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ANIMAL KEEPERS' FORUM



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The Journal of the American
Association of Zoo Keepers, Inc.

MARCH 2002

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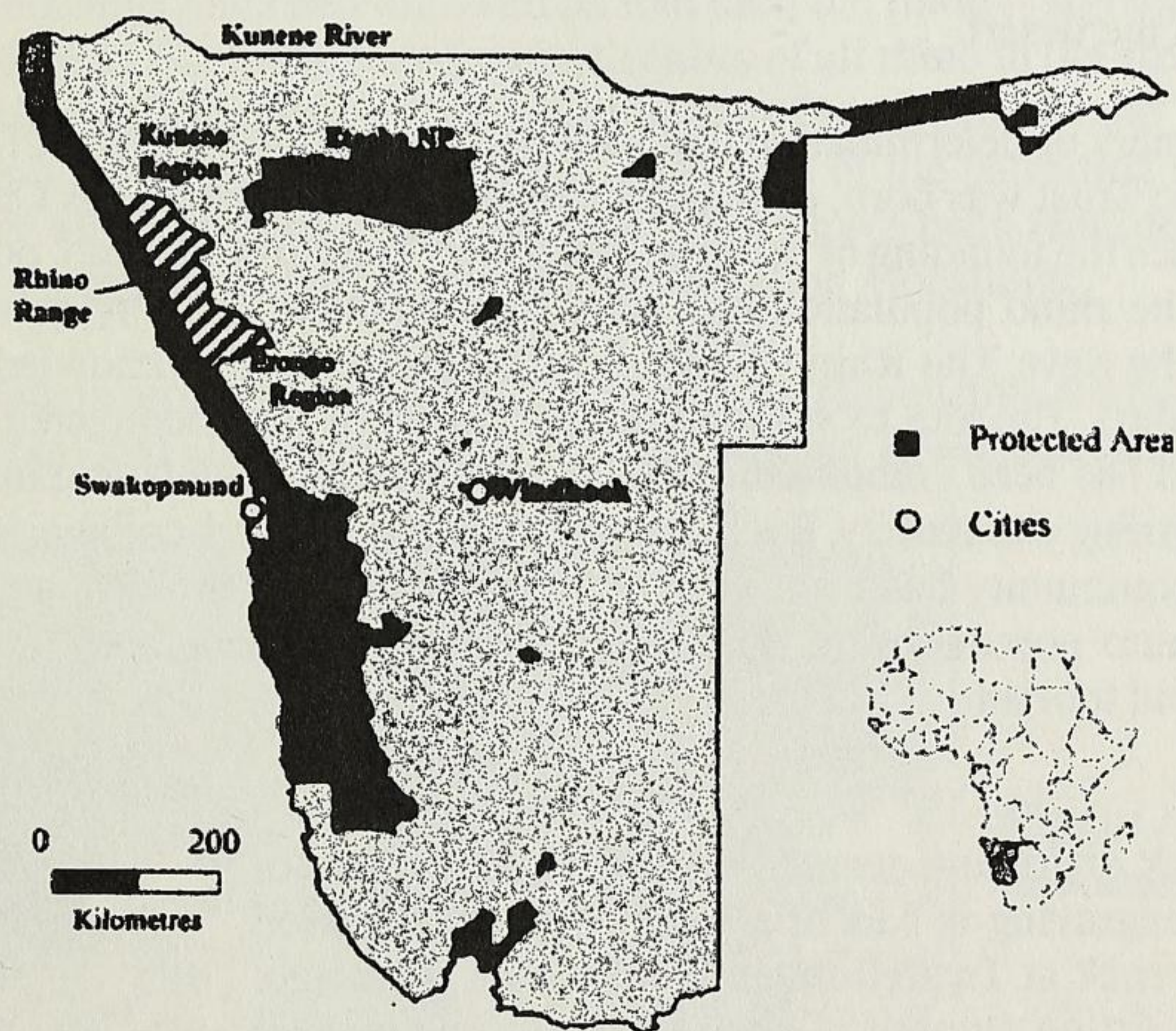
THE SAVE THE RHINO TRUST (SRT)

