

THE HISTORY OF KINGS CAMP

Kings Camp Private Game Reserve is situated in the Timbavati Private Nature Reserve adjacent to the Kruger National Park on the Western boundary and was established in 1995 as a premier Eco-tourism destination. In 1992 the western boundary fence separating the Kruger National Park and the Timbavati was removed to create a 2.2 million hectare open natural ecosystem that would enhance and promote natural ecological cycles. The Timbavati area is located within both the Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces of the Republic of South Africa. Today this great wilderness area is often referred to as the Greater Kruger Conservancy.



WHERE IT ALL STARTED...

In 1902, the Sabi Game Reserve was proclaimed as a protected area by the government of the time and covered the area between the Crocodile and Sabi Rivers. Lieut.-Col. James Stevenson-Hamilton travelled from Scotland to South Africa to take up the position as the first warden of the game reserve in July 1902 after the end of the Second Anglo-Boer War. He stationed himself briefly on the banks of the Crocodile River, familiarizing himself with the land and animals he would come to know so well, but soon moved and settled at Sabi Bridge on the Sabi River. The people living in the Sabi Game Reserve at the time were moved by Stevenson-Hamilton and settled to the North of the Sabi River and to the South of the Crocodile River respectively. In 1903 the Sabi Reserve extension between the Sabi and Olifants Rivers as well as the Shingwedzi Game Reserve between the Letaba and Pafuri rivers were incorporated into the reserve. About half of the farms between the Sabi and Olifants rivers were owned by private land-owning companies, interspersed with government farms. While they continued to farm with cattle, they were no longer allowed to hunt wild animals. With all these changes that were brought about, Stevenson Hamilton was nicknamed "Skukuza" by the local Shangaan people living in the area at the time. The name "Skukuza" means "he who comes and sweeps clean" or "he who turns everything upside down". Stevenson-Hamilton was not the most popular character in the region. Today the main rest camp in the Kruger National Park is named Skukuza to honour him.

In 1923 the area between the Sabi and Olifants rivers was bisected by a line running in a North-South direction. Private farms were bartered for government farms; so that all the farms east of this line belonged to the government and that west of the line remained privately owned (today these areas are the private reserves of Timbavati, Manyaleti, Klaserie, Umbabat and Sabi Sands Game Reserve).

On 31 May 1926, The Kruger National Park was proclaimed as a National Park and the land between the Letaba and Olifants Rivers was added to the National Park

With the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in 1938 all the small stock and cattle of the people living in the park were destroyed by the government. Compensation in money was regarded as inadequate and having been deprived of their meat supply, many of them packed up and emigrated.

The park opened its gates to the first visitor's in 1927. There were very few roads that were very rough and there was no accommodation available for visitors who had to stay in tents within camped-off thorn bushes. The Park has remained open ever since only closing once for the Duration of World War 2 from 1939-1945. The park was re-opened in 1946 by the British Royal Family on their visit to South Africa. James Stevenson Hamilton continued to serve as the Warden of the Kruger Park until his retirement in 1946 at the age of 79.

The Timbavati Private Nature Reserve came into existence in July 1956, when a group of private landowners in the area came together with common ideals of the conservation of the region to form the Timbavati Association. The idea of forming such a reserve was first mooted as early as 1948 and for several years ways and means was discussed to create a nature reserve of a meaningful size in the area. These leading spirits of conservation and sustainable land use eventually succeeded in forming the Timbavati Association governed by a constitution for the benefit of all.

In the 1960's the fence line on the Western boundary of the National Park was erected separating the National Park from the privately owned reserves on the Western Boundary. Forty years passed by until this boundary fence was finally removed in 1992 to incorporate the large tracts of privately owned land into the greater Kruger reserve namely, Timbavati, Klaserie, Umbabat, Manyaleti and Sabi Sand Private Game Reserve. Later on the Balule Nature Reserve and Olifants Game Reserve West of Klaserie joined this magnificent reserve. Today the total area under protection is a mind boggling 2, 2 million hectares of African Bushveld.

James Stevenson Hamilton went on to write the book "South African Eden" which tells this remarkable story of the history of the Park. He dedicated his book to his beloved Park who he referred to as his "Cinderella". In his foreword he says,

"Although the analogy is, I fear hardly a complete one, yet there has always seemed to be a certain resemblance between the story of how the Sabi Game Reserve became the Kruger National Park, and the old fairy tale of Cinderella. At any rate I liked to play with the idea of the little handmaid, whom no one recognized for what she really was, sitting unregarded among the ashes, while her big half-sisters, the important government departments, received all the attention, and the money wherewith to buy themselves fine clothes.

One might fit in, more or less, the other characters by supposing President Kruger to have been the god father who died while the young child was yet very young, the public to represent the prince, and Mr. Piet Grobler, if he will permit the simile, the fairy godmother. I suppose the members of staff and I might be deemed the minions who drove her to the ball, whose humble origin I will not stress but will leave those who have read the old tale to recall for themselves. By a further stretch of imagination, the first bringing of the Reserve into the limelight through the Commission of 1917 might be pictures as the episode of the slipper, after which our Cinderella faded away for the time from public notice, indeed, very nearly faded out altogether, but she had left her slipper behind, and it was found to fit, just in time to save her life."

