

THE
RHINO
STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL
KEEPERS



**CLIVE & ANTON
WALKER**

THE
RHINO
KEEPERS

Clive & Anton
Walker



Note

A percentage of proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to the Waterberg Museum Foundation's Rhino Programme, which focuses on the re-establishment of the Rhino Museum and its associated education and awareness programme.

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*Dedicated to the memory of
Dale 'Rapula' Parker
and
Blythe Loutit and Mike Hearn*

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Note to the Reader



MY SON ANTON AND I collaborated in the writing of this book. Although the text was written together, we have chosen to use the first person singular throughout the book.

The word ‘rhinoceros’ is derived from the Greek words **ῥίνο** (rhin), referring to nose, and **κέρας** (keras), meaning horn, hence ‘nose horn’. The plural can be rhinoceri, rhinoceroses, rhinoceroi or, in our case, rhinoceros. Rhinoceros, with due respect, becomes a bit of a mouthful after continual use, however, and as they are generally known as rhinos, this is the term we will use henceforth.

Prologue



MY RHINO JOURNEY BEGAN in 1956 in the library of my mentor, Hans Bufe, while looking at black-and-white photographs of hunting expeditions in what was then part of Northern Rhodesia and is now Zambia's Luangwa Valley. A section of the reserve was set aside as a controlled hunting area in 1951 at the instigation of the late Norman Carr, who was the warden at the time, with ensuing benefits going to the relevant local tribal authorities. Carr's proposal was unique at the time and in addition to game species such as lion, elephant and buffalo, one could take a trophy black rhino on licence, at a price. One of the photographs depicted a dead black rhino with a game scout standing smartly to attention behind the fallen animal. Hans, an accomplished big-game hunter, was of German descent and had accompanied an Austrian count on safari as companion and interpreter. The black rhino was common in the valley at the time and no one considered the possibility that the species could become extinct throughout Zambia in the not too distant future.

My second encounter was in Kenya's Tsavo National Park in 1960, which was home to no fewer than 9,000 black rhino. From Poacher's Lookout I counted ten black rhinos in the shade of the thorn trees below with Mount Kilimanjaro rising in the distance. The irony of the name was to prove prophetic as poachers eventually succeeded in killing every rhino in the park.

At an International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) rhino and elephant conference in Tsavo 20 years later, it was revealed that the population of black rhino throughout Africa had plunged from 100,000 to less than 15,000. Suddenly everyone was very concerned.

I had, by this stage, already come face to face with both black and white rhinos in Zululand while on a wilderness trail, and in 1973 I founded the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT). I had more than a passing interest in the plight of black rhinos after meeting members of the Natal Parks Board field staff, led by Ian Player and the likes of Peter Hitchins, who were to awaken a deep sense of awe in an animal that had a very bad, and misunderstood, reputation.

From 1973 to the present my family has been swept up in the world of both black and white rhinos in Africa. The work of the EWT, and that of the Rhino & Elephant Foundation (REF), which was founded by Dr Anthony Hall-Martin, Peter Hitchins and myself in 1987, has played a significant role in protecting both rhino species. The establishment of Lapalala Wilderness in the Waterberg in the Limpopo province, by Dale Parker and myself in 1981, was especially significant as it was the first-ever private black rhino sanctuary in South Africa. My son Anton grew up at Lapalala, which became his second home from the age of 12, and today manages the 36,000-hectare rhino sanctuary. The reserve is a testament to the passion and commitment of the late owner, Dale 'Rapula' Parker, who often remarked that 'rhino conservation was not for the faint-hearted'.

The founding of the Lapalala Wilderness School allowed thousands of children to come face to face with a black rhino whose nursery was in our backyard. Karen Trendler hand-raised the calf, named Bwana, until he was six months of age. His care was then taken over by my wife, Conita Walker, who succeeded in raising him to adulthood when he became South Africa's first 'rhino ambassador'. Bwana was followed by a white rhino calf, a hippo and a female black rhino calf, named Moeng. Sadly, Moeng was brutally slain by poachers at the age of four at the commencement of the current rhino crisis. Metsi, a black rhino male who was also under Conita's care at the time, survived the attack.