Field Notes/Introduction

*By Farshid Mehrdadfar, Animal Care Supervisor
San Diego Wild Animal Park, Escondido, CA*

In writing the following article it was my intention to share with my colleagues a snap-shot picture of my experience in Namibia. During my travels / field studies in Namibia, I had the pleasure of meeting Blythe Loutit, founder of Save The Rhino Trust. Furthermore I was introduced to the incredible body of work that was organized and conducted by this non-profit organization. As an animal keeper, I have been trying to educate myself as to better understand the environment and the possible relationship of the behaviors exhibited by our collection to this environment in captivity. Understanding and first hand observation of the true environment (field environment) and its correlation to activity budget and "natural" behavior was high on the list of my objectives as I traveled to Namibia. Through the amazing opportunities that were provided to me by SRT, I came to appreciate the incredible work that this organization has been able to achieve, further understanding of the amazing eco system and the adaptation of black rhino (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*) to this environment. The following is a brief history of this organization, some of their ongoing projects and its involvement with community projects.

During our Rhino Keeper Workshop 2001, hosted at San Diego Wild Animal Park, I had the pleasure of introducing Blythe Loutit as our Namibian representative. Her interest and involvement with our bi-annual workshop have opened up dialogue and possible opportunities for some of our colleagues to volunteer with SRT. I am hoping that this article provides possible window of opportunities for those who are interested in field volunteering and/or becoming member of SRT. I have included SRT address along with this authors address to help expedite information sharing about this organization and its goals and objectives. By establishing/providing a possible bridge between captive and fieldwork, we could institute "Animal Care Excellence Through Shared Strength".



Appendix 1
Republic of Namibia

History

The desert adapted black rhino (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*) (figure 1) surviving in the Kunene Regions (Appendix 1) in the arid north-west of Namibia are the only rhino world-wide, that have survived on communal land with no formal conservation status.



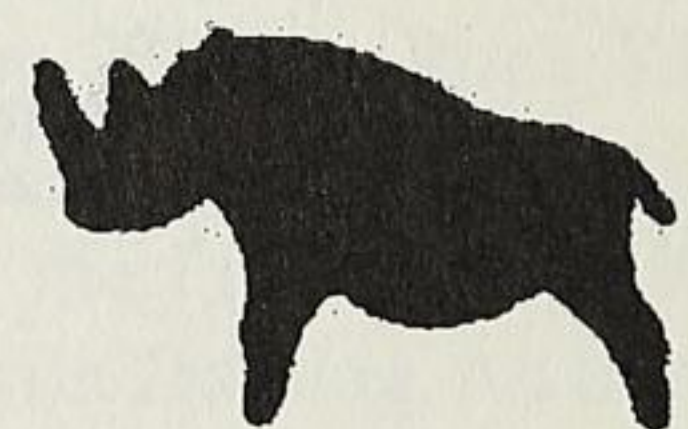
Figure 1. Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*)

In the early 1980's in this vast, strangely beautiful and spectacular desert scenery, a savage slaughter of desert wildlife was taking place. As the rhino numbers shrank to near extinction, a group of concerned people (scientist; geologist; community leaders; nature conservation officials; farmers; journalists; and businessmen) gathered together to form a Trust fund. The aim of this Trust was to stop the horrendous slaughter of rhino, elephant and all other wildlife that was taking place in the desert.

Within a few years of determination and hard work and with the help of international funds the Save The Rhino Trust was born, officially recognized and registered as Charitable Organization number 53. Since the founding of the Save The Rhino Trust 16 years ago, poaching has drastically declined and the rhino population has more than doubled. Initially convicted poachers were employed by the Save The Rhino Trust (as they had extensive knowledge of the habitat and behavior of rhino). The aim to stop the extermination of the endangered black rhino from the communal land has been enthusiastically supported by the Chiefs and headmen as well as the neighboring farming community. Ever since the Trust was formed, collaboration with Government and the local community has been achieved, with the aim to provide security for the rhino, to monitor the rhino population in the region, and to bring benefit to the community through conservation and tourism.

