Mkhuze - The Formative Years

The story of the Mkhuze Game Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal South Africa*.

by Reg Gush

*PLEASE NOTE

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The text of the entire book with photographs is available here:

http://www.africamera.co.za/Book/mkhuze.htm

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CHAPTER 1: EARLY HISTORY

The Mkhuze Game Reserve is an area of many moods and contrasts. The variance in habitat to be found in this small area makes it one of the most interesting and diverse of KwaZulu-Natal's game reserves. From the mountains and open savannah to be found in the western section of the reserve, to the sand forest and the riverine and fig forest near the Nsumu pan, the changing scene has something of interest to offer every visitor. The weather too can change rapidly and be unpredictable, varying as it often does in summer from blistering heat and drought to tropical storms and floods. The autumn and winter months are usually mellow and warm.

The reserve lies at the south-western edge of the coastal plain that stretches from Mozambique into South Africa. Many of the features of the reserve are unique and are not to be found in any of the other game reserves in KwaZulu-Natal. The western section of the reserve comprises the foothills of the Lebombo Mountains, which rise to an altitude of 450 metres, to the summit of the Mpila Hill in the south. The rest of the reserve is mainly flat or gently undulating country, intersected by seasonal drainage lines that carry water only after heavy rains, and low ridges. The successions of soils, from coarse sand to fine clay, were deposited from underlying geological formations and these support a wide variety of plant life - over 700 plant species in 20 major communities have been identified from the area. In turn, this has resulted in some 74 large and small mammal species, over 400 different bird species, 64 reptiles, 76 amphibians, and a vast number of invertebrate species having been recorded in the reserve.

Ken Tinley, a young ranger newly arrived in the reserve in 1956, eloquently described the scene that he encountered while on a patrol in July of that year. "Leaving the Mlambamuti stream, we followed the fenceline for some way before coming to the open aloe-covered slopes of the Nxwala Hill. Taking an old game path up the northern slopes of the hill, we came out onto the grassland and began the ascent of Mpila Hill. From here I saw one of the finest and most beautiful views that I have ever seen. Looking northwards, one's eyes follow the chain of the Lebombo mountains until they are lost in the haze in the distance and looking to the right one sees the dark green of the riverine forest.... and here and there the shine of water from the pans along the river. Below us ... the shining waters of the Nsumu pan. Following the line of forest along the Mkuze River, one can see to the Mosi Swamp area and the blue water of the northern-end of Lake St Lucia and False Bay. To the east is the coastal range with the sea showing through here and there. In one place one could just discern a thin line of water - Lake Sibaya. I stood there for quite some time drinking in the vastness and beauty of the country around me."

Until recently the Mkhuze River flowed past the Nsumu Pan and the reserve was generally very dry, with very little surface water. This was because very little of the water from the river actually entered the reserve. The Mkhuze and Umsunduzi Rivers would periodically come down in flood together and on these rare occasions, the swollen Umsunduzi River would cause the waters of the Mkhuze River to back up and eventually overflow into the Nsumu Pan. Estimated to have been formed ten to twenty thousand years ago, the pan is believed to be the remains of an ancient estuary

that was trapped behind the remains of an old coastal dune. Some years ago the Mkhuze River changed its course and it now flows directly into the pan, creating a permanent water supply. The Mkhuze River still forms the reserve's northern and eastern boundary, cutting its way past the Itshanene Mountain through the impressive Mkhuze Gorge, through the Ukhombe Hillin the Lebombo Mountains and eventually flowing into the northern reaches of Lake St Lucia. The Msunduzi River forms the southern boundary.

Aeons ago, the reserve formed part of the shallow seabed which extended from the coast, across the Makatini flats, which is part of the Mozambique coastal plain, to the Lebombo Mountains. When viewed from the bed of the Mkhuze River, the Mantuma "hill", close to the hutted camp, rises no more than 60 metres from the riverbed and it too was once under water. It does not protrude above the plain. The valley that has developed in front of it creates the impression of the hill. The ridges of this hillside are composed of calcareous sandstones and mudstones, assigned to the Cretaceous Period, making them among the earliest marine strata along the coast of south-east Africa. Mantuma hill contains extensive outcrops of marine fossils, in the form of molluscs and ammonites. These can be seen together with some fossilised trees in the area overlooking the Nhlonhlela Pan. The view down onto the Nhlonhlela pan from the rise above it is one of the finest in the reserve and the early-morning walk through this fascinating area, which is offered to visitors staying at the camp, should not be missed.

The vegetation of the reserve too is of great interest and is rich and varied. It ranges from the dry sand forest of the KuMahlala and Msinga areas, one of only a few such compositions in Zululand, to the open grassland savannah of the Lebombo foothills. The sand forest, in particular is interesting. Despite the indifferent soil to be found in the forest, the area contains an amazing richness of plant species. As most of the existing sand forest areas in South Africa occur outside conservation areas, they are regarded as threatened vegetation types; the area in Mkhuze is therefore of particular significance. The Mkhuze Gorge contains hundreds of cycads and the tropical riparian growth lower down along the river, is characterised by huge sycamore figs and fever trees. The existence of these areas of riverine fig-forest within the reserve is especially important. The total area of this type of fig-forest to be found in KwaZulu-Natal today is 1800 hectares, of which 1400 hectares occur within the Mkhuze Game Reserve.

Shrouded as it is in myth and legend, information on the early utilisation of the reserve by man and even the origin of the name "Mkhuze" itself is unclear. Shortly after his arrival in Mkhuze to start work with the Veterinary Department in 1941, "Singie" Denyer, who was later to become Senior Ranger-in-Charge of the reserve under the Natal Parks Board, questioned local inhabitants in an effort to establish where the name had come from. Old inhabitants living to the east of the river held that it was called Mkhuze because of the warning which was called out when the river periodically came down in flood. On such occasions a wall of water would sometimes surge down the riverbed at unexpected times. Singie reported that he had himself seen this happen several times.

During dry periods, African women were forced to dig tunnels at an angle into the riverbed, up to 3 metres deep, in an effort to obtain water. The story which was told to Singie was that women were sometimes trapped in these tunnels by floodwater, when

these sudden surges of water arrived. During these dry periods, Africans living upstream would call out "MKHUZE", whenever they noticed flood water coming down the riverbed. This long drawn-out warning cry was taken up and passed downstream from kraal to kraal, warning those who might be in the riverbed, collecting their meagre water supply, to get out in a hurry.

In 1958 Singie sent this information to the Director of the Natal Parks Board, in response to a request from him to try to obtain information on the origin of the name. In his letter to the Director, Singie writes that "we have personally heard this warning cry on at least three occasions and, in fact, knew that the water was on its way, two hours before it arrived in a wall from 4 to 6 feet high. This explanation therefore appears to be the correct one". A second explanation is based on the presence of a riverine creeper that grows profusely in the area, which is known as "Ukakuze". The runners of this creeper cover everything around them. Local inhabitants used to refer to an area as "Ukukze" where lands had been cleared and the debris gathered into bundles. As most of the lands were on the riverbanks, Singie thought that this might have had some bearing on the name of the river.

The earliest written records of the settlement of the region are contained in the journals of hunters visiting Zululand during the first half of the 19th century. For other clues to the utilisation of the area we have to rely on archaeological evidence recovered from various sites. One of the reserve's most important archaeological sites is on the Ndunagazi ridge, a foothill of the Lebombo mountain range, within the western area of the reserve. This ridge of grey/black sandy soil, covered in agate nodules and basalt pebbles and boulders, lies within an area of open Acacia nigrescens woodland and contains clues to the occupation of the site by early man.

The earliest tools found in Mkhuze are handaxes, dated to the Early Stone Age. In his archaeological survey of Mkhuze, conducted in 1970, David Penner reports that material from a succession of cultures was discovered scattered over Ndunagazi: he suggests that Middle Stone Age material may still be discovered here. Microlithic scrapers of agate and larger blades of basalt from the Later Stone Age, as well as NC2 and NC3 potsherds have been recorded from Ndunagazi but much else of the history of the site remains a mystery. It is possible that black pastoralists, with a knowledge of iron-working, pottery-making and animal husbandry entered this area some 500 hundred years ago.

What is recorded, is that the marine trade, as we know it and which dates from the 16th century, when Portuguese traders used the natural harbour at Delagoa Bay to extend their trade to the eastern Cape and Natal penetrated into the area. The traders emerged as the principal exporters of ivory and other game products through Delagoa Bay, whilst the main imports were copper and beads. In the 1550s the Inhaca lineage which originally controlled little more than the peninsular and islands to the south-east of Delagoa Bay had, by 1593, extended their influence through a subordinate Inkosi to just east of the Lebombo mountains in the Mkhuze area.

The discovery of isolated blue beads on Ndunagazi and the existence of what appears to be a grave demarcated by a ring of rocks, led to early speculation that the site was once used by Arab traders passing through the area in the 17th or 18th century. This theory has since been disproved following research that I did at the site. The style of

some of the beads found at this particular site, now indicates that they were deposited there after the beginning of the 19th century.

By the start of the 19th century, the trade in ivory through Delagoa Bay had reached unprecedented volumes. This brought about the political expansion of local states as they sought to increase their share of the wealth generated by this export market. As the ivory that was exported increased the wealth and prestige of these states, so they sought to expand their areas of control. By 1810 the Ndwandwe had expanded their area and launched an attack on the Mtetwa, defeating their main army and capturing and killing their king. Although poised to dominate the whole region from the Pongolo to the Tugela, the Ndwandwe came into conflict with the emerging Zulu State. In a pitched battle fought on the banks of the Mhlathuze River, the Ndwandwe were defeated and their territory was forfeited to the Zulus. In addition to the Nwandwe, the KwaJobe and other communities started their migration southwards down southern Africa's low-lying east coast. Descendants of the Amatonga, they came into contact with Zulu culture. Because of the inhospitable nature of the environment, the kwaJobe people were, by tradition, subsistence agriculturists and, because of the presence of the tsetse fly, were not able to keep cattle. They were consequently dependent for meat on the abundant herds of game that inhabited the area around the present-day Mkhuze Game Reserve.

Before Shaka consolidated the Ndwandwe and other individual states into what was to become the Zulu nation of the early 19th century, the game animals of Zululand had been relatively free from large-scale exploitation. All this was to change radically from 1810 onwards. Ivory obtained from the elephants and hippo and their hides and fat, began to attract the attention of white hunters and adventurers to the area, all of whom were anxious to trade through Delagoa Bay and through the settlement at the 'river of Natal' (Durban).

Up to 1824, local chiefs had exercised a certain degree of control over game resources in their area. Most hunting was for purely utilitarian reasons and the succession of Zulu kings imposed restrictions on the hunting of certain species, which were regarded as royal game. These included elephant, lion, leopard and otter. Elephants provided ivory for the flourishing ivory trade. The destruction of these animals was controlled, as they were a source of wealth and political power to the king. Leopard and lion provided regalia which was reserved for the exclusive use of senior political members of the Zulu nation whilst the wearing of a necklace of lion claws was reserved exclusively to royalty or to those who enjoyed their favour. The large-scale introduction of firearms into Zululand by visiting hunters, from 1850 onwards, resulted in them being allowed considerably more freedom to hunt what they pleased than in the past. The granting of these concessions usually being in exchange for a suitable array of gifts to the king and the local chiefs. Thus it was that the large-scale slaughter of game in Zululand, which was to continue for the next 70 years, started.

Around the beginning of the 19th century the KwaJobe people of the Mkhuze area established a sacred burial site for their chiefs or amakosi, in an area that was eventually to be incorporated into the reserve. The site was known as 'Mahlala Amakosi' - the place of the Chiefs. Three Chiefs were buried here between 1802 and 1874. The KwaJobe continued to have access to this site, despite the area's proclamation as a game reserve, until 1947 when an alternative site had to be found.