There is a great deal of scientific and technical literature devoted

Prologue

to the rhino, far more than you may imagine, and this book is not intended to add to this already well-researched body of academic work. Rhinos have not enjoyed the popularity of lions or elephants, however, and this is reflected in the unfortunate shortage of rhino books that are accessible to the general reader. This book, therefore, is an account of my own personal exploration and experiences of rhinos and will explore its journey since before the first Europeans arrived at the foot of Africa. While it is not a scientific work, I have made every effort to ensure that the biological and other information is accurate. I have tried to be as objective as possible and in no way intend to offend, anger or disturb anyone. I hope, at least, that the book will help to clear up some misunderstandings, raise pertinent questions, look at both sides of the story and stimulate thought and debate about how best to ensure the long-term survival of the rhino.

My journey has not been undertaken alone, and I have been privileged to travel with some amazing people, all of whom I consider to be ‘rhino keepers’. These are the scientists, game rangers, wildlife managers, guides, field rangers, journalists, artists, conservationists (a conservationist, in this context, is anyone who is passionate about nature, and can be a school teacher, plumber, school kid or even, on rare occasions, politicians), wilderness walkers and hunters (although not all hunters, mind you) whose contributions, whether large or small, have helped to protect the rhino.

Several very well-known personalities, not to mention the countless unknown, all share the same interest in saving the rhino. The exception to this rule is the poacher and the faceless millions of consumers of rhino horn who know little about this extraordinary animal and probably have no idea what it even looks like. This book offers no silver-bullet solution to the rhino problem, but seeks rather to convey the reasons why I believe these amazing creatures are worthy of our highest respect and protection.

It is once again five minutes to midnight for the world’s surviving rhino, and we all know that the clock is ticking. Once they are gone, they will be gone forever. The choice is ours. Should you read this book, keep an open mind and heed the words of the great American

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poet Walt Whitman who said, 'You must not know too much, or be too precise or scientific about birds and trees and flowers. A certain free margin . . . helps your enjoyment of these things'.

Clive and Anton Walker
Islands, October 2011

CHAPTER 1

The Flight of the Unicorn



THE UNICORN WAS FIRST mentioned by the ancient Greeks in what was to become Europe, not in their mythology but in their accounts of natural history. The earliest description of a unicorn is perhaps from the Greek physician Ctesias in 416 BC. Both Aristotle (384–322 BC) and Pliny (AD 23–79) were convinced of its existence and believed that ‘like the rhino, the unicorn was endowed with enormous strength, but this was concentrated in its single horn’. Some 500 years after Aristotle, the Roman scholar and teacher of rhetoric, Aelian, mentions the unicorn on several occasions in his 17-volume *On the Nature of Animals*. This mystical creature later became an important symbol in both the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period and was described as an extremely wild creature, possessed of purity and grace. Even the genius of Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), writing in one of his notebooks, was taken in by the belief: ‘The unicorn, through its temperance and not knowing how to control itself, for the love it bears to fair maidens forgets its ferocity and wildness, and laying aside all fear it will go up to a seated damsel and go to sleep on its lap, and thus the hunters take it’. The one thing that Da Vinci got right was the unicorn’s wildness, and it can certainly be ferocious.

We know that medieval knowledge and belief often stemmed from ancient Biblical sources that reference the unicorn on a number of occasions. Kelly Enright, in her excellent work entitled *Rhinoceros*,

places it perfectly into context: ‘The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (second century) translates re’em as “monoceros” or single-horned. In the Latin Vulgate Bible, the main version used from 400 through to 1400 CE, re’em, or monoceros was translated to “unicornis”, the Latin word for single horn’.

As Latin was the official language of the church, *unicornis* became the accepted word and took on the meaning as evidenced in Numbers 24:8, ‘He hath as it were the strength of a unicorn’ and again in Isaiah 34:7, ‘And the unicorns shall come down with them, and the bullocks with their bulls: and their land shall be soaked with blood’. In Job 39:9–11 we perceive another element, ‘Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? Or will he harrow the valleys after thee? Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great?’

These Bible passages leave one with an impression of the unicorn as an animal possessed of immense strength and violence. Consider how far back these writings go. Numbers recounts the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in the desert after they left Mount Sinai. They had rebelled against God and his appointed man, Moses. Both Numbers and Isaiah conjure up a sense of great power and retribution for those who disobeyed. But perhaps the unicorn was also imbued with another property, as in Psalm 92:10, ‘But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of a unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil’. Perhaps we should leave the interpretation to more learned scholars.

