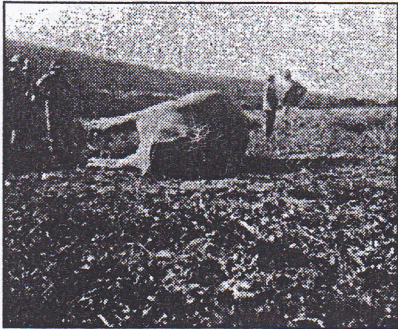


Tourist towns wage war over Huberta the hippo

TRAGIC END: Huberta's corpse after she was shot by four farmers in 1931



GRIG SALGADO

THREE South African towns are locked in a heavyweight fight over the stuffed remains of the world's most celebrated hippopotamus, Huberta.

The battle has become so heated that residents of St Lucia, in northern KwaZulu-Natal, are threatening to kidnap the mounted specimen from its resting place in a King William's Town museum.

"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," said Peet Oberholzer, chairman of the Hlanganani Tourism Association.

Huberta died in a hail of bullets in the Keiskamma River, near King William's Town, in 1931 after surviving a three-year trek from Zululand — which included a visit to a Durban police station.

Described as the most remarkable hippo that ever lived, the three-ton pachyderm was pursued by Sunday Times reporters on her 1600km journey and captured the world's imagination, with updates on her progress appearing in Punch and the Chicago Tribune.

Richards Bay has also entered the fray, scoffing at plans being hatched in St Lucia. Town officials insist that Huberta's remains be placed in a glass case in the port's civic centre.

"They can't prove she came from St Lucia," said

Errard Sullivan, chairman of the Richards Bay tourism association. "It could have been Hluhluwe or Kosi Bay, for that matter. What we do know is that her last port of call before she left the area would have been Richards Bay."

Lloyd Wingate, director of the Amathole Museum, is equally determined to defend Huberta's honour.

"King William's Town is where Huberta belongs," he said. "She was moving away from KwaZulu-Natal when she was shot. I don't think that, after 68 years, KwaZulu-Natal can all of a sudden lay claim to her."

