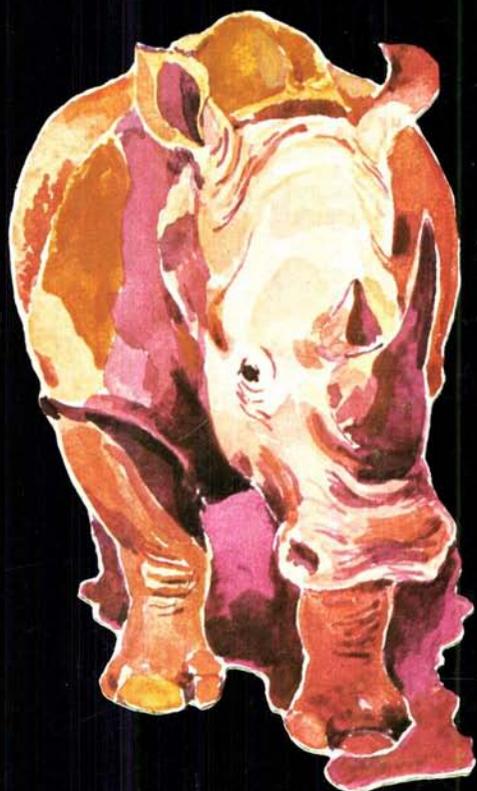


Ian Player



***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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FOREWORD

I HAVE always thought one of the hardest things in newspaper work is writing a regular column. I speak with some feeling because in my own very early career in newspaper work in Natal I once had to write a daily column. Although I only kept it up for three months I was exhausted at the end, and on many occasions in the weeks behind me I had wondered how I was going to get through to the next day. It was due not so much to the fact that the work in itself was difficult but because it was dependent on something outside my conscious control. There are many things one can and must do in a newspaper without necessarily having been born for the task, but writing a regular column of excellence is not one of them. However great one's willingness, however sustained the act of will, the determination, the diligence and sense of duty, it does not work for long unless one has a gift for it. As a result there are very few good newspaper columnists, and such good ones as there are tend to be prized above their fellow workers.

Commentators, men who analyse and evaluate the daily events reported in their papers, are legion and not to be confused with a columnist. The columnist of course is not independent from the reality he shares with everybody else around him, but there is an extra dimension in everything he does which sets him apart from the commentator. It is enough for the commentator that there is obvious everyday drama and importance in the material of his work, but for the born columnist this is only half the story. His pen does not really take wing and his pulse does not refuse to beat slightly faster in the way a writer's does when some non-racial form of awareness stirs in his imagination, and puts at his disposal energies that he did not realise he possessed and he is suddenly enabled to extract something of unusual meaning from the apparent platitudes of the day and, with a sense of surprise, extract what is extraordinary from the ordinary and lodge in the mind of his readers, however briefly, a feeling that there is nothing ordinary or mean in the daily round of existence.

Such men are rare and Ian Player is rare among the rare. There may be others who draw more deeply and more widely on a sophisticated background and a constant input of art and culture and metropolitan sustenance, but none has Ian Player's natural gift without which the columnist is lost: an unfailing eye for where the external event meets the meaning to which it is twin in the spirit of the observer. Where the commentator is literal and one-dimensional, Ian's way of looking at life always has a touch of the symbol and the two-dimensional. What makes him so original a columnist for me is that in a sense it is a continuation of the instincts and intuition which set him on the wilderness trail and founded the Wilderness Leadership School. Had he not had this extra dimension of intuition he might have been content to remain what he is also to this day, one of the most distinguished conservationists in the modern world. But very early on he realised that conservation was only a part, although an important part, of the reality. As he found his way back from the hurt and confusion of the last world war through a prolonged and re-established contact with wilderness in Zululand, he realised that there was a far more important dimension to conservation than mere conservation of specific animals, birds, plants and areas of unique earth. These things undoubtedly were of prime importance too, but ultimately this importance was transfigured in the way the human being dedicated to the conservation and rehabilitation of our wounded earth discovered that he enriched his own life, filled it with new meaning and renewed itself in a greater aspect of what it had been before.

Just by following his own natural self in a natural world he had found for himself that the only life worth living was a life that made the individual whole, that joined the world within to the world without, in fact did, in a macrocosmic way, for man and the world what he was doing in his writing by finding for the external and apparently alienated event, its companion in his own world within.

I have been with Ian in many paces and all sorts and conditions of circumstances and events when one would have thought that this column he wrote for The Daily

News in a country at that moment halfway round the world would be forgotten, because we were so beset by other urgent and pressing things. But as the appropriate time arrived I was amazed and reassured by a look that would suddenly appear on this face, and I would mutter to myself: "Ah! The column is upon us." and I would watch the rather anxious movement of Ian's hand towards his breast pocket as if he was afraid he had forgotten something vital and then almost in a sort of panic reaching into the deep of a hip pocket and a sudden look of relief would tell me all was well. Instantly a little black notebook appeared and the other hand extracted a pen from the side pocket of his coat and I knew that I had to move sideways and shut up, and whatever the conversation it had to be put side and away and within a minute I am would be somewhere else, lost to this urgent world of affairs and his mind following a trail that only he knew, a wilderness trail full of private and personal meaning leading through an immense field of experience of bush, veld, man, plant, animal, bird, beast and fish.

Sometimes he would do this just perched on a stone beside a black Umfolozi trail or sitting on the branch of an old sycamore fig suspended over a crocodile water, sometimes while waiting for somebody to fetch us in the vestibule of some grand hotel on the west coast of America, often in aeroplanes flying over the American heartland or sometimes just on a shingle beach somewhere in Suffok by the cold North Sea. The varieties of these occasions and places are as endless and varied as the experiences of the man himself.

Someone not born with a gift would have been overwhelmed by the variety and the claims and counter-claims of one of the most many-sided lives I have known. I am certain that the pressure of work to which I myself have borne witness must have been so great at times that the call of this column was in danger of being unheard. But since his nature had disposed him in this manner I believe he had never failed, because it was not left alone to him to remember his column, but also for the column to remember him and to the appointed time order him to attention.

It was inevitable that such a marriage of gift and occasion would, even in the singular history of columns produce something of the most unusual quality. And this something is very hard to define, and I can only hint at it by saying that it became an essential part of the way of life of the seeking and ultimate quest of the whole man. It was one of the essential instruments of acquiring the self-knowledge without which none of us can achieve wholeness and see it become a seminal element in what his beloved Jung called the process of individuation, that hard, hard process which makes it impossible for our age of seekers of instant salvation to follow Jung and live out as fully and as truthfully the nature to which they had been born. It is an ideal which few ever achieve entirely and something which Jung certainly would not have claimed for himself, however much his last dreams just before death proclaim to the contrary.

But this much I can say of Ian Player and his frank, truthful homespun writings: they are never repetitive and never devoid of a movement towards new meaning. Already in this latest collection of his the growth towards a feeling of kinship with all living things has advanced considerably and already is immense with a sense of a natural cosmogonic propinquity that makes all life and all within it not alien but kin.

I can only hope therefore that all these pieces that Ian has written over the years will not just be collected into special little booklets but will be carefully kept and joined together with everything else that he has written and strung like the brightest beads of Zululand on a necklace of all he has experienced since he first went into the far North East of Natal as a ranger, the sound of the guns of the world war still echoing in his ears and no clear sense of a future to guide him.

I say this for many reasons but not least of all because they are proof of how, through just following his own partially comprehended natural self and its untried instincts to care for the exploited and wounded nature of his native country and seeking the relevant word to make this experience accessible to others as Ian does so modestly in this book a greater lost self found itself in a more complete and meaning-

ful way than it could have done if he had allowed himself to be conventionally directed towards a more traditional pattern of life. Moreover he found himself so completely that in a sense he won the award of those who persevere in the hard road of individuation: he succeeded in making what he had experienced in the first instance subjectively, valid and whole to render it a compass for thousands, even in countries and places who know him not but are seeking a trail of their own through wilderness and waste land of our time.

For instance, the World Wilderness movement which grew out of his Wilderness Leadership School, the example it set and the natural philosophical implications that fell from it as easily as a leaf from the erythrina tree, have enriched conservation and even helped the psychologist in his hard task of healing the cataclysmic split in modern man and delivery him from his unnatural alienations. And the work is by no means over and far from having achieved its full potential. So the trail which he started thirty years ago in Zululand and led into these far-reaching dimension is not finished yet and will still lead him on through new wildernesses of man and spirit and nature — and, I hope, towards many more booklets composed of Daily News columns. I, for one, shall not think that his trail is nearing its end until I see his writing reflecting a new vision of the place he started from and read the ultimate word indicating that he is seeing it as his home for the first time. I shall accept then that this journey through the wilderness, where he has led so many so creatively, and the garden at the beginning, the origin and the destinations, the departure and the return, have all along been one and that always home is where we started from.

All this and more, even when not so bluntly stated, is in the atmosphere of Ian's thinking and doing, and though atmosphere is intangible and indefinable it is most important of all since it makes the rain fall and the renewal of man and earth possible.

LAURENS VAN DER POST

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.

Penalties for recalcitrant prisoners were unbelievably harsh. They were confined to a section known as "deep lock", where some men spent up to six years in solitary confinement. There was no table or chair in the cell and once a week they were allowed a shower and change of clothes.

Dark hole

● For those who survived this there was an even worse experience known as dark hole cell. This was the final punishment. There was nothing except a toilet and sink. Not even a bed. I went into one of these cells and was shut in for a minute. The deprivation of light and sound and the feeling of claustrophobia was terrifying. For food in the dark hole they got what was known as the Alcatraz cocktail, a watery blending of leftovers in the kitchen.

They stayed there until they signed a "cop out sheet", which was a promise to repent. They could be kept for 19 consecutive days at a stretch and then let out for five minutes.

There were escapes. The ingenuity of man demands a

way out for some, no matter how impossible the difficulties. In 1926 three prisoners dug holes in their cells and got out. They covered the holes with stolen cardboard and on the day of the escape put dummy heads in their beds, the hair made from barbershop clippings. Out of mackintoshes they made a rubber raft which they inflated with an accordion. Prison warders estimated they got into the bay at 9.30pm. Then they vanished. The warden's official report said they were drowned in the bay but no bodies were ever found and others say they got away. It is an unsolved mystery and part of the now increasing mythology of Alcatraz. The statistics are grim: 36 tried to escape, two drowned, and five were missing.

Bird man

● Hollywood glamourised Robert Stroud, an evil criminal from the time he was 18 when he killed a man in Alaska. In a completely different prison he studied canaries and became an expert on their diseases. He also ran contraband at the bottom of the cages and ordered big

supplies of birdseed which officials eventually discovered he was distilling into a raw whiskey. It was the stabbing to death of a guard in front of 1 200 inmate witnesses that led to his being transferred to Alcatraz, where he had nothing to do with birds, but the name sounded better to Hollywood.

Our tour was over and we walked out of the prison following a path back to the jetty. The Island is now a big nesting ground of gulls and they swooped and cried above our heads, while in the bay a buoy with a ringing bell gave warning to ships not to approach too close.

Plants on the path bore the names of the country of origin. My wife stopped and pointed to a plant named Pelargonium geranium and the plaque said from South Africa. It seemed a synchronistic event and that night when I read the local papers and looked at television, South Africa's painful divisions were laid bare. Riots, killing and mayhem flashed on the screen and there was condemnation without respite.

Were we in the equivalent of "deep lock" of Alcatraz?



A friendship forged in the wild

THE old Boers knew from long experience on their hunting trips into the vast wildernesses of Africa in the 18th and 19th century that it took time for a man's persona to drop and reveal what lay behind the mask. They knew too that the friendships that grew on the wilderness treks created a bonding that would be there until the end of their days, so they said you could

not claim to know a man until you had eaten a bag of salt with him.

I was reminded of this recently during a journey to Ndumu game reserve, a place that has a permanent place in my heart because of the many deep friendships made in that little wild corner of northern Zululand. I had been stationed there in 1954 and promoted to the new

post of senior ranger in the Natal Parks Board.

Part of my duties lay in training the junior rangers who were beginning to join the service. One of these new men was Ken Tinley, a tall fair haired and magnificently built young man of 17. He had worked in a bank in Pietermaritzburg after leaving College, but soon angered his employers because he became

so bored he began drawing birds on incoming cheques. He and the bank soon parted company and he arrived by train at Mkuzi station in June 1954.

I had spent six months almost alone at Ndumu and was not looking forward to having to carry on long conversations. But I was soon swept up in Ken Tinley's enthusiasm for birds. As every ornithologist knows, Ndumu is one of the richest avifauna areas in South Africa and not a day passed without Ken seeing a new bird and letting out a wild exultant whoop.

The Tonga people loved him for his enthusiasm and he became particularly close to a man named Nqabango, an outstanding natural botanist. To watch the two of them together was a joy to me. Nqabango knew his plants, trees, grasses and herbs and Ken knew his birds. When Nqabango found a grass Ken did not know, Ken would find an obscure cisticola or warbler and pointedly ask Nqabango, "Now there is a most common bird, every umfaan in Tongaland knows that bird, even the women know it, you of course will remember it."

Nqabango would smile and say, "Of course I do, but do you know the name of the reed it is sitting on?"

"Even the most unobservant white man who knows nothing about the bush knows that reed. Why, even the women at the mission station know all there is to know about that reed." They were quits and they would shout with laughter, and hold onto each other like two schoolboys.

We used to cross over the Usutu river to Mozambique



in a leaking punt poled by one of the sons of old Solomon Gumede who had a big kraal opposite Catuane village. Solomon would ply us with mgano (marula beer) mangoes and bananas. Ken and Nqabango argued about who was the best poler of a punt.

While the argument raged and got louder as the mgano took effect — it could be very heady stuff — the young umfaan, probably aged no more than 10, skilfully guided the punt across the wide and swift Usutu, dropping the pole periodically and bailing with a leaking gourd, impassively unconcerned about the argument.

Eventually Ken would grab the pole and begin guiding the boat upstream, laughing gleefully if water came pouring over the edge and Nqabango shouting that thank God the crocodiles had more sense than to eat the Tongas but how good a young, well muscled white man would taste.

Then he would snatch the pole from Ken and with great dexterity make the punt almost waltz across the water while singing some lovely tribal song. As old Solomon Gumede said, it was as good as a bioscope.

When we reached the Mozambique side we would walk up to a Goanese Indian store that had everything from a sewing needle to the latest red wine from the Verde Islands. We would drink Cereveja beer brewed in Lourenco Marques while the storekeeper buttered small bread rolls and filled them with Portuguese sardines and a liberal sprinkling of peri-peri sauce.

Tongaland is hot country and the peri-peri was even hotter, so this meant more Cereveja. Ken and Nqabango would be arguing over some minute detail of an ansellia orchid, testing and teasing each other all the time. When it grew dark, hordes of bats came shooting out from under the eaves of the various buildings and the air would be heavy with the smell of bat dung.

Ken would talk about the bats and Nqabango would contradict him. So Ken would point to an exotic tree in the street and triumphantly ask, "That tree, now what is that, it is the most common tree in Tongaland."

So this banter would go on until we made our way back to the Usutu river a little under the weather, and get into the punt for the risky journey back to the South African side. Hippo would be grunting downstream or in the pans and tiger fish jumped, slapping their tails on the water. Nightjars called, bats swished past and there was the scent of reeds, sycamore figs, wet planks and the fragrance of an orchid. A faint light behind the Lebombo range was the last of a brilliant sunset. Another Tongaland day was over.

Ken and Nqabango laughed all the way back to camp. This was a friendship forged in the wild that tragically ended when Nqabango was murdered one night. It devastated Ken Tinley and it took him a long time to re-

cover from the sadness. Nqabango had become as close as a brother.

Ken Tinley has gone on in life to become one of the greatest and most innovative ecologists in South Africa, working in Namibia and Mozambique, the Cape and

now Australia, and writing lucid scientific papers.

Whenever I read of antagonism between black and white people in South Africa, I always think of Ken and Nqabango. There are many like them who have shared their bag of salt.

The armistice day message

IT had been a dull overcast day in the Karkloof valley with a cold wind blowing from the eastern hills. Until late afternoon the birds were quiet, then the different cuckoos began to sing: the Piet-my-vrou and the mournful call of the black cuckoo. A paradise fly catcher sang repeatedly and I saw the long orange tail of the male flashing amongst the dark green of the fruit trees.

I walked in the garden after a long spell in the office, looking at the new fruit budding on the plum and peach trees and the mulberries ripening. Our climbing roses are in full bloom and I stopped to smell the strong scent from a red rambling rose. This began an association of ideas. "Roses of Picardy" came to mind and then I remembered my mother and that today was November the 11th.

Armistice Day. I got back to my office and by sheer chance pulled out an imitation leather folder with the crest of the city of Florence stamped on it. I opened it and found letters I had written home from the Appenines in the winter of 1944. There was one written especially to my mother because word had come to me from a friend who had just arrived in Italy that she was in hospital.

She was a woman of courage who lost a brother at Delville Wood in the First World War. She loved him dearly and his death in the mud and trenches of Europe had affected her all her life. I remember her sad haunted look when at the age of 17 I said I was joining the army.

"Do you know what you are doing?" she asked. I was quite certain I knew my own mind and I only had one thought: to be able to join the South African Armoured Division in Italy. I had a bad knee and she was sure the doctors would refuse me. But I found a way to persuade them and within two months I was in Europe.

My letter to my mother was full of gripes about the terrible cold and how we were

continually hungry. I asked for food parcels, polo neck jerseys, gloves — a long litany of asking. I was dependent upon her.

We were close to each other and she encouraged me to read, always getting new books for me. So in my letter I asked what books she had been reading and assured her that we had access to libraries, so I was never without a book.

I posted the letter at the orderly office and that night I had a long and vivid dream. My mother had come to see me and said that she was going to die but that I was not to be upset because she would be all right. I woke the next morning with a terrible sense of foreboding. Some three days later I received a



summons to see the adjutant. As I was walking to the office I knew that my mother had gone.

The adjutant, a most decent young officer, confirmed it. When he saw my grief, he told me how his younger brother had recently been killed in action, and he patted me kindly on the shoulder.

