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International Tourism and Changes in the South African Tourism Product in the 1990s: Accomodation and tourist amenities in the Kruger National Park

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Two

ACCOMMODATION UNTIL 1990
Policy, Market, and Architectural Styles

2. INTRODUCTION

This chapter uses empirical evidence to answer three critical questions on the destination's response to tourist demand. First, how could nature be commoditised and yet still maintain its natural state. Second, how could rest camps be improved and still remain true to their established or evolving traditions, or would they be abandoned for a better image? Last, how could the architecture be used to accurately capture and sum up the new holiday experience to be packaged and sold? The empirical discussion that follows is *not* intended as a complete inventory of all the camps in Kruger; nor should it be expected that the same camps discussed for one specific preceding period will be followed up right through. Rather, this chapter – and the next – are intended to reveal certain aspects that answer the three questions posed without necessarily giving a blow-by-blow chronological outline of every camp's development. First, it will be useful for readers to pay attention to discussion of peculiarities and similarities in the "defining features" of camps and the way they addressed the tourism market. Second, the chapter makes a deliberate attempt to engage the conflict between tourism growth or expansion, on one hand, and nature conservation policies restricting outward spatial expansion, on the other. Third, the chapter deliberately urges attention towards the development of architectural styles that were sensitive to policy and an established tourist clientele. And finally, the discussion on the private and National Parks Board camps, while addressing the preceding concern, centres specifically on the privatisation of tourism within the park, and stirs the discussion towards *decentralization* discourses. Is what is going on *devolution* or *delegation*, is it neither or both? Besides just state vs. private sector participation, the empirical evidence enables a discussion of *layers* of tourism decisionmaking and implementation.

2.1 THE PRE-1940 PERIOD

Because Kruger was first established solely for conservation, and took time to *become* a national park even after its proclamation, neither park authorities nor tourists were too concerned with the rather basic accommodation and rudimentary infrastructure. Visitors tended to look on the brighter side of things – that is, the outstanding wildlife attractions rather than the ramshackle facilities at Skukuza, the park's headquarters. Kruger was opened to visitors in 1927 and by 1930 had 8 rest camps comprising 78 huts, built out of local materials. Visitors' huts had been completed at these places: Malelani 4 huts, Skukuza 17, Satara 22, Olifants River (Balule) 8, Lower Sabie 3, Gorge 4, Letaba 12, and Pretoriuskop 8 (*Custos* May 1976: 19; Bulpin1992). At this early stage Kruger was typical of the *exploration stage* of Butler's 6-stage tourist cycle of evolution, which involves small numbers of adventure tourists attracted by natural features of a place despite the absence of "specific facilities provided for visitors" (Butler 1980: 7).

Such visitors utilized materials and facilities not necessarily intended for tourists, such as rangers' quarters. The early rest huts were more like fortresses: as the camps had no security fences, only small but safe peepholes were left to allow visitors to scan for danger before going out, just in case a mischievous lion or leopard lay in wait. But then again, this sense of danger added to the mystique of Wild Africa. The limited occupancy capacity made the family tent the most common accommodation unit available for rent at 75 cents a night (Skukuza). With few and tiny shops in the foreseeable vicinity, it was the normal thing to carry personal supplies and do one's own cooking (*Custos*, November, 1984:37). Water supply, too, did not come easy: the tourist fetched his/her own water from the nearby Sabie River (*Custos* May 1976: 19). The hurricane paraffin lamp lighting (and the oil-smell it emitted) and the *mopani* wood cooking might surprise today's tourist used to electricity and gas, but at that time it was the common practice. The meals prepared at a central place on an open fire allowed visitors to gather and share the day's adventures, to make friends and to evoke the romance of the African wild. Nor did the dusty roads bother anyone: as long as the wildlife enthusiast saw game, the road was barely noticeable to the experience. Unlike today's automatic and fast petrol pumps, the one at Skukuza, servicing the whole park, was hand operated – a revolutionary presence in its own time (*Custos*, November, 1984). These contrasts of yesteryear and today illustrate the changing nature of the 'state-of-the-art'.

Developing the camp development discussion further, there begins to emerge a connection between individual management styles and development patterns of accommodation, even as such individualism might have fallen within the boundaries of the National Parks Board (NPB) of Trustees policy. As founding warden, James Stevenson Hamilton's fixation with conservation often frustrated the development of 'better' accommodation units: it would disturb the tranquillity of the natural environment, he said. His philosophy was that those desiring to experience the wild must do so at nature's own terms or stay out (Carruthers 1995: 74). Perhaps, as Bunn (2003: 208) says, the retreat from the hectic urban and mining existence demanded a rediscovery of the natural state. Rather than being a weakness, therefore, the natural state and its consolidation as such was Kruger's biggest strength. The state of roads and lack of overnight facilities might protect Hamilton's ideal, but it contributed to the initial slow growth in visitor arrivals: only 3 cars visited the park in 1927. This stagnation was a defining moment that made Hamilton realise the need to develop tourist facilities (*Custos* May 1976:19). At a time when "prominent visitors" (mainly politicians within the Union and abroad) were coming to the park, it dawned on Hamilton that his philosophy must undergo revision urgently.

