



*Baviaan's Kloof Wilderness Trail
South Africa, February 2008*

reflections

In February as part of the African Biodiversity Network's revisioning meeting in South Africa, participants spent two days on a wilderness trail in the Baviaan's Kloof to reconnect with themselves and with nature, to re-energize and reflect.

I was at the Baviaan's Kloof. As mountainous as my country. So, home. We were out in the wilderness, a group of ABNers to be with each other and ourselves.

They say our soul is connected to the soul of nature. Every natural being has a soul. So when you are in nature your soul connects with your surroundings. When this happens you go to the depth of your soul, into the darkness of yourself. I think I went deep into myself and connected with the nature around me. Instead of quietness, my mind was in chaos. I was fighting a fight that I have fought before. Arguments that I have already lost. I was reliving some of my bitter past and I was mad. I was supposed to melt into the tranquility of nature and enjoy the bliss but there I was reliving a past I should long have forgotten.

I was sitting on the bank of a stream. I washed my feet, my sandals, but the coolness of the water could not appease my soul. Then I remembered a process of connecting with nature – conversing with nature. So I looked to my left and saw a huge rock in the stream. The water was passing under it. Then I looked at its shape. It looked like a frog. I said, "Eh you look like a frog, but on your right side it looks like you have a fish stuck on you. You're not handsome and majestic. But you are not worried or mad about it. You accept yourself. How much do I accept myself?" Then I turned my head to the right to find a little green frog staring at me, patiently. It was sitting on the stone and the water was flowing over one of its legs. It was sitting quietly and patiently looking at me and the flies that were dancing at my side.

"Oh, what is this? Is it a message? If it is, what is it? What are you trying to tell me?" The frog slowly moved into the water, swam in my direction and sat under a dead branch. I stared at it for a long time and started walking back to the camp deeply reflecting about it. What is a frog in the African tradition? At the camp I told the story to Liz and she said that a frog signifies transformation and that it must be telling me to transform myself fundamentally. "Oh my, I thought, " What does that mean?"

Million

We reconnected to the importance of trees, stones and grass, for shade, places to sit and wood for fire to cook our food. Our appreciation for nature was deepened.

In our busy lives we have no time for reflection and we don't keep our commitments to ourselves. When we spend time in nature we reconnect to our souls.



I spent my night watch walking about in the nearby cleared area, but did not venture deep into the bush. I had a feeling that I should go deeper into the bush but then I could not because of fear. I now realize that I have been away from the bush for too long. I opted to stay close to the rest of the people in my group, and in an open area.

The stars up there were so beautiful. The snores of the people blended well with the chirping of insects, birds and wildlife and added to the unseen beauty of the wilderness at night. The experience enlivened the rhythm of the wilderness in the dark and I joined in the rhythm by whistling within my heart (whistling loudly would invite snakes, so my mother told me many years ago). The whole experience and my re-connecting with the rhythm of the wilderness shortened my night watch, but I had to give the other wildlings a chance to watch over us!

Mburu



The natural world gives us food, housing and energy. It is imbued with life-force. The industrial world sucks and eats energy. It drains us; distracts and fragments us. We need nature to keep our potency.

Liz



It was a nourishment of soul, mind and a path to my spirituality. Nature feeds me inside. Everyday life feeds the daily life, feeds the physical needs. The daily things we do, do not give the songs within us a space. My concern is, what about the future generation? I know that what I do should relate to nature consciousness and be a sustainable legacy to those who will come after me. Youths are completely cut off from this thinking, the gap should be filled. Does the youth value their beautiful wilderness or see it as a tourist attraction?

Mphatheleni

A time to feed the soul. To look inwards, release anger and tension.

At dawn there is a celebration and jubilation from nature as it greets the day. But I noticed the people were still sleeping and not joining in with the celebration.

The Essence of the Night Vigil in a Wild Camp

It was a good practice, for each member of the team to keep a night watch for 50 minutes while the others slept. To keep vigil and keep the camp fire burning – to ensure that the rest of the group were safe. When one's watch was over, the night guard would wake the next person and this went on the whole night. In case of danger, we had a duty to warn others and while this was not explicit, those awakened may have been expected to react in several ways: Wake up immediately, try to understand what kind of danger they face and what kind of action to take, spring with vigor and zeal to chase away the danger and keep the watch

This exercise made and left a deep impression on me. It reminded me of nature and the essence of keeping watch on biodiversity and the environment. Those of us who are passionate about biodiversity and nature are supposed to monitor and keep watch what the money-hungry human beings are doing and whether this amounts to destroying the environment. As we go on with our business, we all should have whistles in our lips so that when we see people destroying nature and the communities' livelihoods, we immediately blow the whistle to awaken everybody. This is how Africa has been able to resist GMOs and push other eminent dangers away. This is why whistles are being blown about AGRA and Agrofuels. As we all know, these have been introduced in the guise of addressing the problems of the world.