I walked to a cherry grove and sat looking over the Appenine mountains, remembering how much my mother had done for me and how deeply I loved her. Some years before she had cancer of the breast which was removed, then the cancer gradually spread to the stomach and this is what killed her.

In recent years I have learnt a lot about dreams and religiously keep a dream diary next to my bed, where every recalled dream is written down. The enlightenment is worth the effort, especially after understanding the Jungian model of the psyche. But I feel certain that the dream I had of my mother talking to me was an unusual telepathic one sent as it were in her last desperate hours. I know that she would have been thinking and worrying about me as all mothers do over their sons.

As I sat in the chill afternoon with the snow glistening on the Appenine mountains, I glanced at the cherry tree next to me and saw the first tiny shoots of new growth. I remembered the part of the dream where my mother said I was not to worry because she would be all right.

As the cherry tree had borne cherries, so had she given birth to me: it was the cycle of birth-death-rebirth. I shed my tears and my heart would be heavy for a long

time but there was no choice, one had to go on.

When I got up to walk back to our camp in an old lignite mine I heard the drone of aeroplanes above. I looked up to see wave after wave of bombers heading towards Germany, their bomb bays full of lethal metal and explosives. How many mothers would be missing their sons, daughters and husbands this day and how many themselves would die? It all seemed so incredibly stupid.

Again my thoughts went out to the mothers who would be hearing that their sons had not come back from the raid. It was not long after this that I heard in a news report that Edwin Swales had failed to return to base. He was a cousin and I knew his brother and his mother.

I returned from Italy in 1946 supposedly to a new world. The First World War was the war to end all wars, yet within 20 years Europe was reeling against the onslaught of tanks, bombers and infantry. More monuments would be built, name after name etched into mar-

ble walls or the cold stone of grave upon grave in long white silent rows. Parades, bands and sad pipe music, two minutes silence and then the world was on its way again with men plotting to kill other men.

We need the monuments and all that goes with Armistice Day to remind us, albeit for a brief two minutes, of our savagery to each other and the fact that we are not a civilised people but still in the grip of murderous barbarism. Yet I believe that at every monument there should be the figure of the grieving mother, so that men might be forcibly reminded that they not only kill each other but their mothers too.

It was dark when I came in from my walk in the garden and I was glad to sit in front of the kitchen fire to get warm. That red climbing rose had set off a whole chain of thoughts on this Armistice Day. I remembered my mother saying one winter evening in our kitchen at home, "We have such a little time together, it's so important to be kind to each other." This perhaps is the message for Armistice Day.



Ndumu croc attack

A FEW weeks ago my wife and I were at Ndumu game reserve. It and the Tembe Elephant Park are probably the last wild outposts of our province, one senses the primal atmosphere as night falls and the Tonga drums begin to thud.

As a young game ranger I had been sent to Ndumu early in 1954 by the then Chief Conservator, Peter Potter. My brief was very

simple: take over from Tom Elphick who was retiring, get the fencing going, make some more roads and see that the place was well patrolled. Peter Potter ended by saying "You like canoeing — well you have the whole of the Usutu and Pongolo and all the pans to canoe on. But watch out for crocs and hippo."

It was very hot when I stopped at Ingwavuma to fill

my loaded Land Rover with petrol. A young storekeeper came out and asked where I was going "Ndumu" I replied. "You won't last long there," he said gloomily. "A terrible place, full of crocs and mambas and so damned hot that when a dog chases a cat they both walk."

I drove off a little apprehensively and stopped on top of the escarpment, let my dog Lancer out for a run and stood looking at the bush covered plains of Tongaland, the pans and the Pongolo shining amongst the tall green figs and yellow fever trees. It was a wonderful sight, this powerful brooding land that the early Portuguese called Terr del Fumo. To the north I could see Ndumu hill and then the vast expanse of Mozambique.

I drove on down the winding bumpy road and as I reached the sandy flats near Namanini pan a black mamba came slithering out of the bush, reared up when it saw the Land Rover, and struck. I turned the steering wheel and the snake missed me and hit the door. My heart was pounding for a long time and I was glad to reach the camp. Tom Elphick had already left so I camped below a huge marula behind the prefabricated house. Alpheus Ntuli, my cook who had been with me since 1952 at Richards Bay and had had many exciting experiences in various game reserves, was not too enthusiastic about this piece of wild country. The mamba encounter had upset him but he soon became friendly with some girls at a nearby kraal and I heard him singing and laughing.

The mosquitoes came in droves as it got dark and I



had just made tea in a billy when I saw a man coming up the path towards me. A thick set, strong looking person, his face was covered in perspiration. He greeted me politely then immediately asked for help.

He explained that his wife, a young woman he had recently married, had gone down to Nyamiti pan to collect water for his kraal. A crocodile had grabbed her leg and pulled her into the water. He knew what was wrong the moment he heard her scream. He and a brother who was visiting grabbed knobkerries and an assegai and ran to the pan. They plunged in and waded to the woman who was being pulled into deeper water. She was partially submerged and off balance because the crocodile had her leg in its mouth.

While the brother held her head out of water and supported her body, the husband felt for the croc's head and then stabbed at the eyes with his spear. It let go and they began moving backwards towards the bank. When they were only a few metres from the edge the croc came at them with a rush but they were able to beat it off and it sank down out of sight. The man, whose name was Emloyeni, asked me to take her to the clinic.

We jumped into the Land Rover and raced down to the kraal. Some of the other women had laid the injured woman on a reed mat and in the light of the fire I saw her terribly mutilated leg. The shin bone was smashed and the calf muscle hung in loose lumps. We took her to Miss Erikson at the Mission clinic, a wonderful Scandinavian American who did what she could but major surgery was required. She asked me to take the woman to the mission hospital at Ingwavuma. It was a long and painful journey for the unfortunate woman but within minutes of arriving the doctors had her on the operating table and were able to save her leg. We left her in their capable care and drove back to the camp, arriving just before sunrise.

As I left Emloyeni at his kraal I heard the cry of a fish eagle ringing out across the pans and the deep prolonged grunting of a nearby herd of hippo. Women were singing a most sombre song about the water and the crocodile. It was my first experience of a crocodile attack and a grim lesson never to take any foolish chances where they occurred. The woman recovered but she was crippled for life and her mind was touched by the ghastly experience. Emloyeni, who turned out to be the local inyanga, became a

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,

and only the eagle cannot be killed by lightning. The aged eagle renews itself by flying into the sun until its feathers become incandescent fire, and then, diving into the water it emerges young again."

Thus was the thinking of the ancient people. Man had always watched the flight of eagles and envied them as they soared in the thermals or swooped from high hills into deep valleys. Man sought to imitate them and in the myths of Ancient Greece none is better remembered than the story of Icarus who had wings made, waxed together, and then in his hubris flew too high and near the sun and came crashing down in to the sea, back to reality.

I reflected that perhaps we live in an age of Icarus, the age of "puer and puella aeternus", the eternal boy and girl. We strive and succeed in leaving the earth in mental flights of fancy as well as in the reality of the tiny cramped space capsule.

It was in this philosophic frame of mind that I began the walk back to the camp along the well worn contour path through the meda grass and over small streams where clear water trickled. An occasional tiny frog croaked and then overhead I heard the swish of wings and looked up to see two stunning lammergeiers gliding past, the wind humming in their primaries. I sent telepathic greetings to them and complimented them on their beauty. They floated onwards and disappeared into the next valley where krantz faces glowed dark red in the midday sun.

What better symbols of Africa were there than the

black eagle, the lammergeier and those huge towering silent krantzes in sunlight and shadow. Beyond the krantzes was the high range of the Drakensberg, timeless mountains watched and walked upon by the most ancient of African creatures and early man.

The sun was beating down on my bare back as I continued walking along the winding path. Up on a new burn, the green grass showing out of the black earth, an orb resplendent in ochre colouring gazed at us. Two mountain reedbuck ran slightly

ahead of us giving off shrill whistling blasts, warning everything that modern man was coming. How tragic that we have become so separated from the animals of the world. It was not that long ago, 2 000 or 3 000 years ago that all mankind lived close to the animal and was better for it, killing only to survive.

I walked on catching glimpses of a black eagle soaring along the edge of the mountain so aptly named Giant's Castle. For a moment the sun went behind a cloud and the land all around us darkened in the shadow.

"The shadow", I thought. This is the dark side of us too, those black parts inside ourselves that have not received any light, have not been brought to consciousness. Was this not the problem of our land, South Africa, so badly troubled now with petrol bombs, mob rule and mindless destruction.

But I knew in my heart as I walked amongst the game and in this lovely landscape that there was much more to Africa than the dark side we were experiencing and the world was feasting on.

President Kaunda of Zambia said about Africa: "I believe that the universe is basically good and that throughout it, great forces are at work striving to bring about a greater unity of all living things. It is through cooperation with those forces that man will achieve all of which he is capable. The people who are dependent upon and live in closest relationship with nature are most conscious of these great forces. They may be simple and unlettered people and their physical horizons limited, yet I believe that they inherit a larger world than the sophisticated Westerner who has magnified his physical senses through inverted gadgets at the price, all too often, of cutting off the spiritual."

Africa was not dying, it was coming more alive, but the birth pains were not easy to endure. All of us were suffering.



Virtues of silence in time of turmoil

IN this time of turmoil, fear, and sometimes the most brutal savagery from all sides that sweeps our land, I am reminded of the virtues of silence.

When I was at school at St John's College in the late 1930s and 1940s we were forced to spend an hour a day on silent reading. It was time to read a library book of one's own choice. Homework or any school work was strictly forbidden, anyone talking or even whispering could be taken by the prefects to the housemaster and was inevita-

bly caned. One was very aware of the hush that fell over the boys. The only noise was the rustling and turning over of pages.

Outside sounds would drift into the common room: the bokmakierie calling from the kopjes across the rugby fields, Cape sparrows chirping from the window ledges and sunbirds whirring against the tall hollyhocks and other exotic flowers, for the days of indigenous cultivation had not yet arrived. There were smells too, of food from the dining-room, of crushed oak leaves being burnt in the gardens. A sense of peace slowly took over the school. It was a remarkable change from the underlying tensions that rule in a boys' school. Boys can be unpleasant and the law of the jungle is always just below the surface waiting to rear up and strike with mindless viciousness.

In the silent reading period there was an air of sanity and any sensitive person could feel the relief of the masters. It was their time to gather their thoughts and quietly plan for the next day.

I remember too keeping watch at Easter in the small crypt below the great chapel of stone that still stands on that kopje in Houghton. One sat on the hard pews praying and watching the candles flickering on the altar. For me this was the highlight of the year. Church with its noise and false devotion and sermons which bore little resemblance to the true reality of the day had long ceased to touch my heart. But the watch at Easter was miraculous, here the soul merged with the true spirit of the Church and one was aware of the presence of Christ. Si-



lence was the key.

In later years when I returned from World War 2 and worked in the depths of gold mines in Johannesburg, I would seek a quiet place at lunchtime. Anything to get away from the noise of the jackhammers, or crushed ore pouring into golovaans. In those brief moments there was time to remember the crypt watch and also some of those wooded Italian valleys in the Appenine mountains and the Lakes of Como, Lecco and Maggiore where water lapped peaceful shores. Silence was concentration.

On the Wilderness Leadership School trails that Magqubu Ntombela and I conduct in the Umfolozi game reserve I have made the night watch the focus of the trail.

During a recent trail with some of the most prominent businessmen of Johannesburg, they agreed that the night watch of one and a half hours was far too short. They knew only too well the effect of their daily pressures and inwardly they craved that silence to connect with their true being, albeit for so short a time.

The Chinese Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu says: "Where can I find a man who has forgotten words. He is the one I would like to talk to."

Henri Nouwen in his book on the desert fathers, *The Way of the Heart*, says: "First silence makes us pilgrims, secondly silence guards the fire within, thirdly silence teaches us to speak."

Our country is going through one of its most serious times. Forces have been let loose that could turn us into another Beirut. Action and counter action, force and counterforce, unbridled hate, deep wounding and misery of the most innocent of people: never was there such a time when compassion, understanding and wise leadership was required.

Smuts understood the value of silence. This is what made him understand his opponents and work with them. He knew the silence of the long walks up Table Mountain. He had the inner stillness which gave him a sense of balance. One has only to read *Holism and Evolution* to get a glimpse of his inner stillness.

So perhaps it is to the top of Table Mountain that all our leaders should be WALKING — to sit in silence and contemplate what we are doing to each other. On that long stiff climb to

the top perhaps they could help those who stumbled or struggled a little. Putting out a hand in a show of genuine

concern. Then at the top when they first rested in silence and then began talking of where we are all going they

would perhaps see the true essence of each other.

We really do not have to kill each other.

SINCE the early part of May, I have taken more trails than I normally do in a whole year. There have been American and British VIP's, South African businessmen, writers and artists. Each trail is very different because everyone is at a certain point in their own development.

It takes time and gentle probing to find out where they are but it is never too long before the persona — the ancient mask of actors — slips and reveals the personality.

Conversation can vary too from trivia to banality, rising to great heights and falling to deep depressions. The depressive talk of late has been of a political nature. Overseas visitors find the racial intolerance difficult to cope with, while South Africans despair as to where the country is going.

On my watch at the fire when one sits alone in the African night while the fire casts shadows on the schotia tree which gives us shade in the day and protection from dew at night, I have time to contemplate. The sheer luxury of two hours silence is worth all the constant travelling along that dreadful North Coast road, to say nothing of the pain caused by the way the landscape is being scarred because of man's insensitivity to his surroundings.

One evening there had been a long and most agonizing discussion on politics. I was glad when nine o'clock

came and I could stop the talking and let the blessed silence descend upon the camp as everyone got into sleeping bags.

I had the first watch and it was not long before the cane rats snorted nearby and an nyala bull barked from the edge of our clearing. I put

Where is the vision to save South Africa?

more wood on the fire, made another mug of coffee then stared at the dancing flames and strange shapes in the fire.

But I was haunted by the political talk earlier in the evening and the words of the Bible suddenly came to mind: "Where there is no vision the people perish". Where indeed is the vision for all the peoples of South Africa. We seem to be drifting towards an abyss of repetitive confrontation which could eventually deteriorate into anarchy and chaos. Before we can have a vision of the future we need to understand and apologize for the past.

How many people have had their lives ruined by the Immorality Act, were spied upon and hounded by the community. What nightmarish horrors were there for those coloured people who had to appear before a race

classification board. How many families had to suffer the ghastly anguish of not being able to acknowledge a brother or a sister in case it affected their racial category.

What about the anti-semitism expressed so virulently at one time in Parliament? The list goes on and on. There is a lot to apologize for and if we do not apologize and acknowledge the hurt we have inflicted, we ourselves are hurt by our own insensitivity.

We live, I believe, in the most serious times our country has ever faced. Shunned and spurned by the Western world, isolated in sport, sanctions threatening, deep rumblings and violent outbursts in the townships, communities divided.

Yet of all the provinces, Natal has been the least disturbed and we owe this to the Zulu leadership. Their commitment to peaceful negotiation has been proved again and again. Chief Buthelezi and his Cabinet have contained situations which could have exploded into the most horrifying bloodshed. Yet I see very little public expression of thanks to the Zulu people. Let us always give thanks where it is due.

As I sat at the fire with all these thoughts going through my head and the sounds and rhythms of the ancient Africa beyond the fire, I knew in my heart that despite our problems I am optimistic and have a deep faith in the commonsense of the majority of

South Africans.

But we need the vision the ancient book tells us about. It is not only a political vision but one of man and his relationship to the earth — it is a holistic view of the future which embraces everyone and

the land they live upon and the other creatures that are now man's responsibility.

With the right vision we can make this country not only acceptable but the envy of the world.

By the end of my watch

the fire had died down a little. I built it up for the next person then looked up into the sky ablaze with stars.

I remember that Carl Jung was once asked, "Do you believe in God?" He replied, "I do not believe: I know."

Elephant encounter in Umfolosi

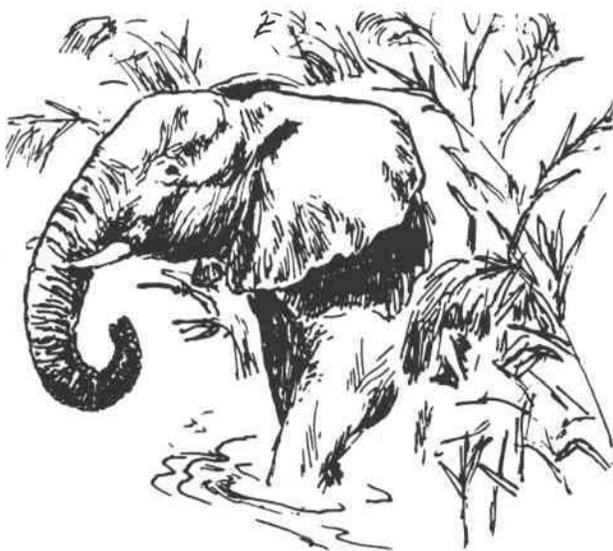
A RECENT trail into Umfolosi game reserve with my friend and long time companion Magqubu Ntombela, now in his 85th year, was special, and in modern parlance I would like to share it with you.

Even as we set off from the big pan near the bridge over the Black Umfolosi, the day had a special quality to it. It rained a few days previously, and this had laid the dust, the river was running crystal clear and two crocodiles, glinting yellow, lay basking in the sun on the warm gold coloured sandbank.

We sat for some time on a high bank and looked downriver. Waterbuck were grazing on panicum grass and in the distance I saw a Bateleur eagle swooping above the dark cliffs at Amatshenyama.

A honey guide chattered from the bush then flew to a dead acacia robusta tree with its top branches twisted by the fierceness of the Demoina flood. I felt the warmth of the sun, could smell the vegetation, and the scent of animals that had come down a path to the river hung in the air.

After rain in winter when the air and earth seems still, animals are quiescent and one can approach very near without them paying too much attention to you. All this was filtering through my



senses and I was filled with the mystery of our whole existence. It was what I would imagine taking a hallucogenic drug would have induced. Was all this the reflection of the inner wilderness?