By 1936, 13 rest camps open to tourists were at Pretoriuskop, Malelane, Skukuza, Crocodile Bridge, Satara, Olifants River Causeway, Letaba, Shingwedzi, Lower Sabi, Olifants Gorge and Punda Maria. Additional huts were erected at the Rabelais (Satara) and Malopene (Letaba) entrances to the park to accommodate late tourist arrivals who might not reach the larger camps before nightfall. To prevent tourist frustrations at not finding accommodation during 'busy July', numerous cottage tents were soon to be pitched at the principal rest camps. To improve booking and other on-hand tourist requirements, each camp had its own management, ready to ease tourists into their lodgings (*Unspoilt Africa* 1936: 27). In some ways, this delegation of duties by park management to camp management represents a kind of *decentralization*, even if the degree varied.

Perhaps reflecting their own time, these camps were managed by white men, with Africans seeing to the more menial jobs like splitting firewood and making fire, carrying water, general cleaning, and so on. Little had changed in the construction and utilities of the huts – they had concrete walls and thatched roofs, riempie or iron bedsteads, a hurricane lamp, rough benches, washstand and basin, table, hangers, and so on. But the larger camps had fully equipped bathrooms or shower baths. Even with

such facilities visitors were asked to ready themselves to lead a camper's life: the nights would do with plenty of bedding, overcoats, and a torch. In the 1930s, Asians and Africans were 'free' to visit, but there was "as yet no accommodation available for them". Because camping anywhere else apart from rest camps was prohibited except for filming parties, effectively, therefore, Asians and Africans were not welcome. When eventually they were welcome, they would have to arrange for their own shelter and carry tents, but not during 'rush periods' and school holidays (*Unspoilt Africa* 1936: 29).

By 1936 shops at Skukuza, Satara, Letaba, Punda Maria, and Pretoriuskop stocked everything from biscuits to mattresses and blankets for hire. All huts now had mattressed beds; however, cooking utensils like kettles, pots, pans, and cups, knives, forks etc. were not supplied, but were hired out from the stores. The smaller rest camps still used grass mattresses (*Unspoilt Africa* 1936: 29).

It was only in 1941 that NPB undertook to provide bedding at all rest camps (except at Gorge, Olifants River and Pafuri) (*Unspoilt Africa* 1941). Motorists could get petrol not only at Skukuza, but also at Satara, Letaba, Crocodile Bridge, Malelane, Pretoriuskop Gate and rest camp, Satara entrance, Letaba entrance, and Shingwedzi. The price varied depending on how far each pump was from the railway line. In case of breakdown, motor repair stations were now available at Skukuza and Punda Maria (*Unspoilt Africa* 1936: 29). It can be said, therefore, that by 1936 Kruger had turned the corner from merely providing accommodation to integrating other forms of tourist comfort and convenience.

By the end of 1939, the 2-bed rondavel was so popular that it was adopted in many other camps. However, some camps persisted with their peculiar architectural styles, perhaps showing another intersection of overall policy and specific camp management styles and tourist tastes. Shingwedzi, for example, put up three more bungalows to "conform" to the "existing system of bungalow huts", which had several rooms under one roof. Punda Maria added one 4-roomed bungalow. Importantly, demand for two-bedded rooms was also met – an illustration of how the market influenced supply and policy directed towards developing the destination. Hence, Pretoriuskop added 30 and Skukuza 11 more 2-bed rondavels. In the latter camp 2 luxury cottages were built in an enclosure outside the main camp; each had two bedrooms with bathroom and kitchenette and a mosquito proofed veranda (**N**ational **P**arks **B**oard of **T**rustees **A**nnual **R**eport (NPBTAR) 1939: 11). In 1939, efforts were

taken to ensure that some new units had electric lighting, perhaps at Skukuza more than anywhere else. Hence while the 30 new huts at Pretoriuskop were not wired, rewiring and substitution of iron standards for wooden poles at Skukuza was completed, while the new luxury huts had electric lights. Only these units and the bathrooms had electricity in the entire camp (NPBTAR 1939: 14-5).

2.2 POST-1945 PERIOD TO 1980

When the park reopened to visitors after having been closed during the Second World War, another factor would increasingly come into play and determine the place of accommodation in the park. The National Party's obsession to use nature as a pivot of Afrikaner nationalism, visible from 1948 onwards, rested on making Kruger a successful conservation and tourism concern (Beinart and Coates 1995). This ambitious programme commenced in 1951 when the NPB embarked on an ambitious and extensive programme to improve tourist facilities. Perhaps taking its cue from Skukuza, management at Lower Sabie in 1964 made provision for electrifying the newly constructed 60 huts, even if at the time the merits of such actions were being debated (*Custos* November 1978: 11). By 1970, the increased occupancy capacity significantly raised the number of arrivals as well as income. In July 1976, it was planned that 15 huts would be erected at Skukuza to replace the old rondavels; **N**ational **P**arks **B**oard (NPB) policy was not to expand but simply improve and "retain the atmosphere that characterizes the camp", that is, to fit the huts within the pattern of existing rondavels (*Custos* July 1976: 46).

