

MILITARY ACTIVITY IN THE GREATER ST LUCIA AREA,  
ITS EFFECTS ON MANAGEMENT, RECREATION  
AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

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SUMMARY

Intensive military activities have taken place in the Greater St Lucia area (GSA) since 1968. As approximately 60% of the GSA is used by the military, this has a significant effect on the Board's management of the area, as well as preventing the realisation of the full recreational value of the area. At the present moment, the military use this area for approximately 50% of the year. As their use of this area would appear to be increasing, it is felt that representation should be made to Government with the request that the military seek alternative areas to conduct their projectile testing programmes as well as their ground and air based training camps.

This report was prepared in response to discussions which took place at the Board Meeting on 27 February 1987.

## INTRODUCTION

The military use of the GSA falls into two distinct classes, namely (a) projectile testing and (b) ground and air training camps. Although these two activities are separate issues, many of the problems their presence creates are identical and hence both activities will be dealt with as one.

The proclamation of the first projectile testing area was made in 1968 (proc. no. 1859 of October 1968). This empowered the C.S.I.R. to make use of the area for the testing of air to air and ground to air missiles on behalf of the S.A.D.F. (it is worth noting that at this time it was specified that at no time would any 'live' equipment be tested).

In August 1970 this proclamation was succeeded by proc. no. 1340 which gave authority for the *carte blanche* testing of military equipment, including 'live' warheads.

Until recently, many of the problems which the presence of the military could have caused have either been averted or diluted by good co-operation between Kentron (the successors to the C.S.I.R.), the S.A.D.F. and the Board. However, as the demand for 'range time' increases much of this co-operation has disappeared only to be replaced by a host of problems.

## AREAS AFFECTED AND DURATION OF CLOSURES

Total area of GSA = 100 000 ha. (this includes lake and land area, but excludes the beach and sea area)

Areas affected by closures (Map 1):

Lake	= 19 000 ha
Land (missile range)	= 33 000 ha
Land (training camps)	= 9 000 ha
TOTAL	= <u>61 000 ha</u>

NOTE: THIS IS EQUIVALENT TO 60% OF THE GREATER ST LUCIA AREA.

The duration of range closures has been expressed in two ways (Table 1.):

1. as a percentage of the total year i.e. % of 365 days
2. as a percentage of the year excluding weekends i.e. % of 252 days.

The data has been broken down in this way as records will show that the range is closed for the full test period although it is frequently opened for weekends.

Table 1. Duration of range closures expressed as percentages of  
1. the whole year and 2. the year excluding weekends.

	<u>1983</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>Mean</u>
1.	33%	55%	47%	48%	45,8%
2.	37%	65%	53%	55%	52,5%

These percentages represent that part of the year from which NPB staff and the public are excluded from part/s of 60% of the GSA.

#### EFFECTS ON NPB PROGRAMMES

As the activities of the military in this area are subject to security restrictions, it is difficult to identify what the full effects of their presence in the area are. Some direct effects are obvious. However, it may be that the unobservable indirect effects are the most long-term and severe. Because of the lack of direct information some speculation of what these effects may be is entered into.

#### 1. Direct effects on NPB management.

##### a. Law enforcement.

On a number of occasions it has been found that the exclusion of NPB staff from the range area during tests and exercises has resulted in an immigration of poachers. On one occasion a man arrested for snaring in the Sodwana State Forest stated that "when we hear the helicopters and bangs we know that the Game Guards stay at Bangazi and we can do what we like".

Apart from snaring, it is known that fish netting, reed cutting, the cutting of trees and the collection of other plant material increases markedly during military tests.

b. Location of outposts.

For security and safety reasons the Board may not locate any outposts in the military area. As the distance from the existing outposts to the extremes of the reserve is great, much of the area is never patrolled (the frequency of range closures exclude the possibility of having fly-camps in the area).

c. Access to the area.

As many of the military activities include the closure of the beach, the OIC of the Eastern Shores Nature Reserve only has access to his outpost at Bangazi North by means of the lower Mkuzi road. The implications of this are that

- i. should his staff require assistance, he is unable to reach them in the shortest possible time,
- ii. for much of the time he is unable to check on and control his staff,
- iii. increased mileage and fuel use.

d. General.

Although military activities frequently restrict a number of other essential management programmes, eg. burning, the main objection from officers in the field is that these activities result in a lack of control in an area for which the NPB is supposedly responsible.

