HLUHLUWE-UMFOLOZI PARK

TEXT: WILLIAM CHARLTON-PERKINS

PHOTOGRAPHS: ROGER DE LA HARPE

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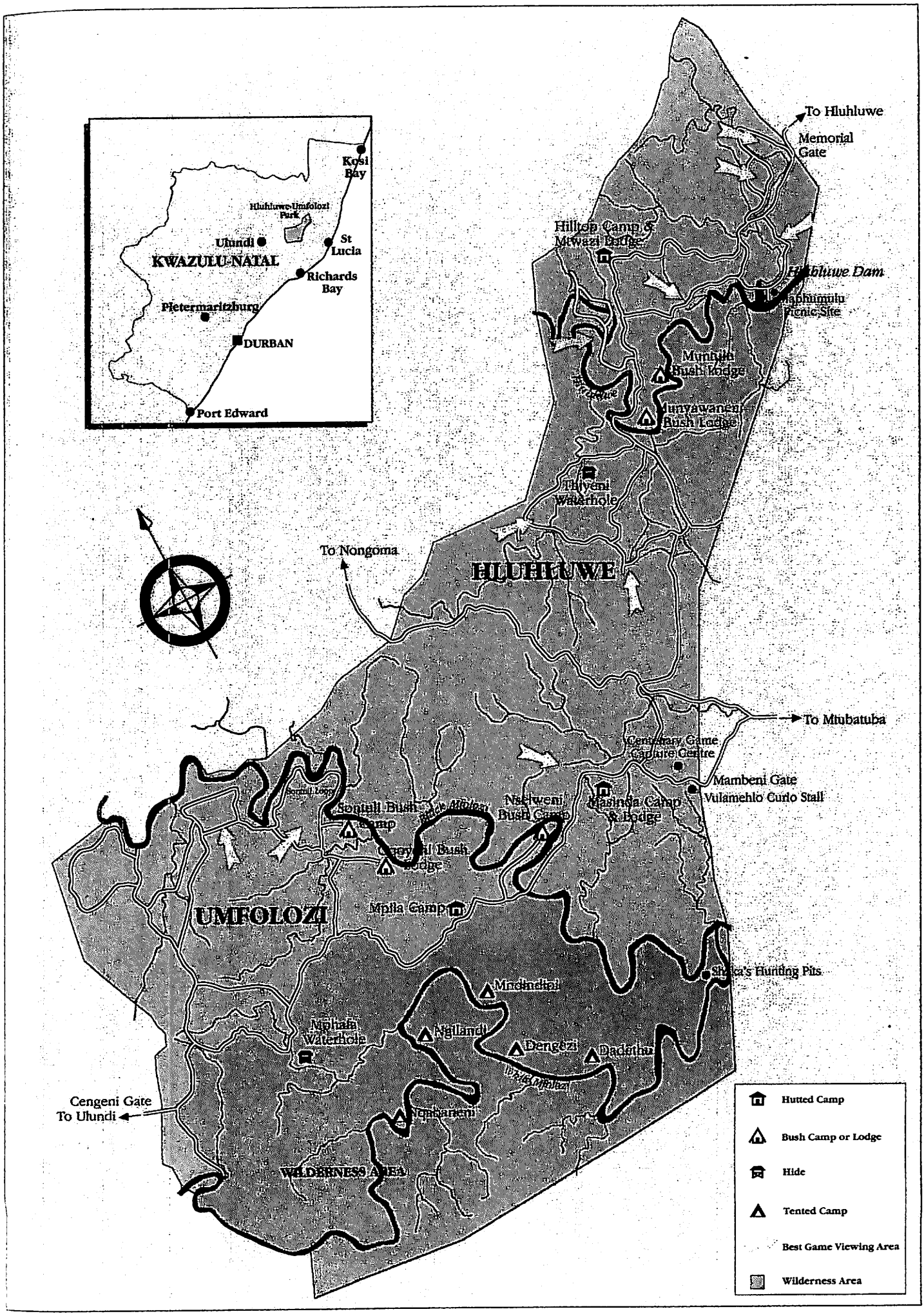
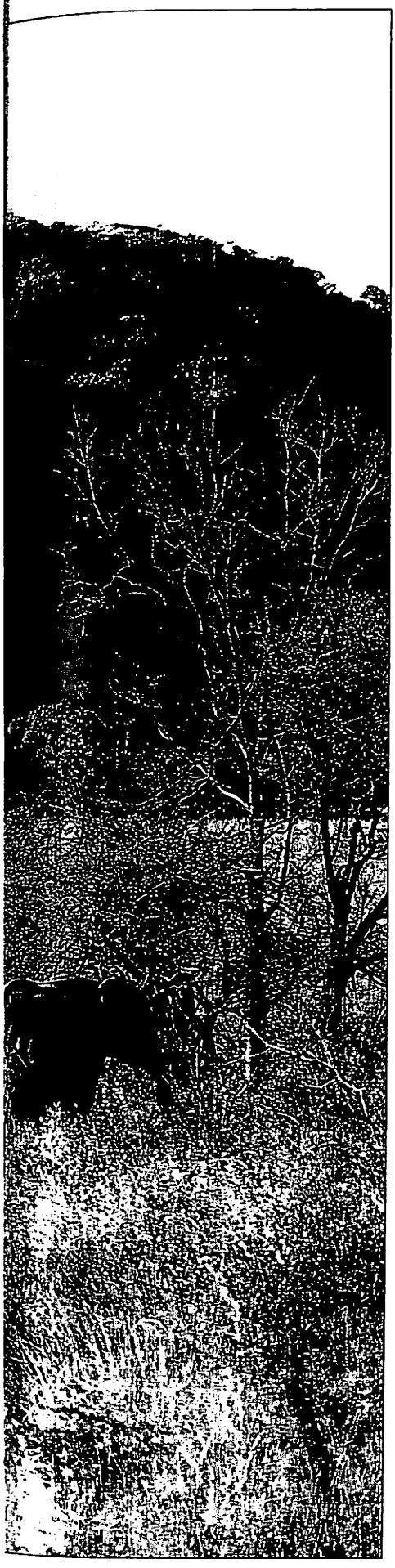
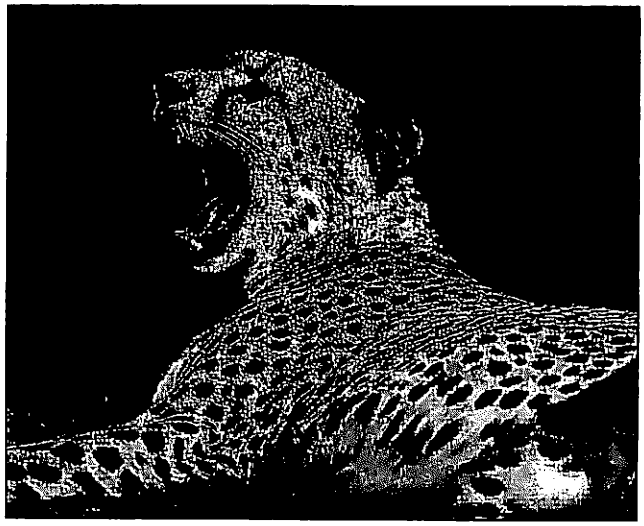

