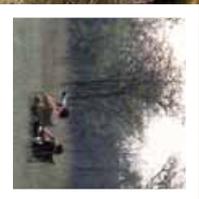


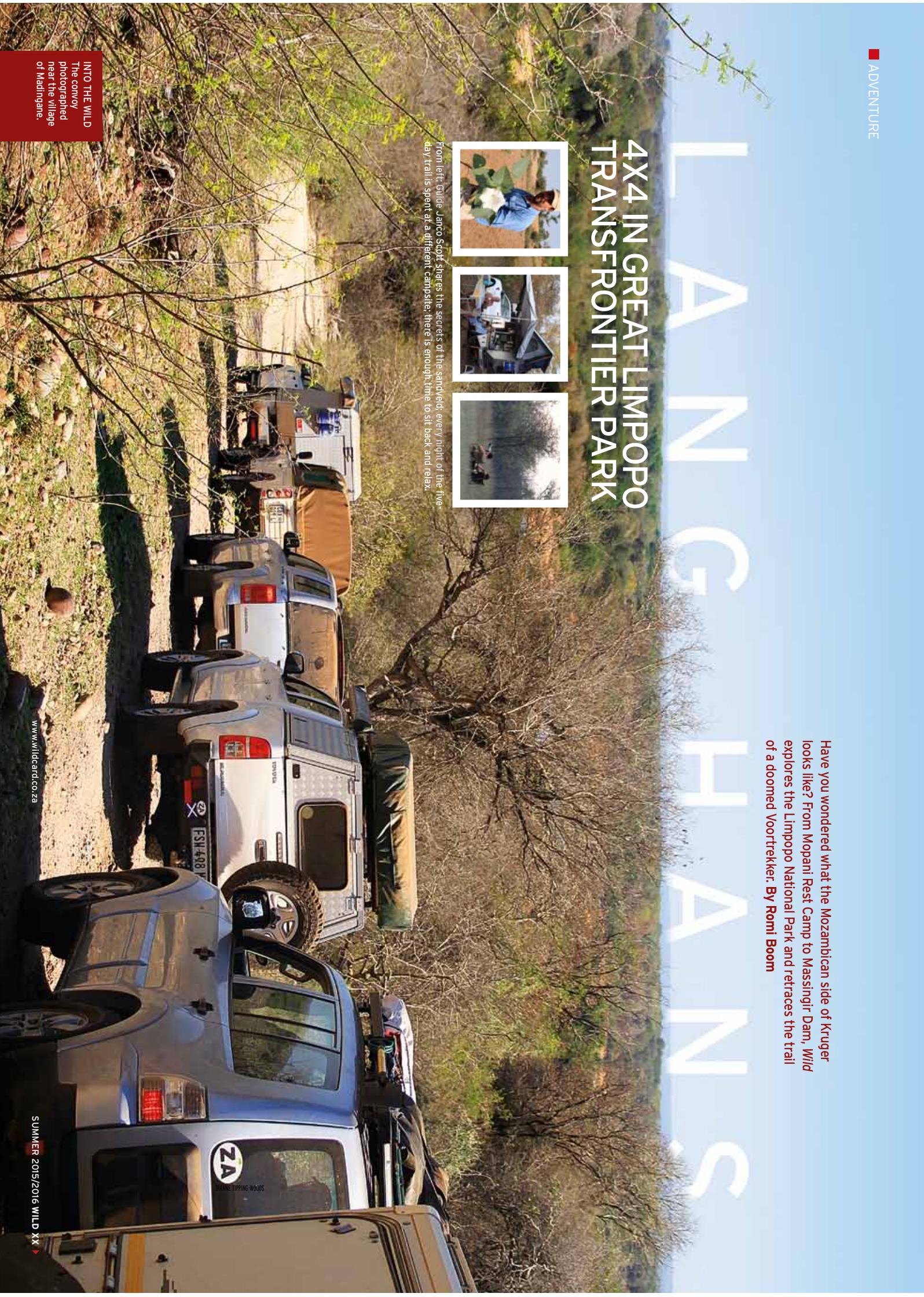
Have you wondered what the Mozambican side of Kruger looks like? From Mopani Rest Camp to Massingir Dam, Wild explores the Limpopo National Park and retraces the trail of a doomed Voortrekker. **By Romi Boom**

