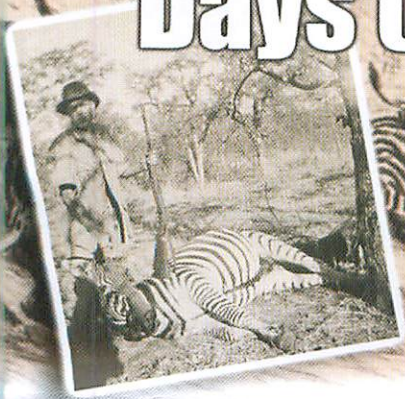


# Days of Yore

Alton Kees -



Extract from "The Black Rhinoceros"

in "Portraits of Game and Wild Animals of Southern Africa"  
by Captain W. Cornwallis Harris, first published in 1840/1841.

When the Dutch first established themselves at the Cape of bon Esperance – now nearly two centuries ago, the *Zwart Rhinoster* existed in considerable numbers on the present site of Cape Town, along the base of Table Mountain; but within the Colony the species has long ceased to exist, the remnant having instinctively fled before the destructive cannonade to which it was subjected. Gregarious in fives and sixes, they are extremely abundant in the wild of the interior, and I have, during a single day, counted upwards of sixty. The Hottentots, ever gasconading of their skill in hunting them, had long kept us on the *qui vive*, but it was not until we had reached the sedgy Molopo, that the animal's dusky form actually appeared to me.

Whilst the teams were being unyoked, I had gone out on horseback ... and was busied in the pursuit of a troop of Hartebeests, when two colossal figures, which my friends at once pronounced to be *Borili*, were described, motionless as statues, in the middle of the level and treeless expanse. I at first endeavoured to approach, frog-fashion, upon all fours, under cover of the grass, but a strong wind setting towards them, they went off at a heavy trot, and as it was getting dark, I remounted my horse, and galloping within seventy or eighty

yards – the nearest I felt disposed to venture on so short an acquaintance – treated the more bulky to a brace of rifle balls, carrying his snout close to the ground, he did but run the faster, and by the time I had repeated the dose without any better effect, it had become so dark that I was compelled to abstain from further hostilities.

The next apparition was even more shadowy. Accompanied by a band of natives who volunteered to show me a Giraffe, I had ridden so far in advance of the wagons – then plodding at a funereal pace through the heavy forest that envelops the food of Kurrichane – that night overtaking me, I began to feel apprehensive of having to bivouac in the bush. My companions evidently contemplated a similar contingency, and evinced a vast longing to rejoin four of their number who had wisely tarried behind with the carcass of a *Sassaybe* [tsessebe] that I had inconsiderately shot. Giving by signs to understand that I disapproved of the measure, we pushed on briskly towards the halting ground that had previously been agreed upon. A contumacious Rhinoceros was stationed directly in our path, and although repeatedly hailed, most peremptorily refused to make way. There was just twilight sufficient to admit of my discharging both barrels of my rifle into his unwieldy form from behind a strong breast-work of thorn bushes. Sneezing violently and wheezing, he

ran off in the direction that we were taking, but presently subsided heavily in the path. We approached him with caution, and were pleased to find that he was extinct – a volley of musquetry at the same moment in reply to my rifle, together with a bright beacon fire which suddenly blazed forth towards heaven, directing our benighted steps to the encampment.

Arriving at the Mariqua several days after this occurrence, we had formed the camp on a verdant spot on the river bank near to an extensive *Matabili kraal* – the captain of which, at the head of some ten of his clan, being clamorous for victuals, I willingly placed myself under his guidance, and dived into the heart of the extensive groves, where, although the sun was shining brightly, a dry cutting wind rendered the cold scarcely endurable, even under the defence of a *duffel* jacket. After running a few hundred yards, the [Matabili], halting, pointed to a huge shapeless mass, which bore so strong a resemblance to a sleeping Rhinoceros, that without asking any questions, I poured through the trees at his indistinct outline, a broadside, which from treble the same distance, would have more than satisfied any other animal in the creation. But notwithstanding that the beast was mortally wounded, he twice contrived to cross the river, and I had no alternative – a cold one though it proved – but to wade after him through water

# Black rhinoceros at Molopo and Marigqua

which reached to my middle, following the bloody trail among the intricacies of the grove, until from single drops the traces became splashes of frothy crimson. Still striving to force his tottering frame through the tangled covert, the dying monster at length sank upon his knees, when another bullet behind the shoulder terminated his giant struggles, as he was tearing up the earth with his ponderous horn.

*A flash like fire within his eyes  
Blazed as he bent no more to rise;*

*And then eternal darkness sunk  
Through all the palpitating trunk –  
Nought of life left save a shivering  
Where his limbs were slightly quivering.*

My companion the next morning achieved a 'gentle passage of arms' with the very duplicate of this gentleman, but his antagonist could not be prevailed upon to surrender to superior weapons, until it had considerably disfigured with the point of its horn the stock of the rifle employed in its reduction. Aroused from a siesta in a

thick bush by the smarting of a gunshot wound, the exasperated beast pursued its human assailant so closely, that Richardson was fain, in self-defence, to discharge the second barrel down its open throat!

*Illustration from Portraits of the  
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