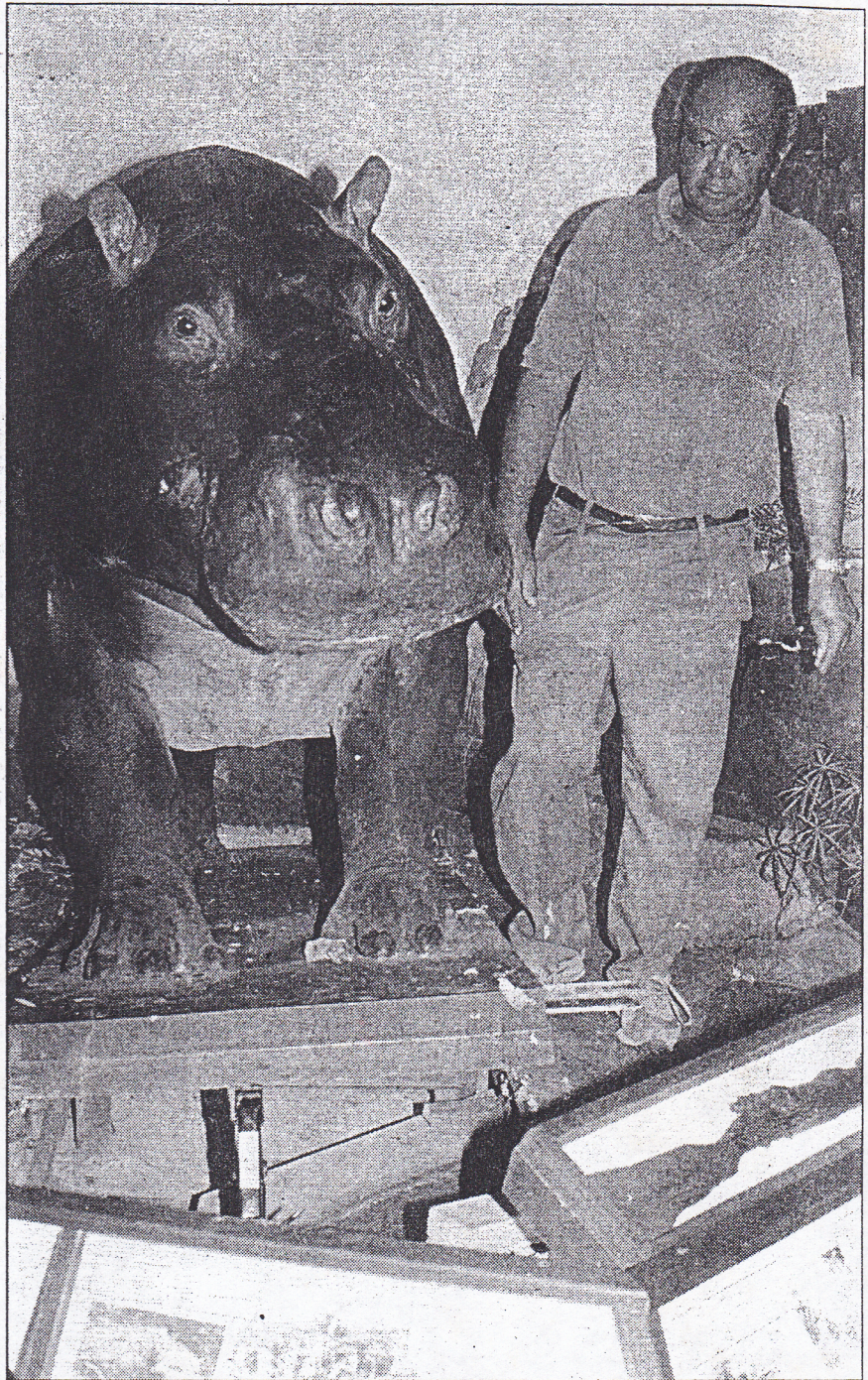
The battle over Huberta is to do with her tourist appeal. So well known was she that upon her return from a taxidermist in London in 1932 more than 20 000 people flocked to see the mounted mammal on loan to the Durban Museum for two months.

The hippo's legendary name is a cherry ripe for the picking. And picking is precisely what Oberholzer plans to do, with the help of Phillip Mkhwanazi and Siphso Zungu, the leaders of the tourism association of Dukuduku, which borders St Lucia.

"We are very serious about stealing Huberta," said Oberholzer. "We are even prepared to go to jail for a year or two."

He insists that Huberta was from the Lake St Lucia area and got such a fright when Zulu impis attacked a group of Shangaans in the Dukuduku forest that she fled south.

"The hippo's real name is Dukuduku, because in the bushes there was no



HEAVY GOING: Huberta begins her journey to the Grahamstown Science Festival this year

noise and you could hear her heartbeat — duku, duku. We have secretly looked at Huberta in the museum and identified her as Dukuduku. There are certain marks on her ear that the old people of the forest remember her by," said Oberholzer.

She was christened Hubert by the press, since she was assumed to be a male until examined after her death.

Numerous myths grew up around her as she pounded her way southwards. Zulus believed she was a reincarnation of King Shaka, while Xhosas hon-

oured her as the spirit of a great chief who had returned to the world to seek justice for his people.

The Mpondo revered her as the spirit of a famous sangoma, and Hindus on the South Coast deified her as the protector of the poor. Whites were so distressed when she was shot that the government ordered a top-level police investigation into her killing.

Despite wrecking vegetable patches, devouring sugar cane, terrifying farm workers and visiting a police station during a whistle-stop tour of

Durban, Huberta was protected for most of her journey after being given "royal game" status.

Her end came at the hands of four farmers, who were subsequently fined £25 each for shooting her.

"Huberta made no effort to run. So they dried their hands and they levelled their guns," Jeremy Taylor crooned in his song about the tragedy, *Huberta*.

"They fired in her nose, in her eyes, in her head/ They fired in her belly till the river ran red/ Huberta, why did you leave home?/ What made you want to walk alone?"

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