There are so many legends attached to the origin of the unicorn that I would argue that the rhino should be considered a candidate for the honour. The popular portrayal, of course, is that of a beautiful white horse with a goat’s beard and a large spiralling horn protruding from its forehead which could, apparently, only be captured by a virgin. Does it surprise anyone, therefore, that it is generally portrayed as such and certainly not in the likeness of a rhino?

Da Vinci had clearly never seen a unicorn, and neither had anyone else of his time until the return of the celebrated Venetian traveller Marco Polo. While travelling in Indonesia, in the 13th century, he described a unicorn as:

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scarcely smaller than elephants. They have the hair of a buffalo and feet like an elephant's. They have a single black horn in the middle of the forehead . . . They have the head of a wild boar's. They spend their time by preference wallowing in mud and slime. They are ugly brutes to look at. They are not at all such as we describe them when we relate that they let themselves be captured by virgins, but clean to the contrary to our notions.

What Marco Polo had seen turned out to be a Javan rhino, which evidently did not fit his perception of a unicorn.

As so often with myths and legends, ideas are developed and passed down from one generation to another, one storyteller to another, one writer to another until they eventually take on a reality of their own. What starts off as a *myth* becomes in the end a *fact*. We know today that no such animal as a unicorn exists, and if by any chance the rhino can lay any claim to the origin of the legend, no virgin in her right frame of mind would go anywhere near one, especially not a black rhino. As a child, it was a great story, but as you grow older you realise that your local zoo, or for that matter any zoo, doesn't have one.

Right up to the beginning of the 19th century, a strong belief in the existence of the unicorn was widespread among writers, poets, historians, alchemists, physicians, theologians and no doubt a fair number of travellers.



In books on traditional Chinese medicine, beginning with the oldest, the *Shennong Ben Cao Jing* (attributed to the Chinese emperor Shennong, who lived around 2800 BC, it was only compiled into three written volumes in the late Warring States and Western Han periods from 475 BC to AD 9), rhino horn is classified as a cold drug, indicated for hot diseases and thus suitable for cooling the blood and counteracting toxins. In the poem 'Juan Er' from the *Shi Jing* (Book of Songs) it says 'Just for a moment, I pour from that rhino-horn cup, so as not to hurt forever'. This may be the first written evidence confirming the fact that

by the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770–221 BC) at the latest, the Chinese were using cups made out of rhino horn. That is more than 2,200 years ago. Another written reference to rhino horn is found in the *Hou Han Shu* (official dynastic history records) dating to the Xin Dynasty of Wang Mang (AD 9–23) where it is mentioned as an ingredient in a recipe for longevity.

So, because of the dramatic decline of the Chinese rhino population during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, the Han were importing rhino horns by sea from Sumatra. By the Western Han period, rhino-horn cups were being buried with their owners, as they were deemed more valuable than jade. The rhino became mythical, and its horns came to be considered magical. Based on the power of their respective horns, images of Zhi, the mythical Chinese goat-unicorn, were transformed into mythical rhino-unicorns.

While the Western Han were conquering and colonising the south, the tide of human influence turned and began to flow mainly from the East to the West via the land routes of Central Asia and the developing maritime silk route, as traders of Mediterranean origin began to use the south-west monsoon winds to sail right through to southern India. Due to the nature of these trade winds, the merchants and traders had to remain ashore in southern India for several months before the turn of the winds. This had an enormous impact on later unicorn myths.

This southern India trade route was not only a conduit for spices, silks and other valuable goods such as rhino horn and elephant ivory, but also for stories and information. As stories of the mythical Chinese unicorn moved westward, they filtered through Indian culture and acquired new erotic and aesthetic aspects from the old Indian story of the gentle one-horned hermit Rishyasringa from the third volume of the *Mahabharata* written in about 400 BC. As such, certain aspects of the European unicorn myths, especially its gentleness and its supposedly easy capture by a maiden, were probably of Indian inspiration. So profoundly was the myth of the Chinese unicorn transformed by its passage through southern Indian culture that knowledge of its origin in China was gradually superseded.

The belief in the power of rhino horn as an aphrodisiac must have

originated within the greater Indian sphere of influence. From ancient times in China, rhino horn was believed to serve the practical medical functions of lowering fevers and counteracting toxins, but people in the West somehow came to believe that rhino horn was used in China as an aphrodisiac. This idea is completely unfounded, as there is no mention of using rhino horn as an aphrodisiac in any texts on traditional Chinese medicine.

