

Part 1:

# Dutch Settlers, Voortrekkers & Paul Kruger

By PH Willem Frost

*One of the great tragedies of our hunting heritage is that the early Boer hunters didn't bother to record their hunting exploits.*



*The first known photograph of Paul Kruger, when he was Kommandant of the Rustenburg district, circa 1860.*

To them, hunting was part of daily life and they saw no need to write down their adventures and discoveries. On the other hand, during the 19th century, the mainly British visiting hunters used to sail into Cape Town, kit themselves out with camping gear, wagons, oxen, and firearms, and set off into the interior on hunting expeditions. Upon their return to civilization, they published one or more books and became famous that way. Much of what we know now of those early days, we gleaned from their books and records.

The Dutch first settled at Cape Town in 1652, and it was a while before they ventured into the interior. They initially settled around Cape Town and in the districts of Stellenbosch, Drakenstein, and Tulbagh – areas excellent for crop farming but not so good for stock farming. As a result, these farmers gradually moved farther inland to the north in search of grazing for their livestock. They developed a semi-nomadic lifestyle, following the

seasonal rains and the game herds, and became known as the *Trek Boers*.

The abundance of wildlife enabled the pioneers to live a self-supporting life in the interior. All that was required was a wagon, oxen, a horse, a rifle and ammunition. This lifestyle was particularly attractive for beginner farmers and the less well-to-do.

For most of the 18th century, elephant were abundant throughout most of the Cape Colony. Although there was big demand for ivory from the Dutch colony of Batavia (now Indonesia), the price hardly made the risk and effort of an elephant hunt worth it.

Although game was everywhere present, initially, the first Dutch settlers were not allowed to hunt, but these restrictions were later on lifted. It was natural for boys to start hunting from an early age – essentially, from whenever they could handle a rifle. Hunting was very much part daily life, not only for meat, but also for ivory, skins and horns for which they had many uses. Hunting also enabled farmers to keep their

livestock to be sold on the market.

At first, the Dutch settlers were hopeless shots, but they soon learned to expertly handle firearms; already in 1687, Commander Simon van der Stel expressed his admiration for the marksmanship of the local farmers. During the 1700s, the Boers established a reputation as exceptional marksmen and horsemen. After the annexation of the Cape by the British, a certain major Charters, for example, wrote: “No country can produce better marksmen than the Dutch Colonists of Southern Africa.”

When Hermanus Hubner visited the Xhosa and Tembu tribes in 1736, in the current Eastern Cape, he already found other whites hunting and trading for ivory. The first white man, as far as we know, to have hunted north of the Orange River, was Johannes Coetsé, a farmer from Piketberg. He crossed the great river in 1760 with the intention to hunt elephant. He got as far as Warmbad in Namibia and, although he encountered many

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rhinos and lions, elephants were scarce. In fact, he only killed two elephants, both of them south of the Orange. Had he gone northeast instead of northwest, he might have been more successful.

The 1830s and 1840s saw a mass emigration, known as the “Great Trek,” of Boers from the Cape colony in search of freedom from British rule. The emigrants were called *Voortrekkers*. Although they

Maputo in Mozambique), but almost the entire party died from malaria. Tregardt’s son, Carolus, was one of the few survivors, and after hunting elephant in Mozambique he set of to explore the interior of a largely unknown Africa. He hunted and traveled far and wide, eventually ending up in Abyssinia (today’s Ethiopia), where he was granted an audience with Emperor Menelik before returning to his people in

hunter. He often delayed the trek, much to Tregardt’s annoyance, to track down wounded animals. All the men in the party, however, hunted. The Voortrekkers were particularly keen on hunting elephant, rhino, hippo, and giraffe, while antelopes were hunted for the pot, but also for skins. Lions caused serious stock losses and there were many narrow escapes, as well as some fatal accidents.

The Potgieter trek started out in 1836, and with this trek was a 10-year-old boy, Stephanus Johannes Paulus (“Paul”) Kruger, who was destined not only to become one of the greatest leaders of his people, but also an exceptionally brave warrior and hunter. He shot his first lion at age 14 at the Rhenoster River in (today’s) Free State. His second lion was taken on the Hex River near where the town of Rustenburg would be developed years later.

Once a pride of lions attacked Kruger’s oxen at that same place. He followed them, but they took off into the mountains. Kruger ran them in and managed to shoot two – quite a feat considering that the young man was using a muzzleloader of

“Paul Kruger first raised the concept of a game sanctuary in 1884, the year after becoming president.”

were farmers, hunting was very much part of their way of life. Some hunted to supplement their farming income while a few others became full-time hunters. Venison was often the only meat available during the trek, and lions, a constant threat to the cattle, were shot on sight.

One of the first treks to leave the Cape, in 1834, was that of Louis Tregardt. He eventually trekked to Delagoa Bay (now

the south. Unfortunately, we know almost nothing about Carolus Tregardt and his adventures in Africa. He must have been the first white man to many places in Africa. His brother Pieta was an equally renowned hunter until his untimely death.

Louis Tregardt often mentioned hunting incidents in his diary. His trek was accompanied, amongst others, by one Hendrik Botha – a particularly enthusiastic

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the time.

