

The day Daniel stood seven feet tall

By [Nic Squires](#)

" Be careful, you can get him'. These are the words Daniel used to call fresh tracks. He was seldom wrong. This judgement was a product of many things, mostly time spent on trail and application. Daniel was a ranger for 20' full 'years, based at Nyalaland wilderness trail. Job titles get lost in the wind these days, however Mentor is something that will not.

One afternoon we were conducting an afternoon walk along the Madzaringwe spruit. Behind the trail camp the spruit cuts through a sandstone ridge, creating an idyllic setting. Something one always hoped to hear in this area was the call of the emerald spotted Dove (Xivambalana), resonating against the ridge. This time we came across tracks of an Elephant bull (Kambaku), which included feeding sign and ground spoor. Daniel shifted into tracking mode, almost trance like. Every fibre of his being was convinced the animal was nearby. His body posture was tense; looking at him you would not think he was almost 60 years of age.

I had the fortune of teaming up with Daniel for a partnership spanning 80 wilderness trails at Nyalaland. During this time all of us learned a tremendous amount, being tutored by someone who gave freely of his knowledge and wisdom.

The amount of knowledge disseminated was impossible to quantify, however certain things will always spring to mind, such as him pointing out urine droplets of an Elephant bull in musth, visible in the spoor. This is a very strong warning to those walking, as most reactions of Elephant in this physiological state are characterised by aggression. Daniel is also credited with showing us the droppings of the Ant bear (, a nocturnal recluse. He held the key to the entire wilderness area and places of interest could be the focal point of a walk. Far away to the Northeast of the camp, is a rock overhang on which the San people painted a little Owl. Across from that roughly north, are potholes, when full with water, contain numerous water lilies. If you headed straight North in the morning and had the weather on your side you would come across a magnificent collection of hundreds of Baobab trees.

This was the magic of a pristine wilderness area, as seen through the eyes of one so wise. Unfortunately retirement beckoned and Nyalaland and its patrons said goodbye to a giant.

There are few left of this genre today who can guide us through the wilderness. They have all left their mark in some way, and have all enriched the time that we have spent in the bush. Those of us left behind with many years of experience and asymmetry to our respective postures might unknowingly or by sheer product of time and application be stepping into their shoes.