

# Travel The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

We approached Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg after a 15 hour flight from New York. Late afternoon sun sculpted South Africa's largest city. The contemporary airport was busy. There were black faces, white faces and brown faces representing the several different cultures: English, Afrikaners, Indian and that of several major black tribes, including Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana.

There were to be adventures ahead. Capetown, founded three centuries ago to equip ships sailing from Europe to the Orient; Kruger

National Park and adjacent private game farms where we would chase animals through the wilderness; the ostrich farms of the Little Karoo; Bushman cave paintings in the Drakensburg mountains north of Durban.

Since there are too many adventures to tell in one or two stories, I will share my daily with you in separate installments as spring progresses here in Michigan. Today we will travel to Kruger National Park the eastern edge of South Africa, adjacent to Mozambique.

— Iris Jones

## South African Diary



Visitors to Kruger National Park view a myriad of animals from land rovers. Some, such as the monkey, will come approach visitors. The animals generally behave as if the visitors are not there. The giraffe eats peacefully from a high tree. The rhino ignores the land rovers.

PHOTOS BY IRIS JONES

# Ah, wilderness Wonderous African park

**KRUGER NATIONAL PARK, South Africa** — This is no Yellowstone Park, with half-tame bears begging beside the car. This is wilderness, herds of impala and warthog and buck feeding together beside the road, a lioness padding towards the river, a giraffe eating from a high tree.

Incredibly, the animals behave as if we were not here, zebras drifting past a family of baboons walking single-file beside our van, a Greater Kudu grazing nearby without raising his head.

Our guide, Tony, assures us that the animals are accustomed to the smell of gasoline and the sound of cars, but that they would run away if they caught our human scent. That is why visitors must photograph through the wide clear windows of the van, without ever getting out. Otherwise the animals might not be here for future visitors.

Would they attack us? No tourist has ever been killed in Kruger National Park, but irate elephants have been known to bang up private cars when drivers got too close, ignoring the warning signs.

WE STARTED into the park in the midafternoon sun, after flying across the red-dirt farmland of the Transvaal from Johannesburg to Skukuza, at the southern entrance of the park. The animals are very visible among the trees, in dry scrub-covered soil devastated by three years of drought.

Impalas are scattered along the



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contributing travel editor

roadside. Baboons sit with their babies on a log down a side road. Tony stops suddenly; only after we blink do we see the giraffe rising in high spotted glory above a tall tree.

"Lion!"

The lioness is the same color as the sandy soil, moving in shadow among the scrub bushes. We follow her along the road and turn towards a river full of large smooth rocks. Only when a 'rock' raises its head do we realize that they are hippos. High in a distant tree, a baboon is on sentinal duty. It squeals a warning, the lioness disappears along the river.

As we drive on, Tony points out a huge crocodile that makes a rock-grey shape against red rocks across the river. Termite mounds rise 10 feet high under the trees. There are zebra ahead, wildebeest to the left browsing among warthogs and impalas.

THERE ARE very few cars as we drive west into the lowering sun towards Pretoriuskop Rest Camp, one of

14 camps in the park. Cars must be in the camps or out of the park by 6 p.m. or the driver is heavily fined.

We find good beds in large rooms with adjoining bathrooms, in a village of whitewashed cottages surrounding a small store and dining room. The cottages cost \$20 for two, more with kitchens, less without showers. John Verhoef, senior information officer for the park, briefs us over a barbecue of wild animal meat.

Kruger is a fenced-in park the size of Massachusetts, set aside in 1884 to preserve a vanishing wildlife. It was to be a malaria-free zone, unsuitable for farming but ideal for park. You must still take malaria-preventive medicine before and during your park stay.

Authorities studied the natural migratory patterns of the animals. The park's charge is to maintain that habitat so that animals can live naturally without human interference.

THE RANGERS must compensate

for the fence, which stops the big animals from migrating into adjoining farmlands, where they would probably be shot and would certainly spread foot-and-mouth disease. They do this by providing water holes and culling the big animals with dart guns when there are too many for the natural food supply.

This means that the major herbivores—elephants, hippos, buffalo—are controlled. Otherwise, the animals live and die by a natural predatory system. There are 130 mammal species, 470 kinds of birds and 47 different reptiles in the park, but none is more dramatic than the elephants. We hope to see them on our dawn drive tomorrow.

5:30 a.m. The long grass under the trees is softly brown in the morning light. Hills are misted to the horizon. It is overcast enough to spoil our photographs but not enough to bring rain.

Sleepily, "There's zebra."

"There is a big animal against these far rocks." Two rhinos stand against a heap of grey rock. Rhinos were extinct

here in 1938, but were reintroduced in 1951.

Five wildebeest drift away to the left as the sun rises, sidelighting the grass lush to thatch roofs. A full-grown steenbok is so tiny it is up to its armpits in yellow grass. It is easy to see the striped pajamas of the zebra, but at first we don't see the three giraffe grazing in high trees 20 feet away. More zebra graze near a gigantic rhino half a mile down the road.

On any "ordinary day on the veld", the animals graze together like groups of children in a schoolyard. Only the predatory lions and cheetahs scare them away.

The impala and the vervet monkeys are enjoying the sun on a plateau above the bend of a river when the warning comes. First the impala leave, drifting steadily away. Then the monkeys leave in a squadron. The baboon across the river lets out a warning cry. There is a lion nearby, but we cannot see it.

We are near the Mozambique border

here, where elephant rustlers often break down the fence to steal the animals for their costly tusks. We are ready for breakfast at Lower Sable Camp. Like all the larger camps in the park, it has restaurant and shop facilities.

As we leave the camp, Tony points towards the river. At last, elephants. They are downhill 300 yards away browsing in trees that are literally "as high as an elephant's eye." On around a bend, and there are more beside the road: a mother, a six-year old and a baby. The baby knocks down a tree with its front foot as it feeds, its back foot relaxed, crossed.

We have seen it all now in 24 hours in the park: lion, hippo, rhino, impala, baboon, wildebeest, buffalo, warthog, zebra, giraffe, and now the elephants. We have seen them at a distance through a car window. Now we move on to a private game park where we will ride off the road in open vehicles.

## Tips for enjoying national park

A national park and a private game reserve are designed for visitors to watch and experience the animals in their natural setting.

It's handy to hire a guide who knows where the animals are. Our guide worked for Comalt, the only service based full-time in the park. Comalt also flies visitors the 500 kilometers from Johannesburg to Skukuza, where we entered the park.

It is a half-hour ride from the Skukuza airport into the private game reserves of Sabi Sands. Here you can enjoy good accommodations and be driven directly to where the animals may have migrated that day.

For more information on South Africa contact your travel agent or the South African Tourist Corporation, Rockefeller Center, 610 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10020.

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