



Mdukatshani Rural Development Project

A note on these news letters they were published sporadically at times between the years of 1975 till 1994 they were typed and copied on a drum copier for distribution. For archival purposes we have left spelling and layout as much as possible. People are welcome to use the material for research but please credit the organisation or contact me at khonya@yebo.co.za for a word version.

Rauri Alcock

Private Bag 154,
Wasbank,
Northern Natal.
March 1975

Dear Cynthia 1

We are sitting on the new hill, with a new world around us, and we thought it was time we let you know our news.

Our lease at Maria Ratschitz Mission is due to end in June this year, and there have been many months of uncertainty, wondering whether the project could find new land, or whether we would have to close down. In mid-January we grabbed a week and set out to look for another farm.

Following our noses, and some wild, unsignposted roads, we landed up on the hottest day of the summer in the steaming Tugela River Valley.

“Where are we?” we asked a storekeeper. He frowned.

“This place hasn’t got a name,” he said. We talked to him about farms and he pointed down the valley to a place where he had heard there was land for sale.

“But nobody in his right mind would buy there,” he said encouragingly.

“The Blacks cut your fences, steal your cattle”

We crossed a drift, wound along some empty, bushy hillsides, and found ourselves on land bare of grass but dense with thorn thicket. Over the river we could see KwaZulu- hundreds of thatched huts almost invisible against the rocky hills. And adjoining “our” farm was more of KwaZulu ... more huts, and dozens of small Black herdboys who deserted their flocks of goats to come and look at us.

“This is it,” we said.

A week later, after some hair-raising adventures exploring “our” almost trackless, fenceless 6 000 acres we had found more erosion, more bare ground, more thorn thicket. But we were still saying: “This is it.”

If we had had the choice of land anywhere in KwaZulu to try out our ideas we would have chosen the worst bit of all, Msinga. Nowhere else is there such a population, such poverty, such staggering soil erosion. Msinga is a byword for destruction and hopelessness. And we had found a farm next door to Msinga, which looked quite as bad as any part of Msinga.

We are still discovering the history of our farm, but briefly it is in such a bad condition because it was part of a block of notorious labour farms. These farms were owned by Whites, but were densely populated by Africans who provided six months service to the farmer-owner in return for residence and the right to run unlimited numbers of goats and cattle. The White owners seldom visited these farms, except to collect workers.

Then about 7 years ago the government abolished the “six months system”.

The African families were unwilling to provide fulltime work at the wages offered reputedly between (R2 and R6 a month) so a massive government removal cleared the farms, and they now stand empty, but ruined.

It is only six weeks since we discovered the place, but today the farm belongs to CAP, we are living in tents in the bush, the first fences are up, a reservoir is dug, there are geese on the riverbank and turkeys scratching on the kopjes. We live with the sounds of women singing as they hack at the thornscrub, their pangas clinking in rhythm, and we fall asleep to the thump of drums across the river.

As soon as we had decided the farm was what we wanted, we collected together all our Ratschitz staff and took several Landrover trips down to the valley to have a look at the land. Together we climbed the hills, looked at the bare places, dug soil samples – and fell into the river at the end of the day to cool off. Camping in the open on the riverbank we discovered a ferry, which lands on one of our beaches. MaDlamini (Poultry Manager), all 250 pounds of her, paid a “bob” and left land for the first and, she says, the last time in her life. These were the diversions – most of the time our people talked.

“It’s going to be tough – but we want to do it,” was their verdict eventually. A meeting of our African loanes followed and it was then the turn of our Directors. They were marvelous. Within a week of our report on the farm Archbishop Hurley had arranged a meeting in situ, and sitting on tree stumps on a cliff above the river the Directors voted “yes” to the purchase. Our Farm Advisory Committee came to this meeting too, and reported that the farm had considerable potential, although obviously lots of rehabilitation would be necessary. In the past month we have been selling cattle to raise the purchase price, the sale papers have been signed, and so for better or for worse, the project has a new home.

And what a home! This is Calamity Gulch country (plenty of calamities and plenty of gulches). Gun running and coffin making are the only two industries.

Our nearest “town” is Tugela Ferry – only 18 km or 10 drifts away. The drifts are the important statistic. We have spent five hours at one of these drifts waiting for a flash flood to subside. It is a world where the rivers dictate life. Some are sandy, rocky, dusty places, which roar down in a torrent once or twice a year. But the Tugela flows steadily all the time. It is Natal’s biggest river, fed by storm far away upcountry, so that we have sudden floods while the sun is blazing.

“I’ll start work on Monday,” says a local tribesman who has joined us. “If the river is down ...” Daily he comes across on the ferry, grabbing a tin and baling as soon as he is seated, like the other passengers. When the river is up the boat disappears from view between wild brown waves and we hold our breath and pray. We cannot decide who is more courageous – the passengers or the infant ferryman.

This is a world where people turn litter into music. Crushed Coke cans make violins, which sing along every footpath. Rusty oil tins, strung with strips of motorcar tube, make guitars. Paper is precious. There was a gasp of dismay as I tossed some old newspaper into a fire. Women walk around our tents, picking up torn scraps, which they carefully take home. We should have learnt before now. For years Neil’s staff have sent memos on the blank margins of newspapers, while our subscription to “The Star” has supplied a community of 500 with toilet paper, tablecloths and cigarette wrappings.

This is a world where the people care so much more than we ever understood when we drove through those destroyed valleys. We never noticed the terraces, painstakingly built over the years. We never noticed the wild gardens ... aloes brought from other places, tree orchids

collected in the kloofs and planted near the kraal. And why did we never wonder at the big, shady wild trees, which still cover the hills, even though the grass has gone? These people traditionally collect only the dead wood. The big trees are one of the splendours of these rugged, broken hills.

Driving through we never discovered the small dams, dug by hand to catch spring water. We never even really noticed the hedges of aloes and euphorbias – a poor man's fencing, but how beautiful. Now we are joining the poor men and many of the internal fences on the new farm will be hedges of wild plants without a strand of wire. We would rather spend money on wages than wire, and already women are piling up barricades of chopped scrub – the start of our biodegradable fences!

At the moment the trees are full of small black (and white!) figures, shaking the branches like monkeys to get at the sweet wild fruits. There are red and purple berries, tiny golden apples and fat green fruits. We have learnt the Zulu names but have yet to find the Latin ones.

But there is very little grass. So the new farm will be called the place of lost grassed – Emdukatsani. And one day, when the grasses come back, its history will be remembered. After the CAP Directors had agreed to purchase the farm, we stayed on and spent the night there, marking the occasion by scratching among the stones in the twilight to scatter the first grass seed. Already, if you get onto your knees and peer at the ground, you can see the green shoots of change.

We hope when the grasses come back the ants will go. They have made the farm a place of dancing. You cannot hold onto your dignity with ants swarming up your legs, so you keep hopping from one foot to another. Everytime we go away we forget how bad they are – until we come back to start dancing again!

There is so much work to be done we resolutely do not look too far ahead. Before we move in June we must have at least some homes built. Local African builders have started on the first stonewalls, but there is a long way to go.

The nearest African school is 20 minutes drive away, so we will be taking our farm school with us. Our Black neighbours say it will be one of the best things we can do. (Of the 18 young women working with us already, only two have ever had any schooling.)

Neil has had his first meeting with local tribesmen, explaining what we are there for, and our African committee has started the diplomatic round, visiting local chiefs and inviting them to Ratschitz to see what we have already done. In some ways we have been very lucky. For years Msinga tribeswomen have been coming to Ratschitz to cut thatch. Some of these women are now our nextdoor neighbours, so we find we have friends in the area.

“Your maas....” They say. “We do not even need the thatch anymore but we go to taste that mass.”

Word of our maas has spread, and all along the road to Tugela Ferry people stretch out their hands and shout “Maas – when are you bringing us mass”.

People come to our camp before dawn, waiting quietly among the trees until we stir. They come asking if we can sell fowls, or cattle. Or they ask for work. Any work, at any price. But please, please let us work.

So.... CAP starts on a new phase. Where it will lead us we can only guess. We will be writing monthly newsletters to our many friends, but if you want to receive this, perhaps you could help us with the postage?

We are going to be very hard up and frankly public relations will be one of our less justifiable expenditures.

Are we scared? Of course. We look at our bare hills, our dried-up streams. We look across the river at all those kraals. We look at the crowd of people already waiting, and we wonder if the odds against success are too great, if the need will not overwhelm us. But we believe it is right to try, and we keep our panics private. Most of all, however, we are happy. We feel as if, for the first time, we are living in Africa.

Neil and Creina

Private Bag 154,
Wasbank,
Northern Natal.
April (1975)

Dear

Month Number Two and we are tiptoeing on a minefield. Our boundary fence is inching over the hills, too slow for our needs but too fast for the watchful people in the Reserve, where hundreds of homes have felt the tremors of our arrival. The fence will eventually stretch out over more than 26 000 metres – every one of those metres a threat to somebody who has collected wood or wild fruits or medicines here, somebody who has grazed cattle or goats, who can now get no water for himself or his stock without coming onto ‘our’ land.

Daily we are reminded we are interlopers.

“Where were you brought up?” we ask a new man.

“Here”, he replies without expression. “My kraal was on that ridge...”

Six years ago he was moved, but although thornscrub has covered the old fields, there has not been time enough to obliterate the signs of the homes that were here.

We find small signs of panic everywhere. An old granny, limping home bent double under the weight of a bundle of umkhukhulo plants, the raw materials for the brooms she makes for a living. She’s carrying out all she can before the fence is final.

“Have a lift?” we offer. She peers at us, recognizes us, and without reply staggers faster.

In isolated places in the bush we find building poles, hurriedly cut and stacked. We pretend not to see the women who lean their loads into the twilight shadows. We can read their thoughts.

”It’s no longer our land, grab quickly before it is too late.”

Within our boundary is a field of mealies.

“I see somebody has a nice field here,” says Neil. “Whose is it?”

“We don’t know.”

“Isn’t it somebody local?”

“Probably”.

“Surely you must see who goes to work in that field?”

“No.”

“Well tell the owner he must not be afraid we will interfere with his field. He is welcome to go on cultivating it. He can use our fence as one side of his garden.”

“All right,” with a grin. “We will tell him.”

The first border incident centred around the donkeys. Donkeys are Msinga’s only cash crop. They survive the droughts, multiply rapidly and sell at R5 a piece to the Basuthos who come down from the Drakensberg on annual buying trips. Donkeys swarm everywhere at Msinga, unherded and apparently ownerless. They assume right of way on the roads – and not even the Johannesburg taxis argue. Hooter blasts won’t raise an ear twitch.

For the time being cattle and goats can go on using parts of Emdukatshani – but not the donkeys.

“There is only one thing to do with donkeys,” advised our White neighbours. “Shoot the bloody things. You’ll never find a donkey owner.”

Instead we called a meeting of local donkey proprietors. Neil, expecting no response, had forgotten the appointment and had to be fetched to meet the men sitting on the rocks. “We will do our best but don’t blame us if we don’t keep all the donkeys away,” they warned. “Some come from a long way down the valley and don’t belong to us. But if you ever have trouble, please try talking to us first.”

Since then the donkeys have been kept away. We sighed with relief. We were over one sticky patch!

However our second border incident loomed up, and this times our talk – it out policy was less successful. On top of the mountain water is scarce and many footpaths wander from the African Reserve to the warm shallow pools of what is now ‘our’ river. When the barbed wire began to cut across footpaths we tried to reassure people. We had left a gate. They could go on taking their stock water, but would they please use the gate.

Soon afterwards we started work on our first dam nearby, and the trouble erupted.

“Our dam, “ we call it.

”Our dam,” say the Africans too. Years ago their picks and shovels hollowed out the small pool which we are now enlarging to provide a permanent water supply.

“This dam is for people only at this stage,” we said. “If you help us we can have water for everyone, including stock, all the year round.”

The women watched with approval as the little dam grew. It would mean only half the distance to walk to fetch water in future, and clean spring water at that.

However the earth walls had been up three days when wealthy old cattle owner, Mr. Xulu, drove his 30 cattle, dozens of goats and a few donkeys to the dam.

“Taste that,” the women said indignantly when Neil arrived next day.

“It tastes of urine.” (It did).

Xulu was summoned for discursion. He was charming. He promised never to do it again, swore he wanted peaceful co-existence, and would of course co-operate in future.

But his stocks were soon back again fouling the dam. Neil prepared a note of complaint to the local induna, but the induna had already set off to call on Mr. Xulu with a tribal reprimand. Today, on the Chief’s orders he is using a shovel at the site to expiate his crime. As most of the local people own no cattle at all feeling against the old man seems to run high.

This is trigger-happy country, and it seems wise to avoid trouble when quarrels are violently settled.

“Sorry I can’t work with a pick,” said BegaBantu Ncunu, apologetically.

“I can’t use this arm because I have a bullet in my shoulder and it hurts when I move. I was ambushed taking my cattle to water.”

The next day work stopped while he was lowered into a hole in the red hills. Ambushed again, he had died with four bullets in him.

It is not entirely for strategic reasons that we are now trying to build invisible houses at Emdukatshani! We are following the example of the Africans in our valley who have combined stone and thatch to merge with rock and tree so that you need sharp eyes to see their homes. We want to be as unobtrusive, as much part of these hills.

We are lucky to be here. Just a little further along the Tugela, the hills glitter with tin shacks. Costs rule Msinga. The shanties are made of flattened drums, secondhand corrugated iron, or a patch-work of both. This is the architecture of the desperate. In a land without grass the tin roof is the only alternative to no roof at all.

We find it ironic that not many kilometers away the White farms are golden with thatch grass, which will be burnt with the first spring rains. Is there no way of letting the farmer make money from his thatch, while providing Msinga with the cheap, cool roofing it needs?

We started out with some grand ideas of combining the best White architectural knowledge with tribal building skills. The White architects came and talked, and even sketched some tentative plans, but perhaps the two worlds were too far apart.

“How much are you prepared to spend?” they asked.

“R120 a home – certainly no more than R200.”

They blinked. Could it be done? It could. All our African neighbours build on this budget.

“But our men cannot read plans”, we had to explain. “And that roof you have drawn – the cows would eat it.” (At Ratschitz the cows steadily munched the thatch until it was trimmed out of reach).

Intimidated, the architects put away their electric calculator, stopped talking of ‘picture windows that you can get cheap at Durban demolishers’ and drove away. But we hope they will return – they have promised to help us build simple solar heaters at R20 each.

Meanwhile we are back with our local Black builders.

“I can’t do squares,” says one, nervously fingering his earring, and are lucky to come out of the deal with a profit.

“People always promise to pay. Then when the work is done they tell us we misunderstood the price. But we have finished the building and we can’t take it down.”

This is the uncertain, slow world of the illiterate. Neil sits hour after hour talking out terms. Then comes the sub-contracting. Mrs. So-and-so can plaster. Young Ntombi will thatch. The floors would best be done by

Every day somebody comes back on some pretext to discuss the terms of agreement again – checking and rechecking that we both accept and understand the contract.

But though they have gaps, our builders also have skills we know nothing about. Grizzled Umzimuka Ngcindi boasted that he could make “real imitation cement blocks.” “Wonderful,” we said. “But er.... Well, we don’t want cement blocks.”

The arguments and persuasions spread over two days, and Neil was taken on a conducted tour of the neighbourhood to admire Mr. Ngcindi’s imitation cement blocks. Eventually Mr. Ngcindi gave in. Of course he could build with stone. But he would still need his own “cement”. He climbed around the hills for a bit until he found what he wanted in the round under his feet. He is right, mixed with water it makes wonderful cement!

One day one of our most reticent men, Kwesekele Mbatha, came looking for Neil with a lot on his mind.

“How much will you charge to teach me to measure properly?” he asked.

“Will the White girl teach me to use a level and a square? How much will it cost? We have to build rounds because squares always go wrong. People want two rooms, four rooms, six rooms. But how can you make rooms in a round?”

So our training is under way. Our builders are “learning square” as we work together. They are learning to use rulers, to understand pitch, the weakness of the square and the strength of the triangle. And we hope they will also learn to estimate the costs of their work.

With hit-and-miss builders we don’t know whether our ideas will work. But even if it is all a mess – at least the mess will be hidden from view. The Emdukatshani visitor will have to do a lot of wandering around to find the farm buildings, for our sites, at least, are invisible.

Sometimes of course we wonder whether buildings are necessary at all. Linda’s literacy classes spread out happily under the thorn trees, and we bet nobody has a workshop like ours. As it grows beneath a grove of tree fuschias, the men call it “Starlite”. We are making small working terraces among the twisted trunks, with a roof to follow one day as “longterm development”!

We wanted to wait a bit before starting to teach. Linda arrived to make sure our Ratschitz men did not miss out on their literacy classes by being here. The Msinga people watched her at work.

“We would like to learn too,” they said. “How much? How much?”

As the world spreads that learning is free, the classes swell. Linda has never had so little time in her day. She’s now busy designing an adult beginners course in maths. Our builders need it. Even the herdboys need it. Ever wondered ho they keep track of their stock when they cannot count to 10?

Our last words should perhaps have been our first. We have all been shattered by the death of Mrs. Prisca Msibi, colleague and friend for ten years. Killed with her in a road accident were little Bheki, Pumaleni, Jabulile and Sizakele. To lose a whole family suddenly like this is hard to grasp. The misery had clouded our days.

Neil and Creina

UMDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 37
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3325

MAY 1975: THE GREAT TREK

We're under siege. Scores of tribesmen have descended on Umdukatshani, waving sticks and axes with excitement. Neil, with a hunted look on his face, makes brief appearances at camp, sees yet another gang approaching, and dashes for the hills.

He needn't bother. Sooner or later he is cornered. Slipping into the lavatory he emerges to find himself encircled by men.

Camouflaged behind a tree he tries to shave.

"There he is," comes a cry, and once more he is mobbed.

"I can't take it," he groans at night. "I've taken on too much. I never knew it would be like this."

The siege started a week ago with a handful of men shivering in the dark outside our tent.

"I was coming back from a beerdrink," said one. "And I looked down at the river and saw the sand BLACK with cattle. Now I heard you were willing to sell, and I have got my money with me and...."

The cattle have arrived and we bet there isn't anyone in 100km who hasn't heard the news. There have been moments when we wondered whether the distant cities have not been vacated.

"We've taken leave to come down," emplead. "You MUST sell to us now – we can't wait a few weeks. We have to be back in Goli – Johannesburg on Monday."

The cattle trek was quite an event. We had kept postponing it because of our dread of driving 900 cattle 100 km along the highways and byways of KwaZulu. The road prickled with signs saying "Dangerous Mountain Pass", "Dead Slow", "Sharp Bends". Where the signs had peeled away or the posts keeled over, you had to guess at the warning.

When we eventually left the shadow of our cold highveld mountain we were an impressive expedition. There were two Landrovers bedecked with flags and piled with blankets, pots, bales of hay, food- and logs of wood for fires along the way.

There were eight horsemen to keep the long line of cattle moving, cantering after strays, yipping, whistling, singing encouragement.

And bringing up the rear were three little boys – Scoot (10) Franseni (12) and GG (7) riding bareback on the Shetland ponies.

As befits his age Neil had been given to dignified job of driving a Landrover, but he could not stand the tensions and soon swapped places to lope up and down alongside the cattle, restless as an old hen.

Footnotes:

Umdukatshani: Our Zulu friends have corrected our
"Emdukatshani" Our Zulu spelling is as bad as our English!

Our days started an hour before dawn and we moved slowly, so slowly from the frosts and clinging white mists of the highveld vleis down into the warmer thorn country. Lenge, the hanging mountain stayed forever far away, making us wonder sometimes if we were moving at all. We made our meals on grassy verges – hot sweet coffee sipped out of a jug (somebody forget to pack the cups!) and goats meat roasted on the coals. At night the men stoked the logs into a blaze and deep, happy songs rang out hour after hour while the cattle lowed around us. The singing stopped only once when a jackal howled nearby. “How big is a jackal?” asked the small boys, and they huddled closer together.

Michael Mabaso spoke for us all as he rolled in his blanket on the hard ground under the stars,
“Icamping yinto elongile”
(Camping- this is the life).

From the moment we left White farm land behind and tramped into fenceless KwaZulu territory, we were a sensation.

“Oh just look at those cattle,” exclaimed men and women as we passed. “What beautiful cattle....”

“Just imagine if those cattle belonged to Black people,” said one.

“They do – they’re our cattle,” grinned a horseman. He was mocked with shrieks of laughter. (But he was right!)

A lorry drew up next to us one morning and a familiar face beamed out.

“Hell, what beautiful cattle,” said Chief Owen Sithole, KwaZulu’s Minister of Agriculture and also one of our CAP Directors. We were passing close to the Chief’s home on a mountainous shoulder high above the dark gorges of the Tugela. The Chief climbed out of his truck to watch the cattle passing, muttering in admiration, the gleam in his eye that of the true cattle man.

The cattle trek as the greatest publicity stunt we could have devised.

An ancient with beard and white horse galloped down one hillside to keep pace with the trek. As he rode along next to us he talked terms.

“My money’s at home, but I’ll be down in a day or two. Save some for me,” he begged.

The last two days of the march were full of drama. We were sharing the roads with do-or-die taxis and buses and lorries which bore down on us, hooters blaring, accelerators flat.

One bus tore into the herd, scattering the animals and bumping the horses. The conductor and a passenger leapt out to manhandle the frightened, milling animals. Hot words were exchanged.

“Get back with that wreck,” cursed our cowboys. The bus kept moving. Neil jumped into its path and stood heroically waiting. The bus kept coming – and a gun poked out of the driver’s window. Our cowboys grabbed stones.

“OK” grinned the gunman, “You win.”

“Sorry, sorry,” said the driver when the bus stopped at last. “But it’s not my fault. This bus has no brakes and I can’t stop even if I want to. Now tell me, are you selling those cattle...?”

Passenger heads popped out with the same question.

“How much? Where do we find you? How many can we have?”

Lorries and taxis ripped through our ranks, stopped, reversed, apologized for their speed and asked: “Are those cattle for sale?”

The moon was rising when we crossed the Tugela River on the third evening, with the hills of home at last in sight.

“Oh my poor feet,” moaned Nkabinde. “It’s madness to go on. Let’s stop and sleep here.”

“Sure,” replied his colleagues. “You stop, but we’ll go on. Just don’t forget what happens to strangers in this country....”

Nkabinde kept going – with gusto.

The last miles were slow. The long line of cattle straggled out, footsore animals limping at the back as we used to moonlight to lead us home. At 9 p.m., after 14 hours on his little horse, GG finally fell asleep on his pony’s neck, and we gently lifted him into a Landrover. For a seven-year-old he had done pretty well.

At 10 p.m. on May 24th the CAP cattle reached their new home at Umdukatsani, and too tired even to sample the sweetveld grasses, sat down in weary humps. We had supper near midnight, the men for once too tired to sing themselves to sleep.

Many of our friends have asked about the cattle and our ‘African loanes’, and this is as good a time as any to tell you this bit of our history. We arrived at Maria Ratschitz ten years ago to find a derelict farm, no money in sight and plenty of time to talk. So for 12 months Neil talked and talked. Here and there a man began to trust cautiously. We started to work together. First a garden of peas and carrots, then a field of potatoes. Man and women worked for nothing, waiting till we had earned an income.

Then two men came forward with an offer.

“Some of us are family men,” they said. “It is tough to live on nothing. We have our savings here. Won’t you take them as a loan to pay wages until we get some income?”

So CAP started with an African investment of R400 cash.

A year later this became R20 000 when many local Africans pooled cattle into a common herd as loans to the embryo CAP.

“An African cattle co-op – It’s never worked anywhere in Africa,” the cynics told us. (They still do!) But here we are, nine years later, going strong.

No cattle or cash? Well your work will do.

Most of our farm workers were men with nothing when they started, but their energy and our deferred pay system has given them a major stake in CAP’s assets today. All our members get 8% interest and can withdraw what they need in either cattle or cash.

By January this year our initial 700 cattle had grown to 1 300, giving us the means of buying Umdukatsani. 400 were sold before the trek, and another 400 must go as the sparse grasses on the new farm can only carry a small herd (also – incidentally! – we need a bit more cash to finish paying off the farm!)

In the past we marketed most of our beef on the White market. Now, as the siege is showing us, we can look to a future on the Black Market instead!

We had not wanted to sell till July when the move was over, we were organized, permits had been arranged. We’ve been defeated.

Nobody could withstand the pressure. So we sit under our tree, writing receipts for dirty, worn bundles of money that have been saved over many years, stored in the thatch, under the

bed, or in a hole in the ground. There are crumpled pound notes, pushed over with shaking hands – somebody's dream 20 years old.

And, until banking day (don't shudder, dear auditor) we are in turn stuffing the notes into suitcases and boxes – and yes, of course, under the mattress too!

So we go into the last month of our move – still far from ready.

Winter has settled in, and the freezing nights and early mornings make us wonder if it isn't time to bring the camping season to a close! Creina is still teaching the children at home, and they start school half an hour before sunrise, swathed in rugs, almost on top of the fire.

The winter has changed our hills, turning the marulas gold, the tambooties into flaming reds and oranges. We can't help wondering who needs grass with trees like this around us. The river has become tranquil and reflective. It's the ferryman's off-season everyone wades across to avoid the fare. He came looking for us last week to ask for the loan of our welding equipment – he thinks the hole in his boat is getting dangerous and better be fixed before summer.

Our month ended with good news and sad news. Sikhosiphi Mcwange, our cripple chair-maker, is on the mend and skimming round his ward in a new wheel chair. When Neil took him out of hospital for Christmas he was warned there was no hope for the boy and Sikosiphi would probably die on the trip home. Neil and Linda refused to accept this, and their prolonged, unpleasant and exhausting nursing pulled him round. Staff at Charles Johnson hospital took over when we left off, and they are as happy as we are at his recovery.

Bellina Nkabinde returned from hospital with a 'no hope' note at the same time as Sikosiphi, and this month timid, big-eyed Billina died of throat cancer after many long, wasting months. She was one of our original wool spinners.

Steve Dyer, our English volunteer, also died this month. He died senselessly and tragically, leaving us all with some of his own sense of utter futility.

Neil and Creina.

Umdukatshani,

P. O. Box 37,
WEENEN.
June 1975

This comes to you from Packingcase Palace.

The move is over and a tired and tatty community is making itself at home in the bush. There are 30 of us, including one deaf mute, one dwarf hunch back, three legless men – and Mrs. Bompan and Dora Mabaso with babies due any minute. More people are to join us later, but right now tent seams are straining.

Somvete Khulu (84) our grand old man shrugs off the discomforts with the nonchalance of a veteran of many moves. He was one of the 10 000 shifted to Limehill seven years ago. He's started from scratch before, he can do it again. So what? But for first-timers like the Alcocks it's a new experience.

Our camp is a bit of an eyesore. Nobody owns much, but a few battered tables and chairs huddle together in the dust, or hang in the trees, out of reach of the relentless, munching termites and roosting turkeys. There are not enough tents, and only two buildings completed, so men sleep in the Landrover cabs or, like us, pile bundles and boxes to make walls. When the wind blows the wall shake, or slip or fall down, but at least the roofs are secure. Zulu-style we have put up our roofs first (when you use mud for mortar your walls need the shelter). So though walls may be in short supply we have a few roofs to share round!

There are some drawbacks to living in a lean-to. Like the daily dismantling of walls. You want to buy beads sir? Certainly. Can you just wait while we pull down the wall there. The beads are in the bottom boxes. Cushions for the chair order? Just remove

And damn, WHO put the 1974 files in the middle of the west wall?

(You have second thoughts about using your reference library when the books are built into the house).

It is midwinter now, and we can answer the question: Do we get frost here? Yes we do! We stoke up our campfires, but there is more light than warmth in the blaze.

The men are weary. There have been too many days that start at dawn, too many breakfasts eaten long dark, too many moonlit roundups.

Our one boundary is not yet fenced and the cattle have been determined to break through and head home for the highveld. We have had cattle rustlers and heartwater. The cattle count is never right and we do not know if the missing animals are lost, stolen or strayed. And, of course, there has been the never-ending queue of cattle-buyers.

"It's funny," puffed Bheki Myaka one day, "how deaf you become when you live in this country!" The beseeching cries of two cattle customers slowly faded away as they climbed up the hill. There just hasn't been time to do the polite thing and escort each buyer on an inspection of the herd. Which is one of the reasons we decided to hold an African cattle auction. Which could then do all the selling in one day, and save time. Well, that was the theory.

But weeks before men came on foot and in taxis, 20, 30, 40, 50 km. “There are no cattle till the sale on the 23rd?” they repeated. “But at home the beer is brewed, the guests notified.” So Neil would ask: “Have you got a permit?”

That’s the way to defeat them. Those who have bought before have usually bought from each other, where no permits were needed. The permit is a penalty, a cost they have not calculated, and it wipes the hope off their faces.

One man turned wordlessly, climbed into his taxi and disappeared. A few days later he was back, beaming. “I have my permits,” he said. Neil looked at his papers. “These are not permits, these are ‘no objections’”. The man almost wept. “I have had to buy two donkeys and I’ve spent R35 on taxi fares. I have paid almost the price of a beast just to get these papers, and you say they are not permits. Where must I go next?” “Weenen”, said Neil. Only another R16 for the taxi.

We’re all right. We ‘re White. We just pick up the ‘phone when we want permits, and it costs maybe 20 cents for the call. And we don’t pay two donkeys for our permit. Normally the formula is: Two “no objections” = one permit. At Msinga it is: Two donkeys + two ‘no objections’ = one permit. Here if a Black man cannot find two donkeys he might as well leave his money buried underground.

The donkey deal is an official gesture to save what little grass is left at Msinga. The donkeys traded-in are sent out of Msinga on a guaranteed no-return basis – and fat lions in the Lion Park are thriving on the results. But Msinga’s hills keep on growing red rocks, for the gesture is made meaningless by the law. No man can take a cow into Msinga without a permit – but there is no law to stop him taking in 100 donkeys and 1 000 goats. And men who cannot get cattle invest in donkeys and goats instead.

Now when somebody says: “May I speak to you confidentially ...” we know what is coming. He cannot get donkeys, so he cannot get permits, but he has an idea ... If we were partial to ideas we’d live on whisky for a year.

“Why don’t you just help yourself to some of the donkeys we see swarming around?” Neil suggested with a grin. There was a whistle. “Hell no!

Don’t even joke about it. Don’t you know this country yet? It’s shoot-bloody-first-and-ask-questions-afterwards,” said one expressive city gent. But some men try it all the same. We have already handed a refund to a fellow who had his permit cancelled for trading stolen property. Donkey permits make desperate men.

And then there was the kehla who asked for a very private conversation. “I hear you are a friend of Gatsha. Is that true?” “Yes”. “Well I want you to take a special message to him.” “Yes”. “Tell Gatsha that next time they send a cattle doctor to Msinga to inoculate cattle against anthrax, they must call for all donkeys too. Then they must inoculate the donkeys with something that will make them get sick and die. Only then can Msinga blossom again.”

Our methods may differ, but Black and White, the aims of conservationists are pretty much the same. Over to you Chief!

Dawned the day of the auction sale, and people began gathering hours early. Travers Lister came too, to be an independent valuator/ Auctioneer.

“These are the rules of the game,” Neil shouted to the throng.

“First – we only sell to men with permits.” There was a groan of dismay. We had lost half our customers.

Nobody will go into the herd to chase the animal of their choice. We will put cattle into the kraal here, nobody will enter ...” It was the familiar outline of White auction procedure.

“If two or more men want an animal, the auctioneer will add 50 cents. And the price will keep going up until only one man is bidding, when the animal will be his.”

“Aw, aw. Then we will have to pay more.”

“Do you think we Zulus will let a beardless boy take an animal which an elder wants? He can bid against his own age group.”

Eventually the debate was closed and the first cattle came into the ring.

“These,” said Travers, “are for sale. Who bids R70 for one or more?”

“What’s that in pounds?” “£35”

“I will pay £35 for this one,” said a young invader of the ring, poking at the animal of his choice.

“Oh no you don’t,” said a well-armed tribesman of mature years. “Get lost. That’s mine”.

“Here we have two bids of R70 - £35 – each,” said the auctioneer.

“Who will bid R70.50 - £35 five shillings”.

“£35,” said senior. “No more”.

“And you?” asked the auctioneer.

“Oh I have decided I prefer this other beast,” said Junior with certainty.

“Stop selling Numzaan,” pleaded one old man. “I want these three heifers I’ve fetched and put aside. How much?”

“Old man you must put them in the ring and bid for them.”

“No, no. You can’t sell my cattle.”

“You can bid too.”

“But I can’t. Please, please Numzaan do it my way.”

It takes too long to argue.

“All right sir. “That heifer is R80 - £40. And that one....”

“Wait, wait. Here is the money for the first one.”

Out of a tobacco bag comes a roll of R10 notes.

“Now count them and take what you need ...”

We count them and hand back the roll.

“Now let me pay for the next one.”

He fiddles in his pockets and brings out a wallet with more notes.

“Take what you need from that,” he orders.

And so it goes, Each beast paid from a separate roll. The customer can’t count but he trusts you can. Then he pools the change from all his rolls and asks: “Now what can I buy with what is left?”

“Look old man, there are other people who want to buy too. We can’t stop the sale for you.”

The ring became a bedlam of men and women, trying to shout each other.

“How much is this? And this? And this?”

The bedlam moved to the herd on the hill. Ignoring the rules, men left the ring to look for their animals among the herd.

Head spinning, Black and White tempers frayed, our kraal in tatters, the sale was over at last. We had made R3 000.

There are easier ways for us to sell our cattle. But the African auction was meant to be more than just a business transaction. It was a lesson in modern marketing for men who are outlawed by poverty and ignorance from the experience. Even when they have the means, they are non-starters, ill equipped to compete in our economy. They cannot understand the language, the method or the money. A R10 note is still called £5, and if you add and subtract you make magic with numbers.

Everyone learnt something from our auction – even if it was only the auctioneer who learnt to give in! And we have done a lot of thinking about the trust that is forced on a man who cannot count his money.

The next sale is set for July 25th. Meanwhile from north and south, east and west, people still arrive daily.

“We hear you are willing to sell cattle...”

“Yes, but only on July 25th”.

“But I have come a long way

Sound familiar?

NEIL AND CREINA

Umdukatshani,
P. O. Box 37,
WEENEN.

July 1975: DISASTER MONTH

Meat for supper tonight.

“What died?” ask the boys. “What died?”

It’s a query that can stop a meal. We have offered them some polite alternatives, but when meat makes its rare appearance in our pot, the boys echo children all over the valley who know meat is only for feast days or animal-died-days.

So they clamour: What died? What died?

This month meat has sickened us. Every night the pots have been full.

Not just our pots, but pots on a hundred fires nearby. Some meat got there legitimately, some didn’t. Eventually it has hardly mattered – we have lost cattle and gone on losing cattle.

First it was heartwater. An animal would jerk, totter, lie down. Within two days, sometimes within hours, it would be dead. If we saw the symptoms quickly we could save it, so the men herded the hills armed with syringes.

We expected some heartwater, but nothing like this. The cattle fell 1, 2, 6, 10 in a week.

Before the worst was over, 38 animals had died. Women came crowding in from the Reserve to rejoice at the carcasses. With gusto they skinned, hacked huge chunks of meat, and carried the dripping portions to our make-shift butchery. If nothing had died that day, they would find a sick animal and sit down to watch it.

“Hasn’t got a hope,” they would observe cheerfully. “Should be dead by nightfall.”

Heartwater is a tickborne disease; so frequent dipping is part of the answer. But we have had to ‘borrow’ a neighbour’s dip until our own is complete, and at the moment dipping is a day’s march away across 86 000 hectares of unfenced space. Sometimes all we seem to do is march to and from the dip.

Finding the cattle at all has been a problem. Leaf and shadow can hide an animal at three metres. When the first cattle counts did not balance we blamed the bush.

Then we got a new recruit.

“Don’t take him,” warned an old hand. “He’s one of a gang of stock thieves, and just out of jail. He’ll stay long enough to see the lie of the land and then help himself.”

We decided it was possibly safer to have him under observation, so let him stay.

Not many days afterwards a passerby brought the alarm. An animal had been garroted and hidden in a donga under a mound of leaves.

“I have been summoned home on urgent business,” said the new recruit apologetically, and he jogged off.

As somebody rushed to telephone the police, and men spread out to search a maze of dongas, his going went unnoticed. Darkness stopped the search. All we found next day was four feet and a stone cold trail.

Oh well. One animal stolen was not too bad.

A week later there were 123 missing. Whew! All other work stopped while we combed our bush. Nothing there. We tried again. Still nothing. Mlambo was walking home in the dark after another fruitless day when he was stopped by a man who kept to the shadows. The man was afraid, but he talked.

“I have just come across the river. I saw 20 of your cattle near the kraal of Manzimnyama. They have been driven high on the mountain to a wide shelf. The valley there has sheer sides, and a waterfall at one end. There is a narrow path in and out, and it has been blocked with stones. But the animals are inside. You had better go quickly for some have already been slaughtered.”

Again we called the Police. It took a week of interviews and statements to get action.

“Where are your permits for moving animals here?”

“Who owns them?”

“Who are your directors?”

“Where do they live?”

“How does your company function?”

“Aren’t they Bantu cattle?”

“Who is your informer?”

“What was he doing there?”

“How do you know he was telling the truth?”

“The cattle are probably in the bush. We will do a count.”

“Are you herding properly?”

“Are you sure you didn’t sell the missing cattle?”

If we had not known otherwise we might have suspected delaying tactics. However, neither the distance nor the danger could deter the law, and the police search duly got under way an hour before sunrise one morning.

They waded over an icy black river, and then climbed for three hours to find the hidden valley. The cattle were there all right, although now there were only 15 left.

“It’s a pity you had to move here in winter”, the policeman commiserated later. “In summer these skelims have some mealies to eat, but in winter they get hungry.”

With the rustling proven we sent off men to scour Msinga’s many hidden valleys. We have found a few more animals. Six crossed the river of their own accord. Eight were found at a drift We end the month only 70 short. That’s the way we are talking now. Only 70.

The doubters told us we didn’t stand a chance. There are times this month when we have agreed. We are at the crossroads of the Msinga badlands, with the occasional volley of rifle fire to remind us. But there have been a few moments when we have been warmed by sudden friendship. On the blackest day of all Neil met a man who had just had a black day too. He was a tall, dignified tribesman carrying sticks.

For three weeks he had been walking through Msinga looking for five cattle stolen from him. He was very weary.

“Numzaan I would speak with you privately.”

They found a tree and sat down.

“We your neighbours are deeply concerned at this trouble you are having,” he said. “This is a vast country with many thieves. I too have lost stock. When I go to my neighbours to ask them to help me, they say:

Tomorrow. We Zulus are like that. When my neighbour loses his cattle and comes to me, it is the same. I say: Tomorrow. Some of us have been talking and we want to ask you if you can help us start a stock-owners association. Then we can combine to help each other in times of trouble...”

Sometimes the good things do just drop into your lap.

Next there was a greybeard who settled himself on a rock and took up the morning with the unhurried courtesy we are learning to accept.

“I see you Numzaan.”

“I see you Baba.”

“How did Numzaan rise this morning?”

“Not badly Baba. May I ask you the same question?”

“No, I too cannot complain. I rose fairly well.”

“That is good Baba.”

“The days are cold now Numzaan.”

They are indeed, Baba.”

“But the days are warming up.”

“Yebo Baba.”

“How are the stock Numzaan?”

“Well Baba, as you probably know we are beset with thieving.”

“We have heard, Numzaan. In fact that is why I have come to visit you.”

“For what Baba.”

“I think you know our customs. You White people laugh at our belief. But do our misguided thoughts matter if you get your cattle back?”

“Speak on Baba.”

“Well, Numzaan, if you were to send one of your senior men to consult an oracle it would do no harm would it?”

“Indeed not, Baba.”

“Then do so, my son, and you will find your cattle.”

“I thank you father, but as you know we are strangers in your land.

There are many imposters. How would we know a good oracle?”

“I have come to guide you my son. A neighbour recently lost four cattles. Good oxen, all four beautiful to look upon. Two were his front oxen when he ploughed.....”

“Indeed Baba, his loss was great”.

“Well now, my son, my neighbour went and consulted an oracle and the wise man told him the cattle had been stolen by a youth who was buying a wife. They were used as lobola. My son, my niehgbour has his oxen back now, and come the spring his front oxen will be listening to his song as they plough together. I will take a man of yours to this oracle...”

So it has been arranged. Maybe we too will be singing to our lost cattle in the spring.

The July dramas would make good cowboy comic stuff. They would even have been funny if they had not been happening. However the heartwater, the rustling, were just the start of July. These losses from Umdukatshani were severe, but they were to be nothing compared to other losses at Ratschitz. Unable to move everything off the place before June 30th, we had piled, ready for removal, rolls of fencing, doors, windows, building poles, and bales of hay. Tons and tons of hay.

Keeping an eye on it for us was Tsotsi Shabalala, a sickly man; with a decrepit band of old folk. They did what they could to mount guard, but once we left it became a free-for-all, with both Black and White grabbing what they could. By the time our lorries arrived, the piles had vanished. Our losses run into thousands of rand.

Tsotsi and Co. were distraught. At night they saw the headlights of lorries on the distant hayfields, but they were too afraid, and too far away, to do anything about it. When we got their urgent messages, hundreds of tons of hay had disappeared. Here milk production had dropped to a trickle.

In between the sickness and searchings we did futile trips round the district trying to buy stockfeed. At any price. Eventually the McNally's offered us the gleanings of their cauliflower fields. We go in when the reaping is done, gathering armfuls of smelly green leaves. Beautiful, beautiful smelly green leaves. Oh the undiscovered loveliness of the cauliflower leaf!

But the hay theft was not yet the final straw. A runaway fire at Ratschitz was to destroy many more of our belongings and leave three families homeless, destitute. The Hlongwanes and Mgagas lost everything they had – even Antos's beloved car was burnt.

So now we have another problem. Long before we are ready for them, we have to find room for more people. The original plan was that wives and children would remain at Ratschitz until the end of the year, when we would have more buildings done, and a school built. Every corner of shelter at Umdukatshani is already overcrowded. We cannot afford to buy more tents, and nobody seems able to lend us any. If it was summer we could live in the open, but it is midwinter.

A cold midwinter.

"The first time in 17 years the water has frozen in the furrows," says our neighbour Koos. The trees rattle in every gust of wind, shedding pods. Our hills are grey, transparent. Only the aloes have any colour. Their fiery blaze has brought convoys of city people on country drives.

The children, both Black and White, wear orange faces.

"Have you been eating aloes again?" we ask the boys. They shake their heads, but bright, sticky pollen spreads from ear to ear. It looks like tribal warpaint – it's the mark of nectar hunters bigger than the birds.

The water of our river drops lower and lower.
Like our spirits.

NEIL AND CREINA

UMDUKATSHANI,
P. O. Box 37,
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3325

AUGUST 1975: MEETINGS AND DILEMMAS

It's been a meatless month. Back to putu, bread and tea. No wet red skins pegged out to dry. Time for other things.

Time for meetings:

First Mr. Mtembu, KwaZulu's first Black professional officer in the Department of Agriculture. How can we co-operate and work together?

Then a visit from Chief Mtembu and his induna. From the top of the cliffs we look across the river at KwaZulu, where smoke falters among the hills.

"What could you do with my land?" asks the Chief, a young man, just installed. "It is mine all the way down to Greytown, all the way up to Pomeroy, yet it is not enough for my people. All that land and our cattle starve and the men have to go to town to work for food. That bare mountain, what could you do with it?"

So we talk about grass, about streams that died in the gullies, about the big waterfall that stopped singing.

"Our fathers say the rains have changed," says the induna. "What can any man do without the rains?"

Across the river we watch as tiny figures carry smouldering cowdung from tuft to tuft of the lonely grasses. Gangs of boys have kerries at the ready, dogs at their heels as they try to flush out game with their wavering fires. Fires which rush brightly through grassy patches, then flicker and die at bare ground, red rocks.

"Why shouldn't they burn the old grass?" says the Chief. "They get a little meat."

So we talk about fire and grass and the boys over the river. The talk lasts many hours. As he leaves the Chief points at the stones and soft dust near our gate.

"Now that, you'll never do anything with that," he says.

"Come back in three years and it will be grass," replies Neil.

The Chief and induna are still laughing as they drive away.

More meetings.

The lawyers. We have traced one load of hay. We need a court injunction to get it back.

Wasted days in town sorting it out, making statements. Then weeks slip away while we wait for the final order, only due in September. Meanwhile the cows get thinner. The cauliflowers are over.

And the meetings go on.

CAP's Farm Advisory Committee travels to Umdukatshani. It's a gloomy gathering. The farm is not yet paid for, and the meat market is not yet improving. Umdukatshani was bought on estimates that knew nothing of plummeting prices, of dying cattle, stolen cattle, stolen

hay, vanished fencing. Ours is derelict land. It cannot be viable this year. Or next year, or the year after.

More cattle, many cattle must be sold soon. But then what shall we do with an empty farm? One day, some day, men from Msinga may trust enough to join the cattle co-op, but that takes time. Perhaps years and years of time. Even time costs money. Meanwhile our assets are ourselves and our cattle. It does not seem enough. The meeting ends, dilemmas unresolved.

We are not short of men to buy our stock. This month Whites as well as Blacks trekked down our road. Could they buy? 50, 100 head? Yes, we might be selling soon. But Neil was vague. He needed time to think, to consult others, Black and White.

One White stranger took aside our manager, Bokide Mzolo: "From now on you are to sell no more cattle to niggers," he said. "We are going to buy the rest." Bokide accepted the instruction without expression.

Do the drumbeats spread the news here? Next day the Chief's induna came back. He too, took Mzolo aside.

"Is it true what we hear, that you are selling the rest of the cattle to Whites?" It is true that they have asked for options," says Bokide.

"So your White man lies to us," said the induna. "He said you had come to help our people. He knows we need cattle. He knows we can buy all you have. He knows we are slow because we have to struggle with permits. But the first Whites that come can take the cattle."

Another dilemma. Our bank overdraft cannot wait. Our Black market has to wait. Which will eventually cost us more – bank interest or lost trust?

Our auction sales continue, still all-Black affairs, and the word has spread so far that the vehicles, which creep into the shade of the tambooties on sale day, have sometimes come 500 km.

Many buyers, in ignorance, come without permits. Those who have trucks rush to Weenen to get papers before the sale ends, returning after dark to say: "The permit office was closed today. We waited and waited just in case somebody came"

No man has yet bid against another at our sales. Pounds remain our currency. The sale is slow-moving still, as buyers discuss their problem with the auctioneer.

"I'll take that if you have nothing else, but I wanted a beast with more Afrikander in it. That's what we need for our tough conditions." At last we have order in the ring. Beasts stay inside, people out. And what a mixture of people we have. City men in suits, country men in skirts of skins; ladies with bras stuffed full of notes, tribal matrons bright with beads and flouncing leather crinolines.

This month one meeting had to be postponed. The oracle was away. Our interest in his wisdom grows. Remember the tribesman who had walked the hills for three weeks to find his stock? He has just come back to see us, gaunt with his wanderings, but beaming: "I've found them," he said. "Four of the five. Only one had been slaughtered." The witch doctor had told him where to go. 80 km west, near Colenso, he had found his cattle.

We go on learning about our new country. Thieves may be many, but there are honest men too.

Chief Kunene of the Limehill area sent his induna, Philip Kanye, to buy cattle from us. We asked Kanye to look out for our missing animals on his way home. Sometimes later he came back to see us. "This is wild country," he whistled. "We were passing through a gorge among those distant hills, when suddenly we were surrounded by men. They all had guns and bullets."

"Stealing" said their leader.

"No Brother," I replied, very meekly, speaking as you do when you address a man holding a gun. "We bought these cattle from that new farm everyone has heard of near Nkaseni."

"The cattle go no further unless you show ownership," we were told. I had the great fear of one whose jacket is full of holes. The guns were raised, and nobody could hear us in that place. But in my pocket I found my receipt, with the brand. Then the men with guns became friendly and helped us to check the brands on the cattle. They took us home, and gave us beer, as is the custom with travelers, and we slept there that night."

Is this what is called a vigilante association?

It is almost spring, the gaudy, crimson spring of the tree fuschias. "We're stuck, we're stuck," shriek children with feet glued to the sticky rocks beneath the trees, caught by the nectar which drips from these beautiful red flowers. Upcountry snows are melting and the river rises gently. But though we sense spring, we are still in the midst of the gusty, tent-shredding winds of August. Winds have ripped the last pods from the thorn trees, and they fall on waiting goats. The goats seem hungry. Once again they have invaded Umdukatsani from the Reserve. One afternoon we arrested 40 goats, 15 donkeys. In twos and threes the owners come.

"No, old mother, you cannot have your goats. They have done much damage. They have been here a month now. You send your children to fetch them, but what do they do? Take them to the boundary and let them loose again?"

"True my child," she replies. "But what discipline can I, an old woman, impose on today's children. Their fathers are in Goli. Are you going to let our goats starve to death outside your fence? Yesterday the farm was our. Today it is yours. You talk to the children. You talk to the goats."

So the month ends with another meeting on top of the cliffs. Goat and donkey owners attend.

"With all the troubles your goats cause you, why do you keep goats?" asks Neil.

"Goats! Au. Au. Au. And we had heard you knew of us and our people.

Tis a wonder to hear the ignorance of you, abelungu. You don't know the function of a goat? Without goats all Zulus would be dead."

"Our men get sick in Goli. When the doctor's medicine fails a man knows he must come home. Then he calls an umfana and says – Put the goats in the kraal. I must see them.

"He chooses a good fat wether and says: Call my eldest brother and he will take this goat to the Nyanga, and at last I will become well again." "The Nyanga gives him muti and tells him that the old people are displeased with lack of attention. He must sacrifice. What would he sacrifice if he had no goat?"

"A child gets sick. We are not alarmed. We sent for the goats."

“A friend visits from afar. Send for the goats.”

“A son wants to marry. If your in-laws are understanding you can lobola with goats.”

“Your husband loses his job, the children are hungry. You sell a kid or slaughter one. The meat can be eaten before it goes bad.”

“You see my skirt? The skin of a goat.”

“And what use is the donkey?” asks Neil.

“The donkey is an essential beast,” agrees the meeting. “You abelungu, have forced the donkey on us. With cattle it is ‘Ipi ipass? Ipi Ipass? Dipa, dipa, dipa. Ncwadi, ncwadi....’ We know where the donkey grazes no animal will follow and the grass dies. But who has cattle these days? When the spring comes the cattle are too thin to plough, so we use donkeys, which are never thin. When we need a bag of meal, the smallest child can ride the donkey to the shop, and bring it back, right to our door, with the sack on its back. For donkeys we need no permits”.

So we talk of goats and donkeys, and try to find answers together. Neil has some ideas. He offers them.

“We must talk with the people at home,” the people say. We know. It is a waiting game.

Under the combretums a handcraft workshop got going this month. Perhaps ‘workshop’ is too grand a name for the gathering of talking, laughing women who come walking from KwaZulu daily to learn the art of spinning rough wool and doing beadwork. The initiative comes from Bathulise Madondo, our diminutive instructor who has spent four months in a pup tent, uncomplaining.

Up the hill Mojiji presides over another tree classroom. She is giving daily English classes to the CAP children who will go to school in KwaZulu next year, and need to cope with English medium. Somewhere Mankosonke has discovered Enid Blyton’s Noddy’. After school he sits engrossed, spelling out the story. (Any offers of other books for 6 to 10 year olds?)

August was an odd month in one way. We had to get used to living without Linda. Three years ago she arrived to spend a month before flying home to Canada. Well she’s stayed and stayed, becoming part of many families. We would have been lost without her. We are lost without her! Nobody else will try cake-baking over the campfire!

NEIL and CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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SEPTEMBER 1975: WATER

“We’re lucky. It’s not far to fetch water from here,” said Gogo Dhladhla. Not far? We had stopped for breath at the top of the ridge.

Below was the sleepy brown bend of the river. Not far?

We clambered on, following the winding rack of the watercarriers. Across stony stream beds and up. Under groves of tambooties and up.’ Across brown spaces prickly with thorny plants. Up and up. We reached another kraal, perched on our boundary. The new fence sagged with the gathering arms leaning on it. A clay pot of beer was passed through the strands of wire. The beer tasted good. It had been a hot climb.

“It’s quite a long way to water,” said the woman of the kraal. “But we’re lucky. Look at our neighbours up there....” The path went on, up and up. On the highest sandstone terraces the huts looked no bigger than boulders.

“And those people? Do they have a spring nearby?” we asked.

Silly questions get silly answers. A spring in the midst of that erosion?

There was a cackle all round.

“They go down to the river like the rest of us.”

Behind, a long way down, the Tugela had almost slipped out of sight. We went on pacing up the hill. 1 000 metres, 2 000, 3 000.

A granny passed us with an empty bucket on her way down.

“See here,” she said wagging her head at us. “The water has pressed a hollow place in my head.” She carried a Coke tin. On the return journey up hill she’d tilt her head back, place the tin on her forehead and balance the bucket on this. The tribal Nefertiti hairdos look lovely but they leave only forehead space for heavy transport. There are 12 in the granny’s family. Three times a day two buckets go up and down the mountain, fetching water. Half an hour down to the river, almost an hour back. Half a day spent carrying water.

We were invited to look around a new hut, almost completed. Thump, thump, thump went a rough wooden block, pounding cowdung, limestone and mud to make a marbled floor. It was warm underfoot. The walls of the hut were made of stone slabs, plastered inside with mud, brightened with ochre. A sudden thought. Mud. Mud is made with water. Did they go all the way to the river to fetch water for building? How many buckets full? How many hours of climbing? Hell.

Watercarrying is Msinga’s main industry. For seven months we shared it. Slopping water over our legs we staggered to camp, cursing a background that missed out on essentials and so left us untrained to carry buckets on our heads. Later the tractor delivered cans of water to our tents. If we were careful a bucket lasted all day. We piled up the dirty dishes and soaped ourselves in the river.

There is no bathroom like ours, with its golden cliffs dropping to the water’s edge. Kestrels nestbuild on a ledge while you scrub your back. When the river is in flood your privacy is

secure, but it's a bit trickier when water levels drop. And, as we have discovered, bathing is a seasonal affair, with local interest waning in the winter months!

This month bathing was back in vogue.

This month the ferryman returned to duty. And this month water came out of taps at Mdukatshani.

"I never knew water could run uphill," said Delane Mbatha, one of our men who live over the Tugela in KwaZulu. "What you can do with pipes! Would you let me borrow a roll of plastic piping? There is a stream above my home and I could lay it close to my kraal so there is water for a garden."

He waded home for the weekend with a roll of pipe and some simple instructions: Clear the pipe of air. Make sure the inlet is higher than the point of delivery.

On Monday a happy man came to work. "The water does not just run, it squirts out of the pipe," he reported.

"Can you take R3 off my wages till I've paid for the piping?"

We pump river water to our reservoir, but eventually we plan to use cheaper power than a diesel pump. Neil doodles. We must be able to lift water up the hills so that it is closer to home for all those women. Then they can think of starting gardens.

The half forgotten sound of thunder brought us early rains. Whoever would have thought Msinga could be a place of lifting, drifting mists? The soft, soaking, gentle rains changed the world. Gone overnight was our clear blue river, and the midriver island with its Egyptian geese.

Had the river really been that brown last summer? Had the coffee tasted quite so muddy? For years we have lived off the waters of a clear mounting spring, and the flavour of flooding Tugela takes some getting used to. Sediment settles in the bottom of the cups, and Janet has scooped tadpoles out the tea.

Neil goes on doodling, muttering: "Such a waste. All that good soil floating past. Now if we could just catch it here and sieve it on our hills."

In the dongas the women crouch to scoop wet oozes into their buckets. In a day or two it will be dust again, and there will be the daily trek back to the muddy river.

With such filthy water is there any point in washing the sheets? We do the washing anyway. At Msinga washday is fun day. Sometimes there has been no room for us on the flat rocks below the cliffs. Women and children go washing in groups. Men and boys go washing in group. Seldom does anybody wash alone. Washday's an occasion. Why hanker after the lonely splendour of the suburban washing machine when you can join the riverside washday line-up?

Umbrellas are soaked and dipped and dried. Blankets make a bright patchwork, spread flat in the sunshine. Slap, slap, soap, squeeze, and rinse away the suds in a rapid.

And sing. All the time the people sing. Though our White arms have grown into the rhythms of rub and scrub, we have yet to find the breath to sing while we do it. There is something good about the warmth on your back, the glinting river swirling past, the roar of water in the drowsy hour while you stretch out waiting for the washing to dry.

But while we have become accustomed to blue soap and grey river rock, we still seethe at clothes that disintegrate between our fingers. We have a few comments we plan to pass on to the Bureau of Standards...

Years ago MaTwala threw out some expensive silk given to our Sewing Club.

"That material's rubbish," she said scathingly.

"That material costs R16 a yard," said Creina grabbing it back again.

"It's still rubbish said MaTwala firmly.

Now we know what she means. Silk just couldn't stand up to river rock treatment. We can, however, strongly recommend khaki drill and denim!

If anybody is quality conscious it is these housewives who wash along the banks of our rivers and dams. They are the majority in South Africa (well, where are the statistics to prove otherwise??) and shouldn't somebody research the resilience of textiles in rural conditions?

The dilemmas of August are not yet resolved, but we have almost forgotten them when watching our lost grasses returning. The green of seedling grasses looks like an emerging lawn on our sandy places. What a spring. Around the kraals children gather bundles of wild spinach, mfino. Across the valley whips crack, men sing as the first cattle move into the fields to plough.

We have worked this month in the heavy fragrance of creamy thorn blossom. The thorns are the most beautiful trees of all, we said.

Until the white-trunked figs began to sprout pink leaves. There is nothing so beautiful as the fig," we said. Until the red ivory burst into gold, and the marula shone like burnt honey.

With the rains we have got our first garden underway, but there are no tidy square beds or long rows for us. We're using a lesson taught a long while back by Robert Morte, a Swazi with green fingers who lived on a stony hill. Between the rocks, in tiny pockets of soil he grew cabbage, tomatoes, mealies and pumpkins. At Mdukatshani his methods make sense. Our garden is just like Robert's.

It has been planted in nooks and crevices between rocks. Seeds were planted one by one. Rocks were rolled aside, dollops of kraal manure popped in, the rock rolled back again. Under their shade manure and soil stay cool and damp, a refuge for the thrusting roots of the young plants, while above the leaves basks in hot Msinga sunshine.

"It won't work," say the people. "You have to plough and plant the proper way." They could be right. We think Msinga's farmers will have to learn to farm with stone. The flat land is too scarce to share round, too worn with overuse already.

One old man asked for a flat patch for a garden across the valley.

Neil agreed with a sigh. Around the old man's kraal is rich, deep soil. But there are rocks, so he must plough in tired shale a mile away. No good talking just yet. We hope our stony garden will do that.

This month Mr. Nzimande lost his son, stabbed in Soweto. He went to Goli for the funeral, and returned silently, holding his grief to himself.

For Dora and Michael Mabaso September was the end of the long, long wait for a baby. Their daughter was born on September 16, the first Mdukatshani baby.

NEIL AND CREINA

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OCTOBER 1975: MBOMA

We met Mboma at the river, tapping music out of a rusty, squashed tin. It was the meandering music of the footpaths. Later he joined the silent, staring circle of Black children who watched GG and Rauri doing school at a wobbly camp table. Sometimes Mboma's tin came too, and he'd tap out his tunes until our boys dropped their pencils. "Mboma makes SO nice music," they'd sigh, their thoughts far away from grammar and new maths.

We worried about Mboma, for his hair was the same rusty colour as his tin violin. Eventually we sent a message to his grandmother. We wanted to talk to her about Mboma's hair. "That is kwashiorkor red," we told her. "He is sick because he is not getting the right food." "I know," she answered. "But since we were thrown off your land where do we get food? We have to farm at the store now." It was six years since they had had to sell their cattle, six years since there had been milk at the kraal.

After that Mboma came to lunch everyday. We swapped eggs and milk for an information service. Mboma knew all the gossip in the valley, and shared it casually. Who was beating the drums? Why. Where to find the weekend beerdrinks. Who had stolen the tinned fish? Who as courting, who was marrying, who was dying.

He showed our boys which wild berries to eat, and how to hook fruit from the top branches. Sometimes they would vanish for hours on inspections of the best groves up the hill. Mboma taught them to pull down dead aloe heads and to look along the stem for a small hole. Inside was a delicious yellow jelly.

Mboma was a crack shot with a sling. Birds – and nests – came tumbling. He could swim like the river eels, and quickly got the hand of the canoe, paddling GG over the Tugela on illegal forays into KwaZulu fields. They'd grab sticks of imfe (sweet sorghum) and shoot back across the water to chew it on our beaches. When the river was flooding Mboma showed us the best game off all – riding driftwood logs in the waves.

He was a confident, quick thinker. "What potential," we said. "If he just had some education." So we offered him a chance to do lessons. For a few days he sat down with pencil and paper, then he gave it up. "What for?" he told our sons. "How can school help me? Anyway it's boring."

And of course it is. No amount of imaginative teaching can beat days that are languid and free, that belong to you, though you may be only eight or nine or ten years old. Only a fool gives up the diverse delights of such days for the discipline of a classroom.

Mboma's hair grew black again, and one day he stopped his daily visits.

His family had decided it was time he returned to his job herding the family goats. We often see him. Sometimes he will spend a whole day playing with the boys. Usually he slips away before a relative comes roaring after him: "Where's the stock? Why aren't you watching them?"

Our valley is full of Mboma's.

While we have been waiting for a school we go on gathering CAP children for a daily session under the trees. Mojiji has moved to the top of the hill to build a home, so Antonia does the class now.

Sporadically children arrive from the Reserve. Each newcomer is given a note for his parents. It explains simply that the "teaching" is free – has the child permission to come?

Mbayi returned next day: "My people say thank you, but they cannot read. They are looking for somebody to read the note to them. Meanwhile I can come."

Gatshani and Velamuva came together one day. The next day Velamuva came alone. He was too shy to answer our questions about his small brother. Eventually we discovered why... Gatshani had been unable to borrow clothes that day. The families are poor. Clothing – and schooling – is by rote

One morning Janet was roused soon after sunrise by a woman carrying a gift of beer. She was Mbatho's mother, and she was very ambitious for her child. She wanted to see her schooled. She had just come to say thank you.

Konjane and Senzeluphi took their notes home and that was that. We didn't see them again. Antonia went to the kraal to find out why. The parents were away but the children were there and they wept when they saw her. They said they had been forbidden to return. Their parents knew our type. Sooner or later we'd send an account.

"Our boys can come," says one family. "But only till we need them at home." At eight or nine a girl is collecting wood, carrying water, caring for the baby, cooking the supper. When they are knee-high the boys begin to follow the cattle and goats. Somebody has to watch that the cattle don't get into the mealfields. Herdboys are indispensable.

As soon as we arrived we started working to get a school. A farm school would only serve the people on the farm. No use. We couldn't apply for a school in KwaZulu, but our African committee could combine with their Reserve neighbours to get it going.

Many weeks, meetings, visits, and official documents later the application was formally submitted, signed by the Chief on the advice of the Regional Authority. And Mdukatshani was two hectares smaller.

"According to the regulations, a school must have two hectares of land for playing fields," we were told.

Every bit of flat land here is a field belonging to somebody.

Nobody wanted to give up his field for a school. But we had a wedge of flattish land that jutted into the Reserve. Could we donate it to KwaZulu? It seemed we could. The site was settled.

Mojiji set off walking from kraal to kraal to do a rough census of school going children. We have a long, long boundary so checked just one corner. The result startled us. At a conservative estimate there were 500 children of school going age nearby. (How many on the rest of the boundary?)

We wish we had the wisdom to answer our own questions. To answer Mboma's questions. "How can school help me?" Is Bantu Education better than nothing at all? What is relevant to a thousand small herboys? What world will they – will we – live in? What about barefoot teachers to move among them, teaching them in the open? What should be taught? Why try to teach at all? We ask the questions but they are not ours to answer. As Whites we cannot teach Blacks or have any say in their education.

This month we mourned a vlei. From the Tugela the land rises up to Umhlumba mountain, a hump of land wrapped in mists and storms, which is higher than all the surrounding hills. About 25 years ago Dr. Oliver West climbed to the summit of Umhlumba and looking down he wrote: "The prospect is melancholy in the extreme – bushveld riddled with cancerous scars that stretches away to the Tugela, while occasional protected patches remind one of how fair it must once have been."

The view has not changed. To get to Mdukatshani's top land we have to drive through a neighbour's farm past a wide, wet vlei which gently seeped into a stony riverbed. This month the vlei disappeared, ploughed over for dryland cotton. It might not be Umhlumba's last vlei, but we have seen no others. We have been missing vleis. Upcountry, October is our time for pink and white vlei lilies, for the first arums and redhotpokers. Last summer we put hundreds of wildfowl to flight as we squelched along the sedgy margins of the bogs we had won back over ten years. Mdukatshani has no vleis and it is strange to us.

Our meetings go on as usual. Meetings to build budgets out of all the ifs and buts: meetings yet again on invading goats and cattle.

The green grass that came with the rains is deceptive. The Msinga cattle know. Along our fence they are queuing up in hundreds listlessly cropping the short lawn at their feet. Mdukatshani was home, and they stand waiting for a chance to come in and move back to their old grazing grounds. Last year, say the locals, the police impounded 1 000 cattle for illegally grazing here. We believe it looking at the animals peering over the wire.

We had our first meeting with the hilltop tribesmen. They came on a cold, grey day, seeking shelter from the wind in a hollow in the hill. Our story was the same old one. We had not kicked them off the farm, but now it was the same old one. We had not kicked them off the farm, but now it was ours and we had to pay for it. It would never pay for itself if everyone grazed their stock there.

The grey heads nodded. Fair enough.

Neil though there could be mutual help. We needed to have ploughing done. If they did contract ploughing for us with their oxen, they could graze their animals on the farm.

"A great opportunity for the community," said the induna, who had had to be fetched and carried, so heavy was the 40 kg he carried on his small frame. "And I as law enforcement

officer will deal severely with anyone who poaches grazing for his animals. We must have a big public meeting to spread the word.”

“And that brings us to something else,” said Neil before the meeting broke up. “This matter of chopping wood. If your people ask us, we will allot them chopping areas, but we cannot have indiscriminate chopping. Your Chiefs support us. They too forbid the cutting of green trees.”

The induna sighed. “What hope is there of stopping this?” he said.

“I am a much-respected man, a man with authority conferred on him by the law, my decisions upheld by the Pretoria government. Outside my hut is a tree I have loved for many years. All of you know that tree. It has grown with me. Daily I sat under my tree and got its shade. Then one short day I went away, and when I came back my tree had been chopped, cut through with an axe. My tree. My beautiful tree! I could understand a woman greedy for wood, but when I examined the cut marks I saw it had been a man who had cut. What is happening to the Zulus when one man cuts down another man’s tree? My beautiful tree!”

The meeting ended – as usual – with friendly promises. But the chopping goes on, the goats creep through the fences, the cattle get in somehow. The date for that big public meeting is still to be set.

Doug arrived like a hurricane from England for two short days of fierce debate. We don’t know about him, but we are still recovering!

Mr. And Mrs. Bompan Mzolo had another baby this. Their fourth daughter. Bompan was too disgusted to comment.

Rauri had a birthday on the beach, and Linda and Keith came to tell us they were engaged. CAP claims some credit for the event!

NEIL AND CREINA

PS. No longer tadpoles in the tea. This month the taps disgorged small frogs.

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NOVEMBER 1975: COPS AND ROBBERS

For us this will always be the month of the jumping seeds. They fell from the tambooties trees and hopped. And hopped. The ground rustled with their uncanny hopping. It was diverting entertainment. The children captured heaps in bowls and left them at the door – hours later the bowls would be empty with not a seed in sight.

A little yellow grub did the jumping, jerking so frantically inside the seedcase that it lifted the seed off the ground. What insect larva was it? Why did it need to use the seed? How did it get in – or out? Why did it hop – and why did it stop hopping? The seeds hated heat for when we placed them in a sunny place they raced for shade, yet even at night, when it was cool, they never stopped leaping about. We know. We couldn't sleep for the insistent clicking of some desperate seeds jailed in a jam jar. And then, three weeks later, the jumping seeds vanished as suddenly as they had started.

Otherwise it has been an uneventful month with the rustlings and rumours that are part of our daily life here. It is easy to be fearful.

One day the women were working in the vegetable garden when they heard a crash. Over the hill stampeded an ox. Close behind raced two men. The animal tore through the thorns and bolted, panting and sweating, into the garden. The men stopped on the skyline and stood staring down. They remained there, indifferent, watching. They did not move as Bokide began to clamber up to question them. Only when he was close enough to see their faces did they turn and jog away.

Twice this month our men stood in camp and watched as 25 insizwas, heavily armed with sticks and assegais and a vast army of dogs, hunted across the top of the farm. Twice the men found it tactful not to see the impis.

We have met many strangers on our paths.

“What brings you onto our farm gentlemen?”

“We are collecting donkeys and goats?”

“Are all these your donkeys and goats?”

“Well, not exactly. It is ploughing time and we felt if we collected our neighbours strays they would be more willing to plough for us.”

Polite greetings were exchanged and the men moved on with the donkeys and goats. Other people's donkeys and goats.

The paths were always lonely one, and though we had not met before, we know something of the men. The encounter worried us.

“Today the Braham cow is missing,” reported Bokide. “I am worried as it is not the first time I have seen those men near our cattle.”

Bokide had been told the men were 'on the wagon' after overindulging in tribal cattle. He had been told that bullets would reply to further pilfering and that the two men knew it and were careful.

"I am told they are behaving now, but still, that Braham cow is missing."

"She is a wild and wiley cow," he said, "and heavy in calf. She could be hiding alone to have her calf, but surely not for so long? This is the fourth count she has been missing." We count every second day.

A friendly tribesman talked. He had seen men driving six cattle through our farm. He knew the men and knew their destination. He pointed the "I love life brother".

The ordinary month went on. A policeman called to identify our brand. Across the river were stolen cattle he thought might be ours. Delane and Pinky went to fetch them. They returned with one, The second had been driven off before they arrived.

We asked Bokide if he would like us to get permission for him and some of the other men to carry guns while they policed the farm.

"No, no, no, never do that," he said in alarm. "Now I walk across the farm freely because everyone knows I carry neither assegai nor gun. If I were seen with a gun I would be ambushed for it."

We were glad he thought that way. So do we, but we also know our men are often afraid.

Halfway through November there were three suspected hijackings and a knowing, silent people all too jittery to talk. Well, almost all Ndimande, short and frail and touching 60 would not hold his tongue and a row erupted over a roll of fencing wire. The wire was needed for our boundary fence, now almost three quarters done. Nging and Ndimande had toiled up a steep slope lugging the 70 kg roll of wire between them.

At the top they flopped down to rest – and the roll started back down-hill. It was late and the men were tired, so they covered the wire with brushwood. Next day it had disappeared.

Ndimande fretted about the wire until his daughter asked: "Baba what does a coil of wire look like?"

"What my child?"

"On the day you lost the wire I saw our neighbours carrying a round thing like a wheel hung on a metal bar between their shoulders. Then I watched them take it to a place where they dug a hole and buried it."

Ndimane is a brave but foolish man. He found the hole, but the loot had been removed. He went straight to the neighbours, cousins of his. "You stole the white man's wire," he said. "I have proof."

Some days later a huge tribesman interrupted early coffee.

"I am from Goli," he announced. "I had a letter from Msinga saying Ndimande had accused me of stealing the white man's wire. I said to my boss: I can never sleep again until I have seen this Ndimande and killed him for this insult and told the White man I know nothing of the wire. Numzaan I demand you come now to my home. I live on your fence. You will see I have two rolls of wire but I bought them in 1960 and I have the receipts."

Neil said he did not want to make a search. The man became angry, shouting with, excitement and waving his handful of sticks.

“I don’t like noise and threats among my children,” said Neil. “Go to your home and tomorrow early I will please you and come to see your wire.”

The imperturbable Ndimande led the way to the giant’s home. Just inside our fence Neil ripped over a roll of new wire hidden in the bushes. Across the fence the giant waited with a dozen allies.

He pointed out his rolls of wire. They were old. They were not ours.

“Are you now satisfied?” he demanded.

“I see your wire. It is not ours,” replied Neil. “But we were lucky.

We found the missing wire over there on our side of the fence. I accuse nobody. However it is sad that our neighbours allow thefts to take place before their eyes and remain silent.”

He and Ndimande went to lift the wire to return home. The giant bounded to his feet, scooped a dozen sticks from sitting tribesmen and rushed at Ndimande screaming: “Dog, I will drag you into my hut and kill you unless you can find the wire there.” He grabbed the old man and hauled him towards the hut.

“I have no sticks cousin,” said Ndimande quietly. “You have many. Is that why you lay hands on me?”

We said he was a brave but foolish man!

“Please, please go quickly,” said a woman who emerged from the hut. She was the giant’s mother. They went, while the giant danced with rage and bellowed threats after them.

“I am afraid to walk home tonight,” confessed the old man later. “My cousin means it when he says he is going to kill me. He has two guns. I have seen them.” So we drove Ndimande home that night, and told him not to come to work next day but to slip away early and take a note to the police at Tugela Ferry.

By the following afternoon Ndimande had laid assault charges, and the giant had counterclaimed with defamation. Both the Chief’s court and the white man’s court were involved.

“No case,” ruled Chief Mvelase when Ndimande appeared before him. “I will investigate these goings-on among my people when the SAP are finished.”

The valley is full of talk. This is a testcase. Ndimande is the first man to defend our property, to back outsiders. While we wait for his case to be heard we feel a bit happier about his safety. Both the Chief and the Police have been alerted. Perhaps in future CAP’s property will be safer too. Perhaps. Nothing here is certain. That Brahman cow has just come out of the bush with a fat frolicking calf!

We will not be sending Christmas cards this year, so this will be our Christmas letter. We have had some news worth celebrating. The Chairman’s Fund of Anglo American are to support the farm’s development over the next five years. The grant will not cover all we hope to do, but it makes survival certain.

As new events overtake the old we forget to report on the many loose ends our letters leave dangling each month. This is probably a good time to catch up. First, we won the court action

over our missing hay. Now, many months later, when there is plenty of green grass and our need has passed, the hay is being returned to us. A Pyrric Victory.

The building goes on, a slow process. Some of us have houses, but others will still be in tents or packing case abodes when Christmas arrives. The Alcocks have a one-roomed house with windows and floors, and though the stonewalls don't yet reach the roof, so what? As Neil is at pains to point out, all Msinga homes are built this way to funnel in the breezes! Our campfires have ended, as they were too extravagant of wood. However our kitchen continues to be an outdoor one. In wind and rain, battling to keep the gas alight, it is not much fun, but the friends who wrinkle their noses at its discomforts have not stayed to clean the supper dishes in a bowl of fallen starlight surrounded by fireflies.

Our bathroom remains the Tugela, with its turtles and leguaaanans, which we see, and the eels and giants whiskered barbell, which, thank goodness, we don't. We know they are there because poaching fishermen pull them out of our pools cheerfully admitting their crime with exclamation of: It's a record – a forty pounder! "A few months ago policeman shot a three metre crocodile near Tugela Ferry. We thought it was a long way away, but have just found it was only a few bends downriver. Poor croc. It had done no harm growing fat on river fish, but was it the last and only one? It's a thought, which makes us happier when bathing in a large company!

Our rocky vegetable garden is flourishing. It looks, satisfying, like almost any other bit of hillside and you have to step carefully for the tomatoes and the pumpkins are growing as naturally as surrounding wild plants.

Recently the drums have been silent and we have wondered if the men were too tired after a day on the lands ploughing. From sunrise we hear their calls and songs as they cajole their spans of donkeys and spans of oxen up and down between the thorns. Last year the rains were late and there were only five or six fields, but this year no land will be left fallow.

November gave us a grudging sun and winds that splintered big trees. It gave us storms and floods and a hillside of yellow orchids and green snowdrops. The zzzzzzzzzzzzzing of Christmas beetles says it is full summer. We are still strangers here and we feel it in the unfamiliarity of the seasons, the flowering of plants we cannot name, the angle of the summer sun over the hills. With rain and rest grass is coming back. In just one season we can see it happen. Trust needs more time than that. Not only in our valley is it slow growing.

We send our love for a very happy Christmas.

NEIL AND CREINA

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JANUARY 1976: BREAK OF ROUGH

At first light the people converged on the farm, following a dozen winding footpaths through the bush. With pangas and axes they came, with hatchets and saws. On or two we had expected, but not this big, waiting crowd. We were delighted.

The meeting had helped of course. Especially the meetings when Neil was asked to stay away so Black man could ask Black man: “What’s he really up to? You know him – do you trust him?”

“Now this idea of yours,” said one of the 60 at the first meeting of the New Year. “It’s all very well telling us to put our cattle in your co-op, but once they’re in will we ever get them out again?”

It will be easy to move animals onto your farm, but you know how we struggle for permits at Msinga. If we wanted to withdraw a beast and couldn’t get a permit – what then?”

It was a good point. We had no answer ready.

Another meeting was called (“No Whites present please...”)

“We’ve been thinking,” said Majozi, the spokesman. “If we can graze our cattle on your farm every day, and take them home with us every night, we will need no permits. What would you charge for grazing?”

Our committee had already discussed the problem.

“Hell,” exploded the usually silent Michael Mabaso. “We can’t give people daily grazing. All that tramping back and forth will make our dongas worse than they are already.”

(Neil beamed. Ten years of conservation training made their mark!)

“They’re already doing it illegally,” he pointed out. “And letting our grazing will be just a stage in developing confidence. It won’t be forever.”

But Michael was gloomy.

“The normal grazing fee is R2 a head,” our manager Mzolo told the meeting. “But as we want to render a service we would charge R1 month a head for cattle, 50 cents a head for sheep and goats.”

“Mr. Mzolo I have 20 cattle – how much will it cost me to graze my cattle on your farm for a year?”

Bokide borrowed a piece of paper and got to work. He has never been to school, and although he is perhaps one of the best Zulu farmers, his formal learning started late.

Finally he had an answer. “R 2 400 a year,” he said.

The crowd whistled.

“But that means, Mzolo, after a year you will own my cattle

It looks bad,” agreed Bokide. “Maybe somebody else here can work it out?”
A man came forward. “I did school, ‘he confirmed. “I think Mzolo must be right.”

“Well then,” said Mr. Xulu, “there is no point in continuing this meeting. I propose you ask your White man why he has to squeeze us so hard. If he won’t reduce the fees you know our cattle will die for lack of grass.”

Bokide reported back. “We must be mad. We can’t give our grazing free, but we don’t need to charge so much.”

His arithmetic was straightened out. Bokide laughed, vastly relieved. “But even at R1 a month there will be many who cannot pay. How can we help them?”

By the time the next meeting gathered he had a reply.

The venue for this third discussion was the site of the new dip on top of the mountain.

“All this talk, talk, talk,” complained Bokide. “It’s getting us nowhere. Say what you want to say, but if you don’t mind I’ll work while you do it. This month we just have to finish building the dip.”

“Your CAP cows have beautiful udders,” one man began. “Lovely soft underparts free of ticks. How do you do it, Mzolo?”

Our cattle have lost their udders because of tick bites, and their calves die because they have no udders to feed them, just big scars”

“The dip is the answer,” said Bokide. “Our dip is kept full strength and the ticks die. There must be something wrong with the dip you use.”

“We have no control of the dip, said another. “It is government dip. What would you say if we asked to dip here?”

“All members will be able to use our dip.”

“Then what are we talking for, brothers. We’re going to be members.

Let’s build the dip.”

And the meeting broke up before it began as 50 men rolled stones and mixed cement. In a week the dip was done.

That was the beginning. Soon afterwards the work-for-grazing system had started and our first big Msinga involvement was under way. The terms were straightforward. We would share the farm with people who obeyed our miles. Those who could not pay cash could work to earn the grazing, but the cattle grazed only in the areas we set aside for them.

So that first morning we had a crowd of men and women, boys and girls, armed with shiny, chopping tools, ready for business. They have kept coming, day after day for a month now, their chatter breaking the silence of the farm’s lonely spaces. With effort shared, jokes shared, they have made a picnic of the heavy work, passing round tshwala, mahewu and porridge in their pauses for rest and discussion. In the first two days, miraculously, a thorn scrub barricade had spread 2 km across the farm.

For that is the job we have set the stockowners, building our internal fences, cutting the farm into units for controlled grazing. Each man works at a set task for a set wage, while his cattle graze nearby. At the end of the month his grazing fees are debited, and if he has a credit, it accumulates as shares in CAP.

The first 38 people have signed up, with 260 cattle, 220 goats and 50 sheep. Heavy summer rains have made the grass rank in places – we would rather see it grazed down than burnt down in a winter blaze.

Indawozendaba should have been the name of this farm. The place of talking. Will life here always need so much talk?

There has had to be a formal contract with each stockowner – and each stockowner has a special, personal problem that must be discussed. Slowly, in detail, at length. Mrs. Mbatha, for example, says she is a widow. She would like to work for grazing for her three cows but as her children are at school, and she must hoe alone in her fields, she cannot see how to manage it. (Or that's the gist of the first half hour) what about Saturdays Bokide queries. If she and her three children will work every Saturday, they will pay for the grazing and end up with money to spend. How does that sound? It sounds like hope for a defeated old woman, says Mrs. Mbatha.

The talk is necessary for trust, but there never seems to be an end to it. What about inoculations, vaccinations, better bulls? Can CAP help? Already the newcomers are possessive of the farm. How, they demand, will we prevent people who DON'T work from poaching grazing? Can we brand their animals with our marks?

“And if we do,” says Neil, “you will soon be saying we are going to rob you of your stock.” Ha Ha Ha.

But that's true. How about another mark then?

The newcomers make no secret of the fact that they are keeping their options open. On Mondays they march their cattle to the government dip, then, regulations satisfied, they march them back to CAP on Tuesday. If anything goes wrong with CAP their cattle will still be registered in the reserve.

One of the things that has pleased us most about the new development is the kind of man now working with us. Individuals with dignity, with status, who would never have come to work as common labourers, can now meet us as equals, not subordinates. As equals they shared the shoving, the flying hooves, the muddy splashes when the dip was used for the first time – and the sense of victory when the last reluctant animal had been pushed through and everyone sang their way home, drenched and dirty.

That was a day to remember!

A bundle of notes stuffed in the roof till banking day tells the next story. Four months ago we stopped selling cattle, but we couldn't stop the people who still came to buy.

They traveled in hired trucks and taxis, on trains from Goli begging for animals. Surely there was one sickly cow we could spare? But there wasn't and we had to turn them away. This is the desperation of the Black man without a marketplace.

In a roadside field of wild red zinnias another pleading gang from Goli gave Neil the answer. They would join CAP with a cash deposit. They would describe the sort of animal they wanted. They would be patient. On their behalf Neil would visit White sale yards to purchase stock.

“Don't expect results tomorrow,” he warned. “Even when there is a suitable sale I may not be able to get the stock you want.”

The offer asked a lot of trust. The men gave it, with the R 1 500 they handed over. This will be a service for members only – not ideal but all we can do until our own herd had built up and we can sell again.

A year ago this month we found Mdukatshani, hopping and dancing on our early explorations. The ants still keep us on the hop, the tormenting swarms nipping furiously if we stop for a moment, nipping even as we move. You can tell an Mdukatshani resident by feet pockmarked with the tiny blisters of new bites and the peeling skin of old. Young chicks are killed by the ants, and milking is murder for the ants overwhelm a crouching man in minutes. We have even found a refugee leguaan a top an aloe, trying to escape the ants. We've tried poisons and powders to fight them, but grass seems to be the only remedy – where the grass is thick there are no ants. We'll have to wait a bit to lose all these ants!

A year ago Michael drove the first load of CAP men to camp on the new farm. "Tough," they agreed, "but we can do it." We've all wondered about that since! This month as we listened to the chatter of the fence makers, and watched the activity round the new dip and a dam-in-the-making, the usually silent Michael grunted: "Hm! I think we're going to get this place right." It's how we are all feeling now.

"This was a much better birthday," said GG. Last year he had to share his day with the Directors, when they met here on the riverbank to decide whether to purchase the farm. This year GG had a party and, from Dad with love, a bucket of snake eggs. We watched them hatch into perfect tiny,.. er... boomslangs? ...Cobras...? Mambas...? grass snakes. Nobody seemed to know so we gave the small reptiles their freedom on the hill.

Tree-fruiting time has come round again, and branches have cracked with the weight of rows of small boys, stuffing themselves with the dark delights of red ivory, tart and juicy wild litchis, sweet brown grewia fruits. And when they have finally had enough, the boys have filled big bowls for barter.

On January 30 Mr. Gina, the Assistant Circuit Inspector, came to call. "I've got good news," he announced. "The government has approved the application for Mdukatshani school. There are posts for eight teachers. School will open on February 3. If you can just show me the classrooms..."

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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FEBRUARY 1976: IT'S ALL BEEN QUITE AN EDUCATION!

No classrooms?

Mr. Ginga was not in the least put out.

"The children can learn under the trees," he beamed. "It's all for the good of KwaZulu. On Tuesday I will bring three teachers. Can you arrange accommodation for them?"

(Heavens! Where?)

"Yes" said Neil.

"You are lucky, went on Mr. Ginga. "The Government will pay the teachers from the moment the school is registered...."

"But you said..."

"I said the school had been approved. Now we must get it registered.

That usually takes three weeks at the most. Can you pay the teachers a little until then?"

"You're sure it only takes three weeks?"

"Well, this year it might be different," admitted Mr. Ginga. "All the papers and staff have just moved to our new capital at Ulundi and many boxes have gone to the wrong place. Maybe your registration papers went to the wrong place too. But I'm sure they'll be found eventually."

"I'm sure," said Neil.

"So if you can tell the parents that school opens in three days time?"

"Yes", said Neil.

But although we had helped to push the school this far, we couldn't push it much further. KwaZulu wants Whites to help with Black education, but Pretoria disagrees, and for the time being Pretoria makes the rules.

"We can help with plans and advice, and we think we have a donor to pay for the building," Neil reported to the Chief. "But now it is over to you."

The Chief said he was delighted at the good news, and he sent a message instructing his induna to call a meeting of all the people to elect a school committee. Meanwhile Antonia set out on the familiar round from Kraal to Kraal, carrying the news.

"A school under the trees?" people scoffed. "Will an inspector inspect it? Will there be examinations and certificates? Whoever heard of a school without a bell and walls?"

"Of course we'll send our children to the school," people told her.

"When we see the classrooms and desks and teachers and blackboards, then of course we'll send our children to the school."

"This is a community school – it is for everyone to share," said Antonia. "Together we can share the work of building it too."

"Oh"

“Oh well.”

“Oh well of course I’d love to come and help but you see....

I have to dip...

I have to herd ...

I have to go and buy meal...

I have to look after the house ...

I am sick....

I have to go to a party...

I have to write to ask my husband’s permission....

I have to reap the mabela

Otherwise of course I’d love to help.”

Antonia arrived home a bit glum.

On the day of the meeting the induna sent a message. He would not be attending. A school on a White farm was outside his jurisdiction. And anyway, there was a perfectly good site for a school next to his kraal. A bit steep maybe, but a good site where he could keep an eye on things.

The meeting went ahead anyway. There were 14 men and 20 women. It was Monday so most of the men were drunk and talkative. Who said they needed a school anyway? Take a girl. What the hell did she gain by going to school? Fancy ideas that set her running to town to become a “mees”. Taught or untaught she got the same price when she married. In fact she made a better wife untaught. Who’d ever seen a “mees” carry water or wood, smearing mud on wall, milking cows or making beer? No, school was not for girls. And another thing if the Chief had approved this school how come the induna wasn’t there as his spokesman? How about a bit of proof that the Chief backed the idea? How about a lift to Tugela Ferry to ask him?

The women listened miserably, their thoughts unspoken. It began to rain and the meeting dissolved.

Anton drove down to Tugela Ferry to see the Chief next day. Had the Chief changed his mind? Certainly not, he was right behind the school and would send for that induna and have a word with him ...

The Day of School Opening arrived.

The promised three teachers did not. Fortunately neither did the children!

This time Janet drove down to Tugela Ferry.

“What’s happening?” she asked. But the Circuit Inspector was away and his staff looked blank. They had heard nothing of teachers for Mdukatshani. Mr. Madonda of the Regional Authority tried to be helpful. “There’s a great shortage of teachers now,” he explained. “So perhaps they have stolen your teachers for another school”.

The induna – under orders – came to see us at last. He’s a great guy. He has told us before, but he made a reminder.

“I am a mighty man, more important than anybody else for miles around. I am the voice of the chief. I am bigger than anybody else. I am the big noise here.”

And eventually: “I will do as my Chief instructs and call that meeting. But I still say it would save a lot of trouble if the site were placed next to my kraal. For 30 years I was with the South African Police, but my corns made me retire. My corns are bad, and even though I use much car battery water on them, they still grow! If it were not for my corns I’d still be a policeman. With the SAP I learnt discipline. Now if the school was next to my kraal I could supervise it ...”

Next we had a visit from the Circuit Inspector, Mr. Mdluli, and our friend Mr. Ginga. They had brought a teacher with them! While they drank coffee and discussed “our problem”, Gaynor Nconyane sat under a tree, bewildered and miserable. Piled next to her were her bed, table, washbasin and suitcase – two registers and two boxes of chalk.

“Didn’t they warn you?” asked Janet.

“I think they were afraid,” said Gaynor.

Later Mr. Cindi came – also to talk about the school. He is a curious man, out of his own pocket paying a crippled student to teach local herd boys the rudiments of the three R’s. The boys learn at odd hours, their slates the rocks among the goats. Mr. Cindi got to Standard 2, but he’s the leading educationist in our corner of the hills. He wanted to talk about teachers for this new school.

The quality of teacher was critical – and he had just the right woman to teach at the Mdukatshani School. In fact he would be willing to pay for her until the school was registered. (Interesting!)

“It’s nothing to do with us,” we said.

“Go on,” winked Cindi. “You know jolly well if you pushed a bit ...”

Day of the Second Meeting. Pity it had to fall on the day of the hut burnings. Pity it had to be on the day the lorry fell off the hill spilling its load of girls. But the induna was there and a smattering of others. This week they were uneasy about the school site. It was all very well that White men saying he would give land for the school, but when he left there’d be a new White man saying:

Off my land kaffirs. Oh no, they weren’t going to help with that sort of school.

Old Timothy the Patriarch had had enough. He spoke, as he always does, coldly and distantly. “You know there is no land for this school in KwaZulu. The man has said the land he gives will be registered in KwaZulu. But does it matter? We can put the buildings on our side then if things happen the way you say they will happen, our children will only lose their playgrounds.”

But this meeting got no further than the first, and again the women went home, their thoughts unspoken. When we opened the door next morning three elders were already waiting under the Council Tree. Timothy, the Patriarch said: “We have come to speak about that school.”

They were weary of talk. They had decided to set themselves up as the school committee, and once the registration was through they’d employ Cindi to do the building. The women wanted the school, but were not allowed to speak. The Chief wanted the school. And only a fool asked the children what they wanted. They got what was good for them. Which meant, like it or not, they’d get that school.

Meanwhile numbers have grown until Antonia and Gaynor teach 50 children under the trees. “Could we have a syllabus?” Janet asked the Circuit Inspector at Tugela Ferry. “Well now, we’re right out of syllabuses at the moment.”

Teachers Guides?

Those too.

Any books?

A few English readers. There will be more in May.

On the way home Janet stopped off at Emtateni School to see if she could borrow something. There were 200 children squashed into one small room, squeezed onto benches, overflowing onto the floor. Half were Sub A, half were Sub B, and two teachers stood at opposite ends of the room, bellowing at their pupils.

(“It’s as if the platteland is bleeding dry,” said the principal of the Weenen White School. “If our numbers drop much lower we will have to close down.”)

This was the month of the Big Storm. It toppled hills with its dark torrents, swept away roads, and hurled mud and rock to smash the walls of huts. Over the river lightening struck a kraal and it smouldered through the long wet night. After the storm we saw Msinga as it must have been – with crystal streams and waterfalls and pools.

“When I was a boy,” said one greybeard. “It looked like that through-out the year.”

Simon Kumalo retired this month. A delicate, refined man, he has been becoming even thinner, quieter, and although he has said nothing, we have all noticed his struggle to cope with the rigours of rough camping life. When his sons ordered him home, we agreed he needed the rest. Simon was in retirement when we first met him – a TB case nursed and supported by his wife, Nancy. When Nancy joined us as a beloved canework instructor, she asked if her husband could come too.

Later he did light work, eventually becoming our Dairy Manager. When Nancy died, Simon stayed on. He won’t be moving far away. He’ll visit often, he says. He’s still a member after all. But we will miss Kumalo with his gentleness and quiet twinkle, and his going has made us sad.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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MARCH 1976: AN ANNUAL REPORT

Fences cut.
Cattle missing.
Old routine.
Patch fences.
Count cattle.
Call Police.

Cattle missing? Are you sure? Didn't you sell them? Count again.
Anyway we can't come tomorrow because it's Saturday and we're playing cricket.
Count again.
Cattle missing.

So our first year has ended rather as it began, although now that we know the routine our calamities assume a more comfortable familiarity. And – as we sniff the air cautiously for omens – we remind ourselves that sometimes we do get our man, and that at least is a change from the early months.

We were driving down to Tugela Ferry a few days after the latest fence-cutting when we saw three fat cattle with our brand grazing along the roadside.
“Whose cattle are those?” Neil asked a throng of curious children.
They did not know. Where was the tribal policeman? They did not know.
I'll have to find the policeman,” Neil said. “Keep the cattle here and I'll be back as soon as I can.”

Have you ever tried to keep cattle in one place? Herding is an art, and the hot, flustered performance of Janet, Creina and the boys soon drew an appreciative crowd.
“Why do you want these cattle?” the crowd asked.
“I can't speak Zulu,” Creina replied, more or less truthfully.
Heading off an escape bid up a donga, Janet found some more animals with our brand and chased them next to the others. Two helpful small boys left the crowd to join us. Helpful? They were driving the cattle away! Hey there – leave the cattle alone. Go away. Go away.
“The children say the cattle are theirs,” murmured the crowd.
“Why do you want these cattle?” questioners persisted.
(Would Neil NEVER come?)

But Neil was having problems.
“Please can you tell me where I can find the tribal policeman?”
Stony faces. Nobody knew. On to another kraal.
“Please can you tell me ...”?
No. The faces were stonier, the reply more emphatic. But as Neil turned away there was a screech of joy within the hut.
“That's him. That's my man. Greetings, greetings.” And a tribal lovely in the throes of mudpack and hairdo emerged to grasp hands.

“Do you remember me?” she beamed.
“How can I ever forget you,” said Neil, more or less truthfully.

The young woman giggled.

“Those days I spent on your farm at Wasbank, cutting thatch and eating all that meat and maas – those were the best days of my life and I will never forget them.”

She introduced Neil to the family.

“Now what can we do for your? The policeman? Of course. That’s his kraal down there. We’ll take you so he knows you are a friend.”

With the policeman loaded up, next stop was the home of suspect number one. Drums and singing were producing a deafening praise to the Lord as they arrived, but the policeman was firm about priorities. The Lord could wait – this was serious business and the priest was required immediately. So the priest climbed in, and an enthusiastic congregation after him. They had to see that justice was done.

The preliminary hearing opened on the river bank next to the disputed beasts, while our boys splashed in a pool at the drift and the crowd moved between the two entertainments. Msinga was not short on sideshows too.

WHAM! Went a lorry careering downhill on two wheels.

“He’s killed a donkey,” yelled the crowd. Donkey owners set off at a run. SPLASH! They slipped on slimy stones and fell flat in the water.

“Haw, haw, haw” shrieked the crowd in delight.

The lorry driver had stopped to examine the carcass under his wheels but when he saw the converging people, he slammed his door, revved up and roared across the river.

“Hey” yelled the crowd wiping away the splash and reaching for stones. Ten minutes later the lorry returned at even greater speed.

“Here he comes – kill him,” shouted the mob, hurling stones.

Meanwhile the hearing was drawing to a close. The old priest said his sons had brought the cattle home only three days earlier saying they had bought them from a White man up the valley. We had sold no cattle for months. The elders decided it was a case for a higher court and the car’s springs sagged another few kilometers to the Tugela Ferry Police Station.

Msinga? You were mad, people tell us. Asking for trouble. You haven’t got a hope. Why didn’t you settle for somewhere easier, somewhere else?

White Farms Threat of War read a Mercury front-page story last month. “White farmers along the Umzimkulu River are threatening armed action to prevent livestock from the homeland invading their land. In spite of appeals for assistance to the Bantu Affairs Department, the situation is deteriorating and race relations worsening. Fences are being cut with impunity, or trees dropped across them... The farmers are now threatening action to focus publicity on their plight.”

That’s what happens somewhere else, those farmers are somewhere else. For somewhere else is a 3200 km boundary that separates Natal from KwaZulu, White from Black, rich from poor. Our experiences are no different from the other White farmers who share a boundary with the homeland – an amazing 3200 km boundary that is being re-affirmed, re-inforced within our small province. New fences go up to mark the separation – and fall as fast all along this inner frontier. Wars were always fought over fences.

What exactly are you trying to DO there? We are asked. Simple enough to answer. We came here to grow grass, and to teach others to grow grass with us, for we believe that only grass will give KwaZulu a future. Growing grass, however, is not as simple as it seems. Grass needs soil, sun and rain – and trust. Growing grass means growing trust, and trust is rooted in personal things, so we try to win back the lost grasses of Mdukatshani by bandaging a baby, finding corn plasters for the induna, starting a school, selling cheap milk, getting a pension for old man Dhladhla, a waterpipe for Mbatha and an asthma cure for Mtshali. We grow grass by telling the priest why his mealies have topgrub, by accepting bags of sweet potatoes for services rendered, by drinking tea with the chief, by giving lifts along the road, and by talking and listening to the many men who doubt and wonder. Sometimes we grow grass just by picnicking together on the riverbank. If the ground is well prepared then perhaps, just perhaps, grass will grow.

At times during the first year it has been hard to live with gladness but at each homecoming our gladness is rediscovered. Msinga is home, and these achingly beautiful hills stir us even though we know them well now.

Msinga – where the women stand helpless before taps.

“I can’t get the hang of this contraption,” complains MaCindi, OC Vegetable Gardens.

“Please come and turn the tap for me.”

Where a man can say: “Don’t you know? I built the Carlton Centre.”

Where the wheelbarrows that trundle across the veld are carrying old folk to fetch their pensions.

“We’ve got to check they haven’t died,” said an official.

Where last week’s news is today’s news and the papers arrived all at once in a seven-day pile.

But we don’t feel we are out of the world. Msinga IS the world. Everybody here knows that.

The cities belong to us just as much as the hills do.

“Parp-Parp” goes a hooter among Johannesburg Skyscrapers.

“Hello there ...!” bellows a happy Msinga face across the street.

“How are the rains? How are the mealies? How are the cattle at home?” asks another Black man on a street corner. We don’t know him but he knows us. He’s from Msinga too.

We have found a few small wisdoms in the year - like learning how to forecast floods. They arrive punctually whenever Creina has a magazine deadline. In the summer months when the rivers are up Weenen is a round trip of 150 km away, and fetching the post becomes a major expedition. We set off with typewriter, stationery and files so that urgent letters can be answered on the P. O. Stoep, and with blankets and books in case the drifts are up on the way back and we have to spend the night on the road. During this year the boys have grown accustomed to a bed in the boot.

Ulundi, the middle-of-nowhere-Zulu-capital-in-the-making, is not much more civilised than we are.

This month we made our first trip to its corrugated iron ugliness squatting in the dusty veld. Black city it may become, but now it seems not very different from any other Black Location. When government departments moved in two months ago, Secretaries of State queued to make their calls at the only telephone in town – the Public Callbox. We visited the solitary store at lunchtime and as we waited our turn at the counter listened to two Black men complaining to each other in Zulu.

“See that White man there and his woman? They walk in here as if they have a right to be here. This is our Location, our town. They should wait at the door until somebody says: Yes, what do you want?”

“No brother – they should stand outside the fence looking through the hole and begging: Please won’t you take my money to the store and buy me this and this and this. There are too many Whites in this place. It might as well be Joburg.”

The Whites at Ulundi are daily visitors, living 50 km away at Melmoth, and trekking back and forth in government buses. It seems an expensive way to run the affairs of a poor country. By the way – despite all the firm resolutions of the KwaZulu Government – it did not take us long to find Black and White still have separate lavatories!

Two Black friends took us home to give us supper before the six-hour drive back to Msinga. “Thank you for being adaptable,” said Otty as we were going. “Whites don’t like to take. They only want to give.”

When we came to Mdukatshani a year ago we hoped we would bring change. Change is a whole new science now, with specialists who learn its laws and do short courses in techniques on how to tame change, yoke it and set its course. But change, we have found, has an impetus of its own, as violent as the flooding river. Grab in wave and whirlpool. Change is not just something you do to other people – it is something they will do to you, and we have become aware of how little we like the turmoil and all it demands of us. It’s much nicer to be in control, manipulating change, than to be the manipulated and the changed.

“Are you willing to be made nothing dipped into oblivion?
If not you will never really change.”

We are swept along protesting. First let us see where we are going, we say. Let us see the purpose of it all. But there’s no long view, no destination, just the heave and the roll and the lurch of the log.

NEIL AND CREINA

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APRIL 1976: THE DESERT OF SIN

We found we were awake long before the 4 a.m. knock.

Dawn? It seemed hours away for the night was dark and starlit and very quiet.

“You’ve got to be early,” the men had insisted. “It’s a long way to the desert of sin and we should be there by five.”

The track led deep into the hills, far beyond the country we knew, beyond the hanging mists of the Mhlangane River.

Long before we reached the place we passed cattle: small groups, big herds, long lines of cattle straggled out among the gullies. All heading where we were heading, but with greater certainty of their direction.

It was still dark when we stopped, but 1 000 cattle were there already, and all around us hooves clicked on stone as other animals converged on the bare gathering place.

Handfuls of sticks collected along the way made tiny fires among the rising smoke of the waiting cattle. At dawn they were still coming. Two thousand, three thousand, four thousand 4 000 cattle! Every week they tramp 8, 10, 15 km dragging new dongas into the gaunt ridges.

“Idless, idless, idless,” screamed the tribal policeman.

“Folm, folm, folm!” bellowed another. “Every seven days you do this. The cattle know, the inspectors knows, only you boys forget! Folm! Folm! Where’s the bloody book for the inspector? You! Where is your other ox?

The one your father got from the son of Dlamini?

Idless! Move up you blasted sons of dogs.”

Dipping day was under way.

“Hau, policeman,” we said. “Supervising dipping has given you a carrying voice and a choice of swear words.”

“Swear?” said the man. “I can’t stop doing it now. Even at home I scream and swear at the children Folm, damn you, keep the line moving you misbegotten....”

Out of the chaos came slow progress. Books were checked, cattle dipped and counted. A huge bull left the line to attack another herd sire, and people and cattle scattered to give them room. Boys forgot what they were doing and rushed to watch.

“Kill him Kolbel! Use your under-the-belly stroke. Push! Dudula! Thatha (Tatha! Thatha O King of Bull retreated!”

“Blummen, red-and-white monarch of Msinga, you have never yet been beaten.

Dudulaaaaaaa! Hi! Hi! Hi! Hi! Ya weena ...”

“Folm, damn you, folm!” shrieked the tribal policeman cracking his whip as he cursed the boys. They scattered laughing.

“Yeah,” taunted some youngsters. “How you have seen a real bull so take your grasshopper away.”

Fighting talk that! Skirmishes broke out as overexcited boys tried to settle the merits of their bulls with sticks.

At last the line was moving again.

We watched at the dip as the cattle came through! There were six of ours. We questioned the dipping inspector. Where was the owner? A tribesman came forward clutching an armful of sticks.

“I paid cash for that heifer,” he said angrily. “She’s mine.

I got her from that speculator Mtshali. I can show you the receipt.”

His story seemed genuine enough – on his dies, anyway the purchase had been legal.

“But the animal is ours,” we explained. “And we’ll have to take her away with us.”

“Blood will flow if that animal moves,” threatened the man, raising his sticks.

Neil was gentle. “Baba sit down with us and let us discuss the matter. Put down your sticks.”

An hour later the conference was concluded. The man had agreed that the heifer could go.

“But Numzaan will you try and get me compensation for the animal?” he pleaded. “I paid for it not knowing it was stolen.”

The four o’ clock knocks have rapped out all month, summoning us to the dips of Msinga. Thirty of our own cattle are back as a result, and scores of suspiciously well- bred, branded beasts are being investigated. The list of wanted White cattle is a long one. The combined CAP – CID operation has uncovered rustling rings that have stolen countless cattle, and resold them again all over Msinga.

“They’ll be in the district ostensibly as Joburg cattle buyers,” explained the CID Chief when he introduced three new Black faces in denim, stetsons and shoulder holsters.

“They’ll arrive in a private car tomorrow and ask if they can buy cattle. Help them all you can.”

Next day three worried detectives arrived.

They had given an old woman a lift on the way down.

“Tell us mother,” they asked, “where can we find Tegwaan, the man who sells cattle to Blacks? We want to buy cattle from him.”

The old lady cackled at them. “You don’t want to buy cattle,” she said. “Anybody can see you are policeman.”

It seemed the old lady was right, for Robert Morte brought them to the door with “Here are the police to see you.”

“These people can smell S.A.P.,” groaned our detectives.

But with or without disguise our plainclothesmen have known their stuff, following the scent between Johannesburg, Ladysmith and Tugela Ferry, and two men are in jail awaiting trial – tow men so far.

Cattle have been found, but cattle will go missing again we know, for KwaZulu is desperate for cattle!

“Money!” say the parents of a bride. “You bring us that stuff to lobola our daughter! You must be joking. Money rots away as we look at it. We want cattle.”

“We Zulus are all the same, we don’t trust money anymore!” explained Mlohli Cindi! “The abelungu in Goli are indeed clever for they raise our wages so that we will stay at work, and then they get their brothers to charge us more and more for clothing! And for food! We come home, and the money that we thought would keep the family, it shrinks and shrinks until you find you have to go back in three months, not six. Please Mzolo... just one heifer, Or maybe two.

Here's my money."

"Why buy cattle when thieves are so active?" Bokide has pleaded.

"Brother, my bride cries for me while I delay. Her father is tempted by a rich old man with many cattle. Thieves are a lesser risk. Just one heifer Mzolo."

"Permits? How can you talk about permits to a desperate man? My wife is dying because I do not appease the ancestors with a beast, and you talk of permits? Jail – better jail – than losing the wife who cost me ten cattle."

"Money? It makes you frightened to see your hard work in Goli buys nothing. Only with a calf can my money grow into more money. They say this land is ours now. If I buy a calf for R50 this year, next year it will be R80, then R100 and then it will give me a calf every year..."

"If you want to stop stealing and violence, get us cattle," says an old man. "Money means nothing anymore."

Money means nothing and even the chiefs' courts set fines payable in cattle. Fines that cannot be paid because there are no cattle for Black men. More stealing, more violence.

Inflation will eat away the hills of KwaZulu.

Four months and months we have had this meaningless money thrust at us by people pleading: "Just one heifer."

Money in pocketful, handfuls, bagfuls. We've never seen so much money.

"We'll join your co-op," they say. "And here's a deposit to buy cattle for us. We will bring more if you need it."

Long ago we sold the last of the cattle, but because of the pressure we have compromised. This month we went to the Weenen White sale to buy cattle. Black men walked 30 km to Weenen to watch Neil buying, to help drive the 46 animals back home again, to make sure their claim was remembered. There were 46 animals – and a waiting list for 160.

There were doubters, waiting to jeer. We wish they would still doubt, but they have joined the new crowds bringing money for cattle. From Johannesburg, Durban, Kimberly – from all over Natal and Zululand – the whole Black world, it seems, has heard of the CAP Black market.

When we walked our cattle 100km to Mdukatshani a year ago, a short-tempered old man kept order among the cattle, men and boys. At 86 Somvete Khulu had not yet found a reason to ask for concessions to his age.

"Come on, let's go," he would say curtly. We would go. Khulu is a man of very, very few words, but when he speaks, you snap to it. His long years never taught him the proper respect due a White man.

"What the bloody hell are you doing taking my tractor yesterday?" he would demand of his White boss, breaking in on a meeting without apology or greeting. His White boss has tended to keep his place. One night an English volunteer illegally 'borrowed' the Khulu tractor to do some night ploughing. He brought it back dented and dirty.

"Oh God, if Khulu finds out I'll have to catch the next plane home," said Doug as he worked until dawn, panelbeating and cleaning.

But even Khulu is beginning to feel old.

I'm not earning my salary anymore," he said gruffly.

"Don't know what's wrong. Just can't keep up anymore."

So at 86 Khulu has retired. Simon Khumalo came back for the day, and we gave two men a joint farewell party under the big marula on the riverbank.

Kumalo was tearful as he tried to make his farewell speech, and we were overwhelmed with him. Khulu was as abrupt as ever. "You'd better hurry up," he said in the middle of the speeches. "It's almost time for me to fetch the cows."

We hurried up.

What will we do without him?

There was another farewell this month. Masandisa, the flying one – the old Mercedes – was laid to rest after a long and noble career doing everything from dragging the hayrake, pulling trailerloads of fertilizer, rocks, horses, fowls... Masandisa looked a bit the worse for wear and we were accustomed to the apologies of traffic policemen who stopped us with: "Sorry sir – thought it was a Bantu car!"

Three times within a few days policemen waved us down this month, and finally ordered the car off the road. We'd like to have contested the decision – but we can't afford the fines!

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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MAY 1976: DUMA'S FERRY

The poles have waited alongside the path all summer. Now their idleness is over and they are on the move again. For us the dwindling pile marks the coming of winter just as much as the first red tambootie leaves, the fresh biltong and wors drying on our neighbours stoep, or the changing song of the river as it rediscovers its rocky islands.

Even if we did not see the people wading chest-deep through the water, the poles would tell us that the river is now open to traffic and the north and south banks are no longer separate worlds.

Girls come daily from the other side to fetch the poles, clutching their clothes on their heads before they plunge in to push the current. Small heaps of ash gives the tally of each crossing, for you need a fire to melt the numbness of the trip.

In summer the Tugela is a cold river and now, with the chill of the first snowfalls in the Drakensberg, it is almost unbearable. But the poles can't wait for warmer weather. They are the frameworks of a home delayed one season already, so the girls come and go, dragging each 7-metre length through the ice water. Then there's another warming fire on the farbank before the poles are lifted for the last lap up the hills.

Where we look upon it the Msusampi valley is flat and wide, yet it is an island cut off by the river and the steep drop of its surrounding mountains. There is only one landward approach – a narrow footpath followed by sure-footed donkeys when they are driven on journeys to “outside” to fetch bags of meal.

This summer disaster hit the Msusampi settlement. Duma's ferryboat was washed away in the big flood. For years the boat has danced perilously across the waves of the summer river. For years the boat has leaked, but the passengers bailed with jam tins and for ten cents each way they only got their feet wet. The boat was never short of passengers, for it was the only link with the busy world. Duma got a living from it- and so did his sons and grandsons when he became to row, for the ferry was a family concern.

Earlier this year Duma had to suspend his service because the holes in the boat had become dangerous. We agreed to weld the hull for him, and he promised to deliver the boat for repair “as soon as the river is a little lower.” Meanwhile six ladies carried the boat to a safe place high up the bank.

Duma thought he knew the river, but there'd never been anything like the deluge that swept down one night and snapped the chain, which fixed the boat to a tree. In the morning bits of boat were found a long way downriver, driftwood left by the receding flood.

We've been here long enough to know the value of the ferry to the Msusampi people. Delani Mbatha caught the ferry to work each day. (He was the first local man to join the CAP workforce).

One day Delani's mother caught the ferry with him. She was desperately ill and Neil said he couldn't help her. She must go to hospital immediately. The old lady demurred. Not that day. First she must ask permission of her husband. Back she went on the ferryboat, and in the night the river rose so high it put the ferry out of action, and when the river dropped again Delani's mother had died.

We worry about Delani now. The mist is still rising off the river when he wades to work before sunrise, and when he goes home again the valley is deep in shadow. Twice he has had pneumonia.

"Can you help me buy another boat?" begs Duma. "I'll give you half my fares every month until it is repaid.

We've looked at boats. They're pricey items, and as we never put a boat on our budget, we can't help this year. (Anybody know of an old boat going cheap? Even a leaky one would do).

We thought the Mdukatshani school would serve the Msusampi children, but without a ferryboat they cannot have an education.

"Oh why do I live so far away?" complains the Msusampi man with the plait over one ear. He has been wading to the weekly discussion group, and although we can see his kraal from here we know what he means. The river runs between us.

While the Friday discussions bring this man wading across the river, others come walking the dusty road from other valleys. One 70 year-old, we discovered, has been walking 30 km, determined not to miss a word. Neil talks agriculture – the widest subject in the world judging by the questions, which the men bring him. They won't give up the Friday gathering and neither will Neil, who is finding the animated lunch hour conversations irresistible.

"Have you heard about Matanzima's army?" asked one of the newspaper readers recently.

"And did you hear that the Xhosas are demanding that we give them land at Ixopo and Harding which they say belongs to them?"

"What makes the Xhosas think it's their land?"

"They say the Whites made mistakes when they planted boundaries."

"Hau – they like to forget the facts," commented Cindi. "Don't you know the Xhosas were originally Zulus" They were sent by the King to fetch a lion from the Cape, and because they couldn't catch a lion they decided it was safer to stay away from the King."

"Well I don't like the precedent they want to set," said Timothy. "Mzilikazi's descendents will be here next, claiming huge chunks of Natal because they say they are Zulus too, and then the Ndebeles will come."

"I have heard it said that even the Shangaans are of Zulu descent," said Cindi, "so I wonder what portion of KwaZulu will be left to us?"

"If the Cape was settled by Zulus chasing lions," wondered Mphephethi, "who did they displace in the Cape? Was there anyone there?"

"Oh the Cape belonged to the Bushmen," said Cindi, "and they were so small that even the Xhosas weren't scared of them and chased them away."

"That reminds me," said Timothy. "There's a huge rock near the Tugela with pictures of men killing cattle painted on the rock."

"Those were Bushmen," said Cindi.

(You mean stealing and stabbing cattle is not new at Msinga?" asked somebody)

“Bushmen did that? I don’t believe it,” said Timothy. “Anyway where did they get paper for their paintings, you tell me that.” Cindi gripped his head in despair. “Brother it is because they had no paper that they wrote on the rocks.”

“I suppose anyday now somebody will start to say those paintings are Bushmen notices proclaiming Msinga is their land?” said Timothy. “Damn it I will get up early tomorrow and go and rub off their title deeds.”

The men laughed.

“But space is becoming a problem” agreed Cindi. “Last week my brother’s son died. We were supposed to bury him on Friday but when we got to the cemetery it was full up. It was three days before we found a place to bury him, and then we had to dig the hole ourselves because the gravediggers were at a party.”

This month a man came to borrow the wire strainers.

“What on earth for?” asked Neil. The man introduced himself with some embarrassment. His name was Vutandi Mdlolo, he said, and he’d just returned home on leave from Goli. His kraal was next to our boundary fence – or what was left of our boundary fence. The wire had been cut or was sagging, and goats pushed through, and cattle push through, and women pushed through to steal wood, and he thought as he had some time on his hands he could try to fix it. Well!

During the precious days Mr. Mdlolo was at home he worked on the fence. At first he worked alone, but slowly shamefaced neighbours joined him. When Mr. Mdlolo returned to the city, the others kept at it, and they are still at it, now piling thornscrub against the repaired fence to make a goat proof barrier.

The drums are busy again – perhaps celebrating the summer harvest?

The women have finished reaping and put away their sickles, and underground silos are bursting with mabela. This crop should keep the beer flowing till next summer’s harvest.

We too are celebrating a crop. On our one short stretch of flat river land, the Lucerne is sprouting. Mphephethi, who has been made OC Irrigation, is a man transfigured with joy. The ploughing, the harrowing, the planting – he has done it all. For the FIRST time he has been more than just an onlookers.

Mphephethi had polio as a child, and it left him with a useless withered leg. Simon Sithole is crippled in the same way. Both men have become proficient mechanics and recently they suggested that as they repaired the vehicles, they should have a chance to drive them too. With a bit of help from Neil they devised an attachment to the footbrake so that it can be manipulated by hand – and hey presto, they are motorpowered. Instead of limping to the lands on his stick, Mphephethi sails down on the tractor, beaming and confident.

We’ve already asked about a boat. Now does anybody know where we can get some vicious dogs?

Under the shine of the May full moon some rustlers headed off 4 of our cattle, drove them to the river, and slaughtered them on the bank. The heads, hides and intestines were chopped into tiny pieces and dropped into the water. The rest of the meat was suspicious when we heard reports that there was a Special Sale of Cheap Meat upriver. Four men have been arrested and are awaiting trial, but we know that fullmoons are always bad for us.

Anton Hlongwane, our bookkeeper, was driving home from Weenen a few evenings later, just as a big yellow moon rose over the hills, when a man stepped into the road, and brandishing what appeared to be a gun, forced him to a stop. Still quaking Anton told us how the man had demanded to know who he was and where he was going.

“Why didn’t you warn me?” Anton asked, still shivering at the fright. But even among staff details of our moonlight patrols are kept very quiet. Until the dark nights return men are posted on the river, on the boundary fences – and one man has the job of stopping and searching passing cars. Court evidence has told us how more than once carcasses of our cattle have been carried away in car boots.

Although our men do not patrol with guns, they need some sort of self-defence. So Neil is poring over the advertisement columns of the Landbouweekblad for those famous “baie kwaai” Boerbuls, or The Farmers Weekly which guarantees a “St. Bernard-Alsation-Bull Mastiff cross – very vicious.”

We don’t know where that leaves our Pacifist principles – but we hope it will leave our cattle herd undisturbed.

NEIL AND CREINA

P.S. Bathulise won first prize on the Royal Show for one of her beautiful homegrown, homespun and homewoven Angora cushions.

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JUNE 1976: FRIDAYS

It probably started the day Mr. Themba Ndlovu asked if he could buy a cow.

“No,” said Neil.

Then came Majozi.

“Please can you get me some fertilizer for my mealies?”

“No,” said Neil.

“I have saved the money to buy a tractor,” said Cindi. “Won’t you help me get one secondhand?”

“No, no,” said Neil again.

“Why not?” they asked. “Cows are good. Fertilizer is good.

A tractor is progress. Why not?”

The whys whirled and rattled remorselessly until all the day was answering whys.

“Come together,” Neil said eventually. “The answers are the same for all your questions.” So every Friday the discussion group meets at the top of the cliffs to peer at leaves and poke at roots, sometimes to chew our home-cured bacon, to finger homespun wool, to wonder if the rockets that went to the moon passed heaven on the way. To argue about the ads.

On Bantu Radio (How can you say that sugar is not protein?

The FM says that sugar makes you strong, sugar is good for you, eat more sugar so now we mix it with water as a tonic for our children). To wonder about all the whys of a very puzzling world.

And now after months of talk, Neil can say at last: “So you understand why I would not let you buy a dairy cow. It would have died on your mealiestalks this winter and you would have blamed me for selling you a dud animal. Before you have a pasture you need some understanding of the sun and soil and water. In life everything leans one upon another. The Whites call it ecology.”

Ecology? Heresy! Murmured shocked men at that first session. Reverend Nguni of the Church of the Nazarene nearly walked out. But Reverend Nguni was desperate about the top grub in his mealies. Last summer he planted twice and never reaped a cob.

So he stayed and listened a little and argued a lot, for Neil had said: “Interrupt me if you think I’m wrong. If you are quiet because of hlonipha (politeness or respect) we will none of us learn,” The men took him at his word and the interruptions are endless.

“When the world began there was just a ball of rock,” said Neil that first day. (The place to begin is somewhere near the beginning). Then the rains fell and they worked on the rock for there was power in each drop of water...” and he squeezed a wet rag and small drops of water exploded in the dust at their feet like tiny bombs. “And so the rock was broken into particles and lichens and mosses took hold and grew, and decayed, and after millions of years.”

“No! No! Broke in the agitated Umfundisi. “On the third day the land and the sea and the plants appeared. How can you speak against the scriptures? Would you destroy God?”

Old Testament or New, animal husbandry or agronomy – in life one thing leans upon another, and farming and theology are inseparable it seems. And the heresy that hurts most is that which contradicts “Genesis Chapter 1 Verse 26,” as the Umfundisi pointed out with some heat that first day. Was the world made for man? Or is it true that he is not overlord but just apart of many miracles?

Friday may not settle the disputes, but it’s a day for looking at some miracles. Look at the sun – there is the machine that powers our world. Look at this leaf – without the green leaf our world would die. Look at this thornbush. It is a nitrogen factory. (So that’s why our goats stay so fat though they only eat thorns!) Look at this soil – it is alive.

But all believing is an act of faith.

“Soil is alive?” The men let it trickle through their fingers. “Full of tiny animals that we cannot see ...? Let us see!”

A gardener complains: “We plant an orange pip and after years and years we get a tree with one orange, but because a Black man planted it, that orange is too sour to eat.”

“Wait for our nursery,” says Neil. “Today, through grafting, you can have a tree bearing fruit in 18 months. You can have an orange tree with branches bearing early, late and mid-season fruit. Or have a naartjie, lemon and orange on the same tree.”

“Yeah, yeah,” they laugh. It’s worth coming on Fridays just for the entertainment. “The ear won’t believe but the eye might.”

“Something that has always worried me,” confesses one man, “is that if God is infallible how come he made the fly, or tick, or crocodile? Was it to punish Adam and Eve?”

The answers lie in parables, familiar to us, but new to them.

There are stories of insects grown resistant for DDT. The mice that multiplied and destroyed plantations when the snakes and owls were wiped out. Each case history that shows up the White man’s blunders gives them a small surge of new confidence.

And it re-affirms the infallibility of God.

“Oh the mysteries of God are unraveling.” They say with deep satisfaction as new words are absorbed into their vocabulary.

“Amalegumes.” Amabacteria” “Amanitrate” “Uphophate”

“Iphotosynthesis” (I keep forgetting that word, complains one,” but I know what it means).

They are talking now of fossils and carbondating, of niches and communities and succession. Some of the men have never been to school, some have been to Standard 2, but they’ve lived close to the land and what they’re learning now “ It all makes sense at last,” declares a kehla with joy, and the information, complex though some of it may be, is readily retained.

Long ago some agricultural demonstrators came too.

“But it is an informal visit,” they stressed with some anxiety.

“We would like to come every week but first we must get permission from our superiors – from our chiefs, our government, our director.” While they wait for a ruling they stay away.

“Who wants demonstrators?” says Mr. Ntabela, a fiery old man who makes his living from the government plots downriver.

“What do we get from them? They go to the office and write progress reports until it’s warm, then they buzz around on their motorbikes.

“Progress reports?” asked somebody.

“Well you pin three letters together,” explained Ntabela,” and you put carbon between them. Then you write: 15th May 10 a.m.

Went to Mrs. Majolas. Taught her to erect a fence. 12 noons:

Went to Mr. Bhengu and showed him how to fertilize his mealies. 2.30 p.m.: Told dwellers at Mahlangaan how to kill cutworm...”

“But you know they don’t do those things,” broke in an indignant listener.

“Of course not,” said Ntabela. Don’t you understand that if they did those things they’d have no time for writing progress reports? Then they wouldn’t get their cheques at the end of the month. Now they write progress reports and everyone is happy. The other day I asked a demonstrator if there was any reason I should not use Malathion, and he said he didn’t know but if I was worried it would be best if I did not eat my vegetables myself but sold them all. It’s ignorance that makes them stay at the office with their progress reports.

Then they don’t have to show us that they haven’t been taught.”

We hear another side to the story when a second party of Msingas demonstrators came to call this month.

“Why didn’t Kissinger come to South Africa for those talks?”

asked the Black Nationalist immediately after the introduction.

Foreign affairs was a nice change from theology! More test questions followed, and there was Piet Retief, and all those White war memorials, and a lot more before we were allowed to start on farming.

“How do you get the people to listen to you?” asked the demonstrators. “Nobody listens to us. They say we are boys and cannot teach them anything. They say they need more land, then they can do the rest themselves. What answers can we give?”

At the end of the afternoon we were back at the beginning.

“At first the world was ...” said Neil

“But the Bible says on the third day,” replied one man. “In Genesis Chapter 1 Verse 26..” He was a devout man. “I never accepted the facts we were taught in our courses, but who disagrees with his lecturer? Yet I won’t teach what I don’t believe, and life was created, it did not evolve. In the Bible it says...”

“Oh shut up,” said the Black Nationalist, weary at last. “Go and read your damn Bible to yourself. It’s only about White people in any case so you are wasting your time on it.”

Yet the visit was happy one, with many thoughts shared.

Reverend Nguni has long ago lost his fear of what our talk will do to God. He’s stayed, and he’s argued, and he is now on his way to sharing a stud bull and a dairy goat. He’s excited. Majozi’s excited. Sithole’s excited. And Neil’s the most excited of all.

“Do you realize what it means?” Neil beams. “Do you realize?”

Majozi had just announced to the Friday meeting: “I’ve got some oxen. Mfundisi here has some land and a dam, which he and his daughters built. UJimu here has a kraal with manure over-flowing at the top. Mhlongo has a cart. Mealies don’t work. We have tried them, and even the fertilizer doesn’t help anymore so we believe you when you say the soil is tired and sick.

So we thought we’d rest the land and plant a pasture. Perhaps Lucerne? My oxen can pull Mhlongo’s cart to fetch uJimu’s manure for Umfundisi’s land. Then you must tell us what to plant and how to plant and when to plant and help us get seed.

And we want some dairy cows and milk goats and poultry and we will start to pay for them with two of our oxen...”

And Majozi handed us an old daydream with a heavy sigh last week.

“Knowledge has its drawbacks,” he was complaining. “I used to like going out to look for wood. I would stop at any tree and listen to my axe, razor sharp, biting its flesh and I rejoiced at the blaze I would get from it. Now I know that tree are not the same. Each is different from its brother. Each has a purpose. And so when I go looking for wood and I stop before a tree I begin to wonder if I can’t find another that is less important. And I move on wishing that I had no need for wood. There is no longer any joy in chopping for me.”

NEIL AND CREINA

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JULY: 1976

We have loved the winding river road that has taken us to the ‘phone twice a week. There is always the cinnamon flutter of word doves, and the blue flash of kingfishers, and we never seemed to pass without a mongoose streaking across the road ahead of us. Or a tribal lady piling in her headdress rubbing ochre on the roof as she gasped thanks for the lift” because there are robbers all along the road here and they stop you and they steal all you have.”

It’s a slow and stopping sort of road with new scents and brightness on every trip. Scarlet fascias in spring. Roosting storks. Thin mists off the river. The owl that takes us on a rev-and-hop race when we try to push him from possession of the middlemannetjie. Sometimes there’s a duiker or a bushbuck or a loping rabbit.

“There’s always something on this road,” say our boys. And there is, even if it’s just Dick Mcllally screaming on two wheels as he takes a ten ton load of singing “labour” home for the day.

Without a ‘phone we have almost become “familie” to our friendly Afrikaans neighbours, who have offered us koffie and gesels – as well as cauliflowers, carrots and koeksusters in season. And while we have waited for our calls we have heard what a tyrant Oupa was, or how Oom Thys Joubert found his bad backache was just a coathanger he put on with his jacket.

Poor Tannie Lettie – a bit simple now – who hoes out shopping in high boots with pillows strapped round her middle. The pistol club wants to start a first aid section, and did we know the teacher had moved in with the mechanic? We would never have become acquainted with Weenen if we had had a phone from the first.

A year ago a charming man from the Post Office arrived with a sheaf of papers for us to sign. “Shouldn’t be long now,” he assured us. “And here’s your number: 1411”.

Where would we put the ‘phone? Where was the homestead? He looked doubtfully at the unfinished wall.

“In here? You need a proper structure before you can have a telephone you know.”

We assured him – prophetically – the structure would be proper long before the telephone arrived.

We’d grown happily accustomed to our independence (We can get you – but you can’t get us) when the van Rooyen’s gave the news:

”The PO has dumped a heap of poles at our gate. They’re starting on your line.”

“Oh no!” cried Creina in dismay when she saw the PO at work.

They had lopped a straight path through the bush, and big trees lay withering alongside. “Tell them to stop. We don’t want a phone.” But the “phone kept coming, and there was nobody about the day they started clearing the way for their poles on Mdukatshani. Combretums and tambooties had toppled when Janet heard the distant buzz of sawers at work, and tore down to the lands to summon Neil.

“If you want a telephone at your house,” said the supervisor firmly, “we have to cut a straight line over the hill here.”

It meant every tree near the house would have to go.

“Actually,” said Neil, “We don’t want the ‘phone at the house.

We’re setting up office over there.... Can the ‘phone go there?”

“There” was Linda’s old campsite under two gnarled combretums.

The supervisor looked “doubtful. No proper structure to house the phone. In fact no structure at all. However he turned his poles and headed at a new and treeless aple down the hill.

When the technician arrived to install the instrument, Neil was again pointing at the house, a treeless zigzag away from the “office” site. The technician was most apologetic. He didn’t have the poles to get that far. He’d have to come back next week. Meanwhile Phone 1411 Weenen was temporarily installed under the combretums – and out of earshot.

So we have an office now, with a canvas roof spread among the branches, and there is somebody there to answer the phone in office hours. Usually. One afternoon we all deserted to beat out a veldfire. Meanwhile the Postmaster says he has bad news.

Those extra poles may take extra months.

Reprieve, we sigh happily. We already hate the phone, and the way it has pruned our independence. Farm hours have always been fairly flexible – with lunch at any time between 12 and 4. Now it must be fixed at 1 to 2 to suit the phone and would –be callers. Which means we’ve lost the freedom to choose our bathtime, for lunchtime is always bathtime, and a winter bath feels best when the sun’s shining on the water. Kettles are for cowards, we sniff at visitors who shrink from facilities. We’ve braved cold baths all winter, assuring each other: “It feels so marvelous afterwards.” Best of all, of course, is the magnificent complacency of our martyrdom!

It’s been the coldest winter in 38 years. Everyone says so and we believe them. Pipes have burst. The aloes burnt before they had a chance to flower. Even the neighbour’s 7 metre avocado trees were scorched, while the milk turned solid in its bucket under the eaves overnight. We added an unfinished chimney to our unfinished walls to give ourselves the warmth of a fire at night.

At midnight on the coldest night in 38 years Mphephethi came to wake us for Antonia was in labour. While we tried to melt the ice on our windscreen, Busisiwe arrived. Antonia thought this was family planning at its best – her new daughter arrived, as firmly scheduled by Ma, on breakup day, giving them both a month to rest before the new term started.

Yes the schools going strong, without classrooms but with registration retrieved from that lost carton at Ulundi. Or so they say. We haven’t seen the papers yet. Classes go on growing, and so do thefts of school equipment.

“Somebody took the table last night, “Antonia reported sadly one morning. Classes under trees have romance but they have security problems too.

Speaking of security... dogs have kept arriving all month.

“Be careful,” warned one owner when he railed a dog to us.

“I have had to keep him caged.”

“Oh yes?” said Creina furiously. “To stop the oaf sitting on your cushions or your lap.”

Geordie is HUGE with a sentimental lapdog nature lurking inside that vast frame of his. He’s only chased a donkey so far – and the donkey soon turned and chased him back again. We have high hopes however for the assorted pups farmed out among the staff and fed a diet of

bloodmeal. Bokide had optimistically named his full-grown bitch “Tandabantu” – Loves People!

No more thefts but many long hours on the courthouse stoep waiting to give evidence in stock theft cases. Sentences have ranged from 18 months to seven years – with two escaped prisoners on the loose. Wexsaw one last night, walking home from a party.

“All you do when you break jail at Msinga,” says Neil, “is go home.”

Neil accompanied the police to the home of a second wanted man. Swirls of dust marked departing people and animals as they drove to a blue pavilion. Inside and out shiny blue plastic draped the walls covered the ceiling, the roof, the table, and the wardrobe. There was wall-to-wall carpeting.

A swanky radio. A steel case of car tools. They were welcomed by the brother of the WANTED MAN.

“I’m not my brother’s keeper,” he said briefly in reply to questions. The policemen wandered round, bemused.

“Where did you get all this stuff?” they asked. “This plastic?”

“I paid R55 for it in Johannesburg.”

“R55?” The policemen laughed in disbelief.

“And these car tools? Where’s your car?”

“Haven’t got one yet.”

“Do you know this one tool here costs R20?”

“So what?”

When the policemen left they wiped their foreheads.

“That family retains two lawyers – one in Greytown, one in Ladysmith.”

Weenen had another stocksale this month and we bought 109 animals, sharing them out over a hectic two days among waiting Black buyers who had come from Sandton, Durban, and all over KwaZulu. Suits and skins mingled with the usual equality in the sales kraal.

“What an outfit!” Neil remarked to the owner of an outstanding bechu. “Does it cost much?”

“Not if you work in Goli,” replied the owner. “The Shangaans bring hundreds from the Kruger Park. If you buy them direct they are R1 a skin. I have ten tiger cat tails in this bechu and if I look after it, it will last me 20 years.

Much cheaper than clothes.”

Neil’s convinced.

After the sale Neil was flagged down on the road by a little girl whose nose just scraped over the edge of the widow.

She loaded her bag of sweet potatoes in the boot and climbed in. “Mashunka,” she ordered.

Settled and over the greetings she asked anxiously! “How is my ox?”

“Your ox?” asked Neil.

“I am Jabulani Skakane,” she said. “You know my ox, Gwazmuntu.

I have been pining for news of Gwazmuntu.”

“I have many oxen on my farm,” said Neil. “What does your ox look like?”

“Gwazmuntu? You don’t know Gwazmuntu? Oh you Whites are funny.

Everyone knows Gwazmuntu. I herded Gwazmuntu every day for two years. I just loved Gwazmuntu. Then my father said we could get two young heifers for breeding if we swooped Gwazmuntu.

How I cried! I cried for days when they took my ox away from me.

He was the best ox at Mashunka. At ploughing time everyone came to my father to ask if they could borrow Gwazmuntu to lead their span. Then I would collect my ox and I led him. He needed no rein, once the furrow was opened for him. The driver only had to say: take them all with you Gwaz, and Gwazmuntu would put his head down and drag the plough and span with him. No driver ever had to hit my ox. You will know him – he has the White blaze on his face and the horns that go up and in. I hate those two little heifers that took his place. They're just cattle,"

When the little girl climbed out she reminded Neil: "And I can come and visit my ox one day?"

Neil drove on with promises to khonza (take greetings) to the best ox in Msinga. (Hell- how can I ever sell it now?)

Our hitchhikers open the world to us.

"People are so hungry this year they are buying the puterleaves of cabbage at R1.60 a bag," says a gardener. "The outer leaves!

They only went to pigs before."

Helicopters hovered above the burning Tugela Ferry High School this month – and we listen to the words of angry young men, and angry old men. They cannot reach each other in their anger and the arguments last all the way.

There's no trouble finding hitchhikers along our road. Now that they know we are willing they will fill up the front and if the front is full contentedly take a seat in the boot with the lid up. Only donkeys patrol Msinga roads, and although they insist on their own right of way, they're pretty lax about all the other rules.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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AUGUST 1976: SENSALUPHI

Sensaluphi was our first camp follower, Spindly legs, big teeth, bright eyes... and a quicksilver touch with our belongings, as we soon discovered. If we turned our backs for an instant, bang would go the lid of the foodbox and away would run the fish and eggs. "The balance of nature," we shrugged, for we knew we had more than enough. And as we never caught our criminal, we could only guess it might be Sensaluphi.

He was such a regular visitor that one day Linda sat him down with a pencil, and after that when our boys did school, so did he. Sensaluphi had started to write his name when he was caught at last, pinching Linda's torch.

"That's enough." We said firmly. "We give him school, we give him breakfast, we give him lunch and still he steals. "There were so many other smallboys hanging around, we argued, that we had to show crime didn't pay. So Sensaluphi was told never to darken our tentflaps again and for five months he vanished.

He re-appeared cautiously, a pupil at the first classes under the trees, but he was always a sporadic attender.

Round about Christmas we met Sensaluphi hitching a lift on the dusty Weenen road. Where had he been all this time?

Working? In Weenen? Who wanted labourer 12 years old?

Sensaluphi grinned. He had been working for years. After all he had a family of eight to support. This last job had not been too bad – chopping cabbages off their stumps so the farmer could send them to market, R 8 a month, food and a bed on the floor of the tin shed. Now that work was finished so he was on his way to the van Rooyens to do some hoeing. We dropped him off with a pang.

Family of eight? It's true all right. Father works in Goli – sometimes – but never sends money home. Mother is an alcoholic always out on a tour of the beerdrinks. She dropped the last baby in the fire, and when we had treated the burns, she handed it over to a daughter and went back to the beer. The eldest girl stays at home for she's an asthmatic and when she tries to work they say she's lazy because she cannot breathe." So that leaves Sensaluphi as sole support, and he brings the money home. Or fish or eggs or items of trade like nice new torches. Whatever it is. It does not spread far among children who bear an assortment of tantalizing names: "We Misbehaved", "Tried Again". "Arrived Backwards", "Doubtful Parentage" (There was a row when he was born, says Sensaluphi, because my father had been in Goli a very long time).

We made peace with Sensaluphi. Soon afterwards Neil began to offer work to the schoolboys – with a lot of opposition from the CAP men. (They're nothing but a load of trouble, they warned). If the boys would herd after school, weekends and holidays, we would pay them so they could earn something despite doing school. Sensaluphi's name went down on the wage list. He was back in our lives, a hero rather than a thief.

Two truths can exist side by side, of course, and this is our dilemma with Sensaluphi.

At first he was paid to herd the geese and turkeys in the bush. For weeks the farm saw no eggs – but no doubt the Dladla family did. Sensaluphi was given another job. This month he was again caught stealing. He and his small brother had cornered a cow on the hill, and milked her into a tin can. The boys had been taking milk home for some time.

When we discovered the thefts, Sensaluphi skipped school and spent a week hiding in the bush.

“Thrash him! Fine him! Banish him from the farm forever!” said an enraged staff.

In due course Sensaluphi reappeared at school, at work, and in the line of boys waiting to be paid for the month. A week’s wages were deducted for the time he had been away, but that was all.

On Sunday we met Sensaluphi’s father for the first time.

“My son’s money is short this month, he said. “I have come to demand it now.

“Please to meet you,” said Neil. “But why are you interested?”

“We have no food at home.” Replied the man.

“Don’t you work?”

“Sometimes, but I have been home from Goli for two months and my money is finished. We must have Sensaluphi’s money for mealiemeal and this month it won’t buy a bag.

“I have seen you around, Neil remarked. Always drinking- yet you say your family starves.”

“If I go to parties I drink the beer and eat the meat of other people – it saves my family one mouth to feed,” he said indignantly.

“Why not work?”

“I’m thinking about it.”

When we told Mr. Dladla that Sensaluphi had been absent for a week, the man was furious.

“I’ll beat him – robbing me of money to support my family.”

Did Sensaluphi ever keep any of his money?

“Hau! What does a boy that age want with money! Nothing!”

Later Neil called for Sensaluphi.

“I am raising your wages,” he said.

“Oh”

“From now on you will get R5 a month from me, but you can’t take this money home. You must leave it here. When you want it just ask me.

“Oh”

We are wondering what he will want to buy for himself.

“Er.. weren’t you supposed to be disciplining him?” asked Creina. Antonia had the same question.

“Why didn’t you take money off his wages for misbehaving?”

“He’s got a family to support.”

And why do you treat him differently from those other three boys who had their wages cut?”

Neil tried to close his ears to her stories of other homes, as bad or worse. Sensaluphi is Msinga youth, and we find we flounder defining its rights and wrongs. The thin air we grasp was something simple we once knew as justice. You spend a lot of time here thinking about right and wrongs, and wondering why they seem the same. Wondering why the goodies and the baddies look so much alike.

All month men have poured back to Msinga from Goli.

We are glad our father has run away from the Soweto war- other fathers have come back in boxes.

Eight armed men came looking for our Manager Bokide Mzolo, at his tented camp on the top of the mountain. Luckily he and his wife were in Weenen for the day.

“Never mind, another day will do,” they laughed. Later came a message from Mexachwa, the owner of the blue pavilion. “You brought the Police to my home. The dogs will trot home with your hands and feet.”

Neil reported the matter to the Police and asked for action.

“Mexachwa is never at home when we go there,” the Police complained. But we noticed that they didn’t try again.

“Well unless I get a gun, I am not staying alone at the top of the mountain,” said Bokide.

Neil went back to the Police. Could he get permission for Bokide to carry a firearm?

“Never” said the Station Commander.

So Bokide and all the others at our mountaintop camp have deserted and come down to join the rest of us here.

The month was not without its good news. A new boat arrived for Duma’s Ferry – paid for by many people, and found and delivered by Roger Lamb.

“But my sons have gone to town to work,” said the old man sadly when he got the news.

While he posts off messages, Delani Mbatha has taken it over, and right now he’s seasoning the wood for the oars.

On the night of the darkest moon, the boat was called out on its first rescue operation. Three women waded across the river with the message: “We have found a man badly beaten up – please fetch him and take him to hospital. “They had crossed at the rapids, a long way from the boat downriver.

“You will have to carry him down until you are opposite the cliffs.” We arranged. “The boat will be waiting.” We grabbed cushions and blankets and torches, lid the boat into the river, and paddled a rocky route to the opposite bank.

Nobody there yet. We walked upriver in the blackness, calling out now and then. At last came an answering shout.

“He’s here – we carried him across after all.” Damn.

Back across the river, up the cliffs and at last he was found, collapsed in a field. His head was a pulp – nose smashed, mouth torn, and skin shredded and soggy with blood. He had been ambushed five hours earlier and had not even seen his assailant as he lay resting in the shade of a rock.

The locals tell us now that he was mistaken for a goat thief.

A young man had seen him, just off a high lonely track. He knew goat thieves always acted like that – pretended to be asleep and next thing you knew your goats were gone.

He had crept up on the older man, beaten him up and left him for dead. Some passing women found him, staggered with him body down the mountain to the river, where they called for the boat. When the women told the semi-conscious man they must carry him

another lonely kilometer downriver, through the blackness, he had screamed with terror.
“They are lying in wait for me still – they will kill me down there.”
So, not too certain themselves, the women splashed a little further with their battered burden.

Our two boys ran for the blankets to wrap around the man.
They stared at his wrecked head quietly.
“I will never go riding on my horse again,” said GG. “I could be ambushed too. “Their
childhood is so different from ours, but then their tomorrow will be different too.

NEIL AND CREINA

Last two pages missing

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SEPTEMBER 1976: CONVERSATION WITH A FRIEND

We were lost in a wilderness of shack and shanty. MABOPANE said one signpost. GA-RANKUWA. A township glinted against the hills beyond this hot, dusty confusion of mud and pole and iron hand-reared on the veld. We must have taken wrong turning. We were looking for a farm.

A crowd waited at a bus stop and we drew up. Could they help us? We were looking for the farm of Mr. Sam Motsuenyane. "Motsuenyane? Sure!" said a young man. "I can take you there." He hopped in. "I know Motsuenyane's place well, I used to go to him for advice about my cows before all my cows were stolen."

And so we found Sam, and his 40-hectare farm. Just beyond his fences loud speakers blared, calling crowds to the local settlement's Sunday entertainment. It was dusty, gusty land, withered, arid, hot, Heartbreaking, backbreaking country.

When we saw us turn in at the gate Sam disappeared to wash and change. Saturday and Sunday he is always dirty, for these are his farm days, his happy days, his hands-in-the-soil days. Weekdays he is another man. Chairman of the African Bank. President of the National Federated African Chambers of Commerce. Yesterday he had been talking to Kissinger. Today he was digging his dusty, thorny dream.

"You know it's what I've always wanted to do," he said!

Ever since he returned from America with a degree in agronomy he's had this ache to be on the land, growing things.

He started with a plant nursery in Soweto, and then got the chance of this farm, an hour out of Pretoria in the Bophutatswana homeland.

We set off down a footpath to look at his land. There are many footpaths and they crisscross his shallow valley.

"I can't stop people wandering through," he said. "They come to buy fowls, to buy eggs, to buy milk. But..." But there must be thousands of people living around him. Sam did some adding.

"Half a million," he said.

The thorn trees were flowering – big, shady trees, sweet scented.

"I'm trying to protect them all," said Sam. "Yet look – people come and chop right next to the house. What can I do? My people are poor. Of course they steal."

We stepped over a fence that had fallen down.

"Every year I must put up a new fence – all the fence poles are stolen for firewood. And of course I've lost cattle.

Thirteen were taken. Only 20 are left."

We passed a hollow where Sam and his family had dug the gravel and made the blocks for the modern house on the hill, finishing it off with stone and slasto. They had lived in a room at a time, building as they went.

A dry furrow crossed the farm leading into a dry dam.

“Once this was a White man’s farm and he took water from the river along this furrow,” said Sam. “Then they built the big dam for the new township and the water stopped flowing to my furrow.”

Now the family gets water from a borehole.

“But three pumps have been stolen in the past five years,” said Sam. So he has bought a portable pump and he wheels it up and down, as he needs it. Down to the river that pours through the donga at the bottom of the farm. A small torrent of water, even though it was the driest time of the year. We marveled at the surprise of it.

“Overflow,” Sam explained. “From the sewer wage works. But it does mean we have permanent water for irrigation.”

For not all the farm is heartbreak country. On the flat river land are green fields of onions, spinach, tomatoes and cabbage.

“I sell easily because nobody can get fresh vegetables in these townships. And I share with the community.” Sam grinned. “Last night somebody cut those two beds of spinach. People are hungry. They must steal. But I am beginning to think if I am going to go on I will need somebody to live here to be on guard all the time.”

Sam arrived on the farm seven years ago with only a few old sheds to help him make his beginning. Even as he struggled to start a home, he was busy gathering together other Black farmers like himself who were struggling too. There was no money for petrol, so he bought a horse and rode out on the thorny, sandy flats organizing a Farmers Association.

Eventually there were 200 Black men, teaching each other, learning together, propping each other up through all the disasters that strike a man who has no capital but tries to work the land. One man became a successful pig farmer. Sam chose chickens. When Newcastle disease arrive, it wiped out all his 7 000 fowls. Back to square one. He started a nursery, planted grapes and oranges, naartjies, peaches, apricots.

A fire swept in from the township. Back to square one.

“Here my children swim in summer,” said Sam, stopping near a vlei with some tall green reeds. “I thought of damming it lower down and making a swimming pool and a playground and then all the children round about could come here. They are township children – they have no touch with nature. I tried to sell my idea to somebody, but nobody was interested. I needed some money to get it going.”

Last two pages missing

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OCTOBER 1976: DELANIE'S PIPELINE

"The day I saw them burn down our kraal, I went mad," said Delanie Mbatha. "After the fire I remember nothing."

"Well there was no other way to move them," said Dick. "When they were given notice they refused to go."

"We thought he would always be mad," said Delanie's brother.

"We don't know how he lived – for five years he was in the bush like an animal."

"And when I was better the move was over," said Delanie. After 100 years the Black people had left White hills and crossed the river to start again on hills that looked the same but were Black hills. Delanie found a place to build a new home up a narrow back valley where Mgejakazi, the Lost Stream, joins the stream that has no name. We were still putting up our tents when Delanie caught the ferry to ask for work. He was the first local to join us – a quiet, different man, his face scarred with the marks of his tribe, his earlobes flapping, empty of earrings. We could always rely on his coming. He rode the high waves of summer in the little boat, or waded the river, shivering and numb, in winter.

Then although he was middle-aged and had been mad, he found a bride, Bhekani, and he rejoiced in her gaiety, and at Christmas gave us R 2.50 for a pretty headscarf for her, five cents for a candle, and R 5.00 towards his plastic piping. He had borrowed a roll of pipe one weekend because "now I've learnt a bit about pipes I'd like to see if I can divert the water from the stream that is near my home." The water had flowed so he had kept the pipe and paid it off at 25 cents a metre, R5 a month.

A year after he had laid the pipe it began to give trouble.

"The water won't flow anymore," said Delanie in despair.

"Airlocks?" asked Neil, but Delanie didn't know so we did our own wading across the river to visit Delanie for the first time. Along the white stones of the Lost Stream, past a pool where two men were bathing, silver bangles flashing as they scrubbed. Delanie Mbatha? Higher up, through the neck in the hills. Just keep going along the stream. So we went through the neck of the hills up to the place where Mgejakazi joins the stream that has no name. Delanie was waiting for us.

It was early afternoon but there was no sunshine in that narrow valley.

"In winter the sun never shines here at all," said Delanie.

"We just see it touch the tops of the trees." He led the way along the top of a high, crumbling bank until he reached a scrub barricade, shoulder high. A thorn tree had been chopped to block the entrance, and he tugged it away to let us scramble over a stile into a neat garden. He grinned at our surprise. There were rows of potatoes, spinach, onions, turnips. And there was the pipe that had made the garden possible, the only garden among all the Msusampi people.

We puffed along the pipeline, following its drape over rocks and under aloes up the mountainside until at last we jumped clear onto the flat rocks at the top of a waterfall. Two

stones held the open end of the pipe firm. Here Delanie collected water from the stream that has no name. It was a high, cold place, and lonely for a man working on his own.

“I think your pipe is being blocked by the mud that washes in here,” said Neil. “What you need is a small pond where the silt can settle. He tugged at the rocks and together the two men sketched out a small wall in stone. Later, in the evenings and on his days off, Delanie would come back to work at it. We slithered back down the pipeline to the garden where Bhekani was waiting with mugs of hot sweet tea, and we perched on stones, feeling the cold seeping from the hills, and idly tossing pebbles at the cattle and goats grazing around us. Delanie has no animals so in the Reserves, where the hills belong to everyone, he has to have a fence if he wants to claim a corner.

“The animals always find a way into the garden,” he said, and before the afternoon was over we chased after an ox that had leapt his barricade and was trampling his spinach. Fencing to enclose his garden would cost one month’s wages – maybe two.

And Delanie wanted to extend his garden. UP there among the rocks, he had thought. And there? Were there perhaps too many rocks? Was it too steep?

“No” said Neil. “Look the soil is good. Along here now...” “While the men paced out new boundaries, Bhekani showed off her small hut. With ochre, blue shale and white clay she had painted bands of colour on the mud-plastered walls. The Mbatha’s clothes were folded in a cardboard carton on the floor. There were two sleeping mats. A blanket. Otherwise an empty room.

“They have nothing,” we said afterwards. Nothing but a pipeline and a garden, an axe, a hoe, a pick, and their own bright hope in their dark and lonely valley.

Pioneers come all shapes and sizes, yet we were slow to recognize Ndala Mbatha when he started coming to the Friday discussions.

Pioneers seldom come over 80, white-haired, deaf, and tottering on unsteady legs.

“It’s a waste of time having him,” Neil muttered. “But I don’t suppose I can keep him away,” and he tried to hide his smile when the old man said he had made a garden based on what he had been learning.... Could we check that he had got his rocks right?

This was a walk to a different kind of valley, hot and dry and tumbled by sudden torrents.

“A garden there” Ndala’s neighbours had laughed. “Ha Ha Ha – poor old man.

“A garden there?” we echoed, but we didn’t laugh. The old man had already done the impossible. He had chopped thorn trees to pile up a barrier to keep goats at bay. Then on his unsteady, tottering legs he had rolled rocks, shifting them into rows that ran neatly up and down the hill.

“No old man,” said Neil gently. “A contour runs this way. It must stop the water. Hold the water.” The lines of rocks were turned round to loop new lines on the steep slopes.

“It’s a miracle,” the old man croaked at the next Friday meeting. “It’s a miracle. I never thought I would live to see such a day. The water stopped. It rained and rained and the water in my garden stopped. It stopped on my contours. Since when has water stood still on a hill?” When there is no rain the water must be fetched from the Tugela and as Ndala’s legs can’t totter that far he sends his grandchildren trooping to the river, and he pays them one cent for each paraffin tin of water. Already he is eating his first spinach. His potatoes are flowering. His onions are in. Nobody laughs now when they see his wobbly passage to the garden to lay out another terrace, to plant out another bed of seedlings. On the uncertain, not-quite-straight-yet-contours of Ndala Mbatha’s garden we sense a small revolution.

And yet October still had more for us.

“I am tomorrow’s man,” crowed Zephenia Tabete, the tiny, twinkling incessantly chattering former Chief’s Councillor, (recently retired” to devote myself fulltime to agriculture”)

“I’m tomorrow’s man,” he said and the funny thing is, he could be right. Tabete is our scholar. Restless, questioning, reading everything he can find – books, magazines, scraps of paper lying in his path. When he comes to Mdukatshani he pokes curiously among office files looking for something new to take home.

“This report of yours,” he said the other day, caving a new discovery.” Have the Chinese seen it yet? I have been reading how the Chinese are now selling tablets of human night soil as fuel.

They’re not far behind us, you know.” Tabete remembers everything he reads, and questions it. An questions follow on questions. His questions have no ending. His tongue runs fast, but never as fast as his thoughts.

“I’ve had a garden at the government plots since 1926. Fifty years! For 50 years I have tried to learn. I’ve listened to the radio, I’ve listened to the agricultural demonstrators. I’ve found books, I’ve studied. And then in March this year I found the key to all knowledge. I came to the Friday meetings.”

(“Oh shut him up,” groans Neil.” He’s doing us more harm than good. Can’t somebody shut him up?” But it’s easier to dam the Tugela than stope Tabete in spate).

“There’s nothing I can’t do now. You’ve talked about lurgence, so I want some Lucerne seed. And wheat. And a cow. And fruit trees. And bees. And chickens.”

“In spring,” said Neil.” Later. Go slowly.”

“Slowly? Rubbish!” said Tabete, and as he’s a champion nag as much as he’s a champion chatterer he got his Lucerne seed. And his wheat, and this month Neil went down to the plots to see what he had made of it. Tabete was in his garden, surrounded by children, and he looked up to beam a welcome.

“Money!” he said, waving his arms. “You taught me money was useless. Money was for yesterday. Who wants money when he is hungry? See my manure heap? See these children queuing here? Barter. They want food. I want dung. So they bring me dung.

Here I measure it – four paraffin tins and I give them one cabbage. And just look at my heap of manure. Just look at it!

My soil has been sick but it won’t be sick much longer. And all it is costing me is cabbages! But I know so much now I burst at all the wrongs I see around me. Look at the government – cutting those road verges, and then burning the rubbish. Burning it!

And here I can never get enough rubbish for my compost. Never.

And look at my neighbours. They burn their rubbish too. I’ve been thinking maybe I should weed their gardens for them so I can get their rubbish. Here, look at my wheat...”

It stood waist, heavy-headed. Tabete then waved and chattered and beamed and boasted in his Lucerne field where the plants were flowering knee deep around him. He didn’t have to nag again for his cow.

“I’m not asking to bring a cow onto the Reserve,” he told the Permit Office firmly. “I’m asking to bring a cow onto my private property. My cow doesn’t want Reserve land. It wouldn’t touch Reserve grass after eating my Lucerne.”

He got his permit for one well-bred Jersey cow and the district goggled? A permit without payment of two donkeys?

“That cow eats all day,” he rattled last time we saw him. “I’ve cut my Lucerne and the heap is this high and I’ve stacked it near the house where the cow is tethered. We get milk for me and my wife and my grandchildren. It’s the first time my 70-year-old-teeth have ever had a rest from chewing boiled mealies.

Now I want to know how to make butter and cheese.... And my wheat is ready. How do I cut it? Can I use the straw to feed my cow? How do I get the wheat ready for baking bread? Can I make porridge? Is it true you can make wheat beer?"

Tabete, Tomorrow's Man. And still there were more men and their gardens, but there in no room left to tell of those visits.

Maybe another time we can tell you about Mnguni and Gumede and Bhengu... A handful of men. But Msinga has 100 000 people.

What we're doing is utterly meaningless.

NEIL AND CREINA

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NOVEMBER 1976: HOLD UP

“There’s something funny going on.” Bokide was nervous. “Those two men are back again.”

He had first seen the men at the dip on Saturday when he had been busy selling cattle. The one man had a red scarf with black stripes, the other a leather helmet with earflaps.

“I could see they were not interested in cattle,” said Bokide. “They would move up close to me, behind my back, and then disappear into the trees if I turned to look towards them. The man with the scarf was carrying a brief case. I noticed that there was something heavy inside. It looked like a revolver. When I had finished selling I went to the men and said: what can I do for you? They said: We want a big animal but yours are small. The men followed me to the gate and when I walked home they walked behind me. I was afraid because I knew they had a gun. They stopped within sight of the house and just waited there. They waited a long time.”

“Today when I went to the dip to do more selling I saw a man hurrying off into the bush as I came along. I remembered Saturday and I was frightened. I started to sell but I felt trouble was coming so after a while I slipped away to the office and sat down and tried to think. I had seen those two men with Temba Ndlovu the taxi-driver, so I sent a message to Temba to come to me. I asked him who they were.

He said: the one is the son of Chonco. I then asked: But why the revolver? He said: They have no revolver. They are fine boys. You know one of them – he came with me once before. So I asked: What is he doing hiding in the bush? Ndlovu said he didn’t know but they were decent boys who only wanted to buy some cattle. I was not satisfied. I left him and did some more thinking. Perhaps I am just frightening myself.”

“I’ll come back with you,” said Neil.

“No.” already Bokide was easier. “They may have gone by the time I get back.”

“Well if they are still there, send somebody with a message saying you need more change and I will know I must call the Police.”

Bokide returned to the sale and Neil sat down to do some thinking.

For a year Bokide had lived with threats against his life. Everytime we caught a rustler, a message would come that Mzolo’s days were numbered. Neil decided to telephone the Police anyway. He was still speaking when we heard the shot, screams, weeping.

“He came from behind and put a gun at my head and demanded the money,” sobbed Tolakele, our clerk. She dropped the day’s takings – R683 – and fled.

“The man ran after her,” said Mphephethi, who was driving the tractor down the road. “He waved his gun at me as he passed and shouted:

Watch out for a gun. Tolakele ran through the gate but another man was waiting there with a revolver. He fired at her and then both men ran away.”

The Police came – and left again, empty-handed. The men are well known in the district.

They are friends of that Buthelezi boy we had arrested for taking six cattle. They came to get Bokide, say some who know, but when they saw the money they were tempted.

The day after the robbery was payday. Anton announced regretfully that he was too busy to fetch the money from the bank. Somebody else would have to go.

“Round up the cattle in that bush that is full of guns? You must be mad,” said Stephen.

So Mdukatshani has ceded another chunk of land to the outlaws. We all live on one river corner of 1 000 ha. It is many months since we moved off the other 3 000 ha. Mxoshwa and his gang graze 200 cattle there instead.

“We can’t do anything about it,” the Police said at first. “It’s a veterinary matter.”

“God,” said the Stock Inspector when we told him. “Those beggars would shoot me. It’s nothing to do with me.”

Hunting parties of 30 to 40 men sweep across our abandoned top farm. Once they encountered our herders searching for stray cattle, and they put them to flight with assegais and dogs.

Eventually the Police did offer to help. There was a ruling, they said, that prevented them from rounding up cattle, but they could give us armed protection while we collected all the stock illegally grazing on the farm, and they could protect us while we drove the animals to the Pound at Weenen. Mla Magasela is not very bright.

“And when we get back?” he asked. “Will the Police still give us armed protection?”

Mxoshwa goes on grazing his herd. The top farm is his. And our cattle, so it seems, are Madlaphuna’s. In July Madlaphuna got nine months for stealing and killing one of our cattle. Two days later he was an escaped convict. Three days later we heard he was back at home. A week later we passed him walking openly on the main road.

“I have a complaint,” the woman announced. “I haven’t been paid the wages due to me. I want to discuss my complaint with you privately.”

Neil took her aside.

“I’ve seen Madlaphuna,” she said hastily. “He says he will kill you and Mzolo for putting him in jail. He says those who had him caught for stealing one beast will now really know what stocktheft is.”

“I need advice on how to run my farm,” said the man. “May I discuss my problems with you privately?”

Once along it was always talk of Madlaphuna. Madlaphuna is out.

Madlaphuna is out but we hear he will be at the beerdrink atkraal on Sunday.

Twice we tipped off the Police. Twice they promised to send armed men.

Twice Madlaphuna drank his beer in peace. Then we learnt what stocktheft really was. 24 cattle disappeared one night.

Mr. Dlamini of the Eating House knew something about it. He said he had been out late and was driving home at 3.30 a.m. near the Skehlenge River on our boundary when an upset stomach demanded immediate attention.

He stopped his car and headed for the bush.

“If you come here and disturb my cattle, you will be sorry,” said a voice from the darkness.

“But...”

“Shut up and push off.”

“I can’t,” cried a desperate Dlamini.

“There was nothing for it,” he told us, “I just had to squat there in the road, then I jumped into my car and drove off wondering why my friend Mhlongo (the CAP stockman) was so bad tempered.”

It wasn't long before we knew where our cattle were. A stranger came to say he had heard about our beautiful garden – could he have a look at it? Among the potatoes he told Neil the real purpose of his visit. He came from the residents of.. valley. The people there lived by growing dagga and making firearms.

“We are a peaceful community. We mind our own business. Now a man has come among us with 24 cattle stolen from you. We know sometime this will bring the Police with their helicopters and then we will be in trouble. We have had a meeting and it was agreed that I should come to tell you where you could find your cattle. In return for this you can do a deal with the Police to leave the rest of us alone. You Whites can do these things. You respect one another.”

“There is nowhere the Police will not go,” said the Colonel on the telephone. We believe him, but it is now many, many weeks since we told the Police where they could find our cattle. And all this time Madlaphuna has moved from kraal to kraal, never sleeping in the same place twice. Ten days ago came news of another party.

Again Madlaphuna was to be present. On the day two armed Black detectives arrived to plan the exercise. We had heard rumours of a faction fight to come. Partygoers would be armed. A small thing could spark a battle. The detectives decided to telephone for a rifle to supplement the revolvers already hanging at their belts.

Hours dragged by. Eventually the constable arrived with the weapon.

He was sorry he was late. He had forgotten to put oil and water in the van and at the Bushman's River it had seized up.

Neil drove Bokide and the detectives as far as the crossroads and then they set off on foot across country, planning strategy as they walked.

“If only they had listened to me,” said Bokide afterwards. “I warned them the people were tense. I warned them it would be best if we showed tact. I said I would go ahead and join the guests, and then seek out the host and speak to him alone. I was sure he would co-operate and help us to remove Madlaphuna. The guests would have been on our side if we had gone about it the right way. Madlaphuna is a man hated and feared by all.”

But the Police had got tired of waiting. Bokide was just tasted the beer when they appeared at the door of the hut, rifle at the ready.

The party froze.

“Come outside Madlaphuna. We are the Police. We want you.”

The argument was a loud one.

“Take him,” yelled some. “Leave him alone,” said others, angry at the police invasion.

Missing?

MDUKATSHANI
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DECEMBER 1976: SEVEN UP

Madlaphuna is a man of his word. He said he would be coming for more cattle and one wet night this month he was back on our boundary with wire cutters and sjamboks.

Before daybreak Mhlongo was knocking to report a big hole in the kraal, ten cattle gone, and he needed “a witness to investigate scene of crime.”

Mhlongo, our stockman, was once a policeman and he still sounds like one. That morning he was ashamed and angry with himself. Three nights earlier he had heard a commotion in the cattle kraal and gone out with his dogs to patrol the fences. The next night he had taken his blanket and his pellet gun.

“I put a new spring in the gun so that if I was attacked I might get the gun close enough to a man’s head to do him some damage.” The dogs were again excited but Mhlongo saw nothing. Now Mhlongo, as the whole world knows, is NEVER afraid, so he did not mention his interrupted nights in case it might be thought he was just getting jumpy, and when Madlaphuna arrived at last not even the barking dogs could rouse our tired stockman.

With his bad news delivered, off to the scene of crime went Mhlongo and witnesses, and off along the trail went our two master trackers. They were excited when they returned. Madlaphuna hadn’t a hope this time. We saw only a couple of hours ahead and the tracks were clear in the mud.

“Thanks to the rain it’s an easy trail,” Neil pointed out to the police when they arrived.

“But first we need to take some statements Mr. Alcock.”

Hours later there was a sheaf of statements, and even Neil Lewis Alcock, a European male residing on the farm ... had signed to say that he had never given anyone permission to cut his fences nor had he given anyone permission to take his cattle. Paper work done the SAP were ready for action. However they announced they would not follow the trail after all. They had a better idea. If they took their van round to the Sunday’s river bridge they might find the cattle had been driven there.

At 4p.m we ‘phoned the Police to ask after our cattle. Well, actually...

At 6p.m we had an official apology. The Police were sorry they had bungled it. How could they put matters right?

“Those young buggers,” muttered the decent, desk bound seagent. “They will come plainclothes and you give the orders. When do you want them?”

So at six next morning, now more than 24 hours behind Madlaphuna, the Mdukatshani Expeditionary Force set off on the trail of the stolen cattle.

Armed with a stick (Neil) axes (Mhlongo and Delanie) and revolvers (two White and two Black policeman) we watched them as they crossed the river for the wildest hills of Msinga. “Just don’t rely on me if there’s any trouble,” one Black detective said cheerfully as they departed. “I’m the fastest runner here.”

Thanks to the delay, signs of Madlaphuna's march had almost been obliterated by the to-and-fro of cattle going to water, and not even Delanie's tracking eye could make anything of the churned dust. But as usual we had friends along the way.

"Shout and curse at me like a White man should," instructed one Numzaan.

"Threaten me loudly because people are watching. Now if you keep going down the valley ..."

With some loud abuse the White men did his bit, and then followed directions towards the border of the Tembu and Sithole country where the cattle were supposed to be hidden. There were old and new cattle there, said the informants. The cattle taken in September would be there, as well as those stolen the day before.

"And the Lord said to Moses, there are three red ones, four black ones and a big dog so lift up your eyes to the everlasting hills," shrilled a melodious voice in the bush as the man began to climb. They were to hear many psalms from devout folk that day, all with the middle verse much the same: "There are three red ones, four black ..."

"Hele, hele, hele," replied echoes from cliffs. "Hele, hele, hele. Hele, hele, hele." Even in the loneliest mountains there were voices crying "Hele."

Even in the hottest hours of the day there were strange birdcalls whistled about them. "Do not look that way," Black comrade advised White. "Some one might feel you envy his weeds." It was a good season for the crops were already waist high and women leaned on their hoes to greet the men as the path took them past field after field.

"Only when you were nearby could you see the dagga plants trained up every third or fourth mealie stalk," Neil said later. The English parlour might have its aspidistra, every Msinga kraal in those forsaken hills had an old potty with a pretty clump of dagga.

"Seed for next season if something goes wrong." Explained Mhlongo. "When you hear the helicopter coming on a raid you grab your pot plant and hide it safely in the bush." Seed reserves also drooped from rock overhangs, with thorn brush piled nearby awaiting the warning cry of "Hele, hele, hele."

Not all the hoeing women waited for a greeting. Many scattered and fled at the sight of strangers. Soon the running figures were all the man needed to distinguish mabela and maize from the lands of pure dagga/

Beyond the fields lay rough country, crisscrossed by small paths running up and down. Usually up. All that country seemed up. Precipices closed in narrow valleys and mountains lurched one after another, ravine upon ravine. Jut and ridge and bulge and cliff, but always up. Who could find anything in that wilderness? The policemen lagged in misery. It was so hot and dry that talking hurt the tongue, but Mhlongo never stopped.

"Yes, my ox in these hills. I have come to take you home. Come out. Let me see what the thieves have done to you. My lovely red ox. Was to the man who took you from me. Come out my ox, I am here to fetch you."

All the way Mhlongo radioed his beloved blood red ox, which had vanished so many months before.

Searching the shadow and light of thorn groves, each man took a separate area. Neil was moving quietly through the bush when he came upon a young herd boy chopping away at a hollow tree.

"Hello umfaan".

“Aaaaaaaay!” with a shriek of terror the child fled, leaving behind his axe, his bees, his combs of honey. He was soon back kicking at the grip of a Black policeman.

“I’ll tell you anything, I’ll give you anything, but please, please don’t leave me with the White man,” the bay was screaming. The policeman laughed.

“He’s never seen a White man,” he said. “He’s sure you’ll kill him. You know how we frighten naughty children by telling them if they don’t behave we’ll give them to a White man.”

At last the weeping stopped and the sniveling bay put out a scared hand to meet the White man. Yes, he herded cattle there every day. He had seen Makokoko’s cattle being driven to water so he knew they were near. But he didn’t want to answer any more questions. Look at the walls of their hut with the bullet holes from the gun that fired from the bush last week. If he spoke about Makokoko’s cattle somebody would know and a gun would fire just once next time he took his cattle to water.

They left the bay with a sense that they were getting close. But which way? Then men looked longingly at the river far below, but turned their feet up for another climb. Nobody seemed to live in this border country, so Neil was surprised to come upon two bareheaded, bare-breasted girls sweating as they lugged buckets of water to a dagga field on a high plateau.

“Hey stop,” he shouted as the girls dropped their buckets and ran. Moments later there was a yell as they collided with other members of the Mdukatshani Expeditionary Force. Wriggling, giggling and well fondled, they made their escape, and grinning at the diversion, the men went on their way.

Soon they found themselves at a kraal in a clearing. Small children were playing in the yard among the fowls and goats but they couldn’t say where the path went next. Perhaps their sisters could help. At a call the sisters emerged from the largest hut. Greetings, greetings said two beautiful, poised young ladies. Were the men well? The heat was bad. Too hot for walking. They must rest and share the cool of the hut. Now did they take mahewu, tshwala or amasi? Their grandmother’s special recipe for mahewu was famous. No, no the men must not refuse.

“You see Gogo is old now and never in all her years has she had such a White visitor. If she came home and knew she had had such a visitor and he had not been treated as a traveler should be treated – why Gogo would be so angry she would send us out tomorrow with khambas of mahewu and tshwala and make us carry the food to the White man’s home with apologies for such mannerless granddaughters. Please, please don’t make us walk all that way in the heat. Taste some now.”

So the party had iced mead at the hands of kneeling maidens on top of a high, hot mountain. And as they sipped the men felt ashamed of their thoughts. Had such soft hands ever held hoes or rooted in weeds?

Pretty headscarves and purple cloaks did not belong to working girls, and earnings that size would be ripped off in thorn bush. Nevertheless the adornments did not quite disguise the two lovelies they had disturbed in the dagga field a short while before.

Refreshed the man took their leave and climbed up again. Five hours from home Mhlongo’s voice called: “My ox. He’s here. He lives. My lovely ox. The ox that was to lead Mdukatshani’s first span. Here he is.”

* Makokoko is Neil’s Zulu name here, a pun for its means paraffin tin.

“Is he along?” shouted the others.

“Noooo. There are six of them. And my ox.”

These were cattle stolen from CAP in September, and they showed signs of their absence.

“Do you think you could drive the cattle home without us?” asked the police.

“There’s a road near the Sunday’s River and we could cut across country and get a lift.” So only three men turned in the midday sun to retrace the long, long route home. At least some of it was downhill. Down to the Ndaga the Mud River, where Neil, Delanie and Mhlongo sat chin deep in its warm, slippery wetness, laughing at each other. The Ndaga must collect all the mealiclands of Elandslaagte, with just a touch of water to keep the mud fluid. The men were parched, but not even desperate men could drink the Ndaga.

It was late afternoon when the sentry on Mdukatshani’s cliffs sighted the returning expedition. Three men, a dog and seven cattle. Round the bend in the river they stumbled while we shouted and waved and launched the boat to bring them home. Neil and Mhlongo were almost too weary to climb onto the ferry. The cattle were footsore too, and Norman and GG had to push them into the water, prodding them across the river, hanging onto their shoulders and tails as the animals swam across.

“Today we brought back more than a thousand rand,” Mhlongo said proudly as he swallowed cups of coffee. “Do you know that? A thousand rand!”

However the seven returned cattle must be measured against the 27 still hidden in the wild hills. They must be measured against the GO never recovered. R6000 worth of cattle. They must be measure against all the other events of our months here. Bokide has gone. If we can get him a gun he will come back. Madlaphuna has gone too and we hear he can be found at the Mai Mai taxi rank in Goli, spending the proceeds of his stock exchange transactions. Our two armed robbers are living at home. One drank beer at Tholagela’s home last week just to show how worried he was about the law. While we have cattle we will continue to be a target for all the baddies who find life easy and unhindered in those parts.

Before Christmas we decided we would have to get rid of the cattle. The first hundred were driven to the Weenen sale. Others have been leased to a neighbour in a safer area. We are left with some cows for milk and this great lump of land to use How? GAP was built around cattle and now we have to rethink what we are and what we must do and how we must do it – and how we must pay our way. Cattle gave us a chance of being viable. Can we be viable without them?

And yet we feel only halfway defeated. The chief came to call to share our troubles. He has had many thefts too. Just like ours. And important indunas have visited to comfort us with stories just like ours. And tribesmen have walked or waved us down to commiserate. It seems we’re all in one boat now. We’re in some good company, even if we must all sink together.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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January 1977: Diversions

“Have bob to daub again. Five pounds to stitch a new isicholo”.

The hairdresser stared hard at our khaki locks. “And it costs a little extra if you want hair you can put on and take off again”.

She went back to work with a mixture of red ochre paste and a fine needle, combing the headdress of a customer who was lying comfortably on the grass, propped up on her elbows. The salon had grabbed the only shade on the hillside, and as the space under the small tree was already fully booked the women shifted reluctantly to make way for a newcomer in the queue.

It was midsummer but so dry that the river looked like a winter river, just a muddy splash among the sandbanks. “It’s hot today” said one of the women politely. “Very hot”. “Is that your only child?”

Asked another. “No, there are six others but still I wait for a daughter”. The five-bob-touch-up lasted an hour so there was lots of time for languid talk. A precession of buckets marched up and down past the tree on their way to water. Donkeys kicked up the dust in the road to Mbele’s store, and every passerby stopped to shout greetings to the tree on the hill. Oh what a hot, dry summer it was.

And look at MaDlamini chasing the calves out of the mabela again.

With the drought why worry? Nothing was going to grow anyway. The salon’s customers fanned themselves with limp doeks and dragged themselves round the tree, chasing the shade of the shifting sun, scolding the babies that crawled across their laps. It was much too hot to cuddle.

At last the hairdresser combed the last strand to her satisfaction and she handed her client the bottom end of a shiny tin so she could view the effect.

“Aaaaah” The other women were appreciative, but impatient.

“Move away. Let somebody else in now”.

But further appointments were to be cancelled that afternoon because at that moment something extraordinary occurred. “Ey, eymey” shrieked a customer suddenly, and leaping up she disappeared ululating.

“Hau Hau Hau” shouted another and off she ran too, and then we were all running, hairdresser and customers with magenta cloaks flying, and toddlers that stumbled and cried far behind. At Mdoweni Gamede’s store wall the crowd stopped, puffing, and with the breath they had left they cheered and laughed and exclaimed in wonder: there was water squirting from a pipe.

Isicholo – the high Nefretiti-type headdress worn by all the married women in our parts. It is built up of the woman’s own hair, fibre from local plants, fat and red ochre.

Mdoweni Gamade stood in his garden, his plait over one ear as always, clutching the pipe, too moved to speak, and his wife beamed and clapped her hands and said “Now I can lose the callouses on my shoulders”.

“Yes” she said “Now we can have a thunderstorm every afternoon”.

We have never yet seen Gamede smile, and that day he did not smile either. He just went on holding the pipe, watching the water spurt into the air and trickle through the dust and the stones downhill.

He had never really believed it would happen.

“And imagine doing that when you have no faith” said Neil, standing in the hole Gamede had dug out of the hill, a hole hollowed from sub-soil and lined with big rocks. With a crow-bar, a pick, a spade and his bare hands Gamede had worked alone to build a dam he had believed would never hold water.

Above the Gamede kraal, in a veld in the hill, is tiny ooze, a steady bubble of water that is held by a rock drooping with ferns.

The spring is constant, but so small that when the water leaves the shade of the rock it only flows a little way before it shrivels up and disappears. Gamede’s neighbours use the pool too, but the new pipe does not rob them, even if Gamede offers his garden that thunderstorm every afternoon. And the pipe has already done more than just keep potatoes and mealies and tomatoes and peaches and grape cuttings alive during the drought – it has made Mdowneni Gamede.

A celebrity in the district. “He hasn’t got time to work anymore,” reports Mhlongo. “All day he has to demonstrate that pipe. Nobody can believe that a Black man has water that comes from a pipe.

“Show us how high it can go” people ask him, and the old man squirt the water as high as a tree.

Up another valley another gardener draws water beneath ferns, although he has dug a furrow to carry water to his new garden. Mr. Majola had always lived too far to attend the Friday lectures, but he came one day to ask questions, and listen and look at the farm.

Then he went away for many months and we had almost forgotten about him when he returned one day to ask “Please won’t you come and see my garden. I don’t know if I’m doing things right”.

Doing things right? One hut was knee deep in onion he had just reaped.

Cabbages stood in rows, fat and green for picking. Sweet potato runners were everywhere, and the tomato bushes had collapsed with the weight of the fruit, which was lying in the field rotting.

“No one will buy” said Mr. Majola “I can’t sell anything here.

Everybody in this place works for White farmers at Nkaseni and Weenen.

Every morning they go in lorries to work in the fields. Every night they come back with bags of small and damaged and cut potatoes, or cabbages, or onions, or tomatoes that are not good enough for the White man to sell. Who wants to buy my vegetables when they can get them free from the farmers? What I should do is buy a truck and take my vegetables far from here. But where do I get money for a truck when I cannot sell what I am growing now?

So we gathered bowls and buckets and tins and baskets and boxes of tomatoes and onions and potatoes and cabbages and we brought them home and sold them here. And every week we sent for more in an uneconomic exercise for if we had added the cost of fuel and wear and tear on our vehicles, we would have left the vegetables to rot in the fields too.

“I know all about it,” said Tabethe. “Don’t talk to me about marketing.

I know all about it. One year I had a wonderful crop of carrots. Each carrot was THIS big and I had a whole field full. Ha I said, this year I will be a rich man, so I bought some bags and filled them with carrots, and I caught a bus to Tugela Ferry and then I put my bags on another bus to Pietermaritzburg market. We couldn't sell the carrots at home that year because everybody had a good crop together, but I knew I would be rich on the money I got from the big town market. Oh I waited and waited for the day my cheque came from the market. And do you know what I got? Ten cents! Ten cents a bag? Just ten cents a bag".

This Christmas Reverend Mnguni was sure he had a fortune coming from cabbages. "The whole family worked in the garden," he said. "We planted and watered and hoed the weeds and sprinkled DDT and watched the cabbages grow big, and when they were ready people came all day to buy. Twenty-five cents for a big cabbage, 15 cents for a small. We were really doing well when one day suddenly there were no more people coming to buy. Then we found that just down the main road was a big NC (Camperdown) lorry selling cabbages at 10 cents each. And then another lorry came from Weenen selling cabbages at 10 cents each and nobody would buy my cabbages any more".

"That's right," said Mkhize. "We always know when the Whites have too much. Suddenly they remember us and come a long way to sell to us. Sometimes it is cabbages, or potatoes, or milk, or tomatoes. Remember the year we had a lorry selling peaches? And that bad winter when all the sheep died and the lorries came down with dead sheep at R3 each?

"If we are to live by farming now, we have to do something to stop it" said Tabethe firmly. "Now that we have come together and know each other we can share these problems. It's time we started our own farmer's company. Then we should go to the Bantu Affairs Department and tell them we don't want White lorries coming and selling to our people. We will organize our own markets and ask for licences for sellers". But until that time Tabethe is learning to cut his surplus vegetables and dry them in the sun. "Good" he said "Good. I haven't got a fridge but now I can eat my vegetables any time of the year. I know what to do with my surplus. No more begging people to buy. If somebody wants a cabbage. Yes, I say. 25 cents. Too expensive? I don't mind. No O. K. My chickens will eat it, or my cow. The cow doesn't ever say no.

Delani Mbatha took a cow and calf home this month, across the Tugela and up to his valley. The cow was pushed into the river first, but she circled and came back to her calf. Then we put the calf in the boat and hoped the cow would follow. Another push into the water, but she couldn't see her calf so circled back again. Eventually the calf was rowed across in the boat and with a rope around her neck and the boat as a bug, the cow was gently persuaded to cross to KwaZulu. Then with a grin and a wave Delani disappeared into the sunset. He is much too busy to work for CAP now. He is a fulltime farmer. There are fences to do, new contours to build, a dam to dig, hay to be cut, a cow to be milked, seed to be planted....but while he waits to earn an income from his land he gets a small cash return as ferryman. At 6 a.m he is on the riverbank to collect waiting passengers, and at sunset he is back to do the last service of the day. (Emergency cases yell for attention at times when Mbatha is not there!)

Mr. Zungu came to call this month with a bucket of potatoes – our share of his crop. "All grown from potato peels" he beamed. "All grown from peels".

There were peaches from Timothy, pumpkins from Mr. Mkhize, more potatoes from Ndala... no, no, you mustn't pay. These are our fees, they insist.

And with such diversions we have kept busy, reordering our life to one without cattle, without Bokide. Bokide's going has left our original Wasbank staff suddenly insecure, timid and confused. They see the needs of today. They cannot think of tomorrow. Mentally they have packed their bags and are ready to go too. So we are a community dispirited and disintegrating. As our original workers leave us we fill the gaps with tough Msinga tribesmen, far better adapted to frontier life. But they are untrained and we are still new to each other. It takes a long time for a community to grow together. But while the Whites see promise in the newcomers, our Black Wasbank colleagues are frightened at their coming; they feel alien and isolated and keep themselves apart even when there is a chance of friendship. It is a period that will pass but it is painful and disturbing and we do not know who will be with us at the end of it.

There has been another cattle-tracking expedition – a fruitless one this time. But those cattle that have not been eaten are still hidden up in the hills. We will go again. There was a hailstorm this month, which smashed the cars and left the houses windowless, and the vegetable garden wrecked. The tents that make up our offices were slashed beyond repair. Two thunderstorms followed the hail tearing chunks from our still-bare hills to build soggy red islands in the rivers. The rain was violent but we were grateful for it – the Tugela has hardly lifted this summer and what is usually a lovely clear brown river, has become smelly and slimy underfoot.

We're still juggling thoughts about the future, but our new direction seems to lie with the Gamede's and Zungus and Mnguni's and Mkhizes and Majolas and Tabethes. Is there a way to teach and help and yet make teaching and helping pay?

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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WEENEN,
3325

FEBRUARY 1977: SOME RAPID RESULTS

“You want cattle for ploughing?” The men exchanged looks and doodled absently in the dust at their feet.

“Of course I haven’t got any cattle myself”, said one, “but my brother has four. I will ask him to come and speak with you.”

“That’s right,” said another. “Dhladhla can speak to his brother and I can promise he’s a good ploughman.”

“I would come myself,” a third excused himself, “but the rains came late and I must finish my own fields first. When that is done I will come and plough for you.”

We had been at Mdukatshani one day when we had that first meeting with some passerby who strolled down the hill to find out who we were. A more formal meeting a week later introduced us to other neighbours.

“We will pay for the use of the oxen,” Neil explained. “And we will give grazing to the animals in return for the work done...”

“Oxen?” said a spokesman. “The oxen in these parts have all been stolen by thieves. Donkeys do the ploughing now.”

“Well bring your donkeys,” Neil said. “Even donkeys will do. We don’t mind what animals we use as long as we can get our ploughing started.”

“Ha Ha Ha. Now you are laughing at us. Since when has a white man noticed donkeys except to put them in the pound?”

“We will hire anything that can pull a plough. Give us your charges and we will pay what you ask.”

“Ha Ha Ha.”

“We can tell others,” said somebody at last. “There will be many who will be glad to plough for payment but they are in Goli and we will have to write to them first.”

“We want to hire cattle for ploughing,” we told the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and every other meeting.

“Won’t you come and plough for us?” we asked every man we saw in a field driving a span.

“Can you help? We will pay.”

There were many negotiations. Many hours bargaining for just two yoked cattle, or spans of four, six, eight donkeys, or spans of donkeys and cattle mixed. Paid to plough? Sure, said the owners. As soon as this field is done. Of course, of course, I will be there.

“I would like to help but my oxen are too few,” said many. So we offered them two of our young oxen, jongosse. Inspan then and train them with your animals, we said. Every season you can use them, and when you have finished we can use the span too.”

“It’s a good idea,” we heard, “but I must first discuss it at home.”

“Next week,” some promised, “next week I will come and fetch the jongosse”

CAP’s big red tractors trundled down from Wasbank to the new farm.

A silver diesel tank went up to feed them. Now we parried requests.

“Can your tractor plough for us,” people asked.

“If your oxen will plough for us,” we replied.

“People will laugh at a small plough and slow oxen in the fields of a man with a tractor.”

“We are going to get rid of our tractors. Do you know what diesel costs? And spares? In this district you pay four bob a pace for a tractor to plough. Soon those who own tractors will watch their machines rusting outside their homes because the money they get can’t pay for diesel and tyres and spares.”

It was six months before we realized there would be no cattle for ploughing Mdukatshani’s first fields. The tractors got busy and did the job and we set about trying to buy trained oxen to build up a span of our own. Even that was easier said than done. We had been on the farm a year before we acquired Baconfat. His owner needed two oxen for lobola, so we did a swoop – two jongosse for the black-and-white Baconfat. Three months passed. Next we made a deal with a stranger who wanted cash to pay a fine. We parted with R60 and another jongos in exchange for his ox.

Madlaphuna stole the third member of our span the same week we bought it. More months went by.

Then Mr. Xulu came from the top of the mountain driving a huge red beast with enormous outcurved horns.

“Au I love this animal,” he shook his head. “It is only because he is costing me so much that I am willing to part with him.”

Skeiman, the red gaint had become a law unto himself, raiding fields, destroying crops and costing his owner a small fortune in compensation.

Regretfully Mr. Xulu parted with his beloved ox, and drove three jongosse up the mountain.

“But please don’t let him stray back – he will tempt me,” he said as he left. In a week Skeiman had jumped fences all the way to his old haunts.

Xulu was tempted.

“Life is sad without Skeiman,” he said. “Can I return your three calves?”

However when Xulu returned, Skeiman was with him. The ox had been in trouble again. Four the next six months Skeiman jumped fences, Xulu was tempted, and we swooped jongosse for Skeiman and then Skeiman for jongosse. But at last the red gaint resigned himself to life at Mdukatshani and we resigned ourselves to a troublemaker on the property. For wherever Skeiman went, there was upheaval. On the first dipping day he jammed in the spray race, caught by his huge horns.

“Get the dehorers,” shouted an exasperated young man at last.

“Au Au Au”. Men swore, and shouted and chided.

“Something so beautiful to be chopped into ugly stumps just because he takes longer to go through the dip.” Said an old man.

“That’s only one of his crimes,” reported the younger man. “No animal can come near him without being poked by his assegais.”

“Nkosi ivunjelwe,” said someone. Kings have privileges.

Deputations argued the case over several weeks.

“At least take a photograph of him first,” said Mhlongo. “Then we can make a carving of the ox with his horns and put it above our gate.”

“It would be wickedness to chop horns of such evenness,” said others.

And Xulu arrived too.

“I know it is no longer my ox,” he pleaded. “But don’t damage Skeiman. Leave his horns.” We left his horns.

In October 1976, by cash and by barter we had acquired eight oxen trained for the plough, and Mhlongo and Duma began to select the span.

Skeiman, of course, would have to be a “telos”.

And there was only one partner possible for the gaint – Baconfant. So the span had its anchor – two heavy, steady animals.

Leaders were needed for the front. Keen workers. Intelligent animals.

After several trails Njogmaan and Lebkonni were singled out. The rest could go to the sale.

“Now we need some yokes,” said Mhlongo and Duma. The trading store had six at R7.50 each.

“And riems,” said our trainers. A bullhide was delivered to the district specialist, Mr. Fourfoot Mvelase, who lives under the red pepper trees.

That night he soaked the skin in a nearby stream, and then buried it in a heap of kraal manure. Every few hours he turned the manure, checking the temperature, checking it was hot enough to cook the hair, not so hot that it cooked the skin. Only an expert could get it right. Three days later the skin was out, ready for the knife, and Fourfoot stopped and working from the outside in sliced a strip five cms wide until the bull skin had become a single thong of rawhide that could be flung, loop after loop, over the branch of the braying tree. Then weighting the bundle of skin with a stone, Mr. Mvelase took to the path of the braying tree, slowly pacing, round and round, twisting the skin tight, spinning it down, twisting and spinning, softening and stretching. Rubbing lard into the strips. Starting again. Twisting and spinning, softening and stretching, walking under the braying tree.

Ten days later the old riemmaker was ready with strips of hide that were now pliable and soft and strong, cut into four metre lengths, the leftovers twined as strops. R2.80 for the lot.

Then Mhlongo cracked his whip among the cattle at last.

“Hoy Hoy Hoy” he called, giving the old signal for which the animals had been trained.

Skeiman and Baconfat, Njogmaan and Lenkonni moved into a row and stood waiting.

“Hoy Hoy Hoy” but the untrained animals milled around, scared and confused, feeling the whip, hearing the noise, learning slowly that there was only refuge when they squeezed between the big oxen in the row. Then riems quickly anchored young ox to old.

“Joga, Joga” shouted Mhlongo, leading an oldtimer with a reluctant jongos dragging behind.

“Joga Joga”. One young animal yoked for the first time.

Now for another opposite. Oldtimers ahead, oldtimers behind, jongosse in the middle.

“Kkkssssk,” came the familiar order to move, and off plodded the trained oxen, while the young ones stumbled forward, noses on the ground, miserable with the strange weight of the yoke, chased by the sting of the whip on their rumps. Soon the oxen would know their names and would move in unison. Soon the driver would not need his whip – his voice would order the span. But first pulling a tree, then a sled, then a plough.

“Ai Zungu, Zungu, Zungu. ...move over, Come brothers, come my children.

“Aaaaaaaaiy,, donsa Dlundu. Wosa Steenkoli. Woza Lupelile

“Boya Skeiman. Come, come, come. Turn, turn, turn. Back again. That’s right my brothers. Hold the plough Baconfat. Don’t let them turn too fast....

“Skeiman, my eyes are on you. Skeiman, did you hear me? Now you have asked for it ...” the whip flicked the back of the huge red ox.

“Come on Skeiman, you’re not pulling your weight. Easy there brothers, come now Zunga.....”

The oxen had to become accustomed to the driver’s voice, so Mhlongo talked all the time, reassuring, encouraging, ordering, complaining, getting the oxen accustomed to his voice.

While the span was being trained we began to search through the scrap heaps of our White neighbours. Mr. Rieckert had an old ox mower and ox rake. What did he want for them? He kept a straight face. Was it true we wanted to swoop a tractor mower and a rake? It was? Well he would throw in a second ox mower and ox hayrake as spares. He thought he had made an outstanding bargain. So did we.

This month a small dust storm swirled along the road. Whip aloft, Mhlongo chanted to a small span of six oxen. One stopped as another started. The animals moved raggedly, in jerks, without co-ordination. Everyone along the road stopped to watch the span, to shout advice as the animals bolted.

“We are men again,” said Duma proudly. “At last our hands can feel the hair of living cattle.”

“Ehhhhh that is something beautiful to look at,” sighed Dhladhla.

“There’s a span now.”

“It’s funny,” said Majozi. “Here we are making a noise about what was once such an ordinary thing.”

By the spring Mhlongo and Duma say they will have a trained span of 16 oxen and CAP can do its ploughing with a fleet of fertilizer producing, grass-fuelled, biodegradable machine.

Back to the ox. It’s what we said we would do when we drew up our first policy and programme of work on Mdukatshani. And it didn’t take it long to get it going. Just 716 days.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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MARCH 1977: A SCHOOLLESS SCHOOL

One mutiny, three protest meetings, 14 crises... a new term is underway at Mdukatshani School.

It is now a year since the school started and still it is out in the open, under the trees, but we're making progress. Nobody has stolen the blackboards or tables this year (last year both disappeared to make somebody's doors). And the ground has been leveled for a classroom and hall.

"Yes I know we could have had the building finished by now" grins the School Committee Chairman. "But how could we trust you? We thought you would get us to help and then when you were finished say: "Out kaffirs. I need a fertilizer shed".

So we lost a year while people argued about where the school should be and whether the White man should help, and whether there should be a committee, and who should sit on the committee if there were one.... Funds were offered, and funds withdrawn when months dragged by and nothing happened.

Then early this year the schoolless school was allocated 40 desks. "You have to have a committee to accept the desks" said the Circuit Inspector. Another meeting was called. Many parents came. A committee was elected to accept the desks.

The Circuit Inspector suggested that as there was no school for the desks, and many older, established schools were in need, Mdukatshani might offer a few desks on loan? The new committee politely refused. "Once you let them go you never get them back," said the new Chairman.

