

Vukani – Harold Trollope: from Hunter to Conservationist

As related by his granddaughter, Daphne McNeill

Stephen Harold Trollope¹, born 7 July 1881, was a hunter, farmer, family man and conservationist “always ready to help his fellow man and to preserve animals; a man



Harold Trollope, Vukani, in the 1930s/1940s

who led an exciting, interesting and adventurous life; a pioneer of wildlife conservation in South Africa.” (Matthews, B. 2005)

Known as Harold, his father was Samuel Wesley Trollope, the 19th child of the 1820 settler, Stephen Trollope, who had come out to South Africa with his brother and father on The *Weymouth*. Harold and his older brother Wesley and younger sister, Jessie Audrey Jane lived in Bloed Street, Pretoria and loved the outdoors. He learnt to handle a gun at an early age and often hunted buck and birds for the pot on Meintjies Kop, the site of the present Union Buildings in Pretoria. Each time he was given only three bullets!

¹ Origin of name Trollope: William the Conqueror became King of England after the Battle of Hastings in 1066. In 1079 he set aside a tract of land for his personal hunting pleasure – the New Forest. According to legend he appointed Harold, a Saxon, as his gamekeeper. One day Harold shot three wolves with his bow and arrows. This was considered a great feat. He was thereafter known as Harold Trois Lupe (three wolves), which later translated into Trollope.

Although he and his brother attended the same junior school in Pretoria, they were sent to different boarding schools for their high school education. Wesley went to Victoria Boys High, now Graeme College, in Grahamstown and Harold was sent to Grey College in Bloemfontein where he and Deneys Reitz became great friends. The two boys spent many happy hours on President Reitz's farm, near the town of Reitz in the Free State.

When the Anglo-Boer war broke out in 1899, Harold tried to run away from school to join up, but he was too young, and was sent back home. On his arrival in Pretoria he went to see President Kruger who suggested that he leave school and join the Post Office as a telegrapher. He eventually landed the job as President Kruger's private telegraph dispatcher.

In 1901, he and his brother Wesley did join up and were attached to the Pretoria Commando. After the war ended Harold returned to live on the family farm, Hartebeeshoek, where Menlyn is today. The farm, however, had been ransacked and looted by the British troops. Wesley and Harold helped their parents re-establish the farm and as Harold was bilingual, he was employed as a Clerk in the Repatriation Scheme.

In December 1909 Harold married Fanny Irene Glen Leary in Zeerust when Rene, as she was known, was 21 years old. She was only 19 when Harold proposed to her so her father, John Glen Leary, made them wait two years before they could marry. Rene and Harold had four children: Margaret born in 1910 in Zeerust; Helen born in 1914; Irene (known as Tinkie, who was to become mother of Daphne McNeill) in 1915, and a son, Glen in 1921. The last three were all born in Fort Beaufort, Eastern Cape.

When Margaret was about two years old, Harold was asked by Major Charles Mullins, VC, to take over the management of the farm *Wardens*, which was owned by the Mullins brothers Charles, Robert and Arthur, and situated in the Fort Beaufort district. Harold worked hard on the farm milking cows and making butter which was sold in Grahamstown.

As this was the time of the ostrich boom in South Africa, Harold also farmed flocks of ostriches which were plucked for the feather market. When the ostrich boom crashed Harold turned to citrus and planted orange trees. He became a prominent figure in the citrus farming world, and the farm Wardens became a showplace in the district.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Harold wanted to join the war effort and fight for England. So, he left the farm in the charge of Fred Eaton and signed up in December 1915. He and his friend, Arthur Pote, were sent to Roberts Heights for

training. From there the two were sent to German East Africa (now Tanzania) with the Van Deventer Scouts, a mounted unit. The men in this unit were all given 'salted' horses, that is, horses immune to horse sickness.

Harold was very suited to the tracking he had to do while with this unit. Life was hard as they had to live off the land. During the East Africa Campaign the German gunboat, *Koenigsburg* was sailed up the Rufigi River to hide it from the Royal Navy. This ship had been responsible for attacking and damaging many of the British ships in the Indian Ocean. The Germans proceeded to camouflage the ship by placing branches on the decks and painting its sides. The Germans then began to shell the South African troops from the camouflaged ship. General Smuts sent Major Pretorius and an African chief in disguise, behind the enemy lines to try to obtain some information as to where the shells were coming from. They were able to send back all the information needed as well as the whereabouts of the *Koenigsburg*.

The Van Deventer Scouts, including Trooper Trollope, were the first men to reach the scuttled German gunboat in the Rufigi River. Harold came across an empty shell case which he commandeered and carried with him throughout the rest of the campaign.

Shortly after this episode, the South African troops captured the town of Arusha. Harold and Arthur Pote were ordered to strike the German flag and raise the Union Jack. Harold immediately thought that as he had the shell case, why not the flag as well! He rolled it up and stuffed it into the shell case and brought both back home with him. They are now in the Harold Trollope Museum, Amakhala Game Reserve. After many bouts of tropical dysentery and malaria, Harold was given his honourable discharge from the Army and sent home to Fort Beaufort.