By 1976, Kruger boasted 13 rest camps with a total of 1.000 huts, accommodating 500 000 visitors a year (*Custos* May 1976: 19). Other than totally new camps, these figures represent significant increases in capacity at the old ones, for example, Satara (from 22 huts in 1929 to 170 in 1978) and Skukuza (17 to 195) (*Custos* November 1978: 13). Out of the 195 at Skukuza, some 117 two- and three-bedroomed units had air-conditioners, own fridge, shower and toilet. The 5 family cottages had all these and own kitchen (*Custos* August 1978:19). Olifants Camp which had opened in 1960 had 48 luxury rondavels (with shower and air conditioning), 60 ordinary huts and 3 family cottages, one with 6 beds and two with 4. Three ablution blocks made of gleaming brass and sparkling white tiles completed the set-up. Overall, by 1976 Kruger National Park's 2 800 beds raking in an average 2 000 visitors per night were a far cry

from the 78 peephole huts of the 1920s (*Custos*, May 1976: 22; 1977: 21). The introduction of credit card facilities removed the need to carry wads of cash, which might run out and cut short the stay. NPB was determined that tourists be comfortable and spend their money (*Custos*, December 1976: 25).

Pretoriuskop: Perhaps as a reflection of this hospitality thrust, Pretoriuskop had by February 1976 emerged as *the summer rest camp*, "one of the most popular rest camps' in Kruger, the oldest yet marketed as "one of the nicest places in which to relax during the hot summer months". Here was "a virtual oasis" for children "getting hot and bothered at midday Pretoriuskop". Which adult or child could resist its tantalizingly shady trees around the swimming pool? The idea of summer was associated with the large pool for adults and children and "a kiddies pool for the smaller fry" (*Custos* February 1976: 16). Pretoriuskop falls within a relatively high rainfall region, giving the camp a green luxuriance and animal life (especially white rhino, giraffe, and hunting dogs on the Pretoriuskop-Skukuza road[1]) few others could afford the tourist. This natural richness blended into the encounter with history that awaited the visitor, who would see the ruins of the residence of Joao Albasini, a Portuguese ivory trader-politician who had struck a good relationship with the Transvaal Boers (*Custos* February 1976: 16).

Olifants: By the end of 1978 when Olifants Camp celebrated its eighteenth birthday (it had been opened on June 3, 1960), it was being sold as a place of magic. The restaurant and shop destroyed in an inferno in February 1972 was redesigned by the architect K.A. Richardson with concessionaire funds from Total Oil Products, and reopened in July 1973. Where the dangerously low-level causeway near Balule had been the only access to Olifants, in 1973 a high-level bridge on the main road to Satara ensured an all-season gateway to the camp. The new-look Olifants had several additional facilities, including a new caravan park, but retained its appearance and sense of presence. Perched on "rocky cliffs high above the Olifants River", it was still the same old red-roofed "lookout post" (*Custos* September 1978:9). Here tourists could savour the unravelling beauty below – hippos and crocodiles lazing it out in the pools and reeds, baboons behaving mischievously among rocks and trees, gazing back to mankind. Its "beautifully built stone retaining walls" separated one terrace of rondavels from another on the hillsides. (*Custos* September 1978:10)

[1] This unique character was testified by two sightings of a white rhinoceros couple and at least four herds of giraffe during my fieldwork.

By 1978 Olifants had a cliff-edge, river-looking conference centre that had an outdoor braai area and veranda with adjoining lounge and dining room convertible to one big room if need be (*Custos* September 1978:10). In total, Olifants could accommodate 318 tourists a night, and maintained a bed occupancy of 62 447 in 1978, which, interestingly, amounted to 124 894 sheets, pillow-cases and towels respectively being changed and washed the whole year after use by tourists. Income per annum was just over R250 000, a 6% increase on 1977. Olifants did not win the 1978 Yvonne Knobel floating trophy for Best Rest Camp in Kruger for nothing; for it to get the accolade, it had to have improved its camp grounds, restaurant and shop, treated tourists well, and pursued outstanding levels of human resources management (*Custos* September 1978: 11). Even as it received this trophy, the Dorbyl Group of Companies were already exploring possibilities of building a guesthouse within the requirements demanded by NPB for Kruger to provide its overseas visitors "the ultimate wild life experience". On 3 November 1979, C.D. Ellis Guest House (named after the Dorbyl director) became the latest of nine guest houses in Kruger. Warmly accepted by the Chief Director of the National Parks, A. M Brynard, the C.D. Ellis was located right on the banks of the Olifants River but within the camp. This *luxurious* beauty could accommodate 8 people; each room was designed to marshal "an exceptional view of the Olifants River". Booked three months in advance like its 'sisters' everywhere in Kruger, the C.D. Ellis as a unit cost R70 per night (*Custos* December 1979: 39).