Term opened with Gaynor and Antonia teaching as before, with a new headmaster, 100 children and 40 desks. "It is now necessary to order cement and corrugated iron," said the School Committee. "And we need a qualified builder to start building." Cement and corrugated iron! A school of concrete and tin! Hell!

"But the government subsidy only pays for a brick-and-iron school" replied the Committee. "The government pays half and we must raise the rest. We know we are going to struggle to pay our half as it is".

"But cement is expensive. And tin is expensive. And hot. And ugly. Surely you can see it is better to build with stone and thatch? Then you won't have to hire a builder, you can build it yourselves. Surely you can see it is better?" But the Committee was scared of the law, scared of government rules that would disqualify a school built of mud, scared of doing something different, scared of finding the money to pay. Yes, brick and iron was ugly. Yes, they could see a Zulu-type building would cost half. Yes, they could see that even if they lost the subsidy they would still be raising the same amount. Yes, they agreed on the economics, the aesthetics, and the benefits. But still the Committee dithered, uncertain, unhappy.

Then there were eight kidnappings and we found circumstances on our side.

Some children who had left for school as usually the day before, had disappeared. Three agitated mothers came for help. They heard it was that farmer who came with a lorry collecting workers for his wattle plantations. "Quite legal you know," said the policeman. "The farmers have a permit to recruit labour. They come from Mooi River, Muden, Greytown, Stanger ... it happens all the time".

"But these are eight and nine-year-olds taken without their parents' consent!"

"Well sir" said the policeman helpfully "we can ask the farmers to let the children go. If the mothers can give us the name of the man who took the children, we will ask him to let them come home". The mothers knew only that it was a man called Kenny. "Kenny?" said the policeman. "We need to know more than that before we can help".

We began to notice the recruiting lorries on the road. One even stopped outside our gate. "You know the people in this area" said the driver. "We can't get enough labour for our farm. If you can help us get recruits we can promise to make it well worth your while". "Do you mind what age they are?" asked Neil.

"No, no. Even children will do". "But isn't that against the law?"

"Ah go on. If they want to come, who's going to stop them?"

And of course that's the trouble. The children want to go. There's a bit of adventure, and a wage, and how else does a nine-year-old pay his way through school? Sensaluphi and his gang went. Mboma whispered that he and others would be going too.

The parents and the School Committee got together to discuss a new proposal. Instead of paying for cement and bricks, we would raise the funds to pay the children to collect stones to build their school. Then they need not go away to work. So a home-made school it is going to be. Stone, and mud and thatch.

One Saturday parents arrived with picks and spades and hoes and they leveled a site on the hill for the first classroom. The children began collecting stones, each making his/her own pile. The teachers agreed to keep a record and every Friday they would bring the children to be paid. One Friday passed. Two more.

The stone piles grew but no lists arrived from the teachers and no children came to claim their pay.

"Today the children went on strike" the Chairman of the School Committee said eventually. "They don't believe our promises. They say they have not been paid."

It took several weeks and several staff meetings before the teachers admitted they did not know how to measure area or volume and so had never kept a record of the children's work. While we tried to teach the teachers, the children were paid and the strike ended. More children trickled to school to bring numbers up to 140.

"Although they do not all come every day" said the headmaster, "these things take time".

"Unless the site is fully fenced, the school cannot be registered" announced the Circuit Inspector by phone one day. Well that at least had already been done.

The regulations said there must be four hectares. We had enclosed 25. Mdukatshani's School was to have a farm with vegetables and fruit to feed the children, with Lucerne for the cows, and poultry for eggs and meat. Or that's the idea. Now there is just thorn bush and stone and thin, sick soil.

“Somebody will have to show the children how to begin” said the School Committee. “It’s just what I always wanted to do” said the headmaster. “I have many plans. I will start next week”. But there was this and there was that and he couldn’t get started and the summer passed away and nothing was done. The School Committee met again. “If you don’t mind an uneducated teacher” said the Chairman “I can do the job. As you know I have been many years in Goli but now I am back to work with cattle again”. “A school manager – that’s a good idea” said the headmaster, and he showed his co-operation by offering to do two sessions. While half the children were doing school, others could be paid to work on development.

Down at the bend of the river the children began to build a garden from nothing. They started on the flat land, next to the graves of the unclaimed corpses that get tossed on the bank by the passing floods. The little ones carried little stones, and the bigger ones carried bigger stones, clearing the way for the spades and hoes of the biggest girls and boys in school. As we said, we are making progress.

Then yawning our way to the kitchen one morning we bumped into a waiting mother. “You have been very helpful” she said “but I didn’t know, and I am sorry and wanted to come and explain first and I hope that although my children have been at school a few weeks you won’t demand that I pay if I take them out now...” The Chairman of the School Committee was hot on her heels. “Unless you do something immediately I will be visited at night and shot. My position is very bad. They will never believe me again. Everybody is taking their children away. There will be no school”.

And all because the headmaster had told every child to bring R10. to pay for the school to be built. “But we promised the parents the school would be free” said Neil “We said we would find the funds...”

An emergency meeting of parents and staff was summoned for the Saturday and the uneducated chairman of the Mdukatshani School Committee walked 20 km to visit the Chairman of another School Committee. What were his rights? He didn’t know. Who was boss – his Committee or the headmaster? Both Chairmen came to the Saturday meeting. There were many parents, all very heated. But not one teacher had come. Nor had the School Committee Secretary.

“We are people without education. We have many trouble” said the guest speaker, the Chairman of another School committee. “But we must remember that our government has given us authority over the schools and the teachers. Foolishly we let the teachers do anything they like because they wear ties and make us feel ignorant.

“Wearers of ties are the people who are killing our country”. Impela, said the listeners. Quite right. We know it. “Wearers of ties do not like us to discuss the wrongs of the world. “Here is a know-nothing talking” they say. “What he sees must be said by one who is learned. One with a tie”. We are reminded of our ignorance and told to be silent. With a tie man it is a crime if you cannot read or write or speak English”.

When we start an organization” said a father “the tie boys have to be elected to hold the money. Then when the money is gone and we see they have lots of brandy and a car, they tell us we are too ignorant to understand. There were many expenses...”

Eh he. We know it. "That is how it is" the meeting rustled its assent.

"Today it is Saturday when only the uneducated work" said a member of the Committee.

"Where are those who wear ties? Their motorcars have taken them away. They are not interested in your children. At the end of the month they get a big cheque.

If you child fails they still get a big cheque. Where is the Secretary of the Committee today? He is an educated man. He wears a tie and dark glasses. He asked us to excuse him because he had an important engagement. Important!

When we have this trouble and our school might have to close? "Tie men fear to put their hands to work needing strength" agreed one parent. "No tie man has ever said to our children "Look here is how you hold a spade. Here is how you plant a cabbage. No, they say "Plant, dig, water. I am busy on important work".

"The trouble is, we put educated people on our committees because they can write letters and minutes and talk to Whites" said somebody. "Leave the business to us" they say. "We have been taught". And so today Whites talk only to the wearers of ties. They only believe what they hear from the wearers of ties. They do not know how to talk to us".

"With educated people on our committee you will soon have a school that is only for boys with ties and girls with shoes" warned a visitor. "The teachers will send the others home saying: Tell your parents you spoil our school because you have no white shirt and red dress and shoes...."

And so it went on, hour after hour. An angry upwelling of bitterness. Down with the men with ties. Speak for yourselves, the uneducated of the world. Stand up for your rights. Make your voice heard. Impela. Quite right. We know it.

A new secretary was elected – Mamjiago Mgaga, the highest qualified present with Standard 3. New rules were drawn up. In future all requests for funds would be cleared with the committee first. There would be signed requests and signed receipts. Meanwhile the widow with her "debt" of R60 need not worry. She could keep her six children at the school for free. The headmaster's instruction was cancelled by the higher authority of the Committee of Men without Ties and Women without Shoes. No R10 per child would be asked to build Mdukatshani's School.

On Monday the teachers came with apologies and explanations. It had all been a misunderstanding. Naturally they were willing to accept the authority of the School Committee.

The term continues.

NEIL AND CREINA

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APRIL 1977: THE ECONOMICS OF OOZES

The birds have no name in this valley.

“We do not know them” say the men. “Until a year ago we had not seen them here. They are new to this country”. Every afternoon the birds fly past, 30 Bald Ibis with pointed wings gliding to their roost on the cliffs at the bend of the river. The cliffs are not high, but because the only way to reach them is across deep, silent, black pools, the birds are safe on their rocky perches. Once GG persuaded Delanie Mbatha to take the boats to have a closer look at the colony, but Mboma refused to go with them. “There’s a huge snake that lives in the pools” he said “and it has a tunnel under the cliffs up to the top where it rolls rocks onto people that go to that part of the river. And when the rocks have knocked you into the water, the snake swing out to eat you”.

GG and Delanie were still among the sandbars when an old man on the hill saw where they were going and began screaming. “Away!” he shouted, “Quickly go away or the big snake will get you”. And the next day there was a deputation warning us to keep the children away from the pools “for it is well known that there is a huge snake with a lamp on its head and anyone going there is sucked into its mouth”.

So the Big Snake and the Bald Ibis are left alone at the dark quiet pools, while we have the joy of knowing they are there.

This month for the first time the ibises hesitated above the cliffs near the house. Then they settled on an overhang, close enough for us to see their bare red heads and glossy wings. After a time the birds dropped over the edge, one after another, fluttering, turning and disappearing into holes in the cliff face. Exploring for next sites? Since we arrived three summers ago the cliffs have been out of bounds to pellet guns and catties and small boys with the agility of lizards, and each season there have been a few more birds nesting in the nooks and crannies of the golden precipices. This year there were crows, owls, rock kestrels, trumpeter hornbills, swifts, swallows starling, rock pigeons and wagtails – as well as a gymnogene which hunted along the cliffs, clinging at the rock face, flapping wildly with its great grey wings as it searched for tasty nestlings.

As the mists lift off the river in the early mornings now, the soft honking of a pair of Egyptian geese say these old residents are back from their summer wanderings to rear another brood high above the water. The Bald Ibis, too, have been back several times, popping into caves and crevices whilst we hold our breath and hope they find the accommodation to their liking. Only a few years ago the Bald Ibis was considered an endangered bird, but although it has proved to be less of a rarity than some believed, it is still a very special neighbour.

The cliffs have recently been witness to some other noteworthy events – seeps, oozes and trickles of freshwater have been appearing along their base. The rain gauge says last summer was drier than the first two seasons we were here, so if it is not the rain that has done it, it must be the grass thickening on the stony hills, beginning to hold the summer storms. Unfortunately, neither Bald Ibis nor oozes register on the farm’s balance sheet. But then neither do the grains of soil that rush away with each flood, so perhaps it is just as well we

continue to make do with the unrealities of an audited statement that assigns no values to birds or mud or the first bubbles of newborn springs. Economics, of course, is a subject, which is less a serious statement of fact than an outlook, which every man organizes to please himself. And there will never be much agreement when men get together to talk economics, for each man stands apart from his fellows clutching at a private dogma.

While our dogma may be more more reasonable than the stockbroker in Hollard Street or the tribesman at Msinga, we remain – as they do tranquil with our own certainties, and knowing ibis and oozes are wealth, we consider the farm has made a profit in the last financial year.

Economy, extravagance, eccentricity – it is hard to sort one from another. Msinga judges us extravagant because we have more than one candle burning in the room at night, while for a long time we criticized the people of Msinga for burning aloes to save a match or two.

Matches cost a cent a box, but when the box has to be fetched from a store many hour walk away, it becomes lavish to strike a match to light each hand-rolled cigarette, and thrifty to chop down an aloe, get alight its dry beard, and to use the smoldering plant as a lighter for the day.

Msinga's economics wear their clothes inside out, saving the right side for formal occasions, while shoes are carried to their destination – how very wasteful to consider walking in shoes! The minute a torch is switched off, the batteries are reversed for longer life. And so the list goes on, a list of economies that look as strange to us as our savings probably seem peculiar to Msinga.

Economics is a favourite debating point during the lunchbreaks at the Friday lectures, and the men get quite heated putting their point of view. Take Mr. Mnguni now, where would he be today if he had not invested in wives, and if the wives, and if the wives had not given him daughters?

Only because he has many wives and many daughters does he have the best garden in the district.

“When there was just one wife, we struggled” he says. “We never finished the work between us. I married a second wife and things got a bit better. One collected wood for the fire, fetched the water, did the cooking and washing, and the other one helped in the garden. When I got a third wife we were able to build a dam together and the garden began to pay”. “You are a lucky man,” agrees Mr. Dhladhla.

“The Whites say we must have small families. Just one wife and two children. We know if we have six children, three grow up and three we bury. A man grows old, but if he has four or five married sons, two can go to the city to get money, and the others can stay at home and guard the household. Only a man who has sons to go after thieves can try to farm here”.

“A daughter is worth ten cattle in marriage,” continues Ndimande. “If she becomes pregnant, she is worth eight. The next time she is pregnant, only six. Now if she has warrior brothers, why they go to visit the boy responsible, and when he sees them coming he says quickly: ‘I will be sending my father to ask to marry your sister!’ If there are no brothers the boy laughs and goes to find another girl and pays no damages or lobola.”

“My neighbour has eight & two children by his two wives,” went on Mkhize, developing the theme. “Two children milk the cows and take the cattle to graze. Two herd the goats. Every year two children have a chance to go to school and the others help their mothers in the fields. White people are no different, but they get servants to do the work that must be done.

Who has ever seen a White man working on his own? Blacks use their families and work together and a big family makes a man rich”.

It may be coincidence, but most of the big-time farmers we have met at Msinga are men with many wives and many children. A man who can multiply his labour force can multiply his opportunities and his profits too. We have no arguments to counter the direct, simple realities of the valley’s economists. Neither have we arguments to counter the direct, simple realities of the valley’s only profitable agricultural enterprise – dagga. At R1, 000 a field there is no other cash crop to compete with the plant with the drugging, scented leaves which is so at home on Msinga’s hot, dry hills.

“Every two years or so the helicopters come on a raid and destroy it all” the locals tell us. Call it R500 a field then. There is still no crop that can match dagga, risks and all. Now that we know a bit about the problems of farming these hills we spent a lot of time thinking about dagga. We do not know where it goes or who pays for it. We do know that our own ferryboat has carried loads.

Mboma was ferryman one day when a woman arrived with two big sacks.

Mboma lifted oars and marched up the hill to report the matter.

“You refused to take her?” we were horrified. “Go back quickly and take her at once.” The informer faces heavy penalties.

One sunny morning this month two helicopters buzzed into the valley searching up and down the hills, fluttering low over every gully and every mabela and mealiefield. Now and again a helicopter landed and soon a plume of smoke marked the end of a crop. Hour after hour the helicopters flew beyond our windows, and work stopped on the farm while everyone sat watching. “Well the helis haven’t been here for two years,” said one of the Dhladhlas. “We must expect it. But still it is hard... families will suffer.

Working with us at Mdukatshani are men who have grown, are growing or will be growing dagga. Dagga gives the poor man his only access to capital – capital to buy a fence, a waterpipe, a cow. CAP has started small fund to give loans to learner farmers, but many of the men who attend Friday lectures are afraid to borrow although the offer is there.

“How will we ever pay you back? They ask. “Where will we ever find the money?”

Somewhere, sometime, somebody’s thoughts will start running on dagga. One crop. Just one crop and the money will be there to start his farm, “Indaba zemali ziyadida” sigh the men.

“Affairs of money are confusing”.

So confusing that while maize, bread, onions, donkeys, petrol, gold fertilizer, taxi rides and even wives have a value in rands and cents, topsoil hasn’t got a price at all, and that makes us unbelievers in our society. Topsoil, like dagga, has become a favourite preoccupation since we moved among Msinga’s hills, where topsoil is a commodity in short supply. It takes 300 years to build up one inch of topsoil.

Downriver experts did some measuring and found that in one Location only 8,4% was soil-covered, while an average 870 tons of silt still went washing daily into the Tugela River.

Men can measure soil quantity, but he has yet to devise a standard unit measure of soil fertility linking the world of rands and cents to reality. At Mdukatshani, where there is very little topsoil left, and where the subsoil is following the topsoil to the sea, any agricultural development policy should set a target of 300 years, but if we get too serious about our topsoil we are likely to end up with very little money in the bank. Much soil conservation has low profit potential.

There are heavy capital costs, and a long lag period before the land shows returns, and Atkins in a study in the United States found that “incomes from high conservation will be 10% below incomes from low conservation for the first 50 years.”

A unit measure of soil fertility could bring about the reform of this unstable economic system which penalizes the man obsessed with topsoil, rewarding the man whose use of the land must in the long term make the country bankrupt. With a unit measure of soil fertility a profitable cash crop could be marked as a loss in the end-of-year account, while there could be a credit balance for the years the land is left alone, doing nothing at all but growing topsoil, grass and springs. With a unit measure of soil fertility we might, in fact, win the world to share our view of the economic importance of oozes.

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MAY 1977: ELIMINATED UNITS

The road winds a long way up through the warm dusts and prickles of the valleys. We passed the man limping slowly uphill, the dents of his tin suitcase glinting in the last sunshine of the winter afternoon. We slowed, reversed, stopped. A lift? The man peered at us, clutching his case. We opened the door. "Nothing to pay. Jump in". Still the man waited. "Hurry now..." At last he clambered in with a clank of his case.

As we started off a murmuring began in the back seat, a low, incessant tumble of words. We looked at each other. Nutty?

"Where are you going?" Neil asked the passenger. "Melmoth".

"Do you work there?" "I don't work anymore". "Are you doing business there?" "That is something I do not discuss with strangers".

Conversation came to a standstill, but behind us the soft stream of words went on bubbling incessantly. Gradually we held the shape of the whisperings. "Jesus helps me. Oh God protect me. Jesus Christ keep me from harm". Scared out of his wits, the man was muttering an endless, beseeching prayer. We had another go at conversation.

"We asked after your business because we are afraid we will only reach town after business hours". "That's all right. I was going to sleep in the bush tonight. I was not going to reach the town until tomorrow morning".

The man would not tell us his name, but in spurts of talk we learnt he had been walking on the road for two days. He knew the road well. He had traveled it every month since his boss said there was no more work. For nearly 40 years, since he was a boy, he had been working in Durban. Suddenly there was no more work. His boss said he was sorry, there was no more work for builders so he had better go home. He had been worried at first but then he had heard there were going to be agricultural plots at Broodstroom and there was a good stream there with lots of water, so he and his wife had hired a lorry and gone to Broodstroom to build a new house.

"But we have had suffering there" he said. "We had but finished the house when a white man came and said he would kill me. I have never seen a white man so angry. He said we were on his land and he would put me in jail if my house was still there in the morning.

So we pulled it down that same day and moved to a place the white man pointed. There was no fence to mark the boundary but he said it was all right to build there. Now they have put up two white gateposts and Hulumeni (the government) says there will be a fence and we hope we are in the right place this time because we have nearly finished building again."

Eventually our passenger even told us his business in town. He was drawing money from his post office savings. All his working life he had put some money in the post office at Melmoth and now that there was no work he was drawing on this money. Times were hard, though, and he was eating into it fast. After only three weeks he had finished his previous withdrawal.

When we left the man in the cold darkness at the railway compound (“they let us sleep for two bob a night”) we knew a lot about him, but although he was no longer frightened, he was not trusting enough to share his name.

Yet we knew what our shabby, unemployed passenger was called. He was an eliminated unit. There are 1½ million more like him, and another 1,000 joining him every day. “It is the first time anybody can remember when at every kraal there was a man” said somebody at the Friday lectures. Msinga footpaths are heavy with the tramp of workless men returning from Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Durban, Johannesburg, Pretoria. They have been away a long time. Now they sit in the sun confronted by their own idleness.

“We are back from a land of no work to a land of no food” said one of the new faces that make up the new class on Fridays.

The register of students runs repetitively:

Sloyiphi Skakane – retrenched stonemason

Nkavazeni Mbatha – retrenched construction worker.

Sopupa Mbatha – retrenched nightsoil carrier.

Bernhard Mtshali – retrenched builder

Nxanyane Mbatha – retrenched municipal worker

Dan Dhladhla – retrenched building construction worker

Joyela Mbatha – retrenched building construction worker

Speti Dhladhla – retrenched building construction worker

“Cela umsebenzi?” Speti asked hopefully when he got back six months ago. Sorry, no money here. No jobs, we said. Already Mdukatshani has a staff of five white and 69 blacks sharing a monthly wage cheque of R2, 500 that can stretch no further. But Speti hung around and lent a hand, collecting cattle, nailing rafters, moving stones.

“I told you, there’s no work” Neil reminded him whenever they met.

“Yes, I know. I’m just helping my friends. There’s nothing to do at home,” he said, and every morning waded the icy river, too shallow now for the ferry. He won. After a couple of months he was on the payroll.

Speti had never had a permit to work in Johannesburg, but his boss told him he was safe as long as he stayed on the premises.

So he became a sort of night watch, sleeping under piles of building material stacked in a corner. When his firm began sacking people because there was no work, his wife was not sorry. She was afraid of Black Power and all those killings in Goli. It was better for Speti to be home, even if there were no money.

Home is a small square mud hut sagging with thatch that is too old and too thin. A patchwork fence runs around the house keeping passing cattle from nudging at the wall. (“The cattle were very troublesome” said Speti). But the fence can’t keep out the dusts kicked up by the passing road. Our hearts sank when we looked at Speti’s plot. “There is water up there” he pointed at a kloof still lying in shadow. “Perhaps it is too far. Perhaps it is too small. It is a long way for you to walk to have a look...”

Apologizing for the distance, for the rutted track, for the cold, for the ragged line of girls and boys he kept trying to shoo away, Speti took to a path up a hillside littered with the yellow brightness of fallen aloe heads cast aside by children who had sucked the nectar dry. At the foot of the kloof, still in shadow, were clear pools.

Upstream there was running water, falling over a cliff. Downstream rocks and dust. Msinga's streams soon lose heart.

"But even when there is drought, there is water here" said Speti, as we puffed to the top of the waterfall. Mountains reared up, pushing the skyline a long way away. Once we heard falling stones and the thud of feet running somewhere above us, but we saw nobody. The rocks were cold and like baboons we found a warm perch before we sat down to talk about water pipes and pumps and possibilities. Speti's plot was a long way from water, but if he could get his neighbours interested they could share the cost of a very long pipe that emptied water into a communal dam in the middle of the settlement.

Suddenly the talk was interrupted by a harsh shout from the mountainside behind us. We did not have to understand the language to sense the hostility. "Benzani lana abelungu?" (What are Whites doing here?) We turned. Silhouetted on a huge boulder stood a man with a rifle slung across his shoulder. There were telescopic sights on the barrel of his gun. Speti leapt up. "These are not Whites, they are friends" he shouted back. "They will only see what we tell that to see. They have been invited by our bandla". It seemed a good time to go. The mountain sentry watched in silence as we began the climb down, and followed at a distance until we were off the mountain. There is no place for intruders near hidden dagga fields.

Speti called a meeting to discuss a waterpipe. Now letters have gone to those who still have jobs in town to tell them what is happening and to ask them to agree to let the work start. Speti has been just one of many tribesmen who continue to lead us to high places among the hills, to trickles and springs and streams where with a pipe they can learn to borrow water to grow a garden like Gamede's, or Delanie's or Mbatha's. Even where they say nothing can be grown, men must now make gardens that will keep their families fed. "A shrinking stomach makes for an expanding brain" said "Captain" Mbele, explaining why he had to lie about the directions to his eyrie. "I knew if you knew I was so far away you would never come to see my place."

Each man's patch of ground poses different problems, and initially at least he must be visited and shown the way. The long tramps along the hills swallow up the days. We are not yet ready for the extension work that must be done. Our first Friday students have graduated and are getting on with their own gardens, coming to Mdukatshani only when in need of help. And they share their problems with their colleagues. A great spirit of comradeship grew a long the men at the first Friday classes and now the togetherness continues with weekly work parties at one home or another. When they can, the graduates ease our burdens giving advice to the "new boys".

Yet the new boys continue to arrive faster than we can handle them. The fund CAP started to offer credit to smallholders never envisaged this demand. It costs between R50 and R600 in loans to set up an African farmer with the bare essentials - a fence, a pipe, a dam and a cow if he does not have one. It seems a lot of money until we look at the wider world that is filling KwaZulu with these workless men.

No work, say the bosses - but along the roads huge machines still trim the grass verges. In the fields giant combines move among the mealie stalks, spitting cleaned cobs into trailers. American, Italian, Japanese machines guzzling Arab oil, eliminating armies of Black workers. Concrete mixing machines, milking machines brick hoists and sugar cane hoists.

Times are hard, but the machines have work. “Machines are stealing our jobs” say the men who have returned. “Machines do not get sick” reply the bosses. “Machines do not get drunk. Machines do not want to go home”.

A professor told us it could cost up to R8000 to eliminate a labour unit in the manufacturing industry. It would cost a farmer up to R4000 to mechanise and do away with a man. “The costs are well justified by increased mechanical efficiency,” said the professor.

As unemployment figures went on rising The Star commented:
“Unemployment will be the greatest single threat to the stability and security of this country”.

You don’t eliminate a man by calling him a unit.

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JUNE 1977: MOUNTAIN-CLIMBING WATER

It will never work.

Good grief!

Ukumosa isondo likaganda lokhu (What a waster of a tractor wheel).

Simosa isikhathi sethu (We are wasting time).

The first flood will take it, of course.

Kuzomuka noThukela lokhu (The Tugela will wash away this thing).

Why don't you just buy a diesel pump?

Amanzi angeke akhuphuke intaba ngaphandle kwenjini (Water won't go up a mountain without an engine).

Well, the birds will enjoy it.

That? Ha Ha Ha. It can't possibly work.

Hau Hau Hau.

Ha Ha Ha.

An inventor must be deaf.

Down at the river bend where the iron structure has slowly taken shape, the Tugela churns and froths over tumbled rocks. In winter, the river growls as it chases past, while in summer the roar is so loud that Norman and Neil have had to walk uphill to make themselves heard, consulting on the next stage of the grand design. If there had been time to concentrate on the thing, perhaps it would have been finished in a month, but there were usually more pressing duties on the farm so the rusty tower grew bit by bit whenever Norman could snatch a free moment. He was out there alone in the morning mists, swaying in the blusters of windy days, burning his hands on sun-scorched metal, always isolated by the roar of the water down below. During the long summer evenings, a new star twinkled upriver as he perched on the airy scaffold with a welding torch that sparked and crackled. The cool hours of twilight were the best time of the day.

Although Mankowitz and Alcock never doubted that the waterwheel would work, the two designers could seldom describe what came next, for they made things up as they went along, scratching in the scrap metal they had dumped on the bank nearby. And because their heads were singing with the river, they did not pay much attention to the crowds of unbelievers who came to look and tell them the wheel would never, ever work.

With an adaptation here and there for local circumstances, the waterwheel is a model anyone can copy. Our prototype was manufactured with the use of the following:

1. Lucile, a dress designer who put the plan on paper because neither inventor had any ability to draw.
2. One Landrover chassis. (Remember the one decorated with white ribbon and wild flowers for the drive to the Church a long time ago? It's found a resting place on its nose on the riverbank.)
3. Another Landrover chassis. (The one that was sprained, Giles, overloaded on that trip down the Ngorongoro Crater. It's now welded to the wedding truck.)
4. A bridge girder.
5. A train rail.
6. A diesel tank stand (we know that's illegal but we hope Shell will understand).
7. A Mercedes car dumper.
8. A tractor buckrake for lifting hay.
9. A Landrover diff.
10. Three wheel rims (including the one you buckled, Doug, when you fell asleep driving to the Lebombo Mountains at 2 a.m. one moonlit morning).
11. A large cable. John found it lying in the middle of a road. Finders keepers.
12. An old-fashioned piston pump rendered obsolete by the oil age, and greedily salvaged from a Weenen scrapyard.
13. A Dunlop tyre for the water scoops.
14. A strong chain bough for R30.
15. Piles and piles of bits and pieces, nuts and bolts, pipes, washers, chunks of reinforcing and chunks of angle iron. The boys hungered for cheap iron and returned from town with springs sagging under scrap.
16. Oxy-acetylene gas and a vice-grip for blending the many parts, smoothing and joining, sculpting and moulding, finally shaping the iron.

If the 1¾ tone machine dangling near the river is something of an aesthetic eyesore-well, a few seasons in the sun and rain should give it an even rustiness that will look well against the rock.

Because the Tugela is a river that can come up seven metres on a cloudless day, the Mankowitz/ Alcock Wheel was designed to have agility, ready to jump a long way up or down. Mounted on a platform, it can be lifted or lowered on a 10 metre column, rising or falling to suit the mood of the flood. The platform was the worst part of the construction. Assembled on shore, it needed every man on the farm for the launching from the river bank.

“Qubula ...zashaaaa,” they chanted, pushing in unison.

“Aaaaaaaaaaah,” they said as the platform lurched over the bank to hang midair, swinging above the water. Now they could begin to see how the wheel would eventually work. However, it was a long time before Able Seaman Mphephethe Masondo, with his one good leg, and Able Seaman Michael Mabaso, with his terror of water, clambered aboard to join Norman working on the strange new machine.

Although the platform was suspended above the surface of the river, it rocked and jumped like a ship in rough seas. Norman’s hat went with the wind. The river took his sandals. Another hat went, but he and his two companions hung tightly to the struts, damp with spray, and went on with the work attaching the pump, bolting, welding, and connecting. When they came ashore in the evenings, they walked with the unsteady gait of sailors.

There were one or two small accidents. On the day they tried to fit the diff to the wheel platform, all the men on the farm were again summoned to the riverside.

“Qhu suka nsimbi, suka nsimbi!” they sang joyfully, pulling at the end of a rope. But somebody had miscalculated somewhere.

The wheel lifted a fraction, swung away, and plopped into the river, below two metres of rushing brown water.

“Qhu suka nsimbi...” the men sang a little less joyfully as they waded in to tug the waterlogged machinery to the surface.

Even Micheal was there, grappling underwater with just his bottom showing –Michael the man who has always sworn he will not touch a river that is so full of snakes.

Before nightfall the wheel was retrieved from the river with ropes, pulleys chains, a tractor and lots of Zulu muscle. It was wet but otherwise undamaged.

As the days passed, the men noticed the murky waters clearing beneath them. The river dropped to its winter level and the platform dropped too until it hung a metre short of the riverbed and the team could work standing knee deep. Then, unexpectedly, unseasonally, a last flood swept down, the wheel was far from ready, only loosely connected to the platform. Caught by the current for the first time, it began to spin, faster and faster, until it was leaping like a wild horse, flinging off nuts and bolts and bits of wire.

“We’ll have to write it off,” Neil said the night when he and the men came home, sodden and cold from a day fighting the flood.

Ropes had snapped, giant logs of wood been tossed aside – nothing had been able to hold the wheel so that it could be lifted to safety out of the water. However, overnight the flood dropped and next morning the wheel was still there, slowly flipping in one lazy revolution after another.

Of course, when the wheel was finally ready for testing, the river had retreated out of reach. Dhladhla, Bhengu, Mtshali, Ndindane, one-eyed, Mbatha, they flinched from the cold,

working in the water to make a channel, pulling the river back towards the wheel. At last there was enough of a swell to turn the wheel. Once. It came to rest. And again. Over. Stop. And around... The two inventors sat on the platform, mesmerized, counting.

One, two, three....

One, two, three, four, five....

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight revs per minute.

At 200, the pump should begin to work.

When the moment came, Norman was alone on the platform. He ran up the bank shouting: “Hey, it’s pumping! The wheel’s pumping!” There was nobody there to hear him. By the time he had run back, the pump had stopped. But it had happened once and it would happen again.

Slipping silently in the current, the wheel first spurted water into the Lucerne fields beyond the bank. And then the water was lifted from the river, gushing into a rocky dam 50 metres up the hill. Waterpower had put free water in the taps.

Norman is now putting the finishing touches, tightening, checking, re-testing all the parts so that the waterwheel is ready for fulltime work. In between times, he gives attention to Mankowitz Model Two – a simple pump made from a car tyre, designed to help those who do not husband their derelict vehicles as we do. And there is Mankowitz Model Three constructed from an old bicycle, which a flood left behind on the midriver island this summer. It’s rusty but the pedals go round and as long as you keep cycling the cycle keeps pumping. This model, too, awaits finishing touches, which include a bookstand fore to keep the cyclist entertained while he pumps water up the hill.

Norman plans to use the bicycle pump to raise water to his own house when if ever – it is complete. Because he insists on building hi home himself, and because the house always takes second place to pumps, the walls are not yet ready for the roof. All summer Norman slept under the stars, and now that it’s winter he curls up in an old Landrover cab, acting as watchman for the goats which are lambing at the moment, doubling the flock with their skinny, bleating kids.

Goats have roamed Mdukatshani illegally ever since we arrived. Or that’s our view of the situation. In fact, the goats have territorial rights stretching far back into history, and with some dignity they have ignored our presence and our fences and our periodic impoundments. Only since the word had got around that we are willing to provide veterinary services have we made any headway with the goats. Which doesn’t mean that we have got rid of them – it just means they live here under new conditions. An outbreak of quarterevil and mange set things off. Goat-owners and herdboys began coming to our dip, driving the goats singly or in small flocks for inoculation. There seemed to be an awful lot of children permanently herding, unable to go to school. We got together with the goat-owners and the upshot was a decision to keep the goats in one flock. Every day four boys herd the goats from 8 a.m. to 11. Then they go to school while another team relieve them for the afternoon duty. At night, the goats sleep in a CAP kraal, depositing high quality manure for our gardens, and during the day we have some control over their grazing, sending them to prune uncroaching acacia scrub in selected areas. Twelve goats owners are involved so far. We would like to see more, but this is another experiment that will need time for development.

Our inoculation services have also proved useful in bringing neighbouring tribesman round to the idea of a communal herd of cattle. About 260 African owned cattle now graze on Mdukatshani under supervision. A couple of men have been trusting enough to leave their cattle permanently with ours. Others taken them away for a few days, and then put them back again, watchful still, emphasizing their independence.

Midwinter brought frosts and an unexpected soft rain which encouraged us to burn the farm's first fireline, up on a mountain camp. To our surprise, many of our neighbours and friends came too, bringing their families with them.

Some were former residents on Mdukatshani and they showed the way in rugged terrain where it was easy to lose direction. Long after dark on a moonless night, we all stumbled together back down the rock paths.

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JULY 1977: A DOG LAPS LITTLE DROPS

There is one drum that starts beating before the stars have faded, a happy drum that laughs and jumps, kicking at the shadows, waiting for the sun to fall over Mashunka Mountain. There are midday drums and afternoon drums and darkness drums and in the thin winter air we can hear the singing a long way off. Anyone with cause to celebrate is having a party now. The days are cool so the meat isn't bad before the guests arrive; the mabela has been reaped; the threshing done and the pots are full of the new season's beer.

Neil was summoned to a meeting the Msusampi people on the last day of the threshing, and he had to raise his voice to make himself heard above the gossiping women wielding their sticks on the pounded surface of the village threshing floor. "Tula! Shut up!" shouted the men. "Have you now respect! This is a meeting on weighty matters." But the women just giggled at them and went on yelling happily as they banged the corn. "There were more people here at yesterday's meeting" apologized the chairman, sprightly Captain Mbele as he opened proceedings on the tumbled rocks of an old cattle kraal. "Today there is an important court case and the Induna and witnesses have had to be away but they sent their apologies and confirmed they would be with us when the work starts on this community project".

Now many years of many failures have made us wise in some matters; and because we are wise about working with communities perhaps it was unfair of us to tell Captain Mbele and five others that we could not help them with water pipes and gardens unless they could get more of their fellows to join them. A community is a heavy, edgeless thing. There are no grips to heave it from inertia. Neither reward nor demonstration, song nor flag, faith nor patience, threat nor force can be sure of shaking a response. Here and there a man may catch alight with hope and carry his hope into new initiatives, but hope is never a wildfire. It smoulders lowly, throwing uneven sparks that barely glow, or fall to ash, or perhaps flare into hot anger. And while a community will quiver to the surface touch of events, there is little that reaches deep enough to disturb its soft layers of inertia.

Knocking this, we watched Mbele and Co. doing the rounds of the beerdrinks, lobbying, finding enough men interested in a plan of working together, digging a pipeline from high up Mgejakazi Stream. And when they had sorted out their doubts privately, and spoken what was really on their minds they had been ready for Neil and had asked him to come across the river. Then, although they said they were unanimous, they asked for answers to the questions that still troubled them. Could the water be carried to every man's garden? Would there be enough water for all? How could the water be distributed according to the labour done? Would there be water for the people on the steep side of the donga? Gardens needed fences. How could all these workless men pay for fencing?

And seed? Well then how could they ever repay their loans? What would the interest be? How soon would a loan have to be repaid? What about the people who had no fields? What about widows who had no men to dig the furrow for them? "If we are to discuss the widows, they should be present" ruled the chairman at that point, and a messenger leaned over the

thorn boma that enclosed the threshing floor to invite the ladies to give the meeting their point of view. It was not just the widows who laid down their sticks, dumped their winnowing baskets on heaps of red corn, and doused the flames which were making the fine white ash that must be mixed with grain to keep weevils away. "Work?" said one matron "We can do the work of any man". "Beer" said another "will in future be offered only at the place of digging. Then you will see work".

"Tshaya!" screeched somebody. "Strike it! Strike it! The food is being finished!" a goat was munching at untended mabela. Stones were hurled and the goat retreated. The meeting continued. "Tshaya!" came the yell again, a few moments later. The goat was back, chewing at the corn. At the fifth interruption the yell was for a child. "Come quickly and stay here. Keep the goat away!"

One gogo took courage from the diversion. "My garden has never given me anything" she said "because every year the goats find a way through the thorns. I want wire for a fence this year. How much does wire cost? Twenty-three rand? And how many rolls will I need to fence my garden? Well I have one goat. Would you take one goat as payment for the wire?"

There were more young men than old in this crowd, but when one raised his hand in query, old Dan Dhladhla's head snapped round. "This is a meeting of men" he said severely, before the young man could open his mouth.

"Children may not raise their voices in this, the Parliament of the People.

Decisions will be made by those with grey hair and wisdom..." The reprimand took a long time. When Dan finished, Captain Mbele stood up: "I would like to put it to the last speaker" he said "that the wealth of KwaZulu lies in the strong arms of its people. Children have the strongest arms.

These young men are stronger than we are and perhaps if we let them make their views known, they will help to dig the irrigation ditch".

Old Dan chewed his lip. "Be it so" he said reluctantly. But the young man had got up and moved beyond the circle, too angry to ask his question again.

Yet the young man was there on the day appointed for the dig, still sitting apart with his soft hat and a new blue overall that said he was lately back from town. And perhaps even old Dan relented a bit for of the 60 who had promised, only ten had come, and three of them were tottering graybeards. Whites are known to be unreliable so we were not surprised that nobody had gathered. Once we had been seen on the hillside path, the people would begin to come. We waited, listening to the gurgle of the cold, clear stream. Time passed. A man cut a branch from a tree, stoked a small fire to burn off the bark, and began to shape a kerie. We watched him. Three hours later when it was obvious that nobody else was coming, the talking started.

"All those promises" said the Induna bitterly "And nobody is here. Not even one woman. Alone we cannot move this stream. It is too far. We are too few". Too far. Too few. The hopes the men had had for the enterprise seemed foolish as they sat on the stream bed, high up in a lonely place among the hills. "Years ago, when I was a young man" wheezed asthmatic old Madonsela at last "I dug a small ditch that took water to my garden. Now that we cannot do this bigger thing, why don't we open my ditch and take it further?" the feeling of failure lifted a little, but would the water be only for those who worked for it? Or would others be able to use it even though they had done no work? "It is the law" said the Induna "that only those who help to dig a dam or ditch to get water for their fields or cattle, can use the water. But you cannot stop others from taking water for drinking". "What about forming yourselves into a company?" suggested Neil. "Then the Company will dig the ditch and only

members of the Company will get water for their gardens”. A company! Of course! A company! The men’s thoughts reached around the idea, and sensing the tentacles, they laughed.

“If we make ourselves into a Company, many will join us because they will fear there will be no water for them when the job is done” said Induna “Perhaps so many that there will be people to dig the pipeline from this place after all”. So sitting at the Mgejakazi Stream, ten men wrote down their names as members of the Company that would be formed as soon as the chief had given his permission. Then feeling a lot more cheerful they moved downstream to examine Madonsela’s ditch.

“I am not worried” we heard Captain Mbele saying to a colleague. “This plan is like a dog lapping water. Each time the dog drinks its tongue lifts just a few drops of water and you wonder where the silly animal will get, drinking like that. And yet the next thing you know, the bowl is empty”.

Madonsela’s Ditch ran off a big fall of white boulders and Neil decided to begin by checking the line which the old man had originally surveyed by eye. “Anybody here with experience of surveying?” he asked. One thing about the present unemployment – it’s put a lot of expertise back among the hills.

Yes, Muzkayfani Duma, there, with the white headscarf, he had been a builder in Bloemfontein and knew about the workings of a dumpy level.

While he and Neil set off to measure the hillside, the others clinked stones, deepening the river pool where the water would begin its detour. A man in green floral pyjamas arrived and joined the work party. Three women arrived and apologized for being late. Another couple of young men.. The hillside thudded with rocks shifted to mark the company furrow.

“This Company now...?” said a newcomer. “Am I too late to join the company?”

“Will you write down my name as a member of the company?” “Madonsela Masoka is not here today but she wants to be written down to.” At last the embryo company took a break for beer, sitting on a steep slope where tiny red fire lilies showed through the winter grasses. It was going to be possible to raise Madonsela’s Ditch. The first lap had been surveyed. The company had grown to 20 in a few hours. The work was underway. Far down the valley a woman emerged from a hut and puffed up towards us with a small tray draped with pink net. “We have brought you some lunch” said Captain Mbele. Everyone watched us. Would we come again after such a disappointing day? Although we had no appetite we drank a pot of sweet tea and swallowed half a loaf of bread. We were not disappointed with the day.

At Nomoya, the Place of Quick Temper, Speti Dhladhla had got another meeting organized. Poor Speti, still anxious and apologetic, running ahead, darting in and out of doorways, rounding up the community that had said it would gather at Mehlwane Waterfall. “I am sorry they are late” he said. “They promised they would come. These are not all who want a pipe. The three women thatching the office could not leave their work but are willing....” Six men and 25 women were present and the proxies ran to 20 more. Captain Mbele arrived late, out of breath, representing Msusampi. One valley must know what another valley was doing, especially when the doing were of such importance. The Nomoya meeting lacked the lightheartedness of the threshing floor. These people were tense, nervous, and afraid. They did not even have tools to begin. Not even a spade each, or a hoe, a pick, a crowbar – just a piece of iron? “We will try” said Speti

We will borrow”.

And although Speti's face crumpled with the burden of his anxiety he need not have worried about attendance on the day of the dig. There were 30 people, dressed in their best, most of them, young men, most of them, sitting close to the sound of wood doves and falling water. Only desperation could bring men like this to work marking the line of a furrow on a graveyard hill of chopped tree fascias. At Nomoya trees that give shade to homesteads are still standing. All the others have been taken to keep the cooking pots warm.

With the rough outline of the work done we went away. "Now for the fun" said Neil. "Now for all the quarrels, suspicions, fears. I wonder what will happen next?" Old timers distrust good beginnings.

Which just goes to show that even old timers can learn, for within a week 40 men and women had cleared a path for the Nomoya pipe, and they had worked so fast that it seemed they would be finished long before the pipe could come from town. And back in the Msusampi Valley a company of 60 was pushing forward with Madonsela's Ditch – men with crow bars leading the way, pick-wielders following, and then stone-builders, and earth shovellers and rock blasters. "See my dynamite?" said a granny, bald with age, when we went over on an inspection. "What do you mean dynamite?"

"We are too old to dig," she said, pointing to another ancient who looked familiar. It was the granny who wanted to buy wire with her goat.

"We are too old to dig but we blow up the stones that are too big for the men". And sure enough, there in the ditch lay evidence of Zulu dynamite which is made by stoking a fire on ironstone until the heat cracks and splits the rock. The dynamiting gogs cackled with pride at their handiwork. When the water runs they will be entitled to a share.

NEIL AND CREINA

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AUGUST 1977: WORK TASTES GOOD TODAY

“Baleka nsizwa encane! Baleka little men! Escape Little men.”
 Women shout a warning as a boulder leaps away to thunder down the hill.
 “Ha Ha Ha” they roar happily. “Look how men scatter when ladies move.
 And here comes another. Baleka little men!”
 The men grin. They know while they are targets they will get maximum effort from the
 women.

"We will work until the mountains roll," sings another group swaying up the valley on dancing legs, heads obscured under a huge coil of black plastic piping. "Sebenza kuze kuse kudilike izintaba. We will work until the mountains tumble down, tumble down..."

"Aya," ululate two gogos with cracked voices, and their tattered leather skirts do a jig around their knees.

"Sisebenza kamnandi namhlanje," says someone. "Work tastes good today. Work tasted good when you can make each other laugh."

Not just today but every day the people of Nomoya and Msusampi have laughed and giggled as they've pushed their furrows along the hills. Old Madonsela hasn't missed a moment although his asthma is too bad for him to help much.

Now and again he picks up clods, or smooths a rough place, but usually he watches in the shade, gasping for breath but a happy man! With his friend Mbele there, anyway, do his services really mater? Mbele is a wizard, a tiny greybeard who leaps around with magical vigour, cracking open the earth, tossing rocks, beamping and hopping as he leads the way ahead. For six weeks now both Nomoya and Msusampi have each had a regular work force of about 60 men and women, with a scampering army of children in a uniform of rags. From a long way off you can hear the chattering, the yells, the thumps and loud laughter. From a long way off you can see the lines gouged and hammered and chiseled through earth as hard as iron. Small boys are in the digging line, lightweights rocking on their spades, struggling to penetrate the soil. There are young men and older men, shrill grannies, mothers with babies on their backs, pretty girls with beads and bangles, and much smaller girls with golden safety pins shining in their ears as they crane their necks to peep out of the ditch. One day when they are women they will have earlobes stretched to carry wooden earrings five centimeters wide. But while they may be beginners in the arts of adornment, they take their turn at the shovels and the dust flies as they work. Even Mlalalwa Khumalo has been at the dig with his paralysed leg and his paralysed arm, hauling himself along the massive retaining wall of the furrow, planting aloes.

On Monday August 22 the first water squirted along Nomoya's pipe, spilling into a donga, forming a pool where children squealed and splashed while their mothers filled their buckets. The same day water gushed into the Msusampi furrow, surging past the crooning radio at Dlonono Masoka's, and past the giant wild fig where sweet red fruit plopped into the new stream, out beyond the open-ended furrow and out across the dry veld.

For as you will gather, the pipe and the furrow have yet to find a destination. The people don't know and we don't know where their waterways will eventually end up. All we are sure of is that the water will flow as far as we can stretch their imaginations. Under their laughter we are watchful for the cracks that sometimes appear in silence, sometimes in babble, in questions asked or questions never spoken, in hesitations and inflections, or the incoherence of old scars. This is a little stream and there are so many of us. Will there ever be enough water for me? Over there? Nothing can take water that far? Which are right –our eyes or that leveling machine?

Those who are too lazy to join us are going to chop our fences and cut the pipe. Remember du Plessis? Won't this White man be the same? When he sees success he will say it came from his brain and his machine and the government will give him the land. If this scheme does too well the government will take it over. If we all work on our gardens and nobody goes to Goli, they will take our gardens away because the white man needs us in Goli.

Sometimes while we are sitting together on a hillside discussing the next state, there will be a moment of withdrawal, a change of tempo. Then we make a note: what we have just said is too ambitious, too big, too frightening, too something. Try again ...

But the people are as careful of cracks as we are, listening to our undertones, testing for solid ground before they take another step. That suggestion we have just made – reversing it will make them uneasy, so we glide past the obstacle, whatever the obstacle may be, and continue” or you can choose to do...” We let the first water flow when it did because up on the mountains there had been fires and hot winds, and the streams had become slow with swirls of green slime. In the furrows spades faltered. “Before we are finished digging the water will be gone.” So the water ran to make excitement.

“Oh ho,” said Neil at breakfast one morning. “There comes trouble. “There comes a deputation.” Four men were hurrying along the far bank of the Tugela. Half an hour later they had crossed the ferry and climbed the cliff path.

“We just thought we would come to see you because we had not seen you for a few days,” said Captain Mbele casually. “The furrow is going on very well but we didn't work yesterday because it was too cold. And because it is cold again today we stopped work a second time and thought we would bring a small problem to you. It is just tiny problem, hardly worth mentioning...”

And with Dhladhla, Zungu and Sithole helping him along, he explained:

“It's the matter of the induna. He has changed since he first said he too would work. He now claims that the land is his for him to distribute as he sees fit and we must stop digging the drain across it. When he told us he wanted to see the Chief we said it was a very good idea and we would go with him to add our voice to his. But the Induna said No, he would go alone. And we must give him money for the bus and we must also let him eat while he is at Tugela Ferry. “That is necessary,” we told him.

Takokoto has already promised transport and he said he would come too to help present our case. And Numzaan that is when we knew there was trouble for the Induna said that these were Zulu matters and since when had Zulus had their problems solved by a white man. And today he took the bus to Tugela Ferry to see the Chief and we have come to ask you to take

us down so that we can get there before the Induna has whispered evil into the ear of the King.”

They needn't have worried. It just so happened that the Chief had been visiting the day before and he had heard about the digs at Msusampi and Nomoya and a day had already been set aside when Alcock and the representatives of the digs could have an audience.

A very silent deputation took the road to Tugela Ferry on the appointed day – but what joyful uproar there was on the way back.

The Chief had congratulated the men on their initiative. Holding court on grass mats unfurled in the shade of his yard he had spoken of the law which said that the water must be available for anyone to fill their domestic utensils. However only those who had done the work could have the water for their gardens. What they should do was form themselves into a co-operative with a chairman, a secretary and a constitution.

Anyone who had worked 20 days perhaps could be a member while a child's work might count for half a day. The Chief said when the constitution was ready it must be brought for him to sign. Then he would give the people authority to enclose their gardens and the furrow, and the Induna would be instructed to allocate no more building sites in that area.

“And,” said Gamede, “The Chief said he would send the constitution to Ulundi so that we will be recognized by the government too.”

The next time Neil went to Msusampi he found the men gathered in a courtyard drinking beer.

“We're not loafing,” they shouted as he hitched his horse to the gatepost.

“We have a big problem and were going to send for you but then we saw you were on your way so we waited here.” The new problem was sandstone dyke in the path of the furrow. Another problem – the Induna – was in their midst sharing the beer. He greeted Neil warmly. “How are things going?” Neil asked.

“Very well,” said the Induna, “apart from certain people but that is nothing do so with you. You know we Bantus are always quarrelling.”

One morning Delanie Mbatha came to the door with a goat on a tether.

“Peace,” he said. “Peace at last. Now the old lady will leave me alone.”

Delanie had brought the gogo's goat in exchange for a roll of wire. She was in a hurry to put a fence around her garden. Delanie's garden lies up above the Msusampi furrow but he is as interested in its progress as any of the workers.

“Poor Delanie,” Mrs. Duma told us. “Look what's happened to him.

Everyone that's hungry lives by him now. “Can we have a little spinach? They all ask. “Our children are hungry and there is no work.” When he tells them the spinach is finished they go away and tell everyone Delanie hates them because he had spinach for everyone but none for them. Poor Delanie. “And poor Delanie is hoping when the furrow is done someone else will have some spinach too.

Success certainly has its problems. Zeph Ntabela was still shaking with rage when he arrived to say he had assaulted the storekeeper who lives next-door to him.

“That bloody fool came and told me I have no right to put up a fence on public property. He told me he'd come to cut it down.”

“Don't you dare touch my fence,” warned the old man.

“A has-been like you won't stop me,” jeered the younger man.

“Touch my fence and I'll fetch my sticks,” said Ntabela.

“Ha Ha Ha,” laughed the storekeeper but he didn’t laugh long.. Ntabela might be 76 but in defence of his newly strung wire he wields the strength of ten. “So I beat him up and then I climbed on the bus and went to report the matter to the Chief,” he said. The case is still sub judice.

August is a month of winds and fires and maternities, and we had them all, as expected. Our black neighbours helped to fight the fires that raced across the top farm – in fact while we slept unaware they battled all night to beat out the flames, and then joined us, weary though they were, to fight the fires all the next day. There’s nothing like a fire to develop comradeship.

The hospital helped with the maternities. Nine months ago Msinga’s men folk came home for their once-a-year visit to their families and the results start appearing now in overflowing wards at Tugela Ferry hospital. Not every woman manages to get to hospital in time for the district has irregular buses, few taxis and fewer telephones. Neil drove past a woman weeping at the roadside one morning. She was in labour and had missed the only bus of the day.

“In the past few weeks I’ve picked up six labour cases sitting on the road hoping a car would pass,” said the doctor.

We managed to get three women to hospital in time. Regina Ndawonde was the fourth. She waded across the river in the dark, climbed the bank, collapsed under a tree and called for help. By the time we were summoned her labour was already far advanced. We asked the essential questions.

Three miscarriages and a Caesar? Well this was one baby that we would not try to deliver at home. Get a vehicle. Get her to hospital quick. But first the gate was locked and nobody could find the key for the Landrover and the car had not a drop of fuel. Almost an hour passed before she could be loaded on a stretcher. Even then progress was slow. What was wrong with Mla staggering in front?

“If I move too fast my pants knock me over,” he shouted in the dark.

“What do you mean your pants knock you over”?

“They’ve fallen off you fool. Don’t you know when I go to bed I use my belt for a collar for the dog? They called me so fast I didn’t use my belt for a collar for the dog? They called me so fast I didn’t have time to put it on. I didn’t know I’d have to use both hands.”

And of course we were too late. The baby was born in the car without complications. We were very lucky.

“This is a precious baby,” said the doctor as we thankfully handed over the care of mother and child. The car is kept filled now, and the key of the gate is close at hand – while notes on “How to Deliver a Baby” are pinned on the office door.

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SEPTEMBER 1977: THE TREE WITH THE BIGGEST SHADE

It has rained at last, with the unremembered sound of thunder, with gusts and sliding drizzles. We sheltered from the first storm sitting on the floor of a hut at Sahlumbe, talking across a stubby candle in the late afternoon. Five men sheltered with us, leaning against the smooth earthen wall, passing the conversation as they passed the pot of beer.

“The boys set the mountains alight just to flush out red hares,” remarked Ntunzi.
“Now the cattle are dying”.

His neighbour took the pot, sipped, and said carefully. “We were grazing the cattle over the river on those hills where we used to live.” He paused and watched us with the stillness we have come to expect when mention is made of the removals.

We said nothing, thinking about the empty spaces across the Tugela, spaces that belong to white men who have never seen their properties, or who come now and again, as strangers, asking us to show them their own boundaries.

“There is lots of grass on those hills,” said our host. “Enough for all our cattle, but recently the man Stone came from Durban to see his farm, and he collected our cattle and drove them away and because we were trespassing said we must pay a fine of R2 a head”.

(Oh God, why did Stone do a thing like that?” said the police sergeant. “He must know the people are hungry. He is not using the land. Why did he do it?
Now they will see that he can never farm there, never”.)

In the hut a man wound a musical box and it tinkled while the rain splashed on the yard. Ntunzi peered outside as soon as the storm had blown away. There were puddles in his cattle kraal, but the clear green currents of the river were undisturbed. “Not enough” he said.

Not enough for grass that is a faded bristle underfoot. Even the fires died on the thin, dead fuzz. The cattle have nibbled at bushes and chewed branches chopped from edible trees, and their bones angle loosely through their skin. At Sahlumbe the hill show their bones too. Only wild figs grow among the rocks, clinging to windy precipices. There is a path from Sahlumbe that goes up among the precipices and one day we were taken there, past the graves of the 24 young men who died in last summer’s war, past women digging for water in the dry stream bed, up along stony stairways that lead from one high place to a higher one. Then at last we reached a tree appointed for yet another meeting about yet another furrow with yet another group of men. They did not let us go until we had a notebook full of details about them, of where they had worked, and how many years they had paid unemployment insurance, and how many times they had been to Ezakheni with the letters given to them by their employers, and how many months they had waited and still there was no money. And still there as no work.

Distracted by the shimmering pink spring leaf of the figs we lost the path back to Sahlumbe’s tight rows of huts squatting below the mountain, but although it was late there were 40

women waiting for us. What had been agreed? They wanted to know. Would they have a chance of gardens? When could the work start? They had heard we bought handcrafts. Could we buy these mats? These beads? Could we tell them what we needed and they would make it?

More details for the overcrowded notebook. And even as we drove home we were to be stopped again and again along the road. "Can you help us? Our homes were burnt in the war and mothers, fathers and children are scattered, living apart. We have been waiting here all day for a chance to talk to you privately..."

"The starter of my car won't work? If I take it to your farm will your mechanics help me to fix it?" "Won't you buy my silver bracelets? I bought them when I became a bride but I'm old and a Christian now. I don't need them but my child is sick and I must have money for a doctor".

There was even the oldest man in the world (there just couldn't be one older) He said "When I took my reference book to ask if I could have a pension the clerk just laughed and threw it in the road and said I must not waste his time".

We came home tired and angry, angry at the needs that the day had thrust upon us, angry at the people who would not let us alone. And the anger returns every day, as the people return every day. CAP: General Dealer should be the notice above the office door, (the new office door for we have moved premises from the uncertain shelter of the two combretum trees).

"Can you help me?" asks one of the many who have queued for an interview.

"You see I can't get a reference book because of my fingerprints". "Your fingerprints?" The boy holds up his hands. "I've got such callouses from working my fingers won't make a proper mark so they won't give me a reference book. I thought you might help me".

"Can you help me?" says an old man. "You see my eye fell out and now I can't see to herd the cattle". Your eye fell out? The old man lifts a decrepit pair of binoculars. One eyeglass is missing.

"You see my feet are rotting and my wife is blind and our only son ran away on the lorries and we are worried that this furrow will take water right into our yard and dampen our walls and make the house fall down".

"I agreed to be a police informer but even though I led them to the stolen cattle, they have not paid me as they promised".

"Take £100. Or more. I will find the money. It was the lawyer in Johannesburg who told me the price was £100. But when I went to the farmer he said he could not take any more prison labour from the Prisons Department because he was full up. Both my sons are in jail for five years and eight years for selling dagga and they have young families. If you applied to have them here as prison labourers then at least their wives and children could see them sometimes".

"Excuse me sir, but can you help me charge my batteries?"

"As I entered the station waiting room I was smashed on the head and when I remembered again I was blind. In hospital they got me some pension forms and said I must fetch my

pension at Ezakheni. I have been many times but it is two years now and still there is no pension”.

“Can I pay off my loan by selling you my banana plants?

“The farmer gave us notice to leave his farm in 24 hours and we have no shelter for our belongings. Can we store them for a few days?”

“This morning my son was taken by the lorry”.

“Please can you try and buy us a boat? Because of the war we cannot take the road to the store anymore. There is only one way to get mealie meal into our valley and that is across the river where it is deep. We will help you find the money.”

“Two months ago they brought my husband’s body from Goli and yesterday the fires on the mountain burnt all our huts with all our food and clothes”.

“I must have R40 to pay my tax. Will you take my goat as security?”

“Die honger maak my klaar”. (Hunger is killing me). When I asked for a pension they said they had no pensions for old women like me. I must try and find a husband to support me”.

“You see the child was born without legs and arms”.

“Can you find us a lawyer? You see the White man took all the cement we bought to make our school. He will not even discuss it and meanwhile our children learn in classrooms in the dongas”.

“Mgunzi Dhladhla is to be killed by the gang. Can you write the name down and keep it and give it to the Police and when he dies they will know who killed him”.

“The child knocked the pot of boiling water over and we are afraid to pull her clothes off the burns”.

.....

“Welfare is not CAP’s function” reminds our Managing Committee.. We know it. We have neither funds, nor staff, nor time to take on the heartaches and injustices of 30,000 people (if we’re just counting those close to our boundaries). So what do we say? Sorry –so you’re blind now. Toughies. Go away and get used to it. Keep paying R7 for the bus trip to Ezakheni. Someday they’ll dish out a pension.

Be patient. And you lady, with your burnt hut. Your neighbours will look after you. Why come to us? Our job is to offer agricultural training and that’s bad enough. Why come to us with all your problems?

Well there’s no other welfare agency in the district for a start.

“That’s not true” said the Magistrate angrily when Pat took down a list of 57 pension applications. “What are you doing interfering? It is none of your business. The government

has welfare agencies that will look after these people. Ummmmm, in Pretoria I think. I can't remember now".

When a man is facing you, and you know White intervention will make a difference to his life, then it is hard to turn him away. Fed up at the perpetual demands for help one of our staff protested: "We are doing all we can. We can't do more".

Can't we?

This month the Nomoya and Msusampi ditch diggers got as far as they could go without approval from the chief for the next step – the construction of dams.

The headmaster was dismissed for being drunk on duty once too often. The milk goats arrived from de Aar and Kathy made goat's milk cheese for lunch every day.

On the flat land near the river we staked out gardens for 36 local women, who were soon busy with their hoes. Each has her own plot, accessible to water pumped from the waterwheel.

It was time for the CAP Annual General Meeting, and the Directors sat under the thorn trees at Mdukatshani with 40 invited representatives from local communities.

The free-range chickens ranged freely among the guests, while Ntabela, champion speechmaker, made a speech:

"Today Black people sleep on White men's beds" he said, "and there's nothing wrong with this except that the Black people are incapable of making the beds for themselves. Our wives and daughters are no longer capable of plaiting a sleeping mat. Among us are youths who cannot milk a cow, and mature men who cannot inspan oxen. That's not progress. It's like a man with a beard on one side of his face. We must have progress where the beard grows on both sides at the same rate".

Thanks to a tip-off, the Police were at last able to arrest one of the youths suspected of robbing Tholakele at gunpoint last year. Yet Tholakele continues to sleep badly, fearful of the threats of revenge that have been made against those who landed the boy in jail.

Two men were shot at the bend of the river while herding goats. For six hours we telephoned the police, waited, phoned again, complained, waited, phoned again.... They arrive the following day. Friends, relatives, neighbours, strangers came to talk about it. We passed on the sum of their information and the Police were able to make arrests of unexpected suspects far away. The news traveled quickly.

"I met a man down at the river," said Dhladhla. "He has always been against you but this morning he said that events were making him change his mind. There will be many like him who will join us now. Everyone is looking for the tree with the biggest shade".

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MONTHLY REPORT: OCTOBER 1977

General

Because the Chairman's Fund grant, due at the end of August, did not arrive, CAP had no financial resources to pay staff wages. Staffs were notified of the situation, and because we could offer no guarantee refuture payments, all except six member of our work force were put off work.

While 39 left, 214 continued to work without pay, most of them on smallholding development on Mdukatshani.

The grant from Chairman's Fund was withheld because CAP had produced no financial statement for the preceding six months as was required. And the financial statement was not prepared because the auditors held the ledgers and journal. These were returned on October 18.

Unfortunately due to the incompetence of CAP's staff on office duty allocations had not been made as instructed and this further delayed the preparation of the financial statement.

Because of the lack of staff this report will reflect little progress on the previous month's work.

Rainfall: There were six inches of rain during the month, transforming the farm.

Pensions: No progress to report.

Sick cases: Hilda Mxhongo reports: "46 people came for medical aid. Most of them suffered from scabies, stomachache, sores on their face or near their eyes and others suffered from toothache."

Lectures: Adult education classes have not yet been resumed as everybody connected with furrow development is taking advantage of the rains to develop their gardens. CAP's white staff again gave a total of 78 hours.

Buildings: The roof of Mbatha's house was completed. Work on the school roof continued despite the financial situation because there was a danger that the summer rains would break down the walls.

Water: Holding dams for the communal gardens are almost complete, and the first vegetables in the gardens are flourishing. The new improved waterwheel was fitted but unfortunately its weight was too much for one bearing and a new bearing had to be installed and an adaptation made to distribute the weight onto a second bearing.

Digester: Mphephethi Masondo has now found that a drumful of gas lasts 25 minutes of cooking time, and therefore the four-drum-unit can provide gas for 1½ hours. The speed at which the gas is generated is limited by the temperature each day while the cool night temperatures tend to reduce the benefits of a hot day. Mphephethi is now working on a solar reflector that can heat the digestive material. The reflector should also develop into a cooker.

Theft: Thefts of vegetables from the school garden continue.

A report that Skeiman, the CAP ploughing ox, had been stolen, kept three members of staff on a fruitless hunt through the hills for two days. Skeiman, however had once again returned to his previous owner. The ox which we followed was a stolen animal and was later recovered.

Cattle: With the desertion of Peter Shaw, cattle on the top farm have been kraaled at night at Mr. Majozi's, and are now grazing, together with the African cattle, under his supervision. Among the CAP cattle are those trained for ploughing. At the request of members of the CAP Farm Committee these cattle are being used to plough lands on the top farm.

Goats: A thatched shelter is still under construction.

School: A great deal of drawing was done at the school this month as illustrations for the proposed book of newsletters and designs for Mdukatshani stationery and Christmas cards. The children also illustrated their own picture dictionaries and painted murals on the school huts.

The teacher studied different methods of teaching reading and writing in the daily teachers' meeting. White staff gave 78 lessons – 30 arithmetic and 48 English and Science.

Two parents meetings were held, one with the local inspector. Beans and spinach were harvested in the school garden.

Extension: Staff made 12 visits to outlying areas.

Meetings: A Directors meeting was attended in Pietermaritzburg.

There were two meetings of parents of schoolchildren, two meetings in connection with community water project, one meeting with the Chief are the projects, and I addressed a Pietermaritzburg Rotary meeting.

Interviews: 19 interviews were given.

Nomoya and Msusampi Projects: The Msusampi furrow was taken further. People on the western side of the stream are now taking a branch of the furrow to their gardens. Unfortunately a tremendous amount of work had to be scrapped because of a surveying error made by a member of staff but this is now being put right.

Three communities again approached the chief for finality re approval of their developments. The Chief admitted that although he had summoned the relevant indunas they had not arrived, and as he was just an Acting Chief he thought the matter would have to be taken up with the KwaZulu government.

This delay means that survey of gardens is impossible and people are making do with patches at random.

Appeals for Funds: An amount of more than R 7000 was promised and some of it received.

Trips Away: A two-day trip to Springvale was undertaken for the collection of beadwork. During my monthly six days off I paid a visit to Johannesburg, having meetings with Goldfields, who have promised us a truck and other support, Mr. David John and Mr. Lyn van den Bosch of Chamber of Mines, Mr. Parker of Chairman's Fund, Anglo American Corporation; Chief Buthelezi and Mr. Gibson Thula, Environmental and Development Agency; and Mr. Len Apfel and Mrs. J. Hannah who are willing to organize a CAP support group in Johannesburg.

Visitors: Africa Institute sent a team consisting of Mrs. E. Moodie, Rand Afrikaans University Institute of Development Studies; Dr. Schoeman, also of RAU, Professor de Klerk of the Anthropology Department at Ngoye, and Dr. Hattingh of the Institute. Jeff Thomas came for five days to continue his evaluation. Daily News and Natal Mercury reporters came for information on BIC faction fighting, and other local matters.

Handcrafts: A one-week exhibition in Durban brought in almost R 900 worth of beadwork sales. Metal tubing was fetched from Pietermaritzburg for welding as chair frames.

Top Farm: At the request of members of the African Farm Committee certain lands on the top farm are presently being ploughed both with oxen and the tractor. The committee members have undertaken to pay fuel costs and wear and tear on the tractor, while sharing the driving.

They will also contribute kraal manure, seed and labour for planting, weeding and reaping. In return CAP will get a share of the crop. For the security of the crop it is being made known locally that it is mainly a CAP crop.

Finance: This has been covered in two more detailed reports already sent to Directors and Members of the Advisory Committee.

Staff Position: This has also been covered both in this report and the two reports mentioned above. The desertion of three members of our white staff during the month has left us without expertise in administration and we have proposed that a vacancy for an administrator/ typist be advertised in suitable quarters.

**NEIL ALCOCK
MANAGER**



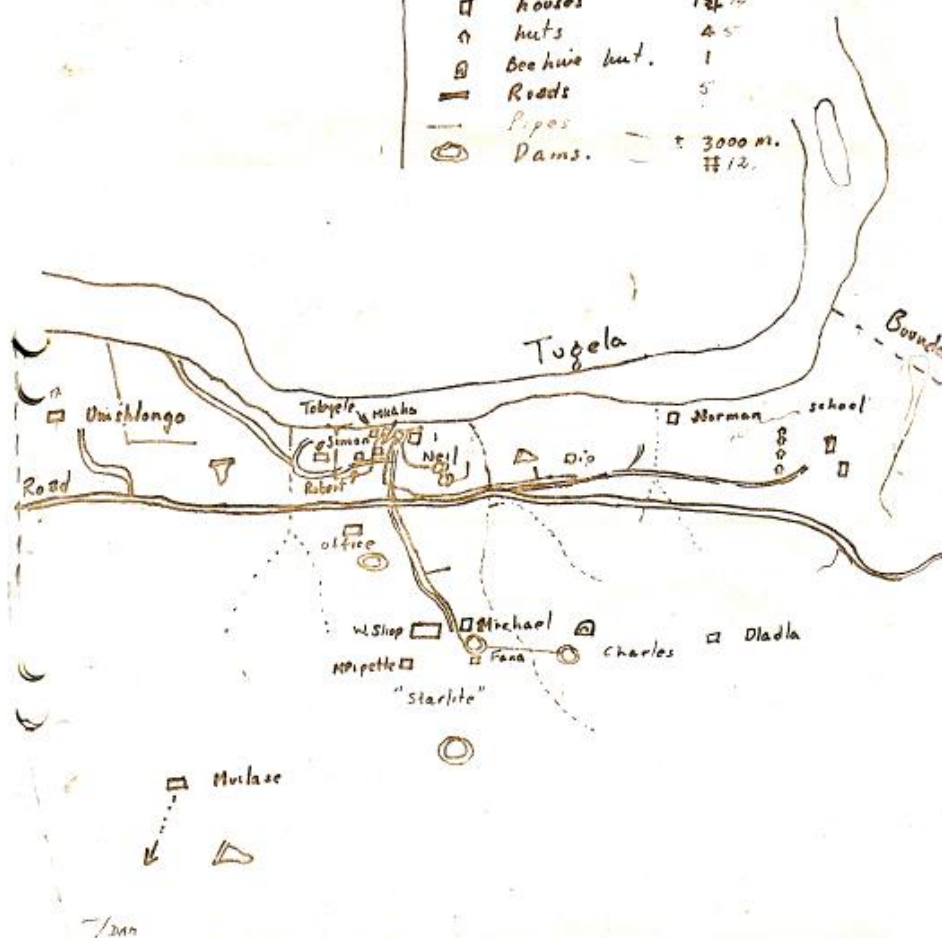
Mdukutshani fences.

LAP property covers 3 farms - Lorraine, The Spring and Koomspruit.

— Fence
.... Thorn barriers

Sketch Map of Houses and Pipes

| | | |
|---|--------------|-----------------|
|  | houses | 13 1/2 14 |
|  | huts | 4 5 |
|  | Beehive hut. | 1 |
|  | Roads | 5 |
|  | Pipes | |
|  | Dams. | 3000 m. 112. |



20 copies

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OCTOBER 1977: SHT!

At first there was just a hole in the ground and a theory. But what a theory! Mix water and manure, stir well, and abracadabra – there's gas for cooking. Everyone enjoys a joke or a promise of old-fashioned mumbo jumbo, so chiefs and cabinet ministers and commoners had a turn peering from the edge of the hole. "Nobody has ever burnt stinks," observed one visitor. "It will be witchcraft if it works" said another. "It could be a wonderful thing – for others but not for me. You'll never catch me cooking on gas from that". You're laughing at us. Now tell us what the hold is really for.

Over a year or two, in between other work, the hole gained a roof, a stirring pole and an outlet pipe. It also gained a lot of problems. We started again and simplified. Four oil drums standing in a row, a pipe, a tap, a crude stove made of scrap metal and hey presto! Mdukatshani has a sideshow as good as the waterwheel. Just as ramshackle, just as much of an eyesore, but like the wheel, whaddya know, it works!

In the experimental laboratory out among the geese and calves and ants, our resident engineer, Mphephethi Masondo offers regular demonstrations. He never spends a day at school but he has a knack for mechanical things and an observant, critical eye. "Ten minutes" he says as he lifts a boiling kettle from the stove. Mushrooms take just over an hour, and everyone's been eating mushrooms since the October thunderstorms brought a record crop popping out of the weat earth. Little boys gather the harvest before dawn, selling the big ones at five cents apiece, which is good value for the mushrooms are the size of plates and one is enough to make a meal. Mphephethi fills a pan, and as his mushrooms cook to tenderness he sits on the ground in that awkward feet-straight-ahead position that seems to give comfort to his crippled leg, and he answers the questions of passersby who have stopped to find out what he is doing.

Cowpeas, beans, porridge.... As the meals have been cooked so the meals have been timed, until Mphephethi could announced with certainty that he got 90 minutes cooking time from the silent, smokeless energy of those four drums-in-a-row.

"Sht!" exclaim the onlookers. "You're cooking on sht! Hey Masondo, how much will you charge to make me a stove like yours?"

"It although the day may come when the Masondo Scrapiron Stove is in every hut in KwaZulu's hills, the project is a long way off mass production. There are too many statistics of excreta still unknown. For instance how many plops from how many cows will generate the gas to cook a pot of porridge? How many plops from how many people will do the same? How many litres of water will the mixture need daily? How many hours of sunlight? How many trees will fall before we can get the valley cooking its meals on methane gas?

"It's a funny thing," said the Induna from KwaPalafini when he arrived on a visit one morning. "Trees have become like cattle. You don't let anyone slaughter your cow. If

somebody comes looking for wood you warn them that tree is for your oxen to shelter, and that one there for your fowls, and here your family gets its shade. Our people are respectful of trees now that they are almost gone". The Induna had come a long way to ask if we could help plant a woodlot on the riverbank. "We are afraid that soon there will be no wood to keep our fires burning".

"Two days a week our women search for wood" said Dhladhla. "If we cook inside the hut the smoke is bad, but outside the wind blows the heat away so the wood is finished in half the time".

"Before the people were moved over the river the forest was thick on the other side" said Mbele. "It was only eight years ago and now we fight for thorn bushes to hedge our gardens. Even the thorn is finished".

Wherever we walk on these lovely hills we pass the raw stumps of trees that have disappeared since the last time we walked that way. Mdukatshani is full of woodcutters' paths and winding sledge tracks that pass under our fences to kraals on the other side. "A nice woodpile you have" we told an old man at the end of one trail. "Where did you find that wood?" "Up on those hills" he gestured away from the farm. "There is plenty of wood on those hills. We laughed, for the hills where he pointed were bare of trees.

"Nobody may cut a living tree," confirmed the chief. "It is a crime to take green wood". But green wood is all there is so neighbours turn their heads away and know nothing of the giant tambootie that lies withering on our boundary, and they never notice when a trunk is chopped and bit by bit carried away. The song of the axe is the song of the hills, and its aching thud, thud, thud daily reaches the thorny yard where we stir our mixture of water and manure.

Of course there's nothing new in what we're doing. Methane is the natural gas that bubbles up from the rotting vegetation in swamps, sometimes igniting to give the flickering, ghostly light of the will-o-the-wisp of folklore. Although it can be dangerous – coalmine explosions are usually caused by methane – the gas is so abundant, cheap and clean that for some time industry has made use of it as a source of heat and power. Certainly we had no shortage of designs for methane gas plant; for big-time schemes developed for industry; smaller models for South African white farmers; still smaller blueprints for Third World village communities; yet we could find no plan small enough and cheap enough and simple enough for a man with a cow, ten goats, and a dozen hens. Was it possible to scale down a methane gas plant for the use of a single Black peasant farmer?

We swatted the books and set to work on that hole in the ground. The family lavatory was added – a long way from the house but in easy spilling distance of the hole. The cows were milked nearby so not a splat was wasted, and the goats were kraaled where every pellet could be raked and shoveled in. We became obsessed with stirring and observing at the hole. In went manure and in went water, and a billion had seen bacteria turned a smelly lumpy stew into a rich, odourless pureed soup and as the bacteria gobbled at their revolting meal, bubbles began rising in the goo.

The hearts of all hole-watchers lifted at the sight. It took a little while, however, before the first gas was trapped – in a plastic bag. Neil climbed the hill, set a match to the bag, and grinned as it exploded. The hole was producing methane gas, and our headaches were just beginning. Gas in a plastic bag was a long way from gas for cooking. We struggled with the

technicalities of stirring and storage, of valves, gas tanks and cylinders, manual agitators and compressors. Whew! We floundered through books and diagrams for many weeks before we realized our mistake.

That hole was too ambitious, too sophisticated. As a gas producer, it would have to be abandoned – as a fertilizer factory, however, we would keep it on. Pumpkins, spinach, tomatoes, carrots and cabbages in the garden had been thriving on the hole's liquid manure.

"Eat plants fertilized on human dung? We're not that poor," muttered MaCindi, the gardener, pulling a face. "Speak for yourself" said a colleague. "Hunger is not choosy". "Well the stuff looks all right" admit the visitors who study the clean trickle from the outlet pipe. MaCindi, however is not convinced and her vegetables go to the cows or the indiscriminating Mla's and Alcocks of this world.

So much for the hole and its part in our history.

The next bright idea on our list needed the support of industry. BP agreed to help and at last some shiny new drums arrived to be filled with the manure-and-water mixture as before. Four little drums were upended on top. If things went to plan the little drums would collect the gas and slowly bob higher and higher. And they did for the first few days. Then quite suddenly they dropped.

Neil went into a gloom. What scientific principle had he overlooked? He went back to the books. No good. Whatever the reason, the experiment was a failure.

"I don't know what's wrong" he admitted to Mphephethi. We've got no gas and I don't know why". But, as we said, Mphephethi is blessed with an observant and critical eye. "Bastard" he muttered. "Do you know what's happened? See here.

"Somebody's taken the rubber washers from the bungs in each drum. Those rubbers are the most beautiful bangles anyone can have. They're just the right size for the wrist. Look I'm wearing some myself". In fact Mphephethi relinquished his ornaments in the cause of silence; the bungs were again sealed; No more gas leaked, the little drums bobbed up and the experiment went ahead without further hitches.

There is no doubt the new design has a simplicity which the hole lacked.

Compressors? A few rocks and a plank. Insulation? Mud. Agitation? Just shake the drums you clot. Storage? Put the drums against the kitchen wall and lead the pipe inside.

Mdukatshani's Methane Gas Plant seems to be small enough and cheap enough for any peasant homestead, although it is not yet producing enough gas to cook all the family's meals.

"On hot days there is more gas? Mphephethi reported. "How can I make more heat?"

With a bit of help he has converted a plough disc as a solar reflector that can intensify the power of Msinga's blazing sun. He has also just worked out a way to hang his kettle to catch the warmth of the reflector, but as the water began to boil a cloud obscured the sun and it's been overcast ever since.

We are not underestimating future problems and the prevailing attitude to human waste is just one of them. The Chinese, so we hear, line their roads with lavatories that are decorated to entice the traveler to come in and leave his night soil for the fields. "But it is a risky matter to leave your waste for an enemy to find" protest in Zulu audiences who have heard the tale.

"Ponsa" is the word they use – literally giving the lasso into the hands of your enemies. An evil spell can be cast when your enemy gets possession of a piece of your clothing, your

house sweepings, your snippets of hair, your nail parings... fill your own lavatory, certainly but beware of the dangers of helping another man fill his. You could be leaving your dung where your enemy will find it.

We see other difficulties too. According to Mphephethi's calculations, two cows, ten goats and 12 buckets of water produce 1½ hours cooking time on a hot day. Twelve buckets of water! No woman will be willing to carry 12 buckets every day. That means more pumps and pipes and water furrows to make methane gas plants feasible.

One development depends upon another. And what if a man has no cows or goats and is far from water? Will we find we can only help the already privileged? Will there ever be a way to help the poor? Beyond one hill there is another hill, and over that hill, a mountain.

We dwell on our successes sometimes for they rise unevenly from many days of failure. October was a heavy-hearted month. A promised grant was so late we had to put off staff, and those who continued working knew they were working without pay.

NEIL AND CREINA

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MONTHLY REPORT: NOVEMBER 1977

The Chairman's Fund grant, due at the end of August, had still not arrived by the end of November. The result has been a psychological disaster for C.A.P. Development is a psychological exercise. The retrenchment of staff and the slow-down of work has given local people the impression we are an unstable organization. Loss of confidence shows in many ways. It can be measured in the fall-off of women making hand-built dams for their gardens on Mdukatshani, and in remarks that are overheard such as: "You can dig that dam If you like. As soon as the farm is sold another White man will take over and tell you to bugger off."

Our penniless condition has affected progress on the community projects at Nomoya and Msusampi too, and this will be explained in detail later in this report. The leader of the Nomoya project, Speti Dhladhla, had been earning a part-time wage working for C.A.P. and when this fell away and he found himself with a not-yet-productive garden he had to come and tell us that he had no choice but to leave home and look for work elsewhere. Six other men found themselves in the same position and after considerable conflict, have gone away work-seeking with their projects incomplete. Their going has added the general sag of confidence. The ground we had won was hard won, and although we cannot be sure of the extent of the damage done, we know there will be some brakes on future success.

The financial situation coincided with problems involved in getting official approval for the next stages of the development of the Nomoya and Msusampi schemes. The Chief must agree to let dams be built, for plots to be allocated, and for co-operatives to be set up. However although the Chief is a supporter of ours, he is in fact only Acting Chief in an area where the real Chief disappeared after being given notice that he was to be banished. The Acting Chief, a young man, is keen to be of help but is naturally reluctant to do anything that could be controversial. He has to have the sanction of the indunas of Msusampi and Nomoya and Sahlumbe before he can give his approval. Two of the indunas work in Johannesburg and their deputies will not speak for them and the third is in hiding following a shooting incident. Until there is official approval for the projects – many families who worked on the furrows can do nothing for they have no plots, or need a dam to get water to their homes.

On an encouraging note – more than 80 gardens have been started and their owners are just beginning to eat their own vegetables. However the potential is much greater than this number.

We originally circulated an appeal for funds for the irrigation projects in August. The response has taken time. Although amounts ranging from R 300 to R 5 have been received from individuals, and although two large grants have been promised – the Nomoya and Msusampi projects have had no funds available until very recently.

When we heard that the first big grant had been approved we made use of a portion of the Anglo funds still in our account at that time, on the understanding that the amount would be

repaid as soon as the grant arrived. We took this step because the success of CAP and the success of the community projects are mutually dependent, and because we felt delay at an early and critical stage could destroy the schemes before they were really underway. In our appeal we asked for wages for furrows workers because although the people were working voluntarily, many families had no breadwinners and needed some form of subsistence while preparing their gardens etc.

After consultation with the people the wage idea was dropped. Instead all regular furrow workers became entitled to a capitalization loan in the form of a bag of mealiemeal. CAP obtained the mealiemeal at wholesale prices, transported it in bulk to the farm, where it was collected by qualifying families. Those who could pay cash, others had the food entered on their loan certificates.

The work invested in the furrow is considered as a subscription for membership for the tribal co-operative that presently awaits approval. All participants have agreed that membership will require that each family invest 20 days initial work to become a member, followed by 20 days per annum working on community improvements and developments. Children are to be considered half work units.

The African Small Farmers Trust will make grants to cover the cost of community works – piping, cement etc. However money advanced to individuals will be in the form of interest-free repayable loans. Each member of the co-op- to be has already signed a loan agreement which records all their loans and acknowledges these will be repaid as soon as they have established themselves.

The loans of mealiemeal enabled the early rapid progress on furrows and gardens as it relieved families of the pressure to look for work. When CAP's funds ran out, however, no more loans of food could be made – hence the unwilling desertion of project leaders in search of employment.

The remainder of this report has been prepared by Falaze Zwane, Anton Hlongwana and Kathy Bond.

Rainfall: There were six inches of rainfall as from the beginning of the month. The gardens use waterwheel water for irrigation. Water from the waterwheel is not enough to cover all these areas, and when there was no rainfall some gardens have no water supply.

Sick cases: 80 people came for medical aid and 23 of them were suffering from stomach. 20 of them asked for pills. We also used as much as 500 grams of sore medicine and 2,5 litres of cough medicine.

Phone calls: 18 people came for phone calls and telegrams.
The total amount of the phone bill is R110 a month.

Pensions: No progress

Buildings: Mbatha's house is finished by now. A man and a woman worked on the erection of the goat shed roof. We hope that that we have will be enough.

Water: There are some women who help with buildings dams for their gardens during their spare time. While installing a new bearing in the waterwheel we decided from the experience gained to redesign the cage/platform and the catspan for raising and lowering the platform to cope with changes in water level. An improvement made was a far bigger drive wheel to increase the speed and the quantity of the water pumped. One man at the top of Msusampi, Captian Mbele, tried to link water to his home using a ram water pump at the waterfall. He got all the material for jointing from the Environmental and Development Agency that is helping CAP.

Digester: Mr. Masondo is trying to make as many as possible. Some of the people have learnt how to do it, like Mr. Simon Sithole and Mr. Delanie Mbatha who have digesters at their homes now. Mr. Masondo is going to stand on his own feet. BP of Durban made a second donation of more drums.

Cattle: Cattle on the top farm are kraaled with Mr. Majozi and below with Mr. Mhlongo. Three stolen CAP cattle were recovered through the efforts of the newly appointed S.A.P. stocktheft squad. Through information supplied by C.A.P. the squad has recovered many cattle belonging to other farmers.

Goats: Two of the milk goat rams contracted heart water despite inoculation. One recovered on treatment but the other died.

Extension: Staff made 10 visits to outlying areas.

Interviews: 16 interviews were given.

School: Not much academic progress was made at the school as we were grappling with more basic problems. The Circuit Office has not accepted the dismissed of Mr. Dlangalala, the principal but we have approached the KwaZulu department of education for help. Secondly, many of the parents don't often understand our approach to education and children are taken out of school to run errands or work at home. Several meetings were held with parents and some parents suggested we draw up a contract so that parents accept the conditions of the school. This might reduce numbers but would increase quality. The thatching of one classroom is nearly complete. Children picked beetroot, spinach, lettuce, carrots, beans and cucumbers from the school gardens. In Arithmetic lessons they sold the vegetables and learnt how to write out account and receipts. In English the children wrote and illustrated simple booklets about themselves. The children also made the first guitars for the school band. One white member of staff gave 60 lessons on various subjects.

During the month Mr. M. Robson from Rhodesia visited the project. He is a lecturer in science education in Rhodesia, and we are using his Discovery Science course at the school.

Anton Hlongwane worked at the school in the mornings, and at the office in the afternoons. School discipline and the herding of goats was in a bad position, and because of this payments to the children was very low this month. Only R99 was paid being thatch collection, roofing, garden and goats.

The roof of the classroom was done by schoolboys this time, under the supervision of Mr. J. Mbatha.

Meeting: Six meetings were held during the month connected with school problems or community projects. While he was at Mdukatshani Mike Robson gave a talk on science education to local inspectors, headmasters and teachers at Tugela Ferry.

Visitors: A party of 15 Rotarians visited the farm in connection with future financial support for the project.

Jeff Thomas paid his usual five-day trip as part of his evaluation assessment. Two members of the Environment and Development Agency came to install a ram pump. They were unsuccessful as a part broke, but when CAP has more staff we hope to put this right. Mike Robson from Rhodesia provided stimulus for our education work. Carl Fatti from the African Conservation Awareness programme came for a day.

Trips away: A one-day visit was made to Ulundi to see Chief Buthelezi, his Secretary Mr. Gregory and Mr. Paauw of the Education Department.

Handcrafts: The absence of Bathulise Madondo, our handcraft instructor, prevented new development at Mdukatshani although Springvale bead women worked as before.

Top Farm

A meeting was held with the people adjoining the top farm and further arrangements made for their use of the land there.

No further progress on the proposed communal irrigation furrow has been possible because of shortage of staff.

Vehicles: A $\frac{3}{4}$ ton Toyota truck arrived in mid-November.

This truck was organised by Len Apfel through Goldfields.

The Landrover broke down at Wasbank at the end of October and has only just been fixed and returned.

Roadwork: Maniza and his tractor worked on a furrow across the public road which will lead water to a school dam that will be started soon. The tractor of Maniza also spent some days at Mchunu's doing ploughing for local people. Revenue made was R 120.

Finance: Over draft at the bank was R 3 222. Thanks to a loan from home industries wages were paid. An advance grant of R 5 000 to pay urgent bills and wages was deposited in the wrong account. As a result there were many complaints from shops for cheques returned RD.

Staff Position: Wages were paid to 17 members of staff.

A rule that daily diary of work be kept by all departmental heads was ignored by several members of staff and their wages were withheld until they produced their work record.

Norman Mankowitz was away doing army training.

MDUKATSHANI,
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NOVEMBER 1977: DEVELOPMENT IS NOT SPECTATOR SPORT

Jumping beans are jumping under the tambootie trees, hopping restlessly in search of shade. And the biting ants are swarming leaving blisters on our toes. Msinga's summer is back again, scattering the night with fireflies, trailing the scent of jasmine through the thorns. Candles melt in their holders; milk sours in an hour or two, and snakes are out everywhere, whipping like lightning underfoot or slithering along the branches of the trees. Below the cliffs ground hornbills boom, boom, boom calling up the rain and the men sing to little spans of donkeys and oxen as they plough their fields up and down in the hot sun. All the signs tell us it's the time of year when trippers start arriving.

"We heard about your project" they say "and we thought it sounded interesting, so here we are. Please show us development".

At Ratschitz it got so bad that even on Christmas day somebody had to be on duty to handle the conducted tours. Visitors had always come a long way – but what exactly did they expect to see? "And here's the cowshed. And here are the pigs.

That's the classroom. This is the garage. And here's Mr. Shabalala who's in charge of the tractors. Do you speak Zulu? No. (Mutual mumble, mumble and embarrassed silence). Well he says he's pleased to meet you too".

Meeting a black – a developing black – is the big moment. However while some projects have their superstars we have always been short of natural performers.

Confronted by white strangers (with cameras!) Michael shuffles his feet. Mhlongo gets garrulous. MaCindi giggles and covers her face. Majozi retreats into the camouflage of being black and quite invisible. When the white audience has come to see liberated Africans – that's the day we can be sure our folk will do the Kaffir Act instead. Doug resigned as tour guide after he led a party to the African village to show them how development had changed the people. Nobody was at home except half-wit Roy and his drunk mother who hurled a pot of tea at them and screamed curses till they went away.

The Mdukatshani sightseeing tour offers a trudge to the waterwheel, a gaze at the methane gas plant, a wade through the rubbish (those damn children have been looking for treasure in the compost pit again) and a view through the binoculars of the distant Msusampi furrow wall. Visitors who hit a lucky day will find no water in the taps, nor in the lavatory, because the pump's not working and the reservoir's run dry. Now that's development. Michael Mabaso made a mistake assembling the pump and he's been working since Tuesday to fix it.

There are other hopeful signs of progress, like those two tribesmen waiting for an interview. Development is a tree which grows imperceptibly. Or perhaps it is a chameleon, a nwabu, that moves as those two men have moved – slowly, cautiously, suspiciously. Each step of the chameleon wavers with uncertainty. One leg stretches forward, pauses, hesitates, withdraws, waits... extends again, pauses again and at last is lowered to the twig. After months of

dithering those men have come as messengers for several hundred people, bringing a proposal about a water furrow.

If you could follow them back along the road, across the river and over the mountain you would see them being stopped at every kraal along the way with the question.

What happened? But without Zulu, and without time to wait around a year or two, all there is to see is two men talking. There's no sign of development at all.

The Goat Boy Saga is much the same. Nothing for a crowd to see – but oh boy! what development. It began when we had a Great Idea. A Great Announcement followed.

“Herdboys of KwaZulu come down from the hills. We can give you education. We can give you money to pay for your education. And we can see that the goats are herded too”.

Boys were thrilled. Parents were thrilled. Enrolment at the school increased.

Family goats went into a communal flock that was kept at Mdukatshani. A roster was drawn up. Every morning these boys would herd the goats from 8 to 12; then they would do afternoon school. And those boys would do morning school and afternoon goat duty. The boys would be paid for herding, and from their wages they could meet their school fees.

There was one small problem. None of the children could count beyond ten. Well that could be part of the education too. The children would keep simple records and a teacher would stand by when the goats went out and when the goats went in and the teachers would check the children count and register the attendance of the herders too.

Wage day arrived. Where were the teachers' records? Well, yes, they had agreed to do it, but what with one thing and another to tell the truth they had written nothing down. In the circumstances there was nothing to do but pay every goatherd in average wage. Immediately trouble flared. Ntoboza said it wasn't fair. He worked every day and Rufus had shirked and skipped a week and yet they got the same money. And Mele said he had never missed a day while Mbuzene.....

The complaints were considered and the appeals upheld. The good goatboys got extra money. The bad goatboys kept what they had not earned. How do you get back money from a little boy who has already spent it?

Children learn fast. What they learnt from their first month was that blackmail worked.

They put the lesson to use immediately. Daily the teachers continued to “forget” to count the goats and mark the herdboys register. The herdboys skipped duty whenever it suited them, and at the end of the month told the teachers; “If you don't write us down for working every day we will complain you never came and counted”. The plotters might have won except that goats went missing. Teachers' records were called in for scrutiny. How come the totals tallied when the goats were short? And how come Mboma was marked down present for goat duty every day when we know he deserted the day of the storm?

The children were assembled. They would have to lose pay because goats were missing.

“But it wasn't me” complained one. “The goats were lost by the boys who went on duty before me”. “And it wasn't me” said the next boy and the next and the next. They took their token wages, and next day the goats stayed in their kraal because the herdboys had deserted in protest. “Marvelous” sighed Neil. “The children are learning social organization”.

Unfortunately the goat boycott was eventually maintained not through consensus but through threatening fists, sticks and sharpened screwdrivers that were raised against any child that seemed to be heading toward the goat kraal. Antonia confiscated a sharpened stake and an irate father descended on her warning: "I don't sent my child to school to be robbed of his only weapon of defence".

_____ and goat-owners began to queue up for interviews. The teachers were out to ----- the scheme, said one. The headmaster was telling everyone that the KwaZulu Department of Education paid teachers to teach, not to be farmhands counting goats.

Another complained: "Our children won't get better marks herding goats. Why should they herd goats if they don't want to?"

A meeting was called. Did the parents want this scheme or didn't they? If not, the goats could go back home and the boys could go with them unless they had money for school fees. "What can we do?" said the parents. "We can't control our children any more. You do what you can on our behalf".

Thanks

Next came a meeting with the boys. "We'll work if the robbery of our pay stops," muttered one almost inaudible goatherd. "We who work hard and do the job properly always lose our pay because some who don't work at all have let the goats get lost".

The small spokesman for the good goat boys was waylaid at the dip on his way home and scuffles broke out. "Friend of the white man" jeered the anti-herders. "We're going to fix you".

Well to cut a long, long story short, a contract has been drawn up and signed by all consenting parents and children:

Most weekdays the goatherders are here now, most weekends they are not. "Educated people do not work weekends," the Headmaster has told the community and the children see good reason why they should be considered educated too. We except many more interesting developments before this experiment in development is through.

Nobody has yet discovered exactly what development is or how you get there, so every project follows its nose. Traveling in the unknown one direction is as good as another. One definition is as good as another too, and we keep finding new ones.

Today there is some development down among the vegetables where the donkey and goats are eating the garden bare because everyone's off at a beer drink. It takes awhile to grow into the discipline of daily work. Routing is uncomfortable – like shoes on a man who has been barefoot all his life. He's bound to throw them off sometimes, easing his toes; in fact we've been surprised it hasn't happened sooner.

There's a splendid example of development too in the rows of yellow, wilted mealies on the flats. Thirty-six tribeswomen have taken up gardens on the farm there, all within reach of water from the waterwheel. All along we told them not to plant mealies. We told them cowpeas would do better. We told them not to chop the trees.

Now no more telling will be necessary. The only mealies that are lush and green are growing in the shade of trees. And the only woman who planted cowpea can't stop boasting about her

crop. The dying mealies will bring new developments in the gardens next summer – but dying mealies aren't the kind of development this summer's visitors will travel here to see.

Every project we know has a visitor problem; just what can be put on public display and who will have to handle the visitors? One scheme has capitulated and even built a reception centre. Another will only let you in the door if you booked and appointment in advance. A third, in desperation, refuses to show anyone around who has not come on business. But politeness makes most of us drop our work to lead the futile, time-wasting viewing processions. They intrude on our privacy, disrupt our days – and then blame us because we're not up to expectations.

Development can't entertain for it lies in hidden things, growing deep in people's minds, behind their faces and behind their words. Development is not for tourists who come to visit for a day.

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December 21, 1977

AFRICAN INVESTMENT IN CHURCH AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS

When we started work at Maria Ratschitz Mission in March 1965 there were no funds at all. For the first four months the Africans who worked with us bringing a derelict farm back to life, worked without pay of any kind. Then two men, Joseph Sibeko and Johannes Kunene pooled savings of about R 1 000 and asked that this money be used to pay their colleagues whose families were struggling. So the first investment in CAP came from Blacks.

In November that year Cap got its second injection of capital – 700 African-owned cattle were pooled as a common herd under CAP.

By the time the first donation from White organizations arrived, CAP had been going 14 months on Black funds, Black labour, Black cattle and Black hope.

When CAP left Maria Ratschitz Mission in June 1965 there were 1 300 cattle in the herd, and the value of African shares in the project totaled R 18 000. The shareholders included:

- + More than 600 handcraft workers who deposited savings ranging from 10 cents to R30.
- + Farm labourers who deferred between R5 and R50 of their pay every month.
- + Non-working members, both Ratschitz residents and others, who invested saving in CAP, or invested cattle.

CAP offered 8% interest on investments, and members could make withdrawals either in cattle or cash.

Investing in CAP was always a risky proposition and the Africans knew it. When the first Black Loans were made there was no guarantee that further funds would be found to back the project, and in that first year it seemed likely CAP would collapse at an early stage. The Africans knew they might be throwing their money away. Still they put their money in. The first loans of Sibeko and Kunene set a precedent of Black giving help to fellow Black.

In the years that followed Black shareholders at CAP's annual meetings were repeatedly told: "By producing farm produce such as milk for sale at break-even prices among your own people you are losing out on the chance of profits." Annually CAP's members voted to continue a profitless service as their contribution to their people.

CAP was a gamble. For the first few years CAP was unsuccessful in persuading the Church to grant a lease on the farm. Every disagreement with the church was discussed at the African Farm Committee meetings and repeated to the community later. Every time a Church official

threatened to have CAP kicked off the farm – this was repeated among the people on the farm.

The CAP enterprise was controversial from the start, and I stress this uncertainty of CAP's position so that it can be understood that the Africans were at all times aware that their investment was a precarious one. Further proof lies in the now-famous Farm Committee Minute Book which is no longer in CAP's possession. The Minute Book was loaned and then held by a dissident group, but its refusal to produce the book should tend to confirm that the evidence of the Minutes supports CAP's case.

The first Black shareholders were men and women who had accumulated savings, who were earning a reasonable wage in town, or who owned cattle. The workers on the farm, however, were people who not only had no savings but no stock either.

Was there any way they could be encouraged to feel part of CAP?

The deferred pay system came into being with the purpose of turning the farms' workers into shareholders too. By the time CAP left Maria Ratschitz men who had been penniless down-and-outs had become men of substance with status and responsibility. More important, they had a commitment to CAP.

They spoke of "our farm" and "our cattle". They worked overtime and they sacrificed a great deal because they knew success depended on their efforts.

While I have so far emphasized the good aspects of the CAP co-op it had its snags of course. The enterprise was a nightmare to businessmen. There was a lot of clerical and bookwork involved in accepting many small investments, working out interest on small totals, coping with small withdrawals, answering the endless queries from shareholders, many of whom were illiterate and therefore needed long verbal explanations and reassurances. Whatever the drawbacks of this system, however, I believe it was an achievement for it taught CAP's members the advantage of a banking system.

When CAP's lease was terminated by the church, ten years communal effort was lost. However the discovery of Mdukatshani offered CAP a chance to start again on its own land. Were the African shareholders willing to support the purchase of a farm that would after all be on white owned land (In South Africa there is no Black Land available for purchase). Several Black shareholders meetings were called and shareholders gave their backing to the new project. Cattle would be sold to purchase the new land, and ownership would be invested in the CAP Board of Directors with its majority of whites.

Africans have always worked with a feeling of insecurity about their future. For this reason CAP operated in the knowledge that if all the stock were sold, CAP's Black shareholders could be paid out in full, with sufficient over to return grants to donor groups too.

When CAP began selling cattle to purchase Mdukatshani, cattle prices unexpectedly dropped, and they have in fact remained low for the three years since. That meant CAP had to sell more cattle than originally planned. Soon after arrival on the farm many cattle died from heartwater, and there was a spate of stock theft. Thefts were so severe in fact that in December last year the bulk of the herd was sold and CAP was left with 100 –odd animals.

In this new situation the CAP Board of Directors was naturally very concerned about the security of the African investments, and as a result a ruling was made that no more people be allowed to join CAP. The Directors quite rightly believed that any further investments

accepted by CAP could end up disappearing as stolen cattle. CAP's Finance Sub-committee proposed that funds be held in a separate banking account to cover African "shares". This has been done. With the sale of a further 10 cattle CAP will be in a position to pay out every single Black shareholder in the organization. There are 43 remaining members with an investment of over R 13 000.

Because I do not draw my salary, my own shares in CAP have amounted to a considerable total. There has been no suggestion that my investment be protected in a special account. This has led to much talk among the Blacks that while they have their money removed as a stake in the farm because I am white I am allowed to retain my share. Only black shares in the farm are objected to.

The decision to protect existing African investments and to prevent further investments seems sensible. It is true that CAP may in future be unable to pay out investors. It is true that the interest on loans is a heavy burden on CAP. It is a great improvement in efficiency to have the money sitting in an ordinary bank savings account. But there is no longer any reason for anyone connected with CAP to have any personal involvement with the scheme. The shareholders have no reason for commitment. They might as well put their money in a Post Office Savings account. So today we find we have a staff who remain with us working for a wage and a pretty miserable wage at that. For the past five years it has been stationary at R 30 a month. Only the general unemployment keeps most of our staff in our employ.

I believe that the decision on African investment in CAP should be reconsidered in consultation with both existing shareholders and Msinga people who have asked for an opportunity to invest in CAP.

Daily experience is showing us just how damaging that apparently sensible decision has been.

Firstly "our farm" has become "the white man's farm". The once-dedicated involvement of Ratschitz people has become disinterest. To anyone familiar with the people concerned, the change in attitude is startling. The lack of interest is most marked in our bookkeeper, Anton Hlongwane, who was a school drop-out when CAP began to train him. He is constantly aware that for a few hours a week our auditors are paid about R 1 800. per annum. For a fulltime job, doing the bulk of the work under very unpleasant conditions with poor housing, Anton gets R 1 400 a year. Low wages, as I explained earlier, were accepted in the past when people believed the project was their own. Now they see it as a white enterprise on a white farm and they know they are underpaid.

The ban on Msinga membership has created a deep and dangerous division between the Ratschitz and the local people. Some suspicion was natural of course, as the Ratschitz people came as strangers into an established community. However they are now seen as a privileged few who try to keep the good things to themselves.

The opposing attitudes surfaced at a recent farm committee meeting when an offer of funds was discussed. A donor had written to the committee offering to send an amount of about R 12 000 for development work subject to the committee's approval. Alternatively the donor suggested he hold the money in trust, earning interest, until a later date. The meeting broke into two groups – those who had invested in CAP and those who had not. The Ratschitz people versus the Msinga people. The investors felt that as they had capitalized CAP originally the funds could be accepted with a guarantee that it be spent on their development

and not on outsiders who had risked nothing and now wanted to share benefits without making a contribution. The Msinga people naturally felt better as several had been trying to get CAP to accept shares from them. They said too that there was no point in a farm that provided for only a small clique and believed funds should be used to develop whole communities on Mdukatshani as well as outside it.

Msinga is an inflammatory area and I expect that it will not be long before some of the Ratschitz people will begin to find it convenient to migrate away – taking with them skills and experience gained with CAP and of benefit to CAP now.

In this report I am drawing attention to the problem, but I am not putting forward any proposals except that the situation be discussed and resolved by both the Cap Directors **and** the people together, in consultation. It may be that the existing shareholders have suffered such a loss of confidence that we cannot rekindle their belief in the future of CAP. However the common-sense, the understanding and the idealism of the African tends to be underestimated, and I believe that open discussion with all the Black people concerned will provide the answers.

A sense of involvement is crucial. As I said in another report this month – development is a psychological exercise. What I have discussed here is the sense of belonging that was shared by many little people whose possessions were too small for investment elsewhere. CAP exists for the benefit of such individuals.

I have been accused of gaining African trust with false promises. I have tried to show that the Ratschitz situation was such that the Africans were well aware that they were taking a risk but they took the risk gladly. However if any future agreement is reached with the Msinga people and a form of investment is instituted, I would like to see the Directors involved in the discussions, and all discussions and agreements must be so documented that there can be no doubts in the future.

The discussions I propose will be time-consuming, and time is a commodity which the “haves” of this world will explain is precious and in short supply. I am directing this report to the CAP Board of Directors with an appeal that they offer time as a sign of their commitment to the scheme. At present I am innovator, leader, manager, director – I am fundraiser and PRO, extension officer, secretary, bookkeeper, doctor, nurse, ambulance driver, foreman and ombudsman, teacher and builder and farmer.

I believe CAP can continue to make a worthwhile contribution to black-self sufficiency, narrowing the gap between the haves and the have-nots. But I cannot continue to make all the decisions alone.

NEIL ALCOCK
Manager

Copy to donor groups and Farm Advisory Committee

MDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 37,
WEENEN
3325
7th JANUARY 1978

MONTHLY REPORT

SICK CASES: 80 people came for medical aid. Two hospital trips.

PHONE CALLS: 28 people came for phone calls.

PENSIONS: Two women came for our help. A man Skhakhane applied in 1975 still hasn't got his pension. A LETTER WAS received from the Secretary for Health and Welfare, KwaZulu saying that pension that pension are being processed but payment is being withheld at present because of KwaZulu financial crises.

RAINFALL: About 5'' rainfall we had. Heavy rains during the month River in flood.

WATER WHEEL: Pumping approximately the same rate as the Kubota Diesel Engine

DAMS: Were being concreted.

CATTLE: Dipping only 3 times one missed because of the rain. The system of keeping cattle with Majosi and Mhlongo works well 96 cattle plus 20 new calves.

GOATS: 90 goats are herded, and their dip is being completed.

LABOUR: There were 34 people working at the farm. This number includes 6 scholars worked during the holidays. There were 4 from Ratschitz & 2 from local schools. There were 8 men Working at the water wheel now working well. There were 4 people for the office & administration. The kraal for the horses is being constructed, 5 people working on stones for the wall. The same people shared some hours to finish concreting the dam at the women's plots. More dams were being started by 2 men helped by scholars. Three people herding horses at the farm now.

24 horses in all. Dairy work & fencing was done by 3 people driving cattle to the veld in the afternoon & morning. The experiment vegetable garden and the digester was looked after by a woman.

SCHOOL: Very few children came to work after Xmas, however there was enough for the goat duties and gardening. Tomatoes, beetroots harvested from garden. 2 men supervised the duties. The syllabus was completed and the first term's program prepared & educational organized. Lunch hour literacy and English lessons have been started with a group of adults.

MEETINGS:

3 Farm committee meetings were held during the month. NEW members were elected from the local people to build up the old committee which consisted mostly, the Ratschitz people, who apparently left the farm. This committee has Mr. Zephania Mthabela as a Chairman

replacing Mr Mzolo's place.

FINANCIAL: Bank balance at the month was R4285.96. Signing powers were given to Miss KATHY BOND & NORMAN MANKOWITZ as MR. ALCOCK has been ill and admitted in Pietermaritzburg Hospital.

December bank balance R 20 261.44 includes monies received for the Small Farmers Trust which have now been drawn and deposited to the said account in Durban, thus this months bank balance is down.

A wage cheque for R 1303,80 to cover school wages and farm was drawn at the end of the month.

VEHICLES:

An aggregated mileage on use of Goldfields Toyota truck is as shown below.
From the last week in November '77 to January 1978.

| | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Petrol Expenditure | R 181,61 |
| Repairs and Servicing | <u>R 95,96</u> |
| <u>R 277,57</u> | |

THE Land Rover back was taken off for welding – Not yet completed.
Report completed by:

Messer A.S. Hlongwane. K. Bond & Norman Mankowitz.

MDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 37
WEENEN
3325

FEBRUARY 1978: MONTHLY REPORT

Sick Cases: 74 people came for medical aid. 3 hospital trips.

Phone Calls: 15 phone calls for outsiders were made.
The office has been given its own telephone (No. 795.)

Goats: 90 goats are herded by school boys with the supervision of Mr. Dladla.

Meeting: 2 school meetings and one farm committee meeting held during the month.

General:

The farm had 24 people working.

Three people for the office and administration seven people at the water wheel and the Kubota pump.

Two men cleared the site for the library at school.

There were seven people working on dams – cementing etc.

One young men at the horses. One women at the experimental vegetable garden.

School:

Opened on the 7th, with lunch and a meeting for parents and children.

The new teacher resigned immediately on the groups that she wasn't physically capable of performing the duties of Mdukatshani teacher.

About 70 children have enrolled; one group of boys walk 3 hours to get to school and 3 hours uphill to get home. (We are trying to arrange accommodation for them nearer the school.)

Dlangalala, the ex-principal, visited us and tried to make us sign some unofficial documents.

The school committee was held on the 9th about the lack of teachers, and in the afternoon I met the new inspector Mr. Mkhize in Tugela Ferry.

Three days later he met the committee of the school and promised to try and dismiss Dlangalala and find us suitable staff.

Mr. Mthabela replaced Johan Dladla as Chairman of the school committee.

On the 15th two new teachers arrived and Mrs. Masondo resumed duties.

On the 18th Mthabela brought a local young man to the school whom he recommended as a suitable headmaster. The following day the 4th teacher arrived, bringing us bad news from the inspector that Dlangalala was coming back, and would continue to work at the school until his case was brought up in ULUNDI.

On the 21st another meeting was held, but some committee members were absent because of the Sangoma's party.

On this date the inspector did not visit Mdukatshani as arranged, neither did Mr. Dlangalala return to school. We did however have a visitor from Ulundi.

Mr. Maphalala, the organizer of Agriculture for the Dept of Education, and he was interested and helpful.

On the 27th the most of experienced of our teachers, Miss Zuma, (none of them are qualified), was appointed acting principal, and met with Mr. Mkhize in Tugela Ferry.

Mealies, spinach, tomatoes and brinjals were harvested from the garden. School lunches have started, and both boys and girls are preparing them. Saturday afternoon sport has been started for all the young people in the area, but the parents asked me to stop schoolswimming as several of them said they had seen a crocodile.

Vehicles:

The Land Rover back has now been welded – only to refit the body.

The Goldfields truck has been registered in our name after two Estcourt trip to get the C.O.R.

Below herewith are trips done by this vehicle since we had it in November '77:

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. Farm trips to towns and other places | 3886 km |
| 2. Hospital trips | 623 km |
| 3. Meetings and others communications with the community | <u>465 km</u> |
| 4. Total miles done since we had it | <u>4974 km</u> |

| | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| Petrol Expenditure | R 253.61 |
| Repairs & Servicing | 95.96 |
| C.O.R and Licence | <u>57.00</u> |
| | <u>R 406.57</u> |

Finance: A wage cheque for R1209.00 to pay the farm and school wages was drawn.

MDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 37
WEENEN
3325

MARCH 1978:

Rainfall: About 4 inches.

Phone Calls: 19 people came to phone.

Sick Cases: 56 people came for medical aid. 4 hospital trips.

Meetings: 3 meetings, one of which was held at the top farm.

Visitors: 2 visitors from Inter Church Aid & 12 from Nqutu who came to have a look at our irrigation project.

Mr. D. Grice & PETER Brown visited us on the 19th to discuss the situation of CAP.

Labour:

- 4 people for the office & administration.
- 5 doing the dams.
- 9 for fencing at the mountain.
- 5 working at the kraal for the horses.
- 5 at the water wheel & irrigation.
- 2 girls did the office floor.
- 1 woman at the vegetable garden, 1 man supervising the goats, 1 herding dairy cows
- 1 man supervising school work, & 1 man at the horses.
- 2 men to complete the roof at the school.

A wage cheque for R 1569.60 was drawn to pay the above mentioned workers.

School: Although we were told that Mr. Dlangalala would be sent back, he did not return.

No further news have been received from Ulundi about the appointment of a headmaster. Practical work at the school has been improved, because the new teachers are willing to work hard themselves. Beans, peas, spinach, & cabbage seed were planted in the garden & the ground has been cleared around the classrooms.

The Sub A's are already reading & writing well under the guidance of Miss Zuma, the acting principal.

The Department of Health inoculated the children against Small pox & T.B.

Teachers meetings have been held to train teachers & prepare lessons.

Sports & Zulu dancing on Friday afternoons have been very popular with the children.

MDUKATSHANI,
P. O. Box 37,
WEENEN,
3325

APRIL 1978: HOME AGAIN

It's been a good summer at Msinga. On the hills stubby green bushes have outpaced the goats at last. Water still trickles in the dongas, and along the road little fields of mabela wave plastic flags to scare the birds.

All summer we have been away and it's hard to contain the joy of being back among the thorns on our muddy, shining river.

Once during the three long months away, Ntabela slipped onto the verandah of the white hospital, just to say hullo and how were we. He'd come to town to find a lawyer because that bloody sheet storekeeper who'd tried to cut his fences was making more trouble. He was suing him for R 3 000 damages.

R 3 000! And all because Ntabela's son – his mature, married son, mind you – had hit him at a beerdrink when they'd both been drunk. Now he, Ntabela, was being sued because while his son was known to be penniless, he Ntabela was known to milk two cows... In the warmth of the valley's gossip the hospital's starched sheets and disinfectant receded for a while.

Msibi sent a letter by registered post: "Last past month Daniel informed me he had sorefeet," he wrote. "All that gives me a regret what is happening to Neil. Oh well Creina time change. There's a time to be happy and there's a time to be in a bad mood."

Johan Dhladhla brought his quietness to the bedside of our city flat, where he told us the killings were over. The chief had called a meeting to put an end to the war between the Mtshalis and Mvelases. And the Tugela had wakened in the night and the water rose so high that even the waterwheel was covered and the dagga on the other bank had been washed away.

Dhladhla went home to beat the sick drum all through the night, but although he was a believing man he told the valley: "With that hole in his stomach Magokogo will never come back."

But here we are, back among the melodies old donkeys and goats and trumpeter hornbills. Back to a garden, if it can be called that, of big boulders and smelly stapelia blooms, with prickly wild cucumbers hanging in the trees. We're back to a home where a two metre long snake has taken up residence, and where the white ants have munched another shelf of books. Three important files have been reduced to dust, and perhaps there's a moral in that somewhere.

Best of all, we are back to a bathroom with cliffs against the sky, back to a bath with a cold brown current and plopping turtles and whiskery barbell – and a crocodile?

The Tugela River still has its crocodiles. Last year the Van Rooyens saw one in their mealielands. And in October a 2½ metre crocodile was killed upriver at Sun Valley. Then Pieter Opperman reported that two crocodiles had appeared in their farm dam at Christmas

and now there was only one ... So when parents complained that the thing they saw at the corner of the river was a lot bigger than a leguaan, Kathy agreed to a ban on school swimming, just in case. Of course we don't believe in crocodiles, so we were laughing at the loca, as we went down the hill path for our first swim on our first day back and there right across the sandy beach was the unmistakable waddle-and-keel track of a crocodile.

"A small one," said Tony when we phoned with the measurements. (There are moments when it is comforting to have a crocodile breeder in the family). "About 1½ metres long. Nothing to worry about. It would have to be 2½ before it could take a child."

We still don't really believe in crocodiles, but something big continues to leave its tracks on the riverbank.

We are slowly catching up on our lost summer. Amon Madonsela died while we were away. He was old and his asthma crippled him, but without him the Msusampi furrow would never have got started and we are going to miss him. Albert Kumalo died too, suddenly and terribly with a twisted bowel, and Mhlabusina Dhladhla, one of the schoolboys, was killed after he had "gone on a lorry" to work at a Greytown farm. We're in for another lawyer's wrangle to get compensation for his widowed mother.

Three ferryboats were taken in the floods, but Delanie dragged ours high into a field and tied it to a tree the night before the river roared down.

"I don't know why I did it – I've never tied it there before," he said: Several ferrymen have arrived to ask us if we can get them new boats. It's all right if you live downriver – you can catch the upcountry boats as they come past, and Mbele's ferry now operates with a boat swept all the way from Winterton.

Bathulise has got wool work going again, and a crowd of chattering ladies fills her little room every day, learning to spin skeins of wool on spindles fashioned of lumps of wood and bent nails. Kathy and Cathy boiled pots of dye on the riverbank, getting earthy new colours for Bathulise's clever weaving fingers.

Some things have waited for us, like the division of plots along the Msusampi and Nomoya furrows. Before Christmas the Chief gave authority for the land to be split and shared, but nobody was ready to dig stones on veld that was not legally his, our relationship with the chief offered security. But if we were not there? Many families waited to see if we came back.

Many, but not all.

"Brothers I want to show you something," Mr. Zungu of Msusampi announced at this month's committee meeting. "Could you better this in Goli?" He slapped a five rand note into the dust at his feet. And another. "Could you better this?" A wad of R 2 notes was counted out.

"Could you better this?" "One rand notes.

"Sixty rand," he said at last. "Sixty rand to pay back what I have borrowed for wire and seed. And that is not all. Look at this," and he scooped an armful of green peppers, beans and sweet potatoes out of a bag. "This is left over after my family has eaten. I would have carried pumpkins too but they were too heavy to carry. All this I have made from my garden in a few months although my neighbours' fowls keep climbing through my fence. The Bible says you must not muzzle your neighbour's fowl but it goes hard when my fowls can't get food from him because he has no garden."

Everyone laughed again. Zungu was not finished.
“That’s why I ask brothers, that we all have gardens,” he cried.
Everyone laughed again.

Robert Morte brought a big white pumpkin to the door to welcome us. Mbatha came with a watermelon. Mvelase brought mealies and chilis. Bonga’s mother sent a bag of sweet potatoes.

The Sahlumbe community didn’t wait for us. There had been enough delays on their furrow, so Norman helped them decide where it was going and they started work. First Saturday back Neil was summoned to inspect the work, and to take an order for chisels and hammers to help them through the rock.

The school has continued to have its ups and downs. It is rumoured that the headmaster’s share in the Tugela Ferry shebeen was the reason for his frequent absences from school. And it is rumoured that the only reason he offered the parents those certificates at R5 each was because his car had broken down.

But you know what rumours are. Unreliable. Just like Mr. D. the headmaster, for whom school was always a part-time job. However his dismissal had take seven months to resolve (on full pay of course) with strong opposition from the local inspector.

Kathy’s report on the school summarizes events: “A meeting was held with the inspector but the school committee chairman had gone into hiding after a threat against his life, and other committee members were too frightened to attend. The meeting was dominated by two women who said they wanted the sacked schoolmaster back again, and the school to revert to traditional Bantu Education. I went on strike for a week and told the parents and children if they wanted Bantu Education they were welcome to it but they would have to organize it without our help. The children were miserable and put pressure on their parents who came in a large deputation....”

(The men back from Goli at Christmas said all they knew about the school was that it could teach children in class one to write letters to their fathers. There was no other school like that in the country).

“Unexpectedly the headmaster came back,” continued the school report. “The local inspector, a close friend, said we had had no right to dismiss him. We told the local Circuit Office that unless Mr. D went we would close the school. The children stopped going to school to prove the seriousness of their intentions. Mr. D. hastily left.

“When classes re-opened concerned parents came together to see what could be done to save the school. They suggested that all parents draw up a contract with the school stating that they agree to their children participating in all aspects of school life as many boys had been skipping goat duty and some parents frequently took their children out of school to go to the shop or move cattle. The unrest and uncertainty at the school, as well as the fact that children from the war some were ambushed by the opposing faction on the way to school, affected attendance which dropped to 35. During the unrest there was also a spate of stealing from the school garden but potatoes, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, beans, beetroot, brinjals and Lucerne were harvested and the children sold vegetables, and learnt how to make out receipt and accounts in arithmetic lessons.

“When school started this year there were 75 children and no teachers. A new teacher sent to us resigned immediately on the grounds she was physically incapable of performing the duties of an Mdukatshani schoolteacher. The headmaster came back again. For three weeks the school continued without teachers. The school committee chairman, about to leave the area as threats against his life continued, called a last meeting...”

On our first week back somebody set alight to the home of Tumani Nxongo, our clerk. She and her family dragged what furniture they could outside, and spent the night with neighbours. Next morning the furniture had disappeared. Three weeks later a second hut was burnt down. Tumani’s father, a herbalist, is paying the price for naming the villain in a case.

Down at the furrow the men discussed the burnings.

“Of course he knows who it is. He threw the bones to smell out the man responsible.”

“That doesn’t help. The white police won’t take that as evidence.

White trusts a dog to smell out a criminal. A dog, they think, is better at smelling out than a man!”

For three long months Africa has been out of sight, too far away to sniff reproach at our supper pot. We have grown clumsy, tripping on the way to the kitchen. Old outlines have become unfamiliar and we have forgotten how to see in the dark.

Bang, bang, bang go guns somewhere in the night.

“It’s lovely to be home,” say our boys,” even if there’s no telly.”

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 37
WEENEN
3325

APRIL 1978: MONTHLY REPORT

Sick Cases: 42 people came for medical aid, and 4 hospital trips.

Phone Calls: 18 phone calls were sent.

Labour:

4 people at the office; accounts, administration and also medical attendances.
6 people on dams; concreting, digging and pipes fitting.
8 people for fencing; droppers and clearing at the mountain.
2 people doing the roof at the school (another classroom)
2 young men herding the horses.
4 people doing the roof at the Alcocks house, enlarging the building and thatching.
6 people for the workshop, waterwheel, digester, piping and other watering supplies, also to community (irrigation) projects.
2 people completed flooring at the office and school manager's house.
1 woman at the vegetable garden.
1 old man supervising goat duties for boys.
1 man managing school work, gardening with the assistance of the school teachers. Also building his house with stones.
1 young man herding dairy cattle, milking, feed poultry and dogs.
3 people at the top farm, for cattle and fencing.
1 man herding beef cattle and also training oxen.
42 is the total number of people working at the farm, wages totaling R 1416.60.

General Information: Office:

A system of posting the books monthly is implanting well, however the big loans ledger with 190 accounts has not due to the thickness of the book.

The girls were practicing to type, using the phone and handling the accounts. This is not improving yet.

About 7 cattle were sold (R720) during the past two months and the money will be used to buy breeding stock as discussed by the farm committee.

The bank manager, Mr. Lake was contacted about the financial problem and that they would not dishonour our cheques.

Anglo money has been coming in monthly basis. We are to submit a statement for each month's expenditure before we get it.

Mrs. Cynthia McKenzie has sent R 3262.04 to our bank in repayment of monies spent on the Small Holding Projects last year.

Figures were sent every month to Mr. D.C. Grice for his information.

A system of buying good for the staff was amended as it meant that a big cheque for petty cash would be drawn every month for such purpose.

School:

Senzalubi and gang returned to school, flashing their new clothes they had bought after working in Greytown; (Their companion, Mhlabunzima had been refused to return to school by his Indian employer, and was shortly afterwards killed in an accident). They have been doing well both on the academic and practical side.

The staff problems at the school which culminated in the desertion of 3 teachers have been dealt with in a separate report.

MDUKATSHANI,
P. O. Box 37,
WEENEN,
3325

MAY 1978: A BURIED BATTLEGROUND

It is easy to get lost, climbing from the bottom farm over the Ngongolo the ridge. Well perhaps not lost, just deflected by the trees in the windy silence of the top country where only the sun directs your wandering. Yet there are dozens of pathways under the grasses, and a battlefield lies buried in the grasses too.

Johan Dhladhla can still follow the lost paths, walking with certainty while we stumble behind. Left at that rock. East as the stump. Around, down, along.

“You know this place?”

He’s surprised.

“Of course. This is the path to Ndala’s old home.” Dhladhla seems unaware that the path has disappeared, and Ndala’s kraal has been gone a long time too. It’s our farm and we don’t know where we are going. His feet have been walking here for 43 years.

Dhladhla was born on Mdukatshani in a grove of tambootie trees near the river. He was about 13, herding his father’s cattle, when the Mtembus and Mchunus fought the battle of Ngongolo up on the ridge.

“When we heard there was to be a war we had to take the cattle and hide them over the river in the hills above Nomoya.

We were very frightened and we slept in the bush for many, many days.”

And many, many men were killed before the children drove the cattle home.

“Although no count was made of those who died,” says Dhladhla, because when a man was wounded he ran away to hide in the bush and he died there and the dogs ate his corpse.”

Grass has obscured the battleground for more than 30 years, but grass cannot submerge memory and so Johan Dhladhla has said goodbye to us. For months we have known his departure was inevitable, but knowing hasn’t lessened our pain.

Black and white farm lopsided friendships, yet there was nothing lopsided in our friendship with Johan. He was farsighted and his perceptions led us to many new ideas. He was the strongest man at Mashunka, and the most alone, although he chose his loneliness, for he lived within himself, thinking. He had never had a day at school, but wisdom is not the product of educations. We noticed him at our very first meeting – a slender bearded man with quiet eyes who spoke once, and then only to say. “Black and white can never work together.”

Dhladhla was six years old when he began working for whites, and in return for herding the cows of a Greytown farmer he got 70 cents a month and a sack on the compound floor.

Mdukatshani was his home, but it belonged to the Greytown farmer who demanded a price from his distant black tenants.

Every member of the Dhladhla family paid the price with six months labour for their landlord – six months home at Mdukatshani.

Time at home – time away. All his life Dhladhla has known the seasons of separation and return.

“Ekhaya bafowethu! Home brothers!”

Even the songs of homecoming have the rhythms of goodbye.

“Salani emakhaya. Farewell homes. We are going away.

Salani, salani...”

At 20 Dhladhla went away during his” free” six months to look for work in the city for the first time. He was first a streetsweeper, then rubbish cleaner, nightsoil carrier, windowcleaner, brick-thrower, flatboy. Was that work for a philosopher, or is that how a philosopher is made?

In 1965 he heard the first rumours that all blacks were to be moved off Mdukatshani. In 1969 a letter arrived to say the moves had started. Those who refused to move were having their kraals burnt.

“My boss said I could have one week off. I caught the train and I caught a bus and walked and got home in the morning. Before nightfall we had taken apart the house my dead father had built, and the house I had built for my bride, and my mother’s home, and we carried the pieces on our heads over the fence.”

Then Dhladhla opened his kraal and he counted his animals as they streamed out. There were 13 cattle and 200 goats that had to be taken across the fence too. Across the fence was African Reserve. Friends lived there. They would try and help even though the animals were not allowed in the Reserve.

Dhladhla covered his belongings with goatskins, left his family to rebuilt, and went back to town. For a long time his family was too busy to write and tell him that most of the stock had been stolen. There were only 38 goats left.

Dhladhla had been promoted to night watchman the Christmas he came home and found us at Mdukatshani. He acknowledged our ownership with a polite request to be allowed to visit” the site of my origin – I need some roots nearby for medicine”.

After that he took possession of the hills, wandering the forgotten footpaths of Mdukatshani. He reminded us we were strangers, and that belonging was not tied to a title.

That January Dhladhla did not go back to Johannesburg. He began to make a living selling Zulu leather skirts. Or rather, he bought skins, tanned them, and then left his wife stitching while he set off on his daily wanderings. There was never a day when he was not somewhere on our hills. Sometimes we knew he was there because on his way home he would drop in to say he had seen a calf in the gully. Or he would report that the horses had strayed to the top. Sometimes he came by just to say that the grass was good that year.

Dhladhla’s presence in the hills became more useful to us than our own organized patrols. Nobody knew the farm as well as he did, and nobody so tirelessly covered every nook and cranny. Dhladhla stopped only to rest the two small sons at his heels. He had never had a chance to know his children.

Now he kept them close at his side.

Gradually Dhladhla became part of Mdukatshani’s affairs, and we felt the benefit of his interest, for the Mashunka people watched his involvement and followed his lead. He was the

first man to trust his cattle on the farm. He became school committee chairman. He helped to devise the goat-herding scheme, checked the boys and the goat count daily, and kept our spirits up when things went wrong. He trained our oxen for the plough, and when runaway fires swept across the farm last winter he roused the neighbourhood to help. For a day and a night he moved from one fire to another, beating at the flames, and for a day and a night his tiny sons trailed behind him.

Things began to go wrong the day he received an anonymous letter warning him he would be killed. As school committee chairman he had assured parents that there would be no school fees. But then the headmaster had carburetor trouble and he told the parents that there was no such thing as a school without fees and R10 was needed for each child immediately. Of course the matter was resolved. Parents were re-assured, children sent back to school. But we never discovered who had sent the letter, and we could see that Dhladhla worried about it.

However the real trouble started with the ploughing. There is little land for ploughing on the bottom farm. It is too rough, eroded, rocky and dry, So far we have had not had the staff nor the time to begin to develop the top farm, but last summer Majozi, Mnguni, Dhladhla and some others who had been with us since the first lectures, came forward with a proposal. If we let them have the use of the fields on top, they would use half for themselves, and half they would plough and plant to profit the farm.

Dhladhla's wanderings stopped. Now every day he set off in the same direction. For three weeks he climbed over the Ngongolo ridge, and walked across the grasses of the old battlefield to spend the day driving the cattle up and down, watching the red earth turning under the plough. It had been eight years since he had had fields, and these were the cattle he had himself trained: Witboy, Mselane, Spompu, Bloemfontein, Ntombincane... He was happy.

One day a meeting was called to discuss developments with all the Mchunu people who live along our boundary. But before the meeting Majozi took Dhladhla aside, and they sat at a distance from the others for a long time, obviously deeply troubled.

"That was when he told me that there had been a terrible argument among the Mchunu because there were some who said I was an Mthembu intruding on Mchunu land, and already there was talking of another battle on Ngongolo. He told me it had been a mistake letting me plough up there, and it would be better if I went away, or I would be the cause of another war."

The next day Dhladhla went back to ploughing his field. And the day after that. Then men began to stop by where he was ploughing to ask: "On whose authority are you ploughing here?" and when he walked home people came out of their kraals to say: "Still ploughing? On whose authority...?"

"I have permission from the white man who has got us to agree to work together," said Dhladhla.

"But then I realized that while I was following the oxen along the furrow there would be a shot behind a bush and the food I was planting would not stop my children from starving. When I got that letter about the school affair I was not really disturbed because I had this promise of land which my children could reap. Now I knew there would be no land for them."

In November Johan disappeared without warning.

“When he is ready he will come and tell us what he is doing,” said Neil. And 29 days later Dhladhla was back. He had caught a train and six buses to visit a relative in Zululand to ask if he could get land there. The Chief, who was a progressive man, had agreed he could settle, and although there was no wood there were many streams and there was grass to feed his cattle.

So Dhladhla prepared to move his family and we prepared to live without him. In between trips to Zululand, carting his possessions, he has continued to walk Mdukatshani’s hills as he has always done.

“When I was a boy there was a stream in the Esweswe gully,” he said one afternoon. But when the grass was finished the water was finished too. Nobody has seen spring water running down that gully since we were boys. This year we saved the grass from burning, as we saved it the year before, and so there is a stream coming out of the ground as it did so many years ago.”

He still talks as if he were staying, even while he is telling us that he wants to start a branch of C.A.P. at the new place.

The Chief has said he will arrange a meeting. And it’s not THAT far. Only one train and six buses ride away.

This month the Dhladhla’s move ended. Johan said goodbye and left. However three cattle remain as his shares in the farm.

We hope he is saying we many still see him back.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 37
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3325

MAY 1978: MONTHLY REPORT

Rainfal: No rainfall has received.

Sick Cases: There were 64 local people came for our medical aid. Mainly asked for cough mixture and chest tablets and the very few for asthma. There were at least 4 hospital trips.

Telephone: We made only 17 phone calls and 5 phonograms for people from the local community. Others were the one whose houses were burnt at Mashunka.

Enquiries: There were 30 people came to seek for a job told them not at the moment.

Visitors: We had about 20 Architectural students from the university of Natal and one man from Johannesburg Interchurch Aid, and also one nursing sister named Cellia Chui, who helped to organize our medicine last month.

Pension: 19 more enquiries inconnection with pension.

School: After the desertion of the three teachers Mr. Bhengu (a member of the farm committee and a trained teacher) came out of retirement to become acting principal. Fana Sibeko (with Std 6 service with CAP) and Nhlanhla Mdakane (with Std 8) were also appointed.

The circuit office said that none of the new teachers could get paid as Emdukatshani School had already 5 teachers on it's payroll: Antonia, Dlangalala (who was sacked 9 months ago) and the 3 teachers who deserted, who are not working at other schools. We have appealed to Ulundi for help. Attendance dropped char ply when the teachers deserted, as they spread the rumour that the school was closing. But by the end of term attendance was almost back to normal. Work was started on a school dam, spinach, picked and beans weighed packaged and sold in arithmetic lessons.

CATTLE:

About 18 cattle have been sold to Small Holders loanees and the animals are being charged to them as their property.

There has been 4 herds of cattle missing at Mhlongo's and Majozi's herd. Some investigation is being done – no luck in finding them yet.

INSPECTION SERVICES: Mr. Mthabela & Mr. Majozi come for meeting and inspection of work every Tuesday.

NOMOYA PROJECTS: The communal dam is built and pipes are now being fitted to individual areas. Sahlumbe pipe furrow has been dug now to be laid.

MEETINGS: There have been three school committee meetings during the month mainly to discuss the teachers' problem and the appointment of new members of the committee. There has been four community meetings regarding the small holdings scheme. One of these meetings was at Mfundisi Mnguni to form Mchunu co-op. to dig Skhehlenge project.

Labour:

@ 4 office workers,
17 people were this time earmarked for the water wheel – built a weir at the Tugela River. They were specially taken for two weeks time to complete the work.
8 people built and improved the digester.
1 man supervising schoolwork.
1 woman at the vegetable garden.
3 people at the top farm for cattle and fencing.
10 people digging the plunged dip – this will be cheaper than using a tractor for the spray racer.
8 people for the workshop; fitting pipes, and managing work.
52 in total.

FINANCE:

Some of the Maria Ratschitz people have through the lawyer demanded in full plus interest to date all monies owing to them from the Maria Ratschitz days. Some of those people had withdrawn their monies in full and others did not appear in the books. The figure involved is going to be R3208.

ACCOUNTING: Since the installation of the telephone at the office there has been a very good and easy communication with the people concerned. Queries and other matters were dealt with at the same time they arise. The Alcocks could easily contact the office, same to the office.

The books are ready for the audit – only to arrange the day of taking them to Durban may be in the Middle of June.

Responsibility in handling applications for funds with Anglo has been given to Mr. Hlongwane's office who will send and deal with the whole thing.

It is therefore requested and announced that all matters to do with the accounting can be telephoned to Number 795 in Weenen.

By:

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K.BOND. HLONGWANE & PARTNERS

MDUKATSHANI,
P. O. Box 37,
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3325

JUNE 1978: SUPER SLEUTH

Mhlongo arrived as is his habit at about 5 a.m. Dogs barked, turkeys gobbled, and sleeping goats woke in the darkness, adding their bleating to the din. Mhlongo's voice has only one tone – thunderous – and as he walks he converses with Mhlongo in his quietest roar. Even when it is not the darkest hour before dawn Mhlongo leaves disturbance in his wake. Flaps, cackles, bellows and rising dust all mark the passing of Msinga's Sherlock Holmes.

"It's nothing," he yelled at our door that icy morning. "I just wanted to ask you a small thing. Why were you visiting my farm on Monday afternoon?"

"Monday afternoon? No, I haven't been near your place for many days, " Neil shivered as he groped his way to the door.

"Are you sure Numzaan?" Mhlongo came in shouting as if we were separated by a valley.

"Because I saw footprints that came into my gate and walked down the river and then went to my cattle kraal, and it was the tread of those Msinga sandals I made you."

"No Mhlongo, I haven't been there."

"I believe you Numzaan, but it is very strange. I know everybody by their tread, and those were your treads. Well I will find out."

Next morning we groaned as the usual animal greetings heralded the arrival of our Chief Security Officer.

"I've got some scene-of-crime evidence," clanged the familiar voice.

"Those tracks made me do a thorough search and I found these wire cutters wrapped in this cloth in a donga. You must keep this as evidence of scene-of-crime."

A few dawns later Mhlongo was back again, his echoes stopping an owl mid-hoot and sending the doves fluttering.

"I've discovered the swine who watched my door," he bellowed. "It's that Zwane that works for us. That Zwane's a criminal. I arrested him in 1965 for stocktheft but he has a lawyer in Greytown and another in Ladysmith and he is always not guilty. He is too clever."

"But how do you know it is Zwane, Mhlongo?"

"Well I was surprised when you said you never came to my house, so I did some thinking and that made me go to the rubbish behind my house and I saw that old tyre I had used to sole your sandals was gone. So I went visiting all the stock thieves to see who had taken my tyre, and at last I found Zwane had the same tread as yours. When he sat watching my house he must have ended up going off with that bit of old tyre."

One thing always leads to another and a few weeks later the midwinter darkness was again shattered by the coming of Mhlongo. "Numzaan the thieves have struck! My cow that was about to calve has been taken, and with her a young ox and a heifer. The fences have been cut in a line from my farm to the top and over the mountain to the main road. They must have been watching my house to know when I was gone."

The South African Police were called to investigate Mdukatshani's latest stocktheft. Mhlongo stood waiting to lead them on a scene-of-crime investigation up the hills. The constables

looked at the slopes, said they were satisfied with the story, and drove away. Mhlongo was furious.

“I’ve been a policeman for 22 years,” he shouted. “No one can teach me Judges Rules. Now when I catch those criminals they will go free because there was no scene-of-crime statement. Judges Rules say there must be a scene-of-crime statement.”

Mhlongo never doubts the fact he’s bound to get his man. He may not be subtle, and his methods are hardly secretive. Creeping into corners is not his way of doing things. He couldn’t whisper if he tried and he’s too big for disguise. He shouldn’t be a great detective, but he is, and the police are still kicking themselves for losing him.

“We made a big mistake there,” a major once admitted to us. “He’s the best black policeman we’ve ever had,” said one officer. Ostensibly it was Mhlongo’s loud voice that caused the trouble. He was accused of being so noisy on a raid that he had given a wanted man a chance to escape. An internal investigation found Mhlongo guilty and fined him R1.

“After that I cared... expletives deleted ... for them and got out,” he says. For he knew, and his superiors knew, that there was more to the case than met the eye. It’s a long story, and probably a defamatory one, and there’s no space to tell it now, but it resulted in Mhlongo’s white commanding officer standing trail on stocktheft charges.

“That man and I hated each other so much,” says Mhlongo, “that at night I used to sleep with my head where my feet should be.”

Several times he has been asked to consider returning to the police. “Never!” he thunders. (Or never is the translation of curses too violent to be repeated here). Mhlongo will never forgive the SAP for questioning his honesty.

Loudmouth he may be, but we have yet to hear him lie.

He was living in a tin shanty at Tugela Ferry trying to make a living from leatherwork and carpentry when we tracked him down and asked him to take charge of our cattle. (My cattle, says Mhlongo now. My cow, My ox. My heifer. My fences. My farm.) So he settled down to farming on a far corner of Mdukatshani, a place where everyone else had been afraid to live alone. He built a house and a dam, both with innate craftsmanship, and he developed a market for his maas by pushing his bike along footpaths with milk in the carrier. We know little of his comings and goings. Mhlongo works best when Mhlongo is free.

Ever since our first animal was stolen in 1975 (and 65 have been stolen since)

Mdukatshani has been the receiving center for a stream of information on cattle rustling. It’s been good information too, and while we have not always recovered our own stock, we have helped the Police to re-posses dozens of other stolen animals. Mhlongo, of course, is usually the source of tips that lead to arrests, and the SAP have come to treat him with kid gloves. If they are doubtful about any statement of his they ask us: “Please ask Mhlongo for more details. But don’t upset him. We don’t want to make him angry. He’s too valuable to us.” We’re wary of upsetting him too. Our eardrums were not designed for Mhlongo’s anger delivered full blast.

Whatever his grievances about the SAP, Mhlongo condescends to combined operations if there is a chance to catching a criminal. So he happened to be in a party raiding a goat thief when he found the next clue in the mystery of our missing stock. The goat thief, a man Mdaai, was an old acquaintance, and he and Mhlongo sat in the dawn sunshine talking while the Police searched the man’s kraal.

“I did not know you were still SAP,” said Mdaai after they had exchanged greetings.”
“No, I am resigned since 1975 and am now late of the police, but somebody has stolen my cow that was ready to calve and some shit is now eating the amasi I was living by.”
“Mhlongo I do not understand the SAP. Here I will go to jail for these few goats, yet others pinch Magokogo’s cattle and are growing fat on them.”
“You know about Magokogo’s cattle Mdaai?”
“Yes Mhlongo, and I am sore that I must go back to jail for six months while Magokogo’s cattle graze in the Tugela Gorge below the Mvelase country.”

The Mvelase people... aaaaah. Mhlongo knew the suspect Zwane had relatives among the Mvelase. It must be Zwane. Mhlongo went home to talk to Michael Mabaso, our manager.
“Where has Zwane been working lately?” he asked.
“At the dip,” said Michael “Except for the days when you asked him to join the fences. As you know I sent him with Mthembu.”
“Me?” roared Mhlongo. “I never sent for anyone....”
“But Mhlongo they said you had asked they be released for two days to mend a broken fence.”
“Hell Mabaso. I saw them in the bush and I asked them what they were doing and they said Mabaso had sent them to chop fence poles.”
So the clues pile up, but there is not enough evidence to convict the suspect and there’s still no sign of the missing cattle.

Thundering his rage, shaking the hills with his threats of revenge, Mhlongo continues to investigate Mhlongo-style. It’s not everyone’s style of course.
Johan Dhladhla accompanied him once on a search for stolen cattle, but the two men parted half way. “Never again,” said Dhladhla with distaste. “You can’t get past my kraal without Mhlongo calling in. So you sit down and get offered drinks, and before you know what’s what you see him flirting with one of the women and later he says he got good scene-of-crime evidence there.”

Mhlongo knows everyone at Msinga, and he knows their sisters even better.
We are still getting used to travel with Mhlongo. “Wait. Wait. There’s the mother of my son. Hullo! How are you? How is my son? See you bring him up to be like his father.”
No. No. Paths are long and there is that brother of yours....”
“Him? He never worried you before!”
Mhlongo and his loves part with no hard feelings. And what a lover the man must be, for along every highway and byway of Msinga, there is a lady who can point to his child.
Shouting his way through a lunchtime discussion this month Mhlongo paused for a moment to say: “Oh my’ wife” had a baby last night.”
He seemed quite pleased about, if rather casual. You get casual when you’ve fathered 30.
“I’ve been accused of more,” he says heatedly. “But I only admit to 30- 22 boys and 8 girls. I’m not too good at having girls.”

While his wife nursed the new infant Mhlongo was chasing a dozen trails.
There was a fruitless trip to Muden at 3 a.m. Blood in the bush where stock were slaughtered at Hopewell. Ours were not the only cattle stolen this month.
“The people are hungry,” said the major in charge of the special Stocktheft Squad. “Wouldn’t you steal if your children were hungry, Mr. Alcock?” The major arrived one afternoon with two-crack policemen specially stationed in the valley to put a stop to the spate of thieving.

The men were dressed in camouflage, revolvers on their hips. They had come to summon Neil to an identification parade. “A sort of ... identification parade.”

Early on the appointed morning a helicopter swung over the house and down into the badlands. Soon Neil was aloft in the same helicopter, floating easily through the steep, weary valleys where he had footslogged after stolen cattle in the past. The Stocktheft Squad had confirmed what we were always saying – that cattle stolen in other parts of Natal find their way to the bushy Ndaga valleys where buyers can buy with no questions asked.

The “sort of” identification parade was a huge operation, carefully planned. The previous day 80 policemen – and, need we add, Mhlongo – had thrown a cordon round the Ndaga area and rounded up 600 head of cattle. Policemen guarded the restless, lowing animals in a clearing on the riverbank, keeping them there all night until the helicopter began its shuttle. Neil was only one of a crowd of about 100 people, black and white, waiting in long queues for their turn in the helicopter. More than 30 police trucks had brought them there from Dundee, Winterton, Estcourt.... One ancient gogo from Limehill stood shaking with terror at the thought of the trip in the noisy machine. “But what does it matter? I have lost everything,” she said. Every one of her 25 cattle had been stolen.

All day the helicopter flew over the house, down to the Ndaga valley and back again. But at the end of the day only five stolen animals had been found.

“Ag,” said Mhlongo. “The thieves heard about the raid and moved their cattle away.” “We heard about it from the goatboys,” said the children. “Everyone knew the police were coming.” Big operations are bound to leak.

The major could not hide his disappointment. But he has not given up. A different plan is being hatched. And meanwhile we heard our cattle are still alive, hidden in the bush. We also hear Mhlongo’s house is still being watched. We wish he was a man who could sometimes be afraid.

We have set R350 as the maximum loan, but R350 will not help Dladla. He’s right. He’s a loser. He’s a loser although he has leadership, initiative, knowledge, vocation, he has energy and drive. R500 and six oxen. He has everything a farmer needs except capital and there’s no way he can get it. There’s no Land Bank for him, as there is for a white farmer. No subsidies for good conservation practice, no co-op with cheap fertilizer, seed and wire.

That night we pasted the latest cuttings in the scrapbook. One headline read: “Call to increase South Africa’s Food Production”.

Another said: “Desperate Farmers Now Owe R3 250 million.” According to that article the National Agricultural Dept had rocketed by 30% in the past year as desperate farmers had taken loans to finance their crops. White farmers of course. At least Dladla has no debt. Is a Black farmer privileged because he cannot borrow what he needs?

A few days after Dladla had left, Zeph Ntabela, chairman of our Farm Committee, was sitting on the doorstep, hunched in depression.

“It’s no use going on,” he said. “We’re wasting our time. We might as well give up now. No Black man can ever farm. Ntabela’s ebullience had gone. Goats and donkeys had got into his

garden and demolished his wheat and Lucerne. He had lost all the feed he had planted for his cows.

Ntabela has a garden down at the government plots near Tugela Ferry – a model garden. “Now that it’s the end of winter,” he said, “there’s nothing for the animals to eat outside the plots, so the owners open the gates at night. They can’t just let their animals die.” Ntabela had no stick to bang. He sat there, an old man without spirit, too tired to go on. “You’re a fool to try and improve yourself,” he said. “Anybody who goes forward gets all the goats and thieves on his property until he is as poor as everyone else.”

He went home to write a report to the KwaZulu Government at Ulundi.

“Since 1976 I have been trying to grow wheat,” he wrote. “And the wheat is doing very well but this year the whole crop was eaten by donkey to such an extent that I had to plow again without getting a single grain. Since 1977 I have never reaped mealies because of donkeys that are grazed in the lands at night when the mealies is about to mature. I have tried to impound these donkeys but the chief gave them to their owners without compensation. Since I have reported this to the Chief many times I am now deciding to make this report to the Chief Officer at Ulundi.

“Since the shortage of food is on the increase people are eating anything they can find it is even hard to keep poultry all their fowls were taken by Newcastle disease most of them are not working especially the younger ones, so it is very hard to make a living in this place under such conditions and it will be difficult for anyone to make any improvement in the agricultural field. Yours, Z. Ntabela.”

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 37
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JUNE 1978: MONTHLY REPORT

Sick Cases: 54 people came for our medical aid, 6 hospital trips.

Phone Calls: 23 phone calls and 9 phonograms.

By Hilda Ngxongo

School Report:

Term closed on the 8th June. During the holidays children have been learning English and working. A hand pump was installed and the children dug a furrow for a pipe to their garden. Others were working on the dam, preparing school lunches, working with the horses and herding the goat.

45 children attended school the first week and 35 on the second (considerably more than that during summer holidays.) 4 new boys have come from across the river.

The morning story hour in English has been popular and several children have taken English library books home.

By Kathy Bond.

Labour Report:

9 men digging the plunged dip.

1 man with Mhlongo, for cattle and digging the dam.

3 at the office and for administration.

4 at the school.

2 at the gardens.

5 men herding cattle at the top farm.

1 man supervising community scheme at Nomoya.

37 people were taking weeks work building a weir at the river to increase to drive the waterwheel.

By A. Hlongwane

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CATTLE:

8 cattle were sold to locals.

6 cattle missing and not found yet.

8 herd of cattle at the farm.

By E. Mhlongo:

Goats: School boys herd 112 goats, 16 of which belong to CAP.

By Kathy Bond:

GENERAL INFORMATION:

1. Water Wheel: Throughout the period of the development of the waterwheel adaptations have been added and subtracted in attempt to discover optimum shape and efficiency. In the original the pump was driven by a Land Rover Vee belt. However it was impossible to stop water splashing onto this belt which caused slippage and wear. Norman eventually decided to couple an old Land Rover gearbox to connect the water wheel driveshaft and pump. This proved successful throughout the summer when the river was high. However as soon as the water level dropped there was insufficient water force to drive the water wheel at sufficient revs to make it efficient.

This past month we overhauled the waterwheel completely, removing temporary fitting and streamling it. With the experience gained the frame has been simplified to include only half a chassis, taken from a stolen car burnt and abandoned at our road. The gearbox was eliminated and a direct drive from the waterwheel driveshaft to the pump was found most efficient. By increasing the flaps speed has increased.

Last year when the river dropped a temporary levee was built to divert more water to the waterwheel. Despite the enormous floods of the past summer, this stone wall remained intact and we therefore employed a squad of girls to extend the levee into the river as a permanent (we hope) structure.

2. Smallholders Scheme:

The managers absence on sick leave had a depressing effect on small farm development. Work stopped and quarreling started because of lack of guidance on what to do next. The few who persisted with gardens received good autumn crops and this has inspired others to come forward to ask for help in getting the work to continue.

a) SAHLUMBE: A committee was formed at the meeting held this month, and the committee has organized a construction of a furrow for a pipeline. The pipe has been connected to the top of the local waterfall and a fall of 2" water has been tapped and taken 400 metres. Despite the tremendous quantity of water, the vast numbers of people to be served makes it essential that dams are built and these have been marked out.

b) NOMOYA: Furrows have been dug into a nest of forks, each fork leading to a separate group of homes. After the success of the autumn crops there has been tremendous activity-enclosing gardens, particularly as people now know the water will come. Water bailiff has been appointed and he switches water to various pipes by __. This month a meeting was held to elect a committee for the area scheme and Norman was elected as chairman.

c) MSUSAMPI: The original 2" pipeline ran on the north side of the stream, and those who have worked but have homes on the south side, have until now had no benefits from the pipes. A pipeline has now been installed taking water across the stream to homes on the south bank.

A meeting was held here too to elect a committee and to discuss the next step.

A large dam is to be marked out and some people have offered oxen to help with the dam construction. The chairman, Captain Mbele has been given authority to immediately start making out gardens for those who had none. Due to the friction caused by fowls and goats intrusions into gardens, the meeting decided to communally fence the whole garden area adjoining the grow in conformity with permission granted by the induna and the chief. The community has started cutting poles for the fence.

3. DIP:

The expense of having an engine running the spray race for the dip has been considered too high, and we have therefore started digging a trench build a plunge dip. The construction is 50% complete.

4. CATTLE:

With increased poverty and lawlessness, stocktheft in the Msinga area has again exploded. Another six of our cattle were stolen this month and slaughtered in a donga near Tugela Estates. A witness has reported watching the animals being shot, cut up and loaded onto vans for sale and distribution.

Unfortunately the witness is not prepared to appear in court and repeat his story.

The police have, however, sent a special stocktheft team to leave at the Tugela Estates area in an attempt to curb the theft.

5. PENSIONS: The pension situation has become very serious. Some of the elderly people at Sahlumbe complained that their pensions had been cut off.

We queried the Magistrate at Zakheni who admitted that disability pensions had been suspended subject to review, but said there should have been no withdrawal of old age pensions. At his request we asked all old age pensioners with unpaid pensions to come forward. At a meeting at Sahlumbe there were 92 men and women, most of whom had never had pension applications granted despite repeated application. All details have been sent to the very co-operative Zakheni Magistrate, who promised to investigate.

6. HAND CRAFTS: Handcrafts teacher Bathulise Madondo suffered a heart attack and had to be taken to hospital. Most of the wool learners are now able to work on their own, but orders will be delayed by Bathulise's absence.

7. VISITORS: Representatives from Devcraft and Oxfam.

8. LIVESTOCK: A very large circular kraal is being constructed, topped with aloes. It will enable us to look up all stock during full moon periods.

9. THATCH: We have been able to cut our own thatch for the first time at Mdukatshani and have sufficient to thatch our goat shelter.

10. STAFF: Our skilled staff is so small that the absence of any member puts a strain on the others. The absence of Norman Mankowitz with infectious hepatitis has been particularly sorely felt.

By Neil & Creina Alcock.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT:

Every Mondays and Tuesdays I visit the farm to see to other matters as well as giving advice to smallholders and had meetings with them.

School: Since there has been teachers' problems we have decided to appoint a local principal and the staff. It is going to be expensive because we shall be paying these teachers ourselves.

Water is being pumped to the garden using the hand pump. The dam is being constructed by the children. Some work is being done to complete the two classrooms.

By: Z. Mthabela.

ACCOUNTING & FINANCE REPORT:

At the beginning of the month there was only R328.15 at the bank in Estcourt and only R126.93 in Durban. The Savings Account held in Durban has R4665.71.

Estimate expenses were tables and an application for funds amounting to R2716 was sent to Messrs. Anglo American Corp.

Expenses were as followed:

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Wages (refer labour report) | R 1500.00 |
| Cement for the plunge dip | 112.00 |
| Vehicle Exp. – garage bills pd | 312.00 |
| School wages, teachers loans and | |
| Feeding exp | 552.00 |
| Chain block lift | 450.00 |
| Piping for Smallholders Schemes | 591.00 |
| Feeding horses and cows | 99.40 |
| Legal Exp. Re N.L. Alcock | 150.00 |
| Welding gas & repair equip | 117.00 |
| Stationery purchased | 25.00 |
| Groceries for meetings etc. | 15.00 |
| | <u>R 3932.40</u> |

At the end of the month we were R861.87 overdrawn.

The small holders' expenditure has been detailed to submit to Mrs. C. McKenzie who will refund CAP.

The auditors had said they will arrange for the - + week to meet and discuss the figures for the financial year ended 28 February 1978. This will probably be in July.

By A. Hlongwane

MDUKATSHANI,
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JULY 1978: SAHLUMBE

Sahlumbe is a cramped suburb of mud huts. If you can have a suburb without a town, that is, for Sahlumbe is squeezed between the bony hills and cottonfields, and if there is any kind of civic center, then it is the big tree at Thusi's kraal.

We spend a lot of time wishing we had never met Thusi and never had to go back among Sahlumbe's bare yards. It's too crowded, too demanding, too depressing. And Thusi is a man with little talent for charm. One-eyed and scarred from many Msinga battles, he is grey and dour. Retired, he says, from battle now.

"Last time there was a war and the young men knocked and called me I told them to go away. I should be left alone now. I'm too old to fight."

He fools himself and he fools you, this craggy old warrior in tattered shorts, for a simmering bitterness drives him. It lies in the simple things of Thusi's everyday. Across the river are the empty hills which were once his home but are now white man's land – unused, but out of bounds. The hills confront him wherever he turns. Then there are his cattle in a small stockade. Thusi keeps his cattle in defiance of the law, for livestock are banned at Sahlumbe. However neither the empty hills nor his thin cattle stir Thusi's anger, as do the cottonfields that stretch out along the riverbank. All day silver water swings in the air, irrigating the cotton while Sahlumbe's women follow long paths with heavy buckets. Cotton plants have drinking water laid on. People don't.

"They said they were going to grow food for us there, but where is the man who eats cotton?" asked Thusi as we rode along Sahlumbe's dusty freeway one cold winter morning. As usual we moved with a procession in our wake.

"Just a minute Numzaan. Can you help me? My pension did not come this month," said an old crone, hobbling.

"Numzaan! Numzaan! The new umlungu said our children may not cross his fields when they go to school. What can we do?" said a mother who had hurried to join the march past.

"When can I buy chickens?" asked another in the line. Any visit to Sahlumbe has continuing interruptions.

The men who had been expecting us fell in behind the dusts of the children's ponies galloping up the road and back again as a gang of small black horsemen took turns showing their daring.

Rrrrrinnnggg! Three bikes came past and a race was on. Wheels versus hooves. The crowd yelled. Oops... a young jockey hit the dust, bouncing on his head. Ha Ha Ha, laughed the procession.

The boy stood up, rubbing his head and limping, then climbed on for another ride. The cyclists jeered, Machine power had won.

At Charlie Mtetwa's we stopped.

“This is the end of the furrow,” said Thusi. Charlie was at work with an orange towel belted to his waist, purple socks and old brown shoes caked with mud. He tried to be modest about the mud but his pride showed through. No other resident at Sahlumbe had a dam in his yard.

“I know the water will get here one day,” said Mtethwa, showing us the pool he had excavated. Summer storms pouring down the hill had already given him water – enough to mix mud for the new hut he was building. Sitting on goatskins under his thorn trees we noticed Mtetwa’s other preparations for the water that was to come. Huge piles of manure had been gathered and stacked in the shade.

“But the goats,” said our host, waving silver bangles in despair.

“I have no fences and the goats come off the mountain and eat everything I have.”

Waiting for the beer the men rolled cigarettes with hoarded scraps of paper and talked as countrymen do of the drought and the grazing, the cattle and the cotton. Always the talk came back to the cotton that the white man was growing on the big estate to make money for the government of KwaZulu.

“But we don’t understand how it helps us for our government to get fat on cotton,” said Nyawose. Now and again a lorry rattled past on its way to collect the harvest. The fields were speckled with the figures of women and children gathering fluffy white cotton bolls. However Sahlumbe may resent the cotton, there’s not a family that does not turn up when labour is needed.

“Piecework pay,” says Thusi. “The women can bring in R1 a day. But in six weeks the work is finished.”

Unlike the furrow. All summer Thusi and Co. had worked on that furrow, resting on their spades to watch spumes of water shining in the cottonfields below. All summer they worked and still the furrow was incomplete. It had stops and starts, no beginning, some middle in between – and at Charlie Mtetwa’s, an end. The men needed help in making a beginning for how could you lay a pipe from a waterfall as high as that? So after Mtetwa had refilled the pot and the beer had done a second round, we led the horses up among the slabs of grey sandstone to the waterfall that might one day give water to Sahlumbe’s dusty huts. Pigs squealed on short legs, disturbed by the procession, while women who were washing in slithery pools full of green algae, wiped their hands on their skirts and joined the crowd at the edge of the cliff, curious to see what would happen next. Over the valley, on a distant krantz, another knot of people gathered, eventually sitting down comfortably to watch the fun, and Pied Pipers streams of children came from every direction. (Did we really say development was not spectator sport?)

Over a ledge disappeared Neil, Thusi and Nyawose and soon the valley echoed to the thump and clink of chisels at work, cutting into an overhang so that a pipe could not be damaged when stormwater rocks came tumbling down in summer. At last the men’s heads popped up again at the top of the rock face. Neil had marked what had to be done. The beginning could be made.

Within a week a messenger had waded the icy river to bring a summons. Everything was ready. Bring the pipe.

And of course there was quite a turnout on the day the coils of black pipe were unrolled up the valley, past the graves of the young men who had died in the war, below the cliffs where the figs were shedding head leaves, all the way up the precipice to the top of the waterfall.

There Mtshali stoked up a small fire with aloe fronds, and warmed the tip of his assegai until it was hot enough to pierce holes in the end of the pipe. Nothing fancy, but as a filter it would work. Then the pipe was concreted into the mouth of a pool and the first water slipped away. Was it coming out the other end?

Nobody could see round the bend in the valley. One of the men slithered down the hillside and disappeared to have a look. In the following silence everyone became uncomfortable.

“Quickly, sheshisa,” somebody yelled at a child. “Go down and see what’s happening.”

“Yes, run, run,” ordered another until all the children had been dispersed to the floor of the valley. Then came distant yells.

“What’s that? What’s that?” that?” bellowed the cliff toppers. A relay of calls from child to child at last got the message back.

The pipe was hissing. There was no water.

Excitement fizzled.

“I always told you it wouldn’t work,” said an onlooker.

“Don’t worry,” Neil said to Thusi. “It’s just an airlock,” and he let himself down the cliff to work on the pipe. The children had started straggling back up the hill when there was a shriek which everybody heard.

“The whole pipe is full. The water’s coming so hard it’s digging holes in the rock!”

At the top of the waterfall there was pandemonium. The furrow diggers danced and shook each other by the hand, and laughed and shouted and shook hands again. Then they disappeared, jumping over boulders, slipping down the hill to see the water they had created.

Back at Thusi’s kraal a dozen men waited. Now they were interested too. Could they join the co-operative? Thusi snorted. “When you’ve paid the entrance fee of 30 days work,” he said.

And as Neil drove away a man waved him down on the road brandishing a scrap of paper.

“You say you will only work with a group,” he said. “Here I have the names of 44.”

“Talk to Thusi,” said Neil.

“Even the fates are on our side” rejoiced Dhladhla. The fates had proved it by dowsing the Induna in the river. Workmates yelled happily while he told how he and the Induna had met on the riverbank that morning to find that the ferryman had gone to register his marriage at the courthouse and so was away for the day. There was nothing to do but cross at the ford, so took off their pants, tied them round their necks, and waded in. They were almost half way across when the Induna complained that his leg had gone stiff with cramp.

“You had better turn back,” said Dhladhla, “for the river is even deeper further on and with your cramps you could end up by drowning.” The Induna agreed, and shivering, turned about. Dhladhla was on the far back, pulling on his trousers, when he saw the Induna slip on a rock and disappear. Downstream a hand came out at last, gripping for the bank. Moments later the Induna emerged crawling on all fours, lamenting loudly. It was too cold for him to wear his sodden clothes, too cold for him to go without.

Dhladhla roared with mirth.

“Justice has prevailed,” he reported to his happy colleagues.

“This was the man who tried to obstruct the digging of the furrow.”

And although the moral was clear, Dhladhla voiced it anyway.

“Because I live on homegrown sweet potatoes from my furrow garden,” he said, “I have the energy to resist cramps when I cross the river. Had the Induna joined in when we needed him, he too would now be so fortified by vegetables that he would not fall and wallow in the water.” All day the story was repeated with joy. The enemy of the furrow had been brought down.

Another score was settle this month when a police van delivered Mboma’s parents to the farm. Weeks before Mboma had come to us to report: “I want to lay a charge against my father because he doesn’t feed us. He’s deserted.” His father, of no fixed abode, was peddling liquor in Goli, and since his mother had gone off at Christmas to join him, not a cent had come home. Thirteen-year-old Mboma felt some discipline was needed, so we took him into Weenen, with his dodderly grandfather in support, to see the Magistrate and lodge a complaint against his irresponsible parents.

Hey presto! The erring Dhladhla’s were rounded up and delivered at the gate free of charge, by courtesy of the SAP. Quite by chance granny Dhladhla was there when the van doors opened and her son emerged.

“Pig, swine, shit,” she hissed. “This is what I think of you..” and she spat and spat again. Between the spitting and the oaths it was quite a homecoming, avidly witnessed by all the goatherds.

They reported the scene, curse for curse when they visited Mboma in hospital later that day. For whatever Mboma had expected, it was not the swift return of his elders, and he was no doubt very relieved to be in hospital with a skin disease when they came back. However peace has now settled on the Dhladhla kraal. A goat has been slaughtered and the beer pots filled. All is forgiven and forgot.

July of course, is partytime at Msinga. In summer the meat is bad before the guests arrive so most entertaining takes place while the days are cold. This winter partygoers have been terrorized by an uninvited guest – a solitary old baboon. GG saw it first, not far from the house.

“It’s as big as my pony,” he said, scared out of his wits. Next day Robert chased it from his garden with a spear. Then it was seen in a tree near the school, eating vegetables stolen from the school garden. Constantly pursued it is little wonder the animal has turned to drink. It must have had its first taste of beer-impregnated mabela husks while scavenging on the outskirts of a kraal. Now the baboon fights the dogs to get at the liquor in the valley. Booze is a comfort to a lonely old age.

There’s little go comfort the old people in the valley since pensions were discontinued pending fraud investigations. The pensions scrounge where they can, but nobody has much to share around since mealimeal went up in price again, and sales tax started.

“We have no money,” the people say, “but now we have to buy our goods twice.” emerge

NEIL AND CREINA

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AUGUST 1978: NO BLACK MAN CAN EVER BE A FARMER

“Siyafa! Siyafa! Nya! Nya! Nya! We are dying. We are dying. Utterly. Utterly. Utterly.” The hard winter earth dented under Johan Dhladhla’s stick, each thump making a small crater at his feet, each blow marking his despair. “The black people are in doom”, he said.

Three weeks earlier Johan had walked in, smiling, and our spirits had lifted to have him home again, sitting under the thorn trees in familiar companionship, talking over the crises of the day.

The new headmaster was absent for the third week in a row. There had been more trouble with the goat boys. Michael had swerved to dodge some cattle in the road and had crashed the truck.... Johan had not been away long enough to become separated from farm affairs. We could almost forget he had ever been away.

“But I can only stay a little while,” he said. “My potatoes are ready for planting. My fields are ploughed. When I finish my business I must go.” Business was first of all a message from the chief in Dladla’s new area asking us to set a day when we could come and address his people for they were interested in starting a scheme like ours. Johan was also back to sell a few cattle, and to get a note from Neil to buy some wire.

“But how can a note help you?” Neil asked.

“If a white man writes a note you get better quality at a cheaper price,” replied Dhladhla. What he meant was that a white member of the Weenen Farmer’s Co-op paid special prices for all goods.

A Black man standing at the black counter had no rights to membership, and so had no rights to lower prices – unless he had a message from his boss.

“But Dhladhla my note can only help you at the Weenen Co-op where I am a member,” said Neil. “It won’t be any use at the store near your home.”

“That’s all right,” said Johan, disbelieving. “But can I have a note in any case?”

And when he had got his note and sold his cattle and had folded R500 into his tobacco bag, he was ready to go.

“What is the price of a roll of wire?” he asked the day before his departure. He was eager to be away. It was nearly spring and his potatoes were waiting.

“Twenty five rand a roll,” said Neil.

And that was why Dhladhla had not left at all but now sat on a rock stabbing the ground with his stick, distracted with the pain of his discovery: no Black man will ever farm.

“You know that was all I ever wanted,” he said. “You know how I worked in Goli to buy cattle and goats until I was fat in both.

And when I was ready to come home to farm I had that letter to say my animals had been stolen. Then I heard the things you were saying and decided to come back and try again. You know what happened. I still believe in what we learnt here together. That’s why in another country I have started a third time. The Chief has given me land. I have oxen to plough. There is lots of manure because the people there do not value it and I can take what I need.

But I must have a cart to carry the manure to my lands, and I must have wire, for land without a fence is everybody's land.

Dladla's stick went on digging while he spoke, jerking at his thoughts.

"When I split the edge of my cattle herd to get R500, I thought this spilling of my blood would lift me up to get the things I needed. Yesterday when counted my money I knew I was rich.

But yesterday I had not counted what I would need – R500 won't even buy my wire."

Quietly Dladla counted off all he had to buy with his fortune.

A cart, wire, seed, a dairy cow... he needed each of these things.

He could not farm by just buying one.

"If you repair that old cart, you can have it," interrupted Neil.

Dladla thought for a moment.

"To hire a lorry to fetch the cart will cost as much as buying a cart where I live," he said.

"Except that where I live there are no carts to buy."

All night Dladla had looked at his situation, and he was shrunk in its blackness.

"We can't even trust Gatsha," he said. "Gatsha is always telling us we must send our children to school to educate them for better jobs. He tells us we must raise ourselves to get better wages.

But he talks only of factory jobs. He never tells Zulus they must become good farmers too."

Thud, thud, thud. The stick banged on.

"And now they are killing us. They are putting a tax on our livestock. To pay the tax we will have to go to town to work.

Sofa! Nya! Nya! We shall die. With a tax like that no man will want to farm. No Black man will ever be a farmer. We weep for ourselves.

But was the tax a bad thing? Wasn't it aimed at the city man who just accumulated cattle which he did not use? KwaZulu's soil was carrying too many animals that could no longer pull a plough and were barren of milk, Neil pointed out. No man would want to pay a tax on animals that were past their use; so old beasts would be sold. The tax could encourage better farming, younger cattle, more wealth. "Yes," said Dladla. But the explanation brought no lightness to him. With tax or without, there was no way he could farm.

It was dark before he stood up to go, dry of words at last. We saw him standing in the twilight on the riverbank, a lonely man aimlessly chucking stones. Comfortless.

That night we worked late on neglected jobs, trivialities that gave us sticks to bang as we examined the outpouring of the afternoon. How much would Dladla need if we could give it to him? How much did it cost to capitalize a farm? R250 000 said an economist at Natal University. It sounded high but it was no thumbsuck. Surveys of white farms in different parts of the country had produced the figure.

"The coons have had it agriculturally," the amiable agronomist at the Cedara Agricultural College told us. "They'll never feed themselves. Look – not one of them can even buy a soil testing kit."

A Rhodesian study of a tribal farming unit found it cost R6, 000 over six years to make a first profit – of R14 a year!

Six thousand rand was a lot better than a quarter million, but it was still way beyond the R350 we could offer Johan, and then on loan against the rules of the Small Farmers Trust, which exists to help members of local co-operatives.

Last year, when the first water flowed in the Msusampi and Nomoya furrows we went out and raised R12 000 to establish the Trust so that we could offer loans for pipes, wire and seed.

And because there had been money – and manpower – there had been progress. You had only to attend the Msusampi first Annual General Meeting to see the upheaval of the past year. The meeting was held on the turned earth of new gardens, in sight of vivid rows of peas, cabbages, spinach, beetroot and early mealies. And nobody came empty-handed – they were workers now, so they arrived carrying spades, picks and hoes.

“As you all see we have come a long way,” said the chairman, Captain Mbele. “We have fulfilled the promises we made one another when we started this work a year ago. We have got water.

These stones where we are sitting have all been moved to build a wall and even our young men are helping us.” The crowd beamed and we beamed with them. Not one of us had really believed the stony veld could become such a busy place.

“Today we must decide to build a dam,” announced the twinkling little Captain, “because as you know there are already quarrels about sharing water. We have a site for the dam but we must agree on a day to start the work. There are new ones among us who having seen the water now want to make gardens too. The plan, as you know, is that everyone must work 30 days to become a member of our co-operative. There is no longer a furrow to dig, so if we want these people to be with us, they must do most of the work digging the dam.”

“We all want water,” said a frail granny from the back, “but I am too old now to dig or carry stones.”

Mtshali, the Secretary, turned round. “MaMpongose,” he said, “We all know you are too old to work, but we also know that among us you are the richest in cattle.” There was a roar of laughter.

“Because you are rich in cattle your muscles are the strongest here.”

“If that is so,” replied the wealthy woman, “I am not too old.

My cattle will be there when it is time to do the work.”

“Now the next thing we have to decide today,” said Mbele, returning to the business on the agenda, “is to do with fences. Some of us have already discovered that although we have gardens we never reap those gardens because our neighbours’ fowls and goats destroy our gardens while our fowls and goats are destroying theirs.

The thorn bushes are finished on the hills so we cannot make together the Whites would help us by making loans of wire. But the poles are very expensive. We must now choose a day when the women can go into the mountains to chop the poles that will hold our fences...”

The Trust has brought a little rain to make the valley green and from the cliffs we see the brightness of the gardens and the figures of men and women working. But the glow and activity have deluded us. Our crummy Trust can’t do enough. That R12 000 has already

stretched to cover loans to 150 families, and there is only money in the bank because they are scared of debt, and so borrow reluctantly, payback a bit, and try not to borrow again.

We have set R350 as the maximum loan, but R350 will not help Dladla. He's right. He's a loser. He's a loser although he has leadership, initiative, knowledge, vocation, he has energy and drive. R500 and six oxen. He has everything a farmer needs except capital and there's no way he can get it. There's no Land Bank for him, as there is for a white farmer. No subsidies for good conservation practice, no co-op with cheap fertilizer, seed and wire.

That night we pasted the latest cuttings in the scrapbook. One headline read: "Call to increase South Africa's Food Production".

Another said: "Desperate Farmers Now Owe R3 250 million." According to that article the National Agricultural Debt had rocketed by 30% in the past year as desperate farmers had taken loans to finance their crops. White farmers of course. At least Dladla has no debt. Is a Black farmer privileged because he cannot borrow what he needs?

A few days after Dladla had left, Zeph Ntabela, chairman of our Committee, was sitting on the doorstep, hunched in depression.

"It's no use going on," he said. "We're wasting our time. We might as well give up now. No Black man can ever farm. Ntabela's ebullience had gone. Goats and donkeys had got into his garden and demolished his wheat and Lucerne. He had lost all the feed he had planted for his cows.

Ntabela has a garden down at the government plots near Tugela Ferry – a model garden.

"Now that it's the end of winter," he said, "there's nothing for the animals to eat outside the plots, so the owners open the gates at night. They can't just let their animals die." Ntabela had no stick to bang. He sat there, an old man without spirit, too tired to go on.

"You're a fool to try and improve yourself," he said. "Anybody who goes forward gets all the goats and thieves on his property until he is as poor as everyone else."

He went home to write a report to the KwaZulu Government at Ulundi.

"Since 1976 I have been trying to grow wheat," he wrote. "And the wheat is doing very well but this year the whole crop was eaten by donkeys to such an extent that I had to plow again without getting a single grain. Since 1977 I have never reaped mealies because of donkeys that are grazed in the lands at night when the mealies is about to mature. I have tried to impound these donkeys but the chief gave them to their owners without compensation. Since I have reported this report to the Chief Officer at Ulundi.

"Since the shortage of food is on the increase people are eating anything they can find it is even hard to keep poultry all their fowls were taken by Newcastle disease most of them are not working especially the younger ones, so it is very hard to make a living in this place under such conditions and it will be difficult for anyone to make any improvement in the agricultural field. Yours, Z. Ntabela"

NEIL AND CREINA

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SEPTEMBER 1978: TROUBLEMAKER

It was spring the day the ground hornbills began their soft boom, boom, booming across the river. Ban-bam-bamkoben, they cried.

Bam-bam-bamkoben. For months we had not heard that call, strangely dislocated, a floating sound that never seems to come from those big black birds pacing the field. Rainbirds the Zulus call them and rianbirds they must be, for when they broke their winter silence, cloud dropped over the valley and the blue winter river was soon lost in muddy swirls, rising in the night, but subsiding back among the rocks, for spring is not yet summer.

There can be nothing as lovely as the bushveld after early rain with its slow green creep and the mingled scents of sweetness and... sniff ...? Rotten meat or urine? Yet the bees are content even among blossoms that push our noses the other way. Up on the hills figs have glowed with pink leaf, and marulas, red ivory combretums have taken turns shining like golden honey. Yet the spring is a distraction, for Sensaluphi has been in trouble again. Again. Again. Again.

This time it is the attempted rape of an eight-year old girl.

"But the law can't touch him," the policeman told us. "He could rap 10 little girls and the courts would be powerless because he's a juvenile and he's been in trouble before."

He's been in trouble all his life, has Sensaluphi, scrawny gang-leader of all the bad kids at Mashunka. He lays ambushes, fights, poaches, trespasses, steals. Yet he hasn't got the making of a great criminal for he lacks cunning, and if there are no witnesses to his crimes (and usually there are) then he talks about his latest escapade to make quite sure that everyone will now.

Since he first appeared at our campfire, all long legs and wide grin in that shrunken old face of his, he has stolen our torches, toys, food, clothes and moneybox. He has been banished, fined, beaten, expelled from school and had a variety of suspended sentences. But he's still around, still being bad, never very far from the edge of our lives. Together with everyone else at Mashunka, however, we can't help liking him. Even now, after the latest thing he's done.

It began as a harmless children's game – boys lassoing squealing little girls in the school grounds. When friendly relations had been established one of the boys produced some money and asked Ntembi Dladla to go and buy him a loaf of bread at a kraal across the valley. Off she trotted, and Sensaluphi announced he'd be going home, and he disappeared with his rope down the same path.

Not long afterwards there were screams from the bush. Sensaluphi had tied the child's arms with his rope and was trying to rape her. But he was obviously inexperienced for he'd tied her legs as well.

The schoolchildren took the story home. All except Ntembi. She went home and said nothing. When her mother eventually heard the news she thrashed her daughter.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she shouted.

“Because I knew if I told you you would beat me,” sobbed the little girl.

It was quite accidental that a policeman dropped in as Neil was starting the preliminary hearing.

“I need your advice,” Neil said. “What will happen to this boy if we take the case to court?”

“He’ll get a warning, perhaps a suspended sentence,” replied the officer. “The law lays down that no juvenile may get more than seven strokes over a period of two years. And you know the boy got five strokes a few months back when he stole that bicycle.”

Sensaluphi was busy reforming when he stole that bike. Or rather he had just finished serving a sentence for stealing Pat’s best winter slacks, the sentence being the return of the pants and compulsory school for three months. The community thought it was a fair judgment and we were surprised at the number of people who dropped by to say they were glad we’d been understanding.

“Thank you for being lenient,” said Charlie Dladla. “What can you do when a boy is worse than an orphan because his father’s a goat thief and his mother’s a drunk?”

“Any child who has grown up in the wilderness will be a trouble to society,” said Sweliswe.

“Wilderness” is the name the people give to the Greytown plantations where Sensaluphi started work when he was seven years old.

The boy seemed to enjoy his enforced return to school.

“Sensaluphi is bright, sensitive, caring – my model pupil,” says his teacher. All of which is true, for he is no more variable than the rest of us, swinging between what we’d like to be, and what we are. Last summer the need for money at home made him take up the post of weekend errand boy at a Weenen Indian Store. The work did not suit him. After two days he asked for his money.

“But the coolie said he wouldn’t give it to me. He wanted me to work longer,” said Sensaluphi. After an argument Sensaluphi went on strike, and wandered out on to the stoep, trying to make up his mind what he should do next. A customer leant his bike against the wall and entered the shop – and Sensaluphi had his answer.

He was on the bike and away.

“But why Sensaluphi?”

”Cos the coolie wouldn’t pay me.”

But the bike belonged to a stranger ... OK. OK. Forget it.

Nobody saw the theft and it was only much later that the owner emerged to find the bike gone and went off to the police station to report his loss. By then Sensaluphi was whizzing down the Blaukrantz cuttings, just for a moment master of his fate.

The moon was up before he crossed the bridle path on Msusampi mountain and pushed the bike down to the ferry. The boat was locked, tethered to a cable, so the boy grabbed two stones and pounded the cable until it broke. Then he loaded his bike, rowed himself across the river, and, leaving the boat adrift, wheeled his new possession home.

The Induna’s wife was watering her garden when the boat drifted past next day and she waded out and pulled it to the bank and sent a message to say it was safe. Meanwhile Sensaluphi had not bothered to cover his tracks or hide his stolen goods. By breakfast we knew he had suddenly acquired a bicycle. We ‘phoned the police. Back went the bike, and back went Sensaluphi with it, to spend a few days at the police station awaiting trial.

“How was it?” the boys asked when he got back.

“Kumnandi,” said Sensaluphi. Appetising. “They bring you a cup of water and a slice of bread and you sit all day watching the policemen going past.”

Mboma giggled. “I must try doing something bad,” he said. “What did they do to you?”

“They hit me with a cane.”

“Was it sore?”

“Hell yes. You can see five strokes on my bottom now.”

But was the punishment a deterrent? Although Sensaluphi disappeared for a bit after that, eventually he was back again, for there’s as much monotony in being an outlaw as there’s monotony in being a model boy. What the strokes did, in effect, however, was to give Sensaluphi freedom to do, as he likes for the next two years.

“Not even the tribal court can thrash him,” said the policeman helpfully. “If it tried, the boy would be within his rights to lay an assault charge. Of course if he has enough convictions the Magistrate may send him to a reformatory.” But even the policeman didn’t think Sensaluphi was that bad yet.

“Well quite apart from the rape,” said Neil, “last week this boy and his gang stole our horses and they must have galloped them all day because when we found the animals next morning they were covered with sweat marks and had sore feet. And that’s not all.

I have a report that these same boys were poaching on the top farm. Must I let them get away with it?”

“Ah,” said the policeman. “There is a way out. You can always get the parents to apply corporal punishment. There’s nothing in the law to stop you doing that.”

We were grateful when the policemen offered to undertake the job for us, and set off to find the parents of the gang. We have a feeling the parents were grateful too, at having a chance to get rid of some pent-up feelings, for the beatings were vigorous.

Sensaluphi’s father, as everyone knows, is hiding in Goli after his last stocktheft, but his drunk mother was there, and with the help of a male relative, she saw that the boy got the thrashing he deserved.

So much for the minor charges of stocktheft and poaching.

Punishment for the rape had still to be resolved. Neil decided he needed the help of wise men and sent a message to the Induna and the Gosa, or “The General” as we call him. He was campaign manager when the war was on, but when the truce was agreed in January he became unofficial peacemaker instead.

“It is not surprising that boys are trying things like this,” Neil said, “when they see grown men getting away with it.” Of course they knew about the cast of M... who had been attacked on the farm getting water on Christmas morning. And they were familiar with the details of 14-year-old... who worked for us. She had been kidnapped by an armed gang of youths who kept her on the mountain all night, raping her. In both cases the names of the men had been known and handed to the police, but nothing had happened. And then only last week Neil had been walking along the river back in the early morning sunshine when he had seen a man on the far bank throw a girl to the ground.

“Hey,” he yelled across the roar of the flood. “Stop that. Leave that girl alone.” But the man tightened a scarf around the girl’s mouth and with one hand on her throat, unfastened his trousers.

Neil plunged into the water, still yelling, watching as the girl reached behind her head to grab a chunk of wood with which she thumped her assailant on the head. He hurled the wood away and kept busy. Only when Neil emerged dripping wet, lugging a big stone, did the man get up and trot away.

“This time,” Neil told the police, “you HAVE to do something.”
And this time the case has been sent to the Regional Court.

“The situation is very bad when we have crimes almost every day and nobody is punished,” Neil told the Induna and the Gosa. “In a country without law and order, where the authorities no longer come to our protection, people who live together must work together to reimpose order. Now the three of us here are all powerful in our own way. Surely between us we can do something?”

“Our country is terrible now,” agreed the Gosa, “for no man goes into his house at night without locking his door and putting a rock against it. The days are past when you left your door open because it was hot. Everyone knows you sleep with your door open at night – it must be wonderful to be white and unafraid.” The Gosa however, does not strike you as a man who can be afraid. His eyes have a direct look, and he has a masterly way of speaking. “Indoda” he calls Neil – a term of equality among men. It is easy talking to the General for he is concise and quick to make decisions. The Induna, on the other hand, is a faffer. He knows too much about the fate of other indunas in the district to want to be conspicuous. He had cultivated gestures that make him appear profound and is a great maker-of-speeches. Yet it is well known that when he tried a case he gives a nominal fine to the accused and makes the complainant pay the same amount in court fees.

“Yes,” said the Induna, it was important that discipline be brought to the district, but the law made it necessary that the matter be discussed with the chief first, and only when he had given his permission could anything be done to create a law-keeping body...
Discussions of the etiquette involved took the meeting well past noon.

At least a decision was reached on Sensaluphi. He was to be summoned by the Induna and given another suspended sentence – more compulsory schooling with a promise to behave – and a public sjambokking if further crimes are committed.

We know it’s neither an end nor a beginning. All the law can offer is a gesture, not justice. Justice is too complicated – and what can justice ever do for Sensaluphi? Hit him harder? Lock him up? Or let him creep away to be born again to other parents in another place and another time?

At least this boy keeps the people at Mashunka self-questioning.
Perhaps this is the only gift Sensaluphi has.

NEIL AND CREINA

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AT MSINGA

BY N.L. ALCOCK

(September 1978)

In the year 2000 AD..... How will we be living then?

Scientists, economists, politicians – all want to know; all want to see across the gulf of 22 years, trying to bridge time with mathematical models, estimates predictions, prophecy.

The learned professors and not-so-learned politicians, however, do their predicting as close as possible to electrified computers and the corridors of power. But if you want a sight of 2000 AD now, just drive four hours out of Durban to the broken hills of Msinga, where I come from. Msinga is ahead of time, already living in 2000 AD.

The price of petrol, diesel and motorspares has pushed many lorries, cars taxis and buses off the road. The taxis and buses that are left are not very crowded because only a few people can afford the luxury of travel in a motor vehicle. Strings of donkeys now carry mealie-meal from the shops, and as far as possible, everyone travels on foot.

Tractors stand rusting outside the homes of ploughing contractors. The price of fuel has put them out of business. Tractors meant profits until a few years ago, but now conglomerates of cows, oxen and donkey plough the worn-out fields.

Combine harvesters and threshing machines are uneconomic in this society, replaced by the flail and threshing floor, where women whistle to make the breeze blow so that they can win now their grain.

The fuel crisis hit more than just farm machinery, cars and buses – it has hit primus stoves too. They stand unused now, while outside every home there is a woodlot instead. But the walk to the nearest wooded area is getting longer, and in places where wood gatherers from surrounding settlements converge, there are quarrels about chopping rights.

It's not that petrol and paraffin are unavailable – they are just too expensive for ordinary people. Like fertilizer. Nobody can afford to buy fertilizer for his crops anymore.

As everyone predicted, this year is a hungry year – hungrier than last year, but then each year has been worse than the last. Many fields have been abandoned because they are too worn out to produce a harvest. Fields far from home are abandoned because owners can not guard against theft. Pawpaws are stolen green and cooked as a vegetable.

Tomato bushes are pulled out and the leaves and unripe fruit used for spinach. The sites of wild spinach and mushrooms are visited regularly. Every patch of bush has its snares for game. In fact every boy, youth and man carries a catty, knobkierie or pellet gun to hunt tiny birds, hares and duiker.

Goats and cattle have become a burden to their owners, for if they are out of sight on the grazing ground, they disappear. Stocktheft is as bad as croptheft.

Natural selection is rigorously practiced – only the environmentally fit stock survive.

A few children whose parents can afford it, go to the outdated schools of the 1970's where they are educated to fill jobs that no longer exist. Way back in 1978 Dr. J. Adendorff, Managing Director of the Corporation for Economic Development, warned that South Africa would have to provide R 1 500 million annually to create jobs for black workers (1). Well of course it couldn't be done, so there are uncounted thousands of unemployed.

Msinga has the fuel crisis, food crisis, unemployment crisis and the inflation crisis too. "Money rots," people say. They spend it today knowing it is worthless tomorrow. They look for ways of doing without it. Few have R1 to go to the government hospital at Tugela Ferry, so instead the remaining trees are being debarked, shrubs uprooted for medicine. Many trees still standing are there only because they have medicinal value.

Finally, of course, Msinga has its share of the capital crisis. For although South Africa is not without electricity, coal, oil, and even nuclear power Msinga has no capital to buy it. And South Africa has no capital to advance Msinga loans to buy time while it tries to solve its crisis.

Living with this practical demonstration of the future, living tomorrow now, is both exciting and educational.

In a tiny corner of this 21st century environment we are co-operating with the African, together trying to adapt to our times, to evolve a lifestyle which can depend upon permanently sustainable yields.

Just for a start – we need a system that can grow food without using tractors, without using fertilizers – while somehow building up the lost fertility of the soil. There are people who say the world will starve without fertilizer I say the world will starve because of it.

It is an interesting thing that a farmer can measure rainfall, temperature, the fertilizer he applies to his lands, the potatoes he reaps, his animal units per hectare, his profits and loss – but there's no such thing as a unit measure of soil fertility.

Traveling to Paarl in 1772 the Swedish botanist Thunberg wrote: "The African soil is intrinsically meagre". This meagre soil sustained the greatest grassland flora the world has ever known and huge numbers of wild animals, but Thunberg's observation was accurate if we are to judge to soil by its capacity to grow crops.

South Africa's first white settlers arrived with a conventional European outlook on agriculture, and a traditional knowledge of the importance of manuring in crop production. South Africa's first fertilizers were kraal manure, wood ash, guano imported from offshore islands and bone meal which came from bones freshly ground or burnt.

From 1842 phosphates were to come in more sophisticated form for that was the year John Bennett Lawes took out a patent for the manufacture of superphosphates from rock. Agriculture had reached a momentous turning point. No longer would farmers have to do the

work of producing most of their own fertilizers. Now they could buy what they needed as concentrates in bags.

The fertilizer boom began. Sales rocketed and harvests soared. Between 1937 and 1967 crop production trebled in South Africa.

If we're looking at production, we've done marvels. But if we're looking at what it cost us...?

In 1937 South Africa was using only 365 000 tonnes of commercial fertilizer. In 1967 the figure stood at nearly 2 million tones. In 30 years our consumption of fertilizers increased fivefold – our crop production only three. By such statistics South Africa can measure her declining soil fertility. Fertilizer is no booster of fertility.

The 1970 Commission of Inquiry into Agriculture (2) confirmed this when it said: “As a result of the increased crop yields ... the true state of affairs regarding the physico-biological condition of the cultivated soils of the Republic tends to be masked. This fact involuntarily creates the false impression that things are not so bad and indeed that everything is fine if it will only rain sufficiently.

Crop lands have not been alone in losing fertility. Pastoral lands have suffered too. Under natural conditions there must have been an equilibrium in which the return of nutrients to the soil balanced the production of grasses, shrubs and trees. As agriculture developed there was an inevitable flow of fertility away from the land to the towns. As early as 1931 there were men in South Africa expressing their concern. D.B.D. Meredith, for example, estimated that at that time the veld was losing 100 000 tonnes of nitrogen a year through the sale of milk, meat, cheese and wool.(3)

By 1945 Dr. J.C. Ross, Director of Soil Conservation was saying: “It is my conviction that over the country as a whole we have already lost upwards of one fourth of our original fertility reserves.”.

As he was saying this the country's agriculture was making another great change – mechanization. In the late 1940's oxen gave way to the tractor. With the tractor and chemical fertilizer, modern agriculture developed rapidly. Today South Africa is counted as one of the six food exporting countries in the world. Surely we can boast a remarkable success story? Well if you don't want disillusion, just keep your attention riveted on those crop yield figures. Close your eyes to uncomfortable reports about soil erosion and economics which show mechanization and fertilizer to be costly disasters.

The Commission of Inquiry into Agriculture admitted mechanization “was by no means an unmixed blessing as excessive ploughing of the land was made possible a good deal of it unfortunately came under cultivation which should never have been brought under the plough..... seriously soil erosion resulted.”

The Commission also noted “declining profits per unit area farmed”. Rising crop yields had disguised the fact that the farmer was producing more but earning less. And that was before the fuel crisis of 1973.

In 1975 Margarest Biswas, a UN consultant told a conference on “Resources of Southern Africa - Today and Tomorrow” (4) that “the most regrettable aspect of the energy crisis is its effect upon the agricultural sector. It has placed fertilizer costs beyond the reach of those who need it most. The big increase in oil prices has forced up the costs of mechanization, fertilizer and agricultural chemicals to such an extent that production in poor countries has been adversely affected.”

Rich countries like white South Africa felt the impact too. The late Dr. N. Diederichs, opening the 1977 congress of the Transvaal Agricultural Union, said that in the three previous years the price index of farming requisites had risen 60%, while agricultural produce prices had gone up only 36%. For this reason, he said, 10 000 farmers had left the land since 1970.

Only a few weeks ago Mr. C. Cilliers, Director of the S.A. Agricultural Union, complained that although the past ten years had been described as a Golden Decade for Agriculture, farmers found themselves in an economic situation where their debt had risen more than R 1 000 million in five years. (5).

This year the National Agricultural Debt rose to R3 250 million. Are we still certain that our agriculture is a success story?

The South African Agricultural Union maintains that all will come right if the farmer is paid a fair price for food – a higher price that will cover his high costs of production, his tractor fuel and fertilizer. Without a higher price for food how can he meet an annual national fertilizer bill of R255 million and annual national fuel bill of R250 million?

But is there no alternative to higher prices for food? Must we continue to base our agricultural progress on expensive and diminishing supplies of finite fossil fuels?

With the 1973 fuel crisis the world woke up to the realization that oil would not be available forever. “But we did not wake up enough”, says Mr. J.J. Bruwer, South Africa’s Director of Agricultural Engineering. Speaking last month at a Veldtrust conference on “Food for Tomorrow” he said: “Ninety-eight per cent of South Africa’s on-farm energy consumption is dependent on imported fuel. Today half a million engines MUST be kept running to ensure our food supply. Petrol is used in the manufacture of fertilizer, insecticides, herbicides, agricultural machinery and other essential farm inputs. It is of the utmost importance that the agricultural sector should be virtually independent of imported petroleum products as quickly as possible.