In 1919 Wesley and Harold bought a farm in what was then Northern Transvaal, now the Northern Province, in the district of Thabazimbi. Harold loved the Transvaal and his dream was to live and settle on the farm *Varsvlei*. Unfortunately, force of circumstances kept him in Fort Beaufort, and it was only after the Second World War that he was able to even think of returning to *Varsvlei*.

After his return to Wardens and his family, Harold became very interested in the Afrikaner breed of cattle, bred for their hardy constitution and suitability for South African conditions. Although he was instrumental in advertising them in North America, nothing came of his efforts to market them around the world.

Harold would take time off to go on his much enjoyed hunting and fishing trips. These trips required a great deal of planning and preparation, however, and meant that he would be away for three or four months at a time so could not be undertaken very

often. Harold was regarded as one of the best shots in the country at that time and was rated as number 7. Rene did not agree with this rating and firmly believed that Harold and Harry Wolhuter were **the** best shots in the country. Harold was not a man whose 'killer instinct' drove him to shoot everything in sight.

Harry Wolhuter was an old friend of Harold's and in 1923 was a game ranger in the Sabie Game Reserve, now the Kruger National Park. In 1898, President Paul Kruger had granted the land between the Sabie and Crocodile Rivers to be set aside for conservation of game in a reserve. The Anglo-Boer War delayed the process so it was not until 1902 that Colonel James Stevenson- Hamilton was made the first Warden of the Reserve. By 1904 the Reserve had been extended to the Olifants and Letaba Rivers in the North. The formation of the Sabie Game Reserve led to much controversy because land owners, mining consortiums, hunters and farmers were against the formation of game reserves. This wrangling went on for many years. The Reserve was sadly neglected during World War I, 1914-1918. Poachers ran riot and wild game was severely depleted.

By 1924, Col. Stevenson-Hamilton was becoming concerned about the number of lions in the Reserve as they were devouring the already depleted numbers of antelope. Antelope had dwindled considerably, depleted by drought, disease (such as rinderpest) and poaching. Lions were also attacking the draught animals on farms outside the Reserve, across the Crocodile River. Col Hamilton, named 'Skukuza' by his staff - this being Shangaan meaning 'he who turns everything upside down,' - set about finding a solution to the problem.

Col Stevenson-Hamilton and Harry Wolhuter decided to create two new posts in the Reserve and employ two new rangers and managers at Lower Sabie and Malelane. Harry Wolhuter recommended his friend Harold for one of these posts. Harold Trollope, with his knowledge of the veld and his hunting skills, would be the ideal person to cull lions and Harry travelled all the way down to Fort Beaufort to persuade his friend to take on the job.

Harold could not resist the lure of the veld and the anticipation of hunting dangerous predators and so he decided to accept the work. Financially it was not a good move as game rangers' salaries were low, and it was also a hard decision for the family to make as living conditions were primitive, malaria a danger and very lonely for the women and children. The Eatons were left in charge of *Wardens* once again and the Trollopes set off for the Transvaal.

In 1924, therefore, Harold was appointed game ranger in the Sabie Game Reserve and stationed at Malelane. He was housed in a hut on the banks of the Crocodile River until such time as he could build a house for the family. Rene stayed in Zeerust with her family. Margaret was sent to DSG in Grahamstown, Irene and Helen went to school in Zeerust. Glen was only three at the time.

Harold took with him his two dogs, two horses and his favourite sporting rifle. His first task was to deal with the lion menace. He did this so well that he not only cleared his area of all lions but even those outside the Reserve. He shot all the lions single-handed, preferring to gallop after them on horseback wherever he could.

The field rangers were all Shangaans, a proud race, and those who worked in the Reserve loved their work. Harold always treated his staff fairly and gained their respect, but he also enforced discipline. He was an early riser and expected his field rangers to do the same. He would call out 'Vukani, my men, time to be up'. As a result he was given the Shangaan name of 'MaVukani' - 'arouse yourselves.'

At first Harold lived in three huts and only later built a house for Rene and Glen. They called their house 'Domain'. Harold and his staff had many adventures with lions, policemen and poachers. Besides culling lions, he had to carry out all the other jobs that rangers have to do, like writing reports of all game seen, noting the whereabouts of different species, checking waterholes, watching out for poachers and anything else to do with game conservation.

