Photo: Gordon van der Merwe

Norman H. Deane.

Poachers in the Hills

Norman Deane's Life
in Hluhluwe Game Reserve

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In Memory of Norman and Jean

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Introduction

Norman Deane was born in Springs, Transvaal, on 12 September 1925. He was educated at Springs High School. When he was seventeen he left school and joined the South African Air Force as a wireless operator/airgunner. During the Second World War he served with 24 and 25 Squadrons on the South African coast and in Italy. Norman worked for an insurance company for some years before taking up the post of Ranger-in-charge, Mkuzi Game Reserve, Northern Zululand. With his wife Jean, Norman was posted to Hluhluwe Game Reserve in 1954 as Ranger-in-charge, where he eventually rose to the rank of Senior Warden.

The Hluhluwe Game Reserve at this time was one of Southern Africa's best known and most visited game reserves. It is regarded primarily as a Black Rhino sanctuary although many species of game, birds and reptiles live in its beautiful wooded hills. Twenty one thousand hectares, in extent, the Hluhluwe Game Reserve was proclaimed in 1897. It has withstood the rigours of many crises, not the least of which was the Tsetse Fly Campaign when thousands of head of game were shot in central Zululand. Later the reserve was saturated in D.D.T. by low-flying aircraft in an attempt to eliminate the Nagana-carrying tsetse flies.

Hluhluwe Game Reserve is situated 90 - 580 m above sea level on a longitude of 32° E - 32° 9 min E and a latitude of 28° 0 min S - 28° 9 min S. It derives its name from the river of that name. Hluhluwe is the Zulu name for an armoured creeper growing there, **Dalbergia armata**.

Photo: C.J. Ward

Nick Steele with his horse Zoom, 1958

Foreword

By John O'Malley, former Editor of The Sunday Chronicle, Daily News and Cape Argus.

This is the story, simply told, of Game Warden Norman Deane's life in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve.

In 1983, long after he had left Hluhluwe with his wife and three children and just before he died of cancer aged 58, he bequeathed his diaries and personal papers to Nick Steele.

"I've often felt that he left the diaries to me in the hope that I would fulfil his own wish to leave a record of his life in conservation", writes Nick in a postscript to this book. "I like to think that Norman would have approved of this modest account".

Indeed he would. For it was a time which saw some of the fiercest clashes between poachers and game guards, and it is Nick's actual participation in many of the hair-raising incidents and adventures described so laconically in Norman Deane's diaries, that give this book an added vividness and authenticity.

Through the skilful linking and interweaving of extracts from the diaries with his own on the ground experiences, the author has given us a memorable portrait of a remarkable man.

The relationship was that of pupil and teacher. "I often reflect how fortunate I was to start my career under a man of such energy, integrity and courage", writes Nick. It was Deane's example that has been the foundation of his own distinguished career in conservation.

Not that Norman Deane was without flaws. His treatment of staff could be harsh, even physical, but it was a rough frontier, no holds barred era and environment in which he operated. His fearless leadership and fundamental fairness, however, won the respect of all who served under him. He had one over-riding aim - to provide a sanctuary for wildlife - and bent all of his own and his team's efforts to that end.

In conservation's crown, Hluhluwe Game Reserve is still one of Africa's brightest jewels. It is a legacy, like all other wildlife legacies, to be preserved only be constant vigilance and dedication.

This is the story, not just of one man's contribution to that legacy, exceptional though it was. It is the story also of the Zulu game guard, then and still conservation's frontline soldier. A story which belongs on the shelves of all who revere and treasure Africa's wildlife, surely the ultimate sanity in a violent, materialistic world.

Nick Steele has served his mentor well.

Chapter One

In March 1956 when I arrived in Hluhluwe Game Reserve as a junior ranger, Norman Deane had just returned from Ndumu Game Reserve on the Mocambique border. He had been helping Ranger Boy Hancock and the South African Police in an unsuccessful search for the bodies of a policeman and game guard. They were drowned in the flooded Pongolo river near its confluence with the Usutu river.

Just over twenty-two years old and from an isolated farm in the Natal Midlands where I worked as a stockman, I felt uneasy under Norman's steely eyed gaze. Somewhat I imagine like a Green pigeon suddenly finding itself under the glare of a Goshawk. Or so it seemed.

Although Norman's wife Jean was kind to me from the start he seemed determined to ensure I did not underestimate his well known ferocity. He need not have worried because I never made the mistake of questioning his authority even by expression, which I was careful to maintain as sphinx like as I could. I was well justified in adopting this defensive stance because later I was witness to Norman's sometimes inexplicable attitude to subordinates. Within earshot of me I heard him ask another unfortunate ranger if he was happy. "Yes Sir" he blurted out quickly, if not entirely honestly. "Well then we will have to do something about that won't we" Norman replied facetiously. The ranger looked visibly uncomfortable and I could see his Adams Apple moving up and down.

Early one morning I was standing in line with the game guards and workers waiting for the days orders when Norman appeared through the door. Walking down the steps he went silently up to one individual, removed the cane knife from his hand and cuffed him. Offended by this harsh behaviour I later summoned up the courage to ask him what the unfortunate recipient of the clout had done wrong. "Oh nothing" said Norman "but I didn't like the look in his eyes". I felt even more grateful for my earlier wisdom not to cross him, even by expression. Being an ex boxer it was not unnatural for Norman to express his feelings through his hands. I had nearly received a cuff myself once or twice when I made mistakes in field operations. Nor did Norman discriminate when confronted by a belligerent tourist. He simply acknowledged insolence, perceived insolence or carelessness with a well aimed blow which hurt the pride more than the flesh.

Although such behaviour would be frowned on today it was not unusual then. My impression was that it was accepted without undue resentment. After all this was the era in which differences were settled physically. There was little or no premeditated violence on the part of law enforcement staff generally and I can only recall one incident in which wardens and game guards were censured. This was for heating a poachers bum over a camp fire to encourage him to name his accomplices. However, this did not happen in Hluhluwe Game Reserve.

I had been a game ranger for only twelve days when

Colonel Jack Vincent . . . an inspiring leader

The Zulu game guards were the major force in bringing law and order to Hluhluwe's wild, lonely hills. Game guards reporting with captured poachers.

Norman was instructed by Colonel Vincent*, director of the Natal Parks Board to go to St. Lucia estuary to shoot crocodiles which were hounding residents dogs.

This was my first contact with crocodiles. Norman and I spent many hours scanning the sparkling waters of the estuary for the tell-tale eye knuckles which indicated a crocodile. I was amazed how camouflaged they were to the uninitiated eye like mine. One crocodile shot was 11 foot 8 inches. Its stomach contents consisted of a three-foot shark; one two foot barbel; hooves and hair of a red duiker, a pair of small shark's jaws and numerous bones.

These crocodiles were shot as a result of a local public outcry over their taking resident's dogs. Some of the houses' gardens ended at the water's edge. A patient crocodile had only to wait for a dog to go into the water and he had a tasty meal. When one or two vociferous locals had lost a dog or two the director, Colonel Jack Vincent, reluctantly ordered some of the crocodiles shot to appease public opinion. It was a futile exercise really because there were hundreds of crocodiles in the St Lucia system and the vacuum was soon filled.

Within days of arriving back in Hluhluwe Game Reserve we were hammering at the relentless incursions of the poaching gangs running amok in the wooded hills. What promised to be a period of ugly violence with casualities on both sides started for me on 18 March 1956.

I was a member of a patrol which encountered a gang of

*Colonel Jack Vincent served in the Natal Parks Board from 1948 to 1963, first as secretary and then as director. He was an inspiring leader. Some of his experiences in the Board are recounted in his book **The Web of Experience.**

poachers in the bush studded uNomageje valley. What impressed me was the intense excitement of the chase, the chaos; men running in all directions, whistles blowing and the cuts and bruises one sustained in trying to run the wily poachers down. I do not recall being scared, only excited.

To Norman this was just another successful sortie. This was my first encounter with Zulu poachers of any kind. One moment we were moving quietly along a rough track, Norman driving and the guards and myself on the back when the landrover lurched to a halt and Norman leapt out shouting "bamba! bamba!". The guards leapt out and sped off into the bush. Although I had as yet not seen the poachers I ran with the guards and Norman. Ahead of me there were men in uniforms blowing whistles intermingled with men wearing beshus and sacks, shouting and running, one crashing to the ground and being handcuffed, dogs scattering, assegais and knobsticks strewn on the ground. It was chaos. I plunged into the mêlee trying to help but I played a very small part despite the cuts and scratches I sustained from the thorns. I was impressed by that first encounter and gazed at the handcuffed poacher standing there dejected as the riflemen shot his dogs. So this was what it was really like. It was also my first impression of true leadership. Norman had led from the front. No hesitation, no hanging back.

Three of the poachers had escaped in the mêlee and a few days later Norman ordered a raid to capture them. His policy of following up poachers who evaded capture was a sound one because it demoralised them. It contributed

considerably to a reduction in poaching. It meant that a poacher who evaded capture could not afford to sleep at home for a few months. These raids, which were in a sense retaliatory strikes, got us into numerous nasty fights in the dark, sometimes in circumstances in which we were outnumbered.

In 1954, when Norman started work at Hluhluwe, the reserve was faced with serious overgrazing and bush encroachment problems. Compounding these problems was the absence of a proper game fence and constant poaching.

Norman's timely arrival coincided with that of another important person, Roddy Ward. Roddy has a scientific background and is regarded as one of southern Africa's best botanists. Together these men, who became close friends, introduced a proper management programme which succeeded very well over the next decade. The combination of Roddy's scientific mind and Norman's practical ability helped to make this management programme in Hluhluwe Game Reserve one of the best in Southern Africa.

Norman never lost sight of the fact that thousands of tourists came to the game reserve from other parts of Africa and the world to see wild animals, especially the pugnacious yet beautiful black rhino, one of Africa's legendary Big Five.

With his wife Jean and three children, Robert, Ann and Duncan, Norman lived in a thatched bungalow on the forest clad western hills in Hluhluwe Game Reserve. These beautiful deep green forests, interspersed with open patches of tall thatch grass echoed with the songs of a variety of birds, among them

the Natal and the Chorister robins, the pretty Forest weaver with its enchanting, lilting call and the wailing Trumpeter hornbill. Huge, gnarled old buffalo bulls and black rhino roamed at will surprisingly close to the little hilltop settlement, sometimes separated from the barking dogs by only a flimsy fence. At night, as wisps of mist swirled among the forest trees under a bright moon the nostalgic call of the nightjar gave way to the whoop of the spotted hyena or the rough cough of a leopard. Here in this lovely, wild and romantic African setting Norman and his band of men gathered together to plan and carry out their patrols and other activities.

Much of the work was of a practical nature; repairing dongas, patching up fences, counting game, organising game drives, hunting wounded animals and waging a ruthless and often dangerous campaign against poachers. Hluhluwe Game Reserve was the ideal training-ground for young staff and Norman, tough and uncompromising, was an excellent tutor.

In 1955 the field staff consisted of a ranger and twenty four other ranks. This later grew to six rangers and over a hundred other ranks of whom a quarter were guards.

The Zulu game guards were the major force in bringing law and order to Hluhluwe's wild, lonely hills. They perform a vital role. They are to wildlife conservation what the Gurkha soldier is to the British Army; certainly no less brave. Success or failure largely depends on their skill, loyalty and courage. The new ranger was "attached" to an experienced game guard and from him learnt the bushlore which would stand him in good stead throughout his future career.

I worked with these men almost from the first day I arrived. Two things struck me: their incredible physical strength and their willingness to face opponents sometimes outnumbering us four or five to one. Although I did not fully appreciate it then, I was working with men whose forebears had formed the bulk of the nineteenth century Zulu armies. These men with whom we tramped the hills night and day, dodging big game and skirmishing with poachers, still retained the fighting spirit of their illustrious ancestors. In all the field operations in which I was involved, I seldom saw a Zulu game guard's courage fail him. If anything, their officers had to restrain them from over-reacting in skirmishes. It had to be drummed into them that the idea was to capture the culprits and present them to the nearest police station in as good a condition as possible. When the poachers offered little resistance and submitted quietly there was no problem and they were treated well, often sharing the guards clothes in bad weather or being given part of their field rations. It was when they resisted that the trouble started and one often had to intervene physically to stop the guards felling a man who had jabbed at them with an assegai or pointed a rifle at them. The game guards often had to make tactical retreats, but they did so reluctantly and often only when severely wounded.

During the retaliatory raids on the homes of escaped poachers, which took place mostly at night, one needed to instil discipline. It was difficult for the officer in charge of the raiding party to be everywhere at once when a homestead was surrounded in a search for suspects. Rough justice sometimes

With his wife Jean, Norman lived in a thatched bungalow in Hluhluwe Game Reserve. The dog is the ill fated Phantom.

prevailed. The suspects were at times helped along by a few good slaps or were unceremoniously dragged out of their huts by an arm or a leg.

A force which undertakes semi-military or military operations almost always includes some rough elements and the Game Guard Force had its fair share of ruffians. Some of them abused their position by snaring or shooting the occasional animal; others could not resist the temptation of selling animal parts to inyangas; others again would slip out of the game reserve at night to a beerdrink or to visit a woman. Norman had to contend with all these problems. When he caught a game guard breaking the regulations justice was swift and depending on the severity of the offence, the offender either lost his job or was fined. Although at times I felt his judgements were harsh and peremptory, I soon learnt that they were always made with the concurrence of the head game guard. He was the equivalent of a non-commissioned officer. He held a responsible and powerful position and his sources of information were usually impeccable.

For a better understanding of the force at Norman's disposal in these eventful days it is worth looking at the raw material recruited into the game guard ranks. The bulk of the force consisted of men from about twenty to forty-five years old. Few if any knew their precise birthdate other than relating it to a significant event in the year of their birth. Thus one might get an idea of a man's age when told he was born at the start of the Second World War or at a time of great floods or other such natural disasters. It did not really matter when he

was born. It was not even necessary for the officer to check his background or his political affiliations, if he had any. The head game guard knew all these things anyway. If he had doubts he would simply indicate his feelings to the warden. If he nodded his head, the man was in; if he shook his head the man was out. Since the new man was recruited from a Zulu clan where personal and social discipline had been instilled in him from childhood there was very little risk of him turning out badly. The head game guard would seldom jeopardise his position by recommending a recruit from a bad background. The recruit did not have to subject himself to a formal medical check. The recruiting officer simply looked him over, saw that he was strong and looked fit and that was that. It did not matter that he was short or tall, thin or fat, for good service was rendered by men of all shapes and sizes. If a recruit was fat when he started he soon lost weight running up and down hills. If he was thin, he soon gained weight from the ample supply of good food, especially meat which was in abundant supply. As a rule the Zulus are good physical examples, handsome in a rugged way.

The recruits were not taken on straight from their homes. They usually began as ordinary workers in the fence-gang. In due course those with outstanding qualities were recognised and they became privates in the force. There were no entrance examinations and one did not ask a recruit if he knew the bush or was familiar with wild animals. He knew all these things and more because he had been in the field herding his father's cattle since he was a toddler. In his formative years he and his friends had learnt bushlore by heart. Even the

weather held no fears for him. He spent many hours sheltering from the sun under an acacia tree or in the shadow of a placid cow, sometimes cowering behind boulders from a driving rainstorm. Most of the time he and his friends were semi-naked. Birdcalls were his music and birds sometimes his food. If he was lucky he managed to kill one with a sling or well-aimed stone, cooking his prize over a small wood fire in the veld. Zulu boys learnt to hunt from an early age, first concentrating on small prey like cane rats which they ran down with their dogs and assegaied, and later joining in the big hunting parties as camp followers. The new recruit did not really understand why it was wrong to poach, since he had grown up with the idea that game was there for the taking. But as time went by and he became part of the force, his knowledge increased. He felt part of a movement which he instinctively knew was a good one with altruistic aims. The camaraderie, the shared dangers and the shared rations out in the field on anti-poaching operations or game drives all combined to make the average Zulu game guard a more than competent conservationist.

Chapter Two

It may seem confusing, even contradictory that so much effort was put into the arrest of poachers when game-culling programmes accounted for a far larger proportion of game killed. The number of animals killed by poachers was only a small percentage of the total number which had, for one reason or another, to be removed from the game reserve every year. There should be no confusion between the two concepts. Organised culling and disorganised illegal poaching are neither comparable nor compatible.

No reasonable authority can condone or legalise the hunting of wild animals in a proclaimed game reserve in the manner in which it is done by bands of poachers. They are not selective in their methods and even if they were it might be on the more vulnerable and endangered species like the black rhino. Poaching is really equivalent to stock theft. Although persons who poach may not be seen as criminals, their action can lead to criminal acts. Poachers, of course, not only kill game indiscriminately; they break and steal parts of fences and installations, they cause wildfires which destroy thousands of hectares of grazing, seriously affecting management programmes.

In skirmishes with poachers some game guards died pierced by assegais; others were badly injured by knobsticks and cane knives. Norman always supported his game guards in their struggles with the poachers in the hills. He taught the young rangers to do the same. Norman led from the front and

in doing so gained the lasting respect of his men. He was brave to the point of recklessness and expected the same of others. When support was not forthcoming he could be very critical. In field operations when mistakes were made he often became angry, shouting and occasionally cuffing the offender. But his anger soon subsided, and glaring at the unfortunate individual through his piercing blue eyes, he would chide him lightly saying "next time run faster, man," or "keep you ruddy head down" or whatever it was that incurred his wrath. The Zulus called Norman 'Mkhondweni' (The Spoor-follower), a tribute to his excellence in tracking down poachers.

Although initially the majority of the anti poaching skirmishes were bloodless for the antagonists, there was always the possibility of violence. Most poachers submitted quietly when cornered or surrounded. The majority were tribesmen living within ten to twenty kilometres of the game reserve boundary. They did not necessarily see themselves as poachers in the western sense. There is no word in the Zulu language for a poacher. In their view they were Umzingeli engaged in the age old recreation of hunting. The main reason they entered the boundaries of the Hluhluwe Game Reserve was because there was little or no game left in the tribal areas. In a sense these poachers were frustrated sportsmen taking what traditionally had always been there for the taking. This attitude did not absolve them from the responsibility of breaking the game laws, but it did explain their actions and why they could not always see matters from the conservationist's perspective. Game conserved in proclaimed game and nature reserves,

national parks and game ranches has an economic as well as aesthetic value. It is thus not there for the taking any more than domestic stock.

It is unfair to denounce every poacher who invaded the game reserve as a potential killer of men but among them there was always an element capable of murder. There were also some chronic poachers, who never learnt from their mistakes. There were four main character types with whom Norman Deane and his force had to contend. The first were the tribesmen taking their chance and invading the game reserve for a social hunt; the second were the habitual hunters, usually armed with rifles, who were after the bigger game like buffalo; the third were the small bands of hardened poachers prepared to resist and even kill the law enforcement staff; the fourth were the local whites from the nearby towns who poached from the safety of their cars at night with lights. Most of the slain animals were eaten almost immediately the poachers arrived home. Occasionally in the slaughter of a rhino the horn would be cut off and sold. This was by no means a regular trade though, and the poachers were largely unaware of the real value of rhino horn. Sadly, this was not the case in later years.

