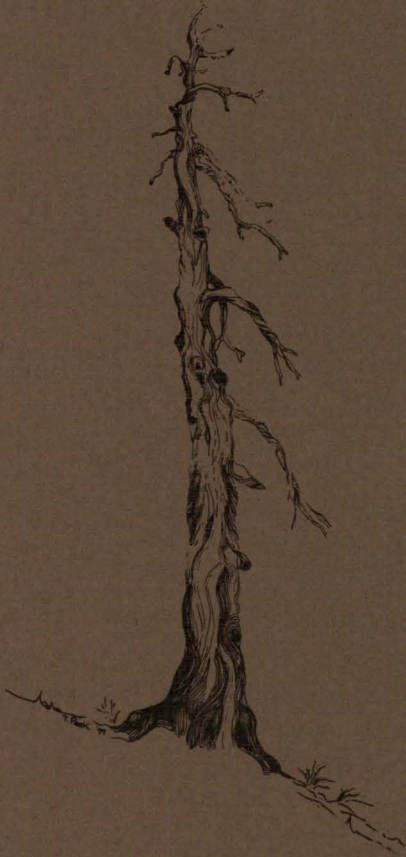


*IAN PLAYER*



*WILDERNESS RESOURCE*  
*DISTINGUISHED LECTURESHIP*

**University of Idaho Wilderness Research Center**











Wilderness Resource  
Distinguished Lectureship

9

***USING WILDERNESS  
EXPERIENCES TO  
ENHANCE HUMAN  
POTENTIAL AND  
UNDERSTANDING***

*Ian Player*

University of Idaho Wilderness Research Center

April 21, 1988

Published as Contribution No. 442 of the Idaho Forest, Wildlife and Range  
Experiment Station.

Illustrations by Lorraine Ashland



# Foreword

Edwin E. Krumpe

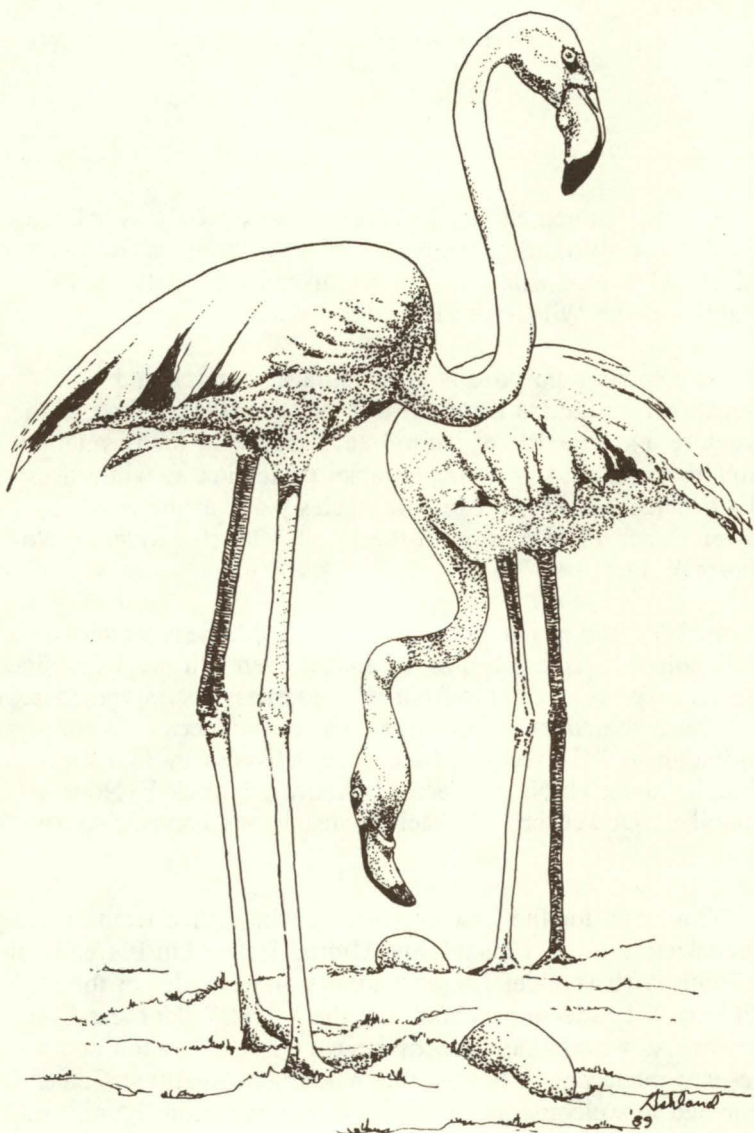
In the United States, Idaho is surpassed only by Alaska and California in the extent of its wilderness. To increase our knowledge of wilderness, the University of Idaho in 1972 established the Wilderness Research Center.

The center's purpose is to encourage research and educational programs that lead to a better understanding of the structure and function of natural ecosystems, of man's relationships to them, and of their perpetual protection as wilderness. Much wilderness-related research takes place at the center's Taylor Ranch Field Station in the Frank Church—River of No Return Wilderness.

In 1977, the center inaugurated the Wilderness Resource Distinguished Lectureship as an annual event. In the years since, national experts at the forefront of wilderness issues and management have shared their reflections and experiences of wilderness. Beginning in 1977, lectures have been delivered by Frank Church, Roderick Nash, Cecil D. Andrus, Patrick F. Noonan, Russell E. Dickenson, Michael Frome, Brock Evans, and Jay D. Hair.

