

Argyle

Before the formation of Sharalumi, the farm Argyle was owned by Mr Koos Louw. The story that follows is an interview, recounted verbatim, that occurred in March 1993 between the Leopard Ladies (Elvira and Aileen) and an ex-employee of Oom Koos, an African by the name of Malplank, who had returned to the farm to 'collect his father's spirit'.



Argyle Farmhouse - early 1980's

'My family came here when I was 9 years old. My father Jim was employed by Baas Louw and I helped in the kitchen. I was paid R20.00 per month and when I left, I was getting R40.00. We were given some meat and mealie meal. Later I had a son James, (born 22 September 1957) who is with me today.'
(We estimate Malplank to be in his 70's).

'Baas Louw had 300 cattle on this farm, and over the road (Ntsiri and Buffelsbed), Mr Rochat had 400 cattle. Baas Louw's father used to farm where that cafe (the Tsakani cafe on Sibon) is now, and they farmed Afrikaners. Baas Louw used to drive a big Chevy van and

used the car to go to Nelspruit. The cattle had many ticks and we had to dip them every Monday which was a big job. The cattle were fat and slept in a kraal but the lions often attacked them. Baas Louw drank too much brandy - even during the day - to shoot the lions but Mrs Rochart shot the lions often. Mr Rochart worked on the mines in the city so his wife worked on the farm.

The river did not flow often and we had to use boreholes for our water. The cattle only drank from the crip. The grass did not grow as long as it is now. I have never seen the grass so long. We battled to get grass for our roofs and used to cut palms to thatch the houses.

We used to take the cattle to Acornhoek to put them on the train. It used to take us two days to get them there. The train would take them to Johannesburg. Hoedspruit was not here in those days, only maybe one or two houses, but no shops. We bought our food in Acornhoek.



Argyle Farmhouse - early 1980's

There were many pangolin, kudu, giraffe, zebra, waterbuck, tsessebe, wildebeest, and impala but no elephant. There were a few sable and many lions and hyena. Sometimes we saw wild dogs. Nobody had horses here as they were too scared to ride with lions about. We used to travel to Acornhoek by bicycle.

Baboons were a big problem. They were always coming into the house. The hippos would come from there (*he pointed in the direction of the Olifants River*). There was a fence at the top of the farm over the road (the Kruger Park fence). There wasn't much rain – the people used to cry for rain. Our mealies grew very badly and we had to dig the ground by hand. The area we used to grow was the open plains below the place where you have the tall seat (*Lookout Tower*). Our house was there and we grew our mealies on the flat ground there. The land wasn't flat when we came, but we made it flat to plant our mealies. There were 3 houses there and 4 where you have the water behind Bass Louw's house (*Elephant Pan*).

Our family had many chickens but the snakes were always trying to get them. We had many mambas. The people used to get sick in the summer from mosquitos. It was hard to get them to a doctor.'



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Malplank explained why they had come to fetch his father's spirit.

'My father's spirit was unhappy because we moved away and he wanted us to come back. The witch doctor told us that my father's spirit was very angry and had made James sick. James nearly died and still uses a stick because he has difficulty in walking. Because he wanted the family to come back to their old home, my father's spirit did not want to go with us then and jumped off the back of the bakkie, so

when we got home, we found him gone. We have now come back to fetch him and has agreed to come with us. He is waiting in the bakkie for us, so we better not talk for too long otherwise he will get cross with us again'.

With that they got in the bakkie and drove off with Malplank's father in the back.