Satara: If Pretoriuskop was an appointment with summer and history in the 1970s, Satara was Kruger's "ostensible Cinderella", lying halfway through the park just off the new tarred road north to Pafuri, and passing an "untouched world of nature". It is not surprising, therefore, that Satara was voted "the best camp in the park" for 1976. The camp started modestly as an overnight spot for Stevenson Hamilton's pioneer game rangers, and thereafter developed as a seasonal (winter) camp, but the popularity of its cafeteria was such that authorities were tempted to build huts and other facilities for a permanent camp. Satara was seen by park authorities as something of an oddity, since it had none of the *natural* resources necessary "to create a camp with an atmosphere". No river flowing past, not high enough to afford a breathtaking view, and no "bizarre" history, yet Satara (rebuilt at a cost of R2.5 million) manipulated its location and took its vast plain as a trump card, since nowhere else could one see bigger varieties of game (*Custos* September 1977: 20-1). Satara rest camp was laid out in a circular architectural arrangement of huts. To be

sure, there were 7 large circles with lawns and trees in the centre, each circle of huts separated by a distance that insulated tourists in one circle from noise or light from another (*Custos* September 1977: 22). The circular arrangement created smaller camps within the rest camp; even when full to capacity, the tourist would seldom feel crowded or notice s/he was one of the multitudes present. It is no surprise that thousands of visitors over the years became "confirmed Satarians", making sure to visit even if only to drink an Amarula bottle, another special Satara *tradition* (*Custos* September 1977: 21). In addition to an already impressive accommodation set-up, in August 1978 a cottage was donated by Annette Regina Stanley in memory of her father, Otto Wolff, the latter a naturalist so passionate about birds (*Custos* August 1978). By November 1978, Satara had a total of 170 huts compared to Skukuza's 195 (*Custos* November 1978: 33).

Skukuza: By the end of the 1970s, Skukuza had emerged as "the Pulse of the Kruger National Park", indeed "the nerve centre" of the park where administrative staff, biologists and ecologists were housed (*Custos* August 1978:16). In July 1978, the tourist manager, Piet du Pleiss was predicting a surge in tourism, building on the 7.5% achieved in the past year; the annual bed occupancy rate had risen from 69% to 72%, constituting ¼ of the total 603 000 bookings for the whole park (*Custos* August 1978: 16). These Skukuza figures were achieved with 61 ordinary huts (with communal ablution blocks), 117 air conditioned 2-/3-bed huts (with communal kitchen but own fridge, shower and toilet), 5 family cottages (similar to the huts but with own kitchen), 3 park homes (with similar facilities to cottages), 3 guest cottages (i.e. Lion, Struben, and Monis), a dormitory block (accommodating 68 school children), and a caravan park (*Custos* August 1978: 19). Coming with the guest and family cottages and park homes were fully equipped kitchen with crockery and cutlery; the beds all had linen. The family cottages and park homes were 2, 3 or 4-bedroomed, each taking in six people. *Lion* could accommodate 2 people, *Struben* 4, and *Monis* 12 visitors. In total Skukuza could accommodate 640 visitors each night, if one takes into account a "special camp" of six 2-bed huts reserved for *guests of the state* and situated near the reception and boasting a spacious lounge and dining room. The huts were open for public booking if not in use. Finally, perhaps as an illustration of Skukuza's maturity as a tourist resort, a medical doctor, bank, post office, shopping centre, restaurant, garage and petrol station were now in place (*Custos* August 1978: 19).

Letaba: Work on 22 new huts to accommodate 66 tourists had commenced at Letaba Rest Camp in July 1976 to replace the old rondavels; each would cost R5 000, a far cry from the £29 in 1929. Consistent with parks board policy at this time, this was not an extension of the camp, and care was taken to retain "the atmosphere that characterises the camp" and ensure that the new huts "fit in well with the pattern of the existing rondavels". The 'old ladies' would be replaced by 'new girls' capped with corrugated iron roofs to lure summertime visitors excited by the newly tarred Phalaborwa Gate-Letaba road to venture thus far (*Custos* July 1976: 45-6). It would seem that in the late-1970s, the corrugated roof was fashionable with tourists; by the end of 1978 the new huts were the most sought-after (*Custos* November 1978:11).

Malelane: Throughout the research, information on the northern complex of camps for this period, that is, Shingwedzi and Punda Maria, proved to be scarce. Much further south, however, Malelane, tucked midway between Nelspruit and Komatipoort, had by April 1979 acquired a brand name as *a place of tranquillity* increasingly popular with tourists. The addition of 5 new huts with facilities "recently" had done nothing to take away its image as "one of the smallest and most peaceful rest camps" in Kruger, because, as with policy at this time, new structures were constructed on the debris of old ones. Comprised of 20 huts without facilities, 30 camping sites, 4 huts with facilities for 4 people, and one hut with facilities for 3, Malelane retained its name as a quiet small place with a big heart (*Custos* April 1979: 31).

