

Property

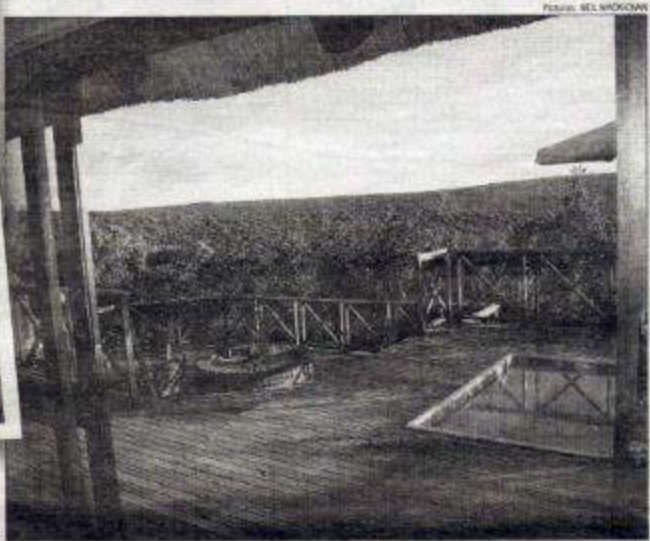
ABROAD

Edited by JANE SLADE

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JANE SLADE travels to South Africa to meet a member of a new land-owning class who is offering intrepid Brits the chance to buy a home deep in the heart of safari country



WILD SIDE: Meic and Billy Brunton with Ruzali and Natsih, left, and a stunning Diskweng property, above

AFRICA'S heart beats to a different rhythm from that of the rest of the world and no one who visits a game reserve or drives across an expanse of veld can fail to be moved by the experience. Now through TV series such as *Wild At Heart* and *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* its popularity has soared, helped by an attractive exchange rate and only a one-hour time difference.

Four hours' drive north of Johannesburg and 100 miles from the Botswana border is Waterberg, a Unesco biosphere reserve (a self-contained eco-system) in which one man has made it possible for Britons to buy a slice of Africa's precious wilderness.

Mac Van der Merwe, former owner of a gold mine and one of South Africa's most successful businessmen, bought 100 hectares of bushveld seven years ago and recently carved 12 thatched lodges on to its ridge.

Each low-rise lodge has fantastic views of the surrounding bush and boasts spacious, airy interiors with double bedrooms and large en-suites. All the furnished properties are identical and feature double-height ceilings, exposed thatch roofs and brick walls.

The living space is open plan with French windows opening out on to a deck with a plunge pool and outdoor oven/barbecue.

Plans are to build nine more of different sizes. The encampment includes a beauty spa, bar,

shop, cycle hire and a communal area with large swimming pool and barbecue. A golf driving range and tennis court are planned.

Each property is being sold in 10-week fractions with options for owners to buy more time if they wish. Prices start from £150,000 (£5,000 a week plus a further \$24,900 (£1,700) a year maintenance fee and £200 (£13) per day when owner/guest is in residence.

Diskweng Safari Camp in Limpopo province is 1,000 metres above sea level and free from any dangerous predators for owners to worry about, just anten, giraffe and impala. The Diskweng lodges make the lightest

footprints. This is really remote stuff and not for the edgy businessmen who need 3G/4G connection. There is intermittent internet and poor mobile phone reception.

"This is an asset that can only appreciate as there is no other like it," says Van der Merwe, who also owns Ka Ingo, a big five game reserve, an hour away. "This is an exclusive domain and because it is a biosphere no further development will be allowed. Besides, I do not want to compromise the integrity of the landscape."

Van der Merwe's passion for conservation is equal only to his love of his wild animals. He is

still mourning the loss of a cheetah that was killed by one of his lionesses two weeks ago.

Ka Ingo, a stunning private reserve and hotel spa resort, welcomes its guests at the gate with the sobering sign, *Beware Of The Lions*. There is an electric fence surrounding the hotel but it does not deter warthogs and hippos.

In a historic ceremonial signing last Saturday, Ka Ingo was linked to neighbouring Mokolodi game reserve, doubling its size from 8,000 to 16,000 hectares. Conservationist Heidi Behr, a German version of Berni Frey's Joy Africanus,

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