



# The Pongola Game Reserve Revisited: The search for an early South African protected area

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## Abstract

National parks and equivalent reserves are a relatively recent category of land-use in human history. The Pongola Game Reserve was proclaimed in 1894 and was one of the earliest protected areas established by a government in South Africa. Although the Pongola Game Reserve comprised only 17,562 hectares, it paved the way for the ZAR government to establish protected areas, and the eventual establishment of the Kruger National Park. The proclamation of the Pongola Game Reserve is an important event in conservation history as a number of management practices were given expression and later became commonplace, not only in South Africa but elsewhere in Africa during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hunting by local communities was prohibited and traditional hunting was defined as poaching. Game rangers often performed a dual function of wildlife protection and the political control of the local indigenous population. The protection of wildlife was achieved through rigid law enforcement by a paramilitary corps of game rangers. Initially predators were regarded as “vermin” and were persecuted as they posed a direct threat to “game”. The history of the Pongola Game Reserve suggests that politics has played a major role in the establishment of protected areas, and protected areas have seldom been established purely to achieve biodiversity conservation objectives. Situating the history of the Pongola Game Reserve in its political and historic context, an attempt was made to locate important landmarks and the relatives of a key person mentioned in early accounts. Annual reports submitted by the first warden, Herman van Oordt, and a visit in 1903 by Lieutenant-Colonel James Stevenson-Hamilton, warden of the Sabi Game Reserve, provided valuable clues. Relatives of the local preacher, the Reverend Mose Nyawo, who was described by Stevenson-Hamilton in 1903, were located on the border of the original game reserve. Mose Nyawo’s relatives indicated the site of his second mission station, the location of the family graves, and the site of van Oordt’s, and later Major Fraser’s, house was verified.

**Keywords:** conservation history, Pongola Game Reserve, James Stevenson-Hamilton

## Introduction

National parks and equivalent reserves (IUCN Category II) perform the important dual function of conserving biodiversity, and providing opportunities for tourism (Dudley, 2008, 16). Near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in 1895, state-owned protected areas encompassed 0.1% of the surface area of South Africa compared to the current 6.6%. Proclaimed by President Paul Kruger on 13 June 1894, the Pongola Game Reserve was one of the first protected areas established by a government in South Africa, and was the first protected area proclaimed by the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR). It has previously been argued that the proclamation chiefly served the ZAR’s political ends, at a time of heightened conflict and power struggles over territory in southern Africa between the Afrikaner republics and Britain (Carruthers 1985, 3). Despite a well-documented drastic decline in large mammal species throughout South Africa, and growing concern amongst elected representatives, the ZAR’s first game reserve occupied an area representing only 0.06 percent of the Republic’s surface (Pringle 1982, 51, 54; Carruthers 1995, 21, 22). President Kruger had earlier proposed vast game reserves north of the Zoutpansberg and in the Lowveld during a Volksraad debate in August 1889 (Carruthers 1995, 21).

At beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ZAR’s human population was estimated at 1.2 million, or a population density averaging 4 people per km<sup>2</sup>, so the choice of just seven farms in the extreme, south-eastern extremity of the Republic as its first game reserve does appear to be

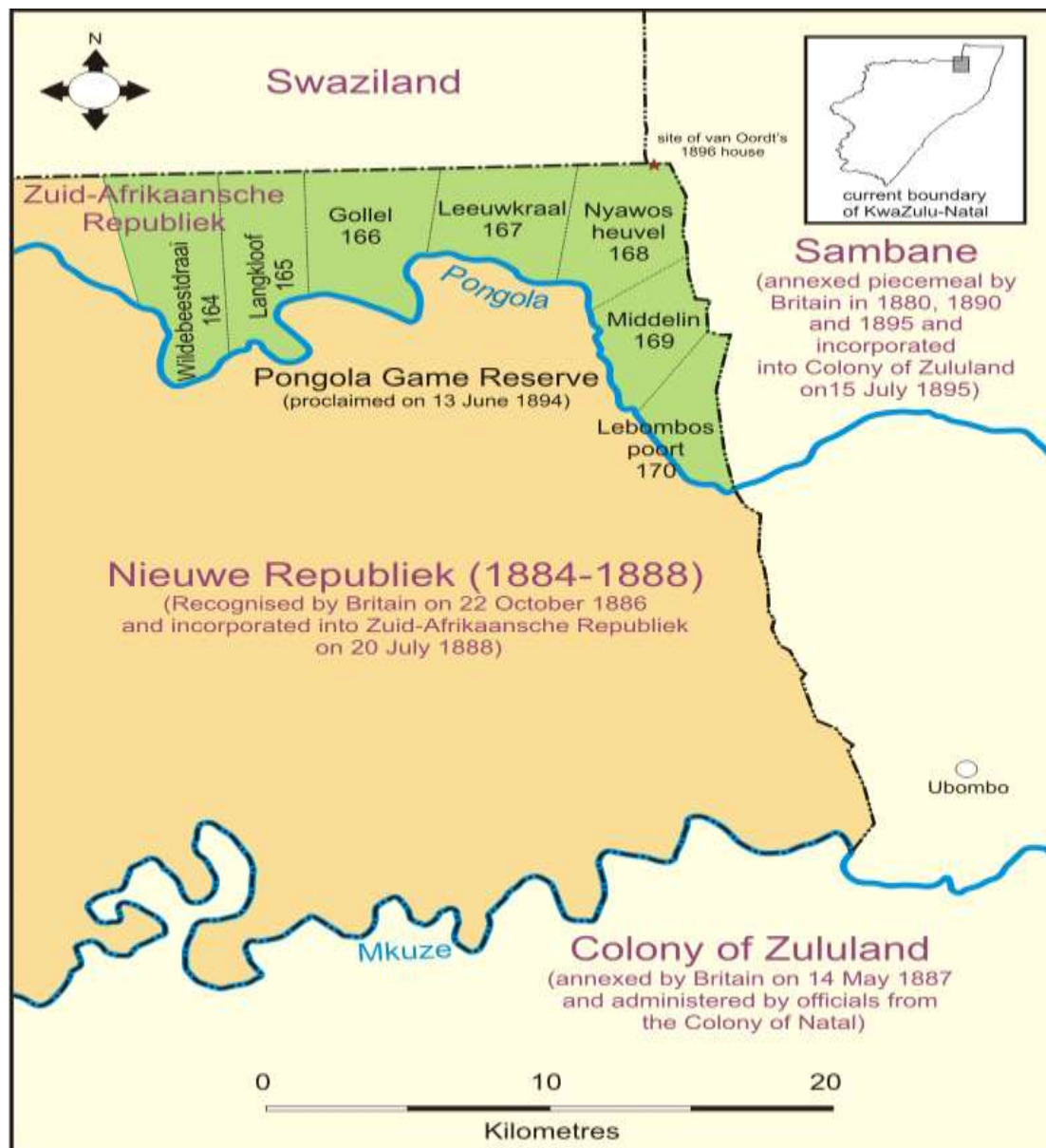
a trifle parsimonious. From Jeppe's 1899 map, it is also apparent that the ZAR government owned 13 farms west of the Pongola Game Reserve, and the incorporation of this land would have tripled the size of the game reserve. In an age predating game fencing, protected area management, and game capture and translocation techniques, this would have rendered the reserve more viable (Jeppe, 1899). A number of game reserves proclaimed the following year in Zululand to protect relic populations of white rhino, black rhino and hippo from imminent extinction were in the region of 15,000 to 36,000 hectares (Ballard, 1981, 17; Ellis, 1993/1994, 33-35), so there was no tradition, at the time, of establishing vast protected areas, such as the present-day Kruger and Kgalagadi national parks in South Africa, Etosha in Namibia, Kafue and Luangwa in Zambia, and Tsavo in Kenya (Curtis, 1996, 74, 96; Stuart, 1998, 7, 18, 36, 126).

On 13 June 1894, the *Staatscourant der Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* published Proclamation R8009/89 which stated, "I, Stephanus Johannes Paulus Kruger, State President of the South African Republic, acting on the advice and with the consent of the Executive Council and authorised thereto by the Honourable Volksraad by resolution of 2 August 1889 Article 1244, herewith make known and proclaim the following farms in the bushveld of the District Piet Retief between the Pongola, Swaziland and Lebombo as GOVERNMENT GAME RESERVE.." (Pringle 1982, 51)

The year 1889 appears to have been an important date for conservation in the ZAR as Volksraad members began to address the precipitous decline in wildlife populations throughout the republic (Carruthers 1995, 15). Although certain farmers in the Wakkerstroom district, such as Alexander M. Robertson, had begun establishing what would now be termed private nature reserves as early as 1890, there were no state-owned protected areas in the ZAR (Pringle, 1982, 47, 49). Hunting regulations were discussed at almost every session of the Volksraad from 1891 (Carruthers 1995, 16). The former president of the Nieuwe Republiek, Lucas Meijer, assisted with the identification of land for the proposed game reserve (Pringle 1982, 51), but a recommendation by the commission, which included Lucas Meijer, that 14 to 18 farms south of the Pongola (Phongolo) River should be added to the game reserve was not implemented. The farms were available at £300 each, and would have extended the game reserve as far south as the Mkhuze River (Pringle 1982, 51; Carruthers 1995, 23).

