

WELCOME

TO

WHITE ELEPHANT LODGE

We hope that our Lodge, the mountains; the lake and this land  
will touch your soul as its has ours.

It's about sounds, whispering winds, dusty smells,  
flapping canvas, snorting impala, liquid bird calls,  
drifting clouds, sunlight and shadows, pure tastes,  
pleasures from simple, natural delights .....

Relax, and celebrate nature and the beauty of our world with us.

We hope that when you leave here,  
it is with a re-awakened soul  
and invigorated senses

from

All at WHITE ELEPHANT

**"I had a farm in Africa ... the geographical position and the height of the land combined to create a landscape that had not its like in all the world. There was no fat on it and no luxuriance anywhere; it was Africa distilled ... the views were immensely wide. Everything that you saw made for greatness and freedom, and unequalled nobility ... you woke up in the morning and thought : Here I am, where I ought to be."**

**KAREN BLIXEN "Out of Africa"**

Rising abruptly before you, are the Lebombo Mountains. This is the start of the Great Rift Valley which crawls northwards until it loses itself in Central Africa. To the eye, the Lebombos resemble a wall rising about 600m above the plains with an almost level summit. This 5km wide summit, in contrast to the plains below, has a relatively cool and humidity free climate, and so was the preferred place of abode for several small tribes and early settlers from Europe. This ridge is composed of basalt which used to cover the entire surface of KwaZulu Natal about 150 million years ago.

2.

Massive erosion over the years has destroyed most of this basalt layer, leaving only the Lebombos and the Drakensburg. Interestingly, about 60 million years ago, the sea flooded the plains of Maputuland and the Easterns cliffs of the Lebombos lay along the shoreline. Sea shell fossils can still be found on the lower slopes of these mountains. One of the most important archeological sites in Southern Africa is situated on the western face of the Lebombos. Known as "Border Cave", the site was first excavated in 1934 by Professor R A Dart.

3.

Over the years, more than 69 000 implements have been unearthed, as well as the remains of five Homo Sapiens which date back to 100 000 BC. Amongst the fossils uncovered, are the remains of seals, dolphins, even whales. Excavated mammal species include: leopard, elephant, rhino, hippo, cape buffalo, nyala, kudu, eland as well as three extinct species; the giant Cape horse (*Equus cf. capensis*), a small Bastard hartebees (*Damaliscus niro*) and Bond's springbok (*Antidorcas bondi*) which became extinct 38 000 BC.

4. The spectacular Lebombo mountains and the plains below them were, from ancient times wild and uninhabited except for the thousands of animals which migrated over the vast tracts of land.

But in the 1800's the mountains began to reverberate with sounds of change and man.

Two great events in Zulu history were played out in these mountains. In 1840, after ruling the Zulu nation for twelve years, the Zulu king, Dingane was defeated by his brother Mpande (who

5.

was in alliance with the Boers). Dingane fled across the Pongola river and sought refuge in the Lebombos. But here he was murdered by the Nyawo tribe. Apparently the murder was a great mistake and a source of great consternation to the Nyawos. Until recently the exact location of Dingane's grave had been a matter which the local people (descendants of this Nyawo tribe) did not discuss.

After the Anglo - Zulu war in 1879 when the British tried to rule

6.

Zululand by dividing it into 13 separate states, each with its own ruler, there was a period of chaotic rivalry, feuding and fighting.

In 1884, the final scene of a battle between two principal rivals, Dinizulu (Cetshwayo's successor) and Zibebhu (head of the Mandlakazi section of the Zulu nation) took place. Zibebu was a resolute leader and his tribe was considered to be made up of the finest Zulu warriors; but he had little chance against the enemy, although he also had a handful of European supporters, including the celebrated frontiersman, John Colenbrander. Zibebhu and the

7.

Mandlakazi fought stubbornly but heavy rifle fire from the Europeans mowed them down. The battle continued in the bush, on the slopes of the mountain, and down the course of the river. Eventually the Mandlakazi fled through the gorge and thus ended the battle of Ghost Mountain leaving the battlefield littered with thousands of bodies. Even today the occasional human bone can be found here. (Illustrated Guide to Southern Africa - Readers Digest)

8.

