanny sense which enables him to scan ahead, behind and to the sides, reading the faintest signs on the path, smelling the air and looking with those incredibly sharp eyes. It has enabled me to relax and to think, knowing that he will pick up danger signs and communicate them with the movement of a hand, a nod of his head or the stiffening of his body, and sometimes I pick up his thoughts telepathically.

On this warm winter day



with the smell of dry dust and crushed tarconanthus leaves in the air I followed the old man, thinking about man and the earth.

What the hell is homo sapiens, or perhaps it should be "non sapiente", doing to the world? We are breeding like flies and destroying everything in our path. Yet when I read the newspapers there are only two subjects that dominate the headlines: politics and economics. Are these the sole *raison d'être* of our existence? We are destroying species of birds, animals, insects and plants at a faster rate than ever before. The conservationists fight for a better world but with a few exceptions the battles are rearguard and guerilla actions against the stupidity of the state, individuals and institutions. It is a constant effort to bring the mindless destruction into focus.

I was at Charters Creek on Lake St Lucia not ten days ago and the Forestry Depart-

ment had cut down seven kilometres of indigenous trees, many of them mature beautiful *mdonis*. They are going to plant pine trees in their place. This will lead to the drying up of one of the few streams on the western shores and the reedbuck will not survive, neither will the grassland birds.

The road through Stainbank Nature Reserve has become an issue again. Many people overlook the fact that creatures besides man are involved but they have no vote, no economic muscle. The red bush duiker, the bushbuck, the Natal robin: who is going to speak for them? Stainbank Nature Reserve is the last indigenous area within metropolitan Durban. If it is destroyed what will the people in 2050 have to say?

It is only when it is too late that we realize what we have lost. Once in the 1930s there was a plan for a game reserve which would have linked Hluhluwe, Umfolozi and Lake St Lucia into one large Park.

Too late now. There is a chance to have Mkuze and the Lake joined as one reserve, but that hope is withering on the vine.

Earlier in the month we were at Southbroom. The sea was blue and clear and pockets of sardines were followed by diving gannets and gulls. I didn't dare think ahead to January when the sea would be heavy with black silt, so I watched the diving birds and enjoyed the moment. Then a whale surfaced, the first I had seen off the South African shore in 40 years. I hoped it was now safe from a whaler. A school of porpoises glis-

tening in the sunlight came swimming gracefully past. I held my breath as they neared the shark nets. In our efforts to save the lives of a few swimmers we condemn many porpoises to death, we do damage to other marine life and we upset natural balances.

Magqubu stopped and

raised his hand. A black rhino was browsing on the fresh shoots of an mkia tree. He turned round and smiled at me with his perfect teeth. "That woke you up, didn't it Madolo?" he said.

We stood behind trees and watched it move slowly up the hill until the oxpeckers alerted it and it spun around

and stared in our direction. As we man and it the beast looked at each other I remembered something I think of T.S. Eliot's along the lines of ". . . we shall not desist from exploration and the end of our exploration will be to arrive where we started, and will be to know the place for the first time."



Domestic play on the banks of the Umfolozi

IT was getting dark and as I stood beside the fire I heard Magqubu give a low whistle. He had gone down to the river to get water and I knew from 30 years of association that he had seen something important.

I had only recently returned from an exhausting three-month journey in America and this was my first trail. My senses were not attuned to the bush and I stumbled as I moved down the path to Magqubu. "Sssh," he whispered, his finger on his lips. His body was rigid and he stared across the wide expanse of white sand of the Black Umfolozi River towards the Amatshenyama cliffs.

In the crepuscular light with the evening star rising on the horizon and the crickets starting their incessant songs of the night, I became aware of the reason for Magqubu's whistle. It was a white rhino calf that could not have been more than a week old.

It was trotting behind the mother, a sure sign of how young it must have been because white rhino calves run in front of the mother after they are a few weeks old. The

black rhino is different — the calf always runs behind.

The cow and calf arrived at the river's edge and the cow began drinking the dark water. I could hear the sound of the sucking of long draughts, then a sigh as air was expelled before drinking started again.

The krantz behind the animals was a great aid to the acoustics, acting like a giant dish against which the sound bounced off and echoed upstream towards us. The calf then moved under the mother's belly and its almost cat-like whimpering drifted across on the still night air.

Magqubu and I stood watching a scene that had been re-enacted for millions of years. The sky above us began to glow with stars; Scorpio appeared on the horizon and the pointers to the Southern Cross shone brightly.

