

Major Trade Routes for Rhino Horn within and out of Africa from 1984-1994

Although from 1984 to 1994 Africa's trade in rhinoceros horn has been almost entirely illegal, at least 500 white rhinos and 4,600 black rhinos died during this time. Most were killed by poachers. These rhinos' horns would total about 16 tonnes and would be worth more than US\$16 million if all imported into Asia.

It is known that well over half the horn was smuggled out of the continent; the remainder was put in government stores or was never found. **Esmond Bradley Martin**, a recognised expert on the trade, tells how rhino horn travels the world

There are two main markets for African rhino horn: Yemen, where it is made into handles for the *jambiyya* or traditional dagger, and eastern Asia, where it is sold as medicine. Traders in Yemen obtained their horn from the rhinos of eastern Africa, notably from Kenya and Tanzania since 1984; traders in eastern Asia were supplied from southern Africa, especially Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The reason for two trade routes is due mainly to the location of the traders within Africa, and their relatives and other trading contacts in Asia. For a time after the second world war Arab and Indian traders living in eastern Africa sent horn to Hong Kong and Japan but, after those countries' governments banned imports in 1979 and 1980 respectively, the traders returned to their long tradition of sending horns to Arabia. North Yemen's imports of rhino horn were banned in 1982, but smuggling was relatively simple. Furthermore, from the mid-1970s to 1985, Yemenis paid the highest prices for rhino horn brought to them in Sanaa, giving added incentive to East African traders to deal with Yemen.

On the other hand, since the early 1980s, rhino horn from southern Africa has gone mostly to China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea because there are many Chinese and Korean traders working in the south of the continent. Since mid-1985, the increasingly affluent Taiwanese have paid most for rhino horn, so there has been no reason for trade links to be established recently between southern Africa and Yemen.

There was a third, less long-lasting trade route for rhino horn out of Africa: via Burundi. Although this small country had no rhinos, from around 1985 to 1989 well over a tonne of the horn left the continent this way. Much came out of Tanzania, originating in the huge Selous Game Reserve. Several traders in Burundi also imported horns from other nearby countries for it to be smuggled by air from Bujumbura to Dubai before being moved on to North Yemen and Taiwan.

The Eastern African Trade Routes

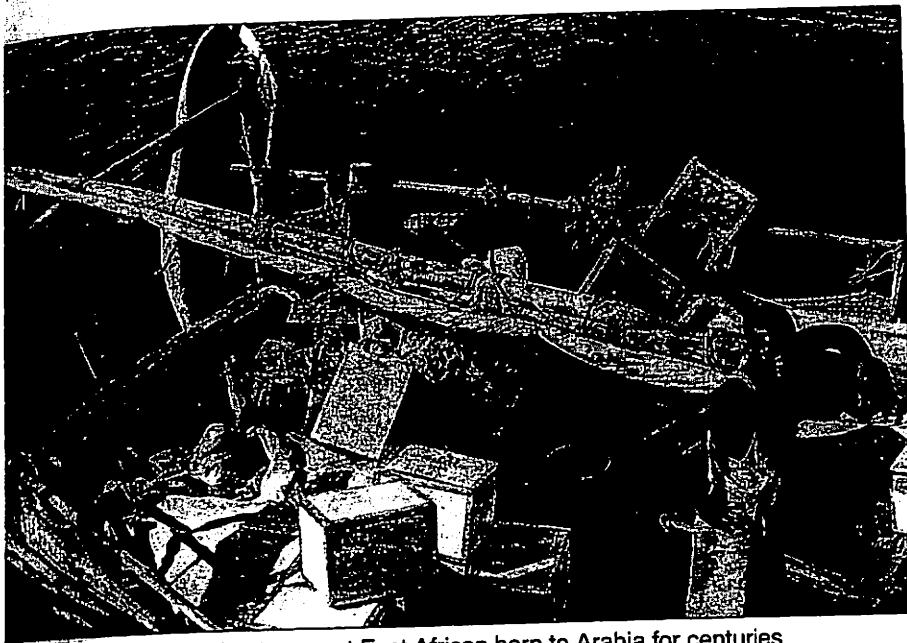
Kenya's Game Department used to hold auctions of rhino horn in Mombasa, not only for the Kenya Government, but also for the Governments of Uganda

and Zaïre; auctions were held in Dar es Salaam for Tanzanian horn. Then, in the late 1970s, the auctions stopped and traders in East Africa could only obtain rhino horn illegally. Some of this was sent out of East Africa by post while other consignments were carried on foot, or by donkey, horse or camel through eastern Africa and northwards. For example, in the mid-1980s, the horns from rhinos shot or speared by Pokot hunters in the Laikipia area of northern Kenya were bought by resident Somalis for about KSh2,000 (US\$117) a horn (about US\$80 a kilo) and sent across the border to Ethiopia and Somalia. Occasional seizures were made, such as in 1990, when about eight horns were taken by



This 10 kg white rhino horn from Bophuthatswana is the heaviest the author has ever seen. In December 1986 this horn was stolen from Pilanesburg National Park and was probably sold to a dealer in Taiwan.

