



Shaka before being incorporated into the Zulu Kingdom. Yet the Ndwandwe clung to these tribal lands around Ithala, sometimes desperately, hiding in these caves along the cliffs right above the Ntshondwe camp. (Ngotshe means something difficult to see, referring to these caves that you can actually see).

The two of us sat alone amongst the sighing grasslands, facing the mountains: An exclusive history class, ideal for story-telling and a vivid imagination.

Later, this Ngotshe region was overrun by the uSuthu and the Boers following the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. Amazingly, after the defeat of Prince Zibhebhu, Ithala Game Reserve and its surrounding areas (more than a million hectares of land,) was given to 800-odd Boers by King Dinizulu in 1884. It was his 'thank you' for their part in defeating Prince Zibhebhu. It became known as the 'Nieuwe Republiek'.

So traditionally occupied land came under settler rule. Yes, the Ndwandwe were suddenly tenants on land that had been theirs for generations. How history feeds us, as I always say.

But the new white farm owners didn't occupy this land. They used it only for grazing their livestock and for supplying labour. The traditional communities could stay on the land but in return they would provide their labour free of charge.

So when labour tenancy was eliminated in the 1970's, those same traditional families were evicted from this land. The title deeds went to the white farmers, whilst the community's ties of settlement, cultivation and family history were ignored. They were driven off by police and farmers with dogs, guns and fire. Huts were burnt down, cattle impounded and people arrested.

Sam had positioned us perfectly. A short walk away from this storytelling was the site of three community graves with their familiar cluster of stones forming the burial

sites. These family graves dated back to the 19thC. (Such claims were particularly strong in this part of Northern Natal; Melmoth, Babanango, Vryheid, Louwesburg). And adjacent to these was an old Zulu indlu (hut) with its intact stone walls. This belonging is here for all of you to see.

Ithala cries African history. Even the gulleys of erosion I spotted were legacies of Ithala's past, where those labour tenancy days caused drastic overgrazing by their livestock. That, with hunting, the rinderpest epidemic of 1896 and the later tsetse fly campaign, decimated this region, which once abounded with wild animals.

We appear to have come full circle, though. Much of the old traditional community land that became so wasted and eroded was bought up by the Natal Parks Board and eventually resulted in the establishment of this incredibly scenic and historic, 30 000ha protected area. It has been re-stocked and wildlife flourishes again. I am delighted that all the areas' Zulu names pay tribute to its African origins, the mountains, flora and fauna, and camps.

For this study and tribute to its African history I take my hat off to the Natal Parks Board.

But what of the community's descendents that still come to visit the grave sites in this protected area? Where do they sit in this evolution? Do I interpret this as saying Conservation is the latest coloniser following King Shaka and the Boers? Was the angry storm the final word from these ancestors? Or do I rest with the stillness and regeneration that followed the next morning?

Dear readers, African conservation is in our hands. I listened to the cries of history that night but the dawn of nature and community caring and upliftment is upon us now. We must live together – this time to the betterment of both. **W**