Magqubu nudged me and nodded in the direction of the rhino. The calf had become playful and was racing up and down the sands like a puppy chasing its own tail. It ran round and round the mother, then up the beach towards us, back to the mother again, under the

stomach and up the bank to a log where it had a mock fight, its tiny head weaving and butting the unmoveable log.

The cow continued drinking impassively, pausing now and then for another long exhalation of breath. The sound disturbed a troop of baboons on the cliffs. They began barking and screaming and the air was filled with noise. The calf shot back to its mother, taking refuge under her stomach.

The cow was unperturbed and now in the starlight I could see her large outline against the background of the krantz. The calf appeared again, peering in the direction of the noise of the barking baboons, and it made a dummy rush in the baboons' direction as though to say "If you do that again I will really charge you."

The thirst of the mother was satisfied and she moved from the edge of the river and began walking along the sands towards the bush. The calf chased some imaginary foe, then realised the cow was going and it raced back and trotted at its mother's heels.

We watched them climb the bank and slip into the

darkness of the bush.

Magqubu and I walked back to the fire of our trail camp. He said nothing for he knew I had soaked up the experience like a sponge in water. This was Africa and its welcoming back.

For many years the white rhino and its plight had been the main focus of my life. From the first time I had seen them on a rainy, misty day with hordes of flies clinging to their flanks and their heads held low as they fed on the short grass, they had cap-

tivated me.

On this night after many months in America, nature had allowed me to witness an intimate domestic scene of white rhinos. I could not have asked for a finer welcoming-home present.

THE eight-hour journey across the Atlantic from London to San Francisco and the eight-hour time change was only made bearable by British Airways staff, polite, forbearing and always helpful. We gave it full marks as an airline.

We landed first in Los Angeles where a howling Santa Ana desert wind had sent temperatures into the eighties and crowds to the beach. San Francisco was almost 30 degrees cooler and our taxi driver said not a word on the journey to our hotel except when I asked him if the cable cars were working again. He granted affirmatively.

San Francisco's skyline had changed dramatically since I first saw it in 1964 but the city seems to have the capacity for absorbing all architectural design, and there is a greater variety here than in any other city I know. The steep hills and vast bay put man made structures into another perspective.

My wife and I holed up in a hotel for two days, avoiding everyone and telling no one of our arrival, so that we could get over the time change shock. My eyes go out of focus, there are memory lapses and the body struggles to adjust.

On Saturday we went down to Fishermans Wharf and took the ferry boat out to

Alcatraz Island. I had been there before when it was first opened by the National Park Service. It had now been discovered with a vengeance and we queued, along with 500 other people after paying \$4 for the trip.

The name Alcatraz has reverberated around the world

Horrors of the island prison, Alcatraz

and as the boat made its way through the cold waters of San Francisco Bay towards the rocky island I suddenly remembered something. Years ago there was a brand of golden syrup with a lion on the tin and a swarm of bees hovering about. A little inscription said: "Out of the strong came forth sweetness". So it was with Alcatraz, once a place of great unhappiness, even misery and degradation, it had now become an attraction of strange curiosity and a money spinner.

We trooped off the boat into a cold wind onto "The Rock" as the prisoners called it. Gulls called overhead and the bay waters crashed against a cliff face. A formidable and spirit dampening place. My wife looked at me as though to say What on earth are we doing here?

We walked up a long, steep

concrete road after a briefing and short slide show by the Park Service. I had some inkling of what the unfortunate prisoners must have felt when they arrived and were given their briefing. Amongst other things the warden told them that 75 percent of the fish in the bay were sharks. Enough to put anyone off trying to escape even if one wanted to swim in the icy waters.

tory of the island is a military one, first as a fortress then later as a military prison.

It was only in the early 1930s that it became a federal penitentiary for the worst inmates of all the prisons in the United States. The total capacity was 300 men and there was one guard to every three prisoners. It was not a rehabilitation centre and it was run on a privilege system. Even to work was a privilege.

Rules and regulations were numerous, including one that insisted all prisoners had to have their top shirt button fastened at all times. After no black marks a prisoner would get writing material or be permitted to read a book. A relative or visitor would be allowed to visit them once a month and they were allowed out onto the recreation yard. Heaven compared to dark, heavily barred cells of special hacksaw-proof steel.

firm friend of mine. We were bonded by the pain of the woman and that long night journey to Ingwavuma.