“To put agriculture in an unassailable position the goal of the national energy strategy for agriculture must be the speedy application of conservation measures and the rapid development of non-conventional energy sources that are ample, available and non depleting. This is the only way to ensure our survival.”

Energy is a new word in our agricultural vocabulary. No longer does the world look upon the profit per hectare as a measure of economic benefit. Today energy input versus energy output is the yardstick (metre stick?) used for profit and loss. Energy is therefore causing an economic revolution.

For American agriculture a number of analyses have become available in recent years.

David Pimental (6) showed that the U.S.A. was using 750 litres of petrol per hectare per year to produce maize, and that the ratio of energy input to energy output had become steadily less favourable from 1940 to 1970. They pointed out that if American techniques were used to feed the world's four billion people, the petroleum required for farm production alone would exhaust the world's reserves in less than 30 years.

M.J. Perlman (7) estimated that the agricultural process in America required 5 calories of energy to produce once calorie of food.

"Yet agriculture is supposed to be a process in which free solar energy is converted into useful food energy to produce an energy surplus," comments Dr. R. Dasmann, former Chief Ecologist at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (8). "Over most of the world, most of the time, it has, for example, so called primitive agriculturists, the Tsembaga people of New Guinea, are said to manage an output of 20 calories of food for every one calorie of energy put into its production (9). In Chinese wet rice agriculture, a yield of 50 calories for every 1-calorie input is obtained (10). However these are labour intensive and not machine intensive ways of growing food.'

So quite apart from the judgements of soil erosion and economics, measurements of energy are exposing the fallacy of the so-called modern agricultural success story.

We have now come full circle back to Msinga and the 2000 AD environment. Msinga cannot buy fertilizer. Msinga cannot buy tractor and petrol to run those tractors. Worst of all Msinga cannot even afford to buy food – not at existing prices and even less at the prices the SAAU is asking be imposed. So if Msinga is to live Msinga must grow food to feed itself. The outlook is far from promising, but let's take a look at Msinga's resources.

There is the sun. The only known form of energy which is virtually inexhaustible.

Then there are plants – green and woody machines for converting solar energy into fuel.

Human labour is another resource – and at Msinga a resource in abundant supply.

There are no problems about the sun. It is there most days – in fact few places in South Africa see it as much as we do.

There are, however problems with plants.

As Mikeal Grut pointed out (11): "Firewood is the most important energy source in Southern Africa in terms of numbers of dependant people as well as in terms of energy released. Yet it is generally ignored in most energy studies."

Msinga's people use wood as their main source of fuel, but some alternative must be found before the hills are chopped out. We can't afford to lose energy converting machines. Nor can we afford to lose the fertilizer factories of the nitrogen-fixing leguminosae family which, free of charge, convert nitrogen into nitrates for plant food. (Nitrogen-fixing bacteria go on strike in the presence of supplied nitrogen – but starved of chemical nitrates they are stimulated to produce their own.).

In 1974 world nitrogen fixation was 237 million tonnes. Of this only 24% was by industrial fixation for fertilizer – the rest was fixed through natural processes (12).

Msinga must look to grass and trees for energy. At its simplest this means plants feed animals, and we are discovering that indigenous plants can feed extremely well. In winter armies of small boys shake the branches of acacia trees and bushes to collect sackfuls of pods as high concentrate protein stockfeed. We also clip and pound acacia branches to make another form of high protein stockfeed. Analyses have shown that our crushed acacia has 16% protein – comparable with Lucerne – and a 46% total digestible nutrient content.

Dung from the feeding animals is the next source of potential energy, because dung (and any other organic matter) – suitably treated can produce methane gas and fertilizer. We are experimenting with bio-energy as a dual solution to Msinga's fuel and fertilizer needs. One day, we hope, there will be a methane gas digester at every kraal.

We are aiming at a plant which will cost no more than R30. Our pilot plant has cost well below this, for it is just four oil drums filled with water, goat and cattle manure. Already we are producing the colourless, odourless flame of methane gas, and the resulting slurry is being applied to vegetable garden as fertilizer.

There is nothing new in what we are doing. All over the world there are larger and smaller plants producing methane for many purposes. It is the poor, however, who need this form of energy most. In 1972 there were 2500 methane digestors in India, and because the technology has proved successful small farmers can now get loans of up to 75% of the initial investment required, with an additional grant of 25% from the Ministry of Agriculture (13). From the Indian digestors we know that 9,2 kg of fresh dung is needed to produce gas for cooking for one person per day. An average medium sized bullock produces 10 kg of dung a day. However any kind of dung will do – and biomass energy is full of interesting equations such as 100 pigs = 1 horsepower.

Our development of methane digestors at Msinga is only one aspect of a programme that is trying to combine manpower, land and solar energy to evolve a system of low capital, organic agriculture.

Because a man will only work and improve his land when he has title to it, we are working with the local chiefs to get security for individual allotments.

Most of the people whom we are working have no ploughing or grazing rights, but half-acres plots on which they have built. Three communities, numbering several hundred families, banded together to dig furrows and pipelines down the mountains to get water close to their homes. They have now formed co-operatives – the annual subscription being 30 days work for the community either digging dams or furrows or fencing the area.

We hope that each man's unit, when fully developed, will include an irrigated field enclosed with wire netting, a cow or milch goats, Lucerne for feed, fruit trees and vegetables, beehives, a methane digester, a fish pond and poultry.

Water has been the vital factor in early developments. Where gravity water has not been available a water wheel, piston pump, and ram pump have been used to make water available.

At this stage a few partly-trained people are partly feeding their families. The results of the few is now drawing far greater numbers of people than we can in fact cope with, with limited staff and resources.

We were warned, when we arrived 3 years ago, that peasant were always resistant to change. However in the words of one co-op chairman, a man of no school but much wisdom: “A shrinking stomach makes for an expanding brain”.

There are many, many problems not the least of them the question of how much land is needed to make a family self sufficient. The answer lies as much in a man’s efficiency as in the soil’s fertility, and for Msinga we certainly have no answer yet.

Non-mechanized agriculture imposes certain physical limits on development. There is a limit to how much land a woman can hoe, a man can dig on his own, a span of oxen can plough. So energy dictates a smaller unit of land for production. However this is a good thing for a heavily-manured fertile patch of land can produce far more than a large field where labour and fertilizer must be inadequately dispersed. In the context of Msinga, where there is a dense population and not much land, the smaller we can go the better.

Livestock are a problem – not because there are too many (we are inclined to the view of the late Professor Roux that the African Reserves are understocked but badly managed) – but because people do not own enough animals to get the manure they need to make our system work.

Whatever the problems, we believe we are on the right track. There is no other way the Msinga’s of Africa – and there are many –can develop economically – and more important, ecologically.

The potential of solar-powered organic agriculture was confirmed time and again at a recent American conference on “Agriculture and Energy”(14).

The following summed up the philosophy that lies behind the work we are attempting at Msinga:

“The first law of nature is that survival for any species whether it is a plant, animal or micro-organism, is dependent on needs, the availability of what is needed and certain mortality factors. If we examine our current food system we find that it contravenes this law at every stage. We are producing many things we do not need. The system is based on non-renewable resources, and some of the technologies that we employ are lethal or sublethal – e.g. injuries by machinery and poisoning by toxic chemicals. The implication for policy makers is that they should support efforts to distinguish between real needs and manipulated wants and establish a safe food system based on renewable resources.”

The second law is that relationships are cyclical. Modern agriculture is characterized by linear nutrient flows. Thus, we produce fertilizer to feed plants, to feed animals, to feed people, to pollute rivers. It is essential that we abandon this practice and develop cyclical systems e.g. return natural organic waste to the land as fertilizer.”

The third law is that all natural ecosystems become more complex with time. Complex systems develop naturally by means of energy from the sun. It is ironic that we have developed a food system that is based on simplifying the biological components of the environment by means of a technology of increasing complexity; thus the farmer needs to know less and less about biology and more and more about engineering, chemistry and economics. In trying to keep the agro-system simple, we are essentially using fossil fuel instead of energy from the sun.

The fourth law is that there are various biochemical restraints that apply to all life such that many organic compounds do not exist in living organisms. Consequently the decomposers that break down dead organisms are adapted to a very restricted diet. Thus if organic compounds are produced that have no counterpart in nature, they will not be likely to break down biologically.”

“The laws of nature know no compromise. They are constant, at least within the framework of human history, and the sooner that our species becomes aware of these laws and establishes political, social and economic systems that are consequential upon them, the sooner we will be able to move towards real solutions to our problems.”

And what holds true for Msinga, holds true for South Africa too. But change in our existing methods of using the land will not be easy.

“Farmers, the private sector and other sectors involved in crop and animal production must be guided to understand an energy plan and persuaded to accept it, even though it may bring inconvenience or require sacrifices,” Mr. Bruwer has said with considerable understanding.

But whether we change of our own free will, or have change forced on us by circumstances – it is inevitable that the agriculture of today will be changed.

South Africa has the potential to feed her people on better food at cheaper prices from smaller farms using energy from the sun, wind, water and vegetation. Labour intensive farming would reduce our 2000 000 unemployed. No foreign exchange would be needed for imported tractors, parts and machinery. Animals would be doing the harvest once again...

All in all there could be a drop in the farmers’ costs of production – lower prices for food – a consumer’s dream.

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14. Limitations of the Energy Approach in defining priorities in agriculture, by S.B. Hill and J.A. Ramsey, Agriculture and Energy etc.

MDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 37
WEENEN

SEPTEMBER 1978: MONTHLY REPORT

SICK CASES: 90 sick cases this month mainly diarea, coughs & colds, scabies and chest.

TELEPHONE: There were 15 phone calls made by the local people.

VISITORS: Mr. Len Apfel visited the farm and brought seeds we wanted for the farming community.

MEETINGS: The Annual General Meeting for the CAP directors was held on the 22nd of September. At this meeting there were some representatives from the CAP Farming Co-op.

There were also representatives from Edendale Lay Ecunumical Centre, and a Mr. Sithebe, M.P. for Ladysmith.

These representatives were invited for introduction on CAP so that we may find new people to become directors.

The Sunday Tribune came and have a meeting with the people who had long been applying for the pension but cannot succeed. About 50 people came bring up different complaints.

OFFICE: The month began with no office girls as they had gone. This was a very difficult month in getting on with the whole office work.
Anton's wife assisted a little during this period.

LABOUR:

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Accounting | R 120.00 |
| 1 Farm Manager | 100.00 |
| 1 Office | 10.00 |
| 7 Completing dip | 219.60 |
| 4 New cattle kraal | 75.40 |
| 8 Fencing | 81.60 |
| 6 Weir at the river | 68.30 |
| 9 Clearing for Houses | 160.80 |
| 5 Top farm | 180.00 |
| 3 Vegetable Garden | 78.00 |
| 2 Tractor drivers | 110.00 |
| 2 School teachers | 60.00 |
| 1 Chairman's fee | 14.00 |
| 1 Small farmer's Work | 30.00 |
| 4 Cattle & Goats herd | <u>111.00</u> |
| 55 | |
| Cash wages | R 1418.70 |
| Manager's Salary | <u>244.19</u> not drawn |
| | <u>R 1662.89</u> |

By: A.S. Hlongwane

CATTLE REPORT: by Mhlongo

95 cattle are being herded. 3 calves died of lumpskin.
1 stolen animal was recovered but 5 are still lost.

GOATS: 90 goats were herded by the school boys and Mhlongo is still looking after 5.

SCHOOL REPORT:

Antonia was paid after a delay of 7 months.

A meeting was held with the parents on the 12th September. We decided to restrict attendance to those children (about 50) who have been learning and working regularly throughout weekends and holidays, as for a long time school has been disrupted by parents taking children out of school to run errands whenever it suits them.

Mr. Dlomo, the Education Minister, wrote us and suggested that we work as a conventional Bantu Education School in the mornings and do our own syllabus and practical work in the afternoons. As this solution is unacceptable to us, and we have had nothing but opposition from the Dept, we have decided to cut ties with the department and become a private learning center instead of a government school. This will enable our educational programme to develop more freely.

We will however maintain contact with Mr. Dlomo and keep him informed about developments.

One of the older boys was caught stealing food and Senzaluphi and his gang were beaten by the police for trespassing onto a neighbouring farm.

All the children involved come from poor broken homes, so it takes a long time to turn them into creative responsible people.

As the school garden is on the edge of Mashunka village, we have had a lot of trouble from Mashunka people stealing our vegetables and letting their goats in. So we have started a new garden in a place where it can be closely guarded, and will use the old one for fodder and willows.

Shaka's day was not taken as a holiday, as in other schools in KwaZulu, but we had a dance in traditional dress and children heard the story of Shaka for the first time.

Our first book, Mboma's autobiography, in English and Zulu illustrated by him and his friends, is nearly ready, and a second, Senzaluphi's autobiography has been started.

TOP FARM: By Norman

Farm is now open and a meeting of most of the men who are interested to hear what the farm's policy is has taken place.

The meeting was opened by Mtabela and led by Majozi, with decisions on cattle and irrigable land being taken.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: By Z. Mthabela

The seeds arrived and supplied to members of the Small farmers. Planting has started.

At Sahlumbe, people are doing furrows, removing stones as well as fencing their gardens.

Same with Msusampi, Zenwaye on top. There was a meeting held on the 30 of September, 33 people involved at the scheme at the moment and have all started the work, preparing gardens and planting.

With the good rain we are getting there should be a good progress this year

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OCTOBER 1978: A HORRIBLE MONTH

There is a case for censorship of private mail – at least at Msinga where death threats are delivered with a 4c stamp. If we had been opening and checking all the letters that spill out of the weekly bag, we could have stopped a scruffy little note that has disrupted our work.

It was addressed to Mphephethi Masondo, who is always a postbag watcher, sifting hopefully for circulars and letters, trying to grab the newspaper first. He reached out eagerly for the pale blue envelope.

“Masondo, your health,” he read inside. “We heard you chased away Nomusa therefore we inform you that we will come to visit you.

You make yourself an induna We know where you stay. Use up all your money which is in the company what is over leave to your heirs because we are coming. You are a baboon and you play with a monkey. We are coming in October no matter what. We will remove you. We are the ones you know. We come.”

Neil would have laughed if Mphephethi had not been so drawn and shaken.

“You always choke us off because we won’t take responsibility,” Mphephethi said bitterly. “Now you see what happens when we try.”

Not that he had sacked Nomusa “that bandy-legged little floozy” as Mhlongo calls her. Mphephethi had been just one of a group of senior staff who had called in the two girl clerks to say they weren’t doing enough and their work had better improve. Whoever would have guessed that could be a dangerous thing to do? One month later, with a wrecked administration, the moral seems quite clear: pay your staff and don’t complain. Not even if they pilfer, run up a R50 telephone bill on your private ‘phone while you’re away from home, use your address list for appeals of their own, arrive late, leave early, and do very little in between.

Tumani Ngxongo joined us a year ago, a tall quiet girl with tremendous charm. We trusted her instantly. She was just the sort of person we needed to have permanently, but right from the start she made it clear her ambition was to be a nurse. She would stay only until she could find an opening in a training hospital.

So she said she would be leaving in January ... then March.... then June... then November.... Each delay pleased us, however, for she was nice to have around.

Nomusa Thabethe was taken on as her understudy in January but within weeks it was obvious she wouldn’t make the grade. She couldn’t cope with simple clerical tasks – she couldn’t even run errands.

So why did she stay so long? Because the Farm Committee hoped a warning would put her right. Then her father died and we had to give her time to get over that. Then the Farm Committee gave another warning, because with Msinga’s talk of vengeance, no sacking is every lightly undertaken. Finally in September she was told she had to go.

Soon afterwards Tumani disappeared. She told Sherrell she was going to a court case. She told her roommate Bathulise she was going because she had been robbed of her salary (she'd been made to repay a long outstanding loan.). She told friends in town Neil had kicked her out. She told her father she was afraid of Anton Hlongwane, the bookkeeper... we were away so she never told us anything at all.

When she did not reappear after a few days Neil became concerned. "Send for her father," said Mhlongo. "He's a wonderful old man and he will tell you what's going on." In fact Mhlongo delivered the message himself.

A rather odd note came in the post in reply. "Now, there is something which I want to speak to you, but not at this moment. I will attempt to phone to you soon next time. Bye from Alfred Ngxongo" It was in Tumani's handwriting. Don't call me, I'll call you? The girl had gone, and whatever the reason, we were too busy to push the matter further.

Then the death threat arrived. "Whoever wrote it, only wants to frighten you," Neil told Mphephethi. "Don't let them." But Mphephethi was plainly terrified and ready to bolt for a safer neighbourhood. Neil promised to see what action could be taken through the Chief and the Police.

"These threats of death are common now," said the Chief. "Everybody sends them. Everybody gets them. Usually you get a drawing only. On one page there is a revolver spitting bullets, and on the other side a person with bullets going into him. Most of the letters are just sent to frighten you, but of course sometimes somebody really does get killed. The trouble is, you never know which kind your case is going to be."

"Everybody get these threats," confirmed the black policemen when they came to take a statement from Mphephethi. "Nothing can be done about it." However they agreed it might be a good idea to go and fetch the two girls for questioning in connection with missing telephone money. Chasing up petty theft is seldom worth the trouble, but we felt it might be time to show threat could be a two-way trade.

As the police were leaving however, Malinga, the detective in charge, took us aside to say quietly: "There is a bit of difficulty in this case. You see one of the girls is currently the lover of Constable Maysela there."

Yes... Well ...

There was nothing more we could do for the time being, for we have a meeting away from home that weekend. We just hoped trouble would simmer until we came back.

And what a weekend it was! On Saturday Nomusa was seen near the farm gate. Panic took hold. Mphephethi and his family abandoned home and went into hiding. Norman came off the top of the mountain to stand guard duty with a gun. Mhlongo fired shots into the air to warn off intruders. (And when Bathulise heard them she wisely crawled under her bed). Asked to help guard farm property from imminent attack, a visiting white refused saying "White and black look the same in the dark". He wasn't going to be the target of

Mphephethi's assassins! Kathy summoned the police, who said they were too busy with a murder at Sahlumbe and another at Tugela Ferry. And then Michael and Dora Mabaso joined Mphephethi in hiding, because as the locals explained helpfully, death threats were seldom sent to the victim. They were sent to somebody close to him to take attention from their real target....

Panic is contagious so Neil was unsympathetic.

"Make up your minds," he told everybody. "Stay if you want to stay, and get on with your work. Otherwise push off now." There was still unhappiness but things settled down. Then Anton Hlongwane, the bookkeeper, returned from leave.

"Gosh Hlongwane, what are you doing here?" Mhlongo asked in mock amazement as Anton and his family stopped at their front door.

"What do you mean?" said Anton.

"Haven't you heard?" said Mhlongo with relish, launching into the tale of the anonymous note. "These people at Msinga have long memories. They never forget when you've been fiddling around with their daughters."

Anton didn't even unpack. He got back into his truck and drove 100 km where he telephoned from a call box, his voice trembling.

"Oh for heaven's sake, what makes you think anybody is after you?"

Neil said wearily. "Come back or stay away. I don't care. Just make up your mind soon. I am tired of all this nonsense."

Mhlongo was penitent. "I was only pulling Anton's leg," he said.

"How could I know he'd take me seriously? Hell, if you got killed for fiddling around with the girls I'd have been a dead man years ago. I've had lots of death threats in my time, but I'm still alive. Nobody's got me yet."

But Anton has a nervous disposition, and he has a philandering past, and the combination of the two has made him crack.

From 100 km away he begged "Can't I stay here and do the books from here?"

"And leave us to do the real work running the office?" Neil retorted.

However he relented when a jittery Anton arrived to put things in order, more or less. He grabbed his belongings, his salary, and some of the accounts.

"We'll see how it goes," Neil conceded irritably.

But a week ago Anton telephoned again. He had been to a doctor who said he had high blood pressure brought about by tension.

"I feel just the way I did that other time," said Anton. That other time he had had a nervous breakdown, suddenly sent home from school, a bright student transformed into a halfwit. For a year he had herded cattle. Then he had started to do odd jobs in the office.

Slowly and painfully he learnt how to handle the books, and for eight years he had been our bookkeeper.

"Drop everything until you're feeling better," Neil said, more kindly this time.

We are only appreciating the work Anton has done now that he is no longer here.

“Advertise” said somebody. Advertise what? A low-paid job in rough conditions? No black with any education works in a rural area, not if he can help it, not unless the money’s really tempting.

So here we are without a bookkeeper, without a clerk, without a typist – and scores of people queuing at the office everyday.

Can they have seed, wire, and advice? This woman is badly burnt. This man needs a lawyer. There is no other telephone – can we ‘phone a message, send a wire? In this valley of many thousands, our office serves as clinic, farmers co-op and advice bureau. If the office is shut, people just come to our front door. To fill the gap until (if ...?) we can find staff, Kathy is tearing herself in two doing the school and the administration, the accounts, the first aid, the

As we said, panic is contagious. When Anton fled, Mphephethi’s terror flared again.

“Why have the Police done nothing?” he begged.

“Why have the Police done nothing?” Neil enquired. Nomusa apparently couldn’t be found. If it was any comfort, she was on the run. Tumani would be fetched any day now.

Neil was on business in Weenen when the police beckoned him to the police station.

“We’ve got her,” said the young white constable. “And we’ve brought her father too.” He led the way to the back, where the girl had been dragged like a criminal to have her fingerprints taken.

“Oh no ...” Neil was anguished. “I told you I was laying no charge and just wanted the girl for questioning.” He is still trying to rid himself of feelings of distaste for the whole miserable affair.

That day he sorted things out with police, and on a bench in the sun calmed the weeping girls and talked quietly with her father.

“Why did you run away?” he asked.

“Because I have enemies down there who want to kill me,” she said.

Story Number Five.

“Why did you send this letter?” he asked Mr. Alfred Ngxongo.

“I know nothing of that letter,” said the old man. He WAS a fine old man, and he was stiff with anger that his daughter had been accused of pocketing money that was not hers. Eventually he agreed to return to the farm with Tumani to see the farm records and resolve the matter.

“There, that will please you,” he said gently to his daughter.

“Now you can clear your name.” Tumani did not answer.

For of course her father was to discover that she HAD taken the telephone money. Our records might be less than efficient, but the discrepancies were very obvious.

“I have never done a dishonest thing in my life,” Mr. Ngxongo said painfully, ignoring his daughter. “I shall see that she repays every cent she stole.”

So much for that episode. We are sorry about the ugliness, the broken trust, and we still miss Tumani and wish things hadn’t gone wrong.

Losing our administration was just the start of a bad month. Sweliswe Dhladhla our best builder, collapsed with serious TB. An unknown Indian in a red lorry reaped our basket willows and disappeared.

No basket industry this year. The waterwheel broke a part, and waiting for a spare we carted buckets for a fortnight.

Quarrels broke out at Msusampi where new gardens are appearing every week. Captain Mbele is in charge of allocating land so he was as surprised as everyone else when a fence appeared across a right of way. He pulled it down. Up it went again. Down it came my grandfathers and great grandfathers,” she said. “It belongs to everyone. If I want to put a fence round the land of my ancestors nobody can stop me.”

“The only land your ancestors ever knew was those holes they dug for the mines in Goli,” said Mbele angrily. “That’s where they lived and worked. You can put a fence around those mines if you want to, but you put no fences here without my permission.”

The month has dragged interminably, dragging us with it, weary and dispirited – slapping at plagues of ants, flies and mosquitoes.

NEIL AND CREINA

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NOVEMBER 1978: OUR MEN GET THEIR MAN

Three times the man walked all the way from Mahlangane stream, bringing us new information. And three times Majozi waited at the Mahlangane dip, watching hundreds of thin cattle lurch through the water.

“No good,” he reported each time. “Not today.”

So for four months our cattle grazed in the Mahlangane bush, and although we knew they were there we did nothing to reclaim them.

Collecting the cattle was easy – collecting the thief was not.

“The man who has your cattle is Mangaphi Dladla, who also goes by the name Badagweti,” our informant told us. He had come on behalf of a community sick and tired of stock theft, sick and tired of Dladla.

They’d kill him themselves, except that he only went out at night, and then with a gun.

Everybody knew he’d been stealing again when he bought three spleens from people who were slaughtering cattle for a party. You only buy spleens if you are dodging the law.

Dladla took his spleens to the Stock Inspector as evidence that some of his animals had died. He said he had bought new ones to take their place. The Stock Inspector made the necessary changes in the official records and was not surprised when Dladla drove new cattle to the dip. OUR cattle.

“The trouble is,” said our informant, “Dladla doesn’t put your animals in his kraal. He lets them graze nearby where they could be anybody’s cattle. If you are going to catch him you must catch him at the dip. But don’t send a stranger. The thieves always send some body ahead to see if there are strangers at the dip. Get a person who comes from Mahlangane, and if he follows a certain ravine he can get close to the dip before he is seen...”

We told nobody the news – nobody except Mhlongo of course, our private detective.

“Is my cow there?” he asked at once. “And the calf? Let’s go.

What are we waiting for?”

“Ah ah,” said Neil. “We can’t do it that way. We want to discover all the men involved in the stock theft. We’ll have to plan the thing.

You’ll have to be patient.”

“But my cow,” pleaded Mhlongo. “They’ll eat my cow before we get there. We must save my cow.”

The lament rang in our ears during the slow weeks of hatching plots.

“To think my cow is being milked by that mother’s afterbirth,”

Mhlongo cried. “The calf was not even born when my cow was taken,” he reminded us for the umpteenth time. “They’ll eat my cow before we get there.”

A waiting game doesn’t suit his style. He had to content himself by keeping close to that Zwane who works for us, becoming suddenly his closest confidante and friend.

“I’m watching to be sure he comes to work every day,” said Mhlongo.

Ever since the cattle had disappeared, Zwane has been Suspect Number 1. Admittedly the evidence is only circumstantial, but what clues we have certainly point his way. Finding that the cattle were now with a man called Dladla did not prove Zwane innocent – instead it seemed to confirm the stock thieves were a team.

We were still busy organizing the assault on the dip when Zwane, of all people, arrived at work one day with a secret message. Our cattle had been seen.

“The whole world knows now,” Mhlongo cried in anguish. But he was wrong. A drunk woman tottering through the Mahlangane bush had recognized our cattle and she had passed the news to the Tribal Policeman, and he has passed the news to Zwane, who happens to live next-door.

Zwane dutifully delivered the message – and then immediately asked for the afternoon off. He had to be court the next day, he said, and he needed the afternoon to prepare his things. “We’ve got him,” chortled Mhlongo. “We’ve got him. He’s going to warn Dladla. Court case! There’s no court case!” But our great detective had miscalculated. There was a case, and Zwane attended it.

“Well what was he doing all afternoon.” Said Mhlongo, unwilling to find his suspect innocent. “What man needs to get his things ready all afternoon?”

And it is an interesting thing that from that day our cattle never reappeared at the Mahlangane dip. Which is why Neil wandered down to Mhlongo at milking time one thundery evening at the end of the month.

“Tomorrow at 2 a.m.” he said. Mhlongo beamed. About bloody time.

There were four in the raiding party – Neil, Norman, Delanie and Mhlongo. And our informant agreed to go too, part of the way, for the place was hard to find.

They went by truck as far as they could, bouncing on the stony cattle tracks that converge on that famous dip. Then they continued on foot, slipping down eroded gullies, sliding on loose stones in the dark.

The guide turned uphill, climbing above a gorge with the far-away sound of falling water. As it began to get light they stopped for a rest, looking out onto two columns of water slashing 30 metres down a precipice. Mahlangane’s waterfall drowned their voices.

They had walked for two hours before the guide signaled they must stop. They were in a dense shrubbery on the top of a mountain and the sky was bright with the promise of the sun. The guide was anxious.

He was an Mthembu in enemy territory. The sooner he was gone the better.

“I want the whites to stay here,” he whispered. “And Mhlongo because he is so loud. I’ll take Delanie because he is not known.” He returned a little later to show which way the rest should follow, and bolted.

In the struggle of that overgrown shrub nobody could ever have found the kraal without help. Bush lapped at its doors, and you could pass within metres without knowing it was there. Or you could creep right up to it without being observed! Stooping away from scratching branches the men approached as quietly as they could. Mhlongo was the first to peer over the kraal wall, and he turned rejoicing, hands clasped above his head in a gesture of victory.

“My cow. My cow is there. It’s there. We’ve got it,” he whispered. Then he marched forward and in his normal roar said: “Ekhaya! Anybody at home?”

Two little girls had been milking the cow and they stopped and came to the gate to gaze at the strangers. A woman came out of a hut, calling to a man inside.

“All right, all right,” they heard him grumble. “I’m just getting dressed,” and at last Dladla emerged, bleary-eyed and sleepy.

“I’ve come for my cattle.” Accounced Mhlongo without preliminaries.

”Well what did you come here for?” replied Dladla.

“What did I come here for?” screeched Mhlongo in a rage. “A bloody thief stole my cattle and now he asks me what I’ve come for. Whose cattle are those in your kraal?”

“Mine.”

“Liar. They’re mine. Where did you get them?”

“I bought them.”

“Listen here,” bellowed Mhlongo. “Do you know for the past three months you have been condemned to death and this white man saved you because he said he wanted to catch you in possession of his cattle. If it hadn’t been for him the locals would have killed you because you won’t leave their goats alone.” (Neil listened with interest).

“Kill me?” Dladla looked unhappy.

“Go to any kraal around here and ask,” said Mhlongo. “See if this white man didn’t save you. And now I suggest you stick close to the white man because I don’t think I will be able to control myself.

Wouldn’t you kill any swine who turned fat cattle into things like that? They haven’t been dipped. That one has a sore eye that hasn’t been treated. Look at the calf. It wasn’t even born when you stole it. Now it’s half the size of a cow. Get your things brother.

You’re going a long way.”

Mhlongo’s abuse flowed on as the prisoner dressed, rounded up the cattle and helped drive them back towards Mdukatshani. At the crest of the gorge Mhlongo stopped.

“Numzaan and Norman had better go and fetch the truck,” he said.

“If we take the cattle down here there is a short cut home.”

“Where’s the truck?” asked the prisoner, suddenly troubled. “At the dip? But the white man will never find the way to the dip. I’d better go with them so they don’t get lost.

Mhlongo cackled: “No you don’t. You’re coming with me.”

Very agitated Dladla stood closer to Neil.

“Please boss, I must go with you,” he said. “This man here has evil eyes. As soon as you are gone he will kill me. Look! He’s looking at me now!” Ha Ha Ha. Everyone fell about laughing.

Delanie sat on a rock and clutched his head in mirth. Mhlongo rolled his evil eyes.

“He won’t kill you,” Neil assured Dladla. “Dead you’re no use to us.

We still have to get a lot of information out of you.”

“Aaagh hurry up,” said Mhlongo impatiently. “We’re wasting time.”

Dladla followed the cattle down the hill like a man going to his doom.

Neil and Norman had not gone far when they fell in with a group of men on their way to plough. Greetings were exchanged.

“What are you doing here?” asked somebody.

“We came to get our cattle that were stolen by one of your people.”

“Who was it? That short ugly man who lives on the top of the mountain?”

“Did you get your cattle?”

“Did you kill him?”

Neil answered the rush of questions. “We’re making him drive the cattle back to our farm,” he added.

“You mean he’s away from home?” There was a whoop.

“Dladla’s away from his gun. Leave the cattle to the umfaans! Let’s go and finish him off!”

“Hey hey,” said Neil, “We haven’t finished with him yet. We want further information.”

“Well do us a favour,” said one of the men. “When you’ve finished with him make a mistake. Kill him. If you knew the goats he’s taken....”

“Which way are your cattle going home?”

“Straight down the hill.”

The men laughed. “Dladla won’t get past those Mthembu people at the bottom of the valley. They’ll take him away from your men and kill him. They want him more than we want him!”

And if Mhlongo had not been carrying a revolver, perhaps our prisoner would never have made it back to the farm for at the bottom of the valley angry crowds stopped their passage.

“We’ve been waiting for his man a long time,” said an Mthembu.

The throng pressed closer. Accusations and threats were lost in the growing din. Mhlongo didn’t like the look of things.

“I want to show you all what a good shot I am,” he yelled suddenly.”

“See that little bird sitting on the stone over there...” Nobody was watching as he fired. They had scattered.

“Hell Mhlongo. We’re your friends. Why do you want to frighten us like that?” Mhlongo cackled. He’d made his point. There was no more talk of lynching and they were allowed to pass through.

When Neil arrived some time later with a team of relief drivers, Dladla was in a state of nervous collapse, but Mhlongo had become his friend.

Breakfast was late, and the jubilant raiders and their dejected prisoner had it together, waiting for the police to arrive for the official questioning.

Yes Dladla admitted. He did have convictions for armed robbery and stocktheft. He admitted he had done those things in the past. But jail wasn’t worth it. He had decided to mend his ways and to straight. He had worked to get money to buy our cattle. The Mthembu has sold them cheap – they said they had got them cheap from that Mabokoko (Alcock)

“Ah,” said Mhlongo with relish, turning to Neil. “So you are the sort of white man who gives two people the same animal. I am going to sue you for the cow that you sold to this dog.”

Mhlongo never missed a second of the questioning.

“Noooo! Don’t believe him when he tells you that,” he’d shout an interruption. “Hey you...” and the prisoner would face a grueling cross-examination. Dladla’s story rambled and was full of contradictions – lots of detective work will have to be done before there’s a case for court.

“Don’t let the bloody police bugger it up,” is Mhlongo’s new lament.

He knows he could do the case better than anybody else. There are moments when he almost wished he was still with the SAP!

The day after the raid we passed our guide walking purposefully along the road.

“I couldn’t wait any longer,” he said in relief when he saw us.

“What happened? Everyone’s talking but I don’t know what to believe.

There are so many rumours.”

He stood in the sandy road, a grizzled old man beaming as the story was told. He laughed out aloud when he heard that Mhlongo had seen HIS cow being milked. He laughed again when he heard Mhlongo had had to fire his revolver to keep his prisoner safe.

“The world is a good place to live again,” he said. “That man will lead you to other thieves and other stolen cattle.”

November was a month with its share of bumps, troubles and tensions.

Much more happened than this account of one day. Sometimes one day can make a whole month worthwhile.

NEIL AND CREINA

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DECEMBER 1978 – JANUARY 1978: AN OLD FIELD

It is chewed, tired and tatty, but it is still the veld. A veld created out of 20 000 plant species, mixed and matched by time into 70 great plant patterns that blend one into another to outline the landscape of South Africa. Veld Types we call these patterns and their 75 variations.

Our veld type here along the Tugela River goes by the name of Valley Bushveld, and if you are a botanist that tells you not only that our plant communities are specially varied, but also that we live in one of the most poorly conserved veld types in the country. Valley Bushveld, in fact, is synonymous with “severe deterioration”.

Long ago there used to be red grass growing among the trees on the hot, dry hills. Now there is Blepharis, a monster plant with thorn-tipped flowers and thorn-tipped leaves that claw at your ankles. Blepharis! Sounds like a curse, and we use it as a curse, mopping the blood from our scratches. But God Bless Blepharis.

Wherever its spiked green mats spread across the shale, there a few grasses take root.

We came to Mdukatshani to grow grass. And we started this newsletter to reflect the politics of the occupation of grass growing.

For you cannot grow grass without controversy. Without hazard.

Without tension. Without trust. Growing grass takes more than just a spade and a hosepipe. It takes something of a social upheaval.

However in trying to encompass these complexities in our monthly account, we seem to have obscured our real purpose of being here.

We have not lost sight of our grasses – but perhaps you have.

Four years ago we camped on Mdukatshani for the first time. On our second evening we walked on the old lands near the river, scattering handfuls of Rhodes grass seed. Three weeks later there was rain and we crowded over a mist of green shoots. Then there was sun, and our grasses shriveled and died. But we can show you an odd survivor here and there, if we search diligently.

Of course the farm has good patches, better patches – and bare patches.

If you climb the hills you will eventually reach an area that is so far from water that the cattle never graze there. In winter the grass is so thick it becomes a fire hazard. On the lower slopes, however, Mdukatshani is still Mdukatshani – the place of lost grasses.

When the tent perished and fell down six months ago, it left a bare space to make its site. In six months of summer only one tuft of grass has taken root there, a bristly little carrot seed plant.

There is nothing else to show the progress of the summer.

Three years ago we closed off the track to the hose, but although it occasionally sprouts thin fuzz, the track is still there. As for the field on which we live – is there anything to show that we have been caring for it all this time?

When we arrived we knew at once we were on an old field. There were no rocks – they had long ago been rolled away. There were no big trees, no aloes. They had long ago been cleared. But there was thorn scrub – an even-sized scrub that told us the thorns were recent invaders. And although there was no fence marking the edge of the field, the plants inside and out recorded the boundary as clearly as any fence poles. On the old land were masses of red zinnias, and sparse clumps of carrotseed grass and feathery Chloris – all plants that like the compacted soils of disturbed areas. And next to them, following the line of the old field was a gathering of different grasses, different flowers, and a greater variety, densely packed.

We tried to put dates on our field. When had oxen ploughed the virgin veld on this small patch of flat land at the cliff edge? Was it 20, 50 or 100 years ago? We could not find even the name of the last owner. However, we were able to fix the date the field was abandoned – in 1969, the year the people were removed.

For ten years our field has been left to itself, with nothing to do but cover up its scars. If the botanists and the books are right, and red grass was once the climax grass here, shouldn't there be at least one red grass shoot after such long years of rest?

Eddie Roux would have laughed at that. Laughed and laughed. Before he died he was involved in experiments in the Transvaal, trying to discover how long you had to wait before climax grasses returned to veld that had been ploughed. He waited 40 years without seeing the change, and he estimated that it might be 140 years before the Transvaal's original purple veld returned to abandoned fields.

Eddie remarked: "The anti-evolutionist often says: show me. Change me a tabby cat into a tiger or a housefly into a mosquito. Of course it can't be done. And one of the reasons is that the evolution of species takes a very, very long time. The regeneration of purpleveld on old lands is like the theory of evolution. It cannot be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the sceptic who demands ocular proof."

Msinga is not purpleveld country. Perhaps the red grass here has a different time scale for its return. Natural succession might obliterate all signs of our field in only 50 years. Perhaps... But we doubt it.

Four years ago we set to work to transform this land that had been under the plough. First we fenced it – to keep the goats out and the cattle in at night. We wanted the cattle for their dung – underfoot there was grit and gravel, but little humus or fertility.

The manure piled up nicely, and the dung beetles scurried about, burying it. And we did our bit too, digging shallow furrows until our hands were blistered from the hoe, tossing in manure, covering up with earth. But our soil, we discovered, needs more than just manure. It needs shelter from the sun. Experiments in Weenen County confirm our own observations, - evaporation from bare ground is double that from undisturbed grassland.

We set off for Escourt to fetch a couple of bags of Star grass runners from the research station, and we purchased a sack of Rhodes grass seed, and we planted one and scattered the other.

We were just beginning to admire the results when the harvester termites arrived. Wherever we walked we heard the clickety click of their jaws demolishing our grass.

There were poisons of course, but we didn't like the idea of poisons, and we looked around for a "natural" way of getting rid of harvesters.

An injured guinea fowl temporarily took up residence in our scrub, and convalesced on meals of termites, and an African hoopoe flew in and pecked among the termites too. It was the only hoopoe we had ever seen here, and we wondered if hoopoes had become rare because of the insecticides sprayed about. The hoopoe gave us another reason for avoiding poison.

Instead of poison we bought chickens, hoping they would multiply the good work started by the guineafowl and the hoopoe. The fowls certainly ate the harvesters – but sadly, fowls were not the top predator in our "natural" system. Almost as fast as they ate they were eaten. At night civet cats stuck their heads through the wire netting of the run and neatly beheaded members of our flock. Mongoose probably took a share too. Robert was in the run one day when he saw a mongoose tail exposed under a rock. He made a grab And was still bellowing with pain, rage and surprise when he came nursing his bitten thumb.

Next time he yelled it was to call for a gun. There was a "crocodile" among the eggs. Poor old monitor lizards – they get stoned to death whenever they are sighted in this valley. We gave orders for their protection – and started buying our eggs.

We have not yet resorted to mass termite poisoning, although we must confess we are sorely tempted. Our reduced chicken population finds an undiminished food supply, and we watch helplessly as the termites chop and clear our grass, storing it out of sight somewhere underground. Bare patches spread like mange on our ailing land.

Although the Rhodes grass and the Star grass failed, the old field is still producing its annual blaze of red zinnias, and its annual crop of little carrotseed grasses, and there are some bobbing heads of unpalatable turpentine grass. After rain, at the end of summer, we can expect a sudden knee-high crop of silvery Chloris and fluffy Sporobolus, their delicate flowerheads belying tough and hardy natures. Like all the other grasses near us, they are species that belong to disturbed areas, but one week of Msinga sunshine can shrivel them to nothing.

Heat and termites are punishment enough, but our field also contends with the regular traffic of passersby, and they leave a criss-cross network of short cuts, bare trails that we block as best we can in an unending obstacle race. We tried growing Blepharis as a deterrent but whatever the requirements of this monster prickly plant may be, they are not fulfilled on our field. No Blepharis has survived yet.

After every storm the shiny back of a new rock surfaces somewhere to remind us that without grass, the soil is on the slip. Down on the hill slopes below us terraces have been built to catch the runaway soil – but what we should be doing, is carting it back where it came from.

If the grasses do not reflect our years of caring, the trees do.

A Ziziphus that was knee-high four years ago is now a young tree more than three metres tall, spreading shade. And in four years thorn bushes have become thorn trees so big we can now walk under their branches. Every thorn is an island of shade and fertility, sheltering

fascinating communities of young red ivory, Rhus, Premnas, Ziziphus, precious, precious Transvaal saffronwood, and broad-leaved panicum grasses. Young Pappeas live tucked away on some islands, and already we anticipate their shiny red fruits. Given time we should be living among glades of some of the most beautiful trees of the Valley Bushveld. How much time? We no longer ask.

But time, of course, means money, and while we may have accepted the slow and at times invisible movements of natural succession, those who give us funds are a lot more impatient. In fact they feel the time is long overdue when Mdukatshani's field should be growing a profitable crop. Of course we don't necessarily have to wait for the climax red grass to return before the land is again productive, but we argue that there is no way our depleted soils can now produce an economic crop – and grass growing holds out as little promise of cash in the bank. Rehabilitation is like education – it always shows a loss.

“The cost of protecting land far exceeds the value of land,” Bill Alexander, Managing Engineer of the Department of Water Affairs, said at a meeting we attended recently. “In the long-term we are going to lose the land, although it will be necessary to generations to come. Somehow we must put a value on it.”

Until that happens – our efforts here at grass growing are totally uneconomic.

The limits of the old field have filled the horizon of one member of this partnership over the past few months. An assignment has kept the typist shackled to the periphery of farm happenings, getting no closer to the fights than pouring coffee for the endless stream of people coming for help.

Who were they?

Fathers of the boys who started the killing. They wanted advice. I told them to tell their sons to give themselves up to the police.

Who was she?

Mother of one of those boys who gave themselves up. She says her son has been tortured and has a hole in his leg where he was branded.

Who were they?

Some of the people who have been sleeping in the bush behind Mhlongos because they are afraid they will be attacked at night.

Who was she?

The mother of the little boy who was shot on Sunday. He was only ten and he was trying to run away when they stopped him. They told him to stand up. They were going to shoot him. And he stood up and they shot him.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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FEBRUARY/ MARCH 1979: SPETI DHLADHLA

Speti is dead!

Speti?

Yes, Speti Dhladhla.

Speti Dhladhla is dead?

They shot him now. They killed him.

They shot Speti?

Yes they shot him on the path while he was walking to work.

Now? This morning? They killed Speti? Speti Dhladhla?

Mhlongo was inside when he heard the shot. He ran through the door and on the mountainside opposite saw Speti crumple. Sithole, Gamede and Speti's brother Dan were with him, and they scattered and fled.

But the four men who had been lying in wait behind the bushes on that high, narrow bridle path above the river – they did not run. They were too far away, however, for Mhlongo to see who they were as they filed up the mountain and out of sight.

Speti first came to us in December 1976, one of Goli's unemployed, a retrenched building construction worker.

"Cela umsebenzi?" he asked hopefully.

Sorry. No jobs. No money here, we said. But Speti hung around and lent a hand, collecting cattle, nailing rafters, moving stones.

"I told you, there's no work," Neil reminded him whenever they met.

"Yes, I know. I'm just helping my friends. There's nothing to do at home," he said, and every morning waded the river until he won.

We put him on the payroll.

Speti had never had a permit to work in Johannesburg, but his boss told him he was safe as long as he stayed on the premises. So he became a sort of night watch, sleeping under piles of building material stacked in a corner. When his firm began sacking people because there was no work, his wife was not sorry. She was afraid of Black Power and all those killings in Goli. It was better for Speti to be home, even if there was no money.

Our hearts sank the first time we saw Speti's home, with its sagging roof, and the patchwork fence that kept passing cattle from nudging at the mud walls. ("The cattle were very troublesome," said Speti).

"There is water up there," he pointed at a kloof still lying in shadow. "Perhaps it is too far. Perhaps it is too small. It is a long way for you to walk to have a look ..." Apologizing for the distance, for the rattled track, for the cold, for the ragged line of girls and boys he kept trying to shoo away, he led us to the top of the waterfall.

All of this you may remember, for it was written once before, when we first told the story of Speti. Speti who was always anxious, troubled, apologetic. Too intense to articulate his

thoughts with any fluency, sometimes he stuttered, and sometimes he gabbled. He had no gift for leadership so it was extraordinary that he took the initiative in organizing meetings, organizing work parties to get the Nomoya communal furrow chipped through the rock of that hillside until there was water at most Nomoya homes. Without Speti there would be no water at Nomoya.

Yet when the community elected its leaders, Speti was not among them. Nobody saw him as a leader, least of all Speti himself. But while he did not attend the meetings of the parliament of the people, he went on doing the real work. He set the pace digging, he worried about blockages in the pipes, and he worried about the boys who were always fooling with the taps. Speti was always hunting little boys until he got locks for the taps.

“And now who will see that our dam is filled?” said the old grannies with tears running down their cheeks as we sat together in the hot sun around Speti’s grave.

The police had brought his body back that morning, still wrapped in the bloodstained blanket with which his womenfolk had fetched him from the path where he was gunned down. He was lifted out of the van and laid down in the shade of the only tree near his home, and there he was cleaned with a bowl of brown river water and a worn cake of Sunlight scap. Then the old blue blanket was wrapped about him again, and the women gathered in a circle, in the hot sun. At first we thought there were only women at the burial. But as we walked up from the river, our feet still damp from the crossing, we saw one man, crouching with his back to the tree. The familiar stony valley was absolutely still. Even the children had disappeared.

We joined the crowd kneeling on the grass as the solitary man began to pray:

“Jehovah, who yesterday saw Cain kill his brother Abel for his inach and his farm, today you see the brother of Speti kill him this troubled land. Daily the Philistines kill us, and so we send Speti to our protection. We bury him, your seed, next to the seed he planted yesterday. It is for his children we mourn.

For Speti we do not mourn. No longer does he have to fear the Philistine behind the bush or the bullet in his back as he leaves his hiding place at dawn...”

The prayer went on a long time, and when it stopped each woman murmured a prayer to herself. At last there was silence, and from somewhere the pallbearers appeared – Speti’s brother Dan, and Sithole who had been with Speti when he had died, and Mkomazabantu and two other Dhladhlas. It is not easy to carry a body in a blanket, and they struggled to get their load up and into balance for the short walk to the grave.

The grave had been dug directly below the stonewall of the dam that Speti and the Nomoya women and children had built together. And next to the waiting hole in the ground was the tap which Speti had talled as water bailiff so that he could switch the supply from other pipe to another, sharing the water among all Nomoya’s kraals.

And now we saw the men – crowds of men moving cautiously from door-ways, from thickets, from the shade of trees. Two friends climbed into the grave to take Speti’s body, to lower him gently, to unwrap the old blue blanket and pass it back to the women. Then they built a coffin of sandstone slabs, placed his sleeping mat next to him, and the mourners became a work party, taking turns at the spade, shoveling in earth, fetching rocks to build a border, and putting up a rough headstone with a cross scratched on it.

The funeral was over, and the men went down to the river to strip and splash in the current and cleanse themselves of the touch of death.

“We have wanted to talk to you,” said Nyawose, one of the Sahlumbe project leaders. “But the road has been blocked both ways. Nobody is working on their gardens anymore. How can they? All a man can do is sit at home and sharpen his weapon.”

The women gathered in little knots, still wiping away tears. Would we have tea? Asked Speti’s widow. After Speti had died she had sent her son to fetch Speti’s money so that she could make beer for the gravediggers. Death is expensive, whether or not you buy a coffin.

(“It’s only R13.50,” says Taffy, the Weenen coffin-maker. “Only R13.50 for a pauper’s coffin. But I haven’t sold a coffin to a local in all the years I’ve been here – I have to sell my coffins in town or in the Transkei”.)

Speti’s wage paid for his grave, but that is all. He died still owing R29.90 to the Small Farmers Trust. His families have no pension, no insurance, coming to them. There is just the beginning of Speti’s garden inside the patchwork fence, as well as a crop of waving red grass. Red grass. That grass says as much about Nomoya and the war as the 18 graves that have been dug among the rocks since November. It is a sign that the valley has only recently been crowded.

Speti and his relatives used to live this side of the river, with cattle and fields and grazing grounds. Then came the removals, and they were sent across the Tugela to a place where the red grass was thick. But what use is red grass when you have been forced to sell your cattle, and you have only a tent and four pegs to mark the narrow limits of a plot that is almost too small for poultry?

What use is red grass when it is swallowed by rows and rows of little mud houses?

“I do not even have a goat,” Speti lied when we first knew him.

Later he confessed he had broken the law – he had kept some goats, but they were registered with one of the old residents who had stock rights to those red grass hills.

“I pay him one lamb in four for helping me,” Speti said.

“There would be no war if every man had his garden and his animals,” Speti used to say. “A man does not go to war who has these things.”

The day before Speti was killed he asked for a new stopcock, another length of piping and cement to put between the rocks of the dam.

The day before Speti was killed, Jamloot Nzuza was killed, and Induna Mdlolo and a man Mvelase and S. Kumalo and the death of all of them came very close to us.

The day started as all Mondays do, taking the boys to Weenen for their weekly visit to school. For once we had left home early enough to be ahead of the bus – usually we trail in its dusts all the way to Weenen. If we had been behind the bus that morning we would have been stopped when the bus was stopped by two gunmen standing in the middle of the road. Then 30-armed men came out of the bush and encircled the bus. They knew the man they

wanted Induna Mdlolo – and they dragged him from his seat out onto the road and there they shot him and then they mutilated him.

Before the gunmen disappeared back into the bush they had killed another two, and left a Nomoya man wounded in the hips, and a schoolboy shot through the abdomen.

“There’s no bus,” we were told in Weenen when a crowd of anxious women came begging for a lift, and they piled in the back of the truck until there was scarcely room to breathe.

We were rumbling slowly through the trees along the river road when ahead of us we saw a line of boulders blocking our way. Msinga children often put up “roadblocks”, but the stones are small and you just drive over them. This roadblock, however, was clearly meant for business. It must have taken two men to shift those rocks into position. We stopped, wondering who was hiding in the bush watching us. A man in the back made a move to get out to clear the road. We stopped him. A black would be a target – not a white.

Instead two little white boys were ordered out, and huffing and puffing and complaining loudly they managed to roll the smallest obstacle. The truck squeezed through the opening, tyres scraping boulders on either side.

The farm gate lay two kilometers further on. As we approached we saw clusters of people gathered on the roadside, and an unconscious man lying on a bed.

Minutes before we had reached that roadblock, Jamloot Nzuza, the delivery driver, had been stopped by the same line of rocks. But as he got out of his truck, two men with guns emerged, one on either side of the road. There was a shot and a bullet hit the truck. Jamloot raised his hands and cried: “I am not involved in the war. Please don’t shoot!” The next bullet went through his hip. He leapt back into the driving seat and drove as fast as he could to Mdukatshani. There he collapsed. That night he died in Edendale Hospital.

Before the week was over the farm had become the scene of skirmishes between two armed gangs another roadblock was thrown across the farm road, halfway down our bumpy hill.

“Aagha! Disgusting!” exploded a party of local grannies who encountered the blockage. Loudly they exclaimed their objections to the war being carried onto neutral territory. Highly indignant they hurried to report to us. Their point had been made. As they paused at the bottom of the hill to look back, they saw armed men rolling away the rocks. Meanwhile Duma was waiting at the house, stiff with terror. Michael Mabaso, our manager, was waiting with him.

“We must get him off the farm or he will bring the battle into our yard,” said Michael. The word had gone out that Duma was the next to be killed. He had come to ask if he could leave work early as his womenfolk had come to escort him home.

We were watching Duma down to the ferry when there was a startled exclamation from Michael. “Here they come!” and he ducked. With a sense of disbelief we saw armed men on the riverbank immediately opposite us.

“Hey! Bugger off! There’s to be no fighting here,” yelled Neil.

The men moved into the mabela fields, and waited. We telephoned the police.

Thandizile came running up the hill.

“Please Numzaan, you have chased away the men who were going to take Duma home,” she said. “Please don’t be angry if they come back.”

Duma had reached the boat, and a crowd of women closed around him, like a living shield. They screened him in the boat, and up the beach on the other side. And with the armed men as scouts, Duma was taken home.

It was getting dark when the police arrived, heavily-armed. They were sorry they were late. They had run out of petrol down the road where Nzuza had been ambushed. Could we lend them enough fuel just to get home?

“No,” said Michael firmly. “I don’t give police petrol after hours.”

“We are not out to trap you. We really have run out of petrol,” protested the dusty policemen. “Police traps always say that,” retorted Michael. “If I give you petrol I break the law.”

If Neil had not been around to intervene, the police would have slept in their van on the road that night.

Mdukatshani has become a refugee centre. Mr. Thusi, chairman of the Sahlumbe Co-op has moved his cattle onto the farm.

“Soldiers are always hungry,” he says. “Twice Madondos with guns have passed me in my fields.” Now Thusi’s cattle sleep here - and he sleeps here too. So do many others.

All weekend helicopters cruised among our hills, so low that they rocked the ferryboat in passing. It is quieter, but still we hear gunfire every day.

NEIL AND CREINA

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APRIL 1979: GUN RUNNING?

It was past suppertime when the car stopped on the hill above the house and began hooting. There was no doubt somebody wanted attention. The hooting went on and on in the darkness. At last Neil got a torch and went out into the night. He returned with a towering, broad-shouldered giant. Chief Ngoza. Chief of the Mthembus. We had not met before.

The candles had sputtered to their holders before he left. The Chief had just been served with a banishment order, signed by the State President. He had a week to order his affairs. Then, stripped of office, he had to leave for the Port Shepstone area for five years.

The Chief left all right, but not for Port Shepstone. If anybody knew where he had gone, they were not saying. For three years the Chief disappeared. He had been given no reasons for his banishment. But there was no doubt about the reason for his return. When he disappeared, order disappeared with him. And when he returned a few weeks ago – by official re-appointment – order returned. The killing has stopped. People are working in their gardens once more.

Only a hereditary chief has authority, and a man with Ngoza's strength has authority twofold. He has threatened severe fines for troublemakers – and his threats stick.

"It won't help you to claim you saw nothing, and hear nothing," he has announced. That kind of talk might flummox a white court, but Chief Ngoza knows his people too well to have cases dissolve because witnesses are non-existent.

While our valley has quietened at last, however, the month has been a troubled one for Mdukatshani, and the trouble has centred around Delanie Mbatha – ferry man and model farmer. He was at the farm gate one day when policemen stopped him.

"We want a gun," they said.

"Where is the gun?" asked Delanie.

"They then had a discussion about the white girls at Mdukatshani and asked if they were courted by blacks," Delanie reported later in a signed statement. "I said I had not time to waste and asked again what they wanted. They said they were serious. I must produce the gun. I said I had a pellet gun I could show them."

But that was not the gun they were after. As our staff gathered round protesting furiously, Delanie was loaded into the policevan and taken to Tugela Ferry for questioning. It was a futile exercise.

Delanie has no gun, and said so. Repeatedly.

"Why won't you just say that your white man supplied you with a gun?" said a black policeman at last.

"I am not prepared to lie," answered Delanie.

"All we want you to say is that the white man gave you his gun, and we will go and tell our white man," insisted the police questioner.

"I am not prepared to lie."

“We want you to understand,” said the policeman, “that our white man will not go and tell your white man what you have said. But we will release you and you will have no more problems.”

Delanie said: Lies hurt me and I am not prepared to lie even about a black man.”

When the SAP dropped him back at the farm they warned: We will return.”

Delanie’s statement was typed out and Neil went to Pietermaritzburg to complain to the Chief of Police. Nevertheless, a few weeks later Delanie was arrested again.

“I was milking my cows at home at about six o’clock on Monday morning,” he said in his second statement. “I heard the geese cackle. I looked up and saw the policemen with the white man. I went on milking and they talked to my wife. Then they came to me at the cow kraal. I greeted them. They said: Do you know us? I said: Yes.

They said: “We request to go into your house.’

I said go: ‘Go in’.

They said: ‘We will go in only with you present.’

I said: ‘Wait while I finish milking.’ I finished milking and went into the house.

They said: ‘Light your lamp and unlock your box.” I did as I was told.

They searched the box and the whole house until they had satisfied themselves. The white man and another one went off by themselves to search the garden. We went into the kitchen which they also searched.

They then went with my wife to a third hut. They found nothing, I told them it was getting late and that I should be at work. In reply the one policeman said: ‘Get dressed and let’s go.’

On the way they told me they would put me in jail for three months and no one would be able to visit me or see what they had done to me.”

The van did some traveling on other business before stopping at the farm gate. For four hours the staff had been frantically telephoning around trying to find out what had happened to Delanie. Somebody had even been to see the police at Tugela Ferry. It was a relief to see the van with Delanie in the back. It just so happened that we had a lawyer visiting us that day and he was in on the haggle for Delanie’s release. This is the way he wrote his statement describing what followed:

“What is Delanie charged with?”

“Suspicion of firearms,” said the young white policeman. “We’re holding him for 90 days in detention without bringing formal charges.”

“Under what authority?”

“Ag man there are so many to choose from. Let me just say the proclamation.”

“What proclamation?”

“Proclamation 103 of 1973. Or maybe the Criminal Laws Amendment Act.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“Because he’s got a gun. That’s why. He won’t turn it over. When we lock him up in detention he starts to think. Then he’ll turn it over.”

“How do you know he has one?”

“I just know.”

“If you are so sure why don’t you charge him and get him convicted?”

“Because I can’t prove it.”

“Then how are you so sure?”

“I am. Listen see, you telling me how to do my job? When we do the interrogation we’ll know. When you have been interrogation for as long as I have you know how it is going.”

“Why are you so sure now though?”

“We have had reports.”

“Can you tell me the sources?”

“No.”

“Do you know there are people who have a grudge against Delanie and might make false reports?”

“Oh yeah? Why should anybody do that?”

“Because he operates a ferry across the river and charges ten cents toll. Because he has a better garden than anyone else. Because he has got his life together and is making a little money when no one else is.”

“Maybe that’s why he needs a gun.” (Score one for the bad guys!)

“Look, we know him. He has already been arrested by you people, three weeks ago, on the same charge, and was released the same day.”

Sheepish silence.

Ask the black policeman with you. He was here last time. We organize him.”

All eyes turn to the black with a downcast look. Still no comment from the interrogator.

“Suppose you are wrong and he doesn’t have a gun?”

“We are never wrong. Everyone we have picked up in this way has turned over a gun, except two. They are still sitting in there and we are waiting for them.”

.....!

“I tell you, you are wrong this time. Suppose he sits there for 90 days and you release him – instead of holding him for another 90 days as you might do. Then he comes home to a ruined garden and three months lost earnings. Are you going to replace that? When we met him he was living in a cave-eating ants. Now he’s better and getting somewhere. You are going to put him back in the cave if you are wrong.”

“Don’t worry. He has a gun and he’ll turn it over. Then I’ll release him.”

“Can we see him?”

“No.”

“Can his wife see him?”

“No.”

“Where is he going to be held?”

“I don’t have to tell you that.”

”Who is going to interrogate him?”

“I am. No one does my work for me.”

“How much experience have you had at this?”

“One year. (Sorry son – the right answer that time is: I don’t have to tell you!)

“Let me tell you, that when he comes out, if there has been any mistreatment we are going to bring action. We have lawyers.”

“Don’t worry. I don’t beat my prisoners. He’ll be seen by a magistrate every day and can make a report.”

“Every day?”

“Well every fourteenth day.”

End of interview. We followed him to the van.

“Remember. We’ve already talked to your superiors about this. And we’ll be talking to our lawyers and the press.”

Suddenly – why? The policeman says: “Suppose we make a deal. I’ll release him and you tell him to hand over the gun.”

”But he doesn’t have a gun.”

“You see how reasonable I am.”

We came up to the van. Delanie was sitting there.

“Ok. You can go.”

What happened? Who was playing who for a fool? Who scared whom?

Was it all just a game? We know the names of most of the district’s gun owners. Delanie owns no gun. Why Delanie? Because of his history of mental instability? Because he might therefore break?

“People are envious of him because he has become too rich with his farm,” says the valley.

The day of Delanie’s second arrest we made the front page lead story of TEMPO, a small Natal Afrikaans newspaper, circulation 3 000.

The article went on to insinuate that the trouble at Msinga was linked to our presence – that our expensive German car might have been paid for with guns. We boiled with rage – and dismay. It was so very ugly. And we had been politeness itself to the nervous and unsteady-on-his-legs reporter who had come to call, trying to get us to say that violence had spread into white farming areas and whites lived in terror of their lives.

“But we don’t. We are quite safe,” we told him. “Ask our white neighbours.” He used our telephone to interview them. They laughed too. Would they let their womenfolk drive to Tugela Ferry unarmed? Of course. Sorry. No story. Or so we thought until we were told about the TEMPO piece.

“It’s libelous,” said our lawyer. In a funny way, that was a comfort! We lodged a complaint with the Newspaper Press Council.

We also lodged complaints – and statements – with the Chief of Police over the Delanie business. Two Colonels came to call.

They assured us they had no interest in our activities, and knew nothing of the arrest of Delanie. But they would investigate.

And from the glint in the officers’ eyes we felt almost sorry for that young white policeman down at Tugela Ferry.

Looking at the month we wonder if it was just a coincidence that Delanie’s arrest occurred at the same time the local police were asked to comment upon memoranda which we had sent to the Minister of Police and the Minister of Plural Relations (or whatever it is).

The memos laid complaints about police inefficiency – complaints which had previously been made direct to local official, but without response. The memos also described areas of friction at Msinga and predicted trouble unless action was taken immediately.

The documents were sent forward before the killing started.

Is a troublemaker the only person who can see trouble coming?

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI MONTHLY REPORT MAY 1979

1. ADMINISTRATION AND OFFICE

New Structure There was a meeting of the interim Local Directors on the 7th and the constitutional proposal of Grice and Neil were considered. Following on from this, a sub-committee consisting of Neil, Mthabela and Cheryl, met with Grice on the 12th and drew up a provisional three-tier structure for CAP (Trustees, Directors and Local Board of Directors). This has still to be confirmed by both the present Directors and the Local Directors. We hope that this can be finalized in time for the AGM in August.

Staff: There were 63 adults on the payroll at the end of the month and the total wage bill came to R1816.90. A new member of staff arrived on the 12th, Thami Kuzwayo a friend of Jotham. His wage is being paid for out of the Oxfam school grant and he will be involved mainly in education work.

Finances: The position is still worrying, especially as we watch the price of petrol. The workshops are getting underway and require quite a lot of initial outlay; our vehicles are proving increasingly costly to run; wages are more and more inadequate. Mealie meal has gone up by R2 a sack; for most people that is their only staple and so we decided that we had to add a mealie meal bonus of R2 to the bottom wages. All those earning R30 and below qualify; this has added about R80 to our monthly wage bill. We are also in the process of setting up 2 new accounts at the bank, one for the school (Oxfam grant) and the other for the Barefoot University (Giannopoulos grant). This will make bookkeeping easier but deplete the CAP general account considerably. Anglo has decided to switch over to paying us our money in quarterly installments. We thus had a double cheque from them this month to bring their payments up to June. Some good news is that an accountant and friends of Douglas Blaustein has volunteered to come out for about 2 months from June to work with Cap. We can really make use of his services.

Visitors: Two people working for SACHED in Johannesburg came to visit on the long weekend of the 24th – 26th. They were most interested in the educational work being done and planned to write up a story on the Barefoot Schools for 'Learning Post', an educational supplement to Sunday Post. Some people from the Parks Board, Joan Caper saw wildlife movies with them. The films were an enormous success – probably the first filmshow ever in this part of the Tugela Valley.

Trips: Cheryl spent a week in Pietermaritzburg at the beginning of the month, doing some research on the faction fights. A group of students and staff went to the centenary celebrations at Isandlwana on the 25th and heard Dr Koornhof exhort us to all stand together against our common external enemies. A further trip was also organized to coincide with the Comrades Marathons, in which Jotham ran. He finished within the first half of the field and earned himself a bronze medal.

Meetings: The weekly Heads of Departments meeting has taken place regularly though not punctually – most people don't have a watch which makes it difficult to do-ordinate times. There have also been regular finance and education committee meetings.

2. PENSIONS, LEGAL AID ETC.

Pensions Norah visited Sahlumbe on the 29th and 30th to process pension applications and find out about people who have not been receiving their payments.

Legal Aid: We've had four cases on our hands this month. There are two murder charges, each involving several accused and related to the faction fighting of the end of last year. The hearings are continual being remanded and both groups are struggling to raise money for legal representation. The third case concerns the refusal of our applicator for Legal Aid for the 43 Majolas tried and already sentenced for armed assembly. An appeal against the decision, supported by an affidavit from Jantie as the interpreter involve, has been lodged with the Director in Pretoria but it all takes an incredibly long time. The fourth case concerns Workman's Compensation for the family of a young boy killed on a neighbouring farm while driving a tractor.

3. EDUCATION

School: A meeting was held with the local Circuit Inspector, Mr. Mthethwa, KZ Minister of Justice and Mr. Madondo of the Msinga Regional Authority on the 18th and as a result it seems as if the school impasse has finally been broken and the Mdukatshani school will be recognised as an experimental school, financially independent but registered and open to periodical inspection and assessment. A start has been made in revising the structure so that we can begin to pick up the pieces from June.

Barefoot Schools: This is a new and exciting development with enormous potential not only for here but all over in the rural areas. Three informal literacy and learning centers have been set up in Msusampi, Nomoya and MaChwinini to cater for the hundreds of kids who never go to school because they cannot afford it as well as their parents. Attendance has shot up to well over a hundred children in less than a month while a growing number of mothers are coming along too. One or two literate and responsible women in each community are in charge of the 'school' and they are being helped by some of the older Mdukatshani children, to teach basic literacy and numeracy. The idea is that Mdukatshani should serve as a resource center, offering assistance and teaching materials and Kathy, Thami and Norma are involved in developing suitable materials.

Agricultural Course: The course was interrupted this month by a heavy schedule of visitors and outside commitments at the end of the month. The class was working on the construction of an irrigation dam at Sahlumbe which, as well as providing a practical lesson in dam construction for the students, will also help revive the Sahlumbe Co-op after the months of inactivity because of the fighting. Many of the smallholders and their families also attended the filmshow and we hope to be able to have many more similar shows in the future.

Tuesday evening class: Neil has started another class for the English speakers on Mdukatshani staff so that they can also learn about agriculture and the aims of the Project. It meets every Tuesday night. At the moment the class is looking at the different departments and their part in the Project.

Library: Two members of the Provincial Library Service visited – at very short notice – to inspect our premises and see whether a branch library could be established at Mdukatshani. It seems the Guesthouse passed the test and that we will be approved, qualifying for 500 books renewable quarterly.

4. BUILDING

Building continues on Norma's house in the school garden. Hadebe has been building doors out of poles. The 'tent' is in the process of being renovated to serve as an office for Neil. Mbatha has been commissioned to build toilets at each Mdukatshani house and is being paid on a piecework basis.

5. EXPERIMENTAL AND DEMONSTRATION

Experimental Garden: A slurry pond has been built to collect the slurry run-off from the Digester. Now all that is required to complete the cycle is a fishpond. The first of Mhlongo's solar cookers has been installed as well and is being used daily to cook and heat water. Sizane and her team have started to empty the digester so that it can be replastered because of leaks. Once that has been done we will be able to start keeping careful records of input of manure, amount of gas produced etc.

Cherryl will be helping Sizane and the students working in the garden to compile and keep these records. We are also feeding the cows on the first of the milled acacia and hope to be able to demonstrate that acacia can provide a nutritious and cheap animal fodder. As part of his demonstration, the school children have helped mark collected and milled. This will serve as an experimental plot. The terracing on the hillside garden has been extended, several different types of indigenous tree seeds have been planted out in a new nursery section and a hand pump installed on the riverbank to provide water to the plot.

Methane Digester: Masondo and his team have finished building a new-style digester at Robert Mutha's and started building one at Mhlongo's the new design has a pyramid shaped base, tapering into the cone in which the storage drum is fitted, which greatly increases the amount of slurry that can be digested and thus the quantity of gas produced.

Solar Cooker: Mhlongo has made three cookers so far and Norman on the top has cut out the frameworks for several. Mhlongo says he can make one cooker in about a day himself. Total cost would seem to be in the region of R40 which is higher than we would like. The biggest expense is the reflector material which costs R10 a metre at present prices and seems likely to rise in the near future. Each cooker uses a little less than 3 metres of this material. We are investigating the possibility of using cheaper aluminium foil.

Waterwheel: The thatching of the waterwheel workshop has been almost completed. A new wheel has been made to replace the old one which, because of the way the tyre had been bolted onto the central metal plates, had worn badly.

6. TOP FARM

Fencing: A fencing workparty was organized by Majozi and Mbele to get the school garden properly fenced stray goats from Mashunka were eating the Lucerne as fast as it grew. This took place on the 18th. The work was later taken over by some of Mabaso's fencing team to

complete. A stile is still needed between the garden and the river. There has also been some fencing and aloe planting round starlight.

Vehicles: Still no Landrover. The Peugeot and Stout are both running but we are becoming more and more concerned about the huge petrol consumption of Stout.

Msusana Milling: 43 bags of Msusana branches had been milled by the middle of the month. Then the tractor broke down, followed by the mill so that has delayed things. Children are being paid 10cents a bucket of msusana seed collected and we have got about 80 sackfuls of seed in this way.

Stock: Problems with stray goats and donkeys continue. Neil had a meeting with the Mashunka people and their induna on the 17th; everyone agreed to keep their animals under control but nothing has happened to improve the situation.

The serious problem of stocktheft continues. CAP has not suffered any losses itself but we have had numerous reports from local people who are struggling this.

4 calves were born this month, 2 bulls and 2 heifers. A new goat pen has been built for the newborn kids and this month we had the first lot of kids born, sired by the milch goat ram. 28 have been born in all. Some of the horses were brought down from the mountain on the 18th. They have been badly neglected. We want to start training them for riding and draft but it is difficult to get somebody to take proper responsibility for this task.

7. THE CO-OPS

Neil visited all three co-ops and the Machwinini group at least once during the month. The work on the Msusampi, Nomoya and Sahlumbe dams is continuing but all three are experiencing difficulties in getting all co-op members to pull their weight and also in dealing with people who have not joined or contributed anything to the co-ops but are trying to take advantage of the irrigation schemes.

The Chairman and some Committee members from the various co-ops was Chief Ngoza in connection with these problems on the 22nd. He supports the projects and has promised to help in sorting out these difficulties. Neil also visited Chief Smakade to discuss the co-op developments on the Top farm and also the problem of the Makuphula band on the farm border.

8. RAINFALL

73 inches

MDUKATSHANI,
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MAY 1979: MRS. DUMA GETS A BRIDE

“I brought her home on my head,” says MaHlongwana Duma, patting the red doek that covers her balding grey hairs. “I walked all the way with my Makoti. I carried her myself because I loved her. Somebody had to come with me because I needed help getting her over the fences, and then we had to climb down the cliffs to reach the boat. I needed help, but she sat in my lap when we crossed the river, and I myself carried her here in case she was scratched by trees on the way.”

So Msinga’s first solar cooker reached its destination, a glittering tinsel bride that outshines all the other beauties in Msusampi Valley. A bride whose face turns always to the sun.

“But I can’t look Makoti in the face,” says old Mr. Duma, pecking the ground with his stick until he finds a rock where he can lower himself. The radiance of the new bride penetrates his blindness and hurts his eyes. “But she cooks for me,” he says.

“Beans, putu, melons, meat, tea...” MaHlongwana ticks off the meals that have been cooked on sunshine. “Hey!” she interrupts to shout at a passerby. “Don’t go too close to my Makoti. Have you no respect?” The offending matron giggles, but nudges closer anyway, taking the lid off the kettle to watch steam rising. MaHlongwana giggles too. She is used to the lid being lifted off her pot. It’s what you must expect when you cook on fresh air.

“People come by the hundred to look at my reflection,” she reports.

Although it is a cloudy day, the silver disc is dazzling next to the two shabby huts with sagging thatch.

“My husband has anew Makoti, a lovely new Makoti to do the work for me,” MaHlongwana chanted when she was introduced to the wonder machine. The ageing wife always encourages her husband to marry again when household chores become a burden. Makoti. Bride. The solar cooker is stuck with its Zulu name.

“She’s a wonderful ntombi, this girls of mine,” goes on MaHlongwane.

“When it is wet she takes a day off, but why should I complain when all the other days she works so well for me? Now that it is winter I make a small fire in the house when I wake up in the morning. But it is just a fire to keep warm. As soon as the sun comes over the mountain my Makoti is ready to make breakfast. Yes, at night the food is cold, but there’s nothing we can do about it. We eat it cold.”

MaHlongwana was one of the grannies who brought up the rear in the memorable days of The Great Dig.

“We are too old to dig,” she explained when we met her in the turned earth of the new Msusampi Furrow, “but we blow up the stones that are too big for the men.” And there in the ditch lay the evidence of Zulu dynamite, made by stoking fire on ironstone until the rock cracks with heat.

MaHlongwana was selected as guineapig for the solar cooker because of her pioneering spirit. But better still – she was decrepit. Too decrepit to swing an axe anymore, her woodpile

was always a scruffy hump of twigs and small branches – the bits and pieces others had dropped. Feeble arms made MaHlongwana ideally qualified to be a solar cook.

The day Neville Tully and Alan Lawrence of Natal University arrived with their shiny reflector; there was a buzz of wonder. Only Norah was disappointed. “One plate?” she asked. What was the use of a stove with one plate? Which just goes to show the difference between a local and a newcomer from Johannesburg. For local acclaim has established the noiseless, smokeless, fuelless one-plate-only stove as Mdukatshani’s lead attraction.

The University model was carted over to Mhlongo’s kraal, and MaHlongwana was summoned for daily classes under the tuition of the head of our solar research institute, Mhlongo himself. Mhlongo is a man of many parts and much experience. Not only is he a great detective – he is a great cook too. (And a great performer. Neil came round the corner one day to find an admiring throng at a demonstration of the wonder cooker – Mhlongo dressed for the part in a white chef’s hat!)

“Parktown North, 1947 – that’s where I learnt to cook,” he says.

“First I was a garden boy. Then Mrs. Leslie said I must learn to cook and she put me in the kitchen. There was a Basutho there who didn’t like Zulus. The first day he told me to put bread in the toaster. Then he sent me to the café to buy something. When I came back the house was full of smoke.

“Now look what you’ve done” said the Basutho. I was so afraid I was shaking all over. That’s when I learnt that blacks can’t be trusted to teach blacks.”

Despite his disastrous debut, Mhlongo stayed on in the kitchen until he graduated to cook in a tearoom in Verening, then cook for a rich man in Benoni.

“Roasts, fish, vegetables... Anything. I can cook it,” he says.

“But not cakes. I’m no good at cakes.”

His early tests on the solar cooker have been concerned as much with time as with variety, however, for his home lies below a slanting mountain which throws an early shadow on winter afternoons. Two litres of water, he found, boiled in 20 minutes – but only after 10 a.m. Porridge took ten minutes longer.

“You know when putu is properly cooked,” says Mhlongo, “because when you open the pot it smells like new mealies.” He shuts his eyes in ecstasy and sniffs. “That’s how the solar cooker cooks porridge every time. And beans!” Everyone is marveling at the beans. Because a potful of dry beans takes four or five hours over gas, wood, coal or a primus, beans are extravagant special treat food, even for those of us who are rich. But now beans are a possibility on the common menu of the common man. Simmering on reflected sunshine they are mushy in time for lunch. The slow, gentle heat of the cooker tenderizes old African goat, softens stamp mealies, blends the many juices of stews. Even scones are possible.

“I put a little fat in the pot,” says Mhlongo. “No, they are not vetkoek. They are proper scones. If you use the right amount of fat they just absorb the fat while they are cooking and when they are ready the fat has disappeared. But they don’t get brown on top. You have to cook them between 1 and 2 to make them a little bit brown.”

As Mhlongo reveals new culinary delight cooked on sunshine, so we learn more of our man of many parts. For he is a talented woodcarver, builder and stonemason, and at the moment

he is putting these skills together to become Mhlongo, the industrialist. He is setting up a solar cooker factory in his yard. As he completes a section for a new cooker, he stores it on top of the mabela crop that is slung from the roof of his still-to-be-completed workshop. He works in a midi-length leather apron, his revolver jutting on his hip, and he complains loudly that his days are not long enough. He is in charge of the cattle. He has to supervise the horses. He is chasing thieves.

He has to teach those schoolboys how to carve, and he's a fulltime farmer, damn it. How can he ever find time to make stoves as well?

But already he has made four.

We bought the first – placing it near the cliff edge, away from the kitchen because it is such a garish thing. It is best out of sight, even if it means a plod down the path to fetch our meals. Like Mhlongo and MaHlongwana, we are becoming familiar with its wonders and its shortcomings. The day the Cabinet Minister and VIP's came to call, the sky was overcast so the water would not boil. The methane gas had already been used. The Total gas ran out. A borrowed cylinder ran out ... Another borrowed cylinder ran out ...

It took two hours to boil water for tea. If the demonstration showed our solar cooker was not perfect – it showed the alternatives presented problems too! Although the water never boiled for tea, the sun cooked the sweet potatoes for lunch. And the Cabinet Minister ordered a Makoti for himself.

That is the big worry with this innovation of course. Will people want solar cookers?

“Want them?” explodes Mhlongo. “Of course people want them! I have a list waiting. You don't have to watch this stove. You hang up your pot and you go away. The food doesn't burn. The fire doesn't go out because you forgot to put in wood. People will buy when we can give them a price.”

The University calculated the silver disc cost R30. Mhlongo thinks it will eventually cost more. Planks for the frame come from Taffy, the coffin maker. Mhlongo needs R1.40 worth of wood for every frame.

Then there are the screws, the masonite, the metal for the hook ...

“And 280 centimetres of silver.” The reflector material is the real expense.

Even R30 is a fortune for a poor man. Maybe the teachers, the policemen, the clerks will buy the cooker. But they are not the people who need it....

Mhlongo gets impatient when he hears this sort of talk.

“I will sell my Makoti for a she goat,” he says. “Even a poor man can get a goat.”

Mhlongo's Makoti Factory. He guffaws as he thinks about it. That's a good one. A really good one. The joke will keep the district laughing too, relishing the double pun, the double meaning. Already the hills are scattered with women. The Great Lover has wooed, won – and deserted. In their time they have all been Mhlongo's Makoti's too.

By an odd coincidence an article on solar energy surfaced in a box of papers yesterday while we were involved on quite different work.

We stopped to read: “Professor Bleksley of Wits. University attended UNESCO's Aride Zone conference at New Delhi in November. He found that the Indians, for whom the burning of dung gas fuel is a problem even graver than ours, have evolved a simple sun cooker for peasants.

It is shaped in polished metal or glass to focus the sun's rays on food to be cooked... Until we harness our sunshine, thousands of morgen of bush and forest will be needlessly ravaged each year. Tens of thousands of tons of kraal manure urgently needed to save the soil will be burned as fuel..."

PUTTING THE SUN TO WORK, the article is called, and it discusses pros, cons and possibilities. The Union Weather Bureau has imported an expert to study solar radiation in South Africa. The CSIR is busy with designs and tests ... Yet it is depressing reading, for the article was written by Creina's Dad in 1955. Twenty-four years ago.

What happened to the years in between? Will the solar cooker still be a good idea, a new idea, 25 years hence, in 2004?

The footpath from MaHlongwana's home leads past many woodpiles. Each hut has laid in supplies for winter, and the wood is stacked shoulder high. Msinga has not quite exhausted its trees.

On the way home we stop at the huge marula on the riverbank, and pat its bulging girth before we pass on. We always stop to pay homage to this ancient male which must have taken root among the boulders perhaps 200 years ago when a sapling might fall to an elephant – not a goat, a woman or a child snapping off a switch. You cannot age a tree until it is dead and you have chopped it down, so we must guess about our marula, estimating that the portliness of a trunk measured by three men with outstretched arms was acquired over a century of summers. And a buttress root that can perch ten adults waiting for the ferry is a root that has had a long, long time to grow. Our tree bears no fruit, but every spring shakes its tassles, letting the wind and bees carry its pollen to a waiting harem of female marulas – smaller, daintier trees that live along the cliffs, annual yielding a crop of golden fruit. If the marula's wood had not been soft and spongy, our giant would have gone long ago, but its offspring cannot claim the same immunity from the axe. Today's woodchoppers are not selective.

So our marula already belongs to history – a relic of the Age of Big Trees. A period in history, which like the Age of Dinosaurs, is behind us forever. So we believe, even while we hope that the ugly silver sun blinking on the cliff will buy 200 years for the slender marula seedling (not yet knee-high) which we watch over in our garden. But we suspect that our hills may not sparkle with the silver sequins of many Makoti's until the last trees have gone. Men change only when they have to.

As usual, our newsletter does not really cover the events of the month, the big crises and small crises, and queues of people wanting help and advice. Mboma, for example, required mediation on a weighty matter.

"Is there no justice?" he asked. "My brother Gatsha stuck his finger into Victor's bread. Victor said he would have to pay for it. So Gatsha said all right, he would pay for it, but if he paid for it, he wanted it too. 'Ngeke Never,' said Victor. 'I never asked you to stick your finger into my bread.' Now is it right that Victor should have the money and eat the bread too?"

NEIL AND CREINA

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JUNE 1979: SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL

The bans have been lifted – the mabela has been reaped. It was a bad year, with poor crops. At the kraals a few stripey green melons lie alongside bunched up heads of crunchy red grain. At last the cattle can wander in the fields, chewing dry stalks and grass that has grown rank at the edges of the lands. At last the herdboys have a holiday. All summer they have been dispersed, separately guarding the family stock. Now the boys gather in flocks, like noisy mousebirds, taking off in constant disturbances, squawking and twittering as they chase new excitements. There are donkey races – dusty, yelling gallops up and down the riverbank. Snare are set for mice in the long grass, catties are aimed at every foolish grey dove that packs at spilt grain on the open lands. Now and again there is a yap from the dogs, and a yip yap from boys leaping after them, zigzagging on the trail of a desperate hare. We hear the din of the hunters from across the river.

The women too are like birds at this time – “hlekabafazia” chattering as they open and sweep out the threshing floors. Hoeing and reaping are arduous jobs that they must usually do alone, but threshing is more companionable, and they enjoy the chance of working together.

This year the Central Threshing Floor at Msusampi – scene of many an historic meeting - had to be abandoned because of damp, the effect of the nearby irrigation furrow and new gardens. There can be few other places at Msinga that are damp, however. Everywhere the land is dry and cracked. The hills sound hollow, like shrunken cowhides left lying in the sun. They have no squelch, no bounce, shriveled back against their bones. Yet the summer was not dry. In fact the gauge showed the rainfall was even slightly above average. We have only been here in unusually wet years, however, and seeing Msinga now we are afraid. If this last year was average – the valley must die in a real drought.

“As regards agriculture, there has been a continual failure of crops in the Tugela Valley for several year; consequently large numbers of Natives have entirely left, others only for a time for the purposes of procuring food... a very little will be reaped by the few Natives left in the Tugela Valley. During the year there have been many deaths.... Chiefly children and elderly people, which may be owing to the drought and therefore the scarcity of good water.”

That quote comes from the official annual report on Msinga in 1878.

Nothing has changed in 101 years, except the number of people that stay in the valley. There are no longer “a few”. The landscape, however, seems much as it was when Mr. Henry F. Fynn, a new Resident Magistrate, arrived in 1884. He was not impressed.

“Most of the surface is rocky and dry,” he said, “and barren, and cannot be cultivated, and almost worthless, and deficient of water.”

But he had grudging praise for the vegetation.

“Some of the varieties of thorn trees are very handsome,” he admitted,

“of which are the Umqamazi, Sanqawe, Msasane, the Umfa and Umkamba...”

Our own vote goes to the Msasane, *Acacia tortilis*, with curly clusters of brown pods which the children wear as earrings. The trees rattle their curly bunches every time the wind blows. Shake, rattle and roll – and gulp. As each cluster hits the ground, a waiting cow or goat swallows it. No pods are ever left lying for long. Especially this year, when animals have been elbowed out the way by little boys and little girls – and bigger boys and bigger girls, as well as aunties and mothers. Once the word got around that we were willing to pay 10 cents a bag, tree-shaking began in earnest, and soon there was not a Msasane tree on the lower slopes of Mdukatshani that had not been relieved of its load of pods. We met pod gatherers on footpaths, in the bush, on the roadside, bent double under the weight of their bags.

Although there is not much Acacia over the river, the tree shakers were busy there too, and throngs of children waited in the sunshine on the riverbank, leaning comfortably on bulging plastic cushions stuffed with pods until the ferryman arrived to cart their loads. One bag of Msasane seed, of course, looks just like another, and it did not take long for some of the smarter boys to take a chance on selling the same bag twice. We had to keep a tight watch on security – and of course we had a network of informers!

Over the past few weeks the pile of pods has grown and grown until we have an estimated two tones of Msasane seed in storage. STOP! We have cried to the district. This is only an experiment.

When we arrived at Mdukatshani in 1975 we came with some conventional experience and some very orthodox wisdom. For ten years we had been at work on an eroded farm, and in that time we had watched a transformation. Worn out fields had been planted to solky love grass pastures. Fertilizer had been added, and the cattle had stayed sleek on love grass hay all winter. Our pastures and our haystacks were much admired. We never for a moment doubted that fertilized pastures were the way to success.

Our haystacks had to be left behind however, the winter we came to the Tugela Valley. Our cattle had to rough it, browsing among the thorns, and they learnt to wait for the arrival of the truck that brought a daily load of cauliflower leaves gleaned from a Weenen farmer. As soon as we could, we ploughed the small strip of flat land along the river, planted Lucerne, poured on fertilizer, and admired the vivid green plants that sprouted so well under irrigation.

The beginning of this demonstration was quickly followed by the end. The price of fertilizer went up. Up and up. In four years the increase has been 117%. One ton of fertilizer now costs R112.00, more than we can afford – our Lucerne-selling white neighbours cannot afford it either – and certainly it is a price no local Black can pay.

Well, what can a black farmer afford to pay? Nothing. If the demonstrations on Mdukatshani are to mean anything to the Africans around us, we have to take this into account.

As our Lucerne dwindled without fertilizer, we began a search for a fodder crop to suit Msinga's needs. Flat land is in short supply, so we needed a wonder plant that could be grown anywhere among the rocks on our steep hills, a plant that needed no ploughing, no fertilizer, and no irrigation (most people live a long, long way from water), a plant that would not wilt in drought...

We began to look at the thorn scrub. Our part of Msinga is short of many things, but there is no shortage of thorns. Thorns are legumes, legumes are protein... Just how much protein we

did not know until we had sent samples of Msasane “hay” to the Cedara College of Agriculture for analysis. The “hay” came from twigs, leaves and thorns carefully trimmed from Msasane bushes and trees, pruned to encourage a canopy shape. The small branches were fed to the hammer mill and emerged as pale green shredded fibre which the cattle swallowed without too much coaxing. Every mouthful, according to the analysis, contained 7% crude protein, just half that of Lucerne.

For two winters Msasane “hay” has been milled as stockfeed for our cattle. Good stuff, but hardly protein concentrate.

A few months ago a little bag of Msasane pods and seeds went to Cedara for testing. The result came back: 17% crude protein.

Better than Lucerne.

We marshaled the children on the farm to collect those bags of Msasane twist. Our offer of ten cents a bag was an arbitrary figure – intended not only to be reward for labour, but good propaganda too.

And there is no doubt the propaganda side of things has worked. The Great Msasane Pod Collection riveted the attention of hundreds of surrounding families. Everybody started looking at Msasane trees.

Everybody started talking about Msasane trees. Suddenly Msasane started to acquire a value.

While the first experimental harvest was coming in, Neil became obsessed with plops. He followed the goats, and he followed the cattle, and he even followed the fowls, always scratching through their droppings. Always getting the same message. Acacia seeds may be protein, and they may be delicious to the animals that eat them – but they are certainly not digestible. The seeds are popped in, pass through and slip out with not a scratch on their shiny varnish to mark their intestinal journeyings. Every cowpat is stuffed with seeds like a currant bun. Goat droppings are like chocolate nutties, each pellet enclosing an undamaged seed. The animal may get some benefit from the shells of the pods – but the seeds escape them. Seed are winners all the way. They do not germinate until they are ready – and when they begin to grow they are surrounded by fertilizer.

It was obvious that if the protein in the seeds were to be made available to the animals, milling would be necessary. Some handfuls of pods were put in our grinding stone and crushed until the little bits looked like dirty sand. “Fowl food” we called this unappetizing stuff, and scattered it. Suddenly our birds started laying. Now for some time we had let our fowls scratch for themselves, African style, and eggs had been few and far between. Since they began their diet of crushed seedpods, however, the fowls have been giving a dozen eggs a day.

We are pleased with these results. Any African housewife can grind her own fowl food at a cost of no more than some muscle power.

Unfortunately a grinding stone is inadequate when it comes to the preparing of Msasane pods for cattle feed. Reluctantly we have had to use the hammermill – reluctantly because the milling then adds costs to an otherwise “free” crop for local people.

Whatever the problems they are worth overcoming, for milk production has actually gone up since we took the cows off cowmeal. Now they chew nothing but crushed Msasane pods and hay, and the milk bucket is brimming. Handmills, we hope, are not impossible to make, and

we are trying to produce a model to supply local homes. And because the clippers needed to clip the “hay”, are expensive too, we are also working on a design for clippers.

Off course the yield from thorn trees is fractional compared to the yield from a field of Lucerne. But then so are the costs, and the thorn crop can be maintained indefinitely, whatever happens to the price of fertilizer and fuel. IN an attempt to get accurate figures on yield, Tina Nash, our English volunteer, has been in charge of staking out experimental plots where every bit of “hay” and pod had been measured, and the results so far indicate an annual yield of just over a tonne of hay per hectare, together with 140 kilograms of pods.

Msasane is not the only local tree that has our attention. In the nursery there are seedling red ivory trees, wild olives, Tugela milkwoods, Pappea capensis, and Witgat, Boschia albitrunca, all trees that are used for fruit or browse. And with an eye on the predicted dry cycle ahead we have been planting out hundreds of slips of Portulacaria, the buttery spekboom that is favourite elephant food – and unfortunately favourite goat food. Our Portulacaria survives only here it is out of reach of the goats, the bushed cascading down the cliffs like creepers.

Harvest time has meant grass bangle time. According to local belief, cut grass brings hail, so no grass may be cut until the reaping has been done. When the ban is lifted, the women have to rush to get the grass before the cattle do, so grass cutting season is only two months a year. The 1879 season, brief though it was, brought in 10 000 beautiful, delicate woven grass bangles. 10 000! Stop! Stop! We cried. In vain, in vain. We paid for the first few thousand – then

At 20 cents each the bangles are a bargain, but 20 times 10 000...
(Prospective buyers should apply to the above address!)

While we were reeling under the deluge of bangles – peanut butte started coming in. Reverend Mnguni is entirely to blame. Last year he had a very successful crop of groundnuts, and asked if we could help him with a recipe. A few trial bottles of peanut butter resulted. This year, unbeknown to us, workparties gathered at grinding stones to produce bottle, and bottles, and bottles Of unadulterated peanut butter. Now while there is nothing as delicious as Msinga peanut butter, it is expensive. (What do factories add to their nuts, we wonder, to make their end product so cheap?) Again we have cried Stop! Stop! Again in vain. Peanut butter keeps arriving. (Prospective buyers should apply etc etc etc).

A brief report on other developments since we last wrote: the Press Council has acknowledged our complaint, and said the Tempo article appears to be “snide and tendentious”. The reporter concerned has been asked to defend himself.

As for Delanie – no more arrest. But he has taken the precaution of taking an axe to his pellet gun, chopping metal and wood into little pieces. For good measure he also used a large rock to smash what was left, throwing all the splinters into a donga.

NEIL AND CREINA

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JULY/ AUGUST 1979: CELEBRATIONS?

It was an important matter – so important that even the events of the recent war were put aside while the legislators of Natal sat in earnest debate, haggling over the details of a new law. Three months and a Select Committee – later, they were getting closer to the final wording of the critical clause:

“No person shall appear on the main roads ... without being clothed in some garment extending from the neck to the knee.”

Or, as John Akerman put it: “... shall legislation countenance or discountenance the assembling of men and women on the public ways of this colony in a nude or semi-nude condition?”

“No one can pass along the public roads of this colony without seeing, if they will only open their eyes, a state of things which is most disgraceful,” said John Walton.

“Very few fathers who respect their daughters would come to a colony where they knew that men and women go naked on the highway,” put in Akerman. “If you want to increase the number of immigrants, pass this law.”

It would increase trade too, said John Robinson. “One of our ideas of legislation should be to impart increased wants to the Natives.

This will do that and it will induce men to come out of their locations where they are sweltering in barbarism and sensuality now.

It will bring men into towns to work in order to provide themselves with clothes.” He reminded the House “of an instance at Home, as a powerful incentive to remedy the present state of affairs, in which the chaste mind of the Lord Mayor of London was inexpressibly shocked, not by seeing the stern, naked reality that confronts us daily, but a photograph of the spectacle.”

“A most abominable sight,” agreed William Garland. “It is a well-known fact that a woman of 16 has only a couple of inches of fringe around the loins.”

Henry Escombe wanted to know if the law should be confined to the road itself.

“If you met a part of these men on the highway, they could just jump a foot or two off onto the grass and so evade the law,” he said.

The legal words were re-arranged: “No person shall appear in view of public thoroughfares....”

“How far does the view extend?” asked Henry Binns.

“If they were a quarter mile off the road they would still be in view,” said Akerman.

“It all depends on a man’s sight,” suggested the Colonial Engineer, Charles Mitchell. “You might use a telescope.” He tended to be flippant about the Clothing of Natives Bill. If the law were to be applied to the road parties in Natal, he pointed out, his vote would need to be increased to cover the cost of 16 000 suits of clothes a year.

The Colonial Secretary, Albert Hime, also tended to be flippant.

“Sir,” he said, “I have no objection to the clothing of Natives. But I must confess I prefer them without.” Only those with indecent ideas and lewd thoughts, he went on, could be embarrassed by “the fine noble form of a naked Kaffir.”

“As regards the women, I say nothing. (Laughter). I have not taken measurements as my honourable friend has, as to what the extent of their clothing may be, (Laughter) but I must admit I have no dislike to see them as they are.” (Laughter).

“I don’t think there is anything to jest over or comic in this,” Garland reproved him. And others agreed it was no laughing matter.

“If the law will not help me,” said Mr. Walker, “then I say I am justified in taking a stick or bludgeon to enforce decency being observed.”

Clause by clause the Bill went forward until at last there was only the question of the penalty. It had to be a deterrent to nakedness.

Three days in prison – or a year? A fine of one pound – or five shillings?

“I should like to know how the promoter of the Bill intends to get his money?” inquired Escombe.

“Take the man’s skin,” suggested John Millar. From the start he had heckled the Bill. “One of the most absurd laws that has been brought forward in this Council,” he called it. “I say if this Bill is passed it will never be carried out.”

Msinga’s Magistrate, Mr. Henry F. Fynn, did his best to prove Millar wrong. He was a zealot at enforcing decorum.

“The present young Native men as a rule have become indecently careless about their waistdresses which are not so well made as formerly,” he reported, urging that the clothing law be extended to include all footpaths likely to be frequented by Europeans.

However, in this, the Centenary year of the Clothing of Natives Bill, “the human form divine” has become rather fashionable. And now it is not just the black form, but the white one too, which appears semi-clothed in public places. Mr. Fynn would also be distressed to know that the road through Msinga is today recommended to tourists for its “scenes of tribal life”, where locals may still be seen “in puris naturabilis,” as Major General Lloyd put it with such delicacy in the Natal Legislative Assembly 100 years ago.

For Natal 1979 has been a year full of celebration of historical events and in July we marked a small but special anniversary of our own: the Laying of the Foundation Stone of Madonsela’s Ditch.

The meeting that started it all was held on the streambed at Msusampi.

It was not an auspicious occasion, for only ten people attended.

“All those promises,” said the Induna bitterly. “And nobody is here, not even one woman. Alone we cannot move a stream. It is too far.

We are too few”. But asthmatic old Madonsela had an idea. Years before, when he had been a young man, he had dug a small ditch to take water to his garden.

“Now that we cannot do this bigger thing,” he wheezed, “why don’t we open my ditch and take it further?” and before the day was through the first rocks had been shifted. And before the week was through there was a company of 60, all ages, all sizes, chipping a furrow out of the hillside. Then the people in the nextdoor valley, Nomoya, started furrow-digging too, and it was not long before the clink of picks and the thump of boulders was also heard echoing

from Sahlumbe's krantzies. Today you can see the gardens that have sprouted since the people moved the stream.

"Our water," the original furrow-diggers call it.

"God's water," claim the others.

"And God's water belongs to everyone," Mrs. MaDlamini Dladla said firmly, hands on hips, when the Msusampi Committee lined up along her fence to accuse her of stealing water. She stayed inside – they stayed out – while the case was argued. At first the evidence had been circumstantial. MaDlamini had been among the critics of the furrow.

"Fools," she said when the digging line toiled past her house. "You think you are digging so you can plant for yourselves, but as soon as things are doing well the white man will tell you: 'These are my crops' and you will find you are working for him."

"That's all right Gogo," beamed Captain Mbele, chairman of the diggers.

"When we are eating good food you will still be cackling about tomorrow."

And of course, as soon as water began flowing, she became silent ... while her garden became suspiciously green. Many sharp eyes watched her movements, but it was some time before she was caught in the act, for MaDlamini did her gardening at night, cutting an incision in the furrow to run water to her garden, burying it again before it was light.

Paid-up members of the furrow co-op yelled their complaints. They had worked 30 days for their share of the water. Why should MaDlamini get it for free? The lady was summoned to attend an investigation into the allegations of water-raiding. She refused to attend. So the judge, jury and witnesses went to her fence and accused her anyway.

"Your garden goes well, sister," Captain Mbele opened proceedings.

"My garden is my own business," answered the lady with some asperity.

"Why do my neighbours come to look over my fence when they have gardens of their own to look at?"

"We requested you come and discuss the sweetness of your garden," the judge replied politely, "and you did not come so we are here, with respect, to talk to you about joining us in the ownership of the water which makes all gardens sweet."

"Your gardens are sweet, my garden is sweet," said MaDlamini. "My neighbours must look after their gardens, and I will look after my garden. There is nothing to talk about."

"Ah," said Mbele, disagreeing as he sidled towards the matter of the charge. "But there seems to be much you can teach us, for your garden is sweet without having water led to it."

"Are you accusing me of stealing your water?"

"We say so."

"Steal!" she exclaimed. "Steal! When has it been theft to use God's water, the water of my ancestors? I have the right to take water from any stream in the land."

"We sweated to bring water to make our gardens," retorted one of the jury. "We invited you to help and you laughed at us. Now you steal our work."

"Report me to the chief, then," said the lady with a shrug. "See what happens when you tell him that water belongs to this man, or that man, and that every man must have a licence to drink here, or fill his drum there. Leave me."

The waters that slip along the furrow at Msusampi, Nomoya and Sahlumbe have brought unquiet to the valleys, making battlegrounds for that old problem: Law versus Justice.

MaDlamini, unfortunately, has law on her side – such law as exists to cover the unusual situation created by the furrows and the gardens that have spread out alongside them. Tribal

land belongs to every man – and therefore no man can own it. In some respects the furrow areas lie outside the law – yet they are also wedged in the overlap of two traditions. One governs fields – fields of such a size they must be ploughed and can only be allocated by the chief. The other covers *izifo* – the little patches that women make, here and there, hoeing for themselves without need of the chief's permission.

The establishment of the furrows – and the furrows co-ops – really calls for some new legislation. But who are the lawmakers to make new laws?

The KwaZulu authorities are in no position to initiate anything until certain formalities with the Pretoria government have been completed. However this is not the place to begin to describe the snarl of red tape.

At the moment the furrow projects operate with the blessing of Chief Ngoza, and with a set of rules totally dependent on goodwill. Captain Mbele – and his fellow wise men are sometimes able to argue on the lines of legal precedent, but more often they have to apply the wit of Solomon in negotiations to keep the peace. Consensus alone, offers no security. And the MaDlaminis of this world are not the only troublemakers. Within the co-ops themselves there is constant bickering.

The dry summer set the first quarrels spluttering. The dry summer and success. More members meant more water to share around. And there was just not enough water. Every gardener became a water pirate. Feuds boiled up between upper gardeners and lower gardeners.

Vendettas simmered.

Two years ago we had explained that the furrows would not be much use without storage dams.

“Yes,” agreed the diggers, but they were tired, and with all that water flowing past their doorways – well, the dams could wait. As the disputes threatened to erupt into violence, however, and the streams withered – it seemed the right time to start hollowing out the hills again. At Nomoya and Sahlumbe there were no natural dam sites, so small reservoirs have had to be gouged out of the flinty rock. At Sahlumbe two small reservoirs were recently completed, lined with cement, and at Nomoya water is trickling into the reservoir up on the hill above Speti's grave. It has been slow-going without Speti, but now a second small reservoir is underway.

Only an old donga at Msusampi has offered a real dam site. It's not an ideal site – erosion has filled the bed with sand and gravel, making it necessary to dig to bedrock before plugging the valley.

A lot of extra work for Captain Mbele's brigade of dam diggers. Every member of the Msusampi Co-op has been expected to attend the dig – and newcomers have had a chance to become fully-paid-up members by working their 3-days-per-annum membership fee.

Mtshali, the elected secretary, has had the job of recording the names of those who report for duty each day. However reporting for duty is one thing. Executing the duty is another. New quarrels have flared.

Some members have been accused of handing in their names, working for an hour, then disappearing. Court cases continue to occupy the time of Captain Mbele.

“Who do you think you are?” some angry accused challenged Mtshali.

“All you do is sit there writing down the names of people. Why don’t we ever see you working too?”

“You appointed me to write down names because there is no one among you who can write,” Mtshali replied loftily. “I am quite willing to do the work if one of you will write down the names. How can I work and write down the names at the same time? Anyway you follow each other. You don’t come at the same time. Must I take my pencil and write, then put my book and pencil away, dig two spades of earth, and then go back because somebody else has come...?” That wrangle went on and on until Mtshali had the last tactless word.

“Anyway, the reason you see me not working is because by the time I start working, you have already gone, lazy slobs.”

Thanks to the statesmanship of Captain Mbele, the work has gone forward.

Slowly. A basin-and-bucket dam is terribly slow. Five spades of earth fill a bucket or basin. But where the earth was moved there is no sign of a hole. Not yet. Not today. Visitors stand at the site and their eyes flick over a small trench, a small mound. Small? Bulldozers have blunted our perspectives. Sure, a bulldozer could have done all that in a few minutes. But his is not bulldozer dam. This is “our dam.”

And slowly, terribly slowly, the outlines of the dam are emerging from the rubble. Picks swing. Spades dip. Buckets and basins glide on the womens’ heads as they circle from digging ground to dumping ground.

At the dam wall, as if in deference, the women salaam, inclining their heads, spilling their loads. Five spades may fill a bucket – but how many spades and how many buckets will make this wall? The builders dare not dwell on such thoughts, so they jive to the beat of their picks.

The Msusampi dam is one of the signs of progress of the past two years. And we can muster some statistics too.

When the first digging started it was obvious that if the people were to develop gardens they would need capital for pipes and cement for wire, for seeds, and so we raised funds to establish a Small Farmers Trust which could make the necessary loans.

Today 240 families are registered with the Trust. Loans of R15 533 have been advanced ... and R5 201 of this has already been repaid.

The Trust has covered the cost of R3 374 for pipes and cement – the white share of the community effort.

There has been progress – but is progress success? In agriculture, two years is too soon to judge success or failure. In fact government authorities reckon five years is too soon to expect results on the land – and this is one of the reasons the Stock Reduction Scheme has been considered a failure. This scheme is one which we cannot resist comparing with our own. In detail there is little similarity – yet the Stock Reduction Scheme shows the real costs, the real time scale of agricultural rehabilitation – and oh boy, does it show up the differences in aid offered to black and white farmers. The Stock Reduction Scheme was designed to pay white stock farmers NOT to farm in badly damaged regions of the country until the land had had a chance to recover from mismanagement,

Between 1969 and 1974 4095 farmers were paid a total of R 45 million.

That amounts to an average of more than R 10 000 per farmer. Yet the scheme failed to achieve the change the government’s experts had aimed at. Our little project has paid out an average of R 50 per farmer...

You have to have a spade to begin with – and how many spades, how many buckets are needed to build this wall we call development? Like the Msusampi dam diggers we try not to think beyond each small load that is shifted. We also try to remember that development is more than furrows, reservoirs and gardens. In the past two years the people in the valleys around us have built much more than they see.

July will be remembered for the visit of Nick Segal – once-upon-a-time a schoolboy volunteer from England who worked with us at Ratschitz. He arrived back as a chartered accountant with six weeks of his time to offer us – and was immediately handed the books. It says a lot for Nick he did not turn tail and return to England. We have been without a bookkeeper since Anton Hlongwane fled the farm last September – and the efforts of the amateurs who have handled things since has created a mess that sets the professionals gibbering.

But Nick kept his cool – even when he found we were in the habit of sending a cheque to the bank to cover the total credit shown on our bank statement!. (The bank, we might add, accepted the money). All month Nick tidied, held classes teaching staff the elementary rules, and designed a system which he hopes will survive our staff's inexperience. Perhaps next time he can have a holiday.

Chatting direct to New York is an experience savoured recently as a result of a wonderful beadwork order from Fifth Avenue in that famous and faraway city.

“Can you produce R 10 000 of beads before Christmas?” we were asked.

Unfortunately the answer is: No. But we are aiming at half that, and it has meant a rush of work for our homecrafters, and welcome money to feed the bellies of tribal families.

Final bit of new: the Press Council has upheld our complaint against the article in Tempo with its insinuations about our lucrative gun-running activities. Tempo has since carried a front-page apology, as dictated by the Press Council.

NEIL AND CREINA

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September/ October 1979: THE NEXT EXCITING EPISODE

“At about 12.45 a.m. a knock was heard and voices sounded calling my name. I walked to the door just to hear a pathetic report related by Mr. Diamond Dhladhla. “Mr. Mokgothadi a house has been gutted to the ground by fire and gunshots are in Mashunka. How can we get hold of Mnumzane? Unquote. I then replied hi to him. Most unfortunately our both phones are out of order but”

So the weekly office report, compiled by Jantjie Mokgothadi, related the death of Tonya Ndimande close to the eastern boundary of the farm. That night Mnumzane, however was allowed to sleep undisturbed while Mike Mabaso, our manager, took charge and went off to fetch the police.

Murder on the eastern fence at night.
A hold-up on the western fence in the morning.

If we were unaware of the events of the night, we were not long in hearing about the drama of the morning. We were sipping a lazy Sunday cup of coffee when Mrs. Mhlongo and her stepson, Makanye, (15) arrived together to report the hold-up.

“I’m not crying, the boy sobbed. “These tears come out of my eyes because I am so angry. They kept hitting my mother with their fists.”

At sunrise Mrs. Mhlongo had got up as usual, tied the baby to her back, picked up a drum, and gone down to the river to fetch water.

When she got back, steadying the full drum on her head, she found two men waiting. “I know them both well,” she said. “They are from Madonselas. Mbiva is the one. Ndoba Madonsela is the other.”

Lowering the water to the ground, Mrs. Mhlongo greeted her visitors politely. It was a pity if they had come to buy cattle, she thought, for Mhlongo was away for the weekend. However the men ignored her greeting.

“Open up the house,” they said roughly.

“And it was then I got frightened,” she said. “I told them I would not unlock the door, so they hit me in the face. Then they said they would kill me if I didn’t listen. I unlocked the door and when we were inside they pulled out their guns. The one gun was brown, like the colour of old chairs. The other was silver and shiny.”

“Uncover the bed,” the men ordered next. “We have come to take Mhlongo’s big gun that he hides here.” But Mrs. Mhlongo didn’t move. The shiny silver gun was pressed against her forehead. The baby lay quiet on her back. One of the gunmen grabbed the bed and pulled it apart, kicked boxes and emptied them. He found a bottle with R150. But no bullets. No gun.

Now ever since we obtained a licence for Mhlongo to carry a firearm, he has lived with his revolver on his hip. Where Mhlongo goes – his gun goes with him. To get Mhlongo's gun – you have to tackle Mhlongo.

Were these men fools that they didn't know that?

For a moment the shiny silver gun was lowered so that both men could ransack the hut. Mrs. Mhlongo bolted outside and screamed for help.

From the other side of the cattle kraal, Makanye heard her, but he did not realize anything was wrong until he got close enough to see the guns in the men's hands. He stopped, turned about, and bolted.

"But the one man ran after me, pointing his gun," Makanye said. "I was afraid. When I saw he was pointed his gun at me I stopped running. He brought me back. Then he poked me here with his gun and said I must find my father's revolver. All the time they kept hitting my mother...."

Mrs. Mhlongo could only duck, keeping the baby's head away from the blows. Not once, through all the weeping and shouting, did that drowsy baby murmur.

Eventually the man had to give up. One tucked his gun in his belt.

The other gestured at the boy and woman to go ahead, and marched them at gunpoint away from the house, up the path.

"They said they were going to take us away with them," said Mrs. Mhlongo.

"But when we were halfway from home, they let us go.

That is all."

Almost. There was yet another incident that weekend. Walking home past the goat kraal at dusk, Mboma, Linda and GG gave a yell:

"People are stealing the goats!" The kraal was empty – the fence cut and in the darkness in the hollow near the dip there was the sound of whistling, cracking whips and animal hooves. The rescue was hardly launched when a rustle in the thorns announced the return of a couple of goats. Soon all had trotted back – obviously rebellious at the unusual night excursion.

While the police were trying to find out whether there was any link between the murder, the hold-up, and the attempted goat theft, life bumped on much as usual.

From Sahlumbe came a deputation to discuss the problem of the trees at the new reservoir. They were red-flowering fuschias, the very last left on the hill. Neil had suggested the reservoir be sited between the huge trunks on the pretext that the trees would do much good shading the water. It was the only hope that they would be saved.

"But now you see," explained the chairman of the Sahlumbe co-op,

"Those trees are dropping all their old leaves into water and they will sink and block off our water pipes. We have decided we must chop them down, but before we do so we thought we should come and explain the matter. It is not that we do not like the trees, you understand ..."

"Why don't you put mesh netting over the mouth of the pipe?" Neil asked. "Yes, we had thought of that," admitted the chairman. "But it is not just the leaves. We are also worried that the roots will crack the dam floor"

One argument was countered with another, and Neil won on points with a long and not entirely orthodox explanation of the benefit of tree fuschias in the prevention of evaporation. The deputation acknowledged defeat. "OK Numzane. We see you love trees too much!" And then as they got up to go, they laughed: "But those trees would have made lovely firewood.

Next there were several interviews with Mr. Agliotti, one-time star of a government swindle inquiry. For a couple of trouble years Agliotti has been the non-resident owner of the farm that adjoins our southern boundary. Opinion has been divided on who has created the trouble. (Read back copies of The Sunday Times ...) whatever the truth of the matter may be – because of the trouble, very little farming has so far taken place. Now our millionaire neighbour has lavish plans for transforming his land – and ours – into a game park with luxury lodge. He has started by building a landing strip "that can take a Boeing" so that clients will be able to jet in for get-away-from-it-all weekends.

There is one unfortunate drawback, Mr. Agliotti admits: our mutual neighbours, the blacks. He hasn't said so in so many words, but we suspect he hopes through a proffered partnership with us to discover the magic formula that keeps our fences intact – while his fence poles are chopped for firewood, and his wire simply disappears. There is a plant for a store at the gate of the game lodge, offering mealiemeal at knock-down prices.

"Then the Africans will be so grateful they won't cut down the trees or eat the game," he has suggested hopefully. "We can also use the locals to give displays of tribal life as an added attraction at the game park."

As the offer stands at the moment: Agliotti will provide the funds to buy up Mdukatshani, game fence and stock both properties. A mansion will be erected for the Alcocks so that they can keep an eye on the restcamp, and guard R4, 000 worth of tinned goods that are to be stored in an underground vault below the guest quarters...

While we were listening to Mr. Agliotti's designs for a rich man's playground ... back at the rah Ndimande was gasping for air inside a canvas bag. Soon after his brother, Tonya, had been shot at Mashunka, and his three huts burnt, the police had arrived at Ndimande's kraal. "We have come for you, Ndimande," they said.

"Get into the van if you killed your brother. Refuse if you didn't."

Ndimande was sitting in the back of the van on his way to the cells before he realized the trap. He had been in jail for three days when two friendly black policemen unlocked his cell door.

"Come, Ndimande," they said. "Come and drive with us." Ndimande's spirits lifted. The ordeal must be over. When he climbed back into there, returning from hospital after the shooting in their kraal.

Ndimande was quite relaxed as he talked with them, watching the familiar scenery on the road home. When the Mdololos were dropped and the van left the main road to follow a track to an isolated picnic spot on the riverbank, he was not alarmed. Nor was he alarmed when the policemen opened the door, stretched in the sunshine, and said:

"Come Ndimande, sit down and let us talk a while." He was so happy he paid little attention to the one policeman as he strolled towards the swirling brown water, dipping a canvas bag into the current, swilling it, filling it, rinsing it again. Ndimande was still unsuspecting when the wet bag was suddenly slipped on his head, squeezed around his throat. He struggled until he blacked out.

“We will have to keep doing this until you admit that you shot your brother dead,” the policemen told him when he came round. Three times the treatment was repeated. Three times Ndimande passed out.

“If we do this once more you will die,” one observed. Ndimande agreed. Yet he could not say he had killed his brother for it was not true. “We will take you home now to think about things,” the policemen said, “But we will come and fetch you again soon.”

When the van had dropped Ndimande at his kraal, he disappeared into the bush and maneuvered along the hillside until he was close enough to slip down to us. He was a man in terror.

“And all the people know,” he said, “that at least 12 of us were having an argument at Mbatha’s house when the guns crackled. The sky was lighted up with burning. We rushed to see if there was anything we could do but we were chased away by lots of bullets.” Twelve witnesses, he says, support his alibi.

The police are not the only ones to dish out rough treatment. Little Nini Mbatha (just 4? Or 5?) has a raw weal on his neck where he was almost throttled with his own vest. For weeks he had been acting stooge for a gang of boys – a tiny mite that could pinch what he liked without raising suspicion. On the path home one evening, however, Mboma and Linda found themselves behind little Nini, clutching a parcel.

“What have you there?” they asked.

“Some things I was sent to the store to fetch,” Nini answered, trotting on. After a time, however, he swung off the path into some bushes.

Curious, Mboma and Linda stalked him to a rock overhang on the cliff top. There two bigger boys, Sakhephi and Nchoko were waiting.

They took over the parcel.

Next morning lo and behold, there was Nini again, with yet another parcel. Mboma and Linda pounced.

“Yes,” said Nini. “I always fetch things at the shop.” A wee gap between the door and the jamb let him slip in when no one was about and those who saw his parcels assumed he had been sent shopping.

That solved the Mystery of the Missing Apples, Bullybeef and Tobacco.

But there was still the Mystery of the Missing Fowls.

“Have you never had chickens?” Linda asked Nini.

“Oh yes, many times,” Nini answered truthfully, as he answered all the questions put to him.

While irate fowl owners gathered to demand thrashings and compensation – the gang lay in wait for Nini. When they had grabbed him they looped his vest under his chin and used it as a saw, rubbing away the skin on his throat while he gurgled.

“We were just playing with him,” Sakhephi explained. The gang must thank their lucky stars it’s only theft charges they are facing.

During the past couple of months the farm has become an advice center for people threatened with removal, and Cheryl Walker has become ombudsman to the displaced families. In hired taxis, on foot, in buses – men and women have converged on Mdukatshani begging for help.

Most come from white farms, some from townlands. All have been told they must move. Destination: Nondweni. It's already a dead-end, no-work dumping ground for thousands of others. And it's far away.

"We don't know that place. We don't know the people. They don't want us. The chiefs are strange,"

Where they are now, everyone has fields, fowls, cattle, and goats. They will lose them all if they move.

On a happier note, Mdukatshani's Road Runners added new badges to their collection (and came home with bottles of orange wine) when they competed in the Greytown to Muden marathon. Although Joatham Mjiaka had done no training, he finished easily up with the leaders.

Tanana Shabalala was our next man home, and finally Mboma and Linda were clapped in, two of the youngest runners in the race.

Most of September and October we were away from home. GG got typhoid and spent several weeks in hospital at Greys, Pietermaritzburg, and we moved to town to stay close to him. He is taking a long time to pick up strength again, but at least he – and we – are now home.

NEIL AND CREINA

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NOVEMBER 1979:
WHITE WHISKERS, WAGONS AND THE VOTE

“Bacteria are everywhere,” said Neil. “They float in the air around us, hundreds, thousands, millions of tiny creatures. In every handful of soil there are more than you can count.”

“Yes,” said Mhlongo, “I’ve seen some of these bacteria. When I was in the police, somebody killed an Indian and buried him. When the SAP discovered where he had been buried we had to go and dig him up. The body was in a box in the ground, and when we opened the box we found the body was covered in long white whiskers, like cottonwool. Those whiskers must have been bacteria.”

“Sounds like a mould,” said Neil. “Same as mushrooms.”

“Mushrooms be bugged,” protested Mhlongo. “I know mushrooms. Those hairs were long and thin. They could only bacteria.”

It was the last week of the month and the Mdukatshani University was again in session. And although “Decomposers” was the subject on the syllabus, the discussion – as usual – followed a direction of its own. “White ants grow moulds you know,” said the lecturer, who is as susceptible to sidetracks as his students. “They make compost out of chewed-up leaves and grass and produce a crop of tiny mushrooms.” The class chartled. “Hai Hai – go on – you’re kidding us.”

“No, he’s right,” said one man seriously. “Whenever I have broken open a white ants’ nest I’ve found white stuff growing on the walls in the center. Is that the white ants’ mushroom field?”

“If the ants are always making compost underground, that explains why an anthep is so fertile,” said another. But an unbeliever asked: “How can an ant that cannot even think be cleverer than people?”

And that is how the lecture on decomposers became a debate on social organization.

OK, the white ant had been around longer than we had. Its society was older.

But was it also better organized? The students were still arguing when the soup arrived for lunch.

There are 25 students at the Barefoot University, and for five days every month they follow footpaths through the hills, wade the river, catch the ferry or ride bakkies to study a subject we have loosely titled: Agriculture. It’s a long time since most of our students have been at school – those who have been to school at all. Ntabela boasts the top qualification with a Standard 4, but most of the classes have entered middle age unable to sign their names. Not that it matters at this university. What our students lack in schooling, they make up in experience. Game ranger, cook, garden boy, kitchen boy, clerk, induna, irrigation supervisor, builder, butcher’s assistant, sewerage remover, waiter, farm labourer, policeman ... they have turned their hands to many jobs in their time. Now they are all trying to live off hard Msinga earth. That is one qualification for our course. The other is leadership. The students are secretaries and chairmen of the different Small Farmers Co-ops.

At Msinga you can only be a small farmer. A very small farmer
With a very small field
With a pick
With a hoe
With musclepower
That's the only capital a small farmer can invest – his energy, his “amandla”.

Amandla! It's the cry of revolution – the political slogan yelled with clenched fist – and the only word in Zulu for energy. Amandla, agree our students, is what their course is all about.

“Sivuna amandla welanga”. We reap the energy of the sun.
Leaves are lungs that turn sunlight into amandla.
Termites cart leaves to compost their crops to produce amandla.

“And donkeys take the grass that should be amandla for the cows!” roared Khoza at one lecture. “Msinga is dead because of donkeys. Can't we ask the government to inject the donkeys like they inject cattle – but to use poison and kill them all?”

“Yebo, yebo,” laughed the class.

“Amandla is the subject,” said the lecturer. “Donkeys another day ...”

“If we are not allowed to keep animals, how can we get manure for this mandla,” asked Nyawose. “The thieves took our cattle anyway when we were chased off the farms.”

“Not only the thieves,” said somebody else. “The Weenen Pound stole our cattle too ...”

“No, no,” interrupted Ntabela. “Amandla we must talk about. Another day the pound... Now I grow cabbages and spinach and refuse money when people want to buy my vegetables. I say a 20-litre tin of manure will buy you a cabbage, and so I get a big pile of manure. But I have to watch the children. They are always cheating. They try to mix half manure, half dust ...”

“Amandla,” said Majozi. “We must stick to the subject of amandla.”

“If manure is amandla,” said Mhlongo, “Xulu will give us all we want. He cannot use his kraal anymore because the manure is so high it is level with the walls and his cattle jump down every night. He has been offering his manure to any one who will clean out the kraal.

“But it's a long way,” said Zweliswa. “And Numzaan says it doesn't pay to use lorries with the price of petrol and tyres what it is today.”

“What about my oxen?” bellowed Mhlongo. “Hell, I've trained them for more than a year now. I have a good sledge too. The trouble is it's too small, and I will be caught if I use it on the roads.”

“You boys make me laugh,” said Reverend Nguni, giggling in his corner. “Such a problem!” But when we were still men we greased the axles of our wagon, told the umfanas to “hooiesha” the oxen, and road or no road we went with our loads.”

“That is true,” said Hadebe, usually silent, always unsmiling. “If we could get carts it would be more important even than getting water. With a cart you can collect water for your wife, enough for a week. Water for your cows, your garden, meal from the shop, and manure from your kraal or your neighbours' kraal.”

“There's a beautiful ox wagon at Mashunka,” Mhlongo remembered.

Beautiful? The old wagon sagged in the yard of Mtshali's kraal, rusty and lopsided. Twenty, thirty years ago the turntable had broken while Chief Induna Mpini was on his way to Tugela Ferry. He dragged the wagon into Mtshali's yard, unhitched his span, and said he would be back later. But the machine age had intervened, and the wagon had been forgotten, except by roosting fowls. Long ago young warriors had looted the body for strips of metal for their assegais.

They tyres had been sliced for shoes and cattle. Some of the bed planks had been stolen for doors. One axle and two wheels had disappeared. But what was left was enough for us. The springs, the turntable, the brakes and chassis were made of soft durable steel designed to survive pioneer bumps and ruts, while the Jarra wood frame was almost intact.

The next University session opened at Mtshali's kraal. Armed with spanners and hacksaws, the students dismantled the wagon bit by bit, loaded it onto the tractor-drawn trailer (the machine age is not quite dead yet!) and brought it home to Mdukatshani. Then up the mountain went some of the men in search of tambooties wood for the scammel – and four of our own trained oxen went with them to drag back the logs.

“Don't worry,” said Majozi. “We will only cut a tree if it has two stems. If we take one part, the other will grow into a better tree.”

Day after day, there was happy chattering as the old wagon was re-assembled.

“This brings back memories of my span of oxen,” one man said nostalgically.

“Witbooir, Kolbel, Tandabantu ... My boys knew when I put the whip down I meant business. They would lift their tails and lower their heads and move forward, and then the chain must break or the wagon must move...”

“Do you remember old Mkhize's span?” said another, as he squatted on a stone, trimming a log with his axe. “One day he found two wagons stuck in the drift.

‘Unhook those grasshoppers of yours,’ Mkhize cried. ‘Let a man show you what a real span can do.’ And before any time was gone he had plucked those wagons out of the mud and up the bank on the other side. Then Mkhize said: ‘Put your grasshoppers back and take your wagons away.’”

For two weeks the class concentrated on the wagon, trimming, stripping, bolting, washing, greasing. Yet at the end of that time it needed a loving eye to recognize a wagon in the bits and pieces strung out across four drums. Many weeks of work are still to be done.

Meanwhile from Norman's workshop on the top farm, a new model two-wheel cart emerged, and was presented to Ntabela, CAP's chairman, for testing. The whole class assembled to enjoy a trial run. First the young ox calf of Ntabela's cow was coaxed between the shafts. The yoke was fitted, and Ntabela took his place behind the docile animal. His three grandsons then tugged to get the young ox to follow. Tug, jerk, pull – suddenly the animal shot forward. The boys thought they were being charged. They dropped the riems and scattered. The ox followed. Really frightened, the boys took to their heels and disappeared. They left their grandfather screaming with rage on a runaway cart. The jerk and rumble of the cart – and the oaths behind him – terrified the ox. Faster it galloped and faster.

“Ben Hur rides again,” Neil murmured as Ntabela shot down the dusty straight.

The old man was only saved because a wheel caught in a thorn branch and snapped.

The calf broke loose. Ntabela landed on his knees. The class was unable to help. It was paralysed with mirth.

Ntabela got up using language unseemly for the chairman of CAP. Only one comment can be passed on: "This is the result of modern education," he said.

"Those bloody boys have never handled livestock. They're too bloody busy using pens."

The Barefoot University course has had other demonstrations during the year.

In August staff from Natal University spent two days here teaching grafting, budding and pruning of fruit trees – an "ooh" and "aah" session for the class.

Then the students had practical building dams, fences and methane gas digesters, and learning to align solar cookers. About half their time, however, was spent at lectures learning some simple genetics, economics, evaporation, the mineral requirements of plants, soil conservation, fished and animal husbandry. Many lectures would envy the attentiveness of our class. "We cannot write it down" the students remind us. "We cannot take notes. We cannot read one word. So we have to concentrate and remember and remember and remember."

The 1979 Barefoot University course ended this month with both lectures and demonstrations on the crucial subject of social organization – otherwise known as "Getting Rid of Unwanted Chairmen." It was the most popular subject in the year.

"The things we are learning are wonderful," sighed Captain Mbele with pleasure when he had listened to an outline of how a secret ballot works. "Now we have learnt to take away a chairman whom everyone fears but who doesn't do his job.

And nobody can be blamed. He is chosen by papers. The papers make the decision.

The theory of the secret ballot was put into practice at six Co-Op AGM's on six consecutive days. (Whew!)

"Four people have been nominated," Neil explained at one gathering. "Each of them is wearing a different colour card. You must take a bit of paper that is the colour of the candidate of your choice and put your paper in the bag." Which was simple enough, apart from a few unexpected hitches.

"Why do I have to wear this thing?" objected one candidate. "I don't believe in badges. Policemen wear badges. Religious groups wear badges. I don't belong to any of those things."

"I am voting for the yellow, the colour of the inside of a pumpkin," announced one co-op member firmly. "I will reap plenty of pumpkins if I vote yellow."

But, but.. it's not the colour you must choose, but the candidate.

"And I will vote blue," said another. "I used blue when I voted for Gatsha and Gatsha came in. So blue's my colour. I will always vote blue."

But, but ...

"How can I vote for one when I like them all," one woman asked reasonably. "They are all good men, hardworking men." There was a murmur of agreement from the women around her. "How can a woman pick on somebody else's husband? That's what starts faction fights!" They were still grumbling when they placed their vote.

The elections were undoubtedly a success. One unwanted chairman got only one vote his own? New office-bearers were voted in without any unpleasantness – without death threats or bullets in the night. For Msinga that's quite something.

NEIL AND CREINA

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CHURCH AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS

MONTHLY REPORT: NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 1979

APOLOGY: Due to staff upheavals this report was prepared but never distributed on time. Subsequent reports for January/ February, March/ April will also be late, but staff reorganization should produce a regular monthly report from May.

BROUGHT

The continuing drought has brought many activities to a standstill. All the crops planted early after the July-August rains have died. The streams at Msusampi, Nomoya and Sahlumbe have dried up, threatening the future of the gardens at these 3 co-ops, which are entirely dependent on irrigation water from these streams. On Mdukatshani itself the Skhehenge River has stopped running, and the remaining pools are disappearing fast. The Tugela River of course has an abundant supply of water. Unfortunately there is no grazing near the river, however, while on the top farm there is good grazing but no water. As a result CAP's livestock has to be driven long distance between water and grazing.

Early efforts to plant out slips of indigenous fodder plants – Portulacaria and Sarcostemma – were brought to a halt by the lack of rain and high temperatures.

Many young fruit trees purchased in spring have already died.

November rainfall: 1,7 inches
December rainfall: 2,85 inches.

Rain fell in short, sharp showers which quickly evaporated.

ULUNDI MEETING WITH KWAZULU CABINET

On November 13 Neil Alcock was invited to attend a meeting of the full KwaZulu Cabinet at Ulundi to discuss differences that had arisen between KwaZulu government and CAP.

Subjects covered during the subsequent discussion included local difficulties experienced with pension applications and payments, CAP's education programme following on the closure of the Mdukatshani KwaZulu-funded school, the conflict between CAP's agricultural policy and KwaZulu's. Mr. Ferreira, director of KwaZulu Agriculture, pointed out that Zulu peasants were simple people and should not be confused by two different policies. The KwaZulu agricultural policy had been drawn up by expert Pretoria planners, CAP stress on organic farming techniques was contrary to accepted modern agricultural practice.

It was agreed that in future CAP would take its problems direct to the Minister concerned, and should make every effort to avoid publicity which was damaging to KwaZulu's image.

Alcock stressed, however, that while it would be beneficial to have direct access to the minister, it was essential that some action follow any approaches which CAP made.

INDUNA NGONONDO

Induna Ngonondo of Mashunka has been of great assistance to CAP in its efforts to restore law and order in the district, so there was shock and sadness at the news of his assassination on December 6 not far from Mdukatshani's boundary.

Ngonondo had been responsible for the successful arrest of a man who had stolen CAP goats. On Ngonondo's evidence the man was convicted and imprisoned for 18 months – and the goats were returned to CAP. Ngonondo was warned that he would die for his involvement in the affair. The police have arrested the recently-released goat thief and companions on a charge of the murder of Ngonondo.

STAFF:

During November- December CAP's educated staff was seriously reduced. The two Project Trust volunteers, Tina Nash and Andy Nicholas, returned to England.

Norman Mankowitz, who had been with CAP more than 2 years, left to continue his studies. Joatham Mnyaka left for more lucrative employment. Ginna Portman, who had spent three months working on pension problems, returned to the USA. Cherryl Walker went off on three months sick leave with infectious hepatitis. CAP decided not to renew the contract of Norah and Jantjie Mokgoathadi following certain financial problems.

OFFICE AND ADMINISTRATION

As CAP's attempts to find outside qualified people to run its administrative affairs has failed, the Executive Committee determined to make use of local people if possible.

As a result Mphethe Masondo was appointed Office Manager, and Fana Sibeko learner bookkeeper.

Mphethe joined CAP in 1974 as a handcraft worker (he is a cripple). Although he has never been to school, after attending literacy classes with CAP at Maria Ratschitz, he became to most avid reader on the project. The CAP Executive believes that his record of long-service, dependability, integrity and efficiency will make up for his deficiencies in education.

Fana Sibeko joined CAP in 1975. He has Std 6. His meticulous records of the CAP stockroom this year are the only records in any CAP department that are faultless.

Both men have been given a job description and have started weekly classes on office management with the manager Neil Alcock. They are also doing arithmetic lessons with Creina.

TRANSPORT

Thanks to a donation of R 10 000 from Barclays Bank a new Toyota DYNA truck was purchased. A Toyota 1200 bakkies was also purchased with a loan from the Alcock Special

Account. The old petrol-guzzling STOOT was traded in together with the ancient and no-longer-honoured Landrover and Peugeot.

EDUCATION

Following on criticisms of CAP's education programme at the Ulundi Cabinet meeting, the Cap Executive appointed a three-man committee to inquire into CAP's education work. Seriously disturbed at the results of this inquiry, the Executive ordered the suspension of all education on Mdukatshani, until improvements could be effected. Educationists were approached for advice on future planning.

Three members of staff working on education were given new job descriptions. Because serious shortages had been discovered at the office, and because office records were in confusion (despite heavy staffing during the year) these three were given a six-week deadline to put different records in order.

MEETING WITH FARM RESIDENTS

This meeting was held to explain that the Farm Labour Tenant and Advisory Board was investigating the work undertaken on local farms, and then deciding how many kraals were needed to handle the farm work. The average suggested number was 5 kraals per farm – so Mdukatshani was entitled to 15 families.

Those resident on the farm were supposed to be in fulltime service from the age of 16 onwards, at a wage to be negotiated between employer and employees. All outside workers had to be registered, which meant that CAP was liable to a fine of R 500 for every employee who did not conform to the above legal requirements. Reference books would have to be signed monthly for CAP's protection. All those unwilling to conform would have to leave.

PENSIONS

CAP has had a sad record in its efforts to get pensions for people unable to travel to Magistrate's offices, and in some cases too infirm to move.

This year Council of Churches offered the salary of a person to do this work.

Unfortunately the staff appointed – one white and one black – took random statements but failed to follow them up – or file them. In September Ginna Portman, a USA research student, arrived to spend three months working on pension problems. On her departure she recommended that because of CAP's extreme inefficiency there was little point in CAP continuing to involve itself in pension matters.

However the CAP Executive, while accepting these criticisms as just, decided the matter was too important to drop, and Kathy Bond was appointed to take over pensions and disability grants.

BUILDING

Before Tina left she and her team of children completed the dam in the school garden. Work started converting an incomplete hut into a proper guest house.

The road to this hut was completed. The goatherds moved into the hut built next to the goatkraal so that the goat could be guarded at night.

GOATS

Over the years CAP has encouraged the development of a communal goat flock.

The agreement made with local goat owners was that they would leave their goats with CAP – their children would help to herd the flock – and CAP would pay the children and offer them an education. Unfortunately the goatowners began to feel they were doing CAP a favour. No children did their goat herding duties- in fact they were sent to distant schools – so CAP paid for the herding with no contribution from the owners. Because the goat owners had been unresponsive to appeals for – co-operation and help, in December all goats were returned to their owners at Mashunka, and CAP was left with only 60 animals from a flock that had formerly numbered about 200.

SAP AND WEENEN POUND

CAP has approached the SAP and the SPGA to investigate the situation at the Weenen Pound where irregularities are reported to have taken place. CAP has been forced to acquire a number of cattle by purchasing them at the cost of pound fees, which the African owners of the cattle could not raise.

TOP FARM

Neil has surveyed a furrow, but people are waiting for him to spend some time on the top as they lack the confidence to start furrow digging on their own. A large area has been cleared for gardens.

Many Mchunu cattle get grazing on the top farm, and their owners pay grazing fees in the form of labour. This is at present being contributed in the construction of a road from the farm boundary to the Skhehleng River.

ANDY'S AMBLE

To make policing of the farm possible, the new residents on the top farm were given the job of cutting bridle paths which could also be used as firebreaks, crisscrossing the farm. The residents are starting at what is known as Andy's Amble – a contour path linking the top and bottom farm laid out by volunteer Andy's Nicholas. The same people have also started erecting a fence along the Amble.

WOOD CHOPPING

On the bottom farm this is almost under control now, and Zwelizwe Dladla spends Thursday's supervising the chopping of local women in selected areas.

On the top farm there is still a large amount of "poaching", and arrests by our policemen Frans Mvelase led to 22 wood chopping cases being heard by the local induna.

CO-OPS

Before the effects of the drought began to be felt, the co-op gardens were show places. Children at the Nomoya Learning Centre reaped spinach, tomatoes, onions and some very large pumpkins from their first little gardens.

At the end of November elections were held at each of the co-ops. New office bearers are as follows:

MSUSAMPI: Chairman: Delanie Mbatha. Secretary: Mandlakayise Zungu.

NOMOYA: Chairman: Jimston Sithole. Secretary: MaMubi Mvelase

SAHLUMBE: Chairman: Fanile Nyawose. Secretary: Catherine Sibiya

MASHUNKA: Chairman: Zwelizwe Dladla. Secretary MaMthembu

In order to assess the needs of the co-ops, and to improve future planning, a survey of all co-ops was launched.

WATER

In October a Maritzburg engineer started work on a tyre diaphragm pump – producing a prototype to CAP's design. In November the "machine" was delivered – unfortunately incomplete as the engineer had not understood part of the construction. Our neighbour is retired an engineer, however – Mr. Burge R. He is also the owner of a Transvaal engineering works. With time on his hands he has offered to help perfect the first model, which could help co-op members pump water direct from the Tugela to save their gardens.

Work has started on a waterwheel on the upper part of the Tugela, near Mhlongo's home the design incorporates a diaphragm pump, and once completed will open up a new area for gardens.

HOME INDUSTRIES

During November – December the value of orders dispatched was as follows: Beads:

R4 033,40

Grass bangles: 188,25

Wool cushions: 164,10

LIBRARY

The Executive Committee noted with concern that CAP was probably going to have to pay for 20 to 30 books lost from the library since it was established as a provincial library branch 2 months earlier. As the library stock consisted of only 400 books, and as library facilities were restricted to the use of 5 white members of staff, the Executive had ordered that the library be returned to the NPA before there were further losses.

VISITORS

Chief Ngoza Mthembu

Dick Connell – a British farmer

Benita Raphaely – University of Wits Dept of Continuing Medical Education

Dr. David Whittaker – SA Institute for Medical Research

Mark Gander – Institute for Natural Resources, Natal University

Morris Smithers – Devcraft

Peter Magubane – Rand Daily Mail

Mr. Grice and overseas Manager of Barclays Bank

Sir Armour and K. Camp – Soil Conservation department

Jeff Thomas - EDA

WEENEN FARMERS ASSOCIATION

Our application for renewal membership of this association was down without explanation. A letter was sent to the Association asking for their reasons and inviting members to come and see CAP's work. No reply!

CAP's involvement in the removal problems of labour tenants ejected from white farms and the Weenen Town Lands is probably the cause for the refusal of membership.

WAGES:

November wages totaled R 1 758 for 49 people

December wages totaled R 1 515 for 42 people

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DECEMBER 1979: A COURT CASE

It's the sound of woodchopping that gives the woodchoppers away. You cannot chop in silence. Every blow of the axe draws a song from the tree, and the echo of the song bounces down the mountain.

Old hardwood chimes. Green hardwood snaps and hums. Softwood has a dull resonance. Rotting trunks throw a hollow drumbeat. Just by the tone a Msinga Hillman knows what trees being attacked, whether it is living or dead, a hardwood or a softwood, an olive or marula.

Nobody has a finer ear for wood-chopping melodies than Frans Mvelase, our policeman. Every day he sets out to patrol 2 000 hectares of bush – a short very dark Shangaan with a mournful expression, spotless white gumboots, a stick, a panga, and a bulldog bitch that slobbers over every passerby they meet. Three years ago Frans built his home on the loneliest corner of Mdukatshani. Nobody else was willing to be alone in that empty, wild country. But Frans was unafraid.

“If it is my time to die, I die,” he said. “People fear a fearless man and kill a coward.”

So Frans goes about his work, making arrests politely, but firmly, indifferent to threats and immune to bribes.

Soon after an axe starts thudding somewhere on the top farm, Frans is likely to arrive.

“Greetings my sisters. That is good wood you are felling.”

“Yebo. How are you father?”

“I am well, but I regret you are not going to be well because you are arrested.”

“Arrested father?”

“I am policeman on this farm, appointed by the chief, the induna, and Magokogo, the white man. Please may I have your axes? They are needed as evidence. And I must know your name and your home. We will meet to discuss the case at Chummy, the Induna.”

At first Frans only asked the names of the woodchoppers, but the names given were so often false that his cases fell away. It was the Induna himself who suggested Frans confiscate the axes. No woman could live long without her axe. That would bring her running to court when she was summoned.

“But now the women are getting paid such good money for their wood they are leaving their old axes and buying new ones,” Frans complained recently to the CAP Farm Committee. He has learnt to distinguish between the professional chopper, and the housewife. The professional is out with her axe day after day, choosing hardwoods, taking only logs and big branches (the lorries that buy her wood have no room for little stuff). A woman chopping for her own home, however, only goes out chopping about once a week, and she carries away all she can – big branches, small branched, and the twigs as well.

Wood is big business at Msinga. To get an idea of the extent of the trade just drive along any road in the remaining wooded areas and you will find heaps and heaps of wood laid out along

the verges, waiting to be collected by lorries which trade wood part-time or fulltime. If you are in an area where the trees have gone – you can watch the same lorries selling their loads at 10 cents a branch.

“Everybody knows they can chop on the farm if they get a ticket from me or the induna, and if they chop where we show them,” said Mvelase. “But those who sell wood want to chop where they like and choose their own trees. In the past months I’ve arrested 23.”

Neil was asked to attend the trial of the last 8 erring ladies.

“It was best you come,” said Induna Chummy Zungu as he offered Neil the VIP deckchair. “If you are here they will know the matter is serious.”

He turned and gave a bellow. A little boy ran into a hut and emerged with a stool, specially reinforced to take two of the thickest thighs in Msinga.

Chummy lowered himself, arranged the skins of his bechu, and spread his legs comfortably. Frans Mvelase, the only witness, took a seat on a stone. Other spectators joined him in the shade of the snowy, flowering thorns. Court was almost ready to begin.

“Let those who are condemned come forward,” roared Chummy. The call roused a group of women sitting together down near the stream. They moved up, dropping to their knees when they reached the court. At this moment a whisper went round the circle. A visitor had arrived. It was the Chief Induna, the son of Kanyezi, with his bodyguard. Respectfully everyone rose to greet him.

Another lusty bench appeared. The court settled down once more.

Induna Chummy, judge for that day, clapped his hands. A six-year-old court messenger scurried to kneel at his feet.

“Go and fetch the knives and axes that are witnesses against these people,” commanded Chummy. The boy disappeared into the hut. He returned with two axes. He put them down before the judge, disappeared again, and returned with another two. Eventually there was a row of eight axes and cane knives.

“Let each condemned come and fetch her axe,” ordered the Induna. Nobody moved.

“Does this mean that none of you will accept ownership of your axes?” A bit shuffling. “You might as well come and get your axes because I know you all, and if you are not careful you are going to be fined extra. Anyway there’s one lovely caneknife here that I hope nobody will claim.” The Induna picked it up and ran his finger along the blade. “I have honed it until it has such a beautiful cutting edge that when I am clearing my mabela patch, it sings through the weeds. I have really taken a liking to this weapon.”

A woman crawled forward reluctantly and took an axe from the row. One by one the others followed. As the Induna’s favourite weapon was carried away, he sighed loudly. Everybody laughed.

“Now why didn’t you all come here before?” he asked. “It’s weeks since some of these axes were confiscated. Why have you been so slow claiming your axes and bringing your fines?”

“As the Induna know,” interrupted Mvelase, “these people can afford to leave their axes because they paid so much money for the wood they steal. And they don’t care about your fine of £2 because the lorries pay them more than £2.

“How much do they get for a headload?” asked the Induna.

“£4.” Said Frans.

“Good, said the Induna. “Then the fine will be £6 each.”

“I’m too poor to pay that sort of money,” one woman muttered.

Chummy Zungu laughed. “That’s all right. Each week you stay away the fine goes up 25 cents. That is the price the wicked pay for their wickedness. You all know all you have to do to cut wood on that farm is get a ticket that gives you permission.”

“I got a ticket allowing me to chop,” said one of the accused.

“And did you tell the policeman you had got a ticket when he arrested you?”

The woman hung her head.

“It’s quite obvious,” commented the Chief Induna, “that she only got her ticket after the event.”

Chummy turned to another accused. “Now you, old woman, you are the oldest here. Since the days when you were a young girl and I was courting you, you have seen an awful lot of me, haven’t you? And it wasn’t to be courted that you came to me – it was to be punished for your perpetual thieving. What a terrible thing it would have been had my courting been successful and the Induna of his area had had you as a wife.”

Ha Ha Ha, the court laughed. The granny stuck her chin in her chest.

“I understand from the policeman,” went on the Induna, “that you said you were not coming to fetch your axe. You were going to wait till your menfolk came from Johannesburg and then the policeman would be chopped up. You are lucky that the white man brought his foolish laws with him. If an ox is always jumping the fence and eating the crops it is slaughtered for a party. If only you were an ox I’d have had you slaughtered long ago and we could have enjoyed your old bones. As it is, we have to put up with you, even though you set a bad example, teaching all the young brides to steal. Now – where is our fine? I want £6.”

“I am sorry,” said the granny. “In my old age my hearing has given in. will everyone speak a bit louder?”

Ha Ha Ha, laughed the court.

“You are always up to tricks” said the Induna. “I know you heard every word I said here.”

“I didn’t ...” she replied, too quickly, unwary.

Ha Ha Ha. Again the court rocked with laughter.

The Induna turned to the owner of the coveted caneknife. “And where’s your money?”

“I hoped if I promised to bring it later, you would agree to let me take my knife now.”

“What!” exploded the judge? “Let you go and steal more wood so I have to fine you twice. And next time you will also say: Baba, my man hasn’t sent the money yet. Please let me take my axe and I promise to pay later.”

“We’ll starve without our axes”, protested the women.

“I’ll starve without my money,” said the Induna, unmoved. “That’s more important. No money – no axes. Especially you who own the knife I covet.

Don’t worry about bringing your money too soon. I still have a lot of slashing to do among the weeds in my mabela.”

Again the women pleaded. "Without firewood we cannot live. Please, baba ..."
The Induna sighed. "I have been Induna so long," he said, "that I know that if I hold onto your axes, by the time the sun sets tonight I'll have my money and you'll have your axes."

"You are right," said the granny who had been deaf. "We will fetch our money now."

Court was dismissed and beer was sent to refresh the judge and his assessors.

"Our people are in trouble about firewood," said the Chief Induna, the son of Kanyezi. "All our tribal laws are being thrown away because people just have to have wood. In fact I came here today to see you about this very matter.

As you know the farmers are chasing our people off their farms and the chief is being forced to give them somewhere to live, although his Location is already very crowded. Because there are so many they are finishing the wood. I have been sent to ask if we can get permission to organize parties of woodchoppers.

We have heard you will let people chop so long as they are organized."

"Yes," said Chummy. "that has been the rule with Magokogo for years, but people like my old girlfriend are unhappy unless they steal wood. That old thing is even unhappy when she finds a dead tree because the law allows her to chop a dead tree. She will look for a green tree just because it is not allowed."

"To try and pass by the law that says a green tree may not be chopped, people are now ring barking trees to make them die," said the Chief Induna. "Our chief has started to impose a fine of one beast for anyone who is caught stripping the bark in a circle."

"One ex", confirmed Majozi at the Farm Committee meeting.

"That is just," said Mhlongo, "especially for somebody who kills an olive. The law says that only a king can have a knobkerrie made of olive – but now everyone takes olive."

"But you have an olive kerie, Majozi", Neil said curiously.

"Yes," said Majozi, "but I do special dangerous jobs for the chief, so I have been given a permit to carry the best knobkerrie, a hard olive one."

"Olive is the drought tree", put in Zweliswa. "When the drought is really bad you climb an olive and chop off the branches to feed your cattle. Here at Msinga the olive trees were always so old and so big they grew new branches before the next drought came along. Now the chief's law is dead."

"And Msinga, like the trees, is dying," said Nyawose.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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JANUARY/ FEBRURY 1980:

**WHATEVER HAPPENED TO INTONDOLO ENKULU-
THE BIG SON OF TINY GOAT?**

“I had to sit down to pull the thorns out of my foot,” said Ntombi Mkhize.

“When this was done I saw the goats racing down the hill to the white man’s dam. I was trying to drive them back when I saw a white man with a gun coming out of some bushes. He lifted up his gun so I left the goats and started to run. The gun went Thwwwwoooooh! and I fell flat so that the bullet would go past.”

As the seven-year-old told her story, she flung herself on the ground, hands over her head, small brown buttocks up in the air.

“The bullet went whhheeeeeeeee over my head,” she said, “so I got up and ran again. Again the gun went Thwwwooooooh! I fell flat a second time and the bullet went whhhheeeeeeee past me.

He shot at me three times before I got through the fence.”

“We had crossed the boundary fence looking for our cattle,” said Themba Dladla,

“When the white man stepped out of some bushes and said: ‘Ja madoda. What are you doing here?’ and he fired. We ran. I felt the muscle of my foot give and my leg gave way but I kept running until I reached the Mchunu kraal. I lay down near the kraal and people carried me inside.”

“He was bleeding all over and breathing bubbles through a hole in his back” said the neighbours, “so we sent for a man Madoda to bring his car quickly.”

“I was on my way to the Indian doctor in the area of Sehlangane,” said Theresa Mabaso, “when I heard a shot over my head, whhheeeeeee, and I saw a grass tuft suddenly turn about 10 paces in front of me. The reason I easily saw where the bullet hit was because it went Xunh! When it hit the ground.”

“He then took a gun out of the car and pointed it towards me,” said Salani Kayise. “It roared. I fell down and he left. He shot my three goats and left the carcasses there.”

“I saw a car go on the road towards the bushes and awaited man got out,” said Mandla Mtshali. “He went up to the cattle and shot three of mine and one of Mzikayise Duma’s.

“The white man shot my cow in the donga,” said Outnel Mtungwa, “and then they piled sticks around it and burnt it.”

“Then we heard gunfire,” said Shayisile Mcunu. “We ran away. That was in the early morning. When it was getting on for midday and we thought the shooters had gone away, we went to see what had been shot. We found my ox dead. There was a bullet hole through my ox that broke the ribs on one side and came out the other.”

“The white man swore at me,” said Neli Malembe, “and said he had come to shoot Malembe and my son. I said: ‘O, Nkosaan you shoot why?’ He left and went about as far as the fence there. Then suddenly he turned and ran towards me and shouted: ‘Now I am going to shoot you!’ He put a bullet in his gun. I ran inside my hut and heard a shot behind me. Then I came out and picked up the cartridge. He said: ‘Leave my thing alone.’ I said: ‘I won’t. I saw him returning to his car. I hid in the veld. I saw him come back and go to our huts and open them. And at last he went away.’”

“We went towards the white man to plead for the release of our cattle,” said Henrietta Lange. “When he saw us coming he fired two rounds at us. We shouted we were coming in peace. We just wanted to negotiate about our cattle. We shouted out: ‘Please, we are not fighting. We want to talk with you.’ He fired again.”

“I had gone to the doctor near Malembe’s store to get my medicine,” said Phumelele Nyawose, “and I set out for home. I heard a car following me. It stopped next to me. There was a child getting water at the stream. A white man got out of the car and chased the child. He caught it and beat it. He then beckoned me to him, but I stood. I feared nothing because I was on my white man’s farm. He then snatched my stick which I need because I am crippled. I resisted so he hit me behind my breast with his elbow. I fell and he grabbed my stick. He also snatched my medicine away and broke the bottles on the road. They cost me R3.”

“I was driving the tractor and trailer when we were met by the white man,” said Emmanuel Mvelase. “He got out of his car with a gun and pointed it at us and walked towards us with his finger on the trigger. Immediately I stopped the tractor. He advanced until he was leaning of the bonnet of the tractor with his gun pointing at my face, and his finger still on the trigger. I was frightened so I tried to move my head out of line, but everytime I moved my head he swung the gun to keep it pointing at my eyes. The white man then said: ‘If you don’t run me over I will shoot you.’ There was nothing I could say. With the rifle still pointing at me he came round and switched off the engine of the tractor, took out the keys and put them in his pocket. Then he leant down and took the valve out the rear wheel. The water and air came out. He said we must all get down and go to his car. So we got down and stood in front of him. He then took his gun by the barrel and smashed it on my scalp. I collapsed on the ground.”

“I was invited to visit Shongolose Mweli to help slaughter an animal,” said Bomule Dladla. “I found a white man near the kraal. The white man said: ‘Come here’. I went. He said: ‘What do you want here?’ I said I was visiting the home. He then caught me and threw me down. I was not expecting the attack so was unready. While I was on the ground he hit me with the barrel of the rifle he was holding.. I went to the Indian doctor with my injuries. He said my jaw was broken.”

“The white man told us our cattle could graze on his farm if we would work for him building his road,” said Charlie Mkhize. “At the end of two weeks he paid us, as he had promised. That day he told us to carry on as we had been doing, but he said he would be away about a month and would pay us again when he got back.”

After he had been away a month, he arrived back with about eight vans, one horse with a white man riding it, and I think four motorbikes, and four big dogs.

As soon as the motorbikes and horses had been taken off the vans, everybody took guns and surrounded the farm. We took no notice of these goings-on and carried on with our work. Suddenly some women shouted. While we were working our livestock was being surrounded. They had started collecting donkeys, horses, cattle, goats, and sheep. I don't think there was any stock on the farm that did not belong to the people working under our agreement with the farmer. A gun was fired which frightened us and we ran away. We all ran up a hill so we could see down onto the flats and see whether our livestock was being stolen. When we got to the top of the hill we saw our animals had been rounded up and were being driven in the direction of Nkaseni. The dogs were strangers to goats and were chasing them around."

"Three of my goats died at Nkaseni," said Simanga Masonda. "I never got those goats back. At the police they told me to ask at the pound, and at the pound they told me it was not their indaba."

"The police asked how many had died," said Bernard Ximba. "We said two had died at Nkaseni and three at the pound. They asked where were the animals. We said they were brought to Weenen but we could not see them. The police said it was OK. The white man who had impounded our animals would pay for those that had died."

"One of my goats died," said Msumba Shabalala, "and I asked the police where I could get that goat from. They said from the white man. At the Pound I asked the Bantu where my goat was. He said the dead goat were in a room, but there were no goats in the room. The pound said the dead goats were at the SAP, and the SAP said the dead goats were at the pound."

"When the white man's lorry got here, it was so overloaded that the goats were packed on top of each other," said Alpheus Sithole, "and fifteen goats at the bottom were dead."

"The white man shot 14 of my goats that day," said Philemon Xaba. "There was one female, white with a red neck, one female white with red ears, one female black with a white belly, one female black with no marks, one male hamel black ... Then he shot these five whose skins I have brought you now."

"Last Wednesday, before it was light, my father and I discovered that the kraal was empty," said Salane Mchunu. "We woke up the boys and told them to go and find the cattle before the white man found them. The boys had just got through the fence when we saw the white man walking near the fence among the bushes. It was getting light. The boys had been followed by our dog. Because of the bushes the boys were hidden from us. There was suddenly shooting and one boy rushed back through the fence. I decided that the other boy, my son, was dead. We heard the dog help twice. We all hid in the hut and barricaded the door until the white man went away. Inside I asked the boy if my son had been shot. He said No. He had hidden from the white man, but the dog was dead."

"Later the same day the white man came in his Landrover and started shooting. We thought he was after my father. When one bullet went very near me I ran inside and again we barricaded ourselves. When the white man had gone we went out and found he had shot one of the goats dead, and the other goats had disappeared. Also my favourite goat, Intondolo Enkulu."

“The next day we went to the pound to ask about our goats. They were all there except for Intondolo Enkulu. The Africans at the pound said they had seen my giant goat arrive, but now it was missing. They showed me some blood near the pound fence and said it was obvious that my goat had been slaughtered in the night and the meat taken through the fence. When I asked them who was responsible, they said I would have to get my money from the farmer.

“I am very sad about Intondolo Enkulu. His mother was my favourite goat. She never grew so we called her tiny goat. Then she had this baby that grew into the huge, beautiful goat that was my friend. Intondolo Enkulu was big and red with just a small white spot on his face, and beautiful white horns. I don’t want money for him. I want the big son of tiny goat.”

“We saw stones put in the road in front of us,” Petrus Majozi, our black director reported. “People ran out of the bush shouting: ‘Stop! Stop! You’ll crash on the rocks we have used to block the road.’ I said to them: ‘What did you do that for?’ The people said: ‘This white man is killing us so we have put stones on the road so that he stops his car and then we will stab him and kill him.’”

“We struggled to get through the road,” our manager, Mike Mabaso, reported a few days later. “We found stones across the road all the way and the bridge was smashed.”

“Ever since 1940, the Department of Agricultural Technical Services has expressed concern about the extent of erosion in the Weenen thornveld area,” said the letter that arrived from our local Extension Officer. “Despite this fact, very little had been achieved until 1969 when the six months labour system was outlawed. Since then ... matters have slowly improved.”

... on the white side of the boundary fence. But when the six months labour system was outlawed, thousands of Africans left the Weenen thornveld area, and with their cattle and goats, moved over the boundary into KwaZulu – right next door to their old homes, their old grazing grounds. When we drive along the boundary – for Mdukatshani shares 7 kilometres of fenceline with KwaZulu – we count the African cattle lined up along the fence. They are thin and weak, although it is not yet the end of summer.

It has been a terrible summer. We measure drought in a rainguage that shows only half L the rain that fell the previous four summers. The Africans measure it in dusty streambeds, dead grass. Even the dagga crop died this summer.

There are eight white farmers along the border between Weenen district and KwaZulu. Two of them are part of Mdukatshani. With the exception of Mdukatshani and one other farm, all the white land belongs to absentee landlords.

Only Mdukatshani is at present carrying any stock. The other white farms are empty. Yet although they have no cattle on their land, our white neighbours are defending their grass with guns ... and collecting thousands of rands in damages to their pastures.

Telephone calls to KwaZulu officials confirmed that there is no provision for drought relief for black farmers, as there is for white farmers in drought stricken areas. Under the South African Drought and Flood Distress Relief Act, white farmers in drought stricken areas in South Africa are presently receiving millions of rands worth of aid in the form of feed, grazing and transport subsidies.

“But drought relief is a last resort, a desperate measure in an emergency situation,” an official in the white Department of Agricultural Technical Services told us. “We cannot stop all a farmer’s animals dying – but we give him help so that he can keep his breeding stock alive.”

With its limited resources, the KwaZulu government cannot help its citizens keep their breeding stock alive. Very concerned about the drought situation, however KwaZulu has approved five new boreholes for Msinga.

“Boreholes!” raged Zeph Ntabela, our chairman. “What’s the use of boreholes? Cattle can’t eat water.”

So they eat the grass on the white side of the fence. Recently Neil was asked to assess the damages incurred by African cattle on one white border farm – for the Africans were contesting the damages that were claimed were exorbitant. He paid a call on a Weenen resident, Mr. du Plessis, to ask if he would come along as a second assessor.

“Mr. Alcock your skin is as white as mine,” spluttered du Plessis with fury. “It’s people like you who caused the trouble in Mozambique, Angola and then Rhodesia, siding with the coons against people of their own colour. You do so much for the wogs – but watch, they will kill you first – like they held up those bloody Nuns (referring to a hold-up on our road at Christmas). You are going to destroy a poor farmer whose land is being wrecked by nigger stock.”

When he came to call, the white agricultural officer asked what we thought “about this problem with the boundary?”

“The farmers have gone mad,” said Neil. “The whites are using gunlaw with people who can outgun them a hundred times over. Nothing will be achieved by it. This winter the white farms will be burnt from end to end, as they were last year.”

“Surely you have to admit,” said the officer,” that the white farmers are entitled to protect their farms? The grass and the trees are being destroyed – the whites have no option but to defend their boundaries.”

Although we also have the wood-cutter problem, there is no other kind of trouble along our stretch of the fence, and we share the longest boundary with KwaZulu.

At this very moment a stretch of fence that is broken and sagging, is being repaired voluntarily by our Mashunka neighbours. We cannot say our fences have never been cut – they have been. However the damage was traced to cattle thieves pushing stolen stock through our property. The Africans closest to the broken fences reported the matter – and fixed the fences.

Recently, black cattlemen escaping an armed round-up on a white neighbour’s farm, cut the dividing fence to get their animals onto our territory. But they apologized for what they had done – and again, immediately, fixed the fence.

We have just had a notice of a meeting called by the Weenen Soil Conservation Committee, in order to discuss the conservation planning of the white border farms. Weenen farmers have no doubt that since 1969 “matters have slowly improved” – they know conservation is making progress in the Weenen District.

They cannot be familiar with the words of Aldo Leopold, one of the philosophers of conservation, for Leopold wrote, "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land."

NEIL AND CREINA

Please treat our newsletters as confidential. They are not intended for publication or publicity in any form. We have had to take legal advice on the contents of this newsletter, for three civil cases are pending as a result of the situation that has been described. For this reason the real names of all people mentioned in the report have been changed.

MDUKATSHANI,
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MARCH 1980: NOBODY LIVES ON A BRIDGE

Squawk, squawk. Cackle, cackle. Another raider must be making off with eggs.

All summer our fowl run has provided a handy snackbar for a variety of visitors. Herdboys have been caught in the act. So have wild cats. So has a leguaan – although It is such a master of the quick getaway that we seldom see more than its reptilian tail as it disappears over the side of the cliff. (Because at least 25% of our family considers it is an honour to entertain a lizard the size of a crocodile, however, we have had to start eating supermarket eggs).

Cobras are the real problem. We have to co-exist with cobras, side – stepping them on the path, prodding them out from under the stove, chasing them off the shelves in the office. We would not even mind their raids on the fowl run, if they just took the eggs and did not kill the fowls as well. Unfortunately as soon as the birds see a snake, they panic into fluttery commotion, trying to protect their eggs or chicks – the snake strikes in self-defence –and we are left to count the corpses.

“Chicken netting is no good,” Sweliswe Dladla told the Farm Committee meeting. “We have to have cobra netting. Unless the holes in the wire are too small for snakes, we will waste our time trying to rear fowls.

Sweliswe, one of our black directors, has suffered more than we have.
He lost all his hens in one cobra raid.

“I was in my yard when I heard the noise, “ he said. “I went to see what was disturbing the fowls, and there in the middle of the hok was a snake, pecking at each hen as it rushed past. I looked around for some way of attacking the snake and saw my son’s catty. I grabbed some stones and took aim through a hole in the wire. God was with me, for the first stone hit the snake’s head and stunned it. I put my hand through the wire and pulled it out and killed it, but next day all my hens were dead.”

Sweliswe is one of Msinga’s small farmers, a tall, dark man of few words – and those curt and blunt. He is quick to anger, over- sensitive to slights, and although he has many good neighbours, he has no friends. Intimacy makes him uncomfortable, so he walks alone.

“But listen carefully to Sweliswe,” the men in the valley advised us.

”When he speaks he has something to say.”

Sweliswe lives on the edge of a donga, watching rocks sprout around him, listening to the clatter and chink of falling stones. When it rains the boulders in the donga growl and rumble as they are thumped by the rush of water. But wishing hours the rush is over. The earth is muddy but the rocks are dry. Sweliswe’s huts are set among the stumps of a ruined forest. A few tambooties remain – lopsided, perched on stilts, or tottering, their roots wrapped around small hillocks of earth. The angles of the trees remind you that where you were walking was once underground. Harvester termites swarm everywhere, carting off snips of grass, while

every fallen twig or leaf is coated with the mudcasts of white ants. If you sit immobile on a rock too long, the white ants start on your clothes as well.

Sweliswe's gulch is not an easy place to farm – but because he has no other place, Sweliswe is trying.

Once upon a time he lived at Mdukatshani, a man of substance with more than 50 cattle and double that number of goats. The numbers are only an estimate, however – for Sweliswe never went to school, and never learnt to count much beyond ten.

He was a boy of 12 when he started work as a farm labourer, earning 75 cents a month. It was not that the family needed that kind of money – but to stay on at Mdukatshani they had to pay a rental of six months labour a year. The white owner never once visited Mdukatshani – he lived up near Ahrens. But he kept a book, and the book told him when it was time to send a lorry to collect his rent to collect a new load of labour. Every six months Sweliswe went off to Ahrens, and the next six months he spent at home.

He married twice – both wives slender, fine-boned beauties who became and stayed inseparable friends. In 1957 there were three toddlers in the family – and Sweliswe was earning R2 a month. He decided to strike out for the big city and its big wages. In Goli he could earn R50 a month as a builder – enough to “hire” somebody to do his six months for him.

He cannot remember when the rumour started that change was coming. “We knew that the six months system was going to stop,” he said. “but we didn't know what terrible thing would take its place. Everyone was restless.”

Sweliswe happened to be home on holiday the day the helicopters came to Mdukatshani. They hovered above, and police vans scoured below, rounding up everyone they could find. “I watched but I was not worried,” said Sweliswe. “I had done nothing wrong. My affairs were in order. The man who did my six months had just returned. I had settled with him. I was walking along a path when I was arrested and locked in a van. The police said when I was in court I could explain why I was not working.”

Despite his protests, Sweliswe was jailed.

“As soon as I came out of jail I went to the farmer. I told him I had done my six months by the other man. He said he knew it, but I must do more work or it would be more jail. So I worked another six months for him. At the end of that time I went to report that I was leaving.

I had worked my time. “You can have a months off,” the white man told me. “But the book says you always do duty in May, so you must be back next month.”

In May Sweliswe was incredulous. His hireling had worked six months for him. He had worked another six months.

“The book says May,” said the white man firmly.

“So I told him,” said Sweliswe, “he would never see me again. Then I went to the Induna in the location and asked him for a place where I could build.” He was given a site on the edge of a donga on a stony hillside, and he began building a new home.

For a while his father looked after the cattle and goats – there was grazing on Mdukatshani – nothing at Sweliswe’s new home.

“But then came the mixed-up period,” he says. The time of the removals. 1969. His father and everybody else was forced off Mdukatshani. Some of the Dladla cattle went to the speculators at knockdown prices. As many as possible were “hidden” with friends who had stockrights in the Reserve. But the mixed-up period was a time of great thieving, and it was not long before the Dladlas, who had owned 50 cattle and double that number of goats, no longer owned any animals at all.

Sweliswe returned to Johannesburg, but he was not a healthy man.

“I was never sick enough to lie down, but I was always sick,” he said.

In 1973 he came back to Msinga for good, and tried to make a living carving doorframes and lintels. When we arrived he asked for work as a builder, and we found a craftsman.

“As square, a spirit level?” Sweliswe growled. “My eye tells me better than those things if a round rock is straight!”

Although Sweliswe is expert at hiding his feelings, his anguish showed when Zepe, his four-year-old daughter, went to hospital with TB. She stayed in hospital for four months. Then Sweliswe himself took ill again. Then his two wives. Then more children One day, brittle- thin and desperate, Sweliswe arrived to ask for a loan to buy a cow. He had been to a witchdoctor to find out why calamity had struck the family, and been told that the spirites of his ancestors were angry that he had deserted his birthplace on Mdukatshani. He would have to sacrifice a beast to appease them.

“The hell with your ancestors,” said Neil. “Sacrificing a beast won’t make your TB better.” But because Sweliswe’s fear went deep, a doctor could not cure him either. Compromise. CAP would give Sweliswe a loan if the entire family would agree to go to hospital for a TB screening.

The beast was slaughtered, Sweliswe donned braces made from its hide, as ordered by the witchdoctor – and the Dladla family went for its medical check. “They told us we must all take pills, even those who are not sick,” Sweliswe reported on his return. MaNdimande, the one wife, was so ill however that she was kept in hospital for six months. So were four children. Misery settled on the shabby huts at the edge of the donga.

Today the family is together again – but they are not well. Even in the few years we have known them, the women have wasted away. Not only their flesh has gone – their bones seem to have been whittled too. You have only to glance at the Dladla’s shopping list to understand why. Last month they spent:

| | | | | | |
|---------|--------|----------|--------|----------------|--------|
| Mealies | R15.50 | Mabela | R12.00 | Malt | R12.00 |
| Salt | .80 | Sugar | R 2.40 | Fat | R 1.60 |
| Onions | .40 | Potatoes | .80 | Cabbage | .80 |
| Beans | R 1.60 | Tobacco | R 1.40 | Matches | .80 |
| Soap | R 1.80 | Paraffin | R 3.60 | Washing Powder | .60 |

A total of R56.10

Seven Dladla’s work: Sweliswe (part time), his wives, three sons and one daughter.

“It was a good month,” Sweliswe says. Because there was a big order from America, his wives earned more than usual, bringing the family’s total earnings to R109.40.

Because it was a good month – and because it was getting cold – they bought two blankets for R11.00 (the other six the family share are threadbare, and five years old). They also bought a vest each – R18.50.

“And the rest I put in my box,” Sweliswe said. “I try to save something every month so I can buy each of my boys a goat. One day they will need to marry.

Give a man a fish, says the most popular of all development clichés, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and he can feed himself for life.

Sweliswe could tell you what is wrong with that. He has had a lot of teaching over the past five years, and he has remembered it. He knows the story. And if anyone has tried to put it into practice, he has. He believed us when we said any land could be made productive, and he got a loan from our Small Farmers Trust to fence two gardens, one for each wife. Although the first year there was food from the gardens, however, this year beans, mealies, cabbages and sweet potatoes grew but did not bear. The heat and drought withered other gardens too. Because there was nothing to be done in the gardens, the family started making a dam across the donga, to hold the rain, if it ever fell again.

Sweliswe asked the Trust for a loan of R16 to buy cement, and sent his two lovely, fragile wives and teenage daughter, Xwayisile, to carry it over the hills. Meanwhile he cared for the five little ones, and they rolled small piles of stones while he heaved big rocks into their niche on the rising wall.

“Zepe, my small daughter, take the baby and stoke the fire,” he instructed. “Mbuyiseni my big son, come with me and mix cement.”

With the toddler cradled on his hip, Sweliswe for a time worked one-handed. “Get the drum and fill it with cement,” he ordered Sukani, his six-year-old daughter. “I know it has a hole in the bottom but we have no other drum. Cover the hole with a piece of plastic. That will stop it pouring out. “Demn-it!” Sweliswe cursed with exasperation as the girl lowered the drum with such a thud that the holey bottom fell out completely. For the remainder of the dam building operation, the drum was carried at speed, held on the horizontal, cupped hands damning the contents.

Sweliswe’s dam was not yet complete when the first storm broke. Part of the wall was washed away, and the dam was filled with silt. Using their broken drum as a scoop, the Dladla’s began to clear out the silt. Sweliswe rolled new rocks for a new wall. And began to think about a new loan for new cement. “If we had had fowls, we would have had something,” he said when he came to ask for R30’s worth of poles cobra-proof fowl house in Msinga. And now that it is almost ready – he needs a loan for fowls. More debt to add to the R261.80 he already owes for wire, piping, seed.

Sweliswe is not poor. He is average. At a recent meeting, in fact, he got very heated about the distribution of a gift of milk powder.

“It must go to the poor,” he insisted. “The widows whose husbands were killed.” He also got very heated when the meeting discussed the problem of obtaining educated staff at Mdukatshani.

“We have to remember,” Ntabela was saying,” that the whites who come here draw very poor salaries.”

“What do you mean, poor salaries?” Sweliswe demanded. “How can you say they get poor salaries when they get R32 each, and that is just for one person?” Mhlongo agreed; “And on top of that,” he said, “whites are unreliable. They only come here for a little bit, then they go. We pay them R32 while they are here – but with that same money we could buy a goat. I suggest we do without whites. It would be better to spend the money we have on goats. At the end of the year we would have a flock of goats – and where the white who’s worth a flock of goats?”

“That is so,” said Majozi,” but we all learn by associating with one another. It is our job to make a bridge between black and white.

Mdukatshani must be a place for building bridges.

Sweliswe was absent from the next meeting. He sent his apologies.

He was sick.

“That man is starving,” said Mhlongo. “I was with him the other day when he ate his food. He took a tiny little tin with enough in it for me to eat in one swallow. We all saw what happened to Nkentchaan.

He got thinner and thinner and weaker and weaker, and then he died.

Sweliswe is going to die if we don’t force him to eat.”

“Resolved,” read the Minutes, “that Numzaan be instructed to get Sweliswe proper food and force him to eat properly.

Next item on the agenda was a job application from concerned whites wishing to work at Mdukatshani. Their application was read to the meeting: “We realize that CAP has limited financial resources,” they wrote, “that we are living in a crisis situation of mass unemployment, pitifully low wages, spiraling inflation, and that the threat of famine is imminent. In these circumstances for us to ask for a higher wage than R32 a month may appear as greedy, inappropriate and out-of-touch with CAP’s philosophy If we are to work for CAP, however, we would like to earn R100 a month each.”

There are bridges across the gulf that separates the black and white worlds, and it is interesting, as an excursion, to cross into black country to see how the other half-lives. Few who have the choice, however, remain on the black side of the gulf. And nobody lives on a bridge.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
P. O. Box 26,
TUGELA FERRY,
3504

APRIL 1980: NGONONDO

Gwaaaaargh! The goat leapt with pain as the plastic tag was clipped onto its ear. Number 89. A new entry for Mdukatshani Goat Register.

“One female, white with black poll, brown neck and shoulders”

Another tag out of the box. Number 90. Another bellow of pain.

Another goat with a white badge.

Week after week new goats have been arriving at Mdukatshani, bewildered strangers that stop and start, leaping about the kraal, butting the gate, tearing into thorns in dashes for freedom. It has made life hell for the goatherds. There are always new goats missing, always search parties out in the bush following up rumours. Seven were sighted on the cliffs at the Skehlenge. Two on the ridge? A white nanny up the dry streambed?

Sooner or later the newcomers return to the fold, they lose their jitters to plot with the flock on the daily routine of in-and-out, the splash through the footbath, the browse on the hills. But when the count comes right at last – another truckload of goat trundles into the kraal. Another ear tagging ceremony kicks up the dust.

Every time we clip a tag onto a goat’s ear we think of Ngonondo. It is four months since he was gunned down on Mashunka mountain and the gabble of the valley was stilled. Ngonondo? Ngonondo! How could Ngonondo be dead? Ngonondo was always lucky.

That’s the way the valley explained his flair for strategy. Luck. In fact he was a disciplined man, precise, thoughtful, deliberate. There was nothing careless in his make-up. Except his courage. Ngonondo was careless with his courage. And we were careless in thinking nerve was all he needed to keep himself safe, a kind of moral bulletproof vest.

“It started off,” says Mhlongo, “that day Ngonondo’s child came to tell us there were goats near him that had our eartags. “Ngonondo could not help but notice the goats for there they were at the kraal next-door, conspicuously labeled with our plastic tags. He strolled up to the boys who were herding the animals.

“Whose goats are these?” he asked.

“Zenele gave us the job of herding them,” replied the boys. Months of doubt settled into certainty.

Although they didn’t say much, Mashunka people had been noticing the strange goats, coming and going, so they guessed that Mashunka had become a staging post for goat thieves. Also a supply post. Mashunka goats disappeared as fast as new goats arrived. We picked up stray bits of information from time to time, and so did Ngonondo, and when we met up we swopped what we knew. There seemed to be a crowd of men involved, and stolen goats were moved rapidly from their home territory to areas where they would not be recognized, and they never stayed anywhere long enough to raise too many questions. They were rushed along the line to be sold somewhere north of us in Zululand.

“There is also a matter of a stolen beast,” Ngonondo confided to Mhlongo when they bumped into each other one day. “I was up in the krantzes above my home – not a well-visited place – and I found biltong drying in some rock overhangs. I’m making enquiries – but let me know if you hear of anyone who has a missing beast.”

News trickled back. A Mchunu had been mourning a lost ox when he attended a party – and saw a man carrying a shield made from the hide of his animal. He was not mistaken for his ox had distinctive markings which he could describe.

He sat through the party, drinking beer, saying nothing. He went home worrying about what to do. The man he had seen with the shield was from another clan. If he made an accusation he could start a war.

Eventually he went to the police and made a report.

Not long afterwards we rang through to say our missing goats had been seen close to Ngonondo’s kraal.

“Whose goats are these?” the police asked when they arrived.

“Zenele gave us the job of herding them,” the boys replied for the second time.

The police searched Zenele’s kraal and found a new shield, made from an ox with distinctive markings. Then Ngonondo directed them to the cliffs where the biltong was drying, and here and there on the meat the police found scraps of skin that matched the shield.

Zenele was arrested, and with him two youths. One was Ngonondo’s own nephew.

When the case came up, Mhlongo and Ngonondo gave evidence, together with the boys who had been looking after the goats. Zenele was found guilty and jailed for a year – six months imprisonment for the ox, six months for the goats. The two youths with him, however, were found not guilty, and discharged.

As Zenele was being taken to the cells he passed Ngonondo and stopped.

“When I came out of jail it is best you disappear and are not seen around,” he said.

“Do you hear what he is saying?” said Ngonondo.

“Yes, I hear it,” said Mhlongo.

The two men were troubled as they left the courthouse. Outside they found the two who had been accused with Zenele.

“Want a lift?” asked Mhlongo.

“Not with him,” said the one youth, pointing at Ngonondo.

“We talked about it on the way back,” says Mhlongo. “Ngonondo said he was worried about those boys because they were always up to mischief with guns.

“Aren’t you worried about what they might do to you?” I asked.

“No, said Ngonondo. “If they kill me, they kill me. I spoke nothing but the truth and we have been seriously worried about these thefts at Mashunka.”

We had first met Ngonondo in 1977 when the Mtshali and Mvelase were warring on our boundary – and Ngonondo was general of the Mtshali regiment. We had heard about him of course, but we did not recognize the stranger who stood in our doorway one morning, and with striking self-assurance asked that we sit together and talk. He was a man in his early

forties, not very tall, but with an unmistakable stamp of authority. He spoke with animation, so rapidly he seemed to stutter, and he walked with a quick step, too impatient to go round an obstacle, springing from rock to rock.

Once we knew him, it did not seem incongruous that the war leader also led the peace, and that the man who risked most for law and order in the valley, was a man who had been an outlaw almost all his life.

“Ngonondo!” men were laughing at the beerdrinks 30 years ago. “The spirits of his ancestors certainly look after him. It’s a wonder somebody’s older brother hasn’t waylaid him on a path and given him beating. Did you hear his gang hammered our kids again? Ngonondo! Already he is a fighter!” and he was. At 10 he spent idle herding days with his head full of schemes to ambush the Mvelase boys. Scrapping along footpaths, clashing sticks, he mastered the brute arts of war.

But he also learnt that numbers don’t matter if you use your wits, which were to be important, for Ngonondo was an Mtshali, and in this bend of the river, Mtshali’s are outnumbered.

“Once when I was up on a hill looking for a cow, I watched the children,” one kehla recalls. “A group of bigger boys came on Ngonondo and his friends, making clay cattle. There was a skirmish, and Ngonondo fled, with his friends following and the bit boys chasing. Ngonondo ducked behind some rocks – the pursuit went past – and that devil Ngonondo slipped back to collect the goats of the bigger boys and drive them off.

That evening the big boys were threshed for losing the goats. Ngonondo waited until the thrashing was over, then he said to the men: ‘Baba, I have come to tell you that there are goats that look like yours in the kloof near the big cliffs.’”

“Even then he was special. Always lucky, “Johan Dladla told us. Johan was a veteran of Ngonondo’s earliest campaigns – a reluctant small boy pressganged into joining Ngonondo’s goatherd impi.

Msinga surges and eddies with restlessness, and when we arrived here in 1975 there was tension because Mvelase youths were helping themselves to Mtshali cattle and goats. Like all the jobless at Msinga, they had nothing to do all day, so rustling neighbours’s stock was a game with a meal at the end of it.

The Mtshalis caught the smell of braising meat drifting from the bush, but they did nothing, scared of the spark that flares into bloodshed, knowing they were a minority. Then some clot killed Ngonondo’s ox.

Ngonondo left his job as night watchman at Anglo American Corporation, Johannesburg, and took a taxi home. He called up the Mtshali young men and a few lightning campaigns later, the Mvelase were under siege.

They had the greater numbers, but each time they launched an attack, Ngonondo turned their offensive into rout. The police were called in to the one-sided war, but long before the first helicopter clattered over Mashunka mountain, Ngonondo knew it was coming. His men were dispersed and he sat on a hillside grinning while the police rounded up unsuspecting groups.

By early 1978 everyone was tired of the fighting, and at the command of acting chief Mlingane, both clans gathered to sort out a truce. Ngonondo, of course, was selected to implement it. He was the only man so powerful that both sides stood in awe of him.

Now the organization and discipline he had used so effectively in war, he used just as effectively to suppress friction and enforce order.

Mtshali and Mvelase he treated with equal fairness and severity, and he did not suspend the law when he found families were offenders.

He inherited a huge backlog of cases, and began to deal with them systematically. Rape, assault, cattle theft, goat theft, fowl theft, wood theft ... tribal policemen went out issuing summonses. Some cases never got as far as a hearing. Once it was known that Ngonondo meant business, many accused offered compensation to the complainants. We joined the queue of suddenly-hopeful to book trials. We had a string of cases pending when Ngonondo died.

In July last year Zenele, the convicted goat chief, was released from jail. He seemed uncomfortable next door to Ngonondo, and was only seen at home sporadically. We heard he was working somewhere in Johannesburg.

In December Ngonondo was asked to officiate at a wedding. Before he left home, however, he was approached by a man who warned him he was going to be killed. "What difference does it make whether I attend or not?" Ngonondo replied. "If I am going to be killed they will get me some other time if they don't get me now." But he thanked the man for the warning.

It was sunset when he took leave of the wedding party. Guests heard him say: "Let's go home following the road." If there was safety anywhere, it lay along the road. But the five men accompanying him said: "It's late. Let's take the short cut through the gap in the mountain." And eventually Ngonondo was persuaded to go that way. At the gap his companions suggested a stop to urinate. Ngonondo was standing quite still when the first shot hit him. He made a rush to attack his killer, and was grappling with him when, from the other side of the path, another shot went off.

"Did you see the killers?" Ngonondo's five companions were asked. But four said they bolted at the first shot, and the fifth said he fell on his face and saw nothing.

There is a rumour that the man who warned Ngonondo of his danger gave evidence to the police, for soon afterwards Zenele and two others were arrested. These arrests are all that distinguish Ngonondo's death from the other seven indunas killed here over the past few years. Gade Zwane, Mashena Ngubane, Kakiwe Mvelase, Mzansi Nsele, Tembo Ndamane, Walter Sokela, Sihluku Mdlolo – one by one they have been picked off, and their killers walk free. It's no longer an honour in these parts to be selected an induna.

"That's why the induna at Nomoya is trying to resign," says Mhlongo.

"And look at that induna at Mbango. The authorities will not let him carry a firearm. He has a knobkerrie and that's all. How can a man like that convict anyone, when he knows they will be waiting on the footpath to get him when he returns home from trying cases?"

Ngonondo's dying has made us face up to one thing: it is no longer possible to delegate the law to some authority, to hope some Ngonondo will handle justice for us all. Each man must now administer the law for himself – knowing successful legislation is written with a gun.

Since Christmas 27 people have been shot dead near Mdukatshani. There have been no arrests. Many others have been shot and wounded, but we have only kept a list of those who have died:

Mina Mkhize was killed after she opened her door to the knock of a stranger.

Zokono Mveli was killed when he was washing his feet by the light of a fire.

Nomavole Mkhize was killed in a garden at 8 o'clock one morning.

Babo Mbhele and Mbili Zungu were held up at a roadblock and shot in the car.

The 10-year old Mdlolo boy was killed when gunmen sprayed the hut with bullets while the family was sleeping.

Langa and his wife were killed as they rushed out of a burning hut.

Reverend Nqulunga was killed as he opened his front door, dressed for church.

Khulu Xaba was shot at dusk as he came out of his hut

It has not been easy relating these events. We have shifted sentences, dropped phrases, changed words – awkwardly aware that whatever we say sounds melodramatic. But melodrama or no – we have dealt with real men.

Ngonondo was buried below Mashunka's krantzes. A week later his successor was named: Thwalioxoza Nsele. A week after that Nsele was shot dead. There have been no arrests. And no takers for Ngonondo's job. His position remains empty.

"The hurricanes of chaos have begun
To buzz like hornets on the shifting sand."

NEIL AND CREINA

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MAY 1980: A LONG DIG

“Well, if people are hungry, why don’t they eat that?” asked the journalist. Our chairman Zeph Ntabela looked about him.

”Eat what?”

“There. That green stuff.”

“But that’s burweed.”

“All right. Whatever its name is – why aren’t people eating it?”

“Auw! Auw!” said Ntabela. “Even donkey won’t touch it. The government used to fine you for having it on your land.”

The journalist was skeptical. “Then why have all these people grown it in their fields?”

“You know,” Ntabela, reported afterwards, “I couldn’t think how to answer him.” Burweed has been outlawed in Natal for more than 100 years, but this sturdy plant with big green leaves is too vigorous to wilt before notices in the Government Gazette, much too abundant to be hacked into retreat or sprayed into oblivion. In Msinga fields it has been sole survivor of summer. A summer when even the dagga crop died.

Only 366 millimetres of rain fell in the past 12 months, less than half the average of the previous four years. The ferrymen can tell you what the result has been. Officially they take no notice of their cargoes, but this year they haven’t had to be discreet. Few sacks have traveled in their leaky boats. Few big suitcases. Few fragrant shopping bags. And for once no helicopters came buzzing through the valleys. The police knew it wasn’t worth the effort. No dagga – no raids.

It was not just lack of water that killed the dagga. Every evening, as bats came out hunting in the hot dusk, women appeared on the riverbanks, and their quick shadows flitted up and down among the dagga plots, sprinkling water on the seedling drug. Although the roots of the dagga kept damp, however, heat curled the leaves. Drought is measured by sun as well as water. Only the dagga growers on the cool heights of the mountain harvested enough of the feathery green crop to fill a few cardboard boxes, which were wrapped in sacks and stuffed into hidey-holes.

A year ago a jam tin full of dagga cost R2. Today the field price is one tin of dagga for one tin of beans. The beans are worth about 50 cents. However stores are so far away that a busfare and a long walk should be added to that 50 cents to give the beans their real value. But whichever way you do the costing – dagga has gone down, food had gone up. In fact food is becoming common currency at Msinga. Sweet potatoes are bartered for clay pots, old clothes and taxi fares. A live fowl buys a packet of sugar. Storekeepers are accepting goats to settle customers’ accounts. And we are exchanging mealie meal for hard labour. Thirty days sweat and toil = R17 worth of putu for the pot.

The original proposition came from Msusampi.

“We thought it was time we moved the Tugela,” announced Captain Mbele, 78-year-old vice-chairman of the community. Yes, the Tugela lay down hill, and Msusampi sat uphill, but The

Great Furrow Dig of two years before had taught them most things were possible. Anyway, if they couldn't get water to their gardens, there would be no gardens, for the mountain stream that filled their furrow had almost run dry.

Msusampi could offer manpower and womanpower. All that was lacking was some technical advice.

"We've been looking at the waterfall," said Mbele, "and if we dug a furrow from the top of it..."

There were some familiar faces at the first on-site inspection. Zungu, Mtshali, Jimstone, Delanie, Duma, Dladla and 1906 Mvelase – all veterans of the first dig. The mountain reared up behind them, dark and cold.

It is so angled that for most of the winter it lies in shadow, so steep that the bridlepath has difficulty finding a perch, halfway up.

"Here," said Mbele, shouting to make himself heard above the water.

The river careered round a corner, shot a rapid, and slipped away, hugging the base of the mountain, "If we started digging here we could make a furrow that would carry the water right around the mountain."

Underfoot was ironstone. Round about were boulders. You don't dig stone, you chip it. Splinter by splinter. The men grinned. Well..?

Well the technical adviser reminded himself he was a long way off 78, and if Captain Mbele was willing to tackle it ... well.... Technical advice might make some progress if it were hitched to imagination.

"The trouble is," said the advisor, "that the waterfall is not high enough." He thought a bit.

"We would need to lift the water higher to get it running to your gardens. Now if we built a dam up there"

The men peered up the slope, blinking into the sun. Life the river 100 metres. OK.

But a dam would still not by-pass the rock. There would have to be a furrow. And the furrow would have to start at the top of the waterfall.

And the top of the waterfall was an ironstone sill. If only there were a weak seam. The men walked backwards and forwards, examining the rocky terraces. They need not have bothered. For tens of thousands of years the Tugela's floods had been probing and found no flaw.

The technical advisor returned home with a sinking heart to gather some tools for D-day. Crowbars, cold chisels, sledgehammers. It was the scale of the thing that was so depressing. All that rock. All that mountain. Would the visiton of those shaky old men be enough to tackle it?

D-day, if anything, increased the depression, for there was so little to show for the first assault on the rock. The men sat in a line.

Thud-uh. Thud-uh. The tock echoed to the blows. "Take that rock!

That's me rock! Strike hammer! Bite iron!" The men chanted to their tools to synchronize the beat. Here and there a flake of rock was dislodged.

The technical advisor marked out a line for the rock chippers, pacing 80 metres to a sandbank above the level of the floods. Here four pegs marked a square in the sand.

"If we can get the water running this far," the advisor explained, "it must fall on a waterwheel to drive a pump. We need a hole three metres deep."

D-day 2 saw the arrival of the women.

“Not enough picks,” observed the chairlady, Bertina Ntshaba. “Can you get us more?” Meanwhile babies were dumped on the sand, and 15 powerful matrons set to work, digging in unison.

“Stop,” panted Madam Chair at last, throwing down her pick. The reserve team took up spades, presented basins and buckets. The mine shaft began to sink. For the first few weeks the women shifted sand.

Bucket after bucket was carted away. The hole-diggers began to disappear from view legs gone. Shoulders gone. Heads gone. And still going down...

The picks started to fall among pebbles, then shale, and layer by layer the shale hardened into rock. Deep blue rock with shiny flecks. Mica?

“No diamonds!” shouted the Lady Chair. “Even here at Msinga we know that Kimberley diamonds come from blue ground.” There were giggles.

“Gold,” asserted one amazon. “That shiny stuff is yellow.”

“Coal,” yelled a third. “No more walking to steal wood. We’ve got our own coal mine!”

They continued to chortle, as they again got busy with picks and basins.

“We’re going to be rich. We’ve got our own mine!”

Long before the miners hit rock, the workforce had been enlarged.

Nomoya gardeners joined those from Msusampi. Now 60 men and women from two valleys were at work daily. The technical advisor was more cheerful.

“If we make the dam big enough,” he said, “the water can run in two directions. One pipe can take it round the mountain to Msusampi.

Another can lead it off to Nomoya.”

A site was marked on a shoulder of the hill. Picks swung again. Sweat trickled down working faces. But trouble was on its way. The Lady Chair saw it and dropped her pick. “Mkwedi Mkhize,” she said under her breath to the technical advisor. “Always unreasonable. Mental illness.”

“We greet you brother,” said Jimstone Sithole carefully as a man approached from a nearby kraal.

“What’s happening here?”

“It’s the drought,” explained Jimstone. “Our streams are dry so we are working together to build a dam so that everyone can have water from the Tugela.

“Not here” said Mkhize.

“But neighbour, you too will benefit,” said the Lady Chair reasonably.

“The water from this dam will give you a garden.”

“This is the traditional path of my ancestors,” said Mkhize. “No dam will be built on this place.”

“We hear you father,” said Lady Chair. “We will discuss the matter with the induna.”

Dambuilding was suspended while the diggers met the induna.

“I can let you dig a dam,” he said, “but the mad and the bad hold the guns here. It would be better to save blood and choose a new site.”

Mkhize’s return home had been unfortunately timed, but if there was to be a dispute, sooner was better than later. Up the hill trudged the diggers to start again. The mine shaft was still going down when the dam wall began to go up.

Almost 30 days had gone by, and 30 days it had been agreed, would be paid for with a bag of mealiemela. Every morning the Secretary, Mamubi Mvelase, put a tick against the names of those present. But a digger needed more than 30 ticks. He or she needed a chit with four signatures:

The Co-op chairman, the Co-op Secretary, the office staff (after a check of the debtors book) and finally the technical advisor. Only genuine fulltime workers were entitled to meal. Only registered members of the small farmers' co-ops. Only gardeners who really had a garden.

Last year there was a bit of a shambles. Hard-luck-tale-tellers got bags they never earned. Clever members claimed mealimeal in the name of half a dozen children in the family, non-members claimed to belong

There had been a lot of cheating on the last scheme. This one was designed to be foolproof.

And it might have been, had our office not bowed before the forceful personality of 1906 Mvelase. ("Born 1906," he declares to all comers, and ignoring the facts. "I'm the oldest man here.") The chits he signed with a flourish were the first sign of his take-over bid for the leadership of the Msusampi valley.

"At the elections I was voted to wear a disc," he announced. "I can write and I can control labour. Also I am always at the dig. Where is the man who is supposed to be leading us, that mouldy mealiecob Mbele?"

