

So What's Zululand Got in Store?

Step back to a time when the pioneer trading store really was the one-and-only-stop shop

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TOP: Hugh Morrison behind the long, wooden counter, typical of the old trading stores. ABOVE: Some of the original tools of the trade: the cash register and typewriter. RIGHT: The architecture of trading stores, post 1947. Rural Zululand is dotted with these buildings, some in operation, others abandoned.

In far north-eastern, rural Zululand, many of the trading stores are monuments to a history of trading families and local people they have served for generations. Two of these families, the Morrisons and Rutherfoords, invited me into their past and present lives, where I found vibrant and trailblazing chronicles of people and places that read like an adventure novel.

“Granny Gladys Rutherford could shoot a mamba out of a tree. She had one lung, she smoked Springboks all day, she was a tough lady. But she lived to be nearly ninety,” says Susan Rutherford from the veranda of Ghost Mountain Inn just outside of the town of Mkuze. This was the calibre of person it took to open the paths of trading in Zululand at the beginning of the 20th century.

In 1918, travelling on horseback on a mission for the St Lucia Sugar Co – to source labour for the Mfolozi Sugar Mill in the far-flung Tongaland and Maputaland – RH Rutherford (as he was known) came across

a farm and trading store at Ndumu that were for sale. In an association with four partners, Rutherford bought the properties and the Ndumu Group was established. The farming of cotton didn’t pan out well, but the labour broking – later also for the Transvaal mines – thrived, as did selling sugar, maize meal, cloth and other items to the Tonga people.

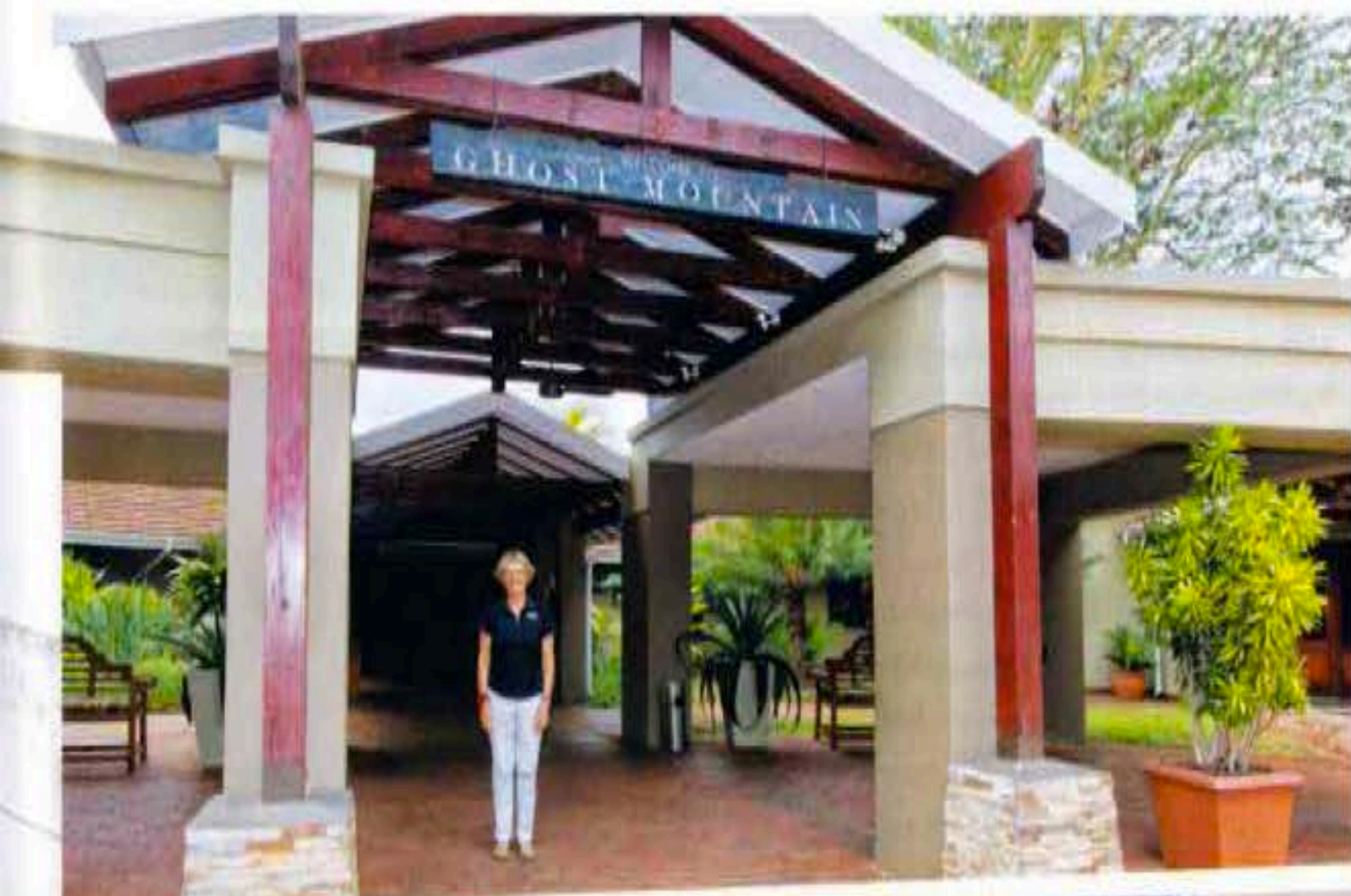
Because of the inaccessibility of this area, goods for the stores came from Fitzpatrick & Co (Jock of the Bushveld’s Fitzpatrick) in Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) in Mozambique, and were taken by dhows to Salamanga on the Maputo River. From there they were loaded onto flat-bottomed pontoons and poled to a place on the Pongola River, some five kilometres from Ndumu. This last leg of the travelling operation took an arduous two weeks for delivery and two weeks for the return trip to Salamanga, with hippos and crocs occasionally adding to the toll of casualties.