Logo

An ancient rock engraving seemed the appropriate logo for the SRT. The engraving is part of a wildlife mural engraved into sandstone rock at Twyfelfontein hundreds of years ago. This logo is a fitting symbol of the symbiotic relationship between man and wildlife and is familiar to the local people. The logo engenders a feeling of pride for their achievement in saving the rhino from extinction from their communal land.



The Save The Rhino Trust

The Present Status

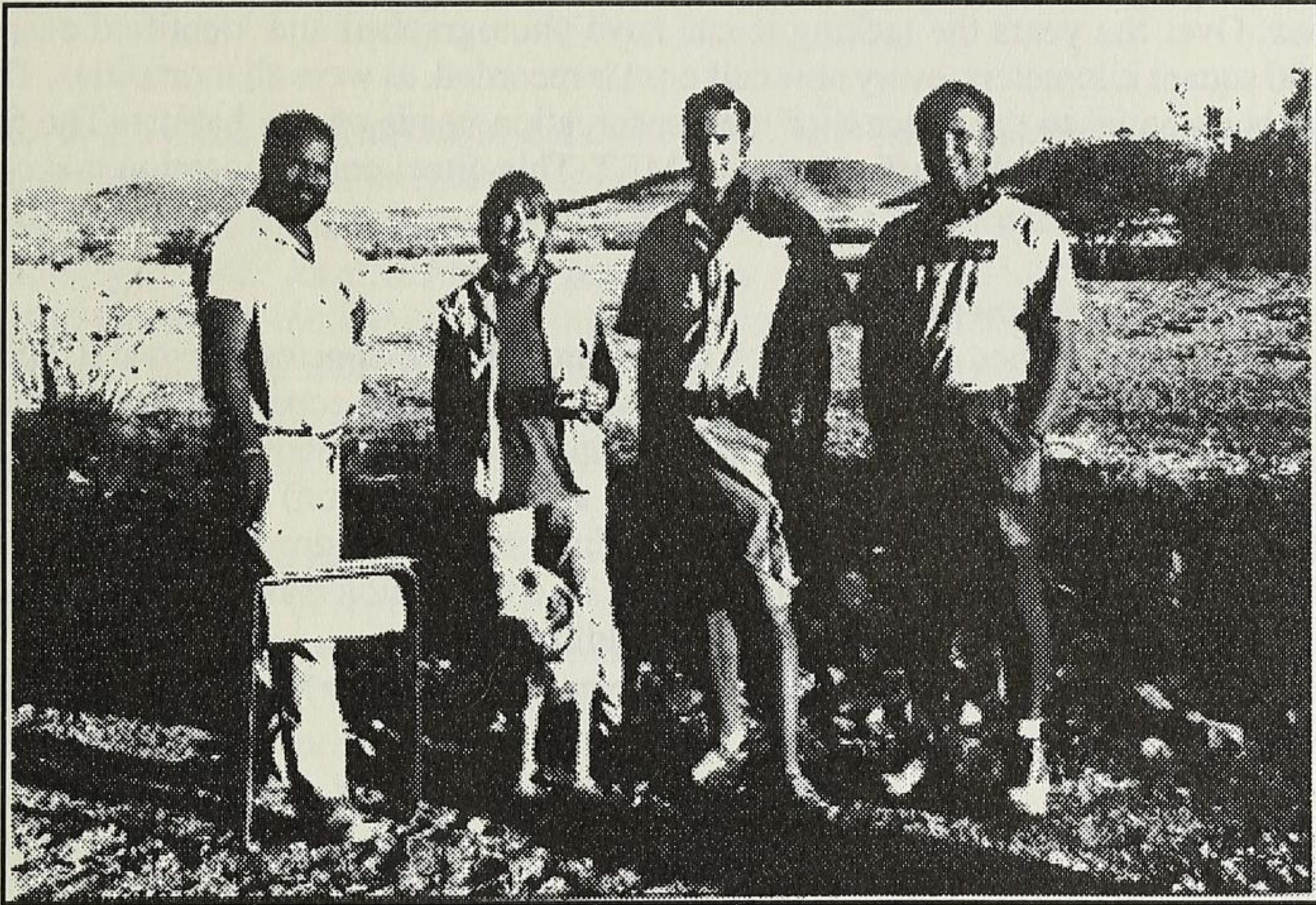


Figure 2. SRT Staff (from left to right) Simon Uri-Khob, Blythe Loutit, Mike Hearn and the author.