On my most recent visit I caught up on years of gossip

from Span Gumede who worked in the garden but is now a proud and efficient game guard. We walked with him through the riverine forest and talked at great length

about those early days.

I will never forget that first night at Ndumu because I realised with a deep sense of shock that man was part of the food chain.

Destroying the earth

In 1953 the late Hendrick van Schoor, senior ranger, and I carried out the first aerial count of the white rhino in the Umfolozi game reserve and the adjoining corridor. We had as pilot a man who had been flying during the tsetse fly campaigns when the game reserves were dusted with DDT day after day. He knew every stream, hill and valley and flushed out with great skill the white rhinos hiding in the thick bush below Ngqoloti and in other areas. Our count was as accurate as it was possible to be and the data served as a base for all the other aerial counts that have taken place down the years.

I remember flying early one morning and looking beyond the Mtunzini and Ukuku mountains and seeing as it were for the first time the overgrazed and abused earth with long erosion gullies and gaping open patches in grassland of windblown erosion. I could see the paths of cattle and goats leading through stony passes down to the Black Umfolozi river. I saw too the Mona river with little vegetation to hold its banks, and the other signs of land trying to withstand the heavy punishment of man and beast.

An intuitive premonition came to mind and I wondered how long it would be before the whole intricate

system I saw before me collapsed under the strain of too much pressure. The disasters came in the shape of floods, the first in 1957, the second in 1963 and the third, Demoina, in 1984. The last one did such damage that the country can never be the same again.

The reason for the initial damage lies in the history



books, mostly unread except by scholarly historians not noted for any evangelical fervour to save the land. History shows us that after the battle at Tshaneni and the Bambatha Rebellion, land was taken from the Zulus and carved into farms by the whites.

The Zulus were pushed into what were then called Native Reserves and were expected to farm in areas where even the most skilled agriculturalist would have had difficulty in surviving, let alone being economically viable.

Farming on steep hillslopes requires the most delicate understanding and I have only seen it done properly in one part of the world, the northern part of the island of Luzon in the Philippine Islands. But that was an agricultural settlement which had begun a thousand years before the birth of Christ.

While it is true that many white owned Zululand farms were eventually purchased and handed back to the Zulus, other factors had come into play. Modern medicine reduced infant mortality, most laudable, but without the corresponding birth control instruction it could only lead to exploding populations.

This is a story that can be repeated in many places in Africa, with different tribes playing the same role as the whites have in Southern Africa. To mention only one: Ethiopia. In a recent World Watch Institute booklet, Lester Brown and Edward Wolf report that the US Embassy in Addis Ababa indicated that the Ethiopian highlands were losing over a billion tons of topsoil per year through erosion. It was only when this was translated into images of starving Ethiopian children on television screens around the world some six years later that the gradual loss of topsoil acquired a human dimension.

When are we going to learn that to talk about agricultural and industrial potential is self delusion until there is an understanding about the critical value of catchment areas, the need to reduce our numbers and how sensitive our ecosystems are to the slightest abuse.

We in Natal are now going into our summer season and if there is normal rainfall we shall see the Indian ocean heavy with the silt of the uplands. Right before our very eyes will be the most serious symptoms of the land sickness. Yet by far the majority of people will look upon it as a natural phenomenon because they now know nothing better. It is estimated that

one 50 acre farm goes into the sea every day from the Tugela. On my most recent trail in the Umfolozi game reserve there was a deposit of 4 centimetres of mud at the bottom of a 5 gallon pail. Multiply that a few times and it is hardly a surprise that the sea becomes a chocolate colour.

Nature responds swiftly when she is treated kindly and with understanding. She is incredibly tolerant in taking abuse, but when she has had enough she reacts with devastating ferocity. Anyone who saw the Umfolozi rivers during Demoina will never forget the sight of everything being swept away. But this only happened where there

had been callousness and no understanding of ecosystems.

The stupidity of man's treatment and attitude to the earth is enough to turn us into an endangered species, let alone our propensity for making hydrogen bombs. To harm the earth is to harm mankind, to destroy the earth will be to destroy mankind. Will we ever learn.

General J.C. Smuts once remarked, probably in a moment of despair, that he wondered if mankind would survive but was certain the insects would. Cockroaches have been around for about 80 million years. What an indictment that the miserable cockroach may out survive homo sapiens.



Symbols of Africa

A FEW weeks ago I sat in the bird hide at Giant's Castle game reserve in the Drakensberg. Some meat had been put out and it was not long before birds began to arrive.

