

In May 2008 the first owner of Zwartberg View Mountain Lodge, Jann Barder, saw the property for the first time. As he gazed upon the barren landscape a shimmer of hope and a glimpse of paradise was envisioned. There was no development on the property and thus not many were really interested in it but he had a dream to build a beautiful lodge. It has now become a real piece of heaven on earth and a somewhat hidden gem. There was only one derelict building, no direct road, no water, no electricity, inadequate fencing, huge stands of invasive plants, mainly sisal and prickly pear and regular incursions of local cattle through the broken fencing had created barren patches littered with dried dung and almost indelible hoof prints. Some years previously, somebody had attempted farming and the area



towards the river was covered in broken fencing and certain portions of the ground had no ground cover whatsoever. Yet, the potential of the land to become a nature reserve and enable people from all over the world to enjoy the sheer grandeur of this region was unmistakable - even then!



The original derelict building on the land had no roof, no doors or windows, and whoever lived there previously had done so with no water, no toilet, or any washing facilities whatsoever. Notice the stand of sisal behind the building



Shortly after transfer, work began to transform the derelict building into what was called "base camp"



The end of phase one, a completed building, with a roof! At that stage there was no electricity and throughout all of the construction, the only means they had was the tiny generator in front of the building.



Spring of the first year, and the new “base camp” starts to take definite shape!



For the most part, local labour and expertise was very disappointing, but fortunately, Eric Motubatse, whom Jann Bader worked with in the Kruger Park agreed to translocate and together they undertook tasks that some people might think required a whole team to achieve.

➔ Eric and his faithful friend Indiana



Jann and Eric built this deck themselves and Eric built the fireplace, and of course they were first to try it out.



Huge amounts of Sisal was removed by Eric and taken to the Local dump... and still there were tons left!



Using brute strength and their trusty one ton truck, they manhandled all the logs, plants, sand and rocks into position at “Base Camp” and in fact everywhere throughout the entire lodge.

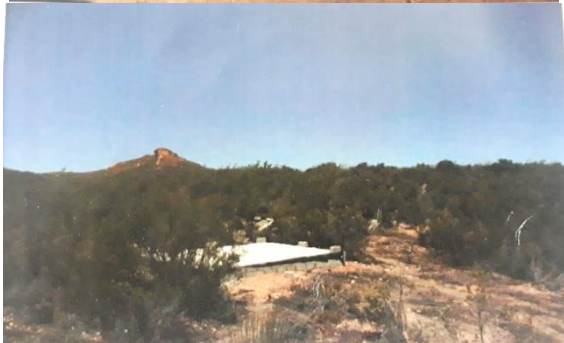
For the first year, Eric had lived in the Caravan, whilst Jann slept in the dining room at “Base Camp” – No hot water or electricity!



During December 2008 they decided to revitalize our small dam, they piped water to it, built an island in the middle and planted the banks with bullrushes, reeds and sedges. They introduced indigenous vlei kurper to the water to join the turtles which arrived to their own accord – by April 2009, they have recorded a vastly improved selection of birds, including fish eagles, giant kingfisher, spoonbill, and grey heron at the dam, regular tracks of otters, jackal, duiker and from time to time kudu are found here.



By early April 2009, after numerous setbacks and disappointments they finally had one single new building up and ready – you will notice that there is an Eskom power pole, but only a pole and some boxes, nothing was to work until well into middle of June 2009 – 10 Months after their first application.



Meanwhile up at the lodge, things were going very slowly, after six weeks of hard slogging, they had managed to somehow shift enough material to get foundations for the three chalets sets.



Some weeks later, and two building crews by the wayside, they at least had some structures up – bear in mind that at this point Eric and Jann had decided to forego all the local expertise except for one bricklayer and his 2 assistants – they lugged all the equipment, the cement, the sand, the stone, the poles and everything else up the hill in the little truck and still only used the small generator.





Not only did they have to create their own road but they then had to collect rocks and gravel to re-inforce them after the heavy toll the original truckloads of stuff took on the surface.



Meanwhile, back in Mossel Bay they proceeded to work on their décor and lodge decorations. At this point, in early April, they had to add issues like beds, furniture, appliances, tiles, towels and the rest of the requirements for a lodge to their list of things to do (making the 24 hour day about 3 hours to short).



Towards the end of April 2009, they had taken enough punishment from local builders that included having to fetch them from De Rust, buy them lunch daily, and pay them for staying home on public holidays, so they decided they would do everything themselves and at end of April they had managed to do all the tiling, fit the decks and mount the porch roofs.



At his point, they were still using the small generator for everything that needs drilling, cutting and angle grinding, and they've started painting and sealing the three chalets.