The chits never got as far as the technical advisor – and the first unauthorized bags of mealimeal were carried over the river.

Mbele was in Zululand visiting a son. He returned to a coup d'etat.

1906 was in power. Not only had he dispensed mealiemela – he had invited a large number of non-gardeners to join the dig, packing the vote to be sure of a majority. All that hurt Mbele, of course, but nothing hurt as much as 06's name for him. "Mouldy mealiecob," he reported furiously. "He's calling me a mouldy mealiecob." We had never seen Mbele angry. His sense of honour had for once deserted him. "I also got a ticket at the election," he said. "When the people voted for their choice. I was chosen behind Delanie and in front of Mvelase. And because Delanie couldn't be at the dig he made me his deputy."

Mbele decided to act as if nothing had happened. He ordered that some of the diggers leave the dig to repair the fences around the gardens.

"What's the use of digging," he said, "if your gardens are destroyed when the water comes?" But the old disciplinarian was ignored. Nobody was about when starving cattle broke into the gardens and trampled them bare. Mbele lost his cabbages, peas, wonder beans, potatoes and napier fodder. His fruit trees were smashed, his cassava acnes broken. Perhaps, after all, it was time he retired.

"But you can't get out," protested Delanie. "The Parliament of the People made me chairman, and it made you my assistant. If you want to get out you must ask Parliament's permission."

As it was such an important matter the dig was cancelled for a day, and Parliament opened alongside the wreckage of the gardens.

"There were a lot of swindles on the mealiemela last year," explained the technical advisor.

"People got up to all sorts of tricks to get more than they deserved." As he listed some of the shady deals there were clicks from the assembled parliamentarians. Abantu! People!

Tch Tch.

“And that is why,” continued the advisor, “this year we decided no mealimeal would be issued without the signature of the chairman and secretary. They know who are legitimate workers. If you don’t like your officials, you must put the matter to the vote, but meanwhile we have to accept Mbele’s signature.”

There was a shuffle. 1906 gazed at the hills.

“But where do these rumours come from?” said an old woman from the back benches.

“We have always supported Mbele.” Other voices followed her. Mbele was confirmed as leader of the dig, and organiser of gardens.

“Well everybody goes away,” he said, “What’s going to happen to these gardens? And the furrow? It’s full of leaks because of crab holes.”

The Parliament considered the problem and decided that in future all the women over 70 would fix the fences, fill the crabholes, and then guard the communal gardens. For this work they would still get a tick.

Everyone else would return to the waterfall.

There are still many days worth of mealimeal to be done. The mineshaft has to be lined with stone, and a tower built clear of the floodline. The dam has to be paved and waterproofed. Then there are the pipelines – 680 metres to be dug along the hillside to Nomoya, 2250 metres of mountainside to be shifted to get water round the mountain to Msusampi. It’s a long dig. If the experts are right, however, this summer was the start of a dry cycle. It’s a long dig for a long drought.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
P. O. Box 26,
TUGELA FERRY,
3504
May 23, 1980

DROUGHT RELIEF SCHEMES

The driest summer in living memory?

The worst drought this century?

Mr. Donald Sinclair, President of the Natal Agricultural Union recently gave the following assessment of the drought situation in Natal.

“...rainfall has been 20% to 60% below average, resulting in crop failure and rivers and streams running dry,” he said.

“The alarming prospect throughout the midlands is that at the end of summer, when water flow should be at its peak and fodder supplies secured for winter – streams were drying up and fodder was at a premium... Whether rain fell or not at all, we are facing a 7-month period, until spring rains arrive, during which water and fodder will mean the difference between survival or very drastic depopulation of stock.

NAUNLU – April 1980).

The Natal Agricultural Union went on to state that it was working with the Department of Agriculture on an action plan.

“The short term objectives would be aimed at surviving the next seven months,” said the NAU,” while longterm aims cannot escape the consequences of a Weather Bureau report that we are at the end of a seven year wet cycle.”

.....

The above extracts describe white farming areas which are generally well-conserved and not heavily overstocked.

What of the black areas?

According to The Daily News (18 May, 1980), Mr. Ferreira, Secretary of Agriculture for KwaZulu is reported saying that 100 000 cattle have already died in KwaZulu. Appeals for supplies of fodder for black stock had brought little response, Mr. Ferreira said.

When I telephoned Mr. Ferreira in March, to report the seriousness of the drought in Msinga, and to ask if the KwaZulu Government could offer any assistance, I was told: “KwaZulu has no money. Anyway the Msinga people have brought trouble on themselves by overstocking the area. However I have authorized 5 new boreholes.”

An amount of R 15 million has been set aside for drought relief in white farming areas. There is nothing for black farmers.

If Mr. Ferreira's figures are correct – if 100 000 cattle have died now when water and grazing is still available – then KwaZulu will lose a million cattle unless relief feeding and water is found.

Recently one of CAP's directors, Captain Mbele, had to travel to Zululand on family business. He returned with graphic descriptions of drought conditions further north.

"The worst I have ever seen," he said, "was at a place Nkanyezi, near Empangeni, in Chief Mthethwa's tribal area. For miles around the animals have disappeared. Everything is silent. Hungry animals have pulled out the roots of the grasses, so that the soil looks like a ploughed field. At one kraal I visited 15 of 40 cattle had already died. The others are so thin they will die soon. Most people who own stock seem to have lost about half their animals. All the men have left the area to find work to pay for mealiemeal. The women are so much alone that they dig the graves and conduct the funerals."

The clearing of "surplus labour" from white farms has exacerbated an already serious situation. At the worst possible time, new families are arriving in the homeland with large numbers of cattle, donkeys and goats.

Rising unemployment and the high cost of living have turned the crop failure of the past summer into a crisis. Recently the KwaZulu Development Corporation reported that of 30 000 men and women who joined the labour market in KwaZulu last year – only 4 000 found jobs.

Meanwhile the Department of Manpower has estimated that South Africa needs to create 1000 jobs a day...

Famine Relief Work – some suggestions

For several years the Directors of Church Agricultural Projects (CAP) have been investigating alternatives to industrialization as it has become increasingly obvious that industry cannot absorb the country's fast growing population.

At Msinga CAP has worked with local communities to create families who can be self-employed as farmers. In three areas, Msusampi, Nomoya and Sahlumbe, streams were diverted to irrigate community smallholdings. Gardens were very successful until this summer when streams dried up.

Now in order to save the investment they have made in their gardens, these communities have banded together on an ambitious new irrigation scheme, diverting the Tugela River. This can be called our **Famine Relief Project No 1.**

Men, women and children are working together, using sledgehammers, picks and shovels to chip a furrow out of rock, lay pipelines, build a dam high on a hillside.

Capital costs required for this scheme are tools and piping. The people are working without payment, but CAP is trying to raise funds to provide workers with a bag of mealiemeal for 30 days work. (A bag of mealiemeal cost R 15.50). There are no handouts – only families who have turned in 30 days of pick-and-shovel work can each their bag of meal.

Although this project has been started as a result of drought the diversion of the Tugela will be of permanent benefit to the surrounding communities, making conditions possible for several hundred small farmers to establish themselves.

Famine Relief Project No 2 is the building of fish ponds along the Tugela. Again – this enterprise will open up permanent opportunities for self-employment.

Famine Relief Project No. 3 is designed to help stockowners. Most of KwaZulu is topographically unsuited to crop production. At Msinga most of the countryside is rugged, and far from water. However large areas are covered with indigenous acacia scrub.

Experiments at Mdukatshani have shown that the acacia can provide a valuable, highly nutritious stock feed. On areas totally unsuited for cultivation, we have been able to reap two ton of acacia fodder per hectare. Analysis showed this fodder contained 17 % protein. The acacia fodder is made by clipping small thorn branches and putting them through a hammer mill. We have used the result as either hay or silage. The addition of molasses is necessary for silage.

The acacia also provide pods and seed – and analysis has shown that these contain 46% protein. The yield is about 300 kilograms per hectare.

Acacias, therefore, can compete with Lucerne as stockfeed of high nutritional value. And acacias can be reaped without the cost of ploughing, herbicides, insecticides, fertilizer, and irrigation.

Despite the drought – the acacias are flourishing, and at present children are scouring the hills with bags, collecting pods – either for individual households, or for the community co-operative enterprise.

Milled pods have been used not only to feed cattle, but as an economic poultry lay mash, to feed hens. At Mdukatshani goats are also being milked feeding on browse with a supplement of acacia hay and acacia pod concentrate.

Although the results of CAP's experiments with acacia fodder are due to be scientifically assessed and tabulated – CAP's directors believe they should offer the results already achieved as they could materially help many black stockowners to get their animals through the drought.

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JUNE 1980

A CORPSE IS GOVERNMENT PROPERTY

On midwinter night Joseph Xaba set off on his last journey. He was dressed for the occasion in a pair of black socks.

“Black socks with spots,” said Mrs. Stepis Mkhize. “Only it was hard to tell what colour the spots were, for there were more holes than there were spots.”

Mrs. Mkhize was the first to discover Xaba. IN fact she almost fell over his dead body as she opened her door to fetch a log to stoke the dawn fire. There he lay on his back in her yard, a complete stranger, naked except for his socks.

Stepis Mkhize shrieked. And she kept on shrieking until family and neighbours had roused themselves and emerged, shivering, into the cold grey morning. Together they peered down at the corpse. The socks, they agreed, were the important clue. Nobody knew the man. The socks were his only means of identification.

A messenger went up the road to waken the storekeeper to telephone the police. The sun rose above the hills. Onlookers began to stream to the Mkhize’s home.

“Don’t worry,” somebody comforted Stepis. “The police can’t hold you responsible when the man is unknown to you.”

“He was probably murdered a long way away,” said another. “That’s the way it’s done. Beat up a man, rob him, then dump his body far from the place where he was killed.”

The messenger returned from the telephone. The police were coming. Until they arrived, however, they warned that the corpse was not to be touched or disturbed. So the dead man stayed where he was stiff and brown, unblinking eyes staring at the sky.

The Mkhize’s skipped breakfast that morning. It didn’t seem right, cooking and eating with that body lying there. And however hard you tried to keep your eyes averted – somehow the corpse kept coming into view. If only the police would come...

Hours passed. The mud walls of the huts oozed warmth to those who leant against them. In the yard itself it was almost hot.

“I know the police said we must not disturb the body,” said a neighbour, “but it is not right to leave this man lying in the sun. The ancestors would not like it. Surely it will not be against the law to cover him with a blanket?” Those present debated the matter. They did not want to get into trouble with the police, and there were so many laws it was impossible to know when you were doing wrong. On the other hand it was hardly decent.... A blanket was fetched. Now everyone was a little apprehensive. They hoped when the police arrive they would understand.

Neil drove past at about 11 that morning, Philemon Khoza, his companion, explained the reason for the crowd at Mkhize's. The womenfolk were sitting and kneeling in the yard. The men stood restless at the edge of the road, watching for the police.

It was dark before Neil drove by again. He slowed down as the headlights of the truck fell on 30 men and women on their knees at the roadside.

"What's the matter?" he asked as he stopped next to them.

"Makokoko!" There was a shout of relief. "God has answered our prayers. We have been praying and praying but the cars in these parts don't stop at night. They just go faster when they see us kneeling here. Can you take a body home for us?"

"Is it the man whom I heard was beaten up and dumped here?"

"Yes," said one of the men.

"But you can't move a corpse if there has been an accident."

"We know that, but we have since learnt that this dead man was just sick and old and mad. He died of the cold. His relatives came and claimed him. They are here now. All day we waited for the police, but they never came. So we went to the induna and he said that, as it was clear the man had died by himself, we could take him home. But we have no vehicle to help us."

Neil reversed into the yard and the obstacle that had blocked the Mkhize's front door was at last removed. As many eager arms raised the load to the back of the truck, there were squeals and thumps.

Neil had forgotten he had six goatherds on board. When they saw the passenger who would be sharing their ride, they decided to bolt.

Neil sighed.

"Can you keep the boys warm until I get back?" he asked the head of the kraal.

"It will be small payment," said the man fervently. "I would be glad to welcome even 100 boys."

A young woman climbed into the cab to give directions.

"The Xabas live in a flat," she said. (A flat?! Neil puzzled).

"And the reason they live in a flat," went on the young woman, "is because only a few months ago the dead one set the house alight and burnt it down. He has tried many times in the past, but Olga, that is his wife, has always stopped him. For 30 years he has been witless and she has had to watch over him. And over her sons too.

They are just like their father."

The previous night Joseph Xaba had gone to bed as usual. The family had been asleep when he opened the door and shuffled off under the stars. They had only realized he was missing when they woke the next morning. All day they had searched in all directions. He had wandered more than 10 kilometres before lying down outside Mkhize's kraal.

"Turn off here," said the girl and the truck bumped off onto the veld.

Gradually the bumps began to lead uphill. "There's the flat."

Ahead was a small square shack with fresh mud walls and a few flattened sheets of iron on the roof. (Flat! Of course.) Later Neil paced the building. Three metres by three metres – home to Joseph and Olga Xaba and four grown sons.

As the lorry drew alongside the little house, a waiting man yelled:

“Have you no honour for the dead? You can’t deliver a dead man at the back door!”
“That’s Xaba’s mad son,” whispered the girl in the cab. “He gets violent if he’s not obeyed. Would you mind driving round the hut to the other side or he will damage your truck.”

There was no backdoor, and Neil could see no front door, but he followed the girl’s instructions, back into the veld, around a corner.

There now.... The body of Joseph Xaba had come home for burial.

Or so Neil thought. The next day a very agitated Xaba relative walked 30 kilometres across the hills to bring a message from the police.

Yes, the police had eventually pitched up, half an hour after the mourners settled to the wake. And while some might regard Alcock as messenger of the Lord, the police made it clear they saw him in another light. Alcock had confiscated a corpse, they said angrily. A corpse was government property. Alcock must be told to report to the police next day for illegally removing government property.

With that, the government property had been loaded into the police van and removed to Tugela Ferry.

On Wednesday Joseph Xaba’s widow got a message that she must come and fetch the body. The police van had broken down. Neighbours made a collection. With 20 cents here and 50 cents there, they raised R20 to pay for a car to fetch the corpse.

The last remains of Joseph Xaba had not been home more than an hour when a police van stopped at the flat.

“We forgot your husband’s pass,” the police told Olga.
(But they told us the van...)

On Thursday the police were back again.

“Papers to sign,” they told the widow.

The assessors at the gates of heaven may find some purpose in Joseph Xaba’s life, but the neighbours are unanimous in their judgment: his life as well as death had only nuisance value. What reliefs, at last, have him underground?

Neil has not yet reported to the police on the charge of illegally shifting government property, and the police seem uninterested in making an arrest. Perhaps they too, tired of old Joseph Xaba. Maybe confiscating a halfwit is a minor offence.

Not many days after the Xaba incident Neil was again traveling an Msinga highway when the sight of a crowd slowed him down.

“Anything wrong?” he asked.

“It’s our friend here,” said a matron. A young woman, very pregnant, was lying in the shelter of her friend’s legs. “We are waiting for a car to take her to the Umhlumayo clinic to have her baby.”

“Has she started labour?”

“Yes, some time ago.”

“Have you notified anybody?”

“Yes, a car passed traveling towards Umhlumayo, and we asked them to give the clinic a message.”

The sun had almost disappeared when Neil returned seven hours later. The women were still waiting, arms folded, staring up the road. The companion was still lying on the ground, but now moaning as her contractions gripped her.

“They must have forgotten to give the clinic the message,” said the woman. “All day cars have stopped because they think there has been an accident. But none of the cars were going to Umhlumayo. Only to Weenen or Ladysmith. Now we are worried because our friend has little time left.”

“But why on earth won’t you send her to the clinic at Weenen? It’s probably closer.”

“Weenen’s no good,” the women explained. “You see she paid Umhlumayo for her checkups, and the money covered having the baby as well. If she goes to Weenen she will have to pay a second time. She has no money to pay twice.”

Neil groaned. “I’ll arrange about paying Weenen,” he said. He drove to the nearest African trading store and asked to use the telephone.

“I’m so glad it’s a white man this time,” said the black trader.

“You will see what we have to put up with. This is the only telephone hereabouts and people wake me at all hours of the night to say somebody has been shot, or stabbed; they are giving birth or dying.

They all say they have to get hold of the doctor, but the doctor doesn’t answer his ‘phone in the middle of the night. I can never get anybody to come out...”

Neil telephoned the Weenen clinic.

“Unfortunately the sisters are away on their rounds. Try the ambulance.”

The ambulance driver’s wife took the call.

“The ambulance can only come out if it is sent by the doctor,” she said, “but the doctor won’t be back till later because he is out on his rounds.

Neil tried the Weenen Police.

“What’s the matter with her?”

“She’s in labour.”

“We can’t come out for that,” said the young policeman.

“Why not?”

“She’s got to be sick.”

“Hemel! Is that what’s wrong with her? I thought you said she was in labour. You must ‘phone the ambulance.”

“But the ambulance won’t come out without the doctor’s permission.”

“Then you’d better ‘phone the doctor.”

“But the doctor’s out on his rounds.”

“Ohhh... Well I don’t know what to do then,” said the policeman.

He really was trying to be helpful.

“Can’t you ask the magistrate to authorise the ambulance for me?”

“Ag. Leave it to me,” said the SAP. “I promise one of us will go...”

And so Dumazile Dlamini did not have her first baby on the side of the road after all. Her son was delivered in the comfort of the Weenen clinic.

NEIL AND CREINA

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JULY 1980: IT SERVES THEM RIGHT

A small cardboard box holds the latest statistics.

11 deaths at Machunwini

23 deaths at Mthatheni

16 at Mbabane

19 at Sbalweni

From Msinga's 60 cattle dips comes the story of the drought, recorded on official forms, files in the small, tin-roofed office of the Stock Inspector at Tugela Ferry. The papers give the cattle deaths in numbers. The people give the death toll in names.

"Bongezi" explains Mr. Mkhize, resting his loaded wheelbarrow.

"My last cow," he says, looking at his cargo of bones and bloodless meat. "She died yesterday."

"Insingisi my black ox went first," says Mathewu Mdlala. "Then my red ox Bayete. The next was my bull Zetuli, and very close after that my cows, Qomphike and Berea." In his yard washing flaps dry and the skins of the dead animals revolve slowly under a tree, clanking on a squeaky wire. Mdlala tried to be polite, talking there in his farmyard, with stripling peaches coming into leaf behind a brushwood enclosure, and a goat on the cage in the doorway of a hut.

Mdlala tries to be polite, but the grey hill slopes distract him. A line of cattle is on the move, swaying with a tilted grace, as if the wind were passing through them. Not all Mdlala's cattle have died. There is still Pineapple, Zenzene, Savini, Zymaan, Bull, Jamluut... a small herd of rickety beasts, too flimsy now to moo or bellow, easily jolted by loose stones. And that is what is worrying Mdlala. Once down an animal stays down, hidden by the surrounding bush. "Like Berea, he says. "She was rotten before I found her." The man is hurt. "And there was a damp, scuffed patch on the earth where her horn and mouth had rubbed and rubbed and rubbed as she tried to roll over to get back onto her legs."

For 45 years Mdlala has farmed at Msinga. Most of that time it has been a long-distance operation, of course, for Mdlala has run his stock from the petrol pumps of Johannesburg. Not that it has made him less of a farmer. A man has to get his capital where he can, and as there is no Land Bank for a black, "I was nightwatch at a garage," he says. All night he lived with the lights of the sleepy city around him, patrolling the corners of the buildings, walking in and out of glare and shadow, swinging his knobkierie. All, all night his thoughts lived on Mtateni hill. If he cleared the stones from that flat place he could make a field. If he cleared the stones he could build a wall on one side there, and perhaps if he planted a line of aloes...

He bought his first cattle in 1935. He was home at Msinga at the time, with two years' saving in his tin box.

"I had this friend, Ndima Mbatha," he says, "and he was in with some whites who were willing to sell. So one day I took my money and he took his and we went along the wagon track as far as Tugela Ferry, and then we got a lift to the top of the mountain, all the way to Greytown.

There was a place where we could sleep for a ticky a night, and the next day we walked to the abelungu.”

The next day Mdlala became a rancher with six cattle. Each animal cost him a month’s salary.

“£3!” he laughs. “£3! A beast was cheap then.”

+ “From various calculations that have been made it would seem that the minimum income that a family of four can contrive to come out on in the principal urban areas is between £6 and £7 per month. The average earnings in mining are about £3, and in industry £4.”

Economist D. Hobart-Houghton, 1938

The cattle set the pace on the long walk down to the Tugela, their hooves click-clicking a tattoo in the midwinter grasses.

“Xisa,” thought Mdlala as he fell in behind a black cow flashing white hooves. “Hey Mbatha!” he shouted to his companion. “I’m calling this one Xisa. That’s the only name for a black beast with white back feet.” He would need to get the feel of the others, though, before he could find names for them.

For a day the cattle sauntered across the mountaintops, chewing thick, sour grasses as they went. Then the track dipped over the edge of the plateau, down into the bushveld where the grass was sweet, and the cattle began to rush, each trying to stay in front to be first at the tidbits. A brown ox with knobbled button horns surged far ahead.

That one would be Leyland, Mdlala decided.

By nightfall on the third day they were at the Mhlangane stream- almost home. While the cattle nosed in the rocky pools, Mdlala looked up at the darkening hills. Here and there a fire twinkled through an open doorway. In the morning he would show his wife his herd, Xisa and Leyland, Skenel and Vetvoet. Already his animals were familiar.

Some he would use to pay lobola. Two he would use to plough that field he had cleared of stones. Six months salary had been blown on stock but there were still some pound notes in his tin. He would not have to go back to his city patrols for a few months yet.

Today this tall, skinny man can list the names of all the cattle he bought, sold or lost in 45 years. Also those he used to lobola his first wife, and when she died, his second, and when she died, his third.

Not all the animals come to mind immediately. Sometimes Mdlala screws up his face, thinking, re-counting a herd, mentally checking the colours of individuals.

“I was away so often,” he apologises. “The boys who herded knew my cattle better than I did.” Then suddenly he remembers another animal. “The yellow cow. Of course. Missus.”

To carry the memories of 45 working years a man must be old. Should be old. Mathewu Mdlala was 70 when he left the Goli garage four years ago.

“The whites told me I was an old man, I had better retire,” he says.

He is still surprised. He is too agitated, restless, eager to be a pensioner. Which is why he turned to ranching when he came back to Msinga for good.

He came back riding the Indian bus with only his busfare in his pocket, ashamed and heartsore because he had no presents for his wife Joanna.

“For years and years the garage had taken money off my wages, and the whites said it was for pension and insurance. I thought I would get all this money when I left, but instead they gave me a little blue card and said if I took it to Tugela Ferry I would get a pension for the rest of my life. For two years the pension money went into our mouths, then it was finished.” But Mdlala had been thrifty, he had Post Office savings, and he spent some of the money building the first home he and Joanna had ever shared together, with square mud walls and corrugated iron roof. Then he came to Mdukatshani and joined the shouting, dusty crowds that jostled at our first cattle auction. For ten high-class heifers he paid R80 each.

“All the heifers calved,” he says, “and we had milk at home. But when the drought started the calves were the first to die.”

One morning in July Mdlala climbed a ridge high above Mtateni.

From a perch above the valley he stared down on red earth strewn with rubble. There was nothing left to graze. Even the bitter aloë leaves had been chewed to stumps. As he clambered on to the top he realized there was nothing left in the high country either. More rock. Thorn scrub. No grass anywhere.

That was the day he found Insingisi, his black ox. He had driven the cattle to the hills hoping they would find browse on the slopes, but when he saw Insingisi resting he knew it was too late. The telltale signs had been there for some time. Uncertain stagger. Legbones adangle. Dung which was hard and dry and full of sticks. No fat smooth plops for the women to pound and mix and smear onto the floors.

It had been weeks since the house had had the sweet smell of newly-dunged floors.

“When I saw Insingisi had stopped chewing its cud, I knew it could not live much longer,” says Mdlala. “There was nothing I could do for it.” But he was not going to leave the ox to groan to a slow death. He loved the beast, so he coaxed it home, gently pushing, giving it time. And when it was in his yard he cut its throat.

“And later when I saw my ox Bayete could not live, I finished him off.”

And Xetuli and Qomephike. Mdlala killed them all. A caring stockman does not leave his animals to die. Only Berea he never reached in time. Berea was finished off by crows.

All over Msinga men have been killing animals they love.

“But it makes no difference to our hunger,” says Zweliswa Dladla.

“There’s no food in an animal that has died of starvation. You cook the meat, and cook it and cook it and it never gets soft. Then you eat it and chew and chew and at last you spit it out. It’s like eating plank.”

Bundles of skins hang at halfmast in the trees.

“But they are of no use to us,” says a gogo who makes a living from the traditional Zulu pleated leather skirts. “The skins of the cattle that have died of starvation never get soft. It’s like banging planks.

The skin breaks because the cattle had no fat in them.”

Taxis career into the valley with sacks of grass piles on their roofs, untidy hairdos, loosely pinned, that come adrift on the corners.

Huts sand with disheveled thatch, yellow whiskers showing under frayed grey edges.

“Somebody stays at home all the time to chase the cattle away,” says Mrs. Ngena Duma. “The animals are so hungry they even break through fences to chew on the roof.”

Cattleowners leave a trail of hacked trees. When a man picks up an axe cattle fall into line behind him. Herdboys drag branches of wild olive to animals that can no longer rise.

One morning we passed Japhet Sokhela pushing a wheelbarrow across the road. At 101 his eyes are giving him trouble. He peered in at us, unrecognizing. “Oh, it’s you,” he says. He has just been down to his plot on the government irrigation scheme to cut lucerne for his eight cattle. We put the bag of green stuff in the boot, and Sokhela rolls an empty barrow on the last stretch home. “The harvester termites are eating my Lucerne,” he complains, “and I haven’t even got enough for my cows.”

Some white farmers are doing well out of the drought, cutting waste rubbish and flogging it as hay. Storekeeper Mshishene Malembe sent his lorry all the way to Escourt to buy hay. “And look what they sold me,” he despairs. “Bales of dried mealicobs and husks!”

“I bought some hay,” says Mdlala, “but there’s something wrong with it. The cattle are starving, but they won’t touch it.” Even hungry animals discern mouldy stalks.

All over Msinga men are killing animals they love, spending money they cannot afford on fodder to get a few survivors through the winter.

“But they brought it on themselves,” an official tells us. “They have only themselves to blame. It serves them right.” Which is a tactless thing to say, coming as it does from a white who holds a high position in KwaZulu’s Department of Agriculture. He has repeated himself several times, although he has never intended to see himself quoted.

“It’s the best possible thing that can happen,” agrees the chairman of a white farmers association. He is against aid for the stockowners of KwaZulu. “Hell man, if we don’t have drought how will we kill off the stock; It’s the only way to stop the blacks overstocking. They’re so greedy for cattle they will never sell a beast.”

The chairman happens to be a cattle rancher himself, with a herd of almost 300 animals. He knows a lot about the beef business. Cattle ranching is an industry for him. Economic, efficient. He has so many animals, though, he does not give them names.

At the Tugela Ferry Stock Inspector’s office we make some enquiries about Msinga’s rich and greedy stockmen.

“100 animals!” Mr. Harry Zuma, the stock inspector, looks at us in disbelief. He knows Msinga well, for he has been posted here for 14 years.

“Nobody at Msinga has 100 animals,” he says. “Not even the chiefs. There may be a few who have.. 30, 40, maybe 60..but most families have one or two animals.”

A white farmer in the Tugela thornveld needs 1 700 hectares and more than 300 cattle to make a living.

A black farmer in the Tugela thornveld needs 83 hectares and 16 cattle.

That's authoritative. The first estimate comes from the Commission of Inquiry into the European Occupancy of Rural Areas, 1959. The second comes from the Tomlinson Commission of Inquiry into the Socio-Economic Development of Bantu Areas, 1955.

Today a man like Mdlala has a share of about 7 hectares. And that's throwing in the mountainsides and krantzes.

The chairman of the white farmers association is absolutely right. Msinga is overstocked. With people.

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AUGUST/ SEPTEMBER 1980:
SATURDAY SWOP SHOP

“That’s settled then,” said the chairman. “We will meet the Sahlumbe people on the 19th.”

“Unfortunately I won’t find my way to go to that meeting,” said one of our directors, Mdowneni Hadebe. “I have work to do.”

“But you’ve got to be there,” protested the chairman. “Sahlumbe is your area.”

“He’s scared!” said Hadebe, with the barest twinkle, that glint which is his only concession to humour. Hadebe never laughs, seldom smiles.

“I’m not scared,” he repeated. “I told you – I’m busy.”

His colleagues jeered.

“Go on! The man’s a coward!”

“You can see he’s terrified!”

“Just because somebody threatened to shoot him!”

Some death threats arrive by post, some are whispered, but this one was yelled in fury. “Just as soon as I can get a gun I’m gong to shoot that bastard Hadebe,” Sayinile Zakwe had told the world, and the world had hastened to pass the message back to Hadebe.

“How big is this Sayinile?” asked Mhlongo.

“This high,” said Hadebe, raising his hand just above his waist.

Mhlongo guffawed. “Course you’re scared. You think a little girl can’t pull a trigger just as well as a big boy?”

Hadebe missed the Sahlumbe meeting, but the next Saturday he showed he was not to be intimidated. He was back at the scale, keeping order, cheating cheats like Sayinile, using that stern face of his to subdue the sweating jostle of 505 people. No. More than that. There were 505 sales written down in the book, but with carriers and helpers, children and hawkers it was 600 ... 650... What the hell! Did it matter?

Did anything matter at the end of Saturday except that awesome total another 11 600 kilograms of acacia pods. Another R2 332 needed to pay for them.

Sheds bulging – bank account empty – Hadebe might not be scared of Saturdays, but dear God help us, we were.

An empty bank account launched this enterprise way back in 1975. There we were, in the red, with 10 hectares of yellowing Lucerne. Now ten hectares may not seem much on a farm of 2 800 hectares, but that Lucerne was glamorous stuff, a showpiece patch, an emerald miracle that glowed among the thorns. Dreary, tough, reluctant thorns. It had taken weeks to chop and stump them to make clearings for the Lucerne. There was a purple sheen on our exotic fodder, its first flowering, when the cost of fertilizer leapt 38% (the first of many startling price jumps).

We would need more than R1 000 to fertilizer our patch. We stopped gloating over the Lucerne, turned our backs when it came into view and discovered the thorns. Msasane to the Zulus. Acacia tortilis to the botanists. Not tough and dreary. Tough and beautiful. Beautiful

and nutritious. There is 5 to 8% crude protein in the “hay” (milled twigs, leaves and thorns) and 12 to 19% protein in milled pods and seeds.

Last year, as an experiment, we offered to pay 10 cents for a bag of curly brown pods. Two tons you may remember were shaken off the valley’s trees, ground into meal, and fed to our fowls, goats and cattle. In April we announced we were back in the market for Ntwethwes, the local name for thorn pods. Nothing happened. The message was repeated. Still no results. Messages get snarled up on their way around these hills.

Then at Nomoya one afternoon we encountered five small herdboys each carrying a basin of pods.

“What are you doing with those ntwethwes?”

“They call the goats.”

“We scatter Ntwethwes outside the door,” elucidated the bieest boy,

“and then the goats come home at night without being fetched.”

“If you will collect some extra ntwethwes while you are herding,” we offered, ‘you can get paid for them.’”

The first Saturday in May five orange pockets stuffed with pods were brought to the door. “More?” we advertised hopefully.

By the end of May we had just over a ton.

By the end of June we had 2½ tons. Too slow. We tried 20c a bag.

By the end of July we had 8 tons.. Whoa! Hold it! Enough!

By the end of August we had 35½ tons. Don’t panic, we told each other. The pods must be finished any day now. There can’t be many left.

By the end of September we had 95,88 tons.

Nearly 96 tons.

133 273 200 pods. Whew!

In the far away valleys of KwaPalafini ntwethwes day started at first cock crow. As neighbourhood cocks flapped one after another into rowdy discord, hails rang out from hut to hut. Time to go. Time to go. There were giggles in the darkness as footpaths slid together and friends met up. There were yells from the stragglers. Voices shrilled a rollcall.

“Mthembu Khayise?”

“Here auntie.”

It was too dark to see more than the outline of the cliffs against the stars, but the mountainside was familiar ground, and women and girls walked surefooted, keeping their distance so headloads did not bump. They walked for more than two hours before they reached the Ndaka River. On the bank they dumped their burdens, stripped, wrapped their clothes around the ntwethwes, helped each other raise the lumpy bundles again. Then they began to wade, a line of buttocks, grey and shiny, splashing in the first light of a winter morning.

Ndaka River was about half way. By the time the KwaPalafini carriers reached Mdukatshani the ntwethwe queue was already 300 strong.

The newcomers took their place at the back and waited.

Up at the front were the lucky passengers of the yellow combi. The combi was usually first to arrive, swinging through the gate at about 6 a.m., roof strapped with ntwethwe bags two layers deep.

“The women pay me half the load,” grinned the driver as he opened the door and bodies began to crawl out in reverse. A maximum load was in everybody’s interest, so passengers traveled flat on their backs, noses touching the roof.

As soon as the combi was emptied, the cheerful driver set off to shuttle another load from Umhlumayo Mountain, 40 kilometres away. And after that, a third load.

Meanwhile, if you cared to look at the encircling hills, you could see lines of pedestrians coming in. women, girls, little boys ... even at a distance there was no mistaking that propped-up headgear. Saturdays we kept our eyes averted from the encircling hills.

Donkeys trekked in, pods balanced like panniers. A truck arrived, even its cab adorned with bags. The Weenen bus stopped on the road. Two women offloaded 20 bags. Most belonged to friends who were walking to save the busfare.

Under the weigh-in tree the queue started moving. The first bags were unhooked from the scale and spilt in the storeroom. The line shuffled. A latecomer cruised hopefully up and down the row. At last she caught sight of somebody she knew.

“Move up,” she said. “I’ve brought the other sack.” There was a rumble of discontent as she dumped her bag.

“You can’t get in there,” shouted those behind. The latecomer retreated. Her bag stayed in the queue.

At the pay-out a pretty teenager handed in three IOU chits. One for herself.. She put the coins in her left cheek. One for MaMvelase she put the coins in her right cheek. And for MaSithole... she clutched the money in her hand. She could not count, but this way the money arrived home without muddle.

A 10-year-old passed up a bag to be weighed. Surprised at its heaviness Vagashile let it fall. It landed with a thud.

“Those aren’t ntwethwes,” shouts rose indignantly from all sides.

“Open the bag,” ordered Hadebe severely. Vagashile pulled out handfuls of pods – and stones. The crowd murmured. Hadebe shoveled the stones back into the bag and hurled it after the boy.

“Take it away! Never come back here!” he shouted. “This is what spoils a good thing,” he addressed the queue.

We have to waste half the day looking to see what you have hidden in your ntwethwes.”

“You’re right,” commiserated a matron. “But what can you expect?

Ikafula ikafula njalo. A kafir is a kafir forever.”

As soon as one racket was uncovered, a new one was devised. The forgeries and frauds have been ingenious. While the crooks in the queue may have been smart, however, we are certain we’ve been smarter.

There’s not a dodge we haven’t cottoned onto ... is there?

The cheats in the ntwethwe queues, we were to learn, were as nothing to the cheats who tried to get free food. At the end of July the drought in KwaZulu became headline news. The KwaZulu Government earmarked millions for famine relief, and a sympathetic public raised thousands more. The first lorryload of food arrived at Mdukatshani, Food for the poor. Food for 90 000 people? At Msinga at least 90% of the people are poor. Our directors – all men from the valleys themselves – set about finding the poorest poor. They tried to untangle all the lies miserable people told them to make their misery worse than it was. They tried to investigate each of a thousand cases, to make lists of the desperate.

“We are widows. Our husbands are dead. We have nobody to support us,” a group of Mashunka women told Swelizwe Dladla. He made a note of their names – then sent his wife MaNdimande to check on them. Their husbands worked in Goli.

“Liars all of you!” Swelizwe yelled at them when they came to get their food parcels.

“Yes, we lied,” admitted one. “But on Friday my husband came home because he is producing blood at both ends. He is so sick he will die.” “Ha,” said Swelizwe with satisfaction. “You wished your husband dead and now your ancestors are obliging you. You should be happy! Suka. Bugger off.”

“I’m resigning,” he told the next Executive meeting. “Every day now there are threats. I’m a married man with a young family, and they will suffer if anything happens to me.” The other directors have also had threats. And the lucky poor who have received food parcels have been threatened too – and forced to go half-shares with those who never made the lists.

“If you want to find the people who are desperate,” Swelizwe advised, “look at those who bring ntwethwes. Do you know how many pods you need to fill a bag? You’ve got to be really hungry to climb the mountains all day picking up one little pod after another.”

Was Swelizwe right? We didn’t know. Were the pod-carriers desperate – or were they Msinga’s tycoons exploiting this crazy form of big business? We began to examine the records – three hardcover books which reflected every sale. We found that each person who brought pods took home on average R4, 05. Averages are misleading, however, so we sampled 100 families...

Mtanazi Mdlolo (84). Tottered 15 kilometres with load. Paid R13.20

One visit only. Ntwethwes finished in her area.

Thanda Ndimande (7). No family. Works for others, herding goats.

Paid 80 cents.

Gcwalisile Majola (65). Widow. Supports herself. For 7 visits paid R37.40.

Busisiwe Mvelase (60) Ha! One of the Top Ten. R60.20 in 8 visits.

“For the first three weeks it was all right,” she said. There were many ntwethwes close to the house. Now they are few.” By the end of September Mrs. Mvelase was one of more than 100 podpickers who traveled 30 kilometres to Weenen to do their gathering on the town-lands. It took the women three days to fill one sack – three days and R2.20 busfare. Just to earn R5 to R6 on Saturday. Big deal?

The first Saturday we ran out of funds we borrowed money to pay for ntwethwes. And we have begged, borrowed, and borrowed some more ever since. Eventually we paid out R18 493 for acacia pods, and raised donations to cover all but R3 558 of it.

Had we owned a PRO we might have done a better job selling the idea of our Saturday Swop Shop. For that is what the ntwethwes queue really was. Cash for food was traded for food for cattle. R18 493 was not money down the drain – it was protein in our sheds. Enough protein to feed 1046 cattle for three months. At the moment there are more than 1 000 hungry African cattle being kept alive on Mdukatshani alone. Who said 96 tons were more than enough? They're an inadequate snack for the animals dying around us.

And who said R18 493 was much of a total? We have have frightened ourselves with the reckless spending, but that huge amount can buy just one bag of mealiema for 924 families for one month. Ntwethwe money, we know, has bought more than just mealiema. It has bought milk for babies, and beans for the porridge pots. It has paid for protein, as well as carbohydrate. That is what concerned us about the suggestion that famine-relief mealiema – not cash – be exchanged for pods. That and the thought of those tired women carting mealiema home 10, 20, 30 kilometres, up mountainsides in the dark shivering through river drifts. As long as we could find the money, we decided we would pay for ntwethwes. At the end of September, however, we had to stop. The announcement was made to a queue of 749. Sorry folks. That's it.

A few later Mrs. Gezekile Mkhize arrived at the office to ask if we were interested in bones. Her ox had died. Would we swop mealma for bones. Bones? Sure. Bones contain up to 13% of that rarest of all fertilizers, phosphate. OK. The next Saturday there were 25 people with bones. Then 94. Then 461. WE now have more than 24 tons of bones. Rib bones, jawbones, shinbones, pelvic bones, hooves, skulls, and vertebra...

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
P.O. Box 26,
TUGELA FERRY,
3504

MONTHLY REPORT: SEPTEMBER 1980

CAP DIRECTOR SHOT

Philemon Khoza died in Tugela Ferry Hospital after an unknown gunman had shot him in the neck and abdomen. Khoza and his wife were having a cup of tea at 8 p.m. on September 30 when the door of their hut was smashed open and two shots fired. It was too dark for Khoza to recognize the attacker.

Philemon Khoza was born at Msinga in 1907. He never had any education, working as a bioscope cleaner, night watchman and factory hand in Durban and Johannesburg at different times.

He was a man with initiative, making a garden in an area where gardens were said to be impossible, milking his scrub goats when CAP had shown him how. Last year he was elected chairman of the Nhlalakahle Small Farmers Co-op, and a director of CAP. When the drought killed any prospect of agricultural development in his area, and famine relief work was launched, Khoza became responsible for listing those who should have a share in the food distribution.

All CAP directors involved in a food distribution have received threats from people who have been left off the food lists, but believe they are entitled to a share. At this stage it appears that Khoza's death was connected with his role in famine relief.

DROUGHT

In the last week of September 45,7 mm of rain fell in gentle drizzle over a number of days. It was the first rain in four months.

Although the rain has brought trees and shrubs into spring leaf, it has made no difference to dry streams.

Cattle deaths due to drought rose sharply this months, and the KwaZulu Government veterinary officials suspended further dipping of African cattle because the animals were too weak to be driven to the dips. Far from bringing relief to the starving cattle, the rains in fact brought cold conditions which killed off borderline cases. Donkeys and goats – short grass grazers – will benefit by new grass growth, but cattle deaths are expected to continue.

With their cattle dead or dying local people have been unable to take advantage of the rain by beginning ploughing. This means that there will be no crops this summer – so whether or not heavy rains fall in the next few months, the effects of this drought will carry through to winter 1981.

RELIEF ACTIVITIES

1) Purchases of acacia pods

A report on this scheme was prepared for a meeting organized by the Sunday Tribune on September 17 – and copies of this report have been circulated to all those who receive this monthly report.

The last pod purchases were made at the end of September, and the final figures were: 94,2 tons of pods were bought in 4 557 sales at a cost of R 18 493.

In July August CAP received donations totaling R 7 272 for drought relief, and in September a further R 4 063; including R 2 000 from the Institute of Race Relations R 1 000 from the Sunday Tribune, R 500 from Mavis Fatti, and R 400 from an anonymous donor. A further R 3 800 has been promised and is on its way.

2) Food distribution

The Red Cross made 100 tons of mealie meal available to CAP for drought relief – with more to come.

Unfortunately the distribution of free food has created ugly situation wherever it has taken place. The very poor are forced by the less poor, who didn't qualify for a handout, to share their ration with them. CAP's directors and organizers have received increasing number of threats. As a result the CAP Executive decided that in future food will only be given out as a reward for work on community schemes. The more privileged members of the community are unlikely to accept the hard labour involved. Where work-for-food schemes have been announced in place of free food distribution, people have accepted them enthusiastically. It is one thing to be forced to share a free gift – quite another to share food that you have earned as a wage through your own hard work.

The costs of CAP's labour and transport for food distribution now totals R 1 359,27. A Tongaat group sent a donation of R500 towards these expenses, but added to last month's donations of R406 it still leaves CAP short of its needs.

3) Tugela Diversion Scheme

The holding dam has been completed – and is being admired as a work of art. During September 38 people from the Msusampi community earned 87,5 kg of mealie meal each for their work on this project, as did 39 people from the Nomoya valley.

4) Provision of grazing

In August there were 735 cattle grazing on Mdukatshani.

By the end of September there were more than 1 000 – way beyond Mdukatshani's carrying capacity, Eighty African stock-owners are legally grazing their animals on the farm, paying for the privilege by working for CAP. How ever many of the cattle have been pushed on by unknown owners who have then conveniently disappeared. CAP will not be able to control the situation adequately until the boundary fences are completed.

Thanks to a grant of R 3 000 from the African Development Trust CAP has been able to purchase fencing materials, and a labour force of more than 60 continues to work under the daily supervision of CAP director Elijah Mhlongo. Only a small section remains unfenced.

Acacia milling

The difficulty of obtaining tractors locally has made this a headache for CAP staff. Although there are eight African owned tractors in the Mdukatshani area, only two are presently in working order. One is committed to ploughing contracts, and the other is now intermittently grinding acacia hay and meal for local stockowner. All grinding is done under CAP supervision, and at least 5 members of our staff seem to be permanently tied up with this work.

Because of the tractor position, BP's three hammermills have not been in fulltime use. CAP obtained a promise from the KwaZulu Government service that a tractor would be available to CAP every Monday. However on three of four Mondays CAP staff have waited in vain for the promised machine. And black stockowners who have cut acacia branches in a last attempt to save their animals, have had to watch their acacia pile wither away uselessly because the tractor never arrived.

CAP has spent R 343.20 on the purchase of clippers to enable local people to cut acacia branches for stockfeed.

Border conflict

CAP continues to fight for official action against the exorbitant damages claimed by white farmers who impound starving black cattle. During September CAP acquired 8 goats, a cow and a calf which were offered by three African stockowners who had obtained loans from CAP to meet Pound fees. Unable to make a cash repayment, they offered stock instead.

Office

Drought relief work has meant a complete breakdown of ordinary office routine. Office staff have been under tremendous pressure.

Apart from the recordkeeping, storage, loading etc. of food supplies, they have had to cope with a constant stream of people who have come long distances to ask to be put on the list for free food – or to complain that they have been left off! African farm labour tenants continue to use CAP as a legal advice bureau, and long hours have been spent taking statements from these people – as well as from stockowners involved in Pound cases.

CAP's office is tiny and space is limited even in quiet periods.

During this past month the crowd at the doors has made office work impossible. The following figures give some idea of the problem.

In September office staff put through 61 telephone calls for local people.

265 people came to the office in connection with drought relief.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------------|
| 14 | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | pensions. |
| 18 | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | farm evictions. |
| 15 | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | “ | Round cases |

Removals

The trespass case against 13 African families evicted from a local white farm was remanded until November. The remand gives the families an extension of time to look for a new place

to live. At the hearing the Weenen Magistrate said he would not preside over future cases involving black labour tenants because of his involvement in the community, and would call for an outside magistrate.

CAP has continued to obtain legal advice and representation for evicted tenants whenever possible.

Poultry

Thanks to a donation from Alan McCarthy, 100 fowls a month have been promised to CAP, and the first consignment arrived in September. These birds have been distributed to the demonstration runs already prepared in differentvare as and are being fed on ground acacia pods.

An outbreak of Newcastle disease has unfortunately already taken its toll, and although vaccine has been ordered, it has not yet arrived.

Frans Mvelase

Frans, our top farm policeman, has not yet recovered from his assault in July, and is still receiving hospital treatment for a damaged kneecap. Recently his wife received a further injury when she went out at night to investigate voices outside the hut, and found a group of men, who bolted, but not before she had been knocked down. Now both she and Frans are immobile with leg injuries.

Rabies innoculations

At the request of the CAP Executive, a government veterinary official visited Mdukatshani and vaccinated more than 60 dogs. Although local people had been told there would be no repercussions if they brought their dogs forward – shortly afterwards a heavily-armed policeman and dog catchers arrived to check on all dog licences, raiding the farm, issuing summonses and shooting one dog. The man in charge of the raid said that his visit was the result of a report made to the Magistrate following the rabies inoculation. The tragedy of this is that there are several hundred dogs on Mdukatshani's boundary which were not inoculated against rabies, their owners having wisely adopted a wait-and-see attitude. Under no circumstances will these people now bring their animals for inoculation.

Thatch Collection

56 local women whose huts had been badly damaged through attacks by starving cattle, desperate to fix their homes before the arrival of the summer rains, asked CAP to organize thatch cutting for them. Mr. Nick Danhauser, a former neighbour of ours from Wasbank area, kindly gave permission for cutting on the farm adjoining Maria Ratschitz subject to there being proper control. Thanks to Mr. Qumbu, an old CAP member at Meran, the women were accommodated and supervised. The thatch was free – but the women had to pay R320 to transport their thatch back to Msinga.

Donkeys

Stray donkeys again invaded Mdukatshani – so we were grateful for a chance meeting with a Basutho who had walked from Lesotho to purchase donkeys (a 12 day journey). Cap staff helped to collect all stray animals, which the Basutho drove off (via the SAP for clearance).

HOME INDUSTRIES

With the arrival of long-awaited bead supplies, USA orders were at last dispatched. During September the following total orders were sent to customers

| | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| Beads; | R 2 129.50 |
| Wool: | 61.00 |
| Grass bangles: | <u>230.00</u> |
| | <u>R 2 420.50</u> |

Beadworkers from the Mashunka area continued to do a daily stint on the access road to the communal garden on Mdukatshani, and have now started to dig over the land.

BREAD DELIVERIES

The daily deliveries of wholewheat bread to Mdukatshani ceased abruptly after the truck delivering the bread was involved in a hold-up on the Weenen Road. The driver was robbed of R 240.

“It’s the second trouble I’ve had in two months,” said Mr. Gangat, owner of the truck which traveled our area making roadside sales. “Two months ago I bought a new truck, and employed a new driver at the same time. One morning he set off with the truck fully laden. That was the last I saw of him or my truck. I’ve decided I won’t take anymore risks.”

Staff:

Nhlanhla Ntombela passed his driving licence test at last.

Kehla Mhlongo, son of Elijah Mhlongo, one of our directors, was employed as a temporary driver to help with transport involved in drought relief.

Priscilla Ntabela, daughter of our late chairman, Zeph Ntabela, has joined the staff. She has experience in nursing and social work and has a licence and we hope will handle the social welfare aspects of CAP’s activities.

Esther Hancock, a Project Trust volunteer, arrived from England to spend a year or two working on Mdukatshani.

Tanana Shabalala returned home after almost two months in hospital after his arm was injured in an accident with the grinding equipment. His arm is still bandaged and he will need further treatment.

Robert Morte, our prize gardener, went mad –his first bad spell for five years. After a noisy week at home he was taken to Tugela Ferry hospital, where his condition is improving.

Visitors

The Sunday Tribune –re drought and Pound case stories.

BP rep Ray Carol re hammermills for drought.

Mr. Stiller – Republican Publications – re agricultural comic strips for black peasant farmers!

Mrs. Clare Rhenialy-Jones and Mr. Ian Simmons.

Natal Parks Board Film Unit – Joan Kuyper

Harry Gordon – local BP rep re drought.

MEETINGS

The Executive met as usual every Thursday.

Mr. Majozi, acting chairman, and Michael Mabaso, Manager, met Mtateni community re acacia grinding.

Mr. Majozi and Neil Alcock met Sahlumbe community re possibility of irrigation scheme in that area.

Neil Alcock attended meeting on drought relief organized by Sunday Tribune in Durban.

Prepare for meeting of those concerned with drought relief organized by Sunday Tribune

WAGES:

A total of R 2 233 was paid to 81 people.

MDUKATSHANI

TUGELA FERRY

P. O. Box 26
3504

September 17, 1980

DROUGHT RELIEF

Drought – and drought relief – is nothing new.

In the years 1874 to 1900 drought occurred in 14 years out of 27 in the Msinga – Weenen area.

As early as 1878 magistrates at Msinga and Weenen were distributing bags of maize for drought relief to needy families.

That the droughts were severe is evidenced by these comments from the magistrates of the times:

Msinga 1878: “As regards agriculture, there has been a continual, failure in crops in the crops in the Tugela Valley for several years; consequently large numbers of Natives have entirely left, others only for a short time to the purpose of procuring food in other parts of the Colony.

Msinga 1900: Because of drought the cows had a diminished milk supply “ which caused the deaths of a number of children.”

Weenen 1879: Many Natives have left the district because of drought.

.....

BIG BUSINESS

Msinga calls it big business. More than R 14 367 worth of business so far. Although no businessman in his right mind would touch it of course. You have to be getting desperate to be an acacia-pod-picker, for there's not much profit in a bag of pods. Not when you have to spend three days climbing stony mountainsides, shaking trees to fill a bag. Not when you have to carry that bag on your head for two, three, four or five hours, to get it to the sales depot. All for R 5 to R 6 a bag.

There are few other jobs at Msinga, however, so the acacia business is thriving.

In the 16 weeks since we sent out word that we would buy pods at 20 c a kilogram, 3 473 people have queued up with 73 574 kilograms of pods. That is 102 267860 pods!

Last year, when we started to experiment with the use of indigenous acacias, thorn trees, for stockfeed, we bought in a couple of tons of pods, milling them as protein meal for cattle, fowls and goats. This year we expected another couple of tons. But this year was a drought

year – and a time of rising unemployment, and we have been overwhelmed by people who travel more than 30 kilometres to sell bags of the curly brown pods.

Eight-year-old herdboys have stood in the queue with small bundles worth 80 cents. And one 84-year-old tottered in with a load of four bags which she and her daughter had been gradually filling over a month. A month's effort, a journey of 15 kilometres – and R 26.40 to take home at the end of it. Barely the price of a bag of mealie meal.

Recently we sampled 100 families in a queue of 505 people and we found the following:

An average family, with 7 people, obtained R6.70 on that visit.
At least two people in each family were collecting pods.

Of those 100 families:

- 38% were picking pods close to home.
- 14% were walking up to 5 kilometres to collect
- 12% were walking 10 kilometres
- 10% were walking 20 kilometres
- 26% were traveling 30 kilometres or more usually by bus.

Of those 100 families;

- 18% lived 5 kilometres from Mdukatshani, the sales depot.
- 58% lived 10 to 15 kilometres away.
- 17% lived 20 kilometres away.
- 7% lived 30 kilometres or more away.

Of those 100 families:

- 46% were on their first or second visit
- 33% had been 3 or 4 times before
- 12% had been 5 or 6 times before
- 9% has been 7 to 10 times before.

(We only buy pods on Tuesdays and Saturdays).

The tremendous effort some families have made to obtain pods led to a scrutiny of our records to see whether the regulars were making “big money.” However top earners seem to get R30 to R35 a month – and more or less within a month their supplies are exhausted and they disappear from the queue. There are a handful of “tycoon” families who have earned more than R50 from pods but that total has been achieved through the combined efforts of several members of the family.

We have been surprised at the number of women who travel from Mdukatshani and surrounding areas to collect pods on the Weenen townlands, 30 kilometres away. Busfare is R2.20 the value of the pods R5 to R6. Effort involved in collecting one bag of pods is at present two to three days. Despite the low return – the women consider their journey worthwhile for any return is better than none.

The following gives an indication of the trend of pod sales:

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| In May we bought | 1 112 kg |
| In June | 1 532 |
| In July | 5 358 |
| In August | 20 483 |
| In September | 38 087 (to the 16 th) |

It appears, to us, however, that the peak is past and from now on the quantity of pods will gradually decrease.

Had we been purchasing pods for our own needs we would have stopped buying pods at the end of June. However we have continued to buy in pods until every available building is bulging because we believe that of all drought relief schemes, this one is the most satisfactory of those we are handling.

We have also been involved in “free food handout” schemes and the costs etc, are described elsewhere. The problem with any handout scheme is categorising the poor. At Msinga probably 90% of the people are in need – and there will never be enough food to go around to all who deserve it. In attempting to separate the desperate from the poor, our African directors have become the target of insult and threat. Their experiences over the past two months have led to a decision that in future food will only be allocated for work. They believe that the acacia pod sales are the best means test yet devised for drought relief, and should be continued.

Suggestions have been made that pods should be swapped for meal. The problem is one of transport. Can we really expect pod-pickers to stagger long distances with the weight of meal? It will have to be carried on women and children’s heads. And we are not too happy at the idea of swapping carbohydrate for protein. When we announced the possibility of meal instead of cash, one mother said: “But all my pod money buys milk for my baby.”

If we can find the funds to continue, we have to face the possibility that we may have perhaps as much as 80 tons of acacia pods. Stockfeed for an area where cattle deaths due to drought are now estimated at 50%...

Many African stockowners who have the means are struggling to get their cattle through the drought by buying hay from white agricultural areas. Hay is just grass, cut, dried and stacked or baled before the sun or rain can reduce its nutritional value. The best hay, green with a pleasant smell, contains 2% to 3% crude protein. The hay that is coming into Msinga is old grass, mealiepods, husks and stalks, of negative value.

In comparison, milled acacia pod meal contains 13% to 17% crude protein.

Cattle, sheep and goats are called ruminants because they have large storage “stomach” or rumen. Large quantities of bulk food are swallowed, and pass into the rumen,. The animal then finds a shady place where it “chews its cud”, masticating food regurgitated from the rumen. The chewed food then passes to the stomach.

Both stomach and rumen are populated by myriads of microflora which attack the food, breaking it down, and so enabling the animal to absorb the nutrients. The microflora, however, cannot exist without the presence of nitrates and sugars. This is why a chemical nitrate, urea, as well as molasses, are fed in small quantities to ruminants. The urea keeps the microflora vigorous, able to deal with fibrous food.

At present the cattle of KwaZulu are swallowing pasturage which lacks nitrogenous food, and as a result their microflora are inactive, and their food indigestible.

The hay being imported into KwaZulu is of such poor quality that it could only be of benefit if molasses and urea were also fed to the animals. However the effects of drought in the sugar belt have made molasses unobtainable – while the Zulu stockowner knows nothing of urea.

This week a broadcaster on Zulu radio announced that the Mahlabathini stockowners who were waiting for hay must expect further delays because efforts to obtain hay at Melmoth had failed, and some was now being sought at Estcourt.

There was no mention of the costs of the hay I ... but transport from Estcourt to Mahlabathini could only mean uneconomic stockfeed. Yet Mahlabathini does have supplies of acacia scrub.

If people clipped acacia branches, milled them, they would find a more nutritious supply of “hay” on their doorstep.

About 5 to 10 kg of milled acacia “hay” and meal, mixed in the proportion of 5 to 1 should feed a cow for a day, while one to three kilos of the same mixture would feed a goat.

The unexpected expenditure on acacia pods has meant the withdrawal of funds already earmarked for other projects, as well as from running costs.

| | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Our total costs so far have been | R 14 367 |
| Donations towards pod sales | <u>R 7 500</u> |

| | |
|-----------|----------------|
| Shortfall | <u>R 6 867</u> |
|-----------|----------------|

In addition to the shortfall already incurred, we estimated that we will require a possible R5 000.00 to make further pod purchases until the supply finally dries up.

NEIL ALCOCK

CHURCH AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS (September 1980)

ACACIA TORTILTS: Potential fodder plant for Africa's semi arid regions.

By Sue Milton

September 1980

Distribution: Senegal, Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe Uganda, Namibia, Botswana, and in South Africa, OFS, Transvaal and Natal.

Growth and Productivity:

Samples made at Mdukatshani, Msinga district, indicate an average density of about 2 500 trees (two metres high) per hectare, and this is comparable to **A.karoo** dominated Valley Bushveld in the Eastern Cap (Aucamp 1976). Acacias growing at densities of up to 2 000 trees per hectare were found not to have any adverse effect on grass productivity (Dutoit, 1968).

With hard pruning these trees yield an average of 2,5 kg each.

This is probably equivalent to 3 to 4 years growth if **A. tortilis** coppice is assumed to grow at a rate similar to that of A.karoo trees in the same size classes (i.e. 150 to 900 g/Tree/ annum, DuToit, 1972). Hard pruning (removal of all shoots less than one cm in diameter) yields 6 to 8 tons per hectare fresh weight, and light pruning, 1 to 2 tons per hectare fresh weight.

To keep pace with production, no more than an average 500 g/tree should be harvested annually – i.e. 1,3 t/hectare.

Local trees yielded about 150 kg pods/ hectare in a sample made at Mdukatshani in 1979, but West (1950) gives an estimated pod yield for this species of 250 to 500 kg/ha when trees are growing at densities of 25 to 50 tree/ha.

Processing Costs

Pods and seeds as well as branches are ground in a hammermill before being fed to livestock. Taking into account the cost of labour and diesel only, Acacia hay costs 10c/kg, and Acacia pod meal, 5c/kg. A 15 kg sack of Acacia hay would cost R1,57 and an 80 kg sack of pod meal, R 4.00. Transport and wear and tear would boost these costs. Silage can be made of Acacia hay by the addition of water and molasses, followed by compaction. This costs an estimated 12c/kg or R 3.00 per 25 kg sack.

Food Value and Palatability

The attached tables show that hay made from leafy Acacia branches is superior to Eragrostis hay with respect to its crude protein content. Leafless branches contain only half as much protein. The 12 – 19% crude protein contained in the pod and seed meal of A. tortilis is well in excess of the 9% protein required for optimal productivity (Louw, 1969).

However both the hay and the meal are relatively poor in carbohydrates and fats. The branch hay and pod meal of **A.tortili** and other African Acacias have proved acceptable to horses, goats and cattle, and are evidently more palatable than tannin-rich exotic species such as **A mearnsii** which will only be eaten in small quantities (Goddricke, 1978). There was no significant difference in the masses of goat kids fed 1:1 and 3:1 ratio of pod meal to maize

meal over a four-week period, and intake average 300 g meal mix/goat/day (unpublished data, Mdukatshani).

Carrying Capacity:

If the daily Acacia hay consumption of a cow is between 5 and 10 kg /day, then the cow will consume 1,8 to 3,7 tons/annum.

If Acacia trees are pruned at a rate equal to their probable annual production, one hectare would yield about 1,5 tons ha/annum.

Stocking density during the dry season should then be, 8 cows/ha, or 80 cattle per square kilometres. Msinga, which is about 1 200 km in area, could thus safely support 96 000 head of cattle during a drought. In 1967 this district contained 70 000 head of cattle. These calculated stocking rates are based on the assumption that Msinga is well covered in **Acacia tortilis**. In actual fact much of the arable land has been ploughed and has eroded. Some hilly areas are dominated by broad-leaved shrubs and euphorbias, rather than Acacias.

CONCLUSION

If **Acacia tortilis** could be established on dongas and on unproductive fields it would, if correctly used, increase the carrying capacity of the land for cattle. The Acacia should be managed for both pods and branches and for soil and grass conservation. The literature indicates that 2000 per hectare is feasible. These could be lightly pruned annually. An additional 25 to 50 trees/ha should be allowed to grow up and produce seed.

This will replenish the soil seed reserve and provide a protein-rich fodder crop.

Research in progress aims to show the effect of acacia pruning on grass cover and composition, on Acacia regeneration and on soil loss. The effect of using pod meal as a supplement, on milk yield of goats and cows is also being studied.

MDUKATSHANI,
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3504

SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 1980
OPEN THE GATE A LITTLE WIDER PLEASE

“Come out or I’ll put a bullet into you!”

Scott tried to make his pistol inconspicuous. Linda’s sub-machine gun dropped at his feet. “GG,” the black boys whispered, tugging at their white companion. “GG. GG. GG,” Shaking with fright they emerged from the shade where they had been resting.

“Oh.” Louis van Rooyen lowered his rifle. He was disconcerted at the sight of our son. He hadn’t expected to see a white kid. “What are you doing?” “Looking for horses,” said one of the boys. There is no fence between our farms – there never has been – so the horses wander across wide-open spaces, often disappearing for weeks at a time.

“Well find them and take them away! Take them away!” Louis returned to his bakkie.

The boys watched him drive off. Linda went to retrieve his firearm.

The boys looked at their plastic weapons, bought the day before on the goatherds’ first trip to a city. Then the boys looked at each other and began to laugh.

Thank heavens they did not panic and run. Like Mzonwa Mabaso and his friends. They crossed another unfenced boundary onto the farm of another neighbour of ours, James Christie, who opened fire, hitting Mabaso in the back.

“With birdshot,” Christie maintained in court.

“Buckshot,” said the firearms expert. “Lethal at 40 metres.” On October 24 a regional court found Christie guilty on three counts of attempted murder. He was sentenced to a fine of R200 or 100 days imprisonment, with a further prison term of 12 months conditionally suspended for five years. The sentence, explained the magistrate, Mr. G.J. Barnard, took account of Christie’s evidence about the uneasy border relationship between himself and his KwaZulu neighbours.

Living on the border is a problem. Weenen has seven farms facing Msinga – facing 100 000 blacks, more than 81 000 cattle, and 126 260 goats.

Each of the owners of those seven farms approaches the problem in a different way. Mr. L. Agliotti, the well-known millionaire, turned his difficulties into cash. In four months last summer he claimed R7 392 in damages allegedly inflicted on his pastures by KwaZulu cattle. Mr. Agliotti kept no cattle on his farm himself. Recently he sold the property, and the company that took it over offered to lease grazing to blacks at R2 per beast per month. In days every grass blade had been booked.

For a long time afterwards, however, hundreds of thin cattle continued to arrive in unsteady processions, some driven from the red desert at Keate’s Drift, more than 20 kilometres away. Tired men peered over the fence. Their animals could not survive a return journey. The men made enquires at local kraals – pushed their animals a little further – turned them in at our gate, and went away.

Only one woman actually asked for grazing.

“No” said Elijah Mhlongo, OC Stock on Mdukatshani. “Haven’t you heard we’re overcrowded? We’ve got too many. We can’t take more.”

“That’s not just,” she protested. “Why am I different? At least I speak to you direct. Others get their cattle onto your farm by handing them to friends who already have rights.”

“Rubbish!” said Mhlongo, provoking her, taking note as she spilt out names. “If you leave them here,” he said at last, deciding to frighten her, “we might steal them.”

“If you steal them, you steal them.”

“And you know we put our eartags on your animals?”

“If you put on tags, you put on tags.”

“No,” Mhlongo bellowed, defeated. “No. No. No.”

When he came off the mountain the next evening, 14 strange cattle were waiting in his kraal.

“Whose are those?” he shouted. Damnit. He’d had a long day. He was tired.

“They’re yours,” said his son.

“They’re not mine! I’ve never seen them before!”

“Well a woman who called herself MaChonco Khoza left them here and said they are yours. You can do what you like with them.”

“Do you know the woman?” asked Neil.

“Until yesterday I had never seen her.”

“Is she good looking, Mhlongo?”

“Ja, very good looking,” Mhlongo was so steamed up he was caught unwary.

The men hooted. “I can’t send them back,” Mhlongo said furiously,

“because I don’t even know where they came from. Perhaps these are stolen animals she has left with us.”

If he had had the time, he would have tracked her down, the bitch.

He would fix her for trying a stunt like that. When had a woman ever got the better of him?

He itched for revenge, but all he could do was fill the night with curses. At dawn he had to be back on the mountain.

So another 14 animals were allowed to graze. Mdukatshani’s gate was pushed a little wider.

The gate is an antique – built of the iron “tyres” of ancient wagon wheels. It is strong, heavy, rusty – and when we first arrived, ludicrous too. There it stood, alone in the veld, without a fence in sight. Looters had taken every strand of wire, every fencepole. Only the gate had been too heavy to cart away. The last time anyone had used the gate, they had left it closed, and it stayed closed until the shiny wires of new fences were attached to its posts. Then we opened the gate and invited black stockowners in for a chat. That’s how we first met Petrus Majozi, a lean man whose handlebar moustaches emphasize his natural air of distinction.

“Our cattle can’t exist without this farm” Majozi said. “They have to get at the river. What’s the position?” the position was that grazing could be swapped for work.

Majozi was one of the first to test us out. But he was wary. He drove his cattle in the gate each morning – and made sure he took them out each night. Gradually others joined him. All friendly, but careful.

As agreed they paid their way putting up fences, scooping new dams, rebuilding the dip.

That first summer there were heavy rains and the grass grew rank on the hilltops.

“We need more cattle on the farm to eat the grass down,” Neil worried.

“That way there will be no risk of fires.” We did not hear about the first fire until two days after it had occurred (the top farm and bottom farm are out of sight of each other). Majozi reported there had been little damage. He and others from KwaZulu had stopped the fire for us.

In July this year there were 688 African cattle on Mdukatshani. People no longer took their cattle home at night. We were trusted. White neighbours might have their fences cut – ours remained intact. Despite the drought the farm looked good. Plenty of grass, plenty of trust. Oh we were smug!

“And now look at us!” Mhlongo stops on a footpath, waving his arm.

“We look just like KwaZulu.” Today there are 1 398 cattle on Mdukatshani (we don’t waste time adding the goats). The farm is devastated.

A boundary with KwaZulu – our eastern fence – has been cut, but it sags in many places. Hungry cattle have pushed against the wire, leaned and shoved until they can step over.

Meanwhile on the west we have been struggling to erect a fence between ourselves and adjoining white farms. Until very recently these farms were vacant and unused, with absentee owners. Now they are in new hands, and any animal that steps over the invisible boundary line is arrested. Until we have the boundary fence, no Mdukatshani cattle will be safe.

In March Mhlongo became fulltime fence builder. At first he worked in earshot of home. Now he walks 1½ hours up the mountain, talking aloud to himself as he always does, addressing spiders in his path. “Ho!

You’ve stopped to listen to what I say!”, pocketing plants for his dispensary. A magenta convolvulus. A red parasite that sprouts on acacia roots. “I pay R1.20 for a tiny piece of this in Greytown!”

By the time he reaches the quiet Ncunjane valley, most of his work-party are gathered, 61 men and women putting up the fence to pay for grazing. Some of them have walked even further than he has. Wire has had to be dumped an hour’s walk away – the women carrying the heavy rolls on their heads.

“Who’s here today?” Mhlongo takes his register out of the pocket of his old khaki raincoat and runs through the names.

“MaButo!” he leers at her. “I haven’t seen you at work since the day I seduced you.” The woman giggles.

“Where’s Spohla Mchunu?”

“I sent him to the KwaZulu fence to do some repairs.” The greybeard with the black railway cap is Mhlongo’s deputy, Vangaan Ndawonde.

“Hell!” Mhlongo protests. “That man will do nothing and report he has been busy all day.” He laments aloud: “How can I trust my induna here? He’s too busy making love to see that people work. He pretends he has a quiet voice”, Mhlongo bends low and pats his lips, “so he has to get close to a lady’s ear to give her instructions.” Ndawonde gives a squeaky chuckle. Everybody knows his horses he loves, not women, and next to Mhlongo he’s the most conscientious man on the place.

For seven months Mhlongo’s team have been at work on the fence, shopping out the bush, stretching wire up hills and down, into gorges and out again, across stony ridges and dry

stream beds. It's rough, wild country, and you have to walk it yourself to appreciate the achievement.

Like all Mhlongo's work, the fence is professional, and because he's slaverdriver, it's been done in record time. "Two months now and we're finished," he estimates.

At 2.30 every afternoon his slaves are released from duty. There's a limit to working in Msinga's summer sun. The women scatter, snapping dead branches, gleaning firewood as they go. Only Mhlongo does not head for home. He's off on a recce. He has to see what the grass is like over on that hill – and those cattle at Mdluli's place, what's happened to them? Mhlongo has to know what's going on everywhere.

Mdukatshani maybe short of grass, but spring has brought out fields of lilies. Heads of yellow Bulbine bob like daffodils. They seem to prefer bare places. So do the Amocharis. Delicate Amocharis with scented pink flowers. The pink lilies bloom in hundreds on Mdukatshani's flats. "That plant is good for mastitis and retained afterbirth," says Mhlongo. But no good for fodder. Dead cattle lie among the lilies, too long dead to have a stench, jawbones and horns cleaned by maggots. How many have now died on the farm? 20? 30? Mhlongo has stopped keeping count. If he recognizes a carcass he sends a message to the owner. However, most of the dead animals are "ownerless", as several hundred of the living cattle are ownerless too.

Well Petrus Majozi, did we make a mistake opening the gate for you?

You are chairman now. It's your problem as well as ours. Should we have let the Zulu brothers in, and Hlateye Sithole, Aloen Malembe Ceze Mchunu and all the others? If we had shut the gate, would it be any different today?

Majozi, Mhlongo and all our other directors talk past midnight trying to find a way to push animals off the farm. In July it seemed fairly simple. We caught 23 trespassing, rounded them up and locked them in our kraal. When the owners arrived we made them sign an admission of guilt – then sent the cases to Induna Chummy. He fined trespassers R10 each. By August, however, there were not dozens but hundreds of animal's trespassing, and when we locked them up, nobody claimed them.

"Au", the men agonized, looking at the beasts. "It's a crime to arrest animals as thin as this." So the prisoners were treated to bags of acacia hay and pod meal. Well, what else were we to do? Shoot them?

And the owners? Have they had a range of choices? If they leave their cattle at home in KwaZulu they will starve. If they ask us for grazing we will turn them down. Dumping their animals on us is a strategy for survival- as guns are for James Christie and Louis van Rooyen.

"But it's not neighbourly," Mhlongo protested to Louis when they met up on the fenceline recently. "This fence won't stop goats. If an animal gets onto your farm how do we get it out?"

"I'm not interested," Louis replied. "I'm just warning you that I will shoot anybody I find on my farm." And he repeated the warning when he examined the newest section of fence.

"Any person who steps onto my farm will meet a bullet," Louis told the fencebuilders. "And you will only trace that person by the smell."

Louis might be wiser than we are. He's refused to have any kind of gate.

What of our own strategy? Once the grass grows and the cattle pick up condition we know owners will materialize again. We're totting up grazing fees to be sued through the chief's courts. And we are making sure we know who these owners are by sowing discord between those who have worked for grazing – and those who have taken it without work.

We are trying to create insiders – and outsiders. But gently. There must be antagonism, but not enough for bloodshed. If 61 families can feel Mdukatshani is their farm – will they be able to keep out many thousands beyond? We do not know.

Meanwhile, of course, there's the problem of what to do now with 1 398 animals on our overgrazed farm.

“Well, we're a little better than KwaZulu because we've still got bushes,” says Mhlongo. More than 2 000 hectares of thornbushes, green with new leaf. Milling acacia hay can relieve the pressure.

“But our animals don't like it. They won't eat it,” stockowners complain. It is, at first, a foreign taste, and goes down better with a dash of acacia pod meal. In a day or two the animals are happily eating.

“They had better be,” Majozi warns stockowners, “because if your cattle don't learn to eat thorns – quick – they will be turned off.”

Lacking firearms we use big talk.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI,
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OCTOBER 1980: THE OZI TREES

Spring never came to Mpofana this year, but close to one shabby hut two wild gingers came into bloom. They seemed to be a mistake, cloudy mauve follies, bits of frippery ill-suited to the dilapidated veld. Yet the gingers were tough. The dam dried up, splintering into grey flakes. Across the Location dead thorn bushes spread in small white patches, like leprosy. Cattle died, and went on dying until the death toll for October was the highest of the year. But the ginger trees kept on blossoming, and when the flowers were over, green leaves sprouted in their place. For Mkonjiswa Ngulungu the plain was beyond bearing.

He was rolling rocks to block a donga when we found him, a tall man with quiet eyes, polite but indifferent. For five years he had been without a job. Now there was this work for famine relief.

“My trees?” he said. “I got them from Umhlumba.” He stood with his back to the mountain, almost as if the mountain were not there.

“Some things,” he tried to explain later, hesitating at the effort of saying it at all, “some things hurt in a place one cannot talk about.”

Mkonjiswa was a little boy chattering at his father’s heels when he first climbed Umhlumba. The mountain rises more than 1 600 metres, a bulky landmark that snatches at passing clouds. Although its slopes are eroded, pink watsonias clump in the rocks, while summer harebells dance among the grasses. With its flowers, its mists and cold winds, Umhlumba is an island high above the surrounding thornveld. And for most of his life Mkonjiswa Ngulungu was an islander, living on Bellevue, a white farm that straddles the shoulder of the mountain.

“That day my father said we were going to fetch an ozi tree (a wild ginger)” Ngulungu said, “so we climbed up to the place where the Ozi trees grew and together we cut a branch and carried it home. But I argue with my father saying no tree could grow without roots. And my father said: ‘This tree is different.’ When we got back we cut the branch into two pieces, and planted them, and I kept watch and found that what my father said was true. The ozi grows without roots.

Over the next 30 years the slips turned into shrubs, and the shrubs became leafy trees that shaded the yard. Then Mkonjiswa’s father died. “It was the time of the draai,” he explained. The draai, the turn, the continuous circle. It was the end of the six months system. Iniquitous it was called, and perhaps it was, but it served the white farmers and his workers. Six months the blacks stayed at home, working for rent, and six months they stayed in the city, working for cash.

Mkonjiswa had started paying his six months as a herdboyc nine years old, and he was a man with a family of his own when the draai came to make the years a circle without an end.

“The farmer had been paying us R5 for every six months,” Ngulungu said.

“We told him we could not live on R10 for the whole year. So we were sacked off the farm and many other kraals with us.”

Love gives a man ownership. When Ngulungu's father knew he had lost his home on the mountain "his old age seemed to settle on him and he died.

I was left alone to do the move." On foot, over the veld, away from the mountain, through the fence that divides white farms from KwaZulu.

Close to the wire was the site for their new home, a dreary spot, without shelter from the blowing dusts of the Location. The chief had said there was no more room for anyone, he was sorry, but an uncle agreed that nobody would notice if Mkonjiswa built close to his kraal.

"Four times we walked from Umhlumba to the Location," Ngulungu said.

"It takes a day from here to there. IN a day there is no chance of a second trip." The family carried blankets, sleeping mats, pots. They carried bundles of thatch from their roof, poles broken from old walls.

They drove their four cattle and eight goats, which were to die for the Location was short of grass. And when everything had been removed, Ngulungu stood in his yard for the last time and cut a branch from one of his father's ozi trees. Then he carried it across his shoulder to the Location, cut it into two, and planted the pieces.

"When we came to his place," Ngulungu said, "I did not like it. Even though we had the trees, I did not like it. But we have been here seven years now, and slowly the trees have brought my father to this place. When we left Umhlumba I knew I would never be allowed back to visit his grave, but his spirit is here now, with his trees."

In March this year a line of surveyors' flags went up alongside Ngulungu's home. "There's been a mistake with the fence," said the surveyors. "You will have to move." While they were chatting they spotted the ozi trees. "Don't move your trees," they gave some friendly advice. "You can get compensation for them. You can get paid."

"I am sorry they said that," Ngulungu could not hide the hurt. "I wish they had never talked about money."

A new fence began to follow the line of the surveyors' flags, but it sidestepped the Ngulungu's small hut. Mrs. Ngulungu stacked a few more thornbushes around her tiny garden and went on tending her red pepper bushes, her spinach and sweet potatoes. And in a tin on a branch an orchid went on swinging to keep evil spirits from the home.

The ozi trees were in full bloom, each branch froth of mauve blossom, when a police van drove to the fenceline on October 4, and two policemen and a farmer got out.

"Here," Ngulungu was handed a torn scrap of paper, carelessly scribbled. It read:

"Mkonjiswa Ngulungu. You have thirty (30) days in which to remove yourself, your family, your possessions, stock and kraals off Lilyfontein Farm. Signed. P.B. Gill."

"If these thirty days are finished and you still here," the farmer warned, "I will come myself and burn your things."

Nou Gesels Ons Direk! Now we are talking face to face, the Natal Agricultural Union proclaimed with a front-page article in the October issue of its journal, NAUNLU. It was describing "an historical get together at Weenen when Zulu chiefs, sub-chiefs, and about 300 followers came to meet the full committee of the Weenen Farmers Association to talk over mutual problems." Mr. Gill was one of the farmers present.

“Dit was ‘n ware, uitsonderlike gebeurtenis,” reported Joseph le Roux, chairman of the Weenen Farmers Association. Ons wou gesels – problem stel, luister; oplossings soek en weereens luister ... Vir ‘n geruime tyd reeds ondervind ons ernstige probleme tussen Zuluboere en ons eie lede wat aan KwaZulu grens. Draadsnyery, ongemagtigde weiding op plase en voorvalle wat, indien nie bekamp word nie, aanleiding kan gee tot geweld – en dan is dit te laat om te praat.”

“A very successful meeting,” Mr. Donald Sinclair, president of the NAU, described it when he addressed the NAU Annual Congress.

“Other farmer’s associations should follow Weenen’s example and liaise with their black neighbours,” Mr. E.D. Ralfe, an NAU Council member urged the congress.

“The initiative undertaken by the Weenen Farmer’s Association and especially its committee holds without doubt a crucial lesson for Natal,” NAUNLU told its readers. “We can ignore it only at our peril.”

Because we agree, we are going to take more space than usual telling the story as the blacks tell it.

“It began when the police came with a note saying there was to be a meeting between whites and blacks,” said one induna. “We all understood that we were going to discuss people being thrown off the farms.” And that is why more than 300 men walked, hitched and caught buses to the Weenen courthouse. Some carried their “30 days to quit” notices in their pockets. There were men there who had been jailed because they did not quite in time. There were men had left new homes halfbuilt in the Location, mud still wet on the walls. There were men who had had their huts burnt to the ground – who had had their goats, cattle, donkeys and dogs shot and killed.

“I have seldom seen such a gathering,” remarked a chief. “There were so many people there wasn’t room for them all, and some had to stand outside.”

Mpofana and Weenen have existed side by side as separate areas ever since the Location was first proclaimed in 1849. Yet the blacks and whites who faced each other in the Weenen courthouse were strangers, ill at ease. They had never been neighbours.

“And what is the use of trying to talk now when our country has been turned into a town for ejected people?” protested an Mpofana councilor afterwards.

“FULL” signs have been hanging out at Mpofana for at least 100 years.

“There is no suitable accommodation in the locations for any considerable increase in the population,” Weenen’s magistrate, Peter Paterson, warned in 1880. At the time he was deeply concerned about the large numbers of Africans being thrown off Weenen’s farms. With Mpofana full up, where could they go? Nowhere. They just kept squeezing in. By 1895 there were 7 392 blacks in the location. Today’s population is estimated to be at least five times that. Five times full up.

Weenen district, by contrast, has changed little with the years. In 1895 there were 517 whites – in 1970, 676. Far from shrinking, farms have recently expanded. Between 1970 the average holding of a Weenen white farmer increased by 115 hectares to a total of 598.

Meanwhile over the fence Chief Simakade Mchunu has watched his veld turn into suburbia. Chief Simakade is one of KwaZulu’s elder statesmen, leader of one of the most powerful Zulu clans. With Chief Ngoza Mtembu and Chief Gilbert Mbhele he attended the historical

Weenen get together. The chiefs were placed in chairs, on the opposite side of the room from the whites.

“As if they were on trial, facing their judges, condemned for all our crimes,” angry followers reported.

“I have been at meeting with whites before,” said an Mtembu Ngoza – a senior tribal officer in charge of protocol. “And usually the whites shake hands with the chiefs, and then sit mixed up together. They address the chiefs with respect as Undabezitha. They never say; Stand up Simakade – what have you got to say? They don’t stick our leaders at the other end of the room.”

The magistrate, Mr. L.P.P. Radyn, opened the meeting. “Today is the first time we have had whites as well as blacks at a meeting like this” he began. They wanted to reach other, black and white. But the black was tongue-tied in the wasteland of his grief. And the white had a wall.

“with a moat
flowing with fright
around his heart.

A wall
without windows
for the spirit
to breeze through.

A wall
without a door
for love to walk in.”

Across the space of the room men lobbed words at each other, words which never quite made the distance, so vast was the gulf of the courthouse floor. Words came and went, to and fro, but both sides were afraid to grasp them. Fallen words are harmless. Duds, not grenades.

Trespass was top of the agenda for the whites. How could they farm when their land was overrun with black cattle? Whites had been suffering because blacks were destroying their farms. On the benches the blacks men did not stir. They sat with folded arms, listening. Had the whites really suffered hardship? The Weenen Pound records showed that turnover increased from R2 800 in 1978-79 to R 35 000 in the next 12 months. The drought year. And almost all that money had come from blacks.

“In one or two cases farmers may be making more from impounding cattle than by farming,” Joseph le Roux admitted to The Sunday Times. “But believe me we are doing everything possible to bring about harmony between black and white and to try to settle our problems amicably.”

“Our cattle are not put onto your farms deliberately,” Chief Simakade told the Weenen farmers. “Where I live it is now so crowded with people thrown off the farms that there is not space left to build a house. Any my land is like this floor. Bare. The cattle are starving. They wander up and down the fences until they find a place to break through. They remember the land that was home. It is only natural they want to go back.”

Mr. le Roux replied: “If I have only one child and you have many children – is it my responsibility to feed your children?” The insult has ping-ponged from one end of the location to the other. Yet an insult was never what le Roux intended.

Evictions, of course, were the burning issue for the blacks.

“Surely you can give us more than 30 days to get off a farm?” pleaded the Mchunu chief induna, Makekeni. “We have to wander around KwaZulu looking for a place to settle, and by the time we get home the 30 days are over and we find ourselves in jail.” Makekeni was one of those who put aside building operations for the day to be at the meeting. Until recently he lived on the farm Goede Hoop. When a new owner evicted the farm’s 35 black families, Makekeni was told he could stay. His job would be to arrest straying African stock. Makekeni decided to move with his friends. Together they are rebuilding in the location.

Summing up the meeting, one tribal councilor said: “What the whites meant was this: now that they have done what they wanted to do to us now we must live in peace.”

“It was a waste of time,” said another. “At this meeting the whites said we must discuss our problems round a table. But when we meet them here on the fenceline they tell us they bought their land with blood and they will shed blood again to keep it. They tell us their country will never be ruled by kafirs.” You can’t use different words for different occasions. You can’t dust off friendship just for parties.

While the blacks felt they had gained nothing from the talking, the Mchunu and Mthembu chiefs went back to Weenen a month later for a second round-a-table meeting. And they went for one reason – there had, after all, been a white man who had touched their hearts. E.D. Ralfe – NAU Council member from Escourt. An outsider.

Chiefs, indunas and the rest all remarked on Mr. Ralfe. He spoke fluent Zulu – and he spoke as a friend. However, Ralfe’s job was to launch the initiative, not sustain it. He was not at the second meeting, when anger spurted close to the surface.

“When you sack people off your farms, why don’t you ask their chief to be present?” asked Chief Ngoza Mthembu. “If I am told what my people have done wrong, I can discuss the matter on their behalf.”

“Two men cannot share one woman,” replied le Roux.

“I am talking about men – not women,” retorted Chief Ngoza.

At beerdrinks far from the Weenen round-table this exchange has been repeated and passed on. Unintentionally, a second time, le Roux had again dealt a bitter insult.

After the official talking was done, one young farmer cornered Chief Mchunu, and waving an angry arm and pointing said to the dignified head of the Mchunus: “Look Simakade, control your people so they don’t misbehave on my farm.”

“I’m too old to be spoken to like that by a white boy,” said the chief.

“That is why I decided it was a waste of time to go to any more of these meetings.”

A date was set for a third get-together in October. No chiefs arrived.

They had agreed on a boycott.

We never attended any of these meetings, so what we have written is hearsay. It may be the truth. I may not. What is important is that the blacks believe it is the truth. And it is striking that their story varies little with the telling. Men 30 kilometres apart, who do not know each other, have repeated the same version of the insults “that made our hearts bitter against the whites.” It’s only the in between talk they do not always agree on.

“When you go hoping to hear something that will save you,” said one labourer, “then when the talk is about other things you listen to your thoughts instead.”

Moving Mpofana's boundary is seen as just another sign of the futility of talk.

"I never asked for the boundary to be changed – KwaZulu did," Mr. Gill has protested. Chief Simakade just shakes his head.

"A long time ago," he said, "some of my people said they thought that some of the location land had been given to the whites by mistake, so we asked the government to check the matter. That is all. Do you really think we would ask for our land to be taken away?"

In fact KwaZulu gains just about as much as it loses. When surveyors did a check earlier this year they found the fence wavered a bit this side, then a bit that side of true. Who made the original mistake?

In 1895, when the first fenceline began to go up on the boundary, Maynard Mathews, magistrate of both Weenen and Mpofana combined, reported that "the boundaries were altered to suit the convenience of the inhabitants."

The new fence defines the boundary accurately, but the difference is only 15 paces here, 60 paces there. Mr. Gill and KwaZulu end up just about evens. Nothing much has changes, except the lives of the Ngulungus – and eight other families who find themselves the wrong side of accuracy. Nine families made up of 71 people – with 1 pig, four donkeys, 40 cattle, 80 goats, 41 sheep, two ozi trees – and a warning to get out or be burnt out. When Mr. Gill handed out his eviction notices, women crawled onto their roofs, pulling at thatch so old it disintegrated in their hands.

We sent a telegram of appeal to Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, chief minister of KwaZulu. There was an immediate result. A KwaZulu official visited the nine homes on the fenceline.

"Forget the farmer's notice," the official assured them. "You don't have to hurry." What they wanted to hear, of course, was: You don't have to move.

At the moment most of the homes are halfway dismantled. Only Ngulungu's hut stands undisturbed. Every day he walks to the donga to roll rocks.

Sometimes a man is less resilient than an ozi tree. He withers without his roots.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI.
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MONTHLY REPORT – OCTOBER 1980

Although the 28 mm of rain which fell in October has turned everything green and hopeful, it has brought little hope to the cattle which are still thin and rakish. Green shoots are rapidly being devoured by hungry animals which could mean that new grass will never get a chance to grow. Only goats and donkeys benefit from short grass, cattle need long grass. October has brought the highest cattle death toll and deaths are expected to continue rising. The high death toll has meant that in practically every area there has been no ploughing. Only those with money to hire tractors have been able to plough – a very small percentage of KwaZulu The lack of ploughing indicates that conditions next year will be far worse than this year.

With these problems in mind we have set up several work parties in various areas; the projects they are working on we hope will provide long term benefits for those communities involved. These projects have been possible because of the very generous supply of mealie meal from Red Cross as well as large amounts of beans from a Tongaat drought relief group. It must be stressed that the cost to these two groups is very high – Red Cross has already spent over R20 000 on us in a matter of 2 months of October. It seems likely that their funds will run out as people see that rain is falling in KwaZulu...

To-day 1 052 people are working for food on a variety of projects organized by CAP. In all areas there has been an encouraging response to projects. The stopping of free handouts has eased the tension felt by distributors who were constantly being pressed “to give to so-and-so or else”. It has also stopped the constant stream of people who were coming to Mdukatshani pleading to be put on the list.’

The areas where projects are on the go are as follows: -

1. Nomoya/ Msusampi-

7 people continue to work on the Tugela Diversion project; the dam is completed and workers are busy laying the piping to the dam.

2. Mseleni

An old furrow which was built by an enterprising chief (or rather his workers) many years ago is being reopened so as to bring water to the areas of KwaMadondo and Sahlumbe. Water will be diverted from the Tugela to supply gardens and people who are at present very far from the river. Work involves clearing out bush and weeds in the furrow together with reconstructing bridges and water exits from the furrow. Altogether 450 people are working on two separate parts of the furrow.

3. Mtateni

This area is relatively well off in Msinga terms because it has the advantage of having gardens which are fed by a government irrigation scheme. A network of furrows and channels brings water right to the gardens. Many people in this area were forfeiting the use of their gardens because they could not afford a tractor to do initial ploughing. Now people are

working together and no longer need the services of the tractor. (Note the area of irrigated gardens covers 0,0001% of Msinga)

4. KwaDimbi

A dam is being built by 114 people; the water will then be piped down to water gardens below a waterfall.

5. Mhlangana

212 people are busy deepening an existing dam while also building contours to guide run off from the slope of the hill into the dam. There is no permanent water supply near these people, they rely on trickles of water for themselves while their cattle are tempted to cross into 'white' Natal farms to grab the available water.

6. Mhlumba

Before Mr. Khoza was killed he was helping supervise the construction of a demonstration garden together with Grace Sithole. Grace has continued with 43 others to finish off the garden.

7. Mdukatshani

35 women continue to help Hadebe with the construction of fish ponds as well as helping to stabilize river banks by grass planting, building stone walls.

8. Mashunka

Work has been temporarily halted while problems with Mashunka are sorted out. Every day cattle and goats are found on Mdukatshani, having been brought across from Mashunka. Mashunka women have been found cutting trees which are on Mdukatshani property.... Work has been stopped until a workable arrangement can be found.

9. Purchase of Bones

As we heard a sigh of relief to see the last of the intwethwes a lone woman arrived. She carried 2 sacks of bones... "didn't we want to buy bones". She waited all day for the answer and eventually was rewarded for her effort. Since then 13 people have brought in 1 016 bags of bones i.e. 15 tons of bones! The bones are bring burnt and then ground using the BP hammermills and will then be used as a lick for animals and a phosphate fertilizer. Bone collecting is giving food to those who live in areas where alternative projects have not been established.

Total mealie meal given for bones - 7½ tons.

10. Acacia Milling

This has been held up periodically either through lack of parts or lack of tractors. The hammermills are not designed to cope with grinding ball bearings and rocks (nor is any normal hammermill!) – both have been put into sacks of ones and intwethwes to increase the weight of the sacks and thus the mealie meal given.

11. Provision Grazing

CAP's attempts to control the provision for grazing to African cattle-owners have been overwhelmed by the effects of the drought. In normal years Mdukatshani can carry 800 head of cattle. At the moment in a bad year, there are more than 1 400 animals on the farm.

CAP knows the owners of 886 of the animals – 67 families from adjoining KwaZulu who have a representative at work daily to “pay” for their grazing rights. A further 200 animals belong to CAP residents, 66 cattle are owned by CAP itself and more than 300 animals are apparently ownerless, pushed onto the farm and left by KwaZulu stockmen desperate to keep their animals alive.

CAP knows that as soon as (if!) the cattle pick up condition, their owners will eventually arrive to claim them. We are letting it be known that we are charging R2 per animal per month for all cattle found on the farm – and will sue through the chief’s court for payment of these fees.

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NOVEMBER 1980: LOVE IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD

“Brrmmmm brrmmmm

“Peep peep!”

“Paarp paarp!”

“Toot toot!”

Through the din of the rush hour traffic, Control Officer Thomson Mkhize bellowed: “Stop playing. Be quiet. This isn’t a game.” For a moment there was a lull. Drivers grinned at him, pulled faces – then hooters blared again in a dozen near-collisions.

“Brrmmmm brrmmmm... whee!” The only way to get a loaded wheelbarrow up the dam wall was to go at it fullspeed. The barrow’s driver changed his roar to a whistle as he pounded up the hump to spill another heap of earth. Behind him followed a noisy line of cartage contractors, each with a vehicle of his own design. There were mini tins threaded with wire, pulled on sticks. There were racy sledges made of forked branches, old cardboard and torn plastic. With a brrmmmm brrmmmm and a peep peep they were rushed to and fro, loading up little mounds of soil.

Thomas Mkhize continued his patrol. Because he was born without fingers there is not much he can do, except supervise. “Don’t dawdle,” he yelled at a slacker. “I’ll make you start earlier tomorrow.” He paced on.

“Who rolled these grains off the top of the wall? It took sweat to get them there!” Out of sight came a giggle. Mkhize bent to grope for a clod, and balancing it on a palm, took aim. The clod went wide – but boys pretended to scatter in alarm.

As fast as the level of earth went up, so did the stone wall, fed by a conveyor belt from a nearby kopje – an uneven sort of belt, with its big girls and little girls, each balancing a couple of stones on her head.

Neil and Petrus Majozi had been sitting in the truck, watching. They were silent.

“Well Majozi,” said Neil after a time. “Must I still do it?”

Majozi ducked: “I think I’ll go and hide in a very deep hole.” They had come to Mhlangane with one purpose – to chase away the children.

“We would like to talk to the people,” they greeted Mkhize.

“Not now,” the Control Officer was irritable. “It’s not time for flekfuss. You must wait,”

While they waited, Neil and Majozi wandered around on a census. There were 249 people at work – 92 of them children.

There were 11 picks in use, 15 worn spades, 39 basins, and three wheelbarrows.

At last Mkhize relented. “Blekfuss!” he shouted. His labourers made a rush for the slimy grey puddle in a corner of the dam scooped the liquid and drank it thirstily. Cattle drank with them.

“We have come to er-um- find out if you need more tools,” Neil announced when everyone was assemble. Majozi flashed a smile of relief. While the adults rested, spooning dry porridge

out of their billycans, the children grabbed at idle basins and bowls and began to construct a train across the floor of the dam.

“That was the trouble,” Majozi explained later to the Executive. “We always seemed to arrive when children were playing. We never saw them at work. It seemed unfair to pay children mealiemeal for fooling around.

But now what will happen? If the children stay, how can we make the mealiemela last a long time?”

KwaZulu is afraid of its children, with their unnerving stares, their shrugs and silences. And the louts that give Majozi a pang, big boys out of work with nothing to do – they frighten their own parent.

“But at the dam” Majozi told the meeting, “they don’t look dangerous.”

Nobody can be dangerous going brrmmmm brrmmmm up a dam wall. The Executive gave a sigh of understanding. If dam building could defuse dynamite, then the under 16’s had better go on qualifying for famine relief. While the relief lasted.

That was the worry. How much longer would supplies of mealiemeal be trundled in at our gate? Since July more than 153 tons of food had arrive at Mdukatshani – which sounds like a lot of food until you count the people. The first gifts of four tons, piles up in our office, seemed enough to start a supermarket. Had we shared it out equally among the families on our shortlist, however, each food parcel would have contained something like this: 1 teabag, 2 spoons of jam, 3 biscuits, ½ kilogram of mealiemeal....

The short list, of course, stretched into a long list, and each name added became a signal for battle. Most of the skirmishes seemed to take place at the office door.

“If she qualifies, why not me?” Plaintiffs and petitioners brought routine to a standstill.

One well dressed stranger arrived in a taxi to negotiate supplies for his area. “My people are in a bad way,” he told us. “If you’ll send the food, I’ll see it goes where it’s needed.” On his suit the man wore Inkatha badge. He said he was regional director of the Zulu Cultural Liberation Movement. If he were – the region had yet to hear about it.

“That old bastard,” snorted Mhlongo. “He’ll steal anything. I know him well. Give him food and he’ll sell it as fast as he get hold of it.” In fact before any food arrived, the man was selling places on his list at 25 cents a time. Were his customers refunded when no supplies materialized?

We grew steel around our hearts, trying to block out the whines and quavers, threats and insults. Even those who received parcels were dissatisfied. Phumaphi Njoko went to Tugela Ferry to report us to the authorities. “She complains she is getting a small supply,” wrote the social worker.

Of course there were genuine cases. There were pathetic people who deserved help. There were children eating one meal a day, and old folk whose stomachs rattled with the water they swallowed to feel full.

However, we almost lost sight of them behind the rising dusts of squabble.

“Food just means trouble,” Oscar Myeni said when he asked to be released from further food distribution. Philemon Khoza threw in his resignation too. “In my area the people now claim it is government food,” he said.

“They tell me government food is for everyone. I have no right to discriminate.

It is one thing to act Father Christmas, another to play the role of God. God might cope with the human wrangle jangle. Our men couldn't. There had to be an end of gifts, they agreed. Instead of food-for-nothing it would be food-for-work. Philemon Khoza went home feeling the tension of the past weeks lifting at last.

On September 30 he and his wife were sharing an evening cup of tea when the door of their hut was smashed open and two shots were fired. Khoza was hit in the neck and abdomen. He died in hospital. Until the unknown gunman is found, the reason for the attack will be a mystery. However, the district is convinced Khoza was killed simply because he was in charge of handing out food.

Sunned by the death of their colleague, our directors did not push the work-for-food projects. Although the schemes got off to a slow start, by November dams and furrows were under construction in many different areas, and 1194 people were working for food.

At Mseleni 450 men and women were clearing a canal to lead water 15 kilometres to their homes. At Umhlumba 43 hopefuls were preparing a garden in case it ever rained. There were 36 women busy at Mdukatshani's fishponds. Nhlalakahle had 96 starting a dam. At Mtateni

Mtateni! The directors sat up straight. There was no problem about Mtateni. Or rather there were so many problems about that place that they were all agreed. No more meal. Mtateni was out.

Mtateni is ruled by ladies – and there are some who say openly that if the Mtateni experience is anything to go by, it is just as well the world is ruled by men.

“Big shots,” said Mhlongo. “They think they're big shots! Getting others to make their gardens for them – and still getting meal!”

“That Saraphina came to the office this week,” put in Majozi, “to complain that we had not been paying her R2 every time she came to ask for seed or meal.” A babble of indignation rose from the room.

Mtateni ladies hotly deny it, but they are better off than other areas.

For a start, they live along the road, which means that those who want work have a chance to climb onto the farmer's lorries which fetch labour daily. Next, Mtateni is right on the Tugela River, where the government has laid out irrigated gardens. Not everyone has a plot, however.

Some families have six. Many have no land at all. Saraphina is one of classes. This year she asked for help. There was no help for individuals she was told, only groups. And so the Mtateni ladies group came into being with the lofty purpose of “helping people who struggle to get food and those who are in need.”

“Which means that those of you who have more than one garden must share with those who have none,” Neil explained, “and if you work together, helping each other, the land can be prepared without paying for a tractor.” Mtateni would get places with community spirit.

“We understand,” said the ladies, and set to work hoeing the garden of the wealthiest among them. Next they dug over the plots of the committee members. Mtateni was seething with

controversy when our commission of inquiry was appointed. The findings were no surprise to anyone.

Mtateni's leading ladies had kept every centimeter of their multi-plots to themselves. All they had shared with their poorer sisters was the digging.

That is why another investigating committee sneaked off before sunrise to catch KwaDimbi unawares. Something seemed to be wrong there too.

KwaDimbi people live at least two hours walk away from the nearest road, tucked into the corners of wooded valleys, perched on dizzy ridges.

Manqomfini they call their high country. The land where the grass lark plays. Not many strangers come visiting – KwaDimbi is too far off the beaten track.

The first time we went to KwaDimbi we were specially invited, and induna Buthelezi was waiting to guide us over the flat rocks of the Dimbi stream up to a high waterfall. In its short plunge from the top the mountain down, Dimbi's clear water makes many leaps, splashing through overhanging ferns, dropping past banks of puffball white heamanthus. Despite the vigour of its upper reaches, however, the stream has died long before it levels out on the valley floor.

"We have never seen our stream like this," Buthelezi gestured from a boulder at the edge of the waterfall. The echo of his words was tossed between the precipices, disturbing a flock of hadedahs. The birds flapped into the air and circled, bugling their annoyance. The cliffs took up the echoes of their cries too.

The technical business was not complicated. KwaDimbi's men had already been to examine the Nomoya dam. They had decided that if a wall could be thrown across the top the waterfall, water could be stored for piping to gardens in the dry valley lower down. All they wanted to know was where to position the wall. And later, when we were drinking beer in the scant shade of a euphorbia on the hillside, Buthelezi broached the subject of mealiemeal. It would be a long time before they could expect productive gardens. Was there any chance of providing them with mealiemeal in between?

KwaDimbi was registered as a new work-for-food scheme with 18 workers.
Another 18 bags of meal.

Not 18 corrected the office staff soon afterwards. 114. KwaDimbi claimed there were 114 people working at the waterfall. Well of course we knew they were cheating. There wasn't room for all those people standing together on that narrow lip of rock. There was certainly no room for that many working. We decided to take KwaDimbi by surprise, making an unplanned call, coming from an unexpected direction, over the top of the mountain.

And the dam workers were certainly surprised to see us. Surprised, but pleased. Two frail grandmothers waved from the bank, where they were lifting rocks onto the heads of six tiny girls. The dam wall had been completed according to plan, a stone-and-earth structure notched into the banks. However KwaDimbi's engineers had decided that support wall for the banks were also necessary, and a gang of boys were shifting rock for building.

"Is it all right? Have we done the right thing?" asked Mrs. Mvelase KwaDimbi's very own Mrs. Thatcher, a powerful organizer, pusher and prodger. While we made the correct sounds of admiration we did a quick count of those present. Only 20. Ha!

“Let me take you down,” offered our hostess, and unsuspecting we left the waterfall, and began a slip-slide journey along the mountainside, following a newly dug pipeline. (But we had never talked of a pipeline.

That was to be surveyed later!) About a kilometre further on we skidded to a stop in a shower of gravel as we rounded a corner – and bumped into a second workparty. This one took a bit longer to count. There were more than 80.

“What do you think?” beamed induna Buthelezi. “You must look at the dam.” Dam? We had seen the dam. But we followed him as he led the way through the bush, past more people at work with axes, clearing a track.

And when we emerged at the bottom of the hill – there was a dam being shaped out of flint with buckets and basins.

Sorry KwaDimbi. You have left us ashamed. Especially as there is no more mealimeal. White sympathy ran out ahead of the work.

“Well we always warned the people this might happen,” said Majozi

“We all know whites are quickly bored.” And he set off to visit 1194 people to announce that from now on it will be work-for-nothing.

Love is a four letter word spelt FOOD, said a headline in The Star which arrived this week. No, it had nothing to do with drought relief.

Gourmet chef Robert Carrier was in Johannesburg to open a R450 000 Food and Drink Fair.

NEIL AND CREINA

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MONTHLY REPORT – NOVEMBER 1980

No rain fell until the end of November, while extremely high temperature prevailed, aggravating the situation. (Rainfall – 4 .5mm) cattle deaths continued and the KwaZulu veterinary service has still not resumed dipping operations as those animals which have survived the drought are too weak to be driven to the dips. Only when dipping resumes will the veterinary authorities have accurate figures on the death toll.

In most areas there has been no ploughing although donkey owners led their spans into the fields after the November rains. Profit from these tardy cultivations is very doubtful as farmers well know.

At the end of November as anticipated in our October report, Red Cross announced it would no longer be able to supply us with mealie meal, as most of the cash raised through the Sunday Tribune Drought Relief Fund had been used. Further donations of cash were unlikely as most of Natal had had rain and the public believed the crisis was over.

At the end of November 52,9 tons of mealie meal were owing to the workers on the various development projects detailed below: cost of debt R 11 623.
The number of workers to whom this mealie meal is owing 1 313.

We have already distributed 90 tons of mealie meal to people working on development projects since September; in addition 40,5 tons has been given to those who have brought bones and acacias/ pods.

Total distributed 130,5 tons of mealie meal which represents R 28 296 for Red Cross. We have also distributed beans generously given by a Tongaat drought relief group which meant in money terms a total of R 4 529. This represents a total cost by drought relief groups of R 32 825,50.

Our November costs for drought relief i.e. distribution, transport and administration were as follows: -

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| Hire of 10 ton truck | R 182 |
| Wages | R 310 |
| Telephone | R 48 |
| Transport | <u>R 540</u> |
| Total | <u>R 880</u> |

The progress of work projects: -

1) Nomoya/Msusampi

85 people have continued to work on this project, some building the retaining stonewall of the shaft that will hold the water wheel, some continuing the pipeline on the mountainside, and others collecting slabs to line the inside of their dam prior to waterproofing it. A local shortage of cement is delaying progress. During the month a 250 metre section of pipe worth

about R60 was stolen, apparently for use irrigation dagga gardens. The local community are investigating.

2) Mseleni

The workparty of 735 is divided into groups which tackle different sections of the 13 km long canal. Some years ago Bantu Investment Corporation fixed in the last 2kms of the canal and clearing this stretch of tons of earth is very slow work. An approach has been made to the managers of BIC to do the clearing for the community with BIC machine, but this request has been refused.

Those working at the intake of the canal have to walk 10kms to work every day how – so the workday is shortened and the workers arrive tired and footsore.

A recent rush of stormwater on the Tugela washed away the plug at the entrance of the canal, and water flowed prematurely. This had the beneficial effect of exposing large numbers of leaks which are now being fixed. The flood also owed up the poor condition of the old steelwork viaducts, which have been so corroded they leak badly. Welding and concreting will be necessary.

Concreting has started at the intake point – the women carrying the pockets of cement on their heads down a steep mountainside. Unfortunately the shortage of cement has affected progress here too. Of these people working 84 are widows, 20 are orphans, 120 children are working with parents and 58 are young married women.

3) Mtatani

Further distribution has been stopped, as the majority of people in this area are much better off than the people on the hills who are a long way from main roads. Violent quarrelling between the haves and have-nots had reached the stage of death threats, so withdrawal seemed advisable.

4) KwaDimbi

Mndaweni Hadebe, veteran dam building expert, spent a few days at KwaDimbi training the local men in concreting the wall of the dam they have built on the lip of a waterfall in the Dimbi valley. Local girls carried the cement on their heads in a three-hour journey. Again a shortage of cement has prevented the completion of the job. A pipeline 1 kilometre long had been excavated along the mountainside, and work has started on a holding dam in the valley below. 197 are now working on the project.

5) Mhlangana

The Mhlangana dam wall is now 116 metres long, and 2 metres high at its highest point. The 212 people working on this dam have now moved over 2 000 tons of earth for the retaining wall and carried more than 15 000 rocks to line it.

The rocks are obtained from a koppie some distance away, and we estimate that workers have covered more than 500 kms in their trips to and from carrying the rocks.

6) Mhlumba

The lack of progress at Mhlumba is entirely due to CAP's inability to provide trained staff to start dam construction work. A dam site was selected some months ago, making use of seepage in a donga. While local people are willing to start work, however, they are inexperienced and need guidance in the initial stages – and we have been too pressured to help.

7) Mathinta

People started work on this new project – yet another dam which is designed to collect run-off from a large area making gardens possible in the long term. This month Mathinta people dug a trench for the foundation of the dam – 45 metres long one metre wide and one metre deep. In some places this involves quarrying rock.

8) Mdukatshani

Drought relief workers at Mdukatshani have continued to work on the fishponds and with stabilisation of banks and grass planting. A methane digester is also under construction.

9) Purchase of Bones

In November we received 14½ tons of bones in 859 bags. 8,2 tons of mealie meal were given in exchange; an average of 14,3 kg per person i.e. R3.08 per person. 12 sacks of bonemeal have been ground so far – all have been used as fertilizer. CAP is teaching African farmers to use it as a phosphate lick for animals as well as a fertilizer. 200kg of bonemeal have been sent to Dept Agricultural at Natal University for testing.

10) Drought Relief Donations and Total Costs

Current costs of drought relief are: R21 102

Donation for the month of November totaled R 913.32 – this means that we are just managing to keep ahead of our costs; but to purchase things like tools to speed up work on the various projects we have had to draw on the Small Farmer's Trust which will soon feel the pinch. In November alone 24 picks and 24 shovels were bought for the Mhlangana and Dimbi dams – these at a cost of R418.90 18 bags of 50 kg cement were also purchased at a cost of R 59.60 to go towards the concreting of the dam at Nomoya and Dimbi.

11) Acacia Milling

Milling continued at the top farm and at Mdukatshani. A total of 19x80kg pods and 370 x 40 kg of hay were milled at Mdukatshani. Most of this was used to feed Mdukatshani's 80 heads of cattle and 200 goats. A cattle owner at Mtateni continued to travel 13km to get fodder from us for his 25 cattle on the top farm milled hay has been going to local stockowners.

12) Acacia Experiment

Sue Milton recently moved to the top farm where she is carrying out further experiments on the regrowth of acacias as a comparative sample.

13) Education

On the top farm a very mixed aged group of children – up to 40 of them are being taught by Sue Milton after her acacia work is finished for the day.

Elmina Siqubu joined her for the last week of the month – she has some experience; the children enjoy it enthusiastically. “The teacher is even worse than me at dampening their enthusiasm through boredom” – extract from Sue's notes.

14) Goats

There are now about 40 milkers out of 200 in the communal herd – 2 were sold this month. The yield per day average 5 –6 litres. 2 litres go to motherless calves, ½ litre to 2 motherless goat kids. The rest is either given to the mother of twins with kwashiorkor or is sold for the

benefit of the goat herds are the end of the month. The goats are given 30 kg a day of intwethwes.

15) The office

Netty Duma joined the office staff and relieved the pressure on other staff.

Office staff have continued to be kept busy organizing mealie meal distribution.

6 people have asked advice on pensions and 4 for help with evictions. 32 telephone calls were made for local people. Fana Sibeko has been busy making accounts for all those who owe large debts to Small Farmer's Trust we have already had some monies filtering in from the accounts. Masondo is still helping with repairs of the waterwheel.

16) Waterwheel

Ox-mower gears have been installed and adjustments continue.

17) Home Industries

Mdukatshani was one of craft groups invited to display and sell craftwork at series of special "Mission Sunday Exhibition organized recent in Johannesburg through SHADE – a self-help organization. The demand for our handwoven wool cushions has necessitated taking on 4 new women as learner weavers under Bathulise Madondo.

A last order from the USA has delayed the dispatch of assignments which may now arrive too late for Christmas. October orders were sold out the day after arrival.

18) Weenen Pound

The following costs have been incurred by CAP to help local people release their impounded stock. (Since March 1980 only)

| | | |
|---|-----------|----------|
| Loans to stock owners to release their cattle | R 2518,68 | |
| Repayments by above | | R 154,58 |
| Transport expenses to Pound | R 555,50 | |
| Less repayment | | R 11,00 |
| Telephone | R 26,00 | |

Total shortfall **R 1 568,10**

19) Staff

Jeremiah Mbatha has throat cancer in an advanced stage. He will be in hospital at least another 6 weeks.

Frans Mvelase was readmitted to hospital this month for further tests. One of the people who assaulted him in July has just been sentenced to 3 months imprisonment.

20) Football

The Y.B.B.F. is thriving and the pitc progress. However they still need kit –letters were recently written to firms asking for financial support for kits and for petrol costs. 5 matches have been played – 3 have been won.

The children working on the KwaDimbi project have formed themselves into another club – a football has been purchased for them.

21) During a visit to Pietermaritzburg and Durban, Neil Alcock saw the University's mechanical engineering department re wind generators, he made approaches to several sources refunds, saw lawyers re right of way problems and made further approaches to sources likely to ease border conflict.

22) Boundary Fence

Mhlongo's work-for-grazing team have completed the boundary fence between Mdukatshani and the farms Kranskop, Klilpkop and the Retreat. Unfortunately the owners of Vernier and Aston Lodge have not yet agreed to do their share of the boundary with us, so while we have completed our half section – a gap remain incomplete. The team is presently busy repairing the boundary with KwaZulu following the precedent KwaZulu has set erecting the boundary fence on several neighbouring farms.

The work-for-grazing team has also constructed a road from the Skhehlinge to the Ncunjane stream to make this lonely section of Mdukatshani accessible to vehicles so that cement can be carted to the stream where we hope to build a dam to provide a perennial service of water for the top farm.

23) Border Conflict

An error we regret was made last month about the Robert Christie case. He was convicted on 3 counts of attempted murder and sentenced to a fine of R200 or 100 days imprisonment and a further term of 12 months was conditionally suspended for 5 years.

24) Removals on Boundary Fence

The status of the 9 families who were given an indefinite stay of removal in October remains unchanged.

Jeremiah Mbatha was sent to Edendale Hospital for a longstanding throat complaint.

Robert Motha was released from Tugela Ferry Hospital cured of his dementia.

Ezainh Masoka took maternity leave.

25) Visitors

David Goldblatt – photographer

Dr. O. Martiny – drought relief aid

Len Apfel

David Jackson – Sunday Times re removals

Donna Heller and Suzanne Beck – Peace Corps workers from Malawi.

26) Wages

A total of R 2 092.40 was paid to 81 people½

MDUKATSHANI,
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DECEMBER 1980:
ON SATISFYING A CRAVING FOR PANTYHOSE

It happens before coronations, pop concerts, rugby tests – and The Great Bone Exchange. People sleep in the open for a good place in the queue.

Michael Mabaso discovered the first overnight campers in the bush near the cattle dip. A line of cloaks – grey, maroon, purple, blue – was strung out along a fence. It looked like washday, but nobody did washing in such a place, before dawn on a grey morning.

“AU! Sanibona! What happened?” he greeted a party of women.

“We were sleeping.”

“Here?”

“We wanted to be at the front of the line.”

“But it rained last night. Didn’t you get wet?”

“Look at our bhayis, our cloaks,” they laughed. “Yes, it was wet.”

Next time Michael offered shelter to all mothers who carried babies with them, and they squeezed onto the floor of his little house.

Outside another 40 women spread themselves around a fire. Some had hitched in on passing lorries in the afternoon. Others trudged in on foot after nightfall.

“Siyabonana makelwana,” newcomers were welcomed. “Hello neighbour.

How’s the famine?”

“Ibokile. The famine is angry.”

“Yes, with us too it is angry.” Tow donkeys plodded out of the darkness. An old woman and small girl walked behind.

“Hello neighbour,” the ritual greeting began again. The woman stood wearily in the firelight while the girl began to offload the donkeys, unknottling the ropes under their bellies.

“Are you sleeping here?”

“Yes, the famine brought us.”

“From where are you come?”

“KwaMajozi.”

“Hau! You have indeed come a great distance.”

“Yes, we sleep three times on the road. My grandchild goes with me.”

“Wakwabani? Of which family are you?”

“I am MaNxamalozi of the Shezis.” The donkeys were tethered to a fence. Together the old woman and the child dragged four bags of bones to an open place. Then the grandmother untied an empty plastic bottle at her waist – the sign of the long-distance traveler. “Where is the water got?” she asked.

“It is late so we will give you some – but we fetch it at the river.”

A bowl was passed up to her and she and the girl emptied it. Around the fire chatter started up again.

“My children and I have found enough bones for two bags of meal,” said one woman. “But we finish the land looking for bones. Everywhere people have been before us.” There was laughter. “Yes, bones are money today.” Gradually the gossip sputtered into silence as one by one the women fell asleep.

Since the first bones were exchanged for Red Cross meal early in October, 3267 sacks have swung on the scale – 57 332 kilograms of bones have piled high into the rafters of the shed.

Which seems to show that strange events are set in train by throwing bones. Not that there was much ceremony about that small handful flung on the mudfloor of the classroom during one session of the Barefoot University many months ago. With the aid of some wood chips the bones were set alight to sizzle in their own fat. When the flames had died down, Elijah Mhlongo took a flat stone to the smoking bones and began to crush them.

“Here you are,” Neil held up a handful of smell, warm powder. “Here’s phosphate. Free.”

Farmers deal in many kinds of magic, but perhaps none is so rare and powerful as phosphate. Only two to 10 parts per million are found naturally in South African soils, but these tiny quantities are essential to life.

“And the only phosphate we will ever have,” Neil told the class, “is that which was here when the world began, sealed in rock. Rock becomes soil, and plants grow up the soil, and insects and animals feed upon the plants, and die, returning the phosphate to the veld to grow new leaf, new wood. But there is no machine, no factory that can make more phosphate than there was in the beginning. We have to make do with what there is.”

A simple query had launched the lesson on phosphate.

“Why,” one man had asked, “why do whites tell us our cattle have measles so when they buy our animals, they pay us a lower price? Why should Zulu cattle get measles by eating human faeces,” Neil explained.

“Have you ever seen a white man’s ox eating rubbish like that?”

“Ja,” said Mhlongo. “Our cattle are always after rubbish. Pantyhose!

God the pantyhose we find inside when we skin a beast! And bits of jerseys, and vests, and socks off people’s feet. That nylon stuff doesn’t rot, so it blocks the intestines. And shit!

Wherever there’s a lavatory in a donga you’ll see cattle eating droppings. We always say it is salt the animals want. Humans put salt in their food, so there must be salt in their shit too.”

Strange appetites in cattle are a sign of phosphate deficiency.

“And you can have all the grass in the world, but if the grass is short of phosphate, your cattle will lose weight,” Neil told the students.

“They will lose fertility. The cows will produce only a little milk.

Your animals will sicken easily. However give them each one matchbox full of bonemeal every day. One little box like this..” Bonemeal contains about 10% phosphate.

Long ago white farmers learnt the phosphate lesson the hard way watching their animals dying with “stiff sickness” or “lamsiekte.”

“A lick of salt and bone dust has been used apparently with success,” the Natal Agricultural Journal advised its readers in 1898.

Bonedust, however, was the best fertilizer on the market, and advertisers outbid each other on the pages of the journal.

“ODAMS CELEBRATED MANURE! – Vitrolized bones at £8 nett per ton.”

“FISONS! Special cut price for Dissolved Bone Compound!”

“Bone dust for Mealies! – Order Early!”

The following manure is devised to apply to the mealiecrop, farmers were told. "Bone dust – 140 lbs per acre..."

By the turn of the century Natal was short of bones, and lamsiekte was "a growing cattle complaint."

"Since bone dust became locally popular as a fertilizer," Dr. S.B. Woollatt, a veterinary surgeon complained in 1900, "the bones of dead animals which used to strew the veld have been most assiduously collected both under the direction of farmers and by natives on their own account." The stockfarmers could not get the one dust he needed for his cattle.

Eventually vets were to discover that lamsiekte was caused by deadly botulism germs that were ingested with carrion and bones. While a vaccine was developed to fight the disease, farmers were warned no vaccine could cure a phosphate deficiency. Only a regular mouthful of bonemeal could do that.

Neil grew up at a period at a period when every farm had its pile of bones. African children were paid 1/- for every 10 pounds they added to the pile, and when there was a wagonload, a span of oxen pulled the bones to the little country station to be railed to a factory in Durban. Bonemeal was always in short supply, so the factory gave preferential treatment to farmers who had sent in bones.

The Alcocks used some bonemeal as stocklike for the cattle, and some was mixed with kraal manure to fertilize the potato fields. By the 1930's Neil was riding the ox wagon in to the station perched awkwardly on the heap of bones. But he swayed back on a cargo of superphosphate that cushioned the bumps. The age of chemical fertilizers had arrived. Phosphate-bearing rock, treated with sulphuric acid, could boost the phosphate content of the soil to the 20 parts per million needed to produce bumper crops.

"But there was one small problem," Neil reminded the Barefoot University. "South Africa's phosphate came from cliffs in North Africa where long-ago fish had turned to stone." Which meant that in wartime, fertilizer had to be rationed. In 1944 lorries provided by the Department of Defence helped to cart kraal manure to South African farmers, while the Secretary for Agriculture reported: "Some soils have already become exhausted on account of the fact that farmers are not able to obtain fertilizer."

In 1950 our friend T.C. Robertson, then general manager of National Veldtrust, warned: "South Africa could starve quite easily in time of war if cut off from imported phosphate rock." His speech was widely publicized with trouble in Korea, war seemed imminent then.

"The disquiet rapidly spread to organized agriculture," wrote John Bond, Creina's father, reporting the effects of TC's speech. "The matter was raised in Parliament and the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. le Roux, took the matter seriously. Finding that stockpiling of phosphate rock from Morocco was not practical, he and his department resolved to see as quickly as possible what could be made of the well known deposits of appetite, a phosphate-bearing rock at Phalaborwa.

Within a few months ISCOR had bought the deposits for the State, the Roads department was hurriedly improving roads to the spot, the Department of Mines proving the deposits at depth and preparing the way for a pilot plant."

Phalaborwa was to be a sort-of answer, for while superphosphate has been manufactured there steadily for almost 30 years – today the price of a bag of fertilizer is one which few whites and no blacks can afford.

And that is why a group of Msinga small farmers was taught that there was strong muti in the bones that lay scattered around their kraals.

New ideas weather into everyday gradually as rock. The phosphate lecture made an entertaining story at the beerdrinks. However, only Majozi, Ntabela, Mnguni and Mhlongo went further than talk. They ordered stocklick for their cattle from the Weenen Farmer's Co-op.

When the price rocketed beyond their means, they moved a step away from the packaged product. They stirred a home mix of molasses, salt, ground acacia pods and bonemeal. Commercial bonemeal. Only Ntabela got round to bashing bones.

By winter 1980 molasses had disappeared from the market, and so had bonemeal. However the drought at Msinga had made one commodity locally abundant – bones. Officials from KwaZulu veterinary department guess 12 000 cattle died at Msinga this winter. At present they can only guess. For months dipping operations have been suspended because there has been no water to fill the dips, and the cattle have been too weak to get to them. Until dipping is resumed and the surviving cattle can be counted, there is no way of accurately assessing stock losses.

However that figure of 12 000 cattle is good enough to provide a rough estimate that 300 000 kilograms of bones have been spread across Msinga. (The dry weight of bones in a starving ox is about 20 to 30 kilograms). And added to this year's bones, there are the bones of other seasons, the remains of marriage feasts and funeral sacrifices.

The 57 tons of bones in our shed are not much, after all. Very few bones have found their way into the sacks of the bone collectors.

Threadbare sacks, so old they rip when they're hooked on the scale.

"25 kilograms," Natty Duma calls out for the census clerks. She has had to heave to get the sack up, now she heaves to get it down off the scale again. For eight hours at a time she remains on her feet, a small broad woman who never tires, never loses her cheerfulness.

"Your name?" she asks each bone collector. "Your place? How did you come?"

"On my head," replies a woman, patting her brow with feeling.

"You came on your head?" repeats Natty. Everybody laughs. The woman drags her head-denting bag behind her as she clambers to the top of the heap to shake out the bones, starting a small avalanche of skulls, vertebra, shoulderblades. Another sack goes onto the scale, jawbones protruding in half grins.

"Ag shame," says Natty, bending double to catch the shy whisper of a ten year old. "Kwela Mvelase from Umhlumayo. Eight kilograms. You carried that alone?" she asks with admiration. Kwela hangs his head.

Gently Natty pushes a ticket into his hand. "Take that to the office and you'll get your meal."

The queue moves up one. Fakazile Sithole, 12. "Are these your cattle that died in the famine?" the boy is asked "No, I brought their bones long ago," he replies. There are giggles.

200 sacks, 300, 400, 500, 600. Still the line of people stretches down the road.

"Tolakele Mchunu, 22 kilograms ..." The scale squeaks at each new load.

Up on the top of the bone pile there's suddenly a roar: "Hau! This one's still alive!" A very meaty donkey has emerged from a bag.

At the end of the day our books show that 14 786 kilograms of bones has come in and 7 225 kilograms of mealie meal have gone out. There were 480 people with 904 sacks between them. A third of the bone pedlars were children under the age of 14. Half the people had come from more than 20 kilometres away.

All of which is very interesting – but do we really need all those bones? Ground up into bonemeal we will have sufficient stockfeed to give 3 000 cattle a phosphate supplement for a year, or to supply the phosphate requirements of 280 hectares of ploughed land. In the normal course of events we would never have invested in bones on such a scale.

But then nothing has been normal at Msinga this year. We landed ourselves with this peculiar hoard because bones offered so many people in such distant places some form of famine relief.

Now that the bones are here we can keep them or sell them. Yes, bones are still a marketable commodity. Every issue of THE FARMERS WEEKLY advertises: “Urgently Needed. Truckload of Bones. Competitive Price Bags Refunded. Contact Republic Fodder, Potchefstroom.” In fact we have decided to keep our bones, and to understand why, take a look at one of agriculture’s old trap questions: “What price should a farmer ask when he sells a load of kraal manure?”

Neil had the question thrown at him in his student days, and he threw it back at the Barefoot University class.

“Kraal manure?” the men exclaimed. “We would never sell manure. We just give it away.”

A good farmer is expected to give this answer: Fertility is beyond price. No man sells fertility off his land. He recycles it.”

We are going to try, through The Great Bone Exchange, to demonstrate this to Msinga.

NEIL AND CREINA

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CHURCH AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS

MONTHLY REPORT: DECEMBER 1980

WEENEN POUND – AND BORDER CONFLICT

In 1978/79 total turnover at the Weenen Pound amounted to R 2 800.
In 1979/80 turnover had rocketed to R 35 000.

“In one or two cases farmers may be making more from impounding cattle than by farming,”
Mr. Joseph le Roux, chairman of the Weenen Farmer’s Association admitted to The Sunday Times.

Mr. L. Agliotti, a neighbour whose farm adjoins Mdukatshani, made R 7 392 in trespass fees and damages claims from African stockowners during a three months period last summer. Mr. Agliotti was making no agricultural use of his farm at the time.

While this information has appeared in CAP reports at different times during the past year it is summarised here to explain CAP’s role in the past 13 months helping African stockowners with a variety of services. We have negotiated with farmers, police, local, provincial and KwaZulu authorities. We have advanced loans to pay Pound fees, provided transport and legal aid. The costs in time, telephone, transport and cash has been enormous and the results disappointing.

In March CAP drew up a lengthy report on border conflict in the Weenen-Msinga area. This report was sent to all donor groups to explain our involvement, and was also used as a memo to petition the intervention of the authorities.

We hoped for an investigation into the Pound which would prevent further exorbitant damages claims against African stockowners already suffering the severe hardships of the drought. This we failed to achieve. However the memo did lead to the reopening of assault and attempted murder cases. A local white farmers, James Christie, was found not guilty of the assaults – but guilty of attempted murder. Subsequently he also lost a civil claim against him by Philemon Ximba, who had had his jaw broken in an assault.

All these cases were connected to the illegal trespass of black cattle on white-owned farms.

At the beginning of the year a local welfare group, AFRA, agreed to help CAP meet some of the costs of pounds fee loans and legal advice, for which we have been very grateful. A donation from the South African Council of Churches also helped offset the costs we incurred in fighting for a better deal for the black stockowner.

During November Dick Connell, a temporary helper with CAP, spent considerable time at the Weenen Pound collecting details required to bring further cases to court.

In December 1979 CAP advanced its first loan to release African cattle from the Pound. A year later, despite our protests, the situation is little changed. Because of the drought and the new fences blocking traditional rights-of-way (described in our November report) African cattle were continuing to break through fences to reach grass and water, and damages claims against the black owners were as high as ever.

During November and December CAP gave assistance to 12 stockowners. Loans of R234.83 were advanced. Four men who had had their cattle shot by white farmer were given legal advice. CAP hired its lorry to another three stockowners who needed transport to fetch their animals from the pound. We also negotiated with the Pound for the release of goats belonging to a further four black stockowners.

All legal costs have been settled with the lawyers concerned by AFRA.

The following are the total costs CAP has incurred since December 1979.

TOTAL COSTS

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Telephone | R 483.90 |
| Loans for Pound fees | R 7 652.93 |
| Transport | <u>R 1 147.70</u> |
| | <u>R 9 284.53</u> |

TOTAL INCOME

| | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Loan repaid in cash | R 1 547.58 |
| Loan repaid in stock | 1 090.00 |
| Hire of transport | 11.00 |
| P.M. Brown | 184.00 |
| S.A. Council of Churches | <u>1 250.00</u> |
| | <u>R 4 082.58</u> |

The shortfall is R5 201.95.

While CAP expects to be able to collect all loans in due course, we have actually refused to accept repayments from some families whom we know are in desperate circumstances following the loss of their livestock due to the drought. Repayment will therefore take some time, and CAP is seeking help in covering the above large, unbudgeted shortfall.

Drought and drought relief has been covered in a report recently circulated.

Acacia milling is covered in a separate report about to be circulated.

Bones See December newsletter.

Rights of Way

During December officials from the Natal Roads Department came to Mdukatshani in connection with our representations regarding blocked rights-of-way. They said they were in too much of a hurry to make an inspection, but set a date for a subsequent visit.

CAP accordingly went to some trouble to collect old African residents and local indunas who could testify to the history of footpaths and tracks and point them out – but the Roads Department officials broke their appointment. CAP has officially protested to the department – and asked attorney to take up the matter.

Goats

During December CAP was able to dispose of adult male goats surplus for the needs of the flock. A total of 19 were sold for R 568.00 13 new kinds were born.

Thatching

Because of pressure of work most of CAP's buildings suffer from lack of finish = leaks in the roof. During the past two months Mr. Mvelase has thatched 7 buildings in an attempt to make them leak proof.

Homecrafts

December was a quiet month as work tailed off before Christmas. Nevertheless R 475.30 was paid to 48 women.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| Orders dispatched in December Wool: | R 159.20 |
| Beads: | R 703.90 |

| | | |
|---------------------------|---|-----------|
| Cheques and cash received | : | R2 156.32 |
|---------------------------|---|-----------|

Bead orders for the New Year already total R 5 500. – promising plenty of work for the 200 + women on our books.

Staff:

Jeremiah Mbatha returned home from Edendale hospital after receiving radiation treatment for his throat cancer.

Frans Mvelase is fully recovered at last, and back on duty.
Another two men have been arrested on charges of assaulting him in July.

After receiving further death threats, Delanie Mbatha was invited to leave his home at Msusampi to live on Mdukatshani as fulltime supervisor of goats, and is living in the rondavel at the goatkraal with his wife and numerous dogs. He has asked CAP to try to acquirer a firearm for his protection.

Nhlanhla Ntombela deserted hastily after receiving death threats because he had caused the pregnancy of a local girl. He has written to apologize for leaving without notice, explaining the reasons.

Unfortunately Michael Mabaso, CAP's manager, and Petrus Majozi, CAP's chairman, are both being held responsible for the trouble, local people blaming them for introducing mission boys to seduce local girls – and as Nhlanhla is no longer available, death threats have been focused on these two men.

Siphiwe Mvelase also received death threats in December – and again a girl was involved. Siphiwe was blamed for causing the girl to break off her engagement with a Mashunka fellow – who returned from Johannesburg at Christmas and began to stalk Siphiwe, firing shots to warn he was in earnest. After the girl had been assaulted, the Firearms Squad was called in, and an arrest has been made.

Visitors

Mr. Horace Rall – re border conflict

Mr. Naude – new neighbour re border conflict and fencing problems

Dr Osburne and Mr. Scholtz – KwaZulu veterinary department

Deon du Plessis – Sunday Tribune

David Goldblatt – photographer

Chief Ngoza Mtembu – re homecraft workshop in his area

Mr. Daniel Thahe – re football clubs in Msinga area

Mr. J. Sosibo, Mr. Mathini Khoza, Mr. David Sithole, and others re removals.

Linda and Keith Hackland – both former CAP volunteers, on holiday from Canada, with baby son Themba.

Roads Department officials

Wages

A total of R 2394.70 was paid of 85 people.

MDUKATSHANI,
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January 1981

THE ADVENTURES OF SELLING A NEW IDEA
ACACIA MILLING PROJECT – July to December 1980

Ever since agricultural research was launched in Weenen district in 1934, the encroachment of thorn scrub, in particular Acacia tortilis, has been regarded as a serious problem.

In the autumn of 1979, a drought year, CAP began experimenting with Acacia tortilis as stockfeed for cattle – believing that the problem thorn could be used to advantage. A fibrous “hay” was produced by milling leafy acacia branches, while seed pods were ground as meal. Samples were sent for analysis to the Cedara College of Agriculture, and the results were promising. The hay contained 7% crude protein – higher than eragrostis hay with only 6%. And the podmeal contained 17% crude protein – as good as Lucerne with its 16,9%.

In May 1980 CAP continued the work started the previous year. Local people were offered 20 cents a kilogram for acacia pods and a silo was built so that the milled acacia branches could be tested as silage. At the same time acacia hay was being regularly milled for consumption by CAP’s cattle and horses, and goats.

At the end of June Sue Milton, a botanist from Cape Town arrived to start a year’s research on the acacias.

By July the effects of drought in KwaZulu were causing hardship and around Mdukatshani cattle deaths were mounting. Very little grazing was available in KwaZulu – yet in many places acacia was abundant. For this reason CAP decided to extend the milling operations into the homeland to assist black stockowners.

Meanwhile we were being overwhelmed by unexpected quantities of acacia pods brought in by local people. In 1979 CAP had purchased two tons of pods – in 1980, 97 tons. While this was far beyond the needs of the experiment, pod purchases were regarded as a form of drought relief with twin benefits. Local families earned much needed cash – and CAP was provided with the means to supply local cattle with a protein supplement.

During July a representative of BP, Southern Africa, Mr. Ray Carol, visited Mdukatshani and the result was a gift of three hammermills for the use of the Mchunu and the Mtembu tribes living adjacent to Mdukatshani. When the mills were handed over it was envisaged that local black tractor owners would be hired for the milling. When CAP approached tractor owners, however we found that 7 out of 10 “available” machines were out of order, and three were committed to contract ploughing elsewhere. As a result the KwaZulu Government at Ulundi was asked to help out. CAP was told it was government policy not to compete with private enterprise, but when our difficulties were explained, permission was granted for the hire of a government tractor from Tugela Ferry.

All this time CAP’s own tractor had been working almost fulltime milling pods and hay. However our machine is now 10years old. As the life of a tractor is five years (depreciation

being set at 20% per annum), CAP's tractor should have been written off years ago. Instead it has continued to work – with regular, time-consuming and expensive breakdowns.

MTATENI MILLING PROGRAMME

In March cattle deaths due to drought were already high in the Mtateni area, and by August some stockowners had lost all the cattle they had. Because the situation was so desperate CAP decided to set up one milling programme in this area. With the help of the local headmaster, a meeting was called at the school. More than 50 people attended. They were addressed by CAP's chairman, Mr. Petrus Majozi. He explained that CAP machine available with which the community could grind acacia branches to feed local cattle and save them from dying.

One speaker after another replied that their cattle were already dead. It was their own hunger they were concerned about. Mr. Majozi suggested therefore that people who were willing to cut acacia for the mill could earn Red Cross mealie meal supplied for drought relief work. Clearly people were not willing to cut for their own stock on the off chance they might help their animals through their efforts – they would have to be convinced of the value of the thorn first. And two serious objections were raised against the idea of harvesting the thorn.

- a) Thorn bushes were needed to fence gardens. If they were cut for stockfeed there would be no material for building stockades when the rains came.
- b) Because CAP was an organization including whites it was suspect. Local suspicion was related to an alleged incident involving a white government agricultural officer. "We are not prepared to get involved in any dealings with a white man because look what happened to us last time," African stockowners told CAP staff. "A white agricultural officer approached us, also saying he wanted to help us feed ourselves. He said if we would lend him some fields for a year, he would show us how to grow monkeynuts. We let him have the fields he needed – but then the fields became the white man's fields. He made us change the footpath so that nobody would walk near his fields, and then whites started patrolling on motorbikes with guns across their backs saying they would shoot people who tried to steal their monkeynuts. And when that first year was over, the white man kept the land and planted it again. When we went to our induna to complain, he told us we had given the whites the fields willingly –he could do nothing to help

"It's all very well to say you will help us feed our cattle.

But now do we know your white man won't come along when the animals are fat again and tell us: "I fed these cattle. Now they are mine."

The reassurances of our black staff did nothing to ease suspicion, and many stockowners offered this reason for refusing to cooperate.

The fence argument was countered by having all the acacias cut from trees growing within the fenced area of the government irrigation plots.

Tractor problems: The day following the Mtateni meeting 20 people gathered to cut acacias... sharing out the available six pairs of clippers between them!

CAP had made a telephone arrangement to hire the government tractor from Tugela Ferry. By midday a huge pile of acacia branches lay withering – with no sign of a tractor. CAP staff went to Tugela Ferry to see what had happened. They were told that the person who allocated tractor must have forgotten the arrangement. Unfortunately he had gone off and nobody else had authority to release a machine.

In order to prevent the wastage of all the branches cut, early the next morning CAP sent its machine down to Mtateni to mill.

A week later CAP again arranged for the hire of a government tractors. Again no tractor arrived. Again branches withered. Again, a day late, CAP sent its own tractor to retrieve what could be retrieved.

A week later we ‘phoned yet again to make arrangements for the government tractor. Tugela Ferry agricultural staff promised to meet CAP men at the grinding site at Mtateni. Again CAP staff waited for some hours, then drove to Tugela Ferry to find out what had gone wrong. Again the in charge was away, but this time we were directed to his assistant. “Go back to the mill. The tractor will follow you immediately,” we were promised. All day our staff and acacia cutters waited. No tractor.

In desperation we again asked around after a private tractor owner CAP’s tractor was fully occupied. A Mr. Khoza agreed to help out at R25 a day plus fuel. At midday the following day, when his tractor had been milling for five hours, a government tractor arrived. The driver was thanked, but we explained it was now too late. Other arrangements had been made.

For two weeks the milling programme operated with only minor hitches (such as a broken fanbelt). Then the chassis of Mr. Khozas tractor was damaged. Milling stopped while Mr. Khoza went off to find the metal he needed for repairs. When he eventually returned he apologized and said he would no longer be able to help. Unable to afford the part he needed, he had eventually acquired it from a white farmer with whom he had worked in the past – but on the understanding that he paid for his spare by carting sugarcane for the farmer at Dalton. Goodbye to Mr. Khoza.

CAP explained the situation to the Mtateni people. As no tractor was available to do the milling, the scheme could not continue.

However CAP promised the 18 stockowners who had been obtaining acacia fodder for their animals that an effort would be made to continue to deliver hay and podmeal to them – produced at Mdukatshani.

During the period of the milling operation at Mtateni a total of 1 110 kilograms of hay and 720 kilograms of pods were milled.

Because of the daily disappointments, many potential enthusiasts gradually dropped away. The one outstanding example was Mr. M. Mdlala who reappears later in this report.

MACHUNWINI MILLING PROGRAMME

CAP directors approached Chief Simakade Mchunu to enlist his backing for a milling scheme in his area. The Chief was interested and offered the use of one of his two tractors.

The first tractor he gave us on loan could not drive the mill because the shaft did not work properly. When this was explained to the chief he replied that his second machine would then be no use either as it was the same make. He suggested however that CAP lend him clippers so that he could set his people to work pruning acacias in the neighbourhood. If CAP also supplied the mill he would see that a tractor was available.

On an agreed day CAP supervised the initial operation in the chief's yard. The chief watched the milling and expressed pleasure at what he saw. All the acacia branches milled that day came only from within the confines of the chief's own compound. The hay was fed to his cattle.

In discussions with our staff the chief agreed that it would be good to extend the programme in his area, and he undertook to give instructions that further cutting be done in the tribal area. Unfortunately he was too busy to give time to this, and after a period CAP collected the clippers.

Next CAP approached the MaChunwini storekeeper, Mr. M. Malembe. He had had bags of pods collected for his own use after hearing what CAP was doing, and he agreed to let us have the use of his tractor on condition we let him have the mill over weekends to grind pods and hay for his own cattle. This was done. Subsequently Mr. Malembe was given 100 bags of pods to grind and distribute among local stockowners to advertise the podmeal. We know he did hand out meal for several cattle owners have thanked us for it. Unfortunately Mr. Malembe is illiterate so no records were kept.

Mr. Malembe's tractor was a godsend – but it was even older than CAP's machine and gave even more trouble. It spent some time on Mdukatshani's top farm, but after repeated breakdowns CAP asked an engineer neighbour to overhaul the tractor. Instead the engineer recommended it be scrapped as the cost of further repairs could not be justified.

Because of the difficulties of obtaining a working tractor – and because the Chief's fears to have thorns cut beyond his own compound made it clear that there would be difficulties having thorns cut in the tribal area – the MaChunwini programme was also abandoned.

However because CAP was regularly visiting the area to supervise a dam-building scheme – we continued to have contact with local stockowners who were suffering high stock mortality. CAP was inundated with requests for grazing – which had to be refused and each time we visited the area it was depressing to be told:

“I have lost another two cows since you were last here – please can't you help?” as a result, whenever there was an empty vehicle going up, it carted bags of acacia pod meal and hay for free distribution. About 40 stockowners benefited from this sporadic and random hand-out. When bags were delivered there was a near riot as stockowners scrambled for the feed.

While the unsatisfactory aspects of this type of handout are obvious, in the circumstances we could do nothing more, and CAP directors felt that the exercise was justified as an advertising venture, to awaken local interest in the potential of the thorns.

MDUKATSHANI MILLING PROGRAMME

This, too has been bedeviled by tractor problems. However it has been the most efficient, closely supervised operation. Unfortunately recordkeeping is not one of the outstanding talents of our uneducated staff. No records were kept in the first months of milling, and some subsequent records have been lost. It is therefore impossible to provide accurate statistics on production. However on the figures we do have we know that more than 12 tons of pods have been milled, and more than five tons of hay, and tons silage.

The 2830 hectares of Mdukatshani is used as a grazing area for African cattle – CAP owning only 80 head. Last winter more than 886 head of cattle belonging to 65 stockowners were legally on the farm – grazing fees being paid in the form of work on the farm. In addition several hundred illegal animals were pushed in from KwaZulu.

The acacia hay and podmeal has been fed on cattle belonging to 43 African stockowners on Mdukatshani. The meal has also been handed out as sample poultry mash to local families. CAP's cattle, horses, goats and fowls have received their rations, which starving cattle arrested for trespass have been fed back to health on acacia fodder.

RELATIONS WITH KWAZULU GOVERNEMENT

In May CAP prepared a report on the value of acacia fodder for African stockowners suffering the effects of the drought. The report was prepared specially for the benefit of members of the KwaZulu Cabinet, Msinga chiefs, and government officials. Copies were sent forwards with an invitation to attend an "open day" at Mdukatshani at which the milling would be demonstrated. There was no response.

Almost three months later, when the BP hammermills arrived, CAP again attempted to involve KwaZulu authorities in a demonstration.

Local agricultural officers were invited – but said they could not attend without authority from Ulundi. So telephone calls were made to Ulundi for this authority – and also permission to hire a government tractor to be used to demonstrate the use of the mills.

CAP was told the tractor would be there – and so would officials.

Mr. Cuff, Regional Director of Agriculture, KwaZulu Government Service, did attend with three black agricultural officers. The tractor arrived too, on this occasion.

Chief Buthelezi has given our scheme his backing, but his support has not trickled down through the ranks. Ulundi white officials told Professor John Hanks that KwaZulu could not support our work "because of Neil Alcock's police record". Neil Alcock's police record consists of one court appearance for hiring a Basuto without the proper papers! A CAP director who approached the Security Police was told Alcock's police record was clear! CAP believes the local acceptance of the acacia project will leap forward if KwaZulu authorities publicly and visibly give support to the scheme. Verbal assurances have been plentiful but have meant little.

LOCAL RESISTANCE

While CAP has had considerable publicity in the white press on the acacia project – invitations to black press and radio have come to nothing. This has been disappointing.

However it is likely that neither newspaper nor radio could do much to promote the idea of acacia fodder in an area like Msinga where word-of-mouth is still the main form of communication.

Members of CAP staff have worked tirelessly to advertise our product. While local blacks are already aware of the value of the acacia – for they see their cattle browsing low branches, and both cattle and goats relish the pods, it is one thing to know this and another to accept the idea of artificially harvesting the trees.

The statement “we need thorns to fence our garden” has come up again and again. This is a very real cause for concern. Thorn brush stockades are the only means a local gardener has to keep stock out of his garden. The stockades decay rapidly and have to be renewed each year. Because of KwaZulu’s growing population the pressure on thorn bushes for fences has all but eliminated the acacia in some places.

At Msusampi, a valley community nextdoor to Mdukatshani, a thorn bush stockade 2 130 metres long divides the arable and grazing areas. The thorns are stacked against a three-strand barbed wire fence which Msusampi inherited from a white farmer who used the land about 20 years ago. The Msusampi people have carefully maintained the fence, and annually rebuild the thorn stockade with the equivalent of the growth of 14 058 trees (9 hectares of trees). The alternative to thornbush – goatproof pignetting would cost this community of 65 families more than R 1 400.

Measured against their means this is an exorbitant amount.

Apart from its ploughed fields, the community also has small individual gardens, each surrounded by more acacia branches.

The perimeters vary in length from about 60 to 80 metres, using an average of about 738 branches (or 0,5 ha of trees per garden per annum). Were these tiny plots to be individually fenced, each gardener would have to spend about R70 to R80.

In one corner of the valley CAP has helped to create a combined garden area, and loans from the Small Farmers Trust have been advanced to help fence the gardens, averaging about R 100 per loan per gardener. As nobody claims a monthly income higher than R50 – repayments will be on the long, longterm.

Disregarding these fenced gardens – Msusampi’s other small plots require the equivalent of 42 000 thorn trees a year. Added to the thorns used to build the main fence, this small community must therefore annually harvest the growth of 56 000 acacias 36 ha of trees. Just to build fences. By comparison, pignetting replacement would cost R 5 600½

Pignetting may be expensive – but it lasts 20 to 30 years against the acacia’s one-year-of-usefulness. Judged in the longterm it is easy to see that pignetting makes economic sense. It will relieve the pressure on the acacias, and so allow to growth of much-needed stockfeed. But does this mean CAP must raise funds for fencing to get the acacia fodder scheme of the ground?

LOCAL SUCCESS

The acceptance of a new idea is often dependent on a few pioneering individuals. While CAP has been disappointed at local reactions to the acacia fodder, one man, Mr. M. Mdlala from Mtateni, has brought his cattle through the winter on acacia hay and podmeal. Not only is he a convert – his success is the talk of the district.

Mr. Mdlala looks after 20 cattle – owned by himself, his brother and his son. When acacia milling started in his area, the family had already lost 9 cattle to the drought. With his wife and grandchildren Mr. Mdlala cut a huge pile of acacia branches in anticipation of the first milling day – only to be disappointed when the tractor never arrived. However the family continued to cut until the milling programme was abandoned.

When Mr. Mdlala got his first acacia fodder, his animals were on their last legs. Some had stopped chewing their cud and showed no interest in the acacia fodder. CAP staff had to show Mr. Mdlala how to dampen the podmeal and coax his animals to eat.

Once he had seen the benefits of the acacia, he went to great length to obtain his supplied of hay and podmeal. When milling stopped at Mtateni he hitched, caught buses, slept overnight on occasions – just to carry his precious feed home.

The transformation of his dying animals has caused particular comment because of rivalry which developed between Mdlala and two neighbours who refused to touch acacia fodder. One man tried to nurse his cattle with Lucerne from his garden, but because there was insufficient his rations were magre and he lost two cattle. The second man owned a vehicle and regularly traveled 25 km to buy bales of Lucerne at R2.20 each. Because of the costs involved he too was forced to be stingy with his rations and he also lost cattle.

CAP could have designed no better publicity. While it was the quantity, not the quality of the Lucerne that was at fault, the district has drawn a simpler conclusion: Thorn is better than Lucerne.

ECONOMICS

Soon after her arrival Sue Milton produced cost estimates for us.

To be economic 5 –6 hours of grinding must be completed per day, producing either 220 kgs of hay or 440 kgs of meal. At this rate acacia hay costs 10c a kg in milling costs, acacia podmeal 5c a kg.

Whenever there are delays – people standing around waiting for repairs, for a tractor to arrive, for branches to be cut – production costs shoot up and the milling becomes uneconomic.

From what we have already described in this report, it is obvious that our 1980 milling programme was uneconomic.

A total of R4 588 was expended on milling (this includes wages, fuel, tractor hire, repair costs, gloves, clippers etc). To have produced hay and meal economically at this level of expenditure, we should have worked at milling 7 to 8 hours a day, 25 days a month.

The following comparative costs are of interest:

| | | |
|----------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Acacia hay | 10c a kg | (5 to 8% crude protein) |
| Eragrostis hay | 4c a kg | (6% crude protein) |
| Lucerne hay | 4c a kg | (16,9% crude protein) |
| Acacia silage | 12c a kg | (5,8% crude protein) |

If acacia podmeal is efficiently milled, it costs 5c + the cost of buying in the pods. In 1979 we paid 10c a kg for pods. In 1980 this was raised to 20c a kg. We intend reducing the price of pods in 1981 to make the price of podmeal competitive with commercial products – that is, 15c a kg not 25c.

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| Acacia podmeal | 15c a kg | (17% protein) |
| Poultry mash | 19½c a kg | (19% protein) |
| Dairy meal | 16c a kg | (28% protein) |
| Steer fattening concentrate | 17c a kg | (24% protein) |
| Lucerne meal | 12c a kg | (16% protein) |

While offering these comparisons we must emphasize one point.

Acacia fodder has one quality which makes it superior to the commercial products – it is locally available here. Only a handful of Msinga stockowner are wealthy enough to own vehicles to travel to local towns to purchase supplies of poultry mash, dairy meal etc.

TRACTOR POWER – AND ALTERNATIVES

Tractor power is to the longterm solution to grinding acacias at Msinga. When a tractor breaks down – spares must usually be ordered from Pietermaritzburg 180 km away. If the part is railed to Weenen or Greytown there is a long wait and many days when the machine is out of action. If the part is fetched in town – time is saved, but at least R80's worth of transport is added to the repair bill.

In November a worn-out gear and drive shaft brought the CAP tractor to a standstill. The replacement part cost R350 more than the value of the tractor itself. We looked for a replacement in our scrapheap, and the used the time of three mechanics to make the necessary adjustments. This one repair had the tractor out of operation for ten days. We were lucky having mechanics to do the job at home – most Msinga tractor owners have to rely on garages, with more prolonged delays.

One of the reasons Cap has done nothing to acquire a new tractor was its policy of trying to phase out mechanical power. Oxen and horses are already being used to do a growing number of farm chores that were once done by the tractor.

Unfortunately we have no animal-powered mill.

Early in 1980 the Environmental and Development Agency suggested we submit a sketch of a hand-operated grinder as a department at the University of Cape Town had shown interest in tackling problems of appropriate technology. CAP supplied a rough design based on an old-fashioned hand-operated chaff cutter. Unfortunately we have heard nothing further. Sophisticated engineering students may have difficulty relating to stone-age engineering.

RESEARCH

Sue Milton is working in co-operation with the Institute of Natural Resources at Natal University and is partly funded by BP Southern Africa. Her project has recently been extended to cover three years and during this period she will attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1) How hard, how frequently, and at what season should acacias be cut to ensure their continued growth?
- 2) What is the effect of acacia pruning on species composition, cover, productivity, and utilization of the herbaceous under storey?
- 3) What effect does pruning have on runoff and soil loss?
- 4) How can acacia hay be stored?
- 5) How many pods are produced per tree? What is the pod production on Mdukatshani?
- 6) To what extent can acacia farming be applied to other parts of KwaZulu?

PROGRAMME FOR 1981

1) Milling

We are planning to centre all milling operations on Mdukatshani itself. While pods will be bought in from outlying areas, the pods will be milled here – then made available to black stockowners. Hay will be cut only from Mdukatshani trees.

To make full use of BP's three hammermills we obviously need 3 tractors. The tractor saga already related will explain why we are going to restrict the operation to one tractor – and we will attempt to raise funds for a new tractor as the old will not attempt to raise funds for a new tractor as the old will not survive another season.

By restricting milling to Mdukatshani we will cut down on the very high to-and-fro-costs of transport between the farm and milling sites in outlying areas.

At the moment 1 200 cattle belonging to 98 African stockowners are grazing on Mdukatshani. The carrying capacity of the farm is about half this number. Attempts to reduce the number to enable the farm to produce some grazing for the bad winter ahead of us, have been frustrated by an order from Chief Simakade Mchunu removing large areas of the tribal lands from grazing. He too is trying to build up grazing reserves for tribal stock for this coming winter!

As a result black stockowners are having hard time now trying to find pasture for their animals – and those who are on the farm are determined not to get off.

Nevertheless we continue to believe that by winter we should, by several means, have control of the situation, and then all those who have cattle grazing on Mdukatshani will be obliged to take part in the acacia fodder programme.

2) Podmeal purchases

During the worst months of winter, when Msinga cattle have to live off coarse, non-nutritious grasses, a ration of 1½ kgs of podmeal a day can mean the difference between life and death for an animal.

Cattle's stomachs and rumens (storage stomachs) are populated by myriads of microflora which attack food, breaking it down to enable the animal to absorb the nutrients. Microflora, however, cannot exist without the presence of protein. Because acacia podmeal has such a high protein content, it can keep the microflora vigorous, able to deal with fibrous food.

This year CAP is planning to buy 70 000 kgs of pods. Half this quantity we shall attempt to sell at cost to tribal stockowners.

The remainder will be shared out in the critical months of July, August and September to nurse 200 cattle on Mdukatshani, and 100 in the tribal area, specially selected for demonstration purpose.

PROMOTION

Because of local objections and doubts it is obvious CAP will have to promote its product before people in KwaZulu will adopt the use of acacia fodder.

As Paul Harrison points out in an article in New Scientist, many excellent developments remain unused in Third World countries because nothing is done to promote them effectively. "Western labour and energy- saving devices were spread commercially by entrepreneurs with effective marketing and distribution systems, using mass media, and advertising to attract customers," he points out adding that similar efforts are needed to plough ideas of real benefit to underdeveloped societies.

"This approach can work, he says," as has been demonstrated by the family planning agency, Population Services International, which coined the phrase 'social marketing'. In Bangladesh, for example, advertising and aggressive marketing backed up by market research have boosted sales of the Raja condoms from nil to 20 million a year in five years, despite the fact that the condom was unfamiliar, alien to local culture and in a taboo area."

CAP has not the resources to promote acacia on a grand scale – nor, indeed, is the knowledge adequate, the practice perfect, or the time right to do this. However we do believe we need to launch some form of promotion and the following possibilities have been discussed:

- * Posters for display at trading stores
- * Handbills for distribution to cattle owners at cattle dips on dipping day.
- * Selected stockowners with very thin animals will be supplied with acacia fodder to provide "before and after" evidence of the value of the feed.
- * A display/lecture at Tugela Ferry on pension day, with samples of stock, hay, meal.
- * Further attempts will be made to acquire publicity from black press and radio.
- * November 20, 1980: Appropriate Technology: How it can reach the villages).

HANDGRINDERS

The rising cost of fuel, the difficulty of obtaining spares, the fact that Africans cannot repair their own machines – all these factors make the future use of tractors risky and expensive.

Because of this it is essential that in conjunction with the research on acacia fodder, a milling process be developed which is man or animal-powered. There are many examples of simple, old fashioned pestle-and-mortar and plate mills, which, with a little appeals to all those who get this report to inform us of any groups likely to be able to help develop an acacia home mill.

BUDGET FOR 1981

(Running costs are based on 1980 expenditure).

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Wages | R 2 700 |
| Fuel | 1 200 |
| Tractor | 11 000 |
| Pod purchases | 7 000 |
| Promotional material | <u>1 000</u> |
| | <u>R22 900</u> |

MDUKATSHANI,
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JANUARY/ FEBRUARY 1981:
A VERY CURIOUS OMISSION

It's the most important crop in KwaZulu. A multimillion rand industry. But agriculturists don't promote it. Industrialists don't invest in it. Shops don't sell it. Planners don't plan it. Researchers don't study it. Economists ignore it.

All of which is very curious.

It doesn't get a mention in the 341 pages of the Preliminary Development Plan of KwaZulu. There's not a word about it in the KwaZulu White Paper on Development. And while it has been **the** big moneyspinner in the Tugela Valley for the past 50 years – you won't find it anywhere among the 1 276 pages of the six likely volumes of the Tugela Basin Survey.

If you want to learn more about KwaZulu development, you can dip into papers that deal with ideas, theories, policies, histories and statistics. But not these statistics. "Economic Realities of KwaZulu" is the title of the most up-to-date, authoritative report on the area. But you won't find this particular reality there.

All the old respectables are on the list. Maize, sorghum, legumes, tubers, vegetables, sugarcane. But once again the wonder crop is missing.

Not that official brush-off worry the producers of delta-9-tetra-hydra-cannabinol. Why hanker after recognition when they have a crop that brings in R 20 to R 200 a kilogram? Green gold, the police call it. Dagga. Marijauna. Pot. Grass. Indian hemp. Cannabis. Insangu. It's snubbed and it's banned, but it's flourishing.

The Tugela Valley is one of the chief dagga growing areas of South Africa, which means that every summer we can expect heat, thunderstorms and helicopter raids. Last summer the police knew better than to waste their time in our part of the valley for drought had killed off most of the crop. However up in the mountains to the north of us, at Jobskop and Helpmekaar, there was more than enough to keep the helicopters busy.

"I have never seen such concentrations," said the head of the CID in Natal, Colonel Conradie Moggee. "The cultivators are growing the dagga right to the front doors of their huts. One dagga plantation was more than a kilometre long and 500 metres wide."

Some of the plants were so lusty it needed two men pulling together to uproot the dagga. On a faraway hillside the police came upon a walled cave, fitted out with a front door and two windows.

Nobody was at home – but inside was 300 kilos of dagga.

Weeks after the dagga raids had been launched a Natal Mercury reporter was flown in. "...after a helicopter trip over part of the area," he wrote, "it was evident that the men had hardly made a dent. Dagga crops were scattered over hills, mountains and in valleys as far as the eye could see. "Yet the police estimated that every day 14 tones of green dagga was being uprooted, stacked in piles and set alight.

“Burning dagga has a horrible smell,” says Elijah Mhlongo, our ex-policeman and veteran of many dagga raids. “It is sharp, like burning bones or skin, and if you are not a smoker you suffer bad effects from being close to the fires. Once when we were burning fields of that special strong variety we call Number One, I was in a daze for three days afterwards. I did not know what day it was. I could not remember what to write in my patrol book. My head aches. I was not sensible.”

In 1979-80 police bonfires destroyed 587 901 kilograms of dagga valued at R 117 million, according to the Minister of Police, Mr. Louis le Grange. Plenty of dagga went up in smoke – but plenty was left for smoking.

This summer the first helicopters clattered into Msinga in mid-October. It was earlier than usual. Too early. Very few fields had been planted out. The young dagga was still tucked away in seedbeds in the shelter of rock crevices and damp overhangs, wile old chamberpots swung in the trees with clumps of feathery – er – pot plants.

The police have been back at Msinga every month since, and armed with a neigan spray” which does the work of ten men pulling up the plants by their roots,” according to Lieut. Colonel J. de Waal, have so far destroyed an estimated 290 tons of green dagga. But if our neighbourhood is anything to go by – the police have touched only a fraction of the crop.

Several times the helicopters have passed over us. One day in January a machine nosed along the river, hovering so low that flock of goats scattered on the bank.

“Today the phephela (the propeller) will visit,” said an Mbatha girl who dropped work to watch uneasily from our side of the river. But she was wrong. The helicopter followed the line of little dagga gardens strung out at the water’s edge, then skimmed away without landing.

Why? Did the policemen note the locality for next time, or were the gardens just too small to justify their efforts?

Some dagga gardens are barely five paces square, yet even these bits of ground can yield the grower R 200. Small growers tend to barter their dagga for bread, sugar, tea, beans and soap, and you have only to watch who is buying treats at Mbele’s store to know there has been a transaction.

Last winter, when GG was acting ferryman, we suggested he charge double fare if he found he had passengers carrying dagga.

“But I couldn’t,” he said when he came home. “There was this poor old granny with a little bundle in a plastic bag. When she got to the other side there were some girls waiting. They gave her two pairs of takkies at R8.99 each.”

Dagga farmers work in beautiful surroundings. Their gardens sit like fairy rings on mountain crests, on spurs and saddles. The little circled of thorn bush nestle in hollows, and backup gorges to catch the spray of waterfalls. Dagga grows at the edges of caves, in walled gardens, on terraces in forested ravines. You will find it among ferns, among arums, among aloes – and among the stalks of mealies and mabela. “Gwayiwenyoni” the Zulus call it with gentle irony, shaking their heads with surprise. “See how the birds have planted their own tobacco.”

Once the plant went by amore homely name: Mthunziwenkukhu. “Shade of the fowls.” For before dagga was made illegal, most Zulu homes had a few plants near the doorway and the chickens fluffed out a clearing under the lower leaves.

“Most Zulu men smoke daily without apparent harm,” A.T. Bryant wrote in THE ZULU PEOPLE. Msinga’s first Magistrate, Henry F. Fynn, would have argued with that.

“Its effects are maddening and depraving of the worst description, far worse than the results of opium or drink,” he reported in 1891. “I am convinced that al the most depraced acts, brutal murders, debased crimes ever committed in this Colony by Natives, are by Nsangu smokers.

In vigorous style Fynn campaigned to have dagga banned, with whipping and fines for those found in possession. His was not a lone point of view. In 1902 the Weenen District Surgeon. Dr. W. Black called on the government to appoint a committee of inquiry to look into the dagga problem.

However it wasn’t until 1928 that dagga was declared illegal under the Medical, Dental and Pharmacy Act – and from that moment hundreds of peasant farmers were in the money. Banning it would not get rid of it – in fact dagga smoking increased steadily until in 1949 the government appointed an interdepartmental committee to look into the abuse of dagga. After visiting 49 centres and hearing 354 witnesses the committee concluded gloomily: “Total suppression of the dagga evil is not considered possible. “But the committee agreed that dagga should stay on the banned list, and police should hit harder.

The people of the Tugela Valley agree.

“Would I like to see dagga no longer a crime? Hau! You are mad! Grins one of our neighbours. As he is still in the business, let’s call him Petrus Dladla. He has just returned home after 4½ years in jail on a dagga offence – he was caught in town peddling his crop. But he had no hard feelings.

“The only thing that keeps up the price of dagga is the police,” he says.

“The police are my friends. The police work hard for me. I’d go broke if dagga was legal. Every bloody fool would start growing his own.”

Dladla has the airiness of spirit that comes to a man who has reached agreement with a mountain. Every morning he opens his door on the edge of a precipice, with the sun billowing under his feet. So sharp is the ridge where he has built his home that his huts seem tipped on a downward slide. But the mountain holds its breath, the huts keep their heads tucked away from the wind, and the Dladla children play on their narrow carthen walkway, unafraid of the drop into light. It’s not a bad place to make a living if you are a family man, and your heat has a need for spaciousness and sky. Twice a year Dladla leaves his eyrie with a suitcase of zols to sell in Durban. Each trip brings in R 1 400 – which keeps the family comfortable, and allows a little over buy a new cow or another goat. The animals kept the family going while Dladla was in jail.

“If I didn’t grow dagga I would be a thief,” he says. “And a thief steals from his neighbours. The dagga planter is an honest man. He hurts nobody. He goes to jail alone. And jail is not so bad. I was made a monitor in jail. I walked where I liked. I was even paid for my work and came home with money in my pocket. The police knew I was not a criminal. And here at home my community respects me.”

The community must respect him when it is in the same business. Recently we checked on one valley that is wellknown to us. Of the 130 families living in the valley, only six are not growing dagga this year. At the annual meeting of a Small Farmers Co-op, Neil told the members; “We are here to help you with your problems.” Afterwards he was surrounded. “If you really want to help, tell us how to grow our insangu without being caught,” women asked.

It’s impossible to live at Msinga and not be involved. By rowing the ferryboat our sons have had insights into the dagga trade since they were eight. Which is another way of saying they have helped to smuggle contraband from an early age. African children are about eight, too when they start carrying dagga for their parents. Police may stop and search an adult with suitcase – not a little boy with a plastic bag of groceries. By giving lifts along the road we have helped hundreds of dagga runners on their way. Old women climb in, headscarves fragrant with small bundles of the weed. Smart men carry smart briefcases. Schoolgirls carry satchels. Matrons carry folded blankets. Young mothers carry their babies on their back, scented with something stronger than Johnson’s baby powder.

We have always believed dagga is harmful – seeing its effects on undernourished people it is hard to believe otherwise. However when our fragrant passengers climb out, we wish them luck and hope they get away with it.

The bigtimers don’t have to catch lifts, of course. They have their own vehicles laid on – once they have crossed the ferry. Sixteen big bags of dagga – about R 5 000 worth – crossed on our boat one afternoon last winter. And the dealer, Ndlovu, would have acrossed too had he not caught sight of Mhlongo. Ndlovu was fat, ungainly, sweating at the effort of clambering around the hills – but in seconds he was across the veld, running. “Come back,” yelled Mhlongo, laughing. “You fat-bellied fool, I’m not SAP now!” Ndlovu kept going.

That night a large car hooted in the yard. “We are looking for friend who had some valuable parcels for us,” said the driver. We were unable to help. For hours the car went up and down the road, hooting. Because it eventually went away we guessed the parcels had been handed over.

Ndlovu is one of the outside” swanks with a tie” who come to purchase. However Msinga also has syndicates of growers who combine to sell their own produce without a middleman. We know of a local priest and his parishioners who operate together. Which is, of course, an old English custom. In the 18th century, when dagga was a common crop on England fields, a tenth part of the harvest in the parish went to the vicar. Yes, in its day, dagga was respectable. Until the 1900’s it was the most widely cultivated plant in the world, providing men with fibre, food, medicine, and magic. So let’s take a closer look at **Cannabis sativa**, a miracle plant if there ever was one, a multi-purpose wonder crop of such astonishing adaptability that from its home in Central Asia it has spread right across the planet.

The Chinese were the first to make use of it, and protein-rich cannabis seeds were considered along with millet, rice, barely and soyabeans as one of the major grains of ancient China. The seeds were also used for oil. Even today Russia is reported to produce 250 000 tons of dagga seeds annually as a source of oil.

However cannabis entered history books as hemp – the plant with the longest, strongest natural fibres known to man. Evidence of the use of hemp fibres has been found in Neolithic remains in China dated at 6 000 years ago. Hemp provided early man with ropes and fishing – and it was an essential ingredient in the first paper produced in AD 105. England could not go to war without hemp rope and hemp canvas for her sailing ships. (The word canvas is derived from cannabis).

To ensure that the country produced enough hemp to keep her battleships at sea, Queen Elizabeth I fined any farmer who did not cultivate it, five gold sovereigns.

The discovery of cheap, tropical fibres, synthetic textiles, and hemp's nasty reputation as a drug – all contributed to its decline. But it never entirely disappeared. Levi Strauss's original jeans were made of hempen sailcloth.

"Now this hemp is the finest fibre known to mankind, my God, if you ever have a shirt out of it, your grandchildren would never wear it out," said Harry J. Anslinger, former Commissioner of the US Federal Bureau of Narcotics. "We used to see marijuana in the yards of Polish families. We'd go in and start to tear it up, and the man came out with his shotgun yelling: 'Those are my clothes for next winter!'"

Nazi concentration camp uniforms were made of hempcloth and at the end of the last war, large stocks were bought up by Robert Fletcher and Sons, British paper manufacturers, to be converted into paper.

For hemp produces high quality paper. That is why the European Economic Community today subsidizes French farmers who grow cannabis – and 8 000 hectares are currently in production. British scientists are looking longingly at the plant, estimating that if dagga were grown for paper production in Britain, the plant would cut the country's timber imports by half.

"Every tract of 10 000 acres which is devoted to hemp-raising year by year is equivalent to a sustained pulp producing capacity of 40 500 acres of average pulpwood's lands," the United States Department of Agriculture reported on experimental trials way back in 1916.

The reason that cannabis has lapsed as a major agricultural crop this century of course, is because of the psychoactive THC – delta-9-tetra-hydrocannabinol – which is secreted in small glistening glands especially abundant on the upper surfaces of the leaves.

However some plants are strong in THC – some are not. **Cannabis** sativa continues to puzzle scientists with its complex variety, its drug strains and non-drug strains. Plants growing in tropical climates tend towards "smoke" production – plants in temperate climates towards fibre. Those French farmers have to plant seeds they have obtained from the National Federation of Hemp Growers, which has developed a plant with low THC content.

In the 1940's South Africa seriously considered dagga as a fibre crop. Pieter Koch, a Technical Advisor in the Division of Agricultural Education and Research suggested that as dagga yielded "an excellent fibre" for making bags and hessian, and as it was readily cultivated in many parts of the country, it could be the solution South Africa's bag problem. Following up reports of a non-drug strain, the government-imported seed supposed to have a low narcotic content and planted it out on ¼ hectare of land at the Rustenburg Research Station.

“The warm climate of Rustenburg produced a plant rich in narcotic properties which the Native labourers on the research station soon discovered,” said the Committee of Inquiry into Dagga. “The result was that though the Station produced a plant with superior quality fibre to meet our sacking and hessian needs, it was nevertheless decided to discontinue the experiment in the national interest.”

Dagga as a fibre crop may have potential, but it will never be as profitable as dagga the drug. Nothing is as profitable as dagga the drug, not even sugar, which is currently billed the most important cash crop in KwaZulu.” Dagga growing, if economists would only take a look at it, explodes the many myths about African backwardness, laziness, resistance to change, lack of initiative. We are no economists, but here are few figures to show the kind of incentive that makes dagga growing big business and sugar farming a low profit undertaking in comparison.

Sugar of course, is fussy about where it grows. Only “high potential” agricultural land will do. Dagga, on the other hand, thrives in areas which the experts have labeled “low potential” It grows on pocket-handkerchief plots tucked into corners of land that is not regarded as arable.

A black cane grower in Natal probably earns annual net income of R 328 a year, according to Neil Frean, economist with the S.A. Sugar Association. That figure of his is close to the average earning of a black cane grower in the Ndwendwe district in 1979/80. There are 4 105 black cane growers at Ndwedwe, an area which for the past seven years has been the focus of the combined efforts of the KwaZulu Department of Agriculture and the sugar industry, represented by the Sukumani Development Company, a subsidiary of the Tongaat Group Ltd.

Ndwedwe, like everywhere else in KwaZulu, is so crowded that cane growers have to make-do with little fields. In 1979/80 the average size of a cane farm was 1,46 hectares, and the average net income R 368. Dagga growers in our neighbourhood who earned the same amount had fields 1/30th the size.

In 1979/80 Ndwedwe canegrowers earned R 5,25 net on a ton of cane.

Msinga dagga growers earned that from the proceeds of one large plant. Anybody with a ton of dagga for sale could have earned R 8 000 to R 100 000 depending on how and where he sold. R5, 35 a ton – or R 8 000 a ton. That’s the difference, but not the whole difference.

In a paper on the Ndwedwe sugar project, E.C. Gilfillan and Leisegang of Sukumani admit that “Because allotments are very small the farmer cannot hope to support himself and his family from the proceeds of sugar farming alone.” They go on to say: “Because small farmer cannot be economically independent. They require the back-up of an expensive extension service. Without this back-up the sugar enterprise in Ndwedwe would degenerate and produce less and less and would employ fewer and fewer people.” In 1979/80 the back-up cost more than a quarter million rand.

For 50 years, however, dagga has flourished without a back-up service. Dagga growers produce their crop without extension officers, without short courses, film shows, demonstrations, loans or subsidies. They earn high profits on small areas of marginal land. Dagga production has expanded without tractors, haulage trucks or roads. Growers have proved highly efficient at disposing of their crop – so have requires no marketing facilities.

As the Committee of Inquiry into Dagga concluded: “There is no evidence of a central monopoly, but rather that it is conducted on an independent and competitive basis.” Which is what a capitalist economy is all about. Dagga is an agricultural business worth millions traditionally run by small farmers.

It costs R 25 000 to create a job in industry in South Africa.

It cost Sukumani R 5 000 to create a job in sugar in 1979/80.

But the dagga industry asks for not a cent – it creates its own jobs, thanks.

Dagga proves that when the economic incentive is there – the black farmer has all the qualities for success. Initiative, independence, flexibility, enterprise, organization. If you need convincing – tour the dagga farms in the Tugela Valley. Follow the mountaintop irrigation channels, the aqueducts made of lengths of guttering or hollow logs. Even the police marvel at the evidence of ingenuity and hard work.

A grower has to be caught redhanded in a field for police to have a case. Most dagga is grown away from home for that reason. Police concentrate on wiping out the crop, not catching the grower.

Yet some mountains we have walked have never yet had a visit from “ the propeller”, and tensions are running high because confident dagga growers are digging up pasture land essential for the cattle – in order to expand their fields. Growers on the river flats expect a raid once every two years, and they harvest the leaf as fast as it grows so that no crop is ever a total loss.

Msinga’s dagga growers probably risk as much from the thieves in their own communities as they do from the police. Handfuls of leaves are stripped in the gardens by boys like Mavave, who started smoking insangu at 9, and now, at 13, he has the lost eyes of the habitual. The children smoke privately in “ play places “ but everybody knows what is going on.

“Insangu ibulala ukulamba”, say the mothers as they pas by with axes, out to chop wood.

“Dagga kills hunger.” The Committee of Inquiry into Dagga expressed something similar:

“The basic cause of the evil lies in the socio-economic conditions under which the non-Europeans live.”

Life holds no promises for Mavave. With dagga or without he is lost.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 26
TUGELA FERRY
3504

MSINGA MAFIA STIR CAULDRON OF VIOLENCE

FACTION FIGHTING WHITE APPEARS ON 26 COUNTS

"I oiled tribesmen's guns," says paratrooper

A TIP OFF BLEW MSINGA TRAP

JUDGE VIEWS MSINGA BATTLEFIELD WHERE 14 DIED

MSINGA: Where People Kill Each Other For a Morsel of Food

Msinga Woman Dies in Rabies Outbreak

COWS SHOT: CHILDREN ESCAPE

A MAN A WEEK KILLED IN ZULU FIGHTS THE POLICE CAN'T STOP

Attorney General Declines to Prosecute 291 Faction Fight Suspects

Thorns Can Save Your Cattle

HUNGER HORROR: Our people are sleeping under bushes without food.

DISCO DAZZLERS!

Beautiful, beadazzling beadwork is adding sparkle to New York's nightlife.

GIVE US BACK OUR LAND:

How long must we be punished? Cry the people

MSINGA STOREKEEPER BEATEN UP IN ARMED ROBBERY

WAR OF THE IMPIS:

In one district in 4 years 327 men killed, 626 women widowed

Another Rabies Death at Msinga

Yes, it was a headline-hitting year for Msinga. Newspaper stories, however, barely touched on our troubles. Had we been doing our own reporting the headlines of 1981 would have looked like this:

CAP Chairman in Hiding After
Gunbattles on Mdukatshani

Secret Peace Conference on
Floor of CAP Combi

Drought Kills 16 000 Cattle

Rejected Lover Burns 13 Homes

CAP Wins R 8 000 Dispute Over
Right-of-Way

CAP Charges SAP Heli Crew with Theft
Minister of Police Investigates

CAP Organiser Held up at Gunpoint

Drought Project Suspended After
Death Threat to GG Alcock

Mdukatshani's Stolen Wood Traded
For Cabbage Leaves

4 Hour Walk to Fetch Water As The
Drought Tightens Its Grip

Hungry Families Collect 85 Tons
of Bones From the Veld

CAP Staff Sleep in Bush as Men
with Machine Guns Cross Farm

Rabid Dog Killed in Kitchen

6 000 000 Mouthfuls of Mealiemeal
Earned Through Hard Work

CAP Pensioners Re-imbursed After
KwaZulu Admits R 90 000 Scandal

Tugela River Hits All-Time Low
In Midsummer

Because no newsletters or monthly reports went out after January, this report summarises some of the happenings of the year.

THE MABASO WAR

On December 15, 1980, Chief Bekabantu Mabaso was shot and killed at his home. Three indunas died with him. The chief's mother was shot in the leg.

It was 68 years since last an Msinga chief had been killed. In April 1922 Chief Gqikazi of the Mabaso was killed in a fight with Mtembus. Then the tribes of Msinga were deeply stirred, and the unrest which followed led to the evacuation of all whites, the arrival of troops, and a Board of Inquiry.

This time, however, the Mabaso chief had died at the hands of his own people following a long-standing feud between the Sdakeni and Mbomvini districts. The Mabaso's are a small tribe – 6 500 people – on a small bit of land. Although the 1954 Tomlinson Commission recommended an area of 18 hectares per person – the Mabaso make-do with 1,4 hectares each, and most of that stony hillside.

Too many people on too little land – soil erosion. Dongas and bare veld Msinga has a plenty – and another symptom of land pressure less familiar to the conservationists: territorial warfare.

In 1880 Msinga was already overcrowded.

“There is not suitable accommodation in the Locations for any considerable increase in the present population,” commented Magistrate Peter Paterson.

One hundred years later Msinga is jam-packed. Once tribe fought tribe over boundaries. Now tribes are divided within themselves, so that district fights district, and brother finds himself ranged against brother.

The killing of Chief Mabaso had Msinga tense. First came the expected.

Retaliation. A week after the chief's death another five Mabaso's were shot and buried together on Christmas Eve. The unexpected happened on January 22 when impi's of the Mthembus, Majozis, Mbomvus attacked the Mabaso's, ostensibly “to chase them out of Msinga for killing their chief.” The Mabaso men were in hiding – from each other – so only women and children were at home when the armies arrived, leaving 117 homes burnt to the ground.

The Mabaso women have maintained that both the South African and KwaZulu authorities were present directing the operation. Despite strong official denials the story continues to persist. Whether or not it is true – it is believed to be true. Although 291 men were arrested on charges of arson, public violence and armed assembly, the Attorney General declined to prosecute.

After the attack desperate Mabaso women trudged 30 km to ask CAP for help, and emergency supplies of clothes, blankets and mealie meal were distributed to the homeless, with help from the elders of both the Sdakeni and Mbomvini factions. Our staff found women and children making lean-tos of aloe trunks, binding make-shift roofs with acacia bark. Many had lost all their possessions in the fires and looting.

“It is the first time since the day I was born,” said our organiser, Natty Duma,” that I heard people say: Don't worry about me. Help her. She is worse than me.” Natty spent days in the Mabaso area investigating individual circumstances, compiling statistics of homes burnt, men

killed in the feuding, cattle and goats stolen etc. Unfortunately her valuable records were lost in the fire that destroyed the Alcocks house.

After the initial hand-outs help was offered to the Mabaso on our usual swop basis – bones for mealie meal.

Fighting between the Mabaso factions continued sporadically. There were armed hold-ups; vehicles were fired at, etc. one evening gunmen broke into the Church of Scotland hospital grounds, at Tugela Ferry, making a getaway after a volley of shots.

By December a new chief had been named, a truce was underway, and hopeful Mabaso tribesfolk were rebuilding on the charred sites of old homes.

Please Draw a Map identifying Mashunka, Mathinta and Mngamkantaba areas.

TRIBAL DIVISIONS AT MSINGA

1. Mashunka
 2. Mathinta
 3. Mngamkantaba
-

SOME MSINGA STATISTICS

These are taken mainly from the Msinga Districts Records Book, rather than the 1970 Census. Because of unrest in the area the 1980 census was incomplete. The population figures are more than 10 years old and so do not reflect the influ of hundreds of families ejected from white farming areas.

| | | | |
|-----------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| MCHUNUS: | 26 764 people on | 31 900 hectares | (Average 1,1 ha each) |
| MTHEMBUS: | 18 539 people on | 30 300 “ | (Average 1,6 ha each) |
| MABASO: | 6 488 people on | 9 200 “ | (Average 1,4 ha each) |
| MAJOZIS: | 29 023 people on | 63 600 “ | (Average 2,1 ha each) |
| BOMVUS: | 19 431 people on | 45 800 “ | (Average 2,3 ha each) |
| ZONDIS: | 1 586 people on | 1 980 “ | (Average 1,2 ha each) |
| ZWANES: | 1 371 people on | 2 200 “ | (Average 1,6 ha each) |
| SITHOLES: | 8 700 people on | 2 589 “ | (Average 3,3 ha each) |
| “ | 2 700 people on | 1 476 “ | (Average 1,8 ha each) |

| | | | |
|-------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| TOTAL | 114 602 people on | 189 045 hectares | (Average 1,6 ha each) |
|-------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|

This total doesn't include smaller tribal groups not mentioned in report)

In 1954 the Tomlinson Commission estimated that an Msinga family in the Tugela Valley Thornveld needed 83 hectares to gross an annual income of R 125. (Average 18 hectares each). The Commission estimated that on that basis 81% of the families in the area were “surplus”.

THE ZWANE- SITHOLE WAR

In October Johan Verster, a former paratroop officer, was jailed for eight years for his part in Msinga faction fights. In one of the country's longest criminal hearings Verster was accused of killing 14 Zwane tribesmen when he acted as a mercenary for the Sithole tribe in June 1979.

The case caused a sensation, and foreign newsmen came to Msinga to focus world attention on the war between the Zwanes and the Sitholes.

Verster was found guilty of participation in terrorist activities, conspiracy to commit murder, and illegal possession of arms and ammunition in contravention of the Defence Act. He was cleared on the charge of killing 14 Zwanes.

Verster told the court that he had gone to the aid of the Sitholes because they were the helpless victims of the Zwanes. This was rejected by the Judge, Mr. Justice Page, who said it was unlikely that a man who talked of "stupid blacks" and "shooting houtjies" would have such philanthropic ideals.

What made Verster's claim even more unlikely were two small statistics which never surfaced in court. The Sitholes outnumber the Zwanes 3 to 1.

And the Sitholes own 5 hectares of land to every 1 of the Zwanes. There are only 1 400 Zwanes – a tiny tribe squeezed into a corner of the hills smaller than the size of Mdukatshani.

CAP established bone collection points in the Zwane-Sithole border area early in the year after discovering that many of the long-distance bone pedlars who drove their donkeys on two or three day treks to Mdukatshani came from this part of Msinga.

In May Natty Duma and the CAP driver, Nkanyane Ngubane, were staying overnight at Khumalo's Store on the Zwane-Sithole border when, at 7 p.m., there was a knock at the door. Thirteen men with guns were waiting in the dark outside. A revolver was stuck in Natty's ample stomach, while a trembling Ngubane was thoroughly frisked. Some of the men stood on guard while the others helped themselves to change from the till –R 200 – and filled paper bags with food and cigarettes. Then a signal was fired, a vehicle drove to the door, and the robbers disappeared. The store had no telephone, so while CAP did bone business as usual, the storekeeper, Mrs. Dambuza, caught a bus to Tugela Ferry to report the matter to the police. She returned at 5 p.m. on the return bus to say the police had been unable to help as they were busy with a pension pay-out. It was the store's second hold-up in a year.

Our driver, Ngubane, had had such a fright he left us soon afterwards for the quieter life of the big city. It was Natty's fifth hold-up however, and unruffled she returned a week later to complete a fact-finding census among both the Zwanes and Sitholes we were helping. In a week she interviewed 919 people who between them had lost 1003 cattle and 1716 goats as a result of the war – the animals being stolen to feed the men always hiding in the hills. Unfortunately these records, too, were later a casualty of the fire, the above summary being gleaned from a scribble in a salvaged notebook.

GUNJANE HOLD-UP

In August Brian Bromwich, the Gunjane storekeeper, was badly beaten-up by six men in camouflage who entered his shop at 9 a.m. One of his assailants was armed with an R -1 rifle, the others with revolvers. A warning shot fired by the Bromwich's induna put the attackers to flight and probably saved Brians' life. An intensive police search has resulted in the arrest of two Ladysmith suspects.

Gunjane Store is one of CAP's regular bone collection points, and Mr. and Mrs. Bromwich are friends who help us in many ways. In more than 20 years at Msinga they have had an increasing number of burglaries, but this was the first armed robbery.

THE MATHINTA- MNQAMKANTABA WAR

On February 17 Richard Zuma, a CAP director, hurried down the mountain in the middle of the night to use the telephone. A man and his wife had been shot at Mathinta, on our boundary. (See map). By the time the police arrived six hours later the man, Bukwenza Ndawonde, was dead. His death was to mark the start of violence which was to kill nine and injure four – and disrupt CAP's work for three months.

Ndawonde had been due to appear in a Johannesburg court on a firearm charge the week that he died. Clues to this war lie in the charge against Ndawonde, the disappearance of a machine gun from its hiding place in a Johannesburg hostel, and a white man who was held at a Weenen roadblock, detained overnight for questioning, but released.

Mathinta and Mmqamkantaba are two ridges running along Mdukatshani's eastern fence. There are about 200 families living on the ridges – all of them Mchunus, neighbours who have often intermarried. When Ndawonde was killed his mother and his wife saw his killers. They knew them well. They made statements to the police, but there were no arrests.

In desperate attempts to prevent further trouble the Mchunu chief, Chief Simakade, the local induna, Chummy Zungu, and parents from both sides had meetings and issued warnings. Their peace-keeping efforts were impressive but lacking police support – fruitless.

On March 9 an impi of Mathinta's young men used the cover of Mdukatshani's thorn trees to creep up on Mmqamkantaba. It was early afternoon and Boy Xulu was killed in his yard, washing. From then on every male over 14 went into hiding. Rifle fire became a common sound on our top farm.

The farm gate became the boundary between the two sides. And the peace makers became the targets of the trouble-makers.

CAP's chairman, Petrus Majozi, had taken a lead role in negotiations, and made no secret of his efforts to get police action. For four weeks he vanished into hiding. Aware of the threats against him, we eventually managed to pass a message arranging to collect him at dawn on a thickly wooded stretch of roadsides. We were almost too late. Half an hour before we arrived the Mmqamkantaba men were ambushed in their sleeping place.

Majozi had the presence of mind to crouch unmoving in the semi-dark. His companions panicked and fled. Mzompika Mkhize got tangled in the taut wire of our new boundary fence and was killed.

On April 11 a gunbattle raged right across Mdukatshani, the Mathinta impi giving chase to some Mqamkantaba men. Only one was slightly wounded.

Elijah Mhlongo, O/C CAP's livestock, was disgusted at the marksmanship demonstrated that day. "If I didn't bring a running man down with three shots," he said, "I'd throw my gun away."

Throughout this period Mhlongo by sheer force of personality maintained a workforce of 50 women from both sides. In the belief that people working together cannot fight together he cajoled and threatened his team to appear at work every day, drilling them on emergency measure in a shoot-out.

"Never run. Throw yourselves flat like this," he demonstrated, "and remember I will be lying somewhere near you but I will be shooting to kill."

Mhlongo is licensed to carry a firearm and never moves without his revolver.

Mhlongo organised the peace conference on the floor of the CAP combi between elders of both sides. There was relief and laughter at being together, but the men admitted little prospect of restraining the ringleaders.

Because there seemed little prospect on an end to the fighting Richard Zuma decided to leave the district. He dismantled his home, put his affairs in order, and said goodbye. We were sorry to lose him.

On April 12 we saw the Attorney General about the situation. Two days later a CID officer was brought in to the instigation. We cannot speak too highly of his efforts. Within weeks there were arrests. Four men have already been jailed for three years for possession of firearms. Two are facing murder charges. Investigations continue.

IT'S A FUNNY THING ABOUT THOSE BOREHOLES.....

.... said the agricultural officer. "They are all along the rivers or along the roads. Look at Kwezi. The Kwezi people have the river. They have the canal. Now they have a borehole too. But the people who live up on the mountains have no boreholes. They walk four hours to water. Or they catch the bus to fill their drums.

"Those boreholes are very expensive you know R 2 000 each. And already, after two months, many are out of order." And there is nobody at Msinga who can fix a borehole. "The man who fixes them is at Empangeni," said the agricultural officer. Four hours drive away. "And he is busy. Very busy.

He hasn't time to come and fix our boreholes. It's a pity they did not think to put fences around the pumps. They just finished drilling and drove away."

So thank you Hulets, and Anglo American and the Cold Mines (popularly assumed to be the donors). Your boreholes have given Msinga a new talking point. Those who were close to water are a little closer. And those who were far away are still far away.

We cannot speak for the rest of Msinga, but this is the position in the areas neighbouring Mdukatshani.

Mchunu country: Before the drought four windmills existed. None is working.

Since October 4 boreholes have been drilled, 3 next to the road and one on a perennial stream. None is working.

Mthembu country: (Mseleni area). Since October 4 have been drilled – all in sight of the Tugela and a canal. Only one is working.

Two have been sabotaged by youths who used hacksaws to cut vital parts so that the girls who fetch water cannot congregate in a public place but must follow footpaths to the river – where they can be waylaid!

Tribal indunas have approached CAP to report on the borehole situation.

They complain about the lack of security fencing, and the fact that the boreholes were never made the responsibility of any tribal official.

The graphs opposite show how rainfall has declined in the seven years we have been at Mdukatshani. By April the only water on Mdukatshani's 1700-hectare top farm existed in a well in the Skehleng river bed, a pool in the Ncunjane, and a sporadic trickle on the Zenwaye. All over Msinga cattle dips were unused because of lack of water. Clothes were left unwashed for months and lice outbreaks were a common complaint.

Gunjane Store opened later in the day to help staff who were leaving home at 4 a.m. to fetch water before going to work.

By February 1982, when this report was completed, the gates on upcountry dams had been closed and the Tugela River dropped to its lowest-ever level, so that there was insufficient water to keep the waterwheel turning.

For the second successive year no fields were ploughed in our part of Msinga, except on the small area of the government irrigation plots.

DROUGHT KILLS R 1 500 000 OF LIVESTOCK

In 1980-81 Msinga lost R 12 000 cattle and 35 000 goats due to drought stock valued at about R1 ½ million. This figure represents a catastrophic loss for people whose economic position is barely subsistence.

“Area 11/2 was worse in cattle deaths. Not that cattle in other areas did not die. Too much in 11/2,” reported Tugela Ferry's Stock Inspector in his annual report.

Yes, the death was too much. Mdukatshani is surrounded by Area 11/2 – and at Mkambula dip, nextdoor, half the cattle died.

Only four out of 10 Msinga families own cattle – a fact that has just come to light following a census by the KwaZulu Veterinary Department, kindly authorised by the Director, Dr. Osbourne, following a request from CAP. On the grassy summit of Msinga Mountain, cattle owners average 13 cattle each. On the floor of the valley near Mdukatshani the average is 3 to 4 beasts per stock-owning family.

While the final cattle toll was much as predicted – the loss of 28% of Msinga's goats was startling. Most goat deaths were indirectly due to the drought. In some areas so many goats were stolen for food that only tiny remnant flocks remain. (A widow on Mdukatshani lost her

entire flock of 40 over the year). Other goats were eaten by their owners, or traded for mealiemeal. Goat barter was a common form of payment at stores near Mdukatshani.

During 1981 CAP again gave emergency grazing to 1 200 African owned cattle – probably several hundred more if we add on those illegally on the farm.

Cattle owners worked on the farm in lieu of grazing fees. Or some of them did. Because of the Mathinta-Mnqamkantaba war work parties dwindled until October when CAP sent out accounts. Immediately the work force trebled as mothers, sisters, aunts and daughters combined to work off their grazing debt. The work-for-grazing parties have been used to re-erect our boundary fences, and then clear strips of bush where new government- subsidized conservation fences will run. Tracks have also been built to give access to dam sites.

In January 1981 CAP held a meeting with all stockowners asking them to take their off the farm for the summer months to develop reserves for the winter. The stockowners were in a dilemma. A higher authority – their chief – had ordained that no stock were to be allowed to graze on the Location's fallow fields, for the same conservation purpose. Reluctantly we allowed the cattle to stay pending negotiation with the chief. The terrific cattle losses in the district have meant more grazing for the survivors so by December conditions had improved enough for CAP to close Mdukatshani to African-owned cattle. The farm is now being rested.

OPEN GATE

An old wagon track traverses Mdukatshani – bumpy and overgrown since wagon wheels gave way to hooves and bare feet. There's nothing fancy about this track. Stone embankments on the slopes. Easy corners, gentle gradients.