In recent years, agreement has been reached with the KwaJobe people that the 'Mahlala Nkosi' would be demarcated as a cultural site and that they would be permitted to have access to it. This means that all future amakosi can be buried here. On 29 June 1852, William Baldwin, a professional hunter, recorded in his diary - "crossed the UMkhuze, a beautiful river, with large trees overhanging and spreading across. Saw wolves, waterbuck and several troops of pallah". An indication of the slaughter of game taking place in Zululand at the time is recorded elsewhere in his journal where he notes that he had met up with another hunter who had a "splendid hunt" during which he had killed 150 sea cows and 91 elephants!

Evidence of the political turmoil that was to engulf the inhabitants of the area at the beginning of the 19th century, is to be found in the reserve, in the cave on the crest of Mpila Hill. Amongst the jagged boulders and indigenous bush just below the top of the hill there is a narrow, well-concealed entrance to the cave. Access to the cave is through a narrow, angled entrance which descends through the rocks, barely wide enough for one person to slide down through. You have to negotiate your way around the rocks, feet first, manoeuvring your way carefully through the narrow opening - a slow and tortuous business. Once inside, the cave widens out and is roomy. Its narrow entrance makes it easy to defend. The wall on the southern side of the cave contains a recess with a round opening in the rockface.

Looking out of the natural window in the Mpila cave.

This natural window affords an expansive view of the bushveld below and across to the distant Msunduzi River. The hazy northern reaches of Lake St Lucia and False Bay are to be seen in the far south. The flat surface of the rock at the opening in the cave wall has been worn smooth and become polished over the years, by the passage of innumerable bodies sliding backwards and forwards to watch from this natural vantage point.

As ranger in the reserve in the sixties, I was shown the cave by one of the old game guards. My first entry into the cave was with some trepidation, not knowing what I might find inside but, apart from numerous bats, it was uninhabited. Scratching through the dusty debris on the cave floor I discovered the empty shell of a monkey apple, the fruit of Strychnos spinosa, in the cave. This could only have been brought up a considerable distance from the bushveld below as there were no trees of that type on the hill. I also found two crude stone grinding tools, which showed signs of having been used as hammers or to grind food of various kinds. The roof of the cave was blackened by smoke, indicating that the cave had been inhabited for a fairly lengthy period. This inhospitable refuge, far from sources of fuel, water and food was presumably only used in times of unrest, when local inhabitants had to flee their homes on the lower levels to find refuge in the cave, until peace returned to the area.

Mkhuze was obviously a prime hunting area during the 19th Century. Singie Denyer showed me the remains of an "Isitogolo" pit in the Ndawana area. These pits were regularly used in Zululand for trapping animals and date to the beginning of the last

century. After a pit was dug and sharpened stakes placed in the bottom of it, game drives through the area would be organised. Animals would then be driven into the pits to be impaled on the stakes.

With the British occupation of Zululand in 1879, government officials, military personnel, and tourists were quick to follow the earlier hunter-traders in the destruction of the game. So great was the slaughter that government officials came to realise that the wholesale destruction of animals could not be allowed to continue. In the years following the annexation of Zululand to the crown in 1887, Sir Melmoth Osborn, Resident Commissioner in Zululand, pressed for greater protection to be given to game and, in particular, to large species such as elephant and rhino. He was to report to the new governor Sir Charles Mitchell that "very few head of large game remain in Zululand". It was his report and interest in conservation that led to the promulgation of Zululand's first game law in the form of Zululand Proclamation No 11 of 31 March 1890. The proclamation grouped all the larger mammals to be found in Zululand under Schedule D and the governor's permission was required before anything on the schedule could be destroyed.

It was around this time that reports of the outbreak of Nagana in Zululand, which was linked to the presence of game, made their appearance. That game acted as hosts to the tsetse fly, the carrier of Nagana had already been established and as the government could not be a party to large numbers of cattle dying from the disease, the previous legislation was abolished. This was replaced by a new proclamation in 1893, placing most of the large game animals under Schedule C, allowing greater latitude in their destruction.

By 1894 a groundswell of support for the establishment of game reserves in Zululand was emerging. President Paul Kruger had already proclaimed the first game reserve in the Pongola area and an approach was made to Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, Governor of Natal for the establishment of game reserves in Zululand. On 30 April 1895, five reserves were proclaimed. One of these was in the Pongola-Mkhuze area. The reserve covered an area between the Pongola and Mkhuze Rivers, from the Lebombo Mountains to where the Pongola River took a sharp northern turn, and then across to where the Nhlonhlela stream joined the Mkhuze River. A map which had been compiled by the Zululand Lands Delimination Commission in the early 1900s showed the whole of the area which was later to form the game reserve to be land occupied by members of the Myoni and Manuguza tribes.

The reserve was only in existence for a brief period though as it was deproclaimed two years later, presumably as a result of the pioneering work that David Bruce was doing in that area on Nagana. Later on, for some years prior to its establishment as a game reserve in 1912, the resident magistrate at Ubombo, Mr Oswald Fynney had given the area his unofficial protection and he kept a watchful eye over activities there. At the time, a section of land in the Nhlonhlela area along the Usoma stream, that was later to become part of the game reserve, was leased to John Lorne Currie for the planting of rubber. This venture never got off the ground however and Currie's lease was transferred to the Amatongaland Rubber Corporation Limited on 11 October 1910.

Following Union, a Select Committee was appointed by the provincial council of Natal to inquire into the application of the game laws and one of its recommendations was that a Game Conservator should be appointed to live in Zululand. The Natal administration accepted the committee's recommendation of the need for such an appointment and the post was duly advertised. Frederick Vaughan Kirby, an erstwhile big game hunter and author of a book of his exploits, "In Haunts of Wild Game" was appointed to the post in August 1911 and became the first professional game conservation officer in Zululand. He was to be stationed at Nongoma.

Fynney's concern for the welfare of the Mkhuze area led him to make an approach to the Provincial Secretary of Natal to have the area officially proclaimed as a game reserve. His entreaties were successful and it would seem that it was on his word alone and without any official inspection of the area that the Administration agreed to the proclamation of the Mkhuze Game Reserve.

The official proclamation of the reserve appeared on 15 February 1912. The original proclamation included the Etshanenei Mountain within the boundaries of the reserve, but this section of the reserve was omitted from later proclamations. Shortly after the proclamation appeared and rather belatedly, the Provincial Secretary called for a report on the area from the recently appointed Vaughan Kirby. One of his early duties as Game Conservator of Zululand then was to undertake a two-day tour of inspection of the new reserve in March 1912. The report that he submitted to the Provincial Secretary on 10 April 1912, reads as follows:

"Report upon the Mkuze Game Reserve

I have been enabled to make a brief inspection of this Reserve, though as I had to travel on foot and the cover was exceedingly dense, I was not able (to) accomplish as much in the two days at my disposal as I would have wished. I entered the Reserve by a good footpath which ascends the Ubombo, passing Headman Madhlaka's Kraal, No II Reserve, and descending the mountain on the other, North, side about four miles west of the Empileni Hill (marked Impila on the map). The hill marked Ingwala is not known to the natives, or rather the name is not known. On this latter is a large kraal of which, I believe, one Madhlela is the headman. Here lives also Mqakazi, the native who was placed by the R.M. Ubombo to look after his "mufti reserve". This hill will be a suitable place for the game guard in charge to make his headquarters, as it is comparatively high and healthy.

The country which the Reserve embraces extends from the Ubombo foothills and slopes gently North to the Mkuze River, with also a slight slope to the East. There are two streambeds running through it from the mountains and entering the Mkuze, the Westernmost one is called Indongana, the most Easterly one the Inhlonhlela, marked Usoma on the map. In fact it is sometimes called the Usoma where it enters the Mkuze. The soil is sandy throughout, and at this time of the year clothed with dense vegetation. The bush is very thick in places, especially along the course of the streams.

The course of the Mkuze is marked by wide dense reedbeds and in this cover the only Buffalo in the Ubombo Division is at present making its home. The bush in places along the Mkuze is almost impenetrable.

There is a fairly good drift over the Mkuze about a mile to the West of the junction of the Inhlonhlela with the Mkuze R. At the time of my visit this drift was quite impassable however, owing to the river being in part flood. I saw a fair amount of game, but the number of head seen is no criterion, in such dense bush country, of the number actually existing there. For this we have to read the spoors and even that, on account of the dense cover and long grass is no easy matter. I saw two Black Rhinoceros, several Kudu cows, eight or nine Inyala, a Bushbuck, several Reedbuck, and Warthogs, and plenty of small game. There must be a large number of Black Rhinoceros, the bush being everywhere intersected with their paths, and their dunging places being constantly seen. Inyala are numerous, and I think that there are quite a nice lot of Kudu also.

I found Kudu spoor on the hills however, so presume that these creatures according to custom, are great wanderers, and often leave the low, fly-haunted river fringes for the cooler air of the hills. I saw plenty of Impala spoor and would make a guess at their numbers as about 30 or 40 head. They seem excessively wild as they broke away just in front of me on two or three occasions without being seen in the bush, the spoor alone revealing the nature of the animal. I saw Wildebeest spoor but no sign of Waterbuck. All the smaller game is plentiful. Crocodiles of large size haunt the river and its banks. I had hoped to have shot a few of these, but my time was too limited to allow of my attempting to get through the wide reed beds.

I have no hesitation in saying that the Administration has secured a valuable Reserve; quite apart from other game, the Inyala and Impala, which it holds, sufficiently warrant the proclamation of this piece of country.

F. Vaughan Kirby

Game Conservator"

Following the proclamation of the reserve, not much appears to have happened at Mkhuze for the next twelve years at least and there is no detailed record of the staffing of the reserve from 1912 to 1925. We do know however that, in 1922, 4 African game guards were stationed there and these men were under Vaughan Kirby's control. As he was living at Nongoma at the time his contact with his guards was very infrequent and they were very much left to their own devices.

As early as 1919 the first of many calls for the deproclamation and abolishment of the game reserve was made: similar calls were to be repeated at regular intervals for the next 50 years!

In December 1914, scarcely two and a half years after Mkhuze was proclaimed, the first report of illegal settlement in the reserve was forwarded to the Chief Native Commissioner in Pietermaritzburg by the Provincial Secretary, Natal. In his minute dated 3 December 1914, he stated that Vaughan Kirby had reported that one of Madhlaka's people, Mbumbuluza Mafuleka had put up huts inside the Mkhuze Game Reserve, without permission from the magistrate. Vaughan Kirby instructed Mafuleka to move out at once and also saw Madhlaka's Induna Mzimana, who promised to see that Mbumbuluza stayed out of the reserve.

Following conclusive evidence that there was a great deal of poaching on the part of people living in Mkhuze, 10 years after the establishment of the game reserve, the Provincial Secretary addressed an urgent memorandum to the Chief Native Affairs Commissioner, Pietermaritzburg on 18 January 1922. He forwarded a report that he had received from the Game Conservator, which detailed the number of residents, dogs and guns in each of the 7 homesteads that were to be found in the reserve at the time. These were recorded as "being between the Nhlonhlela and the Msinga bush". In the meantime, Vaughan Kirby had issued instructions to his game guards on how to deal with the situation. His instructions were that if the guards found that poaching had been carried out in the vicinity of any of the kraals and the people of those kraals failed to report the matter to the guards or assist in the matter, they were to be expelled immediately.

In February of that year, the Magistrate, Oswald Fynney, wrote to the Chief Native Commissioner: Natal regarding his instruction to remove "unauthorised squatters" from the game reserve. He pointed out that "the kraals affected by your present instructions are but a few of the many kraals which will be affected, immediately your instructions are carried out. All these kraals are those of families who have occupied their present localities from time immemorial, so far as we are concerned".

He went on to say that " this very puny situation is likely to become magnified to one of tribal oppression, in the minds of the tribes concerned, unless some real reason for the proposed step can be advanced". He also asked the question - "As the Zululand Lands Delimitation Commission had demarcated the land as tribal land, could any members of either tribe be regarded as unauthorised squatters?" He suggested that the tribesmen living in the reserve be left in peace, unless they were convicted under the game laws, when they would face eviction. This procedure was subsequently approved.

