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From the REF desk

Clive Walker's long-held desire to establish a Rhino and Cultural History Museum in the Waterberg Mountains of the Northern Province, is finally taking shape. The Rhino Museum will be the first of its kind in Africa.

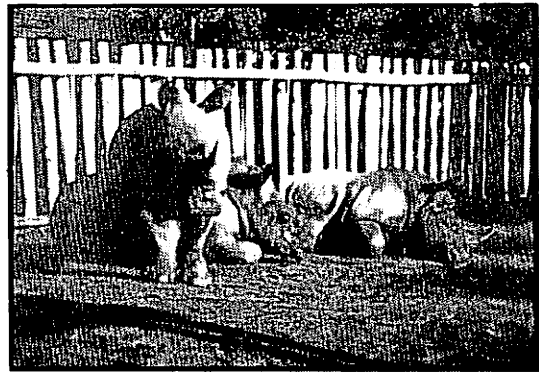
Clive has lived and worked in the Waterberg Mountains for 15 years and he is convinced that the entire region, covering an area in excess of 15 000 square kilometres, holds great hope for conservation. The area is also rapidly developing as a major future tourism destination and subsequently of significant job creation.

Under the joint control of the Wilderness Trust and the Rhino and Elephant Foundation, the Museum Centre is planned to open in the second half of 1997. The premises of the old 'Melkriver' School' has been acquired and is presently being restored to what it looked like years ago. The school lies between the towns Vaalwater and Marken.

The Centre will be open seven days a week and will take the form of a number of sections:

- A. Cultural history museum
- B. A Rhino Museum and natural history section of the Waterberg
- C. Auditorium and venue for meetings
- D. Library
- E. Tea garden
- F. Refreshment area with toilets and adequate parking

Implications for Rhino Conservation discussed at conference



In June of this year, representatives from over 130 governments will meet in Harare for the tenth Conference of the Parties (COP 10) for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

Submit a proposal

At the previous CITES meeting (COP 9) in 1994, South Africa successfully applied to have its population of white rhinos down-listed to Appendix II, subject to a clause that restricted commercial trade to live animals and trophies only. At the forthcoming CITES meeting, South Africa will submit a proposal to entrench the Appendix II listing, and remove the restrictive clause. In its place, South Africa is recommending a zero quota for trade in rhino horn. In effect, South Africa is not advocating the immediate resumption of trade in rhino horn, but is asking for permission to enter into discussions with rhino horn consumer nations such as China, South Korea and Taiwan. These nations are not willing to enter into such discussions with South Africa as long as the total worldwide ban on rhino horn trade remains in place.

Why is South Africa contemplating a legal trade in rhino horn?

This country has an excellent track record in rhino management, partly because local conservation agencies have invested sufficient funds in field protection whereas other African countries have not, and partly because the Natal Parks Board has played a very active role in translocating surplus animals to create new populations throughout the country. However, times are changing; budgets of government conservation agencies are being cut, and there are few protected areas with suitable rhino habitat that do not already have resident rhino populations. There is still much potential rhino habitat on private land, and private landowners already own 20% of South Africa's white rhinos. A legal trade in rhino horn would not only provide an incentive for more private landowners to acquire rhinos and introduce them onto their land, but would also provide another source of revenue to supplement the dwindling budgets of the conservation agencies. Furthermore, a legal rhino horn trade would help to reduce the currently high black market prices of rhino horn, and therefore lower the incentives to poach rhinos.

Stiff opposition

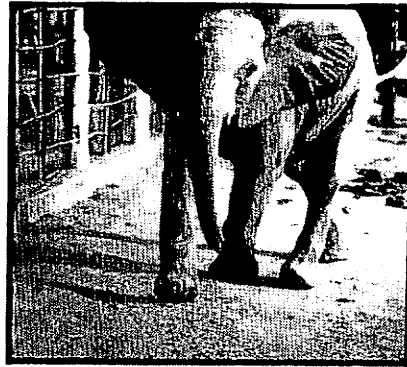
South Africa will face stiff opposition from certain environmental lobby groups who fear that a legal trade in rhino horn may pave the way for a resumption of a legal ivory trade. These groups will argue that even discussing the possible resumption of a legal trade will create fresh incentives for poaching. However, as long as existing laws and enforcement measures remain in place (which they will under the South African proposal), this argument is invalid. If and when South Africa eventually does resume legal trading in rhino horn, this would take place under very tightly controlled conditions. A cartel structure is envisaged, with a single organisation (e.g. Natal Parks Board) acting as a clearing-house for all rhino horn. The cartel mechanism would be designed to ensure that no illegally poached rhino horn could enter the system. Existing high penalties for poachers and illegal traders would remain in place and the cartel would have an added incentive to pursue such offenders.

A sincere attempt

A great deal of thought has gone into the South African proposal and there will certainly be much more input before a controlled legal trading regime

becomes operational. The South African proposal clearly satisfies all the criteria laid out by CITES, and there is no reason for it not to be approved at COP 10. Unfortunately, South Africa still carries the stigma of the Kumble Commission findings, namely that during the apartheid era, members of the South African military were actively involved in trading in ivory and rhino horn to fund covert operations in neighbouring countries. Hopefully the CITES parties will acknowledge that South Africa has "cleaned up its act" and that the rhino down-listing proposal is a sincere and innovative attempt to address the ongoing threat that faces rhinos everywhere.

Shamwari provides new home for Knysna elephants



Based on expert opinion and in agreement with the main stakeholders, namely National Parks Board, the Rhino & Elephant Foundation, the Elephant Management & Owners Association and the Southern Cape branch of the Wildlife Society, the two remaining cow elephants, relocated to the Knysna forests from Kruger National Park in July 1994, are to be settled within Shamwari Game Reserve.

Shamwari, located approximately 65 kilometres north east of Port Elizabeth and an area covering 12 000 h.a. with ideal habitat in which to host elephants, is already home to an existing population of 30 elephants, of which the first calf from relocated elephants, was born two weeks ago.

Three female elephants, aged between 7 and 9 years and donated by Kruger National Park, arrived in Knysna on 25 July 1994. For the translocation from Kruger, the Rhino & Elephant Foundation obtained a sponsorship from the Mazda Wildlife Fund and much of the earlier logistical coordination of the project was a joint effort between the Foundation,