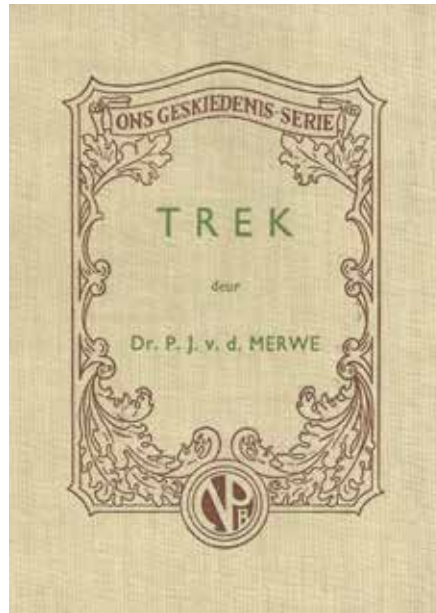
The Voortrekkers considered predators as vermin that had to be exterminated in order to make the land habitable for humans. In fact, men had a *duty* to shoot predators.

Kruger also had many adventures with hippos, elephants and buffalo. On one occasion, in the Waterberg, when he and some family members were on yet another hunting trip, he had an incredible fight with a buffalo cow. His brother-in-law wounded the animal, and Paul Kruger was following it on foot when the buffalo suddenly charged from the thickets. The rifle misfired and Kruger had to run for his life. The ground was still wet from earlier heavy rain, causing him to slip and fall into a mud hole with the rifle disappearing into the muck. The charging buffalo also slipped and fell into the same hole.

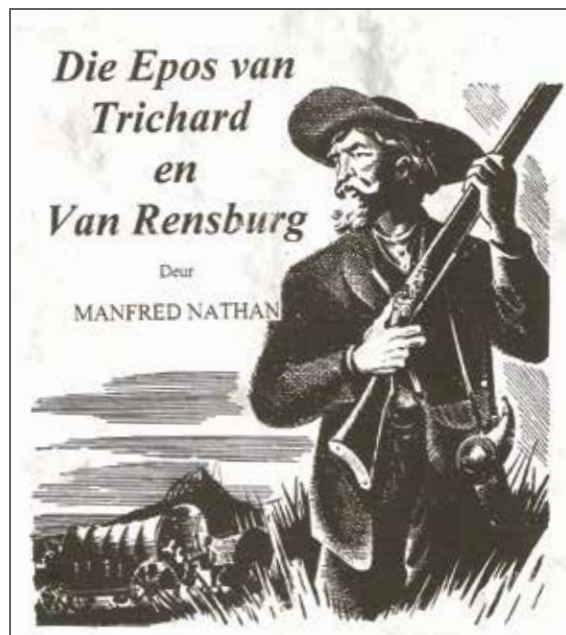
As the buffalo was trying to gore the hunter, one horn got stuck in the bank of the hole. Kruger then grabbed the other horn and tried to keep the buffalo's head under the mire to drown it. The horn was, however, quite slippery from the mud and Kruger had to use both hands. He soon realized that his strength would give in before the buffalo was drowned. He then tried to hold the buffalo with one hand while reaching for his hunting knife on his hip. He was not strong enough and the buffalo broke free. It was, however, half-drowned and weak with its eyes covered in sludge so that it could not see Kruger. Both man and beast managed to get out of the hole, Kruger hiding behind a bush and the buffalo wandering off in the opposite direction never to be seen again.

In 1845 they were hunting in Secucuniland near the confluence of the Spekboom and Steelpoort Rivers. Paul Kruger went out on horseback with a four-pounder with which he wounded a rhinoceros. He got close to the injured animal and when he wanted to give it a second shot, his rifle exploded where he was holding it with the left hand. Parts of the four-pounder, together with his left thumb, were lying on the ground when the rhino came charging. Kruger got back onto his horse and made a run for it. Some distance farther, the rhino fell over and died.

Kruger rode back to camp. His hand was in a terrible shape: the flesh was hanging in pieces, two joints were missing from the thumb, the muscles of the hand were exposed, and he was bleeding profusely. They treated the hand repeatedly with turpentine to stop the bleeding. The family thought amputation at the wrist would be inevitable, but Kruger would not hear of it.



*The Dutch first settled at Cape Town in 1652. Later, they developed a semi-nomadic lifestyle, following the seasonal rains and the game herds, and became known as the Trek Boers.*



### Caption

There was still a piece of bone sticking out of his thumb and he amputated it with his pocketknife; but he did admit that it hurt. The hand was healing slowly, and he often had to cut away pieces of flesh that had turned bad. Eventually he got septicemia,

but they managed to cure it with home remedies. It took six months for the hand to recover, but Kruger was back in the saddle hunting long before then.

Kruger entered public life and eventually became President of the South African Republic. That brought his hunting career to an end, but he became a leading conservationist of his time.

Paul Kruger first raised the concept of a game sanctuary in 1884, the year after becoming president. The members of his *Volksraad* were all farmers and hunters, and they were not in the least interested in their new president's modern conservation thinking. Kruger was forced to put his ideas on the back-burner for the time being.

Five years later, he raised the matter again, and this time got them to pass legislation to prohibit hunting on certain state land. This was a key turning point in the history of the country, for the law also made provisions for the creation of game reserves. Two years later, the law was amended to ban all hunting of rhinos and elephants, and to introduce hunting

seasons and license fees whilst all hunting on state land was banned.

This was certainly unpopular legislation, but it enabled Kruger to be directly responsible for the establishment of Africa's first two game reserves: the Pongola and the Sabie.

President Paul Kruger was not only an exceptional frontiersman, hunter and statesman, but as a conservationist he was years ahead of his time; he reminds one of America's President Theodore Roosevelt. It's highly likely that had the two of them met, they would have gotten on famously.

Some hardy old hunters always preferred the hunter's life, trekking from one hunting area to the next. Until the end of the 19th century, there were still a few of these old Nimrods in the northern Transvaal, Rhodesia, and East Africa. Many of them did not own any land, preferring the wandering

life of the hunter.

*PH Willem Frost of Matlabas Game Hunters, South Africa, is a regular contributor to "African Hunting Gazette."* ♣