Poacher Meshack was a prime example of the type of poacher who never seemed to learn from his mistakes. He lived close to the boundary of the Hluhluwe Game Reserve in 1955. Meshack was a very powerful man with a neck like a buffalo as Norman and game guard Jeremiah Ndletshe found out to their cost. In the days before Meshack's arrest Norman and his guards had been very active trying to locate him after

finding the remains of a buffalo. Their raiding party visited Meshack's homestead at 2 a.m. one morning but found only women present. It was later discovered that Meshack was in hopital after having been attacked by his brother with a cane knife after a domestic argument.

Returning from Mtubatuba village in Central Zululand one day, Norman and Jeremiah came upon Meshack whom they arrested after a ten-minute struggle. Although floored with a right hook from Norman he came back fighting. Rabbit punches, hits on the head with handcuffs, six more punches on the jaw eventually stunned him. The strain of holding one arm left Norman's wrists quite numb. Meshack was tremendously powerful and appeared to be immune to pain. Jeremiah had great difficulty in getting the handcuffs on owing to the thickness of his wrists. When on the last notch, the handcuffs actually cut the flesh. After securing one wrist Norman got him in a headlock for the second time and choked him until he submitted. After the fight they found a sheath knife with a 5" blade suspended from the back of his belt. He had made attempts to get this knife from his belt during the fight. Norman regarded it as a good scrap and was very pleased with the fight put up by Jeremiah. Despite his quite violent arrest Meshack was soon free again and was suspected of being involved in the shooting of a wildebeest cow. Game guards stationed in the area followed up Meshack's tracks, finding the head and feet of the wildebeest near a steam called the uNdimbili. From there they followed tracks to Meshack's homestead. Following up earlier leads it was not until April

1956 that Norman was able to really catch up with him. This time he had wisely used informers to help him. Meshack was re arrested and convicted. Despite the false trails Meshack had led him and his men, Norman still retained his sense of balance, expressing some reluctant compassion for his adversary. Later the incorrigible Meshack was again arrested for being in possession of a waterbuck, an antelope which was by no means plentiful in Hluhluwe Game Reserve and confined mainly to the area in the southwest of the reserve. Game wardens and the police were now on the lookout for Meshack's rifle. They had also been tipped off that another hunting party was heading for the game reserve, their rifles hidden in a sled pulled by donkeys.

Norman and his guards attended the local court to hear Meshack again being convicted and sentenced to months in prison. He wrote: *' Meshack appeared in a cheerful frame of mind and greeted me with a cheerful smile. In the dock he asked for leniency as he handed over his rifle and swore never to come into the game reserve again. He said he was going to become a Christian. Nevertheless he was sentenced to three months without the option of a fine and three months or £15 for being in possession of an unlicensed firearm. After the court case Sgt. Archer and I went out of the court house. Meshack asked us how many months he had got and when we told him he shook his head and asked me if I could help him to get it reduced. I told him I could not. He replied with a broad grin, 'Hau. Nkosaan and I never even had any of the meat as you took it all.' All the other prisoners waiting in the courtyard*

saw the funny side of it. They all burst out laughing. I felt quite sorry for Meshack despite all the trouble he had caused us.'

Head game guard Nathaniel Nkwanyane, whose father had been one of the earliest game guards in Hluhluwe Game Reserve, was reporting almost daily to Norman of poachers incursions. Others were hovering outside the boundaries, sometimes letting their dogs in to kill.* Meanwhile the game guards, occasionally on their own, tracked down poachers. They were sometimes attacked and had to call for reinforcements.

Scouting and tracking came naturally to the Zulu game guard. Generations of his forebears were scouts in the 19th century military campaigns. The average game guard had an innate ability to detect "sign" in the wilderness. The need to be a good scout was inculcated in him from an early age while tending his father's valuable cattle herd. As a boy he sometimes received a heavy whack on the buttocks for failing to locate a missing cow or calf. In earlier times, as a young soldier in the famous Zulu army, poor scouting or failure to detect an ambush could, in rare instances, cost him his life.

Early in his career Norman realised the need for a better trained game guard force. He wrote: *'I cannot overestimate*

*At this time Norman went to Mpukonyoni area to see Nathaniel's father who must have been born circa 1872. He had worked in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve from the Second Boer War to the First World War, part of the time under Vaughan Kirby. Vaughan Kirby was one of Zululands pioneer conservationists (1911 to 1928) He was a tough, dedicated man who fought bravely against the negative forces. This was an era when those in favour of wildlife outside of a pot were regarded as cranks. Some of Vaughan Kirby's achievements are described in John Pringle's **The Conservationists And The Killers.***

the importance of having game guards better trained. There will be trouble in future for us by the blunderings of some well-meaning game guard. Troubles with them will never end until they are taught to feel proud of their work and themselves.' In the fifties and sixties training was informal and by example.

My own field training was achieved by watching my seniors operate in the field. Good as it was it proved inadequate at times for the simple reason that we learnt mainly by trial and error. This sometimes had unfortunate consequences in field operations.

Another inveterate poacher was Mhlongo. He was at large for a long time before being caught. Time did not diminish Mhlongo's hunting instincts and in June 1962 he narrowly missed being captured in a dramatic incident on a cliff face. The incident is vividly described by Norman: *'After the moon had set we heard two shots fired on uZangomfe. We moved off cautiously up the uMgovuso in the dark. Another shot was fired at 5.15. We climbed to the top of uZangomfe hill and split into two parties, one proceeding along the fenceline towards iTshempofu hill. As the sun rose we saw a poacher with a rifle on uZangomfe ridge outside the reserve. The other party passed information to us on top and we moved along the ridge outside to point out where the poacher was seen. He had vanished down a fault in the cliff face. Ranger Peter Hitchins*, game guards Sitambuzo and Meshack went down the cleft while I kept watch from the top. From my position I could see*

*Peter Hitchins is one of Africa's foremost authorities on rhinos. Much of his knowledge about rhinos was acquired during the patrols he undertook in Hluhluwe Game Reserve as a young ranger.

a small cave and told Meshack to search it. He found a poacher lying flat in the grass outside the cave and the rifle inside. The rifle belongs to Mandlakayise Manqele, Chief Induna to Chief Jeremiah Hlabisa. The rifle did not smell of cordite and the poacher said the shots were fired with a shotgun belonging to Istezi Mhlongo. He was supposed to have met Istezi there to hunt together' Two days later, tempting providence, Mhlongo was arrested by alert game guards at the uMgovuso stream on the western boundary of the game reserve. Guards saw a poacher armed with a rifle and eventually pounced on him. To their surprise and delight they discovered it was Mhlongo. His rifle was a BSA airgun which had been converted into a .22 using a nail for a firing pin.

Chapter Three

Almost every geographical feature of minor or major significance has a Zulu name. These are mainly ancient names, their derivations known in some cases, in others long forgotten. Learner rangers and game guards had to learn all these names. Some of these places names have achieved prominence because of the events which occurred there in Norman's era and long before. Some of them evoke nostalgia. One is uMagwanxa, a steep hill in the east of Hluhluwe, topped by huge rocks and clusters of bush. From this range buffalo poachers and other poachers launched their raids. uSeme hill is a high grass covered, rounded prominence on the extreme south western boundary. It is the habitat of the Mountain Reedbuck. uKwankwane hill is the high, dome shaped hill to the east of the rest camp. On its south eastern slopes lie the hyena warrens. Another well known place name was the uNomageje valley, well populated with black rhino.

In the course of my duties in a game reserve inhabited by big game it was not unusual to be charged and treed. Eventually I became accustomed to these accidental encounters as one became more familiar with the animals and their habitat. In the beginning, however, it was nerve shattering. Norman recorded an encounter: *'Creeping through very thick bush at the confluence of the iNzimane and Hluhluwe rivers with Nick Steele and three game guards, Mbangiseni*, Mhluhluwa and Mandlakayise, we were chased by a black rhino from very*

*Mbangiseni Mhlongo was my personal game guard. His help and advice gave me a valuable grounding in the bush. He died at a relatively young age.

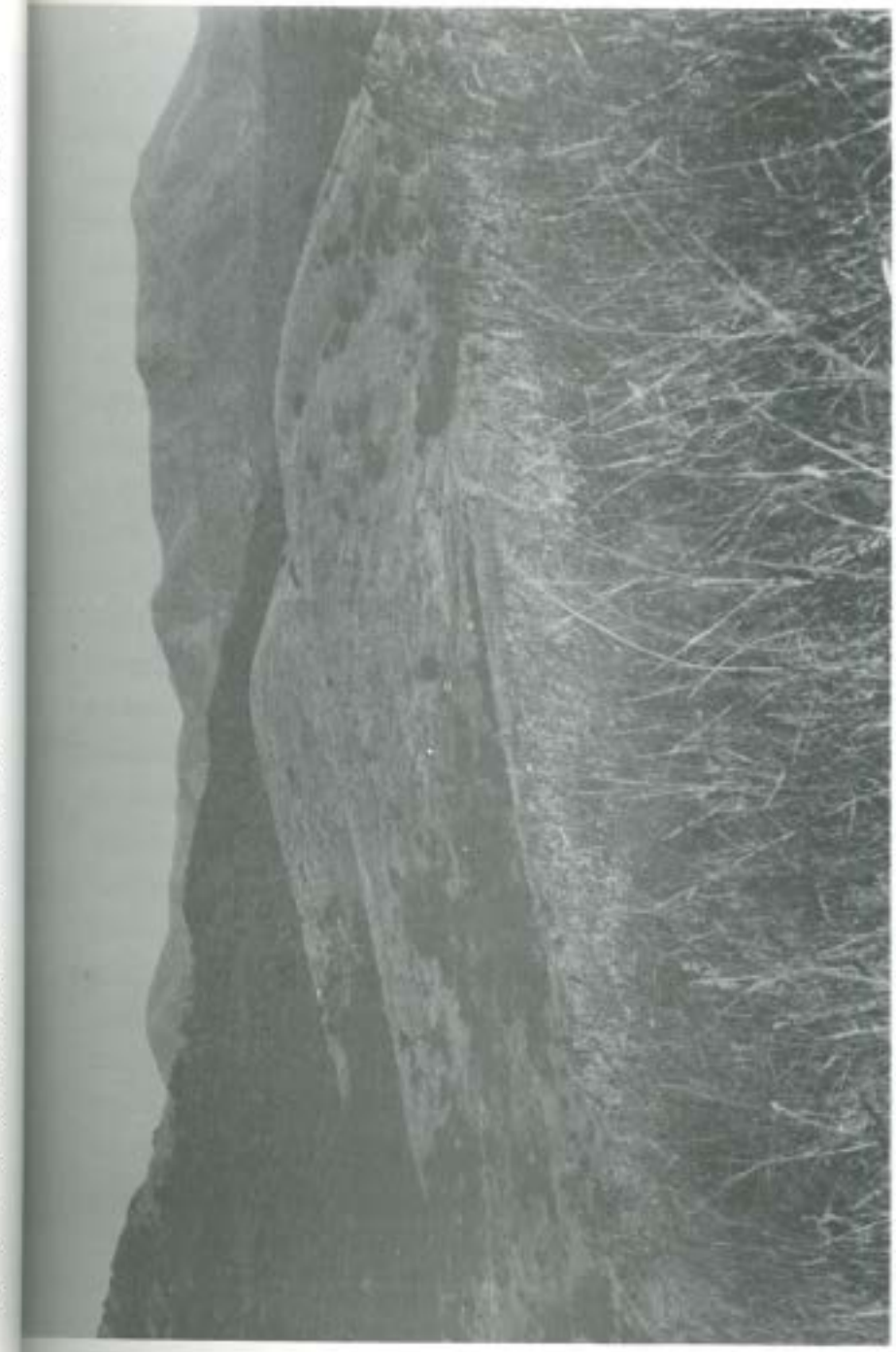
close quarters. Mbangiseni and Nick both had a very close shave. I managed to get well clear being in front and was able to break out into a clearing. The others, however, tried to go back but could not make much headway in the thick bush, while the rhino ploughed into them through the bush without any difficulty.' I have often wondered how it missed me. Possibly it did because I crouched down motionless, less by design than sheer desperation. Hluhluwe Game Reserve's terrain is very hilly and cloaked in forest or bush. Although these heavily bushed areas are interspersed with rounded grassy hills, they belie their innocuous appearance. In some places it is quite possible to walk or ride on to buffalo or rhino lying up in the long grass. Many field staff and poachers alike have been caught off guard by the sudden appearance of a black rhino from what seemed like an innocent bit of grassland. The spectre of being run down by a charging rhino or buffalo was a real one for the men in the field. Protecting its interests did not guarantee the protector immunity. When one of these animals was disturbed, as Norman and his personal game guard Ishmail Msomi found out on patrol, it sometimes resulted in chaos. Up the Hluhluwe river towards iNzimane confluence they saw a black rhino cow lying sprawled out on its side apparently asleep. *'A very young calf was standing sucking quite contentedly. Further on, on one of the numerous spurs of iTshempofu I sat down to rest in the shade of a tree. My game guard, Ismail Msomi, seeking out a tree for himself came back to me in a hurry saying there was a black rhino asleep behind me. Sure enough there was one. It appeared to be fast asleep*

Photo: Richard Smallwood

Some of these places achieved prominence because of the events which occurred there . . . uMagwanxa Hill

and not concerned, so I started to take my shoes off to cool my feet. I had no sooner done this when a change of wind took our scent to the rhino and she was up in a second, shaking with rage. It was then that I saw she had a newborn calf with her and I wasted no time in getting up the tree. She charged in several directions all the time making a duece of a row. The calf, which may have been a week old, ran behind her during the charges and did not seem very worried.' Known to the Zulus as uBejane, the black rhino is primarily a browser. The average shoulder height is 1,4 metres and the mass 900 to 1000 kgs. Its gestation period is estimated at 14 to 16 months. A single calf is born. In flight the calf follows its mother, unlike the white rhino where the calf runs ahead of its mother. At full charge or flight, a black rhino's speed is estimated at about 45 kilometres per hour.

In 1965 Hluhluwe Game Reserve was enclosed only by a cattle fence. Black rhino used to leave the reserve by finding a weak spot, usually in a dry stream bed, and crawling under the fence like a dog. Operations to drive black rhino, white rhino and buffalo back into the game reserve were common. Considerable organisation preceded these drives which were not without their amusing moments and danger. Norman describes such a drive: *'We went to uNomageje to drive five black rhino into the game reserve. Four became aggressive and for a time refused to budge and made charges at a range too close for comfort, about twenty yards. I scored hits with a .410 shotgun but it was too light for success. A dangerous game!* This was followed by another drive using heavier



These heavily bushed areas are interspersed with rounded, grassy hills . . . In some places it is quite possible to walk or ride on to a buffalo or rhino. *Photo: Nola Steele*

shotguns. The pellets only aggravated the rhino and did no lasting damage as they were not shot from close range. Some of these black rhino had lived outside the game reserve for many years and were confused by the attempts to drive them out of what was their territory. Unfortunately their presence there was a threat to thatch cutters, wood cutters and wood gatherers so they had to be removed. At this time the immobilisation of rhino using non lethal drugs was unknown. Our only vision of black rhino captures were those we had seen on film being carried out on flat ground in East Africa. Roping rhino from a speeding vehicle seemed to us a form of suicide as well as traumatic for the animal. A skirmish line of men on foot in low scrub bush "beating" black rhino towards the game reserve fence was a dangerous operation. Norman and his team went to eGunjaneni to attempt to drive in the resident black rhino. They located it and drove the animal which bolted and made for uHlokohloko stream. Norman wrote: *'On taking up a position for another drive I took my .410 shotgun and advanced toward the rhino. As it was facing me I could not fire. From approximately thirty yards range it charged me - I dropped the .410 and picked up the .375 magnum, intending to wait to the last minute. When it charged, the men began firing blanks and shouted to frighten it. It stopped about fifteen yards in front of me, turned and ran off, charging those on my right flank. I had taken up the shotgun again hoping to get a shot at it but realising the danger to those on my right, I again took up the .375 magnum. The rhino appeared in earnest and made no sign of stopping its charge.'* When it was approximately ten

yards behind the slowest beater Norman decided to fire as to delay any longer meant that the rhino, if it continued its charge, would have been directly between him and the fleeing man. If he missed he might have hit the man. He fired, hitting it in the shoulder. Dropping to the ground it rose and ran off. They chased the injured rhino for over two miles where they caught up with it lying down in dense bush and long grass. *'While I was standing about twenty paces away regaining my breath, it became aware of my presence and stood up and charged. I did not have a clear view through the Acacia bush but had to fire. I aimed for the left shoulder but my bullet entered the left side of the lower jaw passing through the shoulder.'* This shot fortunately turned the rhino and it made off towards uNomageje. It fell into the uNomageje stream but being unable to get out turned downstream, smashing the fence. After another two mile chase Norman was able to locate it in dense bush on the slopes of aMahlungulu ridge and finally destroy the animal. Unfortunately there were no experienced horsemen in Hluhluwe at that time. They would have made driving the rhino in open country less hazardous than it was for men on foot. The only other rhino which were shot in the tribal reserve were two white rhino. I shot both of these in the vicinity of Umfolozi Game Reserve. One of them had killed a woman on her way to collect water, and the other was a seriously injured animal which was threatening human life in the Hlungwane steam area.

Chapter Four

The poachers employed well conceived tactics to avoid the game guards. Sometimes the dogs would be pushed through the fence to run down game while the poachers waited in hiding to see if the guards materialised. Alternatively they would climb through the low cattle fence and make a sweep, leaving the game reserve several kilometres further on. Norman and his force had often to track them using available cover, avoiding big game and covering many kilometres in their bid to corner their opponents. When all else failed and the poachers climbed through the fence, they found other solutions, like shooting the dogs as they ran next to the poachers.

Dogs are an integral part of mans life, no less with the Zulus than anyone else. It is their use and not their existence which conservationists abhor. A pack of twenty to thirty dogs is a highly mobile killing machine. They are unrelenting and undiscriminating, chasing and tearing at any living creature in their path. They often range far ahead of the poaching gang. As a learner ranger I recoiled from shooting them as they stood around us panting, their owners manacled. My worst experience was in a poaching incident on top of uMagwanxa hill, scene of many fights. Having run out of ammunition for my .303 rifle I asked Norman for more to finish off another dog close by. "You've got a rifle butt haven't you Steele, club the bloody thing."

Even if the dogs came in and the poachers waited outside, the guards often out-manoeuvred them by creeping out

of the game reserve and going around behind them. The 'chase zone' as it was called, was later recognised as an area where poachers could be arrested outside the boundary. It had the effect of stopping the poachers using these tactics. Instead, they resumed coming into the game reserve in bigger gangs, sometimes breaking through the peripheral patrols to poach deep in the heart of the bush. Being fired on by them was not uncommon. Resistance to being arrested was increasing daily.