It is somewhat ironical that Oswald Fynney, the very man who had so vigorously championed the establishment of the reserve 10 years previously, should now support the concept of tribal occupation of land within the reserve. His attitude in this matter is, however, no more than a demonstration of his personal integrity and an example of the impartial application of his responsibility as Magistrate of the area, to ensure that justice was applied in this case, irrespective of any personal preferences that he might have had.

On 27 May 1925 the Provincial Secretary, Natal again wrote to the Chief Native Commissioner, Natal. He stated that Game Guard Dikidiki Nsele, who was in charge of the Mkhuze Game Reserve at the time, had reported to Vaughan Kirby that 4 local residents had transferred their allegiance to Chief Madhlaka. As a result of this action they had entered the reserve and established their kraals there. In Vaughan Kirby's words "two other residents have already been convicted and they still live in the reserve, and now four others have come in, two of whom have, from time to time, given much trouble, both being active poachers. In justice to my men, and me, I beg that the matter be put right and that the natives in question be ordered to leave the reserve at once. It will be obvious that it is in everyone's interest to ensure that the game in the reserve is not disturbed or scattered to an unnecessary extent, having regard to the popular view prevailing in Zululand at present that the game is the direct

cause of the spread of Nagana". He concluded by saying "if at all possible, I would be obliged if you will take the necessary steps for the removal of those who have recently built their kraals in the reserve".

The Chief Native Commissioner's reply sent to the Provincial Secretary on 19 August 1925 was very specific. "Having regard for the fact that natives were living in the reserve long before it was proclaimed a game reserve, I think it decidedly unfair that they should be ordered to remove their kraals, provided they do not interfere with the game. If the Game Conservator is so positive that July and Zifo are such active poachers, as stated by him, to my mind the obvious remedy would be for the guards to exercise more vigilance and catch them. Madhlaka complained to me that Diacidic (Dikidiki) had ordered some natives to leave the reserve at once and that, when he was told that they were of Chief Madhlaka's tribe, Diacidic had informed them that the reserve belonged to "Mfohloza" (Vaughan Kirby) and that Madhlaka was of no account".

Dikidiki responded to this accusation and vigorously came to his own defence with the following statement made to Vaughan Kirby on 6 November 1925: "We have hardly ever rested but have moved about in the reserve at all hours. I do not think it right for the government to allow them (the residents) here after telling them to go..... I have not enough men to make two patrols. The result is that all three of us have to work together and while we are at Egujini, where so much trouble is caused, Madhlaka's natives are poaching in the Ganenkomo bush, while others from the Nsumu and Msunduze come in and shoot in the bush where we have all the traps. We cannot guard both ends of the reserve at one time as we should do.... Mbumbuluza Mafuleka was convicted and he is still living in the reserve, although he was told to clear out. We want to know why these things are done and if we get an order we are supposed to obey it and we do not understand why these people are allowed to disobey the government. I ask that you will represent this to the government because Sir, we are being made fools of".

His protestations were of no avail and the Chief Native Commissioner: Natal sent the Provincial Secretary a laconic reply. "Reading Diacidic's statement one would imagine him to be most conscientious in the performance of his duties. He has evidently reformed since he was caught some three years ago disposing of wildebeest meat to the natives in return for "busulu" (palm wine) and for which offence he was dealt with departmentally by the Game Conservator".

Three years later, in 1928, the vexed question of the occupation of land within the reserve had still not been resolved. The Chief Native Commissioner had expressed his willingness to abide by the earlier understanding reached which stipulated the removal of new settlers in the reserve who had been convicted under the game laws. He did, however, champion the cause of the other residents who had been living in the reserve for some years. In November 1928 he wrote to the Provincial Secretary stating that "...it does not seem to me that sufficient cause for their removal has been made out. It must be remembered that the natives on Crown Lands in Zululand (including the game reserves) have been resident on these lands for generations. In fact, they are, in most cases, their ancestral homes and it would be a most serious and drastic step to have them removed. I regret therefore that on the information given, I would not feel justified in accepting the suggestion for their removal as far as those natives who have

not offended are concerned". Here to, the goodwill of the Chief Native Commissioner is very much in evidence in this demonstration of looking after the interests of his wards and in speaking out on behalf of the local inhabitants, who had not been consulted when the reserve was established.

The question of control on the influx of local inhabitants, their crops, and their cattle into the game reserve is a subject which has featured in the history of the reserve for the last 80 years and which has not yet been finalised!

Following Vaughan Kirby's retirement in 1929, Roden Symons was appointed Game Conservator in Zululand. A big-game hunter like Vaughan Krby, Symons had acted as Game Conservator, Zululand in 1914, while Kirby was on leave and on Vaughan Kirby's retirement, he was offered the post. He was also stationed at Nongoma, from where he made regular visits to Umfolozi, Hluhluwe and Mkhuze. During 1929 a Ranger Ledward worked in the reserve with Roden Symons and he was succeeded by a man by the name of Liversage, who was appointed to Mkhuze in 1931. Liversage remained in the reserve for 18 months, during which period he camped on the north bank of the Mkhuze River. Symons stayed in the post for only a year, and resigned in 1930 to accompany the De Schaunensee Kalahari Expedition as ornithologist and "white hunter". Symons, in turn, was replaced by Captain H.B Potter who, unlike his two predecessors, stationed himself in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve rather than at Nongoma. Potter was a regular visitor to Mkhuze, following Liversage's departure. He spent a few days in the reserve each month and found it a fascinating place. In 1933 there were 6 game guards stationed in Mkhuze and although the corporal of the guards had a bicycle to get around on, this small force had to look after the whole reserve. Potter was perhaps a bit optimistic when he recorded in his annual report for 1933 that no poaching "by Europeans has taken place here and the few natives who attempted to defy the law have been caught and suitably dealt with". He estimated at the time that there were 1000 impala in the reserve and at least 750 inyala. A rather remarkable statement that he made at the time was that, as he had seen only one black rhino calf, he thought the 11 or 12 rhino in the reserve were animals that had been driven out of the Hluhluwe Game Reserve and that they were mostly old animals past the age of breeding.

During his visits from 1930 to 1939, Potter stayed at a camp that he had established in an area near the survey beacon that was later to be erected in the central section of the reserve. It was here that the first visitor accommodation was built. In his annual report for 1934, Captain Potter records that an unfurnished cottage was now available that could accommodate 12 visitors and that Their Excellencies, the Governor General and Lady Clarendon and staff visited the reserve in August 1934. In 1939 he moved his camp and built a rondavel at Mantuma which has been the administrative centre for the reserve ever since.

The Zululand Game Reserves and Parks Board was established in 1939. This followed a report of an investigating committee that was submitted in 1937, when the formation of a statutory body, somewhat on the lines of the National Parks Board of Trustees, was recommended. This board controlled the management of Mkhuze and the other Zululand game reserves. In 1941 control of Mkhuze passed to the Department of Veterinary Services while they were busy with the anti-Nagana campaign in the reserve.

Up to 1941, access to the reserve was from Hluhluwe Station and Lower Mkhuze, through the Nxwala Crown Lands, past the site of the original staff quarters near Denyer's beacon, to Mantuma and all visitors to the reserve had to use this route. The only other track in existence at the time was to the Masheza Nagana camp. Following Singie Denyer's appointment to the reserve, he opened up other management tracks in the reserve, specifically for the purpose of delivering of water to the staff and bait cattle kept in the western and southern areas of the reserve.

Around 1947 he cleared the track from Mtshopi, over Mission Hill, as a more direct route out of the reserve to Mkhuze Station - the route that the present entrance road follows. The Mission Hill track, as it was known, became totally impassable in wet weather and was cleared for Singie's personal use. The Veterinary Department allowed no public access to the reserve via it and it was only after 1953 that it became the official entrance route to the reserve. Around 1949/1950, Singie also constructed two drifts on the Mkhuze River. The first, known as Shenton's Drift was at Zwaniban Point but was not a success, because of sand seepage. The second, below Mantuma and known as Denyer's Drift, is still in use today.

Leonard "Singie" Denyer

By the time the reserve was handed back to the Natal Provincial Administration in 1953, the Zululand Game Reserves and Parks Board had ceased to exist. The Natal Parks Game and Fish Preservation Board had come into existence and had replaced the old Board six years previously. Established in 1947, the new Board was to control all aspects of wildlife conservation in Natal for more than 50 years until it too was to amalgamate with the KwaZulu Department of Nature Conservation to form the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service in 1998.

CHAPTER 5. POACHING

Poaching in one form or another has been a scourge in the history of the reserve since before its proclamation. From the time the Board regained control of the reserve in 1953, to the present day, it has been engaged in an endless battle with those who see the area merely as a source of free meat.

Up until the early nineties, poaching activity was concentrated on the shooting or snaring of animals for meat. Recently however, an additional dimension has been added to the poaching problem in the Zululand reserves. With the proliferation of modern high-powered assault rifles, which have been smuggled into the country, and the knowledge that ready cash can to be obtained on the black market for rhino horn and elephant tusks, the poachers are becoming increasingly sophisticated and brazen in their sorties into game reserves after these animals. Ezemvelo Wildlife has had to introduce new strategies in order to tackle the problem.

In the early 1950s the problem was a relatively straightforward one - how to stay one jump ahead of poachers using relatively unsophisticated poaching techniques, catch them, charge them and frustrate their poaching efforts. As early as September 1952, when Ian Player was working in the Nxwala State Lands and before the Board regained official control of Mkhuze, he reported that he was after farmers poaching in the area at night. In another incident around the same time, Ranger Hennie van Schoor saw an African's dogs chasing a common duiker. He arrested the poacher and shot the two dogs. The culprit was fined £3 or 2 weeks imprisonment.

In those early years, many of the white farmers from the Lower Mkhuze area to the south of the reserve, particularly those with grazing rights on the Nxwala State Lands, made regular forays into the state lands and the southern portion of the reserve. They were after animals and, with the help of spotlights they shot anything that moved at night. Many black residents from the Makatini Flats, across the Mkhuze River and living in the foothills of the Lebombo Mountains also regularly entered Mkhuze and either hunted with dogs inside the reserve or set wire snares in the thick vegetation bordering the river.

The wire snares used for hunting were particularly cruel. Any animals caught in them would either die a slow death from strangulation at the site of the snare, or would fight to free itself, often tearing the snare loose from the tree or bush to which it was tied. In its frantic struggle to free itself, the snare would cut deeply into the flesh usually around the leg or hoof. If the animal was successful in breaking free it was destined for prolonged suffering and agony before it finally died from its wounds. One victim luckier than the rest was a mature impala doe that was caught, together with her young lamb in the Mlambamude area on 12 March 1964, during the annual impala capture operation. On examining the animal it was found that it had been caught in a snare some months previously, but had managed to free itself. The snare had cut into the flesh around the leg, severing arteries and blood vessels, to the extent that the bottom half of the leg and hoof had rotted away and fallen off, leaving the bare stump of the leg bone. The snaring had taken place some considerable time

before the animal was caught, for the stump of the leg bone that it was hobbling along on, had been worn down from constant use. Such are the amazing recuperative powers of these animals that not only had the doe survived her terrible injury, but was quite capable of moving around on her pegleg. The size of the young lamb captured with the injured impala indicated that it had been born after the doe was caught in the snare. How they both had managed to survive at all was a miracle but as they had managed to make it this far, we released them and left them to their own devices.

