

Photo: P. W. Willis

A full-grown giraffe bull drinking

SOUTH AFRICAN EDEN

FROM SABI GAME RESERVE TO
KRUGER NATIONAL PARK

By

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Warden of the Kruger National Park

With 26 half-tone illustrations



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CHAPTER VIII

1923-1924

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IT was mentioned in the last chapter that the Pretoria meeting, at which the Sabi Game Reserve was theoretically rent in pieces, was in fact the herald of a new era ; its outcome proved the truth of the adage that it is always darkest before dawn. I had several satisfactory interviews with Colonel Reitz, one result of which was that he agreed to pay a visit to the Reserve during the coming dry season, and to see things for himself.

Accordingly in August, 1923, he duly arrived in his official capacity, attended by Sommerville, the Secretary of the Lands Department, and his Private Secretary, Nesor. Apprised of the intended visit, some members of the Executive Committee of the Provincial Council thought they also would enjoy the trip, and Dr. Hjalmar Reitz (Colonel Reitz's brother), Messrs. Stoffberg and Kretschmar, with Mr. van Velden, the Provincial Secretary, accompanied the Minister ; the party being made up by Dr. Haagner, then Chairman of the Wild Life Protection Society. This was the first time since 1903 that the Reserve had been visited officially by any members of the Government or Administration. But Cinderella was now coming into her own ! I met the party at Komati Poort, and travelled up with them in their private coach to Reserve Siding, just across the Sabi, where they spent the night. All the way up in the train, some of the members were excitedly commenting on such game as they could see on either side of the line, and discussing the sport they expected to have on the following day ! I then discovered that before leaving Pretoria

the members of the Executive had passed a resolution giving themselves special permission to shoot in the Reserve ! This would never do, it might have all kinds of repercussions ; so I lost no time in surreptitiously enlisting the remainder of the party to combat so exceedingly dangerous a precedent. I believe a heated argument round the camp fire went on far into the night and that opinions were about equally divided for and against the shooting plan. The deciding factor, I understand, was the discovery that a great deal of the land we were going to travel over was the property of private owners, by whose consent it had been included in the Reserve, and that these would certainly not tacitly permit members of the Provincial Council to exercise privileges denied to them as owners. Moreover, with a Council election brewing, it was realized that the violation of the Reserve's sanctity by the very people who had, or were supposed to have, the task of protecting it, would be made full use of by political opponents.

I had of course put our side wise to the fact that, only the year before, Greathead and party, representing the landowners, had been refused permission to shoot on their own land in the Reserve, and that Greathead, at that very moment only a few miles away, on the newly opened cattle ranch, would, immediately know all about what they were doing. In the background hovered the Minister of Lands, all ready to put an embargo on shooting on government land within a sanctuary ! Anyhow the danger passed, and we spent a pleasant week driving about in two large mule trolleys, and my buckboard. We visited Saliji, Lower Sabi, and Tshokwane, and, though no roads existed and the native mule drivers generally drove their teams at an animated canter through bush and long grass, no serious accident occurred ; the damage being confined to one broken spring, and one smashed wheel.

At Saliji, on a hint from Colonel Reitz that it might further the social amenities if some gesture were made, that would at once do something to assuage the disappointed zeal of the hunters and be an acknowledgment of the good-natured way in which they had abandoned their first intentions, I went out with them, and shot a wildebeest for food. Just as we

had stepped up to, and were contemplating the fallen animal, there was a "click" behind us, and van Velden emerged from the shelter of a bush, camera in hand, announcing that he had got an excellent photograph of "members of the Executive Committee poaching in the Game Reserve" which he thought might do for the Press! But I think even before this, the "atmosphere" had got its grip on the party, and, towards the end of the trip, there was nothing heard except talk of wild life preservation and national parks. Indeed I don't believe that, at the end, a single member had the faintest desire to shoot anything.

Colonel Deneys Reitz was by this time enthusiastically in the national park scheme, and, as a first step, proposed at once to translate theory into practice by approaching the landowners in regard to the disposal of their farms. Meantime, as a result of discussions in Pretoria earlier in the year, Major Scott, Chairman of the Land Board, with Mr. Schoch, late Surveyor-General, were already travelling in the Reserve, valuing the private farms, identifying beacons, and generally getting an idea of the situation. I fancy the work of a land surveyor, at least in countries such as South Africa, must be about the most healthy one a man can lead. Mr. Schoch for instance—though well past sixty years of age—could walk untiringly all day long, however rough the going and hot the sun, discarding every means of conveyance other than his own legs, and I must say all the surveyors I have happened to come across have been of the same pattern. Major Scott, who though considerably younger, possessed what one may term a figure, found, I imagine, his companion a little over-strenuous.