Despite the Volksraad's enthusiasm in 1889 for setting aside game reserves, it took five years before the first game reserve proclamation was issued. Carruthers (1995, 23) has attributed the lack of progress partly to the political impact of the death of the Swazi king, Mbandzeni, in 1899 and the increased influence in Swaziland of white concessionaries from the ZAR. However, a delay of five years could also be attributed to bureaucratic incompetence and a lack of finance, for which the ZAR was well known. The ZAR was caught up in political turmoil caused by struggles over representative government, tensions over boundaries and tariffs, and Cecil Rhodes becoming Premier of the Cape in 1890 (Imperial South African Association, 1900, 6, 10, 19, 28; Pringle, 1982, 49; Carruthers, 2003b, 962). In a report written in 1897, van Oordt complained that he had not received any wages or rations for his black constables for nearly two years (van Oordt, 1897).

Jane Carruthers has presented a convincing argument that the proclamation of the Pongola Game Reserve was motivated primarily by political considerations, and this is confirmed by van Oordt's interest in political interventions in the neighbouring Swaziland and Sambane territories (Carruthers 1985, 14; Carruthers 1995, 22). The warden's duties were going to include more than the enforcement of wildlife protection regulations, and would include ensuring the ZAR's legal authority over this remote, south-eastern and lightly populated frontier (Carruthers 1995, 22).



**Map 1: Political boundaries towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in relation to the Pongola Game Reserve.**

It should be noted that with the inclusion of the Nieuwe Republiek into the ZAR in 1888, six years prior to the proclamation of the Pongola Game Reserve, the thin corridor wedged between Swaziland and the Pongola River had increased in width from between 3 to 8.7 kilometres to 32 kilometres, and ZAR territory now extended as far south as the Mkhuzé River. This would have brought the ZAR boundary to within 60 kilometres of Lake St Lucia. Although largely a shallow estuary, the mouth of Lake St Lucia would have served as a reasonable harbour as long as there was no gale blowing from the south (Laband, 2009, 268). The Boers had earlier laid claim to the lake in 1839, but this claim fell away in 1843 when the Zulu king, Mpande, and the British agreed on the boundaries of Zululand.

Later, in December when it appeared that Germany could be interested in the lake, the British re-asserted their claim 1884 (Taylor, 1980, 2). In 1885 the Nieuwe Republiek had claimed much of Zululand as far east as the coast, and in October 1886 Britain recognised the existence of the Nieuwe Republiek, on condition that the claim to the coastal region of Zululand was rescinded (Laband, 2009, xxxvi). It appears that Britain had always been one step ahead of the ZAR by blocking a route to the sea (Garson, 1955, 118). So although Lake St Lucia



was an inhospitable wilderness infested by malaria, the ZAR was therefore prevented from obtaining a route to the sea by way of the lake (MacKenzie, 1988, 105; Walker, 2005, 4).

While the ZAR's legal claim to the south-eastern extremity of its territory had become far less tenuous with the incorporation of the Nieuwe Republiek, the route to Kosi Bay still offered an achievable promise of a port free of any British interference (Carruthers, 2003b, 963). In the 1950s, it was reported that a new port was going to be built at Sodwana Bay for exporting coal, so perhaps Kosi Bay was not the only site where a port could have been built, but access to the Tongaland coastline was crucial (Brookfield, 1954, 212).

The important boundary matters and British annexations of territory in Tongaland, relevant to the Pongola Game Reserve, can be summarised as follows:

- On 25 April 1895 the territories of chiefs Sambane, Mbegisa and the widow Mdhlalini were annexed by Britain to the Colony of Zululand in terms of Zululand Proclamation of 1895. This area was incorporated into Zululand as the District of Ingwavuma on 15 July 1895 by Zululand Proclamation 12 of 1895.
- On 30 May 1895 the portion of Tongaland south of the border of Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique) was annexed as a British protectorate. The Governor of Zululand was appointed Special Commissioner for Tongaland or Amaputaland.
- On 22 November 1897 this area was fully annexed by Britain in terms of Zululand Proclamation 10 of 1897, and on 24 December 1897 it was incorporated into the Colony of Zululand by Zululand Proclamation 14 of 1897.
- In 29 December 1897 Zululand was annexed to Natal in terms of Natal Act 37 of 1897 as the Province of Zululand (Laband, pers. comm., 31 May 2019).

### **The historic significance of the Pongola Game Reserve**

The Pongola Game Reserve predated the predecessor of the Kruger National Park by four years, but the game reserve was later considered to be too small and was deproclaimed in 1921 (Stevenson-Hamilton, 1937, 102; Carruthers, 1985, 13). In 1973 the Pongolapoort Dam was completed across a gorge where the Phongolo River flows through the Lebombo and inundated 12,470 hectares divided between the then-provinces of Transvaal, Natal and the country of Swaziland (Phongolo Nature Reserve, 2009, 69). Land surrounding the reservoir was expropriated by the state and later proclaimed as a nature reserve. In 1994 the Pongola district of the Transvaal province was incorporated into KwaZulu-Natal, and the nature reserve is now managed by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

The state-owned land bordering the reservoir covers 10,540 hectares and has been complemented by several contiguous private game reserves which cover approximately 7,500 hectares to the east of the N2 road. Including some of the land inundated by the dam, about two-thirds of the original game reserve of 1894 has been re-established by both state-run and private game reserves (Map 4).

Carruthers (1988, 253) and Grove (1995, 465) have addressed early attempts in the Cape Colony to protect elephants in the indigenous forests at Knysna. From as early as 1846 and 1857, a "proto-game reserve" was established, although Grove suggests that the true motive was to "protect the forest in which the elephants lived", rather than the protection of wildlife (Grove, 1995, 466). However, from 1888 onwards, or six years prior to the proclamation of the Pongola Game Reserve, the Cape government began to create state forest reserves in the Knysna Forest.



The original legal status the Knysna Forest could be described as a IUCN Category III or IV protected area and not a Category II (national parks and equivalent reserve) (Dudley, 2008, 14). Even if this is the case, the original Pongola Game Reserve was not originally conceived as a Category II protected area either, and signified a retrospective gaze to the English deer park, which was already a feature of the English landscape in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Milesen, 2009, 53, 61). Applying the IUCN categories, with the wisdom of hindsight, the Pongola Game Reserve was therefore more in keeping with a Category IV protected area (habitat/species management area) as predators were persecuted by the first warden, and an important objective was to protect “game” (van Oordt, 1895; Dudley, 2008, 14, 62)

The same cultural tradition dominated the formative years of the Sabi Game Reserve where species not regarded as “game” were hunted by the first game rangers. The shooting of “vermin” from 1903 to 1927, not only included 1272 lions, 660 leopards, 269 cheetahs, 521 hyaenas and 1142 wild dogs, but also included jackals, servals, civets, genets, otters, baboons, owls, eagles, hawks, crocodiles and snakes (Smuts, 1982, 174)

Taking the Knysna forest reserves into consideration, there is certainly no evidence, as has been stated elsewhere, that the Pongola Game Reserve was the first protected area in Africa (*Custos*, February 1973, 20). The Pongola Game Reserve was, however, the ZAR's first game reserve. In the four years following 1894, a number of game reserves and closed hunting areas were declared and eventually resulted in the proclamation of the forerunner of the Kruger National Park (Carruthers, 1995, 25, 27).

### **The Swaziland question**

When the Swazi king, Sobhuza, died in 1839 he was succeeded by his son, Mswazi (Bonner, 1982, 221). The Swazi army was a powerful military force and controlled territory as far afield as the Zoutpansberg. With the establishment of Boer republics north of the Vaal River, Mswazi later sold the Lydenburg district to the Republic of Lydenburg (Bonner, 1982, 229). This was followed in 1855 by another grant to the Republic of Lydenburg, which on paper at least included the territory as far south as the Pongola River. In November 1858 the ZAR and the Republic of Lydenburg merged under the control of the larger ZAR.

