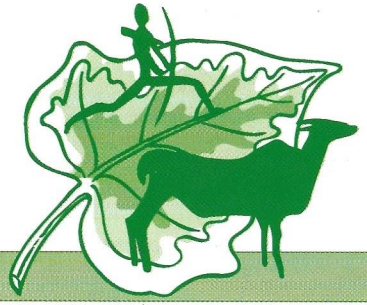


# WILDERNESS SANCTUARY



May 1999

JOURNAL OF THE WILDERNESS TRUST OF SOUTHERN AFRICA AND LAPALALA WILDERNESS

## The Old Melkrivier School

The old Melkrivier School, now the Waterberg Museum and Rhinoceros Museum, was originally located on a portion of the farm known as Muisvogelkraal. The first registered Title Deeds of the land upon which the School is located, were registered in 1870 and it was about this time that the surrounding area, which includes the Lephalala (Palala) River Basin, was first populated by Boer pioneers. Prior to this occupation, the area was inhabited by Early and Late Iron Age peoples and prior to them, there is evidence of Late Stone Age occupation judging from the number of San Rock Art sites within the vicinity.

The farm Muisvogelkraal was subdivided into five different sections and the School was located on one portion, measuring just under two hectares in extent.

The first two schools in the area were located on the farms Kwarriehoek and Libanon, which were situated at the T-junction on the road en route to Lapalala Wilderness and the present Museum. This property has been in the family of the Steyns since before the turn of the century and was originally owned by General Piet Joubert, the most senior commander in the ZA Republic up to the time of the great South African war of 1898. This little school was built in 1869. The original building is still in existence and forms part of the present home of Kassie Steyn, whose grandfather and father trekked into these mountains prior to the turn of the century, on



*Girls' dormitory prior to renovation, November 1996*

wagons that they, as wagon builders, had made. The school was subsequently moved to the site of the Museum and the first two classrooms were constructed in 1935 by a certain Knapp, a

Johannesburg based construction company. The building was constructed using pre-cast concrete blocks and comprised of two classrooms, each with a fireplace and a long verandah. Later a



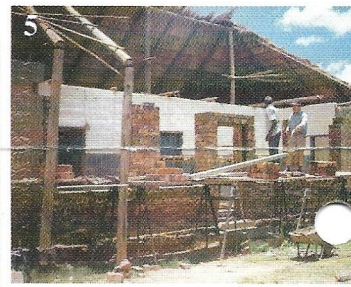
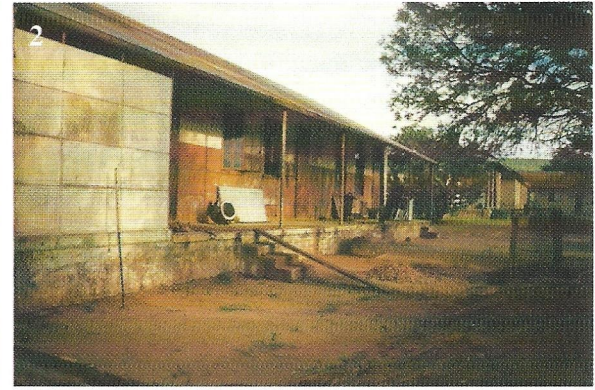
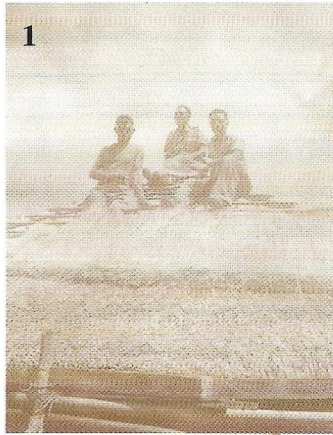
*Girls' dormitory after renovations & restoration work, August 1998*



further classroom was added, we believe in 1949. The headmaster's house was built in 1937 and comprises three bedrooms, a kitchen, a dining room and lounge with traditional Edwardian pillars and a corrugated iron roof. The toilet facilities for the school children consisted of longdrops located behind the school classrooms.