Things now began to move. Dr. Schoch, brother of the late Surveyor-General, and legal adviser to the Government, an enthusiastic sportsman, and then, as now, a great pillar of wild life preservation, drafted a "National Parks Ordinance" which, practically unaltered, later became law. The Wild Life Protection Society started an energetic campaign, and the Railway Administration began to make "Visits to the Reserve" a prominent feature of their Round in Nine tours. It was clear, however, that it would be out of the question for Government to acquire either by purchase or exchange the whole of

the two and a half million odd acres which was the total of private land within the Sabi Reserve. Fortunately the whole of the old portion of the sanctuary, to wit, that lying between the Sabi and the Crocodile Rivers, as well as the whole of the Shingwedsi Reserve, was Crown land, and the private farms lay entirely between the Olifants River in the north, and the Sabi River in the south. In that region there was a big block of government farms lying towards the east along the Ngwanetsi River, and another, known as the "Alexandra Block," in the south-west corner between the Sand and Sabi Rivers; but to make these part of a national park while releasing the private land, would have implied a sanctuary consisting of two big blocks in north and south, and some small isolated ones in the middle; separated from one another by so much private property as to render adequate supervision of the future Park very difficult.

I had long foreseen the likelihood of a portion of the Sabi Reserve having to be deproclaimed, and as long ago as 1913, at the suggestion of Mr. Johann Rissik, had drawn out a plan under which the area between the Olifants and the Sabi Rivers was bisected by a line which followed roughly the meridian of $31^{\circ} 30'$. When, therefore, Colonel Deneys Reitz, feeling that a preliminary to any expropriation of private land would have to be the discarding of a large part of the present Reserve, asked me to draw up a new western boundary line, it was only a matter of defining on the map exactly what farm beacons should be followed. The result was to take out 1,000,000 acres of private land and some 500,000 the property of the Government, the latter including the sheep grazing area west of Pretorius Kop. The 4,000,000 odd acres which remained still contained about seventy private farms with a total acreage of roughly 500,000; not an insoluble proposition for purchase or exchange, if the Government was really determined to create a national park. I had included in my plan two little wedges on the south-west, intruding into the "grazing area," one to take in the ranger's quarters opposite Kaapmuiden on the Crocodile River (which however were soon after moved to Malelane) and another those of Ranger Wolhuter at Mtimba. The former, the less important of the two, was duly included;

but, apparently by a typing omission of two lines, the latter was overlooked, and I did not know anything about it until the new boundaries were in the *Gazette* and it proved too late to have any alteration made.

Therefore, at the end of 1923, having surrendered, as the price of achieving permanency for the remainder of the Reserve, some 2,500 square miles of territory, which included the best of the sable and roan antelope country, as well as that containing all the red, or Natal duiker, and nearly all the mountain reedbeek, I rested in the confident expectation that the desired legislation would be passed during the next session of Parliament.

But alas for premature hopes! Colonel Reitz had asked me to come to Capetown in January to help him with advice on technical points, and so it was a sad shock to receive a wire during that month instructing me not to come, as the "National Parks Bill had been dropped." So there we were, in the position of having given a lot away, and got nothing in return. I gathered that the decisive factor was a deadlock in the negotiations with the land companies regarding the price to be paid for their farms still remaining in the Reserve. Wherever the responsibility for failure may have lain, it was most disappointing; but in reality, though one did not appreciate this at the time, it was probably just as well that the Bill did not come before Parliament then. There had not yet been nearly enough propaganda in the country, and the public was far from being awakened. I feel pretty certain indeed that had the Act then gone to Parliament, it would have emerged in so mutilated a form as to be not fully effective for its purpose. The whole thing had been pushed on in a hurry, largely on the enthusiasm of the Minister concerned, and there had been no time, by a widespread Press campaign, to get the politicians and the public into the right frame of mind.

Early in 1924 there was a general election, and a change of government. While the former was still pending I met one day, in the street in Pretoria, Mr. Oswald Pirow, an old acquaintance, who besides being a keen sportsman and strong supporter of the Game Reserve, was a prominent member of

the Nationalist Party, under whom he was shortly to hold Cabinet rank. I told him of my troubles, and explained how in my belief they had come about. He was sympathetic and encouraging; said that if, as expected, his Party got into power, he would push the national park scheme with the new Cabinet for all he was worth, and that he did not consider they would have any difficulty in getting legislation passed to make expropriation of private land within the Reserve compulsory, if need be. He was I believe as good, or even better than his word, and I think a good deal of what happened later was directly due to his efforts.

Meantime we just carried on. The excision of so much of the Reserve at the end of 1923 had at least quieted opposition for the time being, and I felt that we had breathing space in which to reconstruct plans; but nothing could be done until the new government was firmly settled in the saddle.