The poachers were mainly armed with assegais, knobsticks and cane knives. The assegai or spear is usually about 1,4 metres long with a steel blade anything from 16 cms to 32 cms long. The assegai can be projected fairly accurately up to ranges of 20 to 24 paces. It is more commonly used for close stabbing or projecting at a short range. A full stab with an assegai in the back, side or chest is almost instantaneously fatal. The knobstick, or iWisa as the Zulus call it, is used for throwing or for clubbing. In experienced hands it can bring down a flying francolin at 20 paces. The cane knife is mainly used for cutting up the animals killed by poachers. It is also a lethal weapon used freely and with ugly consequences in hand-to-hand fights. The types and vintage of firearms used for poaching in Hluhluwe and other game reserves were remarkable. Some of the firearms confiscated in the field included a muzzle loader, a Great War long service .303 bolt action rifle, a double barrelled shotgun, a homemade single barrelled shotgun and two lever action breech loading rifles of 19th century vintage.

Before dealing with the increased contacts between

game rangers, game guards and the poachers in the hills it is worth noting some details about the small force under Norman's control. His force consisted of the brave and resourceful Head game guard, Nathaniel Nkwanyana and twenty four men including corporals, lance corporals and privates. These men, dressed in khaki shorts and shirts, tyre sandals or boots, army greatcoats and topped by their green banded slouch hats, were stationed in strategically sited guard camps at intervals around the periphery of the game reserve.

Nathaniel Nkwanyana and Norman's personal aide-de-camp Ishmail operated with him from headquarters. The guards stationed in the thatched camps usually consisted of a corporal, a lance corporal and three or four privates. The corporal was invariably armed with a military .303 rifle which was used for patrol work and sometimes shooting game for rations. This tough, bolt action rifle weighs 3,6 kgs and is accurate even at a considerable range. In anti poaching operations, pointed, hardnosed bullets were issued. Their effect on dogs was instantaneous and final. On humans the .303 is equally lethal yet some do recover from .303 wounds. The privates were armed with an assegai and knobstick. Their equipment consisted of a leather belt and handcuffs, a police whistle on a lanyard and a hunting knife slung on the belt. It was a comfortable, practical uniform and has altered very little over the years. Each corporal in charge of a camp was given a specific area to patrol. Their areas were normally delineated by streams or conspicuous hills or ridges but this did not prevent them from overlapping other patrol areas. Messages and calls

for help were communicated by runners. Almost all the guards were illiterate and requests for rations or re-inforcements were passed by word of mouth. Norman and Nathaniel acted in concert with those patrols under the most pressure. Learner rangers such as myself were also delegated to work with these patrols. Norman was careful to make us appreciate that the corporal was in charge in the field and not us, at least not until we had proved our ability to handle difficult situations. I was taught how to monitor the guards movements to ensure that they were doing their job properly. Sometimes a whole morning would be spent, not in tracking poachers, but in tracking the guards to ensure they were on patrol. Some of them were not above slipping out into the tribal reserve. The fear was that they could be attacked outside and perhaps lose their rifles, even their lives. This apparent distrust did not affect the splendid esprit-de-corps which existed between the game rangers and game guards. They understood the need for monitoring. They appreciated the presence of game rangers with them on patrol, it raised morale and emphasized the importance of their dangerous task. It taught learner rangers the basics of proper man management and they learnt valuable tactics from the wily game guards as well as how to work among wild animals.

The hills reverberated with the sounds of poachers firearms, game guards calling for support with their shrill whistles, Zulu dogs baying in the kloofs. We were fighting a small scale war against determined opposition and the intensity was increasing daily. There were savage encounters with

poachers. Game guards Mziwane and Mpahleni Khumalo were on patrol near iNhlabashana when they saw Jadral Manqele hunting with three dogs. They gave chase and he ran from the Game Reserve past his kraal and crossed the Mtubatuba road. Mpahleni tried to catch him. He turned on Mpahleni, inflicting assegai wounds in the chin, throat and hands. With his cane knife he slashed open Mpahleni's left arm above the wrist. The wound was very deep right down to the bone, leaving a piece of flesh about the size of a tennis ball hanging on by threads. As Manqele ran away Mziwane fired at him but missed. When Norman arrived at the Mdoni Park camp he found Mpahleni covered in blood from head to foot. Pools of blood had flowed from where he was lying. All the wounds had stopped bleeding except the arm which was still flowing badly despite the rolls of bandages used on him, but he was amazingly cheerful. His wound kept bleeding all the way to the hopital. Field staff raided Jadral Manqele's kraal and shot three dogs. They interrogated people at three neighbouring kraals but all to no avail. Norman then reported to the Mtubatuba police. Jadral Manqele was eventually charged with attempted murder. As so often happens in the heat of a struggle game guards Mziwane and Mpahleni saw the events from different positions. Naturally their evidence did not always correspond. Both magistrate and the prosecutor harassed them for these discrepancies. The prosecutor became so angry he called Mpahleni a liar and told the magistrate that the case against the poacher should be dropped. Despite his transparent prejudice the magistrate fortunately did not agree, narrowly averting a

miscarriage of justice. The handling of this case was not unusual in those days and was an example of what game rangers and game guards had to contend with. One saw miscarriages of justice sometimes caused by sheer prejudice, at other times by poor language translations. The effect on the morale of the brave game guards was painful to witness. Such incidents unfortunately gave us a rather poor opinion of the lower court system in South Africa.

On 8 May 1956 game guard Mpahleni Khumalo caught a poacher redhanded snaring a reedbuck just outside the game reserve boundary at eGunjaneni. Norman went to eGunjaneni to collect snares hidden by the man caught by Mpahleni. At the Hlabisa court the magistrate decided to carry out an inspection in loco as the accused claimed he had snared the animal to protect his crops of pumpkins and cowpeas. The snare was at the edge of the lands. The game guard denied this saying the snare was placed in a stream and there were no crops nearby. After court Norman went to the scene. There he saw an unused and overgrown field nearby with one pumpkin plant struggling for life among the weeds and grass. He also found another snare placed in the stream a few yards from the one which caught the reedbuck. This one was made of 1/4" cable and meant to catch big game, probably kudu. Norman examined the poaching case at eGunjaneni Gate with Mr Hazzard the magistrate and Sgt. Archer. *'By the time the accused had finished his story he had obviously told so many lies that Hazzard had had a guts-full of him. He walked off to his car refusing to listen to any more of the accused's lies.*

Many poachers hunted as night approached. Game guard Nkomokaziko reported at 8.15 p.m. that poachers had shot a wildebeest at uMagwanxa hill after sunset. Six poachers were seen but it was too dark to get them. The following morning he tracked them from the scene of the poaching and across the Hluhluwe river to behind uMthole where he lost the trail. On making enquiries he found out that there were two men in the area with .303 rifles. Another group of three poachers were seen hunting near the old uSeme guard camp after sunset. They did not have dogs with them but were examining all the warthog holes. Norman said *'By the time we reached the spot where we first saw them it was already dark and we searched for them by moonlight but could not find them. I think they must have left the reserve, perhaps having spotted us. This is a new stunt not using dogs.'*

Sometimes different animals or birds were hunted for medical purposes or superstitious reasons. The poachers killed a wildebeest with assegais, skinned it and removed only a little meat. After preparing snares for vultures they went down to the Hluhluwe river, 3 kilometres away, for a drink of water. The eSaheni guards saw vultures flying above eMcageni and investigating found the remains of a freshly-skinned wildebeest. Nearby was some skin hidden in a bush. Around the carcass of the wildebeest a small boma with several gaps had been built. In each gap a snare for vultures had been set. Three had been snared. The guards hid themselves and later three Zulus armed with assegais turned up. The guards arrested one. The others escaped. The vultures were apparently wanted for medicine.

Chapter Five

Norman liked dogs and was seldom without one at his side. Even before he tried using them in anti-poaching operations later in his career, his constant companion was an alsation, Phantom. Norman was devoted to his dog. At the age of five years Phantom accompanied Norman on patrol. On one occasion Norman left the fence gang at Manzibomvu No. 20 and started back along the cattle track through thick bush. *'My guard Jeremiah Nxumalo was behind me and Phantom was behind him. The guard apparently stopped to relieve himself and it was then that Phantom left the track and went into the bush. He arrived at the truck about 30 seconds after me. He had a bewildered expression and kept scratching the side of his face. I also noticed that he was dribbling at the mouth but was not worried as I thought he had got hold of a toad and was paying the price. Fifteen minutes later I stopped and noticed that thick saliva was pouring from Phantom's mouth. He had been bitten by a venomous snake. He was rubbing his head with both paws. Although he jumped out of the truck he obviously could not get back so putting him in I immediately sped to the rest camp. During the ten minutes it took me to get back to camp his condition had worsened considerably. He could barely stand on his legs, was giving occasional spasmodic shivers and began vomiting. Mrs Val Potter**

*Val Potter was the wife of the Chief Conservator of Zululand, Peter Potter. Peter, a former Second World War fighter pilot was the son of Captain H.B. Potter, the man who really made Hlhuhluwe Game Reserve famous. Peters eldest son, Derek currently holds a senior position in the Natal Parks Board. Thus, three generations of this distinguished family have served conservation in Natal with distinction.

injected 10 cc of anti-snake bite serum into him and I then took him to our cottage and covered him with sacks. He was obviously becoming worse as he was now shaking violently and continuously and whimpering pitifully. I decided to give him another 10 cc but while I was injecting the last bit he relaxed and died. A feeling of complete helplessness came over me when I realised there was no more I could do. I could not believe he had gone. He had been a good companion at all times and many a night was my only companion in the bush. I still find it hard to get used to not having him with me on the jeep. He met an end which is almost inevitable for a dog that leads a life in the bush. A dog is truly man's best friend.' Norman was devastated. Apparently determined to avenge Phantom's untimely death he went back to the place where Phantom had been bitten and killed a banded cobra about a metre long. It was a long time before he replaced his beloved dog and when he did it was to use it for running down poachers.

Norman was keen on the use of dogs for tracking and arresting poachers. He tackled the task of raising a dog squad with his characteristic efficiency and enthusiasiasm. For many reasons it was a very difficult undertaking. It was difficult to get the dogs to track humans in a game reserve overcrossed with tantalising and distracting game scents; it was difficult to get handlers who were interested in living with and controlling dogs. The dogs did not work well if passed from one handler to another. He had a legal problem because the courts would not support dogs bringing poachers down once they went

Photo: Peter Hitchins

Game Guard Jeremiah Nxumalo with two alsatian dogs used in anti poaching operations.

through the boundary fence. This meant a dog could not be released to chase a poacher if there was a chance it would bring him down outside the game reserve.

After months of training his small kennel of Alsatian dogs Norman took to the field with them. His first encounter with poachers using his trained dog Dingaan for tracking was very successful. He received a report that men had been seen hunting along the fenceline that morning at Ntondweni gate. *'In the area we found the guards hiding in some long grass outside the fence watching several men apparently preparing to remove the carcass of some animal. As these men had spotted one of the guards with me I sent the guards back into the game reserve with the intention of allowing the poachers to see them and get the impression that they were not concerned with them. We then circled behind them but on arriving at the place where they were last seen there was no sign of them. Dingaan picked up their scent and led us to them on the other side of the rise. There were no fewer than twenty-five of them carrying the wildebeest. There must have been at least thirty dogs. We gave chase but they had about half a mile start on us and scattered into thick bush. We recovered the three wildebeest and three overcoats.'*

On a dawn patrol to uNomageje Norman and his game guards saw three hunting parties outside the game reserve. The one party made a kill near the Ntondweni gate. The other party was roving along the fenceline from south to north in a long line. The third party was concentrating near the entrance of the uNomageje stream and on spotting something in the game

reserve they made a dart in. Norman and his men left their place of concealment near the Ntondweni gate and went out into tribal reserve to try and cut off the poachers retreat but were spotted by a man posted on a hill outside the game reserve. They had a one-mile start from the beginning and were able to make a good getaway. Dingaan had their scent but they were too far away to chase. The dogs successes in the field were limited and the difficulties combined to make the dog squad a short lived operation.

Norman's anti poaching activities were interspersed with numerous other varied duties. He often talked to the tourists who came to see the famous game reserve from all over South Africa and other parts of the world. Occasionally he had trouble with the local whites, some of whom felt they should be afforded special privileges for the accident of their birth in Zululand. One day he found two car loads of tourists picnicking in the game reserve. A man called Oosthuizen refused to enter his car, and swore at Norman, challenging him to meet him outside the game reserve. Norman agreed but the tourist soon changed his mind. I often reflect that Oosthuizen's decision was wise. Although quite small and wiry Norman was a trained boxer. I had often seen him punch some uncooperative poacher without hesitation or apparent regret. Oosthuizen it seems, correctly summed up his blue eyed, blonde opponent.

Shooting rations for the workforce was a regular duty and Norman did his share. This involved hunting animals from among the abundant blue wildebeest herds. Although a

strenuous task, often armed only with an open sight .303 rifle i
could seldom be regarded as a dangerous pursuit. The blu
wildebeest, although angry looking, are docile, even timid b
nature. But not always as Norman discovered. After havin
shot an old bull wildebeest through the shoulder for rations, h
went up to it with game guard Jeremiah to finish it off as it wa
not dead. As it appeared to be all but finished he told the guar
to cut its throat with a cane knife. *'No sooner had Jeremiah
started hacking at its neck when in a supreme effort it stood u
on shaky legs and charged straight at us. I had no time to aim
as I was right on him but hurriedly stumbled back a few pace
and fired from the hip at almost point blank range. The sho
hit him and again he fell but rising again he made off in th
opposite direction. I was able to bring him down with a third
bullet. All these bullets and had hit him in vital spots but h
still did not die immediately and fought for life for several
minutes before dying. He showed an unusual toughness for hi
breed.'*

Norman and two helpers were out collecting ration
when he shot a wildebeest. They ran towards it as it did no
drop immediately. *'We ran right into a cow, calf and bull blac
rhino, not seeing them until we were about twenty yards awa
All three charged and we lost no time in making ourselve
scarce. From the safety of trees we managed to drive them of
with much shouting, and continued after the wildebeest whic
we found dead about one hundred and fifty yards from where i
was shot. While we were following the tracks of the wildebees
we went back to look for another rhino I had also seen an*

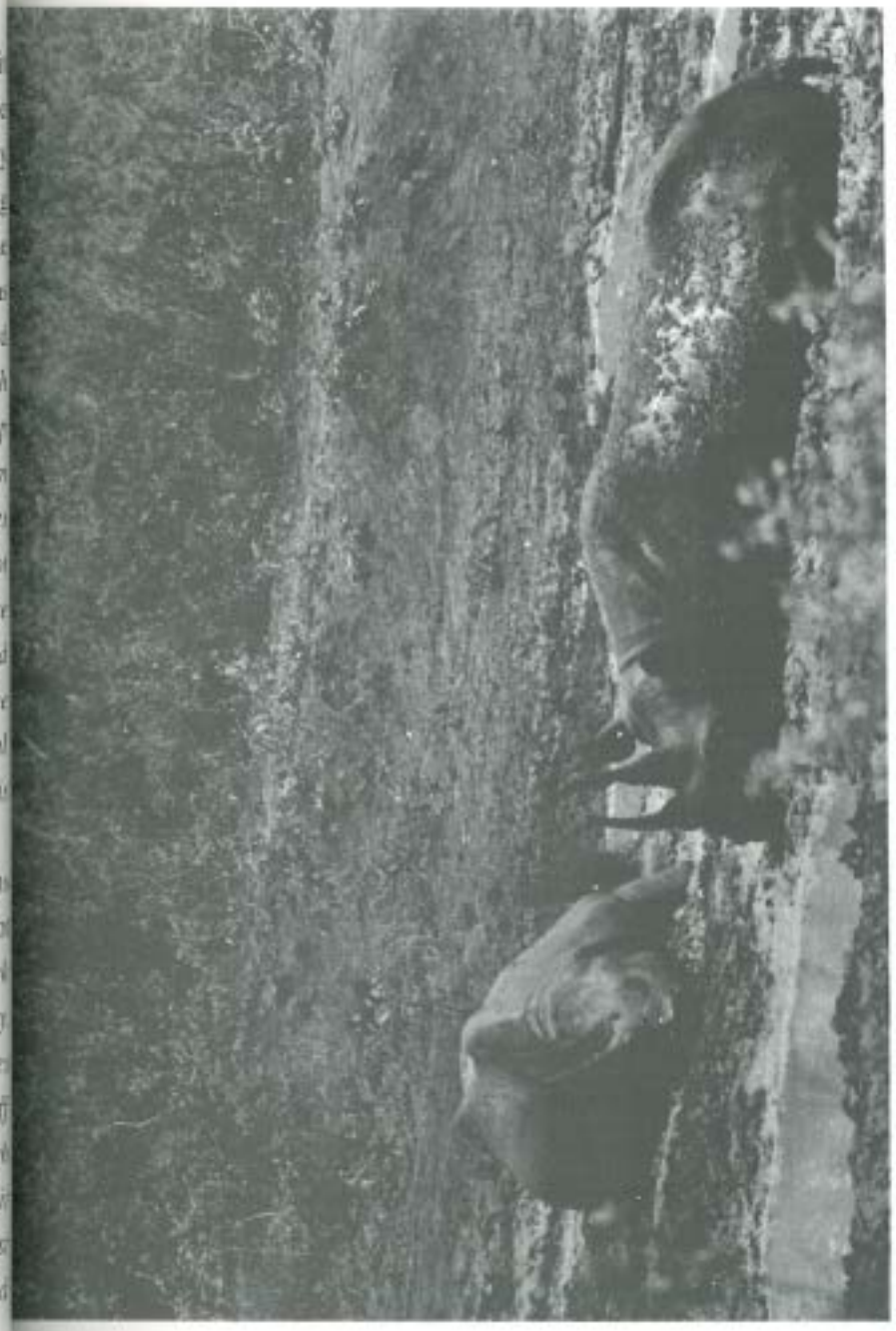


Photo: Norman Deane

The earless rhino was stone deaf.

which I thought might be dead. All the noise had not disturbed it. I stood about thirty yards behind it and made a noise by clapping my hands. It made no response. I then threw a small stone at it, which while missing the target landed very near. Still no response. I walked up to about twenty yards from where I could see it was not dead and was breathing.' Norman clapped his hands and shouted with no better results. Picking up a thick piece of branch, he threw this at it and this time scored a direct hit on its hindquarters, causing the beast to spring to life and stare about it. *'It was not looking in my direction nor did it hear me when I clapped my hands again. It only discovered my presence when it swung around after satisfying itself that there was no danger from the front. Seeing me it charged but veered off to one side. I am now satisfied beyond doubt that this earless rhino is stone deaf to have remained unperturbed by all the noise.'*

While it is usually quite easy to sneak up on a sleeping rhino, it does not take much to put them on their guard. Again while Norman and the guards were stalking a wildebeest, they, in turn, were stalked by a rhino. *'While creeping up on a wounded wildebeest Nkomokaziko shouted a warning that a black rhino was bearing down on us from the left. As it appeared more interested in those behind me I kept after the wildebeest and fired another shot at it. The sound of the rifle upset the rhino who immediately charged, treeing one of the men in a small tree. The man shouted his lungs out at it to make it run away which it eventually did, much to his relief as the tree he was in was very small indeed.'*

It was while out culling with Jeremiah in Hluhluwe that Norman had his most dangerous brush with a black rhino. He had shot an impala in dense Acacia Karroo bush interspersed with rank, Cymbapogon grass about four feet tall. The animal was only wounded and they were searching for it when Norman spotted another impala. Having shot it, he was in the act of running up to it when a rhino, up to that time unseen, snorted and chased him from a distance of about twenty-five paces. *'I turned and ran in the only direction available down a game path. I had no alternative route but through the thick thorn scrub and dense grass. At first I did not exert myself until it became apparent that the rhino was coming down at me at full charge. I burst into what must have been a record-breaking sprint, all the contents of my shirt pockets flying out at the sudden burst of speed. I passed a rather small Acacia tree but was going so fast I could not stop. I saw a marula tree about forty yards ahead of me. The rhino was gaining rapidly and snorted continuously. While I still had my rifle in my hand, I could not turn around and fire as the rhino was almost on top of me. I dared not slow down but hitting the tree on the left side and throwing my right arm out to grasp the trunk, I allowed the momentum to swing me behind the tree on the right so the rhino passed on the left, almost collecting me as I went swinging around to his side.'* Jeremiah had watched Norman from a safe distance but seeing it catch up to him thought he was dead. For some unknown reason he ran away but came back, obviously surprised to hear Norman calling him.