It is interesting to note from a photograph taken in 1944, that there were no trees of any consequence in front of the school buildings. Today, there is a twelve metre high Boerbean tree (*Schotia brachypetala*), amongst many other indigenous trees. The duly appointed headmaster in 1939, and the second incumbent of the headmaster's house, was Mr. Jannie Nel, who was joined by his wife Tant Kindjie and their five children, Louis, Hester, Aletta, Janet and Marie. By 1944, the school had grown to such an extent that it was found necessary to build dormitories to house the number of children and this was commenced in the same year and was built by Italian prisoners of war. There was a departure in the construction in so far as the dormitories were concerned which were constructed of locally produced concrete breeze blocks with a serrated pattern and the roofs were thatched, as opposed to corrugated iron.

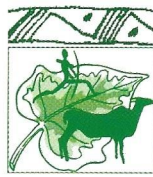
The first construction housed two teachers and the son of the headmaster and the subsequent two buildings comprised an L-shaped building, now the Art Gallery and Rhino Museum which housed the girl's dormitory, a dining block and kitchen and the final building, with a southwest elevation, comprised the boy's dormitories with bathrooms.



1. Italian prisoners of war thatching the teacher's accommodation, 1944
2. The original classrooms, 1996
3. One of the Italian prisoners involved in the building of the school.
4. A great deal of material used in the construction was obtained from the local communities.
5. Restoration of the teacher's accommodation
6. View of the girl's dormitory during restoration
7. The Headmaster, Jannie Nel & his bride.
8. Headmaster's house covered by a golden shower, with the classrooms in the background

Historical Photographs courtesy of Louis Nel





9. Cultural Museum  
undergoing restoration
10. Restaurant &  
Conference Centre



Behind the girl's dormitory, a coldroom was constructed and at some date, which is presently unknown, a Tuck Shop was constructed on the north side of the classrooms. The School operated up until the year 1962, when it closed down with the advent of the opening of the new government-built school, some 500 metres to the south east of the complex. Over the intervening years, the headmaster's home was used as additional accommodation for family and friends and the school buildings and classrooms reverted to

storerooms for the farming activities of both the late Jannie Nel and his son Louis. The entire complex gradually fell into a state of total disrepair.

Jannie Nel passed away in September 1996, leaving the Old Melkrivier School property to his four daughters. Clive Walker had prior to this identified the property as an ideal environmental centre and enquired as to whether it might be for sale. An offer to purchase was duly made to Clive Walker by the four daughters, who were more than

*The photograph below was taken in 1947, looking towards the two original classrooms built in 1935. The two children in the foreground are Louis and Hester Nel who were educated and grew up at the School.*



happy to see the original old school, at which all the Nel children had been educated, go across to becoming an historical landmark. Restoration commenced in December of 1996, with the objective of establishing, within the environmental centre, a Rhinoceros Museum, a Waterberg Cultural and Natural History Museum, a Library, Art Gallery and a Research and Reference Database Centre. In addition to which it was decided to turn the original first two classrooms, built in 1935, into a Restaurant and Tea Garden. Clive Walker was at the time Chairman of both the Rhino & Elephant Foundation and The Wilderness Trust and approached both Boards with a view to making the property available to them in perpetuity if they would be prepared to undertake this as an environmental education project. Both Boards duly accepted the offer. Restoration of the Centre took approximately two years and was made possible by the generous support of corporations, friends and supporters of both organisations. It is under the auspices of these two organisations that it is hoped that the Old Melkrivier School will become a significant centre of cultural and natural history awareness of this spectacular region, which has the potential to develop into one of the most exciting conservation areas within South Africa.

The Waterberg has a fascinating tale to tell and it should become accessible to the broad public from an historical point of view and, equally, from the natural history point of view.