Kosi Bay
Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park
Ulundi
St Lucia
KWAZULU-NATAL
Richards Bay
Pietermaritzburg
DURBAN
Port Edward
To Hluhluwe Memorial Gate
Hilltop Camp & Mtwazi Lodge
Hluhluwe Dam
Mphumulu Picnic Site
Munyawaneni Bush Lodge
Thiyeni Waterhole
To Nongoma
HLUHLUWE
To Mtubatuba
Centenary Game Capture Centre
Mambeni Gate
Vulamehlo Curio Stall
Nselweni Bush Camp
Masinda Camp & Lodge
Sontuli Bush Camp
UMFOLOZI
Mpila Camp
Shaka's Hunting Pits
Mnweni Hill
Mphafa Waterhole
Ngulandi
Dengezi
Dadanhu
Cengeni Gate To Ulundi
Nqabaneni
WILDERNESS AREA
Hutted Camp
Bush Camp or Lodge
Hide
Tented Camp
Best Game Viewing Area
Wilderness Area



HLUHLUWE-UMFOLOZI PARK

A kaleidoscope of habitats

Hluhluwe-Umfolozi is one of South Africa's most famous game parks. It is the home of Operation Rhino, as well as a place where plant, bird and animal life abound in a relatively compact area of land.



Extending over 96 453 hectares, Hluhluwe-Umfolozi is about five per cent the size of the Kruger National Park, South Africa's largest game park. Yet there are over 1 250 plant species here – 68 per cent of those in Kruger. This diversity partly derives from the park's position between the tropics to its north and subtropical conditions to the south, and from its situation at the coastal scarp interface. It is linked to a broken topography, giving rise to many different temperature and moisture conditions, and to the park's geological diversity. Most major rock types found in KwaZulu-Natal are also found in the park.

As flora and fauna are part of the same life cycle, many plant species mean that many animal species also occur. The park has a huge variety of birds and beasts. It is dominated for much of the year by the Black and White Mfolozi rivers in the south and the Hluhluwe in the north. Migration is thus less dependent on water availability than in other protected areas, where isolated watering holes and seasonal pans dictate migration over great distances. Altitudes range from 60 to 650 metres above sea level. The rainfall variation reflects the climatic variation – from Hluhluwe's cool, moist north-western hill forests, through woodlands and thickets to the undulating grassland, savanna and dry stretches of Umfolozi thornveld in the south. Hluhluwe's Hilltop Camp receives 950 millimetres of rainfall a year, compared with 650 millimetres at Umfolozi's Mpila Camp.

The park comprises the former Hluhluwe and Umfolozi reserves. Set aside in 1895 with part of the St Lucia Reserve, they are Africa's longest-standing protected areas. These now incorporate the former state-owned Corridor. Before the latter's protected status was proclaimed in 1989 the entire area was managed as one conservation unit known as the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Complex.

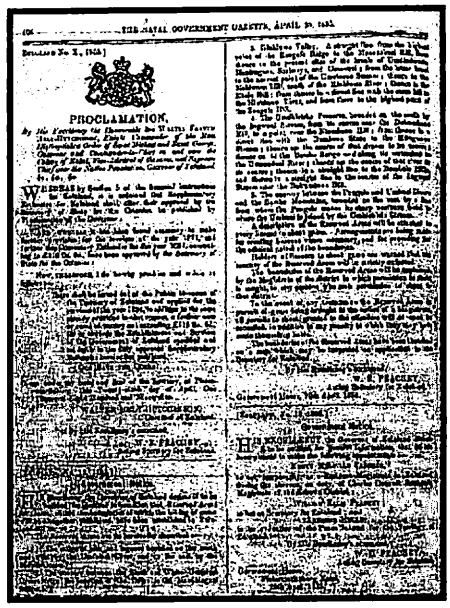
OPPOSITE: *Elephant have thrived in Hluhluwe-Umfolozi since the early 1980s, producing offspring and forming their matriarch-dominated herds.*
ABOVE: *Cheetah are the fastest-moving mammals on earth. Diminishing habitats outside protected areas make them ever more reliant on game parks for survival.*

History of Occupation

Man has been in the area for many thousands of years. The earliest people in these hills and valleys lived in small groups, gathering plant foods, scavenging meat from the kills of predators and hunting small animals themselves. They probably followed the seasonal movements of animals, leaving behind stone tools to be discovered by archaeologists millennia later.

Evidence of early occupation in the region dates back from about a million to 1 500 years. Historic artefacts found have ranged from crude early stone implements for digging roots and cutting meat, to finely crafted scrapers and projectile heads.

