

# Tales from the bush

## The story of Sampson



**With its flowing mane and appetite for a fight, is there anything tougher than a warthog?**

This is the true tale of an African pig, a warthog, a tough, charismatic animal that is common on the African savannah. This particular warthog lived in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve in South Africa and was a resident animal in and around Idube Safari Lodge. There he fed on the green grass of the camp lawns and on off-cuts and leftovers from the kitchen. Over time he had lost his natural fear of humans and became something of a camp mascot.

Late one February afternoon, he was strolling through his 'home' turf when he was surprised by a hungry lioness. He tried to escape but only made it as far as the shallow waters of the Makubela River on the edge of camp before she caught him.

She only managed to gain a tenuous grip, however, and a battle of power and endurance began. The battle raged up and down, hither and thither, with the advantage swinging first this way and then that, with each opponent trying every move they knew. He battered her with his tough, bony head and slashed with his tusks, while she bit and savaged with tooth and claw.

After some 45 minutes, in a final do-or-die effort, the warthog caught the lioness off-guard with a devastating blow and sent her sprawling into the water. The cat was forced to retreat, lest she herself become the victim.

With the adrenaline wearing off, the hog crept under the breakfast deck and collapsed and didn't wake up again until the next day. By this time, the lioness had returned and was waiting for him. He made his escape to the north, running through the camp where human activity deterred the lioness from pursuing him. But as

he ran, he slammed into trees and rocks, because the severe swelling around his eyes had sealed them shut. Indeed, the lioness had inflicted such wounds that he would never see the light of day again.

On a warm March day, a month later and long after he was presumed dead, the most extraordinary creature strolled back into camp. It was clearly the same warthog, but he had massive swellings where his eyes should have been and ragged, torn earlobes. There were cuts and holes all over his head, and he was navigating by smell alone, using footpaths and game-trails to move between his burrow in the bush and the feeding grounds around the camp.

To the camp staff, he was a symbol of strength, courage and determination. His survival in the face of the most terrible injuries was miraculous. He began to gain weight on the kitchen leftovers and the camp's green grass, and his condition improved – he was even seen mating with one of the resident sows – and he once again became a familiar (if somewhat shocking) sight in and around the camp.

He was living on borrowed time. Five months later, the same lioness came to the camp and caught him for a second time and this time he could not win. After half an hour, his light began to fade and the spirit ebbed from his body. Yet the legend of 'Samson the Great', as he was dubbed by the local Shangaan staff, lives on in the area and in the hearts and minds of those who were privy to his story.



**As the fight begins (left), the lioness uses her teeth and claws on the back of the warthog's neck, while the hog himself attempts to gouge her with his tusks. With one final effort (above), he sends her sprawling, and despite horrendous injuries and even losing his eyesight, survives for another six months.**