

HORN OF DARKNESS



Rhinos on the Edge

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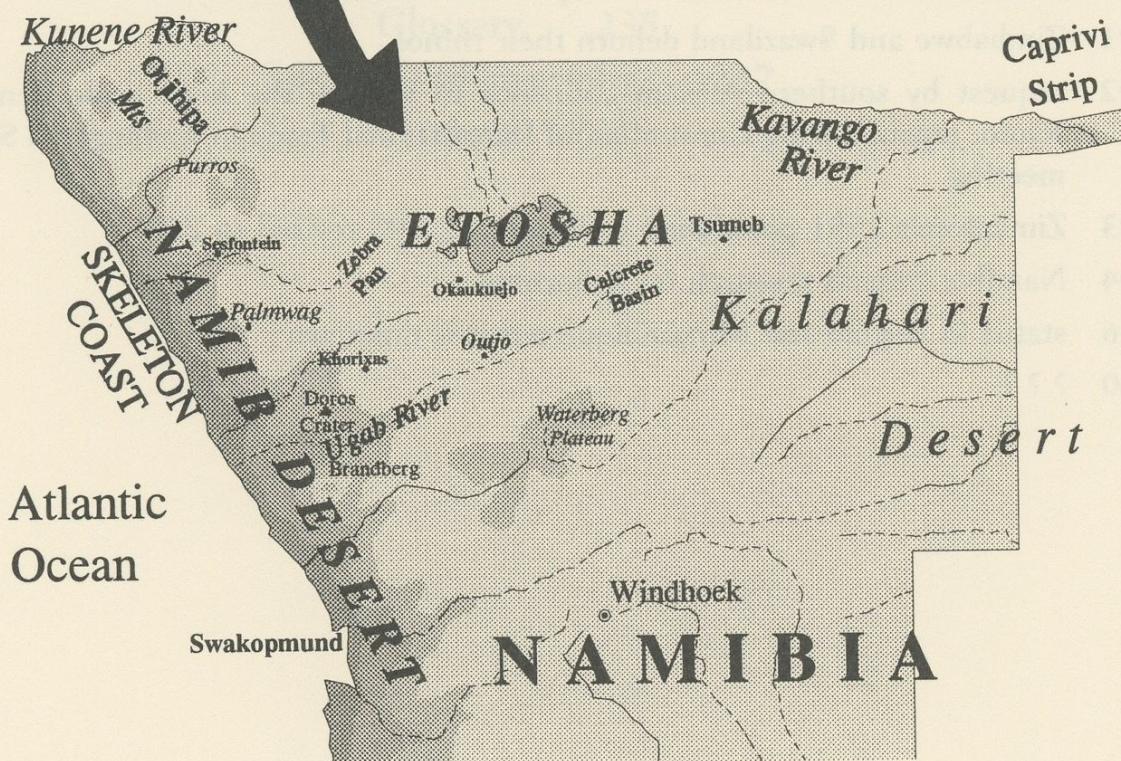
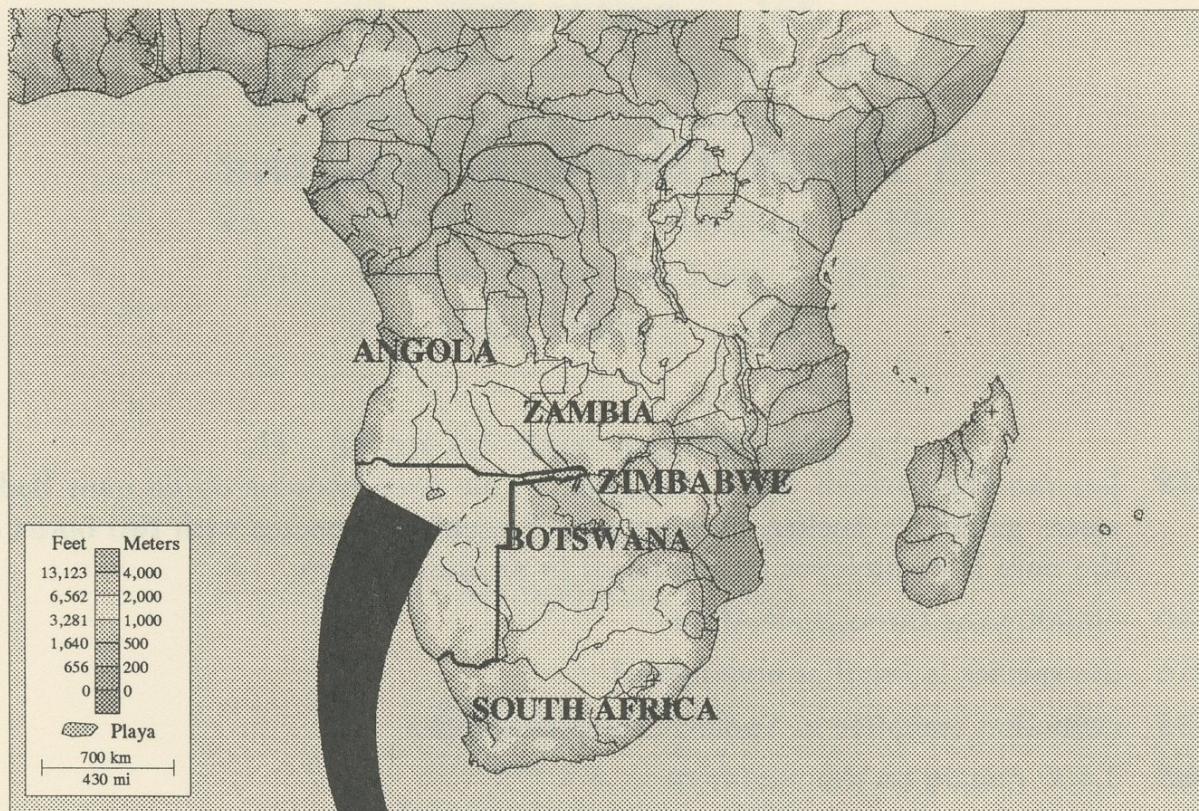
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A Black Rhino Time Line