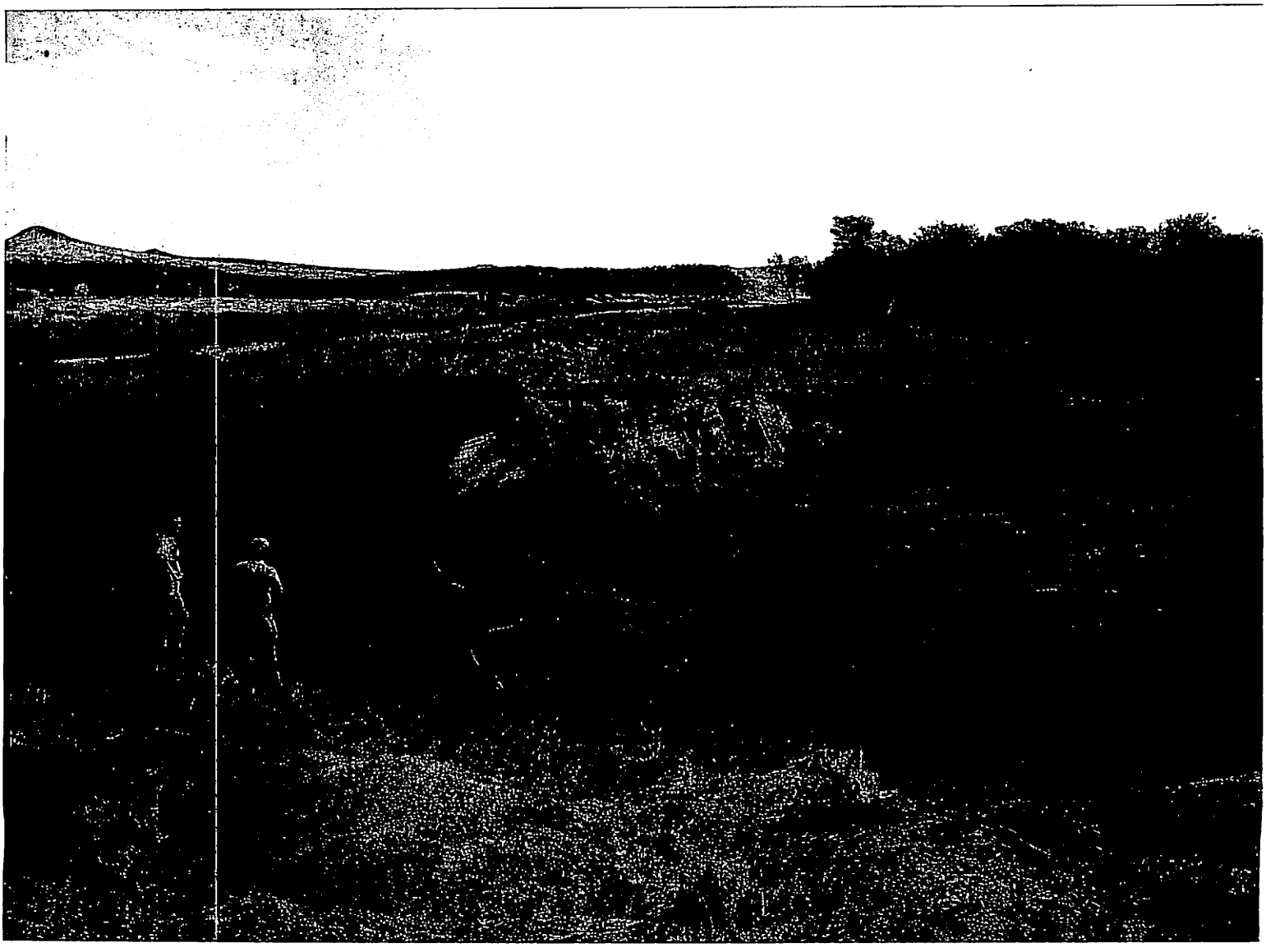
Iron Age movements of people from central Africa are believed to have occurred first along the coast between 200 and 300 AD. Over the next 1 500 years, early farmers


PROCLAMATION.

moved inland along the valleys of rivers such as the Hluhluwe and the Mfolozi, later into higher reaches, in search of richer soils. As populations increased, so did specialized activities, and several smelting sites have been found in the park where iron ore was worked into metal implements.

