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Louis du Buisson was one of nature's higher moments. Not only the gentlest guy in sight, but also a whizz with a pen. In here he touches on various of the ways that misplaced politics bugged people up – the Matanzimas were the brothers who sustained the fiction of an independent ethnic Xhosa state, the Selous Scouts were the storm-troopers of the attempt, that had recently failed, to maintain white rule of South Africa's northern neighbour for 1,000 years. He also evokes a mouth-watering sense of what Africa could be – love and brotherhood and immense warmth. Yes, yes, it can't just be about smiling peasant fishermen holding out the produce of the sea. These guys have also got to graduate to laptops and investment portfolios and Bachelors degrees and other stuff that the late Louis's perspective of thirty years ago would have rated less highly than ours now. But stripped to the core, that stuff is secondary. Maybe Louis's grandchildren will one day graduate out of insurance policies and into standing on hillsides proffering the produce of the sea and loving their neighbours. The townlet Louis talks of is a place of physical beauty beyond description. When southern Africa finally gets on to a sound political footing it will be clamoured for by the rich world's *beautiful people*.

Don't mess with the Selous Scouts

*The Rhodesians have moved in on Port St. Johns, says **Louis du Buisson**, and they're changing the rules of the game*

The first thing Braaivleis Ben did when he moved into his new house at Ferry Point was to build a fence around it. Ferry Point is a picturesque little holiday complex nestling on the slopes of Mount Sullivan on the north shore of the Umzimvubu River - about thirty cottages, houses and dwellings overlooking the river mouth, the Indian Ocean and the village of Port St Johns on the south shore. Pretty as a picture postcard.

Whichever way you look at it Braaivleis Ben's fence was bound' to cause controversy.

That he should have built it from pine is perhaps understandable. There's a sawmill up on Mount Thesiger where you can get pine planks for next to nothing. And the Ready Fence Concrete people have not yet opened a branch in Port St Johns. In fairness one has to speculate that Braaivleis Ben would have built a concrete fence if he could have.

Nevertheless, the fence has already upset hundreds of people.

DON'T MESS WITH THE SELOUS SCOUTS

It upset everybody with an eye for the aesthetic, those pine planks nailed into the middle of the picture postcard. An eyesore for sure.

It also upset Kevin Savage, Capital Radio's hit parade jock who lives next door. Kevin can live with pine. It's not the lack of taste that gets him. What does get him is that the fence cuts off all access to his front door, and it's a long way from the ferryboat to his back door.

Lastly, the fence also upset the entire local Pondo population. The fence cuts off one of their ancient footpaths, probably been in use since the days of the great King Faku.

In a very short while, Braaivleis Ben's fence upset hundreds of people and as more and more vacationers return to their favourite holiday spot, it will grow to thousands. Kevin Savage tried to tear it down one night, but he was caught in the act and never got the job done, Otherwise nobody is doing much about it. Why?

Because Braaivleis Ben is a Selous Scout, that's why, and because right now the Selous Scouts are calling the tune in Port St Johns.

Well one way or another foreigners have always called the tune here, The Portuguese put it on the map by giving it a name. Then came the British. And the Boers. And the Matanzimas, also considered foreigners here because they are Tembu, For a year or so Hollywood had the run of the place, when they filmed

Shout at the Devil here. Roger Moore and Lee Marvin lived at Ferry Point, and some of the most beautiful women in filmdom. That was about a decade ago, One can tell by the disproportionate number of 10-year-old coloured children in town.

Two years ago it was Capital Radio's turn, but that's old hat now. Celebrities like Allan Mann and Treasure Tshabalala, people who get hounded for their autographs in the great cities of RSA, get elbowed out of the way at Andy's Supermarket.

There's a new crowd in town. The Selous Scouts.

"The Sellotape Scouts" one of the regulars at the bar at the Cape Hermes Hotel calls them, to general sniggers from the locals.

If the truth be known, Transkei's fledgling army is something of a joke all round. The chief of the defence force is in jail, accused of collaborating with the enemy, The chief of the army is in hiding, AWOL since they discovered that he

THE BEST OF FRONTLINE

was only an Able Seaman, second class, it's easy to see why the Matanzimas hired the SS. Let's face it - they're scared of the same enemy the SS fought for so many years. And by most accounts they were very good at it.

One can also see why the SS would find the offer tempting, The Rhodesia they fought for is no more, and in the new Zimbabwe there is the shadow of Tekere seeking retribution. After a decade in the war zone and with some of them labelled war criminals, they had to find a safe refuge for their families.

And what safer place for a war-weary white soldier in Africa than Transkei, snuggled so cosily under the right wing of Mother Pretoria?

When their old commander called them up for this new adventure they couldn't believe their luck. And when they first clapped eyes on Port St Johns, they couldn't believe it either, Ripe for the plucking! And ...

"There's no sign of the enemy," one of them says, scanning the lush indige-nous forests with mock binoculars to the raucous laughter of his comrades - the mrelieved laughter of men who know they won't have to lay their lives on the line again soon. This is going to be so easy!

All they have to do is fight an invisible enemy, create the impression that this republic is capable of defending itself and make sure that nobody shoots the president. Easy. A nice, long, working furlough in paradise, a regular paycheck and a comfortable home at Ferry Point.

The problem with the homes at Ferry Point is that they've got no fences around them. The Pondos come and go as they please. Why the Capital Radio people never did anything about it is neither known nor relevant. What is, is that Braaivleis Ben did something about it. He built a big, ugly pine fence around his new house.

"It's a disgrace," fumes Capital's volatile Lesley Scott.