Courtesy of Chrysee Martin



Dhow boats have been used to transport East African horn to Arabia for centuries

Courtesy of Esmond Martin

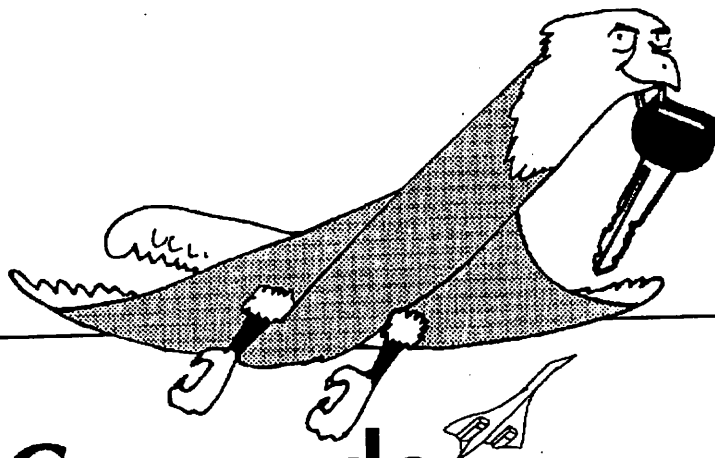
Ethiopian officials at Moyale on the border with Kenya. Rhinos from the thousands of rhinos that lived in Sudan and Central African Republic in the early 1970s also died in this way; heavy poaching had annihilated them by the mid-1980s.

Much of the rhino horn was taken to international ports, such as at Khartoum and Addis Ababa, to be flown to Yemen. As recently as 1993, a Yemeni trader admitted that just over 100 kilos of rhino horn were available at Damazin in Sudan, near the border with Ethiopia. Some of this horn was later transported to Djibouti, and then to Asosa, just across the border in Ethiopia, hidden in lumps of cotton. From Asosa, it was taken by road to Addis Ababa. The main trader organising this consignment merely contacted friends at Addis

Ababa to get the horns flown to Sanaa without difficulty. This quantity of rhino horn represents about 35 animals and its origin is unknown. Kenya's government is unaware of any rhinos having been poached in the country since 1991, and no other countries in eastern Africa are known to have sizeable rhino populations left. There are some black rhinos remaining in Tanzania, Sudan and perhaps Ethiopia that may have been killed or could have died of natural causes; and a few rhinos in remote areas or in the thick forests of Kenya may have died recently without the authority's knowledge and their horns taken. Other horns may have come from old stocks, or been stolen from government stores in eastern Africa.

Besides being transported overland and then by air, horns were frequently exported by boat from the East African coast, especially from Kenya and Tanzania during the 1980s. For centuries the dhow has carried consignments of rhino horn from the coast to Arabia, and continues to do so. In May 1994, during the civil war in Yemen, a dhow, probably a *Zarook* common in the Red Sea, carried 12 kilos of horn from Djibouti to a small village south of Mocha on the Yemen coast, a route also used by smugglers of alcohol. A trader bought the horn in Sanaa for \$1,200 a kilo. Again, its origin is unknown.

Another way rhino horn left eastern Africa, and one much underestimated by conservationists and government authorities, was by diplomats smuggling it out in official luggage. Most governments do not check the personal effects of people travelling on a *laissez-passer*, so some have found it easy and profitable to trade in rhino horn. In eastern Africa, Somali, Ethiopian and Sudanese diplomats have been involved in recent years. A few United Nations' personnel trading in elephant ivory have been apprehended in East Africa, and it is highly likely that they have also traded in rhino horn since it is more valuable than ivory, and smaller and easier to hide. In 1994, middlemen were selling rhino horn for \$500 to \$850 a kilo in Nairobi and Mombasa to exporters. For political reasons, it is extremely diffi-



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to stop diplomats and UN personnel smuggling wildlife products and the problem has not and still is serious.