From the mid-sixteenth century the first of the Nguni immigrants began to move into the northern parts of what was to become Zululand. Among them was a small clan, the amaZulu, who settled 25 kilometres to the west of the Umfolozi section of the park and along the southern bank of the White Mfolozi. North of the Black Mfolozi, the Ndwandwe clan predominated.

By the early nineteenth century the Mtethwa clan under Dingiswayo had occupied the land between the two Mfoloz



rivers and the Mpila range of hills. However, shortly before his death in 1818 at the hands of Zwide and the Ndwandwes, Dingiswayo moved south, evacuating the low-lying area between the two Mfolozi rivers. This was probably due to an attack of *nagana*, the cattle disease spread by the tsetse fly which was to play such an important part in the history of the area.

In 1819, with the defeat of Zwide, Shaka achieved supremacy as Zulu chief, and within four years he had consolidated the mighty Zulu nation. The first white men to visit Natal and Zululand during Shaka's reign, including Fynn and Isaacs, left brief accounts of the multitudes of game they found there. Although few similar accounts survive from Dingane's reign following Shaka's death in 1828, the real influx of white men to Zululand began after 1840 when Mpande became king.

Among them came large numbers of hunters. Their arrival marked the real start of the decimation of big game throughout the region. The accounts of hunters such as Leslie, Drummond, Baldwin and Selous left a picture of the plentiful game which was (or had been) present. With unconscious irony or very little evidence of concern, their accounts traced the declining numbers of big game which had abounded only 60 years before, many on the point of local extinction by the turn of the century.

Elephant had been common in the area until around 1850 but dwindled rapidly due to hunting pressure. The last herd was said to have been wiped out on the banks of the Black Mfolozi around 1890. Lion too were present until as late as 1900, but were gradually eliminated. The last lion in Umfolozi was shot by a poacher in 1915.

The plight of the white rhino in particular played an important role in the proclamation of the Zululand reserves. Due to the wanton compulsions of professional and vogue hunters, there were probably no more than a hundred of the animals left in the whole of southern Africa by 1890.

In 1894 six white rhino were shot near the junction of the two Mfolozi rivers. The incident had a decisive impact on concerned people in the colony. In February the next year, correspondence to the resident commissioner of Zululand regarding the status of rhino was forwarded to Sir Francis Hely Hutchinson, the governor of Natal. It was accompanied by a report that all Zululand magistrates had been instructed to withhold hunting permits for rhino in the area.

On 30 April that year (1895) the Natal Government Gazette carried a Zululand Government Notice (No. 12, 1895), that was dated 26 April and signed at Government House by W.E. Peachey, the acting secretary for Zululand at the time. This proclaimed the establishment of Hluhluwe and Umfolozi as 'Reserved Areas for Game'. Their protected status was ratified with a subsequent proclamation two years later (Zululand Government Notice, No. 11, 1897).

OPPOSITE TOP: *Two of Africa's oldest game reserves, Hluhluwe and Umfolozi were set aside as protected areas in 1895.*
OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *Depressions in the park near the confluence of the Mfolozi rivers are said to be evidence of large game pits Shaka had dug for a great hunt to celebrate his victory over Zwide which reputedly became his official hunting ground.*
ABOVE: *The park is rich in historic relics of early human occupation: hikers examine old Zulu grinding stones,* itshe lokugaya.

Star Attractions – The Black and White Rhino

Due to its great diversity of plant communities, the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park supports a wide range of animal life, including over 80 species of mammals. Among the latter the park's accredited star attractions are its rhino, both the white or square-lipped rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*) and, in lesser numbers, its cousin the black or hooked-lipped rhino (*Diceros bicornis*).