And a short cut to the Tugela River. Msinga feet followed that track when we arrived on Mdukatshani. And Msinga feet followed that track when Phillip Rudolph Buys became the first owner of the property in December 1864. It was his farm – but their road. And the law protected the road.

The first title deed issued on our land 117 years ago clearly stated that Buys had the farm only “on condition that all authorized roads, water-course and thoroughfares, now made or running over or through the said land shall remain free and uninterrupted in their present or past use.”

When CAP acquired title to the land in 1975, the deed carried the same clause, unchanged. It was our farm – but the track still belonged to Msinga feet.

Proving the ownership of Msinga feet, however, has just cost us R 8 000 in legal fees. That's a lot of money for one track – but we hope it will help to open up another 6 roads. And it was because of those six that we first got involved in legal haggles.

When CAP arrived in 1975 there were no white farmers living on the surrounding 25 farms. There never had been. We drove 20 km across country in our Landrover without encountering a fence. In 1979, however, new landowners took over some of the empty, idle farms and began to erect fences. Their title deeds were like ours – their land, too, was granted “on condition that all thoroughfares remain free and uninterrupted.” But as the new fences went up they closed off some of Msinga's highways, preventing Africans from reaching stores, and, more important, watering points for their cattle.

In 1917 the Natal Local Lands Committee reported: “This area is exceptionally dry. Scarcity of water is general, many farms having no permanent water at all. “And the Committee quoted a Weenen rent collector who said:” The Natives have to send their cattle 14 and 15 miles to get water in a dry season.” They still do.

At the start of the drought in the summer of 1979 leaders of the Mchunu and Mthembu tribes approached CAP for help in getting their traditional roads re-opened. After approaches to the Weenen and Tugela Ferry Magistrates, and the Weenen Farmers Association had proved fruitless, we took legal counsel.

Work began preparing a case on behalf of the tribes. Then our advocate reported that only the State President could petition on behalf of the tribes. This presented certain difficulties.

At about this time CAP found itself without water for stock on the top farm – and our traditional access route to the Tugela River – the old wagon track – cut off by the new fence of a new neighbour. Friendly approaches for a gate were made in telephone calls and letters and eventually it became clear we would have to go to court. Our lawyers recommended we use the Mdukatshani road as a test case of sorts. As the farm was in a white area, white could challenge white without the tangles of tribal authority.

We knew we had to win – but our neighbour held out until the day of the District Roads Board hearing when the protracted negotiations had produced a bill of R 8 000. We were very grateful to have this covered by a grant from the Africa Development Trust. We got our gate – and about 1 800 cattle from Mdukatshani and the Location were able to water at the Tugela every second day for a critical period.

At present the District Roads Board is investigating the claims for the re-opening of the other six roads.

WHITE FARMER KILL BLACK

On Sunday May 24 Ephraim Mtshali was shot by a Weenen farmer. He died of bullet wounds in the chest several hours later without reaching hospital.

The reverberations of his death are still being felt in the district.

Mtshali was Weenen’s black butcher – well-known and well- liked. He was known to the farmer who shot him, and to the group of whites who were present at the incident.

Mtshali was accompanied by three companions when he was shot. His friends were arrested and detained overnight on a poaching charge. The case against them was subsequently dropped.

CAP helped the Mtshali family obtain legal counsel, and the services of a Johannesburg pathologist for a second post-mortem opinion.

At the inquest two farmers were reprimanded for negligence, and the police docket on the case is at present in the hands of the Attorney General.

Before Mtshali died Weenen was noted for the hostility that existed between its whites and blacks. Mtshali’s death has widened the gulf between the races, becoming a symbol of black

bitterness. The blacks see the cage in the simplest of terms: A white killed a black. The white went free. The blacks who saw the killing were arrested and charged.

Meanwhile white opinion was outraged that the poaching charge against Mtshali's companions was dropped.

Both white and black are asking: is there no justice?

IF I CATCH YOU HERE AGAIN YOU'LL STOP A BULLET

It may just be talk – but it is the only talk Weenen's armed white farmers trade across their fencelines when they meet up with blacks. Our own staff, safely on their side of Mdukatshani, have heard the threat repeated many times.

Ten days after Mtshali was killed blacks deliberately echoed the familiar threat. Our 13-year-old son GG and two black friends were on the main road at Mathinta, driving horses to the top farm, when eight youths aged about 17 to 20 strung out across the road to block them and turn them back.

Surrounding GG they said: "Hey you. We don't want whites on Zulu land. If we catch you here again you'll stop a bullet."

Prevented from returning home along the road our boys picked their way through the bush, reaching home hours later in the moonlight.

Immediately CAP suspended all work with the Mathinta community home crafts, bone collections and a drought-relief dam-building scheme. It was an attempt to stimulate community responsibility. Whatever sympathy we had towards the reactions of black youths – the incident was ugly and potentially dangerous. For once the disjointed community pulled together.

Parents were summoned from town, and presented their sons for punishment.

There was none. Apologies were all that were needed. There was a sigh of relief all round as work went back to normal.

KEEPING THE HOME FIRES BURNING

On July 29, 1980 Frans Mvelase, our courageous wood theft policeman and his wife were attacked on a footpath on the farm. Frans was so badly injured that he was in and out of hospital for six months and at times we wondered if he would ever be well enough to return to work. Although he has gradually recovered his health – he is a lot more circumspect about arresting women illegally chopping wood.

We are getting used to the sight of a straggle of girls, some only 8 or 9 years old, carrying woodloads to the irrigation plots at Mtateni to swop wood for cabbage leaves. We know the wood is ours but we haven't had the heart to be tough. You have to be hard-up to walk 10 kilometres for discarded cabbage leaves.

Once the wood trade was held in check through the combined efforts of Frans and the local induna, Chummy Zungu. However Chummy died of stomach cancer late in the year after long months of illness when he was unable to hear cases. In fact he was a patient at Tugela Ferry hospital when gunmen broke into the grounds. Chummy decided to return home. He

climbed onto a bus. En route it was held up and searched by armed youngsters. At home the Mathinta-Mnqamkantaba war was raging. One of Chummy's last public duties was holding the screen for the doctor who performed a post-mortem on the exhumed body of Unzolo Xulu – a casualty of the war who was buried too soon.

Despite his illness, Chummy exerted all his authority to save the peace. He was that rare find at Msinga – a strict and unafraid induna. His successor has not yet been appointed.

Without an induna to try woodtheft cases – and without the staff to patrol our rugged, wooded 2 500 hectares, wood thieves are able to take what they like, some for home fires, most for sale.

Without firewood the people at Msinga would have to eat their food raw. The firewood crisis will not be solved by preventing woodtheft on our patch – nor by letting the farm be free-for-all-axes.

KEEPING THE HOME FIRE BURNING PART 2

On July 13 our house was set alight and the fire destroyed most of CAP's files and about R 4 000 worth of stored crafts and raw materials. A policeman confided that the fire seemed to be the work of a local Wit Kommando group – and that is probably as close as we shall ever get to whodunit.

The night our house was burnt, over the river at Msusampi another family lost their home too. Although we reported this fire to the police there was no investigation. Hut-burning at Msinga has become too common to warrant attention.

In six months 13 huts were burnt at Msusampi, affecting 8 of the 65 families there. While the community is wary of talking – there have been witnesses to the start of some of the fires, and a rejected lover is alleged to be the firebrand. Recently, however, the spate of arson came to an end. Do-it-yourself-law arranged for a match to be put into the suspect's roof.

HORSE POWER

“While in the midst of this desolate tract, our supply of wood ended, and we would not have been able to proceed had the happy idea of burning the bones of elephants not occurred to Dr. Livingstone.”

JOHN KIRK, MD, David Livingstone's
Zambezi Expedition, January 1859

It's the fat in the bones tat makes them sizzle. In 1981 we watched 85 tons of bones sputtering and smoking – and we spared a thought for the missionary-explorer who fuelled his boat with elephant bones. It must have been unpleasantly smelly on board, steaming upriver on bone power.

It's a long time since elephant bones lay around in heaps. Today bones of any kind are hard-to-come-by, even here at Msinga after the stock losses of the drought. But bones remain a useful fuel in hard times. Our 85 tons of horse bones, cattle bones, donkey bones, goat bones and pig bones were swapped for 65 748 kilograms of maize and mealie meal which were transformed into 239 980 200 calories (or 1 007 916 840 kilojoules) of energy to help hundreds of families over the bumps of the year.

CAP's Great Bone Exchange started by accident rather than design in October 1980 and previous reports have described how we swap mealie meal for bones which are burnt, then milled into bonemeal – a valuable stocklick and phosphate fertilizer. By the end of 1980 we had acquired 57 tons of bones. This year, however, funds were scarce, and bone collections had to be drastically curtailed in the early months.

Along Msinga's byways there were piles of torn sacks, bulging with bones, waiting for the day when we had mealie meal to offer. Later in the year the arrival of funds from Dick Connell, Oxfam and Misereor put us back in business, and the final tally was 85 250 kgs of bones brought in by 1909 bone pedlars, each carrying on average 44,5 kgs.

The operation cost a total of R 16 348 (Mealie meal: R 14 464; transport R 1245; Staff R 348; Sacks R 291)

Most of the bonemeal is stored in farm buildings, waiting for an end to the drought when gardens are developed again and there is a call for fertilizer.

POD SHOP

In 1980 CAP bought in 97 142 kilograms of acacia pods which were milled as stockfeed for African cattle.

We had grand plans for advertising and extending this project in 1981 but two problems prevented this: lack of pods and lack of a tractor.

In six areas pod production dropped – apparently because trees were smashed by hail at flowering time. In other areas the long, dry period caused die-off of branches and a small harvest.

Which was just as well for our ancient tractor – so old it was “written off” in 1978. Mla Magasela carried out the necessary daily repairs with tenderness, rather than impatience, coaxing the machine into the slow rhythmic putt-putt that marked the elderly engine's doddering best.

The final tally was 30 321 kilograms of pods received in exchange for 31 730 kilograms of mealie meal. There were 1409 pod sellers, carrying an average of 21,5 kgs each.

The pod shop cost a total of R 7 425 (Mealie meal R 6 980: transport R 225; staff R 130; sacks R 90).

Our last report on the acacia project (The Adventures of Selling a New Idea) mentioned the research undertaken and planned by botanist Sue Milton.

Unfortunately after drawing up an outline of a four-year-research project based on Mdukatshani, Sue ran into conflict with the University of Natal,

Which was unwilling to supervise a project situated on a private farm. Sue made preparations to move her headquarters to the Weenen Nature Reserve, but by the end of the year new developments brought a further change in her plans, and she is now based at Nylsvley, a nature reserve in the Northern Transvaal. Her doctoral project is registered with the University of Cape Town. She plans to return to Mdukatshani four times a year to monitor her plots here.

WHO ARE THE PEDLARS? (And where are those big families?)

A census clerk sits at the scale at each bone or pod weigh-in, collecting a few basic facts on each member of the queue. Our statistics have flaws, but they do provide a rough profile of the pedlars. Unfortunately the same questions were not asked each time. For example the questions re schooling only became relevant in June.

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Families represented in the pod/bone queues: | 2 196 |
| Total people in those families | 10 937 |
| Total children in those families | 8 741 |
| Average number of children per family | 3,9 |
| Number of children attending school | 17% (1 494 out of 8 741) |
| Families without a father | 35% (374 out of 1 049) |
| Families with father sick (TB, paralysed, mad) or in jail | 23,7% (249 out of 1 049) |

We were particularly interested in school attendance. Although the KwaZulu drought has continued, public interest has flagged and funds for drought relief become very scarce, despite press publicity.

Early in the year the Red Cross announced that most of its drought aid would in future be directed to school feeding schemes, at the request of donors.

We have maintained that only the privileged black child attends school in an area like Msinga – so schoolfeeding schemes feed those who already have food. This is superficially confirmed by the sight of schoolchildren descending on stores on their way home from school to buy bread, cold drink and sweets.

The 83% of the children of our pedlars who never get to school miss the benefits of education as well as food.

As for those legendary big families...

Well yes, there was one worth mentioning!

Joseph Mtshali of Mhlangana has 25 children – by three wives.

BAUBLES, BANGLES AND SHINY BEADS

It was a record year for all homecrafts – grass bangles, woven cushions and our very shiny beads. “Glitter” decreed New York, and we glittered. “UGH” said those who like their adornments natural and earthy. “OOH” said the others. The OOHS were in the majority. During the year African women earned more than R 17 000 for their skills – all the time working from home. There are 200 women on our books, and while some regularly earns R

30 or more a month (average monthly wage in our district!) others were satisfied to bring in a few rand now and again. The pressures of becoming big business have made it necessary for us to become much stricter about production, shedding the irregulars, and taking on new workers under strict new conditions – a completed article at least once a fortnight.

MaNene Mbatha established a record in December when she took home more than R 120 for beaded headbands and belts – part of a special order for (ahem) Harrods of London.

TWO FARMERS

Jeremiah Mbatha had green fingers, a sly sense of humour, a jaunty spirit.

When a government lorry arrived to cart him from his grassy home to the dusty wastes of Limehill in April 1965, he packed some precious possessions among the struts and thatch of his dismantled home; tins of seedling fruit trees, vine slips, marigolds and tiny Cyprus trees to decorate the desert where he was being shifted. Jeremiah did not easily despair. He was a master at building with rock, and when he joined us at Mdukatshani his home above a bend of the Tugela was the most beautiful on the farm. In October 1980 he found he had throat cancer. A year later, increasingly frail, the cancer crept into his brain and he began to be tormented by hallucinations. Trying to chase spirits from his house he accidentally set it alight and it burnt to the ground. Weeks later Jeremiah died in hospital, and was buried among the rocks of his garden. He had been our friend for 17 years.

Timothy Mbatha, the first farmer on Mashunka mountain, died quietly at Christmas in his mountainside home, overlooking the contoured fields, yukka hedges and orchards which had been his life. He had worked alone, moving each stone for the contour walls, driving his donkey sled long distances to fetch prickly pears which he planted out to create barriers impenetrable to donkeys and goats. In winter he had singed the spines off the plants and fed the juicy leaves to his stock, so his hedges were double-purpose.

“Then the government sent men wit a sickness to kill my hedges,” he said.

Cactoblastis pictorum spores were used to infect the prickly pears – they were a “pest plant”, a proclaimed weed. Timothy Mbatha started again. This time his sledge dragged yukkas, which still outline his vast estates.

He was a man who loved peace more than he loved power – which is why from time to time he descended from his mountain to speak on our behalf.

His gentle authority and quiet wisdom eased some rough patches for us.

He was the first farmer on Mashunka mountain, and probably the last, for today there are so many huts crowded onto the slopes that there is no longer space for a man to farm.

NO REJECTION SLIP

In May the representatives of more than 27 000 Mchunu people elected CAP’s chairman, Petrus Majozi, as chief induna of the tribe. Majozi was in hiding in our “place of safety” at the time, and it was some weeks before news of the honour reached him. He has never looked for honours, and did not welcome this one.

“If you don’t want the position,” Chief Simakade Mchunu reminded him formally, “you must go home, take two big oxen, drive them to my kraal at night and put a log across the gate. In the morning the people will know you have rejected the position.” Majozi sighed. He knew that was not necessarily the end of the affair. For the chief and the tribe could reject

his rejection by returning his cattle. And the argument could ping pong, with an extra beast going to the chief with each protest. Majozi accepted the position.

A COMPLAINT TO THE MINISTER

On August 5 Makwenkwe Mtshali, the induna in charge of the KwaDimbi Small Farmers Co-op reported that a South African Police helicopter crew had destroyed the KwaDimbi water supply pipes, recently laid by the community as part of their drought relief project. Mtshali also complained of the theft of cash, food, assegais, shields, beadwork etc. from the homes of the people in the KwaDimbi valley. His mother, a pensioner, had been saving money to buy thatch for a new hut for the family. After the police had ransacked their home, R 260 was found to be missing from its hiding place.

After a complaint to the SAP headquarters, Pietermaritzburg, had been laughed off, a letter was sent to the Minister of Police. As a result of subsequent SAP investigations CAP has been asked to give an evaluation of the destroyed irrigation equipment, while statements have been taken from all the KwaDimbi complaints, who have also been asked to give an estimate of the value of their losses. We hope this means some compensation is in the offing.

BLACK POWER

“It’s a nice dam,” said the clerk, “but it would go much faster if you used a bulldozer.”

Much faster than men and women with basins and spades. A bulldozer is powerful, efficient. A labour-saving machine.

In 1981, however, CAP spent R 39 229 on black power rather than bulldozers. Why hire bulldozers when labour is the one resource Msinga has in over supply?

During the year 756 people were at work on nice different projects, notching up more than 500 000 hours between them. And a special gang of 325 children, most of them under 12, notched up 30 000 hours carrying mountains of stones to build aqueducts across dongas.

The adults earned 175 587 kilograms of mealie meal for their work – but we must confess we tempted the children with a special offer of 10 cents a day, high-protein biscuits and peanut butter.

We could have made better use of our black power during the year but for a national shortage of cement which delayed work for several months.

When the cement arrived we were rationed to 15 bags a month – which did not go far among our furrows and dams. Waiting for cement, our work forces turned to fencing, enclosing dams against stock. However even the fencing was held up because Greytown ran short of creosoted poles.

The following is a brief summary of progress at each scheme:

HADEBE SAYS NO

“Well old man. We had better plant gardens on your dams.” Yes, ON.

Mndaweni Hadebe glared and turned his back. “Hurry up,” he gestured at the women. They scooped some basinful of sand into a sack, grabbed the ends, walked to the edge of the dam wall and tipped the sand over. Hadebe was going to have dams, not terraces and to hell with everybody.

In February upcountry rains brought the Tugela down in flood before Hadebe’s monumental fish dams had been raised high enough. When the flood water subsided, the slit was level with the top of the walls. For the next three months seven women and five men cleared out the 750 cubic metres of sand, and when the first pockets of cement arrived – they were diverted to the dams. Not because Hadebe’s dams are the most important project on the list – but because he is our most important man. At 96 he is still going strong, but nobody lasts forever, and we wanted him to see fish swimming in one dam before he died. He’s seen them – and he’s still going strong. At 4 a.m., as we lie in bed, we hear a crowbar clinking against rock. He has waded the river and walked 3 km to start work early.

TEARS AT MHLUMBA

“The dams gone,” said Makhanya Mchunu (72) tears pouring down his cheeks.

In November a cloudburst fell on the slopes of Umhlumba mountain. The banks of a government dam gave way before the torrents of water, which created a deluge that took our smaller dam too. Not even the Roads Dep had calculated on a storm like that, for the river jumped the Mhlangana bridge and wiped off the concrete arms. The 37 Umhlumba Black Power builders have started again, but they remain stunned by their disaster.

They had worked for a year to complete their dam, and it was standing finished, waiting for the final touches of cement when the storm hit it.

The community had begun fencing a garden area to be watered by their dam.

Now they look ahead to another six months of dam-building before they start their gardens.

In 1980 CAP paid out 23 150 kgs of mealiameal to Umhlumba dam workers, in 1981 10 565. The total cost of the dam in mealiameal was R 7 417, 00.

CHIBINI

... caught the edge of the cloudburst. The contours designed to catch run off and lead it to the Chibini dam worked as planned – filling the dam until it overflowed at its lowest point. The dam-builders were amazed. They had never expected to see such a stretch of water.

Their dam wall is still settling, with leaks in places. During the year the team of 78 raised the wall, completed contours, fenced in the dam and started fencing a garden area. The cement and pole shortage delayed progress.

Statistics: In 1981 the 78 people worked 4732 days for 17 099 kgs of maize and mealiameal.

MATHINTA HAS FLOWERS

Three months of warfare disrupted work on this dam. Morolo was very low when an overnight storm transformed bare red earthworks into a gleaming stretch of water. The people of Mathinta rubbed their eyes – and rushed for basins, picks and spades. For a year they had lived with what was first just a scrape in the veld, then a dent, then a hollow. They called it “our dam” but saw only a mess. Now they are working with a will to extend the wall.

The dam has been fenced and as soon as we can lay our hands on some more cement, drinking troughs will be built for cattle. Meanwhile the holder of the surrounding land, our chairman Majozi, has donated it to Mathinta for gardens.

Statistics: Hundreds of pink gentians are flowering around the dam. Vlei plants, like water birds, appear from nowhere if there is water.

More statistics: 137 people worked 3 390 days for 20 319 kgs of meileameal.

KWADIMBI

The people of the Dimbi valley had to quarry iron to excavate their lower holding dam. Or that's hat it felt like when you took a pick to the surface, chipping tiny fragments of rubble with each swing. The dam was completed months ago, with a wall-to-wall paving of rock – and there have been months since of waiting for cement to do the necessary waterproofing.

The pipes smashed by the police have been replaced, extending from a mountainside dam to the valley dam. Although a trickle of water has slithered down the pipes – Dimbi needs more than a trickle to fill their dam.

It is now a wait for cement – and rain.

Statistics: 59 people worked 4 967 days for 15 294 kgs of mealiemeal.

A NOT-SO-GRAND-OPENING

It was quite a party, once the formalities were over, the VIP's had departed, and the crowd could get on with it. More than 3 000 people, no drunkenness, no fights.

But the Grand Opening of the Mseleni Canal did not go according to plan.

For a start – there was no water. The day before the opening our men had worked late erecting a gate to stop the flow so that there would be a surge and swoosh at the right moment. But during the night there was sabotage. The surge and swoosh landed on the fields of some upstream landowners, who had never done a days work on the canal, laughing that “we will get water anyway, when it comes.”

So the opening took place without water. And without the Minister of Agriculture of KwaZulu, Chief Dlamini, who was to be the guest of honour.

For four hours the crowd wilted in the hot sun, waiting for him. Then Bishop Zulu, the chairman of the KwaZulu Development Corporation, and Chief Ngoza Mvelase of the Mthembus performed the opening without him the Minister had limousine trouble – he arrived eventually when the opening was over.

But nobody was too downcast, for didn't Chief Ngoza promise that he would appoint water policemen to control the canal in future, so that those who had worked for water got their share? (CAP has agreed to pay the salaries of the two men who have since been appointed).

More than 280 people from three communities – and those 325 children – had worked clearing the 16 kilometres long canal, opening up all but the last kilometre. The opening ceremony was decided on when the worst obstacle of the course had been cleared – a 2 km stretch which a bulldozer had filled in and flattened some years earlier. Chains of women passed more than 350 000 basinsful of earth to get the water running through again.

There is still a vast amount of work to be done on the canal before it is an efficient supplier of water to gardens. In an eroded area where landslides continually fill the canal, 100 drums are now being laid to carry the water underground. The canal is being divided into sections with stopcocks to enable water bailiffs to allocate the water supply with justice. Holding dams have to be built along the way. Gardens have to be fenced....

Statistics: 286 people worked 29 466 days for 64 761 kgs of meal.
325 children worked 6050 days for R 605 and biscuits.

MSUSAMPI GETS WET

The Msusampi

For three splashy, soggy, dripping months Msusampi's Black Power brigade stood waist-deep in the Tugela groping for rocks. At the end of it there was a causeway linking the north bank with the south. It's a slip-slide sort of causeway that has to be negotiated with care and a wading stick – but it is now possible to cross the river without getting more than your knees wet.... Except when there's a flood of course.

The causeway is a boon to pedestrian traffic – but it would probably never have been constructed had there not been the cement shortage, which delayed the completion of the Msusampi dam too. The death of Jeremiah Mbatha, too, meant the loss of our most skilled builder, who had begun the construction of the waterwheel which will pump Tugela water to the Msusampi dam.

Statistics: 50 people worked 8 710 days for 23 922 kgs of meal.

MDUKATSHANI'S TOPFARM

The work-for-grazing-teams and the work-for-meal team combined forces during the year on a number of tasks – in particular laying the foundations for a dam on the Ncunjane stream to trap stormwater for this arid corner.

Statistics: 13 to 60 people worked 5 495 days for 13 737 kgs of meal.

A FIVE STAR HUT

Dick Connell of England spent three months at Mdukatshani last summer.

Since he returned home in February he has raised more than R20 000 for drought relief at Msinga. That must be a record rent for three months in a mud hut without water or electricity.

Dick's cheques arrived at some blessed moments, paying for mealie meal when our bank account was very bare.

Together the cheques have provided more than 400 000 meals.

In the early months of 1981 our Black Power toiled without mealie meal for many long weeks, and we became very dependent on the gifts of individuals – from schoolchildren selling cakes and candy, to Joan Hudson of Dundee who regularly passed on the accumulated fines of laundry customers who lost their tickets. By the end of the year individuals gifts totalled just over R 10 000.

Maurice McKenzie of Balgowan cheerfully ignored the regulations of the Maize Control Board to send us his entire maize crop. By-passing official channels it reached us at almost R 5 a bag cheaper than the purchased product, so our meagre funds stretched a long way further.

The Red Cross struggled to divert R 20 000 worth of mealie meal in our direction, even when its own bank account was pretty bare, and Diakonia remained a steadfast friend with R 6 000 worth of meal and a further R 4000 in cheques.

In June OXFAM came up with a grant of R 25 000 and we breathed again. And at Christmas came notification that R 45000 from Misereor was on the way, which means there is some future for drought relief in 1982.

Because of the fire our financial records for the first six months of the year are almost non-existent. As a result at this stage we can offer the skimpiest overall breakdown of the costs of drought relief transport, wages, equipment, etc. however here is a breakdown of the mealie meal bill.

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| Purchase of pods | R 6 980 | worth of mealie meal |
| Purchase of bones | 14 464 | “ “ “ |
| Black power “wages” | 38 629 | “ “ “ |
| Welfare (emergency supplies | <u>4 979</u> | “ “ “ |
| for homeless families etc) | R65 052 | |

MAD DOGS

In 1980 the Veterinary Department asked CAP to inform all dog-owners in the vicinity of Mdukatshani that a veterinary team would be visiting the farm with free rabies inoculations for dogs.

“Most of the dogs here are African-owned and unlicensed,” we replied. “Can you guarantee that the rabies jabs won’t be used as an excuse to clamp down on unlicensed dogs?”

“Certainly not,” promised the Stock Inspector.

We started advertising. On the day 68 dogs were presented for inoculation – a fraction of the local dog population. The other dog owners had decided on a policy of wait-and-see. They waited one week before they started laughing.

A dog inspector and three armed policemen arrived.

“We hear there are 68 unlicensed dogs here,” they said. By the end of the day dogs had been shot, fines collected, and the dog catchers had made quite certain that nobody produced dogs for a back-up rabies jab in August this year. Only our own farm dogs were done.

On September 14 a rabid dog went for Neil in our kitchen in the dark, and was subsequently killed by our dogs. It was a stray from KwaZulu. In due course seven veterinary officials, including the Chief Vet of Natal, telephoned to inform us we were responsible for any rabid animals found on our property and we had violated the regulations by having the dog killed – it should have been confined. Since that first animal was confirmed rabid, we have had 22 suspected or confirmed rabid animals in sight of our house.

Red tape prevented us replacing the farm. 22 destroyed in the fire, so unless we were able to get the SAP to come and despatch a suspect dog – most disappeared, for we lacked the means to destroy them.

In an attempt to have a blitz on all dogs which had not been inoculated we were eventually promised that the Weenen commando would visit on Saturday – Big Dog Day for the hunters are out.

“Sorry,” said the Stock Inspector the day before. “It’s been cancelled. We forgot the commando plays rugby at weekends.”

Although the KwaZulu veterinary authorities say that all Msinga dogs have now been inoculated – dog owners on our boundaries are still waiting to see an inoculation team.

Four people have died of rabies at the Church of Scotland Hospital, Tugela Ferry, and dog bite victims continue to be treated. Whether or not the animal can be proved rabid, the patient had to be given the benefit of no doubt and given preventative treatment.

SOIL CONSERVATION PLANNING

During the year Simon Armour of the Soil Conservation Department visited Mdukatshani on four occasions to plan fences, camps and dams on the farm as part of the soil conservation programme. The initial bush-clearing work is being undertaken by the work-for-grazing team.

SHOOTINGS, PENSIONS, POISONINGS ETC

In October a second black man was shot by a second Weenen white farmer. This time the black survived multiple injuries to emerge from hospital to face trial on a charge of housebreaking. There are several controversial aspects to this case, which has just had its first hearing. CAP has again arranged for legal counsel for the accused – this time through the Legal Aid Clinic of the Law Department of the University of Natal. There are plans for a regular legal aid clinic here, which will help ease the burden of cases which are now continually being brought to us by blacks who lack the means to pay for lawyer.

During 1981 cases brought to us included:

- : Non payment of pensions. After a KwaZulu inquiry revealed that pay-out clerks had stolen R 90 000 from pensioners, appeals have been following a straight-forward course.
- : Poisoning. Weenen farm workers were rushed to hospital on several occasions after working with insecticides without proper protective clothing.
- : Damages claims for injuries (2 cases were successful)
- : Damages claims for illegal shooting of stock. An Msinga farmer won R 200 from a Weenen white farmer in one successful case.
- : Torture claims. Allegations against a farmer and the police are being investigated.
- : Murder charge – trumped up against a man who refused to fight with an impi.

The Judge made scathing remarks about the evidence of State witnesses when he threw the case out.

: Eviction of farm labourers – destruction of their homes and possessions.

: CAP needed legal aid on its own account when accused of allowing stock to stray on a neighbour's farm. After hearing the evidence of the complainant the Magistrate dismissed the case.

AGITATORS?

In October the Security Police spent a week at Mdukatshani taking statements from CAP directors who had attended a press conference which had resulted in a drought article in The Sunday Tribune. We were told the police were investigating a possible charge of inciting racial hostility" against Neil and our chairman Majozi.

It now seems certain there will be no case – to the disappointment of all who were looking forward to a trial based on descriptions of drought conditions at Msinga.

JUST SHIT

Petrus Majozi calls himself a lamplight scholar. He acquired his education sitting on a pavement under a street light in Johannesburg. His teachers were "kitchen boys". Because of his experience at this night school he is one of five CAP directors who can claim some education. The other seven had no education at all.

CAP has 45 people on the staff of Mdukatshani itself. Eight have been to school. Each stayed an average of four years – Std 2. Educationists state that 4 years schooling is equivalent to no schooling at all.

There are 28 indunas and secretaries keeping records of the 1 000 people on drought relief projects. Eight have been to school. They too average Std 2.

So an educated elite of 18 – with 77 years schooling between them – controlled and organised more than 3 000 people involved in our activities.

By Msinga standards that is not too bad. According to the 1970 census 83% of the Msinga population had never had any schooling at all.

This report is late because it has taken our black staff three months to gather in the daily records and compile a summary for the year. The methods have been snailpace – but the integrity is shining. Not one of our learned elite knows the sequence of the alphabet (A glance through our office telephone index book makes that much clear). So every day every scribe writes out every name of every worker on duty. That is quicker than finding a name on their own list of the day before. But when the names are Mfinyaniswe Kumalo and Mamlongadli Mkhize, recordkeeping is agonisingly slow. And eventually, when all the funny scrawls and scribbles have been put together – we are left to do the adding.

We have not included ourselves in the earlier list of educated staff. We must add ourselves in now. Msinga people may be short of literacy, but they have other skills, insights, abilities which often make the impossible possible. Were the boundaries of Msinga the boundaries of the world, our people could stand on their own feet? But we have to bow the rules of outside

bosses like the Receiver of Revenue, the Workmans Compensation Commissioner, the Drakensberg Bantu Administration Board, the auditor.
There are forms of taxes, licenses, insurances, censuses. There are all the formalities of a literate society. And so being 2 out of 1000 who know the alphabet becomes a burden.

Pay day, alone, is a major undertaking.

“Now Lamula missed six days,” said Elijah Mhlongo, one of out top 5 scholars with a Std 3.

“How do we work out how much to take off his pay?”

“Try the calculator” we said, handing over the small machine.

“Use yourself as an example first. You earn R 1000 a month. You want to know how much you earn a day. Now..”aUnder instruction Mhlongo pressed the right buttons. 3.33333333 appeared in green lights.

“This bloody thing doesn’t work,” prepared Mhlongo. “Nobody gets that much money.” The decimal point was explained.

“Well what’s all this shit after the point?”

Just shit, Mhlongo. Forget it.

WHITE-ANTED

Late in November Mhlongo was about to return home along the solitary bush path down the mountain when eh was called aside and warned that three men with machine guns had been seen crossing Mdukatshani. Afraid of an ambush, Mhlongo slept in the bush that night. Later our super sleuth sniffed around enough to confirm the men had been there, with rifles, but using the farm only as a short cut. What their real business was we had little idea until December when Mbango Zwane was murdered on Mashunka mountain. His death was recognised as a call to arms for two factions on the mountain.

No it was four years since the last flare-up at Mashunka – trouble which the SAP put down after a hut-to-hut search for weapons. Most of the Koornliver faction, however, escaped the raid by burying their arms in the veld. When Zwane died they went back for their buried guns – only to find raiders had been ahead of them. White ants had eaten away all the woodwork.

It was a terrible blow for Koornliver as Zwane’s murderers, so it was rumoured, had access to a supply of 45 machine guns robbed from a Johannesburg armoury.

We welcomed the New Year to the sound of automatic rifle fire echoing in the hills. Rumour was fact.

•S

Robert Morthe, one of our best gardeners, suffered one of his recurring spells of madness recently. We found him sitting on the ground, spooning earth into his mouth.

“Soil is life,” he chanted and he swallowed. Another spoon of grit went down.

“Soil is life.”

The events described in this report may have deflected attention from our real purpose in being here, farming. However grass – and cabbages – grow best in peaceful surroundings. Violence, hostility, tension wither agricultural plans as surely as a bitter drought.

We no longer make plans with any confidence. Msinga has undermined our confidence in planning. It has shaken our old assumptions. Robert Morthé is right however. One belief remains secure. Soil is life.

NEIL ALCOCK AND CREINA BOND

MDUKATSHANI,
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TUGELA FERRY,
3504

1982: ITCHING FOR A FIGHT

Dlamini stands in the half-light of a dawn echoing with gunfire. He is scratching his armpit. "I'm dying," he says. "For God's sake help me." The dark mountain rumbles to another volley. Dlamini groans. The itch has shifted. He begins to scratch his thigh. "My body is aflame with scratch," he says. "I get no sleep from the burning. The bites are everywhere. It is better to be a white man, then you can find the nomsekheza on your skin." **Nomsekheza** – pinhead black ticks which suck blood with fiery mouthparts.

For three weeks Dlamini has been on the hills, hiding with the impi, sleeping at night among the rocks, his belly plopping on the bumps of hard ground, twitching at the gluttony of the nuzzling ticks.

"Sheep dip," he says. "I beg of you sheep dip."

He is a fat, middle-aged, reluctant warrior, without a gun, without a blanket ("a blanket trips you when you have to run"), unhappy and unwashed.

"What fool goes to wash when everyone can see the river?" he says. Fear has prodded him into this war – only the itch could have prodded him out.

No he smears Jeyes Fluid on his bites, fills a bottle with undiluted disinfectant, and is ready to return to his hiding place.

"Where are my colleagues?" he asks "Sweliswe? Sitole? How are they? I sit on the hill and wonder where they are."

Only a month ago the men shared their lunchtime beer under an mviti tree.

Now they are claimed by different armies on different slopes of the mountain.

And while Dlamini is creeping back to cover on Little Mashunka – Sweliswe and Sitole are on Big Mashunka – wheezing, shuffling, limping away from the gunfire into a police trap.

"Because we are of an age and all worn out we decide to stay together," says Sweliswe.

"There are six of us and we hide from both sides."

Sweliswe is a chronic asthmatic. The two Mbathas are frail, tottering.

Mbekeni Sikhakhane is a hlafwit" and when he mixes dagga and beer he ends up without any brain at all." Then there is Hezekiah, another Mbatha.

"He says he's sick. We say he's mad. Maybe it's the same thing," says Sweliswe. As for Sithole – he has escaped from a TB ward, and although the hospital has says it is urgent he comes back – here is Sitole on a battlefield, feebly gasping as he trails a long way behind his friends.

"I am lying under this stone, see," says Sweliswe,"and I hear somebody coughing in front. I think perhaps it is Sikhakhane. Then through the leaves I see a police cap. I pick up a stone and try to throw it down to Sitole to warn him, but I am frightened to raise my arm so the stone skids low. And there is poor Sitole, climbing slowly because he can't breathe properly, and the police see him and begin to move down."

Sweliswe is lying flat with his eyes shut when a policeman tramps on his head. “Hau!” the officer says. “Here’s one!” Then he sees Hezekiah, also flattened on the ground.

“Where’s the impi?” the police ask as they arrest three of the six decrepit deserters.

“We don’t know,” the men reply. “We know nothing about armies. We are hiding.”

“I am a sick man,” Sweliswe protests as he is put into the police van.

“Can’t you see I’m a sick man?”

“We have graves for dogs where we are going.” (Sweliswe is indignant at the memory.” I was so scared my eyes could not see or I would be able to identify the man that made that insulting remark. Is it just to speak like that to the sick?”)

Sweliswe’s two wives are soon at our door.

“Can you pay lawyers to get him out?” they ask.

“But he was fighting,” says Neil. “What’s he doing fighting at his age?”

“Him!” the women are contemptuous.” He can’t fight. He’s just an old rag.”

No lawyer can spring the old rag out of clink, however. Sweliswe and company are in 90 days detention in terms of Proclamation 103 of 1973 – suspected of withholding information in connection with an act of violence.

Why is Mashunka fighting? Even now, when it is over, women shrug, men shake their heads. “That is the thing that is most painful,” says Sweliswe. “The fighting is nothing to do with you. But old and sick you all wander round the mountain because somebody somewhere is fighting somebody else. Sorting out the somebodies and the somewhere is Chief Induna Majozi Ngxongo, secretary of state for the Mtembu tribe if anyone can unravel the threads of this conflict it is Ngxongo, yet even he says: “Ai, ai, I don’t know.”

The trouble starts at the Shezi party on December 29 when the young men are home for the holidays and raring to settle an argument about dancing. The Skaleni boys from Big Mashunka claim they are the champions of a Johannesburg hostel dance. The Koornliver boys from Small Mashunka maintain they are the winners. There is talk of a stickfight at the gap. Instead 15 homeward-bound Koornliver revelers are ambushed in the late afternoon. Mbango Zwane dies.

He is an older man. It is accidental he gets in the way of the bullets.

Before sunset the first messenger comes running to ask us to call the police.

All night women sit on the mountain guarding Zwane’s body, waiting for the police. The sun rises, the body stiffens and begins to swell.

“Please,” new messengers beg in turn. “Where are the police? The body is bloated and beginning to smell. It is out in the open where the hot sun is killing us.” Eventually a complaint to police headquarters, Greytown, brings a van out 21 hours after Zwane has died.

“We don’t want war,” says Notshokoda Mbatha, the tall, serious leader from Koornliver. He is wearing a brown uniform – 1945 battledress bought from Army Stores. He is asking if Zwane can be buried on our farm. “We have been digging in several places,” he says,” but there is no soil left on the stones.

The rock prevents a grave. We don’t want war,” he repeats. “Mashunka will go hungry if the men run home from Goli now.”

“We don’t want war,” says Qondokwakhe Dladla, a leader from the Skaleni side.

He is telephoning from Baragwanath Hospital where he is a cook. "Are the guns crying today? Here in Goli I have asked boys from both sides of the jaw to meet to discuss how to stop killing at the hostels."

"We don't want yet another war," says Chief Ngoza Mvelase when he summonses the men from Koornliver and Skaleni. The chief is a huge man who towers over his tribe. His authority is one force which tugs the men from their hiding places – the cramped longing of their hearts is another.

"What is behind this trouble?" the chief asks. At first the Skaleni men deny they killed Zwane. "But we saw you behind the guns," cry those from Koornliver. "It was light. Even running away we saw you there." At last Skaleni admits to the killing. The chief fines all the Skaleni men one beast – the three ringleaders three cattle each.

The fighting is to stop and you are to return to work," the chief orders.

Six Koornliver boys are among those who gather their belongings and prepare to return to town. The boys are sitting at the busstop when a helicopter lands on the road. They are arrested and flown to Tugela Ferry.

"Why arrest these boys?" asks a surprised policeman when the youths are lined up in the charge office. Within a week they are out and continue their interrupted journey to Johannesburg.

The mountain stays noisy with the crackles, thuds and screech of guns.

Automatic rifles, shotguns, revolvers – just firing keep-your-distance signals for the matter seems settled.

Then a month after Zwane's murder three men climb off the bus at the cross roads. They are a few steps along the footpath to Mashunka Mountain when they see they are stepping towards guns. They begin to run. Majikijela Mvelase dies with three bullets in his back. Mbeni Mbatha escapes. The third man is captured. He is a stranger and is formally escorted out of the area.

Mbeni Mbatha is called to the chief. "Did you see who chased you?" the chief asks. He gets six homes. The six are ordered to report to the chief at once. Messages come back: "These boys are not at home – they are in Goli working." If it is true – and there are doubts about the alibis – the six do not remain in Goli for long. First Doda Dladla is gunned down in a crowded street on his way to work at a sweet factory. Then Schengu Mvelase is killed when a gang breaks into his hostel room. Finally Mgabhi Mvelase dies.

Some say he was murdered. Others say he had a revolver in his breastpocket and accidentally killed himself.

Taxis bring the dead men home to Mashunka Mountain. And taxis bring the living men too. There is no safety in a city street. There is some shelter at home.

Mashunka only telephone is in our livingroom. The calls start at 5 a.m.

"Are my children safe? Can you still hear the guns?"

"Can you tell my brother to 'phone between four and five when the missus goes out?"

"Numzaan you remember me. How's the fighting? Can you call my wife to the telephone before six-tomorrow morning? Not later. I have to ring before the boss comes in."

Every day ten, 20, 30 women queue for calls. Porr Mbatha and his wife speak for an hour at a time. She murmurs dreamily, oblivious of the staring, impatient queue.
“That husband of yours must love you,” Neil says after another marathon call.
She sighs. “Yes, we are compatible. We hear each other.”

The cook at Baragwanath rings for a daily bulletin. He is still acting as diplomatic agent among those who have not run home. “Some of the men have spoken together,” he reports, “but others are afraid to come....

When the people of Mashunka are not on the line, their bosses are.
“Is it true there is a fight at your place? When will it end? One of my boys, Mathanda, left a month ago because he said there was trouble. He’s a good boy and I’d like to keep his job open for him, but I need to know what’s going on.”

The mountain is jittery with gunfire. Shots spatter off the krantzies, boom out from the big waterfall. The nights are quieter, but it is the quietness that chases Hlome Mbatha away.
“It’s my cough,” he explains. He can’t stop his cough, and everytime he coughs the impi turn on him.

“Don’t make that noise – you’ll give us away,” hiss the young men with guns.
“I try to keep the next cough down,” says Hlome. I hold my hand in front of my mouth to silence the cough. But it comes. “The young men are angry.
“You can’t sleep with us,” they say in disgust as they move off to find another sleeping place. Hlome crawls after them, terrified of being on his own. When he catches up he sits a little apart from the group.
“Oh God, and then the tickle comes again,” he groans.

Early in March the chief’s car draws up on the road near Mashunka Mountain.
The chief has sent his chauffeur, secretary and chief induna to do some negotiating.

Chief Induna Ngxongo leaves his companions sitting in the car and sets out alone, making himself as conspicuous as possible. He is a slight man with large, soft eyes, his sparse hair arranged in ever-changing patterns – circles, triangles, squares, all knotted around an off-centre pigtail he is gentle, almost delicate in his manner, but nobody takes advantage of him. He has been chief induna so long that everyone knows the whiplash behind his words. He is one of the most powerful men at Msinga.

Today it is early, but already the dust is hot underfoot. Ngxongo’s fine moustaches are wilting when Notshokoda Mbatha, the Koornliver leader, comes to meet him.
“No more trouble,” Ngxongo passes on the chief’s orders.
“We don’t want war,” Mbatha repeats. “It is not us. We don’t want war.”
Eventually Ngxongo walks on to find the Skaleni impi. He picks his way across bare fields, through slabs of white sandstone, knowing the mountain is watching, making sure he is recognized. At last he reaches a homestead deserted except for small children.
“Fetch your father,” he instructs a small boy.

“The impi is hidden in the forest,” says Ngxongo, “but three men are sent to talk to me. I tell them there is to be no more fighting.”
“As far as we are concerned everything is over,” say the Skaleni men. “But Koornliver keeps shooting at us.”

Ngxongo begins the long walk back to the road. The temperature is 40 degree in the shade – and he is in the sun, bareheaded, beginning to tire after four hours on foot. He is weary when he reaches the road – and finds his car gone.

It has left for Tugela Ferry – in fear, at speed. Petrus Majozi, our chairman, is traveling in a farm vehicle when he sees the chief's driver vigorously waving him down.

“That fool Ngxongo has been killed,” reports the secretary. “We heard the shot.

We were afraid that when the impis had finished him off they would come for us so we've run away.”

“What will you tell the chief?” asks Majozi.

“We'll tell him his Induna was a fool. He committed suicide. We are not prepared to sacrifice our lives in the same way.” Highly exited the pair travel on.

Majozi has a great belief in Ngxongo's ability and commonsense, so he is not too surprised to round a bend and find the Chief Induna on the road, alive and well and furious. Rage has put a spring in his step, a bounce in those fine moustaches.

“We saw your transport escaping,” says Majozi as he open the door to give the Chief Induna a lift.

“Escaping,” Ngxongo is still in a temper when he's dropped at Tugela Ferry.

It is 10 weeks since the war began – and while the men's bodies have grown accustomed to lying on hard places, their spirits are bent by the useless days hiding, hiding, hiding. They want peace – they promise peace – but who will be the first to walk openly on the footpaths to show peace is real?

The guns fidget on the mountain. There are no clashes, no stampedes. Just sudden explosions. Lonely bullets yelping in panic, scaring the hade dash.

The raucous, flapping birds are noisier than the guns.

One morning the Koornliver warriors wake to see a strange war car parked just off the road.

Women are sent to investigate. They circle the car, crawl back and whisper: “It's TJ. It's empty”. Empty? What is an empty car doing there? Who came in the car? The men move off the hill for a closer look.

Suddenly there is a scream: “Baleka, baleka. Run! Run!” A girl has caught sight of policemen in hiding. Evn as the men bold, bullets start flying.

Shaken but unhurt they come to the farm to ask that we lodge a protest on their behalf. Why should the police fire on them unprovoked?

“If this goes on, there will be ore men dead for nothing,” says Notshokoda.

“Will you talk to our impi?”

“Peace needs just a little push,” says the cook form Baragwanath. “You're in the middle of the middle. You're a white man so you are nothing in our quarrels. Can you talk to our impi?”

In the middle of the middle... is that a good place to be? The white man is not sure. Suppose a helicopter lands while he is talking to one of the impi. How will that look in the eyes of the police? How will that look in the eyes of the impi? Phew!

A conversation is arranged with a police brigadier. He is sympathetic. For a week, he promises, the police will stay out of the area.

The Koornliver impi assemble for their meeting in a grove of saffronwood on Mdukatshani. They come unarmed – tired, shabby group, strained and quiet.

Jackson Ndimande sits in front, lugging at his eyelids. Cataracts have made him almost blind. Yet he is a nightwatch in Goli. A nightwatch! When he cannot see anything even in bright sunlight! It's a neighbourhood joke.

Here he is squiring, peering with alternate eyes – a soldier in an army full of familiar faces. Fighters? This dilapidated crowd? They talk with pain, softly, while the wind rattles the leaves and a thundercloud hangs on the edge of the mountain.

Neil goes downriver in the boat to meet the Skaleni impi, his purpose disguised with fishing rods, and the company of our two sons.

"Keep fishing," he tells them when they reach the big rapid." I have a meeting with the impi. I couldn't tell you before because it had to be secret.

Anything can happen but don't be worried. Just fish until I get back."

He climbs slowly to the big waterfall, sits down and waits. After awhile he is joined by three small boys, who sit apart and watch him carefully.

"Hullo," says Neil. "Do you herd cattle here?"

"Yes,"

"I don't see nay cattle."

"They are up on the mountain."

"Why aren't you with them then?"

"Because we've been sent."

"Who's looking after the cattle while you're not there?"

"The men."

"But I thought the men were fighting?"

"The men sent us to give you a message. You must come to Mbatha's house.

He wants to see you."

"I don't know the way."

"We will show you." The three small guides trot ahead, elaborately lifting stones from the path because the stranger's white beard makes him very old. Gradually they slow down, stop.

"Are you lost? What's the matter?"

"He said he would meet you here."

Moments later a figure in a white vest leaps down the hillside, running.

"Up to the forest, we are waiting," he pants. Just then there is a volley.

"They are shooting, they are shooting," the man in the vest keeps running.

Neil watches the gunbattle – a confused melee of running, crouching, firing men. At the river GG and Rauri hear the shooting.

"Were you worried?" Neil asks.

"A bit," they concede.

A week later the Alcocks are again fishing the rapid. This time Neil's guide is a woman who points out a big tambootie tree on a spur. As soon as he reached the tree men begin to appear in twos and threes – also tired and shabby, strained and quiet. Again many are familiar faces. On the mountainside below a ring of women take up their positions, backs to the men, on guard.

The men gaze down on the river as the talking unravels, the shining, brown, lovely river. “Ah,” says a warrior with longing. “If there were no fighting I would be down on those rocks now, scrubbing.” A longing for a wash can be as strong as a longing for peace – or a longing for war.

Peace needs just a little push. The chief has pushed, the chief induna has pushed, the leaders of Koornliver have pushed, as well as the leaders from Skaleni. Suddenly all the little pushes are enough. The chief makes preparations for a formal ceasefire attended by both impis, but it is unnecessary. The guns sputter out. At Mdukatshani men from both sides reappear at work. Taxis are summoned to ferry breadwinners back to Goli.

There it is then. A short account of a short war. Five men died, 18 were arrested, 14 were released without being charged.

An account is not an explanation, however. Knowing what happened does not explain the whys. Why was Doda Dladla picked out on a busy street? Did he die because he was from Koornliver – or did his murderer settle a private grudge under cover of war? Was Majikijela a selected target? Why?

Come to that – why were the boys divided into Koornliver and Skaleni dancing teams when they are of the same clan living on the same mountain?

That is the why history must pick up.

Until 1969 the people of Mashunka were one people. Then dozens of farm labourers were forced off white farms onto the slopes of the mountain.

Suddenly the original settlers found their grazing lands and fields taken over by new huts.

Most of the original settlers lived at Skaleni, below Big Mashunka Mountain – while most of the new lived at Koornliver, below Small Mashunka.

It is not a dancing competition that starts this war. The beginning lies further back in a fight over space.

NEIL AND CREINA

MDUKATHSANI,
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CHURCH AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS

QUARTERLY REPORT – March, April, May 1982

RAINFALL

A series of showers brought March rainfall to 65mm – and marked the end of Msinga's wet season. The past 12 months (May 1981 to May 1982) have been the driest in the seven years CAP has been at Msinga – the total rainfall of 440,5mm being 84 mm less than the same period of the previous year.

Daily temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius were common, and on several occasions the thermometer registered more than 46. The heat and the drought together killed the brave little gardens that were being nurtured close to homesteads. Nobody ploughed fields in our vicinity for the second summer.

BONES, ACACIA PODS AND SERVES

The first Saturday of every month continues to be the CAP Swop Shop where meal meal is exchanged for bones, acacia pods or acacia leaves according to season.

Statistics for past three months:

1248 people joined the queue.

They represented families with 5407 children – of whom 1258 were at school, (that is 23%).

Only 14% had fields.

Only 30% owned stock (on average 4 cattle and 5 goats per family).

Of those who queued:

36% were widows

29% were from families where the father was employed

25% were from families where the father was "sick" – TB, paralyzed etc.

8% were from families where the father was home due to a local war.

Total bones received: 48 528 kgs

Total meal paid out: 25 725 kgs at a cost of R 6 093.00

Total leaves received: 3 282 kgs

Total meal paid out: 2 587 kgs at a cost of R 590.00

DROUGHT RELIEF PROJECTS

CAP has had to do a rethink on existing drought relief projects. By March the Mathinta dam had dried up, the Chibini dam level was dropping and there was no water in the streams that were to have fed the Mhlumba and KwaDimbi community dams. As several schemes were started in the winter of 1980 – workers were showing signs of despair as another winter approached with no prospect of the longed-for gardens.

Further work at Mhlumba, Chibini, Mqamkantaba, Mathinta, KwaDimbi and Msusampi was discontinued while CAP looked at alternatives. The result:

The development of community gardens on Mdukatshani – irrigated from the Tugela River. By the end of May CAP had started a daily shuttle, bringing would-be gardeners from outlying areas to begin work preparing the land for their first seedlings.

KWADIMBI AND BIG MASHUNKA

When it became apparent the only reliable water supply was the Tugela – the KwaDimbi workers joined a new brigade from Buhayiya, below Big Mashunka Mountain, to work on a scheme that will eventually provide water to both the east and west banks. At present a workforce of about 120 is throwing a weir across the Tugela. About 300 metres long, two metres wide and a metre high – the weir will raise the water level so that gardens on both banks can be fed by gravity canals. CAP has purchased an outboard motor attachment for the ferryboat to ease river transport problems.

MSELENI

The canal now runs 16 km from the Tugela... back to the Tugela. That the water does not run the full distance is due to several factors:

- 1) Storm drains on the KwaZulu Development Corporation lands filled a large section of the furrow with silt, and while the Manager of KDC promised to have it cleared, this has only been partially done so far.
- 2) Landslides. Livestock moving on the steep, eroded slopes of the mountains at the take-off point of the canal have led to avalanches of shale which have also blocked the canal. It has taken many delays to get 200 drums from Durban to Mseleni, where they are being laid end to end to provide a tunnel for the water.
- 3) We have been unable to obtain the Watergates and stopcocks needed to control waterflow. Although four different engineering firms accepted the contract – after six months all we have had are apologies. It is obvious we will have to do the job ourselves, and scrap metal and welding equipment is currently being purchased.

FISH DAMS

This is one drought relief scheme which is complete. The dams are stocked with Tilapia mossambicensis and Red-breasted Tilapia purchased from the Natal Parks Board, as well as some bass and barbell. Mphephethi Masondo is in charge of “feeding” the dams daily with varied concentrations of goat manure to establish the optimum amount required to breed the algae on which the fish feed. The Fisheries Officer of Parks Board offered a rough guide, but said trial and error would be necessary.

LIVESTOCK

By the end of February CAP had finally cleared the farm of nearly all African owned cattle to allow the farm to build up forage reserves for winter. Only those animals belonging to CAP and African farm residents remained on Mdukatshani. CAP's 200 goats and 100 cattle are at present all on the "top farm" because all grazing on the lower farm has been exhausted.

Grazing accounts were again sent out to all stockowners who had been grazing their cattle on the farm – resulting in wearisome meetings with the owners arguing the details of how many cattle they really owned, or how many days they really worked to pay their grazing debt.

Our records compiled for the 1981-82 audit showed that 88 stockowners had grazed 1108 cattle on Mdukatshani, incurring a grazing debt that totaled R 15, 475,10. Owners had paid off R 7 284 of this amount by working on the farm building fences etc. A further R 369 grazing fees had been paid in cash. However CAP was still owed R 9 079,10. Stockowners have been told until they "pay" their grazing accounts with either work or cash they will never again be given an opportunity to graze on Mdukatshani.

While some have paid cash, others continue to work daily on the farm to reduce their debt – and a few are paying CAP in tons of kraal manure for the new community gardens.

It should be mentioned that several stockowners worked more days than necessary to pay for their grazing – and have a credit with CAP totaling R 1 257,00.

Unfortunately a lawless small community on CAP's southernmost boundary have started cutting our fences and putting their cattle onto the farm. CAP has reported the matter to the Chief in the hope that a collective fine can be imposed.

The top farm is virtually waterless – particularly since CAP's neighbour, a Mr. Naude, dammed the only stream, the Skhehlenge, to pump water for his stock. His action is contrary to the provisions of the Water Act and CAP may have to take legal action to get its share of the water. Meanwhile the cattle are being driven to the Tugela to drink – a to-and-from procession of six hours.

BUILDING AND FENCING

The building has included an underground, fireproof storeroom for the beads (stocks are valued at R 10 000) documents etc.

The fencing continues to be a heavy drain on CAP's funds. Mdukatshani has been planned by the Soil Conservation Department – which means that eventually we will receive a subsidy for our new fences. Until they are completed and inspected however, the costs are ours. Most of the labour on the fences is still being drawn from work-for-grazing stockowners paying off debt.

MASHUNKA WAR

The first three months of the year were uneasy ones as two factions warred on Mdukatshani's boundary. Five men died and several were arrested in police helicopter swoops before tribal leaders asked for the help of a white in arbitrating an end to the war. CAP's Manager had

secret meetings with both impis –helped by the promise of Brigadier Muller of the SA Police that the police would stay out of the area for a week, to allow peacekeeping moves to take lace unhindered. Hostilities were brought to an end after the talks. Man men lost their jobs when they rushed home to be close to their families at the height of the trouble. These men are now rebuilding the boundary fence between Mashunka and Mdukatshani as a mark of gratitude for CAP's intervention.

WATERWHEEL

For long weeks the waterwheel did not turn because the river level had dropped so low. We were servicing the wheel when an overnight flood came down unexpectedly from upcountry and took wheel and tools with it. We have tried to find a diver to search the riverbed for the wheel – and have started looking for scrap to rebuild it. Meanwhile a diesel pump keeps the fish dams full and the gardens watered.

LEGAL AID

Yet another Road Board hearing is coming up following our attempts to have several local roads opened following their closure by white farmers.

The closure of the roads has prevented Africans openly obtaining water from the only remaining dams and streams in the area – so the water is stolen at night with sentries posted along the fences to watch out for patrolling farmers.

Registering a protest with CAP are two neighbours, Mr. Seel and Mr. Gebers who find their own farm cut off, without access. CAP has agrees to let them make a temporary track via Mdukatshani until the Road Board hearing.

In May an urgent application resulted in a court order to have three roads reopened pending the Road Board hearing – but so far the order has been ignored. CAP has been encouraged by the sympathy and support it has received from the authorities on the issue.

The Legal Resources Centre has continued to take on cases brought to CAP. In the past three months these have included pensions, damages and maintenance claims, detention without tribal, allegations of torture, assault, murder. Two of Weenen's White farmers have agreed to settle out of court – which has been a great morale booster for local black who have never before attempted to challenge whites.

HEMECRAFTS

The past three months have been record ones for the beadworkers. The ultimate accolade to their skills has been an order from Yves St. Laurent for their haute couture winter collection. In May alone beadwork worth more than R 6 000 was sold to buyers as far away as Yugoslavia, Saudi Arabia, Britain and the USA – while orders for a further R 5 000 worth piled up.

WAGES

CAP's basic wage of R 30 a month has remained unchanged for the past 15 years. In April CAP's directors revised staff wages, taking into account qualifications, length of service etc. the new ages scale is an attempt to secure the longterm services of those who obtain a training from CAP – then move on to better paid jobs.

BOOKKEEPING

The auditors are reported to be recovering from shock after CAP's homecraft books were delivered in March, the remainder of the books in April – an all time record for Cap. Although four months records were burnt in the fire, the patch up was as perfect as possible in the circumstances.

A MEETING WITH OUR MP

In April Mr. Pietro Cronje, Progressive Federal Party Member of Parliament for Greytown, and Mr. Rall, Member of the Provincial Council for the area, met the CAP Executive to learn about conditions at Msinga and discuss possible assistance.

MDUKATSHANI,
P. O. Box 26,
TUGELA FERRY,
3504

APRIL 1982: THE INHERITANCE

For a moment Samson Majola is disbelieving. The grader is scooping a ditch straight down the hill. Down!

“No! No! No! No!” Majola erupts in a yell of fury. He gives chase, thumping across the road, across the field, heading for the big machine.

“What’s happening here?” he shouts. The driver knows Majola. He stops and lets the engine idle.

“The whites say I must plough this ditch.”

“But can’t you see what you’re doing?”

“Yes brother, I see. I don’t know what sickness has got into the whites.”

“But down! Are you sure you have to plough down our canal? One storm and this ditch will fill it with mud.”

“Ja. The boss came and showed me himself. And this isn’t the only one. There are two more.”

“No! No! No! No!” Majola’s temper is famous. Sometimes it seems as if all his power is drawn from anger. He stomps back across the fields. It is a cotton field. A battlefield. For 15 years Majola has been fighting over this land and his rage is hot and sharp and bitter.

“That is proof the whites are out to destroy us,” he fumes as he rides with Chief Induna Mpini Kumalo and the Stock Inspector Ephraim Mvelase on their way to the government offices.

“The whites don’t care. They know they’re going soon. Anyway it’s just kaffir land.”

The white official follows the deputation back to the field.

“It’s going to rain today,” says Majola, “and the stormwater will run down your drain and bury our canal.”

“Don’t worry,” says the official. “I’ll put it right.”

“How?” Majola does not like being fobbed off. His eyes redden. “How?”

“I’ll build a bridge over your canal and divert the stormwater across the bridge.”

“And when you’ve made the bridge where will the stormwater go?”

“To the other side.”

“The other side there’s a road and people’s fields. Will you build another bridge over the road and another bridge over the fields?”

Back in Majola’s yard the three men stand with arms on hips, staring at the turned earth of the first ditch.

“We will have to report him to his bosses,”

“He’s a white and a manager and he doesn’t know you can’t plough downhill!”

Majola bangs his fist on his head in frustration.

When the storm comes, it rips through the drains and buries the canal.

“And here the stormwater carried the wall away,” Majola points out the damage. Perhaps he should hang onto his anger. Without it he sags. He has come with a spade to attack the mud, to rebuild the bank, to patch up what is left of the Mtembu inheritance.

There are several versions of how the Mtembus come to inherit the farm Kaffir drift. This is a groundlevel view of what happens, a story of bungles, rows and sabotage and the banishment of the chief.

Kaffirddrift is a big farm, 2400 hectares of stony hills, and 800 hectares of wide valley stretched out along the Tugela River. What makes the farm valuable is the canal. It was dug in about 1900 by Mtembu regiments of Chief Mabizela, but even with regiments digging it was many years work. The water had to be eased around a mountain, through rock wall, along great banks of earth propped up above the countryside, under bridges and over them.

When Tugela Estates buys the farm in 1917 to farm ostriches and Lucerne, there are more than 30 kilometres of interlinked furrows. Tugela Estates begins its operations at a time when the district is buzzing over government proposals to buy up white farms for native location. "This plot of the government to take land to give to natives is just the thin edge of the wedge to damn Natal – to dump it with all the scoundrels... all the bad kaffirs," L C Kinsman a local farmer complains to the Natal Native Lands Committee when it sits in Weenen in March 1917. More than 20 Weenen farms are listed for take-over" with the exception of Kaffirddrift," say the authorities.

On the official map the farm is marked as a white enclave in black land. There is no argument over Kaffirddrift. It is much too good to be a native area.

But shadows dance across the official map, shifting white and shifting black, and on December 1, 1964 Kaffirddrift becomes the property of the South African Bantu Trust. Months before, however, the Mtembus start ploughing new fields under the impression they have inherited the farm. The bequest is announced to them at a ceremony at the old shed. The Regent, Acting Chief Khambilemfe Mvelase is there, together with the government agricultural supervisor, Mr. I.B. Mathieson.

"The white man tells us the land is coming back to the Mtembus," says Chief Induna Mpini. "And our chief, Khambilemfe, replies: 'Mtembus give these people who have returned our land a royal cheer ' and we all stand up and roar BAYETE.

Then Mr. Matheson says to me: Mpini I want you to divide this land among your people. To this day I am still the divider of land.

News of the hand-over whips through the district like a dust storm. The immediate inheritors of Tugela Estates are 128 families living on the farm.

Samson Majola lives at the other end of Msinga, three hours bus ride away. He becomes an heir by special invitation.

Majola is an unusual man. Thickset, tough, aggressive, he has a reputation as an organizer, a wheeler-dealer, a schemer of schemes. None of this is remarkable.

What makes him a puzzle to his fellows is his single-minded passion to farm.

All his speculations, his business ventures are designed with one purpose – to buy him time on the land. If a deal comes off, Majola wins two months at home to quarry another small field among the rocks, to lead the Sampofu stream a little further round the mountain.

"The Sampofu always dries up in spring," he complains. "If it didn't maybe I could stay home all the time. I wouldn't have to go back to Johannesburg."

As long as there is even a trickle, however, he has sweet potatoes, mealies, beans, pumpkins, spinach.

Majola is away from home when two VIP's call unexpectedly one day in 1964. The Magistrate, Mr. R. H. Watling, and the Agricultural Supervisor, Mr. Harris, examine Majola's gardens with interest. They are pleased with what they see. They leave a message asking him to call at the government offices at Tugela Ferry. "The Sampofu is not very reliable," they say when Majola arrives to introduce himself. "How would you like to settle on the Tugela which never dries up? Who are looking for men like you to farm on Tugela Estates."

Majola is cautious. He has never seen the place. But he accepts a piece of paper authorizing him to take up land on the Estates. And he is hooked the moment he lays eyes on the canal. He stands on a bridge, watching the smooth brown current. He tramps along the banks, following the quiet rush of water. At last he sits, dazzled by the stream that never falters, never loses its momentum but flows on and on, everlasting.

"Well?" says Tu Sokhela, the agricultural demonstrator at the Estates. Majola replies with one of his rare grins. "Then you had better choose your field," says Sokhela.

Bumping home in the bus Majola's mind is full of the canal. He is dazzled but he is practical. He will have to save before he can make the move and start farming. The picture of the gliding water has to stay with him for two years while he works in a Johannesburg dairy, trying not to touch his R 40-a-month wage, adding a few investments on the side.

In 1966 he and his wife MaMxongo start camping on Kaffir drift. They erect a lean to with four poles, bundles of grass and old blankets. Majola chooses his site for the view. He turns his back on the mountain. He sees no beauty in broken slopes – his joy lies in level plains, in straight fields, in flatness. There are no trees or boulders to break the landscape in front of him, just the hump of the canal flowing past.

The first season is not easy. Majola and his wife dig together. They carry manure from local kraals, bundle after bundle on their heads. It is a dry year but there is never lack of water, thanks to the canal, and the Majola's reap a good crop of mealies and sweet potatoes. "But not enough to sell. We have to live on the crop. I realize if I want to sell I must expand."

Gradually Majola builds a home, moves his family, adds to his fields. The second year he has a surplus for sale. He is happy with the tempo of life apart from one niggling worry. He discovers the strong current in the canal is not everlasting. That great force of water can stop and start. Landslides on the mountain block the stream and for weeks the canal is dry.

Then Oom Jan Hattingh arrives" a noisy man who does a lot of shouting, but he never raises his hand to anyone". Induna Mpini speaks of Oom Jan with affection. The white man speaks Zulu fluently and he enjoys a chat. When he settles into the old farmhouse the Africans don't mind. They like him and he doesn't interfere. "You and I are in charge of this place," he tells Induna Mpini. "I am looking after the farm for the government, and you are looking after the farm for the chief."

Under Hattingh's supervision the canal gets a springclean.

“We are going to build a dam to catch the water off the mountain,” he explains when he arrives with a grader in Majola’s yard one morning. “There will be two contours.” With gestures he explains the new plan for drainage.

It makes sense to Majola and it works. The dam catches the stormwater. The furrow is kept free of mud. Majola looks out on a sheet of water, its green fringe noisy with birds.

Nobody has any warning that life on the farm is to be disrupted when another meeting is called at the old shed in 1968. A white official stands next to Chief Khambilemfe when he breaks the news. New settlers are to arrive, labourers evicted from Nhlawe, a Weenen farm. “They are Mtembu people with nowhere to go,” says the chief, “We cannot throw away our own people. We cannot deny them space here.”

“We are terribly frightened,” says Majola. “The farm is already full. Where will we plough? This is disaster.”

Only Hattingh welcomes the new settlers. When they arrive on foot carrying their belongings. He issues tents, shows each family its site. Majola and the other residents stand silently in the fields, watching the newcomers pass, the men and boys driving cattle and goats, the women and girls lagging with boxes and blankets and cooking pots.

“We say nothing to them,” Majola admits. “What is there to talk about?”

The Nhlawe camp is at the far end of the valley, an hour’s walk from Majola. He is glad the tents are out of sight. He doesn’t want to see them.

The next trouble occurs in 1969. One spring afternoon a column of smoke rises on the Weenen side of the river. Moments later smoke is spurting from the hill like steam escaping from a punctured kettle.

“They’re burning homes!” In the fields women drop their hoes. Donkeys’ spans are halted midfield. Babies are left crying, pots unattended.

“For a day and a night there are clouds of smoke. We are in a state of horror.”

Then the first refugees arrive.

“They burnt everything,” says Mambilini Dladla. “The doors, the beerpots, even the family ghost.” Little mounds of belongings lie on the veld like debris after a flood.

Weenen is in the news. Months before the labour tenant system was abolished, but the labour tenants refused to move off Weenen’s white farms. They have been threatened, jailed, and eventually burnt out and carried away on government lorries.

“164 families (1 335 souls) will be settled on Tugela Estates,” Mr. P. H. Torlage deputy chairman of the Bantu Affairs Commission announces on October 16, 1969,

That is the official intention. The authorities want to control the numbers.

But Tugela Estates becomes a refugee camp for more than 10 000 people. Dazed, numb, they wander around talking – talking to themselves, to each other, to anyone who will listen. The useless words bat on the air.

Although it is a relief for Majola to escape to his fields, every evening when he returns home he has to face the mud-walled city that is springing up, and he grapples with violent fears. His donkeys used to graze next to his yard.

No there are huts on his grazing land.

“And my fields? What about my fields?” he asks Induna Mpini.

“The new people are not getting fields. They are temporary. They are only here for a little while.”

Who says so? Everyone knows.

Majola need not fear the refugees will take over the farm. The take-over comes from a different direction. In October 1973 the Bantu Investment Corporation arrives at Tugela Estates.

“There are plans to cultivate 800 hectares under irrigation on the Tugela Estates,”

BIC announces in its annual report. “200 Bantu farmers, each of whom cultivates two hectares, are involved in this scheme. The farmers receive financial aid...”

Induna Mpini shakes his head in astonishment. “No! Never never.”

“These farmers! Who are they!” shouts Majola in a rage. “Where are they?

Show them to me!” If they are not invisible, they certainly disappear.

In 1981 Mr. Louis van Aardweg, the man in overall charge of the Estates, admits he knows nothing about the 200.

“I am not aware of the BIC report.... And therefore cannot comment,” he says.

BIC’s arrival is badly managed.

“The first we know Hattingh is packing. He says new whites are coming. He doesn’t know who they are or where they are coming from. Nobody has told him.

When Chief Ngoza Mvelase calls a meeting at the shed crowds of his tribes people attend. They see strange white faces.

“I am here to introduce you to these whites who are with me,” says Chief Ngoza.

“I don’t know who they are or what they are doing here. They tell me they were sent to take over by Chief Sithole (KwaZulu’s Minister of Agriculture) but Chief Sithole has said nothing to me. I cannot be held responsible for them being here.”

The tension is eased by one BIC official, Gavin Wiseman.

“Do not be afraid,” he says. “I was fetched from my father’s home to come and lend a hand to help you. I have heard there is no water in the canal. We will get the water running again. We have not come to quarrel. We want to stay together as friends.” And he means it too.

“Wiseman sits with us,” says Induna Mpini. “We can talk to him. He even knows a black man drinks tea. You never forget a man like that.

Pumps, ploughs, diesel engines arrive in the BIC yard. Fences go up, pipes are laid down. A work force is taken on to clear the canal from end to end.

The brown water starts running again.

Wiseman makes himself familiar with the new farm and its people, wandering around the fields, chatting easily.

“He never takes anything by force,” says Induna Mpini.

“He asks if BIC can borrow some of the fields that are not being used,” confirms Majola.

“But only for a short time. BIC is not staying long.”

Wiseman’s manner melts the local hostility. But Wiseman stays briefly. And within weeks of the BIC meeting Chief Ngoza is suspended.

Majola is one of a deputation who visits the magistrate, Mr. D. J. F. Maree, to sort out an argument over the chief's successor.

"We ask what is our chief's sin? The magistrate replies that the chief knows what he has done. The chief will tell us." But the tribe has decided for itself. It's that speech at the BIC meeting. Only a few hundred of Ngoza's subjects were listening that day – but the chief's words are absorbed into the memory of 20 000 Mtembus. Years later the people can repeat their chief's words with little variation, part of tribal history.

"Look at the coincidence," Mtembus say. "Today he makes the statement. Tomorrow he's banished." Nothing can shake them in their conviction that because of BIC they are without their chief for the next six years. There is never an official statement to argue otherwise.

BIC begin operations by planting 85 hectares to cotton. It is the first step in its plan to "develop the full potential of the Tugela Valley for the benefit of the people of KwaZulu."

The benefit, unfortunately, is not immediately apparent. Down at the river the new engines begin to pump water to the cottonfields. All day the silvery threads of water swing in the air. All day lines of women come up from the river carrying drums of water on their heads. There is not one tap laid on for the farm's 10 000 people.

After Wiseman leaves the new bosses at Tugela Estates lose interest in the canal. A grader is put to work on the intricate system, with its contours, drains and silt traps. Two kilometres are obliterated. Filled in as if the canal were an eyesore. Contours are smashed and leveled. Subsidiary furrows are wiped out. The dam in front of Majola's yard is bulldozed flat.

"Complain?" says Majola. "Our chief has been taken away. Where do we complain?"

It takes half an hour's downpour to bury Majola's section of the canal. The dam has been a shield. With the dam gone the canal goes too, swallowed up in three metres of silt. Majola goes into battle with spades, old basins, his three wives, his children, his neighbours. But weeks later they have only excavated a sticky depression. Majola begins to panic. He has a lovely field of garlic wilting for lack of water. He cannot afford to lose the crop. He goes to the manager of BIC.

"I have come to ask water for my dying fields."

"We can't give individuals water," says the manager. "It would be stealing we used government water for you." On Sunday the BIC pumps are idle. Majola visits the manager again.

"Steal for me," he begs. The water is stolen. For the first and last time.

By March 1974 BIC has taken over 231 hectares.

"Some problems did arise with the acquisition of the required land," says an official report. It does not explain whether the difficulties were at top level or ground level.

Chief Induna Mpini is given the job of organizing the take-over.

"The whites haven't got any land, hawubandla, poor things," he tells the field they give up their lands because the white officials promise to share water in exchange for the land.

After a few months BIC officials approach Induna Mpini again.

“That fence around the land you gave us has a bad bend. If you move your people from the curve we can straighten the fence.” At each request the induna squeezes more people onto smaller fields, divided and divided again on the African section of the farm. There is no sign of the promised water, however.

There are ugly mutterings about that stooge Mpini – the induna begins to get threats on his life.

“But there are times when I cock my tail,” the induna grins. “One day BIC says I can have 16 rows of cotton for myself. If I cultivate and reap those rows I will be paid.” Majola is called in as Mpini’s business manager, watching over the transaction, counting and weighing the bags. The crop brings in R 512 – the induna gets R 140 after costs have been deducted.

“But the next time I reap BIC says transport has eaten up all the money. I get nothing. My tail is not so high.”

At about this time a bag of potatoes and an umbrella are delivered to the induna’s home as a gift from the BIC management. The gesture is friendly – the timing unfortunate.

“So I am being paid for my confiscated cotton?” says Mpini. He sighs and then giggles. “A kaffir will always be a kaffir.”

By 1974 the people of KwaZulu are beginning to taste the benefits of BIC.

“First it is the pumpkins,” says Majola. “We eat until pumpkin oozes out our ears. You can’t say we steal them. They are grown on our land so they are our pumpkins. When BIC plants cabbages we really get busy. We take cabbages in donkeyloads and lorryloads. If one of us is caught there are a thousand take his place. Next BIC plants beans. We thrash the lot. Then come peas. We eat them green.”

“And ai ai ai do we harvest the tobacco!” adds Induna Mpini.

“Can’t you save a little bit for the white man?” asks Sgt Malinga of the Weenen Police.

The mealie crop survives unscathed. Or so it seems. In fact thieves clear all the cobs from the middle of the field, leaving a line untouched along the perimeter.”

“During this period everybody gets fat,” says Majola. And the farm “makes significant financial losses,” admits Mr. Louis van Aardweg. “The main reason for this being due to the theft of crops on the land.” BIC decides to concentrate on cotton.

“And they win,” says Majola. “We can’t eat cotton.”

Majola has been waiting for 1975. The people were promised BIC would only stay for two years. The two years are up. When is BIC leaving?

“But it is not two years,” say BIC staff when they face farm residents at the shed. “Who told you two years?”

“You whites said so when you arrived,” Majola is heated. Would he make a mistake over a promise like that?

“BIC is here for ten years,” reply the officials.

“Well show us the letter where it is agreed two years or ten years,” Majola demands.

“We know nothing about that,” reply the BIC men. “We are just told to come and work here.”

The Africans walk away, hunched and sullen.

“Whites always fool us with their promises,” says Majola. “We make one big mistake. We never have a minute writer to pull out files afterwards when we ask what was said.” Mud has

darkened his anger. His spirit is suffused with the stench of the canal. It is a mouldering hell, an abyss of glue.

Yet he is sucked back. Every day he mines the ooze. He has to have water.

Ten years after his arrival as a specially selected farmer, Majola gives up the battle for the canal.

“Can I clear a garden at the waterfall of Nhlonywana?” he asks Induna Mpini.

The green water roars between white boulders. Majola and his wives clear the bush, hoe and plant and weed. They build a hut next to the land and the first season it is filled with bags of onions, tomatoes, mealies, and potatoes. The garden becomes a district showpiece.

By the end of 1980, however, the drought has silenced the waterfall. In the BIC lands the silver threads of water swing above the cotton. All day lines of women straggle up from the river, drums of water on their heads. After eight years there is still no tap for the settlers. The temporary camp now holds 15 000 people – a colony of strangers, indrawn, separated by grief.

“They are a dead people,” says Majola.

Although the settlement at Tugela Estates is 30 times the size of Weenen town, it has no town hall, no town board, not even a local committee.

“But it’s not a town. It’s a farm!” the pain explodes in Majola. “It’s a farm. OUR farm.”

His anger ignites among the refugee shanties. More than 300 people turn out to join Majola in fighting the canal. For a year they tunnel through slime. They patch and scrape and polish and build. They make aquaducts over dongas, unclog landfalls. Where the BIC grader obliterated one section, chains of women pass more than 350 000 basinful of earth to get the water running again. The people are paid with a bag of mealie meal a month (drought relief supplies) and a promise of a share of the water.

A row of women is in the canal, bedraggled, stinking of churned mud, when police arrive to arrest them” for trespassing on BIC land.”

“You can lift us and carry us,” says Bettina Ngubane. The policeman note the proportions of the opposition. They retreat. The magistrate supports the police. “BIC is private land,” he says. “The women are definitely trespassing.”

A desperate appeal is telephoned to Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, Prime Minister of KwaZulu.

“Tell the women to go on digging,” he says.

They go on digging – flinging the incident onto an inflammable heap of incidents. There is the time two BIC officials fire on children among the green peppers. There is the BIC official who finds himself in court facing charges over Malembe’s dead goats. There is the school cement that is diverted to build a shed. There is the bush land which the people clear on the understanding that in lieu of pay they will have the right to cultivate for one year – but they get neither pay nor ploughing for their work. And of course there is the hijacking of Majola’s donkeys. The animals disappear one lunchhour while they are outspanned at the edge of the field. They are on the road to Lesotho before Majola finds out what has happened. A BIC official has collected the donkeys and sold them to passing Basuthos.

“Get my donkeys back,” Majola is terse when he confronts the official. The man glances at Majola’s flushed face and sets off in his car to pursue the Basuthos. He buys the donkeys back – returns them to Majola.

In the BIC lands the silver threads of water go on swinging above the cotton. All day lines of women straggle up from the river, water containers on their heads, following the shortest path home, cutting across fields, climbing through fences.

Majola's wife Sayina is balancing her load, following a traditional shortcut, when a BIC official catches sight of her one afternoon. He gives chase, orders her into the back of his truck.

"This time you're going to jail," he says angrily. But the women of the neighbourhood see what is happening. Grabbing water containers they rush from their yards.

"We are going to get water across your land – jail us all," they yell. Mrs. Majola struggles to get away. Friends join her. A "Do Not Trespass Sign" is torn down. The noisy tussle breaks up suddenly when a car stops on the road.

It is Induna Mpini, Stock Inspector Mvelase, and Majola.

"The women can't go onto our fields. They walk on the pipes and break them," the official complains.

"Have you seen anyone breaking a pipe?" asks the induna. "If you catch somebody walking on a pipe – I will take up the case. ("To this day," he adds, "I have never had a case").

"If you don't want the women to go inside BIC land – pump water to the fence," says Majola. He is furious.

And that is how one tap is at last laid on for the 15 000 people at Tugela Estates.

By this time, however, BIC is no longer BIC. It has been transformed to CED (Corporation for Economic Development) which passes control to KDC (KwaZulu Development Corporation) which passes control to the KwaZulu Agricultural Company. For the blacks at Kaffiridrit, however, the scheme remains BIC.

"It's the same whites running things," says Induna Mpini. Whites who are known only by their Zulu names: Head-of-a-donkey; The-long-one; The-green-headed-lizard... Only Hattingh and Wiseman are remembered by their real names.

In 1977 CED reports: "One of the big problems of agricultural development in Third World countries is that projects are usually planned for these countries and executed without the active involvement of the indigenous populations.

The establishment of the national development corporations has made it possible to avoid repetition of this mistake in the homelands. The agricultural division has succeeded in establishing good –co-operation with homeland governments, tribal authorities and local populations. Consultation is maintained on all these levels..."

In 1981 there is a strike among the cottonpickers on Tugela Estates.

The Induna is besieged by angry women and children complaining they have been short paid.

"Why are you not paying our children for the work they have done?" Induna Mpini asks the BIC officials.

"Don't worry," is the reply. "The people will get their money." Some are paid months late. Some have their money withheld" because they make a noise, they are cheeky". Some are told they will get their money as a bonus at Christmas.

"But it never comes."

In its annual report CED admits: "A shortage of labour was experienced on virtually all the projects during the harvesting season of 1981/82. This not only caused crop losses but

additional funds had to be obtained to harvest the crop mechanically. The shortage of labour can be attributed to the following:

- Favourable harvests by the local population and /or
- Larger contributions by urban family members. The result was that many people did not find it necessary to seek outside work.”

At Tugela Estates, however, it is a drought year. There is virtually no harvest for those who have fields. Unemployment brings many men home from the cities. The angry cottonpickers cannot afford to be idle. They flock to labour on Weenen farms. Every morning the farmers recruiting lorries fetch them – every evening drop them off at home.

BIC has always given the Africans one privilege – the right to graze their cattle in the cottonfields after the cotton has been reaped. For a short while the animals pick up conditions feeding on the nutritious cottonseed.

The year of the strike, however, something new happens. A Weenen farmer, Mr. C.A.J. Burger arrives at the Estates. His baling machine wraps the cotton plants into neat blocks which are carted by lorry to his farm. Some fields remain for the African cattle – some go to Mr. Burger.

In 1979 Chief Ngoza returns to his tribe, reinstated on certain conditions of good behavior. Soon after his return he appoints a committee to handle the affairs at Tugela Estates. It is led by Induna Mpini, Stock Inspector Mvelase, and Majola.

The chief is attending a KwaZulu Legislative Assembly at Ulundi when he first picks up the news that BIC may be pulling out of the Tugela Valley.

The story is confirmed by Mr. Louis van Aardweg, the manager of the KwaZulu Agricultural Company at a meeting at Tugela Ferry towards the end of 1981.

“He says the land is coming back to the Mthembu,” reports Majola. “He says BIC will not plough again. The cotton that has been planted will be destroyed.

We must plough where we like. The land is ours. That is a Wednesday. On Friday we see Burger ploughing our land.”

Mr. Burger has been given a contract to bale cottonseed, then plant and harvest Lucerne.

At the end of the winter 1982 many African cattle have died at Kaffirdridt.

The 10 cattle in Majola’s kraal are very thin. He pays a visit to the BIC manager.

“We want to buy Lucerne for our cattle that are dying,” he asks.

The BIC Manager is regretful. “We have many orders from the Free State,” he replies. We must finish these orders and if there is any Lucerne left over you can buy it.” But there is no extra Lucerne for the African farmers.

At the end of 1982 Induna Mpini is asked to call the people of Tugela Estates to another meeting at the BIC sheds.

“We are surprised when we get there,” says the induna,” because there are many policemen in plain clothes. But we are not frightened because we have committed no crime. “Chief Ngoza is there, officials from BIC – or is it CED or KDC? – and officials from the KwaZulu government. Now it is formal and final. BIC is leaving.

And taking everything of value with them. The Africans watch silently as the tractors are driven away. The ploughs go, the planters, the big diesel engines that used to pump water. The trucks of local white farmers drive into BIC yards – and drive away with all the fertilizer. “We see men take away the scrap iron that has been lying here since the time it was a white man’s farm,” says Majola. “They even pull water pipes out of the walls of the houses.”

CED comments in its annual report: “The object (of Trust farms) is to ensure that such farms are transferred as going concerns with improved productivity and trained local personnel.”

Tugela Estates is left with some fencing, some pipes, a citrus orchard and lucerne field – and of course those amazing drains that were ploughed straight down the fields on Majola’s hill. Every shower gouges them a bit deeper.

From time to time they are photographed by disbelieving agriculturists.

It is a bad year for Majola. Landslides block the top end of the canal again.

There is only one thing to do. The water will have to run underground through a tunnel made of old drums. For months Majola leads a work party round the mountain to build that tunnel. There are 98 people with him at the start, but before the tunnel is finished there are only 47 left. “It’s my legs,” says an old woman lifting her long skirts to show swollen ankles. The tunnel is two hours walk from the nearest homes – two hours walk back again.

However in November the water is running. Clean brown water, sunflecked, dazzling. Majola’s heart lifts. With his ungainly heavy walk he trudges the back, grinning, triumphant. Ten years before the KwaZulu authorities budgeted R 100 000 to lay pipes along the landslide section of the canal.

Majola’s team did the job for R 6 528 (R 874 for old drums – R 5 654 for mealies to “pay” the workers).

It is summer, however, and even though it is a drought year, there is some rain. It roars down the BIC drains to bury the canal again. Majola picks up his spade to attack the mud, to rebuild the bank, to patch up what is left of the Mtembu inheritance. He is bereft of anger. Weary, an army of Mtembu men built the canal – an army of Mthembu women tried to fix it. Now Majola concedes the canal cannot survive unless a grader is brought in to reconstruct the contours that were wiped out by BIC, to rebuild the silt traps, to rebuild the dam that shielded the canal from storms. And where will they find a grader?

Mr. Charles Cuff, Regional Director of Agriculture for KwaZulu has an answer for the people on Tugela Estates. BIC did not take everything after all. About a year ago electricity was installed to drive electric pumps. Tugela Estates can have pumped water at R 2 000 a month.

“R2000 a month! When our canal will give us water free!” Majola’s eyes redden. He punches the air with his fists, raises his voice and begins to shout. Who says he’s bereft of anger?

MDUKATSHANI,
P. O. Box 26,
TUGELA FERRY,
3504
September 1982

THE SMALL FARMER'S TRUST

Farming means debt.

Weenen's 111 white farmers owed R 1 972 820 at the time of the 1970 census.
And CAPs 221 black farmers owed R 12 230 at the end of the last financial year. (February 1981-1982)

While each Weenen white farmers had an average debt of R 17 773,00.... Each CAP black farmer had an average debt of R 67,20.

There are many credit facilities available to South Africa's white farmers, including loans from the state-owned Land Bank. There are virtually no similar facilities for the country's black farmers.

CAP's Small Farmer's Trust was set up to act as a Land Bank for local African peasant farmers. This is a report on the Trust's first five years.
It is a story of debt; but it is also a story of finding land for the landless.

THE BEGINNING

In May 1977 the people of the Msusampi valley, Msinga district, began work diverting a mountain stream to irrigate "waste land" on a rocky hillside. Before the furrow was completed by a team of 60 volunteers, it was clear the community would need financial assistance to fence its proposed gardens from free-ranging cattle and goats. CAP was fortunate in obtaining a loan of R 5 535 to buy wire for the first gardens.

By July, 1977 a second valley community was at work (Nomoya); then a third (Sahlumbe) and CAP launched an appeal for funds to establish a Small Farmers Trust which would advance loans for fencing and seed to members of the Small Farmers Co-operatives that were evolving out of the community work projects. By the end of 1977 CAP had raised R 14 000 – R 6 000 from Misereor and R 6 000 from the Goldfields Foundation. Further donations from OXFAM (R 5 000) and S.A. Council of Churches (R 5 000) and various individuals brought the total to R 28 007,91.

Since then loans worth R 20 947,78 have been advanced – and R 10 944,80 of this amount has been repaid. At the end of August this year R 9 871,09 was recorded as the debt still outstanding by 181 of the 221 co-op members.

The Trust also paid more than R 6 000 (estimated) for cement for community dams, piping, a pump, fencing around reservoirs etc. (Discrepancies and inexact figures are explained further on in this report).

LAND FOR THE LANDLESS

CAP never expected the rapid growth of the Co-ops. Initially there was no Trust – so CAP could offer no credit. However it was not access to credit that was attracting the local people. It was the promise of access to land.

Most of Msinga's people are landless. In the district's rough, mountainous terrain, flat lands for fields are scarce – and those that exist were allocated a long time ago. In 1954 the Tomlinson Commission estimated that an Msinga family in the Tugela Valley Thornveld needed 83 hectares to gross an annual income of R 125. The Commission estimated that on that basis, 81% of the families in the area were "surplus".

In recent years tens of thousands of people have arrived to settle at Msinga after being forced to leave white farms in terms of a number of laws.

The surplus families have grown. Msinga is a land of landless.

CAP's message attracted crowds because it went something like this: "Build a furrow. Bring water down the mountain. Then all that stony hillside that nobody wants can be turned into gardens."

When the first community projects were launched an unusually large number of men were at home, idle, because of city unemployment. The involvement of these men in the early "digs" was a striking feature of the schemes.

However when there was even a rumour of work elsewhere some of the keenest would-be gardeners made their apologies and left. The chairman of the Nomoya project disappeared for a few months to become "garden boy" to the local magistrate. And without his leadership development flagged.

The drag period between starting a furrow and reaping a cabbage was a long one for families without resources, and this is why CAP began to offer mealie meal on 30 days credit to project workers. The majority complied with the arrangement – taking a bag of meal at the beginning of the month – paying for it at the end of the month when they took a second bag. However inevitably there were those who dodged – and CAP's record keeping was not efficient enough to track down the dodgers – and more important, see that they did not get second or even third bags.

Tightening Up!

By July 1979 there were six Small Farmers Co-ops with 180 members. At this time CAP found itself with new, educated members of staff and a plan was drawn up to improve communications with the Co-ops and to tighten up on credit control. Each Co-op had an educated liaison officer who visited at least once a week, checking Co-op problems and needs and taking orders.

All orders for wire, seed, tools and meal had to be approved by the chairman of the Co-op and the liaison officer. Theoretically the issue of mealie meal would at last be controlled.

For six months – from July 1979 to December 1979 – 5 whites and one black supervised the Co-ops – and in that period debt rocketed. Subsequent inspection of the records showed that mealie meal was often issued without the two signatures required. Some families acquired up to 8 bags without making a single payment.

“Too many people are getting free gifts by telling sob stories,” one of the white supervisors complained in a report she wrote before returning to England.
 She was right. Some debt sheets carried notes from the supervisor remarking
 “I don’t think So-and-So should pay in view of her circumstances.”

The following reflects the situation from 1977 to the end of 1979:

| <u>Period</u> | <u>Taken by Members</u> | <u>Repaid</u> | <u>% Repaid</u> |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1977 | R 1 252,53 | R 422,40 | 33,72% |
| 1978 | 4 869,08 | 1 710,96 | 35,14% |
| 1 st ½ 1979 | 2 673,79 | 1 245,95 | 46,6% |
| 2 nd ½ 1979 | 12 152,38 | 3 436,10 | 28,28% |

By January 1980 CAP had lost the services of most of its educated co-op supervisors – and was faced with a large hole in its cash resources caused by the mealimeal debt.

Updating the Records

Early in 1980 CAP’s African Executive committee and bookkeeper held a series of meetings with each co-op in turn to sort out the shambles. At one meeting after another members stood up to acknowledge they owed for bags of meal for which CAP had no records at all. Their honesty was warming.

The CAP bookkeeper was given the task of co-ordinating the results of the meetings, bringing debt records up-to-date – and sending out accounts to all those who owed for mealimeal. Because he claimed _____ he feared retaliation from debtors, he had done none of these things when he deserted CAP (himself owing a large sum of money) in March 1981.

In July 1981 the Alcock’s fire destroyed some of the Co-op files. However old order books remained, receipt books, some debt sheets, old reports etc.
 Painstakingly the records were pieced together again and just before Christmas accounts were at last sent out to all members.

Early this year CAP’s new bookkeeper held meetings with each co-op in turn getting the members present to confirm their accounts, and at the same time gathering information to provide a profile of Co-op members.

The meetings provided CAP with much new information. Most members were able to produce every receipt they had over had from CAP. One man handed over 466 bits of paper to help us reconstruct his account. However the receipts produced one nasty shock. They revealed that a former CAP bookkeeper had fraudulently issued receipts from a private receipt book. Members assumed they had a CAP receipt, and assumed they were up-to-date with payments, when in fact the official records reflected only a few installments. We are still trying to ascertain the extent of the fraud. Obviously CAP has to credit the members concerned and take the loss involved in this theft.

From January 1980 to the present no further loans have been made to co-op members – and until the accounts went out, virtually no payments had been received. The response to the accounts is reflected below:

| | |
|------------------------|----------|
| Debt repaid 1980 – 81: | R 553,83 |
| “ “ 1981 –82: | 1 325,66 |
| First ½ 1982 –83: | 2 339,90 |

Up to the present members have repaid 52,25% of the total loans advanced.

DROUGHT AND DEBT

CAP's agreement with the small farmers was that all wire was to be regarded as a longterm loan, to be repaid as the gardens became productive. However only two years after the Trust was established, the drought set in. Streams which had been irrigation gardens dried up. Furrows and pipes and reservoirs lay empty of water. Gradually the gardens withered to nothing.

New schemes were launched to supply water to the various communities – and these became CAP's drought relief schemes. Initially people volunteered their labour. Later CAP was able to offer a mealie ration as payment. Many – but not all co-op members became drought relief workers.

CAP has stressed that because of the drought members are not expected to start repaying their wire debt. CAP is trying to recover amounts outstanding for meals, tools, wire, seed –debt piled up in contravention of the rules.

At the end of the last financial year the total due on these items was R 3 859,88 – an average of R 26,43 for 146 indebted members.

(It is interesting to note that the original bags of meal issued on credit cost R 8,55. Today the same quantity of meal costs R 20,52... an increase of 140%. So inflation has hit the basic foodstuff of a poor community).

WIRE – THE ESSENTIAL

Once-upon-a-time Msinga's gardeners used thornbush barricades to fence their plots. However today the thorns are disappearing under the combined pressure of firewood collectors and browsing goats. According to Sue Milton, a botanist who worked on Mdukatshani for 18 months, a plot only 70 metres in perimeter requires about 738 thornbushes as fencing – or 0,5 hectares of trees per annum. The branches decay rapidly, and have to be replaced every year.

Today a garden is impossible without wire. KwaZulu's cattle and goats will jump most barricades to get at young green plants. To keep marauding animals from a plot about 600 metres square, a small farmer needs two rolls of barbed wire and two rolls of pignetting. When Cap first purchased wire for the co-ops in 1977 those four rolls cost R 96,40. Today the same wire costs R 143,18, an increase of 48%.

The fences that have been erected on SFT loans should give members at least 15 years of goatproof gardening. Wire – unlike meal and seed – can be repossessed if necessary – and in six cases where members have returned their wire, they have handed back goods that have increased in value!

Most of the wire was paid through a loan of R 5 535 from an individual donor. Recently the donor informed CAP the loan was to be a gift. The gesture helps ease some of the despair of the drought years.

Today 114 members share a wire debt of R 8 371,11 – an average of R 73,43 each.

WILL THE GARDENS EVER BE PROFITABLE?

The only small farmers we found unaffected by the drought were the two widows of Philemon Khoza, a former CAP director who was murdered in 1980. The two Mrs. Khozas have gardens adjacent to a perennial stream and their gardens were full of vegetables when visited in May this year. Both women were proud of reaping crops continuously since acquiring fencing. They said they sold their produce locally and were in a position to begin repaying their wire debt.

These two women have to serve as our example of what can be achieved.

SMALL FARMERS CENSUS

Members who attended our debt meetings 63%

Of those who attended:

Average age was about 50

Members working on drought schemes: 55%

Members owning stock: 38% (averaging 2 cattle and 4 goats each)

Families removed from white farms to KwaZulu: 57%

Those who planted gardens last summer: 84%

Those who reaped some vegetables: 32%

(A more detailed breakdown of individual co-ops follows at the end of this report).

COMMUNAL COSTS

The loans issued to the members of the co-ops do not reflect total expenditure by the SFT. Additional funds have been spent on cement for dams and reservoirs, on piping, on wire to fence communal dams etc. The local communities were unable to meet these costs from their own very limited resources.

Although the dams and furrows are presently dry, the time will come when they will again be useful.

Unfortunately it is not possible to give a total figure for the expenditure on community works, partly because of records lost in the fire, partly because CAP's bookkeepers did not always keep this expenditure separate from other farm expenditure. In August 1979 a newsletter

records that a total of R 3 374 had at that period been paid out for community pipes and cement.

DEATH DUTIES AND DESERTIONS

Five Co-op members have died leaving a combined debt of about R 1 000,00.

With the improved employment position, many of the unemployed who started the co-ops are now back in the cities, earning. They are keen to keep their enclosed gardens, however, and although they were absent from the co-op meetings, have been coming one by one to acknowledge their debt and make the first of promised repayments.

Unfortunately the CAP staff who handled these encounters did not record any of the census information we would like to have had.

The difficulties of recovering debt from the dead (!) and from deserters bring up the question of.

SECURITY OF TENURE

CAP originally hoped to offer SFT loans on the security of the land worked by the SFT members. Negotiations began with the local chiefs, and extended to the Regional Authority and the Chief Minister of KwaZulu.

Tribal land belongs to every man – and therefore no man can own it. In some respects the gardens established alongside furrows lie outside the law – yet they are also wedged in the overlap of two traditions. Once governs fields – fields of such a size they must be ploughed and can only be allocated by the chief. The other covers izifo – the little patches that women make, here and there, hoeing for themselves without need of the chief's permission.

The establishment of the furrows – and the furrow co-ops – really called for new legislation. But who were the lawmakers to make the new laws? The KwaZulu authorities made it clear they had no power to initiate anything until formalities with the Pretoria government had been completed. So the furrow projects have operated with the blessing of the chiefs, and with a set of rules dependent on goodwill.

THE FUTURE OF THE SMALL FARMERS TRUST

Until the drought comes to an end – or new irrigation schemes become operative, the Co-ops will remain unproductive.

Once water becomes available for gardens, however, CAP expects the co-ops to expand, with the addition of the many people who have become workers in drought relief projects.

Clearly CAP must not again involve itself in handling credit. We were unable to control the system when we had educated staff – with our existing uneducated staff it would be impossible to offer loans on any goods other than wire, which can be repossessed. This means that in future seeds, tools etc. must either be offered for cash – or as grants.

There is a case for initial grants of seed, bonemeal and manure A psychological booster to heave new members over the barrier of their own doubts. Very few of the Small Farmers Trust members had had gardens before CAP arrived. They were – and are – ignorant and pathetically short of confidence in their own ability to produce anything. Inexperience is one reason people choose to remain as observers only – fear of debt is another. Time and again CAP's directors have found people saying: "I don't want a garden" when they really mean "I have no money and I'm afraid of debt."

In the past two months 64 women have taken up irrigated plots on Mdukatshani itself. 45% of these women have tried gardening before (as members of the Umhlumba and Mashunka Co-ops) but because of their past failure, chiefly due to the drought, when asked if they had had a garden before, they all replied: "No".

CAP is treating all the new gardeners as beginners without experience. They are an interesting group in one respect – their average age is cooler to 30 than the 50 years of the other co-ops. They are young married women who were only girls when their families were forced off white farms – and because of the removals they lost touch with the Zulu arable tradition. Because this is the first time the majority have planted a seed in the soil they are very unsure of themselves.

Initially the women have been supplied with seed – but they have been told next season they will be expected to provide the seed they have gathered from this season's crops. "This will, among other things, ensure the gradual developments of strains suitable to the area). Cap has also distributed bonemeal fertilizer (obtained from the stocks of bones swooped for mealiameal as drought relief assistance) as well as manure supplied by African cattle owners paying off their grazing debts.

The Mdukatshani gardens are an emergency response to the drought – when times improve we hope the gardeners will return to areas closer to their homes. Meanwhile because CAP owns the land, provided the seed and fertilizer as well as perimeter fencing – CAP has the right to insist on proper conservation measures – or else. The new plots provide an ideal training ground for SFT members, and CAP believed the lessons learned in this new project will provide guidelines for future developments.

IS R 350 SUFFICIENT TO ESTABLISH A SMALL FARMER?

NO –it never was sufficient to do more than help a family ease its poverty by growing some of its food.

The problem involved in setting up an African family farming in a tribal area were explored during investigations at the Henderson Research Station, Zimbabwe, between 1960 and 1971. The Research Station set aside 34,8 hectares (the average area available to Tribal Trust Land families in 1961) and began work to show what an African family might achieve through mixed farming on this plot.

Five years – and more than 7 000 dollars later – the experimental farm produced its first profit – 14 dollars! During the first four years the mean annual loss was 876 dollars. In the following three years the mean annual profit was 14 dollars. Only in the last two years did the

mean profit jump to 551 dollars. (Investigations into Systems of Farming Suitable for Tribal Trust Land- Rhodesian Journal of Agriculture. Vol 70 (1)

CAP never had sufficient funds to offer the maximum loan of R 350 to the members of the Small Farmers Trust. Most members set their own limits to the burden of debt they were willing to accept – which seemed to be about R 70.

With the expected influx of new members to the co-ops the 1977 target of R 350 per member is less realistic than ever.

At present the SFT has R 5 051 in the bank. Assuming CAP can soon recover the R 3 859 due on meal, tools, and seed (which is unlikely) – that would bring the resources of the Trust to only R 8 910. If the activities of the Trust are to expand, further fundraising will be necessary.

Ideally the Small Farmers Trust should exist to advance loans to establish viable farming units. For the foreseeable future, however, it cannot be expected to do more than “help a little.”

Neil Alcock and Creina Bond
CHURCH AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS

MSUSAMPI SMALL FARMERS CO-OP

This was the first of the co-ops. It is the community closed to Mdukatshani – on the opposite bank of the Tugela. There are 65 families in the community – 53 of them members of the SFT.

55% of the members attended the debt meeting.

Of those who attended

90% planted gardens last summer

76% reaped some vegetables in spring before the heat set in

62% owned stock (on average 2 cattle and 4 goats each)

45% were families removed from white farms in the 1960's and were therefore landless until the Co-op gardens were established on waste land.

Before they were removed from the farms these families owned an average of 31 cattle and 19 goats each. They no longer own any animals.

56% were working on a drought relief scheme.

Meal, tools, seed debt: R 1 066,40 Wire debt: R 1 725,94 Total R 2 792,34

43 members owe an average R 24,80 for meal, tools, and seed

27 members owe an average R 63,92 for wire.

NOMOYA SMALL FARMERS CO-OP

This was the second co-op formed, another small valley community 25 km away by road – or 2 km by river crossing.

Unlike Msusampi, the limits of Nomoya are not easy to define, and it is therefore difficult to estimate what proportion of the community is involved in the co-op.

There are 31 members of the Nomoya co-op, 83% of whom attended the debt meeting.

Of those who attended:

88% planted their gardens last summer

Nobody reaped any crop at all.

23% were stockowners (on average 2 cattle and 3 goats each)

88% were families removed from white farms in the 1960's, and were therefore landless until the co-op was established, developing waste ground.

Before the removals these families owned an average 12 cattle and 12 goats each. 13% of the removed families have acquired a few goats in the past two years. They had to give up all their stock at the time of the removals.

92% are working on drought relief schemes.

Members reported that 22% of their total cattle had died in the drought while a further 30% had been stolen by thieves.

They reported the loss of 87% of their goats to stock thieves.

Meal, tools, seed debt: R 600,60 Wire debt: R 1 192,04 Total: 1 792,64

21 members owe an average R 28,60 each for meal tools and seed
24 members owe an average R 49,66 each for wire.

Wire valued at R 88,00 was stolen during the 1979 war in this area and CAP has borne the loss.

SAHLUMBE SMALL FARMERS' CO-OP

This community adjoins the Nomoya valley – also lacking clearly defined limits.
It was the third co-op established – irrigated by a mountain stream which disappeared during the drought. It is about 25 km by road from Mdukatshani.

50% of the 30 members attended the debt meeting. 7% had died, 9% were seriously ill in hospital.

Of those who attended

73% planted gardens last year

Nobody reaped any crop at all

Nobody owned stock

100% were families removed from white farms in the 1960's and resettled in crowded conditions at Sahlumbe. Before they were removed from the farms these families owned an average of 9 cattle and 6 goats each.

60% worked on drought relief schemes.

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Total meal, tool, seed debt: R 599.33 | Wire debt: R 2 500,10 | Total: R 3 099,45 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|

23 members owe an average of R 26,05 each for meal, tools and seed

26 members owe an average of R96, 16 each for wire

MHLUMBA AND NHLALAKAHLE CO-OP

Mhlumba and Nhlalakahle are two communities separated by a road and veld. They were combined because they lie in the same general direction – about 25 km south of Mdukatshani in a grassy highveld region very different from the low valleys of the other co-ops. While Mhlumba suffered from last summer's drought – Nhlalakahle reported a fair season.

There are 36 members, 67% of whom attended the debt meetings.

Of those who attended:

79% planted gardens last summer

42% produced crops

50% owned stock (an average 2 cattle and 4 goats each)

12% were families removed from white farms.

Members reported the drought had killed 57% of their cattle.

13% of their goats

In addition 3% of their goats were traded for meal/meal at the store, while thieves had taken 31% of the total goat flocks. (In other words drought, barter and theft had depleted goat numbers by 47%)

68% of the MHLUMBA members worked on a CAP drought relief scheme. There was no drought relief project at Nhlalakahle.

Total meal, tools, seed debt: R 348,07 Total wire debt: R 2 302,18
Overall total debt: R 2 650,25

26 members owe an average R 13,38 for meal, tools seed
33 members owe an average R 69,76 each for wire

MDUKATSHANI CO-OP

This was a convenient name for individuals who acquired help from CAP but lived scattered across a wide area, far from community projects. Some residents on Mdukatshani were included. Two of the listed 17 members are dead, and 3 have left the district.

Meal, tool, seed debt: R 768,46 Wire debt: R 650,83 Total debt: 1 420,

Average debt per member for meal, tools, seed: R 45.26
Wire R 38,28

MASHUNKA CO-OP

18 members share a meal debt of R 476,00 – on average R 26,44 each.

There is no wire debt at Mashunka – reflecting the unsuitability of this area for irrigated gardens. Mashunka is an area of rocky kopjes and gullies adjoining the eastern boundary of Mdukatshani. All members of his co-op were removed from white farms in the 1960's most of them from Mdukatshani itself.

Because of the lack of irrigable ground – CAP offered a corner of Mdukatshani as a communal garden area, supervised by Jeremiah Mbatha until he died last October. Since then, without his initiative and constant surveillance against goats, the gardens have died away. When CAP opened up a new area on Mdukatshani in May 30 Mashunka woman took up plots. The new gardens mean a two kilometres walk from their homes.

The Mashunka Co-op was not censused as most of its 54 members were up to date with their loan repayments.... And receiving accounts was the spur to attendance at meetings. Mashunka holds the record for debt repayment - R 1 901,10 – or 80% of the local loans advanced.

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CHURCH AGRICULTURAL PROJECTS

QUARTERLY REPORT – September, October, November.

How has the drought hit Msinga families?

How have recently started a s-l-o-w census of all the local people involved in CAP projects. Of the first 291 questioned – 84% were stockowner before the drought, while only 39% still own stock today.

In the past five years these people lost 80% of their cattle, 62% of their goats, 95% of their sheep.

Water for Sale

At Sinyameni you buy your water at Malembe's store – or steal it from the white man's dam. Distance dictates your choice. For many months now the Sinyameni housewives have done their thieving at 2 a.m. after posting sentries along the fenceline that divides KwaZulu from white land. While October storms brought temporary relief to many parts of Msinga, leaving puddles on the roadsides, springs and streams remain dry.

Rainfall spring 1982

| | |
|-----------|--------|
| September | 10 mm |
| October | 106 mm |
| November | 37 mm |
| Total | 153 mm |

(By comparison rainfall spring 1981 was)

| | |
|-----------|----------|
| September | 33 mm |
| October | 38,5 mm |
| November | 114 mm |
| Total | 185,5 mm |

MDUKATSHANI COMMUNAL GARDENS

There are now 91 gardeners at work among the rocks and aloes and thorn trees. To their surprise and delight... their veges are growing!

Cabbages, spinach, beans, tomatoes, onions, mealies and pumpkins have already been reaped.

Large quantities of manure continue to come from Nkosana Xulu's cattle kraal (in payment for his grazing fees!) and the manure is mixed with CAP's homeground bonemeal to provide the gardens with their P N K requirements. Tuesday is lecture day for the gardeners.

BUHAYIYA

The October storms raised the level of the Tugela to cover the Buhayiya weir, preventing work for several weeks. Now that the river is back at its winter-low, the Buhayiya women and children are back too, rolling rocks down the mountainside to raise the level of the weir to its final height.

(41 people earned 45 bags of mealies)

KWADIMBI

Well, it has happened. The first water has trickled out of the pipeline into Dimbi's massive home made stone-and-cement-lined-dam. One of the October storms, however, lodged a stone in the pipeline so the trickle has remained a trickle while the people of Dimbi wage war on that stone. It's a simple job for somebody with experience - and we are not helping them so that they gain the experience. The water that squeezes past the obstruction may not be sufficient to fill the dam, but it has watered the gardens on the hillside – and put the community at loggerheads. A year ago the hillside appeared ownerless, without a fence or barricade. Suddenly there are thornbrush enclosures staking out private territory. Two meetings have been held to “allocate gardens” but although the induna was present to give official sanction to an unwanted gully as a communal area – the quarrelling goes on. (48 people earned 48 bags of maize a month)

MSELENI – Not still busy on that tunnel?

The tunnel through the landslide area is almost complete. Getting the drums railed from Durban has been one problem. Getting the old men and women as far as the site is another. A year ago there were 300 people busy on different sections of the 16 km canal. Now there are only 60 who live close enough to the landslide area to walk there daily. And “close” means a two-hour walk around the mountain before they start work.

The October rains emphasized the need for the tunnel. Torrents of rain on the denuded mountain dumped rubble and huge rocks in the canal.

(About 80 people earned 80 bags of mealies a month).

MNQAMKANTABA – Cheering or sneering?

The ladies of Mmqamkantaba deserve to gloat a bit. They're a rebel group who turned down the opportunity of gardens at Mdukatshani. They wanted gardens at home, thanks; they would go on with their work hollowing a dam out of a withered vle. So the money for mealies was finished? So what. They didn't need “pay” as much as they needed a dam.

When the October rains fell, that hollow became a dam and the rebels dipped into Nkosana's inexhaustible cattle kraal for manure. Each woman loaded a bucketful on her head and walked two kilometres to the dam, and back again for the next load. CAP's big lorry took a day off to turn the little piles into big heaps, and the 30 dam makers are planting at last.

GETTING TO KNOW WATER

“I know so much about water now,” sighed Michael Mabaso, “but what I know is nothing.” Michael has been in charge of the Msusampi project described in our last report. The scheme is simple – but water isn't. CAP's technical advisor could put things right for Michael, but he won't. Experience is what Mabaso lacks, so experience is what Mabaso is getting. Day after day his two teams (one from Mdukatshani- one from Nomoya-Msusampi) struggle to get

water flowing all the way from the waterfall through their pipes, getting to know the vagaries of water blocking air – and air blocking water. Each time they rejoice at the water gushing forward...another airlock slows it to a trickle.

(57 people earned 32 bags a month)

HULLO FISH, I'M HOME...

Sang Sizani Mbatha as she hoped and danced along the wall of the fish dams. “Hullo river, hullo chickens, hullo ducks...” Sizani had been released from jail after 86 of her 90 days in detention. Sizani and another local girl, Xwalisile Ngqulunga, were detained on August 13 and were released only after the Legal Resources Centre lodged an appeal in the Supreme Court for access to the girls. This was just one of the many cases which increasingly involve CAP staff in legal work. The past quarter has brought us a steady stream of people complaining of police torture, illegal arrest, contraventions of the Pound Ordinance, assault etc.

OPENING THOSE ROADS

October saw a visit from advocates Pitman and Macmillan to take a look at the contentious locked roads. They have since decided before resorting to a Supreme Court action they will attempt to settle matters through the Natal Roads Board, who are arranging a temporary opening and beaconing of the several roads pending a hearing.

IF YOU DON'T SHOT THEM...

You can always try the tribal court. CAP continues to believe that shooting trespassing stock – or their owners – is no longterm solution to life on the border. However the alternative is certainly slow – and so far, not very successful.

After numerous attempts to handle the problems of trespassing cattle and goats by negotiations with the owners, CAP had to lodge complaints with both the Mthembu and Mchunu tribal courts.

The first case was heard by Chief Induna Mxongo of the Mtembus – who ordered all goat owners at Mashunka, adjoining Mdukatshani, to pay a fine of R40 per animal, the proceeds to be shared equally between CAP and the tribal authority.

Half have paid promptly – half have promised to pay at Christmas. Only a handful have made any attempt to control their goats. The Chief Induna has now proposed that all trespassing goats be sent to the chief's pound – with a chief's escort to prevent hijacking along the way.

The Mchunu court hearing which involved the owners of the 384 cattle we arrested on the farm in August, resulted in an out-of-court settlement after the chief had heard evidence and called for further witnesses. The chief himself announced the settlement to a tribal meeting – urging all cattle owners to pull their weight and repay their huge debt to CAP by working for the grazing they had taken illegally for so long. Despite promises of intent to work, however, CAP has seen nothing more of the accused. The matter is back in the tribal court.

BACK AT THE RANCH....

CAP staff were again busy rounding up trespassing cattle – this time on a different section of the farm, involving a different group of cattle owners. More than 100 cattle had been collected when once again the owners used force to reclaim their animals. This case is being tried by the local induna. He is experiencing certain difficulties the accused never arrive to face the charge.

WHY ARE THEY WEARING THOSE FUNNY DRESSES?

Asked our beadworkers when they saw the colour photographs of Yves St Laurent's models showing off our beadwork in Paris. In October we completed a second, larger order for YSL –this time for his summer ready-to-wear collection. We have also just completed a special commission for Pascual, a member of the SA haute couture group who is taking a collection to Spain.

In December our beadworkers will be appearing on TV 2 and TV 3 – and on Italian TV!

CAP MEN MURDERED

Bathini Mkhonza, a CAP Trustee nominee, died suddenly after apparently being poisoned. Mkhonza was one of the district's most colourful characters. Although he held no official position, his voice was the voice of the black in and around Weenen. His last public action was to warn the Weenen Magistrate of the consequences of farmers burning squatters homes. Then he led a deputation to Ulundi to reprimand the KwaZulu government for not coming to the rescue of farm labourers.

Mkhonza had so much fight in him it was hard to believe he was in his seventies.

Nomateyela Sibisi was secretary of the Mseleni drought project, where men are few and far between, and young men a miracle. Sibisi was our miracle. Although his only learning had been acquired on a city pavement under a lamplight, he was scribe for the Sahlumbe area. Arriving home one night to find a gang of youths had abducted his halfwit daughter, he set off to rescue her and was shot dead by her kidnappers.

Vaseline Mpungose was shot dead while he slept in his hut at Mtateni.

A cripple in his seventies, he had been associated with CAP for several years. His death is one of several that mark the escalation of another Msinga war.

ASSESSING CAP

In November Bishop Ken Hallowes spent a few days at Mdukatshani doing an assessment of CAP's work for Diakonia. Being assessed is worse than writing an exam with toothache, but our gentle assessor made the experience as painless as possible.

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November 1982

CAP'S LEGAL AID WORK

Unbudgeted, unplanned, unnecessary?

Until 1980 CAP did very little legal aid work, apart from forwarding boundary applications for local old folk to the authorities.

In 1980 increasing tension between whites and blacks on the KwaZulu boundary began to intrude on CAP's affairs (See CAP report on "Border Conflict, March 1980"). Because of the drought – and because of a partially unfenced boundary – African cattle were straying onto white farms, being arrested, impounded, and the owners charged exorbitant trespass fees.

In one four month period Mr. L. Agliotti, CAP's nextdoor neighbour, received R 7392,00 in trespass fees from Africans. Mr. Agliotti had no cattle of his own on the farm at the time.

"In one or two cases farmers maybe making more from impounding cattle than by farming, "Joseph le Roux, chairman of the Weenen Farmers Association admitted to The Sunday Times. The Weenen Pound records showed that turnover had increased from R 2 800,00 in 1978-79, to R 35 000,00 in the next 12 months.

Because CAP – and CAP's legal advisors – believed that the Pound Ordinance was being contravened, several test cases were taken up. By February 1981 CAP had spent an unbudgeted R 6074,00 on loan (most of this being for Pound fees), and R 3 369,00 had been repaid.

Border incidents involved much more than the impounding of cattle, however. CAP found itself handling a large number of allegations of assault. As a result of CAP's intervention the Attorney General had several cases re-opened, and white farmers were brought to court to face charges of attempted murder and assault. One farmer subsequently paid out R 1 200,00 in damages following civil claims initiated by CAP.

CAP made numerous approaches to various authorities about the conditions at the Weenen Pound, but judged overall our actions were expensive and ineffectual. Two test cases had to be abandoned when the complainants died just before the hearing. Another was dropped because CAP's directors ruled against further expenditure on legal aid. Some cases are still pending. Press publicity produced headlines – and bad tempers at Weenen – but no real change.

We have just been informed, however, that the Natal Provincial Council is to investigate the Pound, and we have been asked to prepare a memorandum as evidence.

Meanwhile the drought has continued – and almost weekly CAP is asked to take up the cases of African stockowners who are having their goats and cattle illegally shot by white farmers.

OPEN GATES

We CAP arrived at Mdukatshani in 1975 there was no white farmers living on the surrounding 25 farms. There never had been. We drove 20 km across country without encountering a fence.

In 1979, however, new landowners took over some of the empty, idle farms and began to erect fences – and as the new fences went up they closed off some of Msinga's highways, preventing Africans from reaching stores and, more important, watering points for their cattle.

In the summer of 1979, with the effect of the drought beginning to hit KwaZulu, leaders of the Mtembu and Mchunu tribes approached CAP for helping in getting traditional roads re-opened.

CAP won the first hearing – at a cost of R 8 000. Our legal advisors assumed that winning the first case would persuade the farmers concerned to open the remaining roads. Instead we have had a slow year of further negotiation – with a Road Board hearing, a Supreme Court hearing, talk, talk, talk and now another Road Board hearing on the way.

LETTERS TO THE MINISTER

CAP has sent two letters to the Minister of Police – the first asking for an investigation into the allegations of the KwaDimbi community that SAP on a dagga raid had stolen personal possessions from Dimbi kraals, and had destroyed irrigation pipes provided by CAP.

The second letter has alleged police corruption, maltreatment of prisoners, and negligence in investigating local cases, including two shootings on Mdukatshani.

These allegations have already had one result – two policemen at Tugela Ferry are being charged with assaulting a prisoner.

SUCCESS BREEDS...

A steady stream of litigants

Because of its small successes CAP today finds itself acting as a complaints office for a very large district. It is interesting that some Africans have been referred to us by local farmers who are distressed at some injustice but are afraid of the social consequences of tackling it themselves.

As a result of the many appeals for legal help two members of CAP's staff are now almost permanently busy on legal aid. Because of the rugged nature of Msinga, and the lack of roads and telephone, gathering witnesses to make sworn affidavits can involve days of journeying on foot or by vehicle (CAP's vehicles cover about 1 500 km a month on legal aid work). CAP must often supply transport to town or city, as well as food and accommodation.

THE LEGAL RESOURCES CENTRE

Was set up late in 1981 and has provided free legal assistance for many of our cases, while winning some notable victories (pension awards, the refund of trespass fees, the release of two girls from 90 days detention). The staffs at the Centre are always willing to listen to our problems and to offer advice. Cap has only one complaint – the Centre is so busy with work from all over Natal that it cannot spend its time exclusively on Weenen-Msinga cases!

WHAT LEGAL AID IS COSTING CAP

| <u>1980-81</u> | | <u>1981-82</u> | <u>First half 1982-83</u> |
|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Income | ^R 3 369,26 | ^R 8 896,95 | ^R 5 678,50 |
| Expenditure | R 6 073,67 | 13 696,96 | 9 821,82 + |

^Part of the income is made up of loans repaid, damages claims temporarily banked with CAP etc.

+Part of the cost of a new vehicle is included in the expenditure for 1982-83.

SOURCES OF INCOME

+ The African Development Trust contributed R 3 000 towards the cost of the initial roads dispute costs of R 8 000.

+ OXFAM agreed to let CAP transfer an amount of R 2165 from the defunct Barefoot Centres fund to offset legal aid costs.

+ OXFAM has recently given a further grant of R 4 000 towards legal costs.

+ N.L. Alcock has made a loan of R 3 837 towards Pound fee loans.

+ CAP has made use of smaller donations and general funds to meet expenses.

BUDGET FOR LEGAL AID

As legal aid appears to have become a permanent part of CAP's work, the following is a proposed budget for the next six months:

| | |
|-----------|--------------------------------|
| Wages | R 800,00 |
| Materials | 300,00 |
| Transport | 2 000,00 |
| Telephone | 1 400,00 |
| Loans | <u>1 000,00 (for bail etc)</u> |
| | <u>R 5 500,00</u> |

IS IT NECESSARY?

There have been a few cases where CAP has had to become involved to protect its own interests (as in the road dispute last year). In the majority of cases, however, CAP can gain nothing from involvement except the chance to have wrongs righted. Is this sufficient reason for continuing legal aid?

CAP'S LEGAL AID CASE BOOK for 1982

The following list does not include CAP's allegations of police corruption.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Mrs Dadeni Dumakude | alleges being punched, kicked and throttled by police while in 90 days detention as a possible witness. |
| Regina Dumakude | ask for maintenance for child allegedly fathered by white farmer |
| Johannes Dumakude and Odin Khoza | detained for 90 days as possible witnesses |
| Mzonwa Mabaso and brother | shot in back and leg by a white farmer |
| Nonjwa Majola | knocked down by a car while on his way to the Pound to release cattle. He had R 400 in his pocket which had disappeared when he recovered consciousness in hospital |
| Mhlalagudewa Majola | alleges white farmer shot three goats dead and wounded one. |
| Mpikelwa Madondo and Vembephi Madondo | allege farmer knocked down their homes with a tractor, and refused to let them take away their corrugated iron roofing. The farmer had their cattle impounded, the veterinary department refused to issues a permit for their release, and so they lost their stock. |
| Mashinga Mbanjwa | alleges farmer hit him in the face with a knobkeirie. He had to be treated in hospital for severe facial injuries. |
| Sakhile Mavundla | alleges assault by farmer |
| Mbanganeni Mbatha | alleges assaulted by white farmer while on public footpath. Mbatha had injuries stitched at hospital. |
| Mzwendaba Mbatha | charged with a murder for which he claims an alibi |
| MaShezi Mbatha | alleges farmer used his tractor to knock down five huts. |
| Sizani Mbatha | detained under 90-day law as a possible witness. |
| Vuzimuza Mbatha | 3 cattle impounded by white farmer who claimed R 160 damages. On representations by Legal Resource Centre the farmer repaid the amount. |
| Mbekisana Mncube | alleges he had to be stitched after assault by farmer |
| Sibusiso Mkwanyana | alleges assault by farmer. Treated for skull lacerations. |
| Njevana Mcunu | 14cattle impounded for trespassing on the main road. After two weeks of being pushed from one department to another to obtain the necessary permits Pound fees |

| | |
|--|---|
| | amounted to R 842. |
| Masibisi Mpikela | 3 animals died. The State is being sued for a refund on Pound fees. alleges farmer knocked down family's iron house and forbade them to salvage the iron. |
| Zondele Mkhize, Nomusa Mkhize Masakayedwa Mcunu | allege they were fired at by white farmer while they were collecting water at his dam. Arrested and fined R 5 for trespass. They were on a disputed public thoroughfare at the time after being told that lawyers had obtained a promise from the farmer that pending negotiations the people could have access to water. |
| Esther Mtshali | claiming maintenance for child born after alleged rape by white farmer |
| Nomazwi Mvelase | alleges police assault while being questioned as a witness. Suffered eye and stomach injuries resulting in hospitalization. |
| Sulwayiphi Mvelase | alleges police assault while in detention which has resulted in him losing the use of one hand. |
| Dozo Mvelase | charged with murder for which he claims an alibi. |
| Mhlongonya Mvelase | alleges assaulted by farmer because he would not sell his beast. |
| Shembe Mbele | murdered at his home on Mdukatshani in July. No police investigation for three months until CAP lodged complaints. |
| Dosotho Mbele | alleges assaulted by police while in detention. |
| Nokwazi Nala | alleges farmer used tractor and chain to destroy family's three houses. |
| Pumucwadi Ngidi | claiming maintenance for child she alleges was fathered by white farmer. |
| Scotsman Ndlovu | 86 year old alleges assault by white farmer – dragged by nose, kicked, beaten – had to be treated for injuries. |
| Vivian Ndlovu | alleges when he asked for his wages was assaulted by three white men, loaded in a car, dumped in the veld, collected again and taken to the police to be charged for trespass. The police took Ndlovu to a doctor for treatment. |
| Bosoma Ndlovu | alleges thrashed with a whip by farmer. |
| Kate Ngubane | 90 days detention as witness |
| Napho Ngubane | alleges police assault while detained |
| Mashaya Ngulungu | alleges farmer used tractor and chain to destroy family home |

| | |
|---|--|
| Xwalisile Ngulungu Mate Malembe, Ngite Mkhize, Ndokusakhe Malembe, Sindleblawe Malembe, Roy Ximba, Msuxine Manyoni | 90 days detention as witness alleges that Tugela ferry police handed the boys their guns at a part “because we are too drunk t look after them” – subsequently arresting the boys for theft of the guns. |
| Makovana Qomo | 14-year-old died in mysterious circumstances on local farm. The farmer gave the family notice to leave the farm immediately, without letting them dig the grave. |
| Ngewu Sithole | alleges farmer knocked down her 5 huts, breaking all possession inside. |
| Kukumba Shezi | bought a cow from a white farmer. When Shezi went to take possession he was shot in the leg, then handed to the police. The Magistrate who heard his “case” ordered the man be discharged and that the farmer refund the money. Instead Shezi was “refunded” an old and sick cow which died on the road home. |
| Kolombo Zungu Tembinkosi Zungu | alleges illegal impounding of stock alleges assaulted by three whites when he asked for his wages. Lost two teeth and sustained head injuries. |
| Matetele Zungu Nombalelo Zungu Sukhephi Zungu Mfinyaniswe Zwane | alleges abduction by a white man alleges white farmer assaulted her alleges assault by white farmer alleges farmer put dogs onto him on a public road. Treated for injuries |

In addition to the above, CAP handles pension claims, applications for disability grants. CAP has employed lawyers to act in several cases where local Africans have been paid for livestock with cheques that bounced.

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QUARTERLY REPORT –
December, January, February 1982-1983

Thirty-two men were killed in fighting between the Ndlela and Mhlangana people over the Christmas period. Much of the action occurred on the main road between Mdukatshani and Tugela Ferry, making access hazardous at times. Mike Mabaso, our manager, was held up by four armed men on one journey, but after searching him and the vehicle they let him go. CAP was called in by police to identify unclaimed corpses – while relatives of the dead begged us, as a neutral, to collect the bodies accumulating at the mortuary as no hired vehicles were willing to risk the dangers of the road. Eventually CAP persuaded the authorities to break a rule and allow the mortuary van to take the bodies home for burial.

Mdukatshani itself has been hit by a crime wave. Mrs. Elijah Mhlongo, wife of our stockman, her three-year-old daughter and Flat Mchunu, a 12-year-old herdboyc, were badly beaten up early one morning by two men claiming to be police. After ransacking the Mhlongo's home, the two made off with R20 – all they could find. Mrs. Mhlongo and Flat suffered several weeks of deafness following blows to their ears.

Soon afterwards the homes of Natty Duma and Bathulise Madondo were broken into (over a weekend when both women were away), and all their belongings, including their beds, were taken. A few nights later an attempt was made to break into the guesthouse – but on this occasion we were able to find the getaway vehicle before the getaway – let down the tyres and called the police, who towed away the bakkie, confirming it was stolen. It was one of four stolen vehicles found on or near the farm. Two were abandoned – one was found parked, out of fuel, and the driver was subsequently arrested.

LEGAL AID WORK

Following a formal letter to complaint to the Minister of Police about certain police activities in our district, the Greytown SAP spent a day interviewing some of the complainants. CAP's chairman, Mr. Petrus Majozi, was twice detained for questioning in connection with confidential information sent to the Minister. CAP has complained to the Chief of Police, Natal, about these attempts to get Majozi to retract statements he has made – and admit to statements he has not made.

The Legal Resources Centre used the case of the detention of Sizani Mbatha and Xwalisile Ngqulunga to win a Supreme Court ruling that 90-day detainees under Proclamation 103 have the right of access to lawyers.

CAP has been successful in obtaining an acquittal for Showliphi Mvelase, framed on three charges of attempted murder. The magistrate dismissed the case without waiting to hear the evidence of all the State witnesses.

At the end of January the Road Board sat to hear the long-delayed

appeal for the re-opening of three public thoroughfares on local white farms. Because the Board could not decide whether or not it had jurisdiction over the KwaZulu side of the boundary fence, the case was again postponed. It now seems destined for the Supreme Court.

At the end of February a series of incidents involving the communities adjacent to Mdukatshani resulted in charge of theft and assault being laid against members of the visiting SAP Brixton Hurder and Robbery Squad.

ON THE FARMING SIDE...

Drought and drought relief are described in a separate report.

On New Year's Day a hailstorm wiped out fine crops of tomatoes, maize, pumpkins, beans, kale etc in the irrigated gardens. The storm destroyed the Mchunu Courthouse – and took one of our fishdams and two incomplete aquaducts on the Mseleni Canal.

The Tugela River has been so low it is easily waded – and for the first time the local ferryboat took not one fare over the Christmas period (usually our Mdukatshani ferrymen earns an ox from his 10 cents fee for a crossing.) on the top farm intense heat caused sheets of ironstone to heave up and explode, like mini-volcanos, flinging broken slabs some distance – and providing the locals with a new showpiece!

LIVESTOCK

At the end of February CAP gave notice to all stockowners on the farm so that fodder reserves could be built up for winter. We are still having trouble with illegal stock on the farm – and in yet another round up succeeded for the first time in getting 15 cattle as far as the chief's pound. Our control of grazing fees shows some improvement. During 1982 83 64% of stockowners paid or worked for grazing, compared to 45% the previous year.

BUILDING

A fireproof bunker for storing fuel has been completed

BEADS

Despite the recession the demand for our beadwork continues. Although the post-Christmas period is usually a quiet one, we had more orders than we could handle. During the past year local women earned more than R 22 000 for their handcrafts.

CHOLERA has once again hit the valley and CAP's vehicles have had to act as ambulances at all hours of day and night, rushing victims to hospital.

AGM CAP's period of constitutional change was finalized at our AGM on February 26th. New directors and Trustees were confirmed as well as our official new name, CAP Farms.

We were sad to say goodbye to Duchesne Grice, who has retired as a director after more than 10 years. Duchesne has seen us through some difficult and often painful periods with his friendship, and we have relied on him entirely for all the legalities and formalities connected with running a company – tasks we must now learn to tackle for ourselves.

We know he will enjoy his “retirement” from our official affairs – but have no intention of letting him resign his friendship.

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JANUARY 1983:
A CASE OF WHO COOKED THE CABBAGE

“I would like to know how I was there.”

“I know nothing about this business.”

“I am very surprised because I was not there. Who said I was there?”

The three accused sit on the cement floor of the Mchunu Courthouse. Chief Simakade Mchunu sits at a table on a dais, slowly entering the pleas of not guilty. There were more than 100 people rioting that Saturday, seizing their cattle by force. Six names were handed to the chief. Three men have arrived to face the charges – Mshumbu Mchunu, Mthethwa Mabaso, Mzolo Nene.

“Do you know this man Alcock we call Magokogo?” asks the chief.

“I do not know him. This is the first time I have seen him,” says Nene.

“And Mhlongo?” asks the chief. Do you know Mhlongo? There he is.”

“Like Magokogo – I have never seen him.”

“Never seen me!” There’s a shout of wrath from Elijah Mhlongo. He begins to rise from his seat against the wall, huge arm wagging. “Where did you get money when you begged for money... “Mhlongo stops perfunctorily “I beg leave of the court to talk to him... When you were chased off the farms by the Dutch, who took you to Magokogo to borrow money to transport your belongings?” Nene gazes mutely at the floor while Mhlongo’s rage clangs the iron roof of the courthouse.

Elliot Nene, the bespectacled Tribal Secretary, puts his head on his arms, giggling. He covers his face with a hankie to hide his laughter. At last the furious turbulence of Mhlongo subsides.

“Yes, perhaps I did once see Mhlongo,” the accused man admits. “He has now mentioned something to make me remember I did once have contact with him.” The Tribal Secretary keeps his head down, snuffling with merriment.

Chief Simakade turns to Mchunu, a dapper man with trim beard and greying hair. “Does Magokogo know you?”

“I used to go to him for help when my cattle were impounded at Weenen.”

“In other words – you know him and he knows you?”

“Yes.”

“Was it possible for him to point out somebody who was not you?”

“He probably made a mistake,” agrees Mchunu, nodding. “He saw somebody who was grey like me. He saw a similarity.”

Beyond the courthouse the hills are maimed with heat. Thorntrees are cracked and peeling, the white grass threadbare. Yet the summer has thrown up its annual crop of Bulbine, Msinga’s wild yellow daffodils.

Fat-tailed sheep slump among the flowers, snoozing.

“If I asked you if you knew the chief of the Mchunus, you would say yes,” the chief reproves the defendant. “You would not say you knew a similarity.”

“I admit Magokogo knows me,” Mchunu replies. “But he did not see me at this incident because I was not there.”

The chief continues writing. Two days a week for 38 years he has listened to the heartaches and squabbles of his tribe. Rape, assault, theft, trespass, maintenance... the plaintiffs place R 5 on the chief’s table, then wait their turn to put their case.

“How many cattle have you Mchunu?”

“Ten.”

“Do your cattle go on to Magokogo’s farm?”

“They did long ago. Last year.”

“With or without permission.”

“With permission.”

“Your cattle don’t go anymore?”

“No, the white man said there were to be no cattle. He put up a fence.”

“Is there any way your cattle can stray onto the farm?”

“When I go past I see the fence is intact.”

“And you Nene, how many cattle have you?”

“Eleven.”

The routine questions follow one another, establishing the background to the case. The chief turns his gaze to Mabaso, a man distinguished by a torn earlobe that flaps limply on his shoulder.

“Where were you on the 28th when the cattle were arrested?”

“I was not there.”

“Where were you?” the chief is annoyed. “We have asked several times where you were, not where weren’t.”

“I was at another place.”

“Where was it?”

“I’d gone to build somewhere.”

“Tell us the exact isigodi,” the Tribal Secretary takes over the questioning.

“I was digging a site at Xulu’s.”

“Which Xulu?”

“Mpanga.”

“Did you hear anything about a hold up that day?”

“I heard nothing.”

There is no prosecutor in this court, no lawyer for the defence. Every tribesman who sits around the walls has the right to cross-examine, to argue for or against. Controversies can jam 300 people into to courthouse.

Today’s case is something of a landmark in the tribe’s legal history – a white called to give evidence in a black court. Yet the court is empty. Is the tribe disinterested – or just afraid that anyone who attends will be declaring an interest?

On the rainwater tank quarreling birds drown a question from the bench.

“I ask again,” says the chief. “Have you a witness? Somebody must have cooked for you. Who cooked the cabbage? Can Mrs. Mpanga come and say she cooked the cabbage for you on the 28th?”

What about you, Mchunu and Nene?”

“We were together working, seeing to the cattle on our white man’s farm.”

“That day was the Sabbath. What time did you stop work?”

“The white man says we must knock off at six but we have no watch so we cannot say what time it was.”

“Can I write down you knocked off at six?”

“Yes. We stopped at six.”

“I have a question.” It is induna Matiyane Sibiya, a tall man, handsome despite the loss of one eye. “When you get to this place where you work, does anyone see you arrive?”

“No. It is wild bush.”

“Some days there are women working with us,” adds Nene, “But they don’t work on Saturday. They ask off to do their washing. We are alone on Saturday.”

“People do come onto the farm,” chips in Mchunu,” but they come to steal wood and they hide so we cannot see them to tell our white man.”

“Mmmmmmmmmmm. Mmmmmmmmmmm,” the Tribal Secretary is grinning.

“Don’t trouble yourselves with stories about women. Just say you have no witnesses,” snaps the chief.

“I see the chief wants a witness,” says Nene. “Well he will have a witness.

I have children at home. They know I get back after six. That’s where my witness starts, with my children.”

“Mmmmmmmmmmm. Mmmmmmmmmmm,” repeats the Tribal Secretary loudly. He is still grinning.

“Do you stay together all the time you are working? Don’t you separate?”

Mhlongo probes.

“We would never desert our white man’s cattle,” Mchunu is definite.

“If you have no witnesses, isn’t there a possibility that you were dodging work that day?” the Tribal Secretary enquires. The three accused keep their heads down, concentrating on their boots.

“I think it would be better to say you made a bad mistake and to ask forgiveness,” suggests Sibiya.

“There is something I want to say that is painful,” Chief Simakade speaks thoughtfully. He is a tall, heavy man with a soft face. A devout believer who neither smokes nor drinks, he lives simply, following Zulu tradition.

He is senior chief at Msinga, head of one of the most powerful tribes in Natal, but like many big men is essentially gentle, shrinking from conflict. It would have been easier for him had the case gone to Weenen’s white court. This way he treads on quicksand. He knows the danger and is afraid – yet he has accepted the case.

“What I have to say is painful, the chief repeats. “Magokogo has explained that he knows you well. You agree that he knows you well. You also tell me that this white man has cried for you in the past. He has suffered with you, he has helped you. On a day when he is held up by strangers is it likely he will say: Because I do not know these people I will accuse my

friends? Look at you Mabaso. Nobody who has not seen your torn ear would make up a story about a man in a crowd with a torn ear.”

Because of the heat the chief’s apricot chit is open at the neck, the cuffs unbuttoned too. “The whole case rests on identification. I am going to move the case back to the sixth. On that day you must bring your witnesses and Magokogo must bring theirs. I don’t want the Mchunus to start saying that I am giving a judgment with bias, that blacks are afraid to argue with whites.”

That’s the quicksand. The court maybe empty today, but every word that has been said will be echoed around the tribe. The Mchunus are the judge of their chief. Chief Simakade has risked the quicksand because he still wants friendship with whites, not war. But can he have friendship without betraying his people?

Outside the courthouse we yawn and stretch. The shutters are down on the mud kiosk that sells refreshments. Who guessed it wouldn’t be worth opening up today? There is a beer seller on the road, however, sitting on the verge with an array of plastic bottles. The three accused stop to fortify themselves.

“Goodbye my brothers,” Mhlongo yells cheerfully. “Take a good look so you remember me next time!”

“Bloody fools,” he adds. “They didn’t even prepare their lies.”

The bloody fools agree. Two days later they are at our gate, tired, apprehensive, sheepish.

“I was so drunk I can’t remember anything,” Mchunu admits.

“I don’t know why I joined in. I don’t even own a beast,” says Mabaso.

Nene is too tired to talk. He flops down onto a rock, easing his weary feet. The trio set off before dawn on their 25 kilometres walk to own up.

On the sixth we are all back at the Mchunu Courthouse. An out-of-court settlement must be ratified by the court. The agreement is explained to the chief. There is a fine for every animal caught trespassing, but the fine can be paid in work. If the owners of all the illegal cattle on our farm work together they can build a permanent dam on the river, and earn the right to have access to the water.

“Is that clear to you?” the chief asks the accused. “It is now your job to meet with all those people who accompanied you on the day the cattle were seized. They have not been before the court but they are all criminals.

They are also accused. If they come and do this work the matter will be resolved.”

“We are thankful,” Nene says respectfully. “And we agree with the terms. But we ask that the court will collect all those other people.”

“Au Au Au,” now the chief is laughing. “Leave me out of the matter. It is your job to collect the others. And if you fail, this case will return to court.

A settlement lies a long way from a solution.

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FEBRUARY 1983: SHOOTING THE WIND

The sentry tree is empty. Not a child on guard atop the branches. No bobbing head to give the alarm.

The riverbed is quiet. No barefoot patrols flicking stones at the birds.

This is going to be a walkover. Nobody anywhere.

“Hey!” There’s a fizz of leaves. Four donkeys. And riders.

“What are you doing here?”

“Looking for lost cattle.”

“What are your names?”

A hesitation. “Themba Mchunu.”

Another hesitation. “Fana Zungu.” “Boy Sitole.” “Zwakele Mbatha.”

“Oh yes? You’d better come along with me so I can check your names with somebody who knows your families.”

“Au.” The boys pat their donkeys and begin to follow. Neil hears the hooves behind him as he returns to the hole in the fence.

“Do you know these boys?” he asks the men who are waiting.

Boys? Two donkeys have followed. Four riders have vanished.

“Who owns those donkeys?” Elijah Mhlongo is disgusted. “Nobody owns donkeys until ploughing time. Now they have no owners. They just hang around. The boys grab them for a ride when they come to check to cattle.

Two ownerless donkeys. The round-up is underway.

Neil is stationed at the hole in the fence. The getaway point. The amiable donkeys are not his only captives. More than 80 cattle are standing around the last pool in the Skehenge.

“You’re under arrest,” Neil mutters. Who says there’s going to be trouble on this round-up? This is easy.

Three kilometres away 42 men, women, boys and girls straggle out across the farm in a rough line, calling to each other as they disappear into the blind alleys of the shallow, wooded valley. The bush muffles the shouts, conceals the searchers. For an hour the valley is motionless.

Then gradually cattle and drivers emerge.

GG has delivered his catch and is idling on his horse when he notices some cattle following the fence, making for the gap. Two strangers are trying to slip them off the farm unnoticed. GG gallops to the boundary to head the cattle back. The strange boys run away.

By noon it is over. More than 200 cattle are cornered between the fence and the river, restless and bellowing.

“There are lots more,” says Mkhombeni. “We missed plenty near Mvelase,” says Makhonya. “AT Mathinta we saw another 100,” says Mvinjwa,” and there were so many goats we couldn’t count them.”

Another day. Another day. This is enough for a start.

A tall thin woman pushes through the cattle. “What’s going on here?” she asks. “That little white boy went into KwaZulu and helped himself to our cattle that were lawfully there...” “Lady,” interrupts Mhlongo,” I suppose you’re going to say we drover your cattle onto the farm so we could claim they were trespassing?”

“That’s right,” she says angrily.

Ha Ha Ha.

“Report me to your chief,” Neil suggests. “Tell him I’m so hard up for cattle I’m stealing them from KwaZulu.”

“What would my cattle want from your farm? They get all the grass and water they need in KwaZulu.”

In KwaZulu? Ha Ha Ha. The Mhlangana stream has been dry for months. The government boreholes are sucking air. There’s no water in KwaZulu, and only this last pool on Mdukatshani, dirty now with trampling animals.

“Where are we taking your animals? To the chief’s pound, lady, the chief’s pound.”

The cattle lead the way – through two of our fences. They’re professional intruders, these animals, treading casually where the wire lies flat on the ground, trotting through the gap where the wire has been cut. We count them as they cross the boundary – 284 cattle, two donkeys. And six kilometres to the chief’s kraal if we march in a straight line across unploughed fields.

The alarm has sounded late but it has sounded at last. People are running down the hillside, jumping kraal walls, yelling.

“What is happening!”

“Nobody has the right to touch my cattle!”

“My animals were grazing peacefully at my door!”

“Talk at the chief’s,” Mhlongo shouts at the newcomers. “Well if it’s a lie, tell the chief. The chief will hear your complaints.”

Gusts of women blow in on the column, howling, lamenting.

“My husband will thrash me for losing the cattle.”

“Please, Magokogo, our cow has a calf in the pen at home. Let us take the cow to its calf.”

Buffeted by shrill eddies the cattle move a little faster. Five outriders keep the procession tidy, galloping to head off any beast that tries to swing onto a pathway home. “We can’t talk now,” the horsemen shout to enquirers. “Speak to the chief.”

Another angry squall hits the posse.

“We work for our grazing,” yells a furious matron. “Why do you take our cattle when we work?”

“All of us work,” screams her companion.

“Work! You call that work!” Mhlongo stops in his tracks. He stands on tiptoes, minces, assumes a falsetto. “You come along dressed all swanky and nice and you stand like this so I can see what an attractive woman you are...” He juts a hip, thrusts out his chest. There’s a roar of mirth from the crowd.

A year ago Mdukatshani was grazed by 1018 cattle belonging to 82 African families who agreed to work-for-grazing, building fences, dams, roads.

In fact 56 worked sometimes, 16 paid cash, Nkosana Xulu paid in manure – and nine helped themselves to the grazing free.

“Well if Joseph Sithole’s cattle lick for nothing – why should I work?” the complaints began. Today there are only 17 families left. Today Mdukatshani is host to hundreds of strange cattle.

“Fetch your ticket books,” Neil tells the angry women. “Show them to the chief. The books will say how many cattle you have on the farm and how many days you worked for them.” The men snigger. They know MaDuma. Five days in six months with 22 cattle on the farm. She will hide her book.

The procession keeps marching. Hot words keep flying. This is a protest- meeting-on-the-move.

“You’re just another white setting traps to make money out of widows,” cries an Mchunu dowager. “Didn’t your man Mzolo put a gate in the fence so we could water our cattle at your pool? Didn’t Mhlongo confirm the arrangement?”

“I know, I know,” Neil says it for her. “There must be give-and-take between neighbours. So we give you water – and you take our grazing.

Let’s be clear about that arrangement. Remember there was a key so the gate could be kept locked. When was it ever locked? We fenced the pool.

Who knocked down the fence? Who broke the agreement?” The dowager is silent. Comments zing and snap around her. The anger is down a notch.

“There are always trouble-makers who spoil things for others,” a voice admits.

The cattle have been moving easily across the withered grey frizz of the unploughed lands.

Now the procession slows, for it has reached the outskirts of Gujini with its Millionaire’s Row. The mud villas bear signs of affluence. Car number plates are fixed to the door.

“Barclays Bank – Welkom Hier” proclaim stolen noticeboards from two rooftops. “Abnormal Load” announces the arch on a gate, nailed upside down.

Gujini also displays the signs of drought – thorn branches stuffed into the eaves of the huts, prickly fringes to keep hungry cattle from chewing the thatch. There is scarcely a home here that does not own an ox or goat – and isn’t that what makes a man a millionaire? A fence-creeper too, come to that. Over the past few years most Gujini families have crawled through Agliotti and Naude’s fences to drag out the carcasses of cows and goats.

“Here...” bullets and tell tale skins are stored as carefully as family heirlooms. “Bits of intestines came out through this hole so it must have been a big gun.” Gujini is not a place where whites feel welcome.

Mshumbe Mchunu has a gaggle of huts set back from the main thoroughfare.

There are no signs on his tree, but it is easy to see that right now his premises are The Gujini Pub. A line of girls, faces daubed white, bob and stamp in rhythm. A sangoma keeps time, her beaded wig swinging, ornamental pig bladders quivering on her brow.

The arrested cattle plod past, breaking rank slightly as they move through the trees. We plod behind, and more than 50 followers plod with us, good-natured, resigned. The main road is ten minutes away.

The chief's kraal perhaps another hour.

The teenage horsemen are enjoying themselves, cantering up and down the column, wheeling after strays. The horsemen are the first to notice that something is happening at The Gijini Pub. The dancing has stopped. The dancers are ululating. "Aphi amadoda? The cattle are taken! Where are the men?" Unsteady figures sway at the doorways.

"Our cattle!" bawls a familiar face. It is MaConco Mkhize. In an hour she will be dead. Now she is drunk, but not so drunk she cannot run.

"I am Ngwagwana's wife," she cries as she comes abreast of Neil's horse and grabs a stirrup. "You know Ngwagwana, your friend Ngwagwana. I am to take his cow home now." She moves into the herd, finds the cow, begins to drive it out. Pubkeeper Mchunu is not far behind her.

"Who gave you the right to take my cattle?" he uses his knobkerrie to thrust a path. The column bulges at the edges.

"You can't do that!" shouts GG, following. Mchunu swings at the horse, just missing.

The sangoma is waving her cowtail aloft, edging her cattle through the commotion. Neil edges after her. "Make trouble and I will take you before the chief?" he snaps. With an oath she retreats.

The drivers are lost in the pandemonium. Only the horsemen have some control over what is happening. Out of the corner of his eye Luke Duma sees a man jump a fence behind him.

"Leave the cattle!" Luke cries, trying to manoeuvre his horse.

"Shut your mouth or I'll shut it for you," replies the man. Luke looks down a revolver barrel.

"Shoot!" he says – what else is there to say? But the gun is just a threat. Back it goes inside a briefcase.

Mchunu has made it to the head of the column, scattering the cattle with swipes of his stick. A cheer goes up. Young men run to join him. Mrs. Mkhize is there too, slashing at rumps. The cattle collide with each other as they try to escape, confused by the uproar, the blows raining on them.

"Mhlongo – your gun!" Mhlongo pulls his revolver from its holster, Neil grabs it and canters round to Mchunu.

"There will be a killing with so many drunks around," he warns. "I'm entitled to shoot if you go on stirring trouble." There's a lull. Almost everyone heard that.

"Take no notice," comes a bellow. "Numzaan knows the law. He's frightened to shoot. He'll shoot the wind."

A shot goes off, aimed at the sky. The horse starts. Mchunu ignores it.

Only Robert Morthé is frightened.

"They're killing us!" he clutches his head, yelping.

That is all that Michael Mabaso sees as he drives the combi down towards the melee: the huge figure of Robert leaping out of the dust, shrieking
“They’re killing us!” Michael swings the vehicle, careers across the veld, drives dangerously fast to the chief’s kraal.
“Bad trouble down there,” he mutters.

“Bad trouble,” he repeats sadly as he draws up at the chief’s gate. It is Saturday. He has forgotten it is Saturday – the chief’s Sabbath. A church service is underway in the yard. Heads are bowed. How can he interrupt?

Well isn’t this a matter of urgency, of life and death? Michael crawls on hands and knees around a hut – trying to be invisible and conspicuous at the same time. The priest sees the movement and gets the message. Briefly the service is suspended. White robes flapping the priest joins Michael behind the hut – it is our friend Mshiseni Malembe. He is disturbed at the news. He tiptoes to the chief – tiptoes back again.

“The chief is sending for his induna, Poison Xulu to arrest the cattle and bring them here.

The service is renewed. Completed. Malembe sheds his vestments, jumps in his lorry and speeds towards Gijini. He has had some cattle grazing there. Are they among those arrested?

But the round-up is over. Michael meets our horsemen on the road, minus cattle.

“It was too dangerous. The people wanted to fight. We let the cattle go.

But it doesn’t matter. We have many of the names. Mchunu, Mkhize, Mabaso, the man with the torn earlobe...”

Chief Simakade Mchunu writes down the names.

“My policemen will sent out summonses,” he promises. He shakes his head.

“My people are very difficult. I’m sorry.”

There has always been trouble along the fenceline that divides the black location from the white farms. The first wire was pulled taut in 1897 – and within months it was cut. Within ten years Ed Fitzgerald, Chief Inspector of Native Locations was commenting: “The fence is of course in bad repair in consequence of being cut in so many places, and requires over-hauling from end to end.” Two Native Rangers of Location Fences were appointed in 1907. A European Fence Ranger in 1908.

As often as the fence was propped up, however, it was cut down. Now there are two Theories of Fence Maintenance. Shoot – or negotiate. Our neighbours live by the first theory – we live by the second. Our neighbours have their fences cut – Mdukatshani’s fences are severed too.

If guns, threats, talks have failed – what’s left? Something formidably slow. Justice cannot be extracted with a blunt instrument, it must be unraveled. Today we were driving the cattle to the chief’s pound so that the Mchunus could disentangle the truth among themselves. Justice by the tribe for the tribe.

“... so Truth be in the field,” wrote John Milton. “Let her and Falsehood grapple; whoever knew Truth put to the worse in free and open encounter?”

Tribal law is based on this open encounter. Ever since the Mchunus arrived at Msinga about 150 years ago, disputes have been argued at the chief’s cattle kraal. When a courthouse was built in 1976, the arguments moved indoors, but the old customs still prevail.

Every man has the right to speak at the tribal court – and when every man is judge there's no place to hide an outlaw. The Mchunu have a courthouse – but they have never had a jail.

Had it not been for the drunks at Gujini, the opening rounds of our debate might now be underway at the chief's kraal. Poor Mchunu. As he sobers does he wonder what will happen next? And MaChonco Mkhize, is she wondering too? Her husband Ngwagwana has come to fetch her home. He's a tall dark man with red eyes and skinny legs" from always wearing puttees" say his friends. The Mkhize's are an affectionate pair, seldom out of each other's company. As they start off down the Gujini thoroughfare there are two shots. They die together.

"It is Alcock's bullet," say some of the people at Gujini. "It spun round in the clouds, it circled until it was ready."

Not that they believe the story. They know too much about bullets. And whoever reaped anything by shooting at the wind?

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QUARTERLY REPORT – March, April, May 1983

THE TUGELA IS DRY!

So said an article in THE STAR in May, describing how black taxi drivers ferry water all the way from Johannesburg to Mahlabathini in KwaZulu.

“We urgently need help,” said a Mr. Ephraim Mbatha, appealing for aid. “The Tugela, one of our main sources, is dry.”

Just where it has dried up is something of a mystery. Although the river level is low, there is still plenty of water flowing past Mdukatshani, and plenty getting as far as the sea.

The mystery of the dry Tugela is one of many mysteries surrounding the ultimate destination of drought aid. At Msinga, for example, some water tanker drivers have been charging people for the “free” government water they deliver. The system must be widespread for Radio Bantu has started to broadcast appeals to the blacks NOT to pay this illegal charge.

CAP has appointed its own small commission of inquiry to travel KwaZulu looking into the problems of drought relief.

RAINFALL

Total rainfall for the past three months was 125,5 mm, compared to 65 mm for the same period last year. The showers added a few weeks supply of water to the Mnqamkantaba and Mathinta dams, which were down to a last puddle.

BONES

The May bones queue of 835 people was the longest we have had since we started our swop shop three years ago. Many of the newcomers in the queue had come from places more than 30 kilometres walk away – a sign of the growing hardship at Msinga.

Unfortunately, as all aid organizations are discovering, there is little money available for drought relief this winter. Shortage of funds made us cancel the March collection, and our prospects of continuing to take in bones beyond July seem dim.

For the past year we have been using mealies, rather than mealiemeal, for drought relief – mealies being R7, 80 cheaper per 100 kgs. On average each bone pedlar carries away about 17 kgs – a fifth of the needs of a family of 6 to 8 people.

In practice, however, we find that the regulars in the queue get more than half their monthly requirements by bringing in bones.

The following are the statistics for April-May;

Total people : 1 276
Total bones : 38 567 kilograms
Total mealies : 21 556 “

Children at school : 28,33%
Field owner : 15,4%
Stockowners : 30,15%
Average cattle : 2,2 each. Average goats 3,8 each
Families without fathers: 37,8% (10,35% being war widows)
Fathers sick : 4,4%
Fathers crippled : 7,17%
Fathers with TB : 9,12%
Fathers Mad : 2, 77%
Fathers Blind (no pension): 2,5%
Fathers jailed : 2,03%
Fathers employed : 18,41% (14,26% in town, 4,15% on farms)
Unemployed : 14,01% (a jump from 6% last year)
Old and pensioned : 1,3%

LIVESTOCK AND GRAZING

Because of the drought CAP has been steadily selling off its goats and cattle. The farm has been closed to all grazing since February. Illegal stock on the farm remains a problem, however – although another successful round-up had us driving 40 trespassing cattle to the chief's pound.

IF YOU HAVE ONE FOOT IN A BUCKET OF ICE...

... and one foot in the fire, on average you should be comfortable,” said Tony Swan, expert consultant on small businesses when he came to Mdukatshani in March to advise us on how to make the most of the homecrafts. Although our turnover last year was R45 000 – we don't qualify as a small business in professional terms – we'd need a turnover of R5 million to do that. However, as Tony Swan demonstrated, some principles apply to big, small and teeny-weeny businesses. His recommendations included a higher wage for the bead workers, a more realistic price to our customers (we are too cheap) as well as formalities like budgeting monthly. “Working without a budget is like driving a car with a blacked-out windscreen, steering by looking in the rearview mirror,” said our consultant.

His visit left us, on average, comfortable!

Bead orders continue to come in faster than we can make up the beads, despite our expectations of a gloomy recession.

In March a CAP delegation attended a craft workshop organized by the Institute of Race Relations. KaMasoka Dladla, our organizer, left the Tugela Valley for the first time in her life

to see Estcourt – a BIG city! – and to meet up with the reps of eight other groups, producing crafts ranging from tapestries to baskets to beads.

STAR RATING

In May an SABC TV team spent a week at Mdukatshani filming the first of a series of documentaries on CAP projects. The series will cover the building of the Mseleni canal and drought relief dams, the beadwork, and the bone collections.

JAM TINS...

... provide kettles for 20 of the 182 families interviewed by Isianah Masoka, of our office staff. This latest census was undertaken on behalf of a researcher at Natal University interested in the cooking habits and cooking utensils of Msinga families – as a preliminary to designing some fuel-saving kitchenware. Of the 182 interviewed only 12 had stoves – small primuses used for cooking in wet weather. Everybody used wood as fuel.

MORE QUESTIONS

All visitors to our office since the beginning of May have had to answer some simple questions from us before we will attend to their own queries. A standard questionnaire has been compiled to enable us to build up a profile of the local people, rich and poor, widely scattered over the district.

The office diary shows that of the 100 visitors in May, 37 came in connection with legal aid, 22 in connection with livestock problems, and 20 in connection with debt.

WEENEN FARMER MURDERED

On the morning of April 29 a local farmer, Mr. Tom Oren, was shot dead at his farm gate. So far there has been no arrest. In the belief that the murdered must be a black man, however, tension in Weenen has been running high.

Three weeks after the Oren murder, a neighbour, Mr. Philip de Bruin, had his farmhouse burnt down. Subsequently 15 African huts on de Bruin's farm were deliberately set alight and burnt down too. The African owners claim de Bruin burnt them out in a retaliatory action. Police are investigating both claims of arson.

PEACE TALK

In March CAP took the initiative in organizing a series of meetings between local black leaders, concerned about the breakdown of law and order in the Weenen-Msinga area, and whites with the same anxieties. As a result of these discussions Mr. Douglas Ralfe, an Executive member of the Natal Agricultural Union, has taken matters to higher authorities. Mr. Ralfe was also instrumental in organizing a meeting between local Africans and the Weenen magistrate and representatives of the white farmers' association where many grievances were aired.

Subsequently local African leaders have had top level talks with SA police officials.

Police investigations into CAP's allegations of graft, theft and torture are continuing and in some cases charges are pending.

LEGAL AID

Pieter Opperman, a local farmer, has finally agreed to the paternity of a child born to an African woman, Esther Mtshali 12 years ago and as the result of a case brought via CAP to the Legal Resources Centre has agreed to pay the family a regular monthly maintenance.

DROUGHT RELIEF

Work on the Buhayiya weir has been suspended following three murders which have made the community fear the outbreak of a new faction fight. One of the dead men, Senosini Mvelase, is brother of the chief of the Mthembus, Chief Ngoza Mvelase. Another is the son of Ephraim Madonsela, the man in charge of concreting the weir.

Elsewhere work has progressed despite the shortage of meal to pay our teams of workers (An average 167 people a month earned only 78 bags of meal for the entire three months period).

At KwaDimbi: 40 people dismantled the wall of the upper dam, taking advantage of a dry stream to remove the rock that had been blocking the outflow for months. The wall has been rebuilt – with a grid to prevent future blockages.

The community is waiting for piping to make it possible to pump Tugela water to their lower dam until rains set the Dimbi stream running again.

At Nomoya: 32 people built a pipeline for the canal under a road – and then dismantled their pipeline when the weight of passing traffic caused the drums to buckle! A new and successful pipeline has since been completed, and the Nomoya team has joined the Mdukatshani and Msusampi workers at the Tugela weir upriver of our farm. The weir is about 60 metres long, 1½ metre high and almost two metres wide and now stretches right across the river. Cementing has begun.

At Mseleni: 63 people are busy on another weir – trying to divert the rapidly dropping Tugela into the 80 year-old-canal offtake point. Sandbags and cement are being used to build up the weir. Everybody is hoping the job will soon be done, for it involves a daily drive of several kilometres, and then a walk of almost an hour. CAP carts the workers twice a week – and the chief's wife kindly lends her tractor and trailer to do our transporting on the remaining three days.

And at Sahlumbe: 35 people are tackling the aquaduct across the Sahlumbe gully which has twice been washed away by storms. Rails have been bought to support the superstructure, and stone pillars are almost complete.

The Mdukatshani Gardens: on the banks of the Tugela are producing green vegetables for the 107 gardeners. In the past three months the women have worked to create a small holding dam in each garden, and CAP staff have helped with finishing touches like cementing and waterproofing.

The fish dams: partially destroyed in one section during a freak storm at the beginning of the year, are again all of a piece. Because of the drought however, two have yet to be filled.

FENCE PATROLS

Regular fence patrols have become necessary as hungry cattle line up along our fenceline, leaning and shoving until strands break and they can get in. Some of our men do nothing else but repair our boundary daily.

MDUKATSHANI,
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3504

MARCH 1983: LIVING ON FIVE LITRES A DAY

In the cities of Natal each person uses an average of 250 litres of water a day. Here at Msinga it is 5 to 10 - for drinking, cooking and cleaning.

With the dams of Natal on average only 14% full, the cities are making emergency plans to cut water consumption to 50 litres per person if necessary to survive the coming winter. At Msinga it seems the government will have to intervene to truck water to many waterless areas.

Our own response to the drought is less clearcut than it was three years ago when we planned to create dams and canals which would make gardens possible. Today our dams are the only source of domestic water for thousands of people, but the water is disappearing fast. Gardens are a forgotten extravagance.

The following figures, recorded since CAP's arrival at Mdukatshani, reflect the diminishing rainfall and growing crisis at Msinga.

1975: 768,35 mm
1976: 854,71
1977: 808,09
1978: 660,65
1979: 541,02
1980: 464,00
1981: 489.90
1982: 384,50

CAP launched its first drought relief schemes in the winter of 1980.

Widespread press publicity on "KwaZulu's Disaster Drought" produced a sympathetic public response, and for six months money poured into a Drought Relief Fund managed by the Red Cross. CAP was offered supplies of mealie meal by the Red Cross, and this was used as "pay" on several schemes until the Drought Fund was exhausted, when we continued on funds raised elsewhere. Our aid has been focused on the following:

- 1) Hand-built dams and canals. Workers earn a bag of meal for 30 days work. In the past three years we have paid 275 tons of mealie meal to create 8 dams and 3 weirs and canals.
- 2) Acacia pod collections. In season pods are swapped for meal – the pods providing a protein-rich stockfeed for African cattle. In the past three seasons we have "bought in" 216 tons of pods.

- 3) Bone collections. Following the first bad winter, 16 000 head of cattle died at Msinga, and the bones of dead animals were plentiful on the veld. We swap bones for meal – the bones being milled as phosphate fertilizer and stocklick. Since October 1980 we have taken in more than 203 tons of bones.

EFFECTS OF THE DROUGHT

+ Springs and streams have dried up. Thousands of people are digging for water, catching seeps deep in the sand of dry river beds. Traders and taxis sell water to those who can afford it.

No maize or mabela has been reaped for three years, and few household gardens survived to produce even a leaf of spinach this past summer.

+ Livestock losses have been severe. According to a census CAP has been conducting among members of projects more than 50% of those who owned cattle or goats in 1980 no longer own any animals at all.

Since the drought started these local stockowners have lost

74,49% of their cattle

61,98% of their goats

95,45% of their sheep

THE IMPACT OF CAP'S SCHEMES

The pod and bone collections – periodically suspended due to lack of funds for meal – offer a form of short-term relief. CAP had hoped that longterm benefits would result from the dams and canals, but we had not calculated on the continuing drought. The following is the state of each project today:

- 1) Mseleni Canal. This 16 km canal was first dug more than 80 years ago to carry water from the Tugela River across 800 hectares of arable land. Re-opening the old canal has been a major project involving more than 300 men and women. By December, however, the Tugela River had dropped so low it could not reach the offtake point of the canal. This indicates the river is at its lowest level this century. As it will drop still further in the winter months ahead – our drought workers are having to tackle the massive job of building a pier to raise the level of the river so they can get water back into the canal.
- 2) The Nomoya Dam is empty.
- 3) The KwaDimbi Dam is empty – its feeder stream having dried up.
- 4) The Chibini Dam is half full – just meeting the domestic needs of hundreds of surrounding people. The dam is the only remaining source of water in the area.
- 5) The Mathinta Dam is also the only existing supply of domestic water at Mathinta, daily supplying hundreds of people, although it is unlikely to last out the winter.
- 6) The Mnyakantaba Dam is half full – also the only remaining supply of domestic water for a large population.

- 7) The pipeline bringing gravity water to the Mdukatshani riverbank gardens finds itself sucking air due to the low river level. A weir is now under construction in an attempt to raise the level of the Tugela to fill the pipes. Meanwhile an engine pumps water to the gardens.
- 8) The Buhayika weir is also high and dry above the river most of its length. However the Buhayika community is using the opportunity to raise and cement the wall.

PLANS FOR 1983

1) Mdukatshani Gardens

In May last year gardens were started among the thorn trees and rocks on Mdukatshani's river bank in response to a growing despair among drought workers. Although they had created some fine dams – their longed-for gardens seemed unattainable. Today there are more than 90 gardeners – some of them traveling 25 km on the twice-a-week shuttle CAP arranges. Until a massive hailstorm on New Year's Day the gardens were flourishing. The hail wiped out the crops and daily temperatures often above 40degree C have seared the new seedlings. Autumn weather should see an improvement, and good winter crops are expected. The number of gardeners is steadily increasing.

2) Pods and Bones

These schemes are at present suspended due to lack of funds to purchase mealie meal. However if the funding position improves we hope to continue to offer this form of relief.

Last year a total of 1169 people brought 61 792 kgs of bones for which they received 33 479 kgs of maize. And 2141 people brought 89 447 kgs of acacia pods and leaves, receiving 41 920 kgs of maize, as well as a payment of R 4 352, 00 on one occasion when the maize failed to arrive in time.

3) Canals, Dams and Weirs

As various projects were completed, the number of workers on the mealie meal payroll declined. During the year an average of 404 people earned a total of 66 290 kgs of mealie meal.

Work is needed to raise the level of the Tugela for the Mseleni canal and the Mdukatshani and Buhayika weirs. All three are ambitious projects for the structures have to be able to withstand the force of the river when it is again in flood. At KwaDimbi a temporary pipeline is to be laid from the Tugela to the Dimbi Dam to supply water for winter gardens. The water will be pumped by engine. At present the garden area is being fenced.

The Mngamkantaba Dam needs to be raised and a spillway constructed.

To provide a vital water supply to the people of Gujini, on Mdukatshani's one boundary, a new dam is planned on the Skehlunge River.

EMERGENCY GRAZING

Mdukatshani has been cleared of all cattle to build up fodder reserves for later in the winter, when the farm will be re-opened to African stockowners.

EMERGENCY WATER

CAP's lorries are already carting water twice weekly to waterless sections of the Mchunu area.

SOME STATISTIC ON OUR DROUGHT RELIEF PROJECTS

| | <u>1981</u> | <u>1982</u> |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Dam and canal worker | 756 | 404 |
| Mealiemeal earned | 175 587 kgs | 66 290 kgs |
| Pod/bone pedlars | 3 318 | 3 310 |
| Total Pods | 30 321 kgs | 89 447 kgs |
| Total Bones | 82 250 kgs | 61 792 kgs |
| Total meal swopped | 103 478 kgs | 97 159 kgs |

EXPENDITURE

| | | | |
|--|----------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Wages: Administration | R | 2 572,35 | 3 121,60 |
| Pods/ Bones | | 1 991,20 | 2 055,60 |
| Irrigation | | 2 364,20 | 2 642,65 |
| Mealiemeal | | 33 456,68 | 47 868,67 |
| Cement | | 1 831,52 | 3 260,04 |
| Fencing | | 4 231,76 | 1 441,66 |
| Irrigation equipment | | 1 768,60 | 9 050,99 |
| Sacks | | 318,00 | 786,93 |
| Beans and other food | | 1 201,28 | 3 503,89 |
| Tools | | 488,38 | 438,47 |
| Fuel | | 2 965,36 | 4 154,86 |
| Maintenance | | 1 542,80 | 1 558,84 |
| Railage and hired transport | | 405,75 | 1 077,15 |
| Licences and insurance | | 181,65 | 535,09 |
| New machine – mills, pump lorry, tractor etc | | 2 132,81 | 32 672,12 |
| Telephone | | 324,94 | 422,13 |
| Total | R | <u>57 777,33</u> | <u>114 590,69</u> |

INCOME

Donations from Misereor, OXFAM, Institute of Race Relations, Interchurch Aid, various churches, groups and individuals enabled us to cover the above costs. We have no funds in reserve to tackle further drought relief work in 1983-84 however. Whether we continue the pod and bone collections, for example, will be entirely dependent on whether we raise funds. Ideally a budget for continuing drought relief in 1983-84 would be as follows:

| | |
|--------------|---------------|
| Wages | 6 600 |
| Mealiemeal | 36 000 |
| Cement | 1 200 |
| Fencing | 6 920 |
| Piping etc | 2 400 |
| Sacks | 500 |
| Beans | 1 200 |
| Tools | 400 |
| Fuel | 4 000 |
| Maintenance | 1 500 |
| Licences etc | 800 |
| Telephone | 300 |
| | <hr/> |
| R | 62 820 |

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MAY 1983:

A GUN PUTS A FENCE AROUND THE HOME

Strangers approach KwaBalambile Hill warily. They stand at the gate, clutching their briefcases, gazing up at the kraal above. Then they climb slowly.

Mankomaan Mabaso pauses at his work under the big thorn tree. KwaBalambile is his fortrees, a conical hill with an airy view of the river crossings, the high mountain paths – and the rocky stairway leading up from his gate.

Not that Mabaso worries about strangers inside his gate. They don't get that far unless they have had clearance from the small, tight community that guards the approaches to the hill: and to the tree that is Mabaso's workshop.

At first glance the workshop is just a pile of rusty car parts. Yet if Msinga ever gets its share of national monuments, KwaBalambile's junkheap must surely be set aside to honour the extraordinary career of Mabaso, a genius who whittles rifles out of ploughbeams. The technology of 300 years is fused in this man. The age of the blunderbuss and the automatic rifle came together under his tree.

"A little Queen Victoria's lady's pistol begins like this," Mabaso fondles the metal while he is talking. "I file here, and then I cut here, and then drill here ..." Revolvers, rifles shotguns emerge from his windy munitions factory. "I can never be defeated," he says. "I can make any gun. I know all about metal and a gun is only metal."

"Here," he tosses over a lump of ironstone. "Do you know what it is? Put it on a fire and heat it and it drips iron." He picks up a chain. "This makes a machine gun laugh tut-tut-tut-tu-tu-tu." His mind is detached, yet at the same time so full of restless vigour it threatens to blow him apart. He rummages while he is talking, pulling out bits and pieces to entertain the children. The blade of a bayonet. A pike. An antique bullet mould. An ugly trap with huge jaws. "My grandfather used that to hunt buffalo." A home-made rivet gun. A motorcar handbrake.

"The spring of the brake fits a .303 firing pin," he explains. Gradually the pieces of scrap begin to look more familiar. Those steel pipes are 22, .375, . 303 and 12-bore barrels. There are heaps of triggers, discarded cartridge cases.

"Do you know how to make a cartridge fire ten times?" he grins as he demonstrates his technique. "And you get a toy cap from a toyshop and cut around the cap."

Under his maroon and yellow turban Mabaso's bony face is sharp and attentive. But it is his walk that you notice the first time you meet him – a curious lilting walk that makes him visible from a distance. His age is difficult to guess. Forty? Fifty? He has the tension, the spring of a younger man – the careless authority of an older.

“Ten weeks,” he says,” and I can finish a new gun. “However most of his business is repairing old. The strangers who climb his hill bring damaged firearms in their briefcases, guns without firing pins, with welded bolts and disfigured barrels. “Whites are up to many tricks,” says Mabaso. “Before they sell a gun they get a cutting torch and make some tiny holes in the barrel. The black man buys a gun that looks perfect, but when he fires he blows off his hand. There are a lot of people with crippled hands.”

A gun is “stolen,” every 80 minutes in South Africa. In the past five years 24 367 guns were reported missing. Police recovered 11 433. That leaves 13 134 in circulation, and a fair number of them destined for Msinga.

The sale for firearms and gunpowder to Africans was first banned in Natal in 1859. Not that it meant the end of the trade.

“The drifts of the Tugela have to be protected,” complained Border Agent Frederick Sutton in 1872, for on the ferryboats” beyond a doubt a considerable number of guns have been smuggled into Zulu country, principally in cases addressed to some missionary.”

Sutton blamed white traders, but they were not the only gunrunners. Basuthos regularly passed through Msinga carrying guns and gunpowder.

“Through ignorance?” suggested a magistrate, Captain G A Lucas in 1862.

However the Basuthos knew what they were about. Some settle in the district to manufacture gunpowder.

“It is bright and strong but the grain is very uneven,” reported Henry Francis Fynn, another magistrate, in 1875.

Why did Africans want guns?

“Because the white man has them,” said Captain Lucas.

“I know for a fact that baboons in their mealiecrop and tigers with young stock are very troublesome,” said J W Shepstone, yet another Colonial official.

The law tended to look kindly on a black man troubled with vermin – in such special cases an African could be granted a gun licence. Thirty years after the gun ban there were 1 853 licensed guns in the hands of blacks in Natal.

As for unlicensed guns ...

“They have guns, lots of them which must come from the Diamond Fields,” a farmer, William Grey, told the Colony’s Gunpowder Laws Committee in 1889. “I think the natives are afraid to come in with their guns, afraid that the guns will be confiscated.

Mabaso’s grandfather, Manamakele, was licensed to carry a muzzleloader, which he bought so he could shoot rhebuck on the mountain. Half a pound of gunpowder a year was a black man’s ration, and he got his tinful from a trading store in Ladysmith.

Forty years after the gun ban there was the first report of an Msinga arsenal.

“I heard that Nohayiya, one of Silwane’s tribesmen, could repair guns and make gunpowder, also that many of Silwane’s tribes, could repair guns and make gunpowder, also that many of Silwane’s men have guns which are hidden away in the krantzies in the Weenen Division,” said Native Intelligence Officer Number after snooping through the Mchunu area.

Hidden guns. But how many hidden guns? Guessing keeps the white man edgy.

The guns disappear from city shelves, slip out of pockets, drawers, cupboards, suitcases. Or just change hands in business deals on quiet streets.

“No white man is satisfied with his salary,” says Mabaso. “He always wants to double it.”

Mabaso first falls in love with a gun when he is 14, carrying a .303 for a white farmer on a rhebuck hunt. The boy is intoxicated by the smooth simplicity of the steel, the unity of the parts. He has a spacious mind, uncluttered by learning. He can neither read nor write, but he is to discover that once he has looked at a machine, the image is imprinted forever.

“I will match my brain against any white man in the country,” he says. “If we are both given tools and a heap of steel pieces and told to make a machine gun, the white man will have to stop to think what to do next. I will never stop because it is written in my brain.”

With the plan of his first gun in his head, Mabaso goes home to dig out his grandfather’s muzzleloader.

“Stay away from that thing – it can kill you,” warns his father. Nobody has touched the firearm since the old man died.

“But how can it be dangerous when it has no powder and no bullet?” Mabaso is scornful. He waits until the kraal is deserted one afternoon, breaks matchheads, grinds them into the powder pan of the old muzzleloader.

“Then pull the trigger and the matches catch alight with a bang,” he says.

Just a little bang.

The boy makes plan for something a little louder.

“At this time many men are returning from Kimberley with fuses,” he says. They make out the gunpowder because it is good medicine for pneumonia.” Mabaso buy some fuses, then takes a stroll to a quiet ravine for his next experiment.

“I pour the gunpowder into the gun, wind some fuse on top, then push in paper and bits of iron and pebbles...” This time there is a loud explosion. Much better. But a gun isn’t a gun without a bullet. It is months before the boy finds what he wants – lumps of lead lying in a farmyard. Back in his ravine he melts the lead and pours it into his grandfather’s bullet mould. The first home-made bullet that he fires smashes into a boulder. Mabaso examines the shattered rock with satisfaction. “Now I have a gun that will shoot,” he says. “Now I think I know all about guns.” But the next experiment almost kills him.

He has managed to pocket one of the farmer’s. 303 bullets. As he does not have a .303 rifle, however, how can he use it? He decided to bore a hole through the trunk of a tree.

“Then I push the bullet into the hole and get a nail and hammer...” The explosion knocks the boy off his feet.

“I am looking at the sky but I cannot see. Blood is oozing out of my face.

All the hair is burnt off my head. I am blind and my brain has gone.” He has to stand up, staggers, lies down again.

“When I come to my senses I think hard,” he says. If I want to use a bullet it must be inside a barrel or I will die.”

Born in another place and another time, Mabaso might have been an engineer, but there are no openings for black kids with a gift for engineering when he arrives in Johannesburg in the 1920s. He becomes a kitchen boy, a prison warder, a carpenter and a handyman. All the

decrepit sewing machines of shanty town are brought to him, for he can make any spare part, even a shuttle.

Mabaso is middle-aged before he is sidetracked to his destiny.

“There is a fortune to be made in animal fat,” an acquaintance tells him one day in 1949.

“The muti shops pay £30 for a ten pound box. The only problem is, the whites are making new rules to stop the killing of game. “Mabaso’s aptitude for machinery is matched by a flair for enterprise. He is a born entrepreneur. Animal fat may be a black market commodity – but £30! That’s a white man’s wage. He checks with the muti shops, makes some enquiries about wildlife, then catches the train via Mafikeng to the small siding of Gaberone.

From Gaberone it is not far to the hunters’ camps on the edge of the Kalahari.

In the Bechuanaland Protectorate (later Botswana) there are no rules. That is what attracts Mabaso, and that is what attracts lorryloads of white hunters from Transvaal. In Bechuanaland they can camp where they like, shoot what they like – and because there are no border posts, the venison, the skins and horns go home with them.

Mabaso lends himself out as a skinner.

“I am allowed to take the fat,” he says. “Fat of lion. Fat of leopard. Fat of hyaena. Fat of aardwolf. Fat of eland. Everything. I post the fat to my special customers.”

For four years Mabaso stays among the hunters on the edge of the desert, but while the fat is profitable, it is not fat that keeps him. Mabaso has rediscovered guns, and this he has a teacher.

The teacher is an old German, Johan Karl, a professional gunsmith who makes a living repairing the firearms of local Africans and visiting white hunters.

“At first I just watch him,” says Mabaso. “Then I work without pay so I can learn.”

The German always has more work than he can handle so the simpler tasks are given out to African assistants. Karl soon notices, however, that his Zulu apprentice is amazingly gifted. The affinity between the two men keep them side by side, content with each other and absorbed in their work. At the end of four years Karl concedes that his pupil is a better gunsmith than himself.

But Mabaso is homesick for the shining river that curves round his hill. He returns to Msinga. The old muzzleloader is still lying about and it is not long before Mabaso’s itchy fingers get busy with a file. When he is satisfied with his work he goes down to the fields one evening and takes aim at a flock of guineafowl feeding in the stubble. The first shot brings five birds. Grandfather’s muzzleloader is now a shotgun.

Strangely, Mabaso makes no move to set himself up as a gunsmith. Guns are for love, not money. He returns to the city to work at a number of jobs, including a spell “in a factory that makes bullets afro aeroplanes. That is interesting. I learn everything about explosives. “He is doing carpentry when sawdust begins to trouble his eyes and he returns to Msinga for good.

It is 1955 and a lot of new guns are coming into Msinga from Durban and Johannesburg. Police patrols are few and far between. Mabaso is so indifferent to the possibility of a raid that he sets up his workshop in the open, on top of his hillock, under that tree. He claims he chooses the site because even on a hot day it sucks in breezes, but outlook has something to do with his decision. He can see people coming from a long way away. And if he doesn’t see

them, the baboons on the Malumbela krantz opposite give the alarm. Mabaso likes the baboons and protects them.

“They are my isiqiwi,” he grins. “My game reserve.” The baboons are the only spectators when he re-invents the Bren gun. It is a remarkable invention, although no less remarkable than the man delicate bits and pieces he manufactures and assembles by hand.

“Spares?” he is contemptuous. “I have everything I need here.” Stocks and dyes.

Files, chisels, drills, a gingerbeer bottle full of oil, and plenty of ploughs.

“Anyone can cut a trigger and a hammer from a ploughbeam,” he says. Ploughs are quality steel. Bullets won’t accept cheap metal. Mabaso is never without ploughs.

He gears an upturned bicycle to an emery stone to sharpen his tools; a big concertina bellows blasts his wood furnace.

“My big trouble is welding,” he admits. “I must make things that have no bulge where the join is. “Burning wood cannot reach the temperatures he would like, but he makes do. His joins are almost invisible. There are no imperfections to snag a bullet. With woodsmoke in his eyes he curls fine springs out of steel wire, and fashions raw chunks of steel into the complicated mechanisms of the bolt assembly of the modern rifle. His tools are crude and his methods primitive but the results are always precision machined.

Mabaso is carving a trigger at his workshop one afternoon when he first hears about the arrival of the police Firearm Squad. There is going to be a blitz on guns at Msinga.

“So?” Mabaso keeps busy with his chisel. But he is uneasy.

The Squad swelters under canvas on the riverbank at Tugela Ferry.

But only for six months,” Sgt. Jurgen Freese, the man in charge of the Squad is told by his superiors. “Six months old should clear the place out.” The Firearm Squad works on a special basis – co-operation with Msinga’s tribesmen. More than 50 guns are confiscated every month, but there are no arrests, no court cases.

Firearms are handed over voluntarily, the owners indemnified from prosecution.

Twenty years pass. The Firearm Squad is still camping in tents. Sgt. Freese is now a Warrant Officer.

“If I didn’t like living in the bush I’d have packed it in year’s ago.” he says.

“Now it’s my home,” He has lost count of the tents he has been through, worn threadbare in the hot Msinga sun. He has also lost count of the guns, for there have been thousands.

“But,” says Brigadier B S Peters, Divisional Commandant of Police, Natal Inland,

“we can’t find them all. They hide them in caves and bury the arms in the ground.

They know the mountains like the palms of their hands – what chance do you stand?”

“Any hooligan can get a gun – but guns are denied to responsible people,” Chief G Buthelezi, chief minister of KwaZulu, tells the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly in a renewal appeal to South Africa to grant gun licences to responsible Africans.

“I am quite certain that any member of the Assembly including myself could get a firearm illegally before sunset tomorrow if he wanted.”

At Kwabalambile Mabaso still works in the open, despite three visits from the Firearm Squad.

“Somebody tips them off,” says Mabaso,” because they say I have parts of guns from Bechuanaland. But they only want whole guns, hot bits. The first time they take a .22. The

next time they find a shotgun and a .303. The third time they take seven Metfords. “The Firearm Squad policemen are friendly. They sit at the junkheap, chatting after they have confiscated the guns.

“And this Mabaso?” a policeman pulls at some piping. “You’re not going to make a new gun?”

“No,” There’s not much in the junkheap to attract attention. Lots of rusty metal and tools for fixing ploughs.

In 1977 Mabaso begins to desert his workshop for days at a time while he supervises a new scheme – a highway round Mashunka Mountain. Like any Mabaso enterprise the road is remarkable, built on foundations of huge boulders with retaining wall in places four metres high. Mabaso coaxes a workforce with pots of beer.

He is following the unfinished road home one evening, that odd springy gait of his outpacing the two youths with him.

“Then suddenly I hear KaWumm,” he imitates the sound of automatic fire. “I swing round and see two men with machine guns down in the gully and about 15 waiting at the river. Their bullets go past my shoulder. “Mabaso’s companies are killed before he can lift his rifle to return the fire. He scatters the ambush with two shots. “And that is the end of that, with all of them running and me alone with my .303.” He always speaks with tenderness of his.303.

Mabaso is a neutral. Kwabalambile lies at the junction of several tribal boundaries and its position tends to emphasize his neutrality.

“Bomvu, Tembu, Sithole, Mchunu, Majozi, Mabaso, Zwane – all have their guns repaired by me,” he says. However the ambush is part of a war that sweeps to the foot of Kwabalambile bringing business to a standstill. Because of the war Mabaso lands in court on a firearms offence for the first time. He is picked up accidentally while he is down at the river, cleansing himself after the funeral of a boy killed in the fighting. Mabaso’s rifle is next to him on the rocks when some StockTheft Squad policemen come upon him. They are out hunting stolen cattle but they cannot ignore the gun.

“Where is the licence?” they ask. Mabaso admits he has none. He is arrested, brought before the Estcourt Regional Court and fined R 200.

The arrest marks a run of bad luck. Mabaso begins to tire at his work, troubled by a persistent cough and lassitude.

“TB,” the doctor tells him. Mabaso spends months in a TB ward before boredom and loneliness drive him back along the footpath to Kwabalambile. He carries pills to clear the patch which remains on one lung. But the workshop is all the tonic he needs. Soon the bellows is huffing and puffing again; there is a whirr and clink under the thorn tree to tell the neighbourhood Mabaso is back at his old routine.

Msinga remains the centre of the guntrade. And omens for its continued growth look promising as Mabaso approaches his silver jubilee as a gunsmith. Fashions are changing – the local taste in weapons is becoming more sophisticated. Mabaso can remember the first automatic that arrives at Msinga – a German gun stolen from the War Museum at the Zoo in Johannesburg. The owner is so proud of his new possession that it is passed around as a local showpiece until the Firearm Squad hears the buzz of talk, tracks down the rifle and confiscated it.

Today automatic are no longer curiosities, however. Their staccato volleys echo in the night.

“All the boys are after automatics now,” say Mabaso, “because they shoot a lot of bullets and make a lot of noise.” He is unimpressed. “You do just as well with an old gun if you learn to shoot straight.”

The ability to shoot straight is rare at Msinga. Most of the guns are in the hands of amateurs. “There have been a lot of fatal accidents because the tribesmen don’t know how to handle the firearms,” says Captain Johan de Klerk, district commandant of Greytown in the early years of police action in 1963.

“All they know about guns is that they are for killing,” Warrant Officer Freese repeats years later. “They know nothing about gun maintenance. They pay several hundred rands for a weapon, but once they have it they don’t care for it. They will never clean it, or oil it. One day they’ll need it and simply pull the trigger.”

Mabaso is less definite in his views. “At first nobody knew how a gun worked,” he says. “People didn’t know you had to aim. They thought if you had the right gun the gun would do it. They were always in danger from their own guns. But now knowledge of guns is spreading. When I started making guns there was one gun to perhaps every five men at Msinga. Now I do not think there is such a thing as a home without a revolver or a rifle.

If Mabaso is only half correct – that adds up to more than 10 000 firearms in these hills. Why?

“A gun is like a fence,” explains Mabaso. “If you make sure everybody knows you have a gun you have a fence around your house to keep out thieves and strangers. With a gun you lock out trouble. And the guns are increasing by the day. If you collected all the guns at Msinga you could fill two five ton trucks and have plenty over.”

Mabaso’s contribution to the total is small. A handcrafted Mabaso rifle costs R260. That’s not much of a return on more than two months work. Were Mabaso to restrict himself to the manufacture of new guns he would just clear R 1 500 gross a year. His profits come from repairs. And a famous Mabaso speciality.

He changes pellet guns, which are legal, into .22 rifles, which are not.

There is a row of pellet guns leaning against the wall of his yard when a group of strangers climb Kwabalambile long after dark one night. Mabaso is wakened by a knock on the door.

“Police. Open up.”

“I don’t open for thieves who call themselves police,” Mabaso replies. Behind him his wife is stuffing the guns under a mattress.

“Then look through one of these holes in the wall.”

“And I peep and there is a white man in uniform shining a torch on his head,” says Mabaso. He opens up.

“We are looking for guns,” say the police. They are not Firearm Squad men – they are police from Weenen.

“While I have been peeping out one hole,” says Mabaso, “a policeman has been peeping in another so he knows the guns are under the mattress.”

The police collect four rifles and about 15 pellet guns.

“We’re taking them all – we know you make them into rifles.”

The next day the police return to confiscate Mabaso's equipment. They take two steel trunks full of tools.

"Every single bit of metal and machinery," says Mabaso. "My stocks and dyes my chisels, my saws, my vices, my files. Sgt Malinga writes them down one by one in a receipt book."

Mabaso is charged with manufacturing firearms and being in illegal possessions of arms and ammunition. He pleads guilty. Mr. E J Coombes, the magistrate at the Estcourt Regional Court, sentences Mabaso to a total of seven years, some suspended, some to run concurrently. "You should get 25 years in jail," says Mr. Coombes. Because of Mabaso's age, however, he will serve, in effect, only two. Under his turban Mabaso's hair is white – the only give-away that he is almost 81.

His silver jubilee he celebrates as a prison labourer "making the pencils straight on the Captain's desk. The Captain is good to me. He gives me light tasks because I am old.

The sentence Mabaso accepts stoically. There was always the risk. But he cannot accept the loss of his tools.

"Can you get them back for me?" he asks when he returns home after his release.

He is stony broke. Despite his age he receives no pension – and guns never made him rich.

His five huts are small and shabby. He has two cattle and eight goats.

And the bellows, and the upturned bicycle, and some ploughs which neighbours have brought in for repair. He can make a living as a handyman if he can lay his hands on his tools.

Prison has done nothing to dampen Mabaso's vitality. His head ferments with schemes. His brilliant hands keep fiddling. He makes a "torch" that throws a beam across the river. He constructs a propeller in front of his huts, fitted onto a bicycle rim, and works out how it can power a generator. That Mashunka highway is not yet complete – Mabaso rounds up a new workforce to tackle it.

He needs water for his mealie lands. A stone weir across the Tugela will raise the waterlevel to fill a canal. More than 40 women build the weir under Mabaso's supervision.

He is a man buoyant with creative energy. He needs more than ploughshares to feed his curiosity.

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CAP QUARTERLY REPORT - JUNE, JULY, AUGUST 1983

Commission of Inquiry Appointed

Early in July the Minister of Co-operation and Development, Dr. P. Koornhof, announced the appointment of a commission to investigate border tensions between KwaZulu and whitefarmers in the Msinga area. This move followed on a meeting between the Minister, officials of his department, and a delegation of the Natal Agricultural Union led by Mr. Douglas Ralfe.

As a preliminary to the commission, the Minister asked that a list of problems be identified. On behalf of local black farmers, CAP submitted a list of black grievances – while Mr. Piet Naude collected white complaints.

STRAWBERRY YOGHURT

In June CAP had the first of several deputations of Mtembu and Mabaso tribesmen complaining about the establishment of a strawberry farm at Tugela Ferry. The strawberries are being grown for fruit yoghurt by a tripartite company including ex-Zimbabweans, the KwaZulu Development Company and the KwaZulu government.

The land on which the strawberries are being grown has for many years been the object of contention. Original taken away from the tribes people as punishment for faction fighting, it was, until fairly recently, leased by the KwaZulu Agricultural Company.

Following repeated representations from the Mthembus and Mabaso for the return of the land, Mr. Ray Swart, PRP Member of Parliament, visited the disputed area in 1980. Mr. Swart was cheered by the local indunas when he announced that he had had a letter from the Minister promising that the land “was being returned to the people.” Although Mr. Swart promised to post a copy of this letter to the indunas, the letter never arrived. However the local people were bolstered in their belief that the land was coming back to them after officials from KDC had meetings in the area last year, announcing that the KwaZulu Agricultural Company was pulling out.

The establishment of the strawberries has been a bombshell.