This year, for the first time, our distinguished lecturer brings a perspective formed outside the United States. Ian Player is one of South Africa's chief conservationists and founder of the Wilderness Leadership School and the World Wilderness Congresses. As worldwide concern for nature conservation and preserve management builds, the Wilderness Research Center is delighted to welcome an international conservation figure, Dr. Ian Player.

*Dr. Edwin E. Krumpe is an associate professor in the University of Idaho Department of Wildland Recreation Management and director of the Wilderness Research Center.*



*"I can remember walking over a dune toward the edge of the lake one morning, and there must have been twenty thousand flamingos, and they took off just as the sun was catching their wings."*



# *Introduction*

John C. Hendee

Good evening. Tonight is special because we have a distinguished author, international conservationist, man of vision, and man of accomplishment as our distinguished wilderness resource lecturer. Dr. Ian Player is the brother of Gary Player, the golfer, although among conservationists Gary is known as Ian's brother.

Ian Player developed his interest in conservation and wilderness while initiating wild river canoeing in South Africa and launching the Duzi River canoe race from Pietermaritzburg to Durban. He was the first person to ever make that run. Developing the race into an annual event, he won its first three runs. Wild river canoeing—a sport launched by his vision—is now almost a national sport in South Africa.

Another Ian Player vision, developed while he was a game ranger for the Natal Parks Board, was that the nearly extinct white rhino could be saved through capture and translocation to zoos around the world for breeding and reintroduction in southern Africa. It was an enormous vision and one that must have provoked laughter from his colleagues who imagined themselves darting the 4,000-pound rhinos with tranquilizers and capturing them to ship to zoos. But they did it, and the white rhino has now been restored to hunting status in South Africa.

Ian Player wrote of saving the white rhino in his book *The White Rhino Saga* and of his canoeing adventures in *Men, Rivers and Canoes*.

He had yet another vision while chief ranger on the Umfolozi Game Reserve: that if people were going to appreciate wild areas, they needed to experience them. So he established a program, now a South African tradition, in which conservation officers, as part of their regular duties, take members of the public on four-day treks into wild areas of game reserves. While visiting South Africa, I was impressed to find that this is a most sought-after duty—taking public groups on trail to teach them about nature.

After seeing the success of wilderness trails sponsored by the Natal Parks Board, Ian reasoned that if *leaders* were taken out to experience wild country, they would develop an environmental conscience and be personally inspired to greater achievement. So he established the Wilderness Leadership School, and over the years he has taken more than 8,000 people, no more than six at a time, on four- to six-day treks into the wilderness. Many world leaders in government and private industry, and young people who have or will become leaders, have joined him on these wilderness trails. Their insights are recorded in his most recent book, *South African Passage: The Diary of the South African Wilderness Leadership School*.

With his friend, the famous Zulu chief and game ranger Magqubu Ntombela, who helped him establish the Wilderness Leadership School, Ian conceived of the World Wilderness Congresses: great indabas (a Zulu word for gathering) where people of the world would come together and share their ideas for saving the planet. He established the First World Wilderness Congress in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1977, a second in Australia in 1980, a third in Scotland in 1983, and the Fourth World Wilderness Congress in Colorado in September 1987, attended by 1,700 delegates from 65 countries.

As one might expect, a man with such radical ideas was often restrained in his position as a government official—the chief conservator for fish, game, and parks in the province of Natal. He left government service from that position, the ranking conservation officer in his province, to develop the Wilderness Leadership School and the World Wilderness Congresses.



In the past few years, his country has begun to officially recognize his many contributions. He has been awarded the Knight in the Order of the Golden Ark by Prince Bernard; the Distinguished Meritorious Service Medal (DSM), his country's highest civilian recognition; an honorary doctor of philosophy degree; and has been named a member of the statutory advisory body, the Natal Parks Board, which is the largest and most prestigious conservation agency in his country.

Dr. Ian Player is now retiring as vice chairman of the Wilderness Leadership School. I hope that his next career will see him associated with students, faculty, conservation colleagues, and citizens all over the world so that he can bring them his message of hope and inspiration for the conservation of the planet.

I know Dr. Player's distinguished lecture will be a wonderful experience for us. Ian, we are honored by your participation in our lecture series.

My friend, Dr. Ian Player.

*John C. Hendee is dean of the College of Forestry, Wildlife and Range Sciences at the University of Idaho.*





# *USING WILDERNESS EXPERIENCES TO ENHANCE HUMAN POTENTIAL AND UNDERSTANDING*

Ian Player

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you very much Dr. Hendee for your introduction. Being the brother of Gary Player isn't very easy. I always tell people, "If you want to be rich become a golfer; if you want to be poor become a conservationist."

I feel very humbled in talking to you this evening. It is a great honor for me to be here, and I am very grateful indeed to you people for coming out this evening in bad weather, although at home, of course, this rain would be considered very good weather. I must also compliment you on your city, which is very clean, and I would like to say too how impressed I've been with your university. I don't visit universities often, but the students and staff have impressed me with their openness, and it has been a great delight to talk with them.

I always like to experience the atmosphere of a place when I arrive, so I took the opportunity to go with Dr. Hendee to the white pine forest, and we stood for a little while after walking a short distance up the trail and just listened to that wonderful

silence. I was reminded that when the United Nations first met, one of their very first meetings was in the Muir Woods, just outside San Francisco. You might be interested to know too that it was General J.C. Smuts, one of South Africa's first prime ministers, who drafted the charter for the League of Nations and who played a prominent part in the early deliberations of the United Nations. He was an outstanding naturalist, an expert on grasses, and a man who thoroughly understood the concept of wilderness. I am sure that he encouraged everyone to hold the inaugural meeting of the United Nations at Muir Woods.

