



HILTON COLLEGE

A letter to Old Hiltonians

Quarter 3 / 2020



The Estate

Quarter 3 | 2020

Dear Hiltonians,

Pinnacles, Gwens, Wheelbarrows, Rolling Stones, Ledges, Beacons, Teapots, Big Rock, Haunted House and Clumps are famous names that invoke nostalgia amongst Hiltonians, reminding them of the happiest of days.

The **Estate**, as it is known to us, is inextricably linked with the life of a Hilton boy. No other school in the world has anything like it, it is truly unique. This is a place that has remained unchanged for generations. A place that has had a positive influence on so many boys. A place that allows for learning, for reflection, for growth, for restoration.

During this difficult period of **Covid-19**, the Estate is a refuge for the boys, allowing them to socially distance and yet to also have complete freedom.

As owners of the school, Hiltonians are encouraged to make use of the Estate which today comprises **1,624 hectares**.

In July 2011, part of the Estate was officially recognised as a nature reserve under the Department of Environmental Affairs' Biodiversity Stewardship Programme. The **Hilton College Nature Reserve** is recognized as an area of conservation significance due to its biodiversity, patches of Natal Mistbelt Grassland, and the presence of endangered species such as the Natal Giant Cycad and Natal Red Rock Rabbit. In addition, the reserve also forms part of the important uMngeni water catchment area.

From a historical perspective, a number of **iron age archaeological sites** have recently been discovered on the Estate, supporting the necessity of conserving this invaluable asset. At one site, fragments of clay pots dating back approximately 1,300 years were unearthed.

The Nature Reserve is now easily accessible by road, which leads to the **Henley Lapa**, on the banks of the uMngeni River. For those of you that knew Hilton before the floods of 1987, this is the site where Big Rock used to be.

Close by is **Derek's**, a picnic site, situated on a knoll overlooking the uMngeni valley. This setting, together with the views from the decks are spectacular and well worth a visit. In addition, there are three other viewing points which also have picnic facilities - Beacons, which overlooks the Albert Falls dam; The Point, offering an excellent view of the uMngeni River and the Gwens Valley; and finally, Bennie's View, which looks out towards Otto's Bluff.

Under the guidance of Dave White and George Harris, Hilton boys constructed a **game fence** around the reserve in order to help protect its biodiversity. It is worth noting that all of the hiking trails and many of the picnic sites on the Hilton Estate were also constructed by Hilton boys.

The Estate is blessed with an abundance of fauna and flora, being home to about **28 mammal species**; including Giraffe, Zebra, Blue Wildebeest, Oribi, Warthog, Bushbuck, Duiker, Bushpig, Porcupine, Black-backed Jackal, and Kudu.

Close to **100 species of tree** have been identified on the Estate. Of particular interest is the discovery of a Mountain Cedar Tree just above Rolling Stones. Typically, this species is found growing in the Drakensberg, with this particular specimen being well out of its normal range.

A letter to Old Hiltonians

Over **300 bird species** have been recorded on the Hilton Estate. This includes six species of owl and many raptor species. Blue Cranes have been breeding at Supply Dams and at Henderson Dam for many years now, while the Grey-crowned Crane have been breeding at the Farm Dam for the past five years or so.

When it comes to **snakes**, neither Black Mamba nor Green Mamba have positively been confirmed as existing on the Estate. However, Puff Adder, are occasionally found on the Estate in the plantations and the rocky areas around Rolling Stones. In 2008 a large number of African Rock Python eggs were found at the bottom of the Teapots Valley, and in July of that year, a Python, estimated at nearly 4m in length, was sighted in the valley.

Linked to the Estate is the **Dave White Conservation Centre**. The centre is home to the school's Conservation Department which assists in the release of rehabilitated birds of prey. Other projects led by the Department are the re-introduction of the highly threatened Hilton Daisy to a protected area of Natal Mistbelt Grassland near Supply Dams; and Hilton's successful **recycling programme** with the Wildlands Trust. As the school strives to reduce its carbon footprint and embrace **environmental sustainability**, **rain water harvesting** and **solar energy** projects are also being investigated.

The Hilton Estate is also synonymous with **adventure**. For generations of Hiltonians, their fondest memories were of exploring the Gwens valley with its beautiful waterfalls, tubing down the uMngeni river, or of lazy days spent at Pinnacles or Rolling Stones. Today, there are about 25km of purpose built **mountain biking** and **trail running** tracks on the Estate. These routes are sign posted and are regularly maintained. There are two main routes - a 16km track towards Beacons, and a 10km trail towards Rolling Stones and the Gwens Valley.

If you have an interesting story about your time on the Estate, we would love to hear from you! Please share your anecdotes with the Director of Advancement - Amanda Thorburn – by emailing her at advancement@hiltoncollege.com

In many, the Estate fostered a deep appreciation of wildlife and conservation. In a time of climate change and environmental degradation, the Estate is a unique platform for educating people about our natural world.

I put it to you that the Hilton Estate is an invaluable piece of our natural heritage. We have a responsibility as custodians of this magnificent piece of Africa, to safeguard it for generations to come.

In conclusion to my third letter of 2020, I invite you all to come and visit the Hilton Estate, you will be very glad you did. To arrange access, and to receive a map, please email mya@hiltoncollege.com

Yours sincerely,

Anton Jooste – Chairman, Old Hiltonian Club
ChairmanOHC@hiltoncollege.com