I have often seen a strange, haunted look come into the eyes of those on trail for the first time, as they look upon this old remnant of Africa. I now was experiencing what they had seen, it was as though I were at a point in the middle between two worlds. I was filled with a sense of exhilaration, a battered leg and other pains of a man in his late fifties were

for a few precious moments forgotten.

Who at moments such as this could deny the existence of Inkulunkulu, the Great Spirit, or God as we in our western brevity call this divine force.

I have known for a long time why the ancient prophets went out into the desert to spend their time in the wilderness, and this day confirmed it yet again. T.E. Lawrence once put it thus: "This faith of the desert was impossible in the towns. It was at once too strange, too simple, too impalpable for export and common use. The

idea, the ground belief of all Semitic creeds was waiting there, but it had to be diluted to be made comprehensible to us."

We walked on and slept the night on the ground at our very rough camp. The closer one is to the ground the louder you hear the heartbeat of Africa.

The next day we walked past Mpika Manqele's old kraal, the spear and instrument maker to Tshaka, Dingane, Mpande and Cetewayo. Magqubu had sat at his kraal as a young boy. We crossed the river, the cold water cool and refreshing to the feet, and at Amatshemhlope had the choice of two thirds. I chose one, Magqubu the other. In deference to him we took his path and came to a view where one looks downriver to the thick bed of reeds at Hlonhla-matonga.

I idly looked through my small binoculars and there on a bend in the river stood an elephant, trunk curled as it drank. In great excitement I pointed it out to Magqubu who at first refused to believe what he saw. "It is a big buffalo", he said. Then slowly he shook his head as the elephant turned and walked with long strides into a patch of bush.

"As a child I once saw the spoor not far from here," he said. "Their spirits have always been here, and now they have returned."

It was indeed wonderful to see one at this place because only a few days previously I had again been reading Henry Drummond and it was here in the Hlonhla-matonga reeds and surrounding country that he hunted most of his elephants. That night as

we sat around the fire and the heavy scent of nthombothi smoke drifted through the still night air, we talked of elephants and Magqubu

spoke about Tshaka hunting them, armed only with spear and battle axe.

It had indeed been a special day.



KwaZulu a shining example to others

LAST month I was invited by the KwaZulu Government to chair a forest symposium day at Ulundi. I flew in a KwaZulu plane from Pietermaritzburg over country that I have got to know so well over the past 33 years.

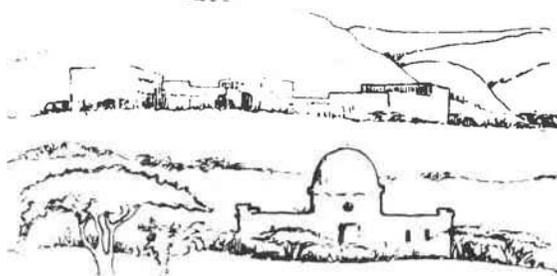
First the Umsindusi and Umgeni rivers which I canoed down in the 1950s, memorable days in what was then still comparatively wild country. Then over the Umvoti and the Tugela past Eshowe where the Hlinza forest glows like a rare green jewel on those rolling hills. Finally over the Melmoth lowveld along the edge of the Umfolozi game reserve, a spiritual home for me and the birthplace of my friendship with Magqubu Ntombela. There was not much of that country we had not walked or ridden over on horseback.

It has changed dramatically since the cyclone Demoina.

Sycamore fig trees that had been landmarks and places under which we had camped were gone. The vast expanse of phragmites reeds near Hlonhla-matonga where Henry Drummond had hunted elephant and hippo in the 1850's and where I had once been lost for a frightening day, were no more.

Yellow sand glistened everywhere and uprooted logs lay strewn like discarded matches on the banks. But many places were still the same, like the Maunzi bush where the young Dingiswayo hid from his warring father. Signs of "Fly Trap Harris's" old camp were still there, marking a site that was the centre of one of the most vitriolic rows between cattle ranchers and game men in the history of conservation.

I could see too an outline of the old Gome camp overlooking the White Umfolozi



The new Ulundi, with battlefield monument in the foreground.

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.

The magic of mist and deep thoughts of Autumn

THE Karkloof has had its first hint of autumn. Late yesterday afternoon I walked with our dog Alice down the track from our house to the main road. A cold mist was sweeping in from the east, enveloping the forest of the hills above and rolling over the fields of maize, rye grass and kikuyu.

Tall gum trees on the edge of the indigenous forest stood like islands in the mist. The heavy rain of the past few months has swelled every river coming out of the forest and when I stood still and listened I could hear the small stream we gravitate our water supply from, racing over round boulders down to a waterfall.

The noise rose and faded with the density of the moving mist. To the south where the Yarrow and the Karkloof rivers meet, the mahem cranes were calling, a deep penetrating cry, and then overhead I heard the sound of rushing wings.

I could see nothing because the mist was so low it was swirling about me and I could only just make out Alice's form five metres away. Flock after flock of geese or ducks flew overhead, calling as they passed. I couldn't see a single one and yet some flew so close I felt the brush of air on my face.

For minutes the flock passed over and then there was silence again except for the piping of a frog. Our own flock of 14 geese graze in a kikuyu field and they were not far from where I was standing, but they too kept unusually quiet and stared up into the mist.

I reached the main road

and turned to walk back and the mist lifted, magically revealing a clear sky and the half moon shining brilliantly white. The mist had vanished as quickly as it has swept in, leaving its scent behind.

Only the smell of the old Natal trading stores, the mixture of tobacco, blankets, soap, paraffin and crushed mealies, can equal in nostalgia the scent of the midland mist, woodsmoke, gum and wattle leaves, indigenous forest tree flowers and the damp red earth. Those of us who have lived in it know its evocative power.

I walked up our drive of old gum trees and newly planted yellowwoods and saw the moonlight on a plane tree, the leaves already turning yellow. Autumn was definitely coming.

I realised with a sudden sense of nostalgia as I breathed in the now faint scent of the wisps of remaining mist that I was in the autumn of my own life. I too was like that old plane tree with its yellowing leaves, but unlike the tree I would not have an outward show of spring with new leaves.

I would have to adapt to the changing season but with a different vision of the future. When the outer leaves of the tree are shed, the life strength is internal. So it is with man if we flow with the natural processes. My own outward journey was coming to an end and the inner path was more important. For me, it was time to pay increasing attention to dreams and the insights that came in calmer moments.

There is so much to be thankful for in life and when

we are young and full of zest we miss many of the simple wonders of the world around us. In the autumn years one can become more aware of the inner life.

Carl Gustav Jung once said: "From the middle of life onward, only he remains vitally alive who is ready to die with life". He spoke of the need to "meet and acknowledge if not master the seven tasks of aging". He suggested that it may be that life is a pregnancy and death a birth.

Such were the thoughts that occupied me on the last stretch of my walk across the lawn to the steps of the house.



The country is going down the river

IT seems incredible that it was so short a time ago that we were in the midst of one of the worst droughts since the 1930s. There were prayers for rain all over the country. Well, the prayers have been answered but I have not seen many church services of thanks. There are complaints now: it rained too much, bridges were washed away and roads are sinking. Such is human memory and gratitude. It is a manifestation of human insensitivity which goes deep into all that we do.

I walked down onto the beach early this morning for a swim but it was impossible. The sea was still a deep dark colour, the waves heavy and sluggish with the mud of

every river on the coast.

Logs of gum, pine and syringa lay like gaunt brown skeletons in intertidal pools. The beach was a metre high in sugar cane, sticks, plastic bags, banana plants and every other conceivable debris. Once I would have been angry, and fulminated against those who plough on hillsides, plant in flood-plains and destroy the river catchments of this once truly lovely province. Now I have a feeling of desperate sadness. Is there anyone who listens? My friend T.C. Robertson has spent a lifetime telling South Africa that our topsoil is going and with it hope for future generations. I have spent a good part of my life trying to help bring about an empathy between man and the land.

As I walked slowly along the beach I had a feeling of the most terrible helplessness. We are like a people bent upon suicide who have slit their wrists and the blood seeps quietly away. We are in the process of creating the Great Natal Desert. In my short lifespan I have seen changes that are terrifying, catchment areas collapsing and the soil going out to sea by the hundreds of millions of tons. We will leave a legacy of hate and misery for our children and grandchildren.

Loss of soil is a quiet crisis, an insidious process, but the results will be there to see and feel: higher food prices, silted rivers and even greater crowding on smaller arable areas. Water will be in short supply because the dams will silt up, like Shongweni. In the end we will look to the desalination of sea water. But soil is food and from that comes life. When people are hungry they become desper-

ate and dangerous. Any fool can inflame the hatred of a hungry man who hears the cries of his starving wife and children. If you want to know what the future holds, read about the present in the Msinga country. Or better still go there and see for yourself what happens when the topsoil goes.

The Ancient Greeks had a word for our condition. Hubris. We stand astride nature thinking we have conquered her and that man can do anything, make hydrogen bombs, transplant hearts, start genetic engineering, fly to the moon. We forget the power of a raindrop and the value of grass.

I listen to the news in the morning and much is said about the drama of floods and the damage that is being done to roads and bridges. Even more is said about the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriages Act. We have got our priorities wrong. There never should have been an Immorality or a

Mixed Marriages Act; in trying to separate people we have lost sight of the fact that we ALL depend upon the earth.

What can be done? I have a few ideas.

Get the army involved. Declare war on erosion. With agricultural and ecological advisers the engineers can do detailed surveys of every river catchment in Natal. Troopies could be used in the physical reclamation of dongas and wind eroded areas. Give them the opportunity of learning how our country is threatened from within. Get a diploma course started at the technikons for soil conservation officers. Create a conservation corps out of the jobless.

We face a serious situation of SOS — Save our Soil to save ourselves and those who come after us.

Last but not least, the Christian world needs to reassess its doctrine of man's dominion over nature. Is not stewardship better?



This gallant little fighter

THE word "gallant" was much overworked in the 19th century and the early part of the 20th, so much so that it lost meaning. Gallant was inevitably coupled with soldier or officer. Nowadays it is infrequently used. I want to use it in this column today to describe a fish. The blacktail. It goes by many names in different parts of the world: dassie in the Cape, a host of names up the east coast of Africa and in Australia too.

For many young boys their introduction to sport angling was the catching of a blacktail in the pools and gullies of

our rocky coastline. Its voracious attack on any bait and the stubborn courage in fighting until the last defiant slap of its tail gives it, in my book, heroic qualities.

Thanks to my father and to many Indian friends, fishing became a passion in my life. I was reminded of it last week when I took a light rod and went fishing off the beach at Southbroom. I was not too optimistic about catching anything. The water was discoloured and I lack the ability to jump from rock to rock as I did 50 years ago. I'd seen fishermen up and

down the beach the past week casting and reeling in with bait or spoon and the only fish caught was a sea barbel. Not very encouraging. But I was tired of being inside and working on figures and reports, so I wandered off to the beach — or limped, I suppose would be a better description.

I broke off a small piece of frozen squid, threaded it on the hook, picked a pool and cast in. I was not anticipating much so when there were only a few perfunctory nibbles I was not surprised. I reeled in and the bait was gone. Some gulls flew overhead and I watched them catching air currents above the water. There was nothing man could do to fly like that. A greenshank flew past, its short whistling notes echoing despite the noise of waves crashing on the beach.

I walked on towards five boulders grouped together that were no more than 10 metres from the shore. I cast in again with a new piece of bait, expecting to be hooked up and lose the trace. My rod was not much heavier than a trout rod, my reel a new-fangled button pusher and the line 6lb breaking strain. The sea washed my trace towards the middle boulder where black crabs were scuttling about, hiding from the big waves. Suddenly my rod dipped and I felt a strong tug. "Blacktail", something said inside my head. My heart was beating a little faster now and my expectations were aroused. "So close to the shore," I said aloud. Waves swished in, covering the boulder, and I caught a glimpse of a silvery-copper fish on the surface. Definitely blacktail.

I threw in again and as the bait sank next to the boulder

— bang! My arm jerked, the fish hit the bait so hard. I struck and there was a split second of hesitation and the fish was off. The tiny reel screamed and the rod was bent almost double. I had to go into the water, holding the rod high above my head to stop the fish winding the line around a rock and breaking off. Aches, pains and limps were forgotten, it was the fish and me. The old hunting instinct surfaced with a rush. A wave came from the side and smacked me in the waist, making me lose balance and fall into the water. I kept the rod up and the line taut and the fish went sideways towards another group of rocks, but it was tiring now. I walked backwards up the beach. The fish gave one last rush and the reel screamed

again and I hung on and moved back. A wave washed the fish on to the beach. A big blacktail of a kilogram or more. The colour as it comes out of the sea is a glittering silver, copper and blue.

I was wet, my heart was going, and my troubles were forgotten. I looked at the fish which had given me so much, not only in the last six minutes but since I was eight years old. "You're a gallant creature," I said to it, "and I thank you for all you have given me."

The light was fading when I walked back to the cottage with two fish in my bag. I could have caught a lot more because there was a big shoal in but two were enough for my wife and myself. The sea and the blacktail had been kind to me.



Who can forget the fish eagle's call?

OUR home in the Karkloof valley lies between two worlds, linked yet apart: a wild indigenous forest above and man tamed alluvial lands below. Each season has a distinct quality of its own but there are some special summer mornings when the sky is brilliantly blue and the forest above the house is green and luxuriant on the dark hills.

We had such a morning a week or two ago. The air was heavy after rain and there was scent from the orchard, the wild roses, honeysuckle and freshly mown grass. Bird calls resonated from every corner of the garden and the trees behind the house. The earth on these days vibrates with music and scent and one becomes aware of the steady pounding of an old rhythm.

All the human senses are assailed and for moments one is carried along with the rhythmic flow. Lawrence of Arabia described it in his book *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*: "On such a morning, the sound, scents and colours of the world struck man individually and directly, not filtered through or made typical by thought: they seemed to exist sufficiently by themselves."

I walked about our garden, attentive to the sounds of the forest that carried so clearly. The chatter of a vervet or the deep boom of an nsamango monkey floated down towards our tree flanked house. The whole world was truly alive. Then above the forest and the grassland peak of our Karkloof range I heard a fish



eagle's call. It is a bird in transit from one dam to another, and therefore infrequently heard.

The bird called again and another one answered with the piercing yet melodic scream. They called repeatedly in a duet that reverberated in the forest ravines and echoed across the farmlands. No one can hear that pure wild music and not feel uplifted. Something deep within the primal beginnings of us all is touched and there is an immediate emotive reaction.

I watched the sky until I saw the two specks soaring, wheeling and gliding on thermal currents. Soon they were

out of sight as they flew northward, but I heard the calls until they became fainter and were drowned by the persistent Piet-my-vrou and the emerald cuckoos.

For the rest of the morning, I reflected on all the wild places I'd heard the fish eagle cry. In the Great Rift Valley of Kenya, in the Sudd along the Nile in Uganda. On the Nkotakota river in Malawi. On the flood plains of Gorongosa in Mozambique. On long canoe journeys down the fig-lined banks of the Pongolo and Usutu rivers, on the Zambesi, the Shashi and the Limpopo. Wherever there was water and space this bird soared and called.

For me it represented the true, undefiled spirit of Africa.

I remembered too, the very first time I heard it as a young boy while fishing from a boat near mangroves on Durban harbour. The call mingled with the deep booming of a ship going out to sea. There was no noise of congested traffic, pile drivers, jackhammers and jet engines to kill all other sound. The ship's horn and the fish eagle cry were compatible, honouring each other. But times have changed.

When I look at Durban harbour now, I think we have misinterpreted progress. Our development has become one-sided. It might not be possible for fish eagles to survive and the traffic be muted enough for us to hear them call, but not too long ago the flamingo fed on the mudflats and pelican fished in quiet shallows. Their presence was a reminder of our link and our debts to the natural world. We will only be civilized when we recognise our poverty at their going.

THERE is a story that when Julius Caesar, Emperor of Rome, landed on the coast of Britain, he took his invading legions to the top of the White Cliffs and made them watch some of the ships that had brought them, being burnt. The implication was obvious: there would be no going back, they had come to conquer and to settle. It was a turning point in the history of the world in many fields — religion, conservation, architecture, road making.

During a recent journey to the United Kingdom I visited an excavated Roman villa in

A sensitivity to nature

Sussex. One could feel the power of the rigidity of thinking of the people who designed and built the house. There was no attempt to make the building part of the landscape. The plan had been drawn and the builders followed it to the last line with no feeling for the lovely green rolling hills, the wooded valleys and the clear streams that flowed nearby.

I walked away from the villa, following a road that was one of the ancient highways of Britain. Like many of

our African roads, it had probably begun as a game path, became a footpath then a road when the first wheeled vehicles were used. It followed a contour and at every turn there was a splendid view of the Sussex countryside. Young people on horseback passed me and in one field I saw golden pheasant, their colouring vivid on the grey soil. In the autumn sunshine that broke through the mist and swept over the hills, I saw a blackbird sitting on the branch of a beech tree. It

ruffled its feathers and sang with a purity of sound that uplifted the heart.

As I walked there was a depth of feeling about the land that took me back to the earliest times of this place. It was as though I walked in a dream, yet was awake, smelling the earth, the mist and the trees, and aware of the presence of much older people. The imagination plays strange tricks at moments like this and I wanted to let it go and see where it took me. I'd had a similar experience on the Island of Iona the previous year and had followed the imaginative conjuring until I was led to a circle of stones. I later learnt that it was a place of religious significance where monks from the St Columba Monastery came to meditate.

The spell of my reverie was broken when a cow moored and I came upon another road. This one was very different from the contoured one. It pierced the landscape like an arrow in the heart. It had been built, like the villa I had just left, with no thought for hill or dale. The Roman army had made it to move troops and bullock wagons in the quickest possible way. It was dead straight and uncompromising. The huge cities in America, patterned on the grid, are the ultimate in the Roman thinking, permitting as they do unlimited but soulless expansion.