A small flock of red-winged starlings flew from a dark krantz and began feeding. They were soon chased away by a jackal buzzard which gave way to two enormous black eagles, picking with their strong curved beaks at the meat. They carried on oblivious of our presence, or if they knew we were there they ignored us. Their plumage was magnificent — black feathers and strong white V on the back.

I remembered the words of James Hillman, a brilliant modern Jungian scholar. He said that of all birds the eagle was the king and that it appears as the emblem of kings and kingdoms.



“At the cremation of a Roman Emperor an eagle was released near the funeral pyre to conduct the imperial

soul to the heavens. Only the eagle it is said can look directly into the sun, as Moses into the face of God,

river. We built a toilet there once and there was no better view in the reserve. I saw the fenceline that now encompassed part of the southern and western buffer zones and the famous corridor between Hluhluwe and Umfolozi.

How we had fought to have that land incorporated into the game reserves. Prime Minister, Cabinet Minister and Administrators, and VIPS from every part of the western world were taken around and talked to for days and hours on end. So were newspaper men, radio men and film men.

I saw places where game guards I had known were killed by poachers and other guards badly wounded protecting this tiny remnant of wild Africa. Both white and black men who had worked here grew to have a fierce love for the place. The struggle is by no means over, there is always someone wanting to use the land for something else.

The aeroplane circled Ulundi and I saw the small monument in the middle of the plain that marked the spot where the British fought the last battle of the Zulu War in 1879. There is a most moving plaque in the monument which says: "To the brave Zulu warriors who died here in defence of the old Zulu order". Until the centenary of 1979 it was the only recognition to the Zulus at a monument.

But on Ulundi plain the phoenix is rising from the ashes of that most unjust of wars. A new generation of Zulus led by Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi and a dedicated Cabinet helped by black officials and white officials has built a new Ulundi.

And they have not forgotten their history. King Cetshwayo's old kraal site houses the traditional Zulu hut and a modern museum, an example of what can be done when men are keen, unlike those who have looked after our own battlefields.

As the plane came in to land I thought how proud King Cetshwayo would have been to see his once defeated people erecting a modern city on the plain. The old Zulu order of tradition, dignity, courage was revitalised here and will play a decisive part in the future of Southern Africa.

The forest symposium was attended by the whole Cabinet and all the members of the Legislative Assembly. This happens nowhere else in the world. The Zulu government is determined to set an example to all its people and to let them know how important conservation is. An example that could well be fol-

lowed.

When I returned home I read Alan Paton's Hoernle Lecture, advocating federation for South Africa, starting with Natal/KwaZulu. I remembered a story that Laurens van der Post once told me, how before bombing Pearl Harbour the Japanese hierarchy had not consulted the I Ching, the Chinese Book of Changes. When Pearl harbour was burning, one of those who had wanted to consult the I Ching said: "Today we lost the war".

I have wanted but been afraid to ask the I Ching about South Africa's future. But on my return from my visit to Ulundi and seeing what Alan Paton had to say, I consulted the Richard Wilhelm translation of the I Ching, using the coin method. Hexagram 45 — "Gathering together. Success", — came out.

You can scorn it or be comforted by it.



The hard days of rhino capture

DARKNESS comes early to the bushveld at this time of the year, so Magqubu and I made sure we got back to our trail camp in time to prepare food and get the camp in order before the night. After dinner, a simple one, we sat next to the fire, drinking coffee and staring at the embers of the burning wood. The night was filled with the fragrance of the woodsmoke, two owls were calling and we could hear a black rhino snapping young sapplings in an nthombothi grove nearby.

Magqubu chuckled. I asked why he was laughing and he pointed to a white

rhino skull bleached by years of sun, on the edge of the fire.

"That skull reminded me of iNganisekoos," he said. This was John Clark's Zulu name, given to him because he joined the Natal Parks Board the day my first son was born.

"Do you remember how he always worked barefoot and you used to get so angry when you took important visitors to the bomas and iNganisekoos would come without shoes and carrying something for one of the rhino." Magqubu shook with laughter and described the look on

my face, with the kind of detail that only he is capable of when he really wants to make sure you will not misunderstand what he is talking about.

"Those white rhino in the bomas were like his children," Magqubu said. "He never stopped worrying about them, only he could get into a crate with a fully grown bull and know that he was safe. He knew how to think like a rhino and they would recognise his voice when he returned to the bomas after being away for a few days".

Soon we were recalling those early and hard days of operation rhino and the wonderful men who worked to make it one of the great success stories of wildlife conservation.