During these early years, the group purchased several stores, including

Mlambongwena, Gwalaweni, and also Harrison and Co, a chain of stores that included Manguzi (today known as Kangwanase), Sihangwana, Kosi Bay, Mabibi and later Othobothini.

For the Rutherford family, living conditions at Ndumu were harsh, and medical help for the severe attacks of malaria and other ailments was a two-day donkey ride away. By 1930, the completion of the railway line from Mtubatuba to Golela on the Swaziland border changed the transport of both goods and people, and saw the Rutherfoords extend their business to include transport. The company eventually moved its head office to Mkuze in 1942 and the family followed suit, making their home at Ubombo.

After RH passed away in 1948, his son Roy (RE) took over the thriving business. Mkuze became the hub of the company’s activities and Roy’s wife Maureen had to cater for all the visiting reps and traders. She hated cooking, so in 1962 the family built a hotel to accommodate this burgeoning



LEFT: Susan Rutherford in front of the Ghost Mountain Inn at Mkuze. BELOW LEFT: The original Ghost Mountain Inn built in 1962, mainly to accommodate the travellers and reps that came to do business with the traders. BELOW: Susan with some of the old journals into which all transactions were written by hand. The book on the right dates back to the beginning years of Ndumu Trading Store.





LEFT Crossing the Pangala River at Bangeri Drift in the 1930s. ABOVE: King Goodwill Zwelithini officiates at the opening of the store at Mngazi in 1992. On the right is Peter Rutherford, third generation master of the business.

ing of their endeavours. The first building looked nothing like the present Ghost Mountain Inn that, to this day, not only is the meeting place for everybody involved in the business, it's a popular four-star hotel with its main focus on wildlife safaris.

I ask Susan what she would like to be quoted on regarding their business, which now is in the hands of the fourth generation Rutherfords - her and Peter's three sons Craig, Scott and Ross. She says it has now been forty-five years that she has lived with this mountain, referring to the legendary Ghost Mountain. "And in all these years, for one word that stands out is 'dedication', putting shoulder to the wheel," she says. When getting to grips with the history of this entrepreneurial family, words like 'innovative', 'tough' and 'community involvement' come to mind.