“Base Camp” is by now a shambolic array of builders mess and broken ground

In May 2009, a tragedy of a sort struck, Eric found himself unable to settle in this region, there are few enough black people per se, and not a single Tsonga or Shangaan. Eric made no friends at all, and had



nowhere to go. Jann immediately started finishing off what was supposed to be his cottage for Eric. Jann undertook the task of finishing it, furnishing and equipping it.

Eric's Cottage at the dam (now known as Zebra Chalet)



By this time "Base Camp" had its deck, and very little else. The chalets whilst fully built had no fixtures and fittings, and were still littered with rubble and left over building materials.

The next big problem for Jann to deal with was the fencing. There is about 5km of fencing, most of it was old and broken down in countless places – invasion by cattle from neighboring farms were a daily nuisance and any thought of bringing game onto the property would have to be forgotten until the fence was in good order, and raised at least to 1,8 meters instead of previous 1,2 meters.

His first task was to clear the vegetation that has grown onto and over the fence over the past few years. Jann had to rely on local labour again to start with, only to discover it takes a full day for three laborers to clear 20 meters, and not necessarily along the fence line – they go wherever it looks like there may be wood for them to cut down and take home.

They resorted back to doing it themselves, first Eric, then Cedric and Jann personally stretched 25km of wire strands and fixed over 1200 droppers to the fence. Each dropper requires to be wired to the fence in nine places, meaning more than 10,000 pieces of wire were used.



Satisfied, Jann began looking for suitable animals to invest in. The first stumbling block however was Cape Nature with the oddest rules in history!

The Daunting task of tying wire to wire



By beginning of June they had completed all the paperwork, were pretty sure the fence would hold up, and accordingly, bought the first animals – some Burchell's Zebra were duly delivered early one morning

Zebras waiting patiently in the truck for the doors to open



...and with little fuss, they leap out and disappear into the bushes



The first 9 springbuck, a bit battered and worse, were waiting for the signal to leave the truck.



One by one, they were hauled out and allowed to make their way into the bush.

Within two days three spring buck were lost and from the remaining 6 only 1 was seen so Jann ordered 16 more and Cedric and Jann decided to redo the fencing and add chicken wire. This was problematic as dealing with the wildlife couldn't become a full time job as there were chalets and a big mess.

It had become apparent that their original site foreman, who lasted a full two months had been a gentleman of little compassion and even less of a conservationist!

The damage to the chalet site up in the hills was enough to bring tears to one's eyes. Great gouges out of the ground. Vegetation trampled and squashed flat by workers and believe it or not... a tractor!

Cement mixed in all of the twenty different places, broken bricks just tossed everywhere and despite us having hired and maintained a portable toilet, hundreds of piles of unspeakables, each covered with a piece of cement bag paper!



Picture gives some indication of what the site looked like



And of course this mess as well



Cedric and Jann had created the pathways here with a million more rocks and begun bringing up the gravel from "Base Camp". Adding succulents that have been strategically removed from the mountains to cover up the empty gaps between chalets.



Proof of how most things were transported.



In January 2010, their Guinea Fowl chicks finally arrived (this photo was taken approximately 14 days later when they started showing their adult feathering). These were a domestic variety, preferring to settle and take food from humans (or at least in theory).

The battle with Cape Nature was never ending, coupled with the fact that game dealers will not deliver in small quantities of any species given the cost of transport and the size of their trucks.



Slowly overtime they began to make connections with people wishing to have small amounts of wildlife on their reserves and then success begun.

In April 2010, they got Nyala.



In May 2010 the second lot of springbuck had arrived in a Venter luggage trailer, each one encased in a grain bag. One imagines they were pretty stressed but no only did they survive but they produced four youngsters in their first season.



Towards the end of August 2010, after an extremely dry period, they started putting out Lucerne for the animals in the evenings, treating the guests to the site of Zebras and Springbuck tucking into their Lucerne net to the deck (the lone gemsbok also came down from time to time).



In October 2010, they got three baby ostriches. These animals are endemic to this region and there was not a reason they should not be between the other game on the reserve. The baby's ostriches were a true pleasure, despite their reputation

of gross stupidity and an almost canny need to commit suicide. They were full of energy and enthusiasm for life... they also loved Eric's Indiana!

One of the babies on arrival day (notice the short neck).



By the third week they were accustomed to having an extended afternoon walk led by Indiana.



Meanwhile as the lodge settled down and formed part of the environment, the wildlife started to accept Jann and his Crew and more or less moved in. There've Agama lizards of three species commonly found in our rockeries, even rare species like the woodpeckers started making their homes less than 3 meters away from the chalets to raise their young. Oblivious and comfortable with the regular stream of people going by.