2.3 THE 1980s: THE RISE OF THE MASTERPLAN

Individualism vs. Standard Policy

This section argues that while NPB policy gave broad direction to facility development, park management dispensed with the specifics. The central figure was Dr. U. de V. Pienaar, who was appointed in 1979. Pienaar represents continuity since he had been working in Kruger all along; his mandate, he says, was that of "maintaining quality", his priority to improve not merely the number but especially the luxury of existing facilities (*Custos* February 1979: 20). Kruger as a destination, therefore, could mature into a modern entity if local development catered to the needs of tourists (Laws 1995: Introduction). This is perhaps Butler's *development stage* of the tourist cycle, whereby the destination develops a well defined market and meets its standards (Butler 1980: 8).

Prior to the introduction of the 1981 masterplan for park management, accommodation development was guided by the 1975 management plan, whose system of zoning had not recognized the need to include tourism development zones. Tourism was second fiddle to natural vegetation and the animal population; the management priority was on conserving the natural environment for its own sake. Even the NPB's *Policy Statement* in 1984 insisted that all activities in the parks be zoned in ways that did not upset the fundamental purpose of preserving reasonably unspoilt landscapes. Only minimal human interference would be permitted, with special areas reserved as "wilderness areas" or "unspoilt reference areas" where human access and activities would be restricted. The "wilderness areas" would provide "educational and spiritual experience of nature", that is, for purposes of wilderness trails and guided walks (National Parks Board of Trustees Policy Statement 1984: 3).

As this statement shows, by 1984 attempts were being made to "categorise the intensity of tourism development", and three key categories emerged: (1) areas off-limits to any tourism facilities (2) existing facilities considered adequate (3) potentially expandable existing facilities (Venter et al 1997: 213). Sooner rather than later, NPB realized the problems of continuous tourism development without proper zoning and resolved that any further tourism development be planned. In 1981, NPB also realized that accommodation demand often exceeded supply, particularly during school holidays and long weekends. For Kruger's tourism to survive, it needed to adequately cater for this assured market of regular visitors, not just seasonally but all-year-round. Old and new visitors could come only if the attraction was readily accessible, when enough accommodation was assured (as in Laws 1995).

The result of all these considerations was the masterplan of 1981 in which "business premises" like restaurants, reception, offices, and shops would be zoned separate from day and overnight visitor facilities, with day-tripper amenities being separate from overnight stay areas. Persisting to the present, this *architecture* of the tourist space minimized disturbance and overcrowding, respecting the diversity of visitors *(Custos* August 1988: 33), going beyond basic accommodation (mere necessity) towards specialized accommodation (luxury) (Joubert August 1988). Provision was also made to boost bed capacity from 3 200 to 4 000 by adding two average sized camps, three private camps, numerous smaller bushveld camps, and additional hiking trails (Verhoef 1992: 14). It is, therefore, not surprising that older huts were upgraded, and new structures were erected; older containers (structures) were inconsistent with new

wine (policy). A major rebuilding/renovation project was unveiled for the older main rest camps, with work at Skukuza and Letaba earmarked for 1988/89 and further works to follow at Punda Maria, Pretoriuskop and Lower Sabie (*Custos*, August 1988: 33). The momentum promised by this plan does not reflect in the 1986 masterplan, whose mission statement did not show any developments for human benefits but, rather reflected purely conservation principles, giving the impression of a park that existed solely for maintaining biodiversity (Braack 1997b: 6). Not surprisingly the mission statement was revised in the 1997 masterplan which was more tourism-focused.

The relationship of the NPB intervention and Kruger Park management must be clearly understood; the former gave individual national parks responsibility of managing all the activities within their fences because, above all else, it was less costly to avoid direct administration. The new policy entailed each park management to compose and religiously adhere to its own master plan, which must be conservation-friendly in the discharge of tourism projects. This rule would apply to both parks-managed and concessionaire projects within the parks (National Parks Board Policy Statement 1984: 8).

2.4 ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

Market vs. Design

The purpose of this section is to outline the development of individual camp styles and the clientele and policies they catered for or addressed. While changes took place in nearly every camp, this section concentrates on selected ones that illustrate the key trends in policy and market influences on facilities. The sustained economic recession between late 1982 to early 1984 did little to dampen tourist arrivals, such that construction and upgrading resulted in night arrival increases of 7 121 compared to a drop of 1 002 in day visitors. The renovation and improvement of huts and interior facilities, coupled with the commissioning of Berg-en-Dal camp in 1984 significantly boosted overall bed capacity from 2 546 in 1982/83 to 3 081 by the end of 1984 (NBTAR 1983/84: 7). Trends show that fewer visitors preferred those rest huts without facilities, while private rest camps proved exceptionally popular and had a higher occupancy figure throughout (NPBTAR 1983/84: 7). Where in the early days visitors were prepared to use the game rangers' facilities, they now demanded state-of-the-

art facilities. There seems to have been a direct correlation between increased occupancy capacity and greater numbers of arrivals, attributable both to significant expansion of existing facilities and the construction of new ones. These two expansions are discussed below.