I thought to myself while we were standing in the silence of those giant white pines: What a great pity it is that the United Nations doesn't meet in the sacred groves anymore, because I'm sure if it did there would be much better understanding among people. In such a place you can't stand and scream at people. Before long the silence would make it sound ridiculous. This is why so-called primitive people could hold gatherings, or indabas, that had such dignity.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank America. The United States of America has been very kind to my brother. He has taken a lot of money out of here, and I can assure you that I've done my very best to bring some of it back. You have a very great country, with marvelous people.

Recently I traveled in South Africa with Dean Hendee; Joe Zimmer; my long-time friend and colleague Vance Martin, who ran the Fourth World Wilderness Congress; and Chief Oren Lyons of the Onondaga Nation, part of the Iroquois Confederacy. We went together on trail—a wilderness trek—and all of us were impressed by how Chief Oren Lyons, a Native American, brought a new dimension to our group, one similar to that provided by my old Zulu friend Magqubu Ntombela, now 88 years old. It was satisfying for me to see the two of them converse, Chief Oren Lyons who is very articulate in English and Magqubu who speaks only a half dozen words of English, and each understand exactly what the other was saying.

### *My Personal Journey*

The title of my lecture this evening is "Using Wilderness Experiences to Enhance Human Potential and Understanding."

Let me say that I do not like public speaking, and this subject is not easy. I considered Dr. Hendee's invitation very carefully, and then I realized I could only speak from one aspect—that was myself, my own personal experience, how wilderness has enhanced my life, how in fact it not only saved me, but made me what I am today. So what I have to say tonight is my testimony to wilderness, of how its therapeutic, spiritual, scientific, and other values made an impact upon me and how, because of this, I was able to help many other people.

The Zulus, who make up the biggest tribe in southern Africa, when they meet you for the first time, they ask the question, "Where do you come from?" They wish to know of your father, your grandfather, your clan. They want to know your whole background. It would be impossible for me to do that this evening. In fact, when thinking of this ritual, I always remember a statement of C.G. Jung about a Chinese philosopher. He asked the philosopher a question, and when the answer was complete, Jung said, "I asked the man about a piece of grass and he brought the whole meadow." All I bring you this evening is a piece of grass, but I hope it will represent this vast and complex topic that would take a much longer time to tell.

### *A Troubled Land*

I want to stress that what I have to say about African wilderness this evening must be seen against the broad background of my country. I live in one of the most complicated countries on our planet. It is a first world and a third world country with all the difficulties associated with both. It is a country of many peoples and a plethora of languages: Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, Venda, Bapedi, Swazi, Shangaan, English, Afrikaans, Tamil, and many others. The biggest population of Indians outside of India lives in South Africa. From a people virtually enslaved by the British in the 19th century, they have become a most important merchant class. South Africa is a troubled land, but where is there real peace anywhere in the world? No country has been more fought over than South Africa: black against black, white against white, and white against black. Our country is littered with monuments of war, and our land has absorbed more than its fair share of blood.

The western world has focused on South Africa with increasing intensity in recent years. We have to carry the shadow,



the dark side of the world. We have become the scapegoat and the pariah. But the truth is that we should be judged by African standards and not those of the western world. We are now Africans irrespective of our color or race. I believe that deep in their hearts, most people know that if South Africa cannot sort out its own problems, neither will the world be able to solve its problems. We are a microcosm of the world, and the giant among historians, Toynbee, acknowledges this fact.

For my own part, I think that the ecological problems of soil erosion and overpopulation and the rapidly diminishing wild lands are far more serious in the long term than the political situation, although I know the two are linked. I believe that those who go on the wilderness trails or treks are not only the ecological vanguard of South Africa, but also the pioneers for a new constitution. It will be a long time in coming, but the yeast is stirring. I hear murmurings of it on every trail I take out, and I see glimpses of it in the reports that come in from young people, as you will read in the book recently published by Fulcrum Press, *South African Passage: Diaries of the Wilderness Leadership School*.

### *Education and War*

I went to school for only a short time, just before the Second World War, then I went off to fight in Italy with the Sixth South African Armoured Division which was attached to the American Fifth Army. So my formal education was very limited. Consequently, I've always honored those who are educated, because I realize how much I've missed. I hope that all the students who are here in this wonderful place realize how fortunate they are, and I am envious of them and the opportunities they have. I say to them tonight: Grab the opportunities that your wonderful country and this fine institution give you.

I am a sixth generation South African; my forebears were English, Dutch, and Scottish. My family fought in the Basuto War of 1860, the Zulu War of 1879, the Boer War of 1899-1902, the Great War of 1914-1918, and also in the Second World War, in which I lost more than a half dozen relatives. I must say truthfully that my life has been a struggle—an almost overpowering struggle. But it is the problems and difficulties that one faces that bring understanding of the true essence of life.

As a boy of 12, I had a bad accident and damaged my right leg. At the time I was very bitter because I loved sport. I was considered a very promising cricketer and a promising soccer and rugby player. I knew I would never be able to play any games. It was a wound that I carried for a very long time. When I tried to join the army in 1944, I had difficulty convincing the doctors, but the war had advanced to such a state and South African casualties were so heavy that I was accepted despite my bad knee.