The people the Romans smashed and subjugated were the Celts. In recent years there has been a great Celtic revival and our knowledge of these ancient people has been enlarged. Their villages were built in a circle, much like the Zulu kraals, and the people were very close to the heart beat of the

earth. I learnt from a Celtic scholar, Jay Vest, at the 3rd World Wilderness Congress in Scotland, that after Christianity spread into the Roman Empire, churches and cathedrals were built on the ancient sacred places of the Celts. This was how they lured the people to Christianity. Eventually those who did not join the church were burned or killed. The early Celts worshipped the spirits of trees, mountains, rivers, and would make long pilgrimages to sacred groves of oaks called nemetons. Here they spent time in meditation and communing with nature, learning too what today we call ecology. They were a highly spiritual people and

living in the circle they were like the Red Indian, the Eskimo and African tribes. They understood their position in the natural world.

But the Romans imposed the "grid iron" thinking, then came Christianity's dogma of man's dominion over nature which has led to overpopulation, pollution, and many other modern ills. The world is in a serious position but we are now realising the wisdom of ancient and indigenous people. The church in America has become involved in the wilderness movement and appreciates that one can commune with God in the forests and the mountains, and that wild places are also sacred.

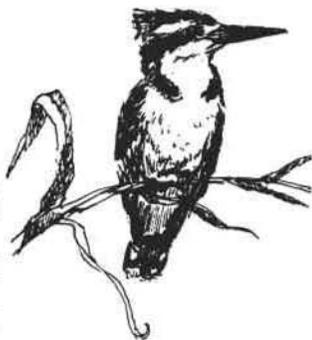
Reflections on a perfect English day

THIS time of the year Britain can be beautiful, as I have experienced during my visits over the past 20 years.

The other day I walked out of the flat where I was staying into one of the most perfect days imaginable, cloudless sky and bright sunshine after two days of wet, damp cold which eats into the bones. My spirits were lifted immediately and it confirmed why the English go on about the weather and crave the sun.

I walked down to Manchester Square looking at the houses and reading the blue plaques that commemorate something historical. One never has to go far in London to find one.

On the corner there was an old house and the plaque



read "Lord Alfred Milner lived here." This was a jolting reminder of home. I think it is no exaggeration to say that this man was the architect of the South African War. I wondered if his conscience had ever bothered him and if he knew what hatred and misery he left in South Africa. Laurens van der Post told me that he had once discussed Milner with Harold Macmillan who had known him personally. "A cold fish," was Macmillan's terse description. How terrible that we

allow individuals to cause so much damage. People like Sir Bartle Frere in the Anglo Zulu War and Milner in the Boer War had an almost hypnotic effect on the government of the day, in much the same way that Mr Scargill has on the bulk of the British miners today.

I walked back to Marylebone High Street and ambled along looking at shops and people until I came to a small graveyard. Here was the grave of Charles Wesley, the brother of the founder of the Methodist Church. On the corner another plaque announced that Charles Dickens had written three of his books in a house that had once stood on the spot. I always enjoyed the works of Dickens. David Copperfield was a particular favourite. But all our heroes seem to have a blind spot and I saw a recent report by a relative of the great man who said that Dickens professed to be a strict moralist but had the

morals of an alley cat.

I drank tea outside a small cafe then continued my stroll to Hyde Park where planes fluttered from the giant plane trees and lay like a great amber coloured apron on the green grass. Somehow this sight was the epitome of the urban park, there was not a hint of wilderness left and when the leaves were gathered and burnt, even the smoke had a scent of tamedness. I watched people — children, parents and grandparents — feeding free-flying ducks on the Serpentine. All the birds had lost their fear of man. It was a heart warming sight.

But it was a great contrast to my previous weekend which had been spent in the country. Miles of lovely hedgerows had been uprooted by big farming combines to enable tractors to work larger areas. Badgers are being gassed in their burrows in Dorset because some of them are suspected of carry-

ing TB to dairy cattle. Herbicide sprayed on fields is being washed into rivers killing the food for trout, and butterflies are becoming rare. One might well ask what is happening to the English countryside celebrated in verse, prose, and song by such great writers of the past as Thomas Hardy, Gilbert White, Rupert Brooke, and Wordsworth and Keats. T.S. Eliot said that half the stuff of British poetry was made up of natural history. Here I was in London watching this wonderful interaction between man and nature, while some parts of the countryside were being savagely desecrated.

The English have produced some of the finest naturalists and conservationists in the world and they have done excellent work on almost every continent. Now, however, most Britons seem unaware of the damage that is being done to their lovely countryside.

Wild fig — Tree of the Year and tree of history

THE wild fig is the Tree of the Year and the Directorate of Forestry has published an attractive little booklet to commemorate the tree. It is full of interesting information.

A species of fig tree, *Ficus religiosa*, was the inspiration for one of the world's largest and oldest religions. Buddha is believed to have attained "supreme knowledge" under this tree. For those of us who have camped in the shade of the giant sycamore figs that once lined the banks of the Black Umfolozi River, this will come as no surprise.

In the Christian Bible we are told in II Kings 20:7 how to use the figs as a plaster on a boil, and the most famous use of fig leaves was by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The garden fig, *Ficus carica*, is said to have been cultivated in Syria more than 1000 years before the birth of Christ.

It was under a fig tree that the fate of Cetshwayo's Zulu kingdom was decided. This is the Ultimatum Tree which survives to this day and its growth over the last hundred years can be carefully measured from the many photographs taken at the time. It

seems to be more than a fortuitous accident that this famous tree has survived the many ravages of floods and of man since 1878. I have sat under it many times and pondered what the fate of South Africa would have been if the British had not embarked upon that most infamous of wars on the Zulus.

I was on a Wilderness Leadership School trail recently in Umfolozi Game Reserve with a group of people and Magqubu Ntombela led us to the shade of one of the few surviving sycamore figs. He can tell a story about the fig tree that could take all



day, but he knows that the attention span of the white man is too short. I find this a great pity because if they were prepared to listen all day they would not only hear the story of the fig, but also of the Zulu people and the animals and the birds and the insects. They would learn too about shade, light and form, and in the quiet moments in between the story, they would see the animals and the birds, because it is by sitting still that one sees things, not by driving around or walking from one point to another.

So Magqubu gave us a much abbreviated story.

"We call this tree siza-abantu," he said, beginning his tale. "It helps the people in times of drought. The women go to collect the ripe figs and they are accompanied by the children who have their fill while collecting."

He explained how the figs were laid out to dry and all the insects were shaken off, then by late afternoon the figs would be dry and they

would be ground into a mealie meal-like paste which was mixed with sour milk. The men used an mkezo to ladle it out for themselves, the women put some on their hands before eating, while the children ate entirely with their hands.

The wood was used to make a milking bucket. Magqubu was emphatic that this was much better than the galvanised iron buckets which made a lot of noise when the milk hit the bottom. He imitated the noise and how the cow would tense itself. Then he imitated the milk splashing softly into the fig bucket and how the cow relaxed. "It is the smell too that helps it relax," he said with a smile.

When our group became restless, Magqubu spoke about the baboons and the monkeys feeding on the figs and how they were sometimes stalked by the big pythons.

"The vultures use the tree too," he said and elaborated how they built their nests in

the topmost branches out of reach of the nsimba cat. He talked about the birds — green pigeons, black-collared barbets, sun birds, toppies — imitating each one in turn. He buzzed like the bee swarms that made a hive in a hole in the tree and chattered like the honey guide calling the ratel. The whole tree and the country surrounding it became alive with the white rhino, nyala, bushbuck and other animals feeding near and around the tree. Everything became alive and gave one a true insight into the meaning of ecology.

As we picked up our haversacks and walked on towards the Tjevu streams I thought to myself that this is how we should be re-visioning South African history. Like Magqubu's story of the fig tree, it should be all-embracing. Right now our history is slanted, one sided and lopsided. Only when it tells everyone's story will the true vision of a people embarked upon a common goal emerge. But at this moment few have the patience.

When our little world was a giant tinderbox

AT Phuzamoya, our small-holding in the Karkloof, we know that spring is near. None of the cuckoos have arrived yet and as we are on the edge of the forest our area is popular, but the sopted-back weavers are building nests in the plane tree behind the kitchen.

Their energy is frenetic and they go to and fro all day. A lot of their nesting material comes from the small vlei on the property where reeds grow thickly in the dark black soil. At night there is a steady chorus of frogs from the swamp and reedback whistle sharply.

The bou-bou shrieks with their lovely liquid notes and the hoopoe's persistent three-note call go on for most of the morning.

Fork-tailed drongos are active and the crowned hornbills fly about, giving their screeching cry as they go for the masses of green grasshoppers in the garden. The bush-buck become unusually bold and circle the vegetable patch. Our elder son saw a mahem crane dancing in our long paddock near the small pan which feeds the vlei.

Blue cranes fly overhead, their peculiar kraaking call echoing about the forest behind the house. The olive thrushes take issue with their images in the hub caps of the car. The chorister robin whistles loudly in the forest and the Cape robin sings so sweetly in the early morning and evening that it is difficult to decide whether its call or that of the white-throated in the lowveld is the more beautiful of the robin songs.

Our geese are beginning to pair off, the female looking for nesting sites. The house



flies are increasing and I have heard bee swarms passing overhead. The pear, peach, and plum trees are blossoming and their scent, with the white jasmine flowers, is really heady.

There is a large Cape chestnut tree on the edge of the orchard and a big old nsamango monkey uses one of the branches as a perch before raiding the fruit tree blossoms. When we hear his deep "boom" so near the house we know that spring is close, but not until the Pietmy-vrou calls do we think it has actually arrived. The firebreaks are greening up and both our small streams are flowing. We've had a good rainy season.

Last year it was very different. One of our streams had dried up in March and the other dwindled every month. The forest drooped, the earth was dry and so was our vlei. The birds were active but there was a strange tension in the air.

Water was on our minds all the time, so was fire. The berg winds blew blisteringly hot, and the stream was reduced to a trickle. Then we had three days of almost con-

tinuous, howling berg winds. I walked down to check the stream and it had dried up, the first time in living memory according to local Zulus. We had two 1 000 gallon tanks and a plastic pool of water, enough to supply the house for some time but hopeless if there should be a fire. All of us kept on waking during the night, looking anxiously out of the windows to the western, the southern and the eastern horizon, searching for that red glow of a plantation and grass fire we knew we would not be able to fight.

For three days we waited and watched and the whole earth around us seemed to hold its breath, it is the only way I can describe it. Then the wind changed to the south and a heavy mist settled on the forest and the hills behind us. Within a few hours there was a tiny trickle of water down our stream. It was as though the earth had exhaled. This was the end of the drought too and for the rest of the year heavy rains fell and the whole earth sang once more. The dams rose steadily and water restrictions were lifted.

It all seems a long time ago, but I will never forget when the earth held its breath.



Coexistence in the wild

MAGQUBU Ntombela led our six person trail along the bank of the Black Umfolozi River. We stepped over twisted acacia robusta trees that had been uprooted by the Demoina flood in February

and flung around like a tipped out box of matches.

Old Magqubu looked at me and he knew that I was thinking of the great fig trees that had been washed away to the sea. To ease the pain he stopped again and again to tell us a story and show us something of interest. He pointed at a ball of fur on a rhino path.

"The lion has spewed this up," he said and he gave a hilarious exhibition accompanied by all the sound effects. When we stopped laughing he became serious and took a stick and poked around in the fur. "See, ibubhesi killed a tortoise. Look at the shells." The pieces of tortoise shell rolled out, shining in the morning sun.

A little further on Magqubu pointed to another ball of hair. "Do you know what this is?" he asked me, testing my knowledge. The hair had a springy look so I took a guess and said it was a klipspringer. "Ca," Magqubu said emphatically. "Ivondo, the cane rat." He extolled the delight of eating cane rat meat, its taste and how much fat it always had.

We walked another hundred metres and he stopped at a castor oil plant and picked off the prickly berry.

"In the old days when the wild pig was bothering a mealie field, we would take this fruit, crush it and spread it around the edge of the field. It was hard work but the pigs would go away to another man's plot, who was too lazy to spread the oil."

He told us too how the grey duiker loved the little black ihlube beans and would dig them up to eat.

"We took goats' dung, mixed it with water and spread it over the field. This

made the duiker leave the beans alone. The people of today don't know this any more," he said. "There is very little game left in Zululand and the old days have gone." He said this in a matter of fact tone of acceptance.

When we rested and made a fire to boil the billy for tea he told us how man and game had lived together in Zululand.

"We had our hunts and there were big ones in Umfolozi in Tshaka's time, and in the Nkwaleni Valley in Cetshwayo's rule. Every Sunday in our kraal we ate venison but we never wiped the game out. It was you white people who killed game on a massed scale." He made the statement without malice. "No, in the old days we and the wild animals lived together. We kept them from our fields and we hunted for meat to eat and we had the big hunts when a Chief died, but we never systematically wiped out animals. We respected the game even though we killed it. In times of very bad drought my father put out food for the baboons. Do you people do that?" he asked with a smile.

Then we began walking back to camp. During the

long climb up Amatshenyama hill my old bones were aching but Magqubu at 84 walked ahead like a teenager.

At the top of the hill we stopped to rest and look back over the expanse of Umfolozi game reserve. In the fading light with dark clouds scudding overhead one sensed the presence of those old people who had lived here compatibly with the wild creatures.

Then I remembered the words of an old Red Indian, Walking Buffalo, quoted in the work, Touch the Earth. He said:

"We saw the Great Spirit's work in almost everything: sun, moon, trees, wind and mountains. Sometimes we approached him through these things. Was that so bad. I think we have a true belief in the supreme being, a stronger faith than that of most whites who have called us pagans. Indians living close to nature and nature's ruler are not living in darkness. Did you know that trees talk. Well, they do. They talk to each other and they will talk to you if you listen. Trouble is, white people don't listen. They never learned to listen to the Indians, so I don't suppose they'll listen to other voices in nature."

End of a search— and the dawning of understanding

IN the early part of 1976 I received a book in the mail from Laurens van der Post. We had by this time become firm friends and he was always kind enough to send me a copy of his latest book. The title of this one was C.J. JUNG AND THE STORY OF OUR TIME*. I knew

that Jung was a psychologist along with Freud and Adler but as I had never had any real interest in psychology, I scanned a few pages and decided I was unable to read the book.

Two years later I was on my way to the United States via the United Kingdom to at-

tend an important and unpleasant meeting in San Francisco. As I left Heathrow airport I looked for something to read on the long flight to the west coast of America. I saw a paperback edition of Laurens's book on Jung and thought to myself that this heavy work would give me something to think about. It certainly did. First of all it was not a heavy book at all, it was extremely easy to read. Secondly it was a book that changed my life.

All my adult life and for some time in my late teens I had been stumbling along an indistinct path trying to understand the meaning of life. When I became a game ranger in 1952 and was stationed in many of the once remote areas of Zululand I read books on philosophy and religion and had long discussions late into the night with my friends Jim Feely and Ken Tinley. On our foot patrols in the Umfolozi game reserve we slept in caves or beneath the big fig and scotia trees. Every evening we discussed the latest books we had read and whether or not they had an answer to what we were seeking.

I remember one spring day when the yellow acacia karoo flowers were heavy in scent and the first Piet-my-vrou cuckoos were arriving. I'd got a book by Paul Brunton and we all thought that this man's thinking was the answer, and we were stimulated and excited. But it did not last long. There were many other books we followed, but the path was still indistinct, faintly lit here and there but with nothing to grip the gut and the imagination.

I had many dreams and wrote some of them down, idly wondering what these

strange visions of the night were all about. I was encouraged by the statement of an old Indian guru who said, "When the pupil is ready the teacher will come." I kept on searching and returned to the church for a brief while. But the traditional Christian upbringing with mandatory attendance at Sunday school, then going to an Anglican church school in Johannesburg, had bruised my religious instinct. The world was in a mess and the church with its ritual and dogma seemed incapable of coping with man killing man and man's inhumanity towards the earth that succoured him. There appeared to be no understanding at all by the church of the very wilderness where Christ spent his 40 days and 40 nights, one of the most important periods of His life. I admired many of the individual clergy for their kindness and humility but for me they had little real insight and seemed more pre-occupied with the political events of the day, or with how to fill their churches on a Sunday. Beyond the church too, there seemed no contact, no follow up, no stimulation, there was a heaviness about it all that was neither emotionally nor intellectually inspiring.

So it was with all this stirring in the personal unconscious that I was eventually led to Laurens van der Post's book on Jung. Immediately so much made sense, particularly dreams and the strong religious instinct that is within us all. It was not a panacea for all man's troubles but it was the most important guide I had received, and I know that there are many people who feel the same way. I am still very much a

neophyte but I have a much greater inner calmness now. I see a path that is illuminated and feel in my gut the value of Jungian insights. I will always be in Laurens van der Post's debt for introducing me to this great man of our time — C.J. Jung.

I was most fortunate through an old game ranger friend, Hugh Dent, to meet Gloria Gearing, one of the most experienced Jungians in South Africa. Through her my understanding of Jungian psychology was enlarged and nurtured and I was introduced to the vast literature on the subject. There were very few fields that Jung had not delved into: religion, alchemy, history. He was a man with his feet always firmly on the ground. Once an old woman stopped him in a street in Zurich and said, "Your books are not books, professor, they are bread."

Today there are four Jung Institutes in the United States and he has become one of the most popular subjects on the campuses of American universities.

Thanks to Jung my own faith in the value of Christianity has been restored, but I look forward to the day when his insights and those of his associates and followers are accepted more readily by the churches.

(*Hogarth Press, London, 1976)

An awful price

I WAS at Enselweni camp in the Umfolozi game reserve at the end of January with Tommy Bedford and his family, and when we had high humidity and incessant rain I knew from past experience in

1957 and 1963 that a flood was coming. We left the reserve as the rivers were rising. I then had to fly to America where I heard by telephone of the terrible damage caused by the floods. John Page, Director of the Natal Parks Board, kindly sent me photographs which showed the devastation of the riverine vegetation.

Two weeks ago I was in Umfolozi leading a trail which included people from overseas. I had prepared myself to expect the worst, but seeing it at first hand exceeded my darkest expectations. My trail companions were seeing Umfolozi for the first time and when we stopped one morning and looked downriver where once great trees stood, a woman said, "How beautiful it all is." I was stunned, then realised she had never seen it as I had done. To her this was how it had always been.