From 1923 there commenced an annual visit by the Barberton Boy Scouts, under their Scoutmaster—Mr. Yates—who incidentally was a brother-in-law of Wolhuter. They used to come by train to Malelane, and spend a few days camping close to the Crocodile River. We provided one or more native police to guide them, and generally to see that they came to no harm. By day, walks were taken in the bush to view the animals. Firewood was collected for the camp fire, and all the Scout ritual, including night watch, faithfully performed under conditions more realistic than falls to the lot of Scouts in most other parts of the world; for though I did not hear of one actually doing so, a lion was quite likely to come prowling round the camp in the hours of darkness, and the Scout on night sentry go could certainly listen with appropriate thrills to the voices of the wilderness during the dark watches, while all the others slept. It was a popular trip, and cut both ways, being good for the boys and helpful to the Reserve. These visits continued until the days when the sanctuary was thrown open to the general public, rest camps provided and roads made; until civilization had really descended upon us, and the Wild Spirit, resentful at what she saw, sometimes hid her face. The happy culmination, in short, of my efforts during so many years.

So far back as 1920, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association had been conveying native recruits from Portuguese Territory through the Shingwedi Reserve from the Limpopo-Pafuri junction to Punda Maria, at first by donkey wagons, and later in big Thorneycroft lorries. They had made an excellent road thence all the way to their headquarters at Zoemakaar, more than a hundred miles away. In 1922 a similar service was inaugurated through Satara to Acornhoek, and at intervals of fifteen miles or so along the road, corrugated iron "lion proof" shelters were erected to protect their donkeys by night : a very necessary precaution.

I recollect a Public Works Department Inspector once travelling through the Reserve with a wagon and a team of government donkeys. One night lions stampeded them ; killed three and scattered the others, which were not recovered for some time. The Inspector turned out with his rifle, but unluckily when it came to charging the weapon, he found that he had brought cartridges for some other sized bore. I had better luck when one day my own donkeys, eight of them, strayed away from a camp on the Hlambamaduba River. I had to send back twenty-five miles to Sabi Bridge for the ox wagon to move the camp, and it was a week before the first donkey was recovered. Yet, marvellous to relate of a lion country, although it was two months before the last one was found by the ganger wandering along the railway line, all were eventually retrieved. They were picked up by ones and twos over about fifty square miles of country by the searchers who were out all the time, and, except that one had been slightly clawed, perhaps by a leopard, they were all quite undamaged, although exceedingly wild. One cannot explain these things. If a valuable horse had strayed, it would probably have fallen a victim the very first night.

Similar good fortune to that which had attended the desertion of the donkeys, befell for a time the tame eland, the last of the herd which was being built up before the war. Finding, no doubt, the cattle dull companions, and eager to discover one of his own kind, he repeatedly absented himself, once for three days, when he was discovered seven miles away. He never on these excursions came to any harm, yet one day when he

was grazing close to the cattle, with herd boys in attendance, the lions got him. We had a good deal of amusement out of this animal ; when a tourist train was expected at Sabi Bridge, it became the custom to have him driven up close to the siding, where he could be seen unconcernedly grazing as the train drew in. He formed a capital advertisement of the tameness of the animals in the Reserve, and his photograph, with appropriate captions, such as " Wild Animals Greet Human Visitors " must have appeared scores of times in the Johannesburg Press.

After Lloyd's death the Satara house stood vacant for some time, and I thought it should be repainted and generally renovated. A painter from some town contracted for the work, and in the course of a tour in that direction I dropped in to see how he was getting on. I found him sitting on the verandah in a deck chair, a cool drink at his elbow, the while, close by, two natives, one of them at the top of a ladder, industriously laid on the paint. It appeared that he was either a Communist, or held advanced opinions in connection with capitalism and labour, and I spent a most interesting afternoon. Finding me to be a sympathetic listener, he explained to me at great length, and with many illustrations, how the idle rich were always " grinding the faces of the poor beneath their iron heel," and how the poor starving working man had to work his hands to the bone, while his well-fed masters sat at ease. At intervals he would interrupt the flow of his conversation to shout at the two natives, " Get a move on you lazy brutes, what do you think I pay you for ? " He would then explain what an unutterably lazy lot the kaffirs were, and how no amount of " hiding " seemed to do them any good. After he had calmed down, he would resume about the persecution of the poor by the rich.

Next morning, when my " boys " were packing the donkeys, my friend came to watch operations, and remarked incidentally how quick and competent at their job they all seemed to be. " I reckon you must ' hide ' them a lot to make them work like that," he added. When I disclaimed modestly any activity in that direction, he winked at me, and said, " Well, all I can say is that I knock hell out of my blighters, as much

as I can, and dock their pay too, but it don't seem to do no good ; rotten lot they are." This contrast between theory and practice gave food for some thought throughout the day's march. Some short time later, I heard this man's name mentioned in connection with some Labour troubles, in which I gathered he was a leading protagonist of the Working Man.