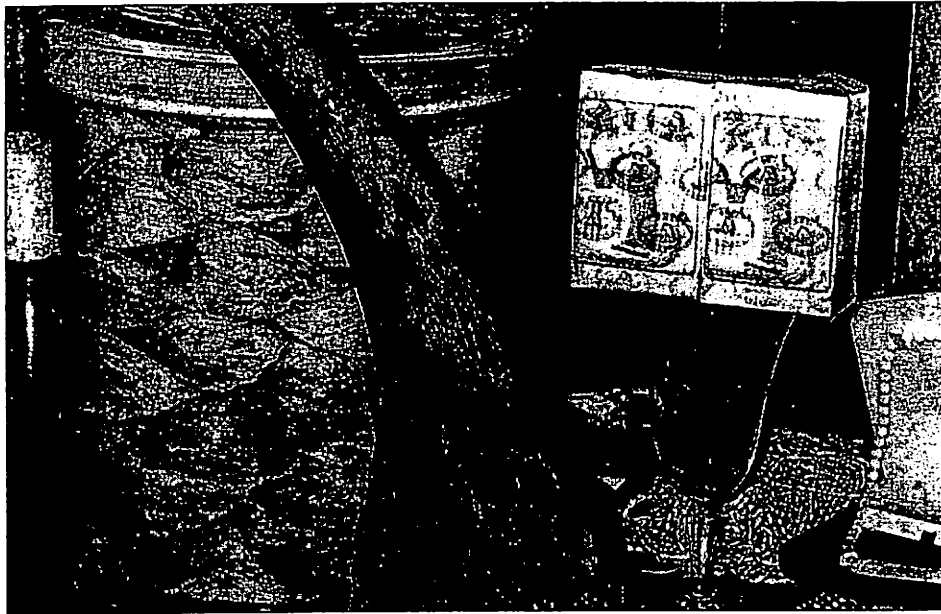
Southern African Trade Routes

Transporting horn in southern Africa was more normally by vehicle rather than on foot or pack-animal. Export could be by aeroplane and ship although during the last decade traders commonly exported horn abroad. The country has seen several horns confiscated by the police that contained rhino horn addressed to Taiwan, photographs of other horns intercepted at post offices in southern Africa

ordered for eastern Asia. Diplomats, especially from eastern Asia, have sent horns abroad in their diplomatic baggage from South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, as has been documented in several publications.

In the 1980s, nearly every rhino in Zambia was killed. In the Luangwa Valley alone there were estimated to be 10 rhinos in the early 1970s, but by 1985, Zambian poachers had shot dead nearly all of them. Some of the horns were posted from Lusaka to Taiwan, but most were sent to Asia via South Africa.

In 1984, Zimbabwean rhinos began to suffer commercial poaching, mostly by Zambians who crossed the Save river and rapidly outnumbered the few local poachers. Then there were over 2,000 black and 200 white rhinos in Zimbabwe. By 1993 only around 300 black and 130 white rhinos were left alive. In 1992, Zambian poachers received from the first middlemen, sometimes organised and outfitted the gangs, only \$100 a kilo for the horn. These traders usually sold the horns for \$350 to \$500 a kilo to another set of middlemen in Lusaka who were West Africans, Greeks and diplomats, especially North Koreans. These traders in turn exported the horns by road through Botswana to South Africa via Malawi or occasionally by air via Swaziland. Sometimes they posted the horn to Taiwan. Some less important middlemen (Zimbabweans, Zambians and Mozambiqueans) brought horns from Zimbabwe straight to South Africa. These traders rarely exported horns themselves to eastern Asia as they did not have the contacts. They sold the horns for \$535 to \$890 a kilo in the early 1990s to Taiwanese, Chinese and some South Africans who had buyers in Taiwan and elsewhere in eastern Asia. The exporters moved the horn out of the country by post, in hand luggage or hidden among other goods, including inside furniture. Traders in Botswana, Zimbabwe and perhaps Mozambique also exported num-



