

# REALLY, RHINOS!



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## AND THE JOURNEY BEGINS...

27, 1995. 2:45 Texas time. I arrived at Fossil Rim after a pleasant, speedy drive from the Dallas-Worth airport. Excellent directions. Warmer than I thought but still cooler than Tucson. Nice drive. Actually crossed over some water (Lake Tawakoni) and saw a real river - Trinity River. (that's the water in the river red). Dashed into the gift shop expecting a mother lode but only got notes, postcards and a ceramic rhino. While waiting for my tour guide to come, I visited the bathroom where I experienced my first toilet that flushes while you stand!

Adam Eyres drove up in a red pick up truck (with "RHINOS" for a license plate). Adam was formerly the head of Defiant Zoo in Tacoma, Washington, working with the red wolf program. He has been at Fossil Rim for seven years.

When we drove off, I was expecting a short, cursory tour (and over here we have...) but it turned into a full-on mystical tour. I got to see and touch all the blacks and whites at Fossil Rim (19, I counted 'em). I got to feed some rhinos and Adam was generous enough to invite me to his house (on the grounds of Fossil Rim) to see his rhino collection and his iguana which is for sale. (Any buyers?) It just kept getting better as I met his roommate who offered to put together my 5,000 piece rhino puzzle that has been in his box since 1982.

Here's the news from rhino land. Forgive me if some of this is not right. It is hard to write when you're bouncing around on unpaved road! (=) Pokey is a three year old Southern white born on November 6th. It's nickname is "Laptop" because her father was Mac and the mother was Tasha. (How hard did it take you to get the joke?) Henrietta was born in 1973. Pokey and Macite are whites too. Pokey is a male and he stays outside much of the time. These rhinos actually belong to Zimbabwe. Fossil Rim is used as a "safety net" if the poaching gets too bad. (Remember the evacuation of children during the London Blitz?)

On to the blacks. Named after a chief of a tribe in the area near where she was captured, Sinampande is a black rhino. There is also Charere and Gota Gota. Did you know that black rhinos (at least at Fossil Rim) like to listen to heavy metal music?

A very important part of the tour was the main gift shop. Here I did serious damage to my credit card. They had the most unusual rhinos I have ever seen in a gift shop. Bravo to the manager! I think her name is Judy. Call her and order some wonderful rhinabilia.

Of course Fossil Rim has other animals. I even saw an ostrich and an armadillo (for the first time). But that's now why I schlepped 1,000 miles and drove for 2 hours in a strange land. I was so encouraged to see the rhinos roaming free (within their pastures), their comfortable barns, kindly vet and expert love and care of Adam and his colleagues. Sure, we want the rhinos to live in their natural habitats, but when the profound becomes profane, we seek alternatives. Fossil Rim is such a place and I am grateful for its existence which needs your help. Fossil Rim started out as a private venture. It is now seeking outside funding. One way you can support it is to sign up for "Ride the Rim" which is a mountain bike tour of the Rim which Adam runs. Fossil Rim also provides overnight safaris with a variety of accommodations. You can have a true adventure at a reasonable cost and help support your favorite animal.

Plan a visit to Fossil Rim during 1996. Route 1, Box 210, Glen Rose, TX 76043. (817) 897-2960 X27. Contact Adam Eyres: (817) 897-3666, and tell him the rhino lady says hello.



**Day two.** I leave Stephenville where I spent the night and blast off to Waco. Wouldn't you know that the exact street I need to turn on has the homecoming parade for Baylor University and I have to find an alternate route. Thank goodness for convenience stores! I got directions and found my way to Cameron Park. A small but lovely zoo. Weather was perfect. Here I saw two whites lounging in the morning sun. The enclosure seemed small (well anything would compared to Fossil Rim!) but they seemed content. The zoo has excellent signs and of course, a great gift shop. While the staff watched "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" on television, I did a clean sweep of their rhino stock. There is a rhino on the zoo's logo and if there is no parade, it is easy to find. After going to Fossil Rim, be sure to visit Cameron Park, 1701 N. 4th Street, Waco, TX 76707. (817) 750-8400.

**Day two, still.** I zip up the interstate to the Fort Worth Zoo. I meet Chris Couch at the information booth who is kind enough to contact the rhino zoo keeper for me. In a few minutes Natalie Mashburn meets me and takes me on a magic carpet ride directly to the many rhinos at the zoo. There are three blacks: Harry (who belched on my shirt), Mtoto (f) who has a frostbitten right ear, and Chula (f) means "pretty" in Spanish although her mom was imported from Zimbabwe. Mtoto's father is Macho, a well-proven breeder. He came from the Bass Ranch. Ben and Sue, the two whites, are from the Little Rock Zoo. They are in their early twenties and have mated but so far no hits.

A real treat was to get up close and personal with the Indian rhino. There are 1.1 (one male/one female) Indians, a gift from the then king of Nepal. Arun is the male and Arati is a six year old female. When they came from Nepal in 1989 they were still on bottles! They are now considered adolescents. And are they huge!! It was a joy to cuddle up with Arati. She had that same herding instinct as my Airedale.

Natalie hails from Cincinnati and has been at the zoo since 1991. She is responsible for the rhinos, wart hogs, bongo, cheetah and giraffe. Although the public may see one side of the rhinos (fat, ugly, lazy, etc.) we know that is inaccurate. Natalie mentioned how cute she thought Harry was. She enjoyed it when the rhinos showed another side to the keepers. We knew that. Natalie was very gra-

acious to spend a chunk of time with me and get behind the scenes especially since it's my birthday! (October 28). Ft. Worth Zoo, 1900 National Parkway, Fort Worth, TX 76110 (817) 750-8400. A bit tricky to find, but definitely worth it!