Chapter Six

Patrolling the rugged terrain in Hluhluwe brought its own rewards. The staff were continually monitoring the vegetation. The results of these patrols formed the basis of the decisions taken by the game rangers and ecologists on how to manage the veld. Records of sightings of rare and common species were also made and were valuable data for those whose job it was to analyse and write up scientific papers.

Learner rangers received no formal training in biology and botany. The information had to be gathered in the field from specialists like Roddy Ward and other fine scientists in the Natal Parks Board service. He had a profound influence on Norman and the other staff, including me. He taught us many important lessons, not the least of which was the importance of the habitat in which the game lived. Roddy balanced our natural love for wild animals with a love for the grass and trees. He helped Norman in the complex task of keeping the balance between adequate species and adequate grazing.

The game reserve staff were continually assessing the veld conditions in what is a complicated environment bedevilled not only by the incessant poaching but by movements of game from one area to the other and by wild fires, many of which were started by poachers. The staff had to protect the grazing from wildfires and to ensure consistency in fire management as a tool for inducing game from one area to another. They also had to control the insidious encroachment of bush through use of fire because it threatened to modify the

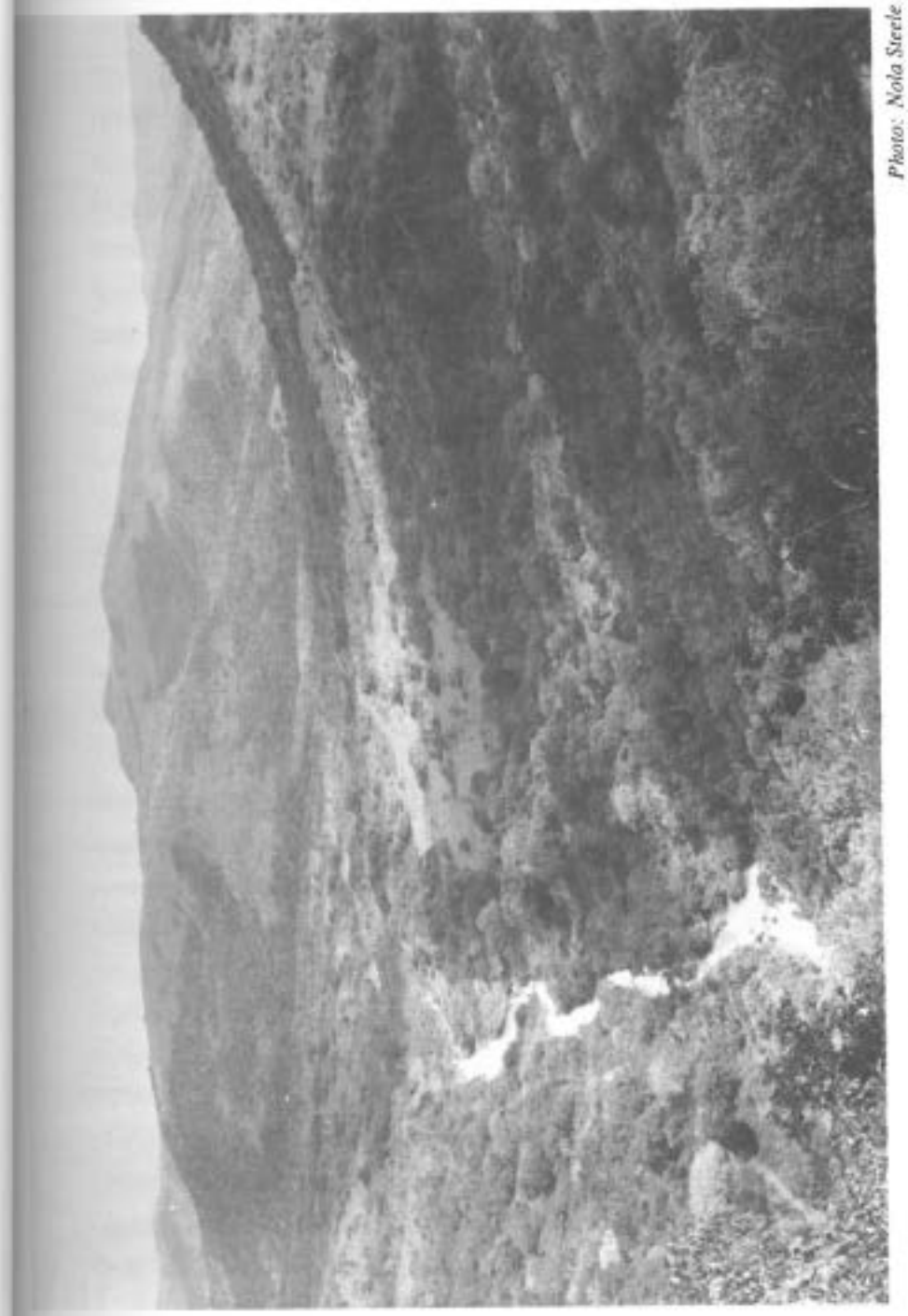


Photo: Nola Steele

Patrolling the rugged terrain brought it's own rewards . . . the iNzimane river valley

landscape as well as threatening habitats of species with definitive feeding requirements. Burning firebreaks and controlling fires is really quite a difficult job. Burning a firebreak in hilly country with tall grass and bush takes a high degree of skill. The firebreak gangs at Hluhluwe were excellent workers and very skilled at dragging the black line across the hills, day in and day out in autumn. Often their work was made more hazardous by treacherous winds, sometimes buffalo and black rhino interrupted their progress. There is a definite technique to burning firebreaks, of which timing is probably the most important factor. A wrong decision can lead to thousands of hectares being destroyed.

In late summer 1959 the conditions in the game reserve were critical. *'If rain, and lots of it is not forthcoming before winter we are in for a very hard spell'.* Norman wrote *' The grass is drier now than at any time during the last five winters. It is most unfortunate as there are no evident signs of improvement in the veld. Where game control has been carried out all growth is at a standstill. The Hluhluwe, aManzibomvu, aManzimnyama and Qumelo rivers have all stopped flowing. The Hluhluwe is still flowing at the iNsizwa crossing but stops lower down. The iNzimane is still flowing fortunately. Most waterholes are bone dry. If a severe drought hits us we may have to reconsider our game control programme.'* Game control, the systematic reduction of certain species of game which are prolific and tend to threaten their habitat, is a necessary management tool for preventing overgrazing. It is a sad fact that the limited surface area of the

Hluhluwe game reserve made it essential to reduce species such as blue wildebeest, zebra, impala and warthog to avert habitat degradation. Despite the early attempts at capture, shooting the surplus remained the only practical alternative to veld damage. In restrospect this policy seems unnecessarily introverted in the sense that the meat was not made available to Hluhluwe's protein hungry neighbours. The Zululand game reserves tended to be managed and defended as if they were fortified encampments. Norman took part in game control operations. Assisting Ranger McDonald, they bagged 45 animals in their first day of mixed shooting of species. After several days of heavy control in which another 60 animals were shot, the game became wary, only about 20% of them returning to the area. On the following day another 56 animals (mainly wildebeest, zebra and impala) were shot. Norman observed *'Once the game became shy in the burnt areas it became impossible. The upper growth of the Acacia, having been killed off by fire, offers no cover for stalking and at the same time forms an obstacle between the hunter and the game, necessitating you to come up very close to your quarry before a passage through the maze of dead bush is obtained. This invariably results in the game spotting you and making off before a shot is fired. In fact the only way the game in the open burnt area can be hunted is by driving them into the thick bush of the low veld to which they show a natural tendency to go. There they can then be hunted down.'* Despite the disturbance caused by the firing of rifles as the control staff went about their necessary but unpleasant task, numbers of wildebeest

returned to the bush dotted hills. At this stage the hunters could only get up to about 150 yards from their quarry, increasing the dangers of wounding. Once shooting operations had started, the number of vultures increased in the areas where shooting was taking place. Many of them were so bloated with offal that they found it impossible or uncomfortable to sleep in trees and consequently slept in large parties on open grass, usually selecting the tops of small hills. Norman saw large numbers of Marabou storks. *'This morning at uNomageje I was most surprised to come across two rhino sleeping on top of Hlayinde hill, completely surrounded by a flock of at least one hundred and fifty to two hundred vultures, Marabou storks and pied crows, the crows actually sitting on the rhinos. The vultures were right up against the rhino in a very tight ring. I stalked up to a wildebeest very close to them. Pandemonium broke loose on firing. The two rhino instantly came to life, charging around among the vultures who, being bloated, were slow in getting airborne. They actually did amidst loud snorts from the rhino. A tremendous roar came from the strain of flapping wings.'*

Norman favoured the .375 sporting rifle for game such as buffalo. The .375 is an effective weapon but tends to kick after three or four shots. Slender in style it is an attractive rifle for big game but it lacks the ruggedness of the .303 rifle. Later numerous other rifles appeared, the most useful general purpose one being the 30.06 bolt action used for culling operations. In the fifties and early sixties we used open V sights. The one great advantage of the open sight rifle was it

taught one the art of stalking and how to use the terrain to ones advantage.

The primitive game captures in 1957 were the first conscious efforts to replace the slaughter of game for control purposes with a more progressive policy. Game control was accepted as a necessary evil but shooting was negative, not only in the humanitarian sense but because the shot animals were lost to conservation. In capture, however, the surplus could be located to other areas. This was an eminently more progressive approach. Our first attempts to capture zebra and wildebeest were of course, of little value as an alternative to shooting, because the results were so poor. It was dangerous and expensive in equipment. The only thing that can be said is that Norman's driving was really remarkable. It was not an easy job to get a wildly swinging noose over a fleeing animal's head in country full of antheaps and antbear holes, to say nothing of the bush which snagged the catching stick at every turn. Norman analysed some of these early capture attempts. *'Last night we caught two wildebeest. It is more than clear that the element of surprise played a big part. If they can be chased where there is small scrub through which the vehicle can crash with ease, the chances of capture are increased as the light and shadow from the scrub appears to confuse them and they tend to run slower than when chased in open country. Again we tried another wildebeest catch. It was raining. Nick's jeep was not operating in four-wheel drive and the ground was too wet. We had three near misses but unfortunately broke the catching stick twice.'*

Chapter Seven

Some poachers, especially in the east and north of Hluhluwe concentrated on killing the Cape Buffalo which roamed in herds of moderate size in the valleys and on the highest hills. The firearms used by these specialist poachers, who usually only operated in groups two or three men were hardly suitable for confronting buffalo. The Cape Buffalo ranks as one of the worst wild animals to take for granted, especially when the hunter is inadequately armed. This did not deter the Zulu poachers who tackled them with obsolete rifles and in some cases only dogs and assegais. Unfortunately they more often than not inflicted painful, non lethal wounds which festered and turned the buffalo into man killers. The buffalo charges with surprising swiftness and is capable of turning sharply to cut off its victims retreat. Norman and some selected game guards like Josephat Xulu and Nathaniel Nkwanyana were well experienced in putting down wounded buffalo, sometimes in dangerously close encounters. I was fortunate to take part in some of the operations against buffalo poachers. Their tactics were sometimes suicidal. While on patrol at uMagwanxa hill at 5.10 p.m. one day Norman and I saw two men approach the game reserve from uNompondho hill. One of these was carrying a firearm. We gave chase and they vanished from view. We found about thirty buffalo outside the reserve which the poachers were after. There was no sign of poachers but at 5.35 p.m a shot was fired at the buffalo, two hundred and fifty yards from where we were

Photo: Norman Deane

Game guards like Josephat Xulu were well experienced in putting down wounded buffalo.

hiding. We lost the poachers in the dark and were lying up in the long grass on the summit of uMagwanxa hill. After a while Norman decided that we needed reinforcements and protective clothing. We were dressed only in khaki shirts, shorts, stockings and combat boots. A cold wind swept the heights and we were all feeling the effects of it. Norman told me to walk back to the landrover at the foot of the steep hill, drive back to our base some twelve kilometres away and collect more guards, overcoats and some rations. Accompanying me was my personal game guard, Mbangiseni Mhlongo. As we rose to leave I put out my hand for the torch in Norman's grip. "You can't use a torch, man," he said, "the ruddy poachers will see it and you'll give the game away." So shrugging my shoulders, Mbangiseni and I groped our way down the steep wooded slope, eventually locating the landrover. Later in the night we climbed the same steep hill back to where Norman and the others lay. It was one of my first experiences of operating in the dark in such rugged country full of big game. I had some anxious moments, not knowing what we were going to walk into next. Mbangiseni, an excellent bush scout took it all in his stride, neither commenting on nor querying the instructions. I was engaged in many such operations as time went by and I often made my subordinates walk or ride in the dark. It was good training, albeit unnerving at times.

Some days later, patrolling in the beautiful iVivi forests in the north of the game reserve, our party, led by Norman, spotted poachers down near the nagana camp at Kalasemoya. They were armed with assegais and knobkerries and

accompanied by dogs. Norman left a good description of the encounter. *'We ran to the neck of Kalasemoya. I sent Nick, Mbangiseni, Mhluhluwe and Mkatazeni Hlabisa around to approach from behind. We lay in wait on the neck. I was amazed to see poachers come out of the forest followed by a buffalo being harassed by dogs. We moved down through bush to just north of the Nagana camp and waited for Nick's party to attack. Once Nick's party was attacking we shot out and Ncibilibane Hlabisa made an arrest. On sorting ourselves out we found Mbangiseni had also got one. The other two or three got away in the forest without even being seen. Nick then said there was a buffalo in the bush with an assegai in its side. Thinking it to be a buffalo cow, I went forward to shoot it and was amazed to find it was a very large bull, facing me at about thirty feet distant. As the front did not offer a clean shot through the heart I moved to the side and fired a shoulder shot which sent it reeling backwards into the stream bed. It was found to have about ten assegai wounds in it . Nick said that when they arrived on the scene the buffalo was being stoned by the poachers, the dogs keeping it at bay at all times. I don't know whether to put their attack down to courage or ignorance. I am inclined to think the latter.'* There was no doubting it that dogs were a wonderful asset on a buffalo hunt as the animal appeared to ignore humans altogether while being harried by them. Some days later Norman discovered a two year old buffalo bull in a small herd of seven which had a large growth on the inside of the left hind leg. *'I made several attempts to get within rifle range but each time the herd would*

run off for a short distance before stopping and eyeing me. At one stage they stood their ground among four rhino, a common trick with wildebeest. On shooting, the sick animal ran for about fifty yards and then dropped, bellowing. My dash forward was checked by the remainder of the herd, which included two large bulls turning back to their wounded comrade. First they smelt the blood on him, then they all tried to pick him up, nudging him with their horns. I was amazed at this.'

It was at this time that I made my first personal arrest of a poacher armed with a rifle. It was practice to announce when payday was to take place and then deploy game guards at strategic places to intercept poachers who took advantage of what they thought was a vacuum. Since news of payday rapidly spread to the neighbouring communities, luring poachers to abandon their accustomed caution, these operations normally succeeded. Norman sent me out on such a day in charge of a small contingent of guards. I placed my men carefully around a small knoll in the uNomageje valley and settled down to wait for an incursion. It was not long before two poachers, both armed with rifles, came running towards the fence just below me, intent on a kudu bull they had flushed outside. The kudu leapt the low fence with ease, disappearing into the game reserve. One of the poachers was now quite close to my position. I stood up and challenged him in Zulu. He turned and fled and I immediately fired around his feet, thinking it would stop him but it only made him run faster. My reckless behaviour taught me a valuable lesson. The guards

had by now left their hiding places and fanning out in that instinctive way Zulus do when they want to intercept someone, they soon overtook him and handcuffed him. As he fled the poacher had cleverly thrown his rifle, an old .303, under a bush. Try as we might we could not find it. Thrusting my face right up against his I yelled and swore at him to tell me where the rifle was. He simply stared at me and answered in Zulu, "What rifle? I have no rifle." I left him with a guard and organised a search party. By retracing our steps we eventually found the rifle. At the subsequent court case, which was defended by a lawer, I was quite nervous, thinking that the poacher would tell the magistrate that I had shot at him. For reasons best known to himself he said nothing about it. Norman was very pleased with our successful operation and praised me and my men for the capture of the rifle.

In January 1957 Norman was alerted to the presence of a poacher's camp deep in the Mahlungulu bush in the east of the game reserve. *'We headed for the spot, walking from the eMunywaneni camp. Reaching the hideout we found that the occupier had done a hasty retreat as his blanket, sticks and some of the meat was gone. The hut was a crude shelter built from branches pulled together to form a windbreak, and overhead to keep out the dew. Judging from the heap of ashes it appeared that he had been in residence for two to four weeks. He must have seen footprints near his hut and decided to make off without further delay. Despite a thorough search of the area we could find no tracks. He must have taken great care to leave no footprints. The area he chose for his hideout was*

thick mthambothi forest, interlaced with huge bush covered dongas. A more perfect hiding place one could not wish to find. The next day we combined forces to comb the lower reaches of the mthambothi forest. Nick and Mbangiseni came upon the recluse sitting in the nude. He had built himself another shelter and was preparing to make himself at home. He is one by the name of Gumede, an old poaching acquaintance of mine from the eGunjaneni area. He claims to be hiding from his brother who has accused him of raping his wife. He says he has been living in the reserve for months. He said he also saw a leopard lying on the rocks at aMahlungulu. He appeared very weak, but he no doubt was putting on a bit, though the skin around his stomach was very loose. His only weapons were a large knife and a sharpened uMgagane stick used as an assegai.' Norman located his family and sent him home.