2.5 The rise of the private camp

Roodewal Private Camp: Roodewal represents a new accommodation concept developed in 1983 – that of the private camp, to be located inside rather than out of the park. Roodewal was constructed by private sponsorship from the General Electric Group, and under the operating agreement the concern had reservation rights; unlike the NPB rest camps, and like most private camps, Roodewal could only be booked 'en-bloc' rather than as individual units. Utilizing a tantalizing concept of silhouette, colour, and contrast, Roodewal manipulated the "beautiful view across the waterhole", where the lions roaring nearby could be counted on to come down and have a drink. The lions being the favourite of the wildlife photographers (Bunn 2003). The camp would achieve an 'all-in-one effect' – combining the suspense and adrenaline of wilderness with the luxury of the lodge's interior, the tourist would watch the unfolding drama of game from the comfort and safety of the couch. In this way, rather than having to drive through the park to see game, it was the game that would now visit the tourist. That was not all. If the traditional camps lacked the extra degree of "privacy between huts", these new structures not only possessed that, but also extra space inside. Each hut had bathroom facilities – a shower, washbasin, and toilet. The larger families were welcome in the cottage, with its 2 bedrooms and a lounge/dining-room; the four huts could accommodate 19 people (*Custos* April 1983: 46).

Malelane Camp: What did size matter, and which size mattered? This is the key to understanding the redesigning of Malelane, which started out as a NPB camp but was by May 1983 a private camp. The idea was to change a large camp into a small one incorporating the latest design technology, such as conferencing and recreation facilities. From a modest 4 huts in 1929, and having developed steadily over the years, the entire camp was then transformed into "a new lovely little camp with only five huts- one three-bed and four-bed units" taking in 19 visitors. In 1983, each hut was

equipped with “modern” kitchenette (fully equipped with a refrigerator, stove, eating and cooking utensils), bathroom (showers, washbasin and toilet), and electric lights and air- conditioning (*Custos* May 1983:19). The *en bloc* tariff in 1983 was R120 per night for ten persons, each extra bed costing R7.50 and allowable only to a maximum 19 persons for the entire camp. Just like at Roodewal, the hut was so-designed as to accord the maximum privacy and wilderness experience. (*Custos* May 1983:19).

Jock of the Bushveld: Another of the small-sized private camps introduced in the 1980s, Jock of the Bushveld was located on “the old transport route” from Lydenburg to Delagoa Bay. Despite being the newest camp in 1983, its architectural style took after the old types rather than the fashions of the modern. The old *hartbeeshuisies* (wattle-and-daub houses) huts represent the personalized tastes of the camp’s sponsors, Jack and Cecily Mackie-Niven, the founders of the Percy Fitzpatrick Fund. The camp, therefore, was something of a monument to the *Jock of the Bushveld* author himself, designed to trap history within its walls, a life-story which Cecily, as a kin of Fitzpatrick, had been part of as a four-year old. That clever and brave dog, Jock, had countlessly passed through the door that was now part of the dining complex; then this piece of wood had provided entrance and egress to “an old trading store at Kruger’s post (between Graskop and Lydenburg) where the traders of the time liked to outspan” (*Custos* September 1983:39). Handed over to the NPB on 13 September 1983 (NPBTAR 1983/84), Jock of the Bushveld is an example of a camp providing different sizes and types of accommodation for a diverse market (National Parks Board Trustees Annual Report 1992/93).

Boulders: This donation in 1985 to NPB by the giant construction company Murray & Roberts was located in “a hideaway in the centre of the park”, from where it offered luxury accommodation with fully equipped kitchen. Just like other private camps, Boulders had separate bathrooms, but to “ensure a peaceful wilderness experience”, it did not have shop or restaurant, and to be “as close to nature as possible”, solar power was preferred for lighting and cooking to diesel generator or grid electricity (www.getawaytoafrica.com).

2.6 National Parks Board Camps

Skukuza: Arguably the biggest facelift completed in 1984/5 was the Selati train restaurant, which offered a 54-dish menu representing the taste of Africa – from main courses of "buffalo tongue, venison patê fillet of buffalo, trout, prawns and crayfish", to *marula* sundae (ice cream whipped up with *marula* jelly), *marula* cocktail, nuts, and a lot more (*Custos* April 1984: 25). With a capacity to serve 44 diners, Selati still bears down on the main camp from the east side some twenty years since accommodating its first diners (on 24 February 1984) (NPBTAR 1984/84: 25). The blending of exotic and local styles shows the summoning of the imaginative talent: an *oldtimer* whistles to signal the start of a menu, the diners go for the cocktail at the same time choosing their meals. All resembles a train journey into a nutritious mystery awaiting discovery – the true spirit of wild Africa. Perhaps with knowledge dawning that in the process of seeing nature, feeding in such captivating places, and sleeping in such improved luxury, people also fall sick, a new doctor's room was completed. Just like in most camps at this time, Skukuza got a guest house – the Volkskas Guest House – in 1984. Finally, a reception and information complex, new ablution blocks and a camp kitchen for the caravan park were set up (NPBTAR 1983/84). The *phenomenal* increase in arrivals (with overcrowding during school holidays and long weekends) and its disruption to camp peace forced the relocation of the reception centre to the entrance gate, away from the rest camp proper; it was officially opened on 3 March 1989. In a space of 6 decades, 3 odd motor vehicles entering Kruger in 1927 had turned to 151 000 vehicles (and 564 000 people) in 1988. In the year 1987/88 financial year, 134 469 visitors entered the park through Kruger Gate and 7 043 direct at Skukuza Airport. The attractive thatched building housing reception offices, a post office, a bank, and a car-renting agency (NPBTAR 1989: 15-6) announced the popularity and dominance of thatched architecture which continues to the present.