About this time I made what proved to be the last of my long treks from south to north of the Reserves. I took the wagon as far as the Olifants River, where I left it and the buckboard, with some police and dogs to guard the oxen, and thence proceeded on horseback with pack donkeys through the Shingwedi country. On the way to the Olifants I spent a night at Satara, then unoccupied, and just as I was sitting down to a scratch dinner in the empty house, a messenger appeared to say the donkeys were lost. Having driven on with the buckboard to get in before dark, I had left the wagon and loose donkeys to follow with the police and herds, expecting them to arrive soon after sundown, as it was only seven miles from Satara to the Ngwanetsi River, where we had outspanned. However, it appeared that some adjustment to the wagon had to be made, and the whole lot had stayed behind till it was in a state to proceed.

By this time it was nearly dark, and, before they had got half-way, completely so. There was no moon, and apparently when about half a mile from Satara, the whole lot of the donkeys had suddenly stampeded into the night. The country around was simply teeming with lions, and my heart sank as I visualized what would probably happen, and how my carefully planned expedition was likely to be wrecked almost at the outset. I collected all the police, about six of them, including the two stationed at Satara, of whom the senior was one named "Zambezi," an elderly gentleman, whose waist line was not what it had once been. We had only two hurricane lamps to light our way, and it was one of the darkest nights I had ever been out in.

The chances did not seem too good, as lions were roaring, seemingly from every point of the compass. We went to the place where the animals had stampeded, thence laboriously followed the spoor, which fortunately led diagonally towards

Satara, and in the end came on the wagon road, which the tracks then followed away to the west. Clearly several donkeys were in front of us, but whether all or not, it was impossible to say. After about an hour, in which we covered a mile or so, we got down into a hollow where there was a swamp, and we could find no spoor leading beyond. Suddenly there was a crash and a snort close by, for a moment we thought caused by some wild animal ; but as we raised the lamps above our heads, somebody called out "Bongolo" and sure enough ten yards away, I could make out a pair of long ears. We spread out, and went cautiously, a lamp at each end of the line ; soon, to our delight, finding the whole eight animals, apparently very nervous, huddled up in a bunch among some long grass. Very carefully, in case of a fresh stampede, we got all round them, and then, having managed to catch one and get a riem round its neck, we led it off, and herded the others along behind. One of the "boys" led the way with a lantern, while the other light was carried in rear of the procession.

The homeward journey, though not much more than a mile, was full of anxiety. Every now and then there was a tendency on the part of the donkeys, which could only dimly be seen, to break away, and if one had not been led in front, I am certain they would have done so. We crept along with constant halts, to make sure every one was in place on the flanks ; once indeed the whole lot, startled by a herd of zebra, which thundered by in the darkness not very far away, went off down the road at best pace. We all ran our hardest, Zambezi (gallantly doing his best) blowing like a broken-winded horse in rear, the oscillating lamp which he carried showing his whereabouts. Luckily we were able to head the fugitives off before they left the road, and getting them once more safely rounded up, drove them triumphantly into camp soon after 9 p.m. It was a lucky let off, and simply miraculous that not a single lion had come near the donkeys during the whole time they were out by themselves in the veld.

Adventures, and incidentally, my good luck, were not yet at an end. Having duly arrived at the Olifants River about 2 p.m. one day, I found the picket and cattle kraal in a very tumbledown condition, and we spent the rest of the day in

strengthening the latter with thorn bushes—fortunately as it appeared later. About 9.30 p.m. I heard lions a mile or so away; two hours later the dogs began to bark furiously, and a “boy” came pattering over to my hut with the cheering news that a lion was in the cattle kraal! There were the usual delays of getting shoes on, lighting lamps—matches always break on these occasions—and grabbing hold of ammunition. Then I ran over, holding my little Osram electric lamp, and found the dogs barking just outside the cattle kraal, the lion, which appeared to be inside, answering them with a continuous purring growl, very low and menacing; not the most pleasant thing to hear when close at hand. Although he appeared to be inside, it seemed strange that not a sound came from the oxen.

Feeling that we wanted all the illumination we could get, I lighted a carbide lamp, a task which consumed a little time, but at length, some ten minutes after the first alarm, armed with my Paradox, which I had loaded with S.S.G. (slugs), and holding the electric lamp in my left hand, I went slowly round the kraal, the dogs preceding me, and the “boys” behind with all the lamps that could be mustered. The low growling continued, but, though quite near by, its exact locality was difficult to define. When we had got nearly half-way round there was a tremendous crashing in the fence, and about a dozen paces away, a dark form bounded out across our front, at which, while still in mid air, I took a snap shot, apparently without effect, while the following second barrel was a mere hazard into the dark. A few seconds later came some deep grunts and sounds of breaking branches; then silence. The dogs ran forward, almost immediately to come tearing back on us; “Belfast,” a big heavy beast, nearly upsetting me in his rush. I did not think it prudent to go on, especially since the lion being now quite silent, there was no indication of its whereabouts, so we all went into the cattle kraal, where to my surprise the oxen were standing perfectly safe, and to all appearance completely unperturbed. Hurricane lamps were then hung up round the zeriba, which stood right on the edge of dense bush, and as there seemed nothing more to be done at present, we all went back to bed. I slept only disjointedly, and through the night could hear what I was

sure must be a second lion prowling round the camp, calling for his mate in the low unmistakable tones used by them when “talking” to one another. I began to think I might really have killed the lion, though it seemed rather a wild idea.