**Day three.** My time is running out. I won't make it to Caldwell Zoo in Tyler. I do make it to the Fort Worth Zoo where Lisa Fitzgerald is waiting for me. She has been at the zoo for six years. She was at the San Antonio Zoo and also at the Arden Zoo in the Bahamas. She is involved with Rhinoceros Relief 2000 and also assists with rhino research. She says, "The rhino is a very special highly intelligent animal in dire need of assistance. I feel pretty good about working with them."

Nyakasikana, "Niki" is a black male named after a base camp in Mana Pools National Park in the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe and still owned by the park in Zimbabwe. He was between 5-7 years old when I arrived. Zambezi (f) was born on 2/28/90 and Niki and Zambezi will breed. Independence is a black male born on 7/3/94. Mabanzo is the mother of Indy and Zambezi. Indy weighed 100 pounds at birth - very low birth weight. He was a preemie. He eats very well now and should be up to 700-800 pounds. He will be going someplace else; they like to ship rhinos when they are between two years old. Indy is Niki's first offspring. When mentioned the keepers noticed differences in personalities. Niki is gentle but not trusting. He was caught in the wild. Mabanzo is also not trusting. Zambezi and Indy are more calm around people because they grew up without much fear because they were part of their daily routine.

Dallas has a strict policy about letting visitors behind the scenes but I got a treat anyway! I was fortunate to witness the operant conditioning of a rhino. Twice a day a keeper spends time with Indy by sitting on a lid and reinforcing the rhino when it comes close to the keeper. This is done to give the rhino the care, conditioning Indy to go into a crate for shipping and allows keepers and vets to get in at harder to see parts (daily maintenance). I was arranged for another zoo keeper who is doing research to spend some time with me. This is the research technician who works with the rhinos. He explained that the International Rhinoceros Conservation Conference in 1988 yielded a number

is among captive blacks which translated to non breeding or substandard captive collections. The 2nd generation of whites are not breeding either. Lisa's project involves tracking the hormone profile of the female (Zambezi) to find out when she is estrus. Fecal matter is checked daily and goes to Deaconess Lab in Montana for analysis. The whole point is to increase the chances of successful breeding. If she is more receptive at night, the zoo may have to change the time the pair are put together. Rhinos communicate with infrasound. The exhibit is near a noisy freeway. They may have a range where the rhinos are housed.

Lisa and John left, and knowing I wasn't going to make it to Tyler, I treated myself to just sitting on a bench opposite the rhinos and watched them for an hour! It was blissful. I'm no Paul Gauguin, but here are my observations.

She is sitting under a shade tree. There was a slight breeze and a partly cloudy day made the weather perfect. I couldn't help but anthropomorphize the mating scenario. She wants it but she doesn't. She's playful and yet keeps him at horn's length. He comes closer. They lock horns. He cuddles and rubs against her. She gives him the cold shoulder. He backs patiently "7 steps behind" for her to make the move. He snuggles up from the back. She backs patiently very still. He starts to mount her. Her legs go up then 4 legs dart away. That's close to what she implied! Round 2. They meet. She ducks under his neck. An occasional horn prod. She pushes forward. He trots off. Okay, so she backs. Gotta admire his persistence. He approaches yet again. She backs slightly into the wall. They assume the rhino face lock position once again. Bingo. He's off again. He's back. He sprays. (I wish he didn't leave the seat up.) Now she backs and goes over to check out his pad. He quickly backs. Is she admiring his etchings perhaps? Fantasy breeds contempt. At least there's something going on! He stays in his space. She hangs out by hers. Maybe later they'll reconnoiter. For now she checks out the action down yonder where the Macho man is back. Here we go again. As the strings of quality take time to create. In their lifetime it shall come to pass. We hope.

One thing rhinos do not have is a lot of time. Whether in situ or captive, their numbers are dwindle-

ing. What man has cast asunder may not be retrievable. Before it is too late. Before another rhino disappears. Before the species is extinct. Please raise money AND consciousness for this intelligent, playful, pulchritudinous pachyderm. It is not only their future which is at stake but ours as well.

Remember, 60,000,000 years in the making ain't a fluke. Rhinos forever!

Update: I just spoke to Lisa and she said tomorrow (12/2) the zoo was offering a new series for volunteers. Guess which animal they chose? Yup! Volunteers will learn about rhino taxonomy, ecology, behavior, vet care and conservation. Please visit the Dallas Zoo, 621 E. Clarendon Drive, Dallas, TX 75203-2996. (214) 670-5656.

Many thanks to all the zoo keepers who donated their valuable time and were so friendly and patient with the crazy rhino lady.

## *Oh no, not again!*

(This is an excerpt that appeared in a local paper back in September)

Poachers hunting rhinos to sell their horns as an aphrodisiac in Southeast Asia have turned their attention from the African savannah to zoos and safari parks in Europe. An anonymous tip to the Frankfurt zoo warning that its three black rhinos were in danger prompted Interpol to issue a Europe wide alert. At the Berlin zoo, veterinarian Reinhard Goeltinbott, who coordinated a warning to all European zoos after Frankfurt received the tip, said: "It is difficult to know whether the threat was serious, but I can well believe that something like this might happen." The tip coincided with reports reaching Berlin police of plans to sedate rhinos held in captivity and remove their horns. The West Midland Safari Park in Bowdley, England is taking the threat seriously. A 24-hour guard has been posted on its six white rhinos. Police patrols at the safari park have been stepped up, and wardens equipped with two-way radios are taking turns spending the night on an old couch in a barn built for the rhinos. "We'll carry on sleeping here indefinitely, or at least until the police tell us that the threat is diminished," said the chief warden Bob Lawrence. "Nothing is going to stop us having rhinos here. Ten percent of the world's rhino population is in captivity and we have an obligation to breed more, even if we release them into the wild later on."