King Mswazi died in 1868 and was succeeded by Queen Regent, Tsandzile Ndwande, who was sovereign until 1875. There was a struggle for the throne between Mbandweni, who was supported by the Boers, and several others contenders, but Mbandzeni became king in 1875. With the British annexure of the Transvaal in 1877, attempts were made to clearly delineate the Swazi border (Doveton, 1936, 325). The Pretoria Convention of 1881 reinstated the independence of the ZAR, and article 24 guaranteed the independence of Swaziland (Imperial South African Association, 1900, 21).

Mbandzeni was king of Swaziland from 1875-1889 and during his reign he awarded numerous overlapping concessions to white settlers, which later proved to weaken the Swazi quest for self-government. During the 4-year-long period of British occupation of the ZAR, Sir Garnet Wolseley had used 10,000 Swazi soldiers to defeat the Pedi king, Sekhukhune, in 1879 and in the same year as the Anglo-Zulu War (Gillis, 1999, 33). The assistance provided by Mbandzeni to the British was awarded by a promise to protect Swazi sovereignty, but the promise was never kept (Garson, 1955, 14, 15). At two conventions, where the border of Swaziland was decided, the Swazi were represented by two white officials, Theophilus Shepstone in 1884 and Allister Miller in 1894, and no Swazi representatives were present (Garson, 1955, 31). The increasing number of white concession hunters in Swaziland, and Mbandzeni's failure to control this intrusion, gave rise to the second convention (Garson, 1955, 34; Nyeko, 1976, 74). The area of Swaziland was reduced and it effectively became a protectorate of the ZAR.

The novelist, Sir Henry Rider Haggard, most famous for the work *King Solomon's Mines*, and its sequel *Allan Quatermain*, and others, believed that Britain should not permit the ZAR to gain control of Swaziland and believed this could be achieved by, “the strict enforcement of such suzerain rights as remain to us under the Convention of London [over the ZAR], by enclosing the anti-English area within the straitest possible limits, and then by leaving the political forces thus confined to work out their natural ends” (Rider Haggard, 1900, 75).

As the Swazi kings had followed a policy of appeasing the Boers, they had never been defeated in war and potentially represented a formidable force. Not only were all black residents of the ZAR denied the franchise, but the government in Pretoria faced continual pressure because of its refusal to grant the franchise to white settlers who were not of Dutch origin (Imperial South African Association, 1900, 3, 4). The 1880s were years of political turmoil and rumour, and continuing struggles over the control of Swaziland (Garson, 1955; Gillis, 1999, 59). Subjugation of any potential Swazi insurrection was therefore an important consideration for the ZAR government.

### **Van Oordt's dual responsibilities**

According to the original map, the Pongola Game Reserve covered 20,500 morgen, or 17,562 hectares (Map 1). Five days before the proclamation of the game reserve on 13 June 1894, Herman Frederick van Oordt was appointed warden at a salary of £10 per month. Van Oordt had emigrated from the Netherlands and arrived in Cape Town in 1881. He worked as a teacher, hunter and trader before joining the Native Affairs Department of the ZAR in 1888 (Carruthers 1995, 22). The following year, the ZAR stationed van Oordt in the extreme south-eastern district, where he acted as a government agent in the territory controlled by Chief Sambane and was given the title, Special Resident (Pringle 1982, 51; Carruthers 1985, 4).

Due to the prevalence of malaria and horse disease in the district, van Oordt established his homestead at Wolfshoek, on the crest of the Lebombo Mountains (Pringle 1982, 51). As van Oordt had been stationed in the region for five years before he was appointed warden, he was well acquainted with its geography. From his annual reports it is immediately apparent that he was more than just a game warden as he represented the ZAR's authority on this remote frontier (Carruthers, 1985, 8).

As Special Resident, van Oordt was acutely aware of the political tensions that existed between the ZAR and neighbouring British colonies and African territories. A key performance area of his position was to secure the ZAR's authority over a vulnerable frontier, from possible incursions from neighbouring Swaziland and Zululand. Swaziland was of strategic importance and was given considerable attention in his annual reports.

In his first annual report for the period 1 August 1894 to 1 August 1895, he refers to, “the unexpected and secret annexation of Zambaanland” (Sambane) (Map1), and “considering the political state of both of the districts bordering the Reserve, viz. Swaziland and Zambaanland, I have had to use my own judgement during the first year of the existence of the Reserve” (van Oordt 1895). Britain's annexing of neighbouring Zambaanland in 1895, prevented the possible expansion of ZAR authority, and any hopes of acquiring a route to the sea through Zambaanland and Tongaland were thwarted.

Van Oordt states that he received a great deal of trouble from the Swazis and visited their homesteads to warn them about the penalties that would be administered in response to any infringements. The Swazis had been threatening his staff and claiming that the British were going to assist them in driving the Boers out of the region. The local black inhabitants were obtaining guns, which van Oordt viewed as a threat to the reserve. He also makes recommendations for the expansion of the game reserve, and also for an extension into



southern Swaziland, into a lightly populated region which was eventually declared in 1905 as the Hlatikulu Game Reserve (Hackel and Carruthers 1993, 66).

Van Oordt did not hesitate in imposing the ZAR's laws on the local people and reported that he had, "convicted four for severe infringements. The fines imposed totalled £22 and one of the main and most wanton Swazi game-poachers I sentenced to three month's hard labour with 25 cuts at the end of his prison term" (van Oordt 1895).

Van Oordt records the wildlife present as kudu, waterbuck, red hartebeest, tsessebe, blue wildebeest, zebra, impala, reedbuck, mountain reedbuck, bushbuck, grey duiker, steenbok, klipspringer, nyala, warthog and bushpig. He also mentioned the crested guinea fowl as occurring. Five lions passed through the reserve, leopard were common although seldom seen, but black-backed jackals and hyaenas were rare. Van Oordt set guns activated by trip wires to kill leopards. Horse sickness was common in the region and three horses died during the year.

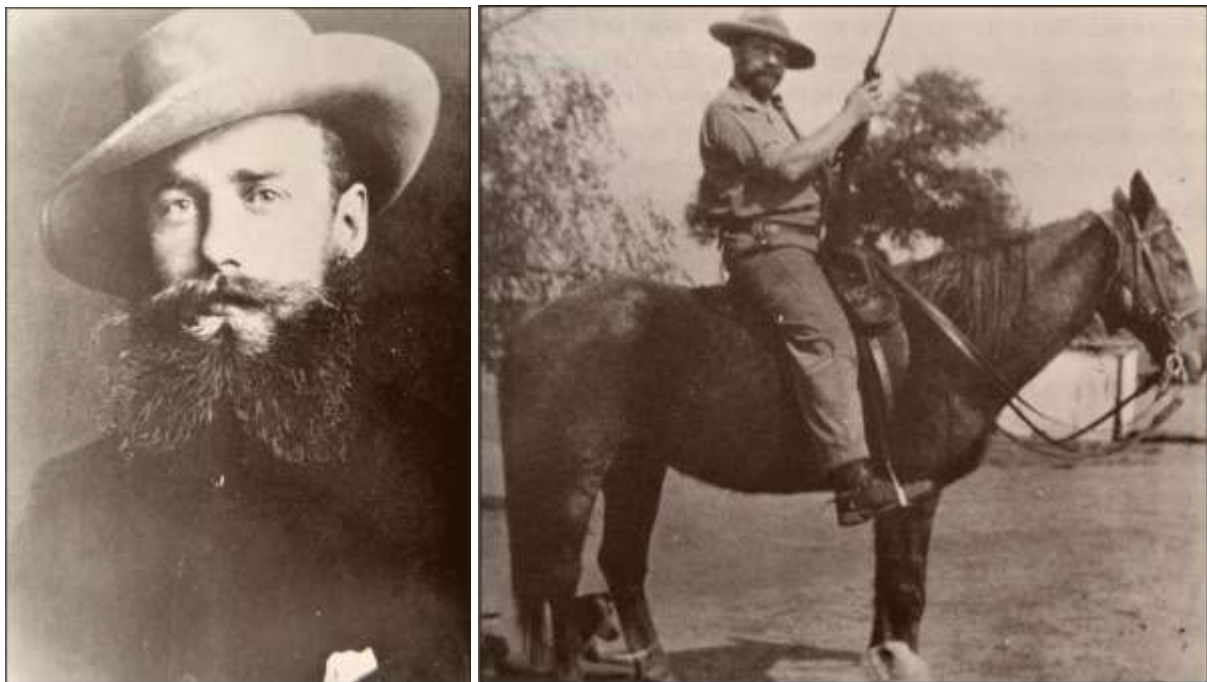
In van Oordt's second report for the period 1 August 1895 to 1 August 1896, he records that no tsetse flies occurred in the game reserve. He states that in the seven years he had lived in the region he had never come across tsetse flies. In his opinion, tsetse flies had disappeared with the extermination of elephants in the district. Again he refers to trouble emanating from Swaziland and states, "for while it seems they can, at present, do in Swaziland whatever they like, they now seem to have the idea they can trespass across the Republic's border, which I have naturally forbidden and shall continue to forbid as long as it is my duty" (van Oordt 1896). Fourteen people were fined a total of £26.10, and the perpetrators had come mostly from Swaziland and some from the ZAR, but the people from Zambaanland had given him no trouble. Political tensions were never far from van Oordt's consciousness and he wrote, "after the annexation of Zambaanland, Umbeguisa (Mbegisa) and Tongaland things have changed considerably in this far-flung frontier corner. A much sharper look-out is essential from all sides, not only for the game, but also for all other infringements on our boundaries, and necessitates continual watchfulness, for the English have built a good waggon-road on Lebombo" (van Oordt 1896) (Figure 9).