- 1658 Jan van Herwaerden met a "renoster . . . die twee hoorens op de neus hadde staen, gelijck de bocken haer hoorens dragen" (rhinoceros with two horns on the nose like antelopes on the head) in southern Africa
- 1960 60,000 exist throughout Africa
- 1976 the species is listed as endangered
- 1983 extinction complete in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia
- 1988 3,500 remain on the continent
- 1989 Namibia becomes the first country to dehorn rhinos
- 1991 Zimbabwe and Swaziland dehorn their rhinos
- 1992 request by southern African countries to legalize the horn trade denied in Kyoto, Japan, during Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species meeting
- 1993 Zimbabwe's 1991 population estimate of 2,000 revised to 250
- 1994 Namibia cancels research on dehorning
- 1996 status in Angola and Mozambique remains unknown
- 2000 ? ? ?



Overview of study areas. *Our* names, Calcrete Basin and Zebra Pan, are fictitious to avoid revealing locations where rhinos still occur and might be poached. Namib Desert names are real, having previously been published by others.

Epilogue

Although conservationists usually work toward common goals, perspectives on how to accomplish them frequently differ. Those of us born and educated in the crowded West, where industrialism and habitat conversion have erased many species and systems, hold convictions about the urgency of protection and the role of science in conservation. These views often contrast with those of people living in less developed countries, places where biodiversity has been under fewer assaults. A fundamental problem confounded us: How can “western” or “northern” scientists fit in, interact, and successfully share in the conservation vision when local research interests are defensive, territorial, or simply out of control?

The answers aren’t easy. Conservation takes time. As when two enemies are suspicious of each other’s motives, peaceful coexistence requires communication and understanding, mutual learning and trust. So does conservation, even if situations call for sitting under the outstretched arms of an acacia drinking homemade brew for six months with the headman, giving lectures at a local university, or writing administrative reports in stuffy government offices. There is no specific prescription to remove distrust.

* * *

It’s ironic that the world is rapidly running out of space for its large mammals: Sufficient space does exist. But on a planet polarized between haves and have-

nots, where wealth and education are unevenly distributed, and where women and other subgroups do not have equal access to opportunity, one would have to be naive to believe that the future of all living beings is rosy. Yet, despite our pessimism, there are reasons to remain optimistic.

Just last century, there were slaughters of wildlife as dramatic as the one that has lately so insidiously removed 97 percent of Africa's black rhinos. North American bison were once reduced to a few individuals in small reserves; now they number more than 150,000, with free-ranging populations in Canada, Alaska, and the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem. Perhaps rhinos too can make a comeback. Already, in India and Nepal, the greater one-horned rhino is at its highest level in half a century. The poaching of African rhinos that was so rampant during the 1980s and early 1990s is slowing. Most black and white rhinos are now sequestered in safe reserves, protected behind fences, with armed guards. We can hope their liberation is not too far off.

If there is anything to be learned, it is that the world has to unite to save its heritage, a biological legacy that involves more than rhinos. Conservation is the responsibility of all nations, not just a few. If we cannot protect rhinos, why should we expect a better fate for ourselves?

There is no perfect formula for conservation. What works in Kenya may not in South Africa or Zaire. But there must be incentives—ethical and moral, biological and economic. Local people must be involved and feel for themselves why conservation matters. It does little good for foreign instigators to argue that there are benefits from wildlife if local people receive nothing.

Inevitably, tactics will vary, locally, regionally, and internationally. In late 1995, the USFWS approved permits for darting safaris. Citizen darters will pay heavily for the privilege and work with professionals in host countries if they wish to return with horns in hand. "Trophy fees" will be \$10,000 for the darting privilege and another \$2,000 per kilogram for the horns. According to Zimbabwe, their main purpose in sanctioning the experience is to raise money for black rhino conservation.