SRT is managed as a charitable trust with five Namibian Trustees.

Founder: Blythe Loutit; Director of Fieldwork: Simson Uri-khob; Director of Research: Michael Hearn; Financial Manager: Lorna Davis.

There are three drivers / team leaders; and 34 trackers / camp staff. Less than 10% of the staff is based in offices, while the rest remain field-based. Many more community members are benefiting indirectly from the work done by SRT, through the Trusts promoting income from craft sales and tourism. The field staffs are divided into five groups, each regularly patrolling a specified area within the 25,000 square kilometers rhino range. All fresh rhino tracks are picked up during such patrols by vehicle, foot and camel and followed on foot until the rhino is sighted. Apart from the regular monitoring work, a complete photographic census of all rhino in the area was completed in 1992, 1997 and 1998 in conjunction with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). During these census all information on the rhino, track logs of the patrolling routes as well as accurate locations of all springs and waterholes (figure 3) have been recorded. This data has been compiled into a report, which includes GPS presentation / locations.

SRT's monitoring data is provided to the MET (who remain responsible for the conservation of all wildlife in Namibia) and also made available to the African Rhino Specialist Group and the

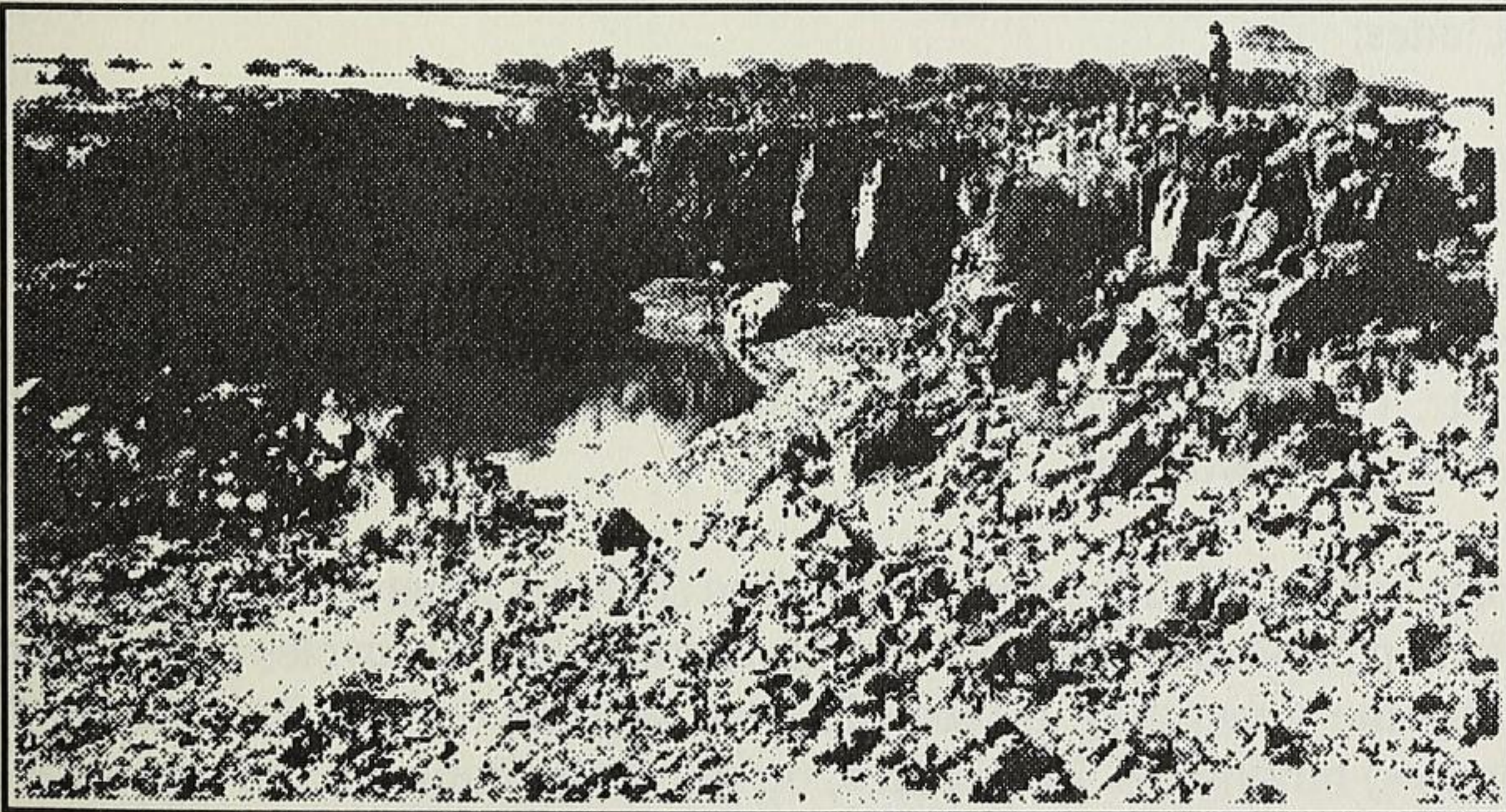


Figure 3. Watering hole in Kunene region

Rhino Management Group of Southern Africa through MET's representative on these conservation bodies. Over the years the tacking teams have photographed and identified every rhino in the 25,000 square kilometers, every new calf born is recorded, as were all mortalities. This monitoring effort is essential to the success of the conservation needs of this habitat. The SRT has direct radio contact with the key officials in the MET. This direct communication makes provision for aircraft to be mobilized if such a need arises.

Community Involvement

The SRT has established one of the first Community Based Species Survival (CBSS) projects for the rhino in Africa, with direct community involvement in the conservation of rhino, and benefits received through conservation and tourism going to the local population. The SRT has build an "indaba" center near Palmwag (Guest Resort at Kunene region) at the Mai Go Ha base camp (figure 4) for community leaders to come and discuss conservation matters with their colleagues. Meetings with headmen and community groups on conservation matters are becoming increasingly important to ensure a future for the desert wildlife.