2. Effect on NPB monitoring programmes.

The closure of parts of the GSA to NPB staff affects a number of routine monitoring programmes essential to the management of the system. Although it is possible to get into the area at other times, the short notice which often characterises many tests, makes it difficult to eg. book the aircraft, organise work programmes, etc.

Monitoring programmes affected by area closures are as follows:

Lake salinity monitoring,  
fish and reed monitoring,  
hippo censusing,  
croc censusing,  
Sodwana game census,  
ESNR game census,  
Sodwana and ESNR vegetation monitoring,  
Pre- and post-burn inspections.

### 3. Effect on recreation.

It is under this heading that the military activity in the GSA has its most noticeable effects. These are:

- i. the closure of lake area, beach area, wilderness area and occasionally sea area to the public, and
  - ii. the restrictions placed on the possible development of public facilities in these areas.
- i. All too frequently people travel considerable distances to enjoy the facilities the GSA has to offer. Upon arrival they find they are restricted to eg. the beach 200m north of Cape Vidal or that for the duration of their wilderness trail they are subjected to helicopter activity and the sounds of missiles being fired. Not only are the wilderness trailers subjected to these disturbances, but trails have been shortened, cancelled and the areas covered during the trails restricted (to the area marked 'R' on Map 1) as a result of range closures.

It is unfortunate that, in the eyes of the public at large, it is the NPB which is restricting their movements on the beach or on the lake and hence it is at this target that their justifiable anger is directed.

- ii. Many of the areas used by the military are the prime situations for the development of public recreational zones. It has been suggested for example that the site at which the missile base is presently situated is an area ideally suited to the development of a massive recreational complex. This area is centrally situated in the GSA, has the potential to be made an excellent bird and game viewing area, has deep water at the shore-line from which large launches can operate, is ideally suited to act as a point from which people can be ferried into the ESNR wilderness area for day trails, etc.

Should the Board gain full control of the Sodwana State Forest from the Forestry Branch, it will be unable to develop this area to its full potential. The reason for this is that 75% of the area is affected by military activity and as such, all activities are subject to safety and security regulations.

### 4. Ecological effects.

This is without doubt the hardest point to quantify. There are a number of observable effects the military presence has on the area, the most noticeable of which are listed below:

- a. craters resulting from missiles and artillery shells,

- b. a vast amount of vegetation destruction due to heavy vehicles driving around at will,
- c. non-degradable litter,
- d. wild fire due to exploding missiles and artillery shells,
- e. alien plants growing on disturbed ground,
- f. debris and structures in the lake which are hazardous to boats,
- g. helicopter activity at low levels over the reserves.

Although pure speculation, it has been suggested that these activities may be responsible for the following: disturbances to bird breeding colonies which were successful prior to the advent of the military presence, unexplained reductions in the crocodile nest density in the north of the lake and an increase in density in the south, and the unexplained death of a black rhino calf on the eastern shores. Staff who work in the Sodwana State Forest have also made the observation that the zebra and reedbuck in the range area are very nervous and are unapproachable by comparison to those outside the range.

It is impossible to list all the events and incidents which may be attributable to the military activity, however, it is this lack of insight which makes it imperative that this presence be restricted and minimised or totally removed.

#### POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.

Without doubt the most desirable solution would be a total removal of all military activities from the GSA. As this is unlikely to occur, the following are suggested as possible ways to minimise the effects their presence is having.