Thirstland Trekkers

In July Mr. Douglas Ralfe, NAU Executive Member, was promised that a tanker would be made available to the waterless Mcunu area of Msinga within 24 hours. The promise – and the tanker – have yet to materialize. Although there have been several attempts by the authorities to drill boreholes in the area – few have struck water, and those that have water have just a trickle.

To help out, CAP's big lorry has been shuttling water containers back and forth from the Tugela to points 25 kilometres away from the river. As the position has become daily more critical CAP has decided to invest in emergency water tanks which can be carried on our lorries.

The boreholes situation – described in previous reports – has been discussed at recent meetings with the NAU, SA Sugar Association and Chamber of Mines.

The End of Our Grass

At the end of June Mdukatshani's top farm was clearly showing the benefits of rest – good of grass despite the drought. By the end of August, however, the farm had been eaten bare by an estimated 1 000 trespassing cattle from KwaZulu.

CAP staff undertook three sport raids, rounding up more than 300 cattle and hundreds of goats.

Twelve cattle in the first raid were sent to the pound of Chief Ngoza Mvelase.

The owners arrived at night to remove their animals by cutting the chief's fences.

However the chief had anticipated their action – and had placed the cattle in a different camp.

When he found his fences cut, however, he decided to send the animals to the Weenen

Pound, where the owners had to pay heavy fines.

The next raid netted 170 cattle and 38 goats on a 500 metre stretch adjoining the Mathinta area. The Mathinta people had cut the fences to make two large gateways through which the animals had been passing freely. In a meeting with this community and the local induna, CAP demanded a community fine and combined trespass fee of R 4 000. A deadline was set for payment. More than R1 000 had been collected before bickering broke out in the community. This case is now being formally followed up through lawyers.

The last spot raid took place on a small corner of the boundary between CAP and Makupula. Several owners who rushed to the scene and owned up, had their cattle immediately returned to them. The remaining 67 animals were kept at Mdukatshani for a couple of days, awaiting owners, and were then driven to the Weenen Pound.

Two collapsed on the way. Mr. Heino Rottcher, a local trader, nursed the animals for us- but one has since been killed by thieves and removed in the night.

The last round-up has illustrated what we already knew – the utter futility of trying to impose grazing restrictions at a time when KwaZulu's cattle-owners have to steal grazing to keep their animals alive. Those who have not bothered to claim their animals have left them knowing the cattle are so thin they are unlikely to survive the next few weeks, and it is therefore not worth paying a fine to have them back.

CAP asked the Tugela Ferry Magistrate, Mr. B. Majola, to call a meeting of Mthembu and Mchunu chiefs and indunas where the problem could be discussed. The meeting has resulted in a date for yet another meeting. Unfortunately there is no real solution in sight!

BEST SELLERS

Our beads go on selling, and selling, and selling. Sales for the first 6 months of our financial year have topped R 30 000. We have tried sharing our surplus customers with other projects, and are nevertheless working on a four month backlog of orders.

In June Natty Duma and Busisiwe Dladla traveled to Pretoria for a two-day Craft Fair organized by SHADE. Their tribal gear stopped the traffic and brought crowds of admirers to gaze, photograph, finger and question them.

Later the same month our beadwork was displayed at an exhibition at the Institute of Race Relations, Pietermaritzburg. Nine beadworkers traveled to town to sing and dance at the opening. It was an unforgettable experience for them, not only because the Institute treated them to their first-ever hot baths and beds, but also because they were violently carsick all the way there and back!

LEGAL AID

Thanks to the Legal Resources Centre, a Weenen farmer, J.J. Bekker, has paid R100 damages to Mashinga Mbanjwa, a labourer whom he assaulted.

Mlungu Sibisi died in detention in July after being detailed by police for questioning in connection with the murder of Mr. Tom Uren, a Weenen farmer.

Sibisi was being held as a witness, not a suspect. Soon after his death, his brother Alfred Sibisi hanged himself after police questioning. Cap has obtained legal help for both families. Inquests are pending.

In July the Weenen Magistrate, Mr. King, gave judgment against Koloni Zungu in a civil claim for damages for assault brought against a local farmer, Mr. Philip de Bruin. This was the second time the case had been heard. At the first hearing judgment was given in favour of Zungu. CAP has asked that the case go for review.

The much-postponed dispute involving the closure off alleged public roads on white farms took another steps forward recently when CAP had the disputed roads surveyed and mapped. Meanwhile the dispute has resulted in a court case between two of Weenen's white farmers. The one, Peter Opperman, claims he cannot get access to his farm without raveling on an old road that runs through the property of a neighbour. The neighbour maintains the road is a private one, and to prevent public access has recently kept the gate locked, and piled old implements at the entrance.

Opperman has broken the lock and removed the implements in order to use the road, and is being charged for trespass.

HITTING THE JACKPOT

We were bowled over at the news that The Daily News Goldpot Competition had granted R 8 500 to enable the Buhayiya weir to be completed. Two representatives from The Daily News, Promotions Manager Carolyn Howie and Senior reporter Bob Frean visited the weir to hand over the cheque. It has certainly helped to revitalize the work, which was suspended in May following the outbreak of fighting which had claimed three lives. At present a combined

workforce of 104 people from Buhayiya and KwaDimbi are busy trying to get the stonewall across the Tugela before (if...) the rains and floods come.

The continuing work is a triumph over fear, for the fighting has intensified, and, in the words of our staff “the men going to work they go with the forest (bush ways). And when they are on their work they select one woman to keep a washfully eye to the mischievous person.”

INSIDE THE RIVER ONLY

At Nomoya the work on the weir had to be suspended only a few weeks before it was due to be completed. The Nomoya weir is about 60 metres long, 1½ metres high and almost two metres wide. It was designed to raise the level of the sinking Tugela River so that water would flow down an intake pipe irrigate gardens downriver.

Unfortunately the weir straddles two countries – KwaZulu and Weenen. When work started, the workers were encouraged by the white farmer on the far bank, Mr. C.J. Burger. His irrigation pumps were sucking air – so he could only benefit by the weir, which would raise the level of the river for him too.

However as soon as the weir was across the river and the first cementing had been done – and the water had risen to cover his pipes – he banned any further work from his bank. “He say we must go inside the river only,” says our staff report.

The weir was to have been raised a further metre, but work was suspended when drought workers were threatened with dogs. N once incident Mr. Burger allegedly assaulted a woman, MaHlatshwayo Masoka, and a case is pending.

It is ironic that by the end of August the water had dropped behind the incomplete weir so that Mr. Burger’s pumps were again sucking air.

The Gardens

A further 46 gardeners have applied for plots this quarter, making a total of 153 families gardening on the communal area CAP has set aside on the banks of the Tugela at Mdukatshani. A total of 8 holding dams have now been completed and more are under construction.

Thieving has unfortunately become a real problem in the gardens. A lot of traffic passes the area on the way to a drift on the Tugela – and although we have started day and night patrols it is almost impossible to prevent passersby helping themselves to bunches of spinach. In addition there have been regular invasions of trespassing goats from our neighbour, Mr. Burger, and although he has paid damages on several occasions, his stock continue to cross our fences to get at the green stuff!

The Nsongweni Diversion is Finished

Samson Majola has continued to lead a workforce of about 40 men and women on the hour-long walk to Nsongweni, where the Tugela River is led into the Mseleni Canal. Or was, until

the river level dropped with the drought. Boulders, sandbags and metal sheets have been used to build yet another weir to raise the waterlevel.

At the end of August Majola announced the water was again flowing into the canal.

More and More Bones

In June and July we set up new records for our bones queues with first 940, then 1111 people bringing a total of 76 977 kilograms of bones. The July collection took place on faith and borrowed money – and the August collection had to be cancelled because of lack of funds. By the end of August however, it was clear that we could once again plan a bones collection, thanks to 25 tones of meal meal from the Red Cross, 3 000 tins of food from Uniliver, a grant of R 9 000 from the Group Chairman's Fund, R 4000 from the Churches Hunger Fund, R 2000 from the Rainmonde Trust – and gifts from friends totaling R 3 270.

The following are the statistics for the June and July bones collections:

| | | |
|------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Total people | 941 | 1111 |
| Total bones | 36 029 kgs | 37 948 kgs |
| Total mealies | 26 851 “ | 19 371 “ |
| Children schooling | 29% | 30% |
| Families with fields | 15% | 31% |
| Families with stock | 13% | 39% |
| Average per stockowner | 4 cattle 8 goats | 1,7 cattle and 2,7 goats |
| Widows | 35% | 36% |
| Deserted families | 2,3% | 3% |
| Father sick | 6,7% | 6,9% |
| Father with TB | 7,8% | 9,2% |
| Father crippled (no pension) | 9,8% | 12,1% |
| Father blind (no pension) | 1,9% | 1,2% |
| Fathers mad | 3,5% | 3,2% |
| Fathers in jail | 2,1% | 1,5% |
| Fathers employed in town | 10,4% | 11,5% |
| Fathers employed on farms | 1,9% | 2,4% |
| Fathers unemployed | 14,8% | 10,8% |
| Pensioned | 1,3% | 2,1% |

KWADIMBI

The two Dimbi dams have remained empty with the continuing drought – but somebody somewhere has water, because the pipeline connecting the dams has been unearthed and stolen “by the other people to use in their insangu (dagga) gardens,” says our staff report. “The one in charge at Dimbi couldn't want to mention the names of these people because of the guns.

SONS OF THE WIND

In August CAP's chairman, Petrus Majozi, again went into hiding following a death threat letter signed by the "sons of the wind". The threat followed clan arguments over who had first use of CAP's firewood and water. The letter was handed to the police, and Majozi has since been coaxed out of hiding.

RAINFALL: There were 35 mm during the past three months.

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JULY 1983:

A JOURNEY WITH DOGSHIT, TOILET AND CHAMPAGNE

“Toilet!” the girls scream rises above the other shouts. “Bludshit! Bludfool! Swine!” Her curses follow the donkey as it shakes free of its pack and trots downhill. “Toilet!” Lethiwe Mdluli is shrill with fury as she catches the runaway and drives it back to the loading zone under the big tambootie tree. Red leaves fall like confetti. The donkey sniggers.

“Hai! Hai! Hai!” a woman skids on the end of a line lassoced by her brown donkey. Some of the animals stand motionless, ears drooping. Others circle and sidekick, showing their teeth. Thirty-five animals are gathered under the tree, and there are more coming across the valley. Ballpen, Champagne, Scotch, Butterfly, Chisel, Snotty, Twista, Sweet, Vicks... Sacks of bone bounce awkwardly on their backs. The procession sounds like a rattle dance.

“Try again,” Lethiwe calls to her sister. Together the two girls heave the sacks onto Toilet. “Wemame! Oh mother! Hagha!” they mutter as the rope breaks in their hands. It is homemade, plaited from rags. There are never enough ropes. There are never enough rags. “Well, it will have to do. “Two knots and a loop secure the load.

The girls dust themselves. They are dressed in their best – tiny loin skirts, lengths of blue flannel knotted at the shoulder, earrings made from the tops of Coke cans. Today they are going to leave their valley for the first time. They are travelling to Mzweni and Mashunka, land of the Majozis, land of the Mtembus – foreign countries 40 kilometres away.

The caravan assembles slowly. A bored donkey flops on the ground, rolling on a mat of devil thorns. That is all the summer has left behind – devil thorns, burr weeds and melons. At every kraal there are piles of green melons gathered from the sandflats.

They taste of nothing. “But they make the mealie meal go further,” explains MaZwane Ngubane. A neat, slight woman in her fifties, she is the wife of the chief induna, the prime minister of the Zwane clan. Their home sits on a ledge in the shadow of Lenge Mountain, high above fields which have been unploughed for three years.

A fuzz of yellow grass has covered the derelict lands, giving the cattle something to chew, but the drought years have left the Ngubane family hungry. A chief induna may have honour and responsibility – but his position carries no salary. That is why MaZwane has become a collector of bones. Although it takes courage to travel across tribal boundaries at Msinga, twice she has walked alone with her donkeys to Mdukatshani, and today 85 Zwane women and children are going with her, a nervous, excited crowd, whistling and shouting, disorganised.

“Shayangenhla! Hit it on the topside! Shayangenhla!”

“Shayangenzansi! Hit it on the bottom side!”

“Vimba! Vimba! Catch it! Whoa”

The donkeys make off before everyone is ready.

“Vimba!” screams Gogo Mdluli as her animals disappear. “Stop them!” Children race away. The stir gets more donkeys going. Twenty, thirty begin trotting downhill.

“Hambani kahle! Slowly! Don’t chase them now! They’ve got a long way to go!” But already the children are out of earshot.

Eventually the donkeys will fall into a rhythm, but at the start they crash and bump, unable to stay in single file, scattering in the bush. The path is blocked by huddles and stampedes.

Lumpy bags clatter.

“Satan!” scream the children, darting in and out among the hooves. “Swine! Demmit!”

A small boy sprints alongside a thickset black stallion. It keeps going, although its bags are loose and swinging lopsided. “Masimbenja! Dogshit!” In despair the boy flings himself at the donkey’s head, using his weight as a brake. A woman stops to help him reload. Dogshit drags away, pounding back into the mainstream traffic.

Only the children can keep up with the donkeys. The older women fall behind, shuffling, complaining. They have tied water bottles and blankets low on their backs, bustles that wag to and from above their long black skirts.

“Hau! Webabo!” an exclamation from MaMdluli Gcininda interrupts the flow of grumbles.

She has found a python track. The women stop to examine the marks. “The king of snakes has crossed our path. “They are comforted. A snake track is a Zulu omen of good luck. Their chatter takes on a cheerful note.

“Tell your mother when pass tomorrow I’ll be rich,” Gogo Mdluli shouts to some children watching from a doorway.

For the first two hours the journey runs through familiar country following the shrinking green pools of the Ndaka. Then the path crosses the river at the buttress of Mzweni Mountain. For the first time the donkeys hesitate, then stop.

“Woza ngenani. Come my friend.” The donkey’s don’t budge. They stand close to the bank urinating.

“Move brother.” But endearments are wasted, the donkeys remain unmoving. Exasperated Lethiwe splashed ahead, coaxing a donkey to follow. At last they are all across, straggling through a neck in the mountains. The Mzweni gorge is deserted, and its silence falls on the noisy caravan. The donkeys spread out to nibble bare shoots.

Women and children drop wearily and unpack small parcels of cold porridge.

“Fetch my needle,” shouts Mahlakazile Zwane. Her daughter rummages in a plastic bag, then passes a bicycle spoke threaded with twine. Deftly the woman stitched a tear in a sack. The sacks are threadbare so nobody travels without an emergency repair kit.

Time to move on. The Mdluli girls check their bags, see-sawing to get the weight balanced.

“Uhlanya! Lunatic donkey”. Gently Lethiwe picks blackjacks off Toilet’s nose.

MaZwane has moved to the front of the procession. She is the only person who knows the path ahead. “Come on,” she rallies the children. “Today you will see so many wonderful things your heads will spin right off your necks.”

The donkeys are falling into a steadier tempo. They make the next crossing of the Ndaka without difficulty. The valley opens out. There are two kraals on the far bank.

A woman cutting sedges straightens in surprise. Then a whistle sounds. It blows furiously, continuously. Other whistles join in. The donkey column flatters. Out of sight under a krantz men chant a single line from a hunting song: Today we will be striking game!" MaShabalala leans on her donkey, staring up at the krantz, miserable. "We are going to be hunted," she says.

The whistleblowers – four young men- emerge on the riverbank and take stock of the caravan.

"It's all right," one yells. "It's just bones for Magokogo." The call is repeated, thrown back and forth across the sided of the valley. Bones. Just bones.

"OK," the young men wave to show the donkeys can move on, but they must keep to the riverbed, away from the dagga gardens of the banks. One dagga nursery lies behind an enclosure of wire netting, the green bushed neatly spaced, well- watered, knee-high. Other gardens are less formal, tucked behind thorn scrub barricades. There is scarcely a patch of bank that is not cultivated. Politely the women and children look straight ahead. The young men walk alongside the donkeys, blowing their whistles incessantly. Only when the last donkey has climbed out of the valley do the whistles stop.

"Mashunka!" calls MaZwane at the head of the caravan. There's a new mountain ahead. They are halfway. Only halfway. The donkeys are plodding now. Most of them Lethiwe stays close behind Toilet, watching its tail swinging, its blue thighs moving one-two-one-two. As soon as her attention wanders or the path open out, however, he breaks away on private excursions.

"Toilet! Toilet! Blutshit! Blutshit!" No other name is called so often. Toilet is a donkey with a strong personality.

The water bottles are empty before they reach Manzimnyama, and the stream is dry. The old women are too thirsty to chatter any longer. Gogo Mdluli set off dragging one lame leg, now she drags two.

"And my legs stopped walking long ago," says Catherine Ndamane. She is a fat, good-natured woman whose raucous sense of humour has kept her group laughing most of the way. But her carpet slippers were not designed for long distance travel.

Only MaZwane never flags. She keeps calling to the children, urging them with tales of marvels ahead, walking swiftly, lightly untiring.

Last lap. The caravan has a tune now, a jingle of hooves, sacks, children's cries. Rattle. Rattle. Blutshit! S-at-an!

The sun has set when the donkeys reach the Tugela. They don't like the dark water. They have to be thrashed, slipping on hidden stones, chest deep, bags immersed. Two little boys strip and wade, shivering. MaZwane folds their clothes on her head, adds her own skirts, splashes in.

They have been travelling for eight hours when knots are loosened and the bags slide off the donkeys. The smoke of many fires drifts off Mdukatshani's big field. MaZwane is not the first to arrive. More than 70 people came in earlier in the day.

"Where are you from?" she greets the woman next to her."

"Msinga."

"Msinga Mountain?" MaZwane is startled. That's Bomvu country, far away.

“Yes,” says Mabeni Bhenya. “We walked for two days.”

By midnight there are more than 400 people sleeping out – more than 250 donkeys jam-packed in the kraal; others parked across the river for the night.

At daybreak the first bags go swinging on the scale. Lethiwe and her sister reach the top of the queue a few hours later.

Age? 13

Father? He was killed in the war.

Children at home? Ten

Field? Yes we have but we don't plough because of the drought.

By midmorning the Zwane caravan is off again. Scotch, Butterfly, Chisel, Snotty, Dogshit, Toilet, Champagne.... They should be home by nightfall with their loads of mealies. And by nightfall, with luck, the last sack will be hanging on the scale; the last cracked skeleton will be shaken on the pile. Thirteen tonnes of bones, 15 tonnes, 24, 36... every month there is a bigger pile of skulls, vertebra, ribs, shins, jaws.

Bone collecting is nothing new at Msinga. For more than 100 years bones have been articles of trade, one of the only commodities of an area regularly afflicted by drought.

“Crops generally fail from drought – in 17 years only four years good crops,” noted Henry Francis Fynn, the first magistrate who arrived at Msinga in 1874. When the crops failed there were always the bones of dead animals to barter for grain at the Arab traders. By 1878, however, the Weenen Magistrate, Peter Paterson, was reporting the end of barter among local people” the usual custom being for them to dispose of such corn, hides, fowls or bones as they may have for sale for cash,” he said.

Tonnes of bones went by ox wagon to Durban harbour to be loaded onto waiting ships for export. For 40 years Natal was an bone exporting country – the record year being 1879 when bones valued at R 2 252 left the Colony – 13 tonnes of cattle bones and 254 tonnes of giraffe bones. By 1884 the supply of giraffe bones had dwindled to only 36 tonnes, while the price had dropped from R 8 to R 5 a tonne. As giraffe gave way to cattle, so agriculture expanded and bone dust became” the only known form of artificial fertilizer in use,” according to the Natal Agricultural Journal of 1898.

Farmers needed every scrap of bone dust they could find. Bone exports came to an end.

Bones are much more than fertilizer, however. They were also a source of phosphate for cattle grazing on African pastures deficient in this essential mineral. Without phosphate cattle die.

By 1900 there were not enough bones to go around. S B Woollatt, the Colony's veterinary surgeon, complained that, “In the matter of bones the demands of the colonial agriculturist have for several years been at the cost of the pastoralist.

Since bone dust became locally popular as a fertilizer the bones of dead animals which used to strew the veld have been most assiduously collected both under the direction of the farmers and by the natives on their own account for sale.

Msinga traders were still buying in bones in the 1960s when the fertilizer companies discontinued their country rounds. City abattoirs were more accessible.

However bonemeal remains an irreplaceable constituent of stocklick. Even now, in 1983, bones are a valuable commodity in short supply.

“There is a terrible shortage of bones,” according to Mr. F A Hunt of Warrenton Bones, one of the companies that regularly advertise in search of supplies. “We will take unlimited quantities,” he says. The wholesale price of bones is R 110 a tonne.

The retail price varies between R390 (Greytown Farmers Co-op) and R 500 a tonne (McDonlads, Pietermaritzburg).

Mdukatshani’s Bone Exchange was never planned. It happened by accident in October 1980 when Gezekile Mkhize arrived with the bones of her dead ox. She had heard bones could be used as fertilizer. Would we give her mealie meal for her sample of the raw material? The following week there were 25 people with bones, then 94, then 461. Ever since, sporadically, when there are funds to buy mealies, there are queues of bone pedlars. We have now had 50 collections, 8510 people in the queues, bringing 326 367 kilograms of bones.

There is no longer a bone splinter to be found on the veld close to Mdukatshani. Bone pedlars have to search further and further a field. Informal industries have sprung up.

Ndanyane, for example, is far away. Mashunka is closer. People meet halfway and bones change hands at R 1 a bag. It may take days to fill a sack. Bone collecting areas are claimed and guarded. Mountaintops are crisscrossed by invisible bone boundaries.

Some women hitch rides to Ladysmith, Colenso, Estcourt to beg bones off butchers on slaughter day.

“But now the queue for bones is longer than the queue for meat,” laments one of our regulars, MaDladla Ndimande of Nkaseni. The shreds of meat on her bones are fresh then she collects them – rotten by the time her bag reaches the scale.

These bones were taken before the cow died,” shout the men supervising the spilling. Giggling, MaDladla reclaims her smelly bag. Her mealies have to go home in it.

Fifty kilograms of bones for 25 kilograms of mealies. Mealies for bones. Mealie-s for information. Nobody gets past the scale without answering a few questions.

“Where does your husband work?”

“He is not working.”

“Why now?”

“He’s buried.”

Overwhelmed with shyness a little girl gnaws a yellow rib.

“Are you hungry?” She looks at the bone. Bitterly shamed she flings it away.

“Where is your father?”

“He has beetles in his head.” Mad.

The line of sacks seems motionless. Queue jumpers begin to edge forward. The line thickens. Sweliswe Dladla tries to restore control.

“Suka! Bugger off!”

But I come far. I come from Mangwenya.”

“Get back! Get back!”

“I’ve got a baby at home,” pleads a woman.

“Baby!” All day GG has heard about babies at home. He’s fed up. “Unamanga. You lie. Get back to your place,” he says.

“I don’t lie. Look!” the woman snatches a breast and squirts a stream of milk.
Ha Ha Ha. The crowd gives her a cheer.

Whether there are 200 people in the queue or 1000 some of the statistics vary little.
About a third of the families have no father. Only a third of the children go to school; less than third own cattle or goats – and about a third of the people in the queue are children, which means the census goes slowly.

“How many goats at home?”

“Many, many.”

“How many?”

“I don’t know.”

“More than 10? More than 20?”

“More than 20.”

“Do you know their names?”

“Delfoot, Venn Swarty.”

“And the others.”

“I have told you all the names.”

Ten years old gets pushed to the scale, sobbing, arms hiding her face.
That’s wrong.

The girl stands weeping.

“What’s the matter? Why are you crying?”

At last, snuffling, the child whispers “We hear that you give food for bones and we collect bones for days and days and days. Now I see you take our bones but where’s the food?”

“Au daughter. You don’t get your mealies here. We give you a ticket and you fetch your mealies at the office!”

There is always spare capacity on the returning donkeys – they go home with half the weight they carried here, and children who arrived with their bones on their heads try to hitch return lifts for their mealies. In ones and twos the children move around the field, negotiating.

“Mother if I help you catch your donkey – can my mealies have a ride?”

Even those who fail to form a partnership have a chance of free transport if they wait for the aimless lost donkeys that remain on the field at sunset. Every Bones Day has its lost animals – and its hijacks. Although the animals may be driven off in strange directions, sooner or later they find their way back home, lady to cart sacks on the next bones day.

A hundred years ago bones cost R5 a tonne, maize R22 a tonne. Today bones are up 2 200%, maize just 1 000%. (Wholesale prices). Since we started our exchange we have paid out maize worth R50 000 in order to acquire bonemeal with an estimated retail value of between R 127 000 and R 163 000. These figures surely reflect the potential of bonemeal industries in the rural areas of South Africa?

Originally we intended to keep our bonemeal for use at Msinga, but we never knew we would acquire so many bones. Recently local white farmers have shown interest in buying their supplies of bonemeal direct from us. If transport problems and some red tape can be sorted out we hope to involve Natal’s white farmers in the project.

By punocasings Msinga bonemeal they can contribute to drought relief – and help to establish a border industry.

Meanwhile there will be no bones queue next month because once again we have run out of funds. The news comes as a blow to all the families with sacks of bones already waiting in their yards. A year ago 20 out of 100 families in the queue had a father with a job. Our most recent census shows the number has dropped to 12 out of 100. Unemployment is filling Msinga's valleys with men. Families that lived by selling their labour are now trying to live by selling bones.

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AUGUST 1, 1983

WHERE IS THE DROUGHT AID GOING?

Millions of rands have been given to drought relief projects in African areas since the drought set in four years ago. Has the money reached the people for whom it was intended? Has aid had any real effect?

These are questions we ask ourselves daily, for although CAP is reaching more than 1 000 families with its work-for-food schemes – there are more than 12 000 families at Msinga. However this is not a report on CAP's drought relief work – it is an account of drought aid seen through the eyes of some Msinga tribal leaders who travelled through two districts on fact finding tours during June and July.

They suggested the tours for two reasons:

- * Although the radio reported generous donations of food and cash for famine relief – none had reached their people.
- * Their experience of boreholes and tankers gave them reservations about this form of aid.

Msinga was chosen as one district – because it was already familiar territory and because by the end of May there was no drought aid trickling through from either welfare or government channels.

Mahlabathini was chosen as the second area because it was the seat of the KwaZulu government, Ulundi, and according to media reports several aid schemes were centred here. (Staff at the Red Cross confirmed that scarce funds were being directed to Mahlabathini” because it is the area that is suffering most.”)

The men who went fact finding were neither educated nor trained researchers. They collected their information informally. Where additional facts have been easily available, we have used them to complement the account of the teams.

BRIEFLY THEY FOUND....

Boreholes were fairly plentiful but the majority were not functioning
Tankers were few and far between – and travelled only on good roads
There was no school feeding
Government work-for-food schemes were insufficient, ill conceived and badly supervised.

OF COURSE THERE'S NOT ENOUGH TO GO AROUND.....

Msinga has a population of 120 000 people, Mahlabathini has 102 000 (1980 census). Msinga has no towns. Mahlabathini has one small town – Ulundi. Both districts are made up of scattered rural households.

Probably almost everybody in these areas has been affected by drought, if not in terms of economic loss, then in terms of a critically diminished water supply. Assuming a figure of only 80% - drought relief for these two districts would have had to total R 470 000 to provide each person with only one kilogram of mealie meal a month for a year.

The amount available has been a fraction of that. The Sunday Tribune/ Red Cross Drought Relief Fund has raised only R 291 700 for all of Natal since it started appealing for funds in March this year. About half of this amount is not for food – it has been earmarked for the supply of water.

Cattle deaths are an indicator of the severity of drought. Unfortunately the KwaZulu Agricultural Department was unable to provide recent figures. Cattle deaths are recorded when the cattle are dipped. Due to lack of water, however, dipping has been suspended in many areas. Only when dipping is resumed will stock statistics become available.

THERE ARE THREE WAYS OF HELPING

- 1) Provision of water - through
 - a) Boreholes
 - b) Tankers
- 2) Provision of food – through
 - a) Schools
 - b) Hospitals
 - c) Stores
- 3) Provision of employment – through construction work

PROVISION OF WATER

1) Boreholes for people

A minority of boreholes provide water. A majority fall into one of the following categories:

- *They used to have water but dried up
- *They never had water
- *They have been sabotaged – allegedly by youths who want to force the girls to follow footpaths to the rivers where they can be waylaid for courting.

In March the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry for KwaZulu, Chief L Dlamini, told the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly a case was pending against certain drilling contractors because only 43% of boreholes drilled in the region had been successful. Since February 1980 KwaZulu had sunk 958 boreholes of which 415 were successful. (Natal Mercury March 23, 1983).

A borehole costs between R 2 000 and R 3 850. Those 543 dry boreholes therefore cost between R 1 million and R 2 million. That's a lot of wasted money.

Theoretically each community is responsible for the maintenance of its own borehole.

In practice nobody is in charge, and it is doubtful whether local people have the skills to do the job expected of them.

When a borehole is damaged or goes out of order – to whom must it be reported?

The communities questioned were all vague. One group said they had told their chief that the borehole had stopped working. He said he knew nothing about boreholes. The group sent a representative to the Regional Authority. The Secretary said “Oh.” That was the end of the matter.

While a couple of Mahlabathini communities reported repair teams had arrived to work on damaged boreholes. Msinga communities said they had seen no repair teams. One Msinga windmill has been out of order for seven years.

In the Tugela Estates area nextdoor to Mdukatshani, only three out of nine boreholes supplied water steadily by the end of July. Two had a trickle. Four were out of order, or broken. Two of the three functioning boreholes were in sight of the Tugela River.

The sitting of boreholes puzzled our teams and the communities they visited. At Msinga, for example, a number of boreholes are sited close to a canal or river – yet people in highveld areas have no water at all. The reason is fairly simply.

Local people see the boreholes as drought relief. Donors see the boreholes as longterm solutions to a supply of uncontaminated water.

At this moment tribal leaders feel it is an extravagance to offer some people a choice of water – canal, river or borehole – while thousands of others have no supply at all.

Boreholes for livestock

At functioning boreholes people complained no provision had been made for watering their livestock” and when our cattle are dead, we will be dead too.” Several communities said they had asked in vain for simple concrete troughs to be erected for spillage and overflow to allow livestock to be watered.

2) TANKERS

Msinga has two tankers. Our team was unable to discover the total operating at Mahlabathini. However in both districts tanker deliveries are restricted to areas accessible on good roads.

At Msinga people have been charged for tanker water – the price being about 60 cents for a 20-litre drum. The system is not uncommon for Radio Bantu has broadcast appeals to blacks not to pay this illegal charge.

Mahlabathini has different problems. At one tanker delivery point our team watched a scuffle and shouting match between a crowd of women.

“One day somebody will be hurt,” observed the tanker driver.

The cause of the trouble is the inadequate supply of the tanker – and a split between a small group of women employed as a drought relief gang, and a larger group of housewives who are not employed on the scheme. The drought relief workers claim it is government water intended for them because they are government workers.

“I don’t interfere,” said the driver watching the disturbance,” because I’ll be reported to Ulundi and get into trouble. Maybe the water IS just for government workers, I don’t know. “One elderly woman who managed to get her drum to the tanker tap had the drum confiscated and the water poured into the container of one of the drought relief workers.

Dams

Dams are a solution for wet years – not dry. However our teams observed that where dams did contain water, it was so polluted by animals that people could not use the supply. No dams had protective fencing, or a pipe, tap and trough that would enable people and stock to share the water.

PROVISION OF FOOD

a) Schools

Early in 1982 the Red Cross announced that most of its drought aid would in future be directed towards school feeding schemes, at the request of donors.

According to the 1970 census, 83% of the people at Msinga had no schooling, while 73% of the population of Mahlabathini was uneducated. (1980 census figures for this category are not yet available). While many schools have sprouted since 1970, our teams maintain that only the “wealthy” attend school, and that school feeding schemes feed those who already have food. Of the families that queue monthly to swap bones for mealies here at Msinga, only 3 out of 10 schoolage children are attending school.

In neither district were our teams able to find schools where schoolfeeding was currently underway. This is not to say no schoolfeeding exists – schools such as those in Ulundi itself were not canvassed.

Some Mahlabathini schools reported that last year the children had regularly received bread (a nutritious food?) and they had been told it had come from the Red Cross. However this scheme ended last year.

b) Hospitals

According to Mr A H van der Waal, Director of Homeland Agriculture, Department of Co-operation and Development, welfare groups have this year concentrated food schemes close to and through hospitals because of the scarcity of funds. This has been confirmed by the Red Cross. If this is so – and our teams did not find any aid schemes operating at the two hospitals it checked – drought relief funds are being channelled to the uppercrust of the rural areas.

Each KwaZulu hospital creates a local centre of employment. Nurses, cooks, clerks, cleaners – all produce a flow of money which supports hawkers and stores, shebeens and bottlestores.

As for the patients – only those who can afford bus or taxi fares and the high admission charges enjoy hospital treatment. Doctors acknowledge the situation with dismay.

Dr. J James Nicholson, acting superintendent of Elkombe Hospital, says that patients of malnourished children no longer bring malnutrition cases to his hospital because of the huge tariff increases introduced into KwaZulu hospitals in April this year. He reports children have died as a result. (Sunday Tribune June 26, 1983).

Our own staffs have daily encounters with people who are seriously ill but refuse to go to hospital because they cannot afford the fees. The CAP telephone is the only one in the area, and is therefore used to summon an ambulance in emergencies.

However ambulance cases are refused unless we can guarantee that the patient has the ambulance fee of R10 waiting for the driver when he arrives. That is 30% of the income of a family in our area.

c) Stores

In 1980/81 some Msinga stores were given food for distribution but there has been none since, probably because of the obvious flaws involved in using such an outlet.

A Mahlabathini community reported that last year the Chamber of Mines regularly supplied bags of meal to local old people. The meal was dished out from the store. This scheme, too, ended last year.

A newspaper reporter recently returned from Mahlabathini concerned because he had been told that there was no drought relief in an outlying area "because there is no store there." However our teams found no stores in either district connected with famine relief. In fact storekeepers were openly hostile to drought relief food supplies because they see it as competition for custom.

PROVISION OF WORK

At Mahlabathini and Msinga there are now a few work-for-food schemes. Our teams found small groups employed on meaningless tasks – lifting stones out of culverts and placing them in a row, or tidying stones off roads. The payment offered appeared to be about 100 kilograms of mealie meal a month.

At Mahlabathini three work groups fell under one induna (supervisor) who was not present when the team passed. He and his wife were accused of keeping a large quantity of mealie meal for themselves every month, and as a result some of the women had left the project.

"Why don't you report him?" the complainants were asked.

"Who is there to report to?" was the reply.

Channels of communication are a problem in any rural drought relief scheme.

The following is another example. Mtembu territory straddles Msinga and the adjoining Tugela Estates. When Chief Ngoza Mvelase of the Mtembus was told some weeks ago that funds for drought relief had been allocated to his area, he promised R 1 500 to the people working on the completion of the Tugela Estates canal.

However when the chief asked for the money he was told it had been allocated to the KwaZulu Agricultural Department to repair roads on Tugela Estates. The canal is a scheme of longterm benefit to the community. The road repairs are trivial.

In losing out on funds the chief has lost face with his people as well.

In all areas where drought relief work was underway, our teams found that local people regarded the projects with disinterest. They were regarded as having no benefit other than to supply time-killing tasks for the workers. Not one was related to a real community need.

SIEVING OUT THE NEEDY

A question that besets donors and distributors of aid is how to ascertain that what there is goes to those who need it most. Our teams were concerned that there was so little evidence of sieving systems. They queried the Mahlabathini scheme where “any old person” was entitled to a bag of meal. An old person with a pension is regarded as one of the wealthier members of a poverty stricken society.

One sieve that helps to sift out the needy is work – our teams believed that where possible food should only be provided in return for work. The government work-for-food projects were therefore supported – if improvements could be made to their implementation.

Another sieve is the food itself. A lot of goodies have been flowing into drought relief – attracting quite the wrong kind of people. Bread, for example, is seen to be the food of the rich. Mealies – not mealimeal – is the food of the poor.

Although mealies are R 7,80 cheaper per 100 kilograms, they are not being used for famine relief work. Since CAP started to provide mealies rather than mealimeal a year ago, some people have dropped out of our schemes. They were people who should not have been there in the first place.

IF IT RAINS

.... There will be an end to the drought, but not to famine.

While it has been convenient to use the drought as a reason for famine relief, the drought is not the real cause of hardship in black rural areas. The people in greatest need are those without fields, without livestock, and often without men.

Recession, removals, a pension budget that leaves thousands of old people without pensions... all are factors contributing to poverty that is only partly affected by whether or not it rains.

CAP has always regarded its monthly bones queue as a barometer of hardship. The following analysis reflects something of the people who have queued. With bones for the first six months of this year. How many people are in the queue because of drought – how many queue because of other circumstances?

| | |
|--|--------|
| Total people: | 3 858 |
| Total children of schoolgoing age at school: | 29,95% |
| Families owning fields or gardens | 21,08% |
| Families owning cattle or goats | 28,26% |
| Widows | 39,10% |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--------|-------|
| Deserted families | 3,09% | |
| Fathers with TB | 8,7% | |
| Fathers crippled (no pension) | 8,66% | |
| Fathers blind (no pension) | 1,41% | |
| Fathers sick | | 4,64% |
| Fathers mad | | 3,75% |
| Fathers in jail | | 1,61% |
| Fathers employed in town | 14,01% | |
| Fathers employed on farms | 3,96% | |
| Fathers unemployed | 10,72% | |
| Pensioned | | 1,64% |

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SEPTEMBER 1983: MASHUNKA BOYS

Choose a hidden place, says Neil. So they choose a spur of the mountain, windy and open, where the only cover is an mviti tree. Its patch of shade is too small to conceal the men who are waiting there. They sit on tumbled stones in the sunshine, relaxed, untroubled by the space around them. Nobody can eavesdrop on space.

Down in the valley women cluster at the borehole, taking turns at the wheel, swinging until it whizzes with its own momentum. Water trickles at the outlet, sighs and disappears. MaThepa Cindi has to wait an hour before she can fill her plastic drum, load it on her head and start the slow climb home. She climbs with effort, grunting and whistling, her back dripping sweat. She has no breath to greet the men who pass her. They shade their heads, fingers on their lips. "Tula. Say nothing."

But she has already been warned. The Cindi kraal is on the way to the mviti tree so the two Cindi wives know about the meeting. They are the only Mashunka women allowed to know. "Women are like babies," says Glow Mvelase. "They pass on everything, even secrets. We choose the mountain for our meeting so we can hide from our wives. "He turns to the two women:" If you tell anybody..." He pretends to flog them.

There is something formidable about Glow, an inner quietness, a restraint behind his slow smile. He is a striking man, tall and powerful, built to be a fighter. Yet Glow fights only to stay away from war. He is an impi dodger like the others who have come today: 30 men, most of them middle-aged and older, representing... perhaps 100 others? How do you count those who shelter on the mountain?

Glow has done most of the organising for the meeting, walking from kraal to kraal, sending messages, posting a guide at the crossroads. Now he waits for Neil in Cindi's yard – Neil and the stranger he said he'd be bringing with him. Perhaps today they will think out a way to stop the trouble. Glow has been dodging trouble since September 1981 when seven armed men chased him across the stony hill slopes.

Although he seems too heavy for speed, he sprinted away, ducking bullets. He knew the men who hunted him.

"I took their names to the chief," he says, "and the chief ordered the gang to come to his court. But they never came. Then the chief said the matter would be handled by the police, but nothing happened."

And that is what lies behind this meeting. Nineteen Mashunka men have died in 18 months. "We bury the bodies, but nothing happens." Klakaza Mtshali (50) speaks quietly but vehemently. He is a short bearded man, tough and wiry. "If somebody ides in Goli (Johannesburg) there are no arrests. Here at home it is the same. When a man dies there are no arrests. We report to the chief and to the police. We give names but nothing happens.

Neil is familiar with the names. There are only about 20. The names do not change. What does alter, however, are the threads of the stories that link the names together. Loyalties merge and dissolve. Alliances snarl and unravel. Where is the tail-end of truth?

“It starts in Goli,” say the men at the mviti tree. Somewhere in Goli a flare of anger sets off a disturbance in gang politics.

“Then the quarrels of Goli are brought home with the corpses. We don’t know the reason for war. Only the gang knows what happens in Goli.”

Last year 16 graves were dug on the mountain. Then there was a lull – months without a killing. In May this year, however, three men were murdered: Mtuteni Madonsela, Sipho Shezi and Puzu Mvelase, the brother of Chief Ngoza Mvelase. Immediately the people on Mashunka mountain went on full alert.

“We don’t want the impi – most of us don’t want the impi,” says Glow, but there is not a man at Mashunka who sleeps at home anymore.

One hidden quarrel has dragged a whole community into a state of war. And it has remained in a state of war even though most of the gang have deserted their Mashunka homes and moved across the river to the Ngubos.

“That is why you cannot help us,” Mtshali tells Neil. “The people who started this war are not here. They are hiding over the river. They are there now, together with our cattle which they have stolen. When we go to the police to report our missing stock they say we also eat stolen cattle. “Mtshali is angry. The men who want peace cannot settle the war. That is what he told his chief at a meeting at Jolwayo recently.

“We cannot be helped because the quarrel is not ours,” he argued with his chief.

It was a stormy meeting, crowded with angry men. But only Mashunka men.

“You Mashunka people killed my brother,” accused the chief. His anger went deep too.

“What is the reason you killed my brother?”

“We can say nothing,” Mtshali repeated, “until you fetch those who are hiding across the river.” No quarrel is resolved with one side missing.

“That is why it is better if you go to the Ngubos,” Mtshali suggests to the stranger who is sitting with Neil at the mviti tree. Then perhaps you can help us. Don’t come here. Go over the river.

The stranger is tall and gentle, with an easy fluency in Zulu.

“We work together,” Neil has introduced him. “I trust him. So can you.” The men are wary, but interested. Well, some things have to be taken on trust. For two years there has been turmoil. Two years, and have the authorities managed to stop the deaths?

“So we think: only an outsider can sort this out and check the truth,” says one of the men afterwards. That is why they drop the barriers that would normally exist between themselves and a white government official, and they talk openly to the stranger.

“Well, amadoda,” says Neil at last. “We will try and think of a plan to help you. There will be another meeting on another day, for you and the Ngubos also.

The men disperse gradually, most heading home to report back to those who are waiting. For the three babies of the meeting, however, thoughts of war are soon pushed away. Funokwakhe Mtshali (18), Velaphi Mbatha (19) and Nomqhusu Mbatha (18) are really too young to sit in an adult talk. However they are Glow’s messengers.

“Good boys,” says Glow. “Quite. Responsible. I know I can rely on them.” Yesterday he used them as runners to spread the news of the meeting. That is why they have been allowed at the mviti tree, looking a bit out of place, a little self-important, trying to listen without expression.

Their politeness disappears as they idle down the mountainside after the meeting, however. They are off to chaff the girls. Although it is a two-hour walk to our gate, the boys walk the distance every afternoon, hanging around until it is time for the girls to leave work. Nomqhusu has fallen for Mtshitshi Mvelase, with her wide eyes, silver earrings, tantalising composure. Mtshitshi is a beauty. Her friend Sopheni Sithole isn’t even pretty but Velephi has been pursuing her for months.

“No, I don’t like you,” Sopheni has insisted whenever he has managed to get close enough to grab a wrist. But she has giggled and ducked her head.

It is not often the boys get the girls to themselves. Most afternoons the girls walk home in the company of Gogo Zungu, pretending to be demure, laughing as they pass.

The boys laugh too, already busy on a strategy to get rid of the old woman. Sometimes they have taken the girls by surprise, waiting on the far bank of the river. The girls have to bare their strong brown legs for the crossing, clutching blue flannel drapes about their waists. On a lucky day there are no adults about and the boys can tug at the girls’ garments as they splash ashore, teasing them, demanding: “Say you love me.”

This week has been unlucky, though. Every afternoon the girls have passed with their chaperone, and the boys have walked home at twilight without even a word exchanged.

Two days after the meeting at the mviti tree, on September 2, the boys are again at the gate at 4 p.m. Sopheni and her friends see them waiting, slip along the fenceline to avoid them, then make a dash through the bush. By the time the boys realise what’s happening it’s too late. They race across the farm, following the girls’ laughter, unable to catch up.

Well, they will be back tomorrow. The boys grin and turn for home. It is dark before they cross through the gap of Mashunka mountain but they are not afraid. They are too young to sleep among the krantzies at night. Only men are targets of war. Children are safe sleeping at home.

Tonight the youngsters make for the curved stone terraces of Funokwakhe’s home. The boys’ hut lies on the lowest terrace, at the bottom of a flight of steps. “Sawbona gogonta hlabani Mtshali” Somebody has roughly painted on the door. “Hullo Gogonta...” Inside a radio hangs from a rope on the rafters, blasting out dance music. Some of the neighbourhood boys have already arrived. Soon there are nine boys jiving. They shuffle and bump, shouting to make themselves heard above the music. A tiny oil lamp flickers on the floor, throwing shadows on the red clay walls.

Funokwakhe’s father, Sikhwebu, is away in Kimberley looking for work, so his mother eats her supper alone in a hut on an upper terrace. She enjoys the din. The boys are having fun. The happy noise spills down the hillside. Music and boys voices. It’s still early. Only 7 p.m.

Mzwekakhe Mvelase (15) begins to feel hungry again. Dancing works up an appetite. He decided to scrounge for a second helping of supper. He leaves the boys' hut, shutting the door behind him.

"And as I go up the steps the bullets start," he says.

The first shot blasts the door open. Inside the jiving boys scatter. The room is bare except for a painted wooden chest, so the boys crouch against the walls, hiding behind nothing. Bhecema Mtshali, a boy of 15, is hit in the stomach and dies instantly. Funokwakhe gets a bullet through his ribs. Velaphi is shot in the chest, his upper arm is ripped away, and he has shotgun pellets in his head. Nomqhusu's buttocks are torn open. Mehlo Mtshali (14) is shot in the leg.

The boys shut their eyes in terror so see nothing of their attackers. Just once they hear a yell: Bamba Mandlakazi!" the battle cry of the Ngubos across the river.

As soon as the firing stops women run through the darkness from neighbouring kraals. Funokwakhe's mother scrambles down the steps and is first inside. The door hangs loose, wood splintered. The clay walls have been shattered. Dozens of cartridge cases litter the floor. Blood seeps through the boys' clothes. And still the radio blares out dance music. "I turn off the radio," says Mrs. Mtshali. "First I turn off the radio." She repeats herself as if the sound of the radio were the strangest thing there. Then she kneels over her son. "I felt a bullet hit me," he tells her. He never speaks again, although he lies dying for the next four hours.

Helplessly the crowding women grab blankets from the painted chest to wrap around the wounded boys. The folded blankets come out riddled with bulletholes.

Three women are sent to ask for help. They walk in starlight, without a torch, over the mountain, stumbling on rocks, missing the path. It is 10 p.m. before they reach us. Another half hour before the police and hospital answer our calls. Then Neil rouses our sons. Rauri can come with him. GG can wait on the road to show the police where to turn.

There is not even a track to the Mtshali kraal. The three women guide the vehicle as far as it can go up the mountainside. Then everyone continues on foot, in single file. They are climbing a narrow path when they hear the sounds of bolts clicking ahead of them. "Niwobani? Who are you?"

In the hours of waiting the men have come off the mountain and are guarding all approaches. "It's only Magokogo," a woman replies. "He's come to help."

The men move away and stand above the path, shadows with glistening barrels.

At the Mtshali's the terraces are crowded.

"The boy who died is in here." somebody leads Neil to a hut where the body of Bhecema has been taken. Neil glances at the dead boy, then goes on to see the wounded, who are lying in darkness. The smell of blood is strong in the dark.

A woman lights a candle. Neil holds it as he examines all four. Funokwakhe has just died, but the others are still alive.

"Please take us quickly," begs Velaphi. "Please hurry. We are dying."

Neil goes back down the mountain to see if he can manoeuvre the combi closer to the kraal. Women prepare to lift Nomqhusu and Velaphi on blankets. While they are busy Rauri scoops up handfuls of cartridge cases – from FN rifles, shotguns, .303s. The door has 13 bulletholes, the wall 14.

It is not easy carrying the injured down the path. They groan everytime somebody slips. Rauri walks backwards, shining a torch.

At last the boys are in the combi and on their way to hospital. “Quickly,” Velaphi begs. “We are dying. Quickly.”

But it is midnight before the boys reach hospital. Its five hours since they were shot. Velaphi has developed a terrible thirst.

“Water,” he begs Rauri. “Nothing else matters. Just bring me water. “But he’s not allowed to drink – he’s on his way to theatre.

“Will you remove their clothes?” the nurses ask. They don’t want to get into trouble for damaging the garments and the boys’ shirts and trousers have to be cut off. Rauri helps while Neil works gently with a scalpel, slicing away the sticky cloth.

“Water,” Velaphi begs. “I must have water.” His injuries have been unattended too long. He is dying too.

The three boys are buried, like the other 19, on Mashunka Mountain. We wait to discover the reason for the attack. Who had a grudge against Funokwakhe’s family?

Why was his home selected? However this time there is no reason, other than that somebody wanted to score against Mashunka. As Mashunka’s men were in hiding, there were only boys to attack. It was nothing more than happy noise that drew the guns that night.

The murder of the boys marks a new kind of killing. Even before the graves have been dug men are on their way home from the cities, in trains, buses, taxis. Once again we live with the sound of gunfire. Even at midday there is firing.

Neil cannot throw off his sadness.

“They were such nice boys,” he says. “Such nice boys.” He had promised the men at the mviti tree he would do something to help. But he had underestimated the danger. He hadn’t helped soon enough.

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OCTOBER 1983: THE WIND IS INVISIBLE

Inside the combi it is too hot to talk.

“Open the windows to get some air,” says Neil. But the windows are already open, catching the heat of the sunny afternoon. Every breeze is wedged tight between sweating men.

The combi approaches the hill of boulders, the kwaNdlela metropolis; it passes the two schools, the shebeen, Kumalo’s house, Ntabela’s.... this is a busy stretch of road.

“Isikhathi? What’s the time?” asks Mankomaan Mabaso, the old gunsmith. Unobtrusively he has managed the best seat in front for himself.

“Four,” calls Loli Dladla from the back.

The combi turns onto the straight below the hill. It’s an odd hill, a rocky alien in the valley. The great slabs of rock don’t belong here. They are part of some other scenery. At the bend a crowd of boys wait in the shade of the wild fig. There are always children at the tree, watching the cars go by when there’s nothing else to do. Mabaso glances at the children as the combi slows for the corner at emaGoqweni. A boy is on his feet, waving, shouting: “Olololo!”

“What’s that boy doing?” asks Mabaso sharply. There is laughter in the combi as the first bullet hits the vehicle.

“It sounds like a stone – khwa,” says Mkonto Dladla. “Then an bullet makes a hole in the windscreen. Then there is thunder.”

The men are too crowded to do more than hunch themselves, trying to drop their heads below their knees. They are blinded by the hot smoke exploding around them, deafened by their own cries. Gusts of fire scud along the roof.

Neil and Mabaso look straight ahead, into the ambush. The volleys come from both sides of the road. The gunmen are not concealed. Mabaso sees them up on the rocks, ducking their heads, scared at the reports of their own guns.

“Baleka Numzaana,” he urges Neil. “Run away Numzaan.”*

Neil accelerates, but it is impossible to go fast around the corner.

“Gijima Numzaan,” yell the men at the back. “Run, run,” But the combi has began to slow down, trundling gently over the bumps. Mpini Mpungose raises his head, squinting through the gunsmoke. What is happening? Why are they so slow? He sees red mist on the windscreen as Neil slumps in his seat.

“Then he looks at me and I see blood spraying from his neck,” says Mabaso,” and the car stops and he opens the door and falls on the ground.”

For a moment the men are unaware they have come to a standstill. As they crouch, unmoving, Loli Dladla is shot in the back. A window shatters above Notshokoda Mbatha.

Shotgun pellets lodge in his head. Maqoqono Dladla's finger odd thumbs are blasted off. Mpini feels something hit his belt. When he touches the place his hand comes away bloody. A bullet rips into the stomach of Mzothuli Dlamini. As he struggles for the door a second bullet hits his thigh.

MaSithela Mbatha is the first to wrench the door open and spring away, swerving across the road to dodge bullets. Mzothuli is behind him, clutching the hole in his stomach, staggering. He falls to his knees, then forces himself into a desperate trot.

Loli never gets beyond the combi. He tumbles over the step and lies still the others jump over his body.

*Numzaan – kraalowner – is the name the men use for Neil when they address him.

An old man, Bhankuza Mtshali, fumbles to the doorway. As he emerges he is shot through the stomach. He falls back inside. Sthembisi Mbatha pushes past him, but Sthembisi has been hit too.

"When I start to run I find my foot has been smashed. There is blood all over my foot." Dragging the useless foot Sthembisi limps off the road, making for the cover of the bush.

Madweba Mvelase, tall, gentle Madweba, is the last of the Mhlangana men to leave the vehicle. He pauses when he sees Loli lying at the step. Loli is not yet dead.

"I am shot," he whispers. "Help me home." Madweba puts his arms around his friend, lifts him, lays him on the floor of the combi. But he cannot wait. Mpembe Mvelase, a Mashunka man, is pushing him. "Get out! Go! Go! The guns are coming! Get away!"

Madweba makes a dash up the road, trying to sprint, but his red gumboots are too much for him. Although the dust jerks bullets, he stops to kick off his boots, grabbing one in each hand. He is swinging away when he sees an Ndlela man after him, hurling rocks. He knows the man well. They are both Mvelase.

"Would you kill me my brother?" Madweba cries.

"Bulala zonke!" yells the man. "Kill them all!"

Madweba speeds on, zigzagging up the road, red gumboots in his hands.

At the combi there are now only Mashunka men. Mpembe stands with his hands up, facing the guns, shouting: "Shwele baThembu! They pity Mthembus! Don't shoot! We're not fighting you! We're from Mashunka!"

Mabaso crawls from the front seat to join Mpembe: "Shwele baThembu!" they cry together, hands above their heads. "We're from Mashunka!" The call is taken up by Ndlela women at a hut nearby: "Don't shoot! They're Mashunka!" KwaNdlela has no quarrel with Mashunka.

There is a lull in the firing as the impi leap from their positions to pursue the Mhlangana men. Some of the impi carry rifles. Others have assegais and stones.

"They look like soldiers because they are in uniform," says Mabaso. But they are wearing no shirts for it is a hot afternoon.

Twelve men flee from the combi. Four are killed before they get far. One hides. Seven keep running.

“A bullet hits the sand next to me,” says Mzothuli. “Then there’s another on the side and the dust flies up. I don’t know where I’m going, but I run, through the bush, past the galbooms. After a long time I see somebody running in front of me. Its MaSithela.”

Mzothuli moves abreast. “Carry me,” he gasps. “I’m tired, MaSithela, carry me.”
“Harden yourself,” pants MaSithela. “You have gone far already. Carry on.”

Gradually the firing dies away behind them and they begin to walk, but pushing themselves, urgently. It’s still a long way home, across the unploughed fields, down to the Mhlangana river.

The sounds of the ambush have been muffled at the riverside so Mandlamakulu Mpungose has heard nothing as he strolls up the river path in the afternoon sunshine. He is startled to see MaSithela and Mzothuli.

“Kwenzenjani?” he demands. “What’s happened?”
“Water,” says MaSithela. “I must have water.”

Water is fetched for him, but not for Mzothuli.
“Urinate,” Mzothuli is ordered. “Then drink the urine. It will deaden the pain.”
But Mzothuli barely hears. He is not stopping yet. He stumbles on alone a little further and then at last topples in a faint.

Mpini, Sthembisi and Phikabo Xulu are in sight of each other as they flee off the road, behind Simeon’s kraal, and Nene’s kraal, and Danisa’s. They know the kraals well. Were they not neighbours once, and friends?

Away from the homesteads they separate. Mpini runs close to the mountain, keeping to thick bush, spurred by the wetness of the blood on his leg. He is at the outskirts of Mutwa’s home when an elderly woman races towards him.

“Wakwabani mntanami?” she calls. “Who are you my baby?” Its Mpini’s stepmother, MaThonzi, too agitated to recognize her son.
“You don’t see me mother?” he cries. It’s me, Mpini.”
“Mpini? You cannot be,” she says. “There’s firing. What’s happened? Who’s died?”
“I know nothing,” replies Mpini. “I think Numzaan is dead because I saw blood on the windows. The others I do not know.”

MaThonzi starts running again, down the path, along the road to kwaNdlela.

All over the eMhlangana hills women are running now, drawn by the sound of gunfire. Sthembisi is nearly home, hobbling on his smashed foot, when he sees his wife Isah fling down the path.

“What’s wrong with your foot?” she calls.
“I was shot. Go and see who’s died.” Isah runs on.

Madweba is the only man who makes his escape along the road. His long thin legs carry him two kilometres, past houses, the church, the old market stall. He has started to walk when a car approaches, traveling towards kwaNdlela. Towards kwaNdlela? Certain that the car is part of the ambush he picks up speed again, sprinting on, the two red gumboots still in his hands. If he can just make it as far as the Mhlangana bridge...

As Madweba crosses the bridge he is surrounded by women.
“Safa! Saphela!” he cries. “They die! They are finished!”

The women pass him, running on, across the bridge, along the road to emaGoqweni, terribly afraid, praying for their men.

At the combi the Mashunka men have stopped calling. The impi has passed. The last of the soldiers are up the road, gathered next to a body.

“Let me hit Thobola,” one shouts, grabbing a rock and hurling it down.

“Move away, move away,” a second soldier pushes his companions behind him, points his rifle at the body, fires. Then, unhurried, they leave the road and walk towards the mountain.

“When the soldiers have gone we see the body is Mutwa,” says Mpembe. He looks at his watch. It’s 4.20 p.m. They are in the midst of a KwaZulu suburb, more than 50 huts and shanties round about them. The sun is still shining on the busy, familiar road.

Neil is lying on his side, his blood soaking the dust. Mpembe touches him gently.

“Numzaan akasekho,” he tells the others. Neil has died. The Mashunka survivors huddle next to Neil’s body. Bhankuza Mtshali weeps. “Numzaan is not all right anymore.” He weeps for Neil, then he weeps for himself. He is an old man with a white beard bleeding from a large hole in his back. There is nothing the others can do for him. Nor for Loli, who is not yet dead, stretched out on the floor of the combi. Loli will be a long time dying.

Maqoqoa holds up a bloody hand. “My thumb’s gone.” He’s surprised. Notshokoda binds the stump with a hankie.

“Where’s UVelaphi? And Mkonto?” Mabaso has been taking stock of the Mashunka group. Two Mashunka men are missing. They look at each other. Who is brave enough to start a search?

An Ndlela man comes to the, shouting, excited. There are tears on his cheeks.
Tears?

“When you are impi, anger makes your tears,” says Mpembe. Yet they cannot be sure he is impi, for although he’s in overalls he carries no gun.

“Ja,” says the Ndlela man, looking at the bodies. “Lungile impela. Very nice.

Our boys did a good fob today.” There is a spurt of words. Useless words. There is nothing of meaning that can be said between them.

“Look at Bhankuza and Maqoqona here,” Mpembe interrupts. “They are Mashunka. You have no fight with them yet they have been shot. And even now we cannot see Mkonto and our Induna.”

“How were they dressed?” asks the Ndlela man. “Overalls or trousers?”

“Our induna was wearing overalls.”

“There’s a body near the donga that might be him. Go and check.”

“We’ll be shot.”

“No. You’re all right now. The impi is not coming back.”

But the body is not a Mashunka man. It’s Albert Mbatha. He fled wearing his hat. He died with that hat still tipped at an angle.

The dead are all from eMhlangana. Mutwa, Albert, Vana Mpungose and Mbunzu Sokhela. "None of ours are here," says Mpembe.

A woman approaches. "There's somebody in that house." She points. "He's from Mashunka. His name's Dladla."

Mkonto! His friends are relieved. "Call him for us," they ask.

But Mkonto is scared to come out of his hiding place under a bed. He has to be called a second time before he comes to the road, a tall man with a moustache wearing a woman's hat and a long shawl to disguise his trousers.

"Take off those things," says Notshokoda. "It's all right. Everybody knows you're from Mashunka." Mkonto removes the garments, then sits down trembling.

"Please can you fetch my hat?" he asks. He left it lying under the bed. When it is brought to him he fingers it, puts it aside. He is uninjured but the hat is red with blood.

There is nothing to do now except wait. Somebody must arrive to help. Mabaso. And Mpembe guard Neil's body on the road while the sound of women rises around them. There are crowds of women – kwaNdlela women and eMhlangana women – standing apart from each other, holding each other, weeping, praying, shocked into silence.

It's about 4.30 p.m. when a van draws up.

"Who killed the white man?" the driver stares at Neil.

"We don't know. We were just shot," says Mabaso. "There are wounded here. Can you take them to hospital and call the police?"

"No. No. No," the driver is vehement. "I can't take anyone."

"Will you tell the police then?"

"Ok. I'll tell the police." The van disappears at speed towards Tugela Ferry.

It's 10 kilometres away. Ten minutes drive.

Another 20 minutes pass. Another van stops, accelerates.

"We are going to die if we wait here," says Bhankuza, the old man with the hole in his back. The others help him to his feet, hand him his stick. Trembling, moving very slowly he starts off along the road to Tugela Ferry. Maqoqona Dladla goes with him, the hankie round his hand now soggy.

They go past the wild fig tree at the corner, past the sloping boulders of the strange hill, past the shanties where nobody seems to be at home this afternoon.

They have walked a kilometre before they are hailed by two women at Ralf Kumalo's gate.

"What happened? We heard firing."

"We were shot. And Magokogo, he has died."

"Hau."

Bhankuza drops to the ground.

"Kahle," the women encourage him. "Don't worry. Malembe's small bus comes soon."

Kumalo's gate is the terminus for the bus.

"We have no money."

"I will pay for you," says Ralf Kumalo, who has joined the group. And when the bus stops he hands over the 50 cents fares.

"Drop them at the hospital," he tells the driver. "You can see they are badly hurt."

Bhankuza and Maqoqona are delivered at the hospital gate before it gets dark. But at the combi there is still no sign of help. The big Weenen bus comes along, maneuvering carefully past Neil's body. Without stopping the bus travels on.

Another car comes by. It's Ralf Kumalo's son.
"Please 'phone Numzaana's wife," Mabaso asks. "Tell her Numzaan is dead."

At about 6 p.m. the telephone rings at home.
"Is that Magokogo's house?" The caller has difficulty with English.
"Yes, but Magokogo is not at home."
"Magokogo is dead."
"Who is dead? You want Magokogo because who is dead?"
"Magokogo is dead. Impi kill him at Mbabane."

No. Not today. Today was just an ordinary day.

"Where is he now?"
"He is sleeping on the floor."
"Will he wake up?"
"No."
"Have you told the police?..... Thank you."

It is more than an hour before the Tugela Ferry police fetch me.
"Mr. Alcock is dead."
"I know."
"Five men die with him." Five men.
"Mabaso?" I ask. "Mutwa?" The policemen shake their heads. They do not know.

We drive in silence through the growing dark. I don't know where we are going. Mbabane, the man said on the 'phone. The Mbabane impi. But Mbabane is the name for both eMhlangana and kwaNdlela.

We drive past the red pepper trees, over the bridge, across the river of stone. There are people clustered at the bridge. Our headlights touch them and swing away. We do not see Mzothuli lying in a wheelbarrow. He has been there since sundown, struggling on the edge of consciousness. Sometimes he seems about to slip away, beyond reach. Then he lunges, rocking the wheelbarrow.
"I'm hot," he whispers. "The blood is gathering." His friends help him to stand to let the blood out."

Sthembisi is also waiting at the bridge, with his smashed foot. They both need a car to take them to hospital but nobody tries to wave us down. We are traveling towards kwaNdlela. Near the church we pass a long line of women walking in the dark. I wonder vaguely what they are doing walking together on the road at night. Beyond them the road is deserted. Has the night always been so dark? The combi appears quite suddenly at the corner at emaGoqweni. The windows are shattered, splashed with blood. The metal has been ripped by bullets. A pool of blood has soaked into the road.
"The bodies have been taken," observe the policemen.

Then I notice the Mashunka men standing in the darkness, shaking their heads, unable to find words. Mabaso is there, tiny and frail. Was he always so tiny?

“Oh Mabaso,” I put an arm around him. “Oh Mabaso.” And I remember. “Mutwa? Is Mutwa all right?” Mabaso whistles soundlessly.

“Gone.”

Mkitshwa Cindi hands me a ten-cent coin. “Numzaan dropped it,” he says.

I gather Neil’s things from the combi. His jacket is wet with blood. His briefcase is wet with blood. The seat is wet with blood. There is blood on the floor, and the roof and the doors.

Dear God, how can there be so much blood?

“Please will you take me to my husband?” I ask the policeman.

“But what are we going to do about the combi?”

“I don’t know.”

“Aren’t you going to drive it home?”

“No,”

“Well what must we do?”

They are nervous, out of their depth, black policemen with a white woman. At last one of them clambers into the vehicle, gets it started, turns. We follow the rattling white ghost on the road towards Tugela Ferry. And we have not gone far when we see the lights of a convoy approaching. Greytown Police. I am put into another car. Sergeant Pistor will look after me.

“Will you take me to see my husband?”

“Are you sure you want to?” Pistor is quiet and kind. He talks as he drives, trying to help me.

Tugela Ferry seems far away, very strange. We park at the mortuary. I have not been there before. A little room in the hospital grounds, set apart, lit up. Pistor goes to fetch the key. He is a long time coming back. We go inside together. There is a stretcher with bits of flesh not yet cleaned away. Drawers are pulled open and shut, open and shut. What a terrible place to say goodbye. But it’s all right.

There’s nobody there. The mortuary is empty. Pistor is distressed. “I’m sorry.

I should have checked first. I’m terribly sorry.”

We drive to the police yard. There are lights burning in the garage. The dead men are laid out in a row on the floor. And there’s nothing to be afraid of. They are familiar, still part of our company. We have found them in time.

Loli’s widow is sitting there. I do not know her. At a tap women rinse blood from their hands. They have been lifting the bodies in and out of the police trucks.

“Vana dripped a lot of blood,” one of the women tells me. “And Loli too. But Magokogo has no blood left. He lost all his blood on the road.”

Neil has a hole in his chest, the skin folded back like the petals of a flower.

The wound in his neck is hidden until I bend over him. Is that all? It seems so little. Too little to have turned a man into a body, my life into my death.

We walked into the day together, all of us, and we walked lightly. But, my love, something in the day was terribly wrong, and we missed it. How could we have missed something so terribly wrong?

Only Mutwa, perhaps, had a sense of foreboding. He was uneasy and afraid –too afraid to ride the open truck on the open road. Yet it was also Mutwa who told the men to ride the combi. His instinct to trust was stronger than his instinct for danger. Mutwa and the others trusted Neil – and to trust was Neil's way of living.

Was it trust that brought you here, six men laid out in a row? Was it trust that killed you?

As the debris of the day is cleared away it is possible to recognize the omens, to know the lies, and trust seems just the ignorance of simple men.

But if you discard trust – how do you defend yourself against the darkness of the human heart? There is no way to be sufficiently on guard, clever enough to grasp the hidden things. A face, words – what do they reveal? They are dustmotes in the wind is invisible.

Trust can never be a fortress, a safe enclosure against life. Trusting is dangerous. But without trust there is no chance for love, and love is all we ever have to hold against the dark.

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1983: MUTWA AND ALBERT

That last night is hot and quiet and full of stars. Up on the eMhlangana hills groups of men are in hiding, not far away, but out of sight of our headlights as we pass along the road and through the valley. We will sleep at home. They will sleep among the rocks in the dark.

For more than 300 nights they have slept on the hillside. One summer, one winter, one spring. When it is cold they have only their greatcoats.

“And when it is wet we crawl under big stones,” says Elphas Mvelase. Even old men like Albert Mbatha have to lie squeezed under overhangs. Albert, together with his hat. Albert and his hat are never separated, not even on mountain at night during a war. He might be in his seventies, but Albert hasn’t started looking old, with his frizz of pale brown hair, parted on one side, and that hat worn always tipped at an angle. The hat belongs to a jaunty spirit.

During the day guns have thundered intermittently from the Ndlela side of the valley, warning shots that died away at dusk. There is seldom much firing at night, but the Mhlangana men have their guns propped next to them in their sleeping place.

Albert reaches for his pipe. Smoking is allowed, but only under cover. He removes his hat, then tugs at his greatcoat, arranging a tent about his head. His companions shift to block the light that ebbs and glows under his coatflaps.

It has been a hot day. Warmth seeps from the rocks. The men sit unmoving, not yet tired, staring at the blackness of mountains and sky.

“When you are on the mountain you are like a man who has already died,” says Nkosiyezwe Thusi. You think of nothing. You do not remember your wife, your lover, your friend. As the sun sets and you start to climb the mountain you become a different person. You are changed.”

This is the first war between eMhlangana and kwaNdlela. There have been quarrels before, but never fighting that has left 21 men dead. EMhlangana and kwaNdlela. It is hard to separate them. They are the same people and the same place. All Mtembus, all living strung out alongside five kilometres of dusty road. The road has kept them close, passing to and from around each other’s hearts. It is better to fight as strangers. If you know a man’s heart you know how to betray him.

The trouble starts in spring 1982 when two Mhlangana men are shot and injured by some Ndlelas. Mhlangana boys retaliate, but they make sure they kill. Mbashela Ndlela dies while he is loading sand on a government lorry.

The Mhlangana elders are agitated, appalled.

“But our sons won’t listen,” says Albert, sitting in our office with his hat as rakish as ever, slanted over one ear. “When we tell them this terrible thing must stop they reply: Watch it baba. We’ll hit you too.”

“Snake eggs,” says Petrus Majozi. “They are born of snake eggs. For we have become like snakes. We lay our eggs and go away. When the eggs hatch the young snakes are a law unto themselves. If they meet their parents they attack or are attacked. Snakes know nothing of family ties. Our strength has been used to make the white twons strong. We live in city jobs, away from our children. They grow up strangers to us, just as baby snakes do.”

Only Mutwa has sons who are friends.

“And when you see him with his sons,” says Elijah Mhlongo,” you think he is with his brothers.”

We first meet Thobola Mutwa surrounded by his sons. They sit together at our camp under the mgugude tree, handsome, lightfooted men with wide grins. It is obvious that they like each other.

“My sons are getting married and need to lobola,” says Mutwa,” and we hear you have cattle and are willing to sell.” He has a square face, an outline of beard and the dangling earlobes of his tribe. He grins easily, but with a slight difference, ducking his head, always a little shy. When Mutwa folds his arms and begins to speak, however, his words are direct and unhesitating. His voice is too high, almost squeaky, not the voice of an orator, yet he can “chaza kahle” reveal, explain, show the meaning of

Mutwa has only recently returned from the city after more than 40 years as a security guard. His sons ordered him home, and he is glad to be back, following his cattle among the familiar hills. He is a tireless walker, with the airy step of a man who has never worn shoes. Even in town he wears only his “ingxabulelas”, his home-made sandals. Shoes are an impediment to walking.

Our friendship gets underway with cattle talk. That first visit we sell Mutwa four cattle. Then eight. Then he buys for his friends Vana Mpungose and Mbuzi Thusi.

Mutwa is always the same, always a little shy, but with openness, a straight decency about him.

“Strong? No he is not a strong man.” A strong man exerts his strength. That is not Mutwa. Majozi frowns, trying to explain. “When he left town the men at the hostel had a party for him. It was the first time there was such a party. It was special. Just for Mutwa. Mutwa doesn’t drink, but beer was bought for everybody.

Shangaans, Xhosas, Bhacas, Pondos, Zulus – all of them were there, for Mutwa is a trusted man, a man with many friends.”

Mhlongo has a loud, exasperated contempt for his fellows, but he respects Mutwa.

“Mutwa is not frightened like other people,” he says. Being frightened is something Mhlongo will never understand nor forgive, but Mutwa’s all right. Who else would chase after trouble tracking down stockthieves like that Badagwetu Dladla?

It is a three-hour walk from eMhlangana to the farm, and three times Mutwa strolls along, swinging his stick, to pass on news about that Dladla.

“We all know him to be a stockthief,” says Mutwa,” and we are tired of his stealing.

Somebody would have finished him off long ago except that he only goes out at night and then with a gun.” Mutwa has information that there are five new cattle grazing outside Dladla’s kraal. Four sound like missing animals of ours. One sounds like Mhlongo’s red cow with short horns that was heavy in calf.

“My cow!” Mhlongo roars. “And the calf I have never seen! Is it there? When are we going?” “The thing is,” Mutwa cautions, “Dladla doesn’t put your cattle inside his kraal. He lets them graze nearby where they could be anybody’s cattle. If you want to catch him....” “But my cow!” pleads Mhlongo. “If we don’t go now he’ll eat my cow!”

The lament rings in our ears during some slow weeks of hatching plots. Only when Dladla puts the red cow into his kraal and starts milking it do we finally get down to planning a raid. “It’s a difficult place,” says Mutwa. “You won’t find it unless I take you myself. It is the other side of the waterfall, up on the mountain.”

So Mutwa is guide to Neil, Mhlongo, Delanie Mbatha and Norman Mankowitz when they set off at 2 a.m. one summer morning. They go by truck as far as they can, bouncing on stony cattle tracks. Then they continue on foot, slipping down eroded gullies, siding on loose stones in the dark. They walk for two hours before Mutwa signals to them to stop. They are in dense shrubbery on the top of a mountain and the sky is bright with the promise of the sun. Mutwa is anxious.

He’s an Mtembu in Mchunu territory. The sooner he is gone the better.

“The whites must wait here,” eh whispers,” and Mhlongo because he is so loud. I’ll take Delanie with me because he is not known.” A while later Mutwa is back, pointing which way the rest must follow. Then with a wave and a grin he slips off, returning home down the ravine.

Dladla’s kraal is hidden in a straggle of overgrown shrub, and the men have to stop, pushing their way through branches. Mhlongo is the first to peer over the kraal wall. He turns, rejoicing, hands clasped over his head in gesture of victory. “My cow! My cow is there! It’s there! We’ve got it!” he whispers. Then reverting to his usual bellow he demands: “Ekhaya? Anyone at home?”

The day after the raid we drive down to eMhlangana. Mutwa is already on the road, on his way to the farm.

“I couldn’t wait any longer,” he says. “Everyone’s talking but I don’t know what to believe. There are so many rumours.”

He stands in the sand, grinning, as the story is told. He laughs out loud when he hears of Mhlongo’s terrible oaths as he arrested the bastard who had milked his cow. He laughs again when he hears how angry stockowners mobbed Dladla on the way to the truck, how Mhlongo had to fire his revolver to keep the prisoner safe.

“The world is a good place again,” say Mutwa. “Dladla will lead you to other thieves and other stolen cattle.”

By 1980, however, thieves are no longer the problem. Drought is robbing Msinga of its cattle. At eMhlangana the stream good dry. Thin cattle scuff at the edges.

“The last drought went on for five years,” Mutwa is worried when we met him one day at the irrigation plots. “I had 34 cattle when the drought started. Thirty died. I saved four by letting them graze along the canal. But his drought will be worse. The canal has been cemented. Nothing grows on the side anymore.” He twists his stick in the sand. “It’s the people in the valley who are suffering now. Some families have already lost nine cattle. I am lucky because I am up in the hills.”

The thatched spires of Mutwa’s home are set on a slope, silver roof tips twinkling. There are 25 huts for him, his wife, his six sons and their families – a shady village of stone terraces and round walls. Even at a distance you notice the beauty of the kraal, its symmetry among the trees. Nowhere else in the valley is there a homestead like it.

By spring of 1980 eMhlangana has become a disaster areas, with bare red earth and aloes chewed to stumps. Mutwa asks if he can bring his cattle to Mdukatshani, and for the next two years his animals graze on the farm. Not until we are forced to close the farm to build up fodder reserves does Mutwa collect his 17 cattle and drive them home.

eMhlangana and Mdukatshani lie in different valleys with a mountain and some hills in between, so we only hear rumours of the quarrel between eMhlangana and kwaNdlela. Then one Sunday morning in November 1982 an almost incoherent stranger pedals a bicycle into the garden.

“Skova Mpungose has been killed,” he says. “Please call the police.”

“Skova? The old man who walks with two crutches?”

“Ndlela people shoot him while he is asleep. Numzaan please help us. There is going to be a war. Please try to stop it. We don’t want war.

On Christmas morning, just as it is getting light, a Ndlela impi comes right into the center of eMhlangana, dragging Qamatha Sokhela from his bed and killing him. Then shooting Matewu Mdlala who is up early looking for cattle. Qamatha and Matewu were men in their seventies. Screaming women rouse the Mhlangana menfolk on the hills. There is a running gun battle along the main road at daybreak. The Ndlela impi retreats without casualties.

It is a withering summer. In the dry riverbeds sheets of rock groan and shatter. On New Year’s Day there is a storm. The rocks hiss, throwing up clouds of steam.

The police tell us about the hold up. Two men in a car stop the bus at Macunwini, climb board, guns at the ready, looking for an Mhlangana boy returning from hospital. But before they can shoot they are killed by a passenger.

“Now we have the bodies but nobody will claim them,” say the police. “Can you help us find out who they are?”

Mhlongo sets off on the enquiry. He is soon back. The dead men are Ndididi and Balela Ndlela. “That means there have now been eight killed in the fighting,” he reports. “Five from kwaNdlela, three from eMhlangana.”

The same day Mutwa arrives with a thin, short companion, Stezi Mpungose.

“Numzaan you have got to help us.” Mutwa’s diffidence has gone. He speaks urgently, quietly, very afraid. “We lose our sons for nothing. We do not want this war. You have to help us.”

“If you do not help I am a dead man,” says Stezi. A dark anxiety hangs about him. Neil is disturbed. Stezi conveys a sense of calamity. Perhaps that is why Mutwa brought him.

Not even Stezi’s wife, Mpahlile, can lift the dread that afflicts him, although she tries, killing a fowl every day until the fowls are almost finished.

“Please my wife, kill a fowl for me,” he repeats.

“But I killed one yesterday and now there are only four left.”

“I am not feeling well. Kill me a fowl.”

He sits at the door of the hut while she cooks, holding their toddler, Khanyake.

“Oh my baby is so small to grow up without knowing her father.”

“What is that? What are you saying? Why do you say that?” Mpahlile leaves her fire to rush outside.

“I am crying for my baby,” says Stezi. “I am crying for my baby.”

The next day is killed on the mountain.

“I find him lying without his head,” says Mpahlile. “It is only from his clothes that I know him. His head is gone.”

Stezi is buried headless, wrapped in a blanket. Mutwa and Albert help to prepare the grave. Then they return to the mountain. But his time they walk away from the war, and their friend Mbusi Thusi goes with them. “They climb out of the eMhlangana valley to the highveld that is Mchunu territory and they ask an Mchunu to shelter them. There has been too much horror. From both sides. Stezi was not the first to be beheaded. Bhekeni Ndlela was. eMhlangana chopped the first head.

Mutwa, Albert and Thusi talk aimlessly as they sit together in their friend’s kraal. Lasting the days pass with inactivity. If the police had arrested that Ndlela boy who had fired the first shot... If the police had arrested the Mhlangana boys who killed Mbashela down at the river... Their thoughts try to encircle the grief that has fallen on their valley.

And they have only been gone about a month when they are called back. Their cattle and goats are being stolen. All three men live close to the kwaNdlela boundary and straying animals quickly disappear. Mutwa finds his kraals almost empty. He has lost 18 cattle and 91 goats. Thusi loses eight cattle and about 50 goats. Albert finds more than 40 goats missing, but he still has four cattle. He begins to herd them himself, whistling as he drives them through the bush, away from kwaNdlela.

He is not yet defeated. Even herding he manages to look immaculate, hair combed, and that hat perched sideways on his frizz.

The return to eMhlangana means, once again, the terrible routine of nights up on the mountain, days down. Some men are able to sit at home during the day, but not Mutwa nor Albert. Their homes are out of bounds, dangerously close to kwaNdlela.

“I long to come home,” Albert tells his daughter-in-law, Mosekile. “I always remember home.” And he speaks as if home were a far country, inaccessible.

There was a time when Albert and the girl were not allowed to address each other direct. They passed messages, and Mosekile hid her face when her father-in-law was near. They were lonely people – Albert a widower, Mosekile a bride with a husband in the city – and tradition kept them alone.

“Until the war started,” she says. “Now we sit in front of each other and talk together.” War has broken down the strict Zulu formality and Albert and the girl find joy in their new companionship.

“He is a soft man” she says. “He was always a soft man, even before. He swept the yard. He prepared the wood. He chopped for me. And when I was cooking he carried the babies.”

Nomusa is three and puzzled by the changes in their lives.

“You don’t have to sweep the yard,” she tells her mother every day. “Mkhulu – grandfather will do it. Why don’t you wait for Mkhulu?”

The little girl knows the way up the mountain to the places where the impi hide, and scampers ahead of her mother on the daily trip to take Albert a bowl of food.

“Mkhulu,” she cries, running between his legs, chattering, hugging him.

“Have you still got bread at home?” he asks. “It’s finished? Then I’ll have to go and get you some more.” The store is safe, so the men idle at the counter, buying tobacco, having a chat. Every day Albert buys his two tiny granddaughters a loaf of brown bread. At eMhlangana bread is a luxury.

Something happens to Mutwa when he returns to the valley. He comes to terms with the fact that he cannot run away from the war – and he starts to take control of eMhlangana. Mutwa does not have a gun, nor does Albert, nor the other older men. They have kept apart on the mountain at night, carrying only their greatcoats and sticks.

Now Mutwa orders that the young men guard the old. Fathers and sons begin to sleep together. Mutwa has three sons with him – the others are “safe in jobs where their whites look after them”. Mosekile’s husband is also safe – it’s Albert’s other son who is with him on the mountain. Thusi has his only son, Vana has four...

There are boys in the impi of only 16, as well as men who are almost 80. They are a group drawn together by fear, in need of each other, yet ill-matched and divided in purpose.

Majozi is on an errand to eMhlangana one afternoon when he comes upon the impi in MaSitela Mbatha’s yard. Mutwa stands, armsfolded, addressing them in that odd high voice. “I’m glad you’re here to see what’s going on,” he greets Majozi. “We’re having this seting because we are tired of war. The boys don’t want to stop fighting but today we told them they are not to cross over to kwaNdlela. If the Ndlelas come here then they can defend themselves. But they are never to attack first.”

And the Mhlangana boys obey. From that day there are no further raids on kwaNdlela, although some boys go on itching for a fight.

“It is true that there are boys who like trouble,” admits Nkosiyezwe Thusi, the quick, articulate son of Mbuzi. “But they are poor boys. We have been shown how to grow up, but these boys have no fathers. They have no schooling, they have no work, they have no cattle. They have nothing. That is why they fight. But they can’t make trouble anymore because there is always somebody who finds out what they are thinking and whispers to Mutwa.”

Mutwa exerts his authority with reluctance. It has never been his way to command. He has been easy going, open, gifted with friendship. And perhaps this is what enables him to keep a hold on the killers among his people, to develop some cohesion out of the quarrels that split fathers and sons, the timid and the unruly at eMhlangana.

The winter takes the fight out of everyone. There is no way to escape the cold. "The cold will kill us first," men tell their wives. By the end of July the impi has decided to send a deputation to Neil. Mutwa and Albert must ask him to help stop the war.

The men afraid to travel on the bus after the Machwinini hold-up, so they cut across the hills in the twilight, asking for a place to sleep at Mashunka, walking on to the farm next day. It is some months since Neil has seen them. Albert is as debonair as ever, tipping his hat like a dance hall star. But Mutwa is altered.

Although he speaks with the old directness, the grin has gone. There is a new gravity. "Numzaan please try to help us. You stopped the war at Koornliver last year. Perhaps you can stop our war too. We have had meetings with our chief, but the chief says he can't do anymore. He has failed to get the Ndlelas to speak together with us.

Once he sent two police vans to fetch the Ndlelas. The vans came empty. No Ndlelas waited at the stop. But if the Ndlelas come, even on foot, without a van, they will be safe. We will know they are coming to talk peace."

Neil has tried to stay at a distance from the eMhlangana – kwaNdlela trouble. When Mutwa and Albert came before he fobbed them off: "These are matters for your chief," he said.

"Your chief must resolve them." But the war is now ten months old and these men whom he loves speaks in anguish.

"I will try," Neil promises at last. "But I must see your chief and then I must see the Ndlelas. I cannot help just one sgo di."

And it is only after he has spoken to Chief Ngoza Mvelase, and the Ndlelas, that he stops at the store to give a message to Mutwa: "The Ndlelas agree to a meeting.

They say they also want an end to war." The meeting will be at the Tugela Ferry court house, neutral territory, on a day that will be kept secret, just in case of trouble.

"We are sitting on the hill among the trees when Mutwa comes with the news,' says Elphas Mvelase," and we start to choose the men who must go." Each deputation is to be allowed ten. Mutwa, Albert, Mpini, MaSitela, Vana, Elphas... the Mhlangana impi select married men, older men. There are no youngsters.

"We are not going," say the boys with guns." Mutwa will speak for us. He can "Chaza kahle". He can explain to the chiefs, to the police, even to whites. He can say everything."

The spring is sudden – very hot and dry. After months without rain one night late in September there is a sharp storm. Up on the mountain the men scatter in search of overhangs. They are not alone among the cliffs.

"There are monkeys," says Nkosiyezwe. "Lots of monkeys. And rats. And porcupines live in the cracks. We hear them snorting." The men hate the rain for it chases them into the soft filth of animal droppings.

Weekend passes without news of the meeting. Nobody is impatient. They are used to waiting. The men idle at the store at home, smoking, talking.

On Tuesday morning Mutwa does something extraordinary. He goes home. His wife, Mshukulwa, is startled. It's ten in the morning. The Ndlelas must see. She hovers, panicky, trying to look in all directions at once while Mutwa sits outside their hut drinking mahewu. She is relieved when he says: "I won't eat here. If you dish up my food now I will take it to the hill." While she gets the food ready Mutwa looks down into the valley. EMhlangana and kwaNdlela country. All of it is familiar, all of it is home ground. The valley belongs to him, as it belongs to any man who gives his heart. It is no longer as beautiful as it was when Mutwa was a boy. The deep pools in the stream have turned into black rock and dust. Where the grass was thick and soft and springy there are now only stones. A shantytown covers old fields with painted walls and tin roofs. Yet the land still twists his heart. For a moment Mutwa stands on his terrace looking beyond the thatched spires of his home. Then he says: "I am going."

All that day guns thunder intermittently from the Ndlelas, warning shots that die away at dusk. The Mhlangana men do not return the fire, but their guns are with them on the mountain. It is so hot they could sleep without a covering, but they swelter in their greatcoats, wrapping them tight as protection against snakes. "There is not one night you are not afraid," says Nkosiyezwe. Afraid of guns, afraid of the dark, yet dreading the moon that follows the stars.

This is not the first time Mutwa has lived on the hills, looking at the stars. Forty years before he learnt about nights in the open, but Mshukulwa was with him then, a soft, lisping, barefoot girl. For months while they were courting they slept in the bush, under the trees.

He had to leave the night sky for a Johannesburg hostel, but he dictated letters of love to remind the girl: "Mtakwethu, my beloved, do you still love me?" Mutwa never did learn to read or write, so Majozi his letter for him every Sunday when they met at the city's Bantu Hall.

Mutwa and Mshukulwa were born at kwaNdlela and married at kwaNdlela, but they set up home at eMhlangana. Forty years ago there was no division between these places. And is there any reality now in the dusty gully that separates them? Umfulawempisi it is called. The river of the hyaena. But where is the river? There is no river. If the river does not exist – can the separation? Sometimes, it is hard to know what has changed the valley. Has the landscape alone been distorted, or has the spirit of the people bent out of shape?

Up on the mountain at night darkness hides the changes. The outlines of the hills are what they always were. The night is the same. The sky is beautiful. But a man can lose his appetite for stars.

The last dawn is still and golden. It is going to be hot again. There is no sign of spring anywhere across the bare grey valley except down at the Tugela where a clump of wild figs glows pink. The colour seems too brilliant for leaves.

At 7 a.m. Mutwa gets the message. This is the day of the meeting.

He goes to the kraal close to the cliffs where the wives leave clean clothes for their menfolk. He washes and changes into a dark green T-shirt with “ Sparks Ginger Beer” on the front.

Albert and his son have an argument.

“Not two,” Sthembisi Mbatha is saying. “Not two of us father. You stay. I’ll go.”

But Albert is no longer listening. He takes his pipe, tips his hat over one ear, and together with Mutwa walks down the hill to the road.

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1983: A MEETING AT THE COURTHOUSE

The omens are there, scattered across the hours of the day. We pass them by, unnoticed. You don't look for omens in an ordinary day.

The dawn is still and golden, touching the dying river with light. Neil looks across the valley to the mountain that is in shadow.

"I wonder who will gather today," he says.

On the mountain the guns have stopped. For five days, since the men heard about the meeting, there has been no gunfire. Somebody accepts the truce. But which somebody? The mountain shelters invisible men.

There are four impis coming to the meeting today. They have agreed to send ten men each – 40 men to be ferried in turn in our combi and truck. It is a condition that we take them, Neil and I. Yet nobody is waiting at Mashunka, the first stop, nor at eMhlangana, the second stop. Neil grins. Well, the meeting won't be early after all. He sets off round the mountain to look for the missing Mashunka delegation.

On the way he meets up with a police van.

"I'm sorry," says the driver, Constable David Madonda. "I couldn't get the message to all the men yesterday..." The message was radioed through on time, but the local police had vehicle problems. Two impis were notified yesterday, two are only being alerted now.

The day turns into long waits and longer detours.

"Go ahead to eMhlangana," Neil tells us. "When the men see you waiting they will hurry. And once you have rounded up everyone at eMhlangana, go on to kwaNdlela."

He will look for the Mashunka delegates, bouncing over those awful mountain tracks, going from hut to hut.

We drive to the red pepper trees at eMhlangana. As we park a man crosses the road.

"The others are coming," he greets us. "But are we going in this?" He's scared.

"We can't go in an open truck." We reassure him. The combi is following. Those who are afraid can go in the combi.

We sit for more than an hour, waiting. GG and Mphephethi Masondo pass the time flipping through a Kansas City catalogue they find lying in the cab. GG is on his way back to school after a couple of days off sick. Mphephethi invited himself along. He's one of the younger men, a radical, very curious.

"Forty five rand!" Mphephethi whistles at the price of a brown jacket in the catalogue.

"Lihle! Beautiful! But so expensive!"

"You can get it cheaper in town," says GG. "It's not worth forty five rand." The two argue over the catalogue advertisements as the eMhlangana men begin to gather under the red pepper trees.

A dust trail hangs above a yellow car speeding across the valley. The driver brakes when he sees us. It's Warrant Officer Van Vuuren of police headquarters.

"What's happening?" He asks. "The magistrate has remanded all the case for the day.

The courthouse has been cleared but nobody has arrived." For almost three hours he's been waiting for the meeting – if there is a meeting. Van Vuuren is a tall, gentle man, fluent in Zulu. He and Neil have worked together, talking to the men of all four impis, so he's relieved when we explain the delay. Today's meeting is important.

"Even if it starts after one it is all right," he says. "I'll tell the magistrate."

The dust trail follows him back to Tugela Ferry.

We keep count of the men under the red pepper trees. Thobola Mutwa is one of the last to arrive. He grins, ducking his head in that shy way of his. It's a long time since we've seen him grin.

As he enters the gate a rifle shot reverberates in the valley.

"Did you hear that!" says an eMhlangana man." See, the Ndlelas are already shooting us!"

But did the shot come from kaNdlela? It sounded close – close enough to have been fired from within eMhlangana. And was it a signal, a bit of propaganda, or just a mistake? Msinga has made us unconcerned about gunfire.

Not Mphephethi. He decides against going to kwaNdlela and climbs out of the truck to join the men waiting at the red pepper trees. GG and I drive off alone, wondering where we are meant to meet the kwaNdlela impi. We forgot to ask. We drive slowly, expecting to find a group near the road.

At emaGoqweni – the place of the stone heaps – we turn up a black shale rack. The chief has one of his homes at the top of the hill. Somebody at the chief's will tell us where to go.

But sentries have been posted to wait for us. At the first kraal a crowd of little boys leap to their feet, signaling back the way we have come.

"Kumalo's Store," they shout. "You must go to father Kumalo's Store." They are excited, full of importance. We laugh. "Siyabonga. We thank you."

As we return towards the main road a woman runs from a home on the hill. "The impi waits at Kumalo's Store," she says. She has also been told to watch for us.

She is smiling.

We find about 15 men waiting under the stunted thorn trees opposite Kumalo's.

They make no move towards the truck when we draw up. Well... we climb out and walk to greet them. "Sawubona. We see you." No reply. There is a man standing nearby with his back to us. We address him: "Are you the people from the impi we have to fetch?"

"No," he says, no turning.

"They've gone," volunteers one of the seated men.

"Gone? How did they go?"

"With the policeman in the yellow car." Van Vuuren must have picked them up as he went past. But how did he manage to fit ten in his car?"

"Did he take everybody?" we ask.

"There were only three. Three is enough."

Puzzled we return to the truck. The men watch us go, saying nothing.

“What are they watching for?” asks GG as we drive back to eMhlangana. “I don’t like the look of them. What are they doing just sitting like that?”
I laugh. “You’ve been at Msinga too long.”

GG remains troubled.

“Well what are they watching for?” he repeats to Mphephethi as we take up our position at the red pepper trees and settle down to another wait. Will there ever be an end to the waiting? Mphephethi and GG page through the catalogue again.
This time they argue over tape recorders.

At last a puff of dust flies down the hill. Neil arrives with four Mashunka men.

Mankomaan Mabaso, the old gunsmith, sits in front. Mabaso is very thin.

“It’s having to sleep on the mountain,” he complains. “I’m too old to sleep on the mountain.”
We tease him. He may look frail but there is a swagger in his manner, far too much swagger to let him sound pathetic.

“Madonda is still chasing after Mashunka men,” says Neil. “I don’t know if there will be room in his van for everybody. Can you go back and help him? I’ll drop the eMhlangana men at the courthouse, then go on to pick up the Ngubos.”

Neil drives away from the red pepper trees with 15 crammed in the combi. The windows are open all the way but even the blowing air is hot. The men sweat, bodies pressed together. It is the first time in a year they have traveled to Tugela Ferry.

Only one eMhlangana man risks our open truck. Albert Mbatha climbs up, hat jammed on his frizzy brown hair.

“I’ll be all right,” he says. “I know Magokogo.”* Albert is not talkative today.

The argument with his son still rankles. Perhaps that’s why he has chosen to travel alone.

We go back to Mashunka with our solitary passenger. Another wait. What a day. It is noon before the police van appears, traveling fast, roaring up the gravel track.

The wire cage looks full.

“Can we take some of your passengers?” GG asks Constable Madonda. The policeman isn’t given a chance to reply, for his passenger thump on the metal, yelling:

“We are not arrested! We are not arrested! Take us out!”

“That van!” they exclaim as they clamber onto our truck.” On every bump our heads hit the roof then the seat hit our bottoms.” They rub themselves, laughing. We hear the laughter on the back as we set off towards the courthouse. The Mashunka men don’t mind the open truck. They have no war with anyone along the road. It’s only the dust they’re afraid of. Yet the chatter dies away as we cross the gully that marks the boundary of kwaNdlela.

“Umfowethu, my brother,” Albert says softly to Mkonto Dladla,” whoever survives this year will tell of this war to his children’s children.”

“Then we are all quiet,” says Mkonto. “Going through kwaNdlela we are afraid to speak.”

There is no reason for fear. The road is empty. Even the men at Kumalo’s have gone.
There is nobody watching from under the thorns.

We reach the courthouse more than four hours late. The delegates from three impis have now arrived. Neil is still away fetching Ngubos.

At the courthouse there is a light-hearted mood. Men who have been in hiding for months greet each other, chaffing: "You're still alive Dladla? I thought they'd have found you by now"

A roar of laughter. "Who do you think will ever catch me?"

Neil arrives at 1.30 p.m. He is weary.

"The Ngubos got fed up waiting," he says. "They refused to come. I told them if they stayed away we'd know who was guilty of the war." The Ngubos decided to come after all.

The courtroom is unbearably hot, even with doors and windows open. Warrant Officer Jurgen Freese of the Firearm Squad tries to get the fans going. He fiddles switches until there are two fans spinning. The air in the room remains thick and heavy.

Freese and Van Vuuren sit in the front row, together with the magistrate, Mr. Bethuel Majola, and the Tugela Ferry police station commander, Sergeant Kumalo.

The men from the impis fill every space on the benches. One young man politely makes way for his elders and sits hugging his knees on the floor.

"Guns and spears never brought peace," says Neil. "All of you are suffering. For months you have been sleeping on the hills every night. You have known the pain of having your friends and relatives killed. But the pain has to be forgotten if we are to find a path to stop the blood..."

There are two wars to be settled. EMhlangana and kwaNdlela. Mashunka and Ngubo.

EMhlangana's first spokesmen are its two tribal councilors – Mutwa for the country, Mpini Mpungose for the city. Mutwa stands up in the back row, arms folded over his green T-shirt. He has few words.

*Magokogo – paraffin tin – is Neil's Zulu name.

"We lose our sons, our jobs, our goats for nothing," he says. "There must be an end to the war."

"What Mutwa says is the truth," Mpini follows on. He is a swarthy man with fierce eyes, but he speaks haltingly, with entreaty. "I have lost my job, and not me alone.

We have all lost our jobs. We cannot work in Goli (Johannesburg) anymore. We can't feed our children. They are sick and hungry. We want an end to the war so we can go back to work."

The councilor for kwaNdlela, Moses Ndlela, is more eloquent. Like the others he wants peace, "but the young men are not here," he reminds the meeting. "We might agree here today to stop the war, but what happens when we get home and our young men disagree?"

"Now we know who's winning the war," whispers GG. "He's not pleading like the others. He wants peace, "but the young men are not here," he reminds the meeting. "We might agree here today to stop the war, but what happens when we get hoe and our young men disagree?"

Now we know who's winning the war," whispers GG. "He's not pleading like the others.

He doesn't sound as if he's ready to settle." GG and I are sitting together in the prisoner's dock. It's uncomfortable – the bars of the dock saw at our backbones – but we have the best view of the court, looking across rows of faces, able to watch expressions.

"We cannot agree to peace without the younger men," Moses repeats. "It is better to make another meeting when they can come too." He speaks at length, fluent, reasonable, yet he disturbs some feeling in the room for Fahlaza Sokhela, the kwaNdlela induna sits next to him, tugging his blue jacket, whispering, shaking his head furiously. They are very different, these two leaders from kwaNdlela.

Moses is urbane, sophisticated – Fahlaza splendidly flamboyant, a tribesman in a swinging kilt of civet tails, a striped yellow blazer and tie. Whatever the argument between them, it never surfaces. Publicly Fahlaza utters not a word.

It is a meeting without rhetoric, without debate. Speakers follow each other, hesitantly, saying very little, just affirming they want peace. That is all that needs to be said if enough men from all sides will say it.

And while the talking is going on there is continuous movement, men shuffling outside to urinate against the brown courthouse walls, shuffling back, bumping along the benches. Van Vuuren leans sideways, keeping a note of the to and fro. It's his training. Just a precaution.

Mutwa speaks a second time. His words are abrupt, full of pain. Moses speaks too, insistently. This meeting can be no more than a preliminary. Real negotiations must await the younger men. There will have to be another meeting.

"It doesn't have to be a big meeting," says the young man who has been sitting on the floor. He dusts himself as he gets to his feet. It's the first time he has spoken and we sense the concentrated attention of the courthouse.

"The youngsters are quarrelling," he says, speaking with a mixture of deference and cool assurance. "We don't need a big meeting. We can sort out the trouble between Ngubo and Mashunka if you bring four boys – Qaphi Mavundla, Fano Mvelase, Mpiyefa Mtshali and Tulezwa Mvelase. They know why we are quarrelling. Let us talk together."

As he sits down we realize who he is: Mandlempi Mvelase. Mandlempi – power of the impi. GG and I study him with interest. We are the only people in the room who have not recognized him. Mandlempi is probably the most famous fighter in the valley.

Now Majozi Ngxongo speaks for the first time. He is the chief induna of the Mtembus, secretary of state for this divided tribe. He knows undercurrents better than anyone. "If there is another meeting," he says, "we must choose the date today. These boys we want to catch are always going up and down to Goli. If we haven't got a day we will never catch them."

Animation crackles in the room. What day should it be? Should a day be set at all? Look at the dangers of having a day that is known....

"Now it sounds like a Natal Agricultural Union Congress," says Bob Frean, a journalist from the Daily News, amused at the arguments over a date. He had expected more drama from this

peace meeting. He is a little disappointed. There's not much of a story in the gathering at the court.

Eventually a day is set for a meeting of the young men of the impis. Wednesday week. Does everyone agree? All hands seem to be in the air.

Outside the courthouse the men gather in little knots. Mutwa and Moses stand together. This is where the peace will be settled, outside, face to face, informally. GG goes off to buy cold drinks for everyone.

"Any chance of a police van to help with transport" Neil asks. He can't bear a repeat of the journeys of the morning. Van Vuuren shakes his head. The police are short of vehicles. He can take three Ndlelas back, but that's all.

Gradually the discussions break up and we sort out lifts home.

"Dad, Dad," GG hovers in front of Neil, trying to get his attention. "Dad I'm going now. I want to say goodbye." At last Neil looks at him. "All right son. Goodbye."

Mandlempi is sitting in front of the combi, engrossed in a conversation with somebody standing on the road.

"Your passengers intrigues me," I say. "I can't wait to hear more about him." Neil grins. I'd had a bet he would never get Mandlempi to the meeting.

"I'll drop off the Ngubos, then collect anyone who's left at the courthouse," says Neil. We part without saying goodbye.

The truck is crowded for the trip home. Mutwa is on the back, together with all the men from eMhlangana. The meeting must have been a success. They are no longer afraid if they are riding the open truck.

We pass Fahlaza Sokhela on the road, tails swinging about his legs. He gives a grumpy salute. No point in offering him a lift. He lives nearby.

At the first bend of the dirt road there is a sudden wild banging on the roof of the cab. "Stop! Stop! Where are you taking us?"

"What a question! Home," shouts Mphephethi through the window.

"But we can't travel this road in an open truck"

"Why did you climb on then?"

It's Mutwa's fault. He is the one who is suddenly frightened.

"Let me ride with you," I offer. "You'll be safe with a white woman standing on the back."

There's a pause. The men confer.

"No. We won't ride even if you are with us."

"Then you had better get off here and wait for Magokogo," says Mphephethi.

"Here?" Mutwa is agitated. "There is danger here!" The tremor of his fear reaches us. We turn the vehicle and drive back to the courthouse. All the eMhlangana men climb off, even Albert. We are left with seven passengers for Mashunka.

As we rattle off again, almost empty, I try to see terror in the road. I try to understand what makes Mutwa so afraid. But I cannot touch his fear, even in my imagination. This is the road home. I know every bump. Unlike Mphephethi. He is less familiar with the route. At emaGoqweni, the place of the stone heaps, he takes the corner a little fast and we fly off our seats, jarred on a seam of rock that is exposed on the road. There are some little boys sitting on the boulders at the corner. The same little boys of the morning?

As the truck slows down, just for a moment, guns are leveled at us, then dropped. We have no sense of danger. We pass all that focused watchfulness without feeling watched.

At the courthouse Neil is surprised to find the crowd still waiting.
“You are here?” he says. “I thought you were going with my wife?”

Mutwa takes him aside and talks earnestly.
“Nothing will happen if I am with you,” Neil says.

Mutwa returns to the men.
“Gibelani – ride,” he says. “It’s all right. Nothing will happen. I trust Magokogo.”

The men squeeze in – 11 from eMhlangana, eight from Mashunka. It is hot and sunny as Neil takes the road home for the last journey of the day.

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CAP QUARTERLY REPORT – MARCH, APRIL, MAY 1984

RAIN – BUT NO WATER

A year ago the Mdukatshani ferryman took not a fare because the river was so low that everybody waded at the drift. This summer's good rains have kept the little boat so busy, however, that the ferryman is considering acquiring a second wife with his income from fares. (His first marriage is childless).

While Msinga escaped the effects of the cyclones which flooded many parts of Natal, two local tornadoes tore the roofs off buildings and caused damage to the dams under construction at Mnqamkantaba and Mathinta. CAP was asked to help a 12-year-old girl, only survivor of three families killed by lightening on a nearby farm. The 12 men women and children who died were living illegally on the farm, which belongs to an absentee owner. Other families living illegally on the farm did not want to draw attention to themselves by reporting the tragedy to the owner, so came to CAP instead.

The following are rainfall figures for the year so far, compared to rainfall for 1983.

| | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| January 1984: | 138 mm | January 1983: | 148 mm |
| February | 82,5 “ | February | 20 “ |
| March | 79,5 “ | March | 68,5 |
| April | 94,5 “ | April | 52 |
| May | - | May | 8 |
| | <u>394,5 mm</u> | | <u>296,5 mm</u> |

Despite the summer rains, the 2 200 hectares of Mdukatshani's "top farm" remained critically short of water. There are only three shallow seeps in the whole area, two of them at the bottom of gorges. The dusty beds of the Ncunjane and Skhehlenge rivers are an indication of the depletion of underground water reserves during five years of drought.

MURDER ACCUSED RELEASED

On the grounds that there was insufficient evidence for convictions the Attorney General has withdrawn murder charges against the 13 Ndlela men who were detained for six months following the death of Neil Alcock, Thobola Mutwa, Vana Mpungose, Loli Dladla and Mbunzu Sokhela. Police believe there were 40 to 60 Ndlela involved in the ambush.

CONTINUED FIGHTING

Msinga's troubles have remained in the news with the deaths of 35 Majozi and Mabomvu tribesmen following a clash in March. The S.A. Police Reaction Unit which was sent in to handle the follow-up operation, helped to control the unpublicized war on Mashunka

Mountain, on CAP's boundary. This war, involving the Mashunka and Ngubo factions of the Mtembu tribe, was all but resolved at the peace talks which proceeded the ambush in September last year. Unfortunately the ambush prevented the conclusion of the peace moves initiated that day, and after five quiet months trouble flared again in February. Since then 14 men have died here and in Johannesburg.

Several have been injured, among them Mankoman Mabaso, leader of CAP's Buhayiya project.

Mabaso was standing chatting in the yard of Ephraim Madonsela, another Cap committee member, at about 7 a.m. on March 6 when a group of Ngubo made a surprise attack. A youth was killed instantly in the gunfire. Mabaso was shot in the hip. He dragged himself into a hut where Mrs. Madonsela was shot in the thigh trying to barricade the door. Mabaso is still in hospital receiving treatment. He will never walk again.

In several incidents Mashunka and Ngubo impis blocked the main road between Mdukatshani and Tugela Ferry, and it became increasingly difficult for CAP to take unemployed "blue card" men to Ezakheni to register for unemployment benefits. Each trip had to take place in the dark following long detours.

The new trouble scores of men back from the cities and tension was running high when the Police Reaction Squad began to patrol the area. The arrival of the police created such an altered mood, however, that the "blue card" men are again happily traveling on CAP vehicles in daylight on the shortest route.

In April the Minister of Police, Mr. Louis le Grange, announced the establishment of a special police unit for Msinga. The unit arrived soon afterwards at a tent camp at Tugela Ferry. On Easter Saturday at 4 a.m. a member of the unit, Constable S.P. Mokoena, was killed on his first day of duty when the police were ambushed by Ngubos who allegedly mistook them for Mashunka men in the dark.

The arrival of first the Reaction Squad and now the Special Unit has been widely welcomed by the people of Msinga. The police have gone out of their way to be friendly, and their procession of armoured cars has become a familiar sight wherever there is a rough track to make access possible. Regular roadblocks and foot patrols are helping to prevent trouble. On CAP's southern boundary Mcunus are rejoicing at the arrest of an alleged hired killer in connection with seven local murders.

CAP has often been critical of the S.A. Police. At the moment we are grateful to pay tribute to them.

"IT'S EASIER SJAMBOKING A WOMAN ON A TABLE..."

...than trying to whip her on the ground,' a Weenen farmer, M.J.P. Bekker told the local magistrate recently. Bekker was facing charges of flogging a 20-year-old woman labourer, Muzekile Mweli, throwing stones at her, hitting her with his fists and setting his dogs on her. He was found guilty of common assault and fined R50 (or 25 days) suspended for three years. Earlier the same day Sibongile Ndimande, another labourer, was fined R60 in the same court for stealing squashed from a farmer.

The Bekker case judgement provoked an angry response from members of the legal profession. While Bekkers got off lightly on the criminal charge, however, he is now facing a heavy damages claim from Miss Mweli, instituted through the Legal Resources Centre with the help of CAP. Miss Mweli and her father came to CAP for help after the assault last year which left the young woman with dog bite scars on her breasts, and the family without a home, for Bekker evicted them from the farm on which they had been born. The girl's offence – making a noise in her sleeping quarters.

A week after the Bekker hearing another CAP case provided headline material for the press when Weenen farmer Flip du Bruin told the Sunday Tribune "There aren't only problems on my farm – it's full scale war." Claiming that Africans had burnt down his rondavel, set alight to his wheatfields, and stolen or shot his cattle and goats he said: "I can take you to see the carcasses and if you're lucky we might find one of the kaffir's carcasses too. When I found them I shot at them and I know I hit two of them, one in the gut. I don't think he's dead – just, well, wounded. "Mr. du Bruin quoted a text from the Bible "a rod for the fool's back" (Proverbs 26 verse 3).

CAP has in the past provided legal aid for several Africans who were tenant on du Bruin's farm, including Phika Mncube and his family in the latest case, a trespass charge. At CAP's request a special magistrate was brought to try the case. The Mncubes, who were found not guilty, and now claiming compensation from du Bruin for seven huts and their contents which he burnt.

Two other cases recently resolved through CAP and the Legal Resources Centre involve claims against the South African Police for damages following assaults at the Tugela Ferry police station. Dadeni Dumakude has been awarded R800, Nomazwi Mvelase R 750.

PARALEGAL WORK

In April, five months after they first registered, 10 of CAP's 60 "blue card" men received Unemployment Insurance Fund benefits totaling R 1 500. Officials at the Ezakheni Magistrate's court have gone out of their way to be helpful, waiving the rule about fortnightly registration because of the distance we travel. CAP vehicles now do the journey monthly.

In May Natty Duma, Isainah Masoka and Tanana Shabalala attended Black Sash workshops on unemployment insurance and pensions, useful back-up for the experience they are gaining through the problems brought daily to our office.

KwaZulu's shortage of funds to pay out new pensions has restricted our efforts to push pension applications in the district. Due to our efforts, however, a local woman has just received a maintenance grant for her small children. Her husband is in jail serving a life sentence.

OUR DAMS AND GARDENS

Torrential rains (94,5 mm) over two days in April had the incomplete Mathinta dam brimming over. The newly extended wall produced a sheet of water which had the dam builders – 40 women and children – beaming with surprised delight.

Work on the Mnqamkantaba, Msusampi and Dimbi dams is now only a few weeks from completion. At each of these places new gardens have been planted.

The recent 18% increases in the price of maize has increased the number of Mdukatshani gardeners, and to enable us to guarantee a supply of water to the gardens we had to purchase a new, and unbudgeted, engine and pump for R 2 000. Breakdowns had become a daily routine for the old machines.

CAP has been besieged with offers of manure from local cattleowners unable to or not interested in using the supply themselves. New seedlings are flourishing on the gardens fertilizer with the 15-year-old accumulation of manure from Gwazisilo Ntshaba's. Each man, woman (or child) has to dig his/her own manure, and Saturdays have been granted as manure-digging days for staff. To relieve our vehicles of part of the burden of carting manure, we have just completed a small ox cart made from the body of a stolen bakkie dumped down a hillside not far from the farm. The police gave us permission to collect and keep the smashed vehicle. (We are on the look-out for a couple more).

CAP's recommended manure-and-bonemeal mix has come out the winner on the tomato yield on our experimental plots. The first results are: Bonemeal only – 8160 gms of tomatoes; fertilizer only – 33 510 gms; manure only – 37 140 gms, manure and bonemeal – 47 100 gms.

Unfortunately the growth in the gardens is attracting hordes of guineafowl, hares and duiker which are doing great damage. We are hoping weekend gunfire will help frighten them away.

The KwaZulu agricultural officer at Mseleni is keen to take on the job of repair-and-maintenance of the Tugela Estates canal, and has asked for the use of our drums. As they were purchased for the chief, we have written to ask for his consent.

Late autumn rains have kept the Tugela River level so high that the Buhayiya and Nomoya weirs remained under water. Both have stood up well to the summer floods and we hope work on them can be resumed when the river level drops this winter.

Despite the loss of their project leader, Mankomaan Mabaso, the Buhayiya workforce has continued to work on the Mashunka mountain road, putting lots of effort into rolling boulders.

The problems of finding gardens for the landless in KwaZulu has again been highlighted by the history of CAP's Umhlumba project. Three years ago the absentee owner of a long-abandoned field near the Mhlangana stream agreed to let the land be turned into community garden. CAP provided advice, poles and wire – the gardeners erected the fence. For two seasons the gardeners grew vegetables, then the last trickle in the stream disappeared and the gardening stopped. This summer's good rains rekindled the owner's interest in his field, however. Not only was there rain, he had our fence to safeguard his crop. So despite loud protests from the gardeners, he reclaimed his field and planted it to maize. In March, at the request of the former gardeners, CAP's entire workforce traveled to Umhlumba on the big lorry to spend the day removing the fence – leaving a large field of maize not-yet-ready-for-reaping. The field owner's wife was the most cheerful person present. She said the fence and field had long been a subject of bitter marital discord. She has always supported the gardeners.

GOATS MILK FOR TEA

We have retained a handful of goats to enable us to continue experimenting with milking goats. Two local nannies are between them producing about 300 ml a day. A third nanny, yet to lamb, shows what a bit of breeding can do. The granddaughter of one of our original milk goat rams, she is producing 700 ml daily all on her own.

BONES

There have been smaller bones ques this year – 395 people in February, 682 in March, 553 in April, bringing a total of 75 326 kgs of bones. The drop in numbers was partly due to flooded streams which prevented donkeys getting through to the farm, partly due to continue fighting which has made women fearful of traveling through war zones.

In April a group of Mabomvu women traveled from the far side of Msinga to check on the rumour that somebody gave food for bones. Several in the group had been windowed in the big Majozi- Mabomvu clash the month before. One woman had lost her husband and her six sons.

Following the appeals of this group, and women from other clans, CAP's chairman Petrus Majozi and Natty Duma traveled Msinga investigating the possibility of doing bones collections in outlying areas. The chiefs and indunas of the warring areas admitted that they did not have sufficient control of their people to guarantee our vehicles safe conduct, however. Only the Ngubo leaders have been able to promise help and security, so CAP will do a bone collection there in July. The May collection at the farm was cancelled to enable us to gather our resources for an away-collection.

BEAD FOR DE ROTHSCILD

We continue to add famous names to our list of bead customers. However many, many would-be customers are still being turned away because of our depleted bead stocks. Beads ordered through our wholesalers 16 months ago have yet to arrive, and because of this it is impossible to exploit the demand for our work by taking on more women to increase production. Most of the beads the women are using at the moment are from supplies posted to us by USA customers.

The Springvale bead group, working with Roxanna Earle, is into its stride and making a welcome contribution to orders. Bead supplies also limit the possibility of expansion here.

A PERSONAL PS

Elijah Mhlongo was recently awarded a driver's licence – after driving, he admits, 40 years without.

And Natty Duma has made history on the hospital scales at Tugela Ferry. She is the first patient, staff say, who has been ordered to lose weight and lost it. With self-discipline and lots of digging in the gardens she has so far shed more than 30 kgs.

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CAP QUARTERLY REPORT

December, January, February

X MARKS THE END OF A WAR

It is an historic bit of paper. The man who writes it out has never been to school. Nor have the four who put their crosses on the paper, gripping the pen tightly, jerking their lines. A pen is an awkward tool if you have not been trained to it.

Today the document lies in a file of Chief Simakade Mchunu – a paper used for the first time to bring an end to a war.

Outsiders call these wars faction fights. Tribal elders disagree. The sporadic killings that draw Msinga communities into war are not faction fights.

“It’s not impis that are fighting,” Makhanya Mchunu gets exasperated. “It’s izigebengu – criminals, gangsters. They quarrel in the city, then bring their quarrels here.”

Petrus Majozi agrees. “People are killed even when they are hiding. You don’t kill a man who is hiding from a fight.”

The Gudluntaba-Mkovini-Matengwenya war starts with yet another drunken hostel brawl. When the Mchunu boys flee home for safety, the fight comes with them. By the end of September, 1984 12 men have been killed, and all the men, young and old, are sleeping in the hills.

Then it rains. It is six years since anyone reaped a harvest, then years since Msinga last had such soaking drizzle. The hiding men watch dusts turn into muddy pools. The soft, wet earth is ready for ploughing.

Gudluntaba-Mkovini men make the first move. They send three womenfolk to talk to the tribe’s chief induna, Petrus Majozi. The deputation waits in his yard at sunrise one morning. “We have come with a message from our isigodi, our district,” the women tell Majozi. “Our men say they are hungry. They say they want to plough.”

The chief induna sits at the heart of the tribe, aware of its heartbeat and the pauses in between. He knows the women, as he knows the men who are causing the trouble, and those who have the influence to end it.

“Tell the men they must put down their guns. I can’t speak for them while they are armed,” he sets his terms as a negotiator. Before Friday I want to see Vimbela and Mandla and Elias and Bhandla. They must sign that they agree to stop the fighting, then I can go to speak with Matengwenya.”

Majozi is not certain that the four will come, but on Friday they are there, ready to sign. Majozi prepares the treaty himself, slowly writing out the declaration. Sithole, Dladla, Mchunu and Conco are tired of fighting and want to plough...

"If the fighting starts up again," he warns the four," then you will have lied and will have to move your homes out of the Mchunu area."

Preliminary discussions with the other side are hopeful, Chief Simakade and Majozi call on Msinga's magistrate, Mr. Bethuel Majola, for help with the next step, arranging a meeting of Mchunu tribesmen in Johannesburg.

Mr. Majola gets Radio Zulu to broadcast the news. All the Mchunus on the Witwatersrand must meet their chief at the Jojo Hostel in Jeppe.

It is a huge meeting. Mchunus are there – and so are the men of many other tribes who have heard the broadcast and have come along, hostel dwellers themselves, out of curiosity. But it is the Mchunus who do the talking. They stand up one after another, full of passion. They are not fighting. Would they have stuck to their jobs if they had wanted to be part of this trouble?

"Tell the people at home," they repeat the warning to their chief," tell the people at home we are losing our jobs because of all this fighting. Nobody wants to employ men from Msinga any more. Firms say if they take on Msinga men they take on trouble. They don't want shooting at their place of work."

The messages from Jojo Hostel are carried back to three follow-up meetings of tribesmen at Msinga. Majozi sees the signatories of the peace declaration among the crowds, but they are never publicly named. There is no need. It is sufficient to say that a paper exists, and that it has been signed.

By Christmas the trouble is over. The men are out of hiding. All over Mchunu territory fields are being ploughed. And that historic bit of paper is resting in a file.

We take some pride in that bit of paper, for according to Majozi, it was his experience as chairman of CAP that gave him the idea.

"Numzaan – Neil Alcock – always said: Get everything in writing, make sure it is signed," says Majozi.

A SUICIDE

Siqomomo Mtshali was not a fighting man. That is one reason he left his home at Mashunka, on Mdukatshani's boundary. He was tired of being afraid, lying out on the mountain at night, kept awake by gunfire. But there was another reason he walked away from home. He had been unemployed for months and his family was hungry.

Upcountry, people said, farmers needed help with the harvest, so Mtshali traveled to Bergville, looking for a hiding place as well as a job. And he was lucky. A maize farmer took him on immediately, offering to pay not in cash but in mealies. The other workers in the compound were strangers. None of them came from Msinga. Mtshali was relieved. He kept to

himself, a quiet, withdrawn man. But he was no unhappy. He was able to sleep through the night.

By September, however, harvest tasks were done. The farmer told Mtshali his job had come to an end. For a day the black man went about his tasks, quieter than usual, more withdrawn. Then he hanged himself.

The farmer brought his body home to his widow and seven children, together with the bags of maize he had earned, and extra bags that were a gift. The farmer was a decent distressed hat he had never noticed Mtshali's despair.

"Why didn't he say anything to me? Why didn't he speak out?" the farmer asked.

Silence is another way of speaking. It describes the isolation of fear.

AND YOUR FATHER?

There are charred huts, abandoned kraals on the Palafin-Ngubo boundary. But the war is over. A new fence says that the war is over. And a group of men say it too as they build the fence, out in the open on a sunny morning. It is a year since men have been out in the open on that boundary.

They greet us with wide grins, relaxed.

"We used to watch you weighing bones when we were hiding in the rocks up there. Weren't you frightened of the shooting? Yes, the impi is over, but we are afraid to go to town. Not yet. We are waiting." There are no hiding places on a city street.

As they chat the men keep busy with their pliers, fixing strands of shiny new wire. It is an amazing fence they are busy on. The finished portion runs out of sight behind them, while posts mark the route it will take a couple of kilometres ahead. Because of the drought there has been no ploughing for five years, and the tribal fields are covered with grass.

"This year a few have ploughed." The men point to small patches of mealies and mabela.

"But we are getting ready for next year. When the fence is finished all this place can be ploughed."

Somehow. Nobody is quite sure how. Cattle are scarce because of the drought and because of the stealing during the war. Ploughing has to be shared among the animals that remain.

"If you have one beast – you bring it to join with the others," say the men.

Until the fence is up, however, ploughing is a waste of time. So each man in the clan has been ordered to bring a roll of wire to the chief's and together they are working to erect the fence.

The fence presents us with a small difficulty. It has enclosed our hanging tree. The large fig that dangled our scale now lies inside the wire. There are not many big tree in that open country and we have to move some distance across the plain to find another – a thorn on which the local women stretch the goatskins of their isidwabas, their leather skirts. From a worn branch we start the old routine, weighing bones, swopping mealies.

The war is over, but not the suffering. Women and children sit on the ground, picking up every yellow maize pip spilt among the stones, half the women in the queue are war widows.

They wear the black widow's garb of the amabhayi, or the blue or the white of the Zionist. Konile Ntshaba's husband was killed the day he returned from Kimberley to hide from trouble. Esalina Sithole lost her husband and three sons. Shonisile Xaba's baby was born an orphan. Ntombikhona Mbatha's husband is paralysed after being shot---

"How many children at home?" we run through the familiar census questions with Makhosonke Sithole (8). "And your father? Is he working?"

The little boy stands wordless, swallowing.

"His father died. "Women in the queue speak for him. "His father died in the war."

The line has shuffled to a standstill, blocked by the child. He is shaken with grief, unable to move, silently weeping.

FEWER TONNES OF BONES

In 1984 2982 people brought 96 477 kgs of bones in exchange for 49 693 kgs of mealies. Compared with the 1983 totals, these figures reflect the growing scarcity of bones. Originally bones pedlars were given mealies equal to half their weight of bones – a measure based on the commercial price of bones. Recently we started giving mealies on a weight-for-weight basis in recognition of the fact that the purpose of the scheme is to alleviate hardship.

The following summarizes statistics from the bones queues during the year:

| | 1983 | <u>1984</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Total people: | 8 709 | 2 982 |
| Total bones: | 305 491kgs | 96 477 kgs |
| Total mealies paid: | 166 723 “ | 49 693 “ |
| Children schooling | 33% | 29% |
| Families owning fields | 19,7% | 21% |
| Families owning stock | 24,9% | 21% |
| Average cattle per family | 2,6% | 2,2% |
| Average goats | 4,03% | 4,04% |
| Total widows | 36,77% | 37,85% |
| War widows | 9,76% | 14,13% |
| Deserted by husbands | 2,94% | 2,38% |
| Fathers in employment | 15,19% | 10,41% |
| Unemployed fathers | 11,58% | 26,1% |
| Sick fathers | 6,23% | 7,59% |
| Old/pensioned | 1,49% | 2,38% |
| Jailed | 1,6% | 2,04% |
| Mad | 3,33% | 1,11% |
| TB | 9,36% | 3,86% |
| Blind/cripple – no pension | 10,86% | 6,24% |

LEGAL AID

Maviyo Duma has been a farm labourer all his life. For the past 12 years he has worked for R46 a month and a bag of mealie meal. Early in January, his employer, Mr. peacock, told him: “Your wife Natty is not to visit you at home anymore. She is brining too much trouble to the whites.”

Natty Duma works for Cap – a tireless investigator who has helped get some headlines cases to court. Her short, stout legs and undefeated spirit carry her long distances across rough mountain country tracking down witnesses. She has become a familiar figure at the Weenen courthouse, giving confidence to Africans who have never been to court before.

Two cases which made headline last year involved farmer Flip de Bruin (“I hit two of the kafirs, one in the gut. I don’t think he’s dead – just, well, wounded.”) and farmer JJ Bekker (“It’s easier to sjambok women lying on the table than to whip them on the ground”). New cases are pending involving both. Phathiswe Mvelase alleges that de Bruin attempted to murder him by forcing his head into a noose after pounding his head with stones, while Msolo Mvelase allages de Bruin held a gun at his head, threatening to kill him, after stopping hi cycling on a public road. Five youngsters working for Bekker allege they were severely beaten for making noise in the compound. All received medical treatment as a result.

Natty has worked hard on all three cases. Her husband has supported her. “You must follow the truth,” he says. “Don’t be afraid.” When he heard Natty was no longer allowed to come home at weekends, he fetched his marriage certificate, placed it in front of his employer and said; “Natty and I are together.” He was given 10 days to get off the farm.

Natty took a day to break down the walls of her home, then returned to follow up the current cases one our files. The following is an outline of some of CAP’s legal aid work last year, most of it accomplished with the help of the Legal Resources Centre:

The S.A. Police settled four damages claims out of court, the claims arising from assaults on prisoners while in detention. Mfiselwa Madondo was awarded R1000 and costs: Dadeni Dumakude R1100, Nomazwi Mvelase R750, and Gladness Mvelase R500. The claims of a further five people are pending.

Without going to court two Weenen farmers paid out damages following assaults: R200 to Phindile Masoka and R500 to the Mabaso brothers. Two further cases of assault were privately settle by the farmers on condition the labourers concerned withdrew charges and stopped publicity.

CAP continued to forward monthly maintenance payments to Esther Mtshali, mother of a coloured child born after a rape by a Weenen farmer.

Officials who Care

Government officials at Ezakheni and Tugela Ferry have helped to ease our way through the red tape connected with claims for death benefits, pensions and unemployment, insurance, and we have been grateful for their help.

During the Mashunka – Ngubo conflict Cap transported about 40 men monthly on a 150 km round trip to register for unemployment benefits at Ezakheni. It was an expensive exercise (only 14 of an eventual 60 have so far qualified for payments totaling R 1 172). However as an education it has been invaluable. CAP staff can now handle any UIF query, while local families know that when a man is retrenched he must immediately come to us for help in claiming benefits. Previously nobody knew how to claim, nor had they the bus fare necessary to make repeated journeys to distant offices.

The Ezakheni bus, for example, does not run on UIF days – and when it does run, costs R8 a return trip.

Although the widows of men holding UIF cards are entitled to claim death benefits, they have generally been unaware of this. During the past year we have helped to process several claims, gathering all the documents necessary (marriage and lobola certificates, death certificates, employer's declarations etc) so far two widows have each received payments of R248.

A pensioner who recently received a happy surprise was Manyoni Zungu, who came to CAP for help when his pension was stopped. Our query resulted in a cheque of R 1 052 – backpay for missing months dating back to 1974.

A SUMMER OF EXTREMES

November 1983 was the wettest in our district this century – November 1984 the driest. By midsummer the Tugela River was at all the time low and could be crossed with a footstep from the Mdukatshani bank. In February record books were out again during some of the heaviest continuous daily falls this century. At Mdukatshani recorded 151,5 mm for the month. Our total rain for 1984 was 711,85 compared to 691 mm the previous year.

The rains helped to bring grass back to some of our barest spaces, while many paths were impassable with neckhigh Themeda. After an inspection of a reclamation camp set aside for a three year rest, the government agricultural office agreed it could again be opened to grazing.

While our farm was a model of reclamation – officials did some tough talking about other Weenen farms where there has been no resting. In response, white farmers told African tenants to get rid of all their stock – a heavy blow in already hard times. The right to run cattle and goats has been compensation for very low wages. The forced sales of African-owned stock has created further rumours in an already troubled district. Some labourers have sold their animals – but moved off the farms.

The Weenen farms – once overcrowded with African labour tenants – are now almost white by night. To obtain labour, local farmers have to send lorries to the location daily, collecting willing togt workers for the day, returning them home each night. The workforce is independent, irregular and unreliable and farmers are no longer assured of helpers at harvest time. Most of their lorries must now travel at least 100 km a day carting togt Cheap labour has become expensive.

STOCKTHEFT

War takes a heavy toll of cattle and goats of Msinga. Hiding men are workless, hungry raiding each other's animals for food. Livestock are also needed to barter guns and ammunition.

Petrus Majozi, CAP's chairman, was one of the many stockowners who lost animals during last year's unrest. He was also among those who were invited by the police Stocktheft Unit on four day raid among the hills of Msinga, searching for missing animals. Although the police operation covered a vast area, only six stolen animals were eventually recovered. One of them belonged to Majozi. Another five of his cattle have disappeared without trace.

BEAD SALES

The recession has yet to hit our bead industry. January – traditionally a dead month for business – produced orders worth more than R20 000 which will exhaust our bead supplies before new shipments can arrive from Czechoslovakia. Most of our sales have been coming from South African shops experiencing boom times because American tourists holidaying in the country have double their usual spending money, thanks to the dollar-rand exchange rate. During 1984 output as minimal for three months when we were, as usual, awaiting shipments. Despite this, sales for the year totaled R89 000 – more than double the sales of 1983.

SICK LORRY

Every month CAP takes a lorryload of sick to the Church of Scotland hospital at Tugela Ferry. Hospital staff must dread the day – they work through the lunch hour to cope. Many of the sick have been “discovery” through our bones queue census. Children are often malnutrition cases. Some people are emergencies- rushed onto drips as they arrive. Recently the lorry turned back because a baby had died on the way. Most of our patients have not been earlier because they can afford neither the R2 busfare no the R2 hospital fee. During the past 10 months CAP carried more than 400 people on the monthly sick shuttle.

UP AND UP

Five years ago mealie meal cost R12, 50 a bag. Today a bag costs R32 at local stores. Last June CAP began to supply staff with wholesales mealie meal on a strictly cash basis (R26, 50 a bag). This service was later extended to beadworkers and gardeners. After 8 months – and R18 000 worth of debt-free mealie meal – the scheme is counted as one of our easiest and most valued services.

GOODBYE MHLONGO

In December Elijah Mhlongo's home was set alight and burnt to the ground. Although Mrs. Mhlongo and her three small children were at home at the time – Mhlongo was away. Most of their possessions were lost in the fire. Twice before, when she was alone at home, Mrs. Mhlongo was robbed and assaulted at gunpoint. This time Mhlongo decided to leave the farm to make a new home. He is retaining his links with us, however, and taking on our contracts for leather harness.

MDUKATSHANI,
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TUGELA FERRY,
3504

SEPTEMBER 1984: NO ORDINARY FARM

Ndala's field and the mass graves are not far apart. The field lies on our farm – the graves across the fence in the location. Cause and effect. More than 6000 men do battle for that field in 1944. It is the biggest fight Msinga has ever known – the greatest battle fought since the Anglo-Zulu war.

But on a white farm? Why on a white farm?

“It was never a white farm,” says Ndala.

When you know the history of the farm, you understand.

.....

FREE LABOUR
FOR SALE
The Farm
“LORRAINE”

Ed Fitzgerald reads the advertisement again. He is apprehensive. Reaching for scissors he cuts out the advertisement, pastes it on a sheet of paper, and begins to write:
“I beg to bring to your notice that one of the farms included in my scheme....”

He has been scheming for years. He wants that farm. But not to farm. It isn't much of a farm if farming is what you want to do.

Lorraine lies on a bend of the Tugela River – a place of gaunt old hills, broken and scarred, worn to the hard knobble of their bones. Footpaths gleam among the rocks, polished to a shine by passing feet. Black feet. The only whites that travel through are occasional hunters, or traders, or officials like Fitzgerald. As Chief Inspector of Locations and Native Reserve it is his job to cover all the footpath country of the Tugela Valley.

The valley is beautiful. If loveliness could be traded like mutton, Natal's white settlers would have moved in long ago. But the valley has been left to the Zulus. It can be a hard, bitter place, even for a tribesman.

“There has been a continual failure of crops in the Tugela Valley for several years,” Msinga's first magistrate, Henry Francis Fynn reports in 1878. “Consequently large numbers of natives have entirely left, others only for a time for the purpose of procuring food in other parts of the colony.”

In 1892 a stranger rides towards the yellow cliffs on the big bend of the Tugela. J.C. Nurden is a government surveyor, dividing the country into farms. Africans follow the stranger as he works, watching curiously. Straight lines are a gimmick on these hills. Ndala's father, Zwangedwa Mbatha, holds a white flag, helping. He is holding a flag the day his life is split in two. The boundary of Lorraine is fixed halfway between his kraal and his field. He lives in the Mpofana location of Msinga – he must plough on a white farm in Weenen.

Weenen's new farms do not impress the district magistrate. "... the soil is poor and stony, and water scarce. The country is steep, stony and precipitous, full of thorns, and unfit for European occupation," he comments in 1893.

The Msinga magistrate has much the same opinion of the Mpofana location nextdoor; "Most of the surface is rocky and dry and barren and cannot be cultivated and almost worthless and deficient of water," he says.

That is why Zwangedwa Mbatha decided to move his four huts onto Lorraine. You can build a hut anywhere. You cannot move a field.

Although Ndala's father is restless with the threat of the surveyor's flags, he has no need to hurry. For the next 19 years the boundaries of Lorraine will be no more than lines on a map.

They are terrible years. Rinderpest wipes out the cattle. Then there are locusts. Drought. East coast fever. More droughts.

"If we natives could only have feathers we would put on our wings and fly to another country," a tribesman called Nduku tells the 1906-1907 Natal Native Affairs Commission.

The black man and the white man dream together. In their dreams they are alike. If only – hey presto – the natives could disappear.

"We can't drive the black man into the sea," Sir Charles Suanders, Commissioner of Native Affairs for Zululand, remarks to the Commission. "... what is to become of the natives eventually? They are increasing in numbers at a great rate, and if the present European monopoly of land continues, it is bound to lead to war."

Sir Charles is thinking of a war between white and black. With no place to fly, however, the natives are fighting among themselves. Ed Fitzgerald has seen faction fights become commonplace in the Tugela Valley. He is an outspoken man, blunt in his criticism of the government's handling of the fights.

"The police are sent in, arrests made, and enormous fines imposed on those taking part," Fitzgerald tells the Commission. "The police even take credit to themselves that the amount paid to the exchequer in respect of these quarrels more than pay for the expense of the force."

He is exasperated. Police will never end the conflicts. The quarrels are caused by boundary disputes. The natives are fighting because of a shortage of land.

Fitzgerald has got to wondering about that shortage as he rides, hour after hour, day after day, through countryside that is almost empty. On the "white farms" surrounding Msinga there is not a white man anywhere.

“These lands are only suitable for native occupation,” he says in a memo to the Acting Chief Native Commissioner of Natal in 1911,” and if purchased by Europeans it will only be with a view to sub-letting to natives in the near future.” He has been devising a plan to enlarge the locations by 137 177 acres. Maps show the area he is after – a budget shows how the plan can be financed.

The Acting Secretary of Native Affairs in Pretoria gives Fitzgerald’s scheme a favourable nod. Then Lorraine is advertised. If the farm goes to a white farmer, Fitzgerald’s plan could disintegrate. He tries to chivvy his superiors. “I beg to bring to your notice”he writes.

Lorraine is a bargain. “Free labour” says the advertisement. Very free. Lorraine can be had for nothing for three years. The first installment will only fall due after that. Yet the advertisement does not draw a nibble of interest. Nine years pass before James Hill becomes the first owner of the farm – the first owner of Ndala Mbatha. He never sees his farm, nor his free labour, however, for he lives far away in the Cape. But Ndala knows something has changed. The farm becomes known as” ntelakabili” – pay taxes twice. “We pay tax on our hut, and then we pay tax on our head,” says Ndala.

Mr. Hill is kaffir farming. After three years, when the first installment is due, he sells his interest in the property for £50.

Fitzgerald’s plan is filed away while the fate of Lorraine is pingponged between white men who argue among themselves about more land for the natives.

“There is plenty of room,” says Mr. O. Fynney, magistrate of Mpofana when he gives evidence to the Beaumont Natives Land Commission in 1915.

Labour Agent A.E. de R. Labistour disagrees. He knows the area well. “It is all krantzes and thorveld,” he tells the Commission.” There is little arable land, and what there is worn out. The natives have had dips put up for them, and have a few goats and a few head of cattle, but there is no room for more.”

The Commission recommends that the native areas in Natal be enlarged by 3 800 000 acres. Lorraine is one of the farms to go black.

There is uproar when the recommendations are published. All that extra land for the natives? In Natal a Native Lands Committee is set up to re-examine the proposals. In 1917 it reports that an extra 900 000 acres will be sufficient for the natives.

Lorraine is to remain a white area.

“It is for the most part very dry, broken, stony and waterless – unsuitable for closer settlement,” says the Committee.

Ndala goes to Johannesburg. He stays six months working for a construction firm. Then he returns to the home his father built on Ngongolo ridge, next to that field.

“O come hills,” he cries in his funny oroak. “See I am back among you.” He is full of joy. Never again will he leave his hills.

I am of the soil,” he says. “The soil is my father and my mother.”

The farm is sold, and sold again. It makes no difference to Ndala. He takes over his father's field, every year extending it a little further. He digs an extra grain pit in the cattle kraal to store the crop of mabela. The maize cobs are stored above ground in a crib – enough to keep the family eating into the second year after harvest.

“There is no man who can compete with me for work,” says Ndala. “When the sun is still in hiding my plough is hissing through the soil.

In 1929 the Meyer family buy Loraine. They also own the nextdoor farms, the Spring and Koornspruit – a block of 2 543 hectares. From now on the block will always be used as one. The Meyers have bought the farm to get labour for their upcountry wattle plantations. Ndala starts to work the “six months system.” For six months of the year he peels wattle bark 150 kilometres away – six months he is back at home cultivating his field.

He continues to expand, using two spans of oxen to plough, urging them in a cracked chant. Ndala never has a real voice. Somewhere in his throat the voice is throttled.

But he can whistle, and the lovely fluting sound follows him as he walks among the leaves sprouting in his field. He pours so much manure onto the earth that the maize grows blue-green, and travelers on the wagon road stop to ask: Who has that field like a white man?

Ndala is ambitious and proud and full of cunning. There is enough grain at home to keep his children fed- but nowhere near enough to feed his ambition. Loraine has never had much room to plough. However the red slopes of Koornspruit are all ploughing land. All Mchunu land.

“And who are you Ndala? The Mcunus ask. “You’re an Mtembu. Just remember you’re an Mtembu Ndala.”

It is a sign of disrespect to call a man by his first name, yet even in his old age Ndala will always be just Ndala.

“We can’t hlonipha – honour – a man who causes so much trouble,” says Petrus Majozi.

At first Ndala skirmishes with bluff and innocence.

“How can it be Mcunu land if the white man has given me permission to plough?” he asks. It’s all the same white farm, isn’t it? It all belongs to the Meyer.

His pride and tongue trip him in contradictions.

“The Mcunus say I have the biggest fields in the Mcunu area, which is true,” he says. Nobody can farm as he farms. Even the Mcunus acknowledge that.

“What is mine, is mine,” he says, as he fences his field.

“It was never a white farm,” he says.

The greatest truth prevails. It was never a white farm. Koornspruit is Mcunu territory.

The Mcunus warn Ndala to keep off. All winter he carries his fury, turning his heart away from the truth. By spring anger has made him reckless. One afternoon in September 1944 he leads a group of armed Mtembus in an attack on Mcunus attending a wedding. Unsuspecting guests are watching a line of dancing girls when they hear Ndala’s croak – that unmistakable croak.

“Stab them! Stab them!” Ndala commands as the wedding guests dash for cover. Petrus Majozi defends himself with a stick, landing a blow on Ndala’s head. Ndala loses his assegai

and runs. Majozi is jumping down a bank after him when he sees the bodies of two of his friends. Four have been killed – one badly injured.

A few days later more than 6 000 men clash on the fenceline of the farm, near Ndala's field. "Get Ndala!" the Mcunus chant. "Get Ndala and bring his body home!"

But Ndala is not among the 65 bodies that police collect in the veld after the battle.

His head is not one of those which the dogs drag home in the days that follow.

"I am running," he says. While he is running his kraal is set alight. The Mcunus don't want Ndala back again.

An official inquiry is held into the battle. At a trial 279 men are convicted and jailed. Ndala is not among them. He is rebuilding his huts.

He has finished thatching the roofs when the Mcunus burn him out a second time. He builds again. He must be ready to plough in spring. His field is his life. A man cannot live without his life.

The battle of Ngongolo, of course, is more than just a battle over Ndala's field.

It is a battle over too many fields – and men who have no field at all. For the farms have become almost as crowded as the location. Koornspruit has been ploughed without rest for more than 80 years. The red solids are wearing out. So is the veld that must sustain hundreds of cattle and goats.

After Ngongolo, Mtembu and Mcunu watch each other warily, ready for further trouble.

The trouble, however, is to come from botanists carrying no more than plant presses and notebooks. Loraine happens to be the cornerpost of an area selected for a pioneering research project. J.A. Pentz, Oliver West, John Acocks, J.D. Scott, John Philips, Denzil Edwards – some great names in ecological research are to pass by, and their reports, spread over 30 years, help to give the area a notorious reputation.

"The desperate condition t which this part of the country has been reduced must be seen to be realized," says West, who starts his work in 1936.

Acocks finds invading karoo bushes, outriders of desert. On a map he colours the Weenen-Msinga area red. His map is produced with the 1951 Desert Encroachment Committee report. The farm lies within the only part of Natal marked desert-to-be.

"The existing conditions are so disturbing – indeed in places so appalling – that nothing but a national emergency should permit their continuance," John Phillips underlines his words in a preliminary report on the Tugela Basin. The remark is censored. It never appears in the final report, published in 1973.

By then, anyway, something has been done. Most of Weenen's 50-odd labour farms have been cleared.

"They are an evil," Mr. L. J. Neethling, Bantu Affairs Commissioner at Weenen tells The Daily News in April 1968.

"Modern day slave camps," an official of the Department of Agriculture tells the same newspaper. He uses strong language for an official.

In January 1969 the six months labour system is abolished in Weenen. Black families must be fulltime workers to stay on the farms.

“What will you pay us for fulltime work?” they ask. “Six rand a month...

The Africans refuse fulltime work. In June 1969 the farmers give them notice to get off the land. The Africans stay, disbelieving.

One morning in September that year the sound of helicopters startles the farm. The police have come to arrest all the men who are not working. Those sitting in their yards or strolling along paths are easily spotted. Others try to hide. Among the goats men walk on hands and knees. They squat in the shade of donkeys. Makwaza Mcunu takes to a tree, lying flat along a branch.

“Get down from that tree,” a loudhailer gives the summons from the helicopter. Mcunu gives himself up.

Along the Skehlinge gorge men are squeezed like bedbugs in cracks in the cliffs.

“When I turn round you had better be on top of the hill on a level place where I can pick you up or I will use a rifle on you down there in the rocks.” The loudhailer is busy again. Mkakeni Chonco crawls out and gives himself up too.

Ndala is not arrested. He is 73 – nobody wants his labour.

“But your sons? Where are your sons? Mr. Koehler, the current owner of the farm has come with the police. Koehler bought the farm in 1953. This is his third visit in 16 years. His real farm is upcountry.

“My sons are working on your farm at this moment,” says Ndala. They are married men earning R2 a month.

One by one the men on the farm are airlifted to the road where police vans are waiting. The arrested men are charged before a special magistrate in Weenen. In 10 days 291 kraalheads from different farms are given suspended sentences on condition they vacate the farms in 14 days.

When the 14 days are up government lorries are sent out to remove resisting families. Koornspruit is one of the first farms to be cleared.

“There are so many lorries they look like storks hunting on a pasture,” says MaMbhele Majozi. Not everyone is to have a lorry ride to the site of their new homes, however.

“Those Bantu who disobeyed the court orders were removed to Bantu areas at state expense,” Mr. P. H. Torlage, deputy chairman of the Bantu Affairs Commission announces in a press release on October 16, 1969. “Henceforth Bantu will have to arrange for their own transport.

Ndala is still at home, following the movements of old routine. Yet nothing is familiar. Quietness thuds on the empty farm. The paths are vacant. The hills are strange. Ndala feels the lurch of madness. But ploughing steadies him. The earth is not empty.

The spring of 1969 is hot and dry. Ndala ploughs in fits and starts, struggling with the hard earth, watching for clouds. He is wondering if it is worth inspanning his oxen one morning when a group of policemen arrive at his home.

“I don’t know what they are looking for, but they open doors, put their heads into each hut, and then say; Phuma. Hamba. Get out. Go.”

Ndala’s sons, Themba and Mathanda, are at home. They returned recently sensing trouble. Ndala speaks to them. “The plough,” he says. First things first. The plough must be moved.

Themba and Mathanda cannot carry it on their own, although they are strong men. They call a cousin, Sabhu Mbatha, to help lift the heavy implement.

“The plough will be safe with my cousin,” says Ndala. “Take it to Timothy. Timothy will keep it for me.”

The women and children are still gathering pots and blankets, making small piles of possessions, when the three men stagger off along a footpath. They journey slowly, panting a few paces, stopping, resting, moving on. It takes them five hours to get the plough up onto Ngongolo ridge, down the other side and across to Mashunka Mountain where Timothy Mbatha lives.

They sleep at Mashunka, walking back early the next morning, to find their home dismantled. The family belongings have been carried across the veld to be temporally stored at homes in the location.

“There is only the wire left,” says Ndala. Next to his plough he loves his wire. Where else will you find a black man with a fence of his own like that? Ndala sold beans and cowpeas and pumpkins to pay for his many rolls of wire.

He and his sons work together, pulling down the fence that has surrounded that famous field. They loop the wire into rolls, and stack the rolls on the veld.

“Timothy will guard the wire too,” says Ndala.

Themba and Mathanda make many journeys across the ridge to Mashunka Mountain to move their father’s many rolls of wire. There is nowhere, however, to store the cattle and goats.

“Livestock belonging to those who have appeared in court is being impounded and sold,” Lawrence Morgan reports in *The Natal Mercury*. “No one entering the Msinga district will be able to take any livestock with him.... If any of the considerable portion of the 19 000 Africans still on the farms have to be resettled, it is certain that the already overcrowded Msinga reserve will not be able to hold them.”

But Msinga makes room. Hundreds of new huts appear on the hills. Veld becomes suburbia.

Because he knows his stock will die in the location, Ndala has stayed on the farm, sleeping out with his animals, guarding them in the bush. When it rains he makes a tent with his blanket, ducking away from the wet. Without a kraal, however, it is impossible to keep a check on the stock. Most of the goats disappear, probably stolen. An ox goes astray. With the fiercest cold nights of winter Ndala accepts the inevitable. He sells his cattle to anyone who can pay for them, and finally leaves the farm.

On Koehler’s block of land there have been 40 families – about 800 people. Police patrol the bush to make sure nobody returns. Once they come across Majozi and friends digging a grave for old Xitshe Sithole who had asked that his body be buried at his old home.

When the grave diggers see the police, they take flight into the bush. Only the widow remains with the body of her husband.

Fourteen old men die that spring. Fourteen kraalheads out of 40 families.

“Everybody knows people die when they are pulled out by their roots,” says Majozi.

Although he has always lived in the location, the farm has given his cattle grazing too.

The farm people are his own. He helps to dig the graves of all those who come back to die at home.

Mandla Chonco is brought on a bus as far as the mgugude tree on the boundary. A rough litter is made to carry him. But he is in high spirits, unable to lie still. He hobbles short distances, or rides piggyback on his friends.

“Put me in the shade of my tree,” he says when at last they reach his abandoned yard.

His friends sit with him until sunset, enjoying his gaiety, his flow of jokes.

Early the next morning he dies.

Gati Masoka walks back from Zululand. He refuses to ride a car.

“A car smells,” he says. Masoka stays in his ruined kraal at the slip-slide waterfall that marks the entrance of the Skehlinge gorge. When he dies Majozi helps to bury him too, leveling the earth, planting a clump of prickly pear to hide the grave.

“We are afraid of the police,” says Majozi. “If they find his grave they might make us dig him up again.”

The police know Delanie Mbatha is still on the farm but they leave him alone.

Delanie is crazy. His family are one of those that have their huts burnt to force them to move.

The flames crack Delanie’s mind. Up on a cliff where two river gorges come together there is an airy lean-to of branches. For six years Delanie crouches here at night, close to the baboons.

“Sometimes I find myself on the mountain,” he says later, “and I wonder what I am doing there. But the light in my head does not last the day. I forget again. And the next time there is light I am still on the mountain.”

The removals are rushed. Within months 20 000 people are pushed off the Weenen farms.

For the next six years the farms stand empty, untended. But not unused. As police patrols fell away the farms become a grazing reserve for Msinga cattle. Without the farms the African stockowners would never get their animals through the drought.

The farms also provide the cooking fuel for the location. It is the chief’s rule that no green tree be chopped. Once the farms fell under tribal law. No longer, however.

The people who have left the farms return to chop green trees for building poles and firewood. Anticipating hard times ahead, Shosonke Chonco’s womenfolk chop and carry a pyramid of firewood that will last them for the next ten years.

There has never been much ploughing and on Lorraine, but there are flat patches in a little valley hidden near the big bend of the Tugela. Ndala’s neighbours have started planting mealies there in 1975, the year we arrive. Ndala sees no point in ploughing such little patches. He looks down on the illegal fields from the yard of his new home on the spine of a stony ridge. His view is all drops and height.

“A hole,” he says. “An ugly hole.” His will has remained strong and rebellious, although he is almost 80. His plough and wire were carried to this new kraal, and lie close to his hut, ready for use. He has not accepted he will never plough again.

We know nothing of the history of the farm. We find empty bush, skeletal fields, old kraal walls. Ndala follows a footpath to take a look at us.

“I just look,” he says later. “I am frightened to approach. You are a white man and I was chased from my home by the whites. There is nothing I can say.”

Delanie stands at our campsite, watching us. For two months he has been off the mountain. He is quiet and withdrawn, but there seems nothing wrong with him. He is the first to ask for work.

Majozi is driving his cattle onto the farm as usual one morning when he sees us.

“My knees go stiff,” he says. “I want to run but my legs are water.”

“Sabona inkosi,” he says. “Greetings king.”

The shock of our arrival is felt all over the location.

“Whites? On our farms! All those farms, from Bellevue to Lorraine, they have always been indawo yethu – our place,” says Elijah Mhlongo, an ex-policeman living at Tugela Ferry.

“Whites never owned that land. They bought the right to own our work. That has always been the law.”

The law Mhlongo?

“The law that is written inside people’s heads.”

What he means is the law that is written in the heart.

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CAP QUARTERLY REPORT –
SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER, NOVEMBER 1983

On September 2nd, three youths were killed and two injured when unknown gunmen attacked a home Mashunka, the area adjoining Mdukatshani. The killings were a factor which led to preliminary peace talks with four warring Mtembu groups, Mashunka and Ngubo, Mhlangana and Ndlela.

The outcome of the talks was a meeting at the Tugela Ferry courthouse on September 28 which was attended by representatives of the police, the magistrate, indunas and about 50 men representing all four factions. Returning home after the meeting Neil Alcock, Thobola Mutwa, Albert Mbatha, Loli Dladla, Mbunzu Sokhela and Vana Mpungose were killed at an ambush set up by the Ndlela faction on the main road between Tugela Ferry and Mdukatshani.

In a six week operation involving about 200 policemen, 25 arrests were made. The police are believed to be looking for a further eight men. The case is unlikely to come to trial before March 1984.

For some weeks after the murders CAP's ordinary work was disrupted as hundreds of mourners streamed to the farm. By the end of November old routines were re-established, however.

RAINFALL

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| September 1983 | 15 mm | September 1982 | 10 mm |
| October “ | 89 “ | October “ | 106” |
| November “ | <u>123,5</u> | November | <u>37 “</u> |
| Total | <u>227,5mm</u> | Total | <u>153 mm</u> |

Temperatures soared well over 40 degrees Celsius during September, and the Tugela River dropped so low that it could be crossed with one step in many places. Although the November rains brought some relief it was “grazing rain” – improving the grass but making no difference to local springs and streams.

CAP continued to deliver water in tanks on the back of our big lorry until mid November, when the rains had produced a trickle in the Mhlangane river so that the women no longer had to dig into the sand for their water.

Despite the rains there has been virtually no ploughing – partly because the surviving cattle are so thin, partly because last year's rains were followed by drought and those who planted crops lost them. This year people are waiting for the rains to set in before they commit themselves to what could be wasted effort.

BONES

Three days after the ambush, 924 women and children queued with 41 843 kgs of bones, The queue included widows of the murdered men, as well as women from both the Ndlela and Mhlangana factions. Despite the local shortage of bones, hardship is bringing more and more people into our bones queues. In September we completed a security fence around our sheds to control thefts, as well as the crush of people on Bones Day. Since September we have been railing our bones to a bone merchant in the Cape, and although the price we receive does not cover all our costs, it goes a long way towards paying for our mealies.

In November two journalists from Association Press attended the Bones Day and the resulting feature, they tell us, has had widespread coverage in newspapers around the world.

We were very grateful for the help of friends who came to Mdukatshani to help with bones census and weighing in October and November. Without them we would have been unable to cope with the large number of pedlars.

The following are the statistics for the past three months:

| | September | October | November |
|--|------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| People | 936 | 942 | 1 648 |
| Bones in kgs | 46 295 | 41 843 | 43 261 |
| Mealies in kgs | 23 148 | 20 922 | 21 630 |
| Average bones per person | 49kgs | 44kgs | 26kgs |
| Children at school: | 60,56% | 31,42% | 29,77% |
| Fieldowners: | 15,85% | 20,97% | 15,49% |
| Stockowners: | 31,13% | 11,3% | 23,46% |
| Average cattle per family | 1,73 | 0,5 | 2,1 |
| Average goats “ “ | 2, 58 | 0,8 | 4,4 |
| Families without fathers: | 37,49% | 36,12 % | 39,25% |
| Deserted by fathers: | 2,54% | 2,91% | 2,28% |
| Fathers with TB: | 12,13% | 10,02% | 9,44% |
| Father crippled: | 11,11% | 11,3 % | 7,38% |
| Father sick | 5,67% | 11,3 % | 10,33% |
| Father in jail | 1,85% | 1,74% | 1,54% |
| Father mad | 2,77% | 2,79% | 2,14% |
| Father blind | 1,73% | 2,33% | 2,73% |
| Father employed in city | 8,44% | 8,15% | 7,08% |
| Father employed on farm | 2,19% | 1,98% | 3,91% |
| Father unemployed | 11,57% | 10,95% | 12,39% |
| Old/pensioned | 1,85% | 0,93% | 1,47% |
| * Of the families without fathers, the following were widowed/orphaned due to war here at Msinga | 8,68% | 7,34% | 14,46% |

LEGAL AID

The Legal Resources Centre attended the inquest into the death of Mlungu Sibisi on behalf of the family, but the magistrate found that nobody could be held responsible for his death. Sibisi died while in detention.

CAP has taken up the case of Mfiselwa Madondo who is claiming damages for the police after, he alleges, being tortured while in detention.

The longstanding roads dispute moved closer to settlement after a meeting between our advocates and the legal representatives of the farmers concerned. As a result of the discussions, an application is going forward to the Districts Road Board to ask that the road be formally recognized as a district road.

The farmers have indicated they will raise no objections to the application.

The Mabaso brothers, shot in an incident on the boundary between KwaZulu and Weenen in 1980, have settled a claim for damages against J.R. Christie by accepting payment of R 550 and R 300.

Shlangu and Thoshana Dladla were found not guilty on a charge of car theft after CAP had taken up their case and provided legal aid. The brothers were arrested during a raid on the area earlier this year by the Brixton Murder and Robbery Squad. Allegations of theft and assault against the Squad are still being investigated by the police.

CAP MEETS THE MAGISTRATE

CAP has been very grateful to have Peter Brown and Elliot Mngadi back on the CAP committee, and in November they joined local committee members at a meeting with the Tugela Ferry Magistrate, Mr. Bethuel Majola, and the Secretary of the Regional Authority, Mr. Sithole. We affirmed that the CAP project was continuing, and discussed problems such as the continuing influx of trespassing cattle onto Mdukatshani.

BEADS

Yves St. Laurent and Ungaro, two Paris couturiers, have ordered for their next haute couture collections – large, theatrical pieces that are stunning visually but hell to wear. We continue to turn down orders, and even old customers are waiting three months for deliveries. We are therefore grateful that Roxanna Earle's efforts with the Springvale beadworkers are at last producing results – regular work of export quality.

After 13 years as our homecraft organizer, Bathulise Madondo has resigned. The ambush has frightened her away from Msinga.

THE GARDENS

About 200 gardeners on CAP communal garden projects have been eating tomatoes, potatoes, spinach, onions and early mealies. On Mdukatshani, 12 holding dams are now complete, and others are underway.

At KwaDimbi 38 women, and at Mseleni 55 have put their names down as new gardeners, and the first soil has been turned.

We have asked Roy Alcock, Neil's brother, to visit us regularly as an advisor, on all farm affairs, but particularly on the gardens. Roy recently retired after a career in the agricultural services which included a period as extension officer at Estcourt.

MSELENI

Water from the canal was irrigating lands at Mseleni until the November rains brought landslides tumbling down the mountainside to block a 500 metre stretch of canal. Chief Ngoza Mvelase has used drought relief funds to have the canal cleared, and the job is almost complete. Only the large boulders have to be removed – using “Zulu dynamite” – fires burnt on top of the ironstone, cracking the rock into bits which can be carried away.

The precipitous and eroded nature of the east bank makes further landslides inevitable, so CAP has ordered 550 scrap drums to create a “pipeline” to carry the water underground on this section. A similar piped area a short distance upstream has been a great success.

NKAWULA

At Nkawula 40 women have been working to complete the three-metre-high stonewalls that will support the bridge that will carry the canal across a difficult donga in the Sahlumbe area.

BUHAYIYA

At Buhayiya the stone weir is across the Tugela, and has been standing up to Tugela floodwaters. The wall has to be raised and cemented, but work is restricted by the river level. When the river is too high, the workforce is busy on a road on Mashunka mountain.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC VISITS MSINGA

In September Tom Nebbia a photographer of the National Geographic spent a week with us photographing different aspects of drought, both on white farms and in African areas. He also photographed a Bones Day.

FUNDS

Drought relief work was supported by grants from Caritas: R 8000; Churches Hunger Fund R 4,000; Desmond Leech Bequest R 2500; and Mones Michaels Trust R 1,500, as well as smaller donations from friends.

Lever Brothers supplies us with 199 boxes Royco soup and 256 boxes of Holsum cooking fat during the quarter.

In November we were particularly grateful for two lorryloads of cabbages from Mr. Myer of Greytown – a gift that was distributed on Bones Day.

BOUNDARY FENCE

Mr. Ndubeki, Senior Agricultural Officer at Tugela Ferry inspected our boundary fence in November. Certain alterations are necessary before we can claim our fund on costs, and Elijah Mhlongo has a team busy on the adjustments.

MDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 26
TUGELA FERRY
3504

CAP's Plans for 1985

CATCHING FISH IN THE SEDERT

Give a man a fish, runs the cliobe, and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for life.

But what if there are no fish? No rivers, no pools, no water?

A river flows from a spring, and a spring bubbles from grass, and green holds the storms on the slopes of the mountain.

To catch a fish – catch the raindrops. Cover the mountain slopes with grass.

.....

Resource Centre for Msinga

Land is scarce at Msinga. For the black man who wants to farm there are nine hectares per family of six (1980 Census and district records book). In Weenen, the district nextdoor, each white farmer has an average holding of 598 hectares (1970 Census).

The CAP project is based on three white farmers in the Weenen district known collectively as Mdukatshani. CAP's 2543 ha share an 11,6 kilometres boundary with Msinga. There are few, if any, rural development projects which operate from their own properties. Despite the land shortage facing blacks in South Africa, most agricultural development schemes are based on government land, with inevitable limitations on action.

The significance of Mdukatshani to the people in the location can be seen from the following the lower farm, Lorain, has an area 3,75% of the total land available to the neighbouring Mtembus, while the two top farms. The Spring and Koornspruit, have an area 5,4% of the total are available to the Mchunus, who live alongside.

At present Mdukatshani provides Msinga people with the following resources:

Firewood for 200 families
Browse for 2 000 goats
Grass for 300 cattle
Gardens for 180 families

The value of these resources is estimated at:

| | |
|------------|-------------------------|
| Firewood: | R 50 700 a year |
| Browse | 105 700 “ “ |
| Grazing | 28 600 “ “ |
| Vegetables | 18 700 “ “ |
| | <u>R 203 700</u> |

An explanation of these estimates follows later in this report

DOUBLE THE LAND

CAP exists to help meet the needs of the local people. In the past 10 years this help has included welfare, legal aid, and homecrafts – all activities which will continue. Since 1980 CAP has also been involved in a number of drought relief measures, including an acacia stockfeed experiment, a bonemeal project, the construction of handbuilt dams and canals, and the establishment of vegetables gardens.

Now CAP plans to shift its focus to Mdukatshani. There are several reasons, among them KwaZulu's plans for a betterment scheme nextdoor to the farm. The plans involve the removal of an estimated 20 000 people to create defined residential, arable and grazing areas. Although the implementation of the betterment scheme is likely to take several years, already there is a limbo of uncertainty. At one of CAP's dams, Chibini, the people have been refused permission to establish gardens because their removal is pending. At another, Mathinta, officials have told the women that their handbuilt dam is to be replaced by a bulldozer dam. Confused lines of authority between the chiefs and government have also created difficulties, leading to CAP's decision to withdraw entirely from one area.

On its own property CAP is independent of the above problems.

In the next five years CAP plans to work towards doubling the farms by doubling its carrying capacity – testing a variety of rehabilitation measures on damaged land while obtaining a sustainable yield of available resources for the people in the location.

POURING A QUART INTO A PINT POT

Although more than 200 people make use of Mdukatshani's resources, the farm's ability to support fulltime farmers is limited.

A white farmer in the Tugela thornveld needs 1700 ha and 300 cattle to make a living.
A black farmer in the Tugela thornveld needs 83 ha and 16 cattle.

These figures come from the Commission of Inquiry into the European Occupancy of Rural Areas, 1959, and the Tomlinson Commission of Inquiry into Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu Areas, 1955.

Mdukatshani therefore has room for 1½ white farmers, or 30 black farmers.

Aiming to double the carrying capacity of the farm is an ideal. It is an ideal which has meaning whether blacks or whites govern the country, whether blacks or whites farm the land. Even the best farmer on the best land, however, is eventually faced with an ecological reality; there is a limit to the production that can be permanently sustained on any natural system. Even at its best, therefore, Mdukatshani may not have enough for the needs of an increasingly crowded location.

“... the fundamental problem remains: Can one put a quart into a pinto pot however strong and excellent that pot may be? “(William Allen, The African Husbandman, 1965)

CAP can temporarily sidestep the question while busy repairing its pot.

DOUBT IS NOT AN AGREEABLE STATE TO BE IN ... BUT CERTAINTY IS RIDICULOUS (Voltaire)

The discussion which follows indicates the direction of CAP's thinking, not the detail. Some statistics are offered to show the potential of resources. The figures are used simplistically – without the ifs and buts of serious argument. CAP is nevertheless aware of the questions and hazards of different forms of management. For example –firewood and browse are not independent resources. A tree the right size for browse is too small for firewood. Maintaining maximum browse means reducing firewood, as well as grass.

The crux of management is control. How much can CAP control the harvest of resources which are essential to the location nextdoor? The answer is: Better then we used to. Is such an answer good enough?

The two extremes of management are total rest and total exploitation. Total rest does not necessarily mean maximum improvement. Researchers have measured no improvements on a local farm entirely rested for seven years. Had Mdukatshani been closed to the location people for ten years – bush encroachment would now be so severe that the project would be paying women to do bush clearance and investing in flocks of goats.

Better control might have seen better results on the farm. The control which has been lacking, however, has not prevented improvements taking place. CAP believes further improvement in the condition of resources is possible even if control remains no better than at present.

SOME BACKGROUND

Since CAP came into existence 20 years ago it has enabled African to demonstrate that they can upgrade damaged land as well as any white farmer. There are probably no other schemes which involve Africans in practical rehabilitation in this way, despite the need for rehabilitation in most African areas.

In March 1965 CAP started work on the Maria Ratschitz Mission farm, Boschkloof, near Wasbank, Natal. The poor state of the farm at the time had brought a warning letter from the local Soil Conservation Committee which was “appalled at the erosion and deterioration of the farm in general.”

In July 1974 Professor J.D. Scott, a pioneer pasture scientist, was called to evaluate CAP's progress. "The farm was in a parlous state from an erosion point of view nine years ago," he reported. "I went to Boschklouf yesterday and I was very impressed with what I saw. The hill slopes are well-grassed compared to the neighbouring farms and the way in which areas that were eroded and eroded have recovered and become well grassed is quite astonishing. The old eroded arablelands have been put down to Eragrostis curvula for hay and I do not suppose there are many farms in the vicinity with such large quantities of conserved feed."

It was a matter of pride to CAP's Africans that they could invite neighbouring white farmers to get free winter because the farm had such a surplus of grass. In 10 years the carrying capacity increased from 800 to more than 1200 cattle. In effect – grass had almost doubled the size of the farm.

Favourable evaluation reports such as Professor Scott's encouraged donors to continue to support CAP when it moved to the Weenen-Msinga area in January 1975, purchasing the farms Loraine, The Spring and Koornspruit, which have become known as Mdukatshani, the place of lost grasses. The history of the farm is described in the report; "No Ordinary farm."

Design a Wonder Plant for Msinga

Make it tough, immortal.

Able to take root on rubble.

Aggressive, vigorous, swift to overwhelm – hacked down it will grow again. Quickly.

Design a multi-purpose plant that can be used for

- * Fuel

- * Fodder

- * Fencing

- * Enriching the soil.

And you will design a plant like Acacia tortilis, a plentiful resource on Mdukatshani.

In 1864 Koorspruit was "densely covered with thornwood," according to J.H. Spence, the government surveyor. Photographs of the farm in 1919 (Chief Native Commissioner files, Natal Archives) show open grassland near our top farm gate. Ndala Mbatha says the bush was there, but kept trimmed to knee height by pressure of goats. When CAP arrived in 1975 there was poor grass cover, little bush. Today grass is plentiful, and so is bush.

While Mdukatshani has a "bush encroachment problems" – Msinga is experiencing an acute shortage of thorn for essential browse, firewood, fencing and stockfeed. The acacia's protein-rich pods are much sought-after by cattle and goats. In resettlement areas like Nomoya where stockowners struggle to maintain animals in township conditions, pods are collected in sacks as supplementary winter feed.

CAP's experiments with the pods have been described in earlier reports. During the 1980, 1981 and 1982 winter seasons, CAP obtained more than 200 000 kgs of pods which were "bought" initially with cash, subsequently with mealies. The pod exchange was a drought relief scheme.

The drought eventually caught up with the acacias, however, and during the winter of 1984 it was difficult to find any trees anywhere with pods.

FIREWOOD

The supply of firewood “is one of the most important problems facing mankind today,” According to a report of the US National Academy of Sciences (Firewood Crops, 1980). The report lists 35 trees particularly suitable for fuelwood plantations in arid and semi-arid regions. **Acacia tortilis** is one of them.

Since its arrival CAP has tried a number of supervised chopping schemes. The problems is the size of the farm. Available staff cannot supervise an 11-kilometre boundary, most of it accessible only on foot. In 1984 five chopping co-operatives were established each to collect its wood during one supervised day a week. Unfortunately a woman cannot gather all the wood she needs in one day. When the supply is exhausted at home she returns illegally to get a new supply.

CAP has hoped to measure the quantity being harvested. Instead we have obtained a simpler statistics – the number of registered choppers – 200. Can the farm sustain their need for fuel? On visual evidence (notoriously deceptive) yes it can. Crisscrossing the wooded spaces of the farm there are few signs of all the busy axes.

Mark Gander of the Institute of Natural Resources, Natal University, has found a moderately degraded savanna produce about 900 kgs of wood per hectare per year.

(The Poor Man’s Energy, Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty).

“As to how much is usable, I don’t know,” he says. “My guess would be about 40% is very suitable firewood, another 30% is not ideal but still usable...” (personal communication).

So an estimate of Mdukatshani’s firewood might be:

40% of 900 kgs of wood per hectare over 2 500 ha = 900 000 kgs of wood a year.

In the valley lowveld of Mahlabathini, Gander estimated firewood consumption at 740 kgs perperson per year. On this basis Mdukatshani has sufficient firewood for 1216 people – or about 200 families.

Firewood has always been free. To place a value on the wood we assume that when all the wood is destroyed, local families will have to use paraffin, a commercial fuel. In a report for the Urban Foundation, 1979, J.L. Rivett-Carnac found an Umlazi township household used 47 litres of paraffin a month. The value of Mdukatshani’s firewood might therefore be estimated: 47 litres @ 45c x 12 months x 200 families.

= R 50 760

Design a Wonder Animal for Msinga

Make it tough, a survivor.

Able to feed on anything – even the poisonous latex of euphorbies and tombootie.

Make it fecund, quick-maturing.

Suitable for milk, meat, sacrifice, lobola and barter.

A free-ranger that will herd itself.

Msinga has more goats than any other district in Natal. A hundred years ago an Msinga family had an average of 6 cattle and 1,5 goats. Rinderpest reversed this. In 1900 a local family had an average 1,5 cattle and 5 goats. (Natal Blue Books – Departmental Reports).

In 1901 the District Surgeon reported: “The unusually small rainfall and consequent poor pasturage for cattle has resulted in a greatly diminished milk supply. This, in a considerable number of instances, has been responsible for the death of a number of children. (Natal Blue Books).

In 1907 things were worse. “The loss of cattle due to East fever has reduced the people almost to a condition of absolute want,” said the District Surgeon. “Luckily a small supply of milk is to be had from their goats.” (Natal Blue Books).

Five years ago CAP began a small milk goat experiment. Local nannies had their milk supply boosted with a supplementary diet of acacia pods and maize. The resulting milk could not compare with that of a breed like the Saanen, but was useful for an Msinga family. CAP also purchased Saanen rams which were mated with local stock. While the Msinga goats are resistant to heartwater, Saanen’s are very vulnerable and therefore have a limited life expectancy in our conditions. Breeding an Msinga milk goat is likely to take a lifetime. A recent gift of three male milk goat kids has given impetus to our efforts.

At a price of R60 the goat is within reach of the poor man who can never get R 500 to buy a cow or an ox, and the goat has a better chance of survival and is also easier to manage. Let loose every morning, it seldom ranges more than a kilometre from home, returning on its own to the kraal in the evening. (The advent of schools at Msinga has made herding a bygone tradition, unenforceable now even among children who never go to school.).

The goat has only recently received serious attention from agricultural researchers, most of the work being centred in the Eastern Cape where sheep and cattle farming is threatened by invasions of Acacia karoo.

“Researcher results show that neither burning nor judicious management prevent its reinfestation after clearing. Goats do according to A.J. Aucamp, J.E. Danckwertz, and J.J. Venter (Journal of the Grassland Society Vol 1 No 1 1984)

“Goats produce more red meat per metabolic mass than cattle or sheep,” according to W R. Teague (Dohne Agriculture, Vol 6 No 1 1984. “If an area were to be debushed and the Boer goat removed from the system, beef production would have to be increased by 124% to yield the same production per unit area as a combination of cattle and goats.”

Preliminary research in the eastern Cape suggests each mature goat needs 2 000 palatable plants 1,5 metres in height (Dohne Agriculture Vol 6 No 2 1984) On Mdukatshani S.J. Milton measured acacia densities varying between 1460 and 4428 trees per hectare (Bothalia Vol 13 No 3 and 4). Accepting a mean of about 2000 – there is goat browse for 2000 goats on the farm. This figure is close to our estimate of the actual number coming in from the location.

Although stockowners have been asked to register their goats with CAP, only 680 goats have so far been registered for 34 owners. Because goats can slip through the fence at any point along the boundary, and are almost impossible to capture or identify – goat owners have no

incentive to register their animals. During 1985 CAP plans a hut-to-hut goat census to obtain a realistic figure of the goats using the browse on the farm.

What is the value of the browse? Aucamp, Dankwerts and Venter provide a figure of R 42,28 as the annual income from goats per hectare (based on liveweight gain) in a mixed cattle-goat production system. So the value of browse on Mdukatshani might be estimated: 2 000 ha x R42, 28 = R 105 700 per annum.

Because of the need for a browser in the Weenen thornveld, agricultural officers studied the Eastern Cape goat farms and decided that the problems of control made it difficult for them to recommend the goat to a farmer.

“A goat is like a snake.... It can get through any fence,” say the Africans.

The challenge of Cap is to manage goats to benefit the farm. On Mdukatshani there are two extremes of management. The location fenceline is heavily browsed – the boundary with white farmers has had no goats for four years, the one is open savanna the other impenetrable thicket. To move the goats where they are needed goatproof fences are essential – fences that will keep goats inside as well as outside selected camps.

OVERSTOCKED – OR UNDERSTOCKED?

Natal’s thornveld is 68% below its grazing capacity, according to Dr. D M Scotney, Department of Agriculture, Natal. (Journal of the Grassland Society, Vol 1 No 1 1984)

On Mdukatshani 650 ha (about 25%) is in a good condition. The remaining 75% is damaged. The plough has been more destructive than the animal. Wherever the slope of land allowed it, fields were cultivated in the past, and despite 20 years of rest, have sprouted thorn but very little grass.

In 1980 the official farm plan for Mdukatshani sets a carrying capacity of 300 cattle. In the drought years that followed the farm often carried more than 1500 trespassing animals. Cattle owners came from distances 20 km away, drove their cattle in our gate and left them. If the cattle died – they were going to die anyway. Dozens of unclaimed carcasses rotted on the veld.

CAP had started a work for grazing scheme soon after arrival, but in the above situation grazing control broke down. Trespass remained a problem as the drought years followed one another, and CAP struggled for control in a number of ways – including charging offenders in the chief’s court.

After Neil Alcock died, Chief Simakade Mchunu called a meeting of his people on the boundary of Mdukatshani, publicly supporting CAP and warning that future trespass would be a serious offence. The chief’s gesture helped to keep the cattle off the farm, and during the wet summer months at the beginning of 1984 the farm was rested. Grass grew so luxuriantly that CAP became concerned at the threat of winter fires. In July the farm was reopened to location cattle on a new basis. Each animal was registered, the owner given a written contract, and grazing fees were set as manure for CAP’s communal gardens.

While the influx of trespassing animals undoubtedly prevented the recovery of some parts of the farm, in other areas the animals provided an example of the benefits of non-selective grazing, judging by the red grass flowering in the veld. Red grass, *Themeda triandra*, is a species of “undisturbed grassveld... Its presence in veld.... Often implies that the veld had been well managed in the past,” according to N M Tainton, D I Bransby and P de V Booysen (Common Veld and Pasture Grasses in Natal, 1976). Not only does Mdukatshani have red grass – there is red grass in Msinga next door.

John Acocks the pioneer plant geographer, once compared the results of rest on the grasses of a white farm, and a black location nextdoor. The location had the superior sward.

“This can be very surprising if one has not previously got down on hands and knees and examined the half inch of growth of grass in the reserve to discover it to consist of all the climax grasses,” he said. (Veld Types of South Africa, 1953) “Close observation leads one to the conclusion that many of the Native reserve are not in such an appalling state as they are popularly supposed to be, and that reclamation of the veld will be easy once rotational resting can be applied to it, providing of course that soil erosion has not been extensive in the meantime.”

In his inaugural lecture in 1963 Professor E R. Roux, professor of botany at Wits University, suggested that many African reserves were probably not overstocked, but understocked. “It has happened before now that scientific advance has been impeded by the uncritical acceptance of easy generalizations,” he said, pointing out that it was the to-and-fro of cattle to water and kraals at night that caused erosion.

At present 40 cattle owners have 322 cattle on the farm. All the animals are kraaled at home, and driven to water every other day. CAP has to minimize the damage of this to-and-fro, assist stockowners with their real problems of security, and control a system of rotational grazing – concerns that can conflict with each other.

What is the value of Mdukatshani’s grazing? According to Dankwertz (Dohne Agriculture Vol 6 No 2 1984) the gross income from cattle on veld in average conditions R44 per hectare per year) based on liveweight gain). Assuming that only Mdukatshani’s 650 ha of good veld are used for grazing, the value of grazing might be estimated:
 $650 \times R44 = R\ 28\ 600.$

VEGETABLES

At present about 6 ha of riverside land is being irrigated for communal gardens. The potential irrigable area is about 16 ha.

With 180 gardeners coming and going at will, it has been impossible to weight the produce grown in the gardens. Recently CAP started to weigh that sample which is transported on the CAP lorry weekly. At the end of a year we will be closer to an estimate of production. In order to arrive at an estimate for this report we have assumed every gardener takes home only R2 worth of homegrown vegetables weekly.
 $180 \times R2 \times 52 \text{ weeks} = R\ 18\ 720$

The costs, progress and problems of the gardens have been detailed in reports to donors and will not be elaborated here.

Some other resources

Mdukatshani provides several additional resources such as

- * Thatching grass for beehive huts
- * Materials for mats, brooms
- * Plants for medicines
- * Wild fruits such as marula, red ivory, Tugela milkwood, sour plum.

AND THE PROBLEMS

1) Water

Although Natal's largest river, the Tugela, runs along the farm's northern boundary, a steep ridge makes the water virtually inaccessible to 80% of the farm – and that 80% is virtually waterless. Because of the water problem, all 15 families (the maximum allowed by law) on the farm are clustered at two points, leaving large spaces unprotected.

2) A Robber's Highway

Because of Mdukatshani's broken terrain and the deep gorge which bisects it, most of its 2543 ha must be traversed on horseback or on foot. The bush is so dense that it is possible to miss an ox grazing a few metres away. This is important in an area where stocktheft is so bad that in 1983 the SA Police established a stocktheft unit at a camp nextdoor to Mdukatshani. Whether the stockthieves collect their loot from Weenen's white farmers, or Msinga's black – police have found the favourite get-away route for both areas runs through the middle of Mdukatshani.

In 1984 13 cattleowners lost 44 cattle grazing on the farm. (Nine were later found), Because of the threat of theft, stockowners keep their cattle kraaled at home at night. Not even a home kraal is safe, however. One Mdukatshani man had 80 goats driven from his kraal while he was sleeping. Another lost 39 in a morning riad – only newborn kids were left in the kraal, and they died for lack of milk. "That's why I gave up goats and decided to buy cattle," he says.

Although goats have many advantages over cattle in our thornveld – a stolen goat is easier to hide, move, sell, kill or eat than an ox.

While a goatowner may lose dozens of animals at a time, the loss of a single cow is crippling to a man with a total of five or six (the average for our part of Msinga, according to KwaZulu Veterinary Service census figures).

The richest stockowner using Mdukatshani has 20 cattle. However 67% of the owners have six animals or less.

Any grazing system that removes an animals from within sight of the home puts the animals at risk. KwaZulu's plans for a betterment scheme are feared because a defined grazing area

will concentrate cattle in a known locality at a distance from protection – ideal conditions for the stockthief.

Msinga cattle owners making use of Mdukatshani obviously prefer to keep their animals within sight of the common boundary fence. The best veld, unfortunately, lies in area of greatest risk.

Cattle men are experts at their own problems. They are therefore participating in farm plans, offering ideas to make their own lives easier, Planned improvements for both security and management include:

- * Increased horse and foot patrols
- * Smaller camps
- * Access tracks
- * Overnight kraals at strategic points
- * Homes to guard these points
- * Radio for communication
- * Quality bulls, and dosing and dipping services.

The homes that are to be built to block the thieves' getaway route will need to have water carted, at least part of the year, and animal-drawn carts are planned to help with internal farm transport.

THE PRICE OF TOMORROW

Soil breeds very slowly – adding a centimeter every 100 years. An eroding field can lose that centimeter in a few summer. Mdukatshani has fields where so much soil has been lost, bedrock is showing.

The farm lies in an area suffering from a shortage of soil as much as a shortage of land. As far back 1940 J. A. Pentz did a survey of 45 700 ha in the Weenen area finding 19% “completely eroded to rock or shales (Union Govt. Scientific Bulletin No 212) In The Tugela Location of Msinga only 8,4% of the land has been mapped as being soil-covered. (R E Schulze, Journal of Geography, April 1970)

The 1973 Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act lays down that no virgin land may be ploughed without the written permission of a government officer. “Virgin land” is defined as land that has not been cultivated during the previous 10 years. Mdukatshani largest camp is 786 ha – the size of a farm. It's eroding red fields have been lumped together because they are regarded as “valueless to agriculture”. Now they are to be “virgin land,” whatever the labels pinned on the maps this giant camp is not yet beyond reclamation.

Serious rehabilitation work is uneconomic for the commercial farmer. There is to profit investing in the future. At the Weenen Nature Reserve, for example, old fields are being re-grassed using a method known as “thatching”. The cost is R 4 000 per hectare (spread over four years). When the grass is back – the land has a market value of R 60 a hectare.

While it does not make economic sense to reclaim one hectare – does it make better sense to lose it forever? Until recently the government contributed towards a farmer's cost of rehabilitation by providing subsidies for wages and wire. These benefits have been suspended

because of the recession. Any reclamation CAP undertakes will therefore be dependent on donors.

JOBS FOR THE JOBLESS

The government's wage subsidy was introduced less to help the farmer than to alleviate unemployment.

While rehabilitation plans for the farm could be implemented gradually over several years, CAP wants to create as many jobs as possible for local families during the predicted hard times of 1985.

Interest grown from a sense of ownership. One of CAP's greatest resources not yet listed in this report – is the interest of the people who call it "our farm". Only 20 of the staff of 50 actually live on the farm. The remainder, like CAP's chairman Petrus Majozi, live in the location. Majozi is an example of the men who are drawn to CAP – that not-often-recognized-class who given the choice would stay on the land.

Material necessity drives them to the city. Spiritual necessity drives them back.

Majozi never went to school. He was a chef in a Johannesburg hotel when CAP arrived on Mdukatshani and he saw the chance to do what he had always wanted to do.... Farm. He gave up his well paid city job for the precarious joys of trying to live off the land.

Many of the workless now at home have the same hungering to be country men. Any jobs CAP can create for them will be opportunities, rather than time-fillers.

At present CAP's monthly wage bill of R 2 800 covers the wages of 50 people.

Although a bag of mealies has been the standard monthly reward for work on CAP's drought schemes, this standard has recently changed because highveld maize farmers obtaining seasonal labour from Msinga have sated to pay their workers three bags of mealies a month. They use homegrown stocks – CAP purchases its supplies, three bags cost CAP R60. That is an average wage for an adult member of staff.

Whether CAP pays additional staff in mealies or cash – the result will be the same.

Lasso the future

A fence can make an island in the desert. Wherever there are fences at Msinga there are islands of green, vegetables or fruit trees, red grass or thatch. The oldest fences are lines of yucca and aloes. The most common, however, are temporary constructions of thornbrush. Acacia is the poor-man's-wire. Without thorn he has no defence against the location's livestock.

Police on dagga raids have been exploiting the brushwood shortage. Where they once uprooted or sprayed green dagga plants, they now set alight to the brushwood enclosures, knowing goats will move in to do the rest. Brushwood is almost irreplaceable.

In a sample of local vegetable gardens S J. Milton found that 65 metre of thorn fences needed an equivalent of 0,2ha of bush – an area ten times as great as the garden.

Goatproof netting would have cost the gardeners R80 – a capital investment beyond their means.

The cost of meeting is beyond CAP's means too, so we will be experimenting with combination of wire, yukka, aloe and thornbrush. CAP started planting yukka in 1975 and now has about 8 km of yukka fences. After rains gaps are filled and the lines extended. Yukka-planting will continue, but it is longterm fencing. To control and rehabilitate the farm, barbed wire will have to precede the plants.

About 30 km of fencing are planned for 1985. Fencing is like rain – essential for growing grass. A strand of wire can lasso the future. Without a fence the future is dust.

PROPOSED EXPENDITURE 1985

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Administration | R 7 650 |
| Security building – 12 huts | 6 250 (30 people's wages for 2 months) |
| Fencing – 30 km | 37 074 (“ “ “ “ 7 months) |
| Water supply and irrigation | 7 650 (20 “ “ “ 2½ months) |
| Wagons and carts | 4 000 (3 contracts at R500) |
| Livestock: Horses | 1 600 (1 contract – leather work) |
| Goats | 100 |
| Cattle | 3 500 (Training draught animals 2 contracts) |
| Legal aid (1) | 2 500 |
| Welfare (2) | 2 000 |
| Bones/pods (3) | 10 000 |
| General repairs/ maintenance | 1 400 |
| Visits to projects/ research stations | 1 500 |
| Gardens wages/materials/transport | 15 000 (wages 1 advisor, 6 demonstrators) |
| Transport – fuel, repairs etc | 25 000 |
| Wages for staffs (4) | 27 000 |
| | <hr/> |
| | <u>R 152 134</u> |

Notes:

- 1) Most of CAP's legal aid work is undertaken by the Legal Resources Centre and CAP's expenses are covered by OXFAM and the Raimondo Trust.
- 2) Hospital fees, help in disasters etc. usually covered by individual gifts
- 3) These expenses are already covered by donor grants.
- 4) Some staff wages are included under gardening. CAP has applied to a donor for an increase in staff wages, but as this has yet to be approved, the above figures are based on existing salaries. Apart from adming, driving, legal aid etc. CAP staff will be used on experimental fencing, reclamation and harvesting work.

CAP staff could also be used to do al the fencing, building etc CAP is hoping to obtain funds to enable it to offer additional employment to local people. The available funds will set the tempo of work.

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APRIL 1985: MVELASE SHAPES A WEAPON

Head turn to watch MaDladla Mvelase pass by.

“She is loved. Hau – Mvelase loves that woman.”

MaDladla walks lightly, leather petticoat bouncing, silver bangles flashing on her arms. Her axe flashes too, and it is the axe that makes eyes follow her. It’s her husband’s axe, a man’s axe. When has a man loaned his axe to a woman before?

It may be woman’s work to gather firewood, but an axe is a man’s tool, a man’s companion.

“No woman will ever learn to use an axe,” Delanie Mbatha is quite definite and he speaks for all the men of the valley.

“She’ll blunt it and dent it and break the handle,” Qalokwakhe Mkhize is just as emphatic.

“Lend my wife my axe? Ai! Ngeke! Never!”

You can tell at a glance to whom an axe belongs. A man carves his own handle, a long narrow shaft of wild pear or silver raisin or tamboti. A woman keeps the same stumpy handle she buys from the store.

“And the iron is dented where she’s missed the log and hit a rock, and you can rub the blade like this,” Delanie demonstrates,” and it won’t even cut your hand.

That is a woman’s axe.” Lend a woman your axe and you might as well throw it away.

Yet Tusheleni Mvelase has let his wife take his axe to the mountain to chop grewia laths.

“Au MaDladla – your husband loves you,” Natty Duma says it out loud when the two women meet on the road. MaDladla does not reply. She just smiles. She is too slender for local tastes – all bone and air and thoughtfulness. And her worn and broken bangles say it is 20 years since she was a makoti, a bride. Yet she carries a soft radiance about with her. The war is over at last and everyone knows it is because of one man. Thusheleni. The turning point came the day he walked home, unarmed, holding just a paper bag. Tusheleni did the impossible. Alone he stopped the killing.

MaDladla’s ears sing with the praises uttered for her husband, but the words are like the drone of zidlanono beetles and she is inattentive, turning inwards to the resonance of her heart.

“Umfazi wami impela,” her husband had told her. “Au MaDladla – you are indeed my woman.”

Those words are part of the story of this war.

.....

“Aunty, aunty...” all day the girl has been sitting at the gate, waiting for Natty Duma. It is dusk when the lorry turns in the gate at last. It’s been hospital day and Natty’s attention is scattered, reminding patients to swallow their pills, when to come again.

“Aunty, aunty....” At last the crowd clears and Natty notices the girl.

“Yes ntombi?”

“I came to ask a garden. Everybody said I must ask you if I want a garden.”

“You?” Natty is astonished. “Why do you want a garden?”

“My brother is hiding with the impi on the mountain and my father is hiding in Goli. There’s nobody to give us food at home anymore. That’s why I ask a garden.

I thought I could grow some mfino, some spinach.”

“Ah,” Natty is touched. “But you’re too small. We dig with our hands here. There’s no tractor. You’re too small to dig.”

“Ah please aunty,” the child is panicky.” I try.”

“Well come tomorrow. It’s late now.”

But Natty forgets. Next day is gardening day and the busiest day of the week. It is again dusk before she notices the little girl.

“I am still waiting aunty. You said you would show me a place for a garden.”

That is the last time Mbotho Mvelase is forgotten. She is about 12, a skinny girl in a tribal shibosh, a short cloth tied at the waist. She is not yet old enough to be allowed an axe, but she learns to wield a pick and spade and a rake. Doggedly she follows instructions, turning the earth, manuring, planting her first seedlings, watering. Mbotho waters every day, and when she has finished she huddles next to her garden, quiet and unnoticed. She is afraid of the gunfire so she watches for women going her way, then splashes across the river in their company.

Mbotho’s arrival in the gardens is significant not just because she is the youngest gardener, but because she is the first from Manqomfini. The women around her are from Msusampi. The two places are at war.

“My child has done my thinking for me,” says Mbotho’s mother, MaDladla Mvelase, when she comes, disbelieving, to look at her daughter’s garden. There are ten rows of spinach.

“And that?”

Mbotho grins. “Beetroot”. She has known about beetroot for two weeks now.

MaDladla becomes a regular visitor, helping her daughter with the watering cans, chatting with the other gardeners. Her leadership emerges as the weeks go by and they struggle to meet the expanding crises of war. Although there is companionship in the gardens, the spinach leaves are reaped for opposing armies. Every morning the women’s bowls and billycans are carried along separate paths to feed the hiding impis. That is not choice, but necessity.

Choice and necessity. Sometimes the difference is a strand, tense and invisible.

Sometimes it is a clear divide. MaDladla lives on the boundary, torn by the forces of the middle ground. If beautrality were possible it would exist here – a point of merger between right and wrong. But her son fights with Manqomfini, while her husband, Tusheleni, is not involved.

If anyone should be involved in this war, of course, it is Tusheleni, for he is Gosa, elected leader of the men. In times of peace that makes him chief of protocol, in times of war military commander who must call up the troops. Yet this conflict is being fought without his consent. While nine men have been killed, he has remained in Johannesburg, a security guard, sticking to his job. A war without a Gosa is an odd thing. Men fight without their Gosa in defiance of themselves.

And a son who fights without his father? MaDladla's spirit confronts separate realities. Just cooking for her son is now love – and betrayal.

Some of her distress might be resolved if she heard from her husband, but since the war started there has been silence between them. The taxis used to carry their notes – abrupt messages dictated through a scribe. Taxis connect the city, 400 kilometres away, and the scattered kraals of the windy hills. War has stopped the taxis running, however, and without the boys in the combis traveling up and down, there has been a black out. The valley has lost its post and its telephone and its newspaper. Yet MaDladla expects to hear something. She has never waited four months without a message.

When MaNdlenye Mbhele's body is brought home from Johannesburg she can endure the waiting no longer. Mbele had stayed on his job, refusing to take sides. He was killed to show no man had the right to neutrality.

After Mbele's funeral MaDladla puts on her black plastic shoes to go visiting. She needs the help of somebody outside the valley. The home of her brother, Bulawayo Dladla, is a few hours walk away. "I need you to 'phone my brother for me," MaDladla explains her plan to her sister-in-law. "Tell him I am coming to Goli and he must wait for me."

Her brother is also a night watchman, and although he does not work anywhere near her husband, he can act as a guide.

"Must I send a message with the answer?"

"No. No." MaDladla is afraid to have her movements known. She will come and fetch the news herself.

Beyond the valley a weekly taxi service continues to operate as usual. MaDladla borrows the fare from MaMvelase Vilakazi.

"I am going to visit my sister at Umhlumayo," she lies. The fare is R 20, even if you carry a baby, as MaDladla will be doing, for although Mtikabani is a toddler, he is still suckling. He can't be left behind.