At grey dawn Bles, that marvellously good lion dog, began barking continuously from one spot; so taking the Paradox again, I went out in pyjamas, to find him standing over a big dead lion just visible in the growing light. It had only gone some thirty paces before it had fallen, and we had heard its dying struggles. The S.S.G. had made a splendid pattern with the heart as centre, and one slug had gone through the aorta. It proved to be a very large and very gaunt male, with a small grey mane, the canine teeth broken to stumps on one side. Its pads were full of porcupine quills, and its chest also, thus evidently it could not catch game, and was a dangerous beast, well got rid of. In fact old Jack, living in a hut not far away, said that with another and smaller male, it had been hanging about for some time in the vicinity, and only the month before had, in broad daylight, killed his donkey, menacing him when he tried to drive it off.

On examining the cattle kraal, I found that the lion had wormed himself on his belly through the thorn branches, which with yesterday's additions were about fifteen feet wide; but had got barely half-way through when he was disturbed by the dogs. He then must have become alarmed and have lain in the middle of the fence growling at his disturbers, and making no further attempt to get at the cattle, which had neither seen nor wined him. When we began to come close, the barking of the dogs, the talking of the natives, and the flashing of the lights, must have been too much for his nerve, and he had dashed straight out—luckily for us not in our direction! I was impressed by two things, first, the enormous strength of an animal which, from a prone position, and at one bound, could smash like paper through at least six feet of thorn bush and packed branches, and secondly by the great natural fear of man which a lion instinctively harbours. The thick zeriba looked as if a motor car had been driven through it, and showed that, when really meaning business, there can be few fences capable of keeping a lion in or out. Of course

had his heart not failed him, and had he come at, instead of going away from us, he would have had by a long way the best of the deal ; so once again it was satisfactory to feel that the lion is not really the ferocious monster of the story books.

Having crossed the Olifants, which in those days meant nearly a whole day's work, implying only a short afternoon march, I went on to where Ledebouer was then living, just north of the Letaba. His wife and infant were with him, and the quarters not too good. No houses for rangers had at that time been provided anywhere north of the Olifants River, the area being too ungetatable in the view of Government ; but the Ledebouers seemed to be quite contented pending something better being provided for them. Ledebouer said that about seven bull elephants, singly or in pairs, frequented the neighbourhood, and so tame were they that they often came quite close to his quarters, becoming truculent only if the dogs barked at, or attempted to drive them off. Once an old male had pursued his terrier almost up to the house. Natives complained that if mealies were stored in a sleeping hut, the elephants sometimes at night would remove the thatch, and insert their trunks ; so it was difficult not only to raise any crops but to keep the grain when reaped. Unfortunately for the sufferers, in a game sanctuary the only remedy was to move out of the patrol area of the animals, though I suggested to Ledebouer that a few squibs and crackers might, as with lions at night, prove of some value.

The journey northwards through the Shingwedsi country was uneventful though interesting. Excepting in the vicinity of Major Fraser's old camp at Malunzane, there was not much game, and such as did occur, rather wild. On the Bubube River I saw a place where a rhinoceros had recently rubbed his horn against a tree, and had broken a bush, but we could not catch sight of the animal in the flesh. This was an interesting episode, being apparently the last time any traces of rhinos have been observed in that country, and I suppose this particular animal wandered into Portuguese Territory, and was killed there. The native hunting camps, which had been so much in evidence along the Shingwedsi in former years, had entirely disappeared, and there were now practically no

inhabitants in the area, until the western border was approached.

One soon falls into a routine in trekking with pack animals, and after a few days everyone knows his particular task. I would awake at early dawn and shout loudly, when the boys would arise, loose the animals, and turn them out to graze, after which the camp was packed up and breakfast cooked. When the loads had been adjusted and weighed—of course they alter in weight considerably day by day, as meal and grain are consumed by men and animals—and we had finished our early meal, the donkeys would be brought in, saddled and loaded, the latter proceeding meriting time and care if delays on the march, and sore backs are to be avoided. Then, when all was ready, the horse was saddled, the donkeys were driven forth, and after a last look round I followed the line.

During the march I usually rode ahead, stopping every now and then to allow the animals to come up, as pack donkeys, though they can keep up a steady three miles an hour, lose about half a mile even on a slowly walking horse in that distance. Sometimes there were small excitements during the march, such as disturbing lions or other carnivora, finding fresh kills and so on. With donkeys I usually found it best to complete the day's trek without making a long halt with its necessary off saddle, and just to stop every hour, see that the loads were all right, and that the pack saddles had not slipped. Therefore we had generally completed our fifteen or twenty miles by about 2 p.m. when there was still plenty of time to select a good camping place, and to allow the animals a few hours grazing before dark. After having watered and then turned them out to their own devices, all hands would set to work to make a good zeriba, which always enclosed the whole camp, leaving one entrance, in which a fire was lighted at night.