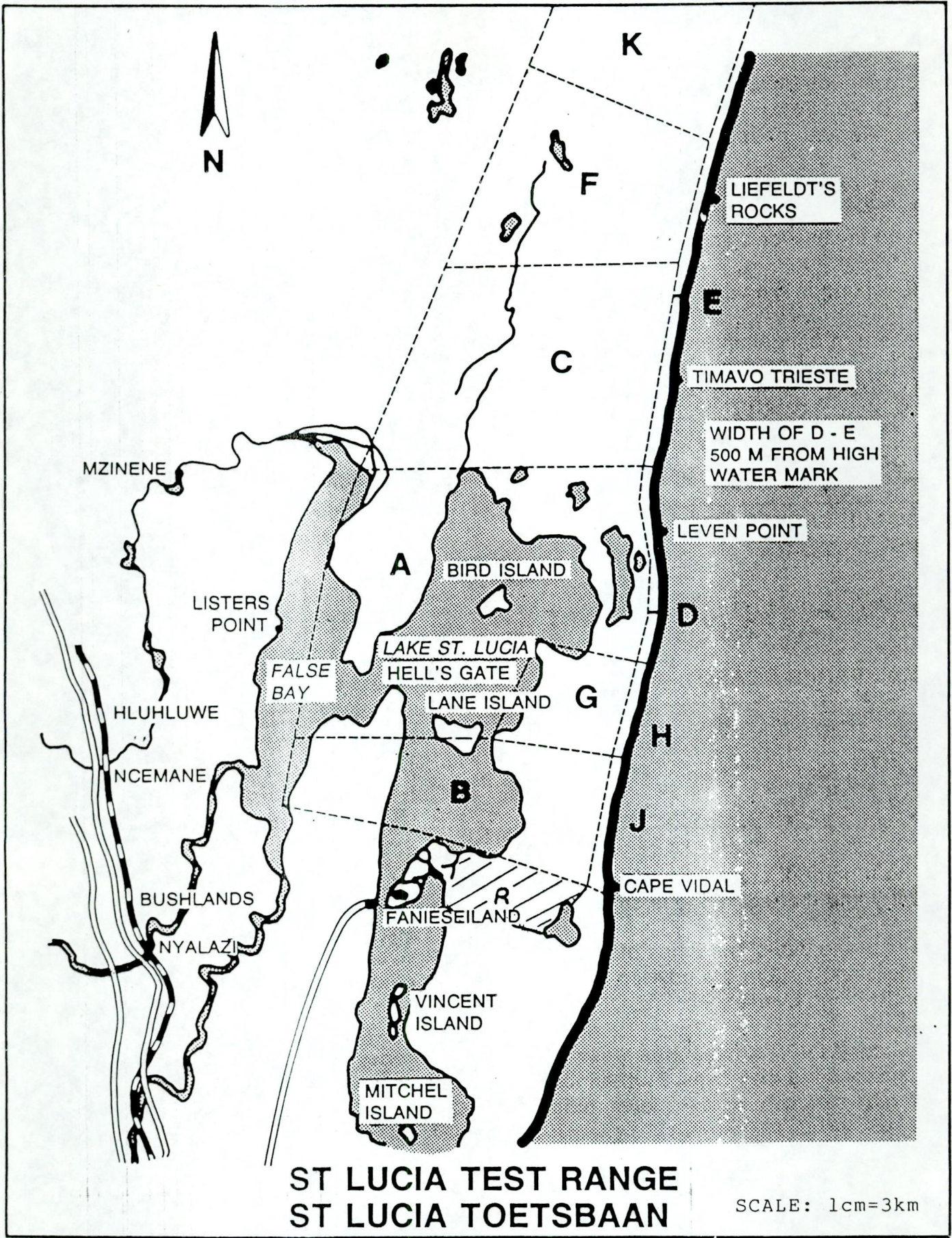
1. The NPB must dissociate themselves from all military activity in the area. If an area is to be closed it must be done by Kentron personnel and not NPB staff. It is suggested that at times when movement is to be restricted in an area Kentron must provide the personnel and not the NPB.
2. The use of the missile range and the training area must be reduced to the minimum. The St Lucia area must only be considered when the operation cannot be conducted at an alternative site i.e. the St Lucia area must not be seen as 'just another testing ground'.
3. When the area is to be used by the military, advanced notice must be given so that public coming into the area can be notified at their time of booking.
4. The onus must be on the S.A.D.F. to inform the NPB when they wish to use the area and not (as is presently the

- case) the onus of Board staff to contact the military to discover when the area is in use.
5. Under no circumstance should the area be used over weekends, school holidays or public holidays.
  6. Activities which are ecologically destructive eg. armoured car training exercises, must be banned. Should it be necessary to use vehicles in the area, no new tracks may be made without prior consultation with the Board.
  7. No 'live' munitions should be used.
  8. An S.A.D.F. environmental officer must attend all occasions at which the area is used.

#### REFERENCES

- Wildlife Society (1979). Bombing the Birds? African Wildlife Vol. 33 No. 4.
- Geddes-Page, J.T. (1980). National Defence and Nature Conservation. Armed Forces Jan-Feb.
- Hey, D.(ED) (1983). Environmental Implications of Weapons Test Range - De Hoop. Report to the Minister of the Environment.
- NPB Internal Records and Reports held at St Lucia Research.

MAP 1.



**ST LUCIA TEST RANGE  
ST LUCIA TOETSBAAN**

SCALE: 1cm=3km