It was during these the 1800's, that the advance of the white man

began; European missionaries and the GREAT WHITE Hunters "equipped with a child's dreams and a man's courage" opened up a 'new' continent to the western world. With this advance of 'civilisation' began the removal of game. Although Maputoland had by now earned a reputation as an unhealthy fever-ridden land, the vast herds of game attracted hunters and adventurers. Those who survived malaria and blackwater fever made considerable fortunes from the sale of ivory. An early hunter named "Elephant White"

9.

ran a joint elephant hunting business in the 1840's. 1840 to 1870 is known as the golden age of hunting. One hunter, George Shadwell, shot 150 elephants and 91 hippopotami in one season!!! "In the plenitude that was Africa, everything seemed inexhaustible ... In Africa, life had always been abundant, so death had abounded, but in natural balance."(1)

During the 1880's "it had become evident ... that the hunting frontier was finally closing and that game as a resource was

10.

becoming scarce"(2) due to indiscriminate shooting, habitat deterioration and increasing human population pressures. The golden age of hunting was over. On June 13<sup>th</sup> 1894, President Paul Kruger proclaimed the Pongola Game Reserve (making Pongola the first game reserve in Africa) The new game reserve comprised seven farms along the Pongola river totalling nearly 20 000 hectares.

(1) From "The End Of The Game" - Peter H Beard

(2) From "The Pongola Game Reserve : an Eco-Political Study" - Caruthers, 1985 : 1 - 2

11.

**PROCLAMATION R8009/89**

**"I, Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger, State President of the South African Republic, acting on the advice and with the consent of the Executive Council and authorised hereto by the Honourable Volksraad by resolution of 2 August 1889 Article 1244, herewith make known and proclaim the following farms in the bushveld in the District Piet Retief between the Pongola, Swaziland and Lebombo as GOVERNMENT GAME RESERVE ...."**

This was an area too inhospitable for large human settlement and agriculture, and sleeping sickness had claimed many lives. It was, therefore, considered an ideal area for a game reserve. Also, this

12.

strip of land would provide access to the coastal ports for the Boers, otherwise cut off from the sea by the British Colony of Natal. The proclamation, thus, also included a clever political manoeuvre.

Perhaps it is here that our story of the symbolic "White Elephant" begins. For how could this reserve develop and prosper when conservation was not a main reason for its proclamation?

13.

The first game warden appointed for the Pongola Game Reserve was a Netherlander, Herman Frederick van Oord. According to his annual reports, game species such as tsessebe, hartebees, nyala, kudu, blue wildebeest, zebra, bushbuck, steenbok, duiker, warthog, bush pig, white and black rhino, water buck, mountain reedbuck, wild dog, lion, hippo and crocodile were plentiful in the reserve. He also mentioned elephant, tiger (!) (leopard) and hyena.

But four years later his annual report makes depressing reading: "The dreaded Rinderpest had swept through the Reserve and wiped

14.

out much of the game". The outbreak of the Anglo-Boer war in 1899 meant chaos in South Africa, Pongola Game Reserve was abandoned and Van Oord was taken prisoner-of-war.

Four years later, James Stevenson-Hamilton (founder of the Kruger National Park) visited the Pongola Reserve to determine its state after the war. He was struck by the flatness of the basin at the foot of the Lebombos and the prevalence of the Umbrella Thorns (*Acacia tortillis*) but was disappointed to find little game

15.

left. Major A Frazer was appointed as game ranger of the reserve. However, the Government (now British rule) had too many expenses and difficulties in trying to maintain the Reserve and Major Frazer was transferred to Sabie Reserve. Two police constables were left in the reserve to look after the area.

Nondwai, one of these men continued to act for many years in an honorary capacity and was instrumental in bringing a number of poachers to justice. Nondwai's self-imposed charge may well have

16.

been critical to conservation in this area in the early 1900 years.