As winter rain is not unknown, and as it also furnished an illusion of privacy, I always carried a small bivouac tent, into which I might crawl on hands and knees, and within which all my more intimate possessions, such as firearms, ammunition, torch, and reading matter were stored on top of the blankets. The " boys " slept round a large fire, and at the farthest side of the zeriba from the entrance a long ground rope was pegged

down, to which the horses and the donkeys were tethered in line. The dogs usually barked more or less all night, but one becomes accustomed to that, and it provided the encouraging feeling that they were doing their job. Dinner was at sundown, and usually by the time it was dark the nosebags were off, the horses and the dogs fed, and I turned in while the boys were discussing their own meal, after which they would talk a little, and then one by one roll themselves in their blankets and relapse into slumber. A good life, and I must have covered many thousand miles thus from first to last.

At Punda Maria, which it had taken nearly three weeks to reach from Sabi Bridge, Coetser, the ranger, had built half a dozen wattle and daub huts, and a sort of summer house, protected from flies by mosquito-wire gauze. I found there Mr. Pirow, with Drs. Schoch, Stamer, and Haagner, proceeding on a shooting trip to Portuguese Territory; my old friend Paul Neergaard, the local manager of the Native Recruiting Association, was also passing through on inspection work. We spent a pleasant evening; Coetser, who, whatever his faults, was a cheery soul, producing a gramophone, and entertaining us with stories of his past adventures, apocryphal or otherwise. He had been a member of the Staats Artillerie before and during part of the South African War, and one gathered that most of the Republican successes could largely be traced to his efforts. He had also, it seemed, been General Botha's right-hand man, both in 1914, and afterwards in the East African campaign!

Long afterwards I learned that, during this visit, he had committed a cardinal blunder in suggesting to Pirow, by way of ingratiating himself, that the latter should come and have a few days shooting with him in the Reserve! He had approached the wrong man as it happened, and when Pirow became a member of the National Parks Board, Coetser's days as a ranger were numbered. In those days Punda Maria was very far away, and one had to do what one could, and accept what was given. The mere fact of having a white officer there, even if the latter did occasionally overstep the line, at least kept the natives and hunting parties generally from doing what they liked, while one had to give Coetser the

credit of being exceedingly energetic, and when he liked, quite efficient.

About a year before this, he had been ill with blackwater fever, and Neergaard hearing of it, and knowing that he was far from any medical aid, indeed, in the absence of his wife, without any attention except that of his native servants, hurried down to take him to hospital, though as it happened he found the patient was already convalescent. Now Coetser was, as his acquaintances knew him, a sturdily built, middle aged man, with a fresh complexion, and rich brown hair without a streak of grey in it. When Neergaard arrived he was greeted by a seeming total stranger, an old man, cadaverous from illness, with long snow-white hair and beard, among whose first words were, "For God's sake, old man, did you bring any hair restorer with you?"

The year after this visit I moved Coetser down to Satara to take Lloyd's place, and Colonel Piet de Jager went to Punda Maria. De Jager had a fine military record, having been a commandant in the South African War, and colonel of a mounted corps in East Africa during the 1916 campaign, greatly distinguishing himself in each. He had earned a D.S.O. in the latter, and several other decorations, which he once showed to me. Among them was some Russian or Serbian Order, and I asked him about it. He said he had no clear idea what it was, but that General Smuts had made him a present of it, and in fact, so far as I remember, he had an inscription to that effect on the back. In person he was, although over sixty years of age, a strikingly handsome man, his features those one associates with the old French nobility, from whom I have no doubt he was a lineal descendant. Unfortunately he had been born before the days of universal higher education in the Transvaal. But he was not contented at Punda Maria; he hated the loneliness, and longed to get back to his family and his farm, besides which he suffered seriously from malaria, first contracted in East Africa, and not bettered by summers spent in the Reserve. In fact his best days, as with many others of us, alas! were behind him.

It is to de Jager however that belongs the credit of definitely having established the existence of nyala in the Pafuri Bush.

These rare and handsome antelopes had once or twice been reported in Coetser's time, but de Jager actually found the horns of one killed by a lion, and sent them to me. It is possible that the animals had come back to old haunts from Portuguese Territory; on the other hand a few—too few to be noticed—may have, all the time existed in the dense bush south of the Limpopo, and on the whole I am disposed to think this may have been the case. Eland too, were beginning to become almost numerous in the north, and this species certainly was heavily recruited from across the frontier; since it is certain that there were few of any in the Reserve up to 1905.

Towards the end of 1924 I called upon Mr. Piet Grobler, who had become Minister of Lands, and in whom, therefore, all our hopes now centred. On my way to his office I put my foot on a loose flooring board, and resprained my ankle, which occurrence I feared might be an evil omen. But for once forebodings were unjustified, and the path to the goal was from this time onwards to be strewn with roses; a pleasant path on the whole, even though the roses had here and there thorns among them.