The war was very important to me because I learned about human suffering. Italy, in 1944-45, was a devastated country. I saw women and children searching garbage bins where soldiers had thrown away food. I saw death; in fact it was a constant companion—men or boys I was with were killed. And that leaves its mark.

Harold Macmillan, a British prime minister, toward the end of his life said, "There are only two forces in the world of man. One is the great spiritual force of religion, and the other is what I call the force of common sense." In my life I have found that we are given both, but in our inflation, or what the Greeks called hubris, and in a technological society, we have to constantly rediscover these truths. We have in many ways become an Icarian society. We live in an Icarian age. We have to remember that like Icarus, who flew too close to the sun, and his wings melted, and he came crashing down to a new reality, we too have to relearn our dependence upon the earth and the need to find ways to live in harmony with our environment.

### *My First Taste of Wilderness*

Again in the war, in 1944, I was in the Appennines, bitterly cold, extremely hungry, waiting to launch the final attack on the Germans in the Po Valley. A group of us were sitting around a fire; we didn't know if we would get home; and we were all talking about what we would do if we did get home, or what we would like to do. One thing I said was that if I made it home, I would like to canoe from Pietermaritzburg to Durban, a distance of 110 miles.

In 1950 I made that journey, and it was there that I experienced my first taste of wilderness. I can remember being



caught in the middle of one of those great African storms, with terrific lightning and thunder coming from all directions. I was in a canyon, and the lightning was bouncing off the walls all around me. For the first time in my life, I really felt a part of the elements. It was my first wilderness experience.

### *The Beginning of a Yearning*

In 1952, I joined the Natal Parks Board, the equivalent of one of your state fish and game departments, as a game ranger. I can clearly remember that all I had with me were two plates, two knives, two forks, two cups, and three books: T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, which is one of the great pieces of wilderness writing, although Lawrence never would have acknowledged it or understood it; a book of Shakespeare; and the Bible. Those books sustained me for a long time. One thing I got out of the Bible was in Proverbs: "It is without vision that people perish." It was something that burned itself into my mind. You will understand when I say it that I was disturbed. I was so very young; I had been in the war, and I had an inadequate education. So I was part of the lost generation—I never did really experience youth—and I was thrust into the isolated world of a game ranger in a very wild country.

One of the first places where I was stationed was a little game reserve of only 30,000 acres, right up on the Mozambique border, called Ndumo, which is a Zulu word meaning to thunder. I was sent there to fence it, to make roads, train game scouts, and to put an end to poaching—that was rough—and also to do bird and game studies. It was a wonderful place; two great rivers meet there, and my canoeing came in very handy. I often canoed on those rivers and all the small lakes that came about when the rivers flooded. The place was full of hippo and crocodiles. It was often exciting being inside a kayak or canoe and in the middle of a hippo herd.

On one occasion I was paddling down the Pongola River and a hippo overturned the canoe in an area known for its abundance of crocodiles. I was in a terrible panic, but remembered to dive down deep and swim underwater to the other bank in the belief that crocodiles do not attack one underwater, an erroneous belief as it later turned out. But it was the beginning of my yearning to understand the habits and rhythms of that wild place, the habits



of the animals and the birds. I was reading technical literature from all over the world, and I made it my business to know the scientific names of the birds, the trees, the animals, and the insects. I considered myself quite proficient and could talk with authority.

### *The Quiet Magic*

But all the time I knew I was missing something, and I could never understand what it was until one day I received a book by Laurens van der Post called *Venture to the Interior*. I remember sitting in the small, pre-fabricated bungalow and beginning to read this book in the late evening, just as the hippo began coming out of the rivers and the lakes to graze. I never put that book down until I heard the fish eagles calling in the morning, an incredible sound, and became aware that without my realizing it, the whole night had passed as I read that book. That book was about the soul of Africa, and it gave me a whole new perception. The ancient Romans said, "Ex Africa semper aliquid novi": Out of Africa always something new. It was so for me.

The time at Ndumo among its wild sycamore fig forests, its dark rivers and lakes with hippo, crocodile, and flocks of pelican, flamingo, and clouds of whistling duck had made a deep and profound impact upon me and began the healing process and the recognition of spiritual values. The wilderness atmosphere had begun to work its quiet magic.

### *The Anti-Poaching Patrols*

From Ndumo I was sent to Mkuze Game Reserve and spent the next five months doing nothing but anti-poaching patrols, which were very unpleasant. I was shot at by people who would have no hesitation in killing a game ranger interfering with their poaching activities. It was not easy working among communities violently opposed to any kind of conservation: cattlemen, tribal people, gangs that would come in and wipe out a herd of impala, load them into trucks, and drive off. There was absolutely no sympathy for our conservation cause among the locals. Even the police and the magistrates were against us. But it was a lesson, and one that I learned well. You can't simply take

everybody else's attitude for granted. You can't think that they too know what is right just because you are a conservationist.

I was then stationed on the coast that leads to the Mozambique border. And we went on long patrols along this very remote coastline, one of the most beautiful in the world, a place where Portuguese survivors from shipwrecks in the 16th and 17th centuries walked, and they called it "The Sands of Gold." It was there that I came in contact with the sea turtles, the leatherbacks and the loggerheads. It was part of my job to protect them, and today the Natal Parks Board turtle protection is considered one of the most successful programs of its type in the world.