For its size Hluhluwe-Umfolozi is home to the largest population of the southern white rhino in the world, between 1 500 and 2 000. The story of this magnificent, prehistoric-looking beast's close rescue from extinction is synonymous with the park's history, and is a foundation stone of the Natal Parks Board's international reputation as a conservation agency.

Diminishing habitats, demand for rhino horn, human greed and its corollary, poverty, combined with the unbridled blood lust of hunters in the last century to bring about what promised to be the inevitable extinction of this comparatively docile animal.

Despite frequent and at times almost insurmountable opposition, six decades of conservationists' persistence, stubbornness and dedication reversed this fate. In the early 1960s, the revolutionary process of moving several hundred surplus white rhino from the park to other sanctuaries around the world began.

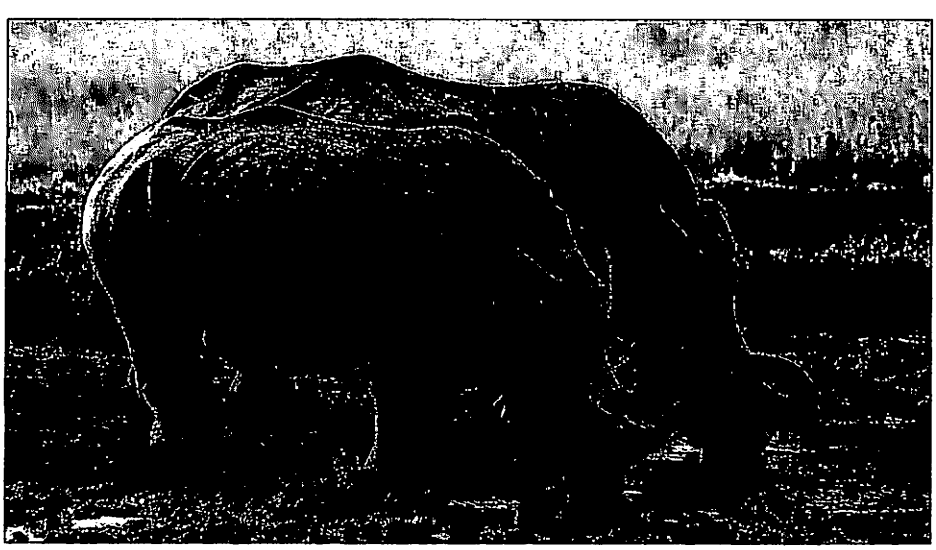
A grazer, the white rhino is readily seen throughout the park in relatively open grassland. It is the third largest land mammal on earth, after the Indian and African elephants, and is considerably bigger than its shyer and more aggressive cousin, the black rhino. A mature white rhino bull weighs up to three tons, while its black counterpart reaches less than half that weight at maturity.

The white rhino carries its elongated head low, its square-lipped mouth perfectly adapted to grazing short grasses. When mature, its front horn is much longer than the rear one, and sometimes points forward. The legs appear shorter than the black rhino's, and its pointed ears are fringed with hair. Another distinctive feature of the white rhino is the pronounced hump on its back, compared with the hollow-backed appearance of the black rhino. When on the move, a white rhino calf runs ahead of its mother, unlike black rhino calves, which follow their mothers.

While white rhino bulls are territorial and solitary, females are often found in small communal groups from three up to a dozen or even more, although this is rare. Dominant bulls clearly define their territories by patrolling their boundaries, spreading their scent by defecating in dung heaps (middens) and spray-urinating. These territories vary in size from 0,75 square kilometres to 2,6 square kilometres. Stronger bulls claim the prime grazing sites which are invariably defined in terms of water proximity and suitable vegetation.

Submissive males are tolerated only so long as they continue to 'know their place', acknowledging the territorial bull's supremacy. The home ranges of white rhino cows however overlap with those of other cows, and can extend between 6 to 15 square kilometres, overlapping with the territories of as many as seven territorial bulls.