The anti tsetse fly campaign was in its final stages in the year 1958. The Veterinary department still maintained numerous camps in the bush manned by a few men tending the bait cattle. These men poached from time to time and had to be arrested. It must have been particularly difficult for them to understand as most of them had participated in the game annihilation campaigns in central Zululand when thousands of game animals were destroyed to stop the spread of sleeping sickness. These men were conditioned to hunting and had become accustomed to an ample supply of game meat. Suddenly it was cut off. This did not concern Norman or his guards and they harassed the nagana employees in their efforts

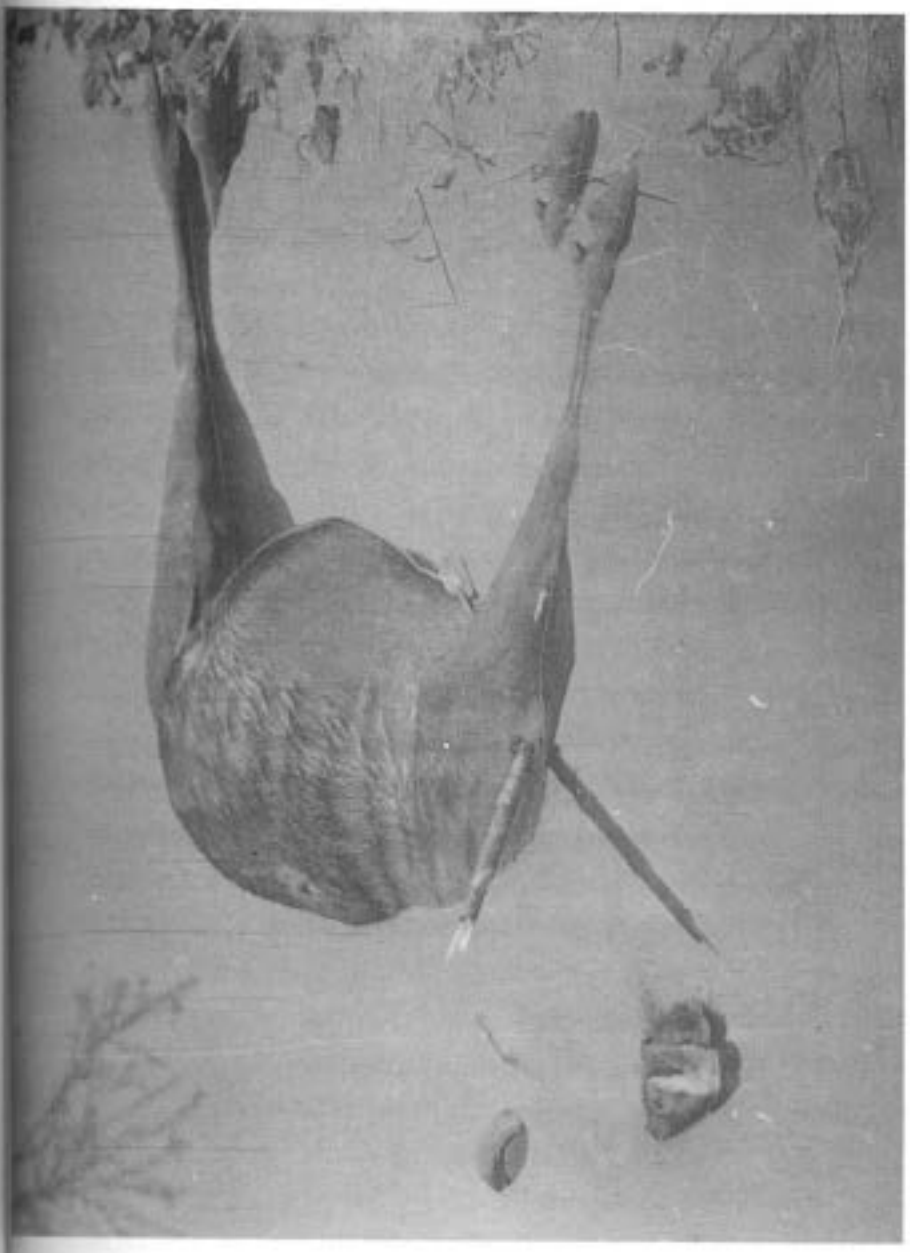


Photo: Norman Deane

Aftermath of a poaching incident. An axe-gaid blue wildebeest lies dead in a pool.

to stop the poaching. Norman went to uZangomfe cattle camp with Scheepers to investigate a poaching case. Nathaniel and uSeme guards caught one of the cattlemen in possession of a warthog. They came across part of the carcass hidden under some reeds near the camp and hid away to keep watch on it. More was found being cooked in the cattleman's hut.

Game guard Madoda was on patrol in the iSitezi area of the game reserve. While talking to a Nagana employee at the iSitezi camp they heard a buck crying out from across the river, about two hundred yards from them. The bush was concealed from their sight by high reeds but surrounding the area was a large troop of baboons making a deuce of a row. Running over to the river crossing, the guard was in time to see a large baboon tearing away the stomach of a baby nyala. Seeing the guard, the baboon fled with the rest of the pack. The buck was fatally injured.

There was a flicker of understanding among game wardens for the urge by local tribesmen to hunt in and around the game reserves but for white poachers there was absolutely no mercy. After a scratch supper at uSeme guard camp Norman and ranger Robin Guy went to the corridor for a night patrol. *'At 8.20 p.m. a car stopped near me on eMasundweni, extinguished its headlights but continued to shine a torch into the bush followed after a short interval by a single shot. After a few moments the car continued on its way. I gave the prearranged signal to Ranger Guy who then moved down to the main road from his point of observation on the uMnqabatheki road. He stopped and searched the vehicle*

finding a .22 rifle, six rounds in the magazine, the bolt withdrawn and a powerful lamp.' At the court case against Labuschagne and Allison, both were found guilty on the two main charges and sentenced to £10 or fourteen days. Their car, rifle and lamp were confiscated.

Warthog, commonly called iNtibane by the Zulus, rank high on the list of animals subject to poaching with dogs and assegais. It is fairly easily brought to bay by dogs. Once surrounded the warthog is finished off by the poachers assegais. Sometimes it makes for its hole in the ground, usually an abandoned antbear hole, where it can only be dislodged by digging. Impala and nyala as well as almost anything cornered by the yapping, snapping dog packs, are taken by poachers. Of the bigger animals the blue wildebeest also suffer. Waterbuck retreat to water when chased, even to quite small pools where assegais are thrown at them until they succumb. Poaching by youths and later quite small children increased over the years after some parents discovered that children only receive corporal punishment for poaching. Although it was not strictly legal these youngsters were often taken home instead of to the police stations. Here the father or guardian was obliged to administer the stick in what must have seemed the ultimate injustice. The youngsters had often been forced to poach by the very persons administering the hiding.

Norman was sometimes lenient in these cases. He watched a party of six youngsters hunting with dogs about one and a half miles from the fenceline. The dogs put up a large male warthog which ran to ground. Being unable to reach the

hog with their assegais, they dug a small hole and induced the warthog to come out where it was set upon by the dogs and stabbed to death by the umfaans. Norman and the guards chased them off, relieving them of their prize and allowed them to escape.

I had the misfortune to have to accompany a group of juvenile poachers to a police station for punishment. In turn each youngster was laid face down on the office bench, buttocks bare. The policeman administering the punishment took a short run across the room and then whacked the unfortunate child on the buttocks, making him rise involuntarily several centimetres off the bench in a horizontal position, amidst sharp cries. It sickened me and when I climbed back into the landrover I was sweating freely. Looking in the back after ten or so minutes of driving I was amazed to see the young boys joking and laughing, albeit sitting awkwardly, their faces streaked with drying tears.

Chapter Eight

Nathaniel the head game guard often worked with game guards in areas where poaching was particularly prevalent. From the time the poachers fired the first shots in this steep, rough terrain no effort was spared to capture them. With his men Nathaniel slept out in the hills, lying on rocky ground, often plagued by ticks and mosquitos and with only the meagre rations snatched from a pot before they left their base camp. It was rough, exhausting work undertaken in all kinds of weather, often stumbling along in the dark, eyes and ears strained for rhino or buffalo, by men whose dedication was largely taken for granted. Nathaniel was an inspiration to his game guards and also to the young rangers who, unaccustomed to the hazards, drew strength from his stoic acceptance of a trying situation. Nataniel expected no less than that the guards should track down and arrest these poachers. That's what the job was about. No one contemplated postponing such work because of the fall of night or a rainstorm or the presence of big game. It was unheard of.

Anti poaching tactics were adjusted according to circumstances in some areas. When the game guards found a string of snares which had been set in the Makwankwa stream, there were too many black rhino in the area for the guards to remain at the spot and then walk home at dusk. The only answer was for them to spend the night in the bush and endeavour to apprehend the snare setter. At Nomageje, Nathaniel, Ranger John Mast and fourteen game guards took

up positions surrounding the valley. Three positions outside and three inside. The only person to fall into the trap was Mbandela Manqele who was armed with a .22 rifle. He found himself surrounded. Every way he ran he saw game guards. He resisted arrest with a cane knife and a stick but Nathaniel and Ntukutandwa bowled him over before he had much chance to do any damage. He struck at Nathaniel's chest with his cane knife, but fortunately it bounced off harmlessly. Some poaching gangs posted lookouts on hills outside the game reserve to warn those poaching inside. We put an end to this practice by firing around the lookout, or if we could not locate him, in his general direction.

By late 1958 Norman had developed effective tactics for capturing poachers. Although to the uninitiated the encounters with poaching gangs seemed chaotic and by their nature they often were, the tactics became more and more effective and the number of poachers actually caught in the field rose sharply. Scouting out the poachers was probably the easiest part of the operation because the Zulu game guard is a natural born scout. Poachers with dogs gave their presence away as soon as the dogs bayed. Poachers using firearms gave their positions away when they fired the first shot. The difficulty lay in closing with the quarry before they detected the presence of the patrol members. This required careful planning and an intimate knowledge of the terrain. More so when the operations were carried out at night, which was doubly hazardous. Whereas the straight line between the poachers and the guards might only be 2 kilometres, the guards often had to

Photo: Peter Hitchins

Nathaniel often worked with game guards where poaching was prevalent. Left back: Lazarus Ndwandwe; right back: Nathaniel Nkwanyane. Guard in front is unidentified.

run three or four kilometres using the best cover to get close to them before revealing their presence. Even at close quarters the optimum distance for disclosing their presence was critical. Too near, it had the same effect as trying to catch a hen in the middle of a flock. Too far and the poachers got a head start, increasing the danger of the guards splitting up as their quarry scattered in all directions. The guards were invariably outnumbered by the poachers. This is where good leadership was important, to ensure that the guards, in their excitement, did not split up with possibly fatal consequences. When the poachers were armed with firearms the confrontation was even more critical. Revealing their presence too far from the rifle or shotgun toting poacher often resulted in the captors being shot at in an effort to foil pursuit. Disclosing their presence too close to an armed poacher might get the guard or ranger shot almost by reflex and shock, especially if the poacher was intent on stalking an animal. The best laid plans were sometimes foiled by the presence of a black rhino within the area. Disturbed by the man scent, the rhino might attack, sending men running for trees, oblivious of anything else.

Norman and his team perfected the hammer and anvil technique used in anti poaching operations. These tactics amounted to deploying about two thirds of the force on the poachers anticipated flight path while using one third to endeavour frightening them to run in the direction where the two thirds lay concealed. They were particularly demoralized by having their retreat threatened. The objective was at least to capture some of the gang. Emerging from where the chase had

led them the guards with their handcuffed captives usually gathered around the patrol leader recounting their experiences of the chase. It was stirring work which built a fine esprit-de-corps among the men. If the whole gang was caught in the field their dogs usually skulked around them until they were unceremoniously shot by the guards. It often happened that only a percentage of the poaching gang was captured in the field. In this case the captives were asked to identify those who escaped. Later, after they had revealed the names and residence of colleagues a night raid would take place. The unfortunate captives being taken along to point out the whereabouts and identity of the suspects. Two fundamental rules for survival which had to be impressed on the game guards and the rangers were not to tackle poachers while separated from colleagues and to disarm their captives immediately they confronted them.

Norman and his game guards frequently had to finish off the damage done to wild animals wounded by poachers. This dangerous work was seldom delegated to others. After receiving a report from Naganamen, Norman and Josephat Xulu went to Newcamp. There they found a wounded buffalo. He wrote: *'I fired two .375 rounds into the animal in quick succession, Josephat firing and hitting it with his .303 rifle. It ran from the open grassland into the forest for a distance of one hundred and fifty yards before collapsing and uttering deafening bellows that echoed through the gloomy forest in the failing light. Two more shots ensured the end of its suffering.'* On another occasion Norman and Josephat came upon pools of

fresh blood and buffalo tracks near the Hluhluwe river. *'Blood was spattered everywhere. It appeared to have taken vengeance on every sizeable stone it came across. After several hundred yards we came upon it lying down among the palms of the river's edge. Although no more than twenty yards from it it had heard us. I threw a stone at it and it immediately stood up and after eyeing us for a few minutes it ran off. I could see the wound on the animal. Unfortunately I was unarmed and could not put it out of its misery. I returned with ranger Guy and followed the tracks but eventually lost them. Shortly after leaving the river it had taken up with another bull, the two heading for uZangomfe hill.'*

Although other wardens at the time carried handguns, Ian Player seldom being without a long barrelled .22 pistol, Norman never carried a handgun of any description. He regarded them as inadequate in anti poaching work and, I suspect, dangerous in the wrong hands. They are useless against wild animals and tend to wound, rather than kill outright, poachers dogs. In hand to hand fights we might have been tempted to draw a handgun long before using a rifle. A heavy .303 was a defensive weapon of discouraging proportions even when used to crack someone on the head or to deflect a knobstick. It was seldom necessary to shoot one's opponent. In any event handguns later became the vogue in game reserves for self defence against human attackers. Norman always carried a rifle. I started my career with an issue short service military .303. With it I shot impala, warthog and wildebeest, all for rations. I carried it over my shoulder

night and day in anti poaching sorties, using it as a defensive weapon and for shooting poachers dogs. I was once forced to help stop a charging buffalo cow. Norman and I were both armed at the time. We were in open grassland when an old buffalo cow detached herself from a small herd and advanced steadily towards us. There were three or four of us with two Alsatian dogs. I suspect she had taken a dislike to the dogs scent. We were not inclined to try to interpret her real intentions. She was about 130 paces away when she started her ominous advance. Norman fired over her head, then after some electrifying seconds of indecision, said quietly "shoot". The buffalo cow, front on, nose pointed, came on faster, apparently indifferent to the bullets penetrating her chest. Then she stumbled, bellowed and lay still, about 55 paces away.

The game guards behaviour was not always exemplary and embarrassing incidents sometimes stained their otherwise fine record. On one occasion Norman received a telephone call from a storekeeper at a place called Mpukunyoni that four men had arrived there with a game guard's rifle. Norman was very angry and drove to the store where he was handed the rifle. It belonged to game guard Mziwane. Taking the guard and his companion to his office he grilled them both about the incident. At times like this Norman became very unpleasant and everyone concerned felt uneasy, the guilty guards shifting from foot to foot and looking at the ground, while those of us standing by hoped this wrath did not boil over and scald us. Mziwane's story was that they chased two poachers from the game reserve in the uNomageje valley to a zulu kraal nearby.

The guards called the head of the kraal and told him the poachers were hiding in one of his huts. According to Mziwane the poachers, re-inforced by twelve other men, came out of the huts and attacked them, overpowering them and wrenching away the rifle. The four men who had delivered the rifle to the storekeeper said the two guards were drinking at the kraal and became abusive, ending up with Mziwane firing shots at them. Norman never could get to the truth of the matter but favoured the tribesmens story. They had acted very responsibly in returning the guards rifle. Despite this unfortunate lapse of judgement Mziwane and the other guard continued to give good service.

Soon afterwards they found some cached meat and donkey tracks outside the game reserve. They hid in the vicinity and were able to confront and arrest one of the poachers. Following the donkey tracks further they were able to ascertain that this one was already laden with game meat. Unfortunately it started raining and they lost the tracks.

Instances of game guards poaching themselves were uncommon but sadly not unheard of. Zemisi Nyawo found that another guard, Mbangiseni* had snared a hyena with a gin trap which he managed to recover. Norman went to the uSeme guard camp to investigate the poaching and arrested the guard. During questioning he also admitted shooting a kudu previously. A search of the guard camp revealed a small bottle of hyena fat and a 25 pound packet of baboon dung. Searching the kraal in the tribal reserve Norman confiscated a basket

*Not to be confused with the Mbangiseni Mhlongo referred to on page ()

containing the four paws of a hyena, slices of dried meat, more hyena fat and a white rhino horn. Mbangiseni had left the basket at the kraal to be collected later. Confronted with all the evidence Mbangiseni admitted his guilt, implicating some of his colleagues. It became obvious that both Zemisi and another guard were afraid of Mbangiseni. Superstition and traditional medicine were the cause of most of the problems in this particular case.

In these years, the only populations of black rhino in South Africa were inhabiting the Hluhluwe Game Reserve, the Mkuzi Game Reserve and the Umfolozi Game Reserve. The black rhino, as well as the white rhino, were regarded as extremely valuable. No effort was spared to protect them. When poachers shot one they were ruthlessly hunted. Norman received disturbing news that rifle shots had been heard at aManzibomvu. A rhino carcass had been found with its anterior horn missing near to the Nagana camp. Because of the moonlight, they were able to visit the area immediately. By taking the route via Espondeni the investigating party approached the area without lights on. *'We woke up six Nagana workers at the camp and questioned them on the events. They claim they heard two shots fired at 7.00 p.m. on Friday night. They were eating their supper and it was dark at the time. They claimed to know nothing about a dead rhino. This I cannot believe as it was near their camp and vultures had been around the carcass for days. We went to the carcass and examination revealed several wounds. The posterior horn came away without difficulty.'* Norman and the guards

thought that the animal had been dead several days prior to Friday. The base of the anterior horn was dry from the sun's rays. He left Nkomozefa Msweli* in the area for the night with instructions to examine the wounds to see if they were caused by bullets and to scan the area for signs of some other animal having been killed. There were other instances of rhino being poached and the irony of a poacher being poached by a rhino. Investigating the death of a rhino outside the game reserve on the eNdlabashana stream, Norman discovered it had been snared. *'The rhino was caught in a snare made of quarter inch cable attached to a pole. After becoming ensnared it ran the odd mile to the stream where the pole caught up in a bush and the rhino plunged down the steep bank, hanging itself. An african caught nearby was thought to have cut the horn off but was released because of lack of evidence.'* About this time a Dr Hestenes, from a small hospital at Hlabisa told Norman that a man had been brought in late one night unconscious with multiple injuries from an attack by a black rhino. One of the man's lungs had been punctured and by midday next day he still had not regained consciousness. It appeared that he and others had been hunting in the Corridor near eMabokiseni.

In the same vicinity game guard Vikinhlamvu Zungu had been found on the Hlabisa road with serious head wounds and rushed to Hlabisa hospital. The game reserve staff immediately retaliated. With Hlabisa police, Norman and his men entered the tribal reserve and arrested both men accused of attacking Vikinhlamvu. *'We found a sack containing game*

*Nkomozefa Msweli was Normans constant companion even after he left the Natal Parks Board.

meat and a knobstick in the grass and at the kraal we found a bloodstained cane knife and several game skins. Twenty nine men searched the site of the attack, the assumed route of escape and the area adjacent to the accused's kraal but no sign of a rifle could be found. At a nearby kraal however, we found buffalo hide, bushbuck skin, nyala and wildebeest horns and, hidden in the grass, an almost completed stock for a home-made rifle. A young umfaan told us his father had buried a rifle in the cattle kraal a few days before, but in spite of digging up the kraal, there was no trace of it. After being locked up for a few days, the captured poachers agreed to co-operate. They took us to a large fig tree on the iNyalazi river where they had hidden the rifle in a large hole about twenty feet above the ground.'