After unification in 1910, a magistrate at Piet Retief was requested to oversee the reserve. The tsetse fly and Nagana had become a major problem. In 1914 on an official visit the reserve provided unexpected information. Contrary to expectations (with Nagana rife in the area) game was found to be numerous, varied and tame. He also found no evidence of tsetse fly or Nagana in the reserve. But, wrote Ubombo magistrate, in the same year "Nagana and

17.

tsetse fly are a curse of this Division. It is an ideal country for cattle ..., there are thousands and thousands of wildebeest roaming about this area and a large number (of) other wild beasts. It is a shocking waste of excellent country".(3) With increasing numbers of farmers in the area and the belief that game was harbouring

the tsetse fly, there was great pressure to eliminate game in an effort to rid the land of the dreaded fly and Nagana.

Dr Earnest Warren, a champion for wildlife for 26 years, wrote  
18.

"The great essential is to eliminate the fly, not the game. It is a fallacy to think killing the game will kill the fly".(3) Despite opposition; in August 1916 the *Government Gazette* appeared with proclamation no 13 which threw the district of Ubombo open to hunters. Vaughn - Kirby (First Game Conservator in Zululand) labelled it a "senseless, hysterical piece of legislation".(3)

Hunters flocked from all over the country to join the "free-for-all". No records were kept but an official estimate set the destruction

19.

of wildebeest alone at 25 000. "On the plains below Ubombo rifle fire drowned the bird song. Women sang among the blood and bones ... They chopped and sliced and sang all day ... The wagons creaked with the burden of venison". The following year Vaughn-Kirby completed a tour of the area and concluded, "the game has gone but the tsetse fly remains".(3)

Soon after World War I, many farms were allocated to returned soldiers. The first year their cattle survived, the second year the  
(3) From "The Conservationist and the killers" - John Pringle

20.

cattle died - Nagana. A tremendous outcry followed with these settlers demanding de-proclamation of the Game Reserves "kill the game!" they cried. In 1921 the Pongola Game Reserve was de-proclaimed.

It was during these times that the "White Elephant" main building was constructed. Living conditions were difficult with heat, drought, disease, poor economy and so the typical architectural design of homes was modest, functional and simple : Large south-

21.

facing rooms and vast verandahs to keep the heat at bay. "White Elephant" was owned by Captain Mansfield in these years, who was given the land by the British Crown for his war service. Captain Mansfield joined in the short-lived cotton boom and his labour force was mainly represented by a Swazi family with the surname "Ndlovu" (meaning elephant in Swazi).

During 1926, the cotton-boom year, and after the completion of the railway section from Zululand to Swaziland, many more people

22.

began flocking to the area. This new railway line was constructed as it would "assist in fostering a new industry in the union, ie the growing of cotton".(2) The "vast agricultural potential of the region" could now be exploited. Bush clearing began in earnest and "game drives" were organised to clear what was left of the game. The cotton - boom was short lived. Disease, pests and harsh weather conditions again contributed to the cotton - crash.

And the battle against Nagana continued. In 1929, the ground thudded as zebras fell. 15 130 zebra were shot.

23.

Experiments and research on Nagana continued into the 1930's. In 1935, the government laid down yet another scheme for irrigation development in his area. Malaria was rife and despite huge government investments in irrigation, engineering, equipment, buildings, stock and wages, the experiment was unsuccessful and abandoned in 1942.

1942 was also the year that the Nagana epidemic was reaching its peak. Before it, more than 60 000 head of cattle died, leaving

24.

ruined and embittered farmers. Guns were again handed to farmers, to rangers, to black hunters. Gunfire again echoed across the plains of Zululand.

"The farmers wanted action, any action - and the authorities gave them action that reaped a harvest of 138 529 animals".(3) But still Nagana continued. In 1948, investigations into insecticides (DDT) to kill the tsetse fly were initiated. Teams of men were

assembled, this time without guns to find the breeding areas of the fly. Then the spraying campaign began. Once again the bush of Zululand

25.

awoke but this time to the sound of planes roaring overhead. The overall cost of this tsetse fly programme exceeded R5 million but it was the most successful of its kind ever undertaken.

"As boundaries are declared with walls and ditches (and fences) the great herds of the past become concentrated in new and strange habitats. Densities rise, the habitats diminished and the land itself begins to die. Imbalance is compounded".(1)

(1) From : "The End of the Game" - Peter H Beard

26.