Black rhino are considerably less sociable and occur singly or in small family units, usually a mother and calf, occasionally with a previous calf as well. The males are not strictly territorial and use middens



Above Left: *Nothing like a good scratch. Visitors may wonder at the sight of mud-encrusted tree stumps, worn smooth at the top. These are rubbing posts, used by rhino after wallowing to remove dried mud, encasing parasites such as ticks.*
Left: *White rhino bear a calf every three to five years. The bond between cow and calf can survive subsequent offspring, producing family groups of three or more; communities of up to 18 sometimes occur. It is not uncommon to find a rhino with a reversed horn, which does not inconvenience it in any way.*
Right: *The black rhino is less sociable, occurring singly or as a mother-and-calf duo, also occasionally with an older calf.*

probably as an indication of their social presence in an area. Bad-tempered and capricious, they are extremely unpredictable and charge with little provocation.

The black rhino is a browser. It uses its prehensile hooked upper lip to gather leaves and twigs and to manipulate them into its mouth. A particular delicacy of its diet in Zululand is the poisonous tamboti tree (*Spirostachys africana*). It also enjoys several scrub acacias as well as certain fruit, bulbs and even shoots of grass in spring.

All KwaZulu-Natal black rhino suffer from a characteristic lesion on the skin behind the shoulders. This is caused by a parasite and takes the form of a blood-encrusted area which bleeds slightly. These lesions are not related to the health of the animals, and appear on perfectly healthy specimens.

Black rhino range throughout the park but confine themselves to suitably scrubby areas. They are not as easily sighted as the white rhino. In most parts of Africa poachers have slaughtered the species to the point of extinction.

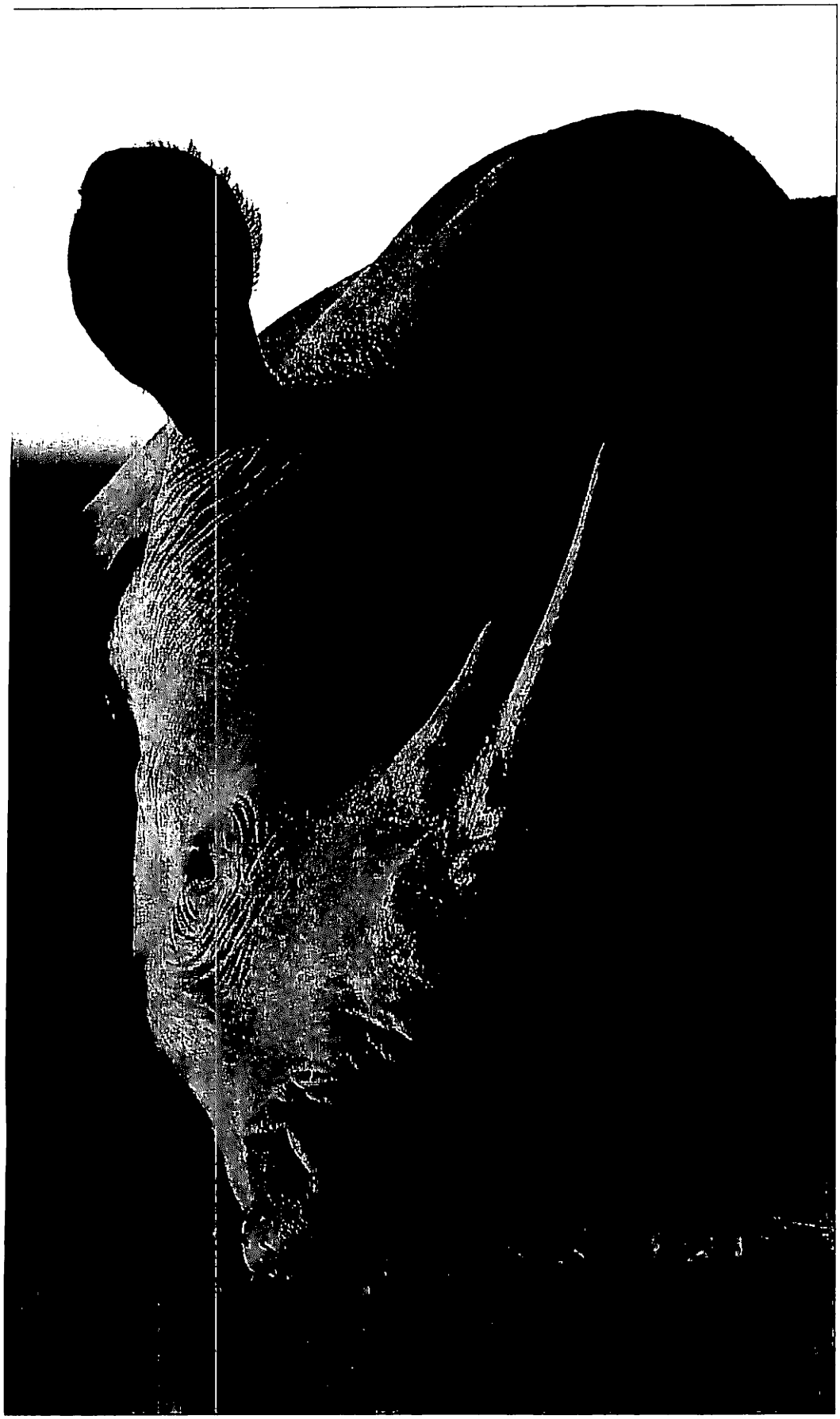
As little as 25 years ago, the black rhino was by far the most populous of the rhino species on earth, then estimated to be approximately 65000.