I found Mr. Grobler's interest in the national park scheme had already been stimulated, and he was most sympathetic, though at that time he seemed to consider the difficulties in the way of fruition too considerable to be tackled at the moment. A grand-nephew of President Kruger, who had been responsible for the inauguration of the original Sabi Game Reserve in 1898, it appeared appropriate for him to put the seal of security and permanence on what his kinsman had originated. I felt that things were going in the right direction; but slowly, and it looked as if there might yet be a long while to wait before anything practical evolved. Sommerville continued to be the Secretary for Lands, and I knew that so far as it came within his official sphere, he would do all in his power to help, though less than two years had passed since at the memorable Pretoria Meeting he had recorded his Department's desire for total abolition!

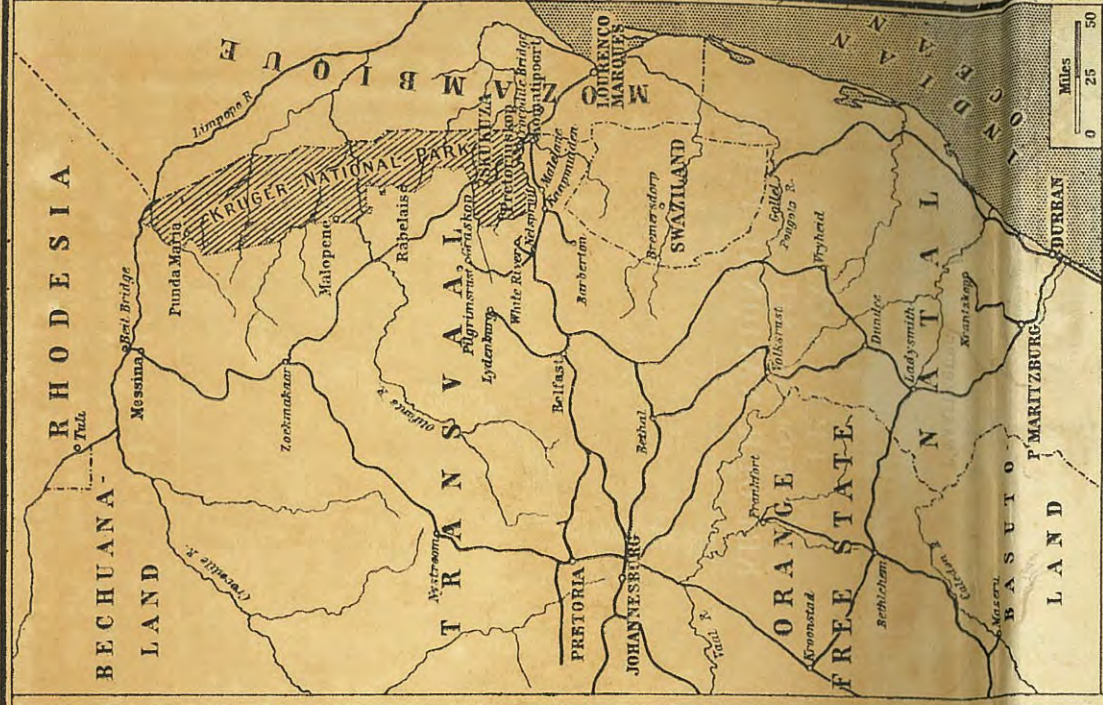
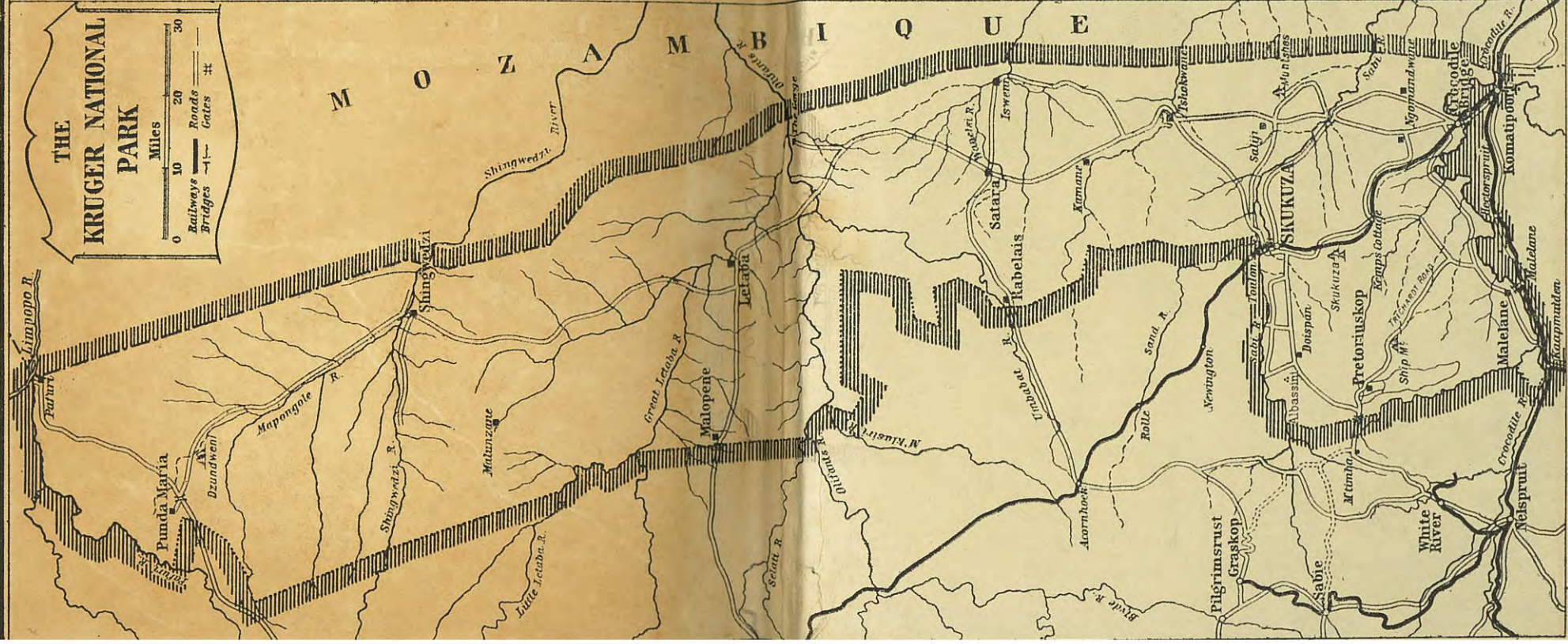
CHAPTER IX

