

General Report

The School Farm Maretlwane has been a hive of activity in 2006. Two major projects have reached fruition. The first relates to an application which P.B.H.S. put into the North West Department of Agriculture, Conservation and the Environment in 2001 to develop a permanent Bush School on the property. After protracted negotiations the Department has finally not only sanctioned the Bush School concept but also allowed us to cross the conservation line which straddles the Bush School area. This is absolutely critical if any expansion of the present infrastructure is to take place. We are hugely indebted to Mr Peter Dacomb and his team from Enviropractice for their time, effort and in particular their patience as our Environmental Consultants. It should be noted that their services, which literally involved hundreds of hours of work, were rendered to the school completely pro bono.

The other momentous development was the completion and inauguration of the Maretlwane Lodge. Initiated in 2002, the building of this Lodge took far longer than anticipated but the Maretlwane permanent staff should be commended for their hard work and perseverance. Hendrik, the contract builder, was the kingpin. No problem was insurmountable, according to him, just a challenge and his stonework is quite magnificent. Dan, Sizwe, Mlungisi and Labius had their patience tested to the extreme in the final stages of building when all the time consuming finishing touches had to be completed. A huge debt of gratitude goes to the team of interior decorators: Marianne Cassells, Kathy Mills and Andorette Havelaar under the able leadership of Ronel van Bassen. They spent months planning and buying the necessary furniture and equipment. A special mention must also go to Robert Bentley, an old boy, for the installation of the solar electrical lighting system. Eventually in Term IV the Lodge was ready for its first visitors after instant lawn and an irrigation system had been laid around the building.

A very attractive brochure was produced and given to all parents advertising the Lodge. It is intended that all friends of the school will be able to make use of it: parents, old boys and in fact anyone who has the welfare of P.B.H.S. at heart. The Lodge has been built specifically to raise funds for the Maretlwane Bush School in an attempt to make it largely self sustaining. It provides comfortable accommodation for up to 10 people. Two separate wings share a common living area. Each wing has two bedrooms sharing their own 'stoep', kitchenette, shower and toilet, which makes it semi-independent. The common area has a central fireplace warming two lounges, a dining room and a fully equipped kitchen with every convenience to

ensure a comfortable stay. The Lodge is self-catering, serviced daily and is tastefully furnished to make you feel at home. Solar lighting and gas heating add to the bushveld experience.

A network of dirt tracks on the property allows game viewing and bird watching in a vehicle or on foot. Some routes are 4 x 4 only. A half hour walk to the Maretlwane waterfall is an absolute must and, for the fit, a walk to the spectacular Castle Gorge waterfall will provide an unforgettable experience. 'Couch potatoes' will be able to 'chill' by the 'swemgat' only 50 metres from the Lodge.

As has now become the custom, the Form I and Form IV Camps were held at Maretlwane. Both were very successful, the former achieving its objectives of orientating the newcomers to P.B.H.S. into the traditions and ethos of the school and introducing them to the farm. The latter has the specific intention of uniting the Form IV group in preparation for them to take over the leadership of the school in the year to come. Many of the staff also continued to use the cabins as a week-end getaway during non Bush School times. The variety of game continues to thrive and we had the excitement of seeing many new-born impala and a few young zebra, wildebeest, kudu, nyala and gemsbok. A runaway fire provided a large patch of succulent grass in the spring on which the grazers congregated. Thankfully no veld fires came through the property from outside this winter.

The Maretlwane Support Group, under the leadership of Keagan Boustead and Rowan McKenzie, continued to help with the maintenance and development of the farm this year. Unfortunately the semi-permanence of the Bush School dictates that the group is able to visit the farm less often. In 2007 it will operate not as a permanent club but the members will form a reserve team who will be called upon at odd times when help is needed.



The Term II Bush School boys enjoying the last sunset together.



Bush School

In 2006 it was decided to offer to two groups of Grade 9 pupils the opportunity of attending the Bush School, one in Term II and another in Term III. An open day was held at Maretlwane in Term I, the boys chosen and an information evening held at P.B.H.S. for both groups simultaneously. A second kitchen and a library were added to the infrastructure and wooden walkways have been erected linking the cabins. These walkways will do much to alleviate the trampling which has occurred in certain areas as well as the dust problem in winter.

In March, Malcolm Armstrong was appointed as a third permanent member of staff to assist Les Richardson and me at Maretlwane. He soon emerged as a distinct asset, not only as a dynamic teacher but also as an efficient manager of the new Lodge. Les Richardson continued to serve Maretlwane with her meticulous efficiency in her multi-faceted role as administrator, tutor, cook and nurse. As the only female, she remained an ever blooming rose among the thorns of the Acacia trees as well as the rest of us.

Having had the pilot group in Term III of 2005, one is now able to make comparisons and more rigorous conclusions about the educational value of the Bush School project.

I continued to be struck by the fact that boys are so adaptable and malleable at this age. I think it would be fair to say that in every single case Maretlwane took them, 'out of their comfort zone' in some way or another. There were many who loved the outdoors so for them the adjustment related more to being away from the comforts of home: Mom's home cooking, a fridge to be raided, cell phones, play-stations and television. For others the natural environment was totally foreign and these young men had to adapt, not only to life on their own, but life in an alien environment. With two notable exceptions, the boys demonstrated unwavering determination to make their Maretlwane experience work and I have the greatest respect for each and every one of them as a result. In particular, they did not allow the Spartan existence or the hardships of the daily routine to get them down. I am now more convinced than ever that character is built through adversity and that a simple, disciplined daily lifestyle creates a happier, more self-confident individual. Many boys discovered aspects of their nature that they never knew existed and this excited them. Ironically many mentioned their increased freedom and independence in the more structured environment as a highlight. Every single boy returned home feeling better about himself and looked forward to the future with a changed attitude to life.