LANGLAAN'S

4X4 IN GREAT LIMPOPO TRANSFRONTIER PARK



From left: Guide Janco Scott shares the secrets of the sandveld; every night of the five-day trail is spent at a different campsite; there is enough time to sit back and relax.



INTO THE WILD
The convoy photographed near the village of Madingane.

Despite the balminess of mid-afternoon, it is spine-chilling to be standing at the site of a massacre, 61 kilometres north of the confluence of the Olifants and Limpopo rivers.

We are in Mozambique, in the Limpopo National Park. A striking baobab marks the spot where 30 Voortrekker children and 21 adults were ambushed in the dead of night in July 1836.

The ill-fated party of Lang Hans van Rensburg, a 56-year-old hunter who intended to pioneer the trail to Delagoa Bay and sell ivory, had already trekked through the present-day Kruger National Park up to the Limpopo River. When the trekkers reached the banks of the Djindi tributary, they were attacked by impis.

I have long wondered what the Mozambican side of Kruger looks like, and the fully guided Lang Hans Trail is an opportunity to explore the 'other side of the fence'. After meeting our guide, Janco Scott, at Mopani Rest Camp, we travelled in a convoy of five vehicles on management tracks across the Lebombo range. On this section, the Shiluba part of the Lebombo Trail, we passed a few mud-encrusted dagha boys that left no doubt as to how they got their name.

The border crossing at Giryondo was pleasant and quick, and then we made tracks to our first campsite, more or less in the centre of the Limpopo National Park. The park existed as a hunting concession area since 1969 and was upgraded to park status only in 2001. As a direct result of the civil war, wildlife on the dry lowland savannah is scarce, but the habitat is still excellent and over 4 000 animals have been relocated from Kruger. The park's primary attraction is the wilderness experience, and nature lovers will find much to see and enjoy. We were soon won over by the scenery and excellent birding.

Initially it was a strange sight to pass the villages with their *machambas* (fields) on the floodplain. Processes are under way to resettle 1 370 households from the Core to the Buffer Zone. These communities plant seasonal crops and own Nguni cattle and goats. It is expected that once the communities have been relocated, plains game will move into those areas.

On day one, our campsite beyond the village of Mbona Kaya was at a spectacular, concealed spot overlooking the Shingwedzi River and a permanent waterhole. We were surprised by sightings of nyalas and woolly-neck storks, with trumpeter hornbills in many trees and bubbly calls from the undergrowth revealing the presence of Burchell's coucal.

A jolly evening around the campfire sufficed for the group to bond and the next morning, after breakfast everyone sauntered down to the riverbed for a lesson from Janco. He pointed out a tilapia kraal in the waterhole, commando ants, datura (castor-oil) flowers which are said to be hallucinogenic, tamboti ringbarbed by porcupines, an African civet toilet with evidence of the millipedes it feeds on, even a monkey skull. Keep your eyes open and you'll discover riches!

With each passing day we learnt more about the vegetation, which ranges from Mopane shrubveld and Nwambila sandveld to mixed bushveld and riverine woodland. The sandveld plains are the dominant geological feature and represent an area 30 times larger than the total extent of sandveld found in Kruger. The unique features of the sandy landscape contribute to the conservation value of the transfrontier park.

Our second campsite at Handekooppan (Leadwood Pan) was idyllic, a vast open space where the convoy could spread out and chill before reassembling as soon as the campfire was lit. None of the campsites are formally designated or fenced. On the previous trip, elephant and buffalo paid the dwindling waterhole a visit. We were happy



1123 316 ha

SIZE OF THE LIMPOPO NATIONAL PARK, ABOUT HALF THE SIZE OF KRUGER.