There is a rhythm to these great beasts coming out of the sea, in the month of October, the loggerhead and leatherback turtles. I recall being absorbed watching the female turtles crawling out of the sea and up onto the sand terraces to lay their eggs. Here was a natural rhythm, one that had been so for thousands of years. A few months later the young turtles hatch and make their way down over the sand to the sea, attacked by dogs and by the ghost crab, back to the depths of the sea to eventually return as adults to lay their eggs.

### *A Very Important Predator*

I was stationed at the mouth of St. Lucia Lake, which is one of the greatest estuaries in Africa, if not the world. It is 45 miles long and a combination of fresh and saltwater, full of hippo, crocodiles, birds, and both sea fish and freshwater fish. At that time the Tonga people lived on land between the lake and the sea, and I can remember seeing sights that will probably never be seen again. I saw tribal people hiding in trees beside hippo paths where the animals would emerge at night to graze on the grasslands. The people would drop onto the young hippo and kill them with axes and knives.

The tribal people were moved from the periphery of the lake when our Forestry Department wanted to plant exotic species of trees such as pine and eucalyptus. From then on the hippo population exploded. It was a lesson to know that humans were a very, very important predator in that wild piece of country, and had always been so.



## Of Poetry

I can remember walking over a dune toward the edge of the lake one morning, and there must have been twenty thousand flamingos, and they took off just as the sun was catching their wings. It reminded me of Longfellow's poem "The Slave's Dream":

Before him, like a blood-red flag,  
The bright flamingoes flew;  
From morn till night he followed their flight,  
O'er plains where the tamarind grew,  
Till he saw the roofs of Caffre huts,  
And the ocean rose to view.

At night he heard the lion roar,  
And the hyena scream,  
And the river-horse, as he crushed the reeds  
Beside some hidden stream;

. . . . .

Seeing those flamingo flying and hearing lion roar and hyena scream gave me an understanding of the need for the inclusion of poetry in our conservation world. We sometimes get too bound up in technology or statistics, and we need poetry to bring us back to the level of appreciation of the natural world we protect. All scientists should never forget the value of poetry and what it can do to make fellow human beings appreciate other values in our struggle for conservation understanding.

Imagine translating those beautiful, evocative verses of Longfellow into scientific language, thus: "*Phoenicopterus ruber* or *Phoenicopterus minor* in flight, followed by the call of *Felis leo*, the scream of *Crocota crocuta*, while *Hippopotamus amphibius* crushed *Phragmites mauritanus* and *Homo sapiens* in *extremis* was having an REM sleep." A slight difference?

One of your great wilderness writers, Sigurd Olson, wrote, "Nature is always in a state of equilibrium and only when we manipulate it for our own purposes do we contribute toward imbalance." This is certainly true, and particularly true of Lake St. Lucia, a once primordial region, later surrounded by sugar cane farms, the establishment of which necessitated the cutting out of



the papyrus reed beds that helped to filter and trap the silt. An imbalance was created, and in a short 40 years a unique lake system was jeopardized. Then, with the planting of exotic pine plantations, the reed bed and the sponges began drying up, and sport fishermen now catch very little. It is only recently that we are beginning to understand what we have done to this place.

### *The White Rhino*

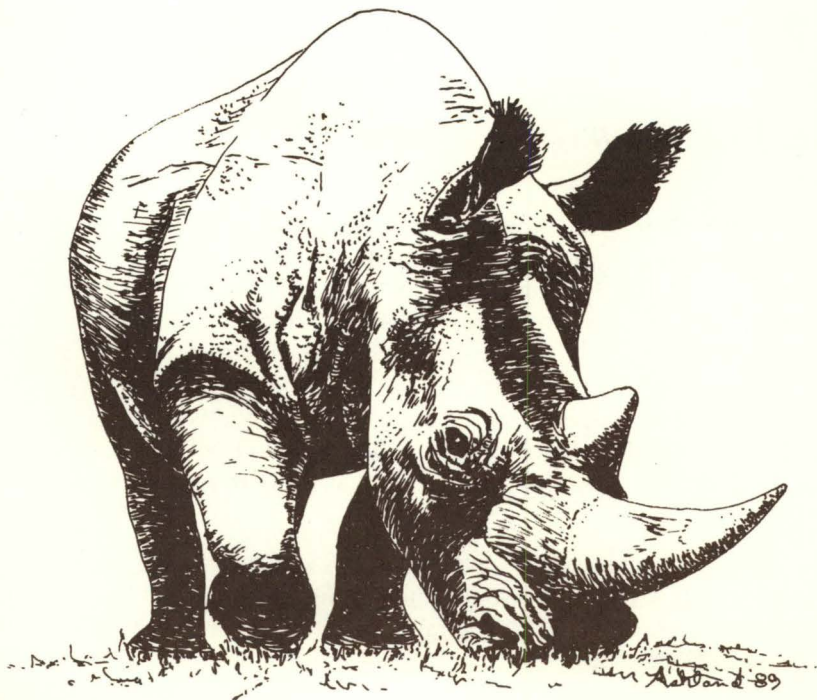
In 1958 I returned to the Umfolozi Game Reserve, where I had already spent a short time in 1952-53 and 1955. I was reunited with a man who has played a very important part in my life, Magqubu Ntombela, now 88 years of age, strong as a lion, can't read or write, and yet is the wisest man I have ever known. It is with him that I went on long anti-poaching patrols. If he taught me one thing it was the value of being an example. He never ever corrected me; he just behaved correctly. We faced some very disturbing and distressing times in 1958. Human populations were exploding all over South Africa, and large numbers of people were coming and squatting on the edge of the Umfolozi Game Reserve.

