

# Samuel Daniell's new species of rhinoceros found in 1801

by Kees Rookmaaker

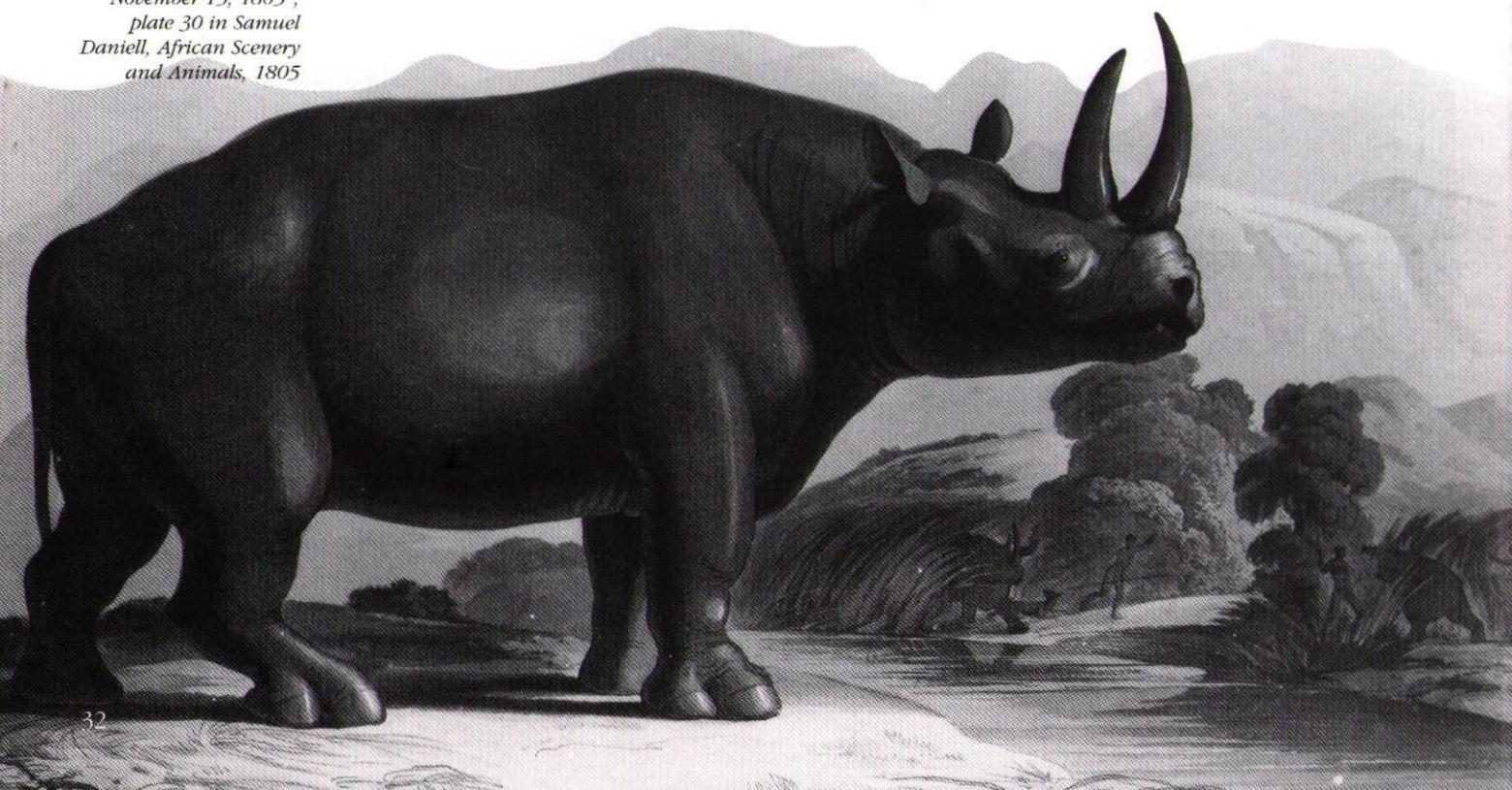
*"The individual from which the annexed print was taken, is supposed to be a new species."*