Rhino / unicorn horn acquired additional magical powers when Ge Hong (AD 283–343), best known for his interest in alchemy and techniques of longevity, wrote his *Baopuzi* (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity). Rumours of these magical powers began to spread westward.

The horn of the narwhal (*Monodon monoceros*), which is actually a tooth and not a horn, came into China from the north-east Arctic seas as early as the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907), and was used, like rhino horn, for medicine and for carving. Soon rhino horn and narwhal horn became linked due to their use as medicine and, as a result, narwhal horn acquired the magical aspects of rhino / unicorn horn. Knowledge of these magical qualities reached the Muslim world via the Turkic tribes of Central Asia, and by the early 11th century the Arabs had come to consider rhino horn and narwhal horn (which they called *khutu* and was carved to make their knife handles) as one and the same. During the 12th century, rumours about the magic of rhino / unicorn / narwhal horn spread to Europe from the Arab world, and images of unicorns with spiral horns began to appear in medieval European art.



While unicorns only exist in our imagination thanks to myth, legend, fairy tales, art and literature, rhinos still exist today. All rhinos belong to the mammalian order *Perissodactyla*, which comes from the Greek *περισσός* (*perissós*), meaning uneven or odd number, and *δάκτυλος* (*dáktylos*), meaning finger or toe. In other words they are odd-toed ungulates. Other extant *Perissodactyla* are tapirs and equids (horses, zebra, etc.). We know from the fossil record that the world's five

remaining rhino species were once widespread and numerous. Rhinos have been around for at least 50 million years. They appeared during a long series of geological time frames comprising three Periods and seven Epochs known as the Cenozoic Era. This Era, which we know as the Age of Mammals, began 65 million years ago.

Rhinos were once a diverse group of mammals ranging over a wide variety of ecosystems in North America, Europe, Asia and Africa, although they were never found in South America or Australia. The earliest rhinos had no horns and some were only the size of a dog. The largest and most spectacular, the *Paraceratherium*, also commonly known as the *Indricotherium*, stood 5.5 metres at the shoulder, was over 8 metres long with a 1.8-metre-long skull and weighed in at about 20 tons. To put it into perspective, that's more than the weight of three African bull elephants.

The woolly rhino (*Coelodonta antiquitatis*), a two-horned animal with the anterior horn measuring up to a metre long, was larger than today's white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*), and was on average some 3.7 metres in length, around 2 metres tall and weighed 2–3 tons. The woolly rhino was well adapted to the steppe tundra, with short stocky limbs and a thick woolly coat, and first appeared in China about a million years ago, later spreading to Europe where it became common along with the woolly mammoth. With powerful neck muscles, it used its large horn to sweep aside the snow in order to eat the underlying vegetation. The long horn was comprised of keratin, as are the horns of rhinos today, and was likewise used as a defensive weapon. They were supremely well adapted to the cold climate of northern Eurasia and the arid desert regions of southern England and western Siberia. We know that the woolly rhino was observed by humans, as they are depicted in the cave art of Europe dating back, in one case, some 30,000 years.

In the valley of Ardeche in France, set in a limestone cliff above the former bed of the river of the same name, is the Chauvet Cave. The cave was only explored in December of 1994 and it revealed the most stunning examples of early cave art, depicting cave lions, mammoths, bison, cave bears, horses and the most superbly executed woolly rhinos. While it has never been my good fortune to see these

depictions, they have been described as exceptional both in quality, condition and quantity – 53 of the images are of woolly rhinos. Chauvet and the other caves of Europe surely rank as the world's first known art galleries, dating back to the Upper Paleolithic (Late-Stone Age). Although artistic creation may not have been the original inhabitants' intention, who is to say the creators were not a little satisfied with their handiwork. In my opinion, as an artist rather than a scientist, they are breathtaking in both their line and form.

In 1940, a cave was discovered near the village of Montignac in France by four teenage boys, Marcel Ravidat, Jacques Marsal, Georges Agnel and Simon Coencas, as well as Robot, Marcel's dog. What they had stumbled upon was beyond their wildest imagination, for within its vast, pitch-black interior the caves were to reveal some of the best known Upper Paleolithic art ever found in Europe. Some of the artworks had been incised into the stone, but most had been painted using mineral pigments. The paintings of the Lascaux Caves, which are estimated at being over 17,000 years old, comprise some 2,000 images of which 605 have been precisely identified. Of the images, 364 are equines and among a collection of other images are seven felines, a bird, a bear, one human being and one rhino. The most stunning images are of four huge black bulls – one is 5.2 metres long, making it the largest animal cave art known. The black bulls, or more correctly aurochs (*Bos primigenius*), now a long-extinct giant ox, are known from the fossil record to have lived in the region and are the dominant feature among the 36 other animal species to be found in 'The Great Hall of the Bulls'. It is believed that the aurochs were driven to extinction by man.