In the second annual report, van Oordt records that a few rhinos had been observed. Hippos occurred in the Pongola River and one lion had passed through the reserve. Wild dogs occasionally entered the game reserve, but were discouraged by the dense bush. Van Oordt reports, "there are few vermin here, besides leopards, of which we killed a few and wounded some". The ZAR's tenuous control over this remote extension of the Republic is acknowledged and van Oordt reports, "I can protect the border effectively with my police, I mean under ordinary circumstances, and not, or probably not, during unforeseen happenings, as during an unexpected invasion by an external enemy" (van Oordt 1896).

Van Oordt's second house on the crest of the Lebombo, the site chosen after the British annexed Zambaanland, was a sturdy stone structure and the ground floor was used as a prison. A clue indicating the location of this structure can be obtained from his second report. Van Oordt states, "I wrote in my first report of last year that I could possibly lose my house because of the annexation of Zambaanland, as I would have no healthy place with water; I can now report that this has happened. In the meantime, as I have found very good drinking water in the healthy areas of the Reserve on Lebombo in the Transvaal part of Zambaanland between the chief kraals, and right on the border line, I am now erecting the new dwelling-house" (van Oordt 1896).

In the third report dated 1 August 1896 to 1 August 1897, van Oordt states that Rinderpest had not been recorded in the game reserve although it had arrived in surrounding districts. Van Oordt states that although neighbouring Zululand contained most of the surviving wildlife in South Africa, due to strict law enforcement by British administrators, the Rinderpest blight

had appeared only recently and the disease, therefore, could not be blamed on wildlife (van Oordt 1897).



**Figure 1 and 2. Herman van Oordt (left) was appointed as warden of the Pongola Game Reserve in 1894. After the cessation of the South African War, the reserve was re-established by the British caretaker government. Lieutenant-Colonel James Stevenson-Hamilton (right) visited van Oordt's successor, Major Affleck Fraser, on horseback at the end of 1903. Source: Pringle (1982, 51) and Stevenson-Hamilton (1937, 57).**

Van Oordt rejects the idea that tsetse flies were associated with kudu, as there were many kudu in the Pongola Game Reserve and no tsetse flies. However, in parts of Zululand where kudu were uncommon, tsetse flies were abundant. Van Oordt could have been referring to the Mkhuze River, and the present location of Mkhuze Game Reserve, where tsetse flies were abundant until the 1950s (Pringle 1982, 147, 148; Ellis, 1993/1994, 42). He believed that buffalo were the main host of the tsetse fly.

During the period under review, nine people were sentenced and fined £35 and 5 shillings but it is significant that only one prosecution was for hunting, the others all being for boundary infringements and trespassing. Van Oordt states that the hunting infringement had originated from Zambaanland. As Chief Zambaan lived in a portion of the Lebombo under ZAR authority, van Oordt informed him that he was being held responsible for the offence. Chief Zambaan reported that the perpetrators did not want to present themselves, probably for good reason given van Oordt's reputation as a harsh disciplinarian, but the chief provided seven head of cattle and a sum of £1 as a payment. Van Oordt reports that he was unsure which section of the law should be applied, as this was both a hunting infringement and a border violation, and the matter had to be referred for legal opinion. The cattle were auctioned and a sum of £16.10 was raised (van Oordt 1897).

Van Oordt's dual function is once again evident in his third annual report. Taxes were collected for the first time from the local people, as required by a new law, and on the instructions of the Assistant Commissioner and Field-Cornet of the Piet Retief district, H. Fellagn. These taxes were not well received by the local people, and were begrudgingly paid, but a few hundred pounds were collected. The precise sum collected cannot be deciphered from van Oordt's original report as that section is illegible (van Oordt 1897).



From van Oordt's reports it is clear that the political situation in Swaziland received considerable attention. Although he states that all matters relating to Swaziland should be dealt with by the ZAR's Special Commissioner for Swaziland, he was also of the opinion that he was in a better position to resolve minor issues. In the third report he presents this argument, "I wish to say that all matters not of immediate importance should be reported [to] me, not to the Honourable Government, if I can dispose of such matters with the local officials in Swaziland, for I know the Honourable Government in Pretoria should not be troubled with trifling cases, which may later prove to be unfounded. This is why in my reports I do not go into details regarding the boundary cases" (van Oordt, 1897).

He complains that black constables elsewhere in the ZAR were earning three times more than his black constables were, and reports that he had only received salaries up until October 1895. He had been forced to pay the constables from his own pocket, and requested reimbursement and payment for salaries and rations. The strategic importance of



**Figure 3 and 4: The headquarters of the Sabi Game Reserve (nuclues of the Kruger National Park) at Sabie Bridge at the time of Stevenson-Hamilton's 1903 visit to the Pongola Game Reserve (left), and black policemen (right) were deployed to enforce wildlife protection regulations in both game reserves. Source: Stevenson-Hamilton (1937, 117,127)**

the Pongola Game Reserve is evident in that, apart from the warden, the staff consisted of two mounted white policemen and two black constables (van Oordt 1897). A staff complement of five police officers to patrol an area of 17,562 hectares, or one official per 3,512 hectares, does appear to be overly generous for a game reserve situated in a lightly-populated and disease-stricken part of the ZAR. In the 1890s there was no established tradition of conservation science, no systematic research and no visiting public. In 1905, the staff compliment of the Sabi and Shingwedzi game reserves totalled 75, or one game ranger per 29,300 hectares. Many decades later, well established protected areas, such as Mkhuze Game Reserve, had one game ranger per 1,025 hectares, St Lucia Game Reserve had one game ranger for every 2,037 hectares, and the Kruger National Park one game ranger for every 6,057 hectares (Curry-Lindahl and Harroy 1972, 105, 108, 111).

Van Oordt states, "when at the onset of winter, news spread that an English fleet was at Durban and the nearby coast, I arranged everything so that the entry of troops could not take place without our hearing about it and we would be able to inform the Government and our nearby burghers" (van Oordt, 1897).

Many myths have been created about conservation in South Africa. In an article published by the National Parks Board's official magazine, *Custos*, on the Pongola Game Reserve in February 1973, several myths are propagated about President Paul Kruger being the "father of conservation". According to the writer, Paul Kruger was the world's first conservationist and, "can therefore be correctly regarded as the first person in the world to propagate the idea of the establishment of nature reserves, game reserves and national parks" (*Custos*, February 1973, 20). This claim is made even though the writer acknowledges in the same paragraph that the Yellowstone National Park in the United States of America (USA) had been established 12 years previously. Similarly, Labuschagne (1968, 11) declares that the signing of the game reserve proclamation by Paul Kruger, "marked the end of a fourteen-year phase in which the President himself fought tirelessly for an idea that often involved him in bitter controversy".

In the *Custos* article an ideological purpose is served and the animosity that existed between the British Empire and the Afrikaner republics during the 19<sup>th</sup> century is resurrected. Van Oordt, who by all accounts dealt ruthlessly with the local people (Carruthers, 1995, 28) is celebrated as, "he must have been an exceptional person for he established a grazing ground for duiker near his house, and also a feeding-place for guinea-fowl and other birds" (*Custos*, February 1973, 20).