2000 Establishment of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park comprising Kruger National Park in South Africa, Limpopo National Park in Mozambique and Gonarezou National Park in Zimbabwe.

4 5



THEO BUSSCHAU
"I enjoy the bush, so this is right up my alley!"



MAGDA MCGEE
"We have learnt so much on this trip. It is even more interesting once you understand the sandveld!"



CORNE MCGEE
"We love camping and this is as close to nature as one can wake up."



EDWARD VAN DYK
"The best part for me is the evenings around the campfire, the conversations, just being outdoors."



MATTHEW DUV
"It is completely different on the other side of the Kruger border. The untrodden roads are a treat!"

1 The Avis Overland Camper is equipped with everything you need. **2** An impressive baobab, close to where Lang Hans and his party had camped. **3** The Lang Hans trail covers a relaxing 400km in five days, nothing compared to the heavily laden ox-wagons of the Voortrekkers, which managed only 5 to 15km a day. **4** Relaxing around the campfire in the evenings is a highlight of the trail. **5** The 4x4 trail traverses dense bush, often on narrow cattle tracks.

To watch the video of *Wild's* Lang Hans 4x4 trail – and share the thrills! – go to wildcard.co.za and type “Lang Hans” in the search box.

To read more about the five-day Lang Hans Trail, Machampane Wilderness Camp and Transfrontier Parks Destinations, go to www.dolimpopo.com and www.tfpd.co.za. Trailists must be self-sufficient. **Cost:** R5400 a vehicle, which includes camping fees for four nights, but not conservation fees.

Wild travelled with Avis Safari Rental. For an overlander trip report, go to www.wildcard.co.za and search “Avis Safari Camper”.

On a guided game drive from Jock Safari Lodge you'll explore the area traversed by the old wagon route to Delagoa Bay.