Rangers and guards in the reserve always had to try and stay one jump ahead of the poachers and staff had to get up very early and stay out late in their efforts to try to catch the culprits, both Black and White and it was an unceasing battle. It was standard technique for poachers to wait until it was getting dark before slipping over the river and into the reserve to set their snares. These were placed across game tracks leading through the riverine bush. The snares themselves were made from plaited lift cable of a type widely used on the cane farms. The thick plaits of cable would be unravelled to obtain the thinner plaits, each of which consisted of 6 to 8 strands, through which the other end of the snare was threaded. The larger noose would then be tied to a tree or bush next to the game track. The noose was held open with thin strips of bark or fibre tied to convenient branches next to the path. Any animal walking down the path was in danger of putting its head or sometimes a foot, if it were a low snare, into the noose. Feeling the restraint, it would try to pull itself free, so tightening the noose around its body.

If caught around the neck, the animal's frantic struggles would cause death by strangulation, a death that, mercifully, was fairly rapid. When caught around the leg however, it would struggle to free itself, causing the snare to cut deeply into the flesh and the hapless creature would die a lingering and agonising death. Singie told me of an incident when one member of a poaching gang was literally "hoist with his own petard". Coming across a group of poachers in the reserve one day, he and the guards gave chase on foot. One luckless indivual ducked underneath a low bush and got himself caught around the throat by one of his own wire snares.

During 1963, over 1500 snares were removed from various areas of the reserve and this number represents only a small percentage of the total number set. The length of the river boundary along which most of the snares were set, made our task of controlling poaching by this method a very difficult one. Many snares were set and removed by hunters, before being discovered. We frequently discovered old snaring sites during the course of our patrols, where bits of grass tied to thorn bushes, showed where snares had been set and removed. Monthly reports submitted by rangers over the years have regularly recorded the cruelty and suffering that the snares caused.

The author in Mkhuze during the sixties, demonstrates how the snares are set

One such report describes the discovery of a blue wildebeest that was snared above the knee. The snare had cut down to the bone and, when discovered, the unfortunate animal tried to get away, dragging the thorn tree to which the snare was tied, before it could be destroyed. Impala, inyala, bushbuck and blue wildebeest are the usual victims of these traps, but occasionally rarer mammals such as suni antelope and black rhino are caught. One poacher arrested in the reserve in 1962 had six suni skins in his possession.

After Mkhuze reverted back to the Board there were only 8 guards in the reserve, three of whom were based at the Mantuma headquarters. Despite the recent activities of the Nagana campaign, snaring was prevalent. In his report for September 1954 Singie states that "the reserve is 105 square miles in extent and each field guard has 21 square miles to patrol, there were 17 guards here in Nagana times". October 1954 saw 2 Africans being prosecuted for having huts and fields in the reserve. By May 1956, new developments in snaring techniques were recorded with local Africans setting their snares in the Ndunakazi area on moonlit nights, along well-defined game trails, and then driving game towards them.

On 17 September 1956, the month that Singie reported that the reserve was cleared of illegal residents, a black rhino cow was discovered that had been snared near the newly constructed Vulture Pan. This was the first recorded snaring of this species. The animal was snared around the left leg, slightly above the knee. The snare had cut into the flesh, almost to the bone as a result of the animal's desperate struggles to free itself and the lower portion of the leg was only being held by sinews. Singie reported that, in addition to the snare, the rhino had several gaping wounds in the shoulder and right leg, presumably caused by the animal's frantic efforts to free itself before it died. It can be left to the imagination as to the pain and suffering that the poor creature endured before finally succumbing to its wounds. Some broken pieces of steel wire were found in the wound and a foetus was recovered from the snared animal that was eventually sent to the University of Natal. The snared foreleg was removed from the animal and shown to the magistrate and his staff at Ubombo, to graphically bring home, the horrors of snaring.

Singie records an incident, associated with this unhappy event. "A very touching scene was witnessed in the late afternoon, when the grown calf made a visit to the carcass of its dead mother. The youngster stole up to nose her body. The smell of the opened carcass apparently upset the calf, which walked around it with all caution. It is strange that the calf left the carcass at all after the cow was snared for, as a rule, they will remain and fight anything attempting to go near.

The story has an interesting sequel. In November 1962 Singie wrote "it is interesting to record that a young black rhino - the calf of the animal snared some years ago, whose foetus was sent to Pietermaritzburg - has made its habitat close to headquarters. It has been seen in the area of the new camp on several occasions. Animal has no fear of people and will pass within a few yards of one. On the 13th, an extremely hot day, Ranger Gush and a friend were having lunch outside his hut when "Mabuya Duze"(Come Close) as the animal is now called, walked within 15 yards of where Gush was sitting and proceeded to the small dam where my cattle drink. The cattle were at the pan and the rhino mingled with them contentedly, the cattle displaying

neither fear nor curiosity of the great beast. Spoor of up to three rhino has been noted at the drinking pan, no doubt introduced to the spot by "Mabuya Duze".

In September 1956, Singie received another report of a snaring that had recently been done by one of the local residents. He recorded that "in consequence of this report a trip was made to native reserve 13. Mpolwana informed me that the head of the kraal was drinking in the mealie lands and, as I approached the group the natives dispersed in all directions. The women discarded their blankets in their haste to get away and by the time they disappeared into the long reeds, some bare backsides were visible. Most amusing!"

The incidence of poaching within the reserve continued to increase and this unsatisfactory situation prevailed until March 1957, when authority was obtained to employ an additional 5 guards, bringing the total up to 13. A month after the additional guards were employed in Mkhuze, the Ndawana guard camp was burnt down. Arson was suspected and investigations finally led to a local resident, Nkantolo Ndimande who admitted to the deed because of his arrest some months previously for selling snares. Following a trip to Pietermaritzburg eighteen months later to plead his case, Singie was given authority by the Director in September 1958 to employ additional 6 guards, bringing the total game guard force in the reserve up to 19. Despite these additions to the guard force, snaring continued unabated. A report for June 1958 records the discovery of an Inyala, which was found snared around both back legs and which had to be destroyed.

In February 1958, Singie recorded how one of his guards, Monewa Myeza, had a narrow escape from death while out on patrol. Coming across a party of poachers, one of who was armed with an assegaai, Monewa tried to arrest him. The poacher lunged at him with his assegaai, which passed through Monewa's tunic just under the heart but fortunately only grazing him slightly. An unusual report for September of that year was of a hunting party being apprehended on Nxwala, which comprised of a male and 4 females. The man was arrested at his kraal. He and his "girlfriends" were charged appeared in court, where four of them were fined £5 or 5 weeks. One of those apprehended was a minor girl who was cautioned and discharged. It was not only poachers that the game guards had brushes with. Travelling to Mkhuze village on the station bicycle in April 1958, Game Guard Mnyaisa Nyawu was stopped by a stopped by a Black constable and ticketed for not having a white reflector on the front of his bike. Singie paid the admission of guilt fine of 10/- and mentioned in his repoirt for the month that "other stations should be warned accordingly".

The anti-poaching activities of the fifties did have its humorous side. In February 1958, game guards on patrol along the Mkhuze River encountered a poacher on his way out of the reserve. They gave chase and, as they approached, their quarry dived into a thorny tangle of vegetation on the riverbank, to escape them. The guards could see that he was entangled in the thorns and, as they made they made their way gingerly towards him. Seeing the guards approach, the poacher rapidly divested himself of his shorts and hat, which he left caught in the thorns, and made good his escape.

In September of the same year, Game Guard Mnyaisa Nyawu reported to Singie that he and Mqolosi Gumede had arrested Banoi Jobe the previous night on a poaching

charge for which he had been wanted for some time. The guards returned to their camp with their prisoner and the following morning started preparing themselves to take him to Mantuma, before going on to the charge office at Ubombo. Mnyaisa went into his hut to change into his uniform, whilst Mqolosi prepared to do the same, keeping Banoi under supervision from his hut door. While Mqolosi was pulling on his shorts, Banoi made a bolt for it and Mqolosi was literally caught with his pants down, neither being able to get them on or off! His shouts to Mnyaisa only spurred Banoi to greater speed and he escaped into the bush, much to Mqolosi's disgust. Banoi, who was small-boned, managed to remove the handcuffs that had been placed around one arm. The following night these were delivered back to Mqolosi's door and left there in a broken condition. Singie reports that Mqolosi's remarks on the incident do not make good reading! In July 1959 guards on patrol in the reserve heard the sound of dogs barking on the Nxwala State Lands and gave chase to a party of poachers. The guards had the tables turned on them though, when they in turn were chased by a black rhino, had to abandon their pursuit and scramble into trees. The poachers escaped but the guards did achieve a certain amount of success in that they recovered 42 snares and an assegaai.

Accusations and counter-accusations in many of the early poaching cases were often very convoluted. Another case involving Monewa Myeza in 1959 centred on an accusation that he had framed one of the local inhabitants and he was required to appear at the tribal court. Singie Denyer graphically described the scene that he experienced when he went to the tribal court. "One of the highlights of my life was experienced on the 6th of April 1959, when a request was made for me to attend a tribal court to give evidence in favour of game guard Monewa Myeza. It was held in the open at the Sidhlele Dipping Tank - Chief Mabandhlele presiding. The case arose out of the fact that one, Fusi Twala, who resides on the Makatini, spread a rumour that game guard Monewa had informed residents that he intended killing an impala and placing the carcass near Fusi's kraal. He would then hide near the spot. When Fusi came to remove the carcass, Monewa would arrest Fusi as a poacher.

Monewa resented this accusation and claimed damages for defamation of character from Fusi, through Chief Mabandhlele's court. The court consisted of eight Indunas as advisers to the Chief, one secretary with Chief Mabandhlele presiding. Ringed around the court were firstly, the older men of the tribe. Several depths of younger men stood on the outskirts of the crowd, together with the women and children: possibly more than 300 spectators in all. The court was the most democratic event that one could experience and the case took several hours. Anyone was entitled to question witnesses, the complainant or the accused and many of the questions were most humorous, causing bursts of laughter, which were silenced by Chief Mabandhlele's threat to fine one and all present £5 for contempt of court! The case was finally concluded with Monewa winning the day and being awarded £5 or a beast as damages, plus costs which amounted to £2-10-0 for the Chief and 10/- for other charges"

The life of a game guard was a dangerous and arduous one and the story of the exploits and adventures of the small band of brave men who formed the game guard force still needs to be fully told. They formed the vanguard of the Board's struggle to secure our reserves. Their lives were often in danger and they were expected to work long hours, often under very difficult conditions. The living quarters of the guards

were not of the most comfortable. The 9 guard camps positioned around the periphery of the reserve each consisted of 3 concrete rondawels with thatched roofs - one for each guard. A door and small window secured with a wooden shutter supplied the ventilation and ablution facilities were minimal, with the guards having to wash in a basin. Water had to be carted to all the camps in 44-gallon drums, which stood outside in the blazing sun. When they ran out of water one of the guards would have to walk or, after 1962 when bicycles were issued to all the camps, cycle to Mantuma to report the matter. A couple of drums would then be loaded onto the back of a Landrover, filled with water and taken to the camp. Paraffin lamps were the only source of lighting and it was only towards the end of 1958, following a request from Singie, that torches were issued to the guards.

Notwithstanding their primitive living conditions, the guards were generally good-humoured and loyal. They were proud of their position in the hierarchy of the reserve; the ultimate honour for many a young labourer was to be offered the position of a game guard in the reserve. The guards were always expected to be cleanly and smartly dressed on pay-days and, to their credit, most of them managed to achieve this.

For protection they were armed with .303 Lee-Enfield rifles, many of which dated back to the First World War- I remember seeing the date "1918" on one of them. Relief Ranger Terry Oatley recorded in his report for July 1958 that " not a single rifle is to be relied on. Barrels are so worn that it is a continuing source of amazement that anything could be hit".

The rifles, which had only been re-barrelled once in 17 years, were not only there for protection but also had to provide the guards with their meat ration. Every cartridge, which was issued, had to be accounted for, the empty cartridge cases had to be produced and the use of each cartridge justified. A guard camp was allowed two bullets a week with which to shoot their ration of a wildebeest and if they were unsuccessful in getting their animal, they would have to go without meat for the week. The guards therefore took great care in stalking their animal and only fired at it when they were confident that they could bring it down. In the sixties, through to the early seventies there was no radio contact with the camps and it was one of our duties to make regular inspection visits to all the camps, to check on conditions there and to work with the guards. The Wives of guards were not permitted to stay with them and domestic affairs had to be conducted during their short breaks from duty. All staff, guards and rangers alike, were effectively on call 24 hours a day and were allowed 66 hours away from our stations per month.