The house we lived in was on top of Mpila hill and I can remember being awakened one night by a tremendous noise of rhino bellowing and men's shouts. The next morning I rode down to the bomas and John Clark told me that there were two female rhino on heat. They had attracted bulls from the reserve and he had woken up to see a fully grown white rhino bull standing on its back legs, its front legs on the crossbar of the entrance to a boma. He had rushed shouting at the animal which dropped down and chased him. John ran into a crate to escape but the rhino followed. Fortunately there is an inspection hatch on top of the crate and he got out as the rhino hooked at him.

There were constant problems with drugs and darts. The darts were 20cc capacity and as bacilli on the skin made it impossible to keep the needles sterile, the



wounds always turned septic. The large amount of liquid injected caused infection over a big area and some of the wounds were so bad John had to put his whole hand in to scoop out the pus. Then new drugs, smaller darts and stronger antibiotics overcame earlier problems and capture became less harrowing. A sick rhino can make the most pathetic and heart rending calls.

"Do you remember Ngozi?" Magqubu asked, and launched into the long and involved story of a black rhino we had had to catch because a thick cable snare around her neck had eaten deep into the flesh. Septicaemia had taken over and the smell of the wound was overpowering. She was darted and brought to the bomas. Within a few days she was tame and would come when called and stand, her head cocked on one side, waiting for antibiotic liquid and powder to be poured into the wound. She recovered completely and was taken to Ndumu game reserve and released on the shores of the Nyamithi pan.

Magqubu laughed quietly and said reminiscently,

"What about the time Malamba (Nick Steele) was following that rhino calf that had been darted and the mother turned and charged him. Malambo stood on his horse's back and climbed into a tree."

Magqubu recalled the horse's name, the size of the calf and the long horn of the female rhino. Nick told me at the time that the rhino cow had hooked his horse and thrown it a good two metres off the ground, and for a split second Nick found himself staring into the horse's eyes. We rushed into the glade, chased the cow off, took the calf then injected large quantities of antibiotics into the horse. It recovered and a few months later was back at work on rhino capture.

The fire died down and Magqubu yawned. It was time to sleep.

As we lay looking through the canopy of trees into the vastness of the universe with the millions of glittering stars, Magqubu said that the stories of rhino capture would be passed on by father to son. They would never end. We must thank Nkulunkulu for letting us be alive to see it all.

parks to get away from the stresses of their daily lives and they want to see live animals and are not interested in how much money is made from the dead ones. Wildlife administrators should be very sensitive and make certain that culling is done so that it is neither seen nor heard by the average visitor.

I would have liked to have

told those two young men about the ancient hunters.

The Red Indians talked to the animals they were going to kill, explaining that they needed their flesh and hide to survive. The old aborigines of Queensland used to point out a kangaroo and follow it, calling its name. Very soon the animals would be feeding

near the huts again, in the same way as after a lion kill.

Economics is not everything. How do you place monetary value on the sight of a springbok jumping on a Karoo morning? Or the heart call of fish eagle on a lake. Or the roar of a lion before the dawn. Or the silence of the bush on a winter's night. These are priceless.



The rewards of silence

AS the trail of six people followed the dusty rhino path through a glade of nthombothi trees near the Tjevu river, there was a constant murmur of voices. It irritated me beyond measure because they were depriving themselves of all sorts of experiences.

It was also dangerous because it distracted Magqubu's attention and it could alert a black rhino. I reflected that scientists claimed that it had taken a long time for man to develop speech, but by Jove since he got started he has never stopped.

Nor is there any truth in the female of the species being worse than the male. My experience has generally been to the contrary. Women appreciate the bush atmosphere more than men do.

"Hau!" Magqubu exploded exasperatedly. He stopped the trail. "You must tell these people to keep quiet. They must listen to the bush and they will learn secrets they never dreamt of."

He looked at me carefully then he smiled and his eyes glinted as I told the trailers what he had said. I knew that look only too well. For 30 years I had been walking with him and nothing tickled

his sense of humour more than to see people festooned on thorn trees while a black rhino ran snorting around like a steam engine. I put it sharply and plainly: "Shut up or he will frighten the hell out of us."

The party kept quiet and we walked on towards the muddy pools of the Tjevu. A flock of white helmet shrikes fluttered in the trees nearby and on our left two big kudu bulls trotted along the opposite bank. The sun shone through their long manes and oxpeckers ran up and down their backs, feeding on the bulging blue ticks.