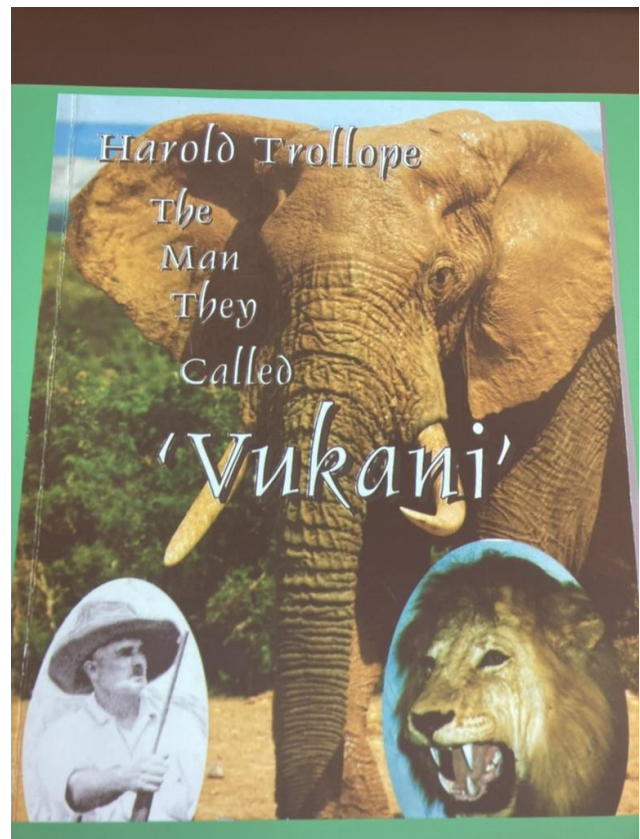
So, Harold the hunter became Harold the conservationist. The Trollopes stayed in the Sabie Game Reserve for three years only. John Glen Leary, Rene's father liked to visit them at the Reserve. In August 1926, tragedy struck when John Leary was attacked by a young leopardess while out in the Reserve with Harold and his rangers. He died from his wounds in the Barberton Hospital. Rene found the tragedy too much to bear and left the Reserve shortly after the incident. As Harold had just renewed his contract with the Reserve he remained there for another year.

In 1927 the Trollopes hired the farm 'Riverside' in the Fort Beaufort district and Rene moved from Wardens to Riverside where she carried on farming until Harold returned from the Sabie Reserve. Harold must have found farming rather tame after his adventures in the Sabie Reserve, but he nevertheless set his mind to growing citrus and became a member of the Board of Directors of the Kat River Citrus Co-Op and also of the Citrus exchange in Pretoria.

In between his farming activities, however, Harold was approached once again by the National Parks Board to assist them. This time it was with the opening of Cape Province National Parks and Addo Elephant Park in particular.

Early in the 20th century, the Addo district had been developed as a farming area for irrigation crops and citrus. Elephants had roamed this area at will, but they soon became a great nuisance, destroying crops and windmills. The idea of a game park was suggested but as the cost of fencing was very high it was decided to destroy the elephants instead. None of the well-known hunters wanted to take on this dangerous task.

Major Jan Pretorius was contacted, and he finally agreed to shoot out the elephants. He killed approximately 120 elephants and then gave up. Only about sixteen elephants were left to roam the area. Years later the Minister of Lands, Colonel Deneys Reitz, proclaimed the Strathmore/Mentone forest as a reserve.



Cover of Barbara Matthews' book

In June 1931 it became known as the Addo Elephant National Park. Harold Trollope was asked to come in at this point to rescue the remaining elephants. By that time there were only ten or eleven left. Harold was appointed the first Warden of Addo with the specific purpose of rescuing and preserving the elephants and the endangered Cape Buffalo.

Harold achieved an amazing feat in driving the elephants back into the reserve area. It was a very dangerous job as the terrain was difficult and the elephants very nervous and frightened. The Park was opened to the public only a few years later when the elephants had calmed down. All the elephants in Addo today (except for the introduction of 4 Kruger Park bulls) are descended from the original eleven rescued by Harold Trollope.

In 1931 the Addo National Park covered an area of approximately 1600 hectares. In 1954 when the warden Graham Armstrong completed the Armstrong fence, the area

covered 4000 hectares. The Addo Elephant Park now covers an area of approximately 170 000 hectares.

Harold Trollope's story is an integral part of the history of our National Parks. While he was Warden of Addo he also had the Bontebok National Park and the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park under his jurisdiction. He also had a hand in establishing the Mountain Zebra Park: it was Harold who chose the present site of the Mountain Zebra Park.

In 1941 Col Stevenson-Hamilton asked Harold to return once again to the Kruger National Park to help drive elephants, that were moving into the farming areas, back into the Park. Harold went back up to the Kruger Park and with his expertise on elephants was soon busy dealing with the problem successfully. As the tourist season was approaching, however, Stevenson-Hamilton recalled Harold and his team and Harold went back to Fort Beaufort in June 1941, unhappy with the fact that he could not complete the task he had been given to do.

Ill health prevented Harold from returning to complete this job. He also did not obtain his dream of spending his retirement at *Varsvlei*, the Bushveld farm he shared with his brother Wesley. He only spent a few months there before he became ill with cancer. He passed away on the 15 May 1949, aged 67.

An obituary in the Adelaide Press sums up his life:

'The passing of Mr Harold Trollope, big game hunter, Elephant Man, sportsman of the highest order, leading farmer and agriculturist, removes one of South Africa's most colourful personalities.'

REFERENCE

Matthews, Barbara. *Harold Trollope: The Man they called 'Vukani'* (2005, Bluecliff Publishers, Port Elizabeth)