The Black Umfolozi is a river of desolation. I walked along the banks with a heavy heart. Fig trees that were hundreds of years old had been swept away. Groves that had sheltered and given me great pleasure watching birds and animals feeding on the fallen figs, were gone.

Our particular giant sycamore fig tree at Amatshenyama camp where hundreds of Wilderness Leadership School trailers had slept and kept watch in the long hours of the night and where Magqubu and I had prayed together, had disappeared.

I looked at a bare beach where this tree had stood and remembered days of delight, watching the baboon families scrambling among the branches, and the black collared barbets, trumpeter



hornbills and sun birds calling in the early morning; the long philosophical conversations I had listened to from people from the four corners of our planet, and the firelight on faces reflected off the yellow bark on the tree.

Over the many years of a life in the hurly burly of conservation I thought I had seen much in the abuse of land, but the sight of kilometres of upturned trees, bare banks and the lack of bird song that once characterised the river, was a most painful experience. Magqubu Ntombela was with me and he sensed that my desolation equalled that of the river. The old man knew how to accept what had happened. This was the fifth big flood in his lifetime. He could look back more philosophically than I could.

"It will all grow back again one day," he said, and to prove his point he took me to tiny sycamore fig trees that were sprouting up through the sand, and acacia robusta growing on a bank. "It will all come back," he said, patting me on the shoulder.

I knew this was so. Nature cannot be destroyed. We can set it back, reverse the succession by obliterating for-

ests, but nature at the first opportunity will re-establish itself and prepare for the next century. But it cannot be the same again in our lifetime. Man with his detachment towards the natural world is wreaking ecological mayhem that at each turn affects us all now. And it is within the now that we are living and having the opportunity of enjoying life in its fullest sense.

The desolation that the 1984 floods caused had its origin after the Zulu War of 1879. The British smashed a most effective political system, took over the coastal land, and forced the Zulus to concentrate in the high country. Modern medicine was introduced and the population grew rapidly. Successive governments did very little to teach modern agricultural techniques, and influx laws prevented most of the population from moving to urban areas. Political decisions always overrode ecological considerations, as they do today.

From the time I arrived in Zululand in 1952 I watched the steady deterioration of the Umfolozi catchment: heavy siltloads, filling up of pools, vegetation stripped from tributaries, overgrazing,

ploughing of vleis. From a river that lived and breathed, the Black Umfolozi turned into a storm drain.

Nature is tolerant and quick to respond to sensitive treatment but constant abuse leads to violent reaction. We are not separate from the earth, we are part of it, and our technological arrogance is a form of barbarism. We can continue as we are, but we will pay a price that other

civilisations, buried in the sands of the Middle East, have paid. We are all standing in the storm water drains of indifference, ignorance, greed, brutality, inhumanity to each other and to our fellow creatures, but above all to the land that nurtures us.

There can perhaps be no greater illustration of the indifference of some men to the natural world than a story I was told by a sugar farmer. A baboon was washed down the

Umfolozi river, having been trapped in the high branches of a giant sycamore fig tree. It floated a good 60 kilometres down the Umfolozi and was washed up on a bank near a farm. One can imagine the relief of the terrified baboon at feeling the earth after its long river nightmare. It crawled, exhausted, towards some cane and was spotted by a group of men who ran down and beat the animal to death.



A ZEN poet said, "what we need in our time today is to hear within us the sounds of the earth crying."

When I first read those lines I felt a rush of emotion because I knew that in those few poetic lines there was great power. They conveyed more than a hundred scientific statements could.

For days afterwards the words of the poet kept coming back into my head. "What are we doing to the earth and to each other?" I asked myself.

In so many ways mankind has become mindless, brutal and savage. We treat the earth as an enemy, not as a mother and a friend as we should. Every day I see a newspaper story about environmental damage, or wantonness, or insensitivity. I get

letters too from friends all over the world who are involved in the struggle to maintain an equilibrium in the environment.

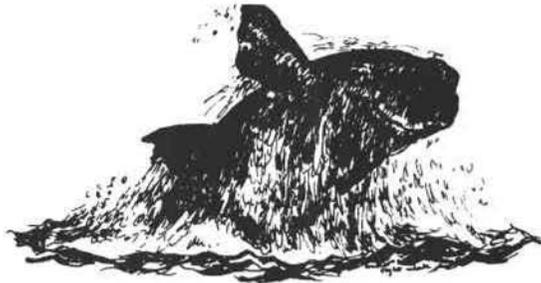
One friend from the Far East wrote to tell me of a day

Hearing the earth cry

he had gone fishing along a coral reef in the South China Sea. He was enjoying himself sitting in his small boat, a light wind blowing and the sea so clear he could see the fish they were catching for food. The day was ruined by two men who came to dynamite the coral reef. Fish of all sizes and species came floating to the surface. When their boat was full the men left to take the fish to a vil-

lage market to be sold, but for hours afterwards dead fish were rising to the surface and floating past, belly up. Five years ago these dynamiters would have used hand lines in the open sea, or nets nearer the shore. Now it is easier to use explosives. No action could be taken against them. They were backed by powerful political figures.

Recently I read about the krill, the minute shrimp that whales and many seabirds feed on, being affected badly by the warming of the Pacific ocean. This is a natural disaster but it comes at a time when whale populations are low after years of heavy hunting to a point of extinction. The lack of krill could be the final blow for these large, beautiful mammals of the sea. The whales have never been a threat to humanity, their products have benefited man, yet most of the world will do nothing to stop their destruction, and whales could soon be added to the list of extinct species. There are other examples too. No one really knows what is happening to insect populations, many of which have not yet been scientifically described.



There are birds, small mammals, trees, plants and reptiles that we know nothing about that are also disappearing. This is bad enough and might lead to sounds of mild concern from people who do care a little or who feel a qualm of conscience, but what about the drastic changes in the landscape of our own country?

If I look back over my own short life span of 57 years and remember Durban bay with its islands, mangrove swamps, kingfishers, flamingoes and pelicans, and excellent fishing, then think of my father's and grandfather's descriptions, and what they were told by my great-grandfather who arrived in 1850, I get sick in the stomach. En-

vironmentally Durban bay has been hit with the equivalent of an enormous bomb.

We have to look at old drawings, photographs and paintings to remind ourselves that it is the same place we know. Surely it is within our competence to have kept some relics of the old bay.

Natal has always been called the Garden Province of South Africa. I do not believe we deserve it. We have lost that honour. Our planning has been piecemeal and expedient, we have not looked far enough ahead, nor had the reverence for what was truly one of the greatest of God's gardens in Southern Africa.

It is no use blaming anyone

for what has happened and is continuing to happen. It is easy to round on the politicians and make them the scapegoat of all our ills. We voted them into power and I cannot recall any really serious environmental questions ever being posed to aspirant politicians. All of us are guilty for not speaking out more, for not becoming better informed, for not becoming involved, for not caring.

Until we as individuals start caring and seeing what is going on around us daily, we will continue to lose. It matters not what the colour of our skin is, all of us in the end depend upon the earth for water, food and air. The injury we do to the earth we do to ourselves.

The Fascination of the predator

I watched the yellow moon on the night it was full, rise slowly above the ocean horizon. Wisps of dark cloud hung over it, creating strange shapes.

Within an hour it was pure white and shining brightly on the dark waves. Seabirds flew past and I could hear their wheeling cries as they landed on the beach to roost. Through my binoculars I could see the shark net buoys bobbing just beyond the breakers. It set me thinking about predators.

Fear of the full moon has given rise to stories about men who turned into werewolves. There are still groups of people in various parts of Africa who are known as the leopard men, or crocodile men, or hyena people. They make ritual killings and relatives of the victims are too afraid to speak in case they

too are killed.

Man has always been fascinated yet at the same time repelled by predators. Many farmers still shoot any hawk or eagle, and sometimes the rare lammergeier, that flies over their land. If they are asked why they kill the raptorial birds, it will be to protect the chickens, the sheep or some other young stock. The rarity and beauty of the bird has no meaning, it is a predator and must be killed.



The innocent side-striped jackal which is an insectivorous beast, harmless to stock and beneficial to farmers, is still killed in some rural areas because it is thought to be a predator. If a lion breaks out of a game reserve it will be followed day and night until it is located and killed. The same with hyena, leopard and even the cheetah, one of the most beautiful of all the spotted predators of Africa.

I can remember thousands and thousands of rand being spent to kill crocodiles outside of reserves — and once for many months inside the game reserve. It was only the very occasional human that was taken by the crocodile, but one death led to hysterical outbursts which gave the impression that crocodiles were taking over the country. It led to meetings in farmers'

halls in Zululand that were attended by the most senior Parks Board officers and even an MEC who was forced to make promises to eliminate crocodiles.

The shark net buoys that I watched in the moonlight on the waves are another manifestation of the incredible passion for the elimination of predators. Neither logic nor expense has any bearing.

Many years ago some people were bitten by sharks. This was enough to keep the hordes of visiting tourists away from the coast and local authorities clamoured for action against the sharks. A most efficient bureaucracy was formed which provides work for a lot of men: the Anti Shark Measures Board.

No politician could ever have questioned the motive of doing something to stop sharks from claiming the occasional victim. He would have been howled down and kicked out of office. The image of dark lean shapes in the depths of the sea leaping up to bite someone was far too powerful to ever question.

It is the same with all predators whether they be shark, or lion, leopard, cheetah, jackal, hyena or crocodile. They are the external projection of something in the unconscious of man that he cannot bear within himself.

I have watched hundreds of people sitting on watch alone at night around a little, flickering fire. They were on watch to guard their companions from rhino stumbling on the camp or a lion wandering. Yet with exceptions so rare that I can literally count them on my one hand, the night watchers always stared into the fire, from which there was no danger. It was

the outside where danger lurked. It took me many years of reading before I realised that people were afraid of the predator within themselves.

It is ironic that the most ruthless and efficient predator in our country is the motor car. In one year it has killed many more people than are killed in our border war, and by combined shark, crocodile, and lion and leopard attacks. The faster we drive the higher the death rate. When petrol restrictions were imposed in the 1970s and the speed limit was lowered, the casualties were more than halved. But this has been conveniently forgotten; we are now being told

that raising the speed limit will be quite safe. How anyone can believe this absolute nonsense is beyond understanding.

The difference between the predators of the deep sea, the lion, the eagle and the motor car, is that we control the car. We are the drivers and we become the predators.

Albert Einstein the great mathematician asked Sigmund Freud the psychologist, "Why war?" Freud said it was because of the death wish. If man did not project out upon other people he would commit suicide. The motor car satisfies both the murderous and the suicidal instincts, hence its popularity.

Scourge of the poachers

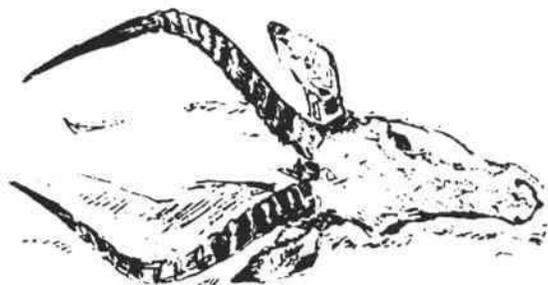
READING Chris Waddington's article on the inclusion of Nxwala estates into the Mkuze game reserve reminded me of one of my great friends in the early days of game ranging in Zululand in the 1950s, Norman Deane. He was a courageous man who for twelve years worked in the most dedicated way for conservation in Natal. He left an easy and lucrative profession in insurance in Johannesburg to go to north-eastern Zululand. It was a great upheaval for him and for his wife, who loyally followed him.

In the winter of 1954 I was instructed to proceed to the Mkuze game reserve to help Norman Deane in his anti-poaching patrols. I stayed the night in the prefabricated cottage in which he and his wife lived on top of the Lebombo mountains. From the

front verandah it was possible to see the glint of the sea at Sodwana Bay on a clear day. To the north the Pongola snaked across the plains of Tongaland and to the south was Lake St Lucia, Mkuze game reserve and Nxwala estates.

It was on Nxwala estates that gangs of white and black poachers were constantly marauding. We went down early the next day and spent weeks patrolling day and night. One day we chased a magistrate after he had shot an impala, but he slipped away in a four-wheel drive vehicle while we ran on foot through the bush, trying to cut him off.

There were some local farmers who earned enough money from selling poached impala to buy new cars and increase their cattle herds, which they grazed illegally on Nxwala. It was a lawless area



where certain poachers would not have hesitated to shoot and kill us if they thought they could get away with it.

We camped on the edge of Nsumu Pan which at that time was bone dry. Tall phragmites reeds grew in the bed of the pan. Many impala had trekked out of the game reserve for the good browsing and grazing on the reeds and grass in Nsumu and the acacia trees on the nearby flats. At night we were plagued by millions of mosquitoes from the Mkuze swamps. In the day time it was the wildebeest flies that swarmed above us, getting into our eyes and ears and biting viciously. The heat could be devastating, too, and there were some days when only tea, thickly sweetened with condensed milk, kept us going. We had to be careful where we made a fire and then it had to be smokeless so that we did not give our position away. The game guards taught us which wood to use in the dry stream beds, out of sight of poachers' eyes.

The white poachers would come in at night in their bakies, blind impala and any other game with strong spotlights, then shoot the animals at close range. Many times the animals were badly wounded and left to die with stomachs shot out or minus legs or eyes. We would find

them days later, staggering dazedly across the hot veld with thousands of "brommer" flies laying their white eggs in the suppurating wounds.

Some nights we raced across the veld, not being able to see more than a few metres ahead. We hit stones, old stumps and antbear holes. Norman Deane was a brilliant driver with an uncanny understanding of the landscape. There were moments when we stopped centimetres away from a deep donga where we would have broken our necks had the vehicle plunged in.

The poachers had many advantages. They knew the terrain intimately and when they heard us coming they switched their lights off and moved half a kilometre or more into the reeds and kept quiet. In the pitch dark it was like looking for the proverbial needle. But we had our successes and caught offenders by lying in wait at roads leading across the Umzindusi riverbed onto Nxwala. Everyone, of course, just happened to be out looking for cattle and by chance they had come upon wounded impala which they put out of their misery. We were told these stories in the most unctuous tones. The fact that the vehicle was bristling with firearms and all sorts of "bulala" lamps was of

course for protection from poachers! We told them to tell their story to the courts and some magistrates believed them, which was very disheartening. One poacher got off because he was charged with killing a wildebeest. The ranger who caught the poacher had not specified blue wildebeest in his statement. The nearest black wildebeest was a good 500 km west, but the court released the man. We who had worked in the burning heat and bitter cold had to learn to keep our tempers and accept the court ruling. It was hard to do it with grace.

Norman Deane died last year after a long illness that he fought with a courage that was second nature to him. I will always remember his strong hands grasping the steering wheel, the glint in his blue-green eyes, the jut of his jaw and his fair hair windblown as we raced across Nxwala estate after poachers. His work contributed to the inclusion of Nxwala estates into areas under the control of the Natal Parks Board.



The one that nearly got away

THE year was 1964. I had been recently appointed Chief Conservator for Zululand when my brother Gary came to visit me. Already he was a world figure in golf and a legend in his own time.

"I need a break," he said. "I want to go fishing and get as far away from people as possible."

I took a few days leave and we made our way to a remote spot on the Zululand coast.

We arrived in the dark and slept on the beach around a wood fire. We talked until the early hours. As brothers we were different in some ways but alike in others. He had never liked books and was an irritatingly slow reader. He was an extrovert while I was an introvert. But we both had this passion for fishing and as boys we had learnt much from our father, and from the Indian fishermen who took us under their wing and showed us the special pools for blacktail and bream on the South Coast.

I woke at first light next morning and watched the sun come up over an almost silent sea. Then the light streamed through the forest, reflecting brightly on the broad green leaves of the wild strelitzia. A yellow sunbird chirped above the tree canopy and a brown robin sang softly in the underbrush. No robin sang as lovely a song and it symbolised the wildness of this coast. I woke my brother and told him that this was the sweet music of a dune forest.

When the sun rose the bird stopped singing. It was a perfect coastal Zululand day, a clear sky, very little wind and the sea shimmering and warm, with small rollers sweeping in from the east. The long golden beach stretched northwards to the horizon and Mozambique.

Gary took a rod and walked to the water while I prepared coffee. I was making the fire when I heard him shout. He was waving frantically. He was into a shoal of fish. I grabbed my rod and trotted down to the beach. As I came nearer I saw him cast out a small silver spoon with the grace and ease that came of years of hitting a golf ball.

The spoon hit the water, he reeled in and the light spinning rod dipped. But now I could see his face and hear his exultant cries.

"Another one, another one," he was shouting. "Didn't you hear me call? There won't be any fish left — look at them," he said excitedly, pointing to three silver shad lying under an overhanging rock. I had to admit they were a fine catch but added, "Some guys are born lucky."

"Luck-nothing," he snorted. "Skill my boy, skill."

We were competitive, so I forgot about breakfast and began fishing. I didn't get a bite all day. Gary had retired to cook his fish and make remarks about game rangers needing fishing lessons.

That evening I fished for shad again, using a strip of Gary's fish. The tide had changed and the deep sapphire blue water came swirling in. I heard Gary shout about a missing strike. "Nearly pulled the rod out of my hands," he yelled.

I turned to look, glanced back at my bait in the gathering gloom and intuitively knew something was going to happen. There was a swirl near my float. My line went taut and I saw the flash of a barracuda. My tackle was hardly strong enough to catch a shad let alone this rapier shaped fish. The rod bent and the spool on the reel wobbled with strain. "I'll never get this fish in," I wailed above the splashing of the waves.

"Never, never?" Gary said mockingly. "Who told me when I was a youngster never to say never. Must I teach you, now that you're an old man?"

The nylon sang in the wind and everything except the sea and the fish was forgotten. The fish began to come in when it was so dark that I could only see the tip of my rod. Then the reel burst. In the few seconds quietness, as one wave smashed against the rocks and another gathered momentum, I heard the fish splashing in the water. I wrapped the line round the spool and guided by Gary with a torch I got onto the beach and felt the warm grit underfoot. The rest was easy and in moments the fish was on the clean sand and lay there glowing with colour.