"Khonza baba – greet father if you find him," the two eldest girls, Bayekile and Mbotho, know where their mother is going. They mix a bottle of thin porridge for the baby to eat on the way, and put it in a shopping bag with five nappies and a few baby clothes. That is the only luggage. Even MaDladla's earring must stay behind.

"You look like a salukazi, an old woman, without them," her husband told her once.

He likes the wooden discs that fit her stretched lobes. MaDladla has hesitated over her earrings, but war is a time to mourn, not to dress up.

The taxi travels through the night, stopping at Nancefield Hostel just as it is getting light. MaDladla has drowsed uncomfortably, aware of a growing pain in her groin. At the hostel gates she looks for a place to urinate. There are lines of men passing to work. She sits on the kere, strange, alone and tired, trying to quieten her child, to forget the pain that is becoming unbearable.

Hours later her brother finds her at the gate. He has brought bread and Coke for them. MaDladla is too shy to say she does not want to drink.

She has instructions for finding her husband in an emergency. Tusheleni told her she must find Ixoxo in Johannesburg, then ask for Kupa, the place where he works.

Bulawayo has never visited the area, but he has a rough idea of how to reach Ixoxo, the street of the shebeens. He pays for a taxi. Then a bus. It is more than 10 hours since MaDladla left home and she is overwhelmed by the pressure of her bladder.

It is agony to stand, agony to walk, agony to sit still. When the bus stops in Randburg late that afternoon she sees a clump of bushes at the terminus. At last.

“Kupa? Can you show us the way to Kupa?” Randburg is unfamiliar territory for Bulawayo. “We don’t know that place,” the men at the shebeens are unhelpful. “We can’t tell you anything. When people come from Msinga they come to kill. We don’t want to be part of trouble.” Stretched earlobes are the giveaway. Only Msinga people have “indlebe evulile,” – open ears. Men and women, all are marked this way.

Bulawayo pleads. Would he come to kill with this woman and this child? Somebody relents. “Along that street. Turn at the corner...” MaDladla plods wearily, the baby crying on her back, its nappy wet against her. The shopping bag smells of soggy nappies.

“Come umfaan,” Bulawayo lifts the toddler onto his shoulders and bounces him.

More streets. More corners. Bulawayo has never been to school but his years in the city have taught him to spell out the liters on a sign. Kupa... Kupa..... They almost miss the building yard, however, for the board says Cooper. Gough Cooper Homes.

A Xhosa guards the gate. Yes, Tusheleni Mvelase works there.

“But I cannot call him. I do not know you. What if you’ve come to kill him?”

“I’m his wife.”

“What is the name of the baby then?”

“Mtikabani.”

“All right.” The Xhosa is convinced. “Tusheleni said his baby was Mtikabani.”

They wait until they see Tusheleni’s tall figure, urgent, hurrying.

“Kwenzenjani? What’s happened?” he demands.

“I came to look for you because of the fighting at home.”

“Do you think I am dead?”

“I do not know this place where you stay.”

“Your heart has been painning you?” the tall man is gentle.

“Ehe.”

“Where did you get the money?”

“I borrowed from MaMvelase.”

“Au MaDladla,” Tusheleni speaks as if they were alone. “You borrow money to come and look for me? Umfazi wami impela. You are indeed my woman.”

He bends down to hug his small son. When he last saw Mtikabani the baby was a month old. The boy screams, pulling away in terror, soiling his nappy. MaDladla is distressed, mopping the trickles on his legs.

“Ssssh. Ssssh,” but Mtikabani keeps up his yelling.

Tusheleni has a small room on the building site. That night he buys meat for supper and he cooks it himself, to stoking a fire with bits of plank from the building yard. The Xhosa has lent him a pot.

“You are thin. Why are you so thin?” he studies his wife while the stew simmers.

“I have been afraid. I have been frightened by this war.”

“And the reason? What is the reason for this impi?” During the week MaDladla stays in the city Tusheleni repeats the question many times.

“I am a woman so I do not know.” MaDladla can tell her husband what happened when. But why? Even at home they ask that question. Nobody can tell you why.

Tusheleni arranges for his wife’s return journey. There is not much he can send home.

A few weeks earlier he had a fire in his room which burnt his savings of R 270, his pass, his clothes, everything. MaDladla ties the charred corners of R20 notes into a doek. We will tell her if the bank will change them.

“If the trouble doesn’t stop I’m coming home.”

“No,” MaDladla pleads with her husband. “You will die if you come home.”

“And perhaps I die if I stay here. When you get back you must ‘phone with the news.”

Tusheleni gives his wife a number, a day and a time when he will be waiting. Then he puts some cents into Mtikabani’s hand.

“Here umfaan. This is for you to buy sweets on the journey.” Father and son have got to know each other.

In the valley nothing has changed. The men are still fighting. That is all MaDladla can report to Tusheleni when she gets through by ‘phone. She has caught a bus to Weenen, 30 km away, to make sure of the privacy of her call.

A night watchman lives alone with his thoughts. Tusheleni Mvelase is a quiet man who has been at ease with his own company on the long night patrols. Or he was until now. Now he cannot live with his own agitation. Thought of his son hurt him most – his boy fooling with death up on the mountain.

“I am asking three months leave to plough,” he tells his white boss. The truth he tells to the Indian foreman. Then he puts his spare trousers and shirt in a paper bag, collect his wage and sets off home.

Bus. Train. Bus. Bus. He travels through the night, reaching Mbele’s Store late in the morning. The store is the end of the road, a border post. Beyond Mbele’s you have to walk. Its footpath country.

The path home lies along the bank of the Tugela. The pools are the limpid green of winter, silent among the rocks. The mountain in overhangs the path, shadowing Tusheleni as he walks. The summit is out of sight. Only goats disturb boulder and scree.

Stezi Dladla was ambushed along this path. Last week Mbekeni Duma’s killers crossed here. Tusheleni walks steadfastly but he is very afraid.

“My heart told me to stay alone,” he reminds himself. He has to trust his heart.

And an unarmed man is not powerless. He can shape neutrality to be a weapon.

Where the path turns away from the river he meets Thoko Mbatha, then MaMbatha Mvelase. They are alarmed, forgetting to greet him.

No man walks here,” says the older woman. “What are you doing?”

“I am coming home.”

Tusheleni turns up towards the village. He has to walk through Msusampi to get home. The war has turned the village into enemy territory.

Mbotho is in her garden, raking, when she hears her father's voice. The winter river is very quiet. Sound travels across the water. Mbotho spins round. Thusheleni's tall figure is unmistakable on the far bank. The girls begin to run.

"My father," she shouts to MaMvelase Masoka. "I've seen my father."

"How do you know it's your father?" MaMvelase tries to hold her. "Where is he now?"

Mbotho points across the river, but already the man is out of sight. They will kill my father." She grabs her loin cloth and lifts it above her buttocks to give her speed.

Gardeners gather on the bank, watching the girl splash across the river and disappear, running for her home against the side of the mountain.

There is nobody in the yard when Mbotho gets there. She flings herself into the doorways of huts, searching. Her mother is in the cooking hut.

"Where's father?" Mbotho's tears have smeared the ochre on her cheeks. MaDladla grabs her.

"What are you saying?"

"Somebody must have killed him," the girl is distraught.

"You saw your father?" MaDladla demands.

"Yes, I saw."

"Where?"

"Talking to Thoko at svivaneni."

"If he was on the path how did you miss him?"

"I came running by a different path."

Mbotho's eyes search the hills, search the valley.

"Nangu 'baba. Father is here." The girl does not greet Thusheleni as he climbs their stone steps. She knows he has been sighted; she is looking to see who has followed him.

"No men walk here," MaDladla is trembling. "You must hide on the mountain."

"I am not hiding. I am staying at home." Thusheleni drops his paper bag and settles himself in his yard, his back against a warm mud wall. His eyes too are searching the hills. Everybody will know he is back. Women stood in their yards watching his passage through the village, but they said not a word. Nobody greeted him. They watched in silence.

It may be Mvelase's last homecoming, but it is still a homecoming. The red hen gives a last squawk as it is captured for the pot. The Zulu morning meal is a late one, and the family has not yet eaten the dry porridge and spinach – Mbotho's spinach – that was prepared for breakfast. However that is not enough for a welcoming meal.

The uneaten breakfast puts Mvelase's daughters in a dilemma. They whisper together, whisper with their mother.

"Tell father we want to send the food." A billycan is waiting for their brother, Bhekisizwe, who is hiding with the impi.

MaDladla hesitates. She is reluctant to use this moment for the request, but there is no other time. If the girls are late with the food the impi will have dispersed.

"Mvelase..." She is unsure of her husband's reaction. He is furious with Bhekisizwe. He feels compromised by his fighting son.

His anger is for his son, however, not his womenfolk.

“Lungile – all right,” he tells the girls. “Take food to my son. But give him a message. Tell him he is coming back off the mountain.

As it gets dark Thusheleni becomes terribly afraid. He prepared himself for fear, knowing his heart would hold him steady. But this heart – where is it now? It has run away with the night. He sits in the darkness while his wife prepares their hut, arranging their blankets on a grass mat on the floor. Then he stoops inside, gets ready for bed, blows out the small candle.

“It is better if you go to stay at my mother’s kraal,” whispers MaDladla.

“If I stay there, how can I end the war,” her husband whispers back. “I have some to end the war.” They lie together, unable to sleep, waiting for the sound of gunfire from the mountain.

“Ngiyasaba. I am afraid. I am also frightened,” Thusheleni whispers his terror in the dark.

Outside Bayekile and Mbotho listen to the night. Their parent’s hut has a small, homemade door, fastened with a latch. Quietly Mbotho slips on a lock, turns the key, ties the key to her wrist. All night she and her sister will remain on guard, patrolling the edge of the yard, starting up every time a dog barks. But is a night without guns.

Sleep catches up with the family day and between visitors they drowse in the sun.

There are visitors aplenty, women from both sides, questioning MaDladla.

“Why is your husband here?”

“He has come to stop the war.”

Older women tackle Mvelase himself.

“You must run away.”

“I have come to speak to the men.”

They will kill you if you stay here.

I don’t know war.

In the late afternoon Thusheleni takes his stick to visit the oldest man in the village, Mtembu Mvelase. After he has gone MaDladla remembers.

“My head is not working! The old man has gone!” What is wrong with her forgetting that? Even feeble Mvelase has had to run away.

Thusheleni has reached the old man’s kraal when the gunfire starts. Volley after volley echoes from the mountain.

“Father, father... Mbotho races along village paths, chasing him. But is all right.

Her father has ducked into a hut. He is sheltered.

“Don’t come home,” Mbotho pushes in after him. “Don’t come back. Stay here tonight.”

It is impossible to move I the village without being seen by an impi on the heights.

Mvelase has been watched all day. The firing is a warning.

The night, however, is again quiet.

At daybreak Thusheleni and MaDladla are on their way to each other.

“Lale kahle? Did you sleep well?” in a public place they speak with formality.

“Yes, I slept, but I was afraid.”

“I wanted to come...” It hurts Thusheleni to see his wife’s fear.

He has decided his mission must start with the induna, Mcunu Mvelase. His kraal lies at some distance, however, exposed on the grassy mountaintop. It is a long walk.

Thusheleni eats breakfast, then pulls on his brown knitted cap.

"I am going to the top."

"How will you go?"

"Straight up."

"You carry nothing?"

"If I am shot you will find me lying with my stick."

MaDladla and the children watch him out of sight. Then they sit in the yard, waiting for firing.

Thusheleni makes his way to the outskirts of the village. Occasionally a woman greets him. He leaves the village behind and starts to climb, scanning the wooded heights above. He soon catches sight of scouts outlined against the sky. Well, they will see he carries no gun.

Iphephani lilies have pushed through the bare earth. The wild red crocuses are the first sign of spring, a signal to start preparations to plough. Because of the drought, however, nobody has ploughed for five years. Thusheleni pauses to get his breath.

The mountains have closed around him. He is alone with the silence, with the light and shadow of the high slopes.

Manqomfini is the name for the mountaintop country, the land where the grass larks play. It is a frontier of wind and grass, remote from the crowded valley.

Manqomfini people live in isolation, their kraal almost invisible on spurs and ridges.

Thusheleni follows a path among the grasses, knowing he has been seen.

He senses the hostility of the induna as he enters his yard, for Mvelase makes no move to greet him.

"I see you," Thusheleni seats himself on a bench against a hut wall.

"Why do you come from Goli after the fighting is finished" the induna is very rude.

"I don't fight. I have come home to stop the fighting." Thusheleni does not say he has come to make peace. In Zulu there is no word for peace.

"I have also tried to stop the impi," the induna is provoked. Many times I have called meetings but nobody arrives"

Gradually he relaxes, more open to what Thusheleni is saying.

"I want to speak with Manqomfini, then with Msusampi, then I will go to the chief."

"You are not afraid?"

"I am not afraid." Not at this moment. Terror does not live among sunny grasses.

"All right. You go and speak to the impi. I will tell you where they are hiding."

He points to the place. It is no far. Thusheleni walks there alone.

"Bandla," he raises his hand above his head in the traditional greeting. The army is expecting him. Although they are in brown uniforms there are no firearms to be seen. Thusheleni is pleased the guns are hidden. It is a kind of salute.

He catches sight of his son, very thin, dressed as a soldier.

"What are you doing here? Why are you on the mountain?" The boy is frightened of his father's anger. He holds his arm awkwardly, hiding a bullet wound under his sleeve. His

companions dug out the bullet, roughly dressed the wound. You don't go to a doctor unless you are in a bad way. Doctors have to report gunshot cases.

Bhekinsizwe replies to his father; "All my brothers were on the mountain."

"That is not a reason." Thusheleni is softspoken. Even in anger he does not raise his voice. At least some of his authority must come from his height. Thusheleni stands a head higher than the short, wiry soldiers. He is a big man.

"Well, what is the reason for this war?" he and the soldiers have seated themselves on rocks.

"They started shooting in Goli."

"That is not a reason." Thusheleni is not going to be fobbed off with history. He knows the sequence of events as well as they do, but what does it explain? History is all he gets though, up on the mountain among the uniformed men.

"We want to stop but nobody will help us," says the leader of the impi. Four months we have been hiding. We are tired now but nobody will help us."

Thusheleni leaves at last, taking a different path home. On this journey he is less afraid, preoccupied with his thoughts. His wife was not mistaken. Even the induna admits he knows no reason for this war. But how can there be a war without reason?

Always a war has a reason, and it is not buried with the dead. Reason must be dragged from the obscurity of living men.

The second night there is again no firing. Mbotho and Bayekile remain on guard while their parents sleep.

Thusheleni uses a neighbour, MaMbatha Zwane, to make contact with the Msusampi impi. He does not want a mass meeting.

"Only five," he tells MaMbatha, naming men who were once his neighbours. If they can speak alone they might give him the truth.

The five arrive suddenly in MaMbatha's yard. The rest of the army must be close by. The village is their territory.

"Nobody is telling me the reason for this war," Thusheleni sits openly with these men who have been friends. It does not matter that they are seen, so long as they are out of earshot.

"We were at home when Manqomfini started firing on us."

Thusheleni is annoyed. "Now you are telling lies. Both sides are telling lies."

There are nine new graves in the valley. Mseshe Duma is in hospital, shot through the testicle. Mtembeni Dladla is in hospital, shot through the stomach. Sdulu Dladla is in hospital... all for no reason? There must be a reason lying under the excuses.

"We are glad you have come home," the soldiers are sure of the old friendship.

"Nobody will help us Mvelase. Please try to stop this fight."

The third night there is again no gunfire. The mountains are quiet in the starlight. Everyone is listening.

With the meetings with the impis behind him, Thusheleni sets off to visit the chief.

Chief Ngoza Mvelase, to inform him what he is about. He passes through the village, no longer afraid. Mbotho, however, is less trusting. She follows at a distance, keeping him in sight. At the river she falls back, watching her father remove his homemade sandals, roll up his trousers, start to wade, feeling his way with his stick. After he has crossed she splashes

too. The bus stops at our gate. Mbotho sees her father climb aboard. Then she goes to her garden. It is four days since she watered her spinach, four days since her father came home. Five hours to wait before he returns home today. The girl tries to keep herself busy, watching the sun, straining for the sound of changing gears on the hills.

At 2p.m. the bus comes past as usual, leaving its dust trail hanging behind. But it does not stop at the gate. It roars on. Mbotho begins to run for home, stumbling across the drift. “Ma, ma the bus never stopped,” she has her father’s round face, wide lips – none of her mother’s fine drawn beauty. MaDladla has been waiting too. “Perhaps he is sleeping at the chief’s” She is speaking nonsense, Her husband must be dead.

But Thusheleni is all right. He has taken the bus to Nomoya stop. He wants to drop in on Mko Duma an outsider, an elder who can help the negotiations. And there is no harm in the precaution of an unexpected route home.

Thusheleni travels to the chief four times without finding him at home. The busfare beats him. He cannot afford so many rides to and from Tugela Ferry. Our bakkie is contributed towards the peace moves. MaDladla is grateful. “It is better than the bus. If he is shot – at least the driver will come and tell us what happened.”

A week passes without firing. Thusheleni grows more certain of his direction. Every day there are meetings. With impi leaders. With men of influence outside the conflict. With the soldiers themselves. Although his meetings are steps along the way, Thusheleni has yet to extract a reason for the trouble. The reason must be exposed to the light. He makes preparations for final get together.

The cattle dip near Mbele’s Store is chosen, as the venue for the dip lies halfway between the two armies, accessible to both.

“I am happy to see you here today,” Thusheleni opening words are from his heart. The men around him are no longer in uniform. They look like any gathering of men, not two impis, sitting around in the mid-morning sun. “But the fighting cannot end unless we resolve the reason for this war. Ever since I came home I have been waiting to find this reason.”

There is silence from the men sitting on the stones.

A deputation of outsiders is present by invitation; the Manseleni induna, Gudluna Mbatha, the Gosa, Nongeni Hadebe, together with five Manseleni men. Mbatha takes over the meeting.

“You cannot end the fighting until you have talked about the reason. You are not at home. Here you can talk openly. Unless you can discuss the reason the fighting will go on.”

More silence. Mbatha persuades, threatens, trying to stir discussion.

“We started because Gcina killed MaHelezi’s son...” Anger bursts with the first accusation. Guns allow a distance between men and their rage. Words are more savage. In order to get to this place, out of hiding, together in the sun, the impis have had to withhold their anger. Fear and weariness has forced them to be tentative, suppressing the violence of their fury. Now words begin to smash into the crowd – brutal, vicious, intended to main.

Thusheleni senses the danger. The anger can trigger new explosions. But it can also peter out. He has to take the chance. The men must rid themselves of anger.

Eventually Mbatha takes over again. The words have been said.

“Do you agree to put your guns down?” he asks simply.

Both impis raise their hands. There is a murmur. “Siyavuma. We agree.”

It is three weeks before Thusheleni is able to get an appointment with the chief for the impi leaders to make a formal declaration. The formalities are brief.

“Are you still fighting Xaba?” the chief addresses Mдини Xaba of Manqomfini.

“We have stopped,” replies Xaba.

“And you?”

“We have also stopped,” says Gcina Duma of Msusampi.

The men travel home in one party. It is startling to see them together, chatting as they roll up their trousers to wade the drift home.

Mbotho is waiting for her father.

“Did all the men come back together?” she asks him.

“Yes, ntombi”

“Are they sleeping at home tonight?”

“Yes, they have left the mountain.”

That night, for the first time, Mbotho leaves her parents’ hut unlocked. She and her sister give up their all-night guard and also sleep.

The reason for the war has remained out of sight, however, and it troubles Thusheleni.

Can it heal if it is hidden? And what about Christmas? When the working men return will the peace hold intact? He delays his return to work, waiting to see out Christmas.

The gunfire starts before Christmas, however. One night machine gun fire bounces off the hills, a terrible sound. Thusheleni and MaDladla lie next to each other – tense, afraid and heavy-hearted. So it was all for nothing?

On the mountaintops of Manqomfini the gunfire has brought men running from their kraals. They crouch in the darkness, listening for the women’s shrill lament. If somebody has been killed they will hear that shrill. There is nothing further, but they sit out the night on the mountain.

At daybreak they stand within hailing distance of Thusheleni’s home.

“Kwenzenjani?” they yell. “What happened? We didn’t sleep this night.”

“Nothing happened,” Thusheleni yells back. “Nothing happened.”

At Msusampi a man goes drunk. He fooled about with his gun, that’s all.

Thusheleni comes across the river to reassure us.

“We don’t want you to be worried. Everything’s all right.”

The peace holds over Christmas, and into the year beyond. Thusheleni, however, loses his job. He has stayed away from work too long.

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Half-yearly Report
March to August 1985

TOUGH TALK ABOUT BARE SPACE

Weenen farmers used to tell the time of day by passengers' planes flying overhead. Then the aircraft were rerouted to avoid turbulent air conditions caused by the district's bare spaces, according to Dr. P. Hildyard, Director of Agriculture for Natal.

Dr. Hildyard was in Weenen in August, together with officials from his department, to face the owners of the bare space. Although every landowner in the district was invited to the meeting in the Town Hall, not everyone came along. Mr. C H. B Boshoff was missing, for once.

"I don't like to speak behind a man's back," began a farmer at question time. "But..."

.... but a lot was said about the missing Mr. Boshoff.

"That farmer," Dr. Hildyard called him. He didn't have to say more. That farmer has just won official recognition as Champion Bare Space Owner of South Africa – he is the first man in the country to be charged with wrecking the veld under the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act of 1983. Standing trial in Estcourt in June he was found guilty of overgrazing the veld, and grazing cattle in an eroded area, and was fined R 300, with a suspended sentence of three years imprisonment.

The act allows for a maximum penalty of R 5000 for a first offence, R 10 000 for a second. The Weenen Farmer's Association was furious Mr. Boshoff had got off so lightly, and wrote to the Minister of Agriculture to protest.

Yes, there are Weenen farmers who care about their veld. Even the best, however, are late converts, with some bare space lurking in their past. There was an uncomfortable silence at the Town Hall while Stuart Armour, the district agricultural officer, showed slides of the erosion that has made Weenen notorious. Some contrasts were startling: Green, well-managed irrigated lands lying next to shale deserts.

"Recognize your farms?" asked Armour.

Well...er, yes.... Those landscapes were certainly familiar, but no a farmer present owned up to say: That's mine.

The Town Hall get-together was called to discuss the Weenen Thornveld programme- a three-year project launched in 1975 with two simple aims:

- * To improve the veld drastically
- * To increase red meat production 100

The programme came with a Special Offer. The Department decided that to speed up change it would dangle a carrot – ordinary subsidy rates would be increased. If a Weenen farmer completed fences and watering points, he could claim the highest subsidies in the land.

Gradually the three years stretched close to ten.

“We churned out farm plans and statistics and spend a lot of time here in the thornveld,” Armour reminded the farmers. “Then we stopped. There was not much point in carrying on. When we revisited farms we found some improvements, but they fell far short of what was required.”

What was wrong? Officials looked at census figures and began analyzing.

“Most farms are too small,” Armour reported to the meeting. A cattle enterprise in the lowveld needs 1500 hectares. However 86% of the district’s farms are smaller than that. (Mdukatshani is 2534 ha).

The small farmers think BIG, however... big numbers of cattle. The district is carrying twice as many animals as the grass can support. Once it was possible to blame the blacks. The Weenen farms were chiefly labor farms. In 1949 –50 blacks owned 31 112 cattle – whites 12 062. by 1964-65 when the labour tenant system was coming to an end, and the first farm removals were almost underway –black-owned cattle were down to 11 621 – whites up to 13 142. Now the district’s blacks own only 5 593 cattle – whites 12 023. (Agricultural Census and Agriquest 1979).

“Labour farms have contributed to our worst veld,” Armour told the meeting. “But today only 13,6% of landowners use farms that way; 14,8% of the Weenen farms are trek farms, providing winter grazing only – 71,6% are utilized throughout the year.”

That is the trouble. The farms can be used throughout the year.

“Suicide veld,” Armour calls the sweet thornveld grasses. “Weenen veld remains palatable 12 months of the year. There is no winter lull.”

In 1983 the Department of Agriculture put Danie Visser to work surveying the veld condition of every farm in the district, grading the veld on a scale of 1 to 4.

His findings were meticulously mapped and measured, and were presented to the farmers for the first time at the meeting at the Town Hall.

The results show that nearly 20% of Weenen district – 15 600 hectares – is “irreparably damaged.”

Mr. Boshoff’s share is not much. He is not the only man to blame. That is why, in some tough talking, Mr. S.D. le Roux, Deputy Director of Agriculture for Natal, warned that the Department would not allow further damage to the veld.

“We will lay down stock limits per farm,” he said. “It may mean we lay down stock numbers per camp. We will do stock counts out of the blue. We will lay charges under the new Act.”

Mr. Boshoff may be the first man to be taken to court – but he won’t be the last.

That is encouraging. For it will take more than one prosecution to bring change to the South African The Azanian?.... veld. When a country is in political turmoil overgrazing seems irrelevant. Death in the townships is stronger stuff than a dying veld. However as events in the townships are changing our lives, so events on the veld are to change us too. In the Karoo,

which covers a third of the country, “there is vast and apparently irreversible degradation.” About 10% is already desert, while 30% is in danger of becoming desert in the next 25 years, according to the annual report of the S.A. National Science Programmes. Beyond the Karoo it is not much better. Only 10% of the country’s veld is in a good condition. Statistics pile up like sand dunes.

“Daming statistics,” says agricultural scientist. Dr. Amie Aucamp. “The situation is serious and calls for radical thinking and positive action. We need a revolution and shared responsibility...” Disaster. Revolution. Reform. That’s the language of the politician, but that the way scientists are speaking too.

The map of our future is already drawn. South Africa – or Azania? Names are just letters on the map. We need grass, not letters, to deflect the desert outline. There can be no winners in a land with a dusty heart.

NOTE: Weenen has no veld rated 1 – in its original condition. The best is rated 2 +. Mdukatshani has 1101 hectares of 2+ veld – the biggest proportion of good veld in the district. Our eroded lands, however, cover 836 hectares (the size of a large farm) with 99 hectares being irreparably damaged.

THEFT AND ROBBERY

Between March and May, CAP suffered three burglaries and one armed robbery, resulting in the loss of more than R 6 000 cash, a typewriter, cameras, building material, fuel, groceries etc.

The armed robbery took place at about 4,30 a.m. when armed men forced their way into Creina Alcock’s bedroom, threatening to kill her if she did not hand over money and guns. A blow with the butt of a revolver injured her eye. She opened the safe and handed over the mealiemeal money, which was ready for banking later that day.

Acting on information supplied by CAP, the police have subsequently made six arrests in connection with both the thefts and the robbery. Two men have appeared at court charged with theft, two with robbery, and two have been released. Police are still looking for a third man suspected of involvement in the robbery.

During the past few months there have been five armed hold-ups on Mdukatshani’s top farm boundary involving the bakery (twice), the bus (twice) and the district surgeon, who has stopped his roadside clinic as a result. A local white farmer was stopped by armed men while on his daily run collection labour in the location nextdoor to our farm. He has since cancelled his run and is getting labour elsewhere.

As a result of the trouble, CAP has taken on night watchmen. Unfortunately we have been refused insurance cover as we are regarded as a high risk area.

Because we do not want to hold money on the property, we have regretfully had to stop our wholesale mealiemeal service for members. This has been a heavy blow for people who are paying R8 to R12 a bag more at distant stores, with transport problems added to their burdens.

THE BEST DRESSED WOMAN IN THE WORLD

That's what they call Paloma Picasso, and we don't argue, for there she is, photographed wearing our beads.

"The ornate jacket is certainly not fashionable," says a caption in a glossy magazine," but look at those earrings – a sumptuous shower of turquoise."

Another glossy shows Jacqueline Bisset stepping out in Hollywood with one of our beads around her neck.

The bead industry is producing a small revolution in our valley. With bead money the only money for many families, unemployed husbands are doing the unthinkable and taking over household tasks to give their wives extra time to work. Zulu husbands can be seen tending their wives' gardens, caring for the children.... and cooking!

Having the mwenyewe at home all the time – not just three weeks of the year – is bringing about another small revolution. For the first time tribal women are queuing shyly for contraceptive help when the Department of Health clinic visits the farm once a month. Clinic sisters report that numbers of women at family planning during the past two months has been a record.

Because of delays in Czechoslovakia, the expected delivery of our new supplies of beads is now September – 8 months late. With the bead cellar almost empty, the women have been put onto grass bangles instead. There are plenty of orders – but so little grass that we have been carting the women in relays 30 kilometres to the nearest site of Sprobolus needed for the delicate braids.

RED GRASS ROOFS

Heavy February rains (151,5 mm) produced bogs and oozes on Mdukatshani, and a harvest of grass that took our breath away. In the location next door some of our neighbours had their first small crops of maize and mabela in five years.

Then in March came a hailstorm that wiped out the crops, killed fowls and goats, injured children and damaged homes.

More than 200 women queued for permission to cut grass to repair their damaged roofs. Red grass, Themeda trindra, does not pack well, or have the durability of thatch, but red grass was all we had to offer, and tones were cut and carried away.

In July we began our annual trek to the highveld farm of Bob and Joy Holiday, at Dundee, where local women can cut thatch for free. The Holiday's hospitality turns the hard work into a holiday for the women. This year 35 took turns cutting their quota (only one roof each) and CAP's big lorry carted them and the grass back to the valley.

INJ'EBOMVU – RED DOG!

The yell has become a rallying cry for Mdukatshani's firefighters, a chant that gives rhythm to the beating sacks.

In the past six months there has been only 15 mm of rain – compared to 210 mm in the same period last year. Long before winter a runaway fire exploded in the dry grass and we realized we'd have to advance our burning programme-. In July last year the grass was still so green we struggled to set it alight. This year it was dangerously dry when the first firelines were burnt in April.

Although there have been three runaway fires this winter, we have been able to contain them, thanks to the help of men, women and children from the location who have run to help. Thanks too, to experienced staff. After weeks burning firelines they are no longer the novices they were a year ago.

Fires in the location have left stockowners in a precarious position at the end of winter. At night the river has glowed with the reflection of flames on the mountaintops – for only in the high places has there been grass to burn. A local woman was burnt to death trying to fight a blaze that threatened to engulf her home.

HARVESTING 10 000 TREES

It is three years since the old blue hammermill was last in action, grinding acacia pods into meal. Because of the drought there just haven't been any pods to feed the mill.

Although we had hoped for a huge crop this year, “only” 20 856 kgs were brought to our Saturday Swap Shop in July and August, being paid with more than 10 000 kgs of yellow mealies. So far about 7 tones has been milled at a total cost of R140 a tonne.

Our neighbour wholesales Lucerne meal with a lower protein content at R170 a tones, so our product has potential to be commercially competitive.

Test-weighing the pod harvest of marked trees we got an average yield of 2,2 kgs per tree. Not much. Many trees did not bear at all, so the women and children who scoured the hills for pods may have shaken the branches of 10 000 trees.

A small but steady supply of bones has continued to arrive every month and we paid out 8 735 kgs of mealies of an equivalent weight of bones over the past six months.

BLUNTED AXES AND BLISTERS

Nobody chops wood all day, every day. So nobody escaped blisters when they spent a fortnight on the Ngongolo ridge clearing a 2,5 km strip for a new fenceline. Men and girls exchanged insults on technique and ability – but neither skill nor experience kept the blisters at bay. At the end of the day, however, there was a harvest to be shared – wood for burning, carving, building and medicine.

The new fenceline lies in one of the least accessible areas of the farm, and wood thieves had an unhappy surprise when the CAP team caught them in the act. A charge is pending at the local induna's court.

Five KwaZulu communities make use of the firewood on Mdukatshani. CAP has issued 574 women and children with woodcutting licences – cards that must be carried on chopping day. There is one chopping day a week – and a rule that only dry wood may be taken.

Recently we had to withdraw all chopping rights from the Nomoya community – a densely settled removal area – after repeatedly arresting people chopping every day of the week, climbing our fences to steal from our neighbours, and carrying away piles of green trees for traditional building.

CAP's African committee has strong views about wild trees being wasted for building for there is an alternative. Most Msinga families now obtain building poles by sending children to work on the Wartburg plantations. Child labour may be wrong, but the children clamour for a chance to go on what is an adventure.

They get a lorry ride, a dormitory, meals, and at the end of the month a load of poles delivered as close as possible to their door.

GOAT PROOF CAMPS?

Of course they are possible. We have almost proved it. Almost. Just watch this space.

PIG MONEY

Five years ago Mr. H D. Jooste bought pigs from eight local women. He paid them with dud cheques. It has taken a long time to recover the money from Mr. Jooste, but in July CAP was at last able to pay for the pigs. The women had long ago given up hope of payment, s were disbelieving when they got the message that their R256 was waiting to be collected.

CAP's run of successful cases, however, came to an end in March when Mr. J.J. Bekker and two youths were acquitted of assaulting six African children and a labourer. However Mr. Bekker has just paid out R750 as damages to Miss Mzukile Mveli following an much publicized smjambokking trial last year. CAP passed Miss Mveli's claim through the Legal Resources Centre.

In May Phathiwe Mvelase was convicted of assaulting the adult son of Mr. Flip de Bruin and was fined R50. The district surgeon was not called to give evidence on the injuries Mvelase had sustained during the incident. Although Mvelase had charge of attempted murder against Mr. de Bruin, following the verdict against the black man, the Statex dropped the case.

The State also decided not to proceed against Mr. de Bruin in connection with a charge by Msolo Mvelase, who alleged that de Bruin held a gun at his head, threatening to kill him, after stopping him cycling on a public road. He further alleged de Bruin had stolen his bicycle.

CAP has continued to transport "blue card" men to Ezakheni once a month to register for unemployment benefits. Some have been waiting almost a year, but clerks assure them the money is still on the way, so the visits go on. Since March three men have received R527.

MOVING MUD

Summer floods obliterated the Mdukatshani canal, dumping tones of sand, pebbles and boulders. Confronted with the task of getting the water flowing again, the work-for-food team echoed our own opinion – it was impossible. Three weeks later, however, the rubble was back in the river and the canal was open.

With the Msusampi war at an end, work resumed on the dm, which was completed and fenced. However the canal feeding the dam has been diverted to provide winter irrigation for village gardens, so the dam will have to wait for summer rain before it is filled.

CAP staff were among the guests of honour at a ceremony at Tugela Estates when the KwaZulu Secretary for Agriculture, Mr. H.M.S. Ferreira, officially opened the Mseleni canal. The re-opening of the canal was launched as a CAP drought relief scheme in 1981. Last year Chief Ngoza Mtembu and his councilors took over responsibility for the completion of the scheme as KwaZulu had made drought relief funds available. As the entire Tugela Estates areas is to be planned by experts, according to Mr. Ferreira, the eventual fate of the canal is yet to be decided.

Work on the Buhayiya weir was suspended last year because an impi was in hiding nearby. Summer floods further delayed progress. At Easter when river levels dropped, work resumed again, and was maintained even though it was icy labouring on winter mornings with arms and legs immersed. The weir has taken more man, women and children hours, and much more cement than we estimated, but the end is in sight.

GETTING BACK TO THE AGE OF THE OX

There are 13 million bullock carts in India – and 60% of all farm produce goes to market in the little carts. Here at Msinga there is only one animal cart left, as far as we know. Two if you count the wrecked-bakkie-back that CAP has returned to action as an cart. The eviction of farm labour tenants from Weenen farms made it possible for Cap to buy six cattle that had some training for draught work, after a year spent fruitlessly searching. We were miserable we had to profit from the loss of African families who in all likelihood will never own cattle again. The cattle have needed further training, and have been dragging sledges in practice for our cart. Meanwhile our cart has been on loan in the location, carting manure and maize stover.

Mphephethi Masondo, the CAP mechanic, has almost completed work on a four-wheel cart, reborn from the skeleton of an ancient wagon. Both the cart and the wagon are destined to cart manure to the gardens, and water up the hill to local homes.

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October 1985

TURNING A SECRETARY OF STATE INTO THE FARM MANAGER

Not many men act as Prime Minister, Secretary of State, and Head of the Judiciary, all at the same time.

As chief indunas of the Mchunu and Mthembu tribes, both Petrus Majozi (65) and Majozi Ngxongo (55) act in all these roles, each handling the problems of more than 30 000 people. Yet neither man has ever been to school. Majozi writes his name slowly. He learnt a little literacy as a “lamplight scholar” on the pavements of Johannesburg when he was a gardener 40 years ago. Ngxongo marks his name with a cross.

Is literacy essential for governing a tribe? Twice a week Ngxongo hears cases in the Mthembu’s brick-and-iron courthouse at Tugela Ferry. The Mchunu make do with a less formal setting – the rusty bus at the chief’s kraal. Since a tornado wrecked the courthouse in 1983, Majozi has held court in the open air while two clerks shelter from the wind inside the old bus to record the proceedings.

Every case in a tribal court is recorded and sent for review by a magistrate. Majozi and Ngxongo may impose a fine of a beast or R 200, but that as far as they can go. Their powers are written somewhere in Official Government Papers. The rules have been read out to them. Yet they govern without law books, for traditional is stored in heads not in libraries, and while law may be learnt by rote, justice is more resting.

Majozi and Ngxongo know enough about justice to lay no claim to it. Justice has furtive habits and as many hidey holes as there are cave in the hills. If a dog kills a fowl, justice will be close at hand to settle the affair. Let bullets start flying, however, and where will justice be? One to ground, out of sight, unreachable.

In the past five years scores of men have been killed in clan wars at Msinga and Majozi and Ngxongo have seen their tribes torn apart by conflict. The chief indunas are not allied to any faction. They are known for their neutrality, recognized as mediators. However there is no way to stand aloof living on a battlefield. Majozi has slept, terrified, among the rocks at night. An impi has stampeded across his yard, gunning down a neighbour. He has been caught in the fire of a predawn ambush.

Last year Ngxongo buried a son killed in the fighting. He was himself hit in the shoulder by a sniper’s bullet.

A little pomp and ceremony should go with high position. It is offered, occasionally, to the chief indunas. Only occasionally. Chief indunas are not chiefs, exempt from equality. They are servants of their tribes, drawing on salary, indifferent to ambition. Or that is what their people expect them to be – men of honour, in incorruptible.

“There is the lobola of course,” Ngxongo will remind you. A chief induna is allowed to ask 16 cattle for the marriage of a daughter, where a commoner has a limit of 10.

The inflated lobola price is recognition of service.

“I can get rich on lobola cattle if...” Ngxongo grins”... if the lobola is paid.” He grins because brides are bought on hire purchase. He still has cattle owing on his wives, and if his sons inherit anything, they will inherit the debt owe their mothers.

The chief’s cars are sent to fetch Majozi and Ngxongo when they are needed on official business. Most of the time, however, they are footpath travelers.

“In the city the summer and winter are the same,” says Majozi, remembering the Johannesburg attic where he lives his migrant years.

“Now something new waits for me with every step I take.” An exile never wearies of his home, and although Majozi and Ngxongo have been back then years now, they are tireless walkers across the hills. They know the where abouts of the last big trees, every ooze and seep and patch of clay.

However it is easier to explore Msinga blindfold than to traverse the ins and outs of the human mind. Nobody knows the thought of the tribes as well as the chief indunas. Nobody is so aware of how much is kept concealed. Majozi and Ngxongo are reticent men, listeners, wary.

If you want experts on Msinga – these two men must surely count among the best. Yet neither has attended a conference on development. They may have stature at home, but beyond Msinga they will be undiscovered, not just for a lack of literacy, but for a lack of English too.

Majozi and Ngxongo are Trustees of CAP, and members of Mdukatshani’s Farm Committee. Majozi was chairman of Cap before the Mchunu people elected him their chief induna. While both jobs draw on his qualities, Cap and the tribe make different demands.

The rules of managing a tribe are easier for him than running a farm. In South Africa, until recently, farms were only for whites. A farm is an exercise in making choices, an intimidating prospect when you have had no choice before. Majozi, for example, has owned cattle for more than 40 years. He is an experienced stockowner.

In the location where he lives, however, all the grass belongs to al the cattle.

He cannot choose to fence the grass. He cannot choose to rest it. He cannot choose the day he dips his cattle. He cannot even choose the dip.

On Mdukatshani the range of choices is bewildering. Planning even the smallest corner of the 2543 hectare property throws up questions Majozi has never faced before.

And planning the farm is easier than co-ordinating the activities of the hundreds of people involved with CAP as staff., gardeners, craft workers, firewood gathers, or drought relief workers. Majozi and Ngxongo may have a deft touch when it comes so to sorting out staff problems, but struggled to devise a system to keep tally of the tools. They buy in farm supplies without losing a cash slip. They return the correct change. Does it matter they will never understand the audited accounts?

Of CAP’s workforce of 220, only 12 have ever been to school. This is both CAP’s strength and its weakness. Most of the people in the world are illiterate. There can be no development without most of the people. But how far can they be extended if they have had no education?

To act as Prime Minister, Secretary of State, Head of the Judiciary and Farm Manager, all at the same time?

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November 1985

Education, I fear, is learning to see one thing by going blind to another.
Aldo Leopold

THE WILD OLIVE AND A, B, C

The comment caused uproar in farming circles.
“Poor soils are not the problem in South Africa,” Charles te Water had said. “The problem is poor farmers.” As chairman of the National Veldtrust in the 1950s he was not afraid of the blunt edge of truth.

Nor was Veldtrust’s director, T.C. Robertson, who traveled to Bloemfontein to justify the remark to a hostile meeting of the Orange Free State Agricultural Union. The farmers were challenging the truth, were they? Well, TC knew how to handle them.

“You think you’re good farmers?” he bellowed, wagging an accusing finger at the rows of angry faces. “Well I will buy a case of brandy for any man in this hall who can me seven grasses.”

There was a long pause, then a burst of laughter. TC would never put a drop of brandy at risk. “Dekgras, rooigras, oulandgras,” he chuckled afterwards. “I knew that was as far as they could get.”

Although knowing seven grasses defined a farmer in the 1950s, the qualification was so stringent it has been eased a little since.

“I bet there isn’t a farmer in this hall who can name me five grasses,” Natal’s deputy director of agriculture, Fanie le Roux, challenged a Weenen landowners’ meeting recently. Judging by the silence, le Roux was right.

Dekgras, rooigras, oulandgras.

Thatch grass, red grass, cough grass.

Although there are more than 800 species on the South African veld, it is still difficult to find a farmer who can name more than three.

Tribesmen like MaHelezi Dladla, or Makhanya Mchunu, or Delanie Mbatha, however, and there is no hesitation. “Intunga, mlalatenesha, uqambalala, ubabe, indulu, ingongoni, imbuthane, isinandi, imbanjane, umsingizane....”

But they speak as histories, and the history they remember is k unknown to their sons. Zulu boys still sit out on the hills all day, crackshots with catapults, slinging pebbles after birds. Armed with rocks they smash the heads of the fish which flicker through the rapids on

spring migrations. The idle hours are full of hot pursuits, yet the gangs of stone age hunters grow up ignorant of grass.

“Intunga,” says Phikayipeli Sithole, our youngest herdboys. “I know intunga is used on roofs. Then...um...uqambalala... um...”

Mlalatenesha? The grass where the red hare sleep? The men wave their arms, describing it. Shaggy grass? Grass that casts a shadow? Phikayipeli shakes his head. The grass he knows is a straggler, running along the ground. Shadows are only cast by trees. He’s better on trees. “Msasane,” he recited trees easily,” umlahlankosi, ubondwe, umvithi, umncaka, ugagane, mabumbula, mngwenya, umthombothi, umnquma, umsululu, umgugude umkhiwane, umgxamu....”

Although he cannot write his name, Phikayipeli is fluent at reading trees. Medicines, fuel, timber, fruit, pesticide, poison, fencing, stockfeed, magic- there is not a tree that does not have a usefulness.

Green tamboti leaves smoke out wood borers. Ugagane saplings make termite-resistant posts. Umvithi provided drought insurance. Purple and gold vitamin berries cluster along the paths.

Where Phikayipeli lives along the Tugela, there is still a need for literacy in trees. Book learning is of little use on the outer reaches of a cash economy.

Ecologists describe the Tugela valley as “valley bushveld” - a savanna of red ivories and olives, tree fuschias and saffronwood, tambotis and marulas. It is an old woodland, older than the fragments of pottery we pick up on the river bank. Although the fragments look similar to pots still in use today, they are the shattered antiques of the early iron age. From about 300 AD farming families were settle in villages along the Tugela, each village with its own furnace for smelting iron. The slag scattered on our hill is the refuse of an ironworks of 1000 years ago.

If it was the age of iron –it was also the age of the burning tree. Because their furnaces needed wood, iron age people stayed close to trees. They were “highly selective in choosing where to live,” says Tim Maggs of the Natal Museum. Although many early iron age sites have been discovered in Natal, apart from those on the coast, all lie within the valley bushveld vegetation,” says Maggs. “Where this gives way to acacia scrub and open grassland, the early iron age sites peter out.”

Not even 1000 years of occupation has turned the woodland into grass. The trees belong,, so assertive that red ivories pop up among the leeks in the gardens.

There are no wild fruits as sweet as red ivories. In good years, women cross the river with basins to gather mounds of the tiny fruits. Were red ivories here in the early iron age? Marulas were. Their nuts have been recovered among the remains of early villages. Marulas still droop scented fruits on the riverbank, and children squat at stone anvils, crackling the nuts.

Although some marulas are very old, hardwoods like tambotis must be older. “Years and years and years,” says Segeza Dladla, assessing a medium-sized tree. “This was my father’s field, and I when I was a little boy this tamboti was as big as it is now.”

“A hundred years old?” suggests Mphephethi Masondo.
Segeeza snorts. “Hundreds and hundreds.”

His father’s tree is a youngster compared to the tamboti that is stolen in the night.
Segeeza notices the theft on his way to work.

“It was cut with an electric saw and taken away in a truck.” He has a high voice for such a big man, and it squeaks when he gets angry. “Last night. Our tree was stolen in the night.”

“Abelungu. Whites,” the staff are certain the thieves are whites. Only whites have the greed, and the tools, and the bakkies. And it’s not the first time. Remember the white man from the NPA who stole all those big tambotis to make furniture? The logs were so heavy he had to bring a truck with a crane to lift them. The official said he had chopped the trees to improve visibility on the road, but when his superiors came on an inspection they found many of the big trees had been out of sight of the road.

“What happened to him?” there’s always a newcomer who has not heard the story.

“He’s in jail.”

“But he was jailed for stealing money – not for stealing trees.”

“The wood was ours. Why didn’t NPA bring it back?”

Everyone laughs. They know whites are always thieving. Can you see a black man getting away with stealing a big tamboti?

Mdukatshani men do wood patrols one day a week, checking on firewood collectors, and getting to know the trees. But you can read a woodland everyday and never see what’s missing. On Mdukatshani, for example, there are no young olives.

Not one? A census is launched to make certain. There’s R20 on offer for every young olive found. Grinning men spread out across the hills on get-rich-quick-olive-hunting expeditions. Only the two cripples, Masondo and Kheceza Sithole, are left behind.

Kheceza is furious. “How can I win anything,” he protests to Natty Duma. “With my feet you know I can’t go looking for trees.”

Natty laughs. “They won’t find anything. Don’t worry. Nobody will find any young mnquma.”

And she’s almost right. The hills are not short of olives, but they are survivors of the past, big trees, gnarled and weather beaten, full of fruit. It takes three months searching before MaHelezi finds one young olive up against a krantz. One.

Meanwhile another treasure hunt is underway, with a prize of R10 for any young umvithi (Boschia species). Umvithis are such common trees there must be saplings all over the place.

But young umvithis, the men discover, are as rare as young olives on our well-wooded hills.

Nobody thinks of checking the dongas. Masondo is limping across the hot yellow spaces on his way to inspect a fence when he sees a small umvithi at his feet. He is jubilant.

“Ten rand!” he shouts. “And there’s another! Twenty rand!”

The yellow dongas turn out to be an umvithi nursery, full of little trees. Does it make sense?

It does if you follow the movements of goats. Olives and umvithis are champagne and caviar for the local goats. While the animals cannot get up into the branches of mature trees to get at their favourite browse, we guess they nibble down seedlings as soon as a leaf appears. Because no goats are attracted to the dongas, the shale has become an unexpected zone of safety.

Although this may be the Last Dynasty of Olives and Umvithis, it's a long way from being the end of the rule of trees. The woodland is full of new generation tambotis and saffronwood, thousands of little trees shooting up everywhere. We think the secret of their success must be their flavour. Goats find their leaves unpalatable, so leave them alone.

Does it matter if the woodland runs out of olives and umvithis? The men shake their heads, for the answer is already growing among their fields.

Those fields puzzled botanist Oliver West when he started research in the district 50 years ago. "The native cultivator seldom removes all the trees from any area that is being prepared for cultivation," he observed. "Occasional large trees are left to provide shade, and some trees such as *Boschia longipedicellata* are for some reason never removed."

The reason is obvious, however, to the smallest herdboy; umvithis, with the olive, are trees of life. The tribesman has no other provision against hard times, no other fodder to get his stock through critical drought.

That is why the men have now fenced every tiny umvithi in the dongas. Establishing olives and umvithis on the hills is more difficult. The woodland has always been a risky place, full of danger for the seedling tree. Getting rid of goats might help the olives – but there have been goats nibbling here since 600 AD. Although they may now be shaping the future – they have already had a share in shaping the past.

1th Without goats, can we control the invading thorn? Fires might knock the thorns back – but are fires any better than goats? We can try to leave well alone – although doing nothing is doing something too.

So what designer labels will our woodland wear tomorrow? Goat, or fire or muddling man?

Man is busy making some decisions at the moment, in among the trees on the western fence. "Chop them down, all of them. Start again," Petrus Majozi is firm.

That's sweeping verdict on hundreds of green trees. However Majozi is not being reckless. Because there have been neither fire no goats in the area for some years, ugagane (*Dichrostachys cinerea*) is forming thickets in the red grass under the canopy of the bigger bushveld trees. Ugagane is wonderful wood, resistant to termites, so hard it can bend an axe. "But you can't build with crooked poles," Majozi shoves his stick among the twisted branches all around him. "That one's all right." He's found a sapling that has grown up straight. "We can use that one, but the rest must go. When they star to sprout again, we can prune them straight."

Chopping won't rid us of ugagane. It coppices readily. But to turn a pest into a resource we need only find a use for it, and Msinga has many uses for ugagane poles, so long as the poles are straight."

A designer woodland starts with a designer tree. Lop and trim and space. Many of our men have worked on commercial plantations so they are familiar with the techniques of management.

Ugagane are not the only trees that need decisions. If young tambotis are to grow into timber, they need to be straightened too. And msasane (Acacia tortilis) – should it be a many-branched-browse-tree or a producer-of-pod? It cannot be both. We have to choose.

Most of the choosing takes place in a two-hectare camp where we practice, hesitantly, asking questions of trees. The trees tend to be rather silent in response, so questions breed questions like swarm of summer flies.

Even the simplest questions about the commonest trees are at the moment unanswered. For example – how old is an acacia before it produces pods? or a rd ivory before it begins to fruit? Or ugagane and tamboti before timber poles are ready? To give a tree a value you have to know its age.

And its uses, of course. Although there may be no manual on woodland management, Dladla, Mchunu, Mbatha and others are specialist advisors on the uses of trees.

They are surprised to discover their expertise. Education has for so long emphasized what they don't know, they have believed they have no learning at all.

Tree knowledge is a discipline of great antiquity. It needs to be updated, to be worked into a science, but while the science is evolving, there's a library of information in the heads of unschooled men. Woodland has always been a free resource – a free resource, highly valued, but never evaluated yet.

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JANUARY 1986: GUTS

“If outdoor labourers would put fern, turnip or cabbage leaves inside their hats, or wind bands of rushes, vetches or green herbage of some sort around them, there would be fewer cases of sunstroke.”

Since the Natal Almanac offered its readers this Handy Hint in 1881, cabbage has passed out of fashion – aspirin is used instead. Aspirin and a rest in the shade will prevent collapse on a hot day.

Aspirin is an essential tool in among the yellow dongas where the women are at work toppling mounds of subsoil. The bare earth has a brilliance that hurts their eyes. Lime nodules glitter on the surface. Picks flash in the sun. The big bottle of aspirin empties as the slow days pass, gullies fall, and certainties are buried in the dust. Certainty is a dead weight on the heart.

The women wipe sweat from their faces with pink and blue shoulder cloths as they pause to survey the plain they have already leveled from the dongas. The dongas have been there as long as anyone can remember. “Damaged beyond repair” is how white officials describe the area, although the Africans do not see damage. Dongas are like the hills – part of the world, an Act of God, unchangeable.

“Inspan the oxen,” calls MaDladla Mbele. The women laugh at a joke that they repeat among themselves every day. Ploughing is still years away, but because of their digging it may eventually be possible. If you can change the world with a pick and a spade and two aspirin, anything is possible. You can stop history in its tracks, reverse time, double the rain, take hold of destiny.

But there are other possibilities too, and more immediate: No jobs for anyone and another year of drought. This is what turns our attention to wasteland like the dongas, a task postponed for ten years while we have been busy with more productive parts of the farm.

Mdukatshani has 848 hectares of wasteland – 33% of the farm. According to the Agricultural Department, Weenen has 34 110 hectares – 40% of the district. There have been no surveys of Msinga, but it has a similar pattern of intensity, where the land is in use, and stretches of openness that puzzle strangers who have heard there is a shortage of land. A shortage? With all that spaciousness? A commodity is not in short supply until it is too valuable to be wasted.

“Well let’s pretend. There are no jobs, no money. Only this bit of land. If you’re going to live this year, this is all you have to live on.” The small camp near the gate is a depressing place to start an exercise in possibilities. Slabs of sandstone have surfaced, grey fossils of an ancient sea. The soil that remains is as dead as cement. The men scuff with their boots. Only a pick will crack that soil open. Scattered thorns are all that have taken root since the field was ploughed 18 years ago. Whose field was it then?

“My father’s,” says Segeeza Dladla.

“He didn’t leave anything for his grandchildren.”

Segeeza is defensive. “It’s because our family was chased off the farm. My father looked after the field. His walls will show you.”

And the old contour walls are still there, obscured by thicket, dislodged by storms and donkeys and shortcut paths that have criss-crossed the field since it lost its owner. Although it may have fed the Dladla family long ago, this year it will struggle to support a couple of goats. There is just enough browse for two or three goats.

“If it rains...” the thought is tentative. No rain and there is no freedom. To control his fate a man must influence a cloud.

“Whether or not, as a scientific fact, clouds are attracted or discharged by the atmospheric disturbance incident to the discharge of explosives,” wrote the Weenen magistrate, Mynard Mathews in 1900, during the Boer War,” it is worthy of note that the exceptional storms to which I have referred, were not only confined within a certain radius of the recent terrific artillery fire at the Colenso end of the division, but were also observed to follow the bigger bombardments.

Some men put their faith in rockets; others pray to wring the clouds dry.

When the drought started in 1980, a fowl was sacrificed at Nomoya waterfall. Its blood trickled dry on the hot stones. Then Mchitheni Mdluli tried to call up the rain from the top of Ngongolo. Robes flapping, he prayed aloud before pushing a line of boulders into the valley below. The thundering rocks drew no echo from the skies.

Yet it is possible to treble effective rainfall, and Mpephethi Masondo gives a demonstration using coloured water in Coke bottles.

“Now this bottle which is full,” he begins. The Department of Agriculture has done experiments to measure effective rainfall, and Masondo regularly lectures on the result using his row of bottles, a jug of water and a tray.

There is 10% run-off on the best veld – 70% on eroded areas like our camp. Last year Mdukatshani had 596 mm of rain. There grass slopes probably retained 537 mm of that – the wastelands only 179mm.

Masondo tilts the tray, spilling water on its tiny surface.

“This is what is happening here now,” he says. “The rain is just running away.”

The camp near the gate could be wearing a tin hat for all the rain that penetrates its crust. If a field is waterproof, every year’s a drought.

Masondo levels the tray and pours again. “When the ground is level the rain will stay.” That is why old Dladla contourwalls are to be repaired, and new ones constructed to stop the run-off and give the grass a chance to take root.

The staff moves into a bigger camp nearby. It is terra incognita – of so little use nobody ever goes near it.

“What are you doing here.”

“Nothing.” Six hectares doing nothing.

“You can’t say nothing. You have to have a plan. You can say the land is resting if you like, but it’s already rested 10 years. How much longer must it rest?” The land is not without possibilities. There is browse for goats, thickets for firewood. Sweet panicums flower in the shade. Grass is returning.

Next camp, same question for the staff; what are they doing here?

“Lutho,” Delanie Mbatha is unwary. “Nothing.”

“You can’t say nothing,” everyone yells at him, laughing.

The hills are not what they seem, fixed in position. They were lifted from lava pools, or dropped from old tides. All rock was flowing once. Sometimes the ripple lines emerge, swirls of sandstone in an eroding field. A man can ignore history until his plough scrapes a ripple. Other rocks can be rolled aside. There is usually room for manoeuvre, there are options to juggle. Sandstone is different however. You can’t budge the ripple of a sandstone sea.

Old fields have vanished completely in some parts of Msinga, opening up extraordinary expanses of stone. Bedrock is beautiful. Although there is strangeness walking on solid currents. The rigid lagoons are hot in the sun, the grey eddies unmoving.

In 100 years a centimetre of dust will have grown from the rock. In 10 000 years there could be soil to plough. Rock is motionless.

For a man in a hurry, however, bedrock is the end of time. When he hits bedrock he is face to face with nothing.

The yellow dongas then, are full of promise – heaps of unconsolidated subsoil, in places four metres deep. If we had to grow all that grit from scratch we would need 100 000 years. For people in a hurry that’s a lot of time worth saving.

And it is a sense of time, rather than economics, which makes us decided to tackle dongas which are worthless for farming, but sold as part of the farm, worth R60 a hectare.

Buhahiya will be finished next week. Then Parliament can start here,” says MaSokhela Mvelase, a plump, middle-aged woman and longtime MP. Her ochre headdress wags uncomfortably when she is digging, but it is like a shading umbrella on a hot day. She is relieved to know there is more work. They have been afraid the work will finish with the completion of the weir across the Tugela River.

There are 70 members of the Buhahiya Parliament, and ten of the toughest are selected for the dongas. The remainders are grouped for tasks in other camps, collecting stones and repairing contours.

As soon as the word gets out that there are new projects on the way, we are beset by people wanting work.

“Not now,” Masondo hates turning them away. “There’s no more money. We will call you if we find more money for jobs.” It’s been a squeeze fitting 70 into the budget.

“But I was also iPhalamende,” MaDladla Sikhakhane is persistent. “Don’t you remember I was with Numzaan’s Parliament?”

Remember? Oh yes, we remember. Everytime we looked her way MaDladla was sitting. Parliament must never sit. You may vote yourself in, but whether you stay depends on your performance. MaDladla performs well at hanging around waiting. She can hang around and wait at the bottom of the list.

IPhalamende – the Parliament – has become part of the valley's life.

"It's people who work for mealies," women explain. "A large group working together."

If there is any other kind of Parliament, they have never heard of it. IPhalamende is the word Speti Dladla chose for the canal diggers at Nomoya in 1977.

"Now we are together, we are strong, we are a Parliament," he said that first day they gathered with picks at the waterfall, and iPhalamende has been the name of every work group since.

There have been hundreds of MPs, aged anything from 10 to 80, working on mountainsides and riversides, building dams and canals, weirs and pipelines in return for payment of yellow mealies. Although the work has not been continuous, it's not because people are unwilling. Everyone is willing to work, but funds run out and suitable dam sites run out too. You can't build water schemes forever. Dongas are different however.

The men have started to notice dongas wherever they go, sizing them up, assessing their possibilities.

"Have you seen the dongas at Koornliver?" They grin. There is enough work in the Koornliver dongas to generate jobs for hundreds of people.

"Forever and ever and ever," says Masondo. In among the dongas you can glimpse eternity.

Simon Zungu served with first Parliament, and here he is, back again, nine years later, hobbling with the pain of the arthritis in his knees. He lives across the river on a terrace dug from the mountain, secured with massive ironstone walls.

Brickwork is easily learnt, the skill of a mechanic. Only a poet can create a wall from irregular lumps of ironstone. Zungu builds intuitively, knowing the inner rhythm of a rock before he lifts it. He is an introspective man, working best when he is left alone. Women pass up and down, chattering as they carry rocks, but he has nothing to say to them, deep in concentration under his old straw hat.

All that is needed is a barrier of sorts to stop the run-off. Zungu builds small masterpieces of symmetry.

Although Kheceza Sithole's walls look almost as good as Zungu's, they have a tendency to tumble after rain. Kheceza has some talent, but he is young and inexperienced.

Zungu struggle to explain what was done wrong. It is easier for him to fix the walls himself. Words are no explanation of music.

Mahlofu Dladla is also busy on walls, although he has no talent at all, tone-deaf to any harmony in rock. He jumps up and down on his walls to check that they are strong enough to hold. His hands are clumsy, his muscles flabby from years as a nightwatchman in Johannesburg, where he needed one ability – to stay awake. That is the only skill he brought home with him when he was retrenched three years ago.

Yet he is dogged and cheerful and full of gusto.

"Late again, late again," he chides his team of women. In fact the fault is his for always arriving early.

Mahlofu was born on Mdukatshani, although he has been living at a resettlement village an hour's walk away since the family was forced off the farm in 1969. Now he has the job of repairing the wonderful terraces built by his father, steps cut along the hillside that would have lasted forever had a cattle track not broken them down. The track developed after the removals.

Gabions, stone packs, contour walls – reclamation requires endless quantities of rock. The surrounding veld is picked clean by relays of women who have to move further and further afield in search of supplies. It is a dull job, not without hazards. Leaving on stone unturned means meeting a lot of scorpions.

There is no stone at all in the camp near the gate, but there are scatterings of rubble that can be gathered into mounds. A small job for small hands. And that is how 50 children come to be working at capturing the rain.

“Trring trring,” they squeal in unison as they work. “Call the ambulance. The soil is sick!” Even little Ningi Dladla (5) knows the chants. She sings to herself in the afternoons as she crouches on the road, piling up rubble for the morning. Work was finished hours ago but it is fun to go on working.

The children bring their breakfast with them, packed in small billycans or plastic packets. Natty walks round peering into the containers. Putu. Stiff porridge. The children squat in groups, sharing their food.

“But not you,” a big boy pushes Gwegwe Duma (7). “Every day you eat with us but you never bring your own.” Gwegwe does not protest. He sits at the edge of the circle, watching. Natty worries about Gwegwe. Perhaps it's because he doesn't get food that he's so terribly lazy.

Gwegwe is the reason the children are taken to the Church of Scotland Hospital at Tugela Ferry for a check on their nutritional status. It takes a day to check the first 20. The doctor cuddles the children, and jokes with them, but she is upset.

“Where did you find children like this?” she asks Natty. Eighteen of the 20 are grossly malnourished.

“Pills are not good if you haven't got food,” says Sister Zondi. She is unhappy about the packets of vitamins the children are taking home. “Those pills make the children really hungry,” she warns. “It's better not to give them pills if there isn't any food.

Diet sheets from the Home Economics Department of Natal University help us design a midmorning meal for the children, and milk and beans are added to their putu.

Gwegwe begins to sparkle.

“This is not just a job,” Natty lectures the children. “This is your school. It is the school of the soil where you can learn to feed yourselves. “Only about 25% of the local children go to school. The others help at home, or idle, and from the age of 12 are togt workers on the farms.

“This is better than school,” observes Phangumuzi Mbele, who has been listening attentively. “Boys who are schooling use knives when they fight. We fight with sticks.”

“That’s why I’m afraid of school,” says Zwelithini Mbatha. “I can’t use a knife. I’m going to work here until I am married.” At 12 that’s a big decision.

In the crowd of children it is easy to cheat and get away with doing nothing. First lesson to be learnt at the School of the Soil is that cheating does not pay. Five women come in as “teachers” to supervise and discipline the children, to jolly them and tease and sing. They improvise the chants that keep the work moving.

“What is the mother and father of soil?”

“A-m-a-t-s-h-e.” Rock.

The purpose of the work is explained to the gangs. This grass seed for example, is a speck, a tiny baby that needs shade and damp to live.

“Now if you put a baby here on this hard earth and left it lying in the sun all day, what would happen?”

“You’d get meat,” says a girl.

“Oh I love the children,” Natty is laughing. “When I’m sad or worried I go to work with the children and then I’m laughing all the time.”

Men, women and children travel in turns to the Weenen Nature Reserve to look at donga reclamation being undertaken by the Natal Parks Board. A troop of giraffe makes each visit unforgettable.

“Oh, oh, oh,” everyone climbs out the vehicles, whispering. They follow the animals at a distance, miming their movement, commenting on each amazing nibble from a treetop, each swishing tail.

The wonder almost eases the pain of seeing kraal sites where some of our members of Parliament once had their homes. The Nature Reserve was created on land cleared in a government removal. The memory of the removals gives an awkward edge to Samson Majola’s questions.

“And you’re fixing this for wild animals?” he demands of the Parks Board induna who is conducting a guided tour. Everyone tries in vain to shush Majola.

“I know these were all dongas,” he is not grudging in his praise of the improvements.

“I never thought it was possible for the grass to come back. The work you have done is wonderful. But why are you fixing it for wild animals?”

The children view the stonepacks appraisingly. The boys are dressed in their father’s skin beshus for the occasion.

“Their walls are almost the same as ours,” notes Zwelithini,” but they put their stones like this.” He bends a hand to describe the angle. The boys understand the design sufficiently to demolish their own efforts when they return to Mdukatshani.

They begin again, rebuilding their lines. Those first mounds were for amateurs.

After a thunderstorm there is a rim of silt piled along the barricades. The children scamper along the lines, noting points where some of the walls need fixing. Rainwater lies briefly in shimmering pools, blocked by the rocks. The runaway soil is centimetres deep. One hundred years caught in an afternoon.

That is just a guess, of course, but it may not be exaggeration. Scientists estimate topsoil grows at a rate of 2½ centimetres a century. Subsoil is much slower one-centimetre per century.

One centimetre of soil weighs about 150 tonnes spread across a hectare. This summer the Department of Agriculture measured soil losses of 500 tonnes a hectare on white farm lands in the Richmond area following a cloudburst. That is 300 years of soil growth gone.

Mdukatshani and the Natal Parks Board are able to spend money on reclamation because both live off grants, not profits from farming. It is uneconomic for commercial farmers to rehabilitate their wastelands. The Parks Board has estimated it costs R 4000 a hectare to reclaim old fields in the nature reserve. Our costs so far are closer to R 1 500. That's a lot of money to pour into a hectare with a market value of R60. The statistics look better stretched across a space of time. If R 1 500 can prevent the loss of 100 years of soil growth –R1 500 should be seen as a cost spread over 100 years. We are arguing that it makes economic sense to invest in just R 15 a hectare a year!

In among our dongas the first storm leaves a bog and a desert, side by side.
“It's too wet to work today,” announces MaSokhela with satisfaction. The plain the women have leveled is a sticky morass with muddy pools.

“Rubbish. There's plenty to do. Get digging.”

The women squelch across the plain, carrying their picks, ready to argue.

“Look, it's much too wet...” MaSokhela stops in surprise as her pick bounces off a donga.

She aims a few more blows at the slope. Under the surface it is dry as dust.

“Hau!” Masondo must be right with those bottles of his. You can have deluge and drought, same place, same time, depending on the steepness of the slope.

The women get busy with their picks. They have a long job ahead of them, changing the angel of the earth.

Love grasses are flowering in the depressing little camp, with wild red zinnias and blue commelina. The wasteland is changing and people are changing too. The past and the present and the future lie underfoot. Energy is transforming time.

Energy is many things of course. It is the sun and a raindrop, pollen on the wind and yellow mealies on pay day. It is a goat and a thorn tree, Zungu at work, as well as children like Gwegwe. Energy is also power, and that is an odd discovery for people who believe they are powerless. A pick can dig an airhole for the spirit.

The bottom of a donga is open to the stars. In all things there is togetherness.

That is a revelation that goes by many names. Physicists call it GUTs – grand unified theories of the universe.

When we set out to create work for the workless, that was all we had in mind, nothing more. So it is an unexpected road which we find we are traveling, where the view stays the same while the view is always changing. There is no destination in the journey to understand.

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Since the Natal Almanac offered its readers this Handy Hint in 1881, cabbage has passed out of fashion – aspirin is used instead. Aspirin and a rest in the shade will prevent collapse on a hot day.

Aspirin is an essential tool in among the yellow dongas where the women are at work toppling mounds of subsoil. The bare earth has a brilliance that hurts their eyes. Lime nodules glitter on the surface. Picks flash in the sun. The big bottle of aspirin empties as the slow days pass, gullies fall, and certainties are buried in the dust. Certainty is a dead weight on the heart.

The women wipe sweat from their faces with pink and blue shoulder cloths as they pause to survey the plain they have already leveled from the dongas. The dongas have been there as long as anyone can remember. “Damaged beyond repair” is how white officials describe the area, although the Africans do not see damage. Dongas are like the hills – part of the world, an Act of God, unchangeable.

“Inspan the oxen,” calls MaDladla Mbele. The women laugh at a joke that they repeat among themselves every day. Ploughing is still years away, but because of their digging it may eventually be possible. If you can change the world with a pick and a spade and two aspirin, anything is possible. You can stop history in its tracks, reverse time, double the rain, take hold of destiny.

But there are other possibilities too, and more immediate: No jobs for anyone and another year of drought. This is what turns our attention to wasteland like the dongas, a task postponed for ten years while we have been busy with more productive parts of the farm.

Mdukatshani has 848 hectares of wasteland – 33% of the farm. According to the Agricultural Department, Weenen has 34 110 hectares – 40% of the district. There have been no surveys of Msinga, but it has a similar pattern of intensity, where the land is in use, and stretches of openness that puzzle strangers who have heard there is a shortage of land. A shortage? With all that spaciousness? A commodity is not in short supply until it is too valuable to be wasted.

“Well let’s pretend. There are no jobs, no money. Only this bit of land. If you’re going to live this year, this is all you have to live on.” The small camp near the gate is a depressing place to start an exercise in possibilities. Slabs of sandstone have surfaced, grey fossils of an ancient sea. The soil that remains is as dead as cement. The men scuff with their boots. Only a pick will crack that soil open. Scattered thorns are all that have taken root since the field was ploughed 18 years ago. Whose field was it then?

“My father’s,” says Segeeza Dladla.

“He didn’t leave anything for his grandchildren.”

Segeeza is defensive. “It’s because our family was chased off the farm. My father looked after the field. His walls will show you.”

And the old contour walls are still there, obscured by thicket, dislodged by storms and donkeys and shortcut paths that have criss-crossed the field since it lost its owner. Although it may have fed the Dladla family long ago, this year it will struggle to support a couple of goats. There is just enough browse for two or three goats.

“If it rains...” the thought is tentative. No rain and there is no freedom. To control his fate a man must influence a cloud.

“Whether or not, as a scientific fact, clouds are attracted or discharged by the atmospheric disturbance incident to the discharge of explosives,” wrote the Weenen magistrate, Mynard Mathews in 1900, during the Boer War,” it is worthy of note that the exceptional storms to which I have referred, were not only confined within a certain radius of the recent terrific artillery fire at the Colenso end of the division, but were also observed to follow the bigger bombardments.

Some men put their faith in rockets; others pray to wring the clouds dry.

When the drought started in 1980, a fowl was sacrificed at Nomoya waterfall. Its blood trickled dry on the hot stones. Then Mchitheni Mdluli tried to call up the rain from the top of Ngongolo. Robes flapping, he prayed aloud before pushing a line of boulders into the valley below. The thundering rocks drew no echo from the skies.

Yet it is possible to treble effective rainfall, and Mpephethi Masondo gives a demonstration using coloured water in Coke bottles.

“Now this bottle which is full,” he begins. The Department of Agriculture has done experiments to measure effective rainfall, and Masondo regularly lectures on the result using his row of bottles, a jug of water and a tray.

There is 10% run-off on the best veld – 70% on eroded areas like our camp. Last year Mdukatshani had 596 mm of rain. There grass slopes probably retained 537 mm of that – the wastelands only 179mm.

Masondo tilts the tray, spilling water on its tiny surface.

“This is what is happening here now,” he says. “The rain is just running away.”

The camp near the gate could be wearing a tin hat for all the rain that penetrates its crust. If a field is waterproof, every year’s a drought.

Masondo levels the tray and pours again. “When the ground is level the rain will stay.” That is why old Dladla contourwalls are to be repaired, and new ones constructed to stop the run-off and give the grass a chance to take root.

The staff moves into a bigger camp nearby. It is terra incognita – of so little use nobody ever goes near it.

“What are you doing here.”

“Nothing.” Six hectares doing nothing.

“You can’t say nothing. You have to have a plan. You can say the land is resting if you like, but it’s already rested 10 years. How much longer must it rest?” The land is not without possibilities. There is browse for goats, thickets for firewood. Sweet panicums flower in the shade. Grass is returning.

Next camp, same question for the staff; what are they doing here?

“Lutho,” Delanie Mbatha is unwary. “Nothing.”

“You can’t say nothing,” everyone yells at him, laughing.

The hills are not what they seem, fixed in position. They were lifted from lava pools, or dropped from old tides. All rock was flowing once. Sometimes the ripple lines emerge, swirls of sandstone in an eroding field. A man can ignore history until his plough scrapes a ripple. Other rocks can be rolled aside. There is usually room for manoeuvre, there are options to juggle. Sandstone is different however. You can’t budge the ripple of a sandstone sea.

Old fields have vanished completely in some parts of Msinga, opening up extraordinary expanses of stone. Bedrock is beautiful. Although there is strangeness walking on solid currents. The rigid lagoons are hot in the sun, the grey eddies unmoving.

In 100 years a centimetre of dust will have grown from the rock. In 10 000 years there could be soil to plough. Rock is motionless.

For a man in a hurry, however, bedrock is the end of time. When he hits bedrock he is face to face with nothing.

The yellow dongas then, are full of promise – heaps of unconsolidated subsoil, in places four metres deep. If we had to grow all that grit from scratch we would need 100 000 years. For people in a hurry that’s a lot of time worth saving.

And it is a sense of time, rather than economics, which makes us decided to tackle dongas which are worthless for farming, but sold as part of the farm, worth R60 a hectare.

Buhahiya will be finished next week. Then Parliament can start here,” says MaSokhela Mvelase, a plump, middle-aged woman and longtime MP. Her ochre headdress wags uncomfortably when she is digging, but it is like a shading umbrella on a hot day. She is relieved to know there is more work. They have been afraid the work will finish with the completion of the weir across the Tugela River.

There are 70 members of the Buhahiya Parliament, and ten of the toughest are selected for the dongas. The remainders are grouped for tasks in other camps, collecting stones and repairing contours.

As soon as the word gets out that there are new projects on the way, we are beset by people wanting work.

“Not now,” Masondo hates turning them away. “There’s no more money. We will call you if we find more money for jobs.” It’s been a squeeze fitting 70 into the budget.

“But I was also iPhalamende,” MaDladla Sikhakhane is persistent. “Don’t you remember I was with Numzaan’s Parliament?”

Remember? Oh yes, we remember. Everytime we looked her way MaDladla was sitting. Parliament must never sit. You may vote yourself in, but whether you stay depends on your performance. MaDladla performs well at hanging around waiting. She can hang around and wait at the bottom of the list.

IPhalamende – the Parliament – has become part of the valley's life.

"It's people who work for mealies," women explain. "A large group working together."

If there is any other kind of Parliament, they have never heard of it. IPhalamende is the word Speti Dladla chose for the canal diggers at Nomoya in 1977.

"Now we are together, we are strong, we are a Parliament," he said that first day they gathered with picks at the waterfall, and iPhalamende has been the name of every work group since.

There have been hundreds of MPs, aged anything from 10 to 80, working on mountainsides and riversides, building dams and canals, weirs and pipelines in return for payment of yellow mealies. Although the work has not been continuous, it's not because people are unwilling. Everyone is willing to work, but funds run out and suitable dam sites run out too. You can't build water schemes forever. Dongas are different however.

The men have started to notice dongas wherever they go, sizing them up, assessing their possibilities.

"Have you seen the dongas at Koornliver?" They grin. There is enough work in the Koornliver dongas to generate jobs for hundreds of people.

"Forever and ever and ever," says Masondo. In among the dongas you can glimpse eternity.

Simon Zungu served with first Parliament, and here he is, back again, nine years later, hobbling with the pain of the arthritis in his knees. He lives across the river on a terrace dug from the mountain, secured with massive ironstone walls.

Brickwork is easily learnt, the skill of a mechanic. Only a poet can create a wall from irregular lumps of ironstone. Zungu builds intuitively, knowing the inner rhythm of a rock before he lifts it. He is an introspective man, working best when he is left alone. Women pass up and down, chattering as they carry rocks, but he has nothing to say to them, deep in concentration under his old straw hat.

All that is needed is a barrier of sorts to stop the run-off. Zungu builds small masterpieces of symmetry.

Although Kheceza Sithole's walls look almost as good as Zungu's, they have a tendency to tumble after rain. Kheceza has some talent, but he is young and inexperienced.

Zungu struggle to explain what was done wrong. It is easier for him to fix the walls himself. Words are no explanation of music.

Mahlofu Dladla is also busy on walls, although he has no talent at all, tone-deaf to any harmony in rock. He jumps up and down on his walls to check that they are strong enough to hold. His hands are clumsy, his muscles flabby from years as a nightwatchman in Johannesburg, where he needed one ability – to stay awake. That is the only skill he brought home with him when he was retrenched three years ago.

Yet he is dogged and cheerful and full of gusto.

"Late again, late again," he chides his team of women. In fact the fault is his for always arriving early.

Mahlofu was born on Mdukatshani, although he has been living at a resettlement village an hour's walk away since the family was forced off the farm in 1969. Now he has the job of repairing the wonderful terraces built by his father, steps cut along the hillside that would have lasted forever had a cattle track not broken them down. The track developed after the removals.

Gabions, stone packs, contour walls – reclamation requires endless quantities of rock. The surrounding veld is picked clean by relays of women who have to move further and further afield in search of supplies. It is a dull job, not without hazards. Leaving on stone unturned means meeting a lot of scorpions.

There is no stone at all in the camp near the gate, but there are scatterings of rubble that can be gathered into mounds. A small job for small hands. And that is how 50 children come to be working at capturing the rain.

"Trring trring," they squeal in unison as they work. "Call the ambulance. The soil is sick!" Even little Ningi Dladla (5) knows the chants. She sings to herself in the afternoons as she crouches on the road, piling up rubble for the morning. Work was finished hours ago but it is fun to go on working.

The children bring their breakfast with them, packed in small billycans or plastic packets. Natty walks round peering into the containers. Putu. Stiff porridge. The children squat in groups, sharing their food.

"But not you," a big boy pushes Gwegwe Duma (7). "Every day you eat with us but you never bring your own." Gwegwe does not protest. He sits at the edge of the circle, watching. Natty worries about Gwegwe. Perhaps it's because he doesn't get food that he's so terribly lazy.

Gwegwe is the reason the children are taken to the Church of Scotland Hospital at Tugela Ferry for a check on their nutritional status. It takes a day to check the first 20. The doctor cuddles the children, and jokes with them, but she is upset.

"Where did you find children like this?" she asks Natty. Eighteen of the 20 are grossly malnourished.

"Pills are not good if you haven't got food," says Sister Zondi. She is unhappy about the packets of vitamins the children are taking home. "Those pills make the children really hungry," she warns. "It's better not to give them pills if there isn't any food."

Diet sheets from the Home Economics Department of Natal University help us design a midmorning meal for the children, and milk and beans are added to their putu. Gwegwe begins to sparkle.

"This is not just a job," Natty lectures the children. "This is your school. It is the school of the soil where you can learn to feed yourselves. "Only about 25% of the local children go to school. The others help at home, or idle, and from the age of 12 are togt workers on the farms.

"This is better than school," observes Phangumuzi Mbele, who has been listening attentively. "Boys who are schooling use knives when they fight. We fight with sticks."

“That’s why I’m afraid of school,” says Zwelithini Mbatha. “I can’t use a knife. I’m going to work here until I am married.” At 12 that’s a big decision.

In the crowd of children it is easy to cheat and get away with doing nothing. First lesson to be learnt at the School of the Soil is that cheating does not pay. Five women come in as “teachers” to supervise and discipline the children, to jolly them and tease and sing. They improvise the chants that keep the work moving.

“What is the mother and father of soil?”

“A-m-a-t-s-h-e.” Rock.

The purpose of the work is explained to the gangs. This grass seed for example, is a speck, a tiny baby that needs shade and damp to live.

“Now if you put a baby here on this hard earth and left it lying in the sun all day, what would happen?”

“You’d get meat,” says a girl.

“Oh I love the children,” Natty is laughing. “When I’m sad or worried I go to work with the children and then I’m laughing all the time.”

Men, women and children travel in turns to the Weenen Nature Reserve to look at donga reclamation being undertaken by the Natal Parks Board. A troop of giraffe makes each visit unforgettable.

“Oh, oh, oh,” everyone climbs out the vehicles, whispering. They follow the animals at a distance, miming their movement, commenting on each amazing nibble from a treetop, each swishing tail.

The wonder almost eases the pain of seeing kraal sites where some of our members of Parliament once had their homes. The Nature Reserve was created on land cleared in a government removal. The memory of the removals gives an awkward edge to Samson Majola’s questions.

“And you’re fixing this for wild animals?” he demands of the Parks Board induna who is conducting a guided tour. Everyone tries in vain to shush Majola.

“I know these were all dongas,” he is not grudging in his praise of the improvements.

“I never thought it was possible for the grass to come back. The work you have done is wonderful. But why are you fixing it for wild animals?”

The children view the stonepacks appraisingly. The boys are dressed in their father’s skin beshus for the occasion.

“Their walls are almost the same as ours,” notes Zwelithini,” but they put their stones like this.” He bends a hand to describe the angle. The boys understand the design sufficiently to demolish their own efforts when they return to Mdukatshani.

They begin again, rebuilding their lines. Those first mounds were for amateurs.

After a thunderstorm there is a rim of silt piled along the barricades. The children scamper along the lines, noting points where some of the walls need fixing. Rainwater lies briefly in shimmering pools, blocked by the rocks. The runaway soil is centimetres deep. One hundred years caught in an afternoon.

That is just a guess, of course, but it may not be exaggeration. Scientists estimate topsoil grows at a rate of 2½ centimetres a century. Subsoil is much slower one-centimetre per century.

One centimetre of soil weighs about 150 tonnes spread across a hectare. This summer the Department of Agriculture measured soil losses of 500 tonnes a hectare on white farm lands in the Richmond area following a cloudburst. That is 300 years of soil growth gone.

Mdukatshani and the Natal Parks Board are able to spend money on reclamation because both live off grants, not profits from farming. It is uneconomic for commercial farmers to rehabilitate their wastelands. The Parks Board has estimated it costs R 4000 a hectare to reclaim old fields in the nature reserve. Our costs so far are closer to R 1 500. That's a lot of money to pour into a hectare with a market value of R60. The statistics look better stretched across a space of time. If R 1 500 can prevent the loss of 100 years of soil growth –R1 500 should be seen as a cost spread over 100 years. We are arguing that it makes economic sense to invest in just R 15 a hectare a year!

In among our dongas the first storm leaves a bog and a desert, side by side.
“It's too wet to work today,” announces MaSokhela with satisfaction. The plain the women have leveled is a sticky morass with muddy pools.
“Rubbish. There's plenty to do. Get digging.”
The women squelch across the plain, carrying their picks, ready to argue.
“Look, it's much too wet...” MaSokhela stops in surprise as her pick bounces off a donga. She aims a few more blows at the slope. Under the surface it is dry as dust.
“Hau!” Masondo must be right with those bottles of his. You can have deluge and drought, same place, same time, depending on the steepness of the slope.

The women get busy with their picks. They have a long job ahead of them, changing the angel of the earth.

Love grasses are flowering in the depressing little camp, with wild red zinnias and blue commelina. The wasteland is changing and people are changing too. The past and the present and the future lie underfoot. Energy is transforming time.

Energy is many things of course. It is the sun and a raindrop, pollen on the wind and yellow mealies on pay day. It is a goat and a thorn tree, Zungu at work, as well as children like Gwegwe. Energy is also power, and that is an odd discovery for people who believe they are powerless. A pick can dig an airhole for the spirit.

The bottom of a donga is open to the stars. In all things there is togetherness.

That is a revelation that goes by many names. Physicists call it GUTs – grand unified theories of the universe.

When we set out to create work for the workless, that was all we had in mind, nothing more. So it is an unexpected road which we find we are traveling, where the view stays the same while the view is always changing. There is no destination in the journey to understand.

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CAPFARM TRUST REPORT

May to November 1986

A LOVE AFFAIR

“Spring Chicken? They want to kill Spring Chicken?” Mdidiyeli Mvelase stops at the farm gate, rigid with shock. The women shrug, unconcerned.

“Tomorrow the knife will cut. This is the last day for Spring Chicken.”

“Why?” Mvelase has started to tremble. “If they have to slaughter they must take another animal. “He waves his arms, panic-stricken, stuttering. “Ha hau hau.”

The herdboys giggle at his agony. The women relent.

“We’re just teasing,” they laugh. “It’s a joke. Nobody wants to kill Spring Chicken.

But it’s two days before Mvelase recovers from the joke. For two days he is silent, unable to force a whistle.

Spring Chicken is a black ox with a rogue temperament, a high kick and a wild eye. Every morning it waits quietly in the kraal, head raised, while Mvelase inspects a rickety cart. He croons as he works: “Spring Chicken Kwaai Man. Wild Man.”

It has taken him a year to win the respect of the ox, but respect is not submitting.

As the little cart creaks onto the dusty road, man and ox embark on a battle of wills, a daily game of challenge and compromise that keeps them oblivious of the monotony of their journeys.

Women lag behind the jolting wagon with its load of plastic water drums. “Careful!” they yell after Mvelase. “Watch our water!” Spring Chicken on the open road is given to bouts of dancing.

While strangers tend to look upon Mdukatshani’s ox cart as the relic of a bygone age, the women now otherwise. That cart is a Mod Con. Their only Mod Con. For where else among the valleys of Msinga is domestic water delivered almost at the door.

Water on the UP route, manure on the DOWN. When the women have offloaded their water they lift up bags of goat manure dug from local kraals and destined for Mdukatshani’s gardens. The cart seldom travels empty. Wood, mealies, rocks for the reclamation camp- the Spring Chicken Service is always overbooked.

LIFE AMONG EQUALS

‘We are not without accomplishments.

We have managed to distribute poverty equally.’

Nguyen Co Thach

Vietnamese Foreign Minister

Better wages for a few? Or smaller wages for many? Every year the subject is discussed again. Every year the vote goes to sharing what there is as widely as possible. Perhaps the most controversial aspect of CAP is its wage policy, with R250 a month the top salary, add R80 the starting wage for a man.

Almost half our wages are paid in the form of yellow mealies, a popular form of payment because families acquire more food this way than if they were paid cash and then bought mealie meal at the local stores (176 kgs mealies against 100 kgs of mealie meal).

As city factories close and companies go bankrupt, Msinga is filling up with workless men. A recent survey of families cutting wood on Mdukatshani showed only 26 out of 296 had a man in a job, which only confirms what everyone already knows here in the valley: things are very, very bad.

CAP made a sad contribution to local equality in April when several grants came to an end simultaneously, and 160 reclamation workers had to be retrenched, while staff had to be cut down to 30, most on half pay.

“We only support community projects,” one donor told us. “People shouldn’t have to be paid. A community must be willing to work for nothing. “Which is a tough definition, or while it is possible to work for nothing, it is a little more difficult to live on nothing. Increasingly, Msinga families are surviving on the earnings of women and children who climb onto recruiting lorries to work together on the farms.

However the white farmers of South Africa presently share a national debt of R11 000 million – an average debt of R 15 000 a farm. If debt is an index of poverty, then whites are suffering more poverty than blacks. Pressured Weenen farmers have been turning to labour-saving crops, and recruiting lorries which once passed the Mdukatshani gate every day, now disappear for months at a time.

Even the upcountry lorries come sporadically, only at harvest time, while payment is wholly or partly in mealies, potatoes, cabbages or wattle poles.

“But we get fed where we work,” people say. To be fed is as good as getting a wage.”

During the long months without funds we did some creative thinking and

- * Expanded the community gardens on Mdukatshani to absorb 300 men, women and children.
- * Helped the Msusampi community fence and terrace a rocky hillside for their own community gardens.
- * Developed a childrens’ gardening group for 100 children.
- * Brushpacked 25 hectares of eroded lands at no cost.
- * Cleared a reclamation camp of unwanted thorn thickets at no cost.

In September – October grants from the Ford Foundation, the Equal Opportunity Fund, and the US Government enabled us to recall our reclamation teams and group leaders and get busy once again on the work-and-training programmes.

BIRDSONG AND GUNFIRE

Warring men have once again been hiding out on the lonely spaces of Mdukatshani's bush, so that it was dangerous to walk alone on the farm's footpaths. One of the bead women, GumaXaba Xulu, was fired upon recently when she came upon a group of men killing a stolen goat alongside the man path.

For two months gunfire was again part of our everyday as two Mchunu factions fought on our boundary. Petrus Majozi, our chairman, who is chief induna of the Mchunus, Was frequently away from farm business while working with his chief, Chief Simakade, and the authorities to resolve a number of small conflicts that flared all over the dwellers, formal gatherings, and informal encounters with angry young fighters out in the veld.

One of the victims of the violence was an Mchunu induna, Poison Xulu, an old friend of ours. Our staff joined the district in mourning his murder.

Hold ups continue to be a problem, and in November Dr. S. Jhilmeet, the district surgeon, was held up at Mhlangane, and his driver shot dead.

IT'S A PASSING FAD OF COURSE....

It can't last long. That's what we have been told about the beads, that's what we have been thinking ourselves for the past 18 years. Yet even in the middle of a recession our women have been setting new records for bead sales (More than R130 000 in the first nine months of the year.)

"We aren't married to husbands, we're married to beads!" There's a yell of laughter from the queue of bead women under the big thorn tree. Bead Day starts at first light and ends when it is too dark to see, a day of giggles, coffee and gossip.

Toddlers chase each other through the interminable hours as the women stitch an earring, add a button, groan aloud at an alteration, or laugh helplessly at another jibe about men.

The passing fad is not past yet, judging by the oohs and aaahs of Londoners who have been discovering a new shop that stocks only our beads, and those a Jane Bedford.

The 18 years of interminable queues have produced a quality that is superb.

OW! EINA! HAU!

As every plant has a quite distinctive flower, so every thorn has a quite distinctive pain. Anyone who lives in thorn country, like Mdukatshani, soon learns to identify each thorn as it penetrates their feet, and there is no agony like ugagane. *Dichrostachys cinerea*. Chopping was therefore a painful experience for the group that cleared unwanted ugagane thickets for a reclamation camp on our lower far. Although about 100 people came to a meeting to hear us make a special offer of green wood, only 48 arrived with axes when they heard the wood was ugagane. Soon rag bandages marked out the Valiant Band of Ugagane Choppers. In among the thickets they shared cries of pain, and argued about the merits of rotten wounds versus cracked feet.;

For while a soak in hot salty water can ease an ugagane inflammation, regular soaks produce terrible cracks. Two months resulted in battle-scarred legs and arms, woodpiles for glowing coals, and a camp on its way to becoming a savanna.

A TRADE-OFF

Meanwhile on the top farm we managed to brushpack a large area by offering woodcutters a chance to harvest green *Acacia tortilis* on condition they chopped selected thickets and discarded the brush on eroded spaces. The scheme drew 296 women from the adjoining location. And yes, there was a lot of cheating, and piles of brushwood never got near its destination. Punishment Days were declared as a result. Is a community developed when the punished attend their punishment?

PENSIONS AND THE FULL MOON

Valleys of gunfire startled the valley one night in September. Soon afterwards there were men at the Mdukatshani cattle kraal, counting the cattle in the moonlight. But it was all right. All the animals were there.

Pension week is always cattle rustling time, and a full moon means double trouble. When the pension vans arrived every two months, they bring a brief flow of money that turns the pay-outs into market places that attract anyone with anything to sell. Fresh meat supplies are soon sold out... which is another way of saying: The evidence disappears.

On Mdukatshani we always keep special watch on the cattle during pension week, and it is a reckless man who leaves his animals on the hill overnight. That moonlit September evening between 50 and 70 stolen animals were driven close to our boundaries. A member of staff heard the sound of hooves, peered through a crack to watch the procession disappear, then gave the alarm. Men ran for their guns to fire warning shot, then checked their kraals, the hillside, and our kraal. Next day reports of stolen cattle began to come in. most of the losses were suffered by African cattleowners.

Although the police stocktheft unit recovered a few of the missing cattle, most disappeared. The unit, which has been stationed in an old farmhouse not far away, has recently shifted premises. The reason? The house haws been burgled three times.

POLICEMAN CONVICTED OF ATTEMPTED MURDER

A one-time police branch commander, Sgt. Dan Danisa of Tugela ferry, has been sentenced to 12 years imprisonment for attempted murder, attempting to defeat the ends of justice, theft, and illegal possession of a firearm.

Danisa, a policeman with 19 years service, appeared before Mr. Justice Milne and two assessors in Pietermaritzburg Supreme Court.

Judge Milne found that on April 15 last year Danisa was with a group of policemen when three suspects were arrested/ the suspects tried to conceal a pistol, which Danisa found and kept for himself. Four days later Danisa instructed Mhlawosuku Dlamini to kill Mrs. F. Ngubane, an employee at a shop where Danisa's wife was also working. After the shooting

Dlamini returned the pistol to Danisa who promised he would investigate the case to ensure Dlamini was immune from prosecution.

Danisa has been the focus of some of CAP's legal aid work in the past, and was convicted of assaulting Mrs. Nomazwi Mvelase, who received R 750 in damages for the assault following a claim made on her behalf through the Legal Resources Centre and CAP.

In another LRC-CAP case heard in October, an Estcourt inquest magistrate found nobody was to blame for the death of Mbazwana Mvelase who died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Richard Lyster of the LRC attended the inquest on behalf of the Mvelase family, who are labourers on the farm of Mr. Flip de Bruyn of Weenen.

A CAREER WOMAN

"Every day when I smelt the fires I cried for Mdukatshani," said Busani Mbatha. A year ago Busani was burning firelines with everyone else. This winter she was a new bride, living at a distance, catching the scent of burnt grass drifting on the wind, and she was homesick. Burning firelines is a time of special comradeship and fun, and while Busani was missing us, we were missing her too. Massive, powerful, untiring, she had six times the energy of anyone else, and an equivalent good humour. "Tiny girl" she was called in teasing, and we wondered if there was a man big enough to see her virtues and marry her. But when a last Nqabeni Conco fell in love and whipped her away we almost wished he hadn't, for what would we do without those huge arms effortlessly tossing sacks of bones, logs of wood, bags of mealies? Tribal rules dictate Busani remains at home for the next two years. "But every day I remember my work," she is wistful. "I remember digging my garden. I remember making the fences. I remember the bones." It is not easy for a woman to abandon her career.

A LEVEL LIES IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

But can't you see the string goes UP?

There is some variety in the view from different eyes, as we discover when we argue out the next section of the cattle track that has to follow the contour round the hill.

Rocks and sticks and string, river reeds with flags – all have been invoked to lay out a level. The most reliable bit of survey equipment so far discovered, however, is the level gaze of MaMsithole Dladla's eyes. After 15 months working with a team of children building stonepacks in the reclamation camps, she doesn't need to wait the arrival of an expert with a dumpy. She can SEE where the line should go.

"We are learning, we are learning," sighs Sekiza Dladla, leader of the fencing team that is building track, and that sends out the SOS for MaMsithole. The team can take a fence in a straight line anywhere, but when you follow a contour, they have discovered, a line on the level doesn't go straight.

.... BUT WE DON'T AGREE MR. AUDITOR

"I'm going to cry," said Natty Duma as tears filled her eyes. "I have lived here years and years and this has never happened." In the rubble at her feet were specks of green, tiny grasses just a few hours old.

Natty was not the only one moved at the sight. Men, women and children walked the rubble slope that day, peering at the grass seedlings.

“And who planted them?” MaMsithole asked the children’s group she supervises.

Her children grinned: “We did. They are our work.” With their rakes and their sacks and their hands, and with a bit of help from wind, sun and rain. They had got grass growing where none had grown before.

So Mr. Auditor, we beg to differ with the statement that there have been no improvements on the farm this year there have been no new buildings, it is true.

No new dams, not a single borehole. But doesn’t a farm profit from new grass on old land?

Not that’s our auditor, of course, who dictates the rules that define farm improvements, such as buildings, which may not improve a farm in any way at all.

Reclamation, on our balance sheet, is money down the drain, not captured soil and thousands of newborn grasses.

THE OLDEST DAIRY ANIMAL IN THE WORLD

... is the goat so there’s nothing new about the Mdukatshani Milk Goat experiment. Although there are 94 goats at Msinga, however, nobody milks them. A recent visit to Richard Vermaak’s “professional” goat farm was therefore a memorable experience for the 15 men and women who stood in the small, neat-as-a-pin dairy watching Saanen nannies line up at electric milking machines. Our party returned home with powdered goats milk, and the conviction that the milk goat was an innovation worth pursuing.

At Mdukatshani, however, we are working with ordinary Msinga goats, not the fancy Saanens that belong in high mountain country and are susceptible to the valley’s many diseases. We have two Saanen billy goats, which have their temperatures checked morning and evening to give early warning of the onset of heartwater. However their mates are a multi-coloured Msinga rabble.

The milk yield from local goats, of course, is very small compared to the high powered Saanens. Yeti is not insignificant if you judge by Third World standards, and compare the Zulu goat to the Zulu cow.

In an investigation into the KwaZulu Cattle Industry in 1984, D.R. Tapson and C.J. Rose found that milk provision was the primary objective of keeping cattle in KwaZulu, and to satisfy this objective and obtain an average of three litres of milk a day, they estimated a total of seven cows was required.

Our argument in favour of goats is based on the following rough sum:

If 7 cows are required to produce an average three litres a day

And if 1 large stock unit is equivalent to 6 small stock units

Then 42 Msinga nanny goats should be necessary to produce an equivalent 3 litres.

In fact Msinga goats are producing almost ten times as much.

PS: Our goatproof camps are goatproof.

DROUGHT AND FIRES

The winter and spring of 1985 were the longest, driest anyone could remember. For seven months there was not a drop of rain, large trees died on the hills, and because of stress, the acacias produced no pods.

If 1985 was bad, however, 1986 has been worse. Rainfall for this period last year was 241 mm. This year there has been only 167 mm – November started with leafless thorns, runaway fires, and dry streams and dams. Mdukatshani's top farm was waterless, and residents were going long distances to fetch domestic water from neighbour's borehole, while cattle were being driven 10 km to the Tugela to drink.

The Tugela dropped so low that location cattle were able to wade across to investigate the green of our gardens. One good rain has since brought the thorns into leaf, but the burnt veld is a long way from recovery. Our firelines contained the fires, and people from the location rushed out, as always, to help us put the fires out.

A WAR ECONOMY

“They kill the fowls and leave them lying in the yard. The cattle and goats they drive away.”

Bomvu country lies a long way from Mdukatshani, so the presence of large numbers of Bomvu women in our Bones Queue told us, without asking, that the Bomvu were at war. When men are hiding on the hills, and families have lost everything of worth to raiding bands of looters – women and children scrounge for bones. It is the only commodity they can trade for food.

Because of lack of funds, there was no Bones Exchange for six months. The following are the statistics since it was resumed in October.

| | |
|---------------|------------|
| Total people: | 903 |
| Total bones: | 17 766 kgs |
| Total maize: | 15 903 “ |

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| Children schooling: | 27% |
| Families with fields: | 29% |
| Families with stock: | 31,9% |

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Average per stockowner: | 1,5 cattle and 2,6 goats |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|

| | |
|-------------|-------|
| War widows: | 13,5% |
| Widows: | 22,2% |

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Families where the father is | |
| Unemployed | 30,4% |
| Self-employed | 0.2% |
| Town-employed | 7,3% |

| | |
|---------------|------|
| Farm-employed | 2,1% |
| Sick | 7,2% |
| TB | 2,8% |
| Cripple | 2,8% |
| Mad | 0,9% |
| Blind | 0,9% |
| Jailed | 0,8% |
| Deserted | 3,7% |
| Old/pensioned | 3,5% |

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MAY 1986: FLOGGING A DEAD TRADITION

Dreams come in all shapes and sizes. Mtwelanga Mdlolo's dream is shaped like a plough. For 17 years it's been lying in his yard, unused, waiting for the spring.

Well, almost unused. There is that one year he ploughs, with the Dladla brothers, near the river bend. But you can't yoke a dream to the sound of quarrelling. Even the cattle are defiant. They have had no training, or forgotten it. The plough kicks at the stones and the stones kick back. Then grumbles and threats spurt in controversy. The place that they're ploughing is another man's field. It's a serious crime, stealing a field – a criminal act, snatching after spring.

It's not obvious that part of the year's gone missing. In outward things the valley is little changed. The first storm brings a sudden end to silence. Mud disturbs the sleep of the winter pools. Krantzes echo to the hadedahs rowdy courting. There is damp and greening leaf among the hills.

Spring, however, is something more than scenery. It is more than the scent of jasalse in the rain. For a man like Mdlolo spring has to be an act of harmony, and he has been looking on as a spectator since the indilayi.

The indilayi – the turn, the draai – Zulu use an Afrikaans word to name the upheavals of 1969 when more than 20 000 people are forced off the Weenen farms and into the location. It's an odd work to chose for an event that is so final, for although the valley has struggled through wars, rebellions, droughts and disease, only the indilayi brings an end to the tradition of growing food.

Grinding stones mark the graves of the lost economy. Nothing else remains of the farmers who were ploughing just 20 years ago. The grain pits have fallen in, the grain baskets decayed, but stones do not rot, lying among the weeds. They lie where they were abandoned, too heavy to carry far.

Other men sell their ploughs when they move. Not Mdlolo. He asks friends to help him carry the implement, a German plough, bought by his father. They stumble down the hill paths, heaving it in short stages. The river crossing is the worst part of the trip. It takes eight men to get the plough through the rapids.

Building sites have been pegged out in the location, although there is a ban on livestock and no place for fields. Mdlolo's plough is an ungainly ornament among his tents.

Gradually new huts rise from the veld while the old farms stand empty and rumours fly that the land is coming back to the Africans. The chief is cautious.

"You can get ready, he suggests. "Settle near the boundary of the farm where you lived before. "Mdlolo pulls down his home and starts building again, close to our fenceline. His

plough sets off on a second journey, back across the river, up the hill to a new yard. There it can wait. A dream, like good steel, does not dust.

Mdlolo leaves home in search of a job in the city. He is a modern farmer now, farming at the shop. Or that is what the people of the valley call this life without fields: farming at the shop.

Mdlolo's wife, the beautiful MaSkhakhane, grows up with soft hands. When she eventually starts to dig it is certainly not from choice. It's because the city has a drought. Johannesburg jobs are withering.

"Uyasinda umsebenzi," she complains, giggling, as she dabs at her plot in the Mdukatshani gardens. "It is burdensome." She takes another swing with her hoe, then retreats to the shade. She is chattering with friends when someone calls a warning.

The women jump up, guilty, as Natty Duma advances, swishing her plastic sjambok. Her beret is tilted over one eye – a sure sign of trouble.

"My knee..." MaSkhakhane begins in explanation.

"... is paining," Natty finishes for her. "Laziness makes a terrible pain. Here's your piecework. Six rows and you don't go home until you've finished digging."

MaSkhakhane wraps a rag around her blisters and starts to hoe, laughing helplessly. Of all the gardeners, she is the most sunny, full of gaiety even when she's complaining.

Natty turns her attention to the other women, dishing out treatment for an epidemic of sore knees. She has one remedy for all ailment: heartache, backache or starving children. Take a garden. Your husband's lost his job? Take a garden. You need a pension? The government has no money for pension. Take a garden.

"But I can't dig because of my operation," says KaMavundla Mvelase, pulling up her jumper to show the scar.

"I've had an operation too," says Natty, exposing an awesome stomach in proof.

As KaMavundla walks away Natty hoots cheerfully. "She won't come crying for a pension again." That awful word garden chases anyone on the cadge.

Natty loves her garden – "Your garden is the same as your child," she is always saying. The women groan. It's all very well for Natty to talk like that. Her children are big now. She's forgotten the fretting and whining, that weight to be jiggled. A garden is just another yell for attention. Turn your back for an instant and it's choked with thistles, wilting, nibbled by duiker, sickening with topgrub, eelworm, aphid and blight.

There are more than 160 gardeners at Mdukatshani, most of them young wives from the location, reluctant novies forever muttering at the drudgery. Their mothers never escaped from the hoe. Why should they welcome the return of a tyranny?

A hundred years ago there were 600 ploughs at Msinga, and women already manoeuvring for change.

"The natives annually increase their lands for cultivation," observed the Msinga magistrate, Henry Francis Fynn in 1891, "and purchase many ploughs so that the women are saved the toil of culture and take one way or another to cause their husbands to procure ploughs, in many cases a plough for each wife."

Although everybody planted they did not always grow enough for their needs. In drought years like 1878 when the crops failed cattle were driven to the highveld to be bartered, one beast for a bag of grain. In 1989, for the first time, the government sent mealies for sale as drought relief. In the good years, however, there was more than enough.

“Most of the natives cultivate with a view to acquire a surplus of grain over their requirements for home consumption,” G.W. Adamson, Weenen’s Acting Magistrate observed in 1896. “Many of the cultivate on an extensive scale.”

So extensive that 40 poor white families of Weenen made a living “ ploughing for the natives” according to the magistrate in 1900.

Mdlolo’s father, Makete, was still farming successfully at the time of the indilayi.

“I did not go to find work until I was 20,” Mdlolo is proud. “My father had 40 cattle and more than 100 goats. The grain baskets were for this year’s food – the grain pits stored the extra for next. I never had to work on the plantations at Wartburg like all our children do today.”

When her husband gets busy remembering, there’s an agonizing stab in MaSkhakhane’s knee. Mtwelanga may have lugged his plough around with him – but would he have shown the same attachment to a hoe?

MaSkhakhane tends to cheat on her plot, with a handful of manure, a scattering of seed, a sprinkling of water. The results do not escape Natty.

“No manure,” Natty brandishes her plastic whip when she catches sight of MaSkhakhane. “And no water.” She sweeps excuses aside. “I don’t care what you say. I look at your plants. Plants never lie.”

There’s not an onion alive with a sense of loyalty. MaSkhakhane damns all green plants. Cabbages, potatoes, pumpkins – a bunch of informers, the lot of them.

Vegetables make some forthright announcements in the experimental gardens, where Sizani Mbatha is testing out responses to different treatments of fertilizer, manure and bonemeal. She was one of the first learners at Mdukatshani, and at 30 qualifies as a veteran, and a raucous critic of the other gardeners. Sizani’s gift has never been politeness. She circles among the plots, laughing so loudly it’s always easy to locate her.

The worst traitors are not the plants, but women like Sizani who begin to love their gardens, lingering among the rows until it gets dark. KaMasoka, Busisiwe, MaDladla, MaMsinga, MaMbuso – gradually the numbers grow, but MaSkhakhane is not among them.

With a bit of scheming she learns to evade Natty for weeks at a time, but she can’t hide from her husband when he comes home.

Mdlolo visits the gardens one morning soon after his arrival, strolling with a group of friends, all recently retrenched. They stop to admire Mathanda’s wife spinach and Dayimane’s wife’s beans. MaSkhakhane watches their approach gloomily.

“Is this your garden?” the moment has come. She giggles.

“This!” Mdlolo is angry. “You call this a garden? This is not a garden. This is dirt. Dirt.” He begins to scold her in front of his friends. MaSkhakhane covers her face, hiding her giggles.

“Take Natty’s sjambok and hit her,” the men laugh. Mdlolo is not amused. “What are you doing with those watering cans? Throw them away. There’s nothing to water here. Dig.”

He turns on Natty. “Why don’t you flog her? She’s so lazy she has to be thrashed.”

All the way home he carries his complaints, swearing at his wife.

“Au Natty, “MaSkhakhane is at the toolroom early next morning. “Why did you let my husband see my garden? All night he was fighting.”

Mdlolo uses the whiplash of his tongue when he joins his wife in the garden soon afterwards. His friends Latho and Dayimane Dladla are here too, cheering him on, occasionally raking. “Better dig them up,” Mdlolo points at the token vegetables. The unkempt plot grows noisy with his insults and her merriment. There’s always been companionship between those two.

“Now plant something.”

“There’s nothing to plant.”

“I’ve got plenty of seedlings,” Natty offers. She’s been passing by to watch the change.

“Fetch them,” Mdlolo sends his wife away. When she returns he has the rows prepared and is resting on his pick.

“It doesn’t take long days to get a garden ready,” he is still lecturing. “One day and it’s finished.”

Spinach beetroot and cabbage are planted out under his critical supervision.

“All right. Take a rest.” He has relented enough to finish off the watering.

A garden grows best on little spurts of energy – weeds twitched in passing, moments opened among the hours. Which is impossible if you live at a distance from your garden, as all our gardeners do. The Mdlolo’s home is closer than most, but it is still almost an hour’s walk away, so that getting the garden watered requires a small expedition.

MaSkhakhane’s daughter Velephi (13) has been starting to help. In fact there is often not a woman in sight in the gardens – only swarms of children, busily weeding and watering. The already know more about gardening than their mothers ever did. By the time they are makotis, brides, they should be practiced at growing food.

For weeks the Mdlolo family tend the garden in company. By the time Mtwelanga returns to town on another search for work, MaSkhakhane’s vegetables are as good as those of the neighbours on either side of her.

“Look at your nextdoor,” Mdlolo warns before he leaves. “Your garden must always be the same as your nextdoor.”

“If my wife lets the garden get bad again, you must phone me in Goli,” Mdlolo tells Natty. “Use your sjambok when you see she is lazy.”

And from the city he dictates a letter to his wife. “How is the garden?” he asks sternly.

MaSkhakhane giggles when the letter is read out to her. The garden is a joke that signals his love.

Natty’s sjambok is a joke too – a joke about the real force that is needed to revive a dead tradition

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CAPFARM TRUST REPORT
August to May 1986

DEATH SENTENCE FOR TUGELA FERRY POLICEMAN

A Tugela Ferry police constable, Simon Mzila, and a hired killer, Fanono Mkhize, have been sentenced to death for the murder of a witness in a robbery case in which the constable was implicated. This is the first of three murder cases brought against Tugela Ferry policemen.

A Tugela Ferry detective, Sgt Danisa, is in jail facing charges of murder, robbery and housebreaking, while's Tugela Ferry constable, Godwill Ngema is one of the three policemen facing charges of murdering a 40-year-old Tugela Ferry man found dead at Nagle Dam last year.

ARMED GUARD FOR PAY DAY

Every month CAP pays out at least R10 000 – wages for staff, reclamation and bead workers. After a number of incidents last year it became clear CAP was a likely target for further armed robberies. It is a 150 km round trip to the bank, most of it lonely road where hold-ups are becoming commonplace. All vehicles that travel the local routes on a regular basis, such as the bus, bakery, butchery or storekeepers, have suffered hold-ups in recent months. A local black trader, Mr. Mngadi, has abandoned his newly-built cement-and-iron store after three consecutive hold-ups.

Because CAP was unable to get any form of insurance cover, we approached the police for assistance, and since October have been very grateful for an armed police guard to the bank and back again. The police stay to guard the pay-out.

In November CAP Directors called in a security consultant for an assessment of the situation. He recommended that the Alcock family be removed from the area,, running the project at a distance, with part-time visits. This was unacceptable. Present security is based on two night watchmen and dogs.

The second night watchman was employed to guard the farm sheds after CAP's TUV truck was stolen one night. It was subsequently found abandoned about 10 km away, with battery, tyres etc, removed. In November the Toyota panelvan was stolen late one afternoon and crashed. It has had to be written off.

ANC, ARSON AND AK'S

In October four white farmers, neighbours of Mdukatshani, found threatening notes signed by the ANC. Soon afterwards one of the farmers, Dick McNally, had his sheds set alight and burnt to the ground. The fire destroyed several tractors, and all his farm machinery and records. The damage was estimated at hundreds of thousands of rands.

In April after four AK 47 rifles had been recovered in police operations at Msinga, there was an unprecedented blitz on firearms. So many guns have been handed over that several local communities are reported to be virtually unarmed.

STOCK THIEVES IN SHOOT OUTS

Weenen farmers have been suffering at the hands of stockthieves who slaughter animals in the bush, carrying away the meat.

Mr. C.J.J. Burger, CAP's nextdoor neighbour, has lost 14 cattle since October, some of them chopped up among trees close to his home. The van Rooyen brothers nearby have lost 10 cattle to thieves. Police have recently made some arrests.

On several occasions police have scoured the thick bush on Mdukatshani for stolen stock – the farm remaining a favourite getaway route for thieves. In November, 23 stolen animals were driven across the farm, the remains of two eventually being recovered at Mathinta, just across our fence.

By March the Mathinta community had got tired of police attention and warned the gang of stockthieves in their midst to stop thieving or move to another area.

The homes of three alleged thieves were burnt down soon afterwards. With a good idea of who had been responsible for the arson, the homeless men planned retaliation but were surprised and chased. In a gun battle in the dark along our boundary one man was killed and two seriously injured. The alleged gang has now left the area.

In the early hours of an April morning a black man was killed and a Weenen policeman, Sgt. J. Cronje, injured in a shoot-out arising from another stocktheft investigation.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

In October Ndudu Ntuli and Mtwelakhe Sithole appeared in the Estcourt Regional Court on charges of armed robbery arising out of the break – in at Mdukatshani earlier in the year. The men pleaded guilty and were sentenced to five years imprisonment.

A third man allegedly involved in the robbery, Jabulani Khoza, was arrested in April, and is now facing several charges, including armed robbery and attempted murder.

In April Mboma Dladla and Zwelakhe Mtetwa appeared in the Estcourt Regional Court on charges of possession of stolen property. They had originally been charged with the theft of R 4 00 and groceries stolen from CAP in March 1905.

The groceries and R 360 was recovered. Although the two men admitted they helped to transport the stolen goods from the roadside near Mdukatshani, they claimed the goods belonged to Da Dladla, who was arrested, released and is now again being sought by the police. Mboma Dladla and Mtetwa were found not guilty.

Mtetwa had earlier made an appearance in the same court charged with the theft of three vehicles – two of which were recovered by CAP staff. Mtetwa was found guilty and sentenced to six years imprisonment.

R 18 000 OF TRIBAL FUNDS STOLEN

Some tribal funds may not be banked. Instead large sums are kept in government issue moneybox and safe. This custom was unexpectedly advertised when R 18 800 disappeared from the safe of the Mchunu tribe at the end of August last year.

CAP's chairman, Petrus Majola, was involved in the police follow-up in his role as chief induna of the Mchunu. Although three people were arrested, they were released without being charged. No money was recovered.

RENEWED WAR

Three separate conflicts left 27 dead and eight wounded in the Mchunu area over the Christmas period.

Makhanya Mchunu, a CAP committee member, tried to stay out of trouble by living on Mdukatshani, 30 km away from his home. One day in January a group of strangers arrived at the farm asking after him. They left after staff had lied that Mchunu was not here. Uneasy about the visit, anxious about the lack of news from home, Mchunu decided to risk returning to his kraal in the Sinyameni area.

The CAP bakkie dropped him off on the road, and he was followed the path home when bullets began flying. He had been caught in a running gun battle between the Gujini and Sinyameni impis. Mchunu fled with other running men, spending that night in the hills. The next day he set off across country to hide with relatives at Mooi River, about 60 km away.

Twelve men died and six were wounded in the Sinyameni – Gujini conflict before chief induna Majozi negotiated a peace settlement.

Nobody has yet found a reason for the fight between the Shelembe and Dlamini factions in the Dungamanzi area of Mchunwini, and nobody has yet been able to end a fight in which 11 men have died and two have been wounded. Two policemen have been injured in operations to control the trouble.

The third Mchunu war took place around Majozi's home at Mnqamkantaba, and four men died before peace was restored early in the new year.

FARMING

Yes, it goes on, despite the disturbances... and despite the fact that the Weenen Farmers' Association once again refused. CAP's application for membership.

In the past nine months CAP's focus has been reclamation work, with the aim of providing employment and training for local families hard-hit by the recession while making waste land productive again.

With the end of several grants in sight, CAP applied for government unemployment relief funds – an application which had to be passed through the Farmer's Association. Although they did not want our membership, the Weenen farmers agreed to approve the application, and after a long wait we were granted 100 jobs for a six week period. This enables us to continue stonepacking donga area until the end of April, when 160 men and women became jobless. Our grants and the government money ran out at the same time.

Unemployment has reduced local families to desperation. While accurate unemployment figures are impossible to obtain, the CAP monthly Bones Queue statistics indicate only 14% of the local men still have jobs.

The Bones Queue unfortunately, has also come to an end because of lack of funds. Last years a total of 2941 people brought 31 762 kgs of bones and 23 519kgs of acacia pods, receiving 43 293 kgs of mealies in return. Since the first exchange six years ago CAP has received 219 652 kgs of pods, and 621 039 kgs of bones.

**“There are holes in the sky where the rain comes in
But the holes are small so the rain is thin”**

Local old people say the winter and spring of 1985 were the worst the valley has ever had. For eight months there was no rain, and thousands of dead trees on Mdukatshani’s hills testify to the severity of the drought. Usually the first green leaf appears at the end of August. Last year, however, the thorns were still leafless in October, and hungry flocks of African goats moved kilometres away from home onto white farm lands, scavenging for feed. Newborn kids were reported to be dying for lack of milk to suckle.
Total rainfall 1984: 695,85 mm – Total rain 1985: 596,5 mm.

As a result of the poor spring there will be no harvest of acacia pods this coming winter. The trees did not bear.

Most of Natal, however and some parts of Msinga had good summer rains, and for many weeks the Tugela River was so high that all crossings had to be made by ferry. The river was frequently so high the CAP pumps were unable to pump water to the dry communal gardens!

As the gardens have expanded, so it has become increasingly difficult to drench crops sufficiently with our “dip” irrigation system (watering cans dipped in little dams). In December we had a visit from Mike Werner of the Wits Mechanical Engineering Department, which has promised help with a water plan for the farm.

GETTING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD

It was just lack of confidence that prevented the men in spanning the cattle to pull the cart up and down the main road. It needed an ultimatum to get the cart busy delivering bags of yellow mealies to the river drift at Nomoya. The mealies are part payment for project workers, usually carried, bit by bit, on the heads of women and girls. The car has certainly eased their burden.

It is now in daily use, together with ox-drawn sledges, carrying rocks for stone packs to reclamation camps.

The art is essential equipment at the Mdukatshani Cattle College – for that’s what we call the group of men and boys who work together with the cattle. Once every 12-year-old boy could handle oxen. Because of seven drought years when there has been no ploughing, however, we have a generation that lacks this traditional skill – a skill no longer taught at any college in the country!

FENCING

The two fencing teams are gradually creating new camps on Mdukatshani – the work often slow because of the difficult terrain and the distances the teams have to climb before they can start the day's work.

“NOW TAKE A BICYCLE...”

said Sipho Nkosi, beginning a story that turned the subject of depreciation into entertainment. Sipho, a management specialist from the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, spent two days at Mdukatshani in December running a training workshop for a group of CAP team leaders, most of whom can neither read nor write. The workshop was so successful that Wilgespruit has agreed to organize more this year.

LABOURER DIES AFTER ASSAULT

In October Mbazwane Mvelase died after being struck with a rifle butt by Mr. Flip de Bruin. CAP obtained statements for the Legal Resources Centre, while the Weenen Police opened a murder docket. The Attorney General has not yet decided whether to prosecute.

STILL SELLING OUT AT R 120 a KILO

A delayed shipment of beads from Czechoslovakia prevented us fulfilling huge Christmas orders. Nevertheless total sales for the year were R 110 000.

January, usually a lull period, saw us with rush orders worth R 30 000. The continuing sales have been unexpected for the new beads arrived at R 120 a kg – an increase of 174% in 15 months. Although our necklaces are now very pricey, they were sold out at two exhibitions, one in Cape Town, one in Bloemfontein.

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CAPFARM TRUST QUARTERLY REPORT-
December 1986, January, February 1987

HUNGRY CATTLE BUTT EACH OTHER IN THE KRAAL

Day after day Msinga made headline news:

IMPIS FACE TO FACE IN THE MOUNTAIN
Police Attacked with Assegais
WARFARE NARROWLY AVERTED

Month after month mobile police squadrons were rushed into the area. Military aeroplanes were sent from Pretoria to help quell the troubles. A Commission of Inquiry was appointed.

“While the Young Commission was quietly sitting at Umhlangana at the end of last week,” reported the NATAL ADVERTISER,” not 10 miles away to the northwards across the Tugela River some thousands of Zulus were sharpening their assegais and talking war.

“The spread of tribal is regarding gravely by officials and police stationed in uMsinga location.

“It will be a 1906 rebellion all over again,” a magistrate said to me. ‘The depression in the towns is largely to blame. Many Natives have returned to the location and without good land for ploughing and scarcely enough scrub for cattle and goats, their thoughts naturally turn to old grievances and fighting.’”

That was more than 50 years ago, during the 1930’s, a period still remembered here as a time of suffering, with recession, drought and unprecedented war. The situation is being repeated now with the flare-up of serious new conflicts in the Tembu, Baso, Bomvu, Cunu and Majozi areas of Msinga.

“Hungry cattle butt each other in the kraal,” says Mankomaan Mabaso, the old gunsmith.

“I AM BAD LUCKY”

three bodies at the mortuary disrupted CAP’s first planning meeting of the year – a meeting that has not yet taken place because most of the men on our staff have fled into hiding or been dragged into the Nomoya-Dimbi war.

Qalokwakhe Mkhize, the leader of a fencing team is a timid man. Last time there was trouble, in 1978, he ran away from home and did not return for four years. For a price a pacifist has been allowed to stay out of war, so Mkhize asked for an advance on his wages to pay his R30 war tax. Then he fled. Within a week men from his own impi had hunted him down.

“This war is different,” he was told. “Every man must fight.” Even Mkhize, skinny and trembling, who does not know how to handle a gun.

In the two months since the fighting started, eight men have died and six men and women have been injured; homes have been looted, stock raided, footpaths blocked to prevent access to the store, and at times the ferryboat has been ordered to stop its crossings. Men from both impis have used Mdukatshani's wooded slopes as vantage points, thoroughfares and refuges. Soldiers have fired from our cliffs, crossed through our gardens, and come openly to our buildings asking for food (which has been refused). It is a daily struggle to maintain neutrality – without consent it can be taken away.

Nevertheless Mdukatshani continues to be a place where women and children from both sides come together every day to work. And they bring with them messages from their menfolk on the hills.

"I am bad lucky," says Kondad Ntshaba. "There is this problem with the impi. Now I'm staying on the hill."

All the messages start in the same way: "There is this problem with the impi."

"And when I'm on the hill I watch everyone working in the gardens, and I cry," says MaHelezi Dladla, formerly OC Goats. "And in the afternoon when I see the boys send cattle to the river I cry."

"Yesterday when the firing started I ran away without my shoes. Now I can't walk for the pain from my feet."

Little notes arrive, some from Nomoya men, some from Dimbi:

"I'm staying on the hill now. I have no money to buy milk for my baby. Please buy milk at the clinic for me."

"I ask for help to find a far place to hide. You must send an answer today."

Refuges ask for a place to camp in the farm buildings. Some are from Nomoya, some are from Dimbi. At night the children chatter together, telling war stories.

"I watched the men practicing how to shoot. They were balancing like this against the tree."

"But why do they have to balance?"

"Because when you shoot..."

Some of the children are from Nomoya, some are Dimbi.

For a time numbers in the gardening groups dropped. Children like Phangamuzi and Ngobinsimbi and Niniza were having to help their families move across the boundary.

But they send messages too: "I nominate.... To take my place. And when I come back I will tell you about the things I have never before seen in my life."

With predictions that the war will last until the end of the year, CAP has now reorganized the work so that women are being trained to do almost everything.

The wife of Kondad Ntshaba is one of those who has been learning to do the work of men. She is very pregnant, but refuses to say when the baby is due, as she is afraid she may then be sent home to rest. She is on her way to work one morning when a labour pain grips her. A friend helps to deliver the baby in the open on the river bank. The news is rushed to her husband with the impi. After three daughters he has at last had a son. This day at least, Ntshaba is not

bad lucky. He sends a jubilant message to his wife: “My son will be called Mduka, because he belongs to Mdukatshani.”

“BUT WE CAN’T ENJOY, WE CAN’T ENJOY”

the women sit under the Bead Tree, wearing badges of war in their headdresses, tufts of wild asparagus for the Nomoya women, tufts of red cloth for Dimbi.

“We thought things were getting better,” says MaSobomvu Dladla,” because the induna said our husbands could start to sleep at home.”

Well no, not exactly the whole night. Just so long as it takers to um, er.....

“And we can’t enjoy, we can’t enjoy,” says MaSobomvu.” Not with the armed guard laughing at the door: “Hurry up! Hurry up! You’ve had your time! Finish! Hurry up!”

“But you’re better off than we are,” MaXimba Dladla is sharp with her. “Our husbands stay in the same impi as yours but they are not allowed to visit. We live too far.

It’s dangerous for them to come home at night.” Only the Msusampi valley women have marital privileges, and a single wife from Nomoya, MaMvelase Dladla. Her husband, Mahlofu, a team leader of ours, has been able to hide only 20 kilometres away.

The Nomoya women surround MaMvelase at the ferry one morning, angry accusing.

“We have to visit our husbands on the hill. We see their faces but we cannot sleep.

You tell your husband to come home and join the impi. Don’t laugh. We’re not joking.”

MaMvelase struggles to suppress her laughter. “I don’t visit my husband for that reason. I visit to take him food. He must also have food.”

“You take the food but you also sleep one night. It’s not far where he’s hiding but you don’t come back the same day.”

“Last time I slept,” MaMvelase admits,” but this time I’m coming back straight away.

You see – I’ll be back here this afternoon.”

The women eye her suspiciously, then burst out laughing.

“We must not fight for nothing.” MaMvelase is lying. They know they won’t see her back until the following day.

“Two months are not finished yet,” warns MaNtshaba Dladla, an older woman. “During the Duma-Dladla impi we stayed without our husbands for more than six months.

The Gosa said the impi didn’t want to see women, so we sent the girls to take the food. We didn’t even see their faces.”

MaMsithole grins. She was widowed when her husband Speti was killed in the fighting in 1978. “Tell your hearts you are widows now,’ she is cheerful. “You are going to be widows for the rest of the year.”

EXPERIENCED TEACHERS – 6 to 60 years old

“Two weeks I teach you and you can’t hear what I say,” Delisile Dladla (13) is near tears, and so are her students eight small children who have been struggling to master the technique of laying rubble on stonepacks.

Stonepacks are a simple aid to dramatic grass recovery, but they are not just pile of rubble, they are not as easy as they look. The discovery comes hard to defeated learner workers. “Rubbish. Rubbish. Pull out those stones and start again.”

In the past two months we have taken on another 80 reclamation workers, all of them being taught by the veterans of last year, including children like Ningi Dladla, at 6 the youngest of our teacher, or bigger girls like Delisile struggling to teach other children, and discovering in the process just how much they really know.

“It takes a long time to learn,” Natty Duma comforts one of the teams that has been stuck on the same line for days. “Last year I cried the same as you. MaMsithole was teaching me and I hated her. All the time she would say: That stone’s no good.

Take it out. That line’s bad. Break the line.”

“Oh we think we are stupid.”

“We are al stupid when we’re learning.”

In the 17 months since the first stone pack was laid bare places have been transformed by grasses, and novices start their training with a tour of our examples of before and after.

MAGICAL MEDICINES

Bangiwe Ntshaba tipped his sack onto the ground and Geoff Nichols gave an appreciative whistle. The sack was full of treasure – orchids and saffronwood, roots and leaves and bulbs and bark.

Ntshaba is a sangoma, a Zulu herbalist and diviner – Geoff a professional horticulturist with the Durban Municipality, and their meeting was not usually. All over Natal an odd mix of people have been getting together in the past year, drawn by a shared concern for the future of magico-medicinal plants in the wild.

“These plants have been in use of hundreds of years,” Dr. Tony Cunningham told a recent workshop in the Drakensburg, and although some plants are still readily available, others are rare and in short supply. In 1930 there were only two shops selling muti plants in Durban. Now there are more than 60.”

A row of izangomas nodded vigorous assent while Tony was talking, their beaded wigs swinging, inflated pig bladders aquiver on top of their heads. Also listening intently were black tribesmen and white farmers, missionaries, a KwaZulu MP, research scientists and conservation officer, as well as members of CAP’s staff.

Since April last year Tony has been based at the Institute of Natural Resources, Natal University, busy on an investigation into the herbal medicine trade in Natal/KwaZulu. It is a

trade in crisis, unable to meet the growing demand for plants that can only come from the wild.

According to Tony's first preliminary report:

- * An estimated 40 000 people in South Africa rely on the herbal medicine trade for a living.
- * An estimated 80 to 85% of the people in Soweto consult diviners and herbalists.
- * Nearly 100% of a random sample of black hospital patients in Natal made use of medicinal plants.
- * It is probable that there are more than 6 600 herbalists-diviners practicing in Natal alone.

‘The demand for plants is massive,’ says Tony, ‘and growing.’

For example, about half a million Natal blue scilla (Scilla natalensis) are used annually, dug from the wild. Each plant is probably 5 to 10 years old.

Large scale cultivation is one answer to the supply problem, and that is where Geoff Nichols comes in. with the resources and back-up of the Durban Municipality, Geoff is establishing an experimental nursery for traditional magico-medicinal plants.

And it is at the nursery that he and Ntshaba met recently, when CAP staff went visiting to learn more about cultivation. For Ntshaba is one of four men being funded by the Ford Foundation to experiment with managing the Mdukatshani woodland for its resources of firewood, timber and medicine.

Ntshaba's sack contained samples of some of the resources still found on the farm, such as saffronwood, Cassine transvaalensis, a species so popular that it is being debarked wherever it grows in Natal. On Mdukatshani, however, it remains abundant and almost unscathed.

SEGEEZA STARTS SCHOOL AT 45

“Eh he he. I'm Standard One now,” Segeeza Dladla beams his triumph. “You think I never went to school? I've come from school now. I'm Standard One.”

The staff give him a cheer.

“You don't start school in Standard One,” tease the girls. “You start in Class One. Then there's Class Two.”

“No. I'm Standard One,” Segeeza is insistent, and he goes about his work chanting: “Standard One. I'm Standard One now.”

Segeeza is one of the members of CAP staff attending short courses at the Midlands Centre for Further Education – the only training that is offered to illiterate men who lack English too. In January Segeeza and Qalokwakhe Mkhize, both leaders of fencing teams, spent a week learning what they did and did not know about fencing.

On Mkhize's return he was dragged into the impi, so Segeeza, alone, is Professor of Fencing, teaching women and girls how to erect a good fence.

His training has one drawback however. Wherever he goes about the farm he complains about the quality of existing fences. He wants to pull them all down and start again. "If my teacher saw a fence like that," he says sternly, "I would fail Standard One."

In February Mbekwa Majozi, Nkanyane Ngubane and Mphephethi Masondo earned diplomas after a week's welding course at the Centre, and staff are booked for further studies on irrigation and cattle.

SOME EXPERTS ON EXPERT OFFER EXPERT ADVICE

Two summers ago the Mdukatshani gardens began to run short of water. There were too many gardeners for the dip-your-bucket little dams. With puff-and-pant energy gardens tend to stay small, for ambition wilts fast under a 40 degree sun.

Because this is The Age of Energy Research, however, we anticipated no problems when we set out to find an energy expert to design a better system of irrigation.

Two summers, two consulting engineers, and two energy researchers alter...

It was still puff-and-pant energy that was watering the gardens. Our problems had been too small, too cheap, too unimportant – or perhaps just too far away – to command expert attention.

We were planting drought-resistant crops for another hot, dry summer when Roger Davis of the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources offered to try and help.

His scheme, he insists, is definitely not expert. However it is inexpensive, experimental, and planned in phases to allow us to correct mistakes.

As experts on experts we know in advance it is going to work, and here's our expert advice to others in our situation: forget about expert advice if it is just words on paper. Instead find a man like Roger who is not going to run away.

THE END OF TIME

In a valley without clocks, everyone tells the time by the dust trail of Giyana Ramkison's bur. Or they used to. Since January, when there were two hold-ups just weeks apart, the bus has stopped running and the valley has lost time.

Giyana Ramkison started working Msinga bus routes in 1958.

"I'm an Mthembu," he used to say. "I belong to Mtembuland." And he did. Everybody knew Giyana, and there was little about Mtembuland he did not hear aired aloud on his bus – gossip, rumour, news, romance.

Giyana never carried a gun until last year, when a brother was held up on the Mhlangana run. At Christmas a conductor was shot dead on the Muden run. Weeks later a driver was shot in the hand on the same run. Then it was Giyana's turn. On January 6 he was held up 5 km from Mdukatshani. He grabbed for the gun at his feet, fired three shots, and the men ran away. A few days later three men stepped out of some thick bush and tried to wave him down. He drove on. On January 23 he recognized one of these men climbing onto the bus at our farm gate. He was unhappy and alert, almost ready for the hold-up when it came at the next stop along the road. This time the conductor was shot in the stomach, while a bullet just missed

Giyana, lodging in his seat. Again he fired at his attackers, and one is reported to have died from the injury.

“But I want to live,” says Giyana, so the bus marked with bulletholes now sits in his yard. It is just one of five that have had to be taken off the roads recently by a family that started bus services in the district in 1932.

And while the buses sit idle – all along our roads people sit idle too. Sometimes they wait all day for an occasional passing taxi.

THE BONES QUEUE WIDOWS

It looks like a funeral procession, this line of Bomvu women, all dressed in black. They sit, withdrawn and still, on their lumpy sacks in the Bones Queue, waiting their turn at the scale. Some of the black cloth is new. Some, like MaZungu Tshali’s, is worn and dusty.

MaZungu Tshali is a large, quiet woman in her sixties. She is a war widow, but the black she is wearing is not for her husband. Recently her five sons were killed, shot in a Johannesburg hostel, all on the same day. She has no other children.

The Bones Census is a record of tragedy. MaDinduna Dlamini’s 14-year-old daughter died when she was caught in crossfire. Zondeni Dlamini’s father was killed last week. MaSpakaza Tshali’s husband was shot on Friday.

Although shortage of funds curtailed the bones exchange last year, a total of 1854 people earned 35 198 kgs of maize for 40 960 kgs of bones, which were sold to a bones merchant at Warrenton, in the Cape.

SIX YEAR FOR ROBBERY

Jabulani Khoza has been sentenced to six years imprisonment for the Mdukatshani robbery in May 1985. Appearing recently before Mr. B.J. Willemse in the Estcourt Regional Court, he was also found guilty on charges of attempted murder, and illegal possession of a firearm. The sentences will run concurrently to make an effective six years in jail. Khoza is already in jail serving six years for an earlier robbery, and is standing trial on charges of a third robbery.

THE ECONOMIES OF LAZINESS

No mealies – only cash on pay day. The bombshell announcement brought a deputation to the CAP committee.

“If you pay us cash instead of mealies,” they protested, “it’s the same as if you cut our pay in half.”

With CAP’s driver in hiding, however, there was no way to send the big lorry to Greytown to fetch mealies, so for a month it had to be cash, used to buy mealie meal once again from the store.

“Money and mealie meal are finished quickly,” the women complained. “Mealies make many kinds of food, samp and rice and stiff porridge and gruel. Mealies go further.”

Bhekuyise Ngxongo gave a short. “The reason mealies go further is because you women are so lazy. You’re too lazy to grind that you never grind enough.” There’s laughter for Ngxongo’s right.

“If you tell a child to fetch mealiemeal, she comes back with a full dish,” agreed MaNdlovu Mvelase. “But when it is mealies she has to grind, the dish is only half.”

“The makotis (the brides) are so lazy to grind, that the food is always finished when you go back to the pot,” says somebody else.” But mealiemeal is easy, so the pot stays full and gets thrown to the dogs. And then another pot gets cooked in the afternoon.”

“And we don’t eat the mealiemeal that is burnt at the bottom of the pot,” MaDladla Skakane joins the laughter at the merits of laziness,” but when it’s mealies there’s so little that I’m hungry for the scrapings.”

RAINFALL

The total rainfall for December, January and February was 333 mm – against a total of only 210 for the same period last year.

Total rainfall 1986: 584,5 m Total rainfall 1985: 596,5 mm

BEAD SALES for the past financial year totaled more than R160 000.

MDUKATSHANI,
P. O. Box 26,
TUGELA FERRY,
3504
JUNE 1987

“People are killing one another at such a high tempo that a situation has arisen that can be described as a murder epidemic in modern times.”

Professor G.L. Ndabandaba

A MURDER EPIDEMIC

In the past three months

- * Three members of the CAP Farm Committee have been murdered.
- * Chief Induna of the Mcunus and CAP Chairman, Petrus Majozi, has spent seven weeks under armed guard following threats on his life.
- * Chief Induna of the Mtembus, and CAP committee member, Fahlaza Sokhela, was nearly killed when he was shot in the neck at close range.
- * Thirty five men have been killed in three separate conflicts that touch the farm.
- * More than 200 people have been left homeless after raiding impis burnt out 115 huts at Msusampi village neighbouring on Mdukatshani.
- * A member of staff, Kondad Ntshaba, has been seriously injured, shot in the back.

HARDEN YOUR LIE

In March Msinga makes front pages and the national TV news when 21 Mtembus die in an inter-clan clash.

“We had a helicopter there on Saturday. We stopped a fight on Saturday,” says Colonel Chris Jonker, Deputy Director of the Police Criminal Investigation Division; Pietermaritzburg.

But it is in the dawn light of Sunday morning that the Ngcengeni impi blunders onto the hiding place of the Ngubo impi among the boulders of a steep, wooded hill. Before the gunfire dies away women are running from their doorways. A thin, high wailing begins to drift like smoke across the valley.

Four hours police vans wait on the track below the hill while relays of women stagger in with corpses slung in their purple and blue shoulder cloths, their flannel bhayis.

“But there was a lot of blood, and the bodies were heavy, so the bhayis kept tearing says Magabuza Ngxongo when she arrives at Mdukatshani the next day to tell her husband Bhekuyise Ngxongo, what has happened. Although Ngxongo, our manager, lives at Ngubo, he has not been home since the fighting broke out.

There have been bigger fights at Msinga, with more dead, but only in inter-tribal conflicts. This time Mtembus were fighting Mtembus. The death toll sets a record for a fight between wards.

While Ngxongo is questioning his wife, they hear gunfire from across the river in another inter-ward conflict: Nomoya and Dimbi. In the gardens the women stand still listening. "We thought it would be better here," says Tryfina Mnguni. "We came to the gardens today to get away from the firing at home. But here it is worse."

"Home" is the Mcunu area adjoining Mdukatshani's top farm where Mcunus are fighting Mcunus. And where Petrus Majozi has just caught sight of a group of armed men. He veers off the road and into the bush and sends a woman to summon the men.

"Why are you carrying weapons?" He is angry. These are Mnqamkantaba boys, nextdoor neighbours. They have no reason to join this war.

"Yesterday the Nduna guys hit one of our boys going to school."

"Who is this boy? Mkhize's son. I will speak to him." Majozi perches on a boulder, arguing. The young men sit on the ground, polite, deferential. Their tongues are soft with assent. But their guns? They have come to Majozi empty-handed. Their guns are hidden.

Majozi's thoughts are alert, uneasy, as he resumes his walk to the farm. And his disquiet grows that afternoon when he questions the Mkhize boy.

"Did you see anything on your way to school yesterday?"

"I saw the Nduna impi, and was frightened and ran away."

"You were not hit?"

"No."

"Harden you lie," Majozi tells the Mnqamkantaba impi. "Harden you lie. Nobody hit that boy."

"Au Baba Majozi. The boy is afraid of you. He is afraid to tell the truth." The deference is still there. The young men have come when they have been called. But soon lies and truth are to be muffled by gunfire. For a day and a night there is firing.

Again Majozi summonses the young men to the umvithi tree. He waits alone. That night he is the only man who sleeps at Mnqamkantaba.

"And today there are no men anywhere, young or old," he says when he arrives at the farm. He cannot risk another night at home. He will sleep on the farm, in hiding.

WHY?

A day later the first-ever symposium on faction fighting opens in Durban. Organized by Professor G.L.Ndabandaba of the Criminology Department of the University of Zululand, it draws a gathering of academic and administrators, mine officials and social scientists, police and magistrates. Chief M.G. Buthelezi, the Chief Minister of KwaZulu is one of the speakers, as is Judge Andrew Wilson, and the Attorney General of Natal, Mr. M.C.W. Imber.

The symposium produces questions, rather than answers, however, and there is no agreement on the most obvious question of all: what is a faction?

Is it hereditary?

a sport?

self-help justice?

senseless savagery?

war?

treason?

gang fighting?
a crime?
a smokescreen for many crimes?
a cultural phenomenon?
a social phenomenon endemic to Natal?
a political problem?
a murder epidemic?

“There is not even a ‘conventional wisdom’ on the topic,” says Professor John Argyle, head of the Department of African Studies at Natal University.

And Professor Ndabandaba comes close to expressing the only consensus when he says: “The occurrence of faction fighting is nothing but mystification. There is only a fog when it comes to this aspect of criminal violence.”

IT TAKES ...

three men to make a riot
four to make an armed assembly
five to make a breach of the peace
eight to make a faction fight, fighting with or without weapons

“Faction fights are not a serious offence.” That is what the Attorney General, H. Escombe, tells the Natal Legislative Assembly in 1896 when he introduces an “Act to Provide for the Trial of Faction Fighting Among Natives.”

Yes – the law is not an attempt to prevent the fights.

“That would be as impossible as trying to stop the ordinary course of human nature,” says the Colonel Treasurer, G.M. Sutton. “I look upon faction fights as a sort of safety valve. If these people did not have an opportunity sometimes to have a shinny of that kind we would probably have them indulging in something worse.”

By 1900 there are 1 300 convictions a year for fights in Natal. Ten years later there are 4 800. Fifty years later the tally is running at about 6 000 a year.

SUSPECT STATISTICS

“Why don’t faction fights become extinct?” asks somebody at the symposium.

Fights may not be extinct, but they are certainly endangered, judging by current statistics. The present Attorney General, Mr. Imber, says he has only seen a couple of cases of faction fighting since he took office three years ago.

However “it is estimated that a man a week is killed in Zulu faction fights,” says Professor Ndabandaba.

While according to Brigadier SM Mathe, Deputy Commissioner of KwaZulu Police: “In the five years ending March 31, 1986, 155 cases were reported in which 411 persons were killed and 486 injured.”

Sometimes today’s fighters are charged murder or armed assembly. Sometimes they are not charged with anything at all. Court records are not the place to find facts on the incidence of fighting.

As to the death toll figures: Who does the body count? And where? And when? On a battlefield after a major clash? A Ngcengeni – Ngubo fight is a rare event. Today most men are killed in hit-and-run raids, and they died in the cities as well as areas like Msinga. That is why Mdukatshani’s name-and-place records are always higher than official figures.

Recent Bone queue census figures, for example, reflect the extraordinary experience of death among Msinga families. The most recent queues produce:

- * 126 families who have lost 379 men in fights in the past five years.
- * 348 families who have lost 713 men
- * 264 families who have lost 414 men

MSINGA: Special Measures for a Special Area

Msinga is the center of faction fights in South Africa.

“And a faction fight at Msinga is not the same as a faction fight on the South Coast,” Chief Buthelezi tells the symposium.

A special law exists to help curb Msinga fighting: Proclamation 103 of 1975 which provides for 90 days detention for anyone suspected of being connected with a crime of violence.

Is it unusual to have special legislation for one area?

“Yes,” says Mr. Justice Wilson. “It is unusual. However sometimes emergency measures are needed in an area and Msinga is such an area.”

“You cannot rely on ordinary measures at Msinga,” agrees Mr. Tom Strachan, a former Msinga magistrate. “I had some rather frightening experiences while I was there. When you understand the situation at Msinga, the violence and the killings, then you have to meet that situation with harsh measures.”

But are the measures harsh enough? Do the police and army show any real interest in wiping out the fights? Asks Advocate C.W.S. Mncwango, Chairman of the KwaZulu Public Service Commission. “Or do they fuel and legalise this form of guerilla warfare?

Special police force units are not found for faction fight duty. Emergency regulations for faction fights have yet to be proclaimed.

“We are painfully aware of the problems at Msinga,” replies Colonel Jonker. “I can say emphatically that there is not a rural area that is more vigorously patrolled. We have a Firearm Squad that confiscates an average of 50 weapons a month. We have a Stock Theft unit. We have three riot unit patrols. We have roadblocks on a regular basis. We had a helicopter there on Saturday....”

Police have died intervening in fights, Brigadier Mathe reminds the symposium. “Whilst a faction fight is in progress, police action, by the very nature of the problem, is limited basically to observer status.”

Observer status. That is all symposium delegates can claim too. They are outsiders. There are no Msinga chiefs present, no tribal leaders, no fighters. There is no inside view of the fighting, and the lack is noted again and again.

“Move from here – and we start fighting”

On the day the symposium opens in Durban a rumour is flashed across the Mcunu area of Msinga. Petrus Majozi has been killed by the Nduna impi. Convoys of armed men begin to converge on the royal homestead of Chief Simakade Mcunu.

Clouds save Majozi’s life. Clouds and the camera class.

Because our team leaders lack the education to write reports, they are learning, instead how to use photographs to show the progress of a year, BEFORE and AFTER shots of gullies and grass. For a day they have been busy with the camera, taking turns, eyes screwed with effort, hands shaking, every click greeted with cheers and applause. However it is slow going and the class overlaps into a second day, a cloudy day.

“Wait for the sun,” says Mathanda Mbatha. “The clouds will go. Wait for the sun.”

It is Majozi’s day to hear cases at the chief’s court, but he delays, wanting to finish the photographs, waiting for the sun. And that is why he is not riding the taxi that is stopped by five armed men on the main road to the chief’s.

“Where’s Majozi?” the gunmen demand, looking inside. If the Nduna impi cannot settle scores with the Mnqamkantaba impi, they might as well settle with Majozi, the chief induna who lives at Mnqamkantaba. If he is neutral – why has he done nothing to stop the Mnqamkantaba boys from mobilizing?

Msinga has few roads and fewer telephones, but within hours of the hold-up alarms are sounding right across Mcunu country. Guns are pulled from hiding places, and men wave down passing vehicles, or set off on foot to the chief’s.

The chief is away at Ulundi. When his wife hears about the hold-up, however, she sends messengers running to summon tribal indunas, and a driver speeds in search of Majozi.

“If Nduna kill Majozi, all the wards will join to kill Nduna,” says the driver when he finds Majozi at last, safe on the farm.

“A man is killed once,” Ngxongo is practical. “Don’t go back the road you came. Take long way round through Weenen.”

That day Majozi is an onlooker at his death. It is a chance given to few men – a glimpse of their place in the hearts of others.

Old men arrive with spears and sticks. Young men come uniformed, but hide their firearms outside the chief's walls. When Majozi is sighted, still alive, the men clap with joy. It is unprecedented, this display of affection for a beloved chief induna.

"There is to be no fighting," Majozi tells the assembled men that afternoon when they sit together for a discussion in the royal cattle kraal. Since the beginning of the year 41 Mcunus have died in Mcunu fighting.

"Too many have already died for nothing," says Majozi.

The young men are disappointed. They have argued with Majozi before, many of them, sitting on the hills with impis. All year Majozi and the chief have been negotiating peace terms. They have lost count of the hillside meetings with impis.

"We want to fight," says a spokesman for the young men." Now. We are all of us here because we want to fight now." There is a low roar of agreement.

"You cannot fight because I am still in life."

"If we wait, you die, and you die once."

"No fighting," Majozi repeats. "There must be no more fighting."

Today he is a prisoner, however, and a jail is not the place to issue ultimatums.

"You can stop us fighting," says one of the indunas," but then you have to agree you will not go away from here. You are not to leave the chief's place. If you move from here – we start fighting. You must stay here until we say you can go."

Then Chief Simakade Mcunu arrives after dark, he finds his home surrounded by armed men. Some doze on their coats in the cattle kraal. In the old wrecked bus the young men continue to murmur rebelliously – eager to fight. Throughout the night there are wakeful guns. Nobody does much sleeping.

Majozi stays under armed guard for the next seven weeks. He is allowed to hear selected cases. He is allowed to meet selected people. The royal quarters, however, remain his jail and he is not allowed to go home.

He is still at the chief's when hears of the deaths of his colleagues on the CAP Farm Committee, MaHelezi Dladla and Mahlofu Dladla.

"Au Ngxongo – I want to come back"

The sound carries across the winter pools. Ngxongo looks up from the pump on the riverbank. Across the water MaHelezi Dladla raises a hand in greeting.

"Come closer," Ngxongo teases. "I can't hear you. You're too far." Both men laugh.

The far bank is a war zone, and MaHelezi is part of an impi – if the crèche-of-old-men counts as part of the impi. For 17 weeks the older men have been sitting around on the hills, guarded by four of the fighters. MaHelezi's bright orange overall shows he's a backline hanger-on, only in action when he's running away.

"I remember my goats," MaHelezi calls. "Look after my goats nicely Ngxongo."

MaHelezi is manager of the Mdukatshani goatflock, or he was until trouble started and he had to desert his job. From the hills, however, he can look down on the farm, and every morning he watches the goats being milked, then trotting off to browse.

“I cry when I see the goats,” MaHelezi calls again. “Au Ngxongo I’m coming back. This impi is nearly finished.”

Ngxongo is not sure. The Nomoya-Dimbi fight does not follow impi rules, and he is often puzzled. Take the flirting. The Nomoya impi sit across the river from the Mdukatshani gardens. It is a long way from Dimbi and they feel safe there.

“Ooo ooo ooo” they call out to the girls laying the new pipe.

The girls giggle and stop what they are doing.

“Ooo ooo ooo” they call back. The halloos are thrown back and forth, while Ngxongo listens, disgusted. War is serious. When he was fighting no woman was allowed within sight of the men.

A hot summer afternoons the youngest soldiers swim in the rapids. Once, when a flood brings hundreds of oranges bobbing on the waves the impi yell to our goatherds! Go and catch those oranges and bring them here!”

Mdukatshani remains neutral ground, however, where women and children from all faction work together every day. The women help to interpret the gunfire, the stray shots, the volleys. “Don’t worry,” Mangalisile Duma reassures everyone one morning after repeated bursts of firing. “The guns got wet in the rain last night. The guys are fixing them. They’re just testing.”

The women count every shot.

“They’re wasting our bullets,” MaDladla Mvelase is furious. While the men fight the women do togt labour. Their earnings pay for the war. “It costs two rand for one bullet. We pay the money for the bullets and they waste them for nothing.”

However the men count bullets too. Once evening the two impis meet in a gun battle across the river. Ngxongo and Natty Duma stand on the patio and watch.

“It’s too dark!” yells a Dimbi soldier at last. “We’re wasting our bullets!”

“We’ll meet you tomorrow!” he shouts across to the other side.

Much of the Nomoya-Dimbi conflict takes place in full view of the farm, so all work stops when a helicopter swops low over the valley one morning. The Nomoya impi has been sitting on a kopje in the early sunshine. Men scatter and run. There are cheers and jeers and laughter from our side of the river.

“They must catch them! Urge the women. “If they catch them they will stop this impi.”

However the helicopter is after dagga, not men and it turns around and flies away.

Next time there are tow helicopters, however, and policemen are dropped off to chase after impi. For hours the helicopters search summits and slopes and krantzes, hanging low over village yards, skimming the grasses on the plain. At nightfall the helicopters are still busy, glowing dragonflies that hover and glide and settle on the dark rim of the hills.

The helicopters flush out the impis. At Nomoya the ferryboat is commandeered by men with rifles. Others swim across the river with revolvers tied in shirts on their heads. For the next few days the men will be sheltering in the bush of white farms.

The helicopters, however, only pick up 20 men. They are charged with armed assembly at the Weenen Magistrate's court. Lawyers negotiate bail, and within days the men are back with their impis.

Gcina Duma, a Dimbi leader, is still in jail, however, when five Nomoya men sexually molest his wife, MaMbatha Duma, a bead woman. Ngxongo is grave.

"You must never touch a woman," he says. "Now this impi will be bad."

The Dimbi army retaliates at night, surrounding the Msusampi village, throwing petrol on thatched roofs, then setting them alight. The river gleams red with the fires. Smoke obliterates the moon. Within a fortnight there is another raid that destroys more homes. The second time, however, the women are better prepared. For days they have been wading the river, carrying their belongings on their heads, looking for places for storage. Little piles of debris gather in our yard. A bed. A table. Bundles and boxes. Grass sleeping mats.

Grass ... it is the loss of grasses that is the real calamity. The earthen walls remain standing in the village.

"We live in the walls now," says MaDladla Mvelase. Forlorn, dazed, she spends the days in the ruins of her old home, cooking inside the blackened walls. Walls can be repaired, but the roof.... Msinga has no thatch.

"My two daughters worked the whole year on white farms to get grass for one house," says MaSobomvu Dladla. Grass for a roof costs years of work and savings.

A NIGHTTIME DESERTER

"Mahlofu loves his wife too much, too much," says MaXimba Dladla. "Twice a week he sleeps with her. Twice a week. Nobody else sleeps twice a week in this impi."

There's not much privacy in wartime. Everyone keep count.

In the first months Mahlofu is safe in hiding 20 kilometres away, and everyone watches MaMbombela setting off to visit him.

"We have to visit our husbands on the hill," the other women are accusing. "We see their faces but cannot sleep. You tell your husband to come home and join the impi.

Don't laugh. We are not joking.

"I don't visit my husband for that reason." MaMbombela struggles to suppress her laughter.

"I visit to take him food. He must also have food." Yet everytime she goes with food she manages to stay overnight.

The Nomoya impi eventually demand that Mahlofu return, however, and on Good Friday he is back, puffing up the hill to join the crèche, unfit from weeks of hiding.

War is for daylight hours, however, not for the night. While the impi shiver under cold autumn stars, Mahlofu becomes a deserter, going home to stay with his wife.

Twenty years of marriage and he is still giddy with love for her, this burly man with the big moustache.

“And we can see you love your husband too much, too much,” observes Mhlakwaan Dladla when MaMbombela clammers the hill one day with a message for Mahlofu. He has not been home for a week and there is sickness... the soldiers are laughing before she has finished. “One week and you can’t wait anymore?” They release Mahlofu. “Baba, go with this wife of yours.”

The last week Mahlofu sits at home all day, and every night his wife lays down their sleeping mat and unrolls the blankets.

“Prepare our sleeping place,” he tells her yet again once evening. He is sitting on a bench chatting to MaHelezi. The two have been friends since boyhood, and like to move about together.

“Not tonight,” MaMbombela is unhappy. The induna has warned everyone he has information of a Dimbi raid.

“Didn’t you hear what the induna said?” she pleads. “Why can’t listen?”

Mahlofu is angered at his wife’s dithering. “Prepare our sleeping place,” he shouts.

“Do what I tell you.”

Moments later there’s gunfire from the doorway. MaHelezi and Mahlofu topple from the bench. They are killed instantly.

CRY ONE FOR ANOTHER

“This is not the only place that is like this,” says Bishop Ken Hallowes, the CAPFARM Trust chairman when he visits the farm the day after yet another man has been killed.

“It is the same in the townships. It is the same everywhere. But here you mix, you try to stay together.”

Around him, perched on bags of bones, sit about 200 women and children from the CAP work teams. This morning they were carrying food to different impis. Now they listen with strained, tired faces.

The occasion is a part – a surprise birthday party for Petrus Majozi and Natty Duma with gifts of words to tell them how much they are loved. And the loving words are not just for Natty and Majozi – they extend to everyone.

“Cry for one another,” Bishop Hallowes speaks quietly of war, of loving rather than hating, of the need for the women to remain open to each other’s hearts.

“We will never forget this day,” the women repeat as they disperse for home. “Until the day we die we will never forget.”

When they follow their separate hill paths that evening, they will carry the day’s words with their billycans to the men of the opposing impis.

A PEN TO WRITE GRASS ON THE HILLS

Driving the cattle, checking the fences, doing woodland patrols – with three impis making sporadic use of the Mdukatshani woodland it is difficult to traverse the farm without encountering groups of armed men.

The goatherds are put to flight when they meet up with a party of soldiers at the dip at dusk. “Don’t run!” September Mncube screams at his companions as the men line up on both sides of the track and he hears bolts clicking.

“Us! We are the boys,” he shouts desperately. “Us! We are the boys!”

Work on the farm goes on more or less as usual. Because the war has taken the men on the fencing teams, twelve girls are chosen to learn fencing. They look like a chorus line, jaunty dancers with their see-through vests and short-short towels tied around their buttocks, tribal style.

Hundreds of metres of stonepacks continue to wind along bare hillsides as women and children learn reclamation techniques.

“I have never used a pen,” says MaThusi Mbele, a pretty tribal wife. “I have never been to school. But here for the first time I have a pen for training. I have a pen to write grass on the hills.”

In April the workteams sit in the shade of the big meeting tree for a two-day course on leadership training run by Siphso Nkosi of Wilgespruit. Although Siphso has some high powered qualifications he has developed a fan following on the farm for his ability to make complicated subjects accessible to people with no education at all.

It’s only because Siphso is to be lecturer that Mphephethi Masondo and Mathanda Mbatha set off for the big city to study “financial management”. It’s an exercise in courage for men who have never been to school.

At the Midlands Centre for Further Education members of staff acquired training in irrigation and stockmanship.

PRINCESS MICHAEL OF KENT and ELTON JOHN

... have just added their names to the list of celebrities who have bought our beads.

MAKHANYA MCUNU

“That’s a fine picture of Ntuli. But who’s this next to him?”

We laugh at Makhanya Mcunu. “That’s you!”

He grins at the photograph, full of interest. Where you grow up without mirrors you are a stranger to your face.

A gentle shining spirit lives under Mcunu’s old straw hat. He is too gentle for the women he tries to supervise in the gardens; too gentle for the goat boys who get the better of him; and much too gentle for the executive committee. He has to be threatened to silence when there’s disciplining to be done because he is always making excuses for the accused.

Yet he is not a diffident man. He is full of curiosity and so at ease with himself that he wanders into wealthy living rooms in his old blue overalls and his tyre sandals, shaking hands, beaming, sticking his head down corridors and round corners.

Then he takes off his sandals and sits barefoot, curling his toes. He may be silent at meetings – but everyone remembers the man who sits without shoes.

Although Mcunu is never embarrassed – his colleagues groan when they see him strolling off, oblivious of the boundaries of society’s no-man’s-land.

“Mcunu” Majozi shakes his head, laughing. What can anyone do with Mcunu?

Mcunu grows up on white farms, and farming is all he ever wants to do. The garden he takes up at Mdukatshani is stony ground, and because he believes “you have to dig deep” he toils at his spade, clearing the rocks, packing them into enclosing walls. It is years before he has his depth of loose earth.

Mcunu lives at Macwinini, a long way from the farm and the fighting. He is asleep at home when he is shot and killed by four men from the Nomoya impi. And it is a mistake. He dies because he is mistaken for somebody else.

MDUKATSHANI,
P. O. Box 26,
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3504
October 1987

“Youngsters were indoctrinated at the ages of 6 to 11, said Major Oosthuizen. They would run behind the impi and where they saw a body gloaming with sweat in the midday sun, would plunge their barbed fishing spears into the stomach and rip out the intestines.”

Natal Mercury

IMPI CHILDREN

“Hey induna! You’re a liar!
What a liar! A bad liar!”

In the darkness the boys are chanting again, shuffling their feet on the cowdung floor.
“Bad lies. There are bad lies
They cover up the case
A path is opened for the lies”

Usually Gwegwe Duma (7) struts in front of the line of boys, leading the chants, Gwegwe, the littlest boy with the crooked leg and the authority that marks him out as an **igagu**, an **umhayizi**, an expert at music and dance, the voice that will urge the warriors. He has never learnt the words he sings when he takes the cattle out to graze in the mornings. He is so small that the men pick him up and swing him over bushes, bantering, full of affection. For they defer to the gift of this stunted child who was born with the songs of the hills inside him.

Only Frans Mvelase is deaf to the music. Or he wishes he were deaf.
“I can’t sleep,” he is furious as he protests once again at the noise. “And when I tell the boys to shut up, they laugh at me. How can I work in the morning when this terrible noise keeps me awake late at night?”

Natty Duma pretends to be severe with the boys.
“Thulani! Be quiet! Didn’t you hear Mvelase?” but she grins as Frans retreats, and eventually he moves elsewhere, out of earshot of that crowd of children.

It’s a crowd that overflows when the river floods the crossing, a crowd that ebbs away as soon as the flood had passed. But behind the water there are bits of debris remaining. Gwegwe stays because his mother’s been a drunkard since his father died in the fighting. Mayekeza Dladla’s father was injured. Mabuka Dladla’s father was shot and carried away. Shida Dladla’s father was killed. They are impi children all of them, experienced in war.

Their rifles tell you they’re experienced. Put together out of planks and tubing, the guns shoot straw bullets with force across the yard. The boys go everywhere in groups, armed.
“But you don’t need guns when you’re doing the milking,” Natty suggests.

“Au aunty – there’s danger everywhere,” Nkosi is serious.

In the evenings guerilla bands of boys hunt each other across the farmyard, taking cover behind walls, metal scrap and bags of bones. Then a bullet pierces Mpikayipheli Sithole’s eye – Not long ago he lost the other eye when it hooked on a piece of wire in the goatkraal.

Overnight the war games stop.

“What happened to your guns?” Natty asked eventually, curious.

“We nearly killed Mpikayipheli. We see that our guns can kill.”

The singing starts with Gwegwe. “Ngiyabuza bafana ukuthi....” It is an old hunting chant that he calls out one evening when everyone is sitting around.

“I ask you, boys, what are the horns for?”

There is silence. Giggles follow. Nobody knows the response. Gwegwe gets busy as instructor, bullying the bigger boys, loosening the rhythms knotted in their threats.

“Left foot. Twice. Like this,” he is severe as he pushes their clumsy feet.

The guerilla bands become musicians’ bands. With coffee tins and tubing the boys make **isigidalis**, banjos, and tinny tunes accompany them everywhere they go.

“That’s why I’m complaining,” says MaSithole Dladla, once of the garden teachers.

“They take their isigidalis to the gardens, and when we send them to fetch the seedlings they don’t come back. They’re playing music and dancing.”

Natty stands at the gate with MaMSithole, in wait for the boys. They come past strumming.

“Nkosi,” she calls sweetly, “can you bring your isigidali here? There’s something I want to see.” He hands it over.

“All of you,” Natty is still smiling as she gathers in the banjos one by one.

Then she scowls: “OK. Go and work. Go to the gardens. I’m going to give these isigidalis to other children to enjoy.”

“Aunty...” the boys begin to wail. “Please aunty.”

“I want to see who tries to use my isigidali,” Nkosi is threatening.

“Be quiet. Get to work.”

When the boys have gone to two women burst out laughing. With arms full of battered instruments they go to a corner of the small goat camp where banjos are hidden behind some bushes.

There are about 150 children who belong to the gardening groups, digging and watering and planting little plots under the supervision of the gardening mothers. And while they work, huge black pots stand on an open fire, heating water for their midday cups of tea.

“You know what the newspapers say about Msinga children?” Natty likes setting off explosions, and this one she has timed deliberately for tea. “They say our children follow the impi with spears and stab the bodies.”

“Lalelani webantu!” MaJay Duma is a thin, passionate woman always on a short fuse. She blows up at once. “Who said that? Who said that? Never! I will stand in court and swear it. Never! I will stand before the police and swear it!”

Wide-eyed children watch the storm from a distance, unable to hear, alarmed at the disturbance.

“They say children follow their fathers in the impis?” MaDladla Sikhakhane is disbelieving, vehement. “From the day I was born such a thing has never happened.”

“Never. Never. Never. Never,” MaMvelase Zwane’s anger is quieter. “We all have children. We all have boys. They don’t know anything. They don’t know what their fathers do on the mountain. They stay with us. They stay with their mothers.”

“The big boys, we wrap them in our amabhayis, our shoulder cloths, at night, like girls, and they sleep hidden among the women,” MaJay’s bangles flash as she gesticulates, on her feet.

Mathanda Mbatha, one of the men, so drawn by the outbursts.

“What is wrong? What has happened?” then he is also disturbed. “That is not the truth. When there is impi it is better if people come and see for themselves what our children are doing.”

That evening Natty grins, recounting the explosion. “And the story hasn’t finished today,” she says. “Everyone is cross. Even tomorrow they will be shouting in the gardens.”

The hidden banjos remain hidden. Natty pretends not to notice the boys searching for bits of tubing. It is a scarce resource, and without it there can be no music.

On the third day she relents, leading the boys down the road to the small goat camp. They sprint joyfully to reclaim their lost isigidalis.

The tinny tunes start up again. The boys’ repertoire is growing.

“Satan is on earth – and in heaven, he’s there too,” Mayekeza composes his first song.

“You catch my belt,

You catch my secret lover.”

Some of the songs are traditional, but whether they are old or new, most of them come from Gwegwe. It is still Gwegwe who takes the lead, who stands out front, calling the chants, strutting up and down.

Tonight, however, Gwegwe is missing when Natty starts rounding up the boys for prayers at bedtime. She goes through the house, looking for him. At the door of the kitchen a hand pulls her back. It is Bhekuyise Ngxongo, sitting notionless in the dark.

“Wait. Lalela. Listen,” he whispers.

Gwegwe and Mabhuku are sitting at the fire on the kitchen floor.

When I grow up I am going to stay at the location, the township, “Gwegwe is saying.

“Why do you speak like that?” asks Mabhuku.

“My father died when there was impi,” Gwegwe is very quiet. “Now I am thinking – me too, I will die when there is an impi, and my children, they will also die.”

The boys sit in silence, “watching the flames, confronting the certainty of “ their own death.

“Gcinisile. That is the truth,” Mabhuku speaks at last. “Me too, I think I will go to a far place where there is no fighting.”

“There is no place that has no fighting,” says Gwegwe. “Only in town they fight with knives. If you don’t go out at night, nobody can stab you.”

“You know what I think,” Mabhuku has picked up a length of firewood, and now he leans on it and begins to hobble round the fire. “It’s better if there’s no impi until I am old. When I am a khehla walking with a stick, then the impi can start.”

“Ha!” Gwegwe scorns him. “Even if you’re old they kill you.”

But if I am old when they kill me I won’t be frightened. I am only frightened to carry a gun. One day I saw the men preparing their guns. I don’t like the things I saw.”

“You are frightened? Or you don’t like?” asks Gwegwe.

“Kokubili,” says Mabhuku. “Both. I am frightened and I don’t like also.”

“Mabhuku!” Gwegwe has remembered something. “Before my father died the police passed our home one day when my father was not there. They were carrying big guns and I said: My father has big guns, bigger than yours. My mother said: Thula! Thula! Be quiet. Be quiet!’ The police turned their heads but they didn’t hear me. I didn’t know the police arrested you for guns but that day my mother tome me. She said the police would catch my father and put him in jail and I would never see him anymore. She was waiting to tell father what I say to the police, but she didn’t tell him because that’s when he died.” Gwegwe has started crying.

“What would be better to you,” he says eventually, speaking through his tears.

“To have somebody hit you, night and day, never stop, just hit you and hit you – or carry a gun and fight with the impi?”

“It’s better to hit me. To hit me and hit me and hit me and hit me.”

Ngxongo gets up quietly in the darkness and moves away.

“I am torn,” he says. “My heart is rent. My heart is crying.”

He has no comfort for the boys sitting at the fire. All paths have one destination. All journeys are journeys to death.

AN ARMED ATTACK

In August there is an armed attack on the farmhouse at Mdukatshani. The telephone line is cut, and armed men block all approaches. What is it all about/ we are still busy guessing, though the answer seems to lie with Ngxongo.

Bhekuyise Ngxongo, the CAP Farm Manager, lives at Ngubo. That makes him an Ngubo man – a man without neutrality when Ngubo is at war, and since March Ngubo and Ngcengeni have been fighting.

Ngxongo tries to make a statement about his neutrality, openly staying on Mdukatshani, openly going about his work. On Bones Days he is at scale, weighing out mealies for women from both factions. He makes no attempt to hide his presence.

If being open means being neutral – it means being an easy target too. In July he is warned he is being hunted to even the tally in a war that has taken more than 50 lives. Within hour he has fled. We make no secret of his going.

A month later there are strangers on the farm paths.

“We are looking for stolen cattle,” the young men reply to questions.

“We have lost goats.”

“We are looking for the kitchen girl. There’s no kitchen girl here? We thought there was.”

The strangers seem to be hungry, for they beg porridge from the boys. If they are checking our movements and routine they have an easy task. We live openly.

On August 13 there's a disturbance among the cattle in the kraal in the middle of the night. When Vayizi Mtshali, our nightwatchman, goes to investigate, he is stoned. He runs to the house shouting: "Ma! Ma! A gun! A gun!" But there is no gun. It has seemed safer to live at Msinga unarmed.

Is the disturbance in the kraal a preliminary to check our return fire? Four nights later there is a noise in the carpark. This time Mtshali meets volleys of gunfire. He falls over in panic, climbs up and runs for the house. We try the 'phone to summon help from neighbours. The line is dead. It'll have to be on foot then, through a window, into the night, crawling away from the gunfire. But on that side too, there's a man in the dark, waiting behind a fence, and he fires twice when he hears movement. Drop and crawl to a bush. Seven long hours to outwait the night.

Up in the hills people lie awake, wondering what has happened, afraid to investigate. "With so much firing we knew there could be no life left," they say next morning.

Is the purpose of the attack to flush out Ngxongo, if he is still here? To frighten us, for having had him? With so much firepower – and so many men – who does nobody eventually break in?

The bones scale remains a meeting place for Ngubo and Ngcengeni. Mdukatshani is neutral, just not neutral enough.

There are now more nightwatchmen, to reinforce our neutrality. We are no longer living unarmed.

Msinga's rules prevail when you hold a gun to meet a gun. To hold a gun is common sense – so why feel we've been defeated?

THERE'S NOTHING DRY, WHEN YOU CRY, TO BLOW YOUR NOSE ON

It is two in the morning when the river begins to stream into the farmhouse. At daybreak the water is waist high and rising.

The files, the books.... Sizani Mbatha and Ntombi Dladla try to close the door against the incoming current so that they can rescue soggy papers, but the river forces the door. They swim back and forth across the room, kicking to stay afloat, hands above their heads clutching papers.

One by one the rescuers retreat. Mla Magasela carries Mphephethi Masondo from a windowsill. Then he lifts Natty, who is neck-deep in the kitchen. Sikiza Dladla is the last to scramble for high ground, but something catches his eye as he turns his back on the engulfing river. It's the orchid, the huge clump of *Ansellia gigantea* wrenched from its log, caught by the river. It dips in the waves, listing, its long sprays of yellow flowers like broken rigging. "The intelezi of our sangoma," Sikiza cries. "The magic plant of our diviner!" He plunges into the brown water, grabs at the orchid and tows it to shore. He has a fine sense of priorities.

It rains steadily, softly, without ceasing until a year's rain has fallen in six days. The once-in-a-century downpour devastates Natal, swamping towns, destroying bridges, taking lives.

Our losses are small, but we count them. For three days the Tugela River covers the house. When the water subsides there is dry land among the tree tops. The house is buried in silt, and so are fences, dams the goat kraal, the pump and engine.

Across the river the dagga gardens are stripped to rock and the valley loses its courting grounds, the bushes where the boys used to hang out at dusk to intercept girls coming to water. Once the squeals and laughter told you what was happening among the bushes. Now it is out in the open for all to see – the teasing grabs, the manoeuvres, the chases.

For two weeks, until we are able to buy a new ferryboat, there is no communication between the separate worlds on opposite banks. Not even shouts reach across.

When the river drops its level is deceptive, seeming lower than it is in its wide new bed. One of our men, Mkehle Dladla, decides to swim across for work. He is drowned when he is returning.

The silt cliffs along the river are six metres deep. We get digging – men, women, children, chairman, secretary and herboys. It's a long, long dig just to uncover essentials.

"This is a mine! We're in a mine! We're miners!" women cry from the depths of the cold dark shaft they are excavating in search of a buried wall.

Gradually familiar outlines emerge. The land drops. Tree tops rise above our heads again. And there is the first sign of our lost civilization – a muddy book has just surfaced on a spade. Wait a moment. Check before it's tossed away. It's "Climatic Change and Variability in South Africa," by P.D. Tyson.

CATCHING THE CHRISTMAS RUSH

The bead storeroom becomes a lagoon. A barbell survives two weeks in the mud in the room before it is found and finished off for supper. It's epic survival deserved a happy ending. Although Christmas-order-rush-time is a bad time for a flood, we have been keeping abreast of orders. Just. We may have no storage, no post, no telephone – but we have Roxanna Earle at Highflats handling customers, orders, messages, wrapping and posting. The earrings for Harrods will almost arrive on time.

IMPI DEATHS

Since the Pod and Bones Exchange started seven years ago 621 831 kgs of acacia pods have been brought to our scale, and 384 228 kgs of bones. The pedlars value the exchange for the mealies they carry home. We value it for the answers every pedlar brings to the scale. Drought? War? Dagga raids? The news from distant valleys is entered in our census books to mount up as statistics in a district of closed societies where statistics are unknown.

Direct questions about impi losses began six months ago, and the results have been a revelation, showing us that 75% of the families in the queues have lost an average of 2,2 men to Msinga fighting.

Celiwe Mtungwa is an impi statistic – a bride who became a widow on her wedding day, a maimed widow with an amputated leg and a stomach torn apart by bullets.

Then there's MaZondo Mhlongo who lost seven sons in one day, and MaMvelase Makunga who lost her mother, two sons, two sisters and six brothers on one day.

And added to the dead are men crippled by war, blinded by war, or brain-damaged and mad.

Since May 2789 people have brought 105 357 kgs of bones, which are sold to a bones merchant in the Cape. The following is a summary of recent impi deaths statistics.

| Month | % families with impi deaths | actual families with impi deaths | total death | per family average |
|-----------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| May | 79,24% | 126 | 379 | 3 |
| June | 77,3% | 218 | 414 | 1,89 |
| July | 80,74% | 348 | 713 | 2,04 |
| August | 57% | 346 | 868 | 2,5 |
| September | 73,65% | 478 | 887 | 1,35 |
| October | 82,53% | 326 | 847 | 2,59 |

WHY YOU CAN'T GET A BLACK MAN TO SELL HIS COW

Well one good reason is, if he sells – there will be only, 77 animal left. Modern cattle management hasn't made much headway anywhere in Africa, for modern cattle management demands that the farmer sells. And as everyone knows, the black man refuses to sell, hoarding his animals.

It's a hoard of 1,77 cattle and 3,12 goats here at Msinga, if the bones queue statistic are anything to go by. Impis, thieves, drought and disease make it likely the stockowner will end up without any stock at all.

Hungry impis live by raiding, and so war is the mechanism by which Msinga culls its stock. Past and present stockowners reported 3885 cattle stolen by impis, 371 taken by thieves, 600 lost to drought and disease; while 5077 goats were raided by impis, 1167 stolen by thieves, 526 lost to drought and disease.

On average each stockowner had lost 3,16 cattle (2,53 of them stolen by impis and 4,4 goats (3,3 of them stolen by impis).

Since May 27,09% of the families in the queues owned stock – while 35,79% had once owned stock, but had lost all they had. Of the total animals owned: 81,24% of the cattle had been lost to impis, thieves, drought and disease – and 77,44% of all goats.

MDUKATSHANI
P. O. Box 26
TUGELA FERRY
3504
January 1988

CAPFARM TRUST QUARTERLY REPORT

STONES CATCH FIRE

“What are you doing down there?”

Down in the dongas seven children are rolling stones. Up on the footpath passerby stop to watch them, puzzled. Is it a game? The children seem busy, but busy doing what?

”Stopping the water,” a boy calls an answer. “We’re building a wall to catch the rain and hold the soil.”

Falthenjwa Ndlovu (11) first had the idea of trying to fix the dip. Although it is many years since cattle were dipped there, a cement trough still marks the spot, in among the dongas that grew from the cattle tracks. “Dip” is now the name for the place of the yellow dongas.

Long ago all the surface rocks were washed away, so the children scrounge on the hill for big stones to look at their walls. That’s the tricky part – angling the rocks so they do not budge. The boys eye their work critically. They are veteran technicians, skilled in the science of stonepacks.

It certainly needs skill. Pioneer ecologist J A Pentz would have confirmed that after masterminding South Africa’s first national reclamation scheme which started in the district in the 1930’s. With government backing and a generous budget he was able to try everything from fences to bulldozers to patch up the hills, to recreate bogs, to get springs flowing. When he evaluated the results more than 20 years later he reported the most dramatic recovery had come from the simple stonepack.

Simple? Not so simple. Mdukatshani’s first stonepacks were laid out in July 1985, and pulled to pieces, and laid again and pulled to pieces and... It was months before our stonepacks began to sit tight. We haven’t waited as long as Pentz, however, to declare the results: our first experimental camps are already overgrown with grass.

That is one result of the stonepacks. There is another, more important, and something even Pentz did not predict: the stonepack is an idea with spontaneous combustion.

The evidence can be found all over the valley. Look at those seven children at the dip rolling stones in their free weekends. Look at Guqa Mthethwa (11) and Thandi Dladla (13) on a hillside a few kilometres away. They are teaching a young apprentice, Nkosi Lamula (7) how a stonepack is done. Ntli Duma (13) works at home in the evenings, building a terrace inside her kraal, while Khombisile Dladla (14) has built a stairway of stonepacks to her home.

During the week 50 children earn a wage and a meal, working on reclamation on Mdukatshani, and in the evenings and weekends and holidays they supervise small work parties to continue to work near their homes.

Although the boundaries of the original Drakensburg Reclamation Scheme included black land as well as white, it was only white farms that reclamation was tackled. The problems in the black reserve were considered insurmountable.

Yet it is on black land that stonepacks are appearing now. They sprout, ownerless, on pathways. They stretch across dry stream beds. And wherever there are children's playground, there are miniature stonepacks, shaped out of pebbles and dust.

There are many theories of spontaneous combustion, of the elements that must be present to set alight to a new idea. But the spark? That is something magical, for it appears from nowhere, out of nothing. It cannot be planned or manufactured by any method of art or science. Only magic can strike sparks from stones to light a fire in children's minds.

"Have you seen what our children are doing?" the people of the valley laugh every time they find another stonepack, but they are proud. "You can see our children have been learning from their school." If a donga is a place of instruction, even a donga can be called a school.

This is not a success story, however, but a story of failure, for it is not the valley that judges the children, but the world outside. And the world believes;

A donga is not a school. Children should not be labouring. If the verdict is blunt and final, it is also principled and morally right. Child labour looks too much like slavery. All children ought to go to proper school.

Ought to go, but will not go, cannot go. Valley homes survive by pooling the wages of children. That is the reality of the valley. Yes, it is wrong. And yes, we have tried to find a teacher to give lessons under the trees so that the working children can learn to write their names. While even the classrooms are short of teachers, however, there will be no teachers under the trees.

Take Falthenjwa's job away from him here, and he will not be going to school. He will be going to Wartburg, or Mooi River, to a plantation or a farm. If he cannot find work here, he will have to find work somewhere else, work as a farmhand, without thought, or responsibility, or initiative, work without a place for joy.

Principle and morality can be instruments of injury.

A CURE OF CAKE

The women's buckets are full of something that wriggles and squirms. Something black. Something.... a little squashed? A lid is lifted to reveal the contents.

'Oooooo. Songololos. "There are squeals as bystanders scatter, disgusted, giggling.

Songololos. Hundreds of songololos. Nobody has ever seen such a heaving, writhing mass of millipedes. But why collect them? And why bring them to us?

"We heard you wanted them to feed your ducks," a woman replies.

He answer is a symptom of a terrible disease.

Like AIDS, it is found in rich countries as well as poor, among managing directors as well as herdboys, professors and popstars, cooks and miners, some of you as well as many of us. Millions have it already and it is spreading to millions more, for a cure remains out of reach despite years of expert study.

But does anyone die of it?

“If it can be shown you die of it, then governments might be more inclined to combat it,” says Richard Smith in his recent book, “Unemployment and Health”, for unemployment is the disease we’re talking about, that” unhealthy condition of body and mind” that comes of being out of work.

At Msinga all it needs is a rumour that we are willing to buy songololos, and there are workless women with songololos at the gate. While the valleys have been filling up with workless people, however, new schools, bright with paint, have been appearing on the hills.

If there’s no bread – give them cake.

If there’s no work – give them education.

Work – or education? Either – or? The ultimatum brings a heavy silence to the men and women under the big meeting tree at Mdukatshani. And the silence is as heavy in an office at Tugela Ferry here the Msinga Development Committee is meeting. The first group is illiterate and poor. The second group is educated and not-so-poor, but both struggle with the same kind of silence. What they know of Msinga, what they see at Msinga is so obvious. How can the obvious be invisible to somebody else? Where are the words to describe the sky when you talk to a man who is blind?

The tree and the office offer different views of Msinga. Bottom up. Top down.

Bottom, top or sideways, however, Msinga’s problems always look the same.

Faction fights. Lawlessness. Soil erosion. Poverty. Hunger. Disease. Lack of schooling. Lack of work.

Msinga needs development. Development is funded by donors. Donors choose how to spend their money, and their choice lies in education. So it is not an ultimatum that is on offer but a single choice of cake. Government is putting money into education. Industry is putting money into education. Institutes and bassies and charitable trusts and foundation; if they have money to spend, the priority is education.

Educationist argue about education. Is it a trigger for change? Or is it a drag on change, always lagging at least 10 years behind whatever is happening

Nobody argues, however, that education is good for you. Not even Bhiya Dladla who at 55 has just had his first taste of schooling. He has been on a short course on cattle management.

When Bhiya still had a job he was a cattleowner, gradually saving up until he had a herd of five. By the time the last one died of drought or disease he was unemployed and unable to think of ever buying another red ox like that one he had loved. Bhiya loves all cattle, however, not just his own. He talks to the animals, and gentles them and senses a beast is sick

long before it sows the symptoms, for he is a born stockman. That is why he is now on the staff, helping to oversee the community cattle that graze on the farm.

It is easy to find a donor to send Bhiya on a short course. But to pay him a wage so that he can put his knowledge to use, and save town another ox one day?

The community cannot pay him, for those cattle that graze on the farm are also owned by men who are not working, and who have just one beast, or two or three.

The men and women in the office at Tugela Ferry are an educated aristocracy. They don't need persuading that education is good for you. More than anything else they want education for Msinga. Yet to lay the foundations for an educational building they crash up against that unspoken ultimatum: work- or education?

Development theory states that developing people know their own needs best, and must be allowed to state them. Theory also states that it is no use spoonfeeding communities. Don't pay them to take part in projects. They must make a contribution.

Ask the people of Msinga how to solve the problems of Msinga and they ask for bread. If it is work they say they need – can work also be their free contribution?

For that is what donors are asking. Here is money for education – but that building must be for free.

“It is all right for us,” says somebody in the room, breaking the silence. “We can work for nothing because we already have salaries...”

It is as obvious as the airy sky that you can only work for nothing if you already get paid to work.

At the other end of the valley, under the meeting tree, MaMsithole Dladla break the silence. “But even if you have an education, how does it help you?” she asks. “Everybody knows even if you have matric you can't get a job. You wait years and years and years before you find work.”

And the wait is going to be much longer in the years that lie ahead. Education alone will not secure the future for the people of the valley. Education just postpones the workless future that is already here.

Cake is seldom prescribed as a cure for disease.

A BABY?

A baby!

Delanie has a baby?

Yes, Delanie has a baby after waiting 12 years!

Few babies arrive to such widespread applause, such relief, such sighs of pleasure.

Delanie Mbatha was in his forties when he married, an intense man, full of gentleness, hungry for a child. Everyone saw the hunger, and they shook their heads as the years passed and Delanie grew rich as his gentleness starved.

Intensity ahs a terrible kick and the inner jolts began to dislodge the mind of this man who had known madness before. Everyone wondered if Delanie would end up back on the mountain like the last time he had been crazy.

When he fled to the mountain last year, however, he went to sit with an impi in time of war. Yet he was content, for at last MaMpungose was to have his baby.

She carried the child, and she gave birth to it, but from the start of her pregnancy it was “Delanie’s child”.

The day she returned from the Weenen clinic with her small daughter Khukhula, the impi sent Delanie home. Armed soldiers escorted him, and stood on guard while he sat in the yard, cradling the baby. His wife gleamed, but stayed in the background. Like everyone else she knew that this was Delanie’s child.

BAD-LUCKY NTSHABA

The doctor is reserved, suspicious.

“The condition of Kondad Ntshaba? Why do you want to know? Who are you? Oh. Well to tell the truth he has disappeared.”

He has disappeared from the Estcourt Hospital in the middle of a winter night. An impossible feat for a healthy man, the doctor explains, and Ntshaba is critically ill with his body full of drains and tubes and stitches.

Bad-lucky Ntshaba is bad lucky again.

Ntshaba is not the stuff warriors are made of. He is a jumpy nightwatchman, always scolding us for giving him a fright. At least his jitters stop him dozing like the others. He does not try to hide his terror when the outbreak of war between Nomoya and Dimbi drives him up into the hills with the Nomoya impi.

“I am bad lucky,” he sends a message across to us,” there is this problem with the impi...”

He has never been part of an impi before, and is running away from action when a stray bullet from his own side hits him in the back. He is carried off the mountain with his intestines dangling from a gaping stomach. He is lucky to be alive.

Lucky? Is Ntshaba ever lucky?

He is barely conscious when he sees two men from Dimbi in the ward one evening.

“Ah. So you are here?” they grin, before they shut themselves in the lavatory.

Ntshaba belongs to the opposite side.

He calls to a nurse, hysterical, begging for help. She listens, hen calls a nightwatchman into the ward.

“Get some rope,” she says,” and tie this patient. He’s mad and he’s going to try and run away. To prevent him escaping, the nightwatchman binds Ntshaba hand and foot to his bed.

He's lying helpless, bound, when the Dimbi men emerge from their consultation in the lavatory, still grinning. They have reached a decision. They are going but soon they will be back.

It is midnight before Ntshaba has managed to wriggle out of the ropes. He pulls out his drip, removed his hospital clothes, wraps a towel around the little bag that is draining his stomach, and in a pair of underpants makes his escape.

He scales a window to get into the hospital yard, and shivering in a highveld night full of frost, clambers over the security fence without alerting the guards, and sets off for home, 5-0 kilometres away.

For seven hours he crawls, stumbles and rests. Cold, dizzy and in agony he is found near a trading store a long way from town the next morning.

"Please call the Weenen Police," he begs the trader. "Don't call Estcourt."
Estcourt Police will just take him back to hospital.

The hospital, this time, takes his fear seriously, and for the rest of his stay he is "hidden" among the women in maternity.

When Ntshaba arrives home for Christmas he is able to walk, although great scars slash across his body. He will be too frail for work for months ... for years?

We take turns to survey his terrible scars.
"Hau Ntshaba! You are lucky!"

Lucky? Lucky?

A STEP IN THYME

"That looks like goats food," says Natty Duma. And she is right. Those stubbly bushes look like goat-damaged thornveld of Msinga, not a profitable crop.

And profitable it is, for those little bushes are a field of thyme yielding R 32 000 per hectare in its third year.

Nobody on Mdukatshani has ever heard of thyme – or sage, or basil or coriander – so the visit to Nino Riviera's herb farm at Winterton is a revelation. Herbs and spices are unknown to the cooking pots of Msinga. You may find currypowder on the shelves of local stores – but these strange little bottles of leaves and seeds? That's what inyanga muti looks like, but you don't use muti to flavour your food.

Herbs and spices are big business, however, and a business facing crisis in South Africa where several dozen spice factories are almost entirely dependent on imported ingredients. Although sanctions are a threat to future supplies.

Chernobyl, the Russian nuclear disaster, has created a more immediate problem, wiping out crops in Turkey, a major world producer of spices and herbs.

What has made Turkey a world producer? Hands. Herbs and spices are labour intensive, crops that must be harvested and processed by hand, so they are grown in countries that have many hands but few machines.

Although a few white farmers in South Africa are herb producers, there are unlikely to be many more, for the market is perceived to be limited, and white farmers are not attracted to a crop that needs plenty of labour.

If South Africa is to start producing her own herbs and spices, therefore, the African areas are likely to produce them. Recently representatives of South Africa's spice companies been traveling the country, investigating the possibilities of obtaining their supplies here. It is not their first sign of interest. A two year research project at the Institute of Natural Resources, University of Natal, was funded by one company.

How much of the talk, or the research, reaches the African grower? It is a long way from Msinga to a supermarket shelf.

At present Mdukatshani' communal gardens produce some vegetables for home consumption for 300 men, women and children. Because the people are poor, and their production is for home cooking pots only, they do not even contribute to the costs of fuel for the irrigation system. That is covered by a donor.

Although there has long been a need for a cash crop, it has been impossible to compete with the large-scale vegetable production of neighbouring white farmers.

Herbs and spices offer real promise, however, because of the following advantages:

- * A high return per unit area;
- * Many herbs and spices are hardy perennials from semi-desert area – plants that cannot grow in high rainfall areas without disease problems.
- * Dagga production has given local people some experience in harvesting and drying.

At Mdukatshani we have recently taken the first small – very small- steps to bridge the gulf that separates business and research from the African producer:
Trial beds of herb seedlings have been planted out.

With friends at the University of Natal, the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources we hope this year to close the distance between Msinga and that supermarket shelf.

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CAPFARM QUARTERLY REPORT

A SOUND OF MUSIC

“Try and bend it.”
The women flinch. “Izinkuni. Wood,” they protest.

On the floor the dead blood is stirring again.
“Try.”

Softly the blood shines their feet. The women stand unnoticed. It's not the blood they're afraid of. It's the outstretched arm, rigid in death. The arm will snap if they try to move it. They don't want to hurt MaMvelase Mbatha's arm.

“Try,” the policeman is gentle but insistent. “We can't fit her into the van like this.”

MaNene takes hold of the dead wrist. They have been wives together, the two of them. “And widows,” they liked to say, using giggles to ridicule their suffering. The husband they shared made them strong in their love for each other, neglect giving a sisterhood of pain.

MaNene starts to manoeuvre the arm, pushing it in an arc, trying to muffle tearing sinews, unable to stop her tears.

“Blankets to wrap her. She is not a nyamazane, a wild buck.”

MaMvelase Mbatha is the most beautiful woman in the valley, even here on the mud floor where she lies exposed, ready for the mortuary. She died in slowfall and hardened during the hours of the night. Now she clangs as she is rolled. Her legs swing, gleaming, into the air. She is fragrant with blood, rigid as stone. Some humanity has gone, but not the loveliness.

Beauty is a quality of life, and the single quality by which MaMvelase was known. If she had other attributes they remained invisible behind her slanted looks, her tilted neck, her striking carriage. Although she seemed to be flaunting to draw the eyes of men, she slanted and tilted and flaunted when she was alone with other women, and she could not reach for a crying child without exaggerated grace. In leading the eye she fulfilled the heart, so beauty was all that was asked of her.

“Three, four, five...” the policeman mutters as he crouches next to the body, counting bullet holes as he waits for the blankets.

“When we were growing up,” another policeman is outside, walking around the yard, taking measurements and picking up cartridges,” no gun was ever used on a woman. What is happening to you people now? None of you speak but you know your own guns. You know who was firing last night.”

Silence can mean both yes and no. Men sit in the cold sunshine, listening. When the body has been wrapped they will carry it to the van.

The policeman examines handfuls of cartridges.

Nine millimeter,” they say. “Vee eleven - .303.” They start to jot notes.

“At about 7.30 p.m.” as the family finished supper and dispersed to the sleeping huts, three gunmen opened fire on the moonlit yard. They had waited for the moon to be sure of MaMvelase, and she was backed against a wall where she fell among her children.

“Ma, ma vuka,” said the twins, trying to tug her awake. The gunmen’s voices could be heard, chatting, as they walked slowly up the hill.

“You can fetch the body at the mortuary on Monday,” the police instruct the men.

“After that every day costs money and you will have to pay.”

When the van has disappeared the women fetch rags and bowls of water. Black scabs are crawling across the floor.

A clue is a fact that suggests a line of enquiry, and perhaps MaMvelase’s body is the most important clue of all for she is a woman, and there is a work commonly used when a woman is murdered with intent: Umthakathi. Witch.

Those accused of withcraft or sorcery are related to their victims either by blood or marriage in 82% of recorded cases, Professor Monica Wilson found in a study more than 30 years ago. The findings are not outdated.