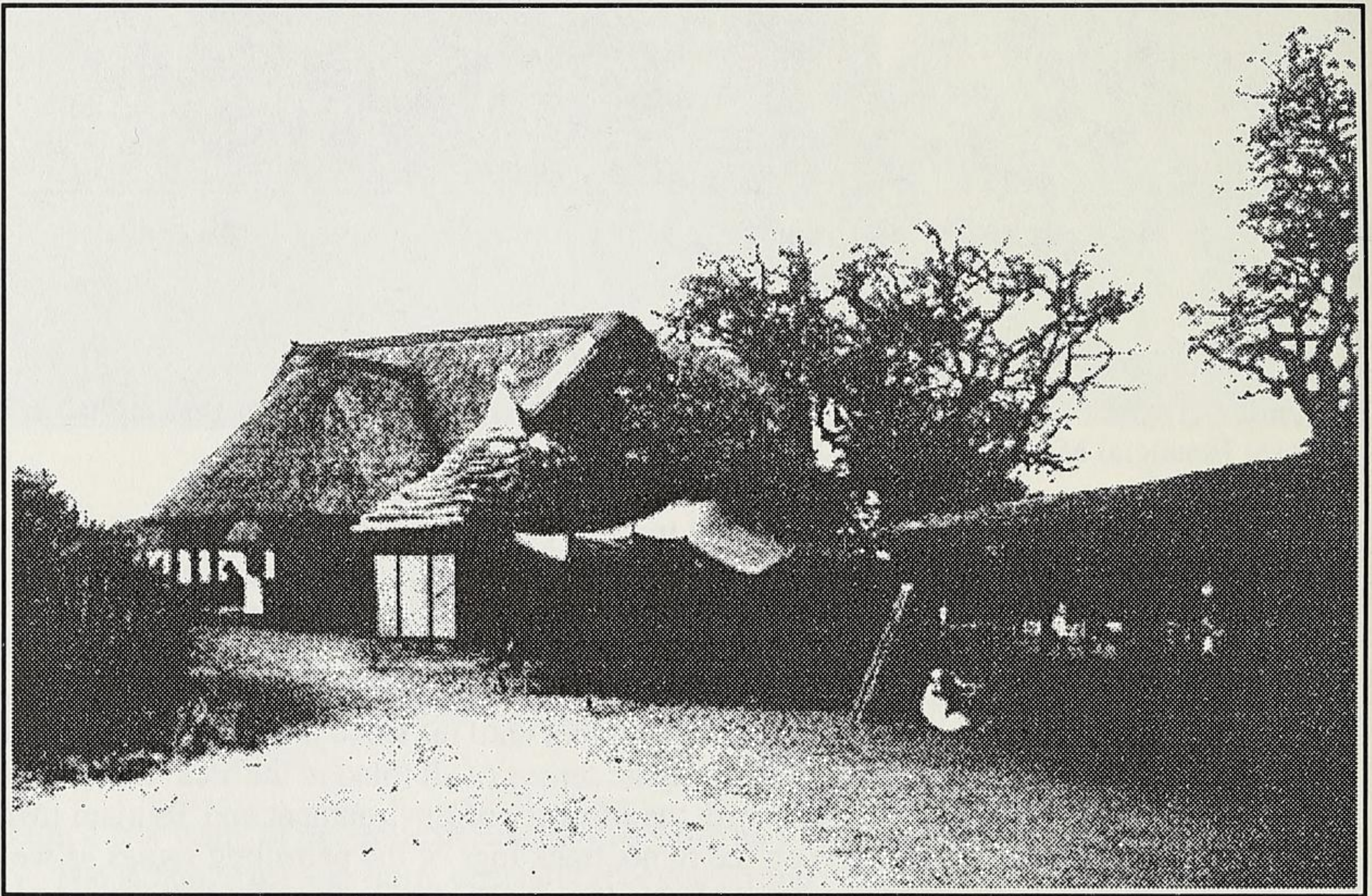


Figure 4. Mai Go Ha camp (SRT field camp) near Palmwags

Other forms of community involvement organized by the SRT in conjunction with the government and traditional leaders, includes:

Planning wildlife conservancies to be managed by the community; information and awareness programs including traveling TV shows; visiting the neighboring farms and villages; showing conservation videos at schools; and developing projects specially designed to involve women in self help income generating projects. SRT has been involved in setting up several craft-centers, to sell locally produced crafts. The craft centers provide training, work opportunities and income for rural communities especially for women.

The office of SRT with a crafts for conservation and information center is situated in Swakopmund. This center provides a workshop for leatherwork, African style embroidery, recycles paper, candle making and many other income generating projects. Rhinos still inhabit the foothills of the spectacular Brandberg (Duares) mountains. In this area, on the shady banks of the Ugab River,

Save the Rhino trust has developed a training center. SRT's Namdeb Training Camp is a basic facility designed to provide training in eco-tourism to rural people who have minimal school qualifications.