That night we ate steaks from the fish grilled on driftwood. A bushbaby called from the sand forest, crickets chirruped and the waves swept up the beach with a long hissing sound.

That was 20 years ago. Today the same beach is crowded. Places are too easy to get to. We need those wild beaches so that brother can get to know brother, and father to know son.



Man of Courage

The recent news of South Africa's deliberations with Mozambique, and the latest canoe race, reminded me of my good friend Paul Dutton.

I remember Paul in the 1953 canoe race paddling into Durban with very little skin left on his hands. I was so impressed with his courage and cheerfulness that I tried to talk him into becoming a game ranger. But it was only four years later after wandering around the world that Paul joined the Natal Parks Board. He was an outstanding game ranger, sensitive to

the wilderness, a good ornithologist, mechanically competent and extremely courageous.

He was for many years stationed on Lake St Lucia and thereafter transferred to Ndumu. It was a world that he fitted into as though born there. The Tonga people loved him and taught him much of their veld lore. I arrived at his thatched house at Ndumu one cold day in June when fish eagles were calling and hippo grunting on the Pongola flood plain. He gave me a Portuguese Laurentino beer and for supper we ate fried caterpillars and termites, marula nuts, and tilapia fish broiled in leaves. Our sweets were marula jelly and umdoni berries. One of the greatest meals I ever had.

Paul was in his element on the rivers and pans of the Ndumu country. He knew most of the hippo and crocodile and was a pundit on the bird migrations. He had a small Super Cub aeroplane and it could be a frightening experience to fly with him over Tongaland and Mozambique looking for elephant herds and doing game counts. He would land the plane on the beach or a road or even in a clearing in the bush.

Paul got on well with the Portuguese and to help them he took surplus game from Ndumu by barge to the elephant park at Salamanca. In 1972 he left the Natal Parks board and went to work for the Portuguese government. He was stationed in Gorongosa with another old Zululand game ranger, Ken Tinley, and together they worked on conservation problems in some of the wildest parts of Africa.

In 1974 the Frelimo gueril-

la movement took over Mozambique from the Portuguese. In the uproar that followed Paul decided to remain and continue working there. He was one of the very few whites who stayed at his post in Lourenco Marques during one of the bad riots in the town. His courage, cheerfulness and cool head impressed the Frelimo leaders, and he carried on in Mozambique.

He watched as many drastic changes took place but he adapted to them and with his love for his work and for the people, he continued to uphold conservation principles. There was very little equipment, trained staff were lacking, food in short supply, but Paul made do. I went to see him and marvelled at his patience and understanding in the most incredibly difficult situations. The old Portuguese era was over and Russians, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Yugoslavs, East Germans, Americans and Britons were coming into the country. The Scandinavians gave large sums of money for conservation but the infrastructure had been badly damaged by the long guerilla war and it was difficult to put the money to good use. But Paul struggled on in his old determined manner. He now spoke Portuguese fluently, which helped smooth the way.

The years passed until March 1982 when he was arrested by the security forces and taken to the dreaded high security political prison of Machava. He was a South African and a victim of the consequences of the pre-emptive raid by South African forces into Mozambique. He knew he was innocent but his protests and questions were ignored.

The days passed with long interrogations, arc lights on his face and accusations of things he knew nothing about. He wondered at the frailty and irony of life. He had done so much for Mozambique and now he was treated like a criminal. He was in solitary confinement and the weeks passed, with others who had been arrested with him being released. The wall of his cell was blotched with blood from swatted mosquitoes and a previous incumbent had created a beach scene with fingers and faeces. On another section there were slogans proclaiming communism. He wondered if he would ever get out alive. The terror of being alone in the cell made him devise all sorts of schemes to keep the guards talking when they brought a broom for him to clean out his cell. Paul was called Cambaco, Portuguese for a solitary bull elephant.

I had been away in the Philippine Islands working in the hell of heat and cyclone on Mindoro Island trying to establish the number of surviving tamaraw, and I came home to be told of Paul Dutton's plight. I realised it was imperative that his captors understood that we knew where he was. Unknown prisoners stood little chance.

Using every friend I had in London, Paris and Washington, telegrams were sent to Mozambique authorities asking why Paul Dutton was in custody. Then my friend Sir Laurens van der Post came to South Africa on a visit and I told him the story of Paul Dutton. Laurens simply said, "I was in prison with the Japanese. I know what it is like, I

will help." His friends were contacted and together with Paul's brother, Bobbv, in Solzburg, and my own efforts, the battle for Paul's release was seriously joined.

In the meantime wildlife had come to Paul's rescue. His knowledge of insects and birds saved his sanity. He became an expert on a spider in his cell and from the barred metre square window he saw the birds he had once lived among and worked to protect. Pelicans, flamingoes, glossy ibis and other water birds flew past on their way to feeding grounds. One evening he saw a bat caught in the sky by a sooty falcon. He

began painting wildlife scenes in his cell with a mixture of pipe ash and a squeeze of invaluable toothpaste. Sable, lion, night adders, dung beetles and elephants decorated the walls. The guards were fascinated and began talking to Paul. His biggest fear now was that there would be no more wall space for his art. He had to stretch up on the tips of his toes to paint.

Eight weeks after his detention he was released. Frelimo had realised he was innocent, and a most valuable member of their civil service.

He was later summoned to the presidency by President Samora Machel who spoke to

him about conservation and praised him for his contribution to Mozambique. Paul in his usual way accepted all that had happened and continued working to complete his contract. Like Laurens van der Post he forgave his captors and became even greater friends with them after his ordeal. But he knew that his work with wildlife and wild places and all the suffering he had endured for conservation had been repaid when wildlife came to his rescue in the Machava political prison.

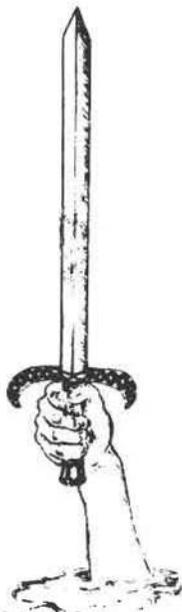
Paul Dutton is still in conservation and is working for a homeland government.

In the shadow of the Holy Grail

I REMEMBER when I was a small boy being fascinated by the story of King Arthur, the Round Table, and the knights who sought the Holy Grail.

So when the opportunity came recently to visit Glastonbury in Somerset after an extended stay on the Island of Iona, my wife and I took the British Rail to Bristol, by far the cheapest and best form of travel. From Bristol we went by car to Glastonbury. Winter was coming fast, it was dark early and a heavy dank mist hung over the land. I knew we were near the town when against a dimly lit horizon I saw the silhouette of the tor.

This hill rising steeply out of the land is a prominent point that can be seen for miles. We climbed it the next day in hazy sunshine and looked at the surrounding country of hedgerows, rye



grass fields and trees in the last of the autumn colours.

As we sat quietly on the hill, listening to the cawing

crow and the whistle of starlings, I could sense the mystical atmosphere. I felt transported back into time and heard horses' hooves plodding on muddy paths, the swish of reeds, a creaking boat coming across the fens, and the rattle of lance against shield. This was the ancient Isle of Avalon, recorded in song, poetry and prose. The aura is still strong and is it no wonder that down the centuries men would have been drawn to this magical atmosphere. In earlier times the tor was in the middle of many interlinked lakes and marshes. The Druids were here and undoubtedly used the hill as a place of worship. Winding up around the tor is a succession of seven terraces. It would appear that this was a maze used in religious festivals by the Druid priests, the number seven having magical significance. Archaeologists

have unearthed many lake villages and found jewelled ornaments and shards dating back to 500 BC, and recorded history begins with the arrival of Celtic warriors in the Iron Age.

A Scotsman who was a professor of engineering at Oxford said that the Glastonbury landscape had been laid out to form a lunar observatory where eclipses of the moon could be predicted. A Mrs Maltwood discovered in the 1920s that the land surrounding Glastonbury had been shaped in the signs of the Zodiac. Some researchers say it dates back to the Atlantean Age but whenever it was done, it became a landmark that has been the font of mysticism in this part of Britain.

Of all the legends associated with Glastonbury the story of Joseph of Arimathea still lingers strongly. St Philip is said to have sent him to take the gospel to Great Britain. When he arrived with his twelve followers, he leant on his staff at Wearyall Hill, and it took root. Very significantly this hill is part of the Piscean effigy in the Zodiac and the fish was one of the first Christian symbols. The world also entered the Zodiacal Age of Pisces with the inception of Christianity. There are three thorn trees in Glastonbury. It is a Near East species which flowers in the early part of January and the first blossoms are always sent to the reigning monarch, the survival of an ancient tradition.

Legend tells us that Joseph of Arimathea brought with him the chalice used at the Last Supper and in which he gathered some of the blood of Christ after the Roman sol-

dier had pierced His side. The chalice was hidden in a well and became the Grail. What is legend, or myth, or truth? In the dimness of the past they are inextricably mixed.

There seems little doubt that a man named Arthur did exist and that he was a great and revered leader. He rallied the Ancient Britons after the Romans left, and fought a long war against invading Saxons. It was at a time too when western man began recognising the unconscious feminine element within himself.

Women became more significant and knights protected and cared for them, and the whole feminine element was uplifted.

An hour's drive from Glastonbury is Cadbury Castle, or so a sign says, but there is no building, only a hill that was obviously once a great fort. A smaller sign says it was the ancient Camelot.

We climbed it early one morning when the ground mists were still rising. Intuition tells you that this was a

place of great importance. Imagination brings it all to life. One can sense where the fireplaces were and a great round table stood. There is the smell of oak burning and the sound of horses neighing and knights singing and women sighing. It is a magical place. I would have liked to waik along its edge on a moonlight night. Alfred Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott" captures the moment:

"And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers 'Tis the fairy Lady of Shalott."

I came away from Glastonbury and Camelot knowing that the quest of King Arthur's knights is not over. The Grail still exists and we continue to seek it. It is the grail of truth, justice, mercy, kindness and love. We wait anxiously for another King Arthur to lead us against the forces of darkness that exist within us all, and that are taking us to the brink of nuclear disaster.



Why they try to appease the spirits

THE Zulus say that you do not take a step in life without the spirits watching over you. The old Australian aborigines would carry two sticks whenever they walked into unknown country. They tapped the sticks to warn the spirits of their presence.

The Batangans in the Iglit mountains in the Philippines go to elaborate lengths to placate the spirits that are said to abound in the dense forests of their country. Ancestral worship was part of every day life for the Red Indians

of North America. Christianity speaks of angelic presences.

I must confess that having recently spent 19 days on the Island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland I am not as sceptical as I used to be.

The island has always called me, perhaps because my mother was a Ferguson and part of the clan were from this region. Hundreds of thousands of other people are called annually too, but ninety-nine percent of them go in

the summer months. The howling gales, lack of sun and an icy cold sea deter visitors in the dark winter.

My wife and I were offered the use of a cottage on the northern tip of the island in October, the end of the tourist season. We had participated in the 3rd World Wilderness Congress at Inverness and Findhorn which was emotionally and intellectually taxing, so we were grateful for the opportunity to rest and renew ourselves on one of the most spiritual and famous islands of Christianity.

I had been here once before in 1969 for only a few hours. At that time one caught a MacBrayne steamer at Fort William and sailed to the island. Half an hour's walk in the ruins of the nunnery convinced me of the power of Iona and I had longed to go back and experience it without the crowds. My wish has been fulfilled.

A ferry paid for by EEC money now transports one across the Sound of Mull from Fionnphort to Iona. We crossed on a rough day with waves splashing over the side and wetting our baggage. The car that brought us had to be left at Fionnphort on Mull because only residents of the island are permitted to have motorcars. A great blessing.

The people of the Western Isles are a taciturn lot and the ferrymen epitomised them and hardly gave us a nod. But a red cheeked broad shouldered man did pick up our two heavy cases, weighed down with books and papers, as though they were feather pillows. I thanked him profusely and got an "aye" in acknowledgement.

The cottage was two kilometres from the jetty so we

trundled our cases on a rickety handcart. It was grey and overcast and a strong icy east wind swept across the sound, sending dark clouds scurrying over the vast Atlantic. As we walked pushing the cart it was impossible to talk. The wind choked the words back.

We passed the nunnery, grey and cold in the darkening light, but a robin flashed across the stone walls, its breast cinnamon rather than red. I knew the bird and that made me happy.

Below us on the right the rebuilt Ionan Abbey stood grey and silent. In a field nearby white seagulls wheeled, calling in loud whistling tones. I heard the last notes of a curlew's call and flocks of unidentified wading birds flew across the grass. Near the Abbey was a mound, the Reilig Oran. It is a most sacred place for Scotland. Sixty kings lie buried here, Scottish, Irish and Norwegian. The last king was buried here before the Norman Conquest of England.

We passed a croft and black faced sheep that grazed on dark green hills, and made our way towards the cottage close to the beach which is called Triagh bhan am manach (The white beach of the monks). On this beach Viking pirates dragged and killed some eight to 15 monks and the Abbot in 986 AD. We saw it peaceful yet wild, with waves smashing over rocks and white spray hurtling into the air.

By 5pm it was getting dark and we built a welcome fire in the kitchen. Driven rain splattered against windows and the wooden panels of the rooms creaked with the buffeting from the wind. Waves from the Sound of Mull

pushed by the east wind pounded the white beach only 15 metres from the cottage. We were on Iona. On the west side of the island there was nothing but the Atlantic until the coast of North America.

For the next 18 days we walked about the island, and beyond the small village and crofts we never saw another human being. We climbed Dun I, the highest point, and watched the sun disappear in a halo of green into the Atlantic. It rained, blew, and one day there was sleet, but it was worth walking to be alone on those dark hills and in the small glens. We prayed at St Columba's shrine, and had the Abbey and the stillness of St Oran's chapel to ourselves. One afternoon I got lost and returned in the dark through the ruins of the nunnery and past the Reilig Oran, the old burial mound. I then knew why the aborigines tapped sticks.



Basic needs

"Slow down, just slow down."

Almost without exception I have to say this to every businessman I take out on trail. I had two out a short while ago who kept on looking at their watches.

"It won't help you to look at your watches. You have nowhere to go. You have no appointments unless it is with an angry black rhino. There will be no telephone calls," I said.

Our world is now so fast with instant telecommunications, cars racing everywhere, areoplanes roaring overhead, everyone in a hurry. Men clutching briefcases and running for the next appoint-

ment. Tension and more tension. No wonder these two poor businessmen looked at their watches as we sat in the shade of an acacia robusta tree. They had been conditioned to doing something or expecting something every hour of the day. What a world we live in. Hardly surprising people get ulcers or die of heart attacks.

I talked at length to the businessmen and saw the tension seeping out of them as we watched purple crested louries flying with their blood red feathers shining in the afternoon sun. Baboons and monkeys fed in the high branches of the fig trees and a fish eagle soared overhead, singing a song of true avian freedom. I had to point it all out. Step by step. Eyes were non-seeing and ears ringing with the crash of progress. But they were very intelligent, they would not have had the high positions in industry if they were not. They began to look and listen and in doing so became dimly aware of that old surge of African rhythm.

Years of cigarettes had almost destroyed their sense of smell and I was not popular when I would not let them smoke as we walked. I was even more unpopular when we reached the camp underneath the sycamore fig and I would allow no liquor. I told them bluntly that if they could not go without for three days they were on their way to becoming alcoholics. For a little while the atmosphere in the camp was strained. Then they lit a fire and put nearly all the wood we had in the camp onto the blaze. It boiled the kettle quickly but there was no wood for the night. I told

them about the lions and rhino that used the path below the camp. It was a main highway to the pool in the Black Umfolozi. No light in the camp and they could stumble in here.

"Let's get firewood," one man said resignedly.

We trekked up the hill and came back sweating and swearing with heavy nthomboti and combretum logs. Suddenly we were slapping at biting insects. "Bonkilo — red ants," Magqubu laughed, his perfect teeth glinting in the dusk.

The woodpile looked healthy again and there was talk of a bath. "Help yourself," I said, pointing to the dry river. "All you have to do is dig a metre." One man took the bucket and trundled down.

That evening the whole bucket was used. Next day they bathed and shaved and cleaned their teeth in a mug of water then washed it out with a little hot water and had coffee. On the third day everyone had found that one spoon, a mug and a tin plate was more than adequate equipment for food and washing.

By the time we had to trek out of the wilderness area we

knew a great deal about one another. The persona had slipped. We were friends, too, in a way that friendships were forged a hundred years ago. No one looked at watches any more and there was a groan when we heard the first car. Those two 20th century businessmen had just had a 19th century experience. They had also learnt what the word conservation really meant.

I was sad to part from them but I knew they would go back to their offices with new vigour. The physical side of the wilderness experience was a little less strenuous than a mild tennis match. We walked no more than five kilometres a day. But we had time to meditate on life and its meaning, accepting the kinship of all creatures and acknowledging unity with the universe of things. There had been spiritual refreshment which gave us a chance of looking at life anew, of appreciating the need for inner exploration. The hours on the night watch had forced them to think and to listen. From all this and the all too brief a time in solitude beside the warmth of the fire, they had felt the presence of the great Creator of the universe.



Whispers of the long grass

AT two in the morning it was my turn to get up and keep watch at the fire under the giant sycamore fig tree. The man who woke me said there had been a leopard grunting on the hill behind the camp. He was for the moment silent about other events on his watch.

In the two days that we had been together in the wil-

derness, his features had softened and his voice had lost that irritable edge peculiar to many people in business under pressure.

I could sense that he wanted to talk so we left the camp and walked past the still forms of the other trailers to the path that led to the river bank. A hundred metres from the fire we sat on some



long grass and made ourselves comfortable.

The sky above us was brilliant with stars. The constellation of Scorpio had begun its journey across the heavens upside down in the early part of the night and now there it was with the stinging in the right position.

I told the man the story of the Tswana people who said that the sun had a very old blanket full of holes. When it went to bed at night it pulled the blanket over itself and the stars were the light from

the sun shining through the holes. We spoke in whispers because even at a hundred metres a human voice can be very loud.