In his first annual report, van Oordt reports that duiker and guinea-fowl were common around his house and amongst the houses because of the scarcity of jackals in the vicinity, and makes no mention of establishing a special feeding ground. Similarly, in *Custos* blame for the demise and eventual deproclamation of the Pongola Game Reserve is placed squarely on Stevenson-Hamilton. The writer states, "At the beginning of this century the Pongola Game Reserve, like the Sabie Game Reserve, was the responsibility of the Transvaal government, and Stevenson-Hamilton later gained authority over the Pongola Game Reserve. Unfortunately, Pongola gradually declined under his control with the result that this lovely and historic reserve was abolished in 1921 and the arable soil was divided into farms" (*Custos*, February 1973, 20). This account differs somewhat from detailed studies on the life of Stevenson-Hamilton, where his commitment to the cause of conservation was unsurpassed during his lifetime (Pringle, 1982, 90; Carruthers, 1985, 11; Carruthers, 1995, 36; Carruthers 2001, 85, 147; Carruthers and Pienaar, 2012, 450). After the Pongola Game Reserve was deproclaimed in 1921, the farms were not enthusiastically occupied by settlers, and more than a decade later the region remained isolated and inhospitable (Carruthers, 1985, 13).

Stevenson-Hamilton's report during World War I also reflects similar prejudice against "the Hollander official" and he recalls that wildlife was at one time very common and even included elephants and black rhinos. The situation had deteriorated because, "the Hollander official placed in charge by the late Government, seems to have shot nearly everything and what he left was nearly exterminated by Boers and natives during the war....At present the Game in the Reserve, or rather which is occasionally seen in it – for it migrates between the Pongola and Usutu Rivers, neither which can easily be crossed – consists of some eighty impala, twenty to twenty-five waterbuck and about eight kudu, duiker and steenbuck are fairly plentiful" (Stevenson-Hamilton, c. 1918, Department of Defence War Records).

The writer of the *Custos* article also incorrectly imposes modern conservation principles as the motivation for proclaiming the Pongola Game Reserve. The proclamation is seen as a watershed event as, "before this date the protection of individual animals had been stressed, but thereafter the emphasis fell on areas where wild life in all its diversity could be conserved" (*Custos*, February 1973, 20). The historic record shows that this was not the case. Van Oordt clearly saw himself as a "deer keeper", in the European tradition which dated back more than 700 years, and took active steps to destroy all "vermin" (Milesen, 2009, 34; van Oordt, 1895). Van Oordt attributed an abundance of game birds around his house to a scarcity of jackals in the area, he set guns activated by trip wires to kill leopards and was pleased to report that



lions were absent from the game reserve. There is certainly no hint in his annual reports of a comprehension of ecological patterns and processes.

In addition, 1894 is not a landmark date where the transition from the deer park approach to an understanding of the complexity of biodiversity occurred in South Africa. In the 1930s, four national parks were declared to protect single species such as elephants at Addo, bontebok in the Swellendam region, gemsbok in the Kgalagadi and Cape mountain zebra near Cradock (Labuschagne, 1969, 207, 217, 227, 235). In 1903 the Giants Caste Game Reserve was established specifically to protect eland in the Drakensberg (Day, 1974, 2), and in the Transvaal four provincial nature reserves were established in 1954 to protect rare antelope (Bigalke, 1968, 23, 25, 26, 27). The Free State had a single game reserve near Bultfontein in the 1930s to protect antelope such as blesbok and black wildebeest (Stokes, 1941, 408), until nearly four decades later when 12 nature reserves were established on land expropriated around state dams (Director of Nature Conservation, 1978). In the Cape province, nature reserves were established to protect endangered mammal species, endangered tortoises, waterfowl and wild flowers as late as 1973 (Hey, 1977, 32, 34, 35, 40, 42, 43, 46, 47). It was only from 1963-1966 that the first national parks were established to protect landscape, or spectacular natural features such as waterfalls and geological features and more in keeping with the American tradition (Hall-Martin and van der Merwe, 2003, 54, 55, 59). Two important exceptions were a decision taken by the Natal legislature in 1906 to proclaim such a national park in the Drakensberg, and the declaration of the Dongola Wild Life Sanctuary in 1947, a national park which emphasised botany and a special project of the Prime Minister, Field-Marshal Jan Smuts (Carruthers, 2003a, 241; Carruthers, 2013, 463).

When the South African War broke out in 1899, van Oordt joined the Piet Retief Commando and served under General Louis Botha. He was captured and sent as a prisoner-of-war to St Helena island (Pringle 1982, 42). His son, Gregorius August van Oordt, wrote a book about his father's life, *Strijd en Hoop: Tot het betere einde*, which was published in 1976.

### **The Pongola Game Reserve revisited**

After the end of the South African War, in 1903 the British caretaker government appointed Major Fraser as warden of the Pongola Game Reserve. A Scot, like Stevenson-Hamilton, Major Fraser had served with the Bedfordshire Regiment in India for 25 years before returning to Scotland. Fraser had extensive hunting experience in India, and accepted the offer (Stevenson Hamilton 1937, 87, 88). Stevenson-Hamilton later described him as, "a born gamekeeper – essentially of the Highland variety", but says, "it seems a matter for regret that, possessing as he did many latent abilities, Major Fraser always obstinately refused to be anything more than a gamekeeper" (Stevenson-Hamilton 1937, 89, 91)

In *South African Eden*, Stevenson-Hamilton provides a detailed account of his visit to the Pongola Game Reserve towards the end of 1903 (Stevenson-Hamilton 1937, 100-102). He also briefly makes mention of a visit in the beginning of 1909 (Stevenson-Hamilton, 1937, 130). Stevenson-Hamilton had to travel on horseback and reports, "it was a little over two hundred miles' ride by way of Swaziland, and it took me about a week to cover on Pompey – the grey horse which I had purchased from Colenbrander" (Stevenson-Hamilton, 1937, 100). He refers to the sturdy stone house built by the first warden, van Oordt, in 1896 as, "a somewhat dilapidated stone fortress". The ground floor of the house had formerly been used by van Oordt as a prison for poachers and those convicted under the ZAR's tax laws. Stevenson-Hamilton reports that Major Fraser, who was known for his dislike of administrative duties and shared his disorderly house with as many as 25 large dogs, had converted the ground floor *sic transit gloria mundi* (and thus passes the glory of the world) into a storeroom for his donkey-pack gear (Stevenson-Hamilton 1937, 101, 160, 161).

From Stevenson-Hamilton's description, and from van Oordt's annual reports, would it indeed be possible to locate van Oordt's house, or the ruins thereof, more than one century later? The first step was to study detailed maps of the vicinity and to locate the gravel road on the crest of the Lebombo described in 1895 by van Oordt. The tarred P522 ascends the Lebombo Mountains and passes through the town of Jozini, before crossing over the wall of the Pongolapoort Dam (Map 4). Beyond the dam wall, the D1837 road ascends the Lebombo for 22 kilometres before reaching the site where van Oordt's house is most likely to have stood.

Stevenson-Hamilton provides a vital clue to the location of the house by stating, "the site was excellent, the house perched on top of the Lebombo, which here falls away almost sheer for a thousand feet to the plain below. The game reserve itself, lying that distance beneath and thus completely overlooked, was a strip less than five miles wide and about twenty long, stretching away to the Drakensberg foothills in the west" (Stevenson-Hamilton 1937, 101).

Stevenson-Hamilton offers further insights into the location of the house by stating, "the little oasis of three or four acres at the top of the hill was therefore, except on one side (and that the uninhabited one), quite cut off from the country to which it belonged, and practically surrounded by 'foreign' territory" (1937, 101). From Jeppe's 1899 map two tracks are shown ascending the Lebombo from the game reserve (Map 2). Being surrounded by foreign territory is also significant as it implies that the house was on the summit and very close to the point where the ZAR, Swaziland and Sambane met. The location is confirmed by van Oordt's second report. Van Oordt reports, "the English have built a good waggon-road on Lebombo" (Figure 9) and he had been forced to relocate his house because of the British annexure of Zambaanland. In the report van Oordt states, "in the meantime, as I have found very good drinking water in the healthy areas of the Reserve on Lebombo in the Transvaal part of Zambaanland between the chief kraals, and right on the border line, I am now erecting the new dwelling-house" (van Oordt 1896).

