

Huberta belongs to us says King museum

By Denver Donlan

KING WILLIAM'S TOWN
Any attempts to "kidnap" Huberta the wandering hippo from her resting place at the Amathole Museum here would be repulsed, director Lloyd Wingate said yesterday.

He was reacting to week-end newspaper reports stating that three South African towns are locked in a heavy-weight fight over the stuffed remains of the world's most celebrated hippopotamus, Huberta.

Wingate denied that the Amathole Museum was embroiled in the dispute: "Huberta belongs here. No questions. So why fight for some thing that is rightfully ours."

According to the reports, residents of St Lucia in KwaZulu-Natal have threatened to kidnap the mounted specimen.

"We are going to do our utmost to bring Huberta back to her grassland roots in Zululand, even if we have to use force to get into the Amathole Museum and steal her," the chairman of the Hlanganani Tourism Association was quoted as saying.

Richards Bay has also entered the fray: "They cannot prove she came

from St Lucia," said Errard Sullivan, chairman of the Richard's Bay Tourism Association.

This is not the first attempt to lay claim to Huberta. In 1931, prior to her death, the Bloemfontein Zoo obtained a permit to trap her in the

Kaffrarian Museum — the museum changed its name to Amathole Museum on January 25, 1999 — Captain Guy Shortridge, took a taxi to Keiskammahoek as the museum had no transport to oversee the skinning process.

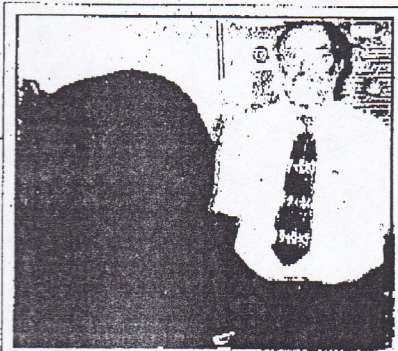
"Subsequent to this, the Kaffrarian Museum sent the skin to London to be mounted and all these costs were borne by the museum," Wingate said. Now, almost 68 years later, two other tourist organisations in KwaZulu-Natal are laying claim to her.

"The Amathole Museum is in possession of Huberta and having paid for her mounting along with other expenses incurred, she is considered museum property," Wingate said.

Wingate stated emphatically that Huberta belonged here and "here she will stay".

"Huberta is a big drawcard ... and last year alone an estimated 30 000 people passed through the doors to catch a glimpse of her."

"Having spent 68 years at the Amathole Museum where she is suitably enshrined ... we will have no choice but to call in the police to deal with anyone who tries to remove her," Wingate said.



Museum director Lloyd Wingate stands alongside Amathole Museum's most prized creature, Huberta the wandering hippo.

Picture by DENVER DONIAN

Nahoon River. The attempt failed. After Huberta's death the zoo attempted to claim ownership by using the permit. It too failed.

Wingate said other museums from Natal also "tried to poach" Huberta, but to no avail.

Huberta's life came to an end in a hail of bullets in the Keiskamma River on April 23, 1931 and her carcass was subsequently found floating in the river.

The then director of the