The man told me how much he had enjoyed getting away from telephones and the rush of getting to and from work, the traffic jams and the interminable noise.

"By the end of the first day, I had lost all the tensions. I enjoyed the companionship of the other five people too. I would never have believed it possible to become

so relaxed in so short a time," he said.

"I'll admit that the fear of lions, buffalo and black rhino got my mind away from the daily grind of life. The sound of the black rhino, snorting and crashing through the undergrowth, made my heart pound, my mouth dry and my mind concentrate on one thing only — survival." He laughed quietly.

He admitted too that the first night had many terrors for him because he could not identify the sounds of the different animals and he wondered when a lion was going to wander into the camp and attack him, but within 48 hours he felt part of this ancient landscape with its variety of animals, birds, and plants. The spirit of the place had unlocked something inside him.

I told him that if the scientists were correct — and the evidence they had was formidable — then it was in this kind of acacia savannah that man evolved. For a million years and more, early man had seen animals and heard birds calling, as we did now.

Man had watched the sun rise and set, seen the moon and wondered about the stars and our place in the universe.

It was only in the last six hundred years that we had begun to cut ourselves adrift from the ancient rhythms and we were paying for it with heart attacks and nervous disorders.

The youth and many other people too searched for an understanding of themselves through drugs, only in the end to become bitter, disillusioned and addicted. A closer contact with nature would have resolved many of their problems.

We listened to the sounds of the night: the wind rushing through the trees, a single frog calling, a greenshank flying upstream and whistling.

A buffalo herd near us fed on the phragmites reeds. I could see the starlight reflected on their shiny horns, and I heard their breathing.

The man and I had talked and listened for nearly an hour and it seemed minutes.

As we got up to go the man said, "You know, I have never considered myself religious but on my watch as I sat beside the fire alone and in silence I really felt the presence of God."

It was an experience that many people had in the 30 years that I had been walking in the wilderness. It came in differing degrees of intensity. Some people had broken

down and wept, others were just silent, but I always knew by the look on their faces what had happened.

As we strolled back to the fire I thought to myself what a pity it was that theologians did not take advantage of what the wilderness had to offer. Maybe around the fire the many different Christian sects could sort out differences and help to lead humanity to brighter horizons.

I WILL not easily forget Tuesday, July 5. I was off on a Wilderness Leadership School trail into Umfolozi game reserve and had reached Mtubatuba when a howling west wind began blowing. Within half an hour the sky was filled with swirling dust and by four o'clock the sun was like a pale moon shining in the western sky. It was an ominous sight, presaging troubles of the most serious kind for our country. The soil of South Africa was being blown away. For years in the good rainfall period it was washed into the sea, leaving dongas and scarred hillsides. Now in the dry period the winds blow it away. We do not seem to have learnt any lesson.

As we began our trail walking along the banks of the dry Black Umfolozi river, there was a weird stillness. The birds did not call and the game hid in the thickets. Only once before had I experienced this kind of quietness. It was July 1963 when Zululand was struck by some of the most worst floods in its recorded history. As we continued walking I contemplated how we lived in a country that alternated between flood and drought. Our long



We're blowing away

term survival required the most careful land planning and involvement of all the people of South Africa.

The great soil men of past decades had given us ample warning of what to expect if we pressed on thinking that man was separate from nature and could continue without heeding her laws. I remembered Dr T.C. Robertson of the Veld Trust, exclaiming angrily in the 1950s about politicians who foolishly believed that man-made laws superseded nature's law. He spoke of the great droughts that were sure to come and the need to conserve catchment areas and prepare the people psychologically to appreciate man's dependence upon the earth.

He asked for a national conservation strategy and reiterated endlessly that drought and flood knew no colour bar. Everyone was part of the land which was like a giant spiderweb: touch one part of the web and the whole web shook.

That was over 30 years ago, but few people listened. South Africa continued to swallow the promises of politicians who had no understanding of the land and who took little notice of those who did. They ignored the fact that South Africa's main problems were biological and not constitutional. We are now understanding that land strategy has been a matter of expediency, not deep understanding. Well, we are getting our comeuppance and it will get worse until we make it our business to learn to live with the land, to respect and love it as we would our mother.

We are going to have to reduce our numbers and this will require the most careful planning and sensitivity. If we do not do it, nature will, and her methods are merciless. War, disease, and famine are but a few arrows in her quiver.

It was dark by the time my little trail party reached the big sycamore fig tree under which we camp. I have known it for 32 years, slept underneath it, prayed to God beside it and eaten its fruit. It is an old and greatly valued friend. We had our supper as the wind died down and dust from the sky dropped like fine rain through the leaves. I remembered a story Dr. T.C. Robertson told me about Hugh Bennet, the father of soil

conservation in America.

In the great American drought of the 1930s, Hugh Bennet was giving evidence before a Senate committee on the urgent need for soil conservation action. He drew out his evidence because he knew that a dust storm was approaching Washington DC. When he saw the sun darkening he called the senators to the window to see how the United States was being blown into the Atlantic ocean. The Senate committee

needed no further urging and agreed to all Hugh Bennet's recommendations.

I watched the firelight flickering on the great fig tree and wondered whether anyone would be pointing to our skies and saying to the political councils of our land, "There goes the soil of South Africa." And even if there were someone who did the pointing, would the political councils listen, let alone understand? We face a drought of human spirit too.



A Dedicated Ranger

RECENTLY there was a small announcement in the press that Nick Steele had been seconded from the Natal Parks Board to the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources. Natal's loss is KwaZulu's gain.

In 1956 I was clattering along the road from Umfolozi game reserve to Mtubatuba in an old Land Rover when I was waved down by Peter Potter, then the Chief Conservator of Zululand. "I want to introduce you to a new man. This is Nick Steele," he said. We shook hands and I looked into eyes that had the spark of deep resolution. It was the start of a long friendship.

Within a year we were working together at Lake St Lucia, catching and selling bait to irate fishermen who were seldom satisfied either with the size of the bait, its quantity, or its age. It required skill and hard work not only to get the bait but to keep it reasonably fresh without deepfreezers.

Then the mouth of St Lucia closed and the Parks Board became the target of



every dissatisfied visitor and local. As Nick Steele and I were the Parks Board representatives we had to bear the continuous abuse. I had already had four years service in the Board and had undergone my baptism of abuse at Richards Bay and at the upper Lake stations of Fannies

and False Bay, but Nick, who was sensitive, polite and kind and wanting to please the public, was shocked by the experience. Other employees wilted and resigned under the pressure but the resolution I had seen in Nick Steele's eyes took shape and he became more

determined.

A year later we were at Umfolosi game reserve together. He and his Zulu game guards who were his friends as well as patrol men, guarded the long boundary of what was then called the Southern Crown Lands. He lived alone at Gome outpost in an old shack that had been made from bits and pieces of Harris fly traps. Nick's sense of order soon turned it into a home for himself and his dogs.

There are many men who think they can stand loneliness but few who survive when they really face it. Nick not only survived but thrived, and I saw as the years passed a young man developing and growing into the kind of conservationist who was prepared to defend the wild country he was responsible for — with his life if necessary. The game guards called him Malamba (The Hungry One), and they loved and respected him and stood by him in some extremely dangerous situations.

Nick understood horses, and fought hard to have them used in patrol work; later they were worth their weight in gold in Operation Rhino. Nick had physical courage as well as moral courage and the two qualities together have made him one of the most formidable men in wildlife conservation. When the pressure was on to get rid of the lions, Nick Steele stood fast and fought for them. When roads were mooted in the wilderness area, Nick was the first to voice his displeasure.

He had learnt to fight too. Wildlife conservationists learn many tricks in the bat-

les to maintain wild country against all sorts of would-be destroyers.

Nick's initiation was in a hard school with some of the toughest politicians Natal has produced. All this experience stood him in good stead and he grew with his responsibilities. It was Nick who pushed hard for the establishment of conservancies when he was at the Parks Board head office in Pietermaritzburg. It was one more contribution to an already long list.

Nick is a product of Weston Agricultural College, a school noted for its practical attitude. It has produced many men who are part of the backbone of farming in Natal. He worked as a stockman before joining the Parks

Board, so he understood the thinking of farmers. However, practical stockmen seldom, if ever, become literary men. Nick is one of the exceptions and he has written three fascinating books on his experiences as a game ranger: "Bushlife of a Game Warden", "Take a Horse to the Wilderness", and "Game Ranger on Horseback". In time to come they will be a gold lode for conservation historians because they are such personal stories.

Nick Steele always had a deep admiration for Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi which was reciprocated. It is a long standing friendship, so it is fitting that Nick now serves this great leader of the black people of Zululand.



Thoughts at Waterloo

WHILE on a journey to the United Kingdom I had to stop off in Brussels for 24 hours. I stayed in a hotel in the centre of the city and phoned the porter to ask about tours.

"Round the city and Waterloo, 1 500 francs, monsieur." It sounded an astronomical sum and the porter sensed my apprehension. "One thousand five hundred francs is 40 dollars monsieur," he said. So I went downstairs, met my bearded driver and he drove me slowly through the city. He was not an enthusiast. Obviously he had taken too many drives and too many people. At the end of one street a big crowd was demonstrating against the stationing of American missiles in Europe.



"Where is Europe going? Where is the vision of this continent?" I asked the driver a little sarcastically, and I pointed at the demonstrators. He answered me slowly. "We have the Common Market and we have not had a war for 37 years. For Europe that is remarkable."

We continued through narrow streets and I looked at the people. They seemed less formal or rigid than their Dutch neighbours. Migrant

Turk, Greek and Italian workers were much in evidence, their dress and attitudes adding to the atmosphere.

I asked the driver where he came from. "My family are Jewish. They escaped from Russia only to be caught in Germany. My brother and sister were sent to Belsen and they never returned." He told me how friends had smuggled him when he was a little boy to France where he grew up, hidden in the country away from Nazi persecutors.

We turned off the motorway and there was a huge mound in the middle of a field. On top of the mound was an enormous bronze lion. "Waterloo," the driver said. I climbed the long line of steps leading up to the lion and had to stop twice in the cold wind for a rest. At the top someone had sprayed red graffiti on the base of the lion. The view, however was impressive. Rye grass grew in pastures and there were ploughed fields where white

gulls flew in among black ravens and domestic pigeons feeding on the open lands. It was down on those fields that Napoleon and Wellington's men had clashed.

I walked down the steps back to the panorama building with its huge circular painting of the battle. It was winter so I had the place to myself. I walked around the raised platform looking at men bludgeoned by swords, horses blasted by artillery. A painted oversize poppy lay near a papier mache horse and it was a symbolic reminder of how this battle was but a forerunner of much worse to come in 1914-1918. Poor blood sodden Europe.

"So what is your future, what of atomic war?" I asked the driver, a little more kindly now. "America and Russia are like two big boys of equal power. They are afraid to fight. We are in the middle. To fight would be the end of humanity," he said simply.

As we drove back to the

hotel with the late afternoon shadows falling across the road and a scent of burning leaves, I pondered it all. Humanity had to plod on, looking at the stars, planning for a better world, wondering about increasing consciousness, thinking about where we had gone wrong. The future is not rosy when one looks back over the bloody mire of human history and the stupidity and viciousness that exist within us all. But the true crossroads have now been reached. The atomic bomb is not the sword, arrow or lance, the ball shot or bullet. It is truly the doomsday weapon. And it is the people of Europe who have to worry most, for here house touches house, city links up with city, and village merges with farmhouse. The knowledge of what the atomic bomb would do has permeated European society.

This is why they take to the streets and demonstrate. Somewhere they believe someone is listening.

Whispers on the wind

IN Great Britain there is, apart from the Scottish highlands, little wild country left. It is a land that has been beaten back and tamed.

From neolithic man to wild tribesman to Roman, to Norman invasion to modern man, there has been a steady attack upon the earth, shaping, altering, and clearing away the forests. Today the little wilderness on this overcrowded island is all the more precious because of the overwhelming threats to it.

I was pleased on a recent visit when promoting the third World Wilderness Congress to be invited with Laurens van der Post to speak by the Dartington Hall Trust near Dartmoor. This organisation was formed by an American heiress and her practical Yorkshire husband, Leonard Elmhirst. Its aim was to do something to revitalise decaying rural estates in England.

We talked in the Great Hall to a crowd of over 500

people, farmers, villagers and townsmen. It was said to be one of the biggest audiences to attend a talk at Dartington. Laurens van der Post spoke on nature and the human spirit, a most penetrating and inspiring talk, to people who were hungry to know more about man's relationship to nature. Discussion time was remarkable in that there was not a single political question, something almost unheard of when South Africans address a gathering.

The questions were about philosophy and history, and man's search for a better understanding of himself and his environment.

The following morning my wife and I were taken out onto the moor. It was a bitterly cold, raw morning, with a strong wind sweeping in from the sea.

We travelled along deep lanes that our guide told us were part of the old network of coach roads. We passed through a village where most of the buildings were made of stone and then within a kilometre we were on Dartmoor. The atmosphere here was very different and the village we had just passed could have been a hundred miles away. Magqubu would have appreciated this open heath and moorland country with its scattered, gnarled oaks scarred by a thousand winds, because he too would have felt the presence of the ancient spirits. Stony outcrops or tors showed above the mist and when the car stopped we walked a short distance and there was a strange silence. I was looking at a mound of rocks when a man wearing a deerstalker hat and a cloak appeared with a dog, guiding a herd of sheep. He gave me quite a start, but in moments he had vanished like a dream into the mist.

Since the most ancient of times, copper, lead, iron and tin have been mined here. There are Bronze Age hut circles and other traces of man's past, in pre-historic dwellings and heaped up stones. But the unseen presence is also here, something undefinable on the wind, whirling on the crag tops and shimmering in the lowland peat bogs. The

spirit of man. No scientist could measure or quantify it but deep down I knew it was there, the mystic link to our past. The feeling of the moor was benign, of something well used but appreciated too, and this was confirmed when we were told a story about a young servant girl whose name was Jay.

She was seduced by a local landowner, a man much above her station who took advantage of her innocence. When he knew she was pregnant he refused to see or help her. In a state of utter desolation she committed suicide and was buried in unsanctified ground on the road lead-

ing from Ashburton to Chagford. Our guide John Lane, a trustee of Dartington, said, "This in itself is not perhaps exceptional but the life enhancing truth is that her simple grave, a mound of earth under the trees and a granite headstone, is always celebrated with a fresh bunch of flowers as a living symbol of human forgiveness and affection."

No one knows who puts the flowers on the grave, but for 200 years it has been happening. The Dartmoor people who did it were keeping alive not only her memory but that of all humanity who had suffered from earliest times.



No laughing matter

AS I sat near the fire and stared into the flames on a recent trail, the hyena called from across the river. The lions had killed an nyala in the early part of the night.

I heard the quiet cough of a lioness, a rush through the reeds and the thump of body against body. A stifled cry and a life was snuffed out. The smell of blood on the night air would instantly have attracted any wandering hyena. Sometimes they follow a pride of lions and know by the sounds, the soft roars and other give-away noises of hunting lions that a kill is in the offing. I suspect too that there is a form of communication that we know very little about. The ways of nature are subtle. You have only to watch a flock of birds flying up river and see them all turn together apparently

without command, to appreciate this.

There were some deep growls and sharp roars as the hyena approached too close to the lions. Then the lions left and the hyena began screaming, giggling and laughing in their maniacal way. It is a chilling sound that gives one gooseflesh and a prickling of hair on the back of the neck. Other hyenas answered from the hills and one large animal came padding along the rhino path just below the camp. I walked to the edge of the camp and peered into the night and saw its long sloping back and big head silhouetted in the faint beams of the setting moon. It began calling, the long, deep reverberating "whoooooop" cry. The noise was so close to me my sternum seemed to rattle



and my whole body was filled with the vibrations of the sound. There was a quickening of fear in my blood and as the noise died down I could hear my heart thumping. Yet it is conversely a thrilling sound and one is caught in conflicting emotions. The hyenas are part of Africa and in their way much more exciting than the white wolves of the Arctic.

Magqubu, my dear 82 year old Zulu friend, loves to talk about hyena. He has a love-hate relationship with them. When they leave the game reserve and smash their way into his goat and calf pens and kill his stock he hates them, and tells me how he has had to clamber out of bed in the night carrying spear and torch and drive these monsters from his kraal. Yet when we are on trail and we are all enveloped by the bush, he imitates their

cries, whoops, and giggling laughs and talks to them like brothers. He told me once of a dreaded group of people in the old days of Zululand who were known as "inswelaboya" which means "those who have no hair". They were reputed to come out at night from their hiding grounds and ride giant hyenas to different parts of the country where they murdered people and gathered human fat which they used in magic medicines. Even today there are men who are said to be able to make a hut full of people fall into a deep hypnotic sleep by burning a concoction of the eyebrows of a hyena and special herbs.

In earlier days Magqubu and I often sat on the slopes of hills in the Umfolozi game reserve towards evening and watched hyena leaving their holes that had been dug by antbears. As soon as they

moved away the warthog took over and crept in backwards for the night. In the early morning the hyena returned and the warthog trotted out to their feeding grounds. I remembered and thought about it all as the big hyena walked to the river, drank from the pool then disappeared in the tall pale green fig trees towards its companions who were grunting and crushing bones, tearing at skin and crying out to each other.

Then as the first flash of light appeared in the sky the whole atmosphere in the bush changed and the hyenas grew silent. Sunlight filtered through the trees then flooded the hills and the valleys, and my own fears of the night, like those of all our ancient ancestors, were banished by the sun, the bearer of a stronger power and the hope of a new day.



The lesson of the hippos

YESTERDAY I found some diary notes I made in October 1956. Drought. Hippo. Cup of coffee.

I thought for a few moments then remembered in that year I had been posted to Charter's Creek on Lake St Lucia with instructions to investigate constant reports of hippo damage on the western side of the lake.

After a few weeks of patrols I found the reason for the hippo problem. The hippo spent all day in the lake which was saline, but when darkness came they had to travel kilometres inland to get fresh water. The planting of trees and the

ploughing of river banks and vleis had seriously lowered the water table and the streams ceased to flow. Some farmers had built small dams to irrigate their sugar cane while others had illegally dammed a river.

