

# CONNECTING WITH WILDERNESS

Re-discovering an ancient connection with the earth



**Belinda Ashton**

photographs by Noel Ashton

FOREWORD BY DR IAN PLAYER

**Wilderness**  
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# Foreword

by *Dr Ian Player*



Sometimes one knows just by a glance or a touch whether a book has special qualities. 'Connecting with Wilderness' is such a book because it comes from the heart of Belinda and Noel Ashton. Together they take the reader on a journey into the human psyche where beats an ancient African symphony. Looking at the photographs then reading the text, the reader enters into that timeless world

and hears the cries of the birds, call of the animals and pounding of surf on lovely beaches. The last remaining wilderness areas on our planet have become temples of deep religious significance. In these wild areas we communicate in a different way with the world as we walk in silent wonder. God becomes personal, and not some distant deity far out in space. The tremble of a leaf, sigh of the wind, murmur of water over rocks, reminds us of the presence of the living God.

Then at night as we lie under the vast canopy of the blazing stars of the southern hemisphere we appreciate both our insignificance and significance. All that is without is also within as the poets and C.G. Jung the great psychologist tells us. When sleep comes the unconscious speaks to us in dreams. The ancients called them the voice of God. The modern theologian John Sanford writes of dreams being God's Forgotten Language. In the wilderness they can be stark, vivid and sometimes terrifying. Could it perhaps be that this ancient dreaming part of ourselves is reminding us what we have done and are doing to this earth?

Belinda writes of the 'unbridled often unscrupulous path

of mankind's material development.' The slamming of jackhammers on a pavement, blaring of hooters, screeching of tuneless music. This comes into us then seeks escape. Wilderness is the cure because it brings us back into contact with our true selves.

All the great religious leaders of the world went out into the Wilderness. Those who know wilderness can appreciate the magnitude of Christ's experience of 40 days and 40 nights. It was in the wilderness that he gained his insight and strength to go out and preach the word of God. It is tragic, how few modern theologians understand the value of wilderness, to rejuvenate their faith and enthuse the congregation about the love of God.

I have had the privilege of spending many days in the wilderness with Laurens van der Post who in his books and speeches, drew heavily from his boyhood in the Free State. Later it was the Kalahari and other wild places in Africa. He had a special resonance with wilderness and what it could do for modern people.

It was through Laurens that I was introduced to the works of Jung. Laurens would have loved this book because it has the right feel.

Wilderness and the fight to save remnants of it, has been part of my life for over 50 years. We have been able to save enough for many thousands to walk amongst the wild animals, and sleep on the red earth of Africa, and dream their dreams.

The most common phrase experienced when people emerge from wilderness is "This experience changed my life". I am certain that those who read this book and immerse themselves in the splendid and subtle photographs will be inspired.

Our world is in desperate need of committed individuals who will take an active role in saving wilderness. This book of Belinda and Noel Ashton will I am sure spark the desire to help the cause of wilderness.

I particularly like this book because it has a poetry about it and the poets are able to see way beyond our normal range of vision. Poetry too, is a balance to scientific thinking, which although necessary and valuable, lacks an emotional appeal and our emotions lead us to the spiritual aspects of our beings, or so it has been with me. Wilderness became important to me when I realised its spiritual dimensions.