1925-1926

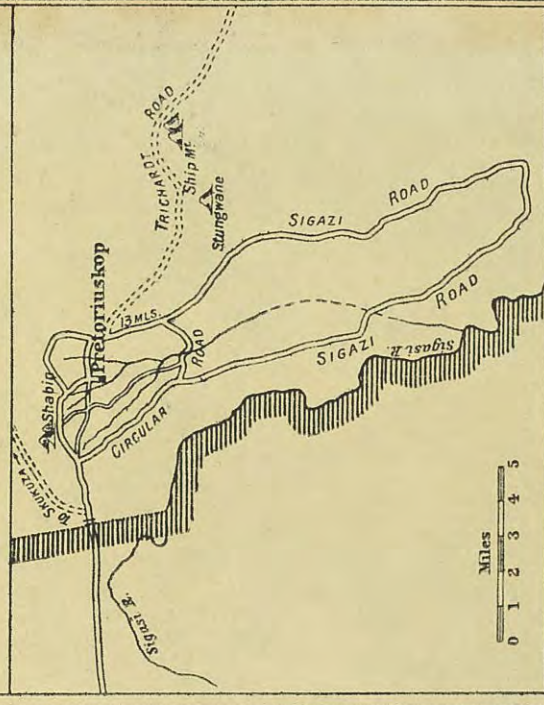
Locust Campaigns: Last Attacks on the Game Reserve: Trollope: A Bush Tragedy: Animal Photography: Royal Visit: National Park Propaganda: Stratford Caldecott: The Press and the National Park: Mr. Piet Grobler: Meeting with Landowners: Allies and Opponents: Passing of the National Parks Act: Victory at Last: The Board of Trustees: Mental Reactions

THE year 1925 began with the campaign against the "brown" locust, which in the latter part of the previous year had invaded the Transvaal from Bechuanaland. This type differs in habit as well as in appearance from its cousin the "red" locust, against which we had battled in 1906. Up to a point they resemble one another in their ways. Both arrive in enormous flying swarms, which, at a distance, resemble thick clouds of drifting smoke, and close at hand, literally darken the sky; where they settle for the night, or to rest during the day, they consume completely every green thing on which they alight. Although the swarms always persist in some general direction, they are often carried hither and thither according to the direction of whatever wind may be blowing at the time. In due course the swarm ceases its flight to permit the females to lay their eggs, which are cemented together in clusters of some hundreds to each, and are inserted several inches into the ground. After having deposited their eggs the old locusts are supposed to die in a short time; at any rate they are believed to survive only during one full season.

After a period, the length of which depends on whether there is in the meantime any rain or not, the young ones, known as "hoppers," hatch out, at first only the size of the tiniest grasshoppers, and spread in little patches all over the piece of country where the parent swarm settled. After a few weeks the isolated patches of hoppers—or *voetgangers*, as they are usually called—having meantime grown enormously,



THE TRANSVAAL SHOWING SITE OF KRUGER NATIONAL PARK



PRETORIUSKOP

THE PRETORIUS SECTION OF THE PARK MAY BE VISITED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR. THE REMAINDER IS OPEN ONLY FROM JUNE TO OCTOBER INCLUSIVE