Only a few of the original stores are still standing, and Peter assisted one of the store managers, William Mzimba, to take over some stores like the ones at Felindaba and Oriboshothiri. Since the sixties, the Rutherfords' trading businesses have all become modern chainstores, still serving outlying communities from Ukhahlamba to Mkatze and north to Ntshonyo and Mangazi. They employ 1,300 people and are still ingraining their unique dedication on the community of Zululand.

At his home at Malakosana on the Western Shores of Lake St Lucia, Hugh Morrison shows me around the Morrison family's original store named Lake Store, now used as a storeroom. Walking through the building, with its veranda, shop with high



ABOVE: Hugh Morrison at the storeroom of Lake Store, the first trading store his grandfather bought in 1919 with borrowed money. RIGHT: Goods transported by ox-wagons in the trading stores.

shelves and long wooden counter, opens a flood of memories from his childhood days.

"I can still remember when I was a boy, how crowded the inside of the store floor was with a long line of people waiting outside for their turn to buy," says Hugh. The textures and sensory imprints of the past can be felt, kept alive by some of the goods the store had sold and the relics from the family's trading lives, four generations deep.

The old Seagull outboard engine that was used to transport locals from the Eastern Shores of Lake St Lucia to Lake Store on the Western Shores is stored in a back room, the boat it had propelled long since perished. On one of the walls hangs an old mirror, and





ABOVE LEFT The Crab House at Makakatana Bay Lodge was used to store crabs and mussels until it could be transported to Durban to be sold. **ABOVE RIGHT:** RE Rutherford with store manager Mqalimani Nkosi at the Mui Store in what is now Tembe National Park. **LEFT** The era of motorised transport made life much easier to get products to the stores. Here the Rutherford family embark on a shopping trip.

Hugh remembers how especially the women would visit and jostle just to get a glimpse of their reflection. A tin of fishing hooks shows a price ridiculous by today's standards.

Anthropologist Deborah Whelan did intensive research on the trading history of Zululand. Among other aspects, she writes about the architecture of the rural trading stores, how the veranda would be a place to seek shelter from the elements and how the store floor would be a place of bargaining and haggling according to the terms and rhythms of this *terroir rural terrain*. Utsako Morrison, Hugh's mother, remembers that most stores had a man working on the veranda, doing his own business of mending and altering clothes.

Hugh's grandfather, Jack Morrison, entered the business of trading in 1918 when he borrowed money to buy a partnership in the trading store here at Makakatana. In time he also bought the stores at Mqheba, Nyulini and Hlabizwe.

Jack died at an early age and his son Jimmy took over the running of the stores. Jimmy married Utsako in 1949, and over the years she became the keeper of the family's history and memories. She remembers that, when she came to Makakatana as a bride, there was no electricity, the only water came from six storage tanks, and the stores had to stock anything and everything in this out-of-the-way corner of Zululand. All sorts of auxiliary services and support had to be provided.

Because cash was not readily available, credit and 'banking facilities' had to be offered to the customers. A telephone service often entailed having to dial numbers for many customers, and a postal service included sending telegrams on behalf of customers, and a postman that walked long distances to fetch the mail from the nearest town. All this and more were part of the potpourri of daily activities.

A fourth generation of Morrisons now

runs the trading business from the town of Mthatha. There are more than ten stores, built according to regulations promulgated in 1947, which demanded that the old wood and corrugated iron structures be demolished and replaced with stores built according to detailed architectural specifications.

Across Zululand, these similar buildings, some in good shape and doing business, others deserted and maybe replaced by a spaza shop, paint the present rural trading landscape that has a deep and fascinating past.

Lake Store is no longer operational and Hugh and his wife Leigh-Anne now run the five-star Makakatana Bay Lodge on the Western Shores section of iSimangaliso Wetland Park. At the centre of the lodge sits a small concrete building clasped in the invasive roots of an enormous strangler fig tree. Known as Crab House, it was here that crabs and mussels were kept in earlier days before transportation to Durban to be sold to restaurants.

In some way, the Crab House and Lake Store are symbols of an era when the trading store was much more than a place to purchase goods. When it was the communal market place, intertwining the owner's life with that of the people. ■

Map reference C608 see inside book cover

Publications on this part of Zululand's history are scarce. Deborah Whelan's research article and PhD thesis on this subject can be found at www.zulu.org.za/qr/qrts.0006.01.012772