A Chinese medicine shop offers, among other less identifiable things, rhino horn to bring down the fevers of those who can afford it
Courtesy of Esmond Martin

bers of rhino horns, especially in the late 1980s when poaching in those countries was significant. Similar to Zambia and Zimbabwe, most of the horn was taken by vehicle to South Africa where it was sold to Oriental traders for export to Asia. South Africa has been the largest known entrepot for rhino horn on the continent since 1985.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, traders in Swaziland became involved in smuggling rhino horn to South Africa en route for eastern Asia. In 1965 60 white rhinos were introduced into Swaziland after an absence of about 70 years. By 1982 there were about 110 animals, but numbers then halved due to poor nutrition. The rhino population built up again with improved management to 82 animals in 1988. (There were no black rhinos until December 1987 when six were brought from Zimbabwe.) November 1988, however, saw the first known incident of commercial poaching, and from then until 1992 at least 50 white rhinos were killed, mostly by Swazi and Mozambique nationals using AK-47s. Some rhinos were even run down by trains moving between Maputo and central Swaziland. As well as the horns, the skin was occasionally removed, and in 1990 a female rhino's teats and vulva were cut out for local medicine.

This poaching was partly driven by Taiwanese living in Swaziland. Soon after independence in 1966, diplomats, businessmen and advisers from Taiwan arrived in the country, and have continued to visit or live there. In 1990, a local poacher admitted to having sold a rhino horn weighing about five kilos for 2,000 rand, equivalent to about \$151 per kilo, to a Taiwanese in Swaziland. During the worst poaching period, between 1988 and 1992, much horn was exported by post or hidden in cars organised by middlemen based in Manzini, and sent to Johannesburg; from there most of it was exported to Taiwan.

No rhinos were poached in Swaziland from December 1992 to the end of 1994, by which time there was only one group of four black rhinos and two populations of white rhinos totalling 33 left. There were five main reasons for this. First, in 1991 a new penalty was introduced: anybody caught poaching a rhino would receive a minimum jail term of five years. Second, scouts guarding the rhinos were given more modern and effective firearms. Third, a shoot out occurred at a small town called Big Bend in April 1992 when one poacher was shot dead and another fatally wounded; some horns were confiscated from the gang. Fourth, intelligence within Swaziland and with South Africa was greatly improved. And fifth, in August 1993 (amended in May 1994), the Non-bailable Offences Act came into force, stating that poaching rhinos and trading in rhino products is as serious a crime as possessing weapons of war, rape and even murder. All these measures have helped to stop Swaziland's rhino poaching; the trade route from there to South Africa has now been virtually closed.

There has also been rhino poaching in South Africa itself during the last ten years, mostly of white rhinos in Kruger National Park with some white and just a few black rhinos from the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi complex. The annual totals of poached rhinos in South Africa, starting from 1990, have been 8, 5, 15, 13 and 26, which shows a recent increase. Many arrests have been made and some horn recovered. Most horn, however, has been moved from South Africa to the Taiwan market.

Since majority rule in South Africa in April 1994, mainland Chinese have arrived in quite large numbers, many illegally, and some are now involved in wildlife trade, particularly abalone, ivory and rhino horn. More overseas Chinese have also arrived recently in South Africa and are buying and exporting rhino horn. It is not clear where this rhino horn is going as the amount entering Taiwan has decreased sharply since 1993 due to much improved law enforcement on the island. Some horn, however, is still being smuggled into Taiwan. For example, in August 1994, Taiwanese police seized 12 horns brought by a fishing boat from Malaysia, and in October 1994 a Taiwanese was arrested when he tried to smuggle a rhino horn into Chiang Kai-Shek Airport from Singapore.



Besides being part of traditional dress, the Yemeni dagger (*jambiyya*) is the main accessory in dances performed by men
Courtesy of Esmond Martin

Conclusion

Since the 1980s, poachers and middlemen have been smuggling rhino horns through and out of Africa by all modes of transport. The two main arteries known for this illicit trade from the mid-1980s into the early 1990s were eastern Africa to Yemen, and South Africa to Taiwan. Recently, smuggling along these routes has been much reduced mainly because far fewer rhinos are now being poached. The small numbers of rhinos left in countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe are mostly on well managed privately-owned land or are concentrated in small, more easily protected areas on public land.

In 1994, more rhinos were illegally killed in South Africa than probably any other country on the continent. This was largely because South Africa had an estimated 7,273 rhinos out of the continent's total of 9,334 in 1993 (78% of Africa's remaining rhinos). Therefore, some trade in rhino horn is continuing, and in addition, a few horns on the South African market are still coming from Namibia and Zimbabwe. Although the South African authorities have been doing a commendable job at intercepting traffic in rhino horn, some is still getting through to supply the Asian demand. More effort must be made, especially through intelligence, to stop the flow of illegal rhino horn from South Africa to eastern Asia.