Elsewhere, other strategies are being used. South Africa is reducing the risk of losing animals by beginning small "founder" populations in areas where suitable habitat still exists. Malawi guards their rhinos in small reserves. Censuses are underway in the Cameroons. Heavy protection has resulted in increases in Kenya's and Zimbabwe's black rhinos. Funding is what seems to work, money for guards and for educational programs.

Still, the world's last large population of free-roaming black rhinos is in Namibia. There—in the world's oldest desert, on stark gravel plains, and deep within canyons and remote mountains—rhinos travel thousands of kilometers, coursing dry rivers and sand to search for food and mates.

Despite humans' barbarism to one another and to nature, the twentieth century has not spelled total darkness for black rhinos. The Kaokoveld population has nearly doubled. The twenty-first century offers new opportunities. There is time for vision, a chance for victory.

Postscript

Eight months after we left Namibia, our bank funds were released to us. Malan was promoted to deputy director and lives in Windhoek.

* * *

Life goes on. After rhinos, we deliberately chose a less political project. Now, instead of waking to the smells of African savannas and the vision of antelopes leaping across dusty plains, we wander glacier-carved mountains and valleys in Alaska and the Greater Yellowstone area. We hope to learn more about ecosystems with and without grizzly bears and wolves.

Sonja, now seven, is adjusting to the new project and new places but, like her parents, still dreams of rhinos. As for Archie, he lives in Sesfontein but finds work, only sporadically as a guide, interpreter, and conservationist. His children are all in school. Perhaps, for a new generation there is hope.

Acknowledgments

Without the selfless commitment and untiring dedication of countless people and organizations, far fewer African rhinos would exist. We are particularly grateful to those who helped us: the Wildlife Conservation Society, the World Wildlife Fund (U.S.), the National Geographic Society, the American Philosophical Society, Rhino Rescue Ltd., the National Science Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development, the Hasselblad Foundation, Camenzind Productions, the Frankfurt Zoological Society, the Smithsonian Institution, and the University of Nevada. South African Air and Virgin Atlantic Airways waived charges more than once for excess gear.

In Zimbabwe, Drs. Michael Kock and Nancy Kock revitalized us with their encouragement and affirmed the importance of scientifically acquired data as the key to successful conservation management. In Namibia, Dr. Eugene Joubert has been a stalwart defender of rhinos since the 1960s. He took us under his wing and helped us gain access to data and rhinos. Duncan Gilchrist and Peter Erb began the Damaraland monitoring program. Blythe Loutit took over and promoted the efforts of Save the Rhino Trust. Ministry employees who helped in ways too numerous to elaborate include Dr. Nad Brain, Martin Britz, Raymond Dujardin, Wynand du Plessis, Mike Griffin, Dannie Grobler, Tommy Hall, Rudi Loutit, Dave Murray, Fritz Schenk, and Dr. Philip "Flip" Stander. Allan Cilliers, Kallie Venzke, and Lue Scheepers helped with photographic techniques, and later Kallie and Alan provided access to records on rhino mortalities and horn sizes. Lue taught us about lions and life in the veld. Dr. Pauline Lindeque was a true friend through difficult times and, together with Peter Erb, shared insights and made rhino files available. Dr. Betsy Fox put in long hours at the Okaukuejo water hole and contributed observations on interactions between lions and rhinos. Pierre du Preez and Duncan Gilchrist openly exchanged information and never wavered from the truth. From the private sector, help, discussion, and insight came from Peter Mostert, Dr. Joh Henschel, and Steve and Louise Braine. Land Rover specialists Luigi Ballotti and Herbie Klein in Windhoek and the Weimans in Outjo always found the time to deal with our vehicle and to take care of us as we waited. Francois and Linda Malan rescued us after our Land Rover burned.

From Dr. Pete Morkel and his wife Estelle we learned about life in the bush

with little children. Pete is among the most committed field people we know. Without the backing of Eugene Joubert and Dr. Malan Lindeque this project would have never gotten off the ground. Malan was a supporter for several years. Mark and Dr. Délia Owens offered inspiration spanning nearly two decades.

Garth Owen-Smith and Margie Jacobsohn taught us about programs in community development and environmental education. They took us tracking, encouraged us, and offered critical observations. They opened their arms to us, sometimes to their detriment. Together, they strengthen the link between human and wildlife. Colin Nott and Tim and Rosie Holmes relayed sightings of desert rhinos and were true friends during trying times.

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Dr. Andy Phillips and Janet Wotherspoon introduced us to Namibian banking and Land Rovers and arranged for us to use the Zoological Society of San Diego's Caravan in Etosha. They also shared insights about leguans, chemoreception, and deadly slangs. Andy graciously allowed use of his photos. Drs. Aron Rothstein and Wendy Green gave yearly updates and shared meals with us in deserts 20,000 kilometers apart. We now understand just how challenging black-faced impala can be.

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