

GREEN IN AFRICA



MELISSA ANDREWS
PICTURES CHRISTOPHER LIST

ROLLING hills reached out to the horizon, broken only by a lonely white cross and monument – a solitary reminder that this was the site of the Battle of Majuba, where one of the greatest military blunders in British history resulted in Boer victory.

After a stretched out yawn of a drive from Joburg, we found our way back to the Battlefields Route and our beautiful campsite at Majuba Mountain. Ostensibly haunted by two soldiers that stand at attention in full regalia, we were relieved when neither spectre put in an appearance.

Stopping at a township outside Newcastle called Blaauwbosch, we visited another inspiring school project at Sizakancane Primary, and were astounded again at the reach and positive impact of Food & Trees for Africa.

Passing through the village of Isandlwana, we glanced up to see Isandlwana Lodge nestled into the side of the iNyoni Rock. Named after the dramatic 1879 battle, the environmentally sensitive lodge with its thatch roof, soaring windows and stone walls is artfully designed to blend in with its craggy backdrop.

A chance meeting between Pat Stubbs and Maggie Bryant led to the establishment of the lodge in 1999. Community development was close to both founders' hearts and the lodge supports the Edupep programme, which provides materials and practical assistance to six schools in the community, as well as the Wild Foundation's Zulu Village Project, which includes vegetable gardens, chicken rearing, a craft market and skills development as well as an orphanage.

We spent the day visiting two schools and sharing ideas for their vegetable garden, talking to Samantha Terblanche and Elizabeth Dhlamini about their work in the Zulu Village Project and walking the battlefields site. Meeting Samantha, a board



CONNECTION: Alyson McPhee with Ntombi and Thabo, two orphaned baby rhinos that found a home at Thula Thula Private Game Reserve

MOTHER NATURE AT HER BEST

member of the Earth Organisation, proved fortuitous as she suggested visiting Thula Thula Private Game Reserve.

If you haven't yet read the story of Lawrence Anthony's incredible rehabilitation of a herd of rogue elephants at Thula Thula, buy *The Elephant Whisperer* now. Lawrence, a renowned conservationist and founder of the Earth Organisation, is remembered for saving the animals of the Baghdad Zoo and for negotiating with the notorious rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army to protect the few remaining northern white rhinos in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Lawrence's wife, Francois Malby, has risen to the challenge of running the 4 500-hectare reserve. Twice-daily guided game drives ensure a good chance of seeing the reserve's once-rogue



ROLLING: A dung beetle scouts for a location to bury its dung.

herd of elephants. From the original seven, the herd has more than tripled to 24.

We also saw zebras, giraffe, nyala and wildebeest. But the highlight of the trip was a game drive with Francois and Alyson McPhee, a veterinary nurse from

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England who'd taken over the care of two orphaned baby rhinos at Crow (the Centre for Rehabilitation of Wildlife) in Durban, before they and McPhee were transferred to Thula Thula. Both rhinos were fascinated by the 4x4 – no matter where we went, they followed.

An armed guard accompanies Ntombi and Thabo 24/7 to guard against poachers. With a gunfight having taken place in the not-so-distant past – one of the rhinos was shot in the back leg – the need for increasing protective measures is a harsh reality.

Francois is also setting up a Rhino Conservation Trust to help raise funds, while plans to expand the reserve into another 6 000ha of tribal land are under way.

Though its commitment to conservation is what really sets Thula Thula apart, the lodge and luxurious tented camp employ 70 people from the community, offer in-house training and invest in community upliftment.

Staying in the tented camp, we experienced teeming rain, deafening cracks of thunder and jagged lightning, which split the sky in a display of grandeur that was unmistakably African.

The next morning dawned with rain-swept magic. We joined the dawn bush walk – discovering the tracks of a hyena and mongoose, numerous birds, spiders and dung beetles.

Though it was hard to tear ourselves away, we had the iSimangaliso Wetlands Park, Hluhluwe Nature Reserve and Kosi Bay to look forward to.

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