"It's a bloody inconvenience," says Kevin Savage.

"It's an eyesore," say the environmentalists.

The Pondos say nothing, at least not in circles where Braaivleis Ben will get to hear about it.

Aesthetics aside, Braaivleis Ben's fence is no different from all those concrete fences in Sandton and Waterkloof and Westville and Rondebosch. If you put them all together into one long line, you have the frontline, with white S.A. on the one side and black S.A. on the other. Or more precisely with the haves on one side and the have-nots on the other, for concrete fences are also catching

DON'T MESS WITH THE SELOUS SCOUTS

on in Soweto and Guguletu and Mamelodi and Mdantsane.

I don't know why Braaivleis Ben imagines he needs a fence. I've been living up the road from Ferry Point for two years. My property has no fence. I allow the Pondos to come and go as their custom dictates. This is their country and having them around is my pleasure. Their cattle and donkeys keep the grass short and fertilised, and they bring me fish, crayfish, oysters, mussels, fruit and vegetables and news from far-flung reaches of the Global Village, places like Ntanfuf and Tambalala and Western Deep Levels. They do it, always, with a smile. They are, by a wide margin, the friendliest people I have lived with in a lifetime of travel. When I go away, I leave Jane alone without fear for her safety, knowing that we don't even have a key for the front door. When we both go away, we leave the house unlocked so my Pondo friends can fetch their catfish bait from the fridge, and we leave the windows open for the cats to come and go.

About a year ago a young stranger from Sikiligindi tried to steal one of my fishing rods. Before he reached Ferry Point, several Pondos had spotted him, and when he got there my friend Gordon Sink who runs the Sink or Swim Store there was waiting for him. He took my rod back and sent the culprit packing to the jeers and cheers of the locals.

That has been the only breach in my security system in two years. My security derives from the fact that I am accepted as a local. Holiday-makers and passersthrough do not enjoy the same protection. They are so clearly on the other side of the fence. The same side Braaivleis Ben put himself on when he built his fence.

What a pity ... Ben is a stranger here. He's probably only trying to keep up with some Joneses, and how is he to know that he doesn't need it? Indeed, how is he to know that his fence, contrary to his intentions, will increase his insecurity? How is he to know that by building that fence he brought the front-line to his own door?

Strange bedfellows, Braaivleis Ben and his Pondo neighbours. And no matter which perspective one takes, the Matanzimas and the Selous Scouts are also strange bedfellows. That the Matanzimas need expert protection goes without saying, That the SS can do that job better than most also goes without saying. And precedents abound. The mercenary tradition goes back into the dim recesses of human conflict. Still, one cannot escape noting the ironic juxtaposition of history that made such an odd couple possible in this place at this time.

THE BEST OF FRONTLINE

Around the time when it became known that the SS were coming here, one parliamentarian cautioned against “white refugees from the north who bring their war mentality to Transkei”.

Such voices are not frequently heard. Not in public. Privately, there is much speculation.

“Rhodesians” are already running the Transkei Development Corporation, most of the holiday resorts, the Maqwa Tea Plantation and much of the government administration. Transkei has become something of a refugee camp for Rhodesians who refuse to become Zimbabweans.

Some say it’s a good thing.

“Those guys will sort out the ANC in no time,” says one of the old colonialists. “We can all breathe a little easier now.”

He says so because, like the rest of us, he has never perceived that these Rhodesians are unchanged and unrepentant. They are still defiantly wearing their “Rhodesia is Super” T-shirts, they still call a spade a spade, they still build new frontiers for future conflicts.

The SS won’t have their hands full taking care of the ANC. Most of the potential trouble-makers in this part of the world have been meticulously weeded out and put away over the years. Like Nelson Mandela.

What will get Braaivleis Ben in the end is tissue rejection. The host body will soon identify him as unsuitable tissue. How will they know? The fence already told them so - this tissue does not want to be part of us.

Nobody’s going to climb over Ben’s ugly fence and shoot the place up with weapons made in Russia. He’ll never have to back his fence up with an Andrew’s Burglar Alarm, and he’ll never have to plant landmines on the perimeters as they did back in good ol’ Rhodesia. The only real validity the fence has is symbolic and it’s symbolism that cuts both ways.

In the white suburban S.A. vernacular the fence says that Ben is with it. He’s one of the boys, even if he’s somewhat short on style.

In the vernacular of the Pondos the fence says here is a different kind of white man, one who builds a fence between himself and the outside world. That it cuts across their path is of no great concern to them. They will find a way around it. All it takes is time, and they have plenty of that. What they can’t get around is that here is a white man who does not delight in finding a dozen smiling Pondos on his lawn bearing fish and crayfish and oysters and news

DON'T MESS WITH THE SELOUS SCOUTS

from faraway places like Ntanfuf and Tambalala and Western Deep.

One of these days Braaivleis Ben will bump into his neighbour, who's lived up the road for two years. Perchance he may ask his neighbour's opinion of the Pondos.

"Friendliest folk I ever met," I will tell him.

And how can Braaivleis Ben but harbour serious reservations about my judgement, because the Pondos he got to know are surly and unfriendly, if not downright hostile? Is it not inevitable that Braaivleis Ben will come to the conclusions that he did the right thing when he built the fence?

Update: *As we go to press, we end with a news flash Braaivleis Ben took it down himself. No, he did not do it for the Pondos. He did it for the Joneses - the Capital Radio people. And what about the Pondos? Well, don't you worry about the Pondos. Braaivleis Ben says he's getting himself two Rhodesian Ridgebacks instead.*