This was the very first entrance to Zwartberg View Mountain Lodge. The old first impression guests got of the lodge.



This new gatehouse was started in May 2010 and completed at the end of June (without any builders just a bricklayer). This was the first improved version of the gate that greets the guests upon arrival. The garden was still in progress...



In June 2010 Jann decided to remodel Eric's Cottage. Using a bricklayer they removed all the silly inside walls, fitted



new and more windows, redid the drains, and created a brand new interior and exterior look for the self-catering chalet at this stage called Zebra Walk.



This is the look before there were ceilings, a tiled floor and without plastering.

The completed and improved Zebra Walk Chalet. With its

own deck, little kitchen, porch, tiled floor and reed ceiling.



All interior furniture, the deck, kitchen fittings, bed and headboard were made personally by Jann. The Zebra Walk opened in September 2010 and had a steady flow of guests ever since. A lot of guests even book for one night and then extend their stay up to five nights.

During 2011, the filling of the dam at Zebra Walk had become something of a problem. It needed at least 20,000 liters of water once it is down to mud to build up a layer of water suitable for the game to drink. In summer it became impractical to pump such high quantities of water out of the trench knowing that in a matter of weeks it would have evaporated. This was when they decided to build a more suitable water source for the game and to attract birds next to the road below the lodge. They dug a shallow hole and laid plastic. They then used the river gravel to mix concrete and layer the inside of the watering hole.



It started this out this big with Oom Piet and Jann doing the digging but this didn't carry on long.



It ended up this big. It was filled using the backflow in the pipes after filling the water tanks and was thus regarded as a success.



May 2016 Belinda and Chris started adding onto the lodge again. This was the start of the new lodge building with this amazing view from the parking area.



July 2016 the walls have finally been built. This is the stacking door area next to the braai.

The view from the main sitting area over the valley. There were many disputes about how this should have been built but in the end it had a wonderful view.



The Kitchen and Bathroom were finally built. This was 3-4 months after the project had started.

The project was coming together. Each brick was starting to fall into place. It was almost time to bring the guests in again. Beginning of December 2016 the roof was up and it was almost time to refurbish.



Middle December 2016 the Porch was completed with the fire pit and braai. Building was now completed and it was time to furnish.



End of December 2016 the furnishing was completed. It was time for the guests to come again.

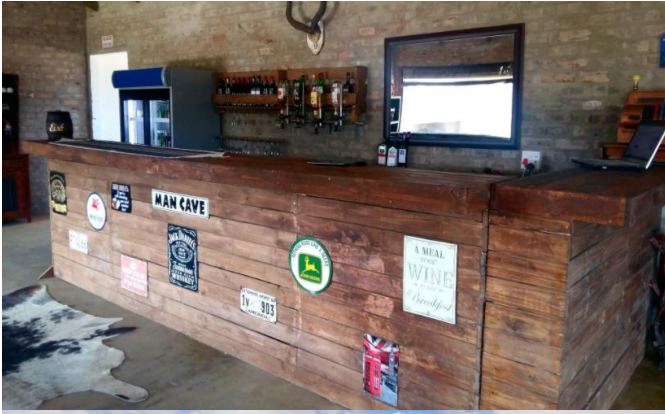


The swimming pool project had started. As soon as the project was completed and the pool was filled with water, they heard a crack and the next moment the entire pool broke through the wall and started sliding down the road. They then had to redo the installation

build the front wall thicker



of the pool and this time.



January 2019 the Bar was installed and ready for customers to come and drink. The new lodge area started becoming a home to the guests and many guests were returning guests.



Middle January 2019 the roads were touched up on and maintenance was done on the chalets. The new look made the chalets blend into the environment making it more friendly on the eyes.



The interior of the Springbuck chalet was touched up on to give the guests the true African Experience. Each chalet was designed to follow the theme of an animal and that theme is followed through all the way.



Beginning of July 2020 the new owners decided to install railings to ensure that guests are safer and couldn't fall of the sides



Middle of July 2020 the new owners of the lodge had removed the tarps and installed stacking doors. They also bought more comfortable leather couches for the guests to sit and enjoy the view with something to drink from the lodge.



They finally bought a ram for the springbuck. Up until till the ram was bought the Springbuck were only ewes. These springbuck truly shocked our eyes at first as they were lesbians and always trying to copulate with each other. The ram was still very young and needed time to become sexually active, lesbians would still have to play awhile longer.

End of August 2020 the Zebra Chalet has been remodeled and the color was changed a bit modern. Blends nicely with nature from a far.

They decided to get Beauty (the female Oryx) a partner and here came the little ram Thor. He was in the boma



for a few days and when we released him he ran straight into the bushes... he hasn't come down for dinner once yet.