The hippo would stay for a day or two and their presence frightened the labour. Sometimes irrigation pipes were broken, or there was a little new cane eaten. My job was to protect the hippo and placate the farmers. An impossible task.

Every time I passed the camp office someone would rush out waving a note and I knew it was another hippo complaint to be investigated. Some farmers were abusive.

"Your bloody hippo, I'll sue the Parks Board, wait until I see Jim Grantham, he'll fire you and kill all the hippo," were some of the milder remarks. I would listen to the ranting man then try to reason with him, telling him that that the hippo were thirsty, that they were there first. The farmers only became more angry and told me to get the hippo out and away from their farms, or they would shoot them and me, too, if I interfered.

The Zulu game guards and I would take shotguns and lie in wait on the hippo paths to try to drive the unfortunate animals elsewhere, anywhere but on the farms. The mosquitoes were bad and I can remember my whole body being a black mass of biting insects. No preventative worked for longer than ten minutes.

Most of the farmers were English speaking and they looked upon me as an intruder. There were not many homes where I was offered a cup of tea.

One hot and sultry morning I had an urgent summons from the camp superintendent. He said that a nearby Afrikaans sugar farmer was furious. Hippo had eaten his newly planted cane the previous evening.

"If you think the English farmers are bad, just you wait until this old boer gets his hands on you. He will skin you alive," he said somewhat too sombrely for my liking.

I fetched my two game guards and we made our way to the farm. One of the really great joys of a game ranger was just being with the guards. Their knowledge of the country was profound and they had an ability to see through people. They would stand impassively behind me as a farmer raved then when we were alone they would rock with laughter and say the man drank too much, had a hangover, or trouble with his wife. They enjoyed their work too, and to them there was always something to laugh about.

We arrived at the Afrikaans farmer's house and he came out on to the stoep.

"Ja, wat wil jy hê?" he

growled. He was a giant of a man with huge hands.

I explained nervously I was there about his hippo complaints. He stared at me for what seemed an age.

"En wat kan julle doen?"

I looked him in the eye.

"Niks, meneer. Dit is 'n droë tyd en die seekoeie is baie dors."

He looked at me again then his eyes twinkled and he laughed.

"At least you tell the truth. Come and have some coffee."

As I sat down he called a servant and told her to take two cups of coffee to the game guards. It was a new experience for me. This man's hospitality was not only for me, an English speaking person, but also for my black companions. This farmer had understanding. He knew instinctively that the guards and I had been through hard times together, that our friendship placed us apart from other men.

That was 27 years ago. The farmer is dead, so are some of the others. The game guards are dead too. Our droughts get worse and I still wonder about the fate of the hippo.



The ways of the poacher

SOMEONE will try to poach wherever there are wild animals. Nobody seems immune to taking a chance. It is the bane of a ranger's life. Magistrates, policemen and even cabinet ministers, to say nothing of farmers and railway engine drivers, have been caught in the act.

In my early days of game ranging in 1952 I was told by my chief conservator Peter Potter, about reports of poaching in the area known

as the Western Crown Lands near Mahlabatini. "It sounds like whites, so you had better get out there with Hendrik van Schoor and see what you can do," Peter Potter said.

I met Hendrik van Schoor at a crossing known as Mndini on the White Umfolozi river. He was a tall, powerfully built man with huge hands and strong calves and thighs. He had the reputation — and I later saw him do it — of being able to lift a full 44 gal-

lon drum of petrol onto a lorry. He was a deadly shot with a rifle and capable of fixing anything mechanical.

Hendrik, or Bocozi as the Zulus called him, wasted no time. "We must cross now," he said. "My huis is mos ver en dit is nou laat." We stripped and waded across the water above our waists. I remember the scent of the yellow flowers of the sweet-thorn trees, and the strong smell of mud from the swollen river.

We walked along the rhino paths as a huge storm broke overhead. Flashes of lightning lit the whole reserve and I was left with an impression like that of a negative print. Water rushed down hill slopes and every stream was a torrent, so different from

the other moods I was to see this land in. The drought and dust and fires of future years could not be imagined. Hendrik walked at a great speed and I stumbled wearily behind him until we reached his house, made of wood and flat iron, left overs from the Harris fly traps. His wife and children were waiting and we were fed on bushbuck steaks, mieliepap and pumpkin, and glasses of cold milk to drink.

In the light of a hissing lantern after dinner, Hendrik drew a map to show where white poachers were hunting. He was like an old Boer general plotting a raid. "Ons sal hier wag en hulle vang," he said, pointing to the map.

The next day we walked back to his Ford truck and drove with four game guards

through some lovely themeda grasslands and streams near the Hlungwana river, and arrived at our destination, a track leading to Nkonjane on the White Umfolosi river. We carefully obliterated our wheel marks and hid in an acacia thicket. In the early evening a truck passed and we watched it go slowly down the road.

"Ons het hulle," Hendrik laughed and clapped his hands. "There is nowhere they can get out."

All that night as we lay next to our nthombothi fire and ate meat and pap from the three-legged pot, we heard the shooting. "Mooi skoot" Hendrik said grimly as a bullet thumped home into some unfortunate animal. Torch light waded the vehicle to the animal and we could hear the men loading up and the curses as a horn struck someone on the leg.

In the early hours of the morning Hendrik said, "Hulle skiet die hele wêreld but we have got them." He made coffee and we sat and waited.

Late the following afternoon we heard the loaded truck groaning along the bush track. We stamped out our fire and hurried to where the road crossed a deep donga and hid behind some boulders. As the truck began its descent into the donga we ran and jumped onto the running boards, shouting "Stop!" The driver in his fright stalled the engine.

In the back were half a dozen sacks. While I asked the stuttering driver for his game licences, which we knew he didn't have, our guards urged a man into action and made him open up the sacks. They were full of



grey duiker and reedbeek. We had everything we wanted: rifles, game, torches — no evidence was lacking.

We drove the 30 kilometres to the old fort that housed the Mahlabatini police station and charged the culprits. They paid an admission of guilt. They were lucky. A few years later

everything they had would have been confiscated.

Hendrik drove back to Masimba camp laughing and singing. The game guards told and re-told the story to each other, yelling with laughter when they came to the part where the driver stalled the truck. Word spread fast in Zululand and

there was no poaching in that area for a while.

Hendrik van Schoor, after over 35 years in conservation, died last year. I will always remember his laugh and his strength and how he could cook a meal in a three-legged pot, his deadliness with a rifle and the way we caught poachers together.

Hamba kahle Bocozi.



I lay under the giant sycamore fig tree at the Amatshenyama camp on the Black Umfolozi river, listening to the sounds of the summer night. Crickets and a solitary frog called nearby, and in the branches above a bushbaby chattered monotonously.

Up on the ridge behind the camp a young baboon was screaming, probably from a nightmare, for it stopped abruptly when an adult gave one loud bark. I've got to know this troop quite well because they have accepted our camp and pass in a long file on their way to the dwindling pools in this drought year.

I could hear a black rhino snapping branches on the other side of the river and the noise of its chewing. A gust of wind from the south brought the sound of a diesel railway engine straining its way along the track in the Biyela country. Through an association of ideas and old Magqubu's form wrapped in a blanket, I recalled the earliest memory of my life and the great significance it was to have for me.

My father was a shift boss on the Robinson Deep mine outside Johannesburg when I was born. The mine environment was a sterile world of

Just a little thing . . .

great dumps, slimes dams, gum trees. The mining community lived in houses according to their position. The manager's house was surrounded by a wide verandah and there were green lawns with croquet hoops, and sprinklers going all the time.

The houses changed in size and style from the underground manager to the mine captain and so on down to the barracks where the black miners were crammed together and the highveld air was filled with the smell of meat and beans from the communal kitchen.

I must have been about five years old when I walked out behind our wood and iron house and went towards a concession store. I can still see the wheels spinning on the shaft headgear as the iron cages, the skips, brought the men up from underground.

They wore tin hats and carried carbide lamps with the reflectors polished and glittering in the sun. Some men knocked the carbide out of their lamps onto the ground and I remembered the strong smell stinging my nostrils. I could feel the earth vibrating and hear the powerful hum of the machinery.

My fox terrier was with me and when I sat on the ground he crawled between my legs and I watched the miners come streaming out of the skips, walking through the shadows cast by the dusty gum trees. Later in life when I worked on the mines myself I got to know many of these men who came from all over Southern Africa and as far north as Barotseland, all welded together with the lingua franca, Fanagalo, and the common danger of being underground.

For a child it was most exciting watching the men returning from underground or walking to the concession store in a great variety of dress. Some had blankets draped over their shoulders, and wore gumboots and the grass hats of the Basutho. Others were in khaki with red, yellow or bright blue patches on the knees and seat of their pants. I clutched on to the dog and talked to it about what was going on around me. I did have a sense of fear probably because of the presence of the machinery and the men literally appearing out of the bowels of the earth, swinging their lamps, laughing, shouting

and having mock fights.

Then two men came towards me. One put his hand in his pocket and handed me two sweets. I felt the roughness of his hand as it touched mine and I heard the rattle of the paper. The man laughed at what must have been my startled look and he walked away with his companion. I quickly unwrapped one sweet

and put it into my mouth. The sweetness seemed to flood through my body and I turned to wave to the men but they had merged into the crowd.

All my life I have carried the memory of those sweets and the act of kindness that prompted the black man to give them to me. It has been

a foundation in my relationship with other races and I am conscious of the hurt in other men's eyes.

I frequently remind myself that the moral of the story is that we who are white and at the moment in control, might bear in mind that small acts of kindness now could change the future of our country.

A few weeks ago I listened to two young men talking about conservation. Both of them are well known and they have done good work, but I was upset to hear them discuss wild animals only in terms of meat, skins, hooves and horns.

They said that to look at wildlife in any but economic terms was sentimentality, and it had no place in modern conservation. They repeatedly quoted Sir Julian Huxley: "If you want to save wildlife, make it economic."

I know that Sir Julian did say that because I was present in Zululand when he visited the reserves in the 1960s. However, Huxley was not only talking in terms of meat and skins, he fully understood and appreciated that most people are aesthetically inclined and they like to see wild animals in their natural habitat.

Sir Julian himself was as enthusiastic as a child when he looked at zebra or impala or warthog, no matter how many times he had seen them. He would comment on the colour, the rhythmic movement, the speed and just the sheer joy of being able to see a live wild African creature.

The young men in their enthusiasm for the taste of

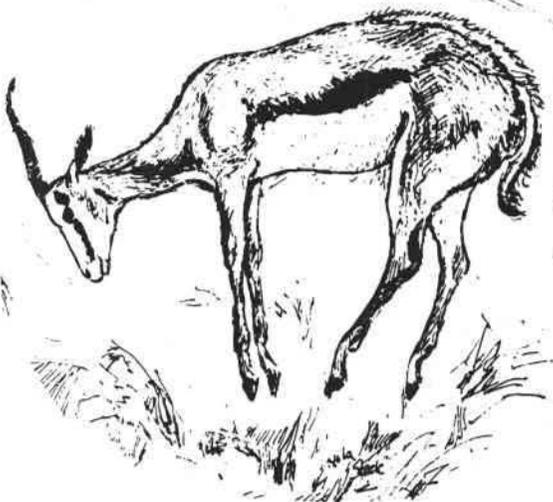
Not just horns and hides and hooves

different kinds of biltong, or quality of skins, or the value of horns to make bottle openers, had forgotten the ordinary tourist. In their misguided enthusiasm for dead wild animals and the byproducts they had overlooked the millions of rand brought to South Africa by people who come from the ends of the earth for their first experience of a game reserve or na-

tional park.

These are live economics and just as important, if not more so, than the money from dead animals.

I do not decry the value of using wildlife in the form these young men spoke about but we must not go overboard and lose sight of other facts. It has taken many years of hard work to educate the public to understand culling in game reserves and national parks but believe me, the general public will get angry and protest if they do not see game. They go to game reserves and national



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 schottia 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 stores — "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.



Before they cast eyes on Ingwavuma

I was looking at some old photographs of Ken Tinley taken in 1956 when we canoed down the Pongola River from Otobotini to Ndumu Game Reserve, then up the Usutu to the rapids where they plunge through the Lebombo gorge.

The photos reminded me of Sigurd Olson, the doyen of American wilderness. He told a story about an old timer who had sent a faded photo of a buffalo hunt on the prairies of Montana, to another old timer and he had written: "To Joe: I am glad we was born when we was." They knew that the days of the great buffalo migrations and the hunters who followed them were over.

I felt like sending my photographs to Ken Tinley with a similar message. The halcyon days in Tongaland will also become a memory, with the yellowed photos and old diaries.

Our journey down the Pongola was not only an exploration of the natural and outer world but of the inner world as well. We heard the fish eagles call, that lonely screaming cry of freedom. We saw the tigerfish skittering through the dun coloured

water. We noted how the ter-rapin always heard us before the crocodiles did, although we were just gliding with the current. We had our scares with crocodiles coming off high banks and falling near us. Once we slid up the back of a hippo and hung for a few seconds, wondering if our last day had come.

We camped near Tonga kraals and heard the drums thudding through the night to keep the elephants away from the fields. The people sang too and danced, and we could feel the vibrations in the earth as they stamped their feet. Confined in a small canoe we could not escape from each other and all the blemishes and brilliances were soon apparent. We talked philosophy and natural history and were at moments transported to a world beyond ourselves and the river we were canoeing on. It was the kind of experience that wild Africa has given to many perceptive people but for us it was a startling revelation of the power of the wilderness.

But we were shadowed by a sadness because we had heard about the building of the Jozini Dam, an engineer-

ing monstrosity that has destroyed one of the finest living river systems in Southern Africa. Each day we greeted new groups of Tonga people who gave us madumbies, maroela beer or mealies. It is always the poor who are most generous. We did not have the heart to tell them that some obscure engineers instructed by a faceless civil servant were planning to change the river to upset its natural rhythm. The Tongas would not have believed us anyway. We were just two young men in a canoe and probably a little mad too.

That was long time ago. Now there is news of the Ingwavuma district being handed over to Swaziland. Politically this could have repercussions for a hundred years and more, for the Tongas have long been allied to the Zulus. The infliction of psychic wounds upon a nation can never be underestimated. We daily still live with the decisions made by an autocratic Britain 80 years ago. There is the smouldering resentment of the Afrikaner which will take another hundred years to heal. Now the Afrikaners are about to perpetrate the same sort of thing

on the Zulus.

How ironic and desperately sad too that the wonderful and most comprehensive plans for a great nature reserve in Tongaland, drawn up by my friend, now Dr Ken Tinley, and accepted by Chief Buthelezi will come to no

avail. This plan is unique, involving as it does all the Tonga people and their deep understanding of the eco-systems. There is talk instead of a harbour at Kosi Bay. I feel sick in the stomach at that thought for it is the last para-

dise in South Africa. There is so little left to retreat to from the noise and fumes of civilisation.

What can we do? Solzhentitsyn said "Our only way out is in no way to support the lie knowingly."

In the first week of May I took a Wilderness Leadership School trail into the Umfolozi game reserve.

I insist that we walk in silence, not only because Magqubu and I need the quiet to listen for warning sounds but it helps those going into the bush for the first time to feel the rhythm of the land: the noise of the wind; the hum of a passing swarm of bees; a short song of the white-browed scrub robin; a cricket chirruping softly in the underbrush, and the warning bark of a baboon sentinel. All separate sounds, but as you walk following a rhino path they fade into each other and become a kind of music, the symphony of the bush. Danger heightens the senses and the other world that we were in only half an hour before was forgotten as we entered a world man had known a long time ago when he was closer to the land, the animals and to himself.

We reached the Black Umfolozi river and took our first rest beneath a giant sycamore fig tree that I have come to regard as a friend. Ripe fruit hung from the boughs and Magqubu pronounced it to be an nconoco, a tree with sweet fruit. We sat, eating figs and looking into the sky and listening, aware of the great surge, the whole earth alive, smells and sounds as-



In May, stillness falls upon the land

sailing the senses and bringing back unconscious memories. It was a good, warm feeling.

Magqubu took out an old billy can and wandered down to the river with his rolling sailor-like walk. He carefully chose a small pool of clear water where silt had subsided, and scooped it up with the billy lid. We lit a fire, a simple one with a few dry sticks, then cut two pronged sticks and strung the billy. The water boiled and we made tea and as we drank

from our tin mugs we watched a line of ants crawling across the sand leaving a tiny path. A wasp buzzed over, busily looking for the prey it had buried. There is always as much drama in the insect world as there is among the large mammals.

We sat alone with our thoughts, the sand hot against our clothes, and I saw the heads of some of the trailers began to droop. Then Magqubu sat up, cleared his throat as he always does before an important announcement and said, "uMay nhlangula." His Zulu is so pure I have to get him to repeat a phrase again and again so I can understand. His patience is endless.

"This is nhlangua, the month you call May. This is when winter starts and we feel the first pinch of cold. The days grow shorter and a great stilness falls upon the land."

He stared out across the river and said, "It is a time when my people begin burning the grass on the hills and in the fields. The smell of smoke is with us all day. It sits in the valleys and hangs about the peaks of the hills. Nhlangua is the month when the impala begin to mate. You will hear the males snorting and chasing each other through the bush." He

laughed and said. "For those who do not know the sound, it can give you a fright for it sounds a little like a black rhino. It is the month too when the leopard mate and you will hear their calls along the river tonight."

We got up, buried the coals then walked out of the river valley to the foothills of the Ncebe range, Magqubu stopping periodically to point out a tree, a shrub or a plant that his people had made use of in days gone by. When we had another rest, he spoke about the old ritual of fire, how important it was to get the sequence right to save en-

ergy.

First it was the small sticks of the tarconanthus, iqueba mhlope, then the combretum or mbonde for the coals to roast the meat on, then nthombothi to give light in the darkness.

We reached camp at the river after the sun had set and stars shone through the leaves of our big protecting fig. We offloaded our packs and I heard Magqubu say softly to himself. "Nhlangua — uMay, this is the month of May." I thought how prosaic our word had become, compared to his poetry of meaning of this lovely month.





Nola