Berg-en-Dal Camp: What is the connection between accessibility, siting, and demand? This is the key to understanding the timing and location of Berg-en-Dal, officially opened by Environment Minister S.A.S. Hayward on Saturday, February 25, 1984. The camp was built specifically to cater for increasing numbers of tourists coming in through the southern part of Kruger, and in response to opportunities the newly completed tarmac from the south via Skukuza to the north offered. Berg-en-Dal's geographical position was tricky; in such cut-throat competition for clients, difficult

access was hardly an advertisement, except, perhaps, to adrenaline junkies.[2] That aside, this camp represents the spatialisation of the NPB's insistence on the separation of day and night facilities, and those for camp personnel. The rather "communal" restaurant, entertainment, information areas, and banks – surviving to the present – created a kind of 'CBD' (central business district) in the park. The "maximum privacy of the individual huts", demarcated quite clearly by the road system, marked how far park planning had come from the days when everyone gathered at the open fires to prepare supper and make friends (or enemies) (*Custos* June 1983:35).

Berg-en-Dal could take in 360 people in 23 cottages and 69 ordinary huts with 30 caravan sites and 20 camping sites to spare (NPBTAR 1983/84: 6). Audiovisual equipment was installed in the exhibition and mini –auditorium" to show wildlife films and for conferences (NPBTAR 1984/85:19). By 1989, the activity profile at Berg-en-Dal included morning and afternoon guided bush walks on the rhino trail.[3] The kids would, meanwhile, relish the playground on site; its "modern equipment" (including seesaw and merry-go-round) was as good as any in the city. To spice up bird-watching pleasure with learning, the camp ran a short bird identification course, usually during school holidays. The day's physical exertions gave way to a 'bring and braai' evening talk with information and park staff, a time to share wildlife experiences, to learn about the wild (*Custos* July 1989:59). If anything, Berg-en-Dal shows that tourism was not just for adults but also for children to enjoy, that the love for the wild need not necessarily compromise a way of life people were accustomed even in town. As the fieldwork showed, Berg-en-Dal has maintained its child-friendly status.

Satara Camp: Renovation transformed Satara into the face of nature-friendly luxury. In 1983, day visitor facilities were added by the gate – "a peaceful braai where fires are kept burning throughout the day", tables, and washing facilities giving maximum convenience to visitors, a picnic site meticulously chosen with the day/night visitors in mind. A new campsite was set up for caravan- and tent-campers on the same principle of separate spaces for specific accommodation. An additional kitchen to the existing three, the installation of coin operated laundrettes and driers, and the upgrading of the 2-bedroom huts to include an air conditioner, a shower, washbasin, toilet and

[2] As I observed during my field trip, the camp appears somehow severed from the arteries of tourism traffic, despite a fantastic tarred road (Field Notes of Research Trip to Kruger 11/3/2004).
[3] I saw two such rhino at a mud-bath en route to the camp and two more grazing by the Malelane-Skukuza tarmac.

refrigerator, brought a touch of modernity into camp (*Custos* August 1983:17). But that was just the beginning: the garden was terraced into an English-type neatly green lawn, clean paths, and flowerbeds; all buildings were red-roofed save the thatched rondavels (www.getawaytoafrica.com). The atmosphere captured the "mood of colonial Africa" – red-roofed public buildings, thatched rondavels, neatly raked paths, lush lawns and flower beds, an imitation of the typical "English country garden". Cast in the slogan of *Making South African Parks A Pride And Joy To All South Africans*, Satara perhaps exceeded Berg-en-Dal when installing special facilities for disabled peoples in two huts. (NPBTAR 1983/84: 6) The statement was clear: Kruger – or tourism – was not just for able-bodied people. This 'conscience' was responding, perhaps, to observations such as one in the UK in 1985 that 14% of respondents said they could not go on holiday because they were disabled and had problems climbing stairs, negotiating bathrooms, and wheeling through small doors (Laws 1995: 44). In addition to this milestone, the Rudi Frankl guest cottage, build from a Tiger Oats Group endowment, took luxury and modernity to a new level with its patio that had a barbecue area, and the front garden "commanding a view of a watering point where game come to drink"(NPBTAR 1983/84:6). The coming of the private sector to invest in camp development, especially of 'guest houses', illustrates a new thrust in tourism development, that of a willingness to use a lot more imagination to create spaces of luxury in the middle of the traditional parks board camps. This was, therefore, another level of private sector intervention separate from the creation of new and free-standing private camps. When the renovators finished their work in 1983, they left in place 148 huts and ten family cottages, all totalling 433 beds excluding the "camping facilities" (*Custos* August 1983; NPBTAR 1983/84:6). This infrastructure at Satara would get a new shopping complex in 1993/94 (NPBAR 1993/94).

