



Kees Rookmaaker on ...

The first photographs of **a rhinoceros**

James Chapman (1831–1872) was one of the great South African pioneers of the nineteenth century. He made journeys to the mysterious Lake Ngami in the 1850s and tried to travel across Africa from Namibia to Mozambique in the early 1860s. He first took a camera with him on his expedition to Lake Ngami in 1859 and 1860, but he was unable to get any good exposures on this trip. He tried again on his cross-continent exploration from 1860 to 1863, when he was accompanied by the painter Thomas Baines (1820–1875).

Chapman would have used one of the early types of stereoscopic camera designed by Frederick Scott Archer. It consisted of the camera itself, which needed a darktent and tripod, and a box in which the glass plate could be processed (Hannavy, 1997). Taking this cumbersome apparatus into the African bush to photograph scenery and

people, as well as animals – as long as they did not move – was quite a feat.

In his diary, first published in 1971, Chapman recorded on 13 May 1862 that, “The wounded rhino cow came to drink near my skerm. Gave her a shot, she ran about a mile, had a drink, then died. I got a photograph of it.” The picture, now in an album preserved in the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town, is entitled *The sleep of death – Rhinoceros Ketloa. Botletlie River*. This is the first ever photograph of a Black Rhinoceros; it was taken on the Botletlie River in Central Botswana (20°12’S 24°10’E).

A month later, on 12 June 1862, one of Chapman’s hunters, John Laing, shot a rhinoceros. Chapman photographed the animal, and Baines sat down to sketch it. This was at Mutu Mabe, or Mutomanye, just south of the Victoria Falls (19°54’S

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25°31'E). The sketch by Baines has not yet been traced (Datta, 1999).

Without doubt, these are the first photographs ever taken of a rhinoceros in the wild. It is quite likely they preceded any taken in captivity, as the first known photographs of rhinoceroses from London Zoo were dated 1864 (Kourist, 1969; Edwards, 1996).

There is also a photograph of an Indian Rhinoceros in an American circus, first identified as the animal shown by Dan Rice between 1855 and 1861 (Reynolds, 1967), but this photograph is now thought to show the rhino exhibited by John V. 'Pogey' O'Brien in the 1870s (R J Reynolds in Rookmaaker, 1998).

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Historic brace: The two earliest photographs of rhinos were both taken by southern African hunter-explorer James Chapman, the first (left) on 13 May 1862 on the Botletlie River in what today is central Botswana, and the second (below) on 12 June 1862 near the Victoria Falls in what is now Zimbabwe. The artist shown at work in the second photograph is Chapman's then companion, Thomas Baines, perhaps the most accomplished early European painter of African landscapes.

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