In the sixties, poaching started to become very prevalent on pay-days at the end of the month. Local inhabitants had come to realise that the guards would all be at Mantuma to receive their wages and then spend the rest of the afternoon doing their purchases for the month at Mkhuze village. A system of staggered pay dates was then introduced to counter this problem. Guards who would be away for the day were replaced by staff from other areas, thereby ensuring that there would always be an adequate guard force in the area at all times.

The new guard camp at Magebugane was completed in December 1958 while another at Ndawana was under construction. Shortly after the completion and staffing of the

new guard camps a joint anti-poaching operation was organised with the staff of the Ndumu Game Reserve. Night shooting had been on the increase and shots had been heard in the reserve the night before the Ndumu staff arrived. A whole day was spent watching the tracks leading out of the reserve and State Lands, but to no avail - the birds had flown.

Around this time, the Board concentrated on improving its anti-poaching strategy. Nick van Niekerk, the Ranger-in-Charge of False Bay Park designed new concrete guard huts with thatched roofs, which were to be a considerable improvement on the previous accommodation. These were built at the new camps that were to be established at Udiza, Qakweni, Nsumu and Gwambane, where work on them started in October 1959. The Mlambamude camp was built in March 1960. Immediately following the completion of these new camps, authority was received to employ 8 additional guards. These were all selected from ex-Nagana staff, ensuring that the men selected had a good knowledge of the areas in which they were to work. An indication of the success achieved by the anti-poaching campaign is reflected in the number of snares recovered and destroyed. In August 1960 over 600 wire noose snares made from cable fencing were removed from within the reserve, burnt and buried. Infiltration into the game reserve during 1960 was a recurring problem, with mealie fields being discovered next to the Msunduzi river in the Mpila hill area and six huts found within the boundaries of the reserve, during a routine patrol to the top of Umkhombe hill.

A constant thorn in our sides too was the periodic nocturnal poaching incursions into the reserve and State Lands by certain white farmers living in the Lower Mkhuze area. One of the minor successes that we achieved was the capture and conviction of one of the culprits who was sentenced to a fine of £50 or 6 months imprisonment. His Landrover was also confiscated. In November 1960 the assistance of the S.A. Police was called on to raid the home of a local farmer in the Ngwenja area, following a tip-off that he had been seen poaching on Nxwala. The farmer concerned was very aggressive and would not allow us to inspect his storage shed where, we had been told, a large number of game skins were being stored. On arrival at his farm he came up to the passenger side window of our Landrover and said in no uncertain terms "Boetie,dis nie jou plaas nie, dis nie Peter Potter se plaas nie en dis nie Colonel Vincent se plaas nie - en jy sit nie 'n voet op my plaas nie" (It's not your farm, it's not Peter Potter's farm, and it's not Colonel Vincent's farm and you're not putting a foot on my farm). We had no option but to request the police sergeant, who was accompanying us, to carry out the inspection on our behalf. He returned to say that he had found the farm shed full of game skins. We unfortunately had no success with our prosecution though as the farmer maintained that he had always been an ardent nature conservationist. The skins in his shed, he maintained, had come from animals that he had discovered in snares on his farm!

Around this time some white farmers in the area started to change their poaching tactics. Their idea was to avoid having to use the roads and run the risk of being stopped at the roadblocks that we set up whenever we heard gunshots or vehicles moving around the reserve at night. The hunters had started coming into the reserve on foot, they would shoot an animal and use a horse or donkey to carry the meat out. It was a difficult task trying to stay one jump ahead of the ungodly! By February 1961 guard camps had been established around the periphery of the reserve and we had

camps at Nsumu, Qakweni, Mlambamude, Mpila, Nhlabeni, Gwambane, Udiza, Magebugane and Mtshopi as well as our central guard force at Mantuma.

There was a considerable amount of poaching on the Makatini Flats as well. On the evening of 8 June 1961, we became aware of poachers operating on the flats and Singie, Khonjwayo, Mnyaisa and I set off to try and apprehend them. By the time we got onto the flats we had to navigate without lights, following the torches that we could see shining in the sky and guided only by the depth of the tracks in the sandy soil. As we approached the intersection of the jeep track from the reserve with the road to Sordwana Bay, the poachers must have heard our vehicle approach, for the torches suddenly went out. We took up a position near the main road, expecting to intercept the poachers' vehicle, which we calculated, was to the east of our position. After waiting for several hours in the bitterly cold wind we decided to call it a day and return home. As we started a normal conversation again, we heard a clatter of boots not 30 metres from the Landrover and the shouted warning " PasOp - Wildwagters!"(Look-out, Game Rangers!). We gave chase, but the poachers got away from us in the long grass and thicket. We were all disappointed to have missed catching them but took a certain amount of comfort from the fact that there were no further reports of lights or poaching from the Makatini for some months after the incident.

The dull routine of our anti-poaching activities, which involved foot patrols through the reserve, trips to the charge office at Ubombo and endless appearances in court did have its more unusual and lighter moments though. In October 1961 a poacher wearing a cardboard mask was seen by game guard John Sibiya in the Gwambane area. The guards gave chase but unfortunately they lost their quarry who managed to escape into the thick riverine bush. They did manage to retrieve the rather strange cardboard mask that he was wearing which had served its purpose in keeping the wearer incognito. The mask was brought in to our office, where Mahukwana obligingly put it on and posed for a photograph.

In another humorous incident, a regular old poacher, Maclibane Myeni was caught poaching in 1962 for the umpteenth time. At his court appearance he made an unusual appeal to the presiding magistrate. Poaching had been much of a way of life for Maclibane and on many of his forays into the game reserve, the guards regularly caught him as he was incapable of running away from them: he had been born with a deformed foot which slowed him down considerably. On the occasion of his trial, after the game guards' evidence had been heard, Maclibane was asked by the magistrate if he had anything to say in his defence, before sentence was passed.

"Yes" said Maclibane, "I do have some thing to say". He pointed out to the magistrate that he was tired of being regularly caught by the guards because of his deformed foot. He felt that he was responsible for a lot of inconvenience to the Board, in that he regularly had to be taken to Ubombo and charged. Later there was also the expense and bother of the trial and, after sentencing, the burden on the State of having to house and feed him while he was in gaol. His needs were few, said Maclibane, all he wanted was a bit of meat occasionally. Could the court not consider allocating a small section of the game reserve to him where he could set his snares in peace and obtain a little meat from time to time, without being constantly harassed by the game guards. Everyone would benefit: he would not have to try to run away on his bad foot, the

Board would be saved the expense and inconvenience of having to take him to the Ubombo or return to court later for the trial. The State would be spared the expense of having to keep him in prison! The magistrate was not sympathetic to his plea however and he got his usual sentence of a fine of £5 or one month's imprisonment for trespassing and £10 or 2 months imprisonment for snaring.

During 1962, 109 poachers were arrested in the reserve and charged and the cases resulted in 78 convictions. During the same year, 1511 snares and 26 assegaais were collected and destroyed and 42 dogs were shot. A muzzleloader and a .22 hornet rifle were confiscated during one brush with poachers and the recovery of these firearms were the forerunner of a new threat that had started to emerge towards the end of 1962. It is one that has escalated to dangerous proportions today: the use of firearms by some of the local populace, for the hunting of game.

As far back as February 1959, Ranger Tony Pooley reported that Isiah Tabeta had been arrested in his hut at close to midnight. A Martini-Henry rifle and 7mm Mauser rifle, both stolen, were recovered and later the police recovered an additional shotgun. In September 1963 a poacher was caught with a home-made firearm of ingenious construction. No one was anxious to try to discharge it as it appeared to be designed to inflict more damage on the user that on its intended victim. In my report for that month I wrote "an African was arrested near Magebugane in the reserve on 15 September 1963 with a home-made firearm. What the instrument lacked in range and knockout power was compensated for in the ingenuity of its construction. The stock of the gun was hand-carved from a piece of indigenous wood and was fitted with the barrel and ram-rod from a "voorlaaier", the barrel being secured onto the stock by means of small metal plates and nails. The detonating mechanism was a six-inch nail entering the end of the barrel through a small hole drilled into the stock. A piece of rubber inner tubing was tied around the head of a 4-inch nail and the rubber was secured on either side of the stock of the barrel with additional small nails. To cock the rifle, the nail was pulled back, stretching the pieces of rubber tubing, causing the nail to act as a firing pin when released."

"Obviously conscious of the firearm act, the maker of the gun had fitted a safety catch to it! This consisted of a piece of string tied to the end of the "firing pin" to which a small piece of wood had been secured. When the rubber bands holding the firing pin were stretched and the firearm "cocked" the piece of wood was looped around another nail hammered into the butt of the gun to prevent the nail from striking home. To complete the appearance of the weapon, a trigger guard and trigger from a "voorlaaier" and a brass keyhole cover had been nailed onto the stock for their decorative effect. When we questioned the poacher about the workings of the device we were told that the gun was loaded with pieces of wire and small bits of metal and that the charge was made up of matchstick heads. When its owner was arrested, the rifle was loaded and cocked and it was with a fair amount of trepidation that it was conveyed in that state to the charge office at the Ubombo. On arrival at the police station the poacher was taken to an open clearing on the crest of the hill and instructed to discharge his firearm, which he duly did. This produced a cloud of white smoke and little else"!

The story of the home-made firearm appears as little more than an interesting diversion when compared with the proliferation of high-powered automatic rifles

being smuggled into the country and used for the poaching of game, especially rhino in the Zululand game reserves today. This is a development that has steadily escalated over the years and is now one that presents a serious threat to the sanctity of the Zululand reserves.

Although all the incidents of snaring which we encountered were distasteful, the most horrendous ones were those involving the snaring of black rhino. In September 1956, Singie reported that "a rhino cow that had previously been reported injured, died on the 17th September near the newly constructed dam beyond headquarters. The rhino was found to have been snared around the left leg slightly above the knee. The snare had cut into the flesh almost to the bone; in fact the lower portion of the leg was merely hanging on by sinews. Several gaping wounds on the shoulder and right foreleg were no doubt caused by the animal struggling to free itself from the snare. Some broken pieces of steel wire were found in the wound. This animal must have died a cruel death. The animal was found to be in calf and the foetus was removed and preserved in formalin. A touching scene was witnessed in the late afternoon after our discovery of the snared animal, when the grown calf made a visit to the carcass of its dead mother. The youngster approached cautiously and nosed the body and walked around it carefully as the smell of the opened carcass seemed to upset it. It is strange that the calf left the carcass at all for, as a rule, they will remain and fight anything attempting to go near it. This is the first time that a rhino has been known to have been snared in this area". In July 1959, another black rhino was snared in the Qakweni area, but managed to tear itself free from the snare. The animal was never found so Singie had no knowledge of the extent of its injuries. Other animals were not so fortunate.

In November 1960 a three-year-old rhino was found dead in the Mkhuze Riverbed, 6km east of Headquarters. In its frantic efforts to free itself the snare had cut down deeply into the animal's neck. It finally managed to break free and make its way down into the riverbed, where it died. In his monthly report Singie wrote "the wound around the neck was sad to see and the pain and suffering that the animal endured can only be left to the imagination, when one considers that the entire flesh between the hump and the head was a gaping wound around 9 inches wide. In fact the neck was all but severed from the body and how the animal reached even as far as the river is a mystery. Ranger Gush was able to take some photographs of the carcass and, when printed, should give an excellent idea of the wound caused by the snare".