The symbolic leap of faith which confronts every Bush School boy. Grant Watters tackling the famous 10 metre big jump.



Burning firebreaks on Zebra Hill.



*'Wow guys, this pool is 11 metres deep!'
The first visit to the Maretlwane waterfall.*



'We are the kings of the castle' – Castle Gorge!



What better fun than swimming in a natural rock pool in the Magaliesberg.



The Term II men (and women) of the mountains with Castle Gorge waterfall in the background.



An everyday occurrence – the inevitable one hour of Maths with 'Junod' in the Ficus Grove classroom!



The Hornbills recital of their group war cry on the central kitchen 'stoep'.



Afam Kotu-Rammopo and Kgotso Molati testing the waters in a dug-out canie. 'Man dog, this water is freezing!'.

The other area in which I feel the boys benefited greatly was in their academic life. Many admitted to being lazy at P.B.H.S. and were grateful for compulsory prep sessions free of distractions and which forced them to put in more effort in their work. The satisfaction of improving your results is a feeling every pupil knows and so many boys commented on how they were enjoying their classes more as a result. Admittedly in certain subjects the boys had to survive on their own but in most they felt they were coping better and were much more positive.

An excerpt from the reflection by Matthew Gough, written on the 24 hour solitaire experience, summarizes well the change that takes place in the life of a Bush School boy.

'For me this Bush School experience has been about finding yourself and from there bettering yourself. You have to find out who you are inside by looking closely at yourself. You can see what you like and what aspects you want to start changing. Maretlwane brings you back to your roots, giving you a new start to life. It is about one word: 'Change!' It has allowed me to change my bad habits and become the person I could live the rest of my life with. I have become more self disciplined because of the system of trust on which everything is based. The 'Pick 'n Pay' philosophy has rubbed off on me and now I think of the consequences of my actions before I act. I have become more philosophical and

learned to think 'out of the box'. Bush School has taken me away from the 'fakeness' and artificiality of our society. It has brought me out here for mother nature to strip me down to my soul and build me up again. You have to want to change, not only here but also when you return. You must guard against falling into the many traps of modern day society. We must remain strong.'

Since the pilot group had attended the Bush School in Term III of 2005, the Term II group of Bush School boys this year were pioneers in their own right. They witnessed the gradual onset of winter and corresponding drying of the veld and drop in water temperature. They were also the first group to write examinations at Maretlwane. The group included some fanatical animal collectors and this disease proved contagious to the point where there was hardly a rock unturned at Maretlwane. My most vivid memory of this term will remain the 3 day hike. The week end of the hike happened to be the coldest cold snap to hit the Magaliesberg that year and we left on the Saturday morning in an icy sleet. By the second day the rain had dispersed but the wind became even colder and our second night camping in the upper reaches of Boulder Kloof was truly freezing. The boys responded to the adverse elements with boundless enthusiasm, in fact, there was not a single complaint the entire trip. At the end of the term many of the boys listed the hike as one of their distinct highlights.



Maretlwane

THE BUSH SCHOOL

The Term III group seemed to gel well from the beginning. I will long remember them as a group with incredible spirit. The diversity of characters ensured that things were always lively (sometimes almost too much so) and some boys in particular I believe learned valuable life lessons which I trust they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. Although not as desperate to collect wild creatures, they certainly showed just as much enthusiasm for the outdoors in general.

Next year it has been decided to run the Bush School in Terms I, II and III and already the Form I boys of

2006 have been selected for the three terms of 2007. A fourth member of staff, Nicolene van Jaarsveldt, has been appointed as an addition to the Maretlwane team. Having taught at the Bush School as a student teacher in Term II of 2006, she is well known to us and is already familiar with the philosophy of the Bush School. We look forward to the impact her dynamism will have.

Alex Junod, Master-in-Charge

'Clements retreated with his British troops towards that "koppie" over there.'

Mr Armstrong giving a History lesson at Nooitgedacht, the highest point the Magaliesberg.



The Term II 3-day hike which coincided with the coldest snap of the winter.



'Elementary my dear Watson!' Jason Ward balancing on top of a lump of Magaliesberg quartzite.



Braving the icy waters of the top cascade of the Castle Gorge waterfall.



Sheltering from the icy wind on the 3-day hike: Grant Watters, Brett Ward, Jonathan Sailer, Quinton Pretorius and J-P Lombard (still asleep?)

'This lumpy spaghetti tastes delicious!' Gray Manicom, Wynand Marx and Angus Steele cooking their supper on a 3-day hike.





Doing what comes naturally in the Tonquani Gorge!



The Term II Bush School group on the evening of their first sunset.



Chilling on canoes on the Hartebeespoort Dam. Fhumulani Maboho, Kurt Schröder, Kgotso Molati and Rhys Carolissen.



Nicolene van Jaarsveld, a student teacher, writing her reflection on the 24-hour solitaire in her anti-leopard boma!



The Term III Bush School group enjoying an early morning Maths lesson with Mr Junod.



The final sunset for the Term III boys.



'This is our turf!' At home in the mountains.