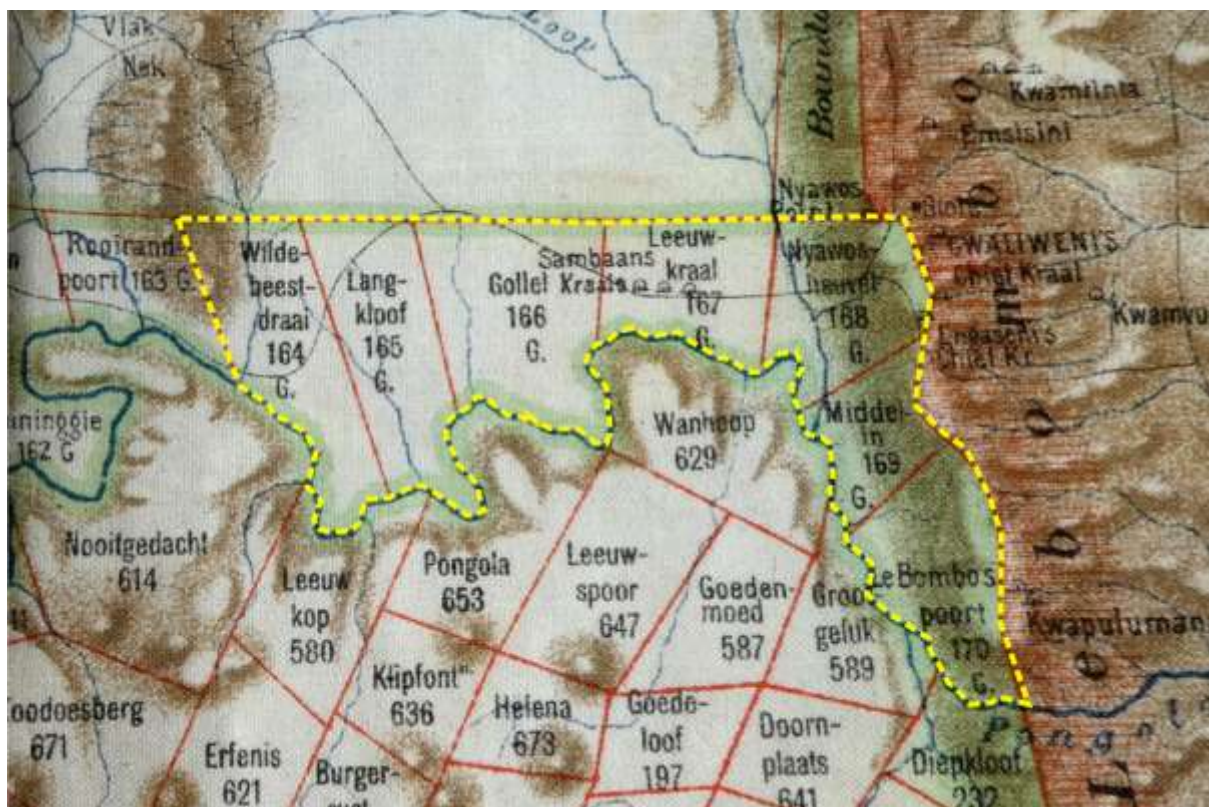


**Figure 5: Major Affleck Fraser had served as a soldier in India for 25 years before being appointed warden of the Pongola Game Reserve in 1903. Fraser was known for an aversion to administrative duties, a limitless ability to consume Scottish whisky, he never read anything apart from an occasional newspaper and *The Field*, a hunting magazine first published in 1853, and shared his disorderly house with as many as 25 large dogs. Source: Stevenson-Hamilton (1937, 90).**



From Jeppe's 1899 map of the ZAR, several homesteads belonging to Chief Sambane (Sambane) are shown connected by two tracks which ascend the Lebombo. The first homestead is in the centre of the reserve on Leeuwkraal, and another four are located on the crest of the mountains in the vicinity of Gwaliweni, and on the border between the ZAR and Zambaanland (Jeppe, 1899) (Map 2).

Despite these two reports, the precise location of the house could prove to be difficult to locate after the passage of 116 years, were it not for the detailed account supplied by Stevenson-Hamilton. He refers to, "Major Fraser's companion on the island", a local preacher, Moses Zinyawo, or 'Moses of the Feet'. In a number of instances in his account, Stevenson-Hamilton's wit and sense of humour surface. In isiZulu, "zinyawo" means "feet", and by adding the prefix "zi" to a common family name in the region, the surname "Nyawo" is transformed to "feet", an obvious reference to the size of the preacher's feet. Interviews with the local people, and immediate relatives of the preacher, confirmed that his correct name was Mose Nyawo.



Extract from Jeppe, F. (1899) *Jeppe's Map of Transvaal or S.A. Republic and Surrounding Territories*. London: Edward Stanford

**Map 2: Boundary of the Pongola Game Reserve of 1894, and location of the homesteads of Chief Sambane and Dave's Store.**

Stevenson-Hamilton did not speak Dutch or any African languages, and Major Fraser showed no affinity for languages and was described as, "he never attempted to utter a word in any language other than Anglo-Saxon", so neither man can be considered as reliable authorities on African linguistics (Carruthers 1995, 36; Stevenson-Hamilton 1937, 129). There is no doubt, that Moses Zinyawo and Mose Nyawo are one and the same person.

Jeppe's 1899 map suggests that the Nyawo family has had a long association with the crest of the Lebombo. The farm forming the cornerstone between Swaziland and Sambane was originally named "Nyawo heuvel 168", and the point where the three territories meet on the crest of the Lebombo is called "Nyawo's point" (Map 2). Nineteenth century surveyors in the ZAR who laid out farms commonly used American and Scottish place names, or Dutch



appellations such as “Leeuwkraal” and “Goedenmoed”, so the unusual use of “Nyawo heuvel” suggests that the Nyawo clan has a long association with the region (Carruthers, 2003b, 973).

Stevenson-Hamilton reported that upon arrival earlier in 1903, Major Fraser had, “discovered the reverend gentleman installed in Van Oordt’s house, and the whole of the small space around, forming Transvaal territory, a camping ground for a large collection of ladies, all young, from the adjoining Zulu and Swazi villages – among them not a single man, so far as could be discovered” (Stevenson-Hamilton, 1937, 101).

Major Fraser took possession of the house, and the Reverend Nyawo built a wattle-and-daub chapel and a few living huts near to the house. The congregation were close enough to the house to disrupt sleep as Fraser, “found life generally, especially the hours designed by nature for sleep, rendered rather trying by the almost unceasing flood of melody which flowed day and night from the worshippers, the deep tones of Moses and the music of his mouth-organ a background to the shrill trebles of the ladies” (101).

Using the game reserve regulations, which were rather draconian, the congregation of ‘foreigners’ were evicted from the rather restricted piece of land which fell within the Transvaal (formerly ZAR) (Map 3). As the Reverend Nyawo was a Transvaal subject he, “proved a harder nut to crack than his congregation had been. His mission, too far away to have any idea of the state of affairs, backed him up, and it took a great deal of official correspondence before we were able to make the ranger’s residence and garden available for him only” (Stevenson-Hamilton 1937, 102).

At the precise point where the ZAR, Swaziland and Sambane had converged on the summit of the Lebombo, and with a very clear view over the surrounding countryside, the Gwalweni Primary School was found to include two very sturdy stone buildings, and with very thick, stone walls, and certainly not necessary for the usual requirements of an education institution (Figures 10 and 11).

The location was, however, a little vexing as the school is located 100 metres north of the present border of Swaziland (eSwatini) (Figure 7). Van Oordt states that the altitude at the border beacon is 677 metres (converted from 2200 feet and possibly not a precise reading) (van Oordt, 1895), and the current 1:50,000 map records the altitude of the school at 665 metres, which would suggest that the correct location could have been found.

Further investigation revealed that a discrepancy of 100 metres is not an insurmountable problem. Masson (1989, 340) compared the current boundary of Swaziland with the 1896 boundary, and indicated that the earlier boundary followed a route a little further to the north, while the precise delineation of the border along the crest of the Lebombo had not yet been determined (Carruthers 1995, 22). Old maps from the 1890s also reveal many inconsistencies and changes in delineation (Jeppe, 1899, Gillis, 1999, 35). According to Carruthers (1985, 3), “the boundaries between Zulu, Tembe-Tsonga, Swazi, Transvaal and British territories were in a state of flux. They had not been conclusively defined and surveyed. Indeed, earlier there had been no reason to do so, for the region was unhealthy and not particularly desirable”. To allay misgivings that the Gwalweni Primary School may not, in fact, be the location of van Oordt’s house, the advice of a neighbour, Malashwa Wilson Nyawo, was sought (Figure 7). He confirmed that the school grounds are indeed the site of Mose Nyawo’s original church. Directions were given to the nearby location of the Reverend Nyawo’s second church (Figure 14), the need for which was necessitated after his eventual expulsion from the ‘oasis’ (Stevenson-Hamilton 1937, 102). A neighbour at the second mission, Busisiwe Nyawo, recounted how she could recall the Reverend Nyawo preaching when she was a child. She supplied directions to a nearby homestead where, Mary Nyawo, the wife of the Reverend Nyawo’s son, Gershom, lives with her son, Sibusiso, and her grandchildren (Figures 14 and 15). Directions were also given to the nearby store, known as Dave’s store, which is clearly

visible on Jeppe's 1899 map (Map 2) (Figures 12 and 13). Mary Nyawo provided the details of the descendants of Mose Nyawo (Figure 6). Two of Mose's descendants live in eSwatini, which confirms the argument by Kloppers (2005) that the international borders in Tongaland have been superimposed on people who regard themselves as the same ethnic group. The location of Mose Nyawo's grave, and those of his children, was also indicated a short distance north of the second church (Figure 16 and 17).