Over the past 25 years, its numbers have dwindled to less than five per cent of that estimate. The safety of this seriously endangered species is relatively secure only in highly protected areas such as South Africa's game parks, notably Hluhluwe-Umfolozi, where its numbers have gradually increased thanks to years of rigorous counter-poaching measures.

The park holds approximately 320 black rhino. This is the largest single concentrated population of the species per square kilometre in the world.

While natural pans occur where impermeable layers of clay retain water after the summer rains, there are a number of theories as to how these shallow depressions were actually formed. The sight of rhino carrying off a good few kilograms of mud after a roll-about certainly suggests their at least partial responsibility for enlarging the small pans of the park.

Operation Rhino – A Story of Success



The conservation of the white rhino is one the great success stories of South African wildlife management. It was the plight of this species more than any other that first provoked the proclamation of the first Zululand reserves in 1895, when there were estimated to be few more than 50 southern white rhino left on earth. All these occurred in the Umfolozi region.

Thanks largely to the early game laws of the Natal colony, actual extinction was averted and by 1960 Umfolozi faced a danger of overpopulation among its white rhino, spectacular endorsement of the species' conservation. This led to the start of 'Operation Rhino', an ambitious project aimed at alleviating local population pressure by moving surplus animals to other protected areas. There was a perceived danger that a major catastrophe in a restricted area like Umfolozi could result in the species' annihilation. Dispersal was clearly in the interests of its continued survival.

As described in *The White Rhino Saga*, Ian Player's detailed and emotive account of the venture, early rhino capture techniques were fraught with problems, and a period of urgent experimentation followed, based largely on a process of brave trial and error. In East Africa certain large game species had been captured by chasing them down with vehicles before roping and manhandling them to the ground. Clearly this was inappropriate to the massively bulky rhino.

Various tranquillizing drugs were tried by Dr Tony Harthorn (the veterinary consultant who spearheaded the operation), without really satisfactory results. After a rhino was darted it would take up to 20 minutes to go down and could travel eight kilometres before this happened. The required large dosage limited the range of suitable darts and often led to serious dart wounds. After being injected, the rhino would frequently injure itself by struggling in its crate.

In 1961 the first white rhino to be moved from Umfolozi was taken to Mkuzi Game Reserve. The operation lasted the whole day and, due to a deluge of rain and serious injuries, the animal died. However a start had been made. In 1963 a drug known at the time as M99 came onto the market that simplified and streamlined the process. A powerful derivative of morphine, it was lethal to humans but worked effectively on rhino. The animal could be tranquillized in