The snared black rhino lying in the Mkhuze Riverbed

In August 1963, I was involved in a second black rhino snaring incident. This one fortunately had a happier ending than the previous one. A game guide who was busy conducting a party of tourists around the reserve, arrived back at camp late in the

afternoon and reported seeing a black rhino in the Magwaza area, with a snare around its neck. The animal had managed to free itself from the bush that the snare was tied to, but its efforts to do so had caused the snare to cut into the neck. It had obviously only been caught a day or two before as it was still in reasonable condition, apart from its wound. It was noted though that it was not feeding. Guards were dispatched to the area immediately. They were able to locate the animal and keep it under observation, approaching fairly close to it from the leeward side. Through binoculars it was possible to establish that the snare had cut deeply into the flesh around the neck and along the top of the head, in places up to 100mm deep.

Four game guards were detailed to remain in the vicinity during the night and they would work in teams of two, their task being to keep the animal under observation. In the meantime a request for assistance was sent to the rhino-capture team at Umfolozi. It was arranged that Ranger Ken Rochat from Umfolozi would arrive the next day with the "Operation Rhino" truck, capture guns and the necessary drugs to anaesthetise the animal. When we met up with the two guards that were monitoring the movement of the snared rhino the following morning, we learnt, to our dismay, that contact with the animal had been lost during the night. All efforts on the part of the guards to re-track it had been unsuccessful. There were numerous other rhino in the area that had left spoor and it was impossible to tell one spoor from another. All the reserve's guards and the whole labour force was assembled and transported to the area. From there they were sent out in pairs, in all directions, to try and locate the injured animal. A thorough search that a small group of us did of the area was unsuccessful and we returned to our rendezvous at mid-day to await the return of the other search parties. During the course of the afternoon, groups of searchers returned, all of who reported negative results.

The afternoon wore on and Ken had to return to Umfolozi the next day. He expressed doubts that even if the rhino was located that afternoon, that there would be enough time to track it, dart it, follow the animal and load it before it got dark. By 15:00 only one party of guards was still out and our hopes of saving the rhino were receding rapidly. As we were preparing to return to camp, the last of the search parties returned and announced that the rhino had been seen in the thick Mahlala bush and that two of its lying-up places, that showed signs of fresh blood, had been discovered. From then on things had to move rapidly. Loading up Ken, his catching equipment, and the two guards we set off to find the rhino. As it was fairly open in that particular area, it was possible to manoeuvre the Landrover through the bush to where the rhino had last been seen. The animal was finally located and we were pleased to see that it had moved out of the bush, into open country and that it could be approached by vehicle. Ken prepared the drug-filled dart to be fired from the gas-powered capture gun from a range of not more than 30 metres and Adriaan Erasmus, Ken and I set off in pursuit. We approached the rhino very cautiously at first, so as not to alarm it and manoeuvred the Landrover behind the animal. As it started moving off we accelerated and careered across the veld after it. The terrain was rough with a lot of low thorn scrub, but we could give no thought to scratched mudguards or minor dents. It was after 16:00 and getting late. We were only going to get one shot at the animal and, if the dart missed, there would be no second chance and the animal would be sure to die within the next few days.

The rhino cantered along in front of the truck as we bucketed up behind it to get within range. Ken fired and the dart smacked into the rhino's rump and stayed there - a perfect shot, but there was still the possibility that the dart could malfunction and that the drug would not be injected. That was in the hands of the Gods. The rhino made for a patch of thick bush and, leaving the Landrover some distance away, we followed up on foot. The animal had gone into fairly heavy scrub and we were able to approach and watch it. After about 20 minutes it showed signs of becoming unsteady on its feet and was staggering and crashing into trees. We knew then that the anaesthetic was working. In its groggy state we were able to creep up behind it and get a rope around one of its back legs. This was secured to a tree to prevent the animal from moving into thicker bush, where it would be impossible to load it. After a further 10 minutes it lay down, completely anaesthetised, and breathing heavily.

The snare was cut off with a hacksaw blade and removed, the wound disinfected and packed with sulpha drugs and an anti-biotic injection administered. The rhino-catching truck was brought up and the crate, with its door open, was off-loaded and placed in front of the sleeping rhino. Once everything was lined up, an injection of the antidote to the anaesthetic was given, and the result was almost instantaneous - the rhino got up and staggered towards the open crate. Before giving the injection, Ken had tied a rope around the rhino's muzzle and this had been threaded through a hole in the front of the crate, to help guide the animal into it. With much pulling on the rope and shouting and heaving, the staff managed to get the animal to enter the crate and the door was closed. A power winch, operating off the drive shaft, pulled the crate onto the back of the truck, the rollers were loaded and Ken and the rhino were on their way back to Umfolozi. Loading time had taken 25 minutes - our race against time was over. As darkness fell we loaded up ropes, catching equipment, and the work force onto our Landrovers and headed wearily back to camp. At Umfolozi, a qualified veterinarian would stitch up the rhino's wounds and administer to its other needs. In time, the animal was moved to the Ndumu Game Reserve as a mate for the solitary bull already there.

Two years later, in November 1965, another snared rhino was discovered in the reserve and darted, but the animal had such severe injuries that it had to be destroyed.

In September 1966 there was yet another rhino snaring incident. Ranger Mike Behr received a report from the guards of a young black rhino male that had been discovered with a snare around its neck, which had lacerated it badly. It had been seen lying in the mud at Mbanyana pan but when Mike arrived at the pan with the guards, the young bull and its mother had already left for a patch of dense bush to the north. His report reads "I followed the tracks until it became dark and for the following three days Rangers Tinley, Sterling and I combed the area very thoroughly. On the morning of September 28, Ranger Sterling located the animals in a spot where photography was impossible. We did, however, establish that the wound was so severe that it would never heal. I approached to about 10 yards and shot the injured animal. At this point the fun started. The cow was very alert and obviously very bad tempered. Rangers Tinley and Sterling photographed the animal as best they could between charges. At one stage Ranger Tinley was up a tree, which would normally bend with the weight of a sparrow, photographing the tossing head of the infuriated cow not two feet away from his legs. Time and again the cow would return to her dead calf. After about an hour she trotted away in disgust. Looking at the wound on the dead rhino's

neck we found a wire snare a 1/4 inch thick, that had cut right through to the spinal cord. The wound was at least 10 inches wide and badly infected".

An unusual poaching incident occurred in the eastern section of the reserve towards the end of 1966. This was the discovery of a dead impala at the side of a tourist road that had been shot a few minutes previous to its discovery. There were indications that a tourist could have done this, as there were tyre tracks from a sedan car leading up to and away from the carcass. No tourist reported the incident to the camp office, strengthening the suspicion that the animal could have been shot by a visitor, who had to abandon it before it could be loaded and carted away.

Another gruesome death involved the snaring of a zebra, the remains of which were found in the Udiza area. In this case the snare was attached to a log which the poor animal dragged around for some time before death mercifully stepped in and ended what must have been a terrible suffering. In his report for January 1970, Ranger Herman Bentley reports having to destroy a blue wildebeest discovered during a routine patrol. The unfortunate animal had two snares around its neck and one on a back leg, just above the hoof. The hoof was half rotted away and the animal was walking on the stump of the leg.

The introduction of horses to the reserve in 1964 saw a change in the Board's anti-poaching operations, which now were extended beyond the boundaries of the reserve. Nineteen seventy saw the installation of a radio mast at Mantuma and the acquisition of 4 two-way radio sets which were positioned at some of the guard camps. A further refinement was the introduction of a mobile poaching patrol in the seventies, which operated in the Lower Mkhuze area, utilising rangers from the Umfolozi and Hluhluwe Game Reserves. This put an end to the long-standing problem of night shooting that had been prevalent in that area for many years. The mobile guard patrol system was extended to the reserve as well in 1976, but it was not to prove a success. In 1975 there were 10 guard camps around the periphery of the reserve and by 1978, this had been reduced to four. In every case where guard camps were closed or amalgamated to form mobile patrols, there was an immediate increase in poaching.

On questioning captured poachers on whether they were concerned about the mobile patrols, the unanimous response was that they were not, and that they merely considered it to be bad luck if they bumped into one! It soon became apparent that poachers regarded the areas around the old established guard camps as the game guards' permanent territory and they were far less anxious to wander into this "territory" than to take their chances with the mobile guard force. In April 1978, Warden Drummond Densham decided to revert to the old system. He planned to up-grade and re-establish 7 outposts around the boundaries of the reserve, thereby vindicating Singie's original concept of having strategically-placed guard camps, with over-lying areas of coverage.

In the last 15 years the activities of poachers have become very much more sophisticated. Poaching with wire snares is still prevalent and a major problem in the reserve, but there is now a new dimension to the problem. The proliferation of illicit firearms pouring into the country from neighbouring states and the realisation that rhino horn is a valuable commodity has led to occasional armed incursions into the reserve. The horror of finding a black rhino with its neck half severed by a snare has

now been replaced by the possibility of discovering an animal, shot with an AK47, which has had its horn chopped off. The Board's guards themselves are now armed with automatic weapons and are in the forefront of an endless battle to stop such illegal incursions.

Concerted efforts were made some years ago to involve the local community in the reserve's conservation activities and this policy has finally started to bear fruit. In 1980, one of the local Chiefs in the area, Chief Jobe, proposed the establishment of a guard force to operate in tribal lands and this force was reasonably successful at the time in its efforts to control poaching. The emphasis today though is concentrated on education and community involvement in the affairs of the reserve. A programme has been initiated to try and convince those living around the reserve that the preservation of Mkhuze and its wildlife is in their interest and can work to their own advantage. Part of the revenue generated by visitors to Mkhuze is now channelled back into projects that benefit their whole community. The goal is to get the reserve's neighbours to realise that they have an asset here, which can improve their lives through the creation of job opportunities, tourism and the selective utilisation of some of the reserve's resources.

Let us hope that the long tide of poaching in Mkhuze mazy soon turn.

CHAPTER 9. "WAKE UP - WE'VE BROUGHT YOU A RHINO"

Much has been written over the years about the capture and translocation of squarelipped rhinos to other areas in Africa and abroad. The initial experiments, which were successfully undertaken in 1961, and the subsequent events associated with the early days of rhino capture and "Operation Rhino" have been extensively documented by Ian Player and Nick Steele and formed the basis of the very informative SATOUR film, "To Catch A Rhino". A major African species was rescued from the brink of extinction and the capture and relocation of these animals, started in the 1960s and continuing today is undoubtedly the most important and prestigious of the achievements of the Natal Parks Board in its 50 years of existence.

The technique used in the capture of squarelipped rhinos has been refined over the years, incorporating as it does today, the use of helicopters to lift the drugged animals out of inaccessible areas. This has resulted in rhinos being reintroduced to many areas where they formally occurred. In addition, they have been sent to safari parks in the rest of Africa and zoological gardens all over the world. Consistently successful results achieved with their capture and relocation has enabled this species to be removed from the schedule of endangered animals and their status fortunately now appears to be secure for all time.

In the 1950s, two young squarelipped rhinos were captured in Umfolozi for the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria. Both were young, orphaned animals, that had to be netted and roped, before being crated and transported. No anaesthetics were used in their capture. This was a significant event at the time but of greater value to the conservation of the species, were the events that were to follow ten years later. Experiments by Dr Tony Haarthorn with the use of anaesthetising drugs fired at a rhino from close range, using the Palmer capture gun had proved successful. In 1961, it was decided to follow up on Tony's early experiments and undertake the translocation of the first of these huge beasts. I was to be privileged to be associated with this historic event - the introduction to Mkhuze in 1961 of the first rhino to be darted and captured in the Umfolozi Game Reserve. The story has all the drama of unexpected events, challenges, and setbacks associated with any new venture of this kind and also a degree of pathos. Sadly, the historic event was to end in tragedy with the death of Amber, as our new arrival was called, despite all the efforts of the staff to save her. However, saddened as we were by the loss of Amber, we were all left with a certain sense of achievement. There was the realisation we had participated in an historic event and the knowledge that valuable lessons had been learnt which would be applied to future movements of rhinos. A stronger emotion though than any sense of achievement was the sadness that we all felt when Amber died. A feeling of kinship with her had developed amongst all of us and there was admiration for the fortitude and tenacity that she had shown during her long and brave struggle for survival.