Magqubu raised his hand and cocked his head on one side. We froze and listened. He mouthed the word *mfeni* — baboons, and pointed to our right. I couldn't see any but heard chewing in an *mpafa* tree. The baboons were feeding on the berries.

A troop moved ahead of us feeding on various pods, leaves and berries. They seemed to be communicating with one another in little soft grunts. It was like being an uninvited guest at a family gathering. Then an old dog baboon came around a *schothia* tree, saw us and gave a

short bark.

For a few seconds there was silence and I saw one young baboon hurriedly drop a pawful of berries. This set the whole troop off and they vanished into the woodland like grey ghosts.

We rested on the warm sand of the river under the shade of giant acacia *robusta* trees and the air was heavy with the smell of their flowers.

I told the group how in earlier days when I had walked alone with Magqubu we had seen many strange and interesting sights because we had kept quiet. Once we had watched a herd of impala and warthog feeding on sycamore figs on the bank of a river. A baboon was in the tree above them, chasing the youngsters. They were barking and screaming and the game below took no notice and continued feeding. Suddenly the baon saw us and gave a different kind of bark. Instantly the impala and warthog stopped feeding and looked up in alarm.

It was the same when we were watching an old rhino bull that had oxpeckers feeding near its ears. They were making what sounded like

their normal churring and the rhino took no notice. When the birds became aware of us the pitch of their churring changed just so slightly and instantly the rhino swung around, alert and ready for flight.

On another occasion we lay hidden in the tall phragmites reeds near the White Umfolozi river. We were watching a bushbuck doe suckling its

young. A troop of vervet monkeys came past and two of them hopped onto the back of the bushbuck and began scratching around in her fur. The bushbuck took no notice. She continued feeding her faun. A leopard stalked out of a clearing and when we stood up for a better view the bushbuck fled. But this time the vervets ignored us and chattered incessantly at the leopard.

They obviously considered it more dangerous than we were.

Yes, there is a lot to be said for silent walking and watching. Laurens van der Post says it gives one a sense of an inner tapping, for life is not only an outward journey but an inward one too. And silence helps to make one aware of this, particularly in the bush.

THE sun had gone down and the bush was hushed and waiting for the darkness. A hyena's long whooping call seemed to trigger off a whole host of night sounds: the deep grunting sawing cough of a leopard, a tree frog, Scops owls and in the distance the booming calls of a pride of lions. The trailers I was leading moved a little

We had our supper, drank coffee then continued the conversation about fear. But campfire conversations on a trail are not stereotyped affairs. There are silences to listen to the different sounds. A bat swishing out of the darkness. The wind in the fig trees and the dry leaves rustling down. A black rhino snorting across the river and

the animal survival instincts took over.

Later in life, I discovered the difference between physical and moral fear. I remembered the terrible effort required to stand up at a public meeting and ask a question. My knees were knocking, my throat dry and the deep pounding of my heart was almost deafening. Each of us

Coming to terms with our fear

closer to the fire. I was reminded of Kipling's Mowgli stories — "It is fear, little brother, it is fear."

ESP was at work because someone asked me if I was ever afraid in the bush. The answer was yes, all the time, because the moment you ceased to have fear, you could be killed.

Conducting trails for the Wilderness Leadership School as I and my brother field officers had been doing for many years, had taught us to be cautious. Our job was to avoid danger and only to use a firearm in an absolute emergency. With me this had happened twice in 25 years and in each case the animals had been injured by humans.

the melodious whistle of a greenshank. This is a nocturnal rhythm that gently forces its attention.

We drank more coffee and continued talking about fear. I was unashamed to say that it had stalked me all my life, wanting to overwhelm me. I remember waiting outside the headmaster's office. I could still recall the smell of his pipe tobacco and see the veins on his hands as he gripped the cane he was going to beat me with. But after the first biting pain of that cane, the fear went and a stoicism set in. There was the fear before my first fist fight with a boy who in my fevered imagination looked as big as a giant. But the first punch drove out the fear and

sitting around the fire had similar experiences and we had all felt the cold hand of fear touch the heart. But in almost all cases it was the anticipation that was the worst.

Carl Jung who studied and understood the human psyche, had this to say: "A man who has no more fear is on the brink of an abyss. Only if he suffers from a pathological excess of fear can he be cured with impunity."

I was conscious of a better feeling among the group of trailers because we had talked out our fears. The hyenas were closer and the lions were roaring nearby. Somehow it didn't seem to worry anyone now. We had come to grips with our fears.