On the basis of the local historic knowledge provided by Mose Nyawo's descendants, geographic cues consistent with the accounts of both Stevenson-Hamilton and van Oordt, and the obvious antiquity of some of the buildings at Gwalweni Primary School, the weight of evidence suggests that these buildings once comprised part of the former residence of the warden of the Pongola Game Reserve. Alterations have most certainly been made, but the buildings remain a very robust construction. The nearby, Dave's Store, would have been a functioning business at the time of Stevenson-Hamilton's 1903 visit as it is present on Jeppe's 1899 map. According to the local people, the store was eventually sold to the owner of a supermarket in Ingwavuma.

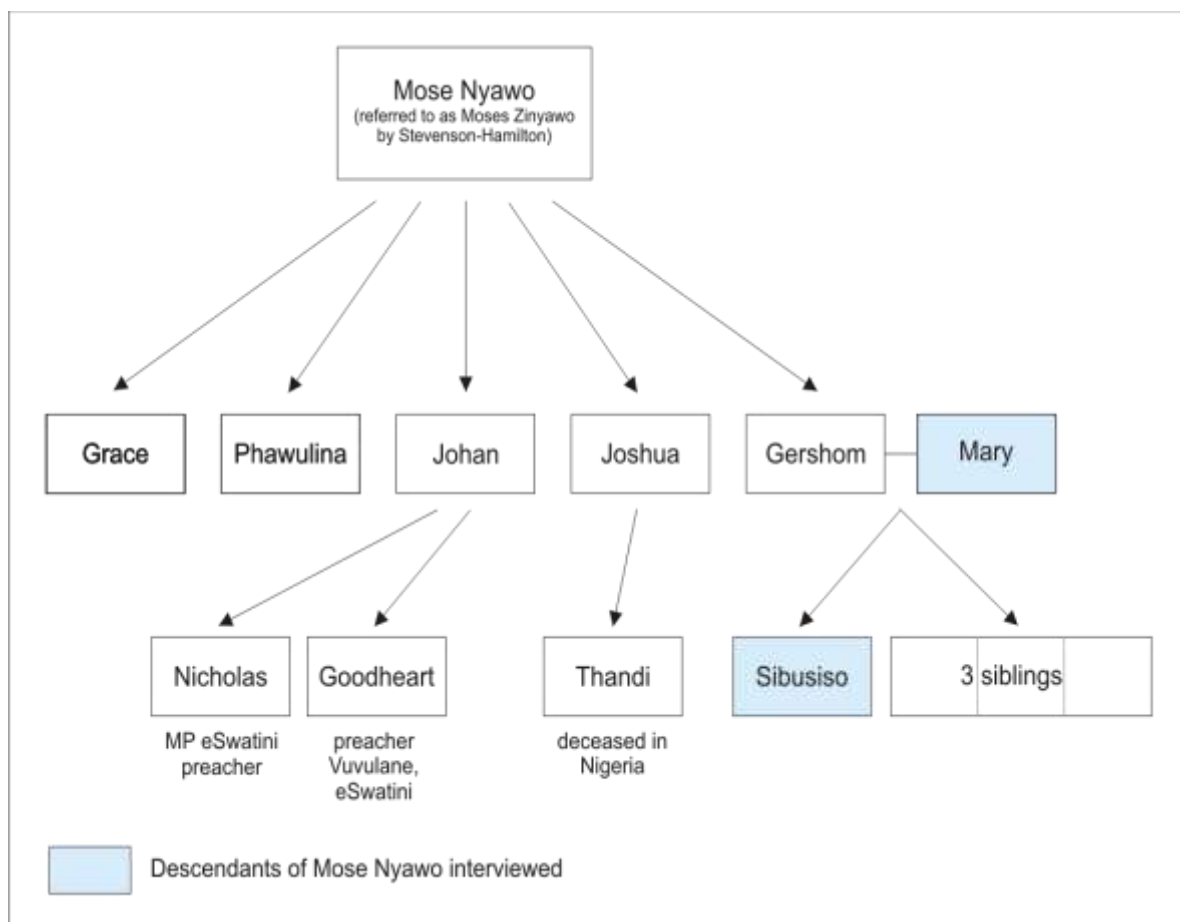


Figure 6: Family tree of the Reverend Mose Nyawo provided by members of his family.

### Significance of the study

The Pongola Game Reserve was the ZAR's first game reserve. Within four years of its establishment, it was overshadowed by the proclamation of the Sabi Game Reserve, which was later enlarged to become the well-known Kruger National Park. Game rangers in the Pongola Game Reserve adopted a number of behaviours which soon became part of the culture of protected area management throughout much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They performed the dual function of protecting "game" species from hunting, and exercising control over the

local black population. The protection of wildlife was achieved mainly through rigid law enforcement and the handing down of fines and jail terms, and not through education or sharing any of the benefits which accrued from conservation with neighbouring communities. Conservation, in keeping with the English tradition dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was by definition highly elitist, and was easily militarised as it needed to suppress the longstanding cultural traditions of local communities. Wardens were often former military officers who formed disciplined, para-military corps that were easily identifiable by the uniforms they wore. As Lunstrum (2015) has shown, such militarisation of conservation agencies often had enduring impacts on the functioning and effectiveness of protected areas.

Sites of archaeological and historical archaeological importance have been particularly well researched in the Kruger National Park (Pienaar, 2012), but not in the majority of protected areas in South Africa. In the USA, the settlements and homesteads of native Americans and settlers are an integral component of the attractions of many national parks (Brett, 2001, 29, 52, 76, 82, 85, 113, 124, 126, 143, 162, 197, 210).

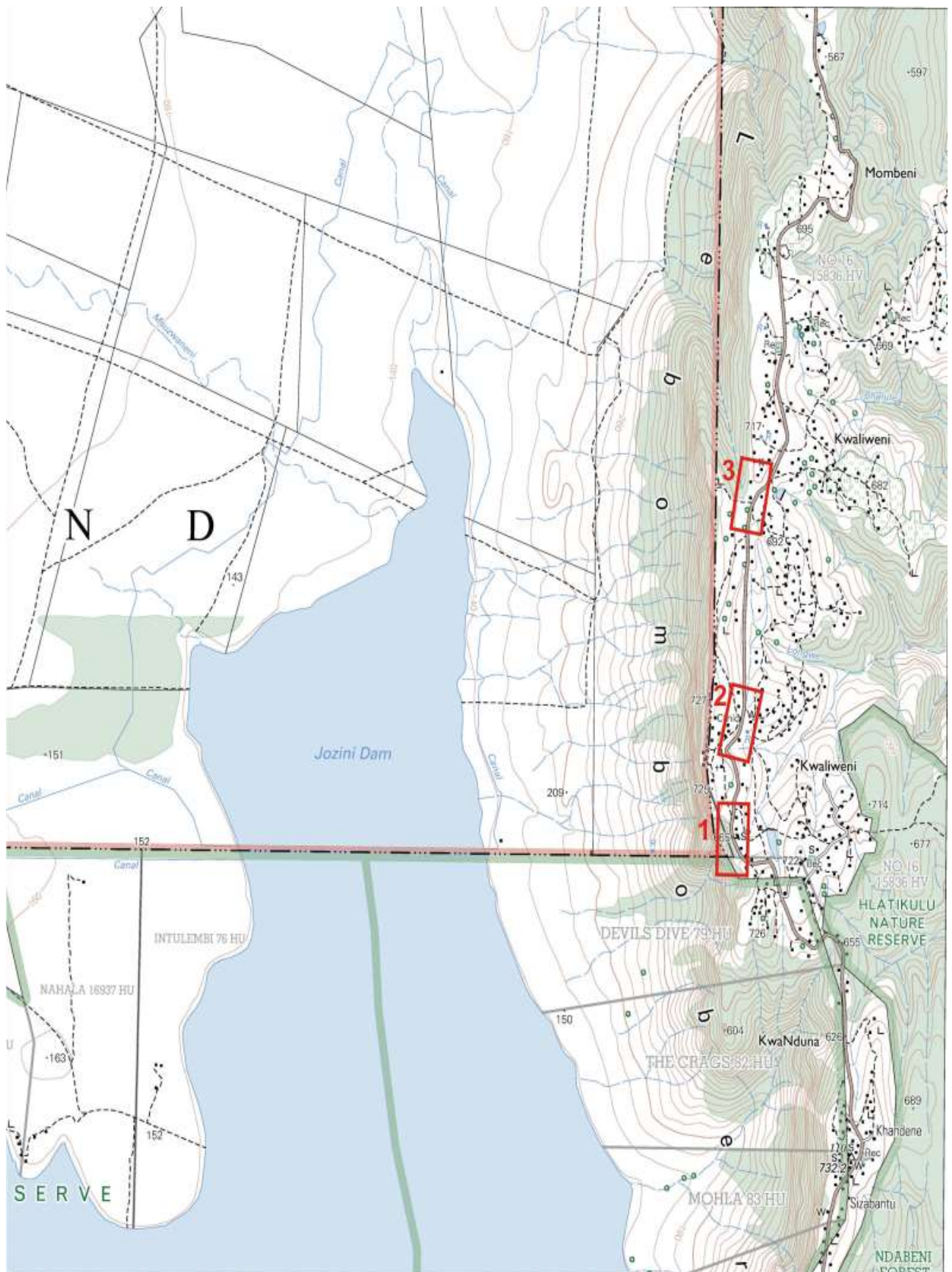
Van Vollenhoven (2016) has described the excavation of four outposts established by Steinaecker's Horse in the present-day Kruger National Park during the South African War of 1899-1902. At the site of Sardelli's Shop, near Lower Sabie, concrete floors, window glass, bottles, beads, wire, buckles, nails and a fishing rod were unearthed (Van Vollenhoven, 2016, 48-56, 116-124). The future management of the site will be guided by the principles contained in the National Heritage Resources Act (25 of 1999), and only important artefacts containing the manufacturer's details or a bottle neck will be retained, and the remainder will be returned to the site. In the province of KwaZulu-Natal, very few protected areas currently have historic displays.