Further north, at the village of Khowarib near Sesfontein, SRT has pioneered a community based camel patrol project. The camel program was introduced due to the very rugged terrain. It is too difficult to get into the mountains to monitor the rhino by vehicle and too far away from water to walk with donkeys. Older local herdsman remembers the days, when German soldiers were using camels to patrol the mountains. The interest from the community has been amazing and there is great pride in being able to work with the camels. Requests have been made for more camels to be introduced to the area to replace donkeys. SRT aims to help communities to be able to take on more of the responsibilities of conserving and monitoring the desert rhino and elephant.

International Representation

The Save the Rhino Trust is represented at the international meetings of the African Rhino Specialist Group (AFRSG), which is a member of the Species Survival Commission of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Contributions from SRT have been made to other International meetings and conferences, throughout Africa, Europe and Americas (i.e., Rhino Keeper Workshop bi-annual meeting).

Volunteer Opportunities and Membership Information

For further information about SRT and your possible involvement with this grassroots / front line organization please address your inquires to:

Blythe Loutit
Save The Rhino Trust
P.O. Box 224
Swakopmund, Republic of Namibia
E-mail: srt@rhino-trust.org.na
Tel/Fax: +264 64 403829

AND / OR

Farshid Mehrdadfar
E-mail: MammalsAtoZ@CS.com
Phone: 760-738-5027