Poaching was totally out of control; there was very little law and order, and within the park there was a population of about 500 white rhino. It would have taken one diseased beast, a cow or an ox with anthrax, to get in among them and that would have been the end of one of the most endangered species on our planet. This led us toward our capture and translocation efforts to protect the white rhino, a long and involved story full of politics and full of practical difficulties to get the right drug, to get the right dart gun, to get the people with enough courage to go after the rhino, to commit ourselves to knowing the rhino intimately, to experience death with a rhino which had been given too much drug.

The first drug we used was a deadly muscle relaxant, gallamine triethiodide or Flaxedil. Once the rhino was darted we had to be in close contact with it until it dropped, then we had to inject the antidote, Prostigmin, in a vein in the ear within minutes. You can imagine the difficulties of trying to do this with a wild rhino, its head moving all over the place, and having to avoid those horns which could easily disembowel a man.

The second drug was morphine, and a gram and more was required along with a tranquilizer. The dose was so large we had to use a 20 cc dart, and you can appreciate that it was impossible to sterilize the dart needle, so as it went into the rhino it carried with it all the surrounding bacilli, causing the wound to go septic very quickly. We agonized with those animals with wounds so bad that we could stick our arms in and come out covered with pus, and then see them get pneumonia and die. I wondered sometimes if it would not be better to cease the operation. That is when people like Magqubu Ntombela and Nick Steele were so important because they said, "You have begun the job, you must finish it." Which we did.

We went on from there to reestablish the rhino everywhere in its former habitat throughout southern Africa—in the Kruger National Park where it had been wiped out in 1897, in Zimbabwe, in Mozambique, where none have survived—the recent civil war has seen to that. But they are entrenched in places like Botswana and in zoological gardens throughout the world. Over





3,000 have now been captured and translocated. The white rhino have even been put back on the hunting list and hunters from all over the world pay astronomical sums to shoot one. We have run out of wild land for more white rhino, so it is natural that they should now be culled. We are very proud of this extraordinary success story in wildlife conservation. A rare wild animal was brought from the verge of extinction to be put back on the hunting list in 77 years.

Following that was the capture and translocation of antelope. I remember very clearly trying to shoot impala with a dart—a very slow and totally inefficient method of capture. A man named Jan Oelofse then developed a new technique of driving the herds into entrapments of plastic sheeting. Where in the past we were able to capture 100 antelope in a year, we could now catch 6,000 in three months. Once caught they were sent to restock other areas in South Africa. That technique has never been fully appreciated, but it is a technique that can save wildlife on the continent of Africa because it is a management tool of enormous importance. There is resistance to this technique being used elsewhere in Africa because the idea originated in South Africa—an example of political philosophies being carried to the most idiotic extremes.

### *The Wilderness Trails*

While all this was going on, a great political struggle for the land was taking place—the land adjoining the reserve and the reserve itself. Cattle farmers wanted the land; black tribal people wanted the land; and we were sandwiched in the middle. That is what led to the establishment of Natal Parks Board trails, because I knew by then that if it was possible to give people the same sort of experience that I had, of walking the wild country and being out there with the Zulu, then it would be possible to do something to save the place. And that is what we did.

We took young people, businessmen, and politicians out for three days at a time, sat around the fire at night, and talked in ways that are not possible in circles of so-called civilized communities. Lots of lessons were learned there, not only for those



on their first trek, but also for those of us who worked in the game reserves.

### *Magqubu Ntombela*

The values of tribal people in our culture and in our technological society have been overlooked, yet they have an enormous contribution to make. They speak a different language from ourselves, probably an intuitive language if we need to describe it. Magqubu is always an example of that. Wherever he went he would be intuitively in tune with his environment. He was infallible in his judgment. The only time I ever made mistakes was when I ignored what he had to say. He can't read or write, but his knowledge of the land is unsurpassed. He can pick up a feather and tell you a whole story.

Once he picked up the small hoof of a bushbuck on the edge of a river, and he told me a great story of how a lion had come and chased the bushbuck, pounced upon it, killed it, and eaten part of it, and then he showed me where the crocodiles had come up to finish it. He has a way of reading what is beyond us and a way of listening too. We are so busy talking, we have forgotten how to listen.

I remember being with a group of people on a trail. Magqubu led us down along the Black Umfolozi River, and it was just beginning to get dark when we saw a pride of lions across the river. Magqubu said to me, "We must be quiet tonight; the lions are going to kill." And as it got dark, I heard a bushbuck coming up the river barking (it is one of the barking antelope), and the next moment I heard it run into the river, the growling of the lion, and the thud, and finally the last gasp. We could see nothing at all, but Magqubu was able to describe exactly what was happening in the pitch darkness. We sat there until I heard a pebble drop, and he said, "Those are the young cubs coming down." Sure enough, we heard the mother growl and go back through the water and bring the cubs one by one to feed. Then shortly after that there was another sound, and he said, "Those are the crocodiles." I said, "How can you possibly know?" He said, "If you will listen, you can hear." He described the croc skimming along with its head above the water and