#### Enquiries:

Telephone Vaalwater (0147552)  
ask for 4041 or 2923

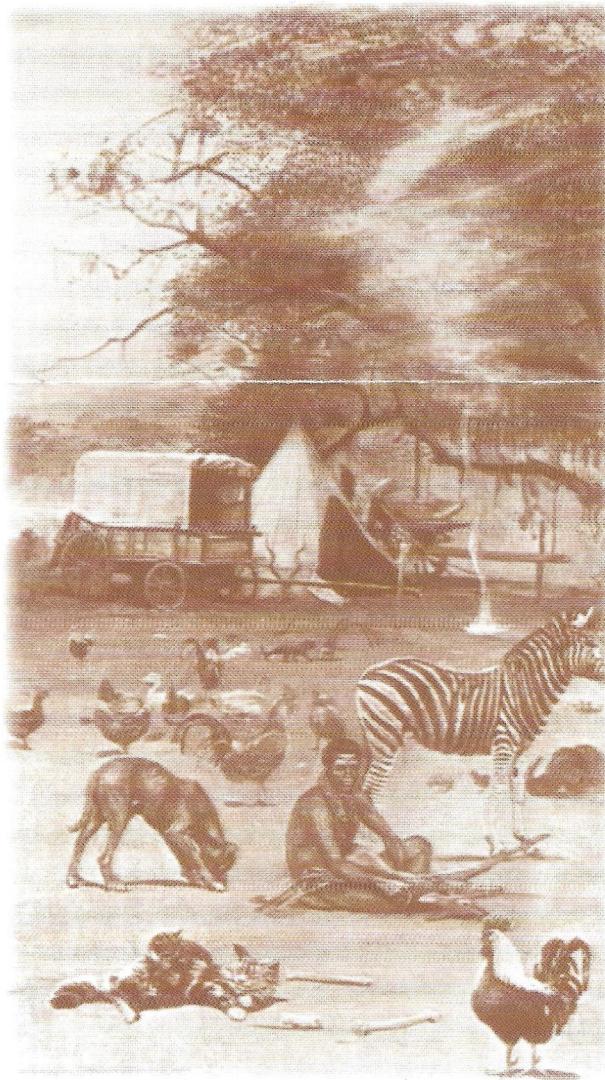
#### Address:

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e-mail: waterberg@biosphere.org.za

# Walkers wayside

Walker's Wayside is situated in the original Old Melkriver School, in two school classrooms, first built in 1935, and which have been restored to their original state. Walker's Wayside fronts onto a magnificent weeping Boerbean tree (*Schotia brachypetala*). The restaurant is open from 09h00 daily except Mondays.

The original gardens laid out by Tant Kindjie Nel, wife of the second headmaster Mr. Jannie Nel, have been faithfully replicated and have become a veritable bird haven. The Melkriver flows past the front of the Wayside some 200 metres away. Should you wish to hold a meeting at the Centre, Walker's Wayside will be only too happy to provide tea and coffee, lunch or dinner. It is also an ideal venue for functions, seminars or workshops. A fully equipped conference room is adjacent to the restaurant in the final classroom which was built in 1949. The Wayside is ideally situated on the road to Marken, via Vaalwater and en route to Lapalala Wilderness and the numerous tourist destinations of the northern part of the Waterberg mountain range, Botswana and the Limpopo country of the Northern Province. The Wayside is the brainchild of Clive Walker, South African conservationist, author, wildlife artist and wilderness trails guide. He, together with his wife Conita, have lived and worked in the Waterberg mountains since 1981 and they were both responsible in assisting Dale Parker, owner of Lapalala Wilderness, with the development of this sanctuary - the second largest



privately owned sanctuary in South Africa and further pioneered the introduction of black rhinoceros onto private land. Amongst many other pursuits, Clive Walker has spent twenty years of his career as a wilderness guide, having received his training from Ian Player's Wilderness Leadership School.

The decor of the restaurant is in a sense a museum in its own right, comprising a private collection of artifacts and an interesting array of photographs depicting many well known personalities within the African conservation world.

Ample parking is available and located at the Centre. There is a Tourist Information Office, providing the visitor with some excellent opportunities of experiencing the Waterberg. From the Wayside there will be the opportunity to go on self guided walks into the mountains and along the Melkriver. Or, you may care to spend a night or two or a weekend in one of the well appointed self catering bush camps in close proximity to the Centre.

A visit to any one of these camps will provide an excellent opportunity to visit the museums and to partake of the culinary delights at Walker's Wayside. Further attractions include game drives to view black and white rhino, horseback riding, rock art sites and village tourism

Your hosts at the Wayside are Terri & Hamish Rodgers, well known to many visitors to Rhino Camp, who look forward to welcoming you.

**Enquiries:**  
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