

Publication: **PiX African Photo Journal**

Edition: May/June 2005

Heavenly...

As we journey through this life we are periodically blessed by something or somebody truly unique. I think my quota has been filled for a good while in the recent past by the people I met in Kenya and then coming back home to have the privilege of spending the day with Koos van der Lende. I first met this man when I was ten years old. Never knew him well, but knew of him, even then his aura of serenity left an indelible impression, just one of those things, some people make an impression. 20 Years later I find him a landscape master without peer.

A very spiritual being who thrives on his time alone in the wilderness with his beloved earth and God.



With a 20 year history of working commercially in studios came his thorough understanding of light –actually, its more than an understanding, it's a unique affinity, a oneness with the light and landscape he chooses to surround himself with. Through his years of experience in the bush he has learned to anticipate, to a certain degree what lighting God has in store for him on a given day. A patient observer, Koos will first make himself aware of his surroundings. Any journey into a remote, pristine landscape begins with a five day walk of the area with a viewer in hand and not a camera in sight, becoming aware, acclimatized, at one with the nature. When it is time to get down to business, his camera of choice is a Fuji GX617 – a medium format view camera that exposes a 6cm x 17cm shot – 4 exposures to a roll of 120 film. Linhoff also has a 6 x 17 offering, but his choice was based on a 1 stop light fall off from lens centre to edge of film in the Fuji as apposed to a 3 stop fall off in the Linhoff. Another factor was that the Fuji – at that stage – offered the versatility of interchangeable lenses – 90mm wide angle, 180mm and 900mm lenses are in his arsenal. For composition he will use a ground-screen viewed from underneath a black cloth. A sturdy Gitzo tripod, light meter, polarizing filter reflectors and trusty Landcruiser with nearly half a million kilometers on the clock make up the rest of his essential equipment. For two months he will live alone in his tent and average one scene shot every two days. The longest he has ever waited for a single scene is 12 days. Koos van der Lende is a one man crusade to capture and glorify our beautiful Southern African landscape – and a privileged browse through his life's work for me, confirms that this man has put together a green document – a piece of heritage of awe inspiring beauty. As unique as Koos is, if I had to compare him, one name falls instantly on my lips – Ansel Adams.

Koos operates without the boundaries of fear – every evening sees him walking back from his shoots to his campsite alone in the dark – up to a kilometer away. Sometimes he will not take his car near a landscape he sees as pure and pristine. Absolute uncompromising dedication, wholly consumed by his crusade to present to us his beautiful world.



The de Lende Collection is not enhanced in post production – the colours and light you see in his images are as they were at the time. He makes minimal use of filters – a central grey filter to compensate for light fall off in the long format, a graduated grey filter to balance bright skies and sometimes a warming filter to pick up the cool shadows.

Koos van der Lende had this to say 'We have photographic opportunities all around us, all the time. Photography has heightened my senses to all that happens around me. Shapes, forms, structures and colours being illuminated either by artificial or natural light. It enriches ones life, because you notice the subtle changes of light in which colour changes and shapes are formed.

Each and every person on this earth was born with a unique fingerprint, a unique character, passion and purpose. Only when we discover that unique purpose can our lives be truly fulfilled. For me, to spend 2 months in any unspoilt area humbles me for the grace I have received to have found my unique fingerprint. Praise, adoration and love pours out of my whole being for every details that is evidence of Gods power and love. The fact that I travel solo is based on a handful of words: in perfect love there is no fear. Driving into remote areas in Angola, crossing through the wild rivers in Mozambique, sleeping on a horn adder underneath the tent all night in Namibia, lions harassing me in Botswana, chasing elephants away at night along the Shingwedzi River in Mozambique. Drenched, ankle deep in water and hundreds of meters from relief in an electric rainstorm with my camera where the eerie charge of lightning was clearly audible and a 25m black mamba rearing its venomous head to chest height when threatened with my presence in Vhembe Dongola National Park.

Leaving home on my journey of discovery in to the bush, I have no time table or pressure to produce. No exchange of money involved in shooting. I shoot because it is my passion and whether I come home with one image or thirty stunning landscapes, is irrelevant. I don't want to compromise because of pressure involving money introduces and only give my best in the given situation. It is better to get home with one excellent photographed than five compromised ones.

To be like a child in the hand of God, enjoying every weather fluctuation and landscape is for me the highest high to know after a week of pouring rain that it will shine again.

It is very important to visualize your end product. I spend hours observing the scene and contemplating what could be done to create the best image – angle, time of day, reflector boards, painting with light, movement, choice of film, pushing the film or not, filters etc. Lying in bed at night going through all the images over and over again, confirming in your mind that it worked or what could have been done to make it better.

And so each one of us is unique. Have you asked yourself what your passion is and the path towards that? It took me 46 years to get to the point.