Another Asian species, the giant unicorn rhino, (*Elasmotherium*) or thin-plate beast, stood over 2 metres high at the shoulder, up to 6 metres long, weighed 5 tons and had an enormous single horn, up to 2 metres long. They first appear in the fossil record some 2.6 million years ago. This long-legged rhino displayed horse-like behaviour and occupied the steppes of Siberia. So, *Elasmotherium* may be the only species of (now extinct) rhino known to early humans that can lay claim to the title of unicorn as it resembled a horse and had a single large horn on its forehead. Apart from one image in the Rouffignac Cave in France, no

extensive cave art exists to reveal what it may have looked like. We have to rely on the reconstructed form based on the fossil remains and the written record of one medieval traveller by the name of Ahmad ibn Fadlan. He set out from Baghdad in June AD 921, as the secretary of an ambassador, destined for the towns of the Bulgars at the three lakes of the Volga. His journey was both illuminating and hazardous and upon eventually reaching the Volga River in May AD 922, he wrote:

Near the river [the Volga] is a vast wilderness wherein they say is an animal that is less than a camel and more like a bull in size. Its head is like a camel, and its tail is like the tail of a bull. In the centre of its head it has a thick horn, which as it rises from the head of the animal gets to be thinner until it becomes like the point of a lance . . . I saw in the king's house three large bowls which looked like [they were made of] the onyx of Yemen. The king informed me that it was made from the base of the horn of the animal. Some of the people of the country told me that it was a rhinoceros.

Elasmotherium and the woolly rhino both died out about 10,000 years ago. Apart from possible climatic change, although their extinction does not coincide with the end of the last ice age, the woolly rhino, the *Elasmotherium* and the woolly mammoth were, in all probability, bundled into extinction by humans.

The *Liber de Spectaculis* (On the Spectacles) is dated to AD 80 and was written to celebrate the 100 days of games held by the Roman emperor Titus to inaugurate the Flavian Amphitheatre, or the Colosseum as we know it. Written by the poet Martial, it gives a complete account of what was intended as an illustration of Titus's power and benevolence:

Now while the rhinoceros is entertaining to observe, when undisturbed it is naturally diffident [shy] and seems to be a disappointing animal for the games. A strict vegetarian, in nature it attacks no other animal for food but is content to munch the placid shrub. This is not very promising for the arena. But the unexpected aspect of this preposterous

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quadruped is its explosive anger and incredible power when annoyed. Its temper is uncertain: you might have to work at disturbing it, but when sufficiently provoked it attacks ferociously, propelling its tonnage at 30 miles per hour, an attack which hardly anything in nature can withstand, while bellowing a variety of frightening noises.

The expectant Roman audience could rely on the usual lion or bull or bear to maul, dismember and (save for the bull) devour its helpless victim, man or beast, with gratifying savagery. But the lion fled in terror from the rhino and the bear was tossed in the air like a bundle of straw. Martial notes that ‘he lifted two steers with his mobile neck, to him yielded the fierce buffalo and the bison’. It is clear from Martial’s vocabulary that the triumph of the rhino is emphatic: ‘The rhinoceros has to be provoked, but once that is achieved nothing can withstand it and it puts on a wonderful show’.

Titus’s games were not the first time the rhino had been included in the assortment of animals exhibited at inauguration games. A rhino was at the games of the Theatre of Pompey and Caesar Augustus exhibited one in the Saepta. But the rhino was always unfamiliar. Interestingly, back then, when Roman audiences were so jaded that they expected animals in any set of games to be slaughtered in their thousands, the rhino had an ‘advantage over the other beasts’ because it was ‘so difficult to acquire, was expensive and put on such a good show’. It was therefore ‘preserved to be produced publicly on more than one occasion’.



In Africa today, the black rhino has a reputation of being a particularly nasty customer and should be avoided at all costs if you are on foot and not intent on killing it. Some 19th-century hunters considered hunting it a ‘tame affair’ and placed little stock in it as a worthy trophy. Take the gun away from the same hunter and let him blunder about in the bush where black rhinos occur and it’s very likely he will never want to set foot there ever again.

