

THE JOURNEY WITHIN

Ian Player

Voltaire once remarked that he loved the man who sought the truth, but hated the man who claimed to have found it. I am now at seventy, and on the last lap of life. My search for the truth has been a lifetime exploration, both internally and externally. I make no claim to have found it, but there have been insights.

When I travelled to the 8th World Wilderness Congress in Alaska in September 2005, my flight from South Africa took me over the Drakensberg Mountains: *Ukuhlamba* of the Zulu people. I looked down and pondered, saw the red grass glowing luminously in the afternoon sun.

These mountains were the last refuge of the San or Bushmen people, who painted their exquisite art on cave walls and recorded the history of our country, the coming of the Nguni people, the Boers on their horses, English soldiers and the vast array of wild animals. By 1870 there were no San people left. They were shot and killed without mercy and with them went vast tomes of wisdom and knowledge.

A man named Richard Nelson said: 'The abandonment of an ethically and spiritually based relationship with nature by our western ancestors was one of the greatest and perilous transformations of the western mind.' Today nearly all of modern humanity's ills spring from this abandonment, and this is why wilderness has become so important: because it reconnects us to that ancient world.

We South Africans can be proud that our country was the first in Africa to proclaim a game reserve and the first wilderness area. Imfolozi Game Reserve in KwaZulu-Natal has that double distinction. It was there, in 1976, that the World Wilderness Congress was born. The congress has come a long way since, on tortuous paths and having to overcome what at times seemed insuperable odds. It has become the longest running, public international environmental forum and a critically important platform for many divergent views.

The congress was a suggestion of my great friend and mentor Magqubu Ntombela who had led many treks into the wilderness with me. He said that we needed a big *Indaba* to bring together everyone who had trekked so that we could share experiences. He was a man who could neither read nor write, but he was the wisest, most gracious and bravest man I have ever known. The African people have a word for it: *ubuntu*.

It is fitting too that the World Wilderness Congress began in Africa. It is the cradle of mankind. All of us have our origin from that mighty continent, as DNA has proved. The psychologist Carl Gustav Jung said: 'We do not come into the world *tabula rasa*: a clean slate'. Three million years of Africa is imprinted on the human psyche.

I know from taking many hundreds of people in small groups from all over the world on foot treks into the wilderness of Imfolozi and Lake St Lucia how they are gripped by the spirit of Africa, and at night as they sleep on the red earth, dream their dreams, and hear the animals and birds, there is a connection that is evoked from the depths of the collective unconscious: the rasping cough of the leopard, the howl of hyena and the scream of the elephant. It is an experience that has awakened thousands of people to the value of the African wilderness, and the understanding that this was once their

home, and this inspires them to protect it. As Shakespeare writes in Othello: 'It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul...'. And so it has become for many of us, worldwide.

In 1977 South Africa was a pariah nation, and organising that first congress in Johannesburg in October of that year was a nightmare, but the congress was an undeniable success where for the first time a black field ranger—Magqubu Ntombela—took his rightful place amongst leading international scientists, politicians, writers and artists.

The congress established the importance of wilderness in breaking down racial barriers in South Africa, and the wilderness trails in Imfolozi Game Reserve were a leading example. Magqubu used to tell the mixed groups as we sat around the fire at night: 'If we are charged by rhino or lion and blood flows, it will be the same colour blood for everyone, even though our skins may be a different colour'.

The congresses that followed, in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Norway, were beset with political problems because the congress had originated in South Africa, and because I am a South African. I will always be grateful to those American and international conservationists who stood by us, and ensured that the congresses became a forum for everything associated with wilderness.

Today, thanks to Nelson Mandela and the peaceful elections of 1994, South Africa is the brightest light on the continent of Africa and stands poised to be a wilderness and conservation example for all of emerging Africa. But we in the world wilderness movement are under no illusions about the difficulties that lie ahead. The struggle for political freedom is over in South Africa, but not in all the African states. The new struggle is an environmental one: for all our people to make wise use of the natural resources.

In 2001 the World Wilderness Congress returned to South Africa, to a transformed country, and thanks to Adrian Gardiner and Andrew Muir and the Eastern Cape government, it was a phenomenal success. South Africa has proved what can be done.

The same is not true for other parts of Africa. I do not want to enlarge on a litany of woes facing conservation in Africa, but the problems range from the desperate situation of the last remaining Northern White Rhino in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to some parks where the game scouts do not have boots.