With the eradication of the tsetse fly, farmers began returning to the area. In 1954 when Mr. K W Kohrs bought the farm Leeuwspeer (the land south of "White Elephant Lodge") game numbers were still very low. As a hunter, conservationist and naturalist he protected this game on his cattle farm, even refusing his own father permission to hunt impala on Leeuwspeer.

He recorded 200 impala, 30 kudu, 30 common Reedbuck, grey duiker and steenbok. There were no nyala and warthog. By 1964, the game numbers had build up substantially, impressing the

27.

Regional Conservation Officer so much, that "Oom Kallie" was awarded the conservationist of the year award. In 1967 "Oom Kallie" telephonically asked Mr Ian Player (then Chief Warden of Hluhluwe / Umfolozi) for 10 warthog. These were delivered 3 days later. For many years after on Leeuwspeer, a warthog sighting was a cause for great excitement. (It was only in the 1980's that the warthog population had increased so much that sightings became regular).

28.

During the 1960's, the decision to build the Jozini (J G Strijdom) dam was made. The wall would be constructed where the Pongola River cuts through the Lebombo and Ubombo mountains on its way to the Makatini flats. Bush clearing in the poort began in

preparation for the construction of the dam and it was in these years, that nyala began reappearing on Leeuwsvoor - being forced out of the poort area. The dam was designated for a huge irrigation scheme for the developing sugar cane industry. But the construction of this dam had many major obstacles and was the

29.

cause of much political controversy. When a large portion of the south-eastern tip of Swaziland became flooded with water as the dam started filling up, the loss of land by the Swazi Nation became a political issue. This was only resolved in recent years, when a water scheme that supplies Swaziland with water from Jozini Dam, was completed at the expense of the South African Government. Even today, the problems with the dam wall structure and sluice gates are a topic of discussion amongst the locals, civil engineers and interested individuals with a knowledge of the dam's

30.

controversial existence.

However, were it not for this "White Elephant" (Jozini / J G Strijdom / Pongolapoort Dam), this scenic wilderness would not exist. Vast sugar cane lands would probably have spread along the course of the Pongola river (as those surrounding Pongola and Mkuze village today).

Ironically, an elaborate water irrigation scheme devised by the

31.

National Party Government which entailed the construction of this dam, a project considered by many to be a "White Elephant", has led to the formation of a wilderness area; an agriculturally motivated construction has led to the re-establishment of the Pongola Game Reserve.

In 1993 the first attempts to establish a co-operatively managed Game Reserve began. Fences were dropped between seven neighbouring farms and 10 rhino were introduced.

32.

Giraffe, wildebeest, zebra, buffalo followed. In June 1997, exactly 100 years after the last report of elephant sighting in this area, the Pongola Game Reserve re-introduced two families of elephant from the Kruger National Park. During the capture operation, it was discovered that a young female member of the family, although not entirely white, is an albino.

The restoration of "White Elephant Lodge" was completed early in 1999. The Lodge had originally been named "Mphafa" after the

33.

Reserve's largest Buffalo Thorn (*Ziziphus Mucronata*) growing close to the main building. A debate on the re-naming of the Lodge had emerged and in the midst of this debate, "Douw" our largest elephant bull pushed the exceptionally large Mphafa tree over. He thereby successfully ended the name debate: The Lodge could no longer be called "Mphafa Lodge" without this large tree, so it became "White Elephant Lodge".

A century has passed since the first proclamation of the Pongola

34.

Game Reserve. Its long history has been punctuated by muddled boundaries, political agendas, many wars, disease, drought, indecision, lack of funds, the senseless destruction of masses of game and many "White Elephants".

For more than a century, man in this area has struggled against nature; contrived water irrigation and agricultural schemes and over the years "nature's processes, patterns, cycles, balances ... harmony (has been) destroyed". (1)

(1) From : "The End of the Game" - Peter H Beard

35.

We cannot undo what has been done.  
We cannot rewrite history

but we can shape our future from past lessons.

It has taken man a long time to realise that we cannot usurp nature.

Our struggles, too, will be difficult and numerous. Perhaps one day, vast herds will once again migrate freely across our plains here at the foot of the Lebombos. Our aim is to return this land to the wilderness!