Black rhino had always occurred in the reserve and had managed to survive successfully at Mkhuze even before the area was proclaimed a reserve in 1912. This was largely due to the impenetrable nature of the riverine bush and the Acacia thickets

in certain areas of the reserve. As early as 1944 a successful capture of one of these animals had been made for the National Zoological Gardens and "Kuzi" was transported to a new home in Pretoria. Not much is known of the circumstances surrounding the capture of "Kuzi" as the reserve was under the control of the Veterinary authorities at the time. What is recorded is that a black rhino cow that had a suitable calf, had to be shot for the purpose. The Zululand Game Reserves and Parks Board was not consulted at the time regarding the capture. Unfortunately all my efforts to obtain details of the capture and transportation of this animal have been unsuccessful, but it must have been an epic event! It is certainly a story that needs to be told.

By some miracle the black rhino population managed to survive the trauma and upheaval of the Nagana campaign, with its regular patrols, constant shooting and later, aerial spraying of the reserve. That the entire black rhino population was not wiped out, as a result in ingesting DDT from the foliage on which they browsed following the extensive spraying over the reserve is even more remarkable. The population however survived successfully.

In September 1954, shortly after joining the Board, Singie could report the unusual sighting of a black rhino that had horns of the same length. Both horns were between 40 and 50 cm long. Strangely enough, Ranger Gilbert Schutte reported a similar sighting 18 years later, in February 1972. It would be interesting to know if it could have been the same animal. Singie made an even more unusual sighting in November 1961, when he saw a black rhino with a posterior horn about 100 to 120mm longer than the anterior one

The disturbances of the Nagana campaign, thankfully, did not appear to traumatise the animals too much, for as early as January 1955 a black rhino cow was seen with a calf 2 to 3 weeks old. Other occasional sightings of rhino cows and calves were made over the next few years. In April 1958 Singie was fortunate to see a black rhino calf suckling from its mother, while she lay on her side. In October 1959, he came across a rhino cow with a very young calf at foot, which he estimated could not have been more than a day old. This sight was especially pleasing to him as the month before he had come across the carcass of a young rhino calf that had been snared, during one of his routine patrols.

In November 1962, during the course of a patrol in the Skonkwane area, Khonjwayo and I spotted a black rhino cow with two calves. This was an unusual sighting as the black rhino, very much a solitary animal, would normally wean and evict a calf, before having another. We positioned ourselves underneath an easily scalable tree and watched as the three animals slowly browsed their way towards us. As the wind was in our favour, the animals were unaware of our presence. They got closer, and we both quietly climbed into our tree, from where we still had an excellent view of them. The youngest calf came right up to the tree, in which we were sitting and rubbed itself against it. While it was doing this, the cow moved past the tree and, picking up our scent made off with a snort of alarm, closely followed by the two calves.

It was towards the middle of June 1961 that the event of major significance for the reserve took place as far as the rhino population was concerned. This was the first reintroduction to an African game reserve of a squarelipped rhino captured in the

Umfolozi Game Reserve. Singie graphically described, in his report for July 1961, the drama of Amber's arrival in Mkhuze and the events around this historic happening.

"On 11 June, Senior Ranger Ian Player and Dr Haarthorn arrived with the news of a possible transportation of a squarelipped rhino from the Umfolozi Game Reserve to Mkhuze. This was indeed wonderful news for all of us. An extensive tour of the reserve was made in order to locate a suitable site for an enclosure and a spot was finally selected near the Nsumu game guard camp. Here Dr Haarthorn requested that four bomas be erected to house the animals after their arrival in the reserve and we set about the terrific task of erecting the bomas in record time. All labour, game guards, togt and ranging staff, threw their backs into the job. Many gallons of sweat were expended in digging the 21/2-foot deep trenches to take the silver terminalia poles that were chopped in the reserve and carted to the site by tractor. The ground was so hard that every time the pick bit into it, sparks flew".

"The transportation of the poles, using our inadequate transport, was a major undertaking in itself. My thanks and admiration go out to all the staff for their co-operation in this task. The work continued in hot sunshine until Saturday, when the arrival of pouring rain turned the whole effort into one of bewilderment. What had shortly before been a piece of steel hard ground, rapidly turned into a quagmire".

"During the early hours of the 17th of June 1961, five days after we had started building the bomas, I was woken up to shouts of "Wake up - we've brought you a rhino". From out of the truck parked near the office scrambled the Director, Mr John Page, the Chief Conservator, Zululand, Peter Potter Senior Ranger Ian Player and Dr Tony Haarthorn, all of whom proceeded to tell me of their experiences on the wet and soggy road. The truck that was carrying "Amber", as our rhino was called, had slid of the road, was bogged down near Ngweni and could not move. The following day, having got additional assistance, they returned to the truck to try to "debog" it and bring the vehicle, carrying the first adult white rhino to be captured and transported in South Africa, to Mkhuze"!

"The tenacity of those members of our staff involved in this exercise deserves great admiration and praise. Anon! Amber. Yes, forever Amber. How sad that after all the great work done, she should lose her life in such a great cause".

Amber arrived in the Mkhuze Game Reserve in grand style. The truck in which she was being transported being towed by a road grader driven by the Board's Roads Maintenance Officer, John Kymdell. Despite the pouring rain and the glutinous mud, John proudly guided the convoy, with us trailing along behind in our Landrovers as best we could, to the holding pens at the Nsumu boma. Here the prodigious task of unloading Amber began.

The ground was so sodden that everyone sank ankle deep into the mud, lifting killogrammes of black daga every time a foot was lifted and collecting more with every step taken. We were all pretty exhausted by the afternoon as none of us had had any sleep for 24 hours, but the importance of the occasion kept us all going.

The crate was gradually manoeuvred off the truck, lowered to the ground, into the mud and eased up to the gate of the boma. The crate was placed at the entrance of the

boma and the door was raised. Nick Steele had anticipated that as soon as the door of the crate was opened, Amber would come charging out into the boma, with much huffing and puffing, but we were to be disappointed. She preferred to stay in her crate rather than experience the discomforts of the wet boma and all our efforts to entice her out proved futile - she would leave the crate in her own good time, when she chose to do so! We were unaware at the time of the injuries that she had sustained during the course of her journey to Mkhuze.

After a number of unsuccessful attempts to get Amber into the boma, it was decided to leave her where she was and tie the crate to the gate of the boma, in the hope that she would leave it of her own accord during the night. The weary staff then climbed into the trucks and Landrovers and headed back to Mantuma, where Granny Macrae, Singie's mother-in-law, a grand old lady in her own right, had prepared a meal and supplied everyone with hot soup and cold chicken and impala - our first meal of the day. Then we all wearily headed off to bed to get a few hours sleep.

Early the following morning we headed back to the bomas at Nsumu in the pouring rain, again slipping and sliding on the waterlogged roads, During the previous two days we had already had almost 100mm of rain and it was still coming down. This would normally have been a blessing for the game and for the reserve in general, but it was certainly not the weather we would have chosen to welcome our important new arrival.

When we got to the boma we discovered that Amber had left her crate during the night but appeared to be still stupefied by the drugs that had been administered to her the previous day. Her right shoulder was very swollen and there appeared to be another swelling near her kidneys. She could not walk on her right foot and was having great difficulty in moving around the boma in the mud. A more unsatisfactory state of affairs for her welfare could hardly be imagined and we immediately set about trying to improve it. Great quantities of grass were cut and thrown into the boma in an attempt to give her a more comfortable footing and to insulate her from the mud, but in no time at all this had been trampled into the squelching mud. We were delighted to see though that Amber had eaten some of the fodder supplied the previous day, but had not drunk anything.

By the afternoon of 20 June she appeared to be doing well and we all started to have hopes that the worst was behind us. Her shoulder was still very swollen and was obviously painful as she was having great difficulty in moving around. However, during the night disaster struck! We discovered on the morning of the 21st that, during the night, Amber had tried to force her way through the poles forming the back wall of the boma and escape.

Amber lies in the boma with a badly cut left leg. Abrasions on her body have been covered with antiseptic ointment

In the process she had severely lacerated her leg on the side of a 44-gallon fuel drum which had been cut in half and placed in a corner of the pen as a water container. In our haste to complete the enclosure before her arrival, there had been no time to fold down and smooth off the sides of the drum. I had been concerned about the edge of the container when we put it into the boma 2 days before, but had been assured that it should not cause a problem. Had the animal been healthy all would, no doubt, have been well, but in her weakened condition aggravated by her sore shoulder, Amber had had got herself into trouble. She had not been able to extricate herself, having gone down to drink from the drum. When she was discovered she was lying half over it with a badly lacerated leg. We realised later that we should rather have dug a small depression in the soil for a wallow and filled it with water, but that was a lesson that we learnt too late!

With much difficulty, we succeeded in placing ropes under the animal to form a sling and with much heaving, manoeuvred Amber out of the drinking trough and into a more comfortable position. Then we set about treating the cuts and lacerated leg with whatever ointments we could find. In her weakened condition and as a result of her cut leg Amber could no longer stand and efforts were made to feed her by hand. These were not very successful and all our efforts to get her to drink water out of a plastic bucket and later a basin, also proved fruitless.

Eventually, a length of polythene waterpiping was placed in her mouth, down which we carefully poured water from a bucket. She was obviously very thirsty and her plaintive whimperings as we tried to get her to drink were heartrending. Having successfully forced the pipe into her mouth, she sucked at it greedily once she had tasted the water. Singie estimated at the time that she must have drunk between 30 and 50 litres of water on that first attempt. Then we were faced with a different problem - having got the pipe into Amber's mouth she hung onto it and would not let go! After several unsuccessful attempts at removing it we decided to leave it where it was for another transfusion in about an hour's time. Water was then again eagerly sucked from the pipe and another 30 to 40 litres disappeared. Some of it spilled onto the ground around her, but most of it disappeared in great gulps. We were all very pleased that we had at least got Amber to drink and Singie spoke for all of us when he wrote at the time " we rangers were delighted as Amber, our very special charge, had crawled her way deep into our hearts".

Tony Haarthorn arrived during the course of the afternoon with a supply of penicillin and gave Amber an injection. He also suggested that, if we could get hold of it, Terramycin should be used. We were fortunately able to obtain a small quantity of this antibiotic from the Mkhuze store. During the following day Amber was injected with 15cc of Terramycin every 6 hours, in the hope that it would contain any infection which she might have picked up.

Our main concern at that time was that Amber had not had a bowel movement since her arrival and on the 23rd Norman Deane arrived from Hluhluwe with a supply of Prostigmine which we injected into her in an attempt to stimulate a bowel movement. Further injections of Terramycin were given, but it was becoming obvious to all of us that Amber was weakening. The matter was discussed between Norman and Singie

and it was decided that, should it start raining again, Amber would regrettably have to be destroyed.

In the meantime we had another distraction; a new arrival in one of the other bomas. On Wednesday 21 June, a truck had arrived in the reserve from Umfolozi with Charlie, the second squarelipped rhino to be shipped out of Umfolozi. This young male rhino was placed in the end boma and left to its own devices for the time being. All our efforts were concentrated on trying to save Amber.

After his talk with Norman, Singie went into Mkhuze village to telephone Tony Haarthorn, who by then had returned to Umfolozi. He agreed with Singie and Norman's decision and confirmed that, if further rain fell, Amber was to be destroyed and Charlie released into the reserve. Singie had hardly returned to the reserve, having spoken to Tony, when the heavens opened up and torrential rain started falling. It was estimated at the time that possibly 100mm of rain fell in 11/2 hours - a most unusual occurrence for that time of the year. We tried to keep Amber dry by covering her with Singie's patrol tent, which was all that was available in the reserve at the time and on Saturday afternoon she appeared to be rallying. We were again successful in getting her to take a small amount of food and she had another long drink of water. There was nothing further that we could do for her at the time and we returned to Mantuma.

