



campfires to the harsh cries of the iconic African Fish Eagle and the sinister shapes of the crocodiles that line the banks and, terrifyingly, occasionally bump their flimsy canoes.

This is highly recommended for all canoeists and nature lovers, and for those who enjoy the nostalgia of a different way of life.

JOHN YELD

(Edited reprint
courtesy of the *Cape Argus*)

Leadership School, that has exposed so many people to the philosophy – some might say religion – of wilderness.

This book, a welcome reprint of a genuine piece of Africana, explains in great detail and with exceptional clarity just how Player developed his world-view and what drove him to his several astounding achievements.

Canoeing enthusiasts, particularly those who do the annual “Dusi” between Maritzburg and Durban, will read with fascination the history of this now world-famous canoe marathon that was initiated by Player in 1951 and who, not surprisingly, also won the first three races.

More than 50 years on, they will marvel at the hardships that Player and his early comrades in the Natal Canoe Club endured with their primitive equipment and minimal support from outside. Player’s first-person narrative has an immediacy and honesty that takes the readers with him right into the steaming hot river valleys of Natal where he and his companions battled the rapids and the heat.

Despite not being a canoeist, I nevertheless found the first half of the book interesting and entertaining, but my attention was really grabbed in the latter half, which is a detailed account of some of Player’s experiences as a game ranger and – particularly – of a major expedition (by canoe, naturally) that he and fellow Ndumu game reserve ranger Ken Tinley undertook down the Pongolo River in 1956.

This was a true wilderness experience on a river as yet untamed by the major dam that came later, although even then the first pressures of a burgeoning rural population were beginning to impact on the great river, and Player correctly anticipates some of the major environmental problems that would emerge both here and elsewhere on the sub-continent in the coming decades.

His descriptions of the river and of his and Tinley’s reactions to this mostly untouched wilderness are deeply evocative – from the wood smoke of their

MEN, RIVERS & CANOES

By Ian Player. Published by Echoing Green Press. Available from all good bookshops and Netbooks Tel. 021-551-4248. www.netbooks.co.za. 258 pages, maps in envelope inside back cover. Size 170 x 245 mm. Hardcover with dust jacket; R240. ISBN 978-0-9802501-2-1.

Ian Player is rightly considered the “father of canoeing” in the sub-continent and he’s also the doyen of nature conservationists, partly for his many years’ work for the then Natal Parks Board, that included a leading role in saving the White Rhino from extinction, and partly for his formative role in the Wilderness