Chapter Nine

Norman was ably supported on the homefront by Jean who nurtured the three children through their school life as well as running an efficient home. By the nature of his work Norman worked long and erratic hours. Activity began as day dawned and Norman expected his personal staff to be outside his backdoor before the sun rose. At that time of the morning Norman seldom appeared through the door smiling and woe betide the unfortunate ranger who tried to introduce levity into the conversation or listened with half an ear to his instructions. Later in the day of course he became more amenable, his sense of humour lightening many a tense situation. Depending on the particular pressures current, he might accompany his staff into the field or send them off by foot or vehicle with instructions. There was no time to have breakfast at that early hour and after a quick cup of tea or coffee staff could find themselves already on a distant hill or inspecting a fence soon after the sun rose. Especially in summer with its long hot days, starting work early and returning for "brunch" and a midday rest was ideal. Towards afternoon activity resumed, often late into the night or if contact was made with poachers, all night. Jean took all this frenetic activity stoically, helping to type reports, prepare charge sheets and doing other administrative duties, all for no pay.

In the late summer of 1959 Norman and his guards were once again embroiled in some ugly close encounters with the persistent poachers. The fight was on. From the top of

uSeme hill at 2.30 p.m. one day they saw two gangs of poachers entering the Corridor from the south, about one and a half miles away. One gang was about six strong and the other four. *'When they vanished over a rise we gave chase. I had five guards with me, Nathaniel, Nkomozefa, Jeremiah, Vikinhlamvu and Mxesevulwa Hlabisa. We spotted one of them on a rocky ledge no more than one hundred yards from us. He had seen Nathaniel, who had gone ahead of us, and was signalling to his companions below him. We crept up to him and pounced. I singled out one of the others and chased him with my dog, Dingaan. Dingaan caught up and grabbed his sack jacket. The poacher struck at Dingaan with the cane knife but the dog got hold of his hand forcing him to drop it. He turned and ran but was brought down by Dingaan again, whom he attacked viciously with his assegai, forcing the dog to let go. As I caught up he fought me off with his assegai. This running fight took place for about two hundred yards down a very steep incline - covered with jagged rocks. Dingaan brought him down three to four times, each time being forced to let go. Both I and the poacher were falling continually in the rough terrain. To make things worse my vision was impaired by perspiration that poured into my eyes. When I lost my knobstick, my only weapon - I threw a stone at him from pointblank range but missed. As he turned to run I tried to follow but my right knee collapsed under me. Being unable to continue the chase I called the dog off.'* The walk back to the jeep, about three miles, took Norman one and three-quarter hours of painful hobbling due to his many injuries. When he

rejoined the guards he found they had made an arrest. On their way back to the reserve they saw a large party about a mile away. As Norman was out of action he took over the prisoner and sent the guards after them. While waiting at the jeep for the guards to come back, he heard yet another hunting party on uSeme but it was already dark.

In another hand to hand encounter Norman narrowly missed being bludgeoned with a knobstick. At the subsequent court case two poachers were fined £10 or two months and a third who attacked Norman £25 or three months. He described the fight. *'The poacher resisted me and as I grabbed his left shoulder from behind he swung around with knobstick raised. I did not want to strike the poacher on the head with my heavy baton so I poked him in the stomach with it. This had no effect on him at all so dropping my baton I wrenched the knobstick from him and hit him in the face with my fist.'* Amid the turmoil and exitement of a game ranger's life his first love was observing undisturbed wildlife in its natural home range. All his efforts and those of his team of men and women were aimed at providing a sanctuary for the wildlife. After all, in its simplest and most pristine form before the rude instrusion of homo sapiens, this is what Africa was like. So it is that time given to watching wildlife at play, mating or feeding is dear to all conservationists. Norman watched a male and female black rhino doing what he called their mating dance. The male advanced on the female while she retreated, both with their heads raised upwards and lips extended. The male almost continually uttered the trumpet sound. *'Unfortunately we*

disturbed them and they became distracted and ran off. Although I have seen rhino about to mate or mating on numerous occasions, this is only the third time I have heard this call and the first time I have been able to watch them thus engaged. While I have frequently seen a certain amount of playfulness with black rhinos I have never seen them as playful as three on nKonono. Unfortunately I was too far away to make out the sexes of the three animals but from the horns I would say the two adults were a male and a female and the latter's calf, a half-grown animal. The calf and bull were engaged in play battle in a most realistic manner, clouds of dust being blown up by the tussling animals. Several times the calf would break away and gallop around the pair of adults in a wide circle, prancing about, then throw itself back into the attack. The bull allowed the calf to take the initiative. On a few occasions the calf, being pushed hard by the bull, would break away, running behind the cow for protection. The bull was stopped short in its tracks by a protective snort and lunge by the cow. By this time the calf had safely encircled the cow and attacked the bull in the flanks. When the calf broke away on one of its wild circuits it was followed by the bull. There is something ridiculous about a rhino behaving like a frisky puppy. This play fighting between males and calves seems to be a definite part of the youngster's training.'

When opportunities arose Norman went to uNkwankwa to the hyena warrens. With his eldest son Robert, they once saw as many as fifteen hyena. The Spotted Hyena's zulu name is iMpisi. A scavenger-predator, they are common in

Hluhuluwe Game Reserve. Their mournful whooping call is synonimous with the wooded hills and valleys here. The average shoulder height is 70 to 81 cm, mass 65 to 70 kgs. Two to three chocolate brown pups are born in their underground warrens after a gestation period of 105 days. Late one afternoon Norman climbed uNkwankwa, reaching the large marula tree before the sun set. Three adults and six whelps of varying ages were outside their holes enjoying the fading light. Norman described what he saw. *The whelps played among themselves the same as domestic dogs. One I saw rub itself on the female affectionately much in the manner of a cat. We finally crept to within thirty yards. The female was aware of our presence as she kept standing up and looking our way, but could not make us out behind the bush. After satisfying herself there was no real danger she settled down again and tended to the wants of her young. Eventually I showed myself completely, when she jumped off into the grass, stopping once to look back. All the time I watched, the adults uttered a continuous rattling noise emitted from the throat. When alarmed and wanting to take cover, the youngsters appeared to make the same sound but with mouth open, giving it a sharper more urgent note. On command the whelps shot down the hole with great speed. All around the holes were lumps of hair apparently disgorged after a feeding. There was plenty of dung but no sign of bones.'*

Chapter Ten

In 1958 Norman was at first sceptical of reports by game warden Singie Denyer* at Mkuzi Game Reserve of a lone male lion in the area. After Ranger Ken Tinley* had returned from the Nibela, he reported that three african cattle had been killed in three nights. *'It appears that Denyer's stories are not all far-fetched after all. Van Wyk the magistrate at Ubombo said that the lion at Nibela had killed another two african cattle. As it does not apparently return to a kill a second time, it appears to be a particulary cunning animal, making sure it is not going to be trapped.'* Lion tracks were then found at the Hluhluwe river. An african was taking the short cut from the main Mtubatuba road to eMunywaneni Nagana camp when he came face to face with a lion. He ran back to the main road and reported to Scheepers who went with some cattlemen to investigate. They came upon lion tracks along the Hluhluwe river downstream from the Hluhluwe bridge. He then directed Ranger Karl Wacker* and game guard Nkomozefa to the footprints, two of which were in heavy mud and perfectly preserved. Norman, Wacker and McDonald later went to a deep donga at eMfukuzweni where Scheepers had found more prints in the wet sand. Norman had taken along a

*Singie Denyer worked in the Mkuzi Game Reserve from 1939 to 1964. He was a fine conservationist with an intimate knowledge of wildlife and zulu culture. He died in 1964.

*Ken Tinley became one of southern Africa's most knowledgeable ecologists, working in Namibia and Mocambique. He now lives in Australia.

*Karl Wacker had been a soldier in Hitlers Russian Campaign in Second World War.

tin of plaster of paris and a bottle of water to take some casts. Leaving the jeep he instructed one of the men to take the bottle and tin. While mixing the plaster he noticed there was a strong smell of whisky but was not surprised as he new the bottle was either a brandy or whisky bottle. As he was mixing it he said to Wacker, *"This water has a strong smell of whisky about it. Wouldn't it be funny if it was Mac's whisky!"* He had at this stage used nearly half the bottle. *"The smell of whisky was so strong and the colour somewhat suspicious, so I lifted the bottle to my nose. I realised my suspicions were correct. In fact on tasting its contents there was no doubting that I had used nearly half a bottle of whisky to mix the plaster of paris with! While all this tasting was going on McDonald had lost his amused look, realising that his national drink was being abused. I need hardly mention that the first cast mixed with whisky is far superior. Where we were taking the casts of the spoor the donga takes a sharp bend. We have named it "Whisky bend".* The lion eventually took refuge in the Umfolozi Game Reserve not far from Hluhluwe.

Norman's enduring sense of humour was a likeable trait. It was in sharp contrast to his somewhat stern countenance and general outlook but when it came to the fore it infected all around him. His particular form of humour was quite common among rangers and was influenced by the peculiar circumstances in which we worked. It was a kind of frontier humour, unsubtle and induced by the mild misfortunes of others. I remember walking next to Norman up a hill while we were hunting wildebeest for rations. On the next spur walked

Photo: Greig Stewart

A ranger confronted by a black rhino in Hluhluwe Game Reserve.

another ranger intent on stalking some wildebeest. Not far ahead of the ranger, and unseen by him, stood a black rhino in a thicket. My natural inclination was to call to the ranger who was about 400 yards away and warn him of the black rhino's presence. Norman, who could see what was going to happen forbade me from calling out saying "Leave him and lets see what happens", a wry smile on his face. When the ranger advanced in the direction of the black rhino, now alert and with its nose raised and its ears moving to catch the sound of the approaching figure, we stood stockstill. The ranger eventually saw the danger and without further hesitation fled unashamedly to the nearest tree, the black rhino making short charges in the direction of the noise. Norman nearly fell over he laughed so much. I too saw the funny side, notwithstanding the possible injuries our colleague could have received if he had walked on to the rhino.

Meeting black rhino on patrol was a common experience. Moving around them to avoid inducing a charge became a fine art. Provided of course one was fortunate to have seen, heard or scented them first. While patrolling in the iVivi forest game guard Ndukumbili Hlabisa was chased from behind by a black rhino. He was wearing his overcoat at the time, unbuttoned. While running away his coat flew open and the rhino on endeavouring to toss him, tore his coat. He was thrown to the ground and managed to make good his escape through undergrowth. A Nagana cattleman stationed at iVivi was not so fortunate. He was badly gored by a rhino while in the act of climbing a tree. The horn struck him above the foot

There were encounters with wild animals . . . Norman befriends an injured black rhino.

Photo: Peter Hitchins

lacerating the whole leg, then entered the rectum. The bone below the knee was also broken. The doctor at Hlabisa said it took him over four hours to stitch the injuries and that the leg wounds were the worst ever encountered by him.

Vehicles were not immune to their charges. While driving his jeep Norman spotted a black rhino cow and a calf. *'I took a picture of her but she started to walk away. To attract her attention I made a clucking sound. To my surprise she turned and without hesitation charged. She came straight for my door in such a determined manner that I had to jump into the middle seat for protection. She then turned her attention to Nathaniel, Jeremiah and the four dogs. She thrust at the jeep, fortunately only a glancing blow. The animal was in a furious temper and was snorting like a locomotive.'* Another rhino attacked a tractor and trailer trying to turn it over with all the men on board. It got its horn under the chassis above the left rear wheel but did not succeed in doing any damage other than leaving several deep scratch marks. Norman was also charged by a black rhino while with a friend Alf Rees. The rhino was asleep when they approached it. After Alf had focussed his camera, Norman made a slight noise and the rhino rose. Alf took his photo. It made a half-hearted charge and then ran away. They moved up again to take another picture. The rhino this time charged flat out! They fled to a donga well covered with mthambothi trees, the rhino close on their heels. Alf's foot caught on a root causing him to somersault into the donga. The rhino turned at the edge and ran off. Despite often dangerous encounters with black rhino in which men were sometimes

badly injured but mostly badly frightened, a deep and touching love for these puffing, hot blooded pachyderms exists. This love for Africa's wildlife, which amounts to reverance, is the beating heart of conservation. When this respect and love for his charges ceases, the conservationists deepest subconscious motives for protecting them also ceases.

Crocodiles were plentiful in Hluhluwes' two main rivers, the Nzimane and the Hluhluwe. They were as closely guarded as any other creature. Norman's interest in crocodiles had been aroused by a return visit to Mkuzi Game Reserve, where his career in conservation started. Here he met Tony Pooley*, who had hatched out twenty crocodiles from eggs. He kept them in a small stone dam. *'Pooley apparently spends most nights gathering frogs for their next day's feed. It was most interesting to watch them stalk the live frogs, then suddenly spring at them. Those caught in the water were swallowed under water.'* Hluhluwe's crocodile population reproduced in the peaceful rivers. Occasionally someone got a glimpse of their nurseries among the reeds. A large number of very young crocodiles were seen sunning themselves on a rock in the Hluhluwe river. *'I went down to the spot and found two young crocodiles on the rock. One dived into the water when I approached closely but the other remained despite me being only ten feet away and perfectly visible. A closer examination revealed four more lying among the reeds on the bank. After I had been there about ten minutes a large crocodile surfaced, about twenty feet from the rock. It was moving away from the*

*Tony Pooley eventually specialized in crocodile conservation. His experiences are recorded in his book **Discoveries Of A Crocodile Man.**

rock when it surfaced. As I was standing right on the edge of the bank it could not help but see me and submerged again.'

Accidents involving crocodiles were rare because the professional staff were careful not to get into compromising situations with these ancient reptiles. A patrol horse belonging to game warden Ted Pearson broke away from a paddock at the game reserves headquarters and trotted down the road towards its home base. Unfortunately when it came to the Hluhluwe bridge it was obstructed by a motor vehicle. Turning down stream the grey horse located a crossing and plunged into the river. A crocodile grabbed it by the muzzle and a deadly tug-of-war started. Eventually the horse pulled free and staggered out of the water, wandering off to its homerange, it's muzzle in shreds. The injuries were too ghastly and it had to be destroyed. While crossing the Hluhluwe river, a zulu tribesman was attacked by a crocodile. He was taken by the right arm and he beat the reptile on the head with his knobstick. The crocodile released him. He was sent to hospital with extensive wounds on his arm, bone showing through at the biceps. Being armed with a knobstick saved his life. In one incident a poacher being pursued, leapt into the flooded Hluhluwe river and swam to the south bank, a hazardous thing to do in a river full of crocodiles.

It was ironic that the game reserve staff had less time to spend quietly observing wildlife than the tourists. It was difficult for the public to comprehend that there were daily pressures on the game wardens. This impression lay behind the romantic vision generally held about professional

conservationists. It was in many ways a misconception in the sense that life was not one long game. The conservation struggle was and still is between human beings, not between wild animals and human beings. There were numerous encounters with wild animals, but they were casual, not premeditated. Even when they ended in injury or in some cases death they were accepted as part of the risk for a really worthwhile cause.

Numerous little skirmishes were continually going on in the bush. Ranger Robin Guy and the guards were on patrol in the iVivi north, when they heard a shot coming from the dense forest. After making their way to the fenceline they lay in wait at a spot where they thought the poacher would come out, which he did. The poacher, who was armed with a double-barrel 12-bore shotgun, was caught red-handed with a red bush duiker.

By 1960 new rangers had joined Norman's staff, men like Reg Gush*, Tom Howcroft and Bob Murray. They all received valuable experience in night operations. Knowing that poachers favoured moonlit nights, ranger Bob Murray and eight guards waited on top of iTshempofu hill. Eventually they heard dogs barking up the uMgovuse stream and moved down towards the sound. All became quiet when they heard a dog bark across the iNzimane river. Crossing the river in the moonlight they met with dead silence. Just when they thought they had lost the poachers they heard a soft whistle close at hand. Creeping forward they came upon a gang of twelve to

*Reg Gush gave the Natal Parks Board many years of excellent service, first in the field and then as a communications officer in Pietermaritzburg. He retired in 1990.

sixteen poachers with a huge pack of dogs. Bob and his guards charged. During the scuffle Bob Murray hit one poacher on the head with his .303 rifle after the poacher threatened to stab him. Another poacher, grappling with a guard stuck his assegai in the guards back although not deep enough to kill him. Three poachers were caught and several dogs shot.

Later Norman with rangers Reg Gush and Bob Murray patrolled to uMagwanxa hill on night watch for moonlight poachers. Eventually they heard dogs barking on the hill. *'We bumped into four poachers and dogs on a grassy ridge. Dropping down into the grass we waited for them to come right up to us. Then we charged. We caught two of the poachers after a struggle. I cracked one on the head with my .303 rifle but he was up and gone. The rest of the night remained quiet.'*

Chapter Eleven

Ian Player* was stationed in Umfolozi Game Reserve in 1960. Ian and Norman consulted and compared notes regularly, discussing operational problems including the difficulties of running a guard force. Although very different in temperament and not always mutually amicable, their combined contribution to the management of these two famous reserves and the stateowned land sandwiched between them, the Corridor, left an indelible mark.

Ian was on the threshold of leading a new initiative to capture and translocate white rhino. Under the guidance of Colonel Vincent and Dr Toni Harthoorn* he gathered around him a team of men who were destined to make conservation history. Norman made his contribution to these early capture attempts. He took part in the exciting pioneer attempts to capture white rhino and the wily nyala. Because he was so heavily engaged in the management of the Hluhluwe Game Reserve while most of the pioneering capture was taking place in and adjacent to the Umfolozi Game Reserve, he did not become a permanent member of the capture team.

Norman wrote: *'Returned to Umfolozi Game Reserve. We darted two rhino. First failed to become immobilized by*

*Ian Player worked in the Natal Parks Board from 1952 to 1974. Among his many achievements in the field was his outstanding leadership of the Operation Rhino team. He had the right blend of compassion and determination to keep this difficult and hazardous operation on course despite some daunting problems and setbacks. Under his inspired leadership those of us charged with following darted rhino on horseback took risks which we may not have undertaken for a lesser person.

*Dr Toni Harthoorn was a pioneer in the use of immobilising drugs for game capture. He tells his story in **The Flying Syringe.**

Photo: Nick Steele

Norman made his contribution to these early capture attempts

drug but on becoming exhausted it lay down in a wallow for fifteen minutes after which complete recovery took place. The second rhino collapsed and died. Artificial respiration failed to revive the animal. We darted the tenth and last experimental white rhino in Umfolozi. It failed to go down and we kept watch on it for three hours. It appeared to recover completely. I went back to Umfolozi Game Reserve to assist in rhino capture with Dr Tony Harthoorn, Ian Player, Nick Steele and Owen Letley. Fifteen minutes after darting, the rhino went down. By pushing it and slapping it we managed to get the animal up. On very shaky legs it started walking around in a small righthand circle. It headed dangerously near a deep donga. By cutting between it the donga we were able to divert it. The rhino walked pressing hard against the side of the jeep. It paid no attention to the vehicle. On the next circuit it got its horn against the front mudguard and pushed forward, the mudguard buckling under the weight. The head and horn then slipped under the mudguard and the pressure she applied turned the wheels. The mudguard buckled further. I could feel pressure on the brake and clutch pedals. The pedal springs then broke. Jumping out of the jeep I pulled it by its tail while Dr Harthoorn and Player seated on the front bonnet shoved with their feet, amid roars of laughter. It tried the petrol tank so I grabbed it by the horn and pulled while Player pushed its head from the other side. Eventually we freed the animal from the vehicle. Whenever it headed for the donga we turned it by pulling round on its tail.'*

*Owen Letley was one of the pioneer members of the world famous Operation Rhino and a close personal friend of the authors. He died tragically in 1962.