The rain carried on throughout the night and on Sunday morning, 25 June, we slithered back to the boma. On our arrival we found, to our distress, that Amber had died during the night. We then had the sad task of having to drag the carcass out of the boma, using the tractor and remove it some distance into the bush, where it was dissected to enable a post mortem to be performed. This revealed that Amber had died from internal haemorrhaging.

In retrospect, it was something of a miracle that Amber managed to survive for as long as 8 days, when one considers the extent of Amber's injuries. Added to this was the trauma of her capture and transportation to Mkhuze, when she had been incarcerated in her crate, her injury in the boma and the atrocious weather. She had faced tremendous odds very bravely. The Ngwenje area between Hluhluwe and Mkhuze had received well over 100mm of rain in two days and it was here that the truck carrying Amber to the reserve had slid off the road and become bogged down in heavy mud. She was stuck uncomfortably in her crate and had to stand at an angle of 45(for over 24 hours, scarcely able to move in any direction, before the truck could be pulled free by our road grader. My last memory of Amber is one that remains vividly in my mind to this day. It is the sight of pieces of her carcass being carried off after the post mortem, by members of the togt labour gang, who had decided to try cooking and eating some of the meat. A sad end indeed to a noble animal!

The second adult squarerlipped rhino to be moved out of Umfolozi was also sent to Mkhuze. This was a young bull called Charlie. Charlie's translocation to the reserve was uneventful and, in contrast to Amber, he arrived very much alive and well! He started feeding immediately on the afternoon of his arrival and also had a long drink of water. Later nicknamed "The Wandering Jew" because of his incessant wanderlust, Charlie lost no opportunity in trying to break out of the boma in which he had been placed. The day after his arrival we arrived at the boma to find that he had tried to force his way out of the corner of the pen. This action again reinforced Singie's theory

that, with both wild and domesticated animals, it was always better to construct a round holding pen with an inner "core" of poles or reeds around which the animals could circle. The absence of corners that the animals could run into coupled with the fact that they could move out of sight of whatever was disturbing them seemed to have a calming effect. I have personally seen that enclosures built along these lines have proved very successful in preventing animals from injuring themselves. It also helped them to settle down and recover from the trauma of capture and translocation, far more quickly than would otherwise be the case. Had we had thwe time, we would most certainly have constructed at least two of the holding pens along these lines.

Charlie had certainly done his best to break out of the enclosure on the first night in his new home. In his attempts to do so, he had succeeded in making several openings in the walls of the pen, all of which had to be speedily repaired. Fortunately for us and despite the fact that the boma had been very hastily erected, it withstood his efforts to smash his way out.

Charlie in the boma at Mkhuze - June 1961

Charlie refused to settle down and become docile. Normally, when a young rhino has been in a pen for a week or more it becomes so tame it will eat out of your hand. Not so with Charlie! Any movement near his pen produced a snort and a mock charge. When it started raining again on Saturday afternoon of the 24th, the gates of Charlie's pen were opened to let him out. When freedom was offered to him however, he positively refused to leave the pen in our presence. All efforts to dislodge him proved fruitless. Even passing backwards and forwards in front of the open gate did not produce the desired result. All that was achieved was the generation of a considerable amount of nervous tension amongst the Ranging staff as Charlie would charge towards the open gate, scattering everyone in the process, before coming to a skidding stop at the entrance to the boma and reversing back inside again. As it got dark it was decided to leave Charlie to his own devices and we all returned to Mantuma.

On the morning of the 25th we found that not only had Amber died during the night, but that Charlie had pushed his way through a corner of the boma and there was no sign of him. There was a fair amount of spoor in the vicinity of the pen that indicated that he had milled around there for some time before heading off into the bush. Unfortunately, the heavy rain that had fallen during the night had obliterated much of the spoor and there was no way of tracing Charlie's movements. On Monday morning we established that Charlie had crossed the Nsumu pan, where he had to wade through water almost a metre deep and then wandered up along the fenceline with Nxwala. Here he had crossed into the Sate Land through a gap in the fence where poachers had lifted it - and then we lost track of him. He was obviously on his way back to Umfolozi. Amber and Charlie were both gone. Not exactly a satisfactory conclusion to the great experiment of moving the first rhino, but an exercise which was filled with considerable drama nevertheless! It was certainly one that taught us valuable lessons.

John Dixon and game guards were sent to find Charlie and he was eventually tracked to a private farm at Lower Mkhuze. Here he settled down with the local cattle for a while and attempts were made to keep him under observation.

On 30 June 1961, Ranger John Clark delivered a third rhino, June, without incident. We decided to change our procedure with June in that she would not be placed into a holding pen, but offloaded at Denyer's Beacon in the central section of the reserve. We felt that the animals did not like to be confined to the holding pens having lived in a wild state for so long. After offloading June at the beacon, she was injected with a tranquilliser and left to settle down in her new surroundings.

For the rest of the year there were periodic entries in all our monthly reports on sightings which we had made of the rhinos that had been introduced. In September 1961, Singie passed on to me a report of a "dead" rhino that had been seen that morning on Badenhorst's farm at Lower Mkhuze. I got myself to the farm as rapidly as possible and, on investigation, found Charlie lying fast asleep under a thorn tree! In October 1961, it was June's turn to get the wanderlust and she moved out of the reserve, onto Hilder's farm near Mkhuze village. It was decided to try and recapture her and bring her back to the reserve. On the 25th the capture team arrived from Umfolozi to make an attempt to redart the animal. We assembled on Hilder's farm and, having checked our equipment, we scoured the farm until we had located June and then the chase was on. Coming up behind the animal as rapidly as possible, Ian Player fired the dart at the rhino, but it missed the target. The capture attempt had to be abandoned for the day, as our quarry ran off into a patch of thick thorn scrub where the Landrover could not follow.

The following day we returned to the farm and tried again. This attempt was equally unsuccessful. As June was running away in front of the capture vehicle, she had her tail curled back in characteristic fashion and, as luck would have it, the dart fired at her, neatly pierced the tail. The needle of the dart became blocked with cartilage material and it soon became apparent that the anaesthetic had not been injected.

June led us a merry chase around the farm for about 25 minutes. We followed her in the hope that some of the drug might have taken effect, but it then became obvious that this was not to be

An amusing scene that I recall while the chase was on, involved the arrival of the "Zululand Express" - the daily train from Durban. The locomotive came into view as we were bucketing over the veld in our Landrovers after the animal. As it approached, I noticed the engine driver leaning out of his cab, deep in thought. He chugged past the rhino, which was running in an open area next to the line and his eyes casually followed the large form running next to his train, not really registering at first what he was looking at. His locomotive passed the rhino and his head suddenly came back with a jerk as he realised that the animal next to his train was a rhino. Leaning out of his cab, he followed our chase of the rhino for as long as he could, before giving us a cheery wave and a toot on his whistle as his engine disappeared into the thorn trees.

Having used up the only two darts that the Umfolozi capture team had brought along, the chase had to again be abandoned for the day as John returned to Umfolozi to collect additional darts. He made a speedy trip back and forth and was back again,

with the darts, early in the afternoon. A third attempt was made to dart June at about 16:00 and this attempt was, fortunately, more successful as the dart smacked into the animal. Then the chase was on again. June ran in front of the capture vehicle for about 25 minutes, during which time she scarcely slackened her pace. The anaesthetic finally started to have an effect and by sunset the great beast was crated and on her way back to Mkhuze, where she was placed in the boma for a while to discourage further wanderings. As it turned out this was wishful thinking on our part.

Singie recorded the recapture of June in his end-of-month report and wrote "Congratulations must go to Nick Steele for a wonderful exhibition of bundu driving. His skill in handling the 'Rover was without a doubt, remarkable. Some very near escapes and misses were the order of the day for June was determined to lead us into the worst terrain and heaviest bush possible. Secondly, Senior Ranger Ian Player is to be congratulated on his skill in getting those darts into June's hindquarters. It is no mean statement when I say that both the animal and 'Rover were travelling very rapidly. Despite bumps and crashing down shrubs, the darts found their mark. Very good shooting indeed".

"A remarkable thing was that at no stage did June try to break through any of the fences, which she encountered, even though, on several occasions, she was brought into a bottleneck while the chase was on. Last but not least, the performance of my valiant Landrover NPA 705 must be mentioned. This machine took a tremendous battering but stood up to it all, despite the fact that it now has defective steering as a result of the battering it took! After this effort, little doubt was left in my mind that possibly no other make of vehicle could stand up to the gruelling experience of being driven in four-wheel drive so continuously, as was required. I take off my hat to a Landrover and the 26th October 1961 will remain in my memory as one of the most interesting, instructive and exciting days that I have ever had"

We should perhaps have learnt a lesson from Charlie's previous efforts to break his way out of the boma, for when we returned to check on June the following morning she was gone! Despite the long and exhausting chase of the previous day, she had forced her way out of the boma during the night and the following morning there was no sign of her.

More rhinos were expected to be sent down from Umfolozi and in November 1961, it was decided to fence in a half-a-kilometre square paddock near the rhino stockade in which to keep the new arrivals until they had settled down. We tried to make the paddock as secure as possible and the fence around it consisted of a double strand of barbed wire and one strand of lift cable. Water was pumped from the Nsumu pan and a small two-stroke pump to feed a rhino wallow, was bought for this purpose.

The first rhino to be placed in the new enclosure was Minihaha. She was kept here for some months before being released but she obviously failed to link up with either June or Charlie during the year. At the end of 1962 she was seen in the company of a black rhino bull - a most unusual occurrence. Towards the end of 1963 she had deserted her erstwhile companion and had taken up with a herd of 5 blue wildebeest. Belinda, a rhino cow arrived in 1963 to join the other three surviving animals and she was the last of the rhinos that were sent to the reserve to have the distinction of having names allocated to them; future arrivals would remain anonymous.

Minnihaha finally sorted herself out, for in February 1964 she was seen with two recently introduced rhino bulls in the Dagela area. The event that everyone had been waiting for finally arrived. In August 1967 a white rhino and young calf were seen in the Mahlambeni area - the first rhino calf to be born in the reserve and an auspicious event. In November of the same year two more calves were seen.

The rhinos that were sent to Mkhuze settled down very well and over the next 10 to 15 years they continued to breed at a satisfactory rate. Territorial competition amongst the animals was obviously taking place, for in October 1979 Warden Mark Astrup reported that five rhino were stranded on the north bank of the Mkhuze River. The animals had wandered out of the reserve, perhaps in search of new territories and had become stranded in the African reserve, as a result of the river coming down in flood. The rhino split up into two groups, one of three animals and the remaining two. During the next two months the animals wandered throughout the Makatini Flats, between Ubombo and Jozini and as far north as the Pongola River. They proved extremely difficult to locate for recapture as they moved considerable distances during the night, in their efforts to locate water. They also lay up during the day in thick scrub. The capture team was called in on a number of occasions and although fresh tracks were located, the animals were not to be found. After a while, no further tracks could be discovered and it was surmised that the animals had eventually found their way back into the reserve.

During the last 40 years many hundreds of rhinos have been successfully moved from Umfolozi, and more recently from other reserves as well, to new homes in Africa and abroad. The capture of these animals has now become something of a routine operation, with the refining of capture techniques and the introduction of helicopters to dart animals and recover them from areas inaccessible to vehicles. Their care in the holding pens is now also something of a routine operation. The capture of Amber and her translocation to a new home was to become the forerunner of one of the most important conservation achievements of the 20th century. Sophisticated though these new techniques now may be, catching a rhino today will never be able to match the excitement, drama, triumph and the pathos of Amber's capture, arrival and death in Mkhuze. As Rangers we were all very aware of how privileged we had been to have had a small part in the drama and share in an historic event, even though it ended tragically. It remains one of my treasured memories of my service in the reserve.