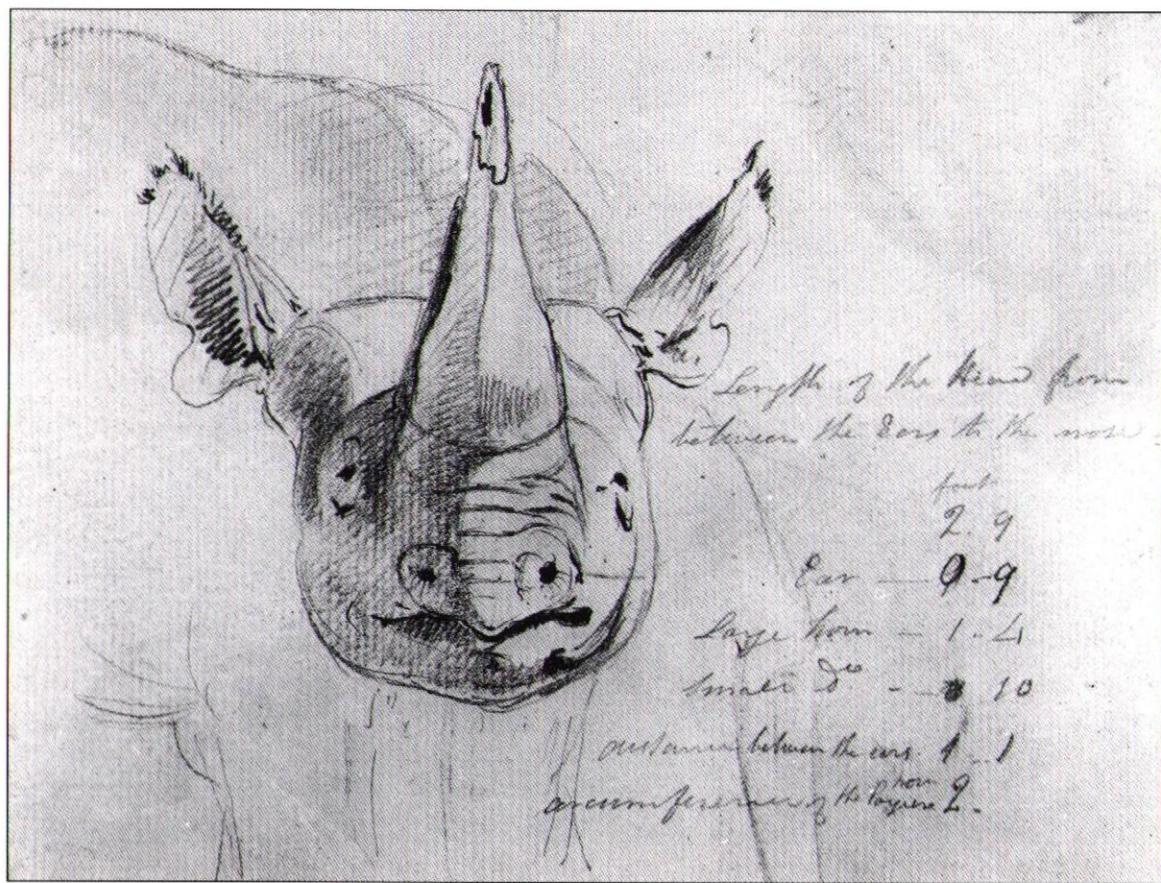
We find this remark in a book published in London in 1805, called *African Scenery and Animals*, produced by Samuel Daniell (1775-1811). The first volume of this work consisting of 30 coloured plates, each accompanied by a short text, was published in instalments of three plates at a time between 1804 and 1805. The 30th plate shows "The African Rhinoceros". According to the caption, it was "Drawn, Engraved & Published by Samuel Daniell. No. 9 Cleveland Street, Fitzroy Square, London, Nov. 15, 1805." Actually the author came from an artistic family, but his work was overshadowed by the more well-known aquatints of Indian scenery and monuments produced by his brother William Daniell and his uncle Thomas Daniell, possibly as a result of Samuel deceasing at a young age in 1811.

Samuel Daniell's print of the rhinoceros was

one of the results of the expedition to Latakoo (the present Kuruman) led by P.J. Truter and Dr. William Somerville from 1 October 1801 to 26 April 1802. Samuel had arrived in Cape Town in December 1799 and was to stay in South Africa until 1803. He joined the official Truter-Somerville expedition as Secretary and Draughtsman, together with Petrus Borchardus Borchers as Assistant Secretary. They encountered several rhinoceroses on the way. It is remarkable that the results of the expedition have never been noticed in the literature about the rhinoceros, although there are reports and letters (all published) by Truter, Somerville and Borchers, art work by Daniell, and even notices in the well-known books by John Barrow. Actually, these riches are a bit embarrassing, because the reports do not really correspond in their details. However, it is certain that at least

"African Rhinoceros, November 15, 1805", plate 30 in Samuel Daniell, *African Scenery and Animals*, 1805





Sketch by Samuel Daniell, probably depicting the male shot at Cossefontein (Museum Africa, Johannesburg, 65/4040)

two rhinoceroses were shot during the expedition, just after Christmas of 1801, in places just south of Latakoo or Kuruman in the Northern Cape. Before we look at the records, it is good to remember that at the time the existence of the species which today we call the white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*) had not yet been confirmed, as the first description of an animal seen at Chué Springs, some 50 km north of Kuruman, by W.J. Burchell only appeared in print in 1817. The black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) was slightly better known, although by that time it was only seen infrequently within the borders of the Cape Colony as it was then.

On Sunday 27 December 1801, the expedition was at a place called Koussie or Kossy Fontein. The official report compiled by Truter and Somerville reported that "Jacob Kruger killed this morning not far from this place a rhinoceros, called by the Boetshoeanas *seikloa*. We rode in the afternoon on horseback to the place, and found the same to be of an uncommon size, measuring from the head to the tail 10 feet 7 inches [=322.5 cm]." Somerville in his private journal added that it was an old male of the "black two-

horned rhinoceros - beyond comparison the most awkward and ugly of quadrupeds", the skin of a disagreeable ash colour, with a total length from the nose to the root of the tail 10 feet 6 inches [320 cm], and with horns measuring 40 and 25 cm respectively. Petrus Borchers essentially agreed in his *Autobiographical Memoir* published in 1861, although when he wrote a letter to his father soon after returning from the expedition, he was a bit confused about the date and less accurate about the length of the animal. John Barrow described the events of the expedition in a supplement to his *Voyage to Cochinchina* (1806), added the height of this first rhinoceros as being 5 feet 6 inches (167 cm) and drew attention to a peculiarity of the horns, "which were pretty nearly of the same length." In summary, these sources seem to agree, that on 27 December 1801 Jacob Kruger shot a male "black" rhinoceros, with a total length of 322.5 cm, height of 167 cm, horns measuring 40 and 25 cm, belonging to a kind which the local Bechuana knew by the name of *Seikloa* (Somerville), or *Sekloa* (