



South African Tourist Corporation

**With Yankee courage
and sharpened pun, our
author sets us on the spoor
of big game in Africa**

ing at the back of our permit, I read a list of things we were not permitted to do. There were fourteen "don'ts" altogether, and they included injuring, feeding, or disturbing any form of wild life; exceeding a 25 mph speed limit; getting out of the car outside of camp areas; or making any disturbing noise after 9:30 P.M. The permit also stated the authorities were not responsible for any fatal injuries caused by the animals. Hastily shoving this last provision into our subconscious, Cecil and I checked one another's pulses, then headed down the dusty road into the reserve.

A few hundred yards in, a welcoming party of shaggy baboons blockaded the road. They were holding down the prized panhandling position—first crack at new arrivals. We halted, and the monkeys' business got under way. The cheeky pack of beggars swarmed all over the car, blithely waiting for a handout. Their expressions were shrewdly eloquent. "We know you're not supposed to feed us," they seemed to be saying, "but if you don't squeal, will we?" A couple of the older and stiffer members of the gang coolly sat it out on the ground to see whether the suckers in the car were going to come across. At sight of our bunches of grapes and bananas, the rush was on.

As our guests chewed contentedly, Cecil became alarmed at the diminishing food stores. He motioned to the baboons to remove themselves. Those that didn't ignore his frantic gestures eyed him stonily; their plans for the day called for staying perched on this shiny roost munching fruit salad. Cecil gunned the motor and we began to move. Grudgingly the baboons slid off.

We followed a northern road

toward the Sabie River, which was hippopotamus country. I kept two fidgety eyes open for massive beasts I figured were capable of swallowing an Austin in one yawning gulp. I learned only later that hippopotami spend their days lolling in watery playgrounds. Only at night do they emerge, and then to dine on grass. At the banks of the Sabie, we were allowed to alight from the car under the protection of a park ranger and his high-powered rifle. He instructed us to follow him in single file through the thick underbrush. I felt the skipping of a heartbeat at the realization of a long-cherished childhood dream. My romantic illusions were constantly disrupted, however, by the noises of Cecil floundering through the thicket, tripping, falling, and frantically calling, "Dash it all, don't walk so fast!"

At the shore of a wide inlet we peered through a curtain of fronds and saw in the middle of the river a monstrous mass of black blubber. Hippos are great sensualists. Whole families of behemoths laze in the sun pressed against each other. Their lethargic contiguity disperses at dusk, when they waddle off in search of herbage.

Returning to our car, we resumed our motorized stalking, straining our eyes to catch sight of elusive fauna behind concealing flora. So busy was Cecil scanning the right side, and I the left, that we almost ran into a procession of ostriches strung out across the middle of the road. Papa, Mama, and fledglings were promenading on their skinny legs, snobbish beaks tilted upward, brilliantly plumed tail tufts held high. Though ostriches can gallop faster than horses, this gadding group was taking its sweet time. Cecil leaned on

the horn, hissed, snorted, and shooed at the periscope-necked flock. Far from burying their heads in the sand at all the commotion, the clan executed a disdainful squads right and marched off into the bush.

The antelope family, which comes in all shapes, sizes, and arrangements, comprises the bulk of the animal population of Kruger Reserve. They number over half a million, including impala, gazelle, wildebeest, bushbuck, eland, kudu, gnu, and springbok, all of which are fair game for the ablest hunter of the animal world—the lion. Most ubiquitous of all is the swift, high-bounding impala, whose spindly legs are his greatest asset in avoiding dinner dates with the king of beasts. On the whole, the antelope tribe are a gentle, timid lot. The springbok, which gets widespread publicity as the national symbol of South Africa, is so retiring, in fact, that it mates only at night.

SINCE the purpose of a visit to Kruger Park is to observe wild life, passing drivers frequently halt along the road to exchange tips on what is to be seen and where. The Johannesburg housewife boasts freely to the clerk from Capetown about the leopard she saw up the road, and he, in turn, directs her to a place where giraffes are grazing. It's stirring talk! To aid in the great game of animal watching, every helpful appurtenance is brought along—spectacles, sun glasses, binoculars, lorgnettes, opera glasses, telescopes. In addition, an arsenal of photographic equipment is hauled into the park daily. The click and whirr of cameras are sounds as indigenous to the reserve as the trumpet of an elephant or the trill of a roller bird.

The roads in Kruger Park have