

held in San Diego from May 9 through 11, 1991. Organized by the Zoological Society of San Diego, it will facilitate communication and coordinated action on behalf of all five rhino species.

This conference represents a significant opportunity to unite leading experts in conservation planning, management, research, health, and disease, as well as government officials from countries

with surviving rhino populations. The aim is well-defined: to assemble the information necessary for the conservation of all five rhinoceros species and establish new initiatives for creating self-sustaining rhino populations. If we can preserve rhinos into the 21st century, perhaps we will have the confidence to use our knowledge to save the next endangered species. **ZZ**

WHONOOZ

Taking Steps for

Rhinos: The Odyssey

of Michael Werikhe

People in Michael Werikhe's native Kenya, and thousands of others worldwide, know him simply as the Rhino Man. In 1982, taking along little else than a strong desire to save his country's rapidly declining populations of black rhinoceros, Michael Werikhe (pronounced where-ree-key) walked three hundred miles from his hometown of Mombasa to Nairobi, telling everyone he met along the way about the animals' plight. For each mile he walked, he also asked people to donate money toward efforts to conserve the rhino. Thus, the Rhino Walk and the travels of Michael Werikhe began.

This month, at both the Zoo and Wild Animal Park, you too can help Werikhe's efforts by joining him and Zoological Society Goodwill Ambassador Joan Embury as they lead two concurrent Rhino Walks on Saturday morning, May 11 (call 268-5882 for information). The walks will help kick off a new trek for Werikhe—one throughout the entire United States—that is expected to earn \$3 million for rhinoceros conservation projects, both in this country and in Africa.

While in San Diego, Werikhe is also scheduled to open the international rhino conference to be held at the Zoo from May 9 through 11. He will later bring his Save The Rhino Walk back to San Diego in September, during the annual meeting of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums (AAZPA), hosted this year by the Zoological Society of San Diego.

What makes Michael Werikhe walk? That question might best be answered by some alarming statistics. In 1975, in his homeland of Kenya, the black rhinoceros population stood at approximately 10,000. In 1980, that figure dropped to roughly 1,500, and today it has fallen to around 400.

Why is this happening? Habitat destruction caused by humans as they clear more and more land for agricultural purposes is part of the problem. But, sadly, most black rhinos—and, for that matter, the four other remaining rhino species—

A Southern White Rhino Family Tree

The following chart is an example of how the offspring of endangered species are transferred between institutions to insure genetic diversity and viability.

Male MANDHILA
wild born Natal, 1960
arrived San Diego, February 17, 1971
sent overseas October 27, 1983

Male RAHISI
wild born Natal, 1968
arrived San Diego, October 27, 1983
sent to private holder July 7, 1988

Female MFOLOZI
wild born Natal, 1963
arrived San Diego, February 17, 1971
She is still living at SDWAP

Female born SDWAP, December 14, 1972
died SDWAP, January 27, 1973

Female born SDWAP, June 29, 1974
to Wildlife Safari, Oregon, June 26, 1975

Male born SDWAP, January 12, 1976
died SDWAP, January 20, 1976

Male born SDWAP, September 2, 1977
to San Jose Zoo, CA, September 9, 1977

Male born SDWAP, May 5, 1979
to Auckland Zoo, New Zealand, September 6, 1980

Female born SDWAP, March 3, 1981
to Taiwan Zoo, China, April 17, 1982

Female born SDWAP, October 24, 1982
to Gelsenkirchen Zoo, Germany, June 1, 1983

Female born SDWAP, July 8, 1984
to Orana Park Zoo, New Zealand, April 25, 1986

Male born SDWAP, September 23, 1986
to Gelsenkirchen Zoo, Germany, April 8, 1990

Female born SDWAP, August 4, 1988
to Gelsenkirchen Zoo, Germany, April 8, 1990

MFOLOZI has been the most prolific female of the SDWAP group, giving birth to ten youngsters from 1972 to 1988.



Michael Werikhe, otherwise known as the Rhino Man.



A concern for the dwindling populations of rhinoceroses in his native Kenya started Michael Werikhe on his now famous worldwide Rhino Walks.

are being slaughtered for their horns, which are considered by some of the world's population to be more valuable than gold. Rhino horns are ground into a powder that is said to cure diseases of all kinds. Modern science has disproved this, but, due to traditional beliefs in some countries, the animals continue to be exterminated.

"It is crucial for our species—humans—to decide today whether the rhinoceros will continue to exist in the future," says San Diego Zoo Geneticist Dr. Oliver Ryder. "It's clearly up to us. They may well be extinct by the time our children are grown." Michael Werikhe is working hard to make sure this is not what happens.

Following his initial walk in 1982, Werikhe walked an additional 1,250 miles across Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania in 1985, raising \$54,000 for rhino conservation studies and rhino sanctuaries. In 1988, he completed an ambitious five-month and 1,800-mile walk across Europe, starting in Italy and ending in Great Britain. He raised \$1 million for rhino projects and captured the attention of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, an avid wildlife conservationist: "It is easy enough to analyze the threats to the future of the black rhino, and it is not very difficult to suggest what needs to be done to prevent it becoming extinct. The real problem is to generate the human will and commitment. Your mag-

nificent walk is just the sort of gesture that provides the spark of inspiration which makes people respond to a crisis."

Werikhe wholeheartedly agrees that people must be involved: "Conservation cannot be imposed; it must have the understanding and support of the public, and especially the people on whose land the animals live. So much of the conservation message has begun to sound sentimental, and must seem horribly out of place to a man whose maize (his sole means of staying alive) has just been trampled by a herd of buffalo. We need to come up with practical systems and solutions in line with these realities and the present times—positive aims and positive actions."

Some might say Werikhe has a childlike confidence when he remarks: "The man in the street is very willing to conserve wildlife, as long as he has information and does not feel left out." But, this is part of his basic belief system, one that has served him well. Lacking any kind of formal degree, Werikhe operates at the grass roots level, trusting average people to become as concerned as he is, and it usually works.

Werikhe's own interests and experiences started him down the road to conservation at an early age. While his current focus is on the rhino, he has always been concerned for all threatened wildlife. As a boy, he would sometimes bring small injured animals home to care for

until they could be returned to the wild. His enthusiasm for these wildlife "friends" caught the attention of his schoolmates and teachers, who encouraged him toward a career in animal and game management. Ironically, he later accepted a job in the Kenyan government's Ivory Room (before the country's current ban on hunting), sorting piles of elephant tusks and rhino horns to be sold at public auction. Needless to say, he soon left the position.

Today, when he is not out walking for rhinos, Werikhe works for the Associated Vehicle Assemblers (AVA) in Mombasa. His employers have recognized his work by granting him time off with pay for his many conservation activities. Others, too, have chosen to acknowledge Werikhe's valuable work. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) honored him as one of UNEP's Global 500 in 1989. And, in 1990, he was given the Goldman Environmental Prize for outstanding environmental achievement.

Now, at age 34, after nearly a decade of carrying his message of conservation and cooperation across two continents, Werikhe will begin his most ambitious walk yet and rally American support for the endangered rhino. He notes: "In this nuclear age, there are no national boundaries to the environment. The rhino will live or die because of us."