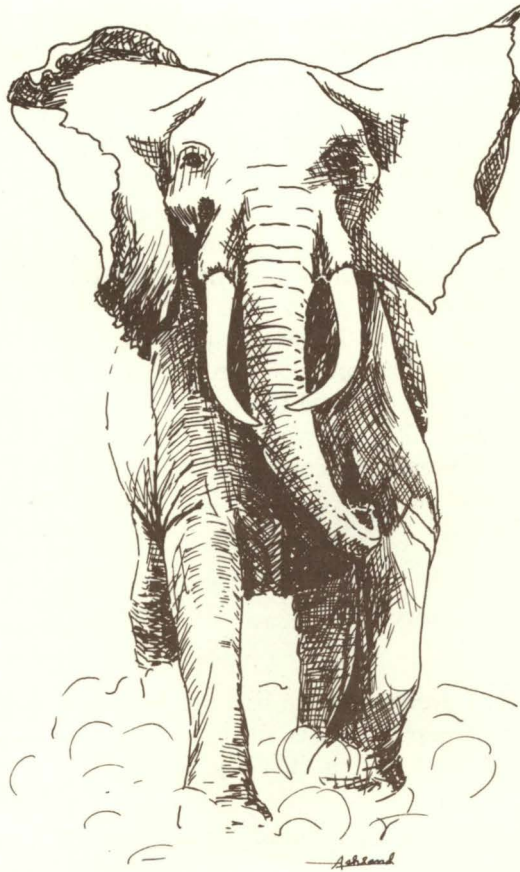
brought to my attention the sound of the water splashing upon its throat. It was coming to feed on the remains of the bushbuck.

### *The Wilderness Leadership School*

These organized treks or trails have led to the establishment of trails in the Kruger National Park and in other areas in South Africa. And they led me to start the Wilderness Leadership School, the first nongovernmental organization of its kind. To keep the Wilderness Leadership School going became the greatest struggle of my life. I left the Natal Parks Board in 1974, after 22 years service, and gave the Wilderness Leadership School my full-time attention. I again learned lessons, even at the age of 47. Working for the Natal Parks I took the salary for granted. The accountant knocks on your door each month to give you your check. When you are running a private organization and have to find money yourself, the situation is quite different, and it was a lesson in my life.

It has, however, been enormously rewarding, because out of the Wilderness Leadership School came the International Wilderness Leadership Foundation and the World Wilderness Congresses and friendships with people from almost every continent. I was given the opportunity of taking multi-racial groups—whose members were hostile toward one another—and watching the wilderness calm them down until they began to see each other as individuals and not just as people from different races or cultures.

As part of the experience of the wilderness trek—and we never have more than seven people at a time—we take turns in keeping watch at night. Often I would lie near the fire and study the person on watch without him or her being aware of my scrutiny. There would be lions or hyenas or elephants calling in the night, and the magic of Africa would weave its spell. The people on watch were told that they were there to protect their companions, because if a lion or a rhino stumbled into camp, people could be injured. For some participants it was the first time they had ever been alone, and I remember two young boys from Los Angeles who had never seen the stars before. To them the blazing constellations of the southern hemisphere were an awesome experience, leaving them tearful when they later tried to describe the heavens full of stars.



### *A Spiritual Experience*

One of the interesting lessons that has come out of the trails of the Wilderness Leadership School is the written experiences of many of the young people who have participated. You have to bear in mind that there were a lot of exciting moments on these trips, canoeing among hippo and crocodile, looking at feeding lions, and hearing leopard and hyena pass close to the unenclosed and simple camp. But their essays were not about the excitements of the trail; the majority wrote about their time on the watch. It was in fact a spiritual experience they were having, similar to the prophets of old who went into the desert or the mountains to have the time alone to meditate. T.E. Lawrence puts it best in his book, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. He writes:



This creed of the desert seemed inexpressible in words, and indeed in thought. It was easily felt as an influence, and those who went into the desert long enough to forget its open spaces and its emptiness were inevitably thrust upon God as the only refuge and rhythm of being . . . . This faith of the desert was impossible in the towns. It was at once too strange, too simple, too impalpable for export and common use. The idea, the ground-belief of all Semitic creeds was waiting there, but it had to be diluted to be made comprehensible to us. The scream of a bat was too shrill for many ears: the desert spirit escaped through our coarser texture. The prophets returned from the desert with their glimpse of God, and through their stained medium (as through a dark glass) showed something of the majesty and brilliance whose full vision would blind, deafen, silence us, serve us as it had served the Beduin, setting him uncouth, a man apart.

### *The World Wilderness Congresses*

At the end of every trek, we have an indaba, a Zulu word for a gathering. The participants sit in a circle, and each person has the opportunity of having their say.

In 1975, Magqubu and I were on a trail, and at the end of the five days, when we sat in the circle and had the indaba, Magqubu said, "It is time now for a big indaba, a great gathering of all those who have been on the trail." Magqubu's statement made me think, and I began working on a plan that led to the First World Wilderness Congress in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1977. It took place at a time of political turmoil following the riots in Soweto in 1976, but the World Wilderness Congress was an outstanding success in both local and international terms. For the first time in the history of South African nature conservation, there were black tribal game scouts and a Bushman sharing the congress platform with senior cabinet ministers, writers, artists, scientists, international bankers, and leaders in commerce and industry. Many international conservationists risked the ire of their respective governments and in some cases their own organizations so that they could show their solidarity with what we were doing for conservation in South Africa. We were the guardians of national parks, game reserves,

and endangered species that in the end belong to or are the responsibility of all mankind.