The pioneering capture attempts were depressing for the staff in the field. We had inculcated into us from our first day in the Natal Parks Board, the value of white rhino and black rhino. So much so that shooting a rhino even in self defence was considered almost a crime. The deaths of these early captures seemed hard to justify. Although Dr Harthoorn's attempts were later vindicated by the enormous success of Operation Rhino, at the time there was scepticism and grumbling among the game rangers.

Despite early capture attempts, returning animals such as rhino, zebra and wildebeest roaming beyond the boundaries was still done by driving them back on foot over short distances, although not always successfully. Norman, Bob Murray, Tom Howcroft and Garth Carpenter were engaged with their guards in this time honoured method. *'We returned to uNomageje after the black rhino we sought had been seen outside the Ntondweni gate. I got three shots in from close range with a .410 shotgun which appeared to have the desired effect. After two miles we got him in. He made one hell of a mess of the fence where he entered.'* Later, with Rangers Murray and Howcroft, Norman tried to drive twelve of fourteen white rhino from the Corridor back into the game reserve. At the beginning they had all twelve in a "net" but seven broke back through the ranks. The beaters concentrated on seven across the river which they got in as far as the fence but again they broke through the ranks. Two eventually entered the reserve a mile away. Zebra and wildebeest were also damaging crops in the tribal reserve in the uSithole area, wandering out of

the Corridor as far north as the eGunjaneni gate. Ranger Garth Carpenter and the control gang tried to drive them back. They located twenty-three zebra and one wildebeest where the uGunjaneni stream leaves the game reserve. The troop would get to the fence then turn about and gallop off into the tribal reserve. After three attempts to drive had failed, they shot the wildebeest and twenty zebra.

Deaths of wild animals by natural causes is a common occurrence in any game reserve. It is routine for game wardens and game guards to watch the soaring vultures and interpret their actions. Riding the thermals in the heat of the day, these useful scavengers are good indicators of a death in the bush. They are either descending with purpose and on what seems sometimes like a pre ordained flight path into the bush, or are found draped on trees or scrambling and flopping over the carcass. It is a fascinating and unforgettable sight. In Hluhluwe there are four species of vulture, some common, others rare. They are the lappetfaced or black vulture, the cape vulture, the white headed vulture and the common white backed species. Common also were the tall Marabou storks, appropriately called Inqendlovu or the 'vultures of the elephant' by the Zulus. It is not long before this group of scavengers finish off the carcass leaving little of small game and only the shells of the big game like rhino. Almost invaribly they are joined or followed by other scavengers, the jackal and the hyena, which further diminish what is left of the carcass. When game ranger Tom Howcroft found a dead black rhino in the Manzibomvu valley on the 11 July 1961 it did not seem

unusual. However when he reported a second black rhino dead in the same vicinity Norman felt uneasy, especially as neither animal had visible wounds. Norman went to Manzibomvu with Tom to examine the two dead rhino. No sign of injury could be found on either. The second one had not been dead as long as the first, probably no more than a day or two. It was lying in about twenty inches of water. A few days later patrolling Qumela, guards found a third dead black rhino at Manzibomvu. It was found to be about a week dead. It was a three-quarter grown bull. There was a cut in the right rear leg that may have been a wound and several other points nearby where the skin was broken and decaying, otherwise there were no signs to indicate cause of death. Hyena had only eaten flesh from the head and neck and pulled off the right front leg. .....and fivedays later a fourth ..... Disturbed by these seemingly unnatural deaths Norman alerted director Colonel Jack Vincent, as well as summoning the help of the Natal Parks Board veterinarian Bob Wright. With Roddy Ward and Bob Wright he revisited the carcass of the fourth dead rhino. *'We found a dead crow and feathers of a black lappetfaced vulture. The crow was in water next to No. 3 rhino. Feathers of a vulture were next to No. 5 rhino (not yet dead). We found another sick rhino. When approached it charged the vehicle several times but merely ploughed into the ground, the front legs collapsing under it. Its rectum and vulva were greatly enlarged and raw. We also found an nyala suffering from paralysis on the legs. I took the animal home to keep it under observation.'* Norman realised these were not normal deaths.

Photo: Peter Hitchins

Norman realised these were not normal deaths. L to R Norman, Roddy Ward, Bob Wright, Garth Carpenter, Peter Potter, Jeremiah Nxumalo, Nkomozefa Mswell and other unidentified guards.

Greatly alarmed he mobilised his guard force to scout for more dead rhino. Ian Player called in from nearby Umfolozi Game Reserve and went with Norman into the field to inspect the death grounds. With the help of Roddy Ward and other staff, most of whom were now delegated to assist in what was Natal's worst wildlife crisis in decades, Norman and his team carried out post mortems, collected water samples and sent Roddy Ward speeding off with them to Pietermaritzburg laboratories for analysis. By the 20 August 1961 thirteen black rhino had succumbed from unknown causes. The crisis was not nearly over and further searches brought more heartaches. Norman organised a further search for rhino. *'One sick one was located at Qumela on Manzibomvu and another dead in the Manzibomvu river, below the confluence of the uMunyana. This is no. 25. While we were examining the sick rhino, two others that had been lying nearby and had run away returned and charged, causing a major panic. The sick one never stirred, though after a few minutes stood up.'*

Desperate even with the help of numerous fine scientists, Norman appealed to the National Parks Board for help. They sent the Kruger National Parks' outstanding Dr Tol Pienaar to carry out a post mortem on the 29th black rhino. Like the other scientists he could not come up with a solution to the inexplicable epidemic. To appreciate the full impact of this natural disaster it should be remembered that at this time, 1961, Hluhluwe Game Reserve was the single largest reservoir of black rhino south of the Limpopo river. Capture and translocation of them had not yet started, although

experimentation with immobilizing drugs was well into its second year with white rhino. The relentless and insoluble march of this mysterious epidemic seemed unending and threatened to engulf the entire black rhino population in central Zululand and ultimately South Africa. Game guards scouted the thick bush, watching the soaring vultures and reporting more deaths, No. 35 found here No. 41 found there, some rising feebly to thrust at their protectors before sinking back and dying, others already dead, their legs sticking straight out like lead toys thrown carelessly on the ground. Others already attended by the feathered undertakers.

Forty-five black rhino eventually died of the unknown epidemic, then the deaths stopped as abruptly as they had started. Some of the best veterinarians and pathologists in South Africa worked on the dead rhino. To this day no one can say for certain what the terrible losses were caused by. The uncertainty was worse because no one knew when the epidemic might recur. There is no doubt that Norman was profoundly shaken by the loss of so many black rhino. No doubt this helped to spur him and others to capture and translocate some black rhino to other areas. These operations eventually succeeded, though not without some hair raising moments.
The section of the Hluhluwe Game Reserve where the deaths took place was by far the most densely populated portion; 5,6 black rhino occurred here per square mile. The Natal Parks Board lost no time in getting the capture of black rhino started. Electrified by the catastrophic loss of so many animals in so short a time, attention was temporarily diverted from the white

rhino. The first of many successful captures took place in the uNomageje valley on 7 November 1961, a momentous event.

Later Norman sent rangers Murray and Howcroft out again to find more black rhino suitable for capture. They found four in unfavourable bush. Attempts at a foot stalk failed. *'We moved over to uSeme along the Hluhluwe river valley where three black rhino were located. After a short fast dash in a capture vehicle we caught up to the bull, when Player put a perfect shot into the rump. It ran for about two miles before the drug became effective, having just crossed the Hluhluwe river near where it enters the game reserve. The steps of the rhino became faulty and uncertain. It came to a standstill and ignored our shouts. After standing for about fifteen minutes Player fired another dart containing Largactil into the shoulder. It showed little reaction to this dart. Suddenly after a few moments it made off towards iNdimbili stream taking no notice of our frantic shouts and attempts to cut it off. Only by placing a Land Rover between it and its intended course was it forced to turn, virtually being pushed about by the Rover. Having got its horn under the front mudguard of the Rover it began shoving and only by anchoring the hindleg with chains was it freed. The rhino had to be forced down on its side but once there it remained peaceful. After being untied and given the antidote, it recovered rapidly and immediately charged. The next day the rhino was located by game guards searching with Howcroft and appeared to be perfectly normal.'* Norman assisted in further black rhino capture in the Corridor on the north bank of the Black Umfolozi river. One black rhino was

The Natal Parks Board lost no time in getting the capture of black rhino started. L to R: Nick Steele, Nathaniel Nkwanyane, Nkomozefa Msweli, Ian Player, Magqaba Ntombela.

Photo: Norman Deane

darted but the dart burst. The second rhino chase ended disastrously. He described it: *'John Clark* was driving and getting into full swing behind a pair of rhino when we collided with a series of small boulders, then hit a large pinnacle shaped boulder with the left front wheel. The impact was terrific and the vehicle eventually became airborne, coming down to earth again with the left back wheel on top of the rock. I bashed my left temple on the windscreen, shattering it. My right knee folded in the cubbyhole. I had several other sore points. Zietsman from the Kruger National Park went right through the windscreen receiving two bad facial cuts and lost all his upper incisors. Clark wrapped his ribs around the steering. Player and Magqubu Ntombela* were both badly shaken up in the back. Zietsman bled profusely for a few moments and then passed out. We had a long wait for someone to fetch other Rovers.'*

Since those dark days when Hluhluwe lost so many of its valuable black rhino the translocation operations to other parts of South Africa have proved very successful.

Nothing thrilled Norman more than an opportunity to go quietly into the bush. In this he was joined by Ian Player, a very good naturalist himself. A sojourn with these men into the bush was an education for a learner ranger. Norman canoed with Ian Player from the Black Umfolozi bridge to the confluence of the two Umfolozi rivers at eSiyembeni. *'The*

*John Clark's contribution to Operation Rhino is described in Ian Players The White Rhino Saga.

*Magqubu Ntombela, now about 90 years old is one of South Africa's best known game guards, conservationists and historians.

level of the water could have been a foot higher, nevertheless it was easy going most of the time. It was a memorable four hours, complete and utter solitude. Numbers of nyala and bush buck were seen feeding along the riverline vegetation. Near the confluence a warthog, still alive, was found in a snare. We despatched it. We also saw a Bateleur eagle with what appeared to be a small snake held in its talons. It sailed up and down the same area with legs stetched back in the normal position. At one stage in mid-air it ate some of it by stretching its legs forward and its neck back.'

Watching the undisturbed natural activities of the wild animals and birds was a welcome respite from the constant pressures of work. At eCakeni he saw baboons feeding on flying ants on the road. *'While the air around the troop was laden with flying ants no attempt was made to get them in flight, with the exception of two halfgrown baboons that made occasional and successful attacks on ants about four to six inches above the ground. The whole troop was feeding at an amazing rate.'*

Chapter Twelve

Poaching in the game reserve had not relaxed despite the introduction of tracker dogs and improved tactics. All that happened was the capture rate improved. By March 1962, in a period of twelve months there were 79 poaching incidents involving several hundred poachers. The courts confiscated thirteen assegais, twenty knobsticks, ten cane knives, eighteen snares, one motor car, one .22 rifle and a spotlight. The majority of the poachers escaped. The struggle intensified in the autumn and winter of 1962. In the forefront were the splendid Zulu game guards. One of the iNzimane guards reported that after 7 p.m. they heard a rifle shot and saw a light at iTshempofu. They could find no sign of the poachers in the dark. Returning early in the morning, they came upon tracks of two poachers and the blood spoor of a wounded buffalo. Ranger Murray later found the wounded animal, shot it and removed a .303 bullet that had entered the buffalo's hide side on. Meanwhile rangers Peter Hitchins and Tom Howcroft had been sleeping out in the indigenous forest at the top of iVivi hill for a week. Their camp lacked tents and was just a clearing in the forest with a small campfire. They cut grass on which to lay their blankets. Food consisted of simple fare like pre cooked meat, a few tins and tea. It was while returning to their camp after hours of vigilance in the dark damp forests that Peter, Tom and their game guards suddenly came upon three poachers, two of whom were armed with rifles. A frenzied chase ensued, men running and shouting to others to "vimba"

the poachers as the startled three each fled in a different direction. One poacher without his rifle was brought down but the other two soon vanished into the undergrowth of the forest amidst shout of "yima" from their excited pursuers. The prisoner, called Manqele, told his captors that they had wounded a buffalo the previous night. Typically he denied all knowledge of owning a rifle but later back at the rangers headquarters said he would show them where the rifle was hidden. A raid on the kraal from where the poachers had initially come netted the second poacher called Gumede, but not his rifle. At sunset Tom, John Tinley* and their guards again raided the kraal to try and capture the third poacher Dlamini and to locate Gumede's rifle. There was no sign of Dlamini or his rifle. They learnt that Gumede's father and a boy had fled with Gumede's rifle. Later on, through patience Tom succeeded in finding Manqele's rifle and, to his unexpected delight, Gumede's wife suddenly produced his rifle, much to Gumede's horror. This operation in the iVivi forests had produced very worthwhile results as the capture of two rifles was regarded as a fine achievement. Serious physical violence was seldom perpetrated against prisoners to make them reveal the whereabouts of their firearms.

A gang of about 60 poachers were hunting in the Corridor in the iMpisaneni area, heading for iNsizwa. This mob was now spread over some kilometres through the bush. Norman had to be very careful not to commit an inadequate force against these hunting impis. Facing such a large force of

*John Tinley served in the Natal Parks Board from 1959 to 1973. He now resides in the Cape Province where he is engaged in professional hunting.

poachers increased the danger of confrontations. *'I rounded up what few guards were available; game guides, check gate guards and some keen labourers. Including rangers Hitchins, Howcroft and myself, we mustered about twenty odd. Umfolozi Game Reserve staff were asked for any help that could be spared. We went to where the iMpisaneni crosses the Hluhluwe road and leaving the jeeps there moved off on foot for a spot where the gang were cutting up meat. We caught up with a portion of the gang numbering at least twenty-five, just as they were about to leave the Corridor. After giving chase for several miles, we caught three poachers. Dingaan routed one out of a densely wooded donga. Thirty-eight dogs were destroyed. One poacher was injured. A line of game carcasses was found spread from the Corridor into the tribal reserve; 2 wildebeest, 3 reedbuck, 3 warthog, 1 bushbuck. Regrettably we missed the main section of the gang.'*

The poachers attitudes to the rangers and the game guards were changing. Whereas before they made incursions into the game reserve simply to hunt, the incidences of resistance were on the increase.

Then the inevitable happened. Norman was woken up late at night by the phone ringing. It was the keeper of the eastern gate, Mr West reporting that game guard Mandlenkosi Ndletshe was missing after a clash with poachers. Rushing off in his landrover accompanied by Tom Howcroft and several guards to the check gate, Norman met game guard Elias who quickly explained what had happened. The party combed the bush in the vicinity of the fight until 3 a.m. but could not find

Lifting their slain colleague onto a makeshift stretcher they retraced their steps.

Mandlenkosi. Returning to the gate where a police sergeant Harmse awaited him Norman learnt that a wounded poacher was at a kraal about 3 miles outside the boundary. *'We found Loyindoda Zungu suffering from a bullet wound in the stomach.'* (The poacher subsequently died from his wound) After learning from the expiring poacher's mother that the guard had been left for dead in the hills Norman left the police sergeant at the kraal and went directly to uMagwanxa hill via uNompondo hill where the reinforced search party was waiting. It was now daylight and they began combing the bush. Soon Peter Hitchins came across the guards body. Signs indicated that a terrific battle had taken place. Assegais, knobsticks and cane knives were spread over a distance of twenty to thirty yards. Even pieces of leather had broken away from Mandlenkosi's boots in the struggle. The brave game guard had been stabbed through the heart. Sergeant Harmse had meanwhile caught fellow poachers Dinginsfawobo Zungu and Balancwadi Matabele hiding in a mealie field. They had a .303 rifle with them which they had taken from the body. *'We returned to the game guard's body accompanied by Sergeant Harmse who completed his investigation.'* Lifting their slain colleague onto a makeshift stretcher they retraced their steps to the vehicles and on to headquarters. Towards sunset the sad procession handed Mandlenkosi's body over to his family. The effect of Mandlenkosi's death on Norman was considerable. Although outwardly tough and uncompromising, even harsh at times, he was never callous. There lay within his heart a deep feeling and concern for his men. By no means morbid about

such tragic losses he felt them more than he admitted. His own courage brushed off on all who worked with him. Judging from the fight Mandlenkosi had put up against a numerically stronger opposition, his courage was evident. Such courage impressed Norman deeply. He subsequently often referred to Mandlenkosi and visited his bereaved wife, personally delivering the guard's last pay packet and a cash donation from his staff.

Chapter Thirteen

By 1963 Hluhluwe had a mounted unit and every opportunity was taken to familiarise the staff with the horsemanship and horsemastership necessary to run such a unit. Norman took a keen interest once he had been convinced of the value of horses. He had hitherto no experience in horseriding but was determined to succeed. With few exceptions I can think of no environment less suitable for novice riding than Hluhluwe Game Reserve. Even assuring that the novice rider managed to avoid the numerous holes, dongas and thorn thickets, he or she had inevitably to encounter rhino or buffalo. Most novice horses, let alone the novice rider, have an instinctive aversion to such apparitions appearing in front or behind them. Their natural tendency is to bolt. Norman never considered this an obstacle. *'I took the gelding Pride out for a training session. I put Nkomozefa onto a tame mule. Considering that he had not ridden before he did quite well. Pride's behaviour was an improvement on previous sessions. Due to my using a hard bit I had more control over him but he still shies like hell. I took him to uMdoni Park area and gave him a real workout with wildebeest, of which he is terrified. He bolted twice and tried to ditch me but I managed to remain seated. If only I could spare time every day, after a week I would have him right.'* Norman was fortunate in having on his staff Gordon Bailey, an excellent ranger and a good, practical horseman. Together they managed and rode the newly acquired patrol horses, also experimenting with pack

mules. Training the notoriously recalcitrant pack mules became even more hazardous than learning to ride. The mules Tom and iSipukupuku had to get over their objections to carrying impala carcasses. Norman recorded, *'Tom would not allow the load to be put on him and performed like hell. iSipukupuku was a little better but while we were tying the impala carcasses on, she kicked forward knocking Anderson for a six. He stopped the hoof right in the face from the forehead across the left eye to the left cheek. How he was not concussed I don't know. He was somewhat shocked but soon recovered.'* After bolting a couple of times they settled down to loads on their backs.