Whereas the birth of the World Wilderness Congress was in Africa, the honour for the establishment of national parks and wilderness areas belongs to the United States of America. It was Americans who articulated the wilderness concept and set aside wilderness areas against what at times seemed overwhelming odds. But the spirit of one of the greatest American Presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, was always with them. Not for nothing did he say: 'The greatest sport the world affords is aggressive fighting for the right'. Yet we must remember that Frederick Courtney Selous, the great Nimrod, was his guide in Uganda, and he and the African wilderness made a deep impression on Roosevelt, and affected his thinking.

Selous and Roosevelt spent weeks in the African wilderness together, hunting rare species for the Smithsonian Museum. One can imagine the long conversations they had around the fire at night, while lions roared, hyena whooped, elephant trumpeted and jackal screamed. In the morning as the thermals swirled, they would have listened to the fish eagle - its long, screaming, piercing and lyrical call echoing over the lakes, forests and wetlands. This bird calls from the soul of Africa.

Roosevelt wrote in his book *African Game Trails*:

I speak of Africa and golden joys: the joy of wandering through lonely lands; the joy of hunting the mighty and terrible lords of the wilderness...In these greatest of the world's great hunting grounds there are mountain peaks whose snows are dazzling under the equatorial sun...lakes like seas; skies that burn above deserts...mighty rivers rushing out of the heart of the continent...forests of gorgeous beauty, where death broods in the dark and silent depths...

These things can be told. But there are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness, that can reveal its mystery, its melancholy and its charm...the large tropic moons, and the splendour of the new stars. Where the wanderer sees the awful glory of sunrise and sunset in the wide spaces of the earth, unworn of man and changed only by the slow change of the ages through time everlasting.

As a result of Roosevelt's efforts, America became the leader in the field of environmental protection, national parks and wildlife management. He was a prophet and saw what was coming in his beloved country.

In 1908 Roosevelt brought all the governors in America to a conservation conference. It was from this conference that the National Parks Service eventually became law in 1916. There is hardly a country in the world that today does not have a national park.

In my library is a book with the prosaic title of *S.1176: Hearings before the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the United States Senate* - the 1957 hearings about wilderness preservation. The pages are worn thin and underlined everywhere. The cover is tattered from constant use. It has been in my possession since 1958, a most treasured book sent to me by Howard Zahniser, the then Secretary of the Wilderness Society (US). In it I have written: 'This has been the bible of the wilderness movement in South Africa'. The Americans showed us the way. It is a phenomenal story of the past, the present and the future.

The S.1176 hearings led to the United States Wilderness Act in 1964. One of the witnesses quoted was Sigurd Olson. Listen to what he said:

In days to come, the wilderness concept must be clear and shining enough to capture imaginations. It must take its place as a cultural force, with all expressions of man's deepest yearnings and his noblest achievements in the realm of the mind. It must be powerful enough to withstand everywhere in the world, the coming and enormous pressures of industry and population.

Talk about intimations of the future: this is it.

In S.1176 is the gripping story of the blood-and-guts fight for the conservation *soul* of America. You realize too, that what it is expressing is the depth of the impact that the Native Americans made on the psyche of Anglo-America. Constantly there are echoes, and one senses their spirit in the extraordinarily eloquent pleas from some of the most eminent Americans of their day.

I first came to America in 1964 as a guest of Metro Goldwyn Mayer, and through Ira Gabrielson I met Stewart Udall, Secretary of the Interior, and a man proud of his

Native American blood; he became a speaker at the first World Wilderness Congress. Just ten minutes in his company gave me a deep and emotionally moving insight into the soul of American conservation. He reiterated that America had to be an example to the world.

The men and women who testified for wilderness in S.1176 were heroic people, many times going against the grain and knowing that they were up against it. They warned against roads, lodges, hotels and restaurants in the national parks. They knew they were setting an example for the world and it had to be the right one. Another witness, Edwin Way Teale said that wilderness areas are 'storehouses of wildness, and wildness will become an ever-increasing spiritual need in the crowded tomorrow'.

We are now in the crowded tomorrow, with a vengeance. Try a Los Angeles Freeway on what they call a quiet day.

The wilderness work that America articulated and the rest of the world has followed is practical, political, philosophical, psychological and scientific, but at the deepest levels there are still too few people who understand it is the work of the soul. The lines of the psalm say it best: 'Be still and know that I am God'. It is in the wilderness that the stillness can be found.

Jung was another man whose life was changed by the African experience. In the autumn of 1925 he visited Kenya and Uganda. He came to Africa to learn, before it was too late, something about the archetypal nature of mankind. He woke at sunrise while travelling in a train, and on a steep red cliff he saw: '...a slim, brownish-black figure...motionless, leaning on a long spear...'

This image gave him an intense sense of *deja vu*, and he said: 'I could not guess what string within myself was plucked at the sight of that solitary dark hunter. I knew only that his world had been mine for countless millennia'.