## **Conclusion**

This paper documents the quest to locate important landmarks and persons associated with a historic game reserve in South Africa. Local knowledge was used to determine the precise location of the house of the former warden, Major Fraser, which was last described in detail in 1903. The weight of evidence, based on the collective memory of local descendants, indicates that the Gwalweni Primary School contains buildings which were part of the warden's homestead.

Further research is needed on the site of Gwalweni Primary School. Permission should be sought to excavate portions of the site and search for artefacts which would corroborate local knowledge and the oral tradition. These artefacts could be displayed on site, and would add historic value to an important site in the environmental history of South Africa.





**Map 3: Detailed insets of Gwalweni in relation to the Pongolapoort Dam and the Pongola Game Reserve.**  
**Source: 1:50,000 map, 2731BD Golela.**



**Figure 7: Inset 1 - Location of Gwalweni Primary School and the present delineation of the border of eSwatini (Swaziland). Source: Adapted from Google Earth images.**



**Figure 8: The western slopes of the Lebombo which were incorporated in the Pongola Game Reserve in 1894. The reservoir in the distance was formed with the completion of a dam in 1973. Source: Author's own**





**Figure 9:** In his 1896 report, van Oordt wrote, “a much sharper look-out is essential from all sides, not only for the game, but also for all other infringements on our boundaries, and necessitates continual watchfulness, for the English have built a good waggon-road on Lebombo”. Source: Author’s own.



**Figure 10:** A sturdy stone building on the grounds of Gwalweni Primary School, which is out of place with the design of other school buildings and provides a clear view of the valley to the west. Source: Author’s own.



**Figure 11: The second sturdy stone building located on the grounds of Gwalweni Primary School.**  
Source: Author's own.



**Figure 12: Inset 2 - Location of Dave's Store at Gwaleni, which is indicated on Jeppe's 1899 map.**  
Source: Adapted from Google Earth images.





**Figure 13: Dave's Store, according to local people, was open for business during the time when the Reverend Mose Nyawo and Major Fraser lived in the vicinity and is shown on Jeppe's 1899 map.**  
Source: Author's own.



**Figure 14: Inset 3 - Location of Reverend Mose Nyawo's second mission and church, the location of the Nyawo graves and the homestead of his daughter-in-law.** Source: Adapted from Google Earth images.





**Figure 15: Mary Nyawo (centre), her son, Sibusiso Nyawo, (far left) and her grandchildren.**  
Source: Author's own.

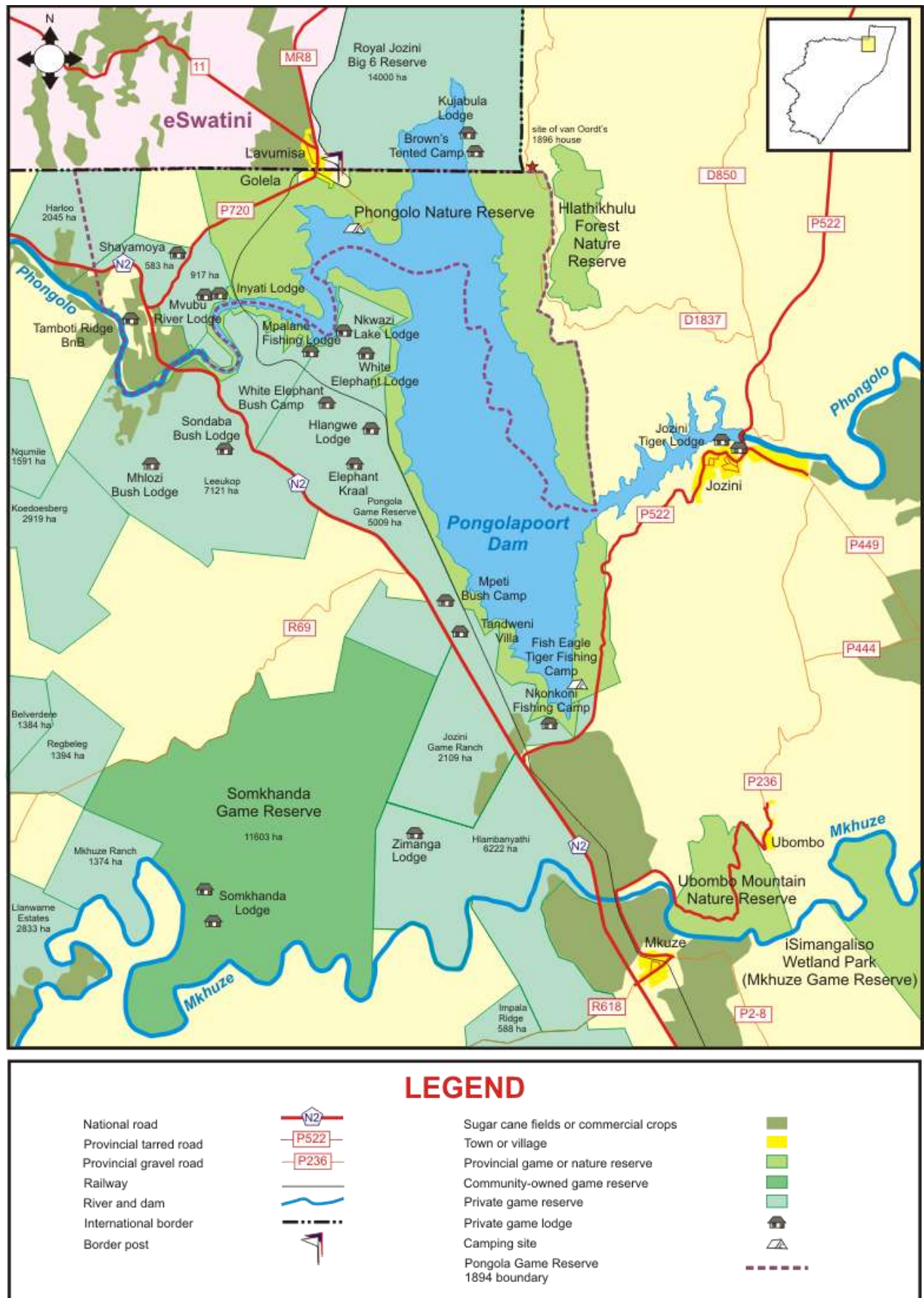


**Figure 16: Site of the grave of the Reverend Mose Nyawo located near to his second church.**  
Source: Author's own.





**Figure 17: Graves of the children of the Reverend Mose Nyawo. Source: Author's own.**



Map 4: Current land-use in relation to the Pongola Game Reserve of 1894.





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