During my watch, I was gifted to see leopard. My torch shone on some flashing eyes and there it was: the spotted one as we call him in my community. It disappeared behind some bushes. After five minutes or so, I saw it on the other side of the camp and then it disappeared into the night. Of course, during the rest of my watch I was very alert.

I was trying to imagine what would have happened had I gone to sleep and did not keep the camp fire burning. Obviously, we all would be in danger. But we all trusted each other and hence people went to sleep knowing that someone was watching.

On the last day of the camp, I was on the last watch and I saw how night changes into day. I was surprised by how the birds and baboons welcome the daylight. Suddenly the birds were singing and the crickets were louder. I looked at my fellow human beings – none detected the change to day light as they were all sleeping. We are so disconnected from nature that, unlike other earthly creatures, we do not notice the changes in nature.

I have several questions to ABNers and all the friends of biodiversity and nature. One, are we really keeping watch over biodiversity, nature and communities or have we all gone to sleep? The second question is – if we are asleep and others are keeping the watch, do we awaken to their whistle-blowing or do we turn around and go on sleeping in our comfort zones? The last question is – shall we now keep on sleeping or do we join the watchers and whistle-blowers? The choice of what we do, my dear ABNers and friends, is yours and mine and indeed ours. A quote from Mark Twain may help us remain focused "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore, Dream and Discover."

Zachary



Walking in nature brings me into my

We make our lives so complex. Being in nature we learn to appreciate simplicity.



Body still dripping
alive with kloof water
I lie on my back between cliffs of rock and tree and aloe
warm rock draws me into the earth.
Sinking
the endless circles of words fall away
thoughts become grains of sand
washed away by the gushing river
that whispers and shouts and sings
of clouds and rain and oceans.

I breathe my insides green
edges dissolve.
I am
rockearth
watersong
dragonroot
fern.

Eyes open
meeting the sky.
Eagle glides across
a strip of rockframed blue
and I remember
I was born part fish, part eagle, part moon.

Katja



In the bush there was a small cactus called 'katjie'. It was like a kitten that grabbed onto our feet as we were walking so we had to watch carefully how we walked. Can we live with the same awareness as we walk through life to avoid getting caught up in the industrial model?

Kariuki

Thoughts drop away as you're walking.

When we were walking and crossing rivers we held onto roots or tall grass and reeds to steady ourselves. What did that tell you about how we relate nature?



My time in the wilderness gave me the opportunity to revitalize my connection with nature and learn how resilient nature is.

On my night watch in the wilderness, I really felt hollow in the beginning, nothing came to my mind; no fear, no happiness or sadness. It might have been because I was not fully awake. We had gone to sleep late and I was a bit tired as it was the first day of the walk. But later on, things became clearer and I started realizing that I was in the middle of the natural world somewhere in the Baviaan's Kloof. It was dark in my eyes and light in my heart. I was calm and peaceful, there was nothing to disturb me. I could hear water flowing and wind blowing, making the trees dance calmly. My colleagues slept quietly breathing the fresh air. I was wondering at how resilient and patient nature is to forgive all the evils that human beings have committed. It reminded me how I learnt about the resilience of nature when I was young.

Far back in the past, I was a member of the Ethiopian Navy. I used to sail on the ocean day and night. The fresh air from the sea refreshed our souls. Dolphins and seagulls escorted our ship during the cruise. We used to enjoy the parade of fishes with beautiful golden, blue and gray colours. We also used to jump into the sea and swim with all the friendly creatures. But there was a huge human interference which frequently messed-up all those natural phenomenon. Missiles were blown-up, there was 76mm gun fire, torpedos and sea mines exploded. All of these evils disturbed and destroyed those beautiful creatures. Amazingly, all sorts of lively activities continued a short while after the explosives and gunfire ceased. The Dolphins, fishes and other creatures used to start playing again.

Fassil

The rock bares its back to the river forever. The rock allows itself to be eroded everyday. Can we be resilient like the rock?