Jung had been touched by Africa, had re-connected with his own interior Africa. He always referred to Africa as 'God's country'. For the rest of his life Jung continued to say how important the African experience had been to him and his work.

I need hardly add how Jungian psychology has influenced western thought. His 22 volumes of books and the hundreds of analysts who have followed up on his work is proof of this. He has made modern humans aware of the importance of the dream. The external scientific world has made us aware of the value of ecology. We now need to journey within.

We have to face the fact that rampant materialism is creating havoc in our world and wilderness areas are under threat everywhere. This has not been helped by Judaeo-Christianity. Edward Whitmont puts it succinctly: 'For several centuries traditional theology has tended to create an absolute gulf between man and nature'. Yet the world seems to continue as though there were no tomorrow. We have forgotten those wonderful images in the gospels that describe John the Baptist coming out of the wilderness '...clothed with camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey'.

A 2005 report in Time Magazine said:

Today, with little notice, more vast archives of knowledge and expertise are spilling into oblivion, leaving humanity in danger of losing its past and perhaps jeopardizing its future as well. Stored in the memories of elders, healers, midwives, farmers,

fishermen and hunters in the estimated 15,000 cultures remaining on earth is an enormous trove of wisdom.

We are losing the greatest living library, but in Africa we still have many indigenous cultures. Some time back, we in our foundation found a group of Bushmen in the Kalahari Desert who had been moved to a farm in the Cape. We use some of them as guides on trails and there is a lovely story told by a field officer.

Although the Bushmen had never seen an otter because they came from the desert, when they saw the spoor in the sand on the banks of a river of the Baviaanskloof they got on their hands and knees and looked at it, smelt it, walked around it, and then eventually one of them stood up and described what sort of an animal had been there, and his description fitted the otter perfectly. Later our field officer proudly pointed out the spoor of a leopard, and the Bushmen looked at it and said, 'Yes, it is a leopard, but do you know that it is a female and she is carrying a cub?'

The moral of these stories is that you do not destroy people, cultures and the natural world. Our indigenous people who are being assailed from all angles have a tremendous amount of wisdom about animals, birds, plants and trees, that they can pass on to the world.

For too long there has been a cataclysmic clash between western and indigenous cultures, with the latter being the bigger loser. Sense of place and spirit of place have been destroyed. As Jung said: 'We have lost a world that once breathed with our breath and pulsed with our blood. Did the wind use to cry and the hills shout forth praise?' It is a cry of helplessness from indigenous people as a once known world is swept away.

Marie-Louise von Franz, a great depth psychologist, said: 'Western civilisation is in danger of building a wall of rationality in its society, which feeling cannot penetrate. Everything has to be rational and emotion is frowned upon'.

This makes the poets critically important to our cause. Wilfred Owen, a First World War poet, said that all a poet can do is to warn, and that is why true poets must be truthful. Poets warn us and they inspire us. Think of W. H. Auden's words (*Funeral Blues*) as a reflection of ecological doomsday:

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood,
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

Compare this to the inspiration of Hermann Hesse (*Sometimes*):

Sometimes, when a bird cries out,
Or when the wind sweeps through a tree,
Or a dog howls in a far off farm,
I hold still and listen for a long time.

My world turns and goes back to the place
Where, a thousand forgotten years ago,
The bird and the blowing wind
Were like me, and were my brothers.

Fraser Darling, the great Scottish biologist, said: 'To deprive the world of physical wilderness, would be to inflict a grievous wound on our own kind'.

My great friend the late John Aspinall, the most famous gambler in Britain, who became a conservationist and who even when devastated by cancer of the jaw continued to campaign and poured millions into the saving of the gorilla and other conservation causes, he said:

I believe that wilderness is the Earth's greatest treasure. Wilderness is the bank on which all cheques are drawn. I believe our debt to nature is total. I believe that unless we recognise this debt and re-negotiate it—we write our own epitaph. I believe that there is an outside chance to save the Earth—and most of its tenants. This outside chance must be grasped with gamblers' hands. I believe that terrible risks must be taken and terrible passions roused before these ends can be accomplished.

We are all engaged in a momentous struggle and we owe it to the early pioneers to honour their vision and their achievements. This is our task in the 21st century. We need something that will stir our psychic depths and touch the images of the soul. It has to surpass creeds and instantly be recognised. We must learn a new language to convey the feelings of beauty, hope, inspiration and sacredness for humanity and all other life.

We need to remember the first principle of ecology: that 'everything is connected to everything else'. *And the wilderness experience is the spiritual spark that ignites the understanding.*

We need to go back to the bird and the blowing wind - when we were brothers. To trek into wilderness and look into our own souls and regain the spiritual connection with the Earth.

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