When it comes to the question of good looks, most people would agree that only a rhino could love another rhino. Considering that the unicorn is universally portrayed as a beautiful white horse, it's not surprising that the poor old rhino has had a bad PR rap and lost out to his equine opposition. Is it deserved? After all they are related. As to being good looking, well, rhinos have their moments. Nothing will arrest one's senses and focus one's attention more acutely than coming upon a black rhino in its own space when it is on its feet and facing you directly with head held up high, beady eye straining forward and ears twitching. While this is the perfect opportunity to decide for yourself on the rhino's aesthetics, you won't have much time to make up your mind. In this moment, two possibilities exist: the rhino will either give a sharp snort, about-turn and vanish, or it will give the same snort and you will discover very, very quickly what is meant by a bullet train. The options thereafter will be few. To me, that is true beauty and it has nothing to do with good looks.

While the first European-recorded rhino sighting in southern Africa dates back to 1647, the San left us an amazing record in rock-art depictions of primarily the black rhino, which they regarded as a 'heavy rain' animal, as well as the white rhino, which was regarded as a 'soft rain' animal. The largest concentrations of these painted forms are to be found within the Limpopo basin, south-western Zimbabwe, south-eastern Botswana and the Makabeng and Waterberg escarpments where I live. Traversing this beautiful region of mountains, sandstone and granite outcrops, deep incised krantzes, arid sandy plains supporting a diverse range of habitats from dry mopane woodland to dense riverine and mountain forests, one finds many seasonal streams and rivers of which the Limpopo is by far the most prominent. Here the hunter-gatherer San reigned supreme for over 5,000 years before the arrival of the hunter-herder Khoe with their livestock about 2,000 years ago and the arrival of the first Bantu-speaking peoples who crossed the Limpopo in about AD 300. Changes in occupation of the land began when the colonisers, more skilled in iron-making and agriculture, set about altering the landscape of the original inhabitants forever.

Commencing with the San, each group imprinted on the region their

own unique rock-art style. Both the Khoe and the iron-mining agro-pastoralists sought to leave their mark by way of painting in various forms and rock engravings. They left us hundreds of superb art galleries with some of the most beautiful rock art to be found anywhere within southern Africa. Sadly the San were not able to adjust to this invasion of their wilderness and in time were either exterminated or absorbed into the more dominant and powerful occupiers. Today the San no longer exist here as an ethnic group and all we have of their former existence is their rock art.

The study of rock art is well understood in South Africa and, as the images occur in important places associated with shamanistic rituals, mythology, rainmaking, medicine-making and experiences such as trance dances, most researchers agree that the depictions are not simply art for art's sake. Dr Sven Ouzman put it most succinctly to me in an email: 'We know much of the rock-art works on symbolic and religious levels. Just like the "lamb" in Christian iconography. The engravings plus the place it was engraved combined to help people think about their world'.

I find his view most profound, particularly his opinion that not all species were necessarily 'menu' animals, which suggests that other forces were at work in the lives of the painters. One only has to look at the symbols representing a belief system such as idols, tomb paintings, cave art, tapestries, scrolls, small stone seals inscribed with elegant depictions of animals, including a unicorn-like figure dating back to a 2500 BC Indus Valley civilisation, to see how closely associated art and religion were in their development. Human beings throughout history have always sought out something, be it water, food, shelter, land, possessions or wealth. Is it possible that art as self-expression started out as a means of reaching out to a higher being in order to acquire these needs?

The rhino, it is suggested by archaeologists, was considered by the San to be an animal of great potency, possibly because of its size and, in the case of the black rhino, its aggressive nature. They had great empathy with the animals that occupied the same landscape as they did. Their very survival depended on their ability to accurately

determine their habits and the space they needed to be given in order to avoid any confrontational situation. The art of the San left us evidence, in the absence at times of the written word from travellers and hunters, of the existence of rhinos. At least four depictions of the black rhino have been found on the north side of the Waterberg plateau of the Limpopo, which played a minor role in the decision to reintroduce the species back into these densely wooded hills and valleys.