Old Trade ROUTE

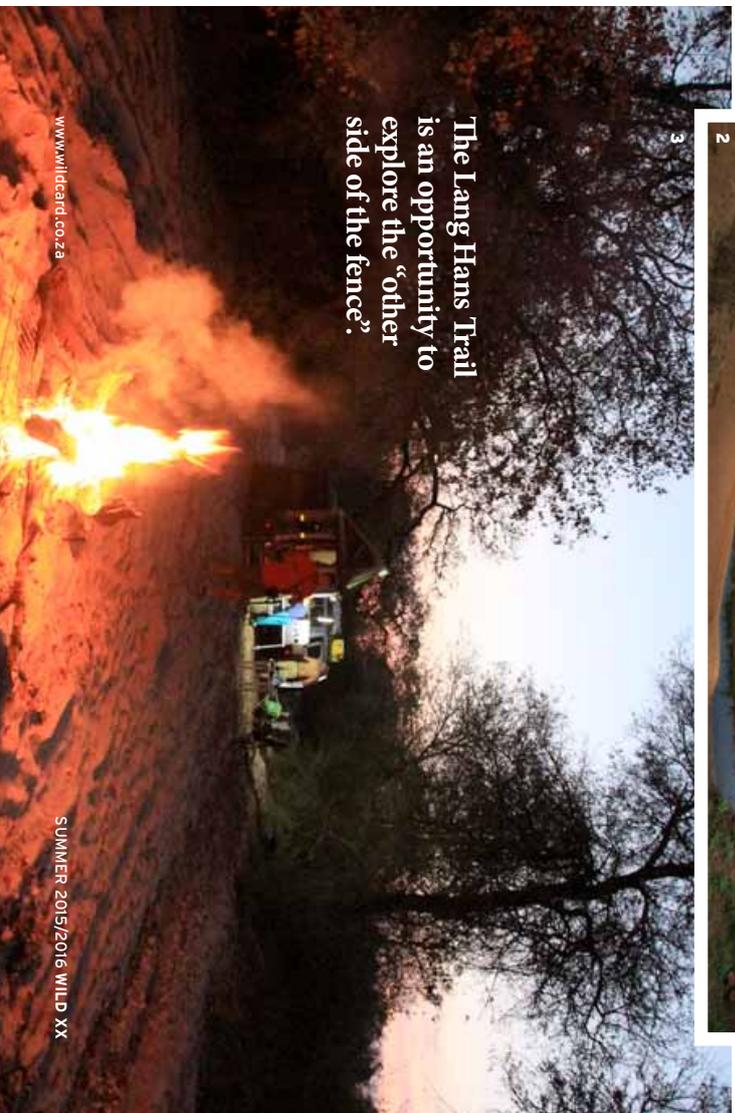
with fish eagles, scorpions and frogs. The third night was spent at the site of the massacre, at the confluence of the Djin-di and the Limpopo, in the shade of tall jackalberry trees. Our vehicles were strung out like the oxwagons would have been, except that we camped in the dry, sandy woodland of the riverbanks. When Janco claimed to have heard a chilling shriek on a previous visit, a huge bonfire was stoked to ward off any lingering ghosts. By the light of its dancing flames, we pondered the mysterious Aeljee 12-8-68 inscription on the trunk of the baobab where we had stood that afternoon, as well as the tale of the anvil which belonged to Van Rensburg and was found near the very same tree, 100 metres from the Limpopo River. Our final campsite was at White Cliffs overlooking the Olifants River, at a launch site of the three-day, 50 kilometre Rio Elefanties canoe trail. The next morning the rest of the group continued onwards to reach Giriyondo and Kruger at noon. We proceeded to Machampane Wilderness Camp, where wilderness walks are the primary attraction. The best game-viewing area is said to be in the Machampane concession section of the park. Over the past five days we had had as much fun as you could possibly have on a 4x4 trail. We had enjoyed the intermittent churring of the Mozambique nightjar, marvelled at fever and fig trees along the Shingwedzi, Olifants and Limpopo river banks, watched saddle-billed storks standing 1,5 metres tall, Kingfishers and brown snake eagles, plus the latter's prey, yellow-bellied sand snake and brown house snake. We had seen how the locals make lala palm wine from the vegetable ivory palm which only grows where the water table is lower than 18 metres. As a final reminder of the Limpopo National Park's surprises, on the last stretch to Giriyondo, we happened upon a group of 10 giraffes. Their relaxed grazing, in complete disregard of our approaching vehicle, was testimony that despite the harshness of the terrain and poaching, one of the best wildlife areas in Southern Africa is in the process of being conserved. 🌿

1. Bush camping at its best! The Avis Safari Overland Camper takes five minutes to set up or close up.
2. Sandveld plains dominate on the other side of Kruger's eastern border.
3. A blazing bonfire banishes the ghosts of Lang Hans's party.



While Lang Hans van Rensburg never realised his dream of a transport road to Delagoa Bay, the wagon route between the interior and the coast was regularly used between 1874 and 1882 by the author of the famous *Jock in the Bushveld*, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick. Jock Safari Lodge is one of the SANParks' Golden Kudu or luxury lodges, in the southwest of Kruger, and the concession's southern boundary is the old wagon route from Delagoa Bay into the interior. *Out of Africa* style memorabilia in the lodge commemorates the transport rider's adventures with his dog Jock during the pioneering days of the Bushveld.

The concession is known for its diversity of game. “The best place to seek out the Big Five is the dry river bed of the Biyamiti,” said general manager Louis Strauss. It is one of two seasonal rivers that originate in the Jock Safari Lodge concession. The lodge is built at the confluence of the Biyamiti and the Miltonen. Apart from the scenic beauty of the area, guests can easily imagine what the unnamed wilderness was like when the lure of gold brought men from all corners of the world to the Transvaal.



The Lang Hans Trail is an opportunity to explore the “other side of the fence”.