Shingwedzi: The primary objective of changes in the 1980s, as in the last decade, was to improve the camps without "any damage being done to the historical character of the old huts" or the natural environment. The old huts were renovated and re-decorated to offer visitors "the most comfortable accommodation available in the park". New entrance and exit gates, fencing, swimming-pool changing rooms, a main administrative block, and 2 staff houses were part of an impressive list of achievements over the 1983-4 period that also included the completion and handover of the Rentmaster Guest House by the donors to the Board. Others included the

completion of a temporary exhibition and preparations to make it permanent (NPBTAR 1983/84: 6), as well as a new ablution block, camp kitchens and a day-visiting area (NPTBAR 1984/85: 5).

Punda Maria: In the 1980s, Punda Maria was marketed as "the only rest camp in which the essence of Africa can be experienced", what with the bush pig patrolling freely around, with the densest concentration of *nyalas*, and "bushbuck galore" (*Custos* October 1983: 33). Its popularity with tourists influenced changes envisaged in the 1981 masterplan that remodelled the reception/restaurant complex, but then created a serious dilemma. The idea to enlarge this small camp to a medium-sized one would detract from "the atmosphere of this charming rest camp", the northernmost of Kruger's camps. The original huts constructed in 1933/34 were retained but renovated, with unusually thick (insulating) walls being added to the huts' interiors and squared off, each hut being fitted with its own shower, washbasin and toilet. The thick walls and neatly thatched, skirted roofs cooled and refreshed guests even in the hot summer. The roof extended over the veranda on Lebombo ironwood poles, the same ones erected 50 years ago, which time, wind, weather, and termites cannot corrupt (*Custos* October 1983).

By the end of 1983, Punda Maria had 17 two-bed huts; four three-bed huts (with own small kitchen), and two 4-bed apartments, while a further 30 would be built in similar architectural style, together with a new main complex to house a reception and information office, a shop, and a cafeteria on the veranda. Further transformations to the caravanning/camping site, to build 2 ablution blocks, and 2 camp kitchens (all thatched) were under construction "in an area dotted with trees". Plans had also been finalized to create a swimming pool for tourists to cool off during sweltering summer days. It did not matter, therefore, whether the visitor got into the park through the new Punda Maria gate from Louis Trichardt and Sibasa, or traversed the park to this rest camp via Shingwedzi; Punda Maria was strategically located to be the gateway to "the intriguing new world offered by the park's northern territories" (*Custos* October 1983: 33).

2.7 CONCLUSION

What direction was tourism in Kruger taking by 1990? Was the market running away with the park or was policy firmly keeping tourism well within the clutches of nature? These are very important questions that should help discussion on the 1990s and thereafter. From the foregoing, it seems that increasingly, Kruger's management was *involving* South African citizens, especially in the corporate sector, in tourism development within the park. It is also apparent that, 'outsiders' to the park were having strong influences on how tourism infrastructure should develop, even within the standards set by National Parks Board with reference to preserving rest camp surroundings, sizes, and conservation issues. The devolution of rest camp management and architectural styling could proceed within only those functions delegated to such authorities; at no time could such rest camps impinge on the overall conservation agenda of the park.

Tying in with the introductory chapter, the development of additional tourism facilities reflects both the abilities to market the product as well as the filtering of market demands beyond just national tourism policy (i.e. in SATB and SATOUR) to actual destination development by Kruger and rest camp management. It does not seem that the destination lost all control over the product to the tastes of the market however; if anything, the cases of Jock of the Bushveld, Pretoriuskop, and Satara, illustrate trade-offs between keeping a distinct accommodation tradition and adjusting it to tourism taste. The response of policy, especially at the rest camp level, does not reflect a total submission to market demands. In some cases of economic depression, supply might exceed demand; however, tying with the first chapter, perhaps the success of marketing strategies, reflected in concomitant increases in arrivals, might have caught Kruger napping sometimes, such that in 'busy July', demand outstripped supply. This was a huge spur to the renovations of the 1970s and 80s.

Overall, the very peculiar nature of tourism development in Kruger's rest camps does not sit nicely within Butler's 6-stage model. If anything else, there are countless slippages and simultaneities between what he might call 'stages'. Hence totally new private camps emerged as old ones were being increased or decreased in capacity, suggesting that *development* is in itself a strategy of *consolidation*. At the same time, the *stagnation* of certain camps was a call to *development*, to the devising of new strategies to lift the rest camps out of their problems. Perhaps Butler's consolidation stage is relevant to the 1990s, a time when National Parks determined

that the park had reached its capacity and, therefore, suggested that efforts should now be on maintenance. This policy decision was also motivated by stagnation in terms of the resources Parks could master towards any new developments. In some ways, the decision to award 7 private concessions and 11 designated safari lodges was a *post-stagnation* strategy aimed at *rejuvenation*, not with Parks money (which it did not have) but through private investment. It is this complicated interplay of Butler's consolidation, stagnation, and post-stagnation stages that will concern the final chapter on the 1990s, bearing in mind that slippages between these 'stages' exist. The key issues emerging on the 1990s centre largely on policy, not least the connections between privatization and international tourism.