

Background and article for newspaper October, 2010
Barry Vernon Home Owner of Fynbos Camp No 11 Gondwana Game Reserve.

In November, 2005 I read an article by Alexander Garrett titled 'Where the neighbours are Wild-A home on Gondwana Game Reserve is definitely different'. Having spent over 15 years on 'safari' type holidays to Africa, Thailand, Mexico, Costa Rica I had decided that a home on a Game Reserve would become my dream. So in 2006 I started on the project to fulfil that dream. This is the story of that project and my link with Gondwana Game Reserve and Wendy and Mark Rutherford on how easy it was and how the reserve has matured and become an outstanding world class reserve increasingly attractive to visitors and potential home owners.

I really had fallen for Africa the size and feeling of remoteness while being close to wild and free animals was what I wanted not just for two weeks but at any time I wanted and for any length of time I suppose I wanted to be free to roam like the animals on the Masi Mara. But Kenya was unstable still difficult to travel the distances to the game reserves, Namibia was vast but very under developed while South Africa had a lot going for it. They speak English drive on the left have a developed economy and good transport links also the food and wine are great. So it was South Africa.

A research via the internet was the first part of the plan to research 3 options of a house on a game reserve that would be a good investment and give the quality of experience I was looking for. It had to be close to an airport that I could fly to from the UK, close to a town for shopping, entertainment and business contacts. So I narrowed refined my search and only of what was available that Gondwana ticked all the boxes.

I travelled by South African airways and booked straight through to George Airport via Cape Town. I stayed in Mossel Bay and on the next day we drove to Gondwana along the N2 then onto the R327 and after 20 minute we turned left onto the gravel road. Suddenly the mountains came into view. The place became very remote and that feeling that I got in Kenya came back. This was it.

But this was better lots of rolling valleys with Fynbos vegetation with the backdrop of the Outinique Mountains.

The plots at this time were just a stick in the ground but the plans and guidelines gave a good impression of what a house on Gonwana would look like. I chose Fynbos Camp plot 11.

I flew back the next day. In all this took 3 days. On return having given Braam Deacon my power of attorney to act for me all contracts were signed and the building started. Stage payment were part of the contract so I arranged to purchase the necessary Rand via HIFX at exchange rates of between 15 to 17 rand to the £. This fixed the cost so I had no currency fluctuations to worry about. The money being transferred to my solicitors trust account. They invested any surplus cash for me at rates up to 9%. So my money was working for me while the builder finished each stage.

I cannot stress how easy and trouble free this all went I did my bit by paying on time and the builder got the job done with no hassle to me. Vicky my wife never got involved in these details so we decided to take a holiday to South Africa and do a 14 day tour. As we were staying near by we opted not to take the day tour but hired a taxi to drive to Gondwana to show Vicky what we had got for our money and me to see the building and the reserve development. You can image my anxiety. What if Vicky doesn't like it, have I done the right thing? Well when we arrived they showed us round a finished house (It was very reassuring that the agent had brought and built a house). The house was fully furnished to a very high standard I had agreed to also buy the same furnishing for my house. We were delighted at the house, thatched, larger then we imagined beautiful furniture. Or house was at final fix stage but when we visited it the position was just brilliant. Stunning views, large deck with Braai(barbecue), open fires, two huge bedrooms with walk in showers. On return to our party on the tour we were all smiles. The taxi driver thanked us for taking to Gondwana he said ' it was like going to heaven'. Vicky loved it.

We made our first stay in February for just 1 week. The house was finished to a very high standard the snagging had been done for use thanks to a very efficient project manager. The animals had been arriving in stages including two black rhino's. To make the best of our time we booked a game drive, what an experience the most knowledgeable ranger called 'Forget' with an amazing capacity for collective nouns. We had just great fun with him but it was not just the animals but the Fynbos was just huge in area and so

colourful and the birds that lived there were just stunning. Particularly a Black Harrier who visited us nearly every day flying low over the Fynbos, twitching his way then darting down to catch some prey.

We now visited again in May and again in August each time the colour of the Fynbos is different May it seems to be all white, August it comes all lilac. The place is so stunning. Each time we visit we take a game drive as more and more animals including the big 5 now live on the reserve. I have come quite an expert on watching the animals from our deck. I notice the way the Zebra behave when there are Lions close by. Eland, Gemsprock, Rhebuck, Lions and Elephants all have passed by our deck. During the day I can drive on all the roads and undertake my very own game drives. Where in the world can you say that?

Gondwana is world class in the facilities now developed. A home owners lodge a hotel with a bar and separate restaurant. It makes a great holiday for us and our guest who also just love the place. It is quite special. It feels remote but only a short drive from the essential of life, eating, drinking and shopping. When we retire we plan to spend October and November and January, February and March away from our cold wet winters.

I have done well on my original investment though prices of plots, just a few are still available; have not been escalated by Mark and Wendy. The outlook is sound increasing numbers of paying guests more and more diverse animals, the Fynbos being protected. Gondwana is a magic place to visit run by very caring individuals Wendy and Mark Rutherford. We the home owners all share and contribute to their vision of what the reserve is and will become.

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