“Thakathi means you must look in the family,” mutter the people of the valley.

If MaMvelase was a witch, she was the second witch in the Mbatha family to die in seven weeks. In February MaMkhize Mbatha was also killed at home in the early evening. Both women had gardens on Mdukatshani. One was a beadworker, the other a member of a reclamation team. Young and old, beautiful and plain – did they share a capacity for evil?

God and the Devil often switch faces so that the temptations they offer may look just the same. To convince men of their presence they leave trail behind them trails that are strewn with identical clues.

Discord, dreams, sickness, disaster, suffering – God inflicts pain for the sake of good. Discord, dreams, sickness, disaster, suffering – the Devil uses pain as an avenue to death.

“You know your own guns,” the policemen accused the men. A gun sings a personal song. Yes, the men know which guns were used that night, who held the guns and pulled the triggers. But were the gunmen the guilty? No bullet is fired direct from a gun. It takes flight from the heart on an erratic path, and it ricochets and ricochets and ricochets again. When God and the Devil intervened the like to make use of oblique trajectories.

The murdered bodies of the two Mbatha women lead deep among the Mbatha men, among sons, nephews, cousins, uncles and brothers where there has been sickness, estrangement and misfortune.

Who did it? Why? These are the simple questions that direct the course of a murder investigation under white man's law. Finding a guilty party is the basis of that law. Wrongdoers must be caught and convicted and punished. There is another, older system of law, however, that is at work among these hills, and it is based on restoring good relations where these have been disrupted. The killer is almost always known, as well as his reasons why. So the crucial questions have a different pivot: how? How can harmony be restored?

Just is a work that means, among other things "harmonically pure – sounding perfectly in tune." All societies recognize justice, although justice will appear in variegated forms. While justice is a scale of weight – a scale is also a set of sounds. For some justice will always belong to the law. For others it belongs to music.

Music has two distinct – the art of the composer, and the art of the executants. The executioners. When executioners live out of tune with themselves, at odds with the gods and devils of the soul, the jarring notes of guns in the night are the sound of a search for harmony.

In the weeks since MaMvelase's funeral, one man has left the district, and four of our women have fled. Although meetings have been convened to discuss the threat to the womenfolk, a community does not act in a family affair. So good men stand aside, waiting and listening.

The Law provides a Book of Rules to live by, but no rule can bring quiet to an unruly soul. Only God or a bullet can do that.

So the waiting hearts are saying in this valley of Guns, where the gun is now an instrument of music. When justice is no longer seen to be done – justice may have to be heard.

A GUN BLOCKADE FOR THE ROYAL CAR

Bayede! Bayede! Bayede!
Hail your majesty! Hail! Hail!

Everybody knows the royal car. If children are in the playground when the chief passes they drop to their knees and salute. Women put their waterdrums on the ground and ululate. Men raise their arms and raise a shout too.
Bayede! Hail your majesty! Hail!

In January seven men blocked the passage of the chief's car on the main road in Mchunu country near out top farm. As Chief Simakade Mchunu climbed out he recognized some of the faces in front of him.

"Bayede!" the salute was involuntary as the gunmen scattered for the bush. The chief was alone and it was not the chief they had wanted, but the chief induna, Petrus Majozi, who is our chairman too.

Not long after this incident our bakkie was forced off the road.

"What are you doing? Why did you do that?" our driver, Mphephethi Masondo was shaking as the Valiant that had almost run him down reversed, then drew alongside,
"Sorry," shouted the driver. "I was looking for somebody." He leaned out, checking the

passengers inside the bakkie and on the back. The Valiant allowed Mphephethi to drive away, but tailed him. Another hunting party was after Majozi.

The hunt for Majozi started on September 22 when Mthiyakhe Sibiya, an induna, was murdered on an open path near out top farm one sunny afternoon. Sibiya lived at Nduna – Majozi nextdoor at Mnqamkantaba. Nduna and Mnqamkantaba: for more than a year there men have been at war, on the brink of war, or in between wars, waiting. Although Sibiya was murdered in a private quarrel, his death offered a release from waiting. One dead induna deserves another. One excuse for war is as convenient as any other.

Majozi disappeared, and for six months our only contact with our chairman has been through letters that have arrived dateless, unsigned, without an address.

Although the S A. Defence Force arrived briefly at Msinga, setting up roadblocks, making arrests, it did not flush out the impi that stayed in the gorge on our farm. Our fences sagged as patrolling became dangerous.

The roadblock that stopped the chief's was unprecedented. Guns had never been pointed at the chief before, and indunas and tribal councilors assembled amidst talk that the entire tribe would take up weapons to destroy Nduna.

The Nduna elders faced the court on behalf of their young men, pleading there had been a mistake because nobody recognized the car. A mistake? Countered the elders. Was it also just a mistake that the tribe had lived without its chief induna such long, lawless months? Nduna was fined two cattle – payment to be made within two days. Delivery was prompt.

Majozi is starting to appear in public again, to hear cases at the chief's court, but nobody knows when he comes and goes, and he does not sleep in the same place.

His beloved face has the dragmarks of the distance he has endured. Fear and despair are depthless pools where the spirit of a man falls soundlessly.

“THAT NIGHT WE CAME TO KILL YOU NGXONGO....

.... We nearly killed a woman? Hau, that was bad baba. We didn't come to kill a woman we came to kill you.”

Fifty five men died in the Ngubo-Ngcengeni war last year, but now men from both sides are drinking beer together at the open air pub with its benches under the trees. Bhekuyise Ngxongo, our managed and an Ngubo man, recognizes Ngcengeni boys when he arrives. “How are you bafana?” he nods.

There is some ceremony about drinking, and an array of bottles stands between the men on the ground as they ease into conversation. Both sides buy, both sides share the drink. The beer has done several rounds when two Ngcengeni youngsters place four bottles in front of Ngxongo.

“It is a long time since we saw you, baba. There are your bottles.”

“Ha,” says an Ngubo man. Now you buy him beer – just now you tried to kill him.”

There is laughter.

”Yes, that is the truth,” admits the Ngcengeni boy. In fact we had gone hunting Cule at Sahlumbe where we heard he was hiding, and we stayed a few days but couldn’t find him. We were on our way back when we passed your place and said: Ha, Baba Ngxongo stays here. Lets kill him instead.”

“You went to kill an old man who was just staying with a white, not fighting?

There is derision from Ngubo.

“Ai, we wanted to wash our hearts because we could not find Cule. We wanted to roar, to be appeased.”

Ngxongo listens to the story of how the gunmen surrounded our farmhouse that night.

“And we nearly killed somebody,” says the hunter. “Baba we thought it was you we shot.”

“I wasn’t there,” says Ngxongo. “I went far away to hide when the impi started.

But you know who you nearly killed that night? Alcock’s wife. She was staying there alone.”

“We nearly killed a woman?” there is shock. Both Ngubo and Ngcengeni have strict rules on killing women. “We didn’t know we were firing at a woman. We thought it was you running away in the dark.”

The Ngcengeni hunters do some thinking. “If we were not frightened we could go and tell her we are sorry, we apologize. But if we apologize she’ll have us arrested.

“It’s a pity she didn’t die that night,” says an Ngubo man with relish,” because if she had died you would have been hanged in Pretoria. A long time ago you would all have been hanged.”

“But nobody knew we were there? How could the police catch us?”

“When you kill a white,” the Ngubo men speaks with authority,” the police come with a special camera that finds you at the body even if you are no longer there.

Nobody can hide in that special photograph.”

There are shouts of laughter.

“Why do you laugh?” the young hunters are indignant. “We could have died because of that night. Why do you laugh?”

“So and say sorry,” suggests Ngxongo. “Don’t be afraid. She’s not kind of woman who will have you arrested.”

Ngubo and Ngcengeni are wards in the Mthembu chiefdom, as are Dimbi and Nomoya where 19 men die in another conflict that has recently petered out. Gradually men are returning to work, worn and ill from a year living and fighting and hiding on the hills. Qalokwakhe Mkhize, always the thinnest man on the staff, was the first to return to work, so feeble he could only do token jobs, while a doctor diagnosed malnutrition.

Hunger, wariness, a lack of bullets, all help to extinguish the fires of war, as do the words of innumerable meetings held at Tugela Ferry, at the courts, the schools and on the battlefields.

Chief Ngoza Mvelase took off his shoes and trousers to wade the slippery Tugela rapids for a meeting with the impis of Dimbi and Nomoya. Stripped, wet and cold, the towering chief lost none of his regal authority as he sat among the ruins of a village burnt out in the fighting.

While some men were speaking within the derelict walls, the chief knew more were hidden, watching from vantage points high in the woodland.

The tamboti tree in our cattle kraal provided shade for the chief when he had his next meeting with the impis. This time there were so many familiar faces openly out in the open that everyone knew the war was almost at an end.

PEPPER AND SPIT

“Amathe empukane”. Fly’s spittle. Call that rain? Fine dribbles of drizzle that puff hot smoke in the dust?

On shore the summer was red and peppery. Offshore great floods rolled by, slow and slumberous and nothing to do with us. There were no pumps to pump and no ferry could make a crossing, so the quiet heave of brown water was just for gazing on.

When Bad Lucky Ntshaba’s baby died, we had to watch the burial from across the great swell, trapped on our landlocked frontier. Only afterwards did we hear how he sobbed over his little son Mduka who was born on riverbank a year ago.

Devil thorns turned crisp on the flats and branches showered brittle leaves, but where seed had fallen on stony ground – ah, there was the lesson of the summer. Seed must fall among stones to grow. Hot rocks throw a shady. Night rocks gather few. From the great community of rocks vines waddled, splay-footed, and grasses spurted stemmy plumes.

When the new engine and pumps were eventually installed four months after the Great Flood, stone-cobbled gardens were being laid out by the children, rocks mulch terraces to guard the seedlings of next summer.

The CRAZY PEOPLE OF MBULWANA

Today the lunatics sit among us. Other days they wander off with their mad, vague smiles on made, vague ramblings. When it begins to get dark somebody goes out to look for them to bring them back to the tents for the night.

“See that man is mad, over there. And that woman.”

Would we notice if they were not pointed out? Are the lunatics any different from the rest of this crowd that sits transfixed, silent, withdrawn and staring. All seem skewed to craziness.

“Shaya Mbulwana, shaya,” call the schoolchildren. “Strike, assault Mbulwana.”

Madness is a refuge from reality, and perhaps there is no other refuge for the people of Mbulwana who were destroyed by the September flood, their homes smashed, their minds deranged, some more, some less, some permanently.

Mbulwana was a squatter settlement outside Ladysmith until the river rose in the night, obliterating houses, fields, stock. Mothers, fathers, children disappeared under the water. Some of the survivors are still in hospital six months later.

The government worked hard at relief. The Mbulwana people were placed at Waayhoek, a resettlement village about 30 km away from the town, and there they were settled with tents, primus stoves, paraffin, food, foam mattresses and blankets.

There were also free busrides to help everyone in their search for work.

Six months later, however, most families have sold all but their tents to buy food.

The few who have been able to find occasional work washing or gardening help to look after the rest. Bags of cabbages get shared among the tents. Bags of mealie meal get measured into bowls. But there is not enough, and the “kwash” children are shuffled in and out of hospital by the free clinic that can diagnose hunger, but cannot provide food.

Whenever the old residents of Waayhoek have a party, a religious ceremony, a celebration, Mbulwana people will arrive, uninvited, with plastic bags for stuffing food. That is why the schoolchildren start to chant, when they see them: “Strike Mbulwana. Hit them. They finish all the food.”

We visited Mbulwana to distribute blankets and food on behalf of Operation Hunger. There are only 87 families – 287 people. In a world full of people, this community is too small to matter. They seem beyond recovery – chickens with their heads chopped off, still capable of motion.

We wish we didn’t have to go back, for they tell us so definitely: there is no meaning to living.

THE LITTLEST AND PRETTIEST ENGINEERS

Ntili Duma is 14, dainty and full of sparkle, with a little comb tucked among the plaits that encircle her pretty head. Gosile Mvalesi is 19, with a slow shy smile, and slow, soft curves. Phendulile Dladla is 15 – dark-eyed and honey tones.

There are engineers quite like these girls on Mdukatshani and they give a light sweet touch to the water that pulses through the gardens. Once the pumps were the arena of men. During the war months, however, with men scarce, the project was handled almost entirely by women and children.

Ntili, Gosi and Phendu were trained by Mla Magasela, a mission man and a rare neutral. Dogged, gentle and stammering he enabled the girls to graduate to weekend duties, handling the engines and pumps all on their own.

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CAPFARM TRUST QUARTERLY REPORT
JUNE, JULY, AUGUST 1988

Sangoma? Inyanga? Mumbo jumbo?
Not anymore.

HERE'S THE FRONT PAGE NEWS THAT NEVER MADE FRONT PAGES

It could be the most powerful group in the country –this invisible power group with its invisible powers.

Traditional healers may not be political, but they have recently made their debut on the political scene. Just look who has been talking to them:

- * The President, Mr. P.W. Botha.
- * The Minister of Law and Order, Mr. Adrian Vlok
- * The Minister of Defence, General Magous Malan
- * The Minister of National Health and Population Development, Dr. Willie van Niekerk.

Mr. Vlok was “very impressed when he was told the traditional dealer could go from tribe to tribe, something nobody else could accomplish,” reported the SA Traditional Healer’s Council – a controversial body with easy access to the cabinet and easy access to money.

While the Council was getting chatty with politicians, white business executives were scratching their heads uneasily over what has been hailed as a breakthrough in industrial relations”. At Gallo workers can now stay off sick if the sangoma or inyanga agrees.

In August 400 Gallo workers, members of the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers” Union refuse to work after a month long strike for higher wages and the right to time off if this s prescribed by a traditional healer. Large chains like OK, Pick ‘n Pay, Metro, CAN and Frasers are likely to face similar demands soon.

Seeing a sangoma, of course, means paying a sangoma. Workers think medical aid schemes should cover the costs, and this is the next item for campaigning.

While the Cabinet may support traditional healers, and Big Business may support traditional healers – the veld can’t. It’s running out of wild resources, and the powers of healing come from the veld.

Unless you visit The Great Muti Markets of the townships, or the “chemists’ near busranks and stations, it is impossible to imagine the scale of the harvest from the wild; pelican bills and baboon jaws, python skins and puff adders, feathers and bones and fat and claws; roots and bulbs and bark that treat everything from pimples to nausea to a soul-sick heart.

An estimated 80 to 85% of the people Soweto still consult diviners and herbalists, according to a study by T.L. Holdstock. That figure alone suggests the volume of the trade in magico-medicinal plants. Millions of patients use millions of plants.

Mdukatshani was once renowned for its powerful inyangas, each a specialist in a different kind of treatment. The farm was rich in plants that were rare elsewhere, and the inyanga were superb botanists, who guarded some plants and grew others.

The farm's traditional as a source of healing power came to an end in 1969 when government removals cleared the farm and scattered its families. Today, however two sons of the original inyanga are back on the farm where they were born, and Mcijeni Mchunu and Mangempi Ngqulunga practice the skills they learnt from their fathers.

Although the farm continues to be rich in plants found nowhere else, looting has grown with unemployment. More and more workless people are turning to plant gathering for a living.

There is no way we can keep guard over 2 543 hectares of broken, unoccupied woodland, and even if it were possible there are just not enough orchids and bulbs and trees on the farm to supply the growing demand. That is why we have set aside an area for a magico-medicinal plant nursery to experiment with cultivation. And that is why Mchunu, Ngqulunga Segeza Dladla and Qalokwakhe Mkhize set off recently men to manage our woodland for its resources of firewood, timber and medicines but there is no training course for the subject. Only ideas.

Muti shops, muti markets and museums were on the itinerary – but the ideas came from:

* Dr. Tony Cunningham and Bonginkosi Zondi – an extraordinary combination with unique knowledge and experience. For the past two years they have been working at the Institute of Natural Resources, University of Natal, on a two year study of the trade in medicinal plants in Natal. One offshoot of their study is a ncema farm at Jozini Dam. Ncema is a sedge used for making mats. One offshoot of our visit was a gift of a bakkie load of “fecund little beasts,” said Tony, as he helped to load pots of *Boweia volubilis* for our nursery.

* Geoff Nichols – a horticulturist with the Durban Municipality who is making the cultivation of wild plants a reality at the Silverglen Nursery near Umlazi Township. With a variety of sophisticated techniques Geoff can take in seed, rear it to transplant age, then return it “back home”. The fee is.... Some of the seed for the nursery. (Dladla and Mkhize have just sent in bags of yellow fruit from the saffronwood, Cassino transvaalensis).

* Ian Garland – a Zululand farmer with a home-grown forest that merges with a coastal dune forest. His trees can be counted in species – or counted in rands, and the men did both kinds of counting as they wandered along forest paths.

Ian's homegrown yellowwoods are worth a small fortune as timber, but it was his isiBaha, Warburgia salutaris, that was the high point of the trip for the men. Isibhaha is a legendary medicinal tree, on its way to extinction, and they stood in homage before their first live specimen.

On a hilltop nursery Ian rears thousands of trees, and the men browsed longingly, wishing for a ten ton truck to carry some of the trees back home.

Final stop on the tour was the tamboti factory at Stanger. Tamboti is a dominant tree in our woodland, but never used locally even for firewood because of its poisonous blinding sap. “But we use Indian medicine to doctor the wood,” said Mr. E.D. Singh, showing off tamboti tables, chairs and chests. The men stroked them with disbelief, lovingly, but while they wanted a small sample to bring home, the smallest was a tray costing R 200!

MBULWANO JAILS TWO LAVATORIES

The obstacles are two brown iron lavatories.

“They will have to be locked inside the fence,” says Lucy Mabotho. Two lavatories won’t be missed, not on this African plain with its wide open veld. At Waayhoek there are dozens, scores, hundreds of lavatories, like coffins prancing on their heads, some a little tipsy.

There was an iron discipline among them once, but years standing idle in the African sun makes anything wilt, even a tin toilet. Now some slump in their holes while others are wavering. Yet they grin, all of them, white bowls flashing under the doors. There is a companionable silence between them and the cattle that graze alongside. A lavatory has no meaning in life unless it has some company.

Although there is room for cattle in between the toilets, however, there is no block of land big enough for a garden.

“Except this place,” the tent people of Mbulwana are a little anxious. The communal tap is just over there, and they have moved two tents. If they fence a garden however, those two toilets will have to be jailed.

“Is it all right?” a deputation asks Willy Sithole, the mayor who watches over Waayhoek, a government resettlement township. Or township-to-be, for it has hardly started growing. Red and green prefabs house the original settlers, while beyond them stretch the lavatory suburbs, waiting for settlers, and beyond the lavatories there is the open veld.

The tent town that houses the flood victims of Mbulwana is set apart from the city center. Every month we deliver mealie meal to the tents on behalf of Operation Hunger – and every month make a note of the “kwash” shuttle, the to-and-fro of kwashiorkor children to the faraway hospital.

Workless, sick, listless, crazy – the tent people have less verve than their lavatories. However the garden is already changing that. Picks are swinging. The fence is up. The manure is paid for and delivered and dug in – 22 loads in Zakhele Bonambi’s ox-cart. The ground is damp around those lavatories-in-jail.

Spinach roots are rooting. It’s not just the lavatories that feel a stir about their feet.

Oooooooooo!

It’s the morning after the day before and the girls can barely move.

“That white man?”

“My knees,” giggles Gosi Mvelase.

“Here,” Ntili Duma pats her thighs.

“Look at my scratches!” Phendulile Dladla lifts her skirt and bares her legs.

Franek Raciborski has been visiting again. On the run. Only Mphephethi Masondo is excused from running with him. Mphephethi crippled leg can't keep the pace. The rest have to try, stumbling and panting to stay close enough to hear Franek's instructions as he jogs through the bush.

Faster! Hurry! Run! Chop that! Dig here!

"A day of rest?" the girls suggest, immobile after another of Franek's flying visits. Not a chance! In three months electric power will be here, and when it arrives the pipes and sprinklers of the new irrigation system must be ready for it.

Electricity. AT. Alternative Technology. An alternative to diesel engines and watering cans and never-wet-enough vegetable gardens.

When we arrived at Mdukatshani 14 years ago the nearest electric power line was a long way away. Now it lies a kilometre up the road, and ESCOM promise we will be linked up within about three months.

Franek, an irrigation planner, filled in the forms, answered ESCOM's questions and designed an irrigation system that will enable us to quadruple the size of the gardens while saving R 600 on our fuel bill every month.

We have never had enough water. Now we won't have enough manure.

"The soil in the new area," says Franek. "It's awful. It's sterile." Moon dust.

To quadruple the gardens we will have to quadruple the supply of manure to put some life into our barren dusts.

A special team has been taken on to dig the new pipeline.

"The l-a-t-e-r-a-l-s," Mphephethi licks his tongue around the word, enjoying the new sensation. He's in charge, having sleepless nights as he worries about the main line he started in the wrong place, the pay-by-the-metre wages he has to calculate.

He smiles briefly, in relief, when Franek arrives for an inspection.

"Hundred percent," he tells Mphephethi.

It's even better than that.

"You're ahead of schedule," Franek is surprised. "I've never seen such a pace, even on white farms."

MORE MAJAZI!

"More! More!" the crowd is roaring, clapping.

MaJazi Zwane turns her back on them, pretends to sit down.

"MaJazi!" it's a bellow.

She turns round, tilts her head, and her eyes flash a smile. Elvis Presley used to do that too, flash a smile from the eyes, and he, too, had the crowd on its feet stomping, yelling with delight.

“Xolela ‘gazi ‘lami....” The crowd relaxes. MaJazi is dancing again.

MaJazi is the Gosa-of, the- Women in our corner of the valley; Commander-of-Protocol, Queen-of-the-Dance.

“With a mind like a man,” say the men, who trust her as one of them.

There are no disturbances, no outbursts around MaJazi. You come upon her authority unexpectedly, for while she is deft and efficient, she is also quiet and withdrawn. A Zulu woman uses power as art, with an exquisite delicacy of undertone.

Only MaJazi’s back gives hint of the dancer, her sensuous back, bare under the purple shoulder cloth. Working among the goats that is all you see of her, the dancer’s back, startling in its loveliness. It’s impossible to believe MaJazi is a grandmother.

Today she is sitting under the meeting tree, unable to hide signs of apprehension.

“Open it. Open it.” All eyes are on the brown envelope.

“You passed!” There are sighs of relief, cheers, laughter, applause.

MaJazi wipes her face with the purple shoulder cloth. She has earned a certificate in Advanced Stockmanship from the Midlands Centre of Further Education. So have Bhiya Dladla and Segeeza Dladla. The three of them attended the stockmanship courses together at the only place that offers training in Zulu for illiterate people – of any age.

SACRIFICE FOR SALE

Goats!

Bhekuyise Ngxongo puts down his beer at the WaGijima Shebeen. He has just caught sight of four parked combis, full of goats. Zulu goats. Multi-coloured Zulu goats. He leaves the beer.

“How much?” he asks a combi driver.

The young man shakes his head. “Not cash. Bullets. We want to change these goats for bullets.”

“Where are you from?”

“Mbondwana.”

Ngxongo nods. He’s heard the people from Mbondwana are fighting the people from Ntsehla.

There are more goats than bullets, however.

“All right, cash then,” the Mbondwana men change the currency.” Sixty, eight or one hundred rand. Not more than a hundred.” They are in a hurry to be finished and be gone.

Ngxongo is tempted. That’s cheap. Only a hundred rand for those BIG goats...

Impi goats always cheap. And that’s the problem. Ngxongo puts temptation behind him. Buy impi goats and the next thing you know the Stocktheft Unit are visiting to claim the animals. You lose the animals and your cash. He can’t risk CAP’s money.

For more than a year Ngxongo, our manager, and Mphephethi Masondo have undertaken countless long journeys in search of goats. They have carried a chequebook with them, not

bullets, however so the project is only 30 goats richer. There may be 94 000 goats at Msinga, but a Zulu goat for sale? That's as rare as a rose bush in the African dust.

Because Zulu goats are such a rare commodity tens of thousands of goats are trucked to Natal each year, docile Boer goats that travel vast distances from the Cape and Namibia to meet the local demand for ritual sacrifice.

There are no official statistics on the trade in animals for sacrifice, despite its value and turnover. A few white companies do door-to-door deliveries of sacrificial animals in the townships. A few white farmers hang boards at their gates: "Izimbuzi. Goats". Traders occasionally sell goats from their stores.

And there are the great open-air marketplaces around the townships where flocks of goats chew placidly while they wait for customers. Some are led away on the end of a rope. Some are driven to home shrines on the back seats of cars.

Africa's spiritual traditional finds expression in sacrifice and Christian and heathen, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, all find deep meaning in the rituals.

Msinga has always carried more goats than any other district in Natal. While the animals appear to be the most successful product of the stony hills, however, a goat owner can expect to lose 77% of his flock to theft, drought, disease or impi, according to figures collected at our Bones Exchange. The greatest losses are due to impi. Whenever there is war, soldiers raid each other's flocks, living off goat meat while they live up in the hills. Goats are therefore never a cash crop. A goat owner lives with the certainty of loss. He also needs animals for sacrifice. Only in desperation is he forced to sell.

Red-faced Cape goats find their way to Msinga stores.

"They're not from our place," Ngxongo snorts in contempt. Buy, yes, if you are going to slaughter for sacrifice. And soon, for everybody knows that these outsiders are not survivors.

They quickly die under local conditions. They are never bought for breeding.

On Mdukatshani's hills, meanwhile thickets are thickening. We wish we had bullets. There is more money than there are goats to buy.

TRUCE!

By the end of July Mbondwana and Ntshela no longer needed bullets. A peace settlement was under way – made possible by the S.A. Police. There could be no peace until the return of the cattle raided by both impis. Two helicopters and eight police vans were at the scene of the delicate cattle swap operation, armed policemen standing by as all the cattle in the area were rounded up, and men from both factions took it in turns to search through the animals, identifying and claiming their own.

A CASE OF A MISSING INVITATION

"I will bring my costume with me," said GG Alcock.

Majozi was puzzled. "Your costume?"

"I know the verdict now. You're going to say: There's the sea, white man. Swim for your home!"

What will be the verdict on the white man's crimes when he stands accused in a black man's court? We had a ... ahem... trial run recently when the two Alcock boys did what they could to defend their race. It was an African trial, in the open air, presided over by our chairman and Mchunu chief induna, Petrus Majozi.

He charged that the whites had * Destroyed the base of their political power.

* Destroyed the base of their economic independence.

Majozi listed the details – the taxes that had forced men out to work, the land that had been taken.

“Such big farms,” he said. “Just for one man.”

“But our taxes were used to help,” GG started the defence.

Ngxongo listened, impassive, to an account of the many ways in which the white man had helped.

“All I want to know,” he said, interrupting, “is who called you to come and help?”

Who invited you, white man?

Um, yes....

The trouble started, of course, well before our time. Can a man be charged for his grandfather's crimes? A discussion started on collective guilt.

At lunch the trial was adjourned without a verdict. The case for the white men didn't look good, but it was not yet time to swim for it.

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CAPFARM QUARTERLY REPORT
CAST QUARTER 1988 + FIRST OF 1989

THE DAY THE SHIT STOPPED

The lavatory doors hang skew.

“What happened?” Natty Duma tries to hang a door back on its hinges. The lavatory looks indecent with its private parts exposed.

She mutters as she examine the violence that smashed a door off its hinges. The impi had sheltered in the lavatories overnight. Why smash the shelter?

Happy Magasela had been first up that morning. She crawled out of her tent and made sleepily for the toilet, pushing the iron door. It wouldn't budge. She pushed harder.

“Leave it.”

The door gave suddenly. Inside was a man with a rifle. He gestured to her to go away.

“My wee – that minute it stopped,” says Happy. “I didn't want to wee any more.”

There were armed men in most of the brown iron lavatories among the tents of the Mbulwana people.

“What do you want? Go back! Get away!” a gunman ordered MaNdaweni Mngwenya. “This is our Great Father's country. They died in this place.”

“I had gone to shit,” says MaNdaweni. “When I saw the gun the shit stopped. Every thing stopped when we found the impi in the toilets.”

“This is our Great Fathers country. They died in this place.” The tent people repeat the words as they stand in the wind among the smashed lavatories. The government brought them here a year ago when floods destroyed their homes. This place, Waayhoek, is a Government resettlement village.

“And this is now Government land,” officials have repeated at meetings. Officials come and go, however. To hold a territory you must remain in occupation, and there are never any officials around when the Mbondwane impi marches through the streets. Deliberately it runs its wars into the village to make the point. Strangers have been brought to live in the tin pre-fabs and tents. Mbondwane isn't fighting strangers – just reminding them they are on Mbondwane territory.

There have been three wars in the past five years, and this latest started in October when the Mbondwane impi raided the Nkomane ward, killing a schoolboy. The impi then retreated to Waayhoek, hiding in the lavatories until reinforcements arrived.

When the soldiers emerged eventually they stood around the Mbulwana garden fence, looking at the spinach.

“Peel spinach for us,” they asked the women. “We sleep in the hills. We are hungry.” “It is not ours,” lied the women. “This garden is for whites. The spinach belongs to whites.”

“In fact we are reaping some every day,” Lucy Mbatho reports. Today the Mdukatshani garden teachers are visiting to check on their tent-town pupils.

“I see the pumpkins are growing,” observes Natty. Everyone giggles. The first pumpkin seeds were planted in waist-deep holes, and the teachers had laughed helplessly as they climbed down into the pits the Mbulwana pupils had quarried for their seeds.

We have learnt,” says tall and lovely Ellen Mokoena. “The spinach is all right now.” Last time the teachers visited the plants were yellow from standing in permanent water.

With nothing else to do all day the tent-town people were killing their garden with an overdose of energy.

“And the rain has helped the chilies,” says Lucy. There is not such for the Mdukatshani teachers to do any more, except to share the problems of the tent people, and what a month it has been for problems.

Lucy and her husband Emmanuel were stabbed at a bus stop while looking for work. After weeks in hospital they are back at home in their little tent, though Emmanuel is still too ill to stand.

The Pauline Mhlakwana’s daughter died, a child of one, and there were only women to dig the grave. “Hau,” Ngxongo our manager is distressed. He has never seen women dig a grave before. He walks through the tent town, jerking his head over Mbulwana’s possessions. The people have no pots. They cook in jam tins. The spinach is a garnish for the ration of mealies-meal which CAP distributes for Operation Hunger every month.

Silent and troubled, Ngxongo returns to the farm that night to find a message from Operation Hunger: there’s a shortage of funds. No more food for Mbulwana.

“And now? What can we do to help them?” the committee ask as they sit under the Meeting Tree.” Bones? If we give them sacks they can collect bones. There must be lots of bones around Waayhoek. If they find bones we can repay them with mealies.”

However, it’s dangerous to go out in the hills when there’s impi. “We can’t even fetch firewood,” says Lucy. “We don’t go to the hills anymore because that ‘s where the soldiers are hiding. Last time we went they asked us to sleep with them – They said long time they don’t run away.”

“They asked nicely,” admits Happy. “They didn’t try to rape.”

But no women go near the hill anymore, not even in a group.

“And yesterday 18 men died in the fighting.” The deaths made the front pages of Natal newspapers, and special police were rushed to the area.

“But this morning the impi was here, firing next to the toilets.”

While the tent people discuss the gun battle five police vans draw alongside, and young men in camouflage uniform pile out.

“Do you want to know what we are doing here?” we ask. Police discourage visitors in a trouble spot.

“No,” grin the policemen. “We’re looking for a tap for a drink of water. But OK – what are you doing here?”

they are friendly young men and Waayhoek’s villagers are glad to have them around. If only they could stay around, permanently.

“Pray for us,” says Zodwa Duma. “All the women sleep together at night now.” She lives in the village prefabs.

In the tent town the wind gusts, sucking the canvas, shaking the ropes, clanging the smashed doors of the lavatories. The Mbulwana people lie flat on the ground as bullet fly around them.

TRAVELS

When! It’s quite a journey for a single day – this journey along 771 footpaths.

Across tribal frontiers.

In and out of war zones.

Past the graves of hundreds of dead.

Through hidden dagga gardens, green with scented narcotic.

Past men who are maimed, blind, crippled and mad.

Past abandoned fields, empty cattle kraals.

“And oh, it is lovely here! Says MaMvelase Makunga, sighing with delight. “It’s my first time. When can I come again.”

MaMvelase has brought her footpath with her to the bones scale, and as her bag swings she takes us to the far place that is her home; to the yard with three fowls, a husband crazy with a bullet in his head, the five children who will never go to school. But there is no path anywhere that is bereft of laughter.

Is that what makes a Bones Day so exhausting? We have to travel too many journeys into too many hearts, with too volatile a mix of tragedy and giggles. When the last bag of bones has clattered onto the heap the staff sit around, drained, unmoving. The census book can reduce 771 footpaths, 771 families into columns of statistics, but we are unable to reduce the distances of the day, the headlong smash into real lives, misshapen and damaged – exuberant and vigorous.

When the Great Bones Exchange started in 1980 it was intended as a temporary drought relief measure, a once-a-month event where we swapped bones for yellow mealies. Eight years and 869 478 kilograms of bones later however, the scheme is still going strong.

There have been only 7 collections in 1988 because our big lorry was out of action awaiting a new gearbox. However, the following is a summary of the statistics gathered from those seven months, averaged out.

Total People: 3395

Total Bones: 82 344 kgs

Total Maize: 54 347 kgs

Children schooling: 37,22%

Families with fields: 32,16%
Those who are able to plough them: 8,86%
Families who have lost fields through impi: 27,35%

Cattle owners: 28,76%
Families who once owned stock but have lost them all: 29,39%
Average stock per owner: -1,92 cattle and 3,42 goats.

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| Widows | 18,23% |
| War Widows | 29,97% |
| Unemployed | 17,05% |
| Farm employed | 1,00% |
| Town employed | 3,73% |
| Self employed | 0,21% |
| Sick | 8,34% |
| Jail | 1,06% |
| TB | 5,91% |
| Deserted | 2,36% |
| Crippled | 6,64% |
| Mad | 3,85% |
| Blind | 0,69% |
| Old-on Pension | 0,91% |

Impi Deaths; - 61,95% of families in queue had lost an average of 2,19 men in fighting.

APRIL 1989

BY THE TIME THIS WAS DUE TO GO TO PRESS CREINA HAD ALREADY BEEN SENT ON A WRITING SABBATICAL BY THE CAP COMMITTEE SO THE NEXT PAGES ARE FROM ANOTHER CORRESPONDENT.

“WHEN TILLAGE BEGINS OTHER ARTS FOLLOW” (Daniel Webster)

Birdsong, children’s laughter and the sound of hoe blades biting into wet earth are all that can be heard; peaceful sounds falling softly through air made fragrant by last nights rain. The children stop to show us with pride the fruits of their labours; huge pumpkins, ripe mealies, rich purple aubergines and fiery red chillies. The gardens are neat, the earth hoed into deep furrows to conserve precious water, every weed pulled out before it seeds and carried as a gift to the compost heap. Six garden-mothers watch over ten children each; helping, teaching, and giving love, deeply needed by these children whose small lives have almost all been damaged by loss of a parent or by home circumstances so bad that the child is, in some cases, the sole provider for the family.

Here they learn not only skills but hope, trust, and self-respect. A few live here but most of them go home at night bearing food they have grown themselves. At the end of the month they take home a small wage which may be the only cash that the family is able to earn.

“DISGRACEFUL – CHLDREN WORKING!” “SCANDALOUS; CHILDREN SHOULD BE AT SCHOOL” “OUR FUND WOULD NEVER SUPPORT A PROJECT WHICH LETS CHILDREN WORK.” “Somebody should DO something”

So easily said from an armchair in the big city – and seen from that perspective, how light it sound. But look again. Look at it through the eyes of a Tembu or Ncunu, a Bomvu or a Mabaso or of anyone who knows the reality of life in the harsh land that is Msinga. Take for instance Qedile Duma aged 6. in another life she would be starting Grade 1 and trotting off to school each day with uniform and satchel. But that isn't Qedile's life. For a start there isn't any school for miles and miles – and the nearest one is in enemy territory. Nobody in her family has ever learned to read so the benefits of literacy, while recognized are things they've managed quite well without up to now, and anyway there's no money for such a luxury. Education is free but uniforms and books and food are not.

Her father is dead, killed in the last war. That was when their hut was burned down by the impi but family members have helped them to build another high up on the mountain. There, an enemy impi intent on burning may have less chance of attacking unobserved. It is far from the river and every drop of water has to be carried up the steep slopes. Her mother works as hard as she can gathering firewood to sell but it brings in little. With younger children at home the little doesn't stretch far. If Qedile doesn't work she won't eat – it's as simple as that. If she and her brother were not able to work at Mdukatshani they would have to leave home and go far away to find work on farms, where, unknown and uncared for they would be faceless hands.

The people of Msinga are deeply rooted in their traditions and their culture. They disdain the shallow materialism and the desire for instant gratification which they see in townspeople. Like all country men they are conservative by nature; change must be thoroughly assessed, maybe for years, before it is accepted. The new is not valued for its newness.

At the same time they long for their children to attain the skills of literacy which so few people in the Msinga region possess. When Mdukatshani's Learning Centre is in operation the children will work in their gardens for half the day and will attend the learning center for other half, thereby being able to make their contribution to the family economy while learning. Most importantly they will still be able to stay at home with their own families. The scholars will no only be children; many adults have been to ask diffidently if they may also come to learn. Mtshali, aged at least 70, was one of the first to ask to be enrolled. “Hawu, Mkhulu, what do you want to learn at your age?” “To read the Bible.” Everyone will have the chance to learn and, in addition to literacy, what is taught will be what people need to know – which they will decide. The University of Natal will be providing advice, expertise and materials to assist in this process.

The Learning Centre is fast becoming a physical reality. Tons of stone have been moved by boys and oxen and a large area leveled. David Sithole, the builder in charge, has first erected all the roof poles following ht classic Zulu order of building. These are now awaiting their thick coating of thatch while David builds the walls out of ruddy-gold stone. The initial building will house two large classrooms and a store room. The teacher's accommodation and a community kitchen will be housed in the second building placed at right angles to form an L-shape. In the corner of the 'L' between the two, there will be an open air meeting-place.

Apart from cement and gumpoles, all the building materials are gathered on the farm or nearby. It is not unusual as one drives in the gate to be halted by a Stonehenge gang of teenage boys who, wielding only thin poles, are busy moving huge monoliths on rollers towards the building site. Their progress is remarkably fast, punctuated by grunts of effort and bursts of laughter.

Four young girls aged less than 15 move through the gardens bending over pipes, adjusting valves, searching out leaks – qualified irrigation engineers at work. With a sigh and hiss powerful overhead sprinklers begin to turn as Mla Magasela switches on the big electric pump on a river terrace far below. Mdukatshani has electricity. The lines marched over the mountain in December and for thirty Rand a month all the 300 gardens can.

One Friday morning in March twenty people of all ages gathered in a circle under the meeting tree. Solemn apprehension or fixed nervous grins, a tendency to study the ground and an unnatural silence made this no ordinary group.

Natty looked at them, sympathy and laughter alternating in her eyes. “Hawu, poor things. Those are the students. The principal is coming to find out if they have remembered their lessons.

The Irrigation engineers are among the group who have all ‘graduated’ from the Midlands Centre for Further Education at Nottingham Road. This college offers residential skills courses conducted in Zulu to students of any age, and any or no degree of literacy. Fencing, welding, stockmanship, basic and advanced, as well as irrigation are among the skills as well as a new view of the world and themselves. A few minutes with Mr. Gesau and two lectures dispersed their exam nerves, and laughter soon replaced the unnatural solemnity. They all acquitted themselves with honour.

Sizani Mbatha points to the bush covered hillside next to her garden. “There’s where our next 300 gardens will be: many many people have been waiting for a garden but we didn’t have enough water. Now that we have electricity we can begin to dig.” Sizani has an experimental garden where she treats several beds of the same crop indifferent ways. One gets manure, one rotted compost, one is given chemical fertilizer, the next bonemeal and the last has green manure – weeds and grass dug in while still green to a depth of 30 cm. If lush green foliage were the criterion the last method would be the clear winner but as the crop is sweet potatoes the proof will lie in the roots in a few months time.

WARS AND RUMOURS OF WARS

As we walk through the peaceful gardens Natty Duma is continually pulled aside by women with troubled faces and urgent tones of voice. In each case the story is the same. “She lives across the river at Nomoya,” says Natty. “They have just built a new house after they were burnt out in the last war at the end of 1987. Now the men are sleeping out on the mountain again.

‘Sleeping out on the mountain is tantamount to a declaration of war, in this case on the Dimbi clan who live on the mountain on the other side of the plain. Already at least four men are known to have died, and the war has barely begun. The women do not want the war; many men do not want the war – but war there will be.

After a year of unusual peace there are separate wars on at least three fronts. Dogs bark all night at things unseen. A worried member of the committee spends the night crouched on the floor of the sitting-room before going into hiding in a distant town. His health was wrecked in the last war and he doesn't want to fight again so he is in fear of discovery by both sides. Bands of armed men are crossing the river once again to use the high ground on the Mdukatshani side as a lookout-post. As we sit talking in the deep shade of a pawpaw tree on this ordinary Monday morning we watch gun-bearing men in single file moving purposefully up the mountain. Nobody speaks.

THE GIST OF NEW GLASSES

"We must all pray for Creina and the book because with this book Creina can give the world glasses to see Africa as it really is."

Petrus Majozi, Chairman of CAP committee and Chief Induna of the Mchunu territory was speaking to committee members at a meeting at Mdukatshani last month. By order of the committee Creina has taken a Sabbatical to free her time for writing. Many of her day-to-day tasks have been divided amongst the committee members though she will continue to do correspondence and the accounts.

Roxanna Earle is handling the greater part of the beadwork administration while GG and Rauri Alcock and friends are helping out with Bones Days and other tasks when they are free. Natty Duma's son Themba has joined one staff to work eventually in the Learning Centre but while waiting to go on a course in Literacy training in Johannesburg he has been helping in all areas of the farm and its work. His appointment, made long ago, has given unforeseen solace to Natty who lost a beloved son in tragic circumstances just later Christmas.

Natty: - "I have had so much love from Maveo and Stanley (her husband and son) and now God says that it is time that I should give love to others."

My agreement, when asked to write the newsletter during Creina's writing-time, was given with some trepidation because I am no writer. I am afraid you will receive a much more pedestrian report than you are accustomed to. News will be gleaned during frequent visits to Mdukatshani to assist with Bead Days as well as constant contact with the farm by phone.

I will add my address to this and will welcome comments, questions and suggestions on subjects you would particularly like to hear about in the next edition (due out at the end of June).

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CAPFARM QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

SECOND QUARTER 1989

FENCING IS A DANGEROUS OCCUPATION

Ntombi raised a dusty forearm and wiped the sweat from her face. Although summer was over the sun had lost little of heat and scorching waves pulsed back from every rock. Ntombi and Khebe had been up on the high hill since early morning stretching and making fast the shining blue wire between firm posts which marched bravely across the mountain marking to top farm border. It was quiet up there, only birds and the scuttering of lizards disturbed the silence so the falling rock and the sibilant click brought Ntombi's head up sharply. She lifted her hand to her throat in horror. Over the fence, on the far side of a little donga seven men were crouching, rifles to their shoulders their eyes fixed with deadly intent on Khebe whose back was towards them. Unconscious of any danger he was straining the bright wire towards a fence-post further down the hill.

Ntombi's brain raced as she put her head down pretending she had seen nothing, busy with her work. I don't now these guys – a new impi, nervous, looking for trouble so they can prove themselves in the war that barely begun – but Khebe's no enemy; he's not of Mnqamkantaba or Mathinta, he's at war with no-one. How to let him know? And how to show the watchers that is was only Khebe. She was under no illusion about their intentions – if he made a sudden move they'd shoot first and ask the questions later.

“Khebe”.

“Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm”?

“Can I borrow your pliers”?

“Why, whatever's happened to yours”?

(Oh Khebe – please – turn and look up so they can see)

“I don't know, I can't seem to see them, I must have lost them.”

(That should bring his head up – we can't go back with tools missing)

Sure enough, with indignation and astonishment stiffening every line of his body, he slowly turned to stare at her.

“What – well you'd better start looking, you can't just lose tools Ntombi, what's the matter with you?”

Ntombi breathed again as one by one the men on the far side lowered their guns and got to their feet with a slight air of disappointment – they can't shoot non-combatants. Muttering stern warnings about being on the hills when there's an impi at war they marched past Khebe who stood rigid as he realized what had missed him.

Shaking with after-shock Ntombi and Khebe drove back to Mdukatshani to tell their tale.
A small pain of red pliers is lying on the hill.
For now, the impi has possession.

MY SUBJECT IS WAR AND THE PITY OF WAR (Wilfred Owen)

Mdukatshani lies at the center of two simultaneous but totally separate wars. On the top farm border lies the territory of Mathinta who are at war with their neighbours across the valley at Mngamakantaba. Over the river from Mdukatshani is Nomoya who are at war with their neighbour, Dimbi. Their lands are at opposite ends of the same mountain.

By the standards of modern warfare these are tiny events and yet it seems unlikely in any other country in the world that villages waging war on each other would go unremarked. (I try to imagine headlines were, say, Sturminster Newton to declare war on Okeford Fitzpaine in my native Dorset – England.) Here it doesn't rate a single line in any but the local Natal press.

And yet:

* The Chairman of Mdukatshani's Committee. Petrus Majozi, Prime Minister of the Mcunu kingdom has been in hiding since Easter, unable to go home or carry on his work because he is in danger of assassination.

* In one eight men have been killed in these two wars since Easter.

*In one single battle nine men died any many more were injured.

* Men from all four villages who were working in Johannesburg and Durban have been assassinated.

* Two men were killed in the ambush of two Combis (mini-buses) on a winding mountain road to the top farm boundary late one night. The Combis were being used to take people back to town after a funeral.

*More than six hundred women and children from Dimbi and Nomoya are going through this winter without a roof over their heads because their houses have been burned down.

*Mdukatshani _____ neighbour was fired on while driving through his farm.

*Ntombi's house on the cliffs above the river has bullet holes in the walls. It caught in a crossfire one night.

*The best efforts of two Chiefs, the Magistrate and the Police have so far failed to stop the fighting.

At Mdukatshani large Impis from both Mngamakantaba and Mathinta are encamped on the top farm making normal movement on the farm impossible. For the families living up there the only way to come down to the river and the lower farm is by long tortuous journeys made at

times when they hope not to encourage anyone. Mini-bus loads of supplies and reinforcements arrive at night and off-load on the road next to the farm-buildings. An attempted raid on Starlight (the farm-buildings across the road) was foiled by the quick thinking of the night-watchman who realized that the signal he was being given to open the gates was very slightly altered from the usual one. He refused to open the gates and fired a warning shot which was returned. Then the sound of many feet was heard. They ran towards the river through a gauntlet of firing from the Nightwatchmen and escaped. Vehicles, cattle and mountains of mealies for Bones- Days are kept at Starlight so the raiders probably hoped for easy gains. They learned otherwise.

Creina, on the phone one night in June.

“There’s lots of firing across the river – they’re using strange bullets like flares. Some are landing on this side just below the house.”

The use of those strange bullets soon became apparent.

That first night Nomoya burned down 22 kraals in revenge for having been burned out in 1987.

The next morning Dimbi women who had lost all that they possessed in the fires climbed the mountain to their men in hiding.

“We ask you, men of Dimbi, do not go back and burn again. Let there be an end now. We know how, it feels to be without a roof, with nothing left but the things we are wearing. We don’t want our sisters at Nomoya to suffer again.”

“Hau women; go attend to your woman’s work. Leave us to conduct the affairs of men, they are no concern of yours.”

The Dimbi women knew that they had failed to influence their men so they sent messengers to Nomoya to warn the women that they must take all their possessions out of their huts and hide them in the hills so that at least their loss would be reduced.

For the next five days and nights there was constant gunfire. The smoke from burning hoes lay across the valley like a shroud. Creina had to go to town for two nights, so Natty and Ngxongo with all the herd boys and a shifting population of refugees children and old people spent their nights fire-watching; sleeping in the open in case stray incendiaries fell on the thatch.

Natty, one morning on the phone: -

“Oh no – let me sit on the floor – the bullets are flying over here like bees.”

Despite the horror of their loss, the fear and the sleepless nights, by the end of that terrible week the women of Nomoya and Dimbi were back under the big tree at Mdukatshani busy with beadwork. They gave each other strength and support as they swapped stories of the night raids, united in disgust at their men’s behaviour. From the start the women have been against the fighting and it is not allowed to interfere with their relationships with the women of ‘enemy’ villages. Mdukatshani, which maintains a strict neutrality, provides a meeting place for all women where they can unwind as they do beadwork or work in their gardens. The kind donation of hundreds of blankets has relieved the misery of the winter’s nights.

The impact of the loss of more than 200 houses in two such small communities is incalculable. With no men working, the burden of the replacement of shelter for their falls on the women alone. Each house costs at least eight hundred Rands for poles and thatch. Mud for the walls is free for those who have the strength to carry all the water required for puddling the hard dry earth. In many cases their houses are miles from the river and there is unlikely to be rain until November. They have no money to buy poles so every available child over the age of twelve will have to go and work in the gum-tree plantations and be paid for their labour in poles. It will take months to amass enough poles to re-roof a whole house. Thatch grass does not grow in the surrounding area so has to be transported in from distant farms. Meanwhile those with roofs shelter those without, though each woman returns to her own hearth in the center of her burned down hut to cook the family meals. Sometimes they are prevented by the impi of one side or the other from crossing the river to tend their gardens at Mdukatshani but the committee has arranged that their gardens are watered and that the new seasons crops are planted for them.

No-one envisages an end to the fighting in the next few months. From past experience they know that it will continue until the men lose the will to fight or until they run out of ammunition – whichever comes first. The great concern of everyone is that it should not extend from being ‘inter-village strife’ to being full scale war between the two kingdoms whose territory meets at Mdukatshani.

WINTER IN A TWO YEAR OLD TENT

As I write there is a temperature of –5(C) at Ladysmith with a wind chill factor of –15. Beyond the little town of Ladysmith the land folds gently, hills and valleys reaching the horizon under an enormous sky. A few small trees stand stark against the bleached grass, gnarled and distorted by unceasing wind, providing neither shade nor shelter. Sheep country perhaps, or the haunt of soaring raptors but hardly, one could have thought, the Land of a Thousand Lavatories. Yet here they are, in undisputed possessions, precision marching across the land their corrugated splendour. On the edge of this array, apologetically, in one small corner, live the people of Mbulwana. They were moved here after the flood disaster of 1987 in which they lost all that they possessed. The government provided each family with a new green tent, basic bedding, cooking utensils and a paraffin stove and enough food for one month; and of course, a lavatory. The town is 30 km away and there is no regular transport, but even if there were there are no jobs to be had.

They are Basothos in Zulu country – displaced by desperation and disaster. The men are old or ill, some are mad. Operation Hunger does not help them now; the 87’ floods are distant memories overtaken by more recent catastrophes. But it’s minus 5 out there and the tents are two years old – their fabric threadbare and tattered. Eight hundred Rands for a house is out of sight even of their dreams.

And yet, here where the people have just a toe-hold on life, tiny threads of hope are emerging. The first garden which was Mdukatshani initiated, instructed and supplied has been followed by a second one made by the Mbulwana people themselves. Maybe now they’ll have a tiny surplus to sell to the better off village of Waayhoek next-door. They are proud of their garden, every plant is watched over and discussed.

The next stage is to try to earn some sort of regular income, however little. Perhaps because they have been without roots for so long this tiny community has very few skills of any sort. The successes of their gardening has put new heart in them however, and the CAP farm committee felt it was time to introduce them to something new. With the help of a kind friend a skilled craftsman was found to teach Mbulwana to make baskets, for which a ready market is available in the cities. At first it seemed hopeless. As soon as they found that it wasn't easy to make a perfect basket, all but a stalwart few drifted away from their teacher and went back to contemplating their miseries.

When this news reached Mdukatshani Natty Duma drew herself up to her full four foot ten inches and went into action. With an equally scandalised Ngxongo and Mphephethi she drove in to Mbulwana.

“Hau, you lazy donkeys. You know what happens to people who won't work? They STARVE. You think that CAP is going to feed you if you are starving? Ha – You'd better think again because we WON'T. Here you've got a chance to learn to do something for yourselves and you give up before you even try – what sort of a people is that?”.....
..... And on and on and on in that vein. When Natty got tired, Ngxongo or Mphephethi took over, sjamboking the people with their eloquent until no-one dared meet their eyes.

The next day everyone was in their place before the teacher arrived and gradually as they learned they have gained confidence.

A few weeks have past since then and their work is becoming really good. Even more importantly, they are working with enthusiasm and hope.

MDUKATSHANI

The war has disrupted work on the top farm and has severely restricted movement on the lower farm. The herd boys caring for cattle or goats are accompanied at all times by an adult in case of trouble. Most of the herd boys live at Mdukatshani. Some are orphans and others cannot live at home because conditions there make it impossible. They are mothered by Natty Duma, given fatherly guidance by all the older men and taught skills and responsibility. Two of the eldest are Mphikayipheli Sithole who came from Dimbi, and September Sithole who first home was at Nomoya. They are now aged about fifteen and both have been at Mdukatshani since they were very small boys – it is their home.

One day in June a young man came to see September. It was an older brother who had long since left home but who was now called back to the impi at their Nomoya home.

“Come home September. You are big now, almost a man. If the Dimbi catches you out on the hills with the cattle you won't stand a chance – They'll shoot you on sight. We can't protect you while you stay here – come home where we can look after you. You don't have to fight yet you are still too young for that.”

September reluctantly agreed, sad to leave, but asked for a few moments to get ready. Once out of sight of his brother he ran as quickly as he could to find his friend Mpikayipheli, an uneasy hunch rapidly becoming a conviction in his mind.

“Mpikayipheli my brother, listen. Nomoya impi has called me to come home. They say I’ll be shot if I stay. But I have thought and I am afraid.

When I have gone safely home it will be so easy for Nomoya to come here and shoot you without the risk of shooting me as well.

Don’t speak. I am sure that is their plan. Just go and run, now, before I’ve even left so that you get home to Dimbi before the impi comes after you. GO.”

Mpikayipheli went – hastily taking leave of Natty and heading for the river.

A few minutes later women who had been working in their gardens came to Natty.

“Natty, the Nomoya men are down there by the river, just across from our pump. There are many and they are stopping the women from Dimbi from coming over the river.

Natty’s heart sank – the boy would be killed right there, as soon as he came to the water’s edge.

But Mpikayipheli had not listened to Impi tales all his ... without gathering wisdom. He ran along the steep cliffs on Mdukatshani’s side under cover of thick bush. When he was some miles from the farm he crossed Tugela in the gathering dusk to take the long road home around the mountain.

‘Bones Days’ have been temporarily suspended because Khalesakhe Khumalo, the driver of CAP’s huge truck has left to work in town so mealies could not be transported in nor bones out. However a new driver has recently joined the staff and there will soon be a ‘Bones Day’ possibly held in different areas to enable the people to come with their bones without crossing enemy territory.

Although some areas of work have been restricted this has allowed everyone to concentrate their efforts on developing the first phase of the new gardens made possible by the electric irrigation system. Trees have been cut and their roots back-breaking grubbed out. Rocks and stones removed have been used to make retaining walls. The bush clearance is being tackled by the men and they are followed by garden-mothers who clear and dig and hoe. As soon as the ground is ready it is given liberal helping of compost and manure and in goes the first crop. Not an inch of ground is wasted. The gardens are so valued and tended that there’s never a weed or a browned off leaf in sight. Any woman or child who willfully neglected her garden would be sent away by the garden committee and the garden given to one of the many who are waiting for the chance to grow their own food. Not surprisingly this rarely happens. When this phase of garden development is complete there will be three hundred more allotments and three hundred more Msinga families will eat good food they have grown themselves.

The children’s Account has had no money in it for the last few months and so the children have been catching transport to nearby cotton fields where they pick cotton on a piece-work basis. Their gardens are maintained by their garden-mothers during the week but the children come to work in them and pick their crops at weekends. It is hoped that funds will once more be available when the Learning center is complete so that the children can learn to earn a little money and grow food for their families at the same time.

One job that has not been necessary this winter is the burning of firebreaks along Mdukatshani's 11 km boundary. With two impi's in residence there will be constant fire watching since neither of them would like to lose their cover of dense bush. However, that is the only benefit from their occupation. Like all armies they appropriate' whatever they decide they need so Ntombi's and Khebe's fence is now likely to be gracing a distant kraal. At the last bones day almost every woman had the same tale of woe in response to the 'census' questions:

"Yes, we had five cattle but they've been taken by the impi."

"No, our ten goats were taken by the impi, in broad daylight too, but what can you do?"

"Well we had crops in our fields but the impi came in the night and now there's nothing left."

They seemed resigned, there was no anger.

During June three of CAP's stockmen, Mcijeni, Mangempi Ngqulunga and Khebe Mtshali, went on an Advanced Stockmanship Course at the Midlands Centre for further Education. They impressed their instructors and received excellent reports for their work.

Themba Duma is doing a Community Development Training course at Wilgespruit in Johannesburg. By the time his course is completed the Learning Centre should be ready for its _____ students.

Creina is well and immersed in her writing. Being a 'morning-person' she writes from dawn until 1 pm when she stops for a few hours to work with the beadwomen.

My thanks to all of you who wrote after the last newsletter. For those who asked how best they could help – I will be going to Mdukatshani very soon and will ask the CAP committee for ideas. I do know that all help, however small, is deeply appreciated.

Please do send comments, queries or suggestions to: -

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MARCH 1990: THE SMELL OF DEATHS

I am sick of the smell of human blood, and I am sick of the smell of death, and I am sick of writing round the edge of experience, when there's been a subsidence inside my head from living too close to violence.

This is about reality – told without comfort and written in rage, because rage is a way of affirming life, and when hops is gone, the spirit must be nurtured on fury.

THE DEADWEIGHT OF THE DEAD

The prison cell is a cheerful place, with the sun streaming in the open door, and a glimpse of lawns and flowers outside.

A blast of music starts up nearby. Ta tum ta tum... a heavy rhythm for an early morning.
The police disco?
“The barracks,” grins the policeman at the desk in the corner of the cell.

It is years since the prisoners moved out and the detectives moved in, taking over the Weenen Jail as CID headquarters. Although there are little touches to show they have tried to make it homely, there isn't much you can do to make a prison cell cheerful, except leave the door open.

Ngxongo and I sit drinking tea in the cell, gazing at the gardens through a narrow doorway. The door has been painted a pretty blue, but there's a disfiguring gap where the bolts were removed.

Above the policeman's head is a calendar with a picture of an elephant. **HESKE BROS (Pty) Ltd** says the lettering. The Weenen coffin factory. That seems appropriate. We have been talking about guns and death, this tall, burly policeman and I, and I am grateful to him. He was so strong and gentle the day Themba died.

“I have terrible nightmares about his head,” I say. “I can't forget his head.” The policeman photographed Themba's head – what was left of it. He had seen heads like that before, however. How did he live with the deadweight of the dead who were part of the routine of his everyday?

“You get used to it,” he says. “No....” he closes his eyes momentarily and I can't read the expression that passes across his face. You never get used to it, he corrects himself, but after a day or two an image will disappear, and then there's another one to follow.

Sgt François van der Westhuysen is 21 years old, although you could mistake him for 30. He was at school with my sons, and like them, has seen so much of death that he has acquired the unconscious authority and compassion which belongs to men long accustomed to manhood.

Service in the Riot Unit must have added something to him. He was one of nine young policemen specially selected to live at Hammarsdale, notorious as one of the worst areas for black-on-black violence in South Africa. The team spent nine months on danger pays investigating the origins of the violence.

“Political?” Van der Westhuysen shakes his head. Criminal elements have taken over, he says.

There are few policemen these days who haven’t done time in the Riot Unit in the townships of Natal, and the experience alters them in different ways some walk out, as three policemen are walking out every day now. In the first two months of the year more than 1 300 policemen left the South African Police Force. Of those who stay - an average of six are killed on duty every month, four are disabled, and 390 injured. That’s been the average for the past five years, so of course they’re leaving.

Last week the commander of the Riot Unit, Major Deon Terblanche, was found dead in his car with gunshot wounds in his head and neck. A constable in the Riot Unit, Roy Mandla Ngcobo, was arrested soon afterwards – and two boys later he was also killed, shot in the head by an investigating officer while allegedly trying to escape from custody.

That’s another thing that can happen to policemen who live on the threshold. They blow each other’s heads off, or they blow their own heads off.

Natty’s son, Stanley Duma, was one of the policemen who couldn’t take it.

“The quiet one,” the police called him. Too quiet and shy and introspective, perhaps, to be a policeman, but there were no other openings for him. He didn’t last a year.

Unhinged by what he was seeing in the townships, he slumped to the floor of the Plessislaer police barracks with his head smashed in by a bullet.

“You’re lucky to have a body to bury,” a police spokesman said at the funeral. One of Stanley’s colleagues had been burnt alive by a mob the day before. Plessislaer is the police station with the highest toll of deaths-by-violence in South Africa.

You’ll find Stanley Duma’s death mentioned somewhere in that pile of documents on the desk in front of Sgt van der Westhuysen. It’s a factor in the evidence that will be considered at the inquest into Themba’s death. Not a clue, not a reason, just a link in a chain of events.

My own statement to the police is almost finished. Van der Westhuysen reads it back to me. “Can you sign here?” he says. The investigation into Themba’s death is now complete.

We chat briefly as we stand up to go. The policeman mentions trouble at Ezakheni, the township up the road near Ladysmith. On Monday five men were stoned, then burnt to death. I tell him about the stoning at Steadville, the rape at Waayhoek, the man beaten to death at the bus stop last week.

Van der Westhuysen looks down at the papers on his desk – a dossier of facts with only one thing missing, a factual explanation of Themba’s death.

“When you read all this,” he says slowly, “I think you can see that the real reason he died is because things were too vivid for him.”

Vivid.

I am sick thinking about that word an hour later when I am with Natty at Waayhoek, listening to a woman in blue-flowered chiffon who sways on heels far too high as she stands in the dusty yard, gesturing. She was at Ezakheni on Monday, watching the five bodies burn.

“They used pangas to kill them,” she says,” and picks and forks and bricks and also sticks, and then they put tyres and tubes and bins on top and burnt them.”

“Bins?”

“Rubber bins for dirt...”

Vivid is a word I’ve been looking for months. Thank you Sgt Frans van der Westhuysen. You have given me just the word I wanted.

COUNTING HEADS, COUNTING THE HEADLESS

Themba was the first black matriculant on the project – cocky and shrill, eager to please, excitable, naive, exasperating. He was immature for his age, closer to sixteen than 23 in the uncertain needs of his self-discovery.

I often wondered whether his immaturity was the protective shield of a happy home, for he grew up in the laughter of his parents’ marriage, knowing nothing of the hardship of death.

In June last year Themba left home for the first time to do a six months development course in Johannesburg. He had been there a month when he saw a man stabbed to death at a braai vleis.

By September he was in the Natal townships doing the practical part of his course – literacy teaching and gardening.

“You are working in the garden and you hear firing and there’s somebody dead,” he said.

Sometimes he would find a callbox to phone home and Natty and I would hear the trembling. “Pray for me that I live through the night,” he would say.” I am at a bad place. They kill people in front of my eyes. There are guns at Msinga, but I never see guns like this.”

If we didn’t listen from the depths of our souls – well, we were also struggling with the experience of death, so much death, spattered like bloodmarks, random patchy, vivid and meaningless.

THE VIVID HILLS

The year changed us.

Some of the change came from the accumulation of violence outside the valley. Some of the change came from the accumulation war here at home. It was our fourteenth year at Msinga – our tenth year of war. When we arrived in 1975, none of the communities on our boundary had a previous history of war. War was as new to them as it has been to us.

This last year there was more war, more death, and it came closer. Four impis took over the farm, so that apart from the gardens, the entire farm was a war zone and out of bounds to us.

Two impis took turns using my office on the cliff as a command post – and although there has been a truce since Christmas, I am no longer allowed at my old workplace.

After two small girls were gang-raped while out gathering wood on the farm, it has been considered dangerous to move around anywhere alone. My deserted office is almost visible from the house, but if I need to recover a detail from one of the old files stored there, a man will guard me there and back again. The familiar has become skewed, refracted.

The hills themselves seem different, sunken in on themselves, pockmarked with graves.

Across the river is an open plain, silky with flowering grasses. When the wind ripples the grasses I think of Thuthukani Masoka, the 12-year-old son of my beloved friend Dora. You could say Thuthukani cleared the way for the grasses. The plain became a no-man's-land after he was killed one morning playing a game of "zwilis" with his friends. Zwilis are the fleshy green seeds of aloes, flicked from the end of switches. The boys were chasing each other, ducking and laughing, when there was the sound of a shot, fired from the hill.

That where Thuthukani toppled, clutching a handful of green zwilis. He had to lie in the sun a long time before the police arrived and gave permission to move him. That's the drift where we splashed across the river, carrying his body on an old iron bed frame. Here, under this milkwood tree, we laid him down, smelling so strong that the dogs kept circling, looking for a gap to get at the blood....

There is nowhere to walk anymore without the coming along too. Wherever you turn your eyes there is a place of loss.

That tree fuschia – that's where Phefu Ndamane died running.

Those are the sedges where the unknown body surfaced

There's the cliff Khanjane Sithole was thrown down after he was murdered.

That's the rock where Delanie Mbatha hailed me across the river only a month ago.

"My child has been bitten by a snake," he called.

"Mfezi?" I shouted back across the water.

"Mfezi," he replied. Cobra.

(Oh God, I prayed, not that child. Twelve years he waited for that little girl. He has no other child. Leave that child).

There in the shadow cast by the mountain you will find the place where he buried his child.

THE OVERFLOW MORTUARY

MaNjoko's son, Sipho Khanyile, entered the New Year on a tray in the Estcourt overflow mortuary.

When we went to fetch his body for burial, MaNjoko went with us – tiny, beloved MaNjoko wrapped in the traditional blanket of mourning. We were glad tradition kept her blinded for it was an awful place, that small, grubby building next to the cemetery.

Natty and I glanced around the room, and then glanced at each other. Dear heaven- didn't they ever clean up? The door was smeared with old blood. Up on the wall hung a towel as

filthy as an oilrag. The two wash basins were grimy, and the floor was awash with bloody spillings

“Here he is,” said the attendant, pulling out one of the six trays in the room. We gazed down at the still, broad-shouldered beauty of a man in his thirties. No, that wasn’t Siphó. The unknown man did not seem a stranger, however. Why were the dead never strangers? Gently we pushed the tray back.

The attendant tugged another handle, and this time there was a swish of blood and water as the body emerged. The mixture smelt rotten as it spilt on our legs. We held back a moment, flinching from the smell, shrinking from the touch of death. Then we took hold of Siphó’s arms and legs and lifted him into the coffin. It was done.

We looked around, but there was nowhere to wash, not in that filthy room. We opened a tap, trying not to touch the dirty basin, and held our hands in the water, shaking them dry afterwards. The smell of the spilling traveled with us, however, drying on our legs and shoes as we drove towards the mountains, to the single iron-lean-to which was Siphó’s home. There, in a little spring next to the open grave, we washed ourselves clean.

STRONG WORDS

Themba was the next of our sons to die. The last night of this life he sat at a table in the light of candle, translating an article on Msinga for a room full of people who could not understand English. He wasn’t really fluent himself, so he read slowly, frequently referring to the dictionary next to him to check on the meaning of words. “I don’t know all the words,” he said, “ but I know they are strong words.”

There were strong photographs too, like that close-up of a windscreen shattered by bulletholes. Although everyone recognized the picture they made Themba translate the caption for them.

“The microbus in which Neil Alcock was shot from an ambush in September 1983,”
Themba repeated in Zulu. **“A bullet from an automatic rifle hit Neil in the neck. Blood spewed onto the windshield. The van slowed to a halt. Neil opened the door, staggered out, and fell.”**

It was almost midnight before Themba finished his rough translation of the article. The roomful of people dispersed heavy-hearted.

“We didn’t sleep,” Natty said the next morning,” because we were remembering everything, not only the ambush but everything that has happened afterwards also.”

At Msinga we never live far from a sense of futility, for the events of the past are the events of the future lying in wait for us.

A SACK FULL OF BLOOD

On the afternoon of March 2nd Themba shot himself in the head with a shotgun.

He left five letters lying on his bed. An African policeman translated them for Sgt van der Westhuysen, and then stood in the doorway reading them aloud for the silent crowd that filled the small courtyard and overflowed beyond the fence. Natty was doing beads when it

happened, so all the bead women were there with her, and there were men from Mashunka who had hurried down the hill when they heard the news, grave-faced and stricken for Natty.

“Are you listening Natty?” I shock her. “You have to listen. The police have to take the letters so you have to listen now.”

Not that the letters explained anything. They were tranquil and affectionate, thanking those who had given him happiness.

“When I meet my father and brother,” Themba wrote, “I will explain the situation I now face.”

“I am glad he was happy when he died,” Natty said quietly when the policeman had finished intoning.

The Mashunka men filed in to carry the body and Natty stirred. She wanted to say goodbye to her son. We helped her outside and she watched the blanketed form going into the police van. The door closed and the van reserved and began to move away.

“Hamba kahle,” she cried out in despair. “Go well Themba, my young insizwa.”

(I’ll kill you, Themba, I thought. God help you when I get hold of you because I’ll kill you for doing this.)

In the house two women were already at work with stones, scraping the brains and blood off the earthen walls and floor, then rubbing the surfaces smooth with rough sacking. As they worked they collected every bit of blood-drenched soil and dust, and put it in a sack that would travel with Natty next day, when she went to Waayhoek, the resettlement village which is the Duma family’s home. Tradition dictates that the blood must be collected, and even on a battlefield, after the bodies have gone, you will find women scraping blood from the ground. It is one of the skills at Msinga.

“Don’t cry,” Natty told her family when they sat alone together that first night. She opened the sack and showed them Thembas blood. “He won’t come back anymore,” she said.

“Even if we cry he won’t come back.”

THE POLICE MORTUARY

The police mortuary is a brisk, shining place, with an efficient, matter-of-fact policeman who fills in the forms for identification, and then leads the way to a shiny steel door in the wall, pulling out the tray with Themba.

“I think you should tell the family to bury the body without opening the coffin,” he says.

The tray has come out with Themba’s head next to us – a rim of empty cavity, a mouth and a bit of ear. I am there to identify him.

“But there’s nothing to identify,” I say.

“Have you arranged to have him moved?” asks the policeman. The police mortuary covers a huge district, and hasn’t got space for storage. As soon as a post mortem’s been completed the body must be removed.

“Yes. Estcourt Funeral Services say they will keep him until the funeral.”

Twenty rand for moving him. Five rand a day for refrigeration. Forty-five rand for the week.

THE ESTCOURT FUNERAL SERVICES MORTUARY

Ngxongo and I drive alone to fetch Themba on Saturday. Nobody wants to travel with the body because they have heard there isn't a head.

"We need to wash him before we put him in the coffin," I tell the pretty young secretary. I've never washed a body before and I'm not sure how to do it."
"I never look at the bodies much," she admits, leading me to a cold room round at the back.
"I saw this one though, and I screamed and screamed." She giggles.

There's a man in the yard, hosing down the concrete with a disinfectant. He comes to help us.

Through the door of the cold room there's a glimpse of bodies lying on shelves, each neatly covered with a sheet of white plastic. The man remembers Themba, and a tray slides out onto the verandah, steaming with cold.

"Have you got something for washing?" I ask. "A sponge? A cloth? Anything."

The man finds a remnant bit of sponge and a bowl of water, and pulls back the sheet of white plastic. (Dear God, help me. I don't think I can do this.)

Don't look at the head. Start at the shoulders and work down.

I start rubbing. The stomach is distended and the hair slides off below the sponge. It was hot day, the day he died, and it must have taken time to get him to the mortuary. The bloodstains are stubborn, ingrained in the body. I rub gently, afraid the skin will come away.
"Is this all right?" I ask Ngxongo. I can feel his distress, standing next to me. He grunts. I move on. Over the stomach, along an arm, down to a head.

Themba's hand is beautiful. Cold, but human. The blood sticks fast, but I don't mind lingering over his fingers because they are real. Why did I never notice his hands?
A leg, a foot, up the other side, back towards the head. There's an eye. I didn't realize there was still an eye.

(So many bodies we have handled together, Natty, but I was the watcher. You did the touching. This body is your beloved son. This broken head is only Themba.)

An ear. The mouth. The chin with the stubble of beard.
"Is it all right Ngxongo?" I don't know whether to wash inside the cavity.
"Enough". He's hoarse with trying to hold back his tears.

Natty gave me the calico and blankets for the coffin.
"It's a rule they must come from the home," she said, so they were bought at the Waayhoek trading store, and I spread them inside the coffin, as a lining for the body.

It's going to be difficult lifting Themba. The man gets some rubber gloves to manoeuvre the head onto the sheet of white plastic. Between the three of us we gently slide the body off the tray and into the coffin. The man dumps the tray in the yard where he's been hosing the disinfectant, and then helps us ease the coffin into the bakkie.

This time there's a place to wash our hands. We thank our helper and drive away.

It's more than an hour's drive to Waayhoek, through wooded hills and flowering grasses. I stare at the hills, but they've lost their strength, and there isn't enough beauty to uphold me.

WHITE SUGAR AND TOAST

Waayhoek is a village a long way from anywhere, stranded in the middle of an African plain. It's a government resettlement village – although the word village is much too grand to convey an impression of the reality. Even from a distance Waayhoek looks more like an encampment – hasty, rickety and impermanent.

Natty lives in two metal boxes on the dusty main road. The number 897 has been roughly daubed on the red and green paint which is peeling away from the metal walls. There are 1300 metal boxes in the village, all red and green, all peeling away to leave a tinny glitter. About 5 000 people live in the boxes, which were provided by the government as temporary accommodation some years ago.

If you want a measure of the sudden, pervasive nature of the violence in Natal, Waayhoek can give it to you.

Start with the waterless taps. There has been no water since one night in November when the settlers woke to the sound of gunfire. People cowered in their metal boxes. When they unlocked their doors in the morning they found the roads under water, as if there had been a deluge in the night. The Mbondwana impi had come and deliberately destroyed the water system.

"This is our Great Father's country – not yours," the men of Mbondwana have been threatening ever since the government brought strangers to their territory.

"Nonsense – it's government land," officials maintain. After four months the water system has not yet been repaired, however – probably because the authorities know as well as everyone else that Mbondwana will be back to attack the taps again.

The broken taps are a vivid symbol of a vivid year at Waayhoek. At Number 591 a boy was stabbed to death. At 779 two men were shot at the wake. Round the corner is the abandoned home of MaMbatha Maseka who was stabbed in the head, covered with blankets, doused with paraffin and set alight. Her baby burnt with her. Her attackers then made off with four bottles of beer. That was all they wanted of her.

Number 486 is another empty home, although it is Waayhoek's view site – two red boxes facing onto the grandeur of Lenge, the Hanging Mountain, and all the wooded valleys in between.

A pink flowering hedge gives the two red boxes a cared-for cottagey look. They reflect something of the personality of MaThusi Mntambo, who was shot through a window when

she yelled at some goat thieves in her yard. Her killer pushed her door open, and raped her dead lady in front of her three small children.

“When he stood up I saw mother was full of blood, and also full of white sugar,” said the boy.

Pervasive means to flow or extend through, to permeate, saturate, diffuse itself throughout. Violence pervades Waayhoek everytime an outsider climbs off the bus with news of the world beyond.

Take Natty’s sister, Almina Mlaba, who arrived on the bus from Dingezi township yesterday. She and I have found a quiet place in the shade of some tall mealie plants, away from the crowds at Themba’s funeral, and she is talking about the violence she left at home.

Although Almina is younger than Natty, today she looks older. She is drawn, agitated, and her speech keeps tailing off into an incoherent tremble. A woman she knows was found in the street with her eyes, breasts and genitals removed. She was a wealthy woman and her family didn’t call the police. They found the youth who killed her and demanded the return of the missing parts of her body. A crowd armed with knives and iron bars followed the youth to his home.

“He said, ‘Ma –bring all those pieces you roasted.’ She fetched them, and they were dry, like toast. Then they cut the mother’s arms and legs off with an axe and just left her.

The boy – they cut his eyes out while he was still alive, and then they stabbed him in the stomach with a knife. He died before his mother. His mother took a long time to die because she only had her arms and legs off.”

Almina’s images were not the same as mine, and although we shared words, we woke in the night with different dreams.

I dreamt I was sitting alone in the bakkie, on my way to the funeral.

“Won’t somebody come and sit with me?” I asked. “I don’t want to drive alone.”

“I’ll come,” said Themba, and he hopped out of the coffin and came to the front to sit alongside me, eager to please, trying to be helpful, the same Themba, but missing his head. I had forgotten his endearing, little-boy sweetness. I had also forgotten my anger.

THE STONE PILE – THE FIRST CULTURAL SYMBOL

“Was Almina better when she left?” I asked Natty when I visited her the week after the funeral.

Zulu mourning rules dictate that Natty wears widow’s black and remains in her small metal room for the next two months, so a new day has been added to my week – a Waayhoek Visiting Day.

“Almina?” Natty shook her head. “Zodwa will tell you. She went to the bus stop with my sister yesterday.”

Natty’s daughter, Zodwa, has a volutuous wide-eyed beauty that draws wolf whistles and followers when she walks city pavements. Today she huddles next to her mother like a small

child, however, and those wide eyes are shocked as she whispers her account of what happened when she accompanied her aunt to the Durban bus.

They were standing at the Ladysmith bus rank when three women fell on a man next to them, hitting him with jagged chunks of concrete and an iron bar.

“Blood and brains spilt everywhere,” said Zodwa. “He tried to crawl on his knees under the bus but the women pulled him back. His head was still spilling. There was a butchery there. He tried to crawl inside. The owner tried to help him by closing the door but the women pushed in.”

Two women hurled rocks at the man’s head, while one pounded him with an iron bar.

“When the police came,” Zodwa said,” two women quickly took off their aprons because they were full of blood, and they sat down to sell vegetables again.” The woman with the iron bar, however, had been shouting: Yesterday you stabbed my husband. I want you to be carried the day he is buried.” She was still shouting when she was led into the police van with the dead man and driven away.

Almina stepped over a pool of blood to climb into the bus to Durban.

In the night Zodwa woke the women sleeping on the floor with Natty in that little metal room.

“Let us pray,” she said quietly.

Down the road Albert Ngubo was sleepless too. He had just returned from Steadville, a Ladysmith township, where he had watched schoolgirls and boys stone a fellow student to death.

When the police arrive, the children chased them away. Only after their victim lay buried under a stone pile did they disperse.

“I’m glad Themba never killed somebody,” Natty said. “If he had killed somebody, then that thing I can never forget in my life, and there’s danger for the whole family.

I hardly heard her, however, for I was haunted by the image of that stone pile at Steadville.

There’s no culture without a tomb, I read at home that night, and no tomb without a culture. At the end the tomb is the first and only cultural symbol. The above ground tomb does not have to be invented. It is the pile of stones in which the victim of unanimous stoning is buried. It is the first pyramid.

THE NONENTITIES

Cornelius Sithole and his son were nonentities. That’s why nobody tried to stop them when they left Waayhoek on March 21 on a trip to KwaMashu, a township near Durban. Nobody even knew they were going, these two shabby men, dressed up in their best –shy and eager and innocent.

By the end of the day the two shabby men would be known to the nation. The outcome of their trip to town would be announced in several languages on the news networks of South Africa.

Even as news, however, the Sitholes were nonentities: a nameless father who watched his nameless son being necklaced in front of him.

Although the people of Waayhoek heard the news on the radio, they didn't realize it was Sithole until a police van arrived at the village four days later with Sithole sitting alone in the back alongside the body of a dead policeman being delivered to Johannesburg.

There was a small stir of curiosity at Sithole's return, but that was all. Nobody went to lament at his home. Nobody asked about the plans for the funeral. Nobody even enquired about the body of his son. Waayhoek hasn't much time for the Mbulwane tent town people and Sithole is one of them – one of the bits of unwanted dumped on the village after the floods.

You can see Sithole's home from Natty's yard – just down the road, behind that clump of thorn trees. From inside her room, however, all that is visible of the outside world is a slant of sunlight through the open door, which is as it should be. During the period of mourning her room is supposed to be something of a prison cell, guarded against the intrusions of life.

Anywhere else Sithole would be prevented from carrying trouble into a mourner's room. He comes to Natty, however, bearing the problems of death, and he is mourning too, so perhaps no Zulu Rules are being broken as he sits across the room from us, white socks showing through the flapping soles of his shoes.

His voice has grown steady from repeating his story to the police, and he tells it again with a shy, courteous gravity.

He need never have gone to KwaMashu that day for it was not urgent business, the matter of the disposal of the lobola cattle paid for his daughter. Although he and his son knew from the radio there was trouble somewhere, they were vague. It was Umlazi, wasn't it?

The taxi driver who dropped them on the outskirts of KwaMashu assumed they belonged there and knew what they were walking into, so the two men were unsuspecting as they trudged from the highway to the distant dolls' houses of the township. They only realized there was something wrong when they reached Sithole's daughter's home and found it locked up and deserted.

They went nextdoor to make enquiries.

"What are you doing here?" shocked women asked them. "Where do you come from? Don't you know no men walk here anymore?"

The woman didn't want to be seen talking to strangers, but the men were so transparently ignorant, that they tried to help them, warning them if they were stopped they must say they were UDF as they were in a UDF area.

"But when you get near that hill there," they indicated, "you have to say you are Inkatha."

"Then we were confused," says Sithole. "Our heads were muddled. We were mixed up. AD...?"

DC...?" he gestured helplessly. "I can't remember."

“UDF?”

“Yes. UDF. We don’t know what’s UDF. We don’t know what’s Inkatha. We asked the women to show us where we could catch a bus. They said there were no buses anymore.”

Sithole and his son looked at each other.

“God be with us,” they said aloud as they started to walk away.

They hadn’t gone far when three young men fell into step alongside them and asked where they came from.

“We come from Ladysmith.”

“Don’t you know nobody is allowed to walk here?”

We come from very far. We don’t know anything.’

“You haven’t read the papers? You don’t listen to FM?”

“No. We know nothing. We come from farms.”

A crowd of men had started gathering around the two Sitholes, surrounding them and keeping pace as they tried to push on.

“Go and fetch two pangas,” commanded somebody and two youths sprinted away.

“That’s when we started to run,” says Sithole. “We were near the boundary and we could see many people watching us from the other side.”

A red combi came along the road towards them.

“Baba – here’s a taxi!” Sithole’s son shouted desperately. The two men had been split by the crowd, however. Sithole was too far away to reach the taxi, but he saw it stop, he saw his son wrench the door open, leap inside, and slam the door shut again. At least his son was safe.

Now Sithole noticed two youths with pangas coming up behind him. He tried to run faster.

The youths yelled; ‘Stop’ Don’t go to that place! Inkatha will kill you!’ Ahead of him, however, Sithole could hear girls shouting: “Leave the old man! Why do you want to kill and old man!”

As he stumbled across the boundary a girl grabbed him and hugged him protectively.

“She was about 16,” he said. When he had stopped panting she released him and pushed him across to a group of watching men.

“The men said to me: ‘You were going with who?’ I said: ‘ I was going with my son.’

They said: ‘Then it looks like your son they have caught down there.’ I said: ‘No, my son climbed the taxi.’ They said: ‘Ha – that red combi was the same group that was chasing you.’”

Sithole’s son was wearing a red shirt so it was easy to pick him out in the crowd that was milling around about a hundred metres away.

“I saw men holding my son, and pushing him, holding him and pushing him. I saw them put the tyre. He tried to pull it off. He fell down. He stood up, trying to pull it off like this. He fell down again. When he fell down I saw smoke. The Inkatha people said to me: You see that smoke? Now he’s dead. When you see that smoke you know the person is dead.”

At the moment of death women's voices rose in piercing ululation. Sithole knew that sound. It was the traditional signal of death when an animal was slaughtered for ritual purposes.

Sithole was taken to a shop, where he was eventually picked up by a passing police van. "They were Indian police," he said, "and they told me it was not their place but they would take me to the KwaMashu Police Station.

There Sithole made his report, and a convoy of seven vans set off together to recover his son's body. Sithole sat in the front of the lead vehicle, while the others drove two abreast along the road behind.

"When we got there I saw blood and my son's body was black. The people were still there, waving bottles of beer and singing: Viva! Viva!"

The vans stopped and the policeman next to Sithole opened his door and got out. "I never see people not frightened to point a body," said Sithole. "The policeman said: 'Where's this guy you killed?' and the people answered him like friends. Then there was firing and the policeman dropped dead."

The police vans slammed doors and sped away. "There were bulletholes like this," Sithole said, "all over the van."

When the police returned to the scene with reinforcements, all the vans were full of policemen, back and front, except for the van in which Sithole traveled, this time sitting alone at the back. His son was loaded next to him, and then the dead policeman. "I won't forget the police collecting the bodies," said Sithole. They were frightened. You could see they were frightened."

The day was not yet over, however. As the huge convoy of police returned towards the police station, they came across another crowd in the road. Sithole peered through the window to see what was happening. Again the crowd was waving beer bottles, and singing: Viva! Viva! Outside there was smoke, and Sithole saw girls scattering, running.

The police opened the door next to Sithole, and five smouldering girls were tossed on top of the dead policeman and his dead son. "The police were very frightened so they just threw the bodies and shut the door and drove away fast."

Sithole sat alone with the dead. "The girls were like this" he draws his legs and arms into a rigid contortion. "They were about fourteen and twelve and smaller than that and eight and eighteen."

THE VERULAM MORTUARY

We leave in starlight the next morning, Cornelius Sithole and I, with a Heske Bros. Coffin wrapped in plastic in the back.

"Go well," say night watchmen waving their torches. "Go well, Sithole. We will remember you this day. Hamba kahle."

Sithole is wearing his best again – a grubby cream suit, a blue polo neck sweater, and a black plastic leather hat. He is impossibly thin, bony kneecaps jutting through his trousers. He does not know the towns we pass through, the rivers we cross. He is a quiet, observant presence as we drive out of the valley, across the highveld, then down to the sugarcane fields of the coast.

“KWAMASHU” says a sign on the highway. The township lies at the foot of green hills, its neat box houses laid out in rows.

We drive on. The dead of KwaMashu are taken to the mortuary at Verulam, along a shady avenue at the crest of the hills.

The mortuary is an airy red brick building, behind the police station, out of sight of the road. There is a wide, sunny reception area facing a blackboard with the chalked numbers of the bodies in stock.

Up on the walls are red posters headed TERRORIST WEAPONS. They display life-size plastic models of limpet mines, a land mine, an anti-personnel mine, and five hand grenades. LOOK AND SAVE A LIFE, say the posters.

The dead have not been killed by terrorist weapons, however, but by stones and tyres and knives and guns.

In the background there’s the whirring hum of refrigerators. At a desk a policeman is fixing a camera to photograph the unclaimed dead who are buried in pauper’s graves. An average of six to ten a month, he says, but it can go up to twenty or more.

A tall, balding policeman in white lab coat takes us through to his desk, and with a quiet compassion begins to question Sithole.

There’s that word again: Compassion. It means: Suffering together with another, and that is certainly the quality that shines out of Sgt Gcabashe. He has been at the mortuary for 25 years, and his daily encounters with grief and suffering must have hollowed out his capacity for pity. I watch him acknowledging Sithole’s shy dignity. He is a lovely man, is Sgt Gcabashe.

“What was your son’s name?” he asks Sithole.

“Muzonjane,” replies Sithole. The name is a question: what –kind-of-homestead-is-this?

“His age?”

“Twenty two years.”

Sgt Gcabashe walks us round to the back of the building to identify the body. This mortuary has the hygienic appearance of a big laboratory or hospital. Through an open glass door we glimpse a body lying on the floor – a man charred to a crisp. He looks like one of those little birds the boys used to roast on the fire.

Sgt Gcabashe opens a door into a huge, dark room with the smell of death. Racks for bodies run right across the room, and ankles jut out at us, tagged with brown tickets.

The dead died violently, and the violence is still present in the bloody clothes, the twisted angles of the bodies. On the floor at our feet women and girls lie in careless, broken heaps.

No. Look again. The distortion is the limbs which are missing, the stumped torsos. This child at my feet has her head turned away. Although her eyes are closed there is an expression of concentration on her face. Next to her is a slender, beautiful form, in pink bikini pants. I cannot see a head.

“I think this is your son,” says Gcabashe.

Cornelius Sithole looks at a huddled figure on the top rack. Yes, that’s his son.

“The children...” I say as the door closes behind us.

“Many, many children,” says Gcabashe quietly.

“Burnt.”

“And shot. Plenty shot.” Involuntarily he points a shooting finger.

Back at his desk he asks Sithole if he can sign his name.

“No?”

“You cannot read at all/”

“No.”

Sithole presses his thumb print on the release forms. The post mortem finding states that his son died of an incise wound of chest.

“A post mortem report will not mention a necklace then?” I ask.

“No. Necklace victims are usually stabbed first.”

The smell of the dead comes drifting into the reception area. The cold room doors must be open. The smell is strong, sickening.

There are six bodies lying on the floor when we return to the back of the building to carry coffin inside. We stand among them on the bloody floor. They are boys – sixteen, seventeen, twenty. They are so vulnerable, so exposed, stripped to underpants, lying on their backs, arms outstretched, heads on one side, eyes closed. They have been stitched after post mortem. They were stabbed, shot. One has raw burn marks.

“How do you sleep at night?” I ask the Indian policeman who is going to help us load Muzonjane. He is wearing gloves, white wellington boots, and a long white apron streaked with wet blood.

“They are human beings, the same as you and me.” He gives me a level look, almost hostile. He is rebuking me. He didn’t understand. It isn’t the horror, the smell of carcasses, the great contorted broken piles of humans that overwhelms me –it’s the feeling of pity and tenderness.

A trolley emerges from the coldroom with Muzonjane. “475” says the ticket on his foot. His face is turned towards us, blackened, scorched. His clothes were removed for the post mortem. An assistant tosses them to the end of the coffin. The bloodied shoes, the shabby jacket, crumpled and bloody, and the red shirt, the bright red shirt he wore for best when he set off so eagerly on his trip to town.

The policemen help us carry the coffin to the bakkie, raise their hands in a grave salute, and return to the waiting bodies.

Sithole and I drive in silence.

“There were so many,” he says at last.

There were so many.

THE OUTCAST COFFIN

Nobody had prepared for us when we arrived at Waayhoek that afternoon.

Women stand up in their yards when they see us pass, but no voice is raised in the wail of lament that traditionally greets a dead body.

We draw up next to Sithole’s gate. It’s a pretty gate, white palings under an arch, with pink, red and orange zinnias flowering in the midst of veld grasses. Muzonjane’s body may not pass inside that gate. In Africa violence is treated as a contagion, a radiation leak, and the victim of violence has to lie outside the home to prevent the home being contaminated.

“They said there would be a tent,” mutters Sithole as he opens his gate. I stay where I am. Somebody must sit with Muzonjane.

I think about his name while I wait. Muzonjane: What-kind-of-homestead-is-this?

It’s a homestead unlike any other at Waayhoek – a private domain of scattered flowers enclosed by a flowering hedge. There is still a tent in the yard, once of those the government gave out to flood victims, but Sithole has built a mud-and-iron home for his large family and there is a spotless artistry in the way he has combined bits and pieces of salvaged junk.

The Sithole’s stand lies like a hedged enclave between the village and the tents – a position which emphasizes their independence, for they don’t belong to Waayhoek anymore than they belong to the tent town people, who are Basutho.

If you are a white, you will tend to judge the family as marginal people isolated on the outskirts of two communities. That’s a simplification, however, which takes no account of the nature of a Zulu umuzi. Sithole’s shy dignity comes from his status as a man with an umuzi. Roughly translated, umuzi means homestead, family, a collection of huts under one headman. There is no English word that conveys the concept of an umuzi, however.

Muzonjane’s home was an umuzi – a relic, reduced by poverty, but still a self-contained family domain, “a detached residence, situated within its own ground, always alone,” said Bryant.

No Zulu homestead was ever alone at a time of death, however, and no dead body was ever treated like this scorched young man in the coffin behind me. Zulus understand violence but the violence of the necklace? The Sithole have dragged a terrifying new element into the village with this body of theirs. The young man who used to hawk vegetables has come home branded.

Sithole and I set off along the dusty tracks of Waayhoek looking for somebody to help find a place to lay down the coffin. Where’s the Councillor? He promised a spare tent when we left yesterday. A woman says there’s a message we can use one of the empty metal boxes instead.

We drive off, park, look inside. The place has been used as a latrine. There are piles of human faeces on the floor. We retreat.

A few men have followed us.

“The Councillor left a message you can use a classroom,” says one. A classroom is a double metal box. I reverse the bakkie towards the door of the classroom, but before I have switched off the engine the headmaster is there, furiously gesticulating. Don’t we know Zulu Rules? How can children sit in a room which has carried the victim of violence? The room will have to be ritually cleansed afterwards... No, definitely not.

There must be a spare tent. Sithole goes off to track one down. I park in the shade of clump of thorn trees and walk across to Natty to say we are back, but there are problems.

Natty’s been watching from her doorway, however, and she has seen the body arrive without a lamenting. I find her shouting with anger:

“Where are all the women? Is everyone in this place dead, or are you all in jail like me? Since when do you leave the body like that? MaMvelase, Juliet, Germina, Lucy – what’s wrong with you?”

“We’re frightened,” says Lucy.

“If I wasn’t in jail, I’d go myself,” says Natty. Her yells haven’t had much effect on the women, who hover unhappily, reluctant to make the first move to the coffin under the trees.

Well, if nobody else will honour the Zulu Rules of Mourning, why should she? Natty marches to her gate. MaMvelase Mncube rushes after her, shocked.

“eh eh eh. Go inside. We’ll go and sit with the body. You are not allowed to leave your room. You’re not allowed to shout. You are breaking the rules.”

“I can’t worry about the rules if I see there’s something wrong,” Natty’s blazing as she’s tugged back to her room. “You think I can keep quiet when there’s something wrong?”

There’s so much wrong that afternoon, that although she consents to remain inside, her shouts can be heard, bouncing off the metal walls onto the road outside.

“Say that again – nobody wants to dig the grave?”

“Say that again – Sithole’s wife is crying alone?”

“Say that again – the men refuse to carry the coffin to the cemetery tomorrow?”

It’s exactly four weeks since Themba died, and for the first time Natty is vigorous and strong. Against all the rules, Room 897 has become Command Headquarters for the funeral of Waayhoek’s unwanted necklace victim.

THE RADIATION LEAK

In the end the men dig the grave, the coffin gets carried to the cemetery, and the whole village turns out for the funeral, gathering at Sithole’s home afterwards for refreshments. Natty has seen to that too – all the food has been cooked in her yard and carried to the –and-iron home with its flowery surrounds, where Sithole’s wife sits in a gauzy white dress, a slightly crazy Ophelia.

That’s another reason for Sithole’s independence, of course –he’s protective of his wife and the two of his sons who are simple-minded. His umuzi has guarded their frailty, as it has

guarded the delicacy of the flowers around them. His wife is coherent when she's among her flowers... the wild lilies from the forest, the bowl of succulents, the small field of zinnias, marigolds and dahlias. She harvests the seed, storing it in plastic bags for spring.

When their squatter shack was destroyed by the 1987 floods, they lost their reserve seed. The Sitholes knew the position of their flowers under the mud, however and hitched lifts to Ladysmith on government lorries to dig into the silo to recover their plants. Nobody else in the emergency camp had flowers dancing around their tents.

The gentle consistency of their lives has been destroyed, however, by the necklacing of Muzonjane, their breadwinner. Although his body never entered their gate, the violence of his death has leaked among their flowers, where a gang of youths stand at night now, hurling rocks on their roof, shaking their door, and yelling: "We're going to necklace this whole family and burn the house."

LIFE

"Cre, I want to tell you the truth I was hiding from you," said Natty "The night Themba died I nearly killed myself. Everybody was asleep, and I thought: it's easy. I can get the knife from my room and fall on it and I won't make a noise and the women will find me dead in the morning.

"Then I heard your voice in my ear and you were saying: 'Natty look at all these people here. If you die, what will happen to these people?' In my mind I saw the women going to tell you I'm dead, and I thought: I know Creina. When she comes she'll kick y dead body and shout: 'Natty you bloody swine, why did you do this?' I knew you'd hit me and kick me and then you'd die of shock... When I die I don't want somebody to kick my dead body." She grins a little. "Would you kick my dead body?"

Definitely, Natty. I'd kick you and kick you and kick you, but I wouldn't die. I'd be so angry nothing could kill me.

It's a life-giving force, is fury.

TOPIC: CATTLE IMPOUNDING IN THE WEENEN AREA

AFRA and the Weenen-based CAP commissioned freelance journalist Fred Kockott to investigate allegations of profiteering, extortion and human rights abuse that accompany the impounding of livestock in the Weenen area. We discovered that the underlying issues touched on in this newsletter require far greater analysis, and a special report is being compiled.

Who's in the pound seats?

Business is brisk at the Weenen livestock pound. Judging by records in the town clerk's office, the impounding of African livestock has become a regular money-spinner for several farmers. Indeed it is alleged that when some farmers want beer money, they impound a few stray goats. If they want big profits, they impound cattle. They have been doing so for years. In 1982 human rights advocate Neil Alcock, who was publicly despised yet quietly respected by many local white farmers, exposed some of the corruption related to impoundings in the Weenen district.

At the time, a glimpse into the pound records showed that turnover increased from R2 800 in 1978 – 79 to R35 000 in the following 12 months.

The chairman of the Weenen Farmer's Association, Joseph le Roux, was quoted by a newspaper as saying that some farmers might be making more money from impounding cattle than by farming their land.

After the press exposure, the Natal Provincial Council announced that it was to investigate activities at the pound.

However, after the still – unsolved murder of Neil Alcock in 1983, nothing more was heard about extortionist impoundings in the Weenen district.

Although the matter has faded from public scrutiny, wholesale impounding of African livestock has continued, and some farmers are still making a mint out of the practice. The same names appear regularly in the pound receipt book; the Weenen pound's turnover has increased more than two-fold in the past few years (the pound's income for the 1988 financial year was R93 664,22); and members of the African community complain bitterly that they are being robbed.

The cattle that are impounded are mostly herds that have strayed onto white farms from the wasted lands in Msinga, or livestock belonging to people living on white farm land.

The pound records reflect that eight farmers have made a total of more than R42 000 in fees from the pound in the past six months. One Muden farmer impounded 100 goats and 184 head of cattle from land he was renting for R10 a year, and claimed R21 200 in trespass fees. The livestock owners, all former labour tenants who are still living on the land, have challenged the farmer's action and applied to the Supreme Court for a permanent interdict preventing the farmer from interfering with their livelihood. They claim that the land rightfully belongs to them—that their forefathers lived and died there – and have effectively asked the court to reach a decision in this regard. The Supreme Court case, set down for final hearing on December 3 and 4, is being watched closely by farmers. The matter is subjudice, but a

review of the trial and interviews with the farmer and the people concerned will be included in the special report.

When herds of stray cattle are impounded the African cattle owners cannot always afford to pay the trespass fees and in order to pay the trespass fees and in order to retain some of their herd, are forced to sell some of their impounded cattle.

Some farmers have allegedly used this to increase their livestock numbers. Such stories are presently being investigated by Afra and the Church Agricultural Project, CAP.

The same names regularly appear in the receipt books

Speculators

The constant flux of African cattle from the land and into the pound has also seen the emergence of cattle speculators near to the pound.

They can pick up impounded livestock at good prices, particularly if the owner is feeling the pinch of exorbitant trespass fees, like R200 a beast.

Every day the livestock remain at the pound, the costs accumulate, and so the owner needs cash quickly to retain some of his livestock. If he cannot pay the fees, he loses all his animals to the auction.

For speculators, the pound has

“Just last week a guy made a R 1 000 from some goats.”

SPECULATOR

Become a source of good bargains. They have learned how to pick up cattle at half, if not a quarter of their market value. They hold the cattle

“If I had started 20 years ago, I would have retired by now.”

SPECULATOR

On rented land, resell them quickly and buy some more, as two local businessmen do. They buy and sell to and from the black market. Sales are quick, and it's easy to dodge tax, we are told.

In talking to the cattle speculators, Fred Kockott posed as a man who had inherited land in Mooi River. He said he had heard that cattle could be bought at cheap prices in Weenen if one knew how to go about it. Our suspicions of profiteering were confirmed, including the fact that some farmers do use the pound to make quick money.

- ❑ **The full dealings with cattle speculators will be published in the special report.**

Official line

Although the Weenen Pound records indicate that profiteering is taking place, Town Clerk Louis Cunha is at pains to tell us that the pound runs at a loss.

“Our books prove that,” he says. “There is no profit. The pound is more of a hassle than anything else.” Cunha shows me the financial statement for the year ending June 30, 1988.

According to the statement, the income, made up of pound fees and trespass claims, was R93 664,22. Expenditure, excluding the pound master's salary, totaled R 92 397,79.

Cunha is the pound master. The position comes with the job of Town Clerk.

Weenen has its own Pound Ordinance, and its administration falls outside provincial regulations. The laws regulating the impounding of cattle are wide, particularly with respect to the calculation of trespass fees.

No questions are asked when livestock are impounded, Cunha says.

"We are just the agent," he explains. "All that is required is a letter stating who the impounder is, where the cattle are from, and the amount of livestock. The letter will also state the owner's claim for damages (trespass fees). The claim must be substantiated by two independent land owners who must both sign the claim. The impounder has four days to get the damage assessed."

The impounder is also allowed to charge 50c per animal per kilometre for transport up to a maximum of R150. "We don't let people abuse that," states Cunha.

Charges at the pound include the costs of feeding and herding: R6, 16 a day for cows and horses; R2, 66 for goats and sheep. A mother and suckling are treated as one unit. Once a calf or kid goat has stopped suckling and started grazing, it is charged the full tariff.

There's nothing to hide. It's just that (the records) are private

Cunha states that farmers in the Weenen area seldom use the pound.

"It's seasonal," he says.

"When the grasses start to grow, that's when the impounding occurs.

It's really only once a year."

"You see, in Weenen a lot of farmers are absentee landlords," he explains. "They come and check their farms once every six months. They get there and they find their farm being farmed for them. Because people are using the farmer's land illegally, the cattle are impounded."

Cunha is adamant that no profiteering is taking place. He says that no local farmer has impounded livestock more than once in the past year: "I can tell you that from knowledge."

The pound records, however, reflect that about a dozen local farmers have impounded livestock several times this year, claiming thousands of rands in trespass fees.

Interestingly, the Weenen Town Board has also impounded livestock on three occasions this year and has claimed more than R25 000 in respect of a total of 100 head of cattle and 180 goats that have strayed onto townlands since April this year.

Refused

Initially, Cunha prohibited Afra from perusing the pound records.

"It's not that there's something to hide," said Cunha.

"It's just that they are private."

Cunha argued that as Weenen's ratepayers had paid for the pound, he was therefore answerable to them.

However, paragraph 28 of the Weenen Pound Ordinance states the poundmaster shall keep detailed records of all transactions and these records "shall be subject to the inspection of any person during office hours."

A detailed analysis of the pound records is being compiled for the special report. Afra will examine how the trespass fees are calculated and will set out the legal and procedural basis for this practice. We will further investigate whether there is any officials are guilty of complicity in this regard. Finally, Afra will recommend changes to the pound ordinance to ensure a more regulated practice of cattle impounding.

Although the tightening of laws might reduce profiteering and the likelihood of corruption, the problem is actually far greater. In addressing the question: "Why are so many animals impounded?" we found that the underlying causes are situated within broader social and environmental factors and firmly rooted in a primary conflict in the area.

THE GREAT DIVIDE

It's a WAR out there...

Weenen, a small Voortrekker dorp established in the early 1800s, is bordered by Msinga, which was declared a Zulu reserve in 1849.

The border is not marked; there is no need, as Rian Malan, author of *My Traitor's Heart*, observed. On the one side are neat and orderly white farms, green pastures, irrigated fields, big houses, fresh gardens and peace and comfort. On the other side is rugged, dust-blanketed country, scarred by deep dongas, covered with thickets of thorn trees, covered with thickets of thorn trees, and about 150 000 Africans competing for space, still trying to practice traditional subsistence agriculture on this ruined land.

As early as 1878, the government had noted that Msinga was dry and barren and prone to famine; not fit for European occupation.

Today, with a population density of 101 per square kilometre, Msinga carries twice as many humans, cattle and goats as it can support.

Weenen, on the other hand, has a total of 69 farms, all owned by whites, many of whom have never lived them. The farms are mostly old labour reserves.

Whites, who owned farms in other parts of Natal, bought land on the borders of Msinga in the late 1800s and allowed blacks to live on it in return for six month's labour from every man on the property.

They basically farmed people.

The tenants lived in the traditional manner, under the rule of tribal chiefs, working the land and grazing their cattle. The labour tenancy system continued uncontrolled for generations. The farms became overstocked with African cattle. The land became denuded. Grasses and flora, previously peculiar to the Karoo, began sprouting. In time the labour farms became ecological wastelands and the district was entered on maps as Natal's desert-to-be.

The government outlawed labour farming in 1960 and declared a district by district ban on labour tenancy. About 22 000 people, and their livestock, were forcibly removed from farms after the ban was declared in the Weenen district in 1969.

Police moved in, huts were burned down and the inhabitants driven into the desolation of Msinga with no land to farm and no grazing for their cattle.

Underlying their submissiveness is a defiant, rebellious spirit

After the rushed removals, many of the Weenen farms stood empty, untended. But not unused. As Creina Alcock once wrote: "As police patrols fell away the farms became a grazing reserve for Msinga cattle. Without the farms the African stockowners would never get their animals through the drought."

That was in the early 70s.

Today, most of the land in the Weenen district is farmed by the title deed owners, under strict prescriptions from conservation authorities. Many Africans still live on the farms. They are mostly employed on a modified system of the old labour tenancy contract. According to the law, land owners can only allow people to live on their

farms if the people work for them on a full-time basis. Thus, instead of providing six month's labour, a family has to provide labour throughout the year. People have clung to labour tenancy system as it is the only means of securing access to land outside the already over crowded Msinga, and some are prepared to work for no pay as long as they are given the right to graze their cattle. As a result, a few farmers, particularly those who have land on the rich sugar cane belts of Natal, still use land in the Weenen district to stock labour, and at most, only use the land for winter grazing.

Across the border, the ecology of Msinga has worsened. There is no effective conservation control by the KwaZulu Government and some areas are without a blade of grass, without a single tree, beyond redemption. There are no longer enough trees to provide firewood for the winter, for cooking. Once proud and flourishing, the people of Msinga are now an indigent, desperate, needy people. They have resorted to all means to retain their only wealth left, their livestock.

They hardly hesitate to cut white farmers' fences to push their cattle onto grazing land. They know exactly what they have suffered and who caused their suffering, and they have never accepted their loss.

Their submissiveness is superficial.

Underlying it is a defiant, rebellious spirit. As Rian Malan remarked, in their hearts they are proud and untamed and utterly ungovernable by anyone. Land in their minds, the land from which they were removed, is still theirs: they worked

Please insert MAP

it, grazed cattle on it, and buried their fathers on it. They even fought wars over it.

SPECIAL REPORT

There are two maps of the Weenen-Msinga district: the one written with ink in the offices of development planners; the other written on the ground with graves.

Put together, the two maps tell of the primary struggle that has never really ended – a struggle for land.

In our special report we will examine these issues in depth in the hope that a positive contribution can be made to redress the conflict in the area.

Today, the situation has hardly changed since that drought of the early 70s. the only difference is that African cattle owners have become more adept at cutting white farmers' fences, rustling their stock, stealing their crops, slaughtering their cattle and setting fire to their grazing land. The white farmers, particularly those bordering on KwaZulu, complain that the police are ineffectual in dealing with such transgressions and have resorted to their own means to protect their land, writing the law with their guns. They argue that it is the only language that is really understood.

It is a war out there, not far different from the time when white settlers first arrived.

The cattle impounding cannot be disassociated from this conflict between white farmers and the rural African community.

As one farmer succinctly put it: "It is a struggle between the haves and the have nots."

In this battle, the odds are strongly weighted against the black community. The farmers have the law on their side.

The law says that the land is their and that they can do what they want with it except overgraze it. They can approach the courts to evict people and destroy their houses. They can sell the tenant's possessions to meet the court expenses.

Thus people sometimes lose not only their homes, but their possessions as well. The farmers point out that it is not their duty to take care of people who trespass on their land. They own the land and they are protecting their property. They are acting within the law.

These are the very laws which initially deprived the people of a place to live and land to cultivate...

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JUNE 1992

THE STOCKPILE

Though development newsletters continue to cram NGO pigeonholes – and more are produced and less are read – the stockpiling seems a necessity.

CAP has, for a number of reasons, been off the newsletter standard – the main reason being that the original author and editor has been engrossed and automated in getting her book started, written and perhaps even published. There is animated discussion as to what-stage-of-what-stage the book is at, and at the time of going to press, no one knows.

UPDATE

The most important recent change at CAP has been the establishment of a Management Committee to advise and help the Mdukatshani Farm Committee, who, though being competent on Msinga matters and problems, have little knowledge of ‘outside’ matters such as finance and funding.

Members of the Management Committee include:

Dale White – Chairman. Executive Director of Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, in Johannesburg.

Mrs Gertie Mofokeng – Vice chairman – Natal Co-ordinator of SHADE, Pietermaritzburg

David Moon – Lecturer, Ndumisa Teachers’ Training College, Pietermaritzburg

Miss Gugu Ngcoya – Director of Hlanganani Project, Sweetwaters – organic farming

Eric Apelgren – Project Co-ordinator, Development Office, Archdiocese of Durban

Richard Clacey – Co-ordinator, Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA)
Pietermaritzburg

Charles Ndlovu – Co-ordinator – Community Law Centre – Durban

GG (Marc) Alcock – currently involved in building projects, Johannesburg.

The Farm Committee is represented by Petrus Majozi, Majozi Ngxongo, Mphephethi Masondo, Natty Duma, Creina and Konya (Rauri) Alcock.

THE MECCA

The effects of the drought are becoming more and more noticeable, with cattle from the KwaZulu side of the Tugela river wading across to get to the (comparatively) lush white farms on the far bank. Invariably the cattle are in this mecca for only a short while before being driven off the Weenen Pound, 20 to 30 km away, where they stay until frantic owners have sold off other animals to raise the Pound fees.

A number of Weenen farmers have prospered from this, buying cattle from the Pound for a R300.00 and reselling them at their real value – treble the amount.

CAP and AFRA have co-operated in a joint project to respond to the situation, which will be reported on more fully in due course.

MOUNTAIN POTATOES

Theft of cattle, fruit and vegetables continue to be a point of friction between Weenen's white farmers and their black neighbours. Recently cattle rustlers made off with the communal herd on Mdukatshani's lower farm –cutting a “corridor” through four fences between the kraal and the road. All work was set aside while staff set out to track down the missing animals. Predictably the tracks meandered towards KwaDimbi, a remote, deserted and notorious hang-out for cattle thieves, who refer to cattle as “zambane lentaba” – potato of the mountain.

Fortunately for CAP, the stock thieves had taken a Brahman bull known for its bad temper, and the Brahman kicked up such a fuss, that the thieves had second thoughts about their night's haul. They were in the vicinity of the proverbial neighbour who was best not wakened – a black man on our boundary known for his accuracy and vicious dogs. Our animals were therefore abandoned in the dark. Bush telegraph alerted us to their whereabouts. Thankfully they were returned home, the fences repaired – but the shockwaves were felt for some time.

MAN-ALONE

KwaDimbi's fortress-like mountains are accessible only on foot, and police attempting to recover potatoes, are known to have been shot at.

A few months before the CAP cattle were stolen, one of our herdboys was shot while helping a white neighbour recover stolen stock from the Dimbi area. We had summoned our neighbour after sighting some of his missing 28 animals on the riverbank, where they had wandered in the direction of home. The boy – Muntuyedwa (Man-alone) Duma – was asked to show the neighbour and his herdsman across the river. That was all. Being young, however, and sensing an adventure, he followed the group into the mountain, following the tracks of the missing animals. They were in sight of the stolen stock when a shot rang out – and Muntuyedwa felt his arm jerk with a bullet through the fleshy part.

A rush back to safe ground followed. To the mirth of the blacks, the white man was seen leading the race for quite a distance, even though he was the only one with a gun.

CARROTS AND STICKS

CAP has not been immune to the problem of cattle trespass, and has done its own share of impounding to control winter grazing on the farm.

After more than a year of warfare, which placed Mdukatshani's Top Farm virtually out of bounds, cattleowners in KwaZulu had removed sections of boundary fence to allow easy access to the farm. To regain control – a number of meetings were held with the four separate communities that live along CAP's 11km boundary with KwaZulu.

To re-erect the boundary fence in the Mnqamkantaba (Breaking of the Mountain) area, and the Makhuphula (The Uphill) area it was agreed that CAP would supply materials and four workers – and the communities themselves would clear the grounds and do most of the work.

The boundary was completed in about two months – and all stock owners removed their stock from the farm before Christmas to allow the farm to be rested for winter grazing.

SOME VERBAL ATROCITY

You don't have to cut a fence to put cattle on the farm, however. You can just drive them through the gate, openly, in defiance of the rules and regulations, as one man was doing recently, when I stopped on the farm road. Puzzled that he was so unconcerned at being caught, the Last Great White Farmer on Mdukatshani demanded:

"What do you think you are doing?"

"Driving these cattle onto the farm," quote the offender."

"Don't you know no cattle are allowed on the farm?"

"Yes," the black man showed concern for my stutter. "But they are not my cattle," he explained. "They're from neighbouring areas. They broke into my mealiefield last night so I thought I'd teach the owners a lesson. You could arrest their cattle for me."

"Does that seem correct to you?"

"It's easier than taking them to the Chief's Pound, which is way too far."

I expound various verbal atrocities and Christian sentiments, and called a meeting between the Farm/ Community Liaison representatives.

The response to my attempt to extol the principles of ethical fairness went much as follows:

"OK,"

"Hau."

"Terrible."

"Tut tut."

"You know what blacks are like- what can you do with blacks?"

Behind my departing back came the sentiment: "Whites just don't understand reality."

EARINGS

That's what KwaZulu cattle are wearing this winter, in order to gain admittance to Mdukatshani's grazing. The tagging has followed months of negotiations with cattle-owners and KwaZulu veterinary authorities, and enables CAP to tell at a glance whether the grazing animals are from Mathinta (white) Mashunka (orange) Mnqamkantaba (green) or Ncunjane (numbered).

Soon after Bafana Majozi placed his 12 eartagged cattle onto the farm, they went missing. He tracked them down through tribal channels, eventually discovering them in the possession of a "new" owner 30 km away.

"Oh," said the culprit. "I saw the earrings and thought they were white man's cattle."

The word is out that the tagged cattle on Mdukatshani belong to a very warlike section of the Mchunu tribe – so for the time being, there are no further losses. Poverty and unemployment will probably increase pressure on the "untapped resource" of black cattle, however.

A VIBRANT, ONGOING SAGA

A vibrant, ongoing saga to which chapter after chapter is added at each Management Committee meeting is the subject of films on, around and about Msinga, the Alcocks and the project. The interest and attention was greatly intensified by Rian Malan's book, "MY TRACTOR'S HEART."

With numerous proposals of different varieties, ranging from TV interviews to full-length feature films, the Committee has established a formal procedure to avoid hasty-later-regretted decisions. The word NO features prominently in our responses.

Most of the Mdukatshani people have never seen a film – which makes it difficult for them to discuss film offers, or consider selling the rights to their stories. Recently they had their first experience of "bioskop" when Ephraim Zwane brought his mobile film unit to the farm to turn the Learning Centre into a cinema for the day.

The films he showed were traditional skop-skiet-en-donder. All the women cried and were disturbed. All the cheered each shot and punch. In other words their traditional role in society was adopted by all concerned. For men must shoot and women must weep...

GRAFFITI IN THE DUST

The Learning Centre has been electrically fitted with plugs and lights – the electric cable laid on from the irrigation pump on the river. So electricity has at last reached one building on Mdukatshani – although it won't reach the guest house or main house. "Candles are much better," decrees Creina.

Activities at the Learning Centre recently have included a short course on arc welding and working metal, bookkeeping classes for staff, paralegal workshops, and craft instruction. For years CAP has had an arrangement of mutual assistance with Tessa Katzenellembogen, who runs a very successful wire mbenge basket project for the tentdwellers at Waayhoek Resettlement Village, among others. The baskets provide employment for men and women who were destitute until Tessa started training them. Today the quality of their work is so high, that the Museum of Modern Art in New York is among their customers. To enable Tessa to meet Christmas orders, she has provided training in basketwork to craftworkers connected with Mdukatshani.

While the basketworkers weave their coloured wire at the Learning Centre – literacy classes are also underway, covering an age group ranging from five to 30 years, all of them first time learners.

As a result all the open patches of ground around the Learning Centre are graffiti'd with fingered a e i o u's, making pattern in the dust.

KLIPKOP – STONEHEAD

The difficulties of frontier farming have led to the departure of CAP's immediate neighbour of the farm Klipkop, nextdoor to Mdukatshani.

For some years our neighbour has suffered steady losses of livestock to cattle thieves from Nomoya, The-Place-of-Wind, across the river from his farm. In February Nomoya men chopped the Achilles tendons of two animals, killed them, and left them lying in the bush, planning to return for the meat that evening.

One of the farm workers came across the dead animals, however, alerted the farmer and his manager, and when the thieves returned that night – there was an ambush lying in wait for them. As a contingent to five women with large enameled dishes prepared to carry away the carcasses, the farmer and his manager opened fire in the dark. There was pandemonium. The men, being fleet of foot, escaped. Two women were killed, and one injured, however.

White justice has brought two murder charges against our neighbour – who has received nothing but sympathy from black cattle owners, who are suffering as much from stocktheft as the whites.

A couple of days after the two women were killed on Klipkop- Black Justice dealt with three stockthieves who were caught in the Mabaso area of Msinga. The men were killed by their own community – and their widows were ordered to get out of the area. There have been no charges in this case.

RACING CARS

The owner of Klipkop, 70-year-old Mr. C.J. Burger, was forced to retire to the coast a couple of years ago, for health reasons. He regularly visited the farm, however, to check on the work and bring in the wages. He was about 3 km from his gate on a sunny afternoon recently, when he came round a corner to find a log across the road, and three men with AK 47s suggesting that he stop. He didn't hesitate. He drove straight at the men, who jumped out the way before opening fire. Mr. Burger was hit in the chest and arm, three wheels were punctured, windows shattered – but with bullet wounds and flat wheels he managed to get to the farm. “When we were made long ago we weren't made of plastic,” he said afterwards.

The end result of the continuing theft, the death of the women and the ambush is that the family has decided the valley is too rough and violent for farming. They have sold and are getting out.

“If farming means shooting – I'd rather live in Weenen and build racing cars,” says Steve Schiltz, Burger's grandson, who gave up a job designing for BMW in order to follow his dream to farm.

In a strange way the Msinga are grieving their departure, for they were one of the more thoughtful white farmers – and always willing to lend a hand, especially to the kombi owners, who will no longer get free advice, pumped tyres etc. at all hours.

BOB HOLIDAY

Many Msinga homes have roofs thatched with grass cut on the farm of Bob and Joy Holliday – Directors of CAP, living at Dundee.

“When we go to Hollidays we have a holiday,” the women used to giggle when they set off on their annual pilgrimage in search of thatch. Bob helped in many ways – arranging access to grass in adjoining areas, providing transport with his tractor and trailer – and giving the women the only real maas (sour milk) they tasted all year.

On June 22 last year Bob was driving on his farm road when he was apparently stopped by three young black men – who shot him at close range in the head and neck – apparently in an attempt to steal the vehicle. Bob managed to drive five kilometres before he collapsed and died at the wheel.

The police were able to make early arrest, and the three men were sentenced to 28 years, and 17 years in jail. The Judge ordered that the sentences were not to be reduced.

GRAVE DIGGERS

In the valley the men bury their own dead – and there have been blistered hands from the graves that have had to be chiseled out of the rocky hills.

Among the many deaths which have touched CAP...

Sensaluphi was shot and killed in July – an early death not unexpected for a boy who lived dangerously, even when he was small. Sensaluphi was the subject of one newsletter, and made an appearance in many others. He may be remembered as the boy with kwashiorkor who milked our cattle dry while they were grazing on the hills. He stole the milk to feed his orphan brothers – a family of small criminals who managed to rear themselves after their parents were killed in bed for involving themselves in stocktheft.

Mthanana Dladla – the fiancé of a member of staff – was killed after he agreed to help an old man safeguard his pension from his son.

Dudu Ndlovu – Johnny Clegg’s drummer/dancer was shot by unknown assailants. “That’s not the sound of the wind in the tree,” said Dudu’s mother. “It’s people saying w-h-e-w now we won’t have to pay back the money we owe him”. Dudu’s death probably means the end of an Msinga tradition – The Boxing Day Home Dance near Dudu’s home, PARIS. Wherever Johnny was in the world – he would fly back home for the Boxing Day dance, when the dancers not only performed, but treated the crowd to cold drink and beer, bought with the money thrown at them in tribute during the year.

In May Mangempi Ngqulunga, his wife and 14-year-old son were shot while sitting in their kitchen hut on Mdukatshani’s Top Farm. Ngqulunga was a member of the Farm Committee. After burning three of his four huts, the assailants went into his cattle kraal and shot three cattle. The youngest child fled in the dark, and was only found three days later. He is still in trauma, and mentally disturbed.

A SONG OF LAND, LOTS OF LAND.... And a starry sky above?

Over the past year land issues have been the major focus of CAP’s attention – much of the work undertaken jointly with AFRA, the two organizations contributing different skills to a series of workshops held on Mdukatshani for labour tenants, or former labour tenants evicted from farms.

Areas which were represented at the workshops included Mashunka, KwaDimbi, Nomoya, Bulinga, Mnqamkantaba, Mathinta, Ncunjane, Mngwenya and Ngodini.

In order to establish a lobbying body for these communities, a representative committee was elected to contact local government, and put pressure on the authorities to implement change. Eventually Mr. Val Volker, MEC, Natal, agreed to a meeting at Natalia, the headquarters of the Natal Provincial Administration, Pietermaritzburg. A deputation comprising one person from each area took turns describing local problems. A discussion ensued.

The outcome was an agreement that each community would concretize and quantify its separate needs and problems, that these would be documented and forwarded to Mr. Volker to enable him to call a meeting of affected communities as well as relevant authorities.

The meeting took place at the Weenen Town Hall, and a steering committee was elected which includes: Representatives of the NPA's Physical Planning and Land Affairs, the Weenen Town Board, the Weenen Agricultural Union, absentee landlords (or "owners of grazing farms" as they prefer to be called.). On the African side there are representatives of local black committees, the black township, and displaced people.

The meetings proceed.

RAURI KONYA ALCOCK

CAPFARM TRUST

Capefarm Trust Quarterly Report
MDUKATSHANI,
Private Bag x 544
TUGELA FERRY,
3504
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A COUNTRY WHERE ONLY THE STONES SURVIVE....

... is a good present description of Msinga. It is pitifully dry and harsh.

The old men of the valley describe the aridity in terms of how far away you can see a snake in the wild. It is more than a manner of speech. The hills are so bare you can see a snake at a distance.

Lighting birds – ground hornbills – are supposed to eat rocks, according to local legend. If this were true, they would be all that still thrives at Msinga.

Even the goats – tough survivors at the best of times – are moving up to 10 kilometres onto white-owned farms in a desperate attempt to get browse.

Predictably a lot of farmers are shooting them, as it is too much work arresting them, and goatproof fencing is too expensive. The Community law Centre office on Mdukatshani is handling numerous cases of goats – and even cattle – shot by peeved white landowners.

But, in the middle parts of Msinga, stockowners who can afford it have started feeding their cattle with bales of lucerne, while others are cutting grass, if they can find it, or reeds on the riverbanks.

Mdukatshani has been and still is being extensively grazed by more than 400 African-owned cattle, but even these animals are becoming dullcoated and listless. Where there is grass there is no water, and vice versa. In the waterless areas the grazing has held out. Even the Extension Officer was impressed when he visited Mdukatshani to draw up a fencing plan for the residents' camp.

While water is a problem on the Top Farm, providing a supply such as borehole can be a curse, as the resultant crowding of cattle and people would cause massive denudation at the spot.

The Mathinta community on the eastern boundary of the Top Farm have taken to driving their cattle to the Tugela River twice a week, a trip of 14 kilometres. Again, it is not a matter of choice.

The river is so low that cattle continue to splash across from the KwaZulu bank to poach on white farms on the Natal side of the river. Strict white farmers have a reputation which has encouraged black stockowners to do shifts on the opposite riverbank to stop their cattle walking to their demise.

The river is also showing the effects of drought. Apart from being very low, the Tugela is laden with chemicals – effluents and fertilizers. These are leaching out as levels drop, and

salts glitter on the surrounding banks. This is alarming when one considers how many people rely on the river for all their domestic water, drawing direct and drinking as is.

Reed banks have grown en masse in some places in the past couple of years. Wildlife worshippers trill and declare things are back to how they used to be – while white farmers groan, thinking how many people can hide in the reeds, plotting evil against them, and more evil against their crops.

Well at least CAP's cattle enjoy the reeds, as well as the salt bush grown on our reclamation areas, and now being harvested as a supplement, especially for the draught oxen which cart manure to the gardens.

WEARING YOUR TEETH TO POWDER

For the people of Msinga, yellow maize meal is the most forcible reminder of tough times. Once yellow maize was used only for stockfeed. When the drought set in, coarse yellow meal became the basic foodstuff of the poor. It is disliked, and if white can be found, it is treasured and flaunted. The coarse yellow counterpart, known as bokide, has always been the cause of insults made against the rural by the city dweller. Farm people are taunted with having small teeth, worn out on chewing bokide.

UPWARDLY MOBILE

Msinga is lumbering forward into the New South Africa and the New World Order. Firearms are being bought – legally. Even at Koonriver, nextdoor to the farm, shiny new 9 mm pistols are openly carried by the young, upwardly mobile black taxi fraternity. For the first time their guns are licensed.

A DOMESTIC TIFF

CAP continues to play a part in the ongoing saga of Peter Channing versus the labour tenant families on two farms adjoining Mdukatshani.

The saga began in May 1991, when Channing announced he had a lease on the farms, Vernier and Aston Lodge. Six months of controversy followed – with threats, arrests, evictions, impounding, assaults and court actions – the interest of the tenant families being handled jointly by CAP and AFRA. In December Channing capitulated. He offered a two-year lease to 15 tenant families – with an option to buy.

The lease began on January 1, 1992 – and ever since both sides have been arguing about the breaking of the agreement.

Having taken a beating from the legal system last year, Channing resorted, this year, to browbeating the tribal system. He went to the Chief (King) Nkosi Simakade Mchunu to complain the Chiefs people were a thorn in his side, and he must sort them out. This said, the Chief called upon to tenants, who might be his people, but don't live on his land. The tenants denied the allegations against them- and laid some of their own with their chief. Back and forth the allegation went.

Eventually the Chief conceded that a meeting should be held on Channing's farm, in the presence of Chief Sithole, aides and various officials. So early in August, on an old field on the labour farm Aston Lodge, a meeting was set for 9 o'clock.

CAP arrived late at 9.30: the owner, with Another White Farmer, at 10.30: the main mass of people at 11.00, and a cavalcade of KwaZulu cars at 12.00.

They had to be fetched as they had lost themselves on the farm tracks.

A scurry ensued as the dingatories, i.e. the two Zulu chiefs, were given seats that were carried 4 kilometres through the bush from the influential induna's house. A table was also brought (to lean their elbows on), and two low benches for the aides, an MP, and an Mchunu Tribal Councillor, a grey-haired man, carrying knobkierie, and wearing large, ornamented wooden lugs in his earlobes. (Isiqhaza the lugs are called, meaning, in today's language, backwardness. Uyisiqhaza – he is oldfashioned, backward).

The MP was co-opted to write Minutes, and a case of cold drinks and glasses was provided by the tenants for the royal refreshment.

The whites squatted and stood to one side, while the blacks all sat flat at the royal feet. A group which kept slightly apart was identified, at the end, as the Inkatha Freedom Party from Greytown.

Chief Mchunu began by introducing The Respected One, Chief Sithole, and outline the purpose of the meeting, which he described as a tiff between a married couple.

"Do you hit your wife?"

"No."

"Yes he does."

"OK. Don't hit her anymore."

"I won't."

"You wife – go back home now."

"No," looking away. "I'm scared of him."

"Do you still love him and want him back?"

"Of course."

"And so it goes on," Chief Simakade explained the parable. Every allegation had a counter-allegation.

"Why do you hit her?"

"She won't cook."

"Why don't you cook?"

"He hits me."

"So Most Respected One," the Chief concluded, "that is how I am beaten in this matter, and I have flu so I am going to sleep in my bakkie."

He retired to his vehicle and slept.

Chief Sithole, a well-grounded man in Zulu terms, leaned back and said: OK White Man. Tell your problems.

Channing told them. Another White Farmer translated, with many references to Channing laced with the words uNkosaan uthi – the master Says – which was greeted with muted jeering.

I get voted in as an alternative translator. Things settle down a bit, but still the accusations fly.

“You said you’d give us water.”

“You sabotaged the well.”

“Who are the witnesses to this?”

“Anyhow, why isn’t the dip fixed?”

“How can we fix the dip, or use the dip without water?”

Eventually Chief Sithole intervened to ask for a solution. Silence reigned supreme.

At this point an Inkatha Councillor from Greytown identified himself, and suggested that Inkatha mediate to resolve the crisis. It was now 3 o’clock and the whites were glowing pink. The blacks were shining jet black, and the Chief and aides drank the Lemon Twist and glowered. There was no other solution.

Three weeks later a meeting was set up at Inkatha’s Greytown offices.

Channing informed the tenants they should be at his house at 9 o’clock the next morning. Knowing nothing about the meeting, and being unwilling to ride alone in a car with him, the Tenant Committee did not arrive.

I conclusion: Chief Mchunu is well recovered from his bout of flu, and the labour tenants’ struggle goes on.

FOOLS GOLD

Msinga’s Gold Rush began in May when a sangoma dreamt she should dig for medicine near Ndanyane Mountain, in the Mchunu tribal area. She followed the instructions of the dream – and struck gold.

“When she took the gold to the Indian storekeepers in Weenen,” reported Tryfina Mnguni, “they told her to choose all the furniture she wanted – double bed, wardrobe – and they delivered to her home.

Tryfina, a CAP beadworker, was one of the hundreds who flocked to the area as the news got out. But she would never to back, she vowed. People were going to get killed, digging in those tunnels. It was terribly dangerous, and there wasn’t much gold.

As the story of the gold spread, people came in from hundreds of kilometres away, carrying food, sleeping mats, blankets – and candles to give them light as they excavated overhangs in the hillside. The desolate shalebed gained a road and a highway of footpaths, all leading to the diggings.

It was rumoured the gold was laid by a snake that didn’t like white. Boys were posted on the hilltops to prevent whites or government officials coming in to steal the treasure. When I

passed by the diggings I was threatened by a hostile crowd, and accused of spoiling the magic of the snake with my presence.
Retreat was deemed advisable.

Local black capitalists put up “Thug Gateways” – demanding money from travelers as the price of the right to dig. Among blacks the gold changed hands at high prices. It was reported that in Johannesburg people had been offered whole stores full of good, or new –Hi-ace vehicles in return for their bits of gold,.
White farmers were harassed daily by dozens of people trying to sell them fools gold.

The Gold Rush diggings lie in the area of Chief Simakade, and concerned about the danger, he visited the area with his chief induna, CAP’s chairman, Petrus Majozi. It was clear the situation was beyond control. He asked the Magistrate to intervene. The Magistrate had a meeting on the diggings, warning that the gold was of little worth – and the unstable homemade tunnels a threat to life.
Again – there was no result.

Then the bottom fell out of the gold rush – or the top fell down on it. Fourteen people were killed, among them the mother-in-law of Cap Committee member, Mphaphethi Masondo. One of those seriously injured was Tryfina Mnguni. Despite her declarations, she had been tempted back in search of treasure.

The area is now proclaimed No Man’s Land, with guards to keep people away. Intrepid diggers sneak through the guards saying that it is now that the gold will be laid by the snake that lives in the mountain. Now, after it has tasted blood.

And almost daily travelers arrive from far places, hoping to find gold for sale among the locals, and prepared to pay high prices.

HLINZA: The verb to skin, or to flay

Driving back from Greytown late one afternoon in August. I was waved down on the road by a busdriver of my acquaintance. Would I take a man to the police station at Tugela ferry? My ears pricked. Not many men go voluntarily to the police station at Msinga. Mr. Elton Vezi of Walton’s Stationery, Durban, was in need of a lift, however, to report he had lost his vehicle in an ambush on the main road.

Mr. Vezi had been passing through Msinga on a delivery run when he was confronted by two men with guns on one of the steeper corners of the main road into the Tugela Valley. A shot was fired through his windscreen – probably a sign the gunmen wanted him to stop. He stopped. He was instructed to climb into the back of his vehicle and lie down – and he was driven 20 kilometres down a dirt road to the area of the abandoned Gold Rush.

There the vehicle stopped and offloaded him. He was frisked of all the money he was carrying – about R400. Even the small change that fell out his pocket was meticulously picked up. He had a packet of meat (on special) for his kids, and two bales of hay for his goats at home. He lost it all. Then his glasses were removed, and he was told to lie face down on the ground. If he moved or looked up he would die.

“I expected to die,” he said. Being a Shembe-ite however (a member of a traditional Zulu church) he hoped he would be able to die praying

The delivery vehicle disappeared for redistribution at some deserted spot. It would be very carefully stripped of anything unmarked and useful, and would be pushed off a cliff. This is called hlinza at Msinga... to skin a car.

Mr. Vezi told the police he would definitely recognize the robbers again – a very unMsinga – like remark to make. He spent the night at the farm, refusing supper.

“I have fright in me,” he explained. UValo. Chronic palpitation for the heart.

A very shaken man was collected by his employers the next day. In reward for my honourable deed, Walton’s gave me a spiffy watch-calculator-pen-notepad-combination.

Ngxongo loves it.

MANURE SOUP

The gardens are well into summer, via spring, thanks to the pump, and from near and far appear a lush green. Police helicopters on dagga raids recently, have dropped down for a closer look.

The children’s gardening group – now doing classes in the learning Centre – are making use of one of the old cement ponds to mix weeds, torn paper and kraal manure. Under the ancient wine press principle, the children are stamping a thick manure soup for application to their depleted soils.

GRIME IN THE WHEELS

The Community Law Centre, recently established in the Learning Centre, is flourishing, with the three paralegals coming to grips with the grime in the bureaucratic wheels both in Natal and KwaZulu. Most of their work involves pension claims, and unemployment insurance matters. Problems of illegal impounding are providing additional experience for the new staff.

CAPTAIN MBELE

“A dog laps little drops,” said Captian Mbele, sitting on a hillside in June 1977, waiting for a meeting that didn’t take place. He had called the Msusampi community together to discuss building a furrow round the mountain – and only five old men had pitched up.

Little drops leave an empty bowl, he said cheerfully. If the five old men got started on their own, it might take a little longer, but the job would still be done.

When Captian Mbele died in June 1992 – the furrow he had started on faith was still running. The first of CAP’s community projects was always the most successful, and the spirit of the man who led the work had much to do with it.

The valley which Mbele viewed from his mountaintop home had changed in 15 years, however. War had completely destroyed Msusampi, scattering the villagers who had

eventually joined hands to dig the furrow under Mbele's direction. Their homes had disappeared, their fields, their kraals. Along the furrow small gardens remained, however. Something is left.

Mbele always live above the valley, on a ledge of the mountain very close to God. Here he died, in his family village, among his peach trees, and his fowls, his cattle and his goats. He had been bedridden for three years when he passed away, a gentle, farseeing, uncomplaining man, strong in faith, twinkling with laughter.

We miss him.

MKONTO DLADLA

We also miss Mkonto (Spear) Dladla – another wise man of great age. Mkonto was sitting next to Neil Alcock when his vehicle was ambushed and six men died.

Despite his name, Mkonto had never had experience of violence. He fled from the ambush and hid in a hut, emerging a long time later, in the clothes of a woman, an incongruous sight with his moustache.

Mkonto was glad to live long enough to see the engagement of his favourite grandson, Mdumseni (Make-him-b-known).

In an age where men die young, the death of the last of the valley's old men was so remarkable that their death caused comment. "Wacusha" it is said. They climbed through many fences to get this old.

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Kindle The Dust
AN MSINGA LOVE STORY

In January a furtive message is sent to the Mkhize kraal, at Gujini.
“Be there. People are coming to see you.” Early the next day, two girls (tins filled with pebbles tied to their ankles) stamp into the kraal, each step crashing.
Each girl holds a white doek (flag).

The inhabitants, acting surprised, come out, and are joined by neighbours of adjoining kraals. The women ululate, and also stamp around, “giya-ing”. An entourage follows the girls, including someone carrying a qabane, a double row of white beads. Others, also, with dancing tins and whistles, and the yududu, a shrill mouth siren. The entourage stops outside the boys’ hut and shouts: “Come and fetch what you were wanting so long.”

In due course Fiko Mkhize comes out, the qabane is thrown around his neck, the girls whip him with thin, honorary sticks, and he runs back inside shouting suitably loudly.

The beads have been given in final submission, a public statement that he is the one-and-only. The girl in question, Landile Ngqulunga, is not at the ceremony, however. She is cowering at home, as is customary. She may not see, or be seen by, Fiko’s family until she marries, and there is a good chance that she will be lambasted by her mother, father and brother.

With the throwing of the qabane, the engagement ceremony is complete, and the feasting begins. A goat is fetched, slaughtered and consumed. Cold drink, beer and spirits are imbibed. The girls chatter to their new sibali, brother-in-law.

In the late afternoon all set forth for the girl’s home at Guqa, Fiko to spend his first night there, supposedly without the knowledge of the parents and elders. He sits just out of sight of the kraal until nightfall. Then, with his new fiancée holding the dogs at bay, he creeps into the kraal, and an older girl, called a qhikiza, shows him into a hut that has been prepared for him.

The qhikiza, a virgin-that-was, has been sitting with the qhikiza-to-be, telling her what she must do and say, taking food in to her lover, meeting him. She has warned her about the dangers of men, instructed her on what she can allow him to do, sexually, and advised her on the tantrums to throw if he demands too much.

Fiko sits alone, waiting. Food is brought and he eats. Eventually the girl will enter and they will spend the night together.

What has happened, however, is that there is another suitor, a Xaba boy, whom the mother regards as a better choice, for he and his brothers have steady jobs, and are known to help their families financially. Mrs. Ngqulunga has the support of her cousin, MaXaba Dladla, and

the women work together to further the suit of the Xaba boy, sending a message to say: “Landile has been doctored with potions. Fiko has stolen the girl.”

Fiko, tipped off that he is being hunted, eloped with his fiancée to a Weenen farm. His father, to prevent a dispute, sends 7 cattle and an mkhongi to the girl’s home. (An mkhongi negotiates the terms of lobola, or bridewealth payment). Terms of marriage are arranged.

Xaba:

Place in difficulties, put in a fix

Block the way, stand crosswise

Unaware that the lovers are in hiding, the Xaba boys lie in wait for Fiko near the Mkhize kraal. By mistake they shoot his brother – Phunyuka (Get-away). He is taken to hospital in an opposition taxi, and he takes four months to recover.

Fiko returns home under cover of darkness to find out what has happened. The Gujini people are up in arms – literally. There is now more than just a girl at stake. The rival suitors are from different wards, and a shot has been fired. Fiko joins Gujini in battle readiness.

Guqa and Gujini

A note of explanation is now required. Guqa and Gujini are Mchunu isigodi, or wards, a first building block in African tribal hierarchy. They have different indunas (headmen) and gosas (military commanders), and within each ward is a complex division of mhlathi, or cheeks, each with a lesser induna and gosa, and each probably mustering 20 to 100 fighting men. Guqa has six cheeks. Gujini four.

Cheeks usually unite only under threat from another isigodi, or under military instruction from the Nkosi, the chief.

Guqa and Gujini fall under the same chief. Most of their cases are tried at the same tribal court. They border onto each other – and they also border onto the farm. Each ward stretches about 5 kilometres along the dirt road, and a traveler wouldn’t notice a difference in the numerous traditional homesteads dotting the hills. Only the people themselves know which side they are on, and which side their neighbour is on.

Phembuthuli – The Peacemaker

The story now switches to the home of the Guqa induna, Chakijana Mchunu. The induna, being part of the legal hierarchy of the tribe, should at no time allow himself to be involved in a fight. He is the chief’s representative, and the chief rules both sides. The induna’s sons are independent, however, and Mchunu’s second son, Phembuthuli, is taking charge of the situation.

Phembuthuli is known as the natural leader among his peers. Indoda impela. Indoda eqinile are terms which are used to describe him. A real man. A hard, or tough man. He is well-liked and respected by all.

Phembuthuli is about 35 to 38, of the Amanqa (Vulture) regiment, and a veteran of the numerous wars which the Quga men have fought among themselves. He has an old kombi he sometimes uses to ferry people, and a battered pick-up which he uses to fetch supplies for his “spaza” shop. He worked awhile in Johannesburg, but was retrenched, and has come home to his two wives and 11 children – both wives pregnant as war looms.

He hears what has happened at Gujini, and with some other men, waylays and catches the Xaba boys, putting them under tribal arrest for starting up a fight between Guqa and Gujini. Guqa men are called together, and draft a letter saying: “We have caught the boys. We have them here if you want to send the police to fetch them. If you want to come and kill them, that is fine with us. If not – we’ll bring them to the Chief’s court next week.”

Phembuthuli signs the letter on behalf of the ward, and a woman is sent to deliver the letter to the Gujini Gosa, who is in the hills, preparing for war.

The letter is read and discussed. Eventually the men agree war should be avoided, and they disperse with proper ceremony. Judging by what happens soon afterwards, however, the decision is probably not unanimous. The Gosa, as an older man, usually acts as a calming influence on the hot-blooded young insizwas. (An insizwa is a young man, not in the western sense of being 16, 18 or 21, but in terms of his fighting ability. He can fight men’s wars, much like the young buck of the American Indians).

The Gujini insizwas disperse, but they are probably bitter at having to step down when they feel their side has been wronged. They are on their way home from the war-gathering in the hills, when they notice Phembuthuli parked at the crossroads.

Phembuthuli, thinking all is settled, has driven with a cousin to the crossroads to wait for the baker’s van. He needs bread for the shop. He is waiting for the van when the insizwas approach to demand to know what he is doing there. Doesn’t he know his people have started a war? They order the cousin out of the vehicle, and fire through the open door. Phembuthuli dies at the dusty intersection at two in the afternoon.

“He always has an unfortunate name,” say the old men.
Phembuthuli means: Kindle-the-Dust.

Now war is in the air. Men at both Gujini and Guqa stop sleeping at home, and hide in force in the hills. Phone calls are made to men in Johannesburg, at their hostels and places of work. “Trouble is at home,” they are told. Kombis return with men from both sides. Those who don’t come down pay a fighting fine to buy ammunition, and keep low. Opponents are out to assassinate those who have remained in Johannesburg.

Four Shots

Gujini decides to take action against the two women who caused all the trouble. Mrs. Ngqulunga has fled to another tribal area and is constantly on the move. Her cousin, MaXaba Dladla, is still at home, however, when a party of men arrive, looking for her. “Where is she?” they ask her husband, Nunu Dladla. “She left to fetch water,” he replies standing at the door. “You lie,” they say, pushing him aside. They walk in, shoot her four times in the chest. She recovers in hospital, and after her discharge isn’t seen again. All are convinced of her evil,

however, for she must have been a witch to survive four shots in the chest. “Strong muti,” they say. You bet.

Attention then turns to Mrs. Ngqulunga’s husband. If he is killed, she will return to his funeral. Mr. Ngqulunga gets a tip-off, however, and he also disappears.

Mdukatshani

By now the men on Mdukatshani’s farm have also left for the hills – on the side of Guqa. Some complicated politics are involved. Mdukatshani’s top farm falls within the Ncunjane cheek, or mhlathi. Ncunjane is an mhlathi made up of white farms. There is a feeling prevalent that farm matters are farm matters, and location matters are location matters, and thus farm people are rarely drawn into Mchunu affairs on the KwaZulu side of the boundary. Here we have a question of allegiance to a sgodi, however. Ncunjane is part of Guqa. People have to come into the open.

Mdukatshani people are reluctant to get involved in a fight that isn’t theirs, but they are dangerously fence-sitting if they try to remain neutral. And there has been friction before, with Gujini.

Mdukatshani’s Top Farm is still open to visits from the brave, but to get hold of anyone living on the top farm is impossible. Everything waits. Meetings, projects, schemes. Only on the lower farm it’s business as usual. The lower farm lies outside the Mchunu area.

Peace Talks

All is quiet, awaiting the funeral of Phembuthuli.

In the lull Chief Simakade Mchunu and his chief induana, Petrus Majozi (CAP’s Farm Committee Chairman) go to each faction separately to try and establish peace. At Gujini only the older men appear. The chief reminds them that Gujini started the conflict. Guqa is strong from many fights. It would be best to sue for peace.

At Guqa he finds all the men present. They are angry, however, and more than willing to fight. The chief tells them that his heart aches at the death of Phembuthuli, a cousin. He is tired of making peace between people who want war, however. When either side wants peace, they know where he lives.

The Battle

Phembuthuli is buried without incident. Weapons are close at hand, however, and men sit at vantage points waiting for trouble. After the funeral they go into the hills to be doctored for war. Tension builds as one day passes, then another.

Guqa attack at dawn, in the classic horn formation. Gujini are chased a good five kilometres, leaving nine men dead on the battlefield.

The Conclusion

The single battle concluded the war, and all is back to normal again, judged the Msinga way. Guqa and Gujini are drinking together.

“They are drinking with each other? Then it must be finished.”

Romeo and Juliet are happily married, and living at Gujini, and the Xaba boys have been fined by their sgodi for causing so much grief. They were brought before the men at the Insizwa Tree. Some suggested they should be shot outright. Eventually it was agreed, however, that each of the four brothers should produce a beast for slaughter this coming Christmas, to be feasted on by the sgodi.

Mr. and Mrs. Ngqulunga are still missing from home, and so is the aunty, MaXaba. On Mdukatshani’s top farm, however, the men have reappeared. Projects are on track again.

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JANUARY 1993: DOWNTOWN JEPPE

I started when GG was installing public pay phone in a kiosk just inside Jeppe Hostel, Johannesburg. He was immediately recognized, and questioned on the where of this, and the what of that.

What was happening on the Weenen farms? When was the land coming back to people? Why were their families being thrown off the farms while the men were at work in the city? Was any land coming back?

GG arranged that I would brief them on my next visit to town.

Jeppe Hostel is in a dingy, café-lined street of downtown Jeppe. In the alleys, every Sunday, dance teams get together in dabuluzwanes (tear-open-toes), the universal Zulu dance shoes, leather-thonged with car tyre soles. The loose tongue at the back, colour-coded to suit the customer, adds a slap-thump to the dance, as the teams compete, usually area for area.

All sorts of lucrative and shady deals take place in this corner, cut off by the railway line. The café owners are on official good terms with the local hierarchy, and don't get harassed. The usual array of Chevys, Valiants, Cressidas, and an occasional being-fixed or off-duty combi line the streets in true African parking style – three deep with their hazard lights on.

Huge double steel gates open onto the hostel, with the living quarters on one side of the entrance, towering four storeys up. On the other side – there's a cafeteria, the phones, the beerhall, and a big open courtyard. The cafeteria has a single speaker the size of an average car, thumping away with electro-pop. There is a constant in-and-out, reminiscent of a flea market, people talking, jeering, laughing, and most, if not all, looking suspicious on seeing whites.

We walk through the man gates. People from Msinga wave and shout. "Howzit GG? Howzit Konya? Howz my wife, my kids, my cattle, the fighting, the drought?" I answer as best I can as some live a good 20 km away.

Segeeza's brother giggles as he slopes past. "Send regards to my brother. I've got a job making icecream cones."

Eventually we get to the courtyard. The messenger melts away to tell of our arrival. Those that are already waiting ask about home and confirm stories they have heard. Is it true...? I heard that... Whenever a bum sees whites and slips closer to ask for anything that comes to mind, they shoo him away. "These are our whites. Go away."

Every now and again someone drifts across the street wearing a huge trenchcoat, or the like, clutching what looks suspiciously like an automatic weapon.

Eventually the men have arrived – 20 representatives sitting on rickety benches. They come from hostels all over Johannesburg, and they all live on farms where they are under threat of removal, or in tents in an emergency camp.

There are two tent camps in Weenen – one green and one white. There is also the Weenen Emergency Camp, an emergency that started way back in 1969, and has settled, with time, into a township.

All three camps have a tribal identity. The green camp is Mchunu, the white Mbhele and the township mainly Mthembu.

The men in the hostel come from all three tribes.

STALLING ON THE BRIDGE

The discussion is in Zulu. What has happened, the men ask, to “the meetings”?

“The meetings” are Weenen’s tentative step into the New South Africa, where blacks and whites drawn from all interest groups in the district sit down together to discuss common problems. CAP represents displaced people.

The first meeting was held in December 1991, on the initiative of the Natal Provincial Administration, and there have been four meetings of the Weenen Working Group since.

But progress has stalled, I tell the men, on a proposal for a bridge. The white farmers of Weenen hold a written undertaking that they will not have to drive through a black township to get to town. The Emergency Camp will be restricted to just one side of the road. With plans to expand the township, however, they are demanding an alternative route to town, which will mean yet another bridge over the Bushmen’s River.

There are three emergency camps in Weenen. Why not three bridges too?

The demand for a bridge has brought an end to the meetings. There have been no meetings now for more than three months.

“A child that doesn’t cry when it is hungry dies on its mother’s back,” I remind them. The Zulu proverb describes the response of the black communities in Weenen. They are offering a dignified silence. This dignity isn’t helping their plight or their cause, as people take it as acceptance and go on without them.

After discussion the hostel men ask us to convene a meeting between themselves, the Weenen farmers, and the NPA. They will join forces with the people at home and send a combined delegation.

BROKEN TELEPHONES

Setting up the meeting takes a little time. There are three groups who have to be co-ordinated: The hostel migrants, the farm labour tenants, and the tentdwellers.

There are no telephones on the Weenen farms, so a simple message can mean a round trip of almost 100 km. To get to most of the farms is a labour of love in itself. If there are roads, they are dusty hazards with potholes and rocks, probably fit only for four-by-fours. When the track peters out there is a walk some distance to a kraal, or homestead, where two or three grass-roofed huts are framed in thornbush.

Those living on the farms are harassed if they are seen talking to, or meeting with CAP staff, so sometimes long messages are relayed by word-of-mouth through accessible friends and/or relatives.

Men from the hostels phone the farm from a callbox. Coins clatter and there's a yell:
"Tell Makonya to phone Mkhize."

You phone back,
"Hello."
"Who's that?"
"Someone who wants to speak to Mkhize."
"The Mkhize which is who?"

There are few thousand men in the hostel.

"John."
"Huh."

Shouting in the background: "Where's Mkhize?"
Someone else picks up the phone.

"Mkhize?"
"No. Dladla. Who you?"
"I'm phoning from Msinga. Is Mkhize there?"
"Let me check."

Five minutes pass. Ten...

"Ja. No. He's gone to Daveyton. He didn't say when he'd be back. Anyhow what you want him for?"
I explain.
"OK. Let me call Dlamini."
Another voice.
"Dlamini?"
"No. Ngxange."

An hour later you are still working through a relay of voices.
"Look, it doesn't matter. I'll come and see him."
"Who you?"
"I just told you."

THE LAST STAND-ers

The tentdwellers are the only group who are easy to find. Everybody finds them. Press photographers. Reporters. Sightseers. Researchers. The police.

Last year a farmer 10 km away had a beast stolen. When the police found meat in the tenttown pots, all the pots were impounded as evidence. The pots were released, without charges, after CAP had questioned the CID.

The green tent people have been a camping community since June 1989, when about 20 families were evicted from farms in the Mngwenya Valley, Weenen. The evictions were not the first in the district – if anything, they were almost the last. Since 1969, and the abolition of the labour tenant system, about 20 000 people have been removed from the Weenen farms. Planners estimate that there are only 300 to 2700 people left to go. The district is almost empty.

So what made this little pocket of Mngwenya Valley people in their heels? In an action that made newspaper headlines when it was news, almost four years ago, the families set up house on the roadside, a valiant last Stand, a tiny rebellion from people who had had enough.

The families had been on the roadside two months when the NPA and police moved them in lorries 15km to their present campsite, close to the town. It is tribally hostile land they were dumped on, so no buildings were or have been built. There is no running water, no toilets, no electricity. The cattle have nowhere to graze.

The tents are what sporting shops call “two-man-tent”. Sometimes a whole family crowds into one tent.

The tents are steaming hot, no shade in any corner. Flocks of children and dogs greet you in the dusty clearing among the tents. Litter is not a problem as these people can’t afford anything to litter.

The tent people have become quite antagonistic to outsiders taking pictures of them and writing about them. They give a welcome to Ntombi Dladla and Monica Lamula, however-CAP staff who go in to do a survey. Ntombi and Monica have family links with the tenttowns, and they go from tent to tent, family to family, getting solid information on names, numbers of children, dates of removal etc.

A CENSORED DOCUMENT

“We may come to the meeting – but we want to see an agenda first,” say the Weenen farmers.

The message goes back to the hostels. What do the men want to discuss? Can they prepare a draft agenda?

There are laborious, huddled meetings in the hostels. In due course a handwritten document is delivered by hand. Translated from the original Zulu it is titled: “The Tortured Cries of the Mngwenya Valley Community.” Thirty points follow.

“Even a donkey throws off its burden when it gets tired.

“You have ridden us enough.

“ All you have you have through our strength.
“ You only threw the people away when you had plucked them off all their feathers.
“Today, Whites of Weenen, we have opened our eyes.”

It is rather militant. Will the farmers come to the meeting if they read it beforehand? We decide to withhold it. An abridged version is sent instead.

“As you are aware the majority of men from the Weenen farms and surrounds work in Johannesburg and stay at the hostels there. These people are not happy with the progress being made regarding their removals, or indeed their precarious existence on the farms...”

A date is set. CAP hires the metal shed next to the tennis courts for R120, and arranges that a member of CAP's Management Committee, Charles Ndlovu, will be there as chairman. Charles is a lawyer with the Community Law Centre at Natal University.

REHEARSAL

The day before the Weenen meeting, there is a gathering on Mdukatshani. Some men walk 10 kilometres across the hills. Others wade the river. Bakkies fetch and carry from the farms, the township, the tenttowns. There are tribal indunas from Msinga – as well as men who were thrown off the farms in the 1960's. Sitting in a circle on rocks in the sun, the gathering discusses the hostel proposals, and decides on their own spokesman – a firebrand who won't be afraid of speaking to whites.

The rehearsal concludes with a Zulu meal of dry porridge, boiled potatoes, and cabbage relish, ladled out of huge three-legged pots cooking on an open wood fire.

THE ANONYMOUS MEN

The day of the meeting starts badly. There is no sign of the hostel delegation. (They have broken down near Harrismith, and will eventually limp back to Jeppe without reaching Weenen at all). Njoko and two others are there, however, on leave from the hostels, and “fully informed”, although not part of the official delegation.

Njoko is known as The Medicine Man of the Tenttown, and many fear to cross him because of the excellence of his art. He has been our liaison with the hostels, and is well-qualified to act as stand-in in the absence of the official delegation.

The NPA have arrived, and four white farmers. We ask them to wait outside and have a quick rethink.

The meeting starts with a request for information. The white delegation want to know the names of the blacks present, and the farms on which they reside. Mumbles rise and fall. No names are volunteered, as everyone knows they will then be the targets for payback.

Eventually Mcijeni Mchunu stands up, six-foot-six with beaded rastafarian-like dreadlocks and a cut-out of a goatskin worn permanently over his overalls. He is an inyanga from our top farm, and an Mchunu induna. He tells the farmers it is irrelevant who they are. They come as representatives of the black people in the area. Enough said.”

“We are the ladder you have climbed up,” he will tell the farmers in the course of the meeting. “Now we are taking the ladder away. We are tired of your weight on our shoulders.”

At 12 o’clock exactly the Chairman of the Weenen Farmers Association leaves the meeting, pointing out noon was the closing time mentioned on the agenda. As he walks out to his vehicle there are catcalls and mutterings.

Njoko stands up: “Is it right that this white man walks out on our meeting?”

If there’s been one walkout – why not two? Njoko and the Boys march for the door, the sound of their departure drowning out the sound of the but...but.... Buts of the remaining whites.

On the veranda the assembled blacks work out a strategy for the near future.

“The people on the farms have always been against taking action against the farmers,” observes Charles Ndlovu. “What is happening now is they’re merging with the people from Johannesburg.” He is touched by the passion of the men at the meeting.

A TWO-DAY STRIKE

Most of the Weenen vegetable farms are dependent on casual labour which is fetched from KwaZulu in labour lorries daily. A week after the inconclusive meeting in the metal shed, a two-day strike leaves the farmers with empty lorries. There is no intimidation, no force – and no political group involved. For two days- three days in some areas – farm workers from Weenen and Msinga combine to show “power is with the people.”

The 80% stayaway covers an area of 9000 square kilometres. The 20% who don’t take part are either living on farms, and excused because of the danger of repercussions, or living in a faction fight area where message didn’t get through.

One strike-hit farmer sends his driver and lorry to call on local indunas, offering R50 notes to get them to come and talk to him. The indunas decline the invitation.

THE GO-BETWEEN

CAP is seen as instigator, and is approached for a solution.

“What do the people want?”

“Meaningful dialogue and a chance to be heard.”

I point out we’re just go-between, mediators as such.

“Then can you set up a meeting with these people, whoever they are, as they didn’t identify themselves at the last meeting?”

The farmers ask for seven-a-side-a controlled meeting with a controlled agenda.

We start passing messages to the huge and scattered constituency, driving from indunaship to chieftainship, telling people to come themselves or send someone.

There will be “a meeting about the land” at Mdukatshani on Sunday. Coded messages are sent to the people on the farms. Cars and combis from further afield are flagged down. Women are sent into faction fighting areas. Taxis take messages to Johannesburg.

It’s the age of communication, isn’t it?

Setting times for the preparatory meeting, arranging who-will-pick-up-who-where-at-what-time – in Africa it’s a nightmare.

Then there’s the hostel callbox...

A SWIG OF SPIRIT

The second meeting takes place at the Weenen Farmer’s Hall on Midsummer Day. This time the hostel delegation arrives. The hostels have sent two gosas, leaders of the warriors from Msinga areas, as well as the man in charge of Jeppe Hostel, John Mkhize (not his real name). He’s a tall, moustached man with bloodstained eyes, carrying his umbrella like a spear.

In his position as hostel supervisor, Mkhize has a house of his own in Johannesburg. When he returns to his wife and family in Weenen, however, he has to squeeze into a tent. In Johannesburg he is a force to be reckoned with. In Weenen he is not even a person.

To complete the official black delegations there are also indunas from both major tribes at Msinga, men from the tenttowns, and labour tenants. After discussing strategy outside the Farmer’s Hall, a bottle of intelezi is passed around, and great swigs takes. (Intelezi is a concoction to give you spirit and power in battle – a concoction without which most Zulus won’t go to war).

Chief Ngoza of the Mthembus arrives.

“What’s happening?” he asks as he enters the hall. The whites have invited him counterpart, the Mchunu Chief? If Chief Simakade is not going to be present, he can’t attend himself. He drives away.

The meeting starts, once again with a request that the anonymous men identify themselves. Who are you?

Where do you come from?

Who do you represent?

As squabble sets in.

On the farmers’s side are Douglas Ralfe and Peter Stockhill of the Natal Agricultural Union, Joseph le Roux, Chairman of the Weenen Farmer’s Association, a couple of local farmers – and Philip du Toit, a labour relations lawyer from Johannesburg.

“I can’t do anything for you unless I can say I have been sent by you people,” the lawyer explains.

“You have not been sent by us,” reply the people.

The meeting is hot and flustered most of the way through. Much to the farmers' consternation, the agreed-up-seven-a-side quickly falls away as a black tide swells in. people wandering by, in true African tradition, see a meeting is on the go and drift in to hear what it's about. Some drift out again.

Whites smoke inside. Blacks – being respectful – go outside to smoke what-we-hope-is tobacco. This adds to the to-ing and fro-ing.

“You accuse us without justification,” say the farmers. “The people you complain about are not here. We can't be held accountable for their actions.”

“Nangu! Nangu! Here he is! Here he is!” Fingers are pointed at one young farmer. “You! You impound our stock. You rob us of our money!”

The farmer stares back silently, then starts to answer in Afrikaans.

“Order! Order! No personal attacks,” rules the chairman.

Eventually the discussion reaches deadlock.

“We have done it before. We will do it again,” says the black delegation. “We will remove the ladder from you people.”

“It helps no one to talk in angry words,” respond the whites. “We have come to talk, not fight.”

Graham McIntosh stands up. He knows the area well, he says, and he knows the problems of the people of the area because he has several farms. He names them.

Several farms?

Mkhize stands. “We have no land and you have many farms?” he says. “Isn't that the very reason we are here?”

McIntosh retreats.

It isn't his day for being tactful, however. He gets to his feet again. Enough of talk about boycotts and strikes, he says. What ought to be considered is the fact that there are many, many people without jobs. It will be easy for farmers to replace striking Zulus with Xhosas.

LOOSENING THE CHAINS

A hush falls on the room. A rumble echoes. Mkhize quietens the crowd with one flamboyant hand in the air. He lets McIntosh finish. Then the black man beats his chest.

“This makes me sore here,” he begins in English. “My name is Mkhize. I am in charge of the amabutho, the regiments, in Johannesburg. Every day we are killed by these people you talk about.” (He does not use the word Xhosas).

The youth, he continues pointedly, are not as well-mannered as mature men. If he lets loose the animals kept chained at his command, then the land will belong to no one.

“It was a joke! It was a joke!” cries McIntosh.

The translation disintegrates in the ensuing clash of words, and GG, the interpreter, sits back grinning. The chairman attempts to bring the meeting to order.

After much debate and counter-debate the labour consultant suggests a solution. He, as a legal person, will take the problem to government circles and relevant authorities. A deadline for a reply is set for the end of January.

The deadline is officially extended.

Meanwhile ...

.....

In Mudén, the district nextdoor to Weenen, 52 families are given eviction notices. CAP is called in to help. After initial visits and interviews, we join forces with the Community Law Centre to fight the evictions in the courts.

Work is ongoing.

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THE HILLS ARE SMELLING

Situation Report on Stock Losses

September October 2003

On September 25th a white cow died in the bush on Mdukatshani. It was the first death due to drought. Nobody claimed the animal, so it was left to rot – one of many animals that have wandered distances of up to 25 km in search of browse and water.

By October 17th so many thin, unfamiliar cattle had gathered on our river bank that we started feeding a daily protein ration of *Boschia foetida* branches. *Boschia*, or umvithi, is traditionally used as an emergency feed during drought, one of several species of wild trees that are harvested for their high protein leaves. Feeding *Boschia* has been a gesture, but the only gesture we could make in view of the lack of grazing and browse. With the woodland leafless, and the grass grazed flat, cattle appear to be surviving by chewing spiny yucca hedges to stumps.

By the end of October the stench of dead animals was overwhelming. No matter where you traveled at Msinga the reports were the same.

“The hills are smelling.”

“The mountain is smelling.”

“The bush is smelling and full of flies.”

When two animals collapsed and died on the Bushman’s River bridge, traffic was halted for 2½ hours while an attempt was made to find the owners. The owners had to be alerted before the animals could be moved.

Because cattle and goats are sacrifice animals that belong the spirit, they are only left to rot on the veld if they are unidentified. When an owner finds an animal dying, he slits its throat and every scrap of the carcass – meat, skin and bones – is carried home in buckets. If the animal is found dead and rotting, it is still carried home, the buckets reeking with the load. The spirits demand an account of the loss, so the horns and skin will be displayed at the cattle kraal, and the meat will be cooked and tasted.

“But even the dogs are sick of meat,” the men comment.

At the end of October Mdukatshani decided to do a sample survey of local stockowners to get an idea of the extent of stock losses. The last great die-off was 1980-1981 when 12 000 cattle and 35 000 goat deaths were recorded at Msinga.

At the time it was possible to get accurate figures of stock losses because the government still controlled dipping. This has since fallen away so there are no accurate figures to compare stock losses then and now.

2

Rainfall

Mdukatshani’s rainfall records suggest that the current drought is worse than the 1980 – 1983 period, when cattle deaths were cumulative and seemed to peak in winter. This year’s high summer temperatures have exacerbated the situation.

In 1982, previously the driest year since Mdukatshani’s arrival in 1975, total rainfall was 384,5 mm

Rainfall 1982 – January to end of October: 303,5 mm

Rainfall 2003 – January to end of October: 188 mm

Although the Tugela River has continued to flow strongly, by the end of September tributaries like the Sundays, or Ndaka, were dry, and boreholes and springs had dried up. At the beginning of October government water tankers began delivering water at Msinga, although only to homes close to the main roads. At the Waayhoek village reservoir and river ran dry, and residents have been paying R 100 a trip to fetch water at Ezakheni, near Ladysmith.

The survey

Although we began by questioning stockowners in the Mchunu and Mthembu wards in the immediate vicinity of Mdukatshani, we subsequently extended the “survey” further afield to include stockowners in the Sithole and Zwane tribal areas, as well as Mthembu wards like Ngubo, which are 40 km away by road.

We kept the questions simple:

Name of owner or informant

Number of cattle living

Number of cattle dead

Number of goats living

Number of goats dead

Have you fed grain or wild trees to your stock?

We have made no attempt to record the sex or age of the dead animals – or the survivors – although this information is obviously crucial to questions around recovery. Mortality among cattle has been heaviest among pregnant cows, cows that died while calving, or cows that died soon after calving – a loss of breeding stock that will have serious repercussions. The details, however, can be gathered once the animals have stopped dying. Our sample merely reflects the overall situation at the end of October.

The survey has been easy in one respect. Everyone has suffered loss and everyone wants to talk about it. Although most members of a family can tell us how many animals have died (the skins are pegged out in the yard or hanging in a tree), a surprising number are unable to tell us how many animals survive. If we cannot get a figure for the living, we make no entry on our lists.

The most accurate figures come from families which own less than 10 animals. A man with six cattle will not make a mistake about how many animals have died and how many remain. However the larger stockowners are less likely to know whether they have 16 or 21 goats, or 18 or 23 cattle. We have had to resort to estimates of surviving animals along the lines of: More than 10? More than 20?

Goats mortality figures reflect adult goats only. Nobody counted the deaths of goat kids which died in large numbers.

“Many,” people reported. “Many twins. Two. Two. Two.”

Frequently a stockowner we questioned today would suffer further losses tomorrow.

Although the new deaths were reported to us, we did not include them on our lists. Amending the lists on a daily basis would be a nightmare. Instead we propose doing a follow-up survey in January or February, when “normal” rains may have returned.

Grazing reserves and feeding

One reason stockowners have been vague about the number of surviving animals is because cattle are no longer kraaled at home at night. Some have been sent away, others are left to fend for themselves. For once stocktheft is not a problem. The animals are too thin to be driven away.

Mdukatshani’s woodland once again provided a reserve of sorts, with an assortment of browse species no longer found in adjoining tribal areas where firewood and fencing needs have all but eliminated the bush.

In August many Mashunka cattle owners took the precaution of sending their cattle across the Tugela River to the mountaintops of KwaDimbi, or the bush in the Majozi tribal area. The Mashunka stockowners were dependent on the consent and help of friends and relatives in these places, and every few days boys waded the river to check on the animals. By the end of October Dimbi and Majozi stockowners were losing cattle too – and blaming Mashunka for the overcrowding. Mashunka is bare of grass, however, and the cattle are now too thin to be driven back across the river. In a drive around the base of Mashunka mountain only three donkeys and a few goats were sighted. There were no cattle anywhere.

At KwaNdllela local cattle owners have been paying herders to drive their cattle onto the government irrigation plots to graze the reedbeds and the verges of the fields. Even here mortality has been high – the cattle dying in sight of extensive green maize fields that will be reaped within the next few weeks.

Some Weenen farmers have been offering grazing for a fee – or having it stolen at night. Several informants admitted keeping their cattle alive by driving them onto white Lucerne fields in the dark, and then driving the animals back at about three in the morning. Those cattle that can't keep the pace and stop along the wayside are located by boys later in the day. The animals may, or may not, have the strength to be driven home.

Most of the stockowners questioned had tried feeding their animals branches of Boschia, Olea, Schotia, Maerua and even Ficus, although all these trees are now in short supply on the hills.

4

“Every day I count the umvithi,” said Nkomazabantu Dladla of the Nomoya land reform area. He has already lost four cattle and 11 goats, and is feeding a daily ration of umvithi to the two remaining cattle and 21 goats.

Branches may be harvested a long way from home. At one Mashunka homestead we visited, a branch lopped down in the Tugela gorge was placed in the family's spirit hut overnight. Half the branch was fed to the goats in the afternoon, the other half the next morning.

The knowledge of which branches to feed seems to belong to the older men who have been through serious drought before. We never found a woman cutting a branch for stock feed, although women harvest firewood almost daily. Strong traditions differentiate the function of men's and women's axes. A woman cuts dry wood. A man cuts green. A woman has a blunt axe. A man's axe is sharp. Because the tradition persists a woman will watch her ailing husband hobble up a hill to cut branches for the stock, but not take on the job herself.

During the 1980's drought boys were still herding the family's animals. This has changed with education. The boys are now at school with new ambitions.

“When you got your first salary you used to buy a goat, Maviyo Xulu of Ngqumantaba complained. “Next you bought a cow. Now it's a cellular, then a gun – and then a cow.”

The boys agreed.

Lobola Exchanges

Lobola exchanges were halted – or accelerated - as the drought set in.

Malosheni Zwane's family, for example, became unwilling stockowners for the first time in mid-September when six cattle were hastily delivered to their home at Mashunka as lobola for their daughter. Within weeks four animals had died.

In other cases the lobola exchange has been finalized – but the payment deferred. The family offering the lobola is forced to retain custody of the animals, and if one dies the carcass has to be presented as evidence to the other family. The onus is on the man's family to bring the lobola animals through the drought, and any losses are a debt that has to be replaced.

Survey areas

The survey team included Mzonzima Dladla, Natty Duma, Zamani Madonsela, Mla Magasela, Gemu Mkhize and Creina, and the areas they visited included: Sithole tribal area

(62 people), Zwane tribal area (27, the Mchunu tribal wards of Mathinta, Ngqumantaba and Ncunjane (62) the Mthembu tribal wards of Mashunka, Mbabane (KwaNdlela) Msusampi, Sahlumbe and Ngubo (198) and the land reform areas of Nkaseni and Nomoya (52).

Stock loss survey

Interviewed : 401 people

62 cattle owners owned no goats

27 goat owners owned no cattle

374 cattle owners have so far lost a total of 1872 cattle = 43,11%

4342

339 goat owners have so far lost a total of 1999 goats = 35,16%

5684

STOCK LOSSES during September – October 2003

CATTLE

Stockowners with 1 to 5 animals

Total : 89 owners

Cattle owned before die-off : 329

Average per owner : 3,69 animals

Died so far : 190 = 57,75%

Stockowners with 6 to 10 cattle

Total : 120 owners

Cattle owned before die-off : 1010

Average per owner : 8,41 animals

Died so far : 558 = 55,24%

Stockowners with 11 to 15 cattle

Total : 85 owners

Cattle owned before die-off : 1062

Average per owner : 12,49 animals

Died so far : 477 = 44,91%

Stockowners with 16 to 20 cattle

Total : 33 owners

Cattle owned before die-off : 597

Average per owners: 18,09 animals

Died so far 260 = 43,55%

Stockowners with 21 to 25 cattle

Total : 26 owners

Cattle owned before die-off : 606

Average per owner : 23,3 animals

Died so far : 198 = 32,67%

6

Stockowners with 26 to 30 cattle

Total : 9 owners

Cattle owned before die-off : 248

Average per owner : 27,55 animals

Died so far : 66 = 26,61%

Stockowner with 31 to 40 cattle

Total : 9 owners

Cattle owned before die-off : 280

Average : 31,11 animals

Died so far : 78 = 27,85%

Stockowners with more than 40 cattle

Total : 3 owners with 210 animals

Average : 70 per owner

Died so far 45 = 21,42%

GOATS

Stockowner with 1 to 5 goats

40 owners

Goats owned before die- off : 156

Average : 3,9 animals

Died so far : 95 = 60,25%

Stockowners with 6 to 10 goats

79 owners

Goats owned before die- off : 684

Average per owner : 8,6 animals

Died so far : 303 = 44,29%

Stockowners with 11 to 20 goats

126 owners

Goats owned before die- off : 1877

Average per owner : 14,89 goats

Died so far : 718 = 38,25%

Stockowners with 21 to 30 goats

62 owners

Goats before die- off : 1431

Average per owner : 23 goats

Died so far : 476 = 33,26%

Stockowners with more than 30 goats

32 owners

Goats before die- off : 1536

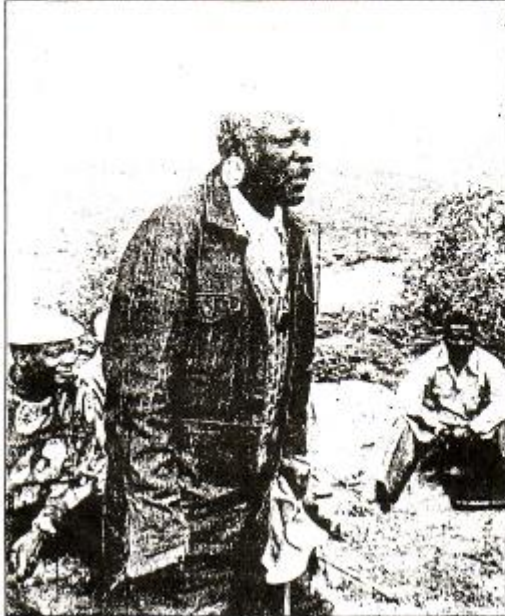
Average per owner : 48 goats

Died so far : 407 = 26,49%

FEATURES

52 families face eviction

The future is extremely insecure for two black farming communities in the Muden area. After ploughing what little money they have into their homes, they now face eviction. IMRAN AMLA reports on the mounting tension among these people who have little hope of making a living elsewhere.



Ezwangane Ndlovu says his belongings were looted up and dumped at sea by Mkhosi after he and other families on a farm in the Muden area were served with an eviction notice.

A CLOUD of uncertainty hangs over the future of two black farming communities living in the Muden area. After living and working on the white-owned farms for most of their lives, the communities now face eviction.

On one of the affected farms, owned by H. Hillerman, 40 families have been served with notices of eviction and fear they could be removed at any time. On the Mkhosi Game Ranch nearby, 12 families have the same fear of eviction after the property recently changed hands.

Mostly illiterate and uneducated, these communities grapple with the little chance of making a decent living elsewhere.

At a meeting last week, the two communities met to discuss their problems, and spoke of the insecurity and tension that results in each day passes.

Ezwangane Ndlovu, an elderly resident on the Hillerman property, spoke at the day in February when the Muden police, the sheriff of the court and officials from the S.A. arrived at his home.

Ndlovu said they began loading his belongings on to a truck. His wife said that they were being taken to Makhosi, a township near Grahamstown in the heart of the townships fighting. Ndlovu said that after he pleaded with the area, they delivered his belongings to relatives at Mkhosi.

Ndlovu said he remains on the Hillerman property because he has no other place to go.

Attempts to contact Hillerman were unsuccessful.

The offer to move to Makhosi was made to the community at large, but was rejected because of the violence and overcrowding there.

The families say they are willing to continue working for the owner, if this will enable them to remain on the land.

For the 12 families on the Mkhosi Game Ranch, life has become considerably harder since the new owner, Richard Alcock, acquired the property.

The families claim that they were made to sign an agreement stipulating to let the number of dwellings and the area occupied by each family.

The people say they never fully understood the contents of the agreement, and were they could not write, their thumbprints were stamped on the agreement. Some say they were forced to "thumbprint" at gunpoint.

At a recent meeting, the families said they agreed to sign, but could not afford the amount asked by Alcock. The families say they made proposals for a reduced levy, to which Alcock apparently agreed, but never responded. They say they were then issued with summonses.

The community claims that since then, the ranch management has shot their livestock, restricted their access to water sources and prevented them from repairing their dwellings. They further claim that they were forced to sell off all their goats on instructions from the ranch management.

However, Alcock says that the community agreed to certain conditions when he had bought the property and he denies having coerced anyone into signing a document.

He believes that the reason for the discontent is the presence of certain bad elements within the community that are causing trouble. Alcock said that the restrictions on livestock are aimed at replenishing the herd. He offered to buy an intention of removing the families from the land, but those that do not comply with the agreement will face removal.

With most of their money being tied up on the property in the form of buildings or livestock, the community is not even considering moving elsewhere.

Ezwangane Ndlovu, who lives on the ranch, explained: "We need our money to build our houses, and because livestock is there the farm changes hands, we are somehow required to leave all this, and move elsewhere. We are in a terrible state, the future will keep changing us. We are even hoping that the government will be able to find a place, or establish a township nearby."

Both communities have warned that tensions are rising daily and their fear people might take the law into their own hands.



Some of the members of the 40 families on a farm in Muden area who are uncertain future. — Pictures by IMRAN AMLA

FOOTNOTES

Vilakazi

...One has to study the primitive dancing of nay nation to gain a better understanding of the development of human institutions and the growth of mental conceptions regarding the universe.

... The selfishness of the ballroom is marked by the fact that each pair of dancers is oblivious of what the next pair is doing. Essentially European dancing is a matter for the individual. In African society, however, every branch of dancing is a communal and concerted emotive action. It is a perfect form of altruism.

Dancing in African society, therefore, is not merely a recreation as it is in European society, but it forms an essential part of Native life and is of great psychological and social value.

Communal dancing is in itself an art. The mental configurations it evokes in the minds of the performers and onlookers correspond to those evoked by the poet in the recitation of his izibongo. It is by the way in which music and dance change the shape of the universe as it passes through the minds of dancers and spectators, so that they materialize and visualize

and historical episodes... That the communal dance artist impresses his signature upon his work as art. ... He thereby creates a world more real than the reality offered to the senses.

.... One needs to read the minds of the dancers, the handclappers, and the spectators to know what a psychological effect the dance has on the Nguni.

There is an undeniable sublimity through physical and spiritual resignation.

Performers accentuate their own individuality as they strive for negation of self and the surrender of the personality. The unique importance of a ceremonial dance - and this does not differ from the war dance in a movement depicted by young people – is directed to the life and welfare of the tribe, or clan, and therefore one finds that random improvisation is debarred. The performance, before being brought to the public and the tribe, calls for planning and precise formulation, so that it may demand from the public and succeeding generations the consistent adherence to tradition.

.... Whereas most Nguni songs are ceremonial and military, social themes are found in songs sung during the carrying out of ukwemula, ukulobola and ukubaleka.

GRASS BANGLES

Inyanga yoMfumu itwese, the Zulu people used to say. “The moon of Mfumu has awakened. Thirteen months marked the Zulu year, and Mfumu was the moon-of-new-grass-sprouting, the spring moon.

In the broken hills of Zululand there were many signs of spring – red fire lilies blooming, the first call of the diderick cuckoo, the drifting scent of thorn blossom. But the Zulus were pastoral people herdsman whose lives were dependent on grass – and for them spring began when the first Sporobolus grasses flowered along the footpaths when children began appearing with grass bangles on their arms.

South Africa has the greatest grassland flora in the world, with more than 800 species of grass. Zulus were familiar with the different grasses of their countryside, they distinguished them by different names, knew their different characteristics – and for rural people this is still true. Even today Zulu people use grass in many ways for thatching their huts, making ropes, sleepingmats, shallow bowls and dishes, baskets and beer strainers.

Umsingizana is the Zulu name for Sporobolus with its narrow, ratstail flower spikes. Because this grass occurs in disturbed places, along footpaths, near cattle kraals, bunches of soft, pliable flowers were easy to collect for plaiting. Although Zulu girls often made grass bangles and necklaces – traditionally the boys were more skilled at it, plaiting grass braids as they sat idly in the sun on grassy hillsides, herding the family's cattle and goats.

There are many different braid patterns, the simplest being a twisted cord of 6 or 7 strands, the insonto. The indundu is a square braid plaited with four stalks around a central one, and the insontance and umthamo wempisi were plaited with eight strands. There are also a number of flat braids like isixwexwe and isixembe

Although grass bangles were once children's ornaments, made by the children themselves, today the grasses are being plaited by the women of the valleys of the Tugela, and their bangles are being offered as a handcraft in the cities far from their homes in KwaZulu.

The grass bangle season is a brief one, for the grass is only pliable for plaiting for about six weeks. Then it becomes too brittle. This year the women have scoured the hills, spending long days looking for the ratstail flowerspikes. After years of drought, the Sporobolus has died back, and despite a wet summer, the grass is hard to find.

NATAL WITNESS – 22 September 1924

Special Report and Photographs of Saturday's War Dance (Banner headline) Saturday's Celebration of the ReUniting of the Amachunu Tribe

The War Dance

Impressions of Saturday's Ceremony

A Mixed Turn Out

New Chief a Mighty Man Physically

From our special representative

I can't be said that we found many signs of fervid interest in the great Native war dance fixed for the following day at Mount Moriah when we turned up on Friday afternoon at Greytown in the famous "Sell it Through the Witness" car. As a matter of fact when we said we had "come out for the dance" folk at first thought we meant the jazz function at the Masonic Hall for which a City orchestra was to apply the current. But of course the bulk of the crowd were going from Weenen, they even had a motorbus from there for the benefit of those who had not cars or Tin Lizzies of their own.

I have always held that people who get up early in the morning have an uneasy conscience and I have always been dead against the vice. However the run from Greytown to Mount Moriah in the cool of the early morning was quite exhilarating. It is "some" road – parts of it are not too bad and others –

The careful humorist once gently remarked. "If it wasn't for the ancient Victorian of the remark I should say: What ho! She bumps!"

The effects of the drought were strikingly apparent in the spectacle of what were once wide watercourses now as dry as German South West. It reminded me of Lionel? Fleming's remarks on Free State rivers. "There are rivers in the Free State. If you fall into one your clothes are covered in dust.

There were large flocks of sheep, goats and cattle scattered over the countryside and one could dimly wonder what nourishment the animals could extract from the unpromising grass.

In Cactusland

Suddenly we were in Cactusland: every class of cactus known to botany seemed to be concentrated there. There was something so grotesque yet menacing in this twisted,

contorted vegetation springing high up on either side of the road. There were tall anthropomorphic cacti and thousands which looked for the all world like huge Red Indians standing as stern and silent sentinels against the intrusion of the visitor.

And so on to the Golden Valley, Muden where the largest citrus estates in this province are situated. The scent of blossoms hung on the air. There is a fine-looking hotel and post office and a store, all newly built, which give a very business like touch to a romantic view. I use the word "romantic" because that humorist of ours said there he would not have thought there were weddings enough in the world to warrant the growing of all that orange blossom.

"Ten miles to Mount Moriah," they told us – so the neat little Maxwell got down to it again, and son ate up the remaining distance. The "Witness" car was the first to arrive on the scene, beating the ATT car from Weenen with Mr. Albrecht, the cinema snapshottist in board, by several lengths.

Mrs. Rodgers of Weenen Hotel fame opened a refreshment tent where "eats" and drinks (soft and hard) could be obtained, and did a roaring trade as soon as the crowd arrived (and deservedly so). The ceremony was fixed to take place on the vast flat expanse in front of Mount Moriah (or Umhlumba) a black-bearded prominence of majestic proportions.

The kopjes in the neighbourhood, with their multitude of boulders and their khaki tint looked more a like chunks of Transvaal scenery.

A Distant View

Mounting one of these kopjes on the right I got one of the most imposing experiences of the day. A couple of miles away was a long black line, steadily approaching, it seemed almost endless. Then the battle chant was heard faintly, distance lending enchantment to the sound.

The far off glimpse of that band of warriors was more imposing than the close up I afterwards had when the tatterdemalion aspect of so many spoilt the effect.

There seemed some mighty force behind that moving mass, with its not unmelodious chant – until I looked beyond them – to the ancient hills and realized how puny and futile all man's efforts seem to be in the face of the unknown and irresistible agency which decrees that while the hills may stand for a million years, with human being races die out or change beyond recognition in a few hundred years.

Unfortunately I thought it best to stroll back to the European enclosure as we were "supposed" to keep the other side of a barbed wire fence, and have a talk with Mr. von Gerard, the magistrate of Weenen – as to the *raison d'être* of the ceremony.

The Reason

Mr. von Gerard said the position was that in 1906 after the Bambatha Rebellion the Chief of the Amachunu tribe, Silwane, was deposed. He subsequently died in exile. The tribe had ever since been in mourning and had been split up under two chiefs. The Weenen section was always fighting the Mpofana section. Some years ago Mr. von Gerard proposed that in order to stop the fighting an effort should be made to reunite the tribe. About six weeks ago the aged chief of the Weenen section announced that he wanted to retire and the whole tribe unanimously asked that Silwane's heir, Muzocitwayo, be reinstated as chief of both sections. Mr. von Gerard notified the government of the tribe's wish of which he heartily approved, and the government had agreed. It was reunification of the tribe which was to be celebrated that day.

By this time there were about 30 odd cars parked – three from Pietermaritzburg all told. The vanguard, a "troop of cavalry" of the impi was now coming from over the kopje.

A Mixed Lot

The "cavalry" proved to be a mixed lot – some pukkah warriors jumbled up with Natives of the go-to-meeting type in black coats, and the ordinary "Kissmissbox" Jimfish whom we have always with us, except when he doesn't feel like work.

The "infantry" were also a curious conglomeration. There were some splendid warriors – chiefly old and aged men these – in the semi-nude state of the old times, Native fighters with shield, plume and carrying sticks in place of the forbidden assegais. Cheek by jowl with these fine looking men were Native in cast-off European clothes – dirty old shorts reaching down to their knees and so on. They looked like a lot of Pietermaritzburg rickshaw boys.

The numbers were imposing, increasing as troop after troop marched on to the turning point, singing all the way. There were probably between 3000 and 4000 troops in the impi. The various troops marched in from the spectators' right with Mount Moriah in the background, and turned and took up their positions in long lines facing the flagstaff, squatting on the ground in the baking sun awaiting the arrival of the chief. They kept up a monotonous chant and occasionally one would spring up, come to the front, and do a single turn, completely annihilating some hypothetical foe. One could not help being struck by the splendid carriage of some of the older warriors who occasionally walked from one end of the lines to the other. Men in the prime of life, or just past it, they displayed a muscular development which would have pleased a physical culturist, and had none of the unhealthy flabbiness which Europeans over 40 so often allow themselves to be saddled with.

There is a certain natural dignity attaching to these old warriors which gives them the right to regard themselves as the aristocrats of the veld. The old warrior is a fine proud man, but the Jimfish spoilt by town life picking up our meanest attributes and not being able to emulate our better qualities is quite another proposition.

While some of the European were protesting that the chief should not keep "them" waiting (the dance had been specially arranged for their benefit they fondly imagined) a terrific din

sprang up, the banging of shields and the roar of 3000 voices. The chief was coming. It was the most exciting moment of the day for the intense feeling among the black troops seemed to charge the very atmosphere and communicate itself to the spectators.

“What a Man!”

“My word, what a man!” gasped one.

Muzocitwayo really is a tremendous fellow, standing well over six foot, and is wellbuilt – but of bone and muscle, no flabby rubbish. In his full dress uniform, which consisted of tufts of white hair and purple plume, and a black and red headdress and gleaming ebony skin, he looked enormous.

He was accompanied by his ring-kops (men with headrings), wise and shrewd – looking old men of a type that is becoming extinct. When one hears Negrophobes declaring that the native is devoid of brains and incapable of being anything but a hewer of wood and drawer of water, one thinks of the inherent cleverness of these old men, uneducated in one sense of the word but possessed of as much common sense as many a cultured European and having a fairly good idea of justice withal.

Muzocitwayo basked in the focus of the movie camera like a lizard in the sunshine. He just loved it. These camera men of different kinds, by the way, seemed to be running the show and the authorities were just a little riled about it. Before anything could happen Muzocitwayo must be photographed in several different attitudes. He is a natural actor and would probably be hailed with joy in an American movie studio. It is difficult to estimate a native’s age, but he is still a young man, probably younger than he looks, and I would say he was about 30 to 35. In one hand he held a gleaming assegai against his shield, and in the other a bayonet. He was, of course, the only one allowed to carry steel.

The salute was given, and Mr. Wheelwright, the Native Commissioner, advanced to welcome the new chief. By this time the European had swarmed onto the parade ground”, clustering around the flagstaff while those with cameras were endeavouring to get as near the chief as possible. A professional photographer in a very excited state rushed up and tried to get them all shifted.

It would have needed a squad of police on duty at the entrance of the enclosure to keep the European out. Everybody wanted to hear what was being said, though as the speeches were in the native tongue, not everyone could follow them.

Mr. Wheelwright said that the tribe had grievances, and that he had communicated with the government with the object of getting them rectified. Their chief cry was that the tribe had been divided. They were there that day to celebrate the fact that the government had allowed them to reunite once more, and he hoped they would show their appreciation of the government’s decision by their actions in the future.

The Chief's Reply

The chief in his reply said that he had been welltreated by the government.

"My forefathers lie on your battlefields," he said. "My grandfather, Gobonga (Gabangaye) died at Isandlwana fighting with our troops. My father, Silwane, fought with you against Langalibalele in 1873. And again in the Bambatha Rebellion we were with you. He added that he had not had an opportunity of helping Britain, but that they could rely on his loyalty, for he was truly grateful for the way in which he had been treated. He added however, that he did not think that they'd done anything in 1906 to cause them to get into trouble and he hoped that the authorities would not listen to any gossip that might be spread about the tribe.

Several prominent Europeans then proceeded to congratulate the chief, and one heard the astonished bilingual remark "Machting, they are shaking hands – met een Kafer."

The cameras got busy again and it was sometime before the chief could be rescued from the crowd of enthusiastic snapshotters, not that he was anxious to be rescued. The enclosure was then flooded with hordes of excited native women who were eventually got away and then the dance itself commenced. The chief, as will be seen from the photograph, led the dance, which was, for all its size, not the most imposing one has seen. One curious feature was the spectacle of a native police boy in uniform standing in front of crowd of novices and showing them how to do it. He was apparently enjoying himself very much.

For while the spectacle of thousands of natives swaying from side to side striking the ground with great force, first with one foot, then with the other, to the music of their own human orchestra while they brandished their imitation weapons aloft, was very picaresque but it? To get monotonous after awhile.

When we left at about 1 p.m. the dance was still in progress and looked like continuing, although the most exciting part was still to come in the location afterwards when the natives got busy with "the inyama" and the "utywala".

On the road we passed many boys who'd journeyed from afar to attend the dance and were returning to their kraals.

The Inevitable Change

What the ceremony brought home to me was the change that is inevitably coming to the Black man, and which will continue despite the regrets of Europeans summarized in the following sentence heard on Saturday: "In their raw state they are all right but when they get civilized they are no good. "Getting civilized in this sense usually means learning to drink European liquor, using the vilest of European oaths and endeavouring the master the art of "working points," to use the old Cockneyism.

Many of the race obstinately refuse to recognize the fact that it is impossible for the native to live in such proximity to us and remain "a fine, healthy savage". He is bound to imitate us and the extent to which he is doing so would surprise some who don't take that interest in anthropology and psychology which Mr. Ramsay Muir (a brilliant observer of South African

conditions) so rightly says we should do if we wish to gain true perspective of the native question. When you see native piccanins on self-constructed putting greens holing out in a way that would shame many white beginners it makes you think hard. I nearly exploded the other day at hearing one of those black “golfers” yell out to another: “ Oh rotten man.”

It seems to me that the suppression of the fighting instinct of which these war dances are an indication leads to the skebenge spirit. One problem before our statement – if we have any! – is how to guide the native idea so that healthy sport takes the place of the old lust for combat.

NOTES on removal of Chief Silwane of Mcunu – in exile of Harding in 1909

54 adults
27 children
162 cattle
5 horses
139 goats
44 fowls
89 bags mealies
240 bags mabela

1888 – A dry year at Msinga

Natives take cattle to Newcastle to buy mealies
Terrible scarcity – Natives begging, eating wild spinach.

Kaffircorn is the chief food upon which the Natives live, much being consumed in the form of beer by children as well as grown up people. It is more like thin gruel, and a most wholesome and nutritious food, much more so than any European food of its kind.

Native Affairs Blue Book 1889