Norman and Gordon even tried zebra capture on horseback. The zebra were to be used for exchange. He increased his horse troop by exchanging them for zebra with farmers on a one for one basis. The latter were much sought after by them. With Gordon Bailey mounted on his horse and Norman operating from a Land Rover they successfully caught a young zebra. It became exhausted very rapidly after being chased around the circle at uMdoni a few times. They loaded it up and transported it to a farm, releasing it in a small paddock with a horse which was at first afraid, then aggressive. The zebra panicked and went through the fence. It ran past two mules and they chased it. The zebra eventually vanished in a well-wooded paddock. *'The only answer is to keep them in a stockade for a week until they are tame and used to the area.'* Night captures of zebra using long noose poles (vangstokke) were not only dangerous for those involved in them but caused

severe and sometimes irreparable damage to the vehicles. The zebra frequently injured themselves and had to be destroyed. Given the difficulties and dangers of catching a zebra in this way the horses actually cost much more than their monetary value.

Norman was delighted when late one evening the mounted guards had their first successful arrest of a poacher. The shaken poacher denied he was hunting but merely looking for his cattle, a universal excuse for anyone found where he should not be. So common was this excuse that captured poachers were often chided by pre-empting them, saying "Apart from looking for your cattle what were you doing here?" It never failed to reduce tension and raise a laugh, even with the poachers themselves.

It was through intensive ground patrols that the rangers became so intimately aware of veld conditions, game movements and concentrations as Norman describes, *'I patrolled from eGodeni dam to the confluence of the uHlaza and uFulula to iCibingoma and back to uHlaza. Grazing throughout the area is much improved.* ***Eragrostis curvula*** *is the predominant species where sufficient sunlight penetrates the trees. In the dense shade* ***Dactyloctenium australe*** *cover is very good in most sections although still sparse in the mthambothi forest but then it will more likely never become very dense. It was a delightful day and full of interest.'*

Norman and Gordon rode into the Corridor, covering the iNsizwe valley, eZiqhumeni and part of the Hluhluwe valley in a search for 'Poking Polly.' There were no signs of

her. Poking Polly was a notoriously aggressive black rhino cow. When she heard human voices, or sounds of cutting or chopping in the bush, she would often follow the sounds up and attack whoever was found. As she had her home range in an area of low scrub where lots of poaching took place, she had ample opportunity to engage in her manhunts.

Norman exercised his horse in the vicinity of his home, mainly in an area called Nkonono. This long ridge, running west of and parallel to the ridge where the rest camp lies, is covered in fairly tall grass falling away steeply on both sides into thickets and forest. It was well frequented by both black rhino and buffalo bulls, both of which could often be seen from the rest camp. Because of its terrain and inhabitants it was unsuitable for all but the most experienced horsemen riding well trained bush horses. Despite his lack of experience this did not deter Norman who trotted and cantered along as if he was in Hyde Park. The tranquillity and elation he enjoyed being out on his horse was shortlived however, as inevitably he encountered a rhino at close quarters. Norman recounted the story to me afterwards. "There I was trotting along the Nkonono ridge when I almost ran over a black rhino lying in the grass. Although it did not immediately charge it leapt to its feet. Without any prompting from me, the horse fled down the steep eastern side of the ridge. I knew damn well that lying ahead was thick forest on very steep ground. I still am not sure how I stayed in the saddle but I did and by bringing the ruddy horse's head around got it under control." Norman told me the story amid fits of laughter at what would have happened had he

and the horse plunged into the forest. Not long after this game guard Lazarus Ndwandwe had a narrow escape on Nkonono ridge. A buffalo charged and gored his horse. In the ensuing collision the horse fell on Lazarus breaking his leg. Fortunately for Lazarus the buffalo pursued the horse while he hobbled to a tree. His horse was later found dead. Zemisi had a similar encounter when a black rhino confronted him. In evading the rhino the guard's horse fell into an antbear hole, injuring itself so badly that the next day it could hardly walk. Riding in Umfolozi Game Reserve was less hazardous. There were fewer black rhino and buffalo and the terrain, although rough, was not as steep as in Hluhluwe Game Reserve. Norman discovered the difference when he went over to Umfolozi Game Reserve on a ride with Ian Player. Although it was midwinter rain had fallen heavily for three days in central Zululand. The resultant eleven inches turned the country into a quagmire. The rivers rose to enormous heights, sweeping all before them. Later when the rivers had subsided Norman and Ian went on horseback to see the results of this flood. About seven warthog were found drowned and about the same number alive. This was in an area previously teeming with warthog. In places along the banks of the river the damage was extremely extensive. In one section of the Umfolozi river on the south bank, for a distance of several hundred yards, a thick avenue of **Ficus sycamorus** trees was uniformly smashed in half as if by a giant scythe. In places, particularly where small streams entered the Umfolozi river, mud was feet deep and the horses floundered in mud up to their bellies. Later on, Norman

Ian Player on mounted patrol

came on a two day horse patrol with me in Umfolozi. He wrote: *'We left Mpila, passing the rhino boma along the iDengezi ridge, crossing the White Umfolozi at iSiwasamange, the traditional bathing place of the vultures. There were a number of vultures resting on the rocks at the water's edge. We had tea under the shade of the giant fig trees. We rode on through the uMeva bush to the uMpekwa bush. The grazing in the uMeva bush is almost non-existent but it has the appearance of a condition of long standing. It is an extremely dry, arid stretch of country, its vegetation markedly different from the greater part of Umfolozi. We off-saddled for the night at eNqabaneni. Taking a late afternoon ramble along the banks of the White Umfolozi, we found fresh leopard tracks. While we were cooking supper around the fire, the lion began roaring from up close on the eNqabaneni ridge. He kept it up on and off for an hour. We heard jackals but not hyena though their spoor is evident in the vicinity. The next morning Nick's induna, game guard Mzwabantu Masuku* led our horses up the Umfolozi river while we scrambled to the top of the eNqabaneni ridge. Here we had an excellent view of the overgrazed areas that are of concern to Nick. The ridge itself is very interesting and is interlaced with white rhino paths. The scrub shows signs of fairly heavy browsing. The western slope of eNqabaneni is heavily overgrazed. uMfulamkhulu, the area cleared by Nagana, shows signs of very heavy, bad overgrazing and though very few warthog were noted from the*

*Mziwabantu Masuku, whose activities are described in Bushlife Of A Game Warden. He now works as an extension scout in the KwaZulu Bureau Of Natural Resources. He is well over 70 years old.

top of eNqabaneni, Nick assures me they are the culprits. Large numbers of waterbuck were observed and two small herds of impala. Nick, Masuku and I returned via Momfu cliffs, where we had tea and the last of Jean's enjoyable biscuits. The horse I rode, a grey by the name of James, was exhausted by the time we got back to Mpila.' This was a memorable ride in Umfolozi with me. Little did I realise at the time that it was to be the last patrol with Norman. I look back on it with a somewhat melancholy nostalgia for I had long admired and loved Norman as a mentor and a friend. I often reflect how fortunate I was to start my career under a man of such energy, integrity and courage. Although I only worked directly under his control for about 16 months, his example of leadership and dedication formed the foundation of my future career. A lesser, perhaps more benevolent leader might have been easier to work with, but I have no doubt he would not have given me the grounding I needed in the hard world of conservation.

A horse patrol consisting of game guards Zemisi and Mhlelemba was attacked by a party of six poachers on a prominent hill called uSeme in the southwestern region of Hluhluwe. Chaos reigned when the guards dismounted in the face of the attack, the horses breaking away, reins trailing as the sharp crack of Zemisi's rifle stopped the attackers. Norman was alerted. *'I had just sat down and poured myself a drink when at 6.50 p.m. the phone rang. Mr Hyman from eGunjaneni gate made a call to say game guard Zemisi Nyawo had arrived on foot to report that he had been attacked by six poachers and that in the fight his rifle had been discharged*

hitting one of them in the leg. I sent Murray to eGunjaneni and went to uSeme camp with Dr Anthony, a board member and a medical doctor in camp at that time, and ranger Hitchins. We went to the scene of the poaching incident which was high up between the two uMlebezi streams. The poacher Manqele was already dead. The bullet hit his thigh breaking the femur. The point of exit was the size of a saucer. He must have died very soon after being shot.' Mhlelemba recovered his horse not far from where the clash took place but Zemisi's mount Apache, had bolted and was still lost. Days later it was found in thick bush along the Hluhluwe river near the uSeme drift. The reins were caught up in a bush. Apart from hunger the horse was in good condition, and the saddle was still intact. Norman left the guards at the scene with the poacher's body while he drove back to his headquarters and phoned the South African Police. The police wanted to charge Zemisi for the death of the poacher. The all too familiar bias of the policeman and later the magistrate became patently obvious to Norman so he asked the District Commandant to appoint another investigating officer. The trauma of having to kill a poacher to save himself was second only to the trauma game guard Zemisi suffered at the hands of the South African Police sergeant. Although in many ways a fine police force, though much maligned, there were always members of the S.A.P. who themselves were not averse to poaching. The ferocity of these poachers in attacking Zemisi's mounted patrol attested to the increasing tendency of some poachers to resist arrest. Because the patrol consisted of only two members it was at a

Photo: Norman Deane

Veteran of many skirmishes . . . Zemisi Nyawo holding snares.

disadvantage. Had there been a third horseman present to hold the horses, leaving the two guards free to handcuff the poachers it seems unlikely that a fight would have started. In fact in anti poaching operations two-men patrols, afoot or mounted are inadequate to meet the difficulties in confronting armed poachers. Veteran of many skirmishes in the past, game guard Zemisi again found himself in danger in the iVivi forest . . . . this time he held his fire, as Norman wrote, *'The uGontshi guards heard a rifle shot in the iVivi north. They kept watch on the area and eventually saw four men come out of the forest near iVivi camp. One had a rifle with which he took two shots at a buffalo cow. The guards followed them after they had given up looking for the wounded buffalo. The poachers went to the kraal of Thakathi Myeni. Here the guards tackled the man carrying the rifle and were set upon by the four poachers and two women. They managed to get possession of the rifle. Zemisi kept the two who charged him with raised assegais at bay with the captured rifle, warning them he would shoot if they attacked.'*

From March 1964 to March 1965 ninety-six poachers were arrested. Weapons confiscated included 3 x .303 rifles, 1 x .22 rifle, 3 x 12 bore shotguns, 50 assegais, 33 knobsticks, 43 cane knives and 96 snares. 52 dogs were shot in skirmishes or when found hunting alone. The 96 poachers actually caught were only about a quarter of the number who invaded the game reserve.

Chapter Fourteen

After taking a decision to re-colonise central Zululand with giraffe the Natal Parks Board delegated Norman to plan and execute the difficult translocation operation. In this task he was assisted by ranger Jan Oelofse, who probably had the most experience in the capture and transport of these timid and ungainly animals. The giraffe were caught in the eastern Transvaal and tamed in bomas in preparation for translocation to the Umfolozi Game Reserve. While Jan Oelofse* and the Kruger National Park officials were capturing the giraffe, Norman was busy mapping the route, especially overhead wires and bridges, and making arrangements for the giraffe convoys passing through Swaziland to Zululand. He had an interview with Schuss, the Assistant Veterinarian for Swaziland at Mbabane. *'He had now agreed to let the giraffe through Swaziland. I booked into the Cheetah Inn and then went to Oelofse's camp at Klaserie to find cheetah cubs and giraffe in the boma. Oelofse, Drs Tol Pienaar and van Niekerk were out bringing back another one. Oelofse's camp was very well organised and the giraffe had taken to lucerne very well. We went out in the morning and immobilized a female giraffe. It was too big so we released it. We then immobilized another successfully. In the afternoon search we found plenty of male calves but only one female which we immobilized successfully. The whole operation went off very smoothly with great success.'*

*Jan Oelofse is now a successful game rancher in Namibia.

When the final capture of fourteen suitable giraffe was complete, Norman and ranger Ken Rochat* again proceeded to Klaserie Reserve. *'I found John Kymdell and technicians from the Star newspaper already there. They had a Mercedes Benz car and a Baretti, the latter a travelling dark room.'* Norman's decision to allow the Press to accompany what was an experimental translocation of giraffe reaped a whirlwind for him. Niether he nor Jan Oelofse had at that stage previous experience of moving so many giraffe over a distance of some 700 kilometres on huge low-loaders. Although the mechanics of the operation were very well organised no-one knew how the giraffe would react.

We were up at 4.30 a.m. and began loading giraffe at 5.30 with Board staff, myself, Oelofse, Ivan Steytler and Ken Rochat. Loading two low-loaders with six giraffe each and two in the four-ton truck took a lot of handling. The operation was only complete by 6 p.m. The day was extremely hot and it meant that those giraffe first loaded stood in the sun for twelve hours before we got on our way at 6.45 p.m. Many hours later and thirty miles further on the first giraffe collapsed. It obviously could not recover and therefore was given an overdose of M99 (a morphine drug). We rested the other giraffe for two hours before pressing on. We passed through White River at about 8.30 a.m. The telegraph wires were all high and no problem. We had breakfast at the roadside tearoom beyond Nelspruit. Another giraffe had succumbed.

*Ken Rochat had a major influence on the technical development of Operation Rhino. The loading and transportation techniques he worked out over two decades ago are much the same today as they were then.

We stopped in the heat of the day in a kloof below the escarpment, a favourite resting spot for travellers. The giraffe caused great excitement among the travellers stopping there. The journey up the escarpment was painfully slow. We had hoped to make Ermelo by 7.00 p.m. but more giraffe showed signs of stress so we pulled into a sheltered wood about six miles from Ermelo. I went into Ermelo, taking the famished drivers for a quick meal. We had a few hours rest and got going by 1.00 a.m. The highveld night was very cool.' The Press accompanying the operation were sympathetic and understanding but they came to report and "news was news". They had no option but to file copy. The convoy still had two dead giraffe aboard which caused adverse publicity and was demoralising for the men. Norman had no option but to keep them for he could not discard their carcasses in the veld. *'We passed through Ermelo at about 1.30 a.m. The trip to Piet Retief was uneventful but the giraffe were looking very dusty and their eyes were watering from the excessive dust. We had a wash up in a garage toilet and pressed on for Pongolo. The next sixty-two miles were fraught with troubles; both low-loaders began playing up, one with clutch trouble and the other with fuel trouble. The latter had been giving trouble the whole trip. The giraffe were keeling over fast and we decided at Pongolo to make for Mkuzi Game Reserve about 150 kilometres nearer than Umfolozi Game Reserve, in preference to the latter which was still ten hours away. I went ahead with*

*John Forrest worked in the Umfolozi-Hluhluwe Complex from 1963 to 1983. He was largely responsible for the introduction of the idea of bushcamps for tourists which have been a phenomenal success.

Ken to Mkuzi to warn Adriaan Erasmus to have everything in readiness. Erasmus and John Forrest got cracking and had everything ready by 6.00 p.m. The loading and off-loading points had to be fixed up in one hell of a hurry. The convoy arrived at 5.00 p.m. Off-loading began in pouring rain and eventually the one low-loader got stuck and the holes made by the enormous tyres had to be filled with hardening.* The surviving giraffe were lifted off the low-loader with a block and tackle, placed on a five-ton truck and then taken to the boma and taken off by hand. We finished off-loading at 4.00 a.m. and I returned to Hluhluwe Game Reserve at 6.30 a.m. I went to bed until 2.00 p.m.'* The entire operation from loading to off-loading had taken 71 hours. Six of the giraffe died but the remainder recovered.

Norman and his colleagues had taken the first bold if traumatic steps to return giraffe to their former habitat in the Zululand game reserves. Norman and Jan Oelofse went back to Mkuzi Game Reserve to release the eight surviving giraffe. *'They came out of the boma, stood around for a while, then browsed on nearby trees. One youngster took fright and dashed off through the bush followed by all but one. The one female re-entered the boma, running round and round excitedly. She had to be driven then she ran off and joined the others, all of whom had run back towards the bomas. I last heard that they had broken into two groups and were heading southwest, apparently in a hurry.'*

END

Postscript

After Norman and his family left Hluhluwe Game Reserve they went to live on a game ranch called Ubizane. There, after a great deal of hard work, the Deane family built up a hunting safari organisation called Zululand Safaris. It became well-known throughout southern Africa and the western world. The evolution of this safari business is a story in itself.

At that time, 1965, game ranching and hunting safaris were virtually unknown in Zululand. Norman and Jean were really pioneers of what is today a lucrative industry.

While it is well known that in the old days some hunters eventually became good game wardens, it was not so common for a game warden to become a good hunter. Thus Norman reversed a trend and today numerous game wardens are involved in the hunting safari business.

In early 1983 Norman bequeathed his diaries and personal papers to me. He had already contracted cancer. I have often felt that he left his diaries to me in the hope that I would fulfil his own ambition to leave a record of his life in conservation. I like to think that Norman would have approved of this modest account.

Norman fought cancer with the same courage he tackled other problems in his life. Despite his terminal illness, he continued to run Zululand Safaris with his wife, Jean, and the family. There were more setbacks, the most tragic of all being the sudden death of Jean in 1982. Her death was a very cruel

blow to Norman and the family.

In 1983 my wife Nola and I visited Norman and his family at their ranch style home in Hluhluwe district. He had personally prepared the lunch, throughout which we reminisced about the old days and current events. Even at this late hour of his life Norman displayed an optimism and an interest in events which was typical of his courageous nature.

He died in July 1983 at the age of 58 years.

About the author

Nick Steele is currently Director of the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources.

As a junior ranger in 1956-57 Nick worked closely with Norman Deane. During the last three and a half decades Nick has served in various capacities in most of Natal and KwaZulu's famous game reserves. He was a pioneer member of the world renowned Operation Rhino and is the originator of the concept of grouping farms for conserving their wildlife, later to become known as the Conservancy Concept.

Nick and Nola live near Ulundi. They have three sons, Vaughan, a nature conservator with the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources and Warren and Clinton, pilots in the South African Airways and South African Airforce respectively.

By the same author

GAME RANGER ON HORSEBACK 1968
TAKE A HORSE TO THE WILDERNESS 1971
BUSHLIFE OF A GAME WARDEN 1979

Poachers In The Hills is the authentic account of Game Warden Norman Deane's life in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve.

In the decade 1955 to 1965 gangs of poachers persistently invaded the wooded hills of Hluhluwe, colliding with Norman and his brave Zulu game guards by day and by night in what were often fierce clashes. It is also the story of the wildlife which Norman and his men struggled to protect, especially the black rhinos and buffaloes which themselves sometimes attacked friend and foe with equal facility. Despite the hard work and the dangers, perhaps because of them, frontier humour and heartwarming camaraderie were common bonds between the men who fought the poachers. The poachers themselves were not lacking in courage nor were they all necessarily regarded as bad or criminals. The majority sought cultural fulfilment and protein. Hluhluwe's wildlife was the obvious target.

This account has considerable relevance for conservationists now, 25 years later, as once again some of southern Africa's wildlife, like the endangered rhino species, face possible extinction at the hands of poachers, many of whom are armed with modern semi-automatic weapons, a legacy of the seemingly endless wars which are being waged on the sub continent.

Poachers in the Hills

Nick Steele