From Johannesburg the World Wilderness Congress went to Cairns on the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. The third one was held at Inverness and Findhorn in the north of Scotland. The Fourth World Wilderness Congress was in Denver and Estes Park in Colorado. I know many of you were there, and I believe it was the most successful Congress we have had. Some 65 nations participated, and it was a mini United Nations gathering without the rancor.

At all the congresses there was a representation of indigenous peoples, and I believe that their contribution made an important impact. The indigenous people symbolize the rejected part of ourselves; they are filled with much ancient wisdom that in many ways holds the key to the future of all societies. Many of the guides in the Wilderness Leadership School are tribal people and in using them on equal terms, in fact on terms sometimes unequal for us, we have made a contribution to the building of something new, not only in South Africa, but in the world.

### *A Single Green Leaf*

The symbol of the Wilderness Leadership School is the leaf of the *Erythrina caffra* or coral tree as it is called in America. The three-pointed leaf represents the philosophy of the Wilderness Leadership School: Man to God, Man to Man, and Man to Earth. The leaf was chosen 25 years ago by Magqubu Ntombela who said when he handed it to me, "Thatha lokho—take this leaf. It is the tree of the settlements of people as well as of the wilderness." I knew the tree well. In summer the leaves are green; in winter the leaves drop and blood red flowers take their place. It symbolizes the growth that man must undergo in order to become whole.

The idea of using a leaf as a symbol came from my reading of Grey Owl, an Englishman who became an Ojibway Indian in Ontario, Canada. Toward the end of his life Grey Owl said, "You are tired with years of civilization; I come and offer you—what? A single green leaf." In 1987 we brought the leaf back to North America as a symbol of the Fourth World Wilderness



Congress. A statuette of Grey Owl holding the leaf was made by Jonathan Bronson, and it was awarded to the leader of the delegation from the People's Republic of China in recognition of their conservation work.

One very important aspect of the Wilderness Leadership School's trails is that the school does not want to pit the participants against nature for any reason whatsoever. There are organizations that do this, and perhaps it is an aid in character building, but it is not our way. We tried it when the school first began, but something vital was lost. We hope now to provide not only a conservation awareness, but a deepening of the spirit too.

### *Courage and Hope*

In the conservation movement, which all of us here this evening are part of, there is a time when there is a great sense of helplessness. No matter where one goes in the world we see these dreadful mistakes that we are trying to right. We see a terrible ravaging of our world: the pollution of the rivers and seas, collapse of the catchments, advance of deserts, and now pollution of outer space. It can be overwhelming for anyone who is sensitive; it can drive them to a point of despair and madness in wondering if we will ever get it right. But those of us in the conservation movement live on and battle for what we know to be right, and I do not believe that it will be in vain. Today, with a group of university students, we discussed this theme for a moment, this overwhelming avalanche of destruction that is facing all of us, and the inclination to give up against something that is very hard to fight.

I told them the story of Thermopylae where some 300 Spartans under King Leonidas held the pass for three days against an overwhelming mass of Persians in 480 B.C. In our modern computer age, I wonder what the computer would reply, if given the information, if asked what chance the Spartans had. I believe the computer would have told them to run, and run like hell. But they did not, and although they were annihilated, their courage and endurance has come down through the ages: "Stranger bear word to the Spartans that we lie here keeping their charge." So let us take courage, and if we face an overwhelming mass of people intent upon destroying our



conservation work, we will sell ourselves at great cost, and through this inspire those who follow us.

I hope I have conveyed to you my feeling for the essence of the lecture title, "Using Wilderness Experiences to Enhance Human Potential and Understanding." Everything I have achieved in my own life, I owe to the wilderness experience. I have seen countless other lives molded and changed by encounters with wilderness; in most cases, only a few days in the wilderness atmosphere has been enough to change a life of despair into one of hope.

To again quote Sigurd Olson: "When the history of the 20th century is written, I believe that the conservation movement will be regarded as the most important aspect of our century. Perhaps even the only redeeming feature."

I thank you for your patience this evening and for the opportunity of being with you. In conclusion, let me remind you of the story in Greek mythology of Pandora's Box. You will remember that when it was opened all the bees representing the ills of the world flew out. Only one remained, and it was the bee of hope. So it is always upon hope that we must build our future. We have to hold onto it, because the very moment we give up hope, we have lost.

I would again like to thank your college and the university for inviting me to talk this evening. In your dean, Dr. John Hendee, you have a man who has in a balanced way served the cause of conservation for a long time. It has been a privilege to know and to work with him since the Second World Wilderness Congress in Scotland in 1983.

I also thank Ed Krumpke for a most instructive journey yesterday and for his many other kindnesses. Vance Martin, the president of the International Wilderness Leadership Foundation, the sponsoring organization of the Fourth World Wilderness Congress, is here this evening. I first met him in 1980 at the Second World Wilderness Congress in Australia. He has done a wonderful job in putting the Third and the Fourth World Wilderness Congresses together.

Finally, I must thank my colleagues in South Africa with whom I have worked for 36 years in the cause of conservation and wilderness. Some—Norman Deane, Ken Rochat, and Owen Letley—have passed into the next world, but others, such as Nick Steele, Hugh Dent, Barry Clements, John Tinley, Ken Tinley, Mediceni Gumede, Bruce Dell, Gqakaza Ntombela, Paul Dutton, John Clark, Jack Vincent, Drummond Densham, and Magqubu Ntombela, carry on the struggle.

God, bless Africa,  
Guard her children,  
Guide her leaders,  
And give her peace.







