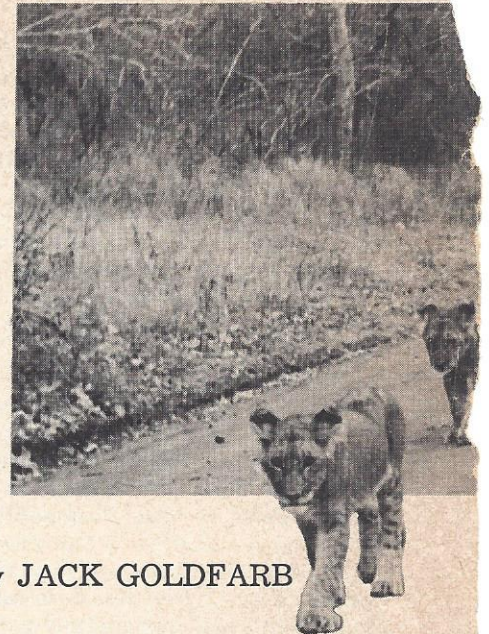




LOOK WHO'S STALKING



By JACK GOLDFARB

AS A CHILD I was fascinated by things African. I spent many a Saturday matinee watching a ululating Tarzan swinging through the treetops, many a rainy afternoon poring over my stamp album stuck with besmudged treasures from Abyssinia through Zululand, and many a tingling hour at the circus and zoo making faces at snarling jungle beasts until nervous adults dragged me away.

My fantasies ranged widely, from equator to cape and back again. A combination David Livingstone and Frank Buck, I tramped about the dark continent pacifying hostile natives with my fluent Swahili, rescuing helpless maidens who had lost their safaris, and trapping wild animals with unflinching aplomb.

After lying dormant for three decades, this Africophilia was recently stirred by the arrival of a letter from a distant cousin in South Africa. Shortly thereafter, I passed a travel agency window adorned with 6-foot posters depicting Africa's "mystery and majesty . . . charming contrasts . . . primitive lure." I decided I was getting a little bored with Fire Island, USA. Thus it was that I awoke one morn from a deep dream of home as our jet touched down on the cocoa-colored earth of Johannesburg's airport.

Within the hour I was at the home of my cousin Cecil. A pompous but cordial fellow, Cecil wasted no words. He sternly notified me that to visit South Africa without going through the Kruger Game Reserve was unthinkable. Bristling with facts, he fairly gurgled with pride in describing the place: "the largest animal sanctuary in the world . . . every species of African game in native habitat . . . 8000 square miles of bush

between the Limpopo and Crocodile rivers . . . the thrill of meeting untamed beasts around every turn in the road—while riding in your car, that is." As I suspected, Cecil, in all his forty years in South Africa, had never been there.

I soon learned that Cecil's pitch was no solitary voice in the veldt-ness. In the flurry of introductions that followed my arrival, each new acquaintance urged me on to Kruger Park. Fleeing the drumfire barrage, I retreated to the South African Tourist Corporation office, fluttered my white handkerchief, and capitulated. I made arrangements to go to Kruger Reserve.

No sooner had word leaked out than an avalanche of advice poured in. Cecil's friends chorused a medley of suggestions: Take the northern route through Punda Milia! Take the southern route through Numbi! Camp overnight at Skukuza! Take along bedding! Don't take along bedding! In the midst of one such flea-in-the-ear session, Cecil sidled up and confessed he had been bitten—he would go along too.

NEXT MORNING at the preposterous hour of 3 A.M., Cecil and I stashed food supplies, camping equipment, and an antiquated Enfield rifle into his Baby Austin and pointed its snub-nose down the highway toward the Eastern Transvaal. Cecil navigated through the clammy darkness for 150 miles before we set eyes on another living thing. It was a Jaguar, with orbs unblinking, racing at 90 miles an hour—bearing some tired playboy home for a night's rest.

The blue-winged finches were chirping reveille by the time we passed beyond the slumbering range of Magaliesberg Mountains. In dawn's

pearly light, we wheeled on through the lowveld approaches to the Kruger Reserve. This drowsy looking countryside with its huge citrus estates was once treacherous terrain, Cecil informed me. It had been infested with tsetse flies, crocodiles, and fevers. We were following in the footsteps of Trichardt, intrepid Boer explorer who trekked through here a century ago, blazing a trail to the Mozambique coast on the Indian Ocean. But the greatest danger in this serene scene today, Cecil reassured me, was getting hit by falling grapefruit.

Mindful that his audience was captive, Cecil's fount of historical data gushed volubly as he rolled the Austin—in full daylight now—down the last few miles to our destination. Kruger Park, he enlightened me, was named after "Oom Paul" Kruger, the old Boer statesman who proposed the idea back in 1884. Wild animal hunters in the neighborhood had objected strenuously—a natural reaction in light of the fact that elephant tusks at the time were fetching as high as \$1400 each. But "Oom Paul's" dream came true when the park was officially opened in 1926. Although a total of only three cars ventured into Kruger Preserve that first year, the primitive appeal of the place has since attracted many thousands of curious folk like Cecil and me. In fact, there were several other curious humans that morning who paid their fees, got their permits, and followed us on the great safari.

At the entrance we were relieved of our firearms, on the questionable assumption that our automobiles were weapons enough. Then, quint-