To the east of the Waterberg massif lies a mountain range known as Strydpoort. This island mountain range is approximately 19 kilometres long and 10 kilometres wide. Within this range of rugged folded hills and deep bush-clad ravines, known as the Makapan Valley, lies the farm Makapansgat. The farm is important due to the tragic interracial conflicts in the middle of the 19th century and the discovery of a palaeontological and archaeological site of mind-blowing proportions. Secluded among the hills are numerous ancient caves formed by the dissolution of the surrounding dolomite rock by percolating water. Preserved within the sediments filling these caves is an astonishing fossil record spanning more than 3 million years including extinct species such as elephants, sabre-toothed cats, giant porcupines and dassies, as well as proto-humans and humans from *australopithecine* to the present. No extinct rhino fossils are evident in the record, but the caves have revealed fossilised teeth of both species of today's white and black rhino.

About 200 kilometres north of Makapan, and more than 1,000 years ago, Mapungubwe was the centre of a thriving, powerful kingdom with wealth created by trade with the Arabs on the Indian Ocean coastline. The remains of high-quality trade goods have been found at Mapungubwe including items from China, India and the Middle East. Glass beads, Chinese ceramics and cotton cloth would have been traded for ivory, copper, hides and in all probability rhino horn, for we know from the written record that rhino horn was sought after by Arab traders for centuries. Gold was similarly coveted by the Arab traders from their base on the coast of Sofala in present-day Mozambique. This was the fabled land of Monomotapa of the legendary *King Solomon's Mines*. Slaves were also very much in demand for later trading and

one must remember that someone had to carry the goods to the coast, which was a very long way away.

From AD 1300, with a population of some 9,000 inhabitants, a new type of social hierarchy emerged. Coupled with the onset of climate change, which resulted in drought and crop failure, Mapungubwe began to wane and a shift of regional power to Great Zimbabwe resulted in the ultimate collapse of the kingdom. Today Mapungubwe is a World Heritage Site and a national park under the control of the South African National Parks. The site is on the south bank of the Limpopo River bordering Zimbabwe in the north and Botswana in the west. The meaning of the name Mapungubwe is a mystery. It has been referred to as the 'Place of Jackal', although the origin of the word is neither Venda, Shona nor Karanga, and most likely comes from a dialect not as yet recorded by linguists. A place of haunting beauty, which locals believed was sacred to ancestral spirits, Mapungubwe was shrouded in the past with mystery and a degree of fear, not to mention the hidden treasure that ultimately led discoverers to it.

In 1932 local farmer Jerry van Graan discovered the site. Being from an educated family, he informed the Transvaal University College (now the University of Pretoria), who have been the custodians of the unbelievable relics and treasure trove of golden objects recovered from a hidden grave for more than 70 years. Among the enormous number of golden objects found was a beautiful gold-plated rhino. According to Sian Tiley-Nel, curator of the Mapungubwe Museum at the University of Pretoria, this golden rhino was:

once a symbol of royalty [and] lay buried for seven centuries in a sacred grave on Mapungubwe Hill until it was unearthed in 1933. This fat-bellied rhinoceros is about 15.2 centimetres in length and shaped out of two finely beaten sheets of gold foil only 0.5 millimetres thick and was fashioned around a soft core, probably sculpted wood, and held in place with minute gold nails.

This is the only complete and restored animal found at Mapungubwe, although two other torsos of rhinos were recovered. The animal has

a single gold-foil horn and a solid gold tail. The shape of the rhino, with characteristically lowered head, powerful shoulders and fat belly, depicts a white rhino in my opinion. The white rhino most certainly occurred in the region, as evidenced by the rock-art sites and the records of 19th-century hunters. The one confusing aspect, however, is the single horn, which is only found on the Javan and greater one-horned rhino today. Both of these single-horned Asian rhinos were, at one time, widespread across Asia. Given the discovery of a vast number of glass trade beads originating from India, Persia, Egypt and Arabia via the east coast trade merchants, is it possible that there was some influence from this quarter? The single horn is indeed fascinating. The golden rhino of Mapungubwe was to become not only the symbol of a once-flourishing empire but a symbol of the once-numerous rhinos alongside the painted images of a now extinct species emblazoned on the sandstone cliffs and overhangs by the artists who followed the same fate.

At the confluence of the Limpopo and the Shashe rivers, there is an island whose ownership was disputed by Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa at one stage, and largely disowned by all three. Willem Coetzer, the private owner on the Botswana side, who was a great friend to Educational Wildlife Expeditions (EWE), and allowed us to run trails on his property, proposed setting up an independent state with its own flag and stamps. His suggestion was more tongue in cheek than serious. This beautiful island covered in magnificent trees was directly opposite what was to become the Mapungubwe National Park and the haunt of elephant, impala, baboons and bushbuck. Amid the vegetation and outcrops of sandstone, a San painting of a rhino and a single human figure was found – further evidence of the importance of the rhino in San belief and of the ultimate disappearance of both. The dispute was eventually settled with ownership residing with Botswana.

After an absence of more than 100 years, the black rhino was successfully reintroduced to Venetia, the De Beers reserve to the south of Mapungubwe National Park, in 2003. Venetia remains a separate, closed system. I was a member of the South African National Parks Board, which was on a conservation committee visit to the park, and

we all witnessed the release of the rhinos into the holding pens. For most of our committee this was their first-ever opportunity to see a living black rhino. As part of the planned international transfrontier park embracing Zimbabwe, Botswana and Mapungubwe, the black rhino should hopefully one day be seen again within the rugged, beautiful sandstone landscape, roaming free as it did more than 1,000 years ago. We will have to be patient as this has yet to become a reality.

To the west near the Motloutse River, a tributary of the Limpopo, the artist and explorer Thomas Baines recorded the following in his diary of 1871, 'We breakfasted under a leafless baobab, about 40 feet in circumference, and passed others beginning to show young foliage, some of them 50 feet in girth; we saw a rhinoceros, two giraffe, and some antelope.' He subsequently produced an excellent oil painting of a black rhino in 1874, which is now in the Sanlam Art Collection and forms part of a series he produced from the region. The hunting of rhino for meat (the best part being the tongue, well salted and boiled), the hide for sjamboks (whips for horse riding and punishing wrongdoers, no doubt) and the horn for trade, is well illustrated in an earlier painting he produced in 1850 of the market square in Grahamstown.



The story of the rhino in southern Africa has been a bloody one since the arrival of the first European settlers in 1652. The rhino has survived largely due to the far-sighted and timeous interventions of individuals who recognised that the species would not survive the hand of man if action was not taken. The tsetse fly and malaria played an important part in the survival of the last pocket of white rhino and perhaps less than 100 black rhino in the wilderness of Zululand in 1895. One black rhino female survived in the Kruger National Park as late as 1936. With the exception of the remote desert regions of the Kaokoveld, the rhino of Namibia was extinct by the turn of the 19th century. Botswana did not do much better with occasional sightings in Ngamiland up to 1994, when it finally became extinct there. Zimbabwe and Zambia fared far better, thanks to dedicated field men and the old ally, the tsetse fly.



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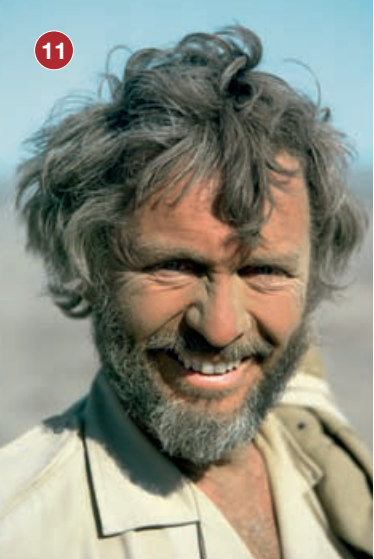
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THE RHINO KEEPERS

The Rhino Keepers is a personal story of the conservation of rhinos in Africa, told through the experiences and insights of the pre-eminent conservationists Clive and Anton Walker. It is a harrowing real-life account that underscores the enormous challenges faced in a world where rhino horn is more expensive than gold or cocaine in the Eastern end-user markets.

In 1970, Africa had a population of 65,000 black rhinos. Rampant poaching whittled this down to about 3,400 in just 20 years, with numbers still plummeting. Conservationists fought back with trained and dedicated rangers, shoot-to-kill policies, dehorning of rhinos and translocations to safer reserves – small triumphs in the ‘rhino war’ that was heading inexorably south. Today, headlines report on the resurgence in poaching in South Africa where rhinos are being killed at an unprecedented rate. A second rhino war is now being waged against well-trained, well-armed and well-connected poachers.

Despite the CITES ban on the international trade in rhino horn, 448 rhinos were killed in South Africa in 2011 – only approximately 5,000 black rhinos and 21,000 white remain. Did we win the battle but lose the war? Is it time to change focus from protecting the supply to trying to restrict the demand? Is the final step in securing the rhino’s safety a legalisation of the rhino horn trade?

A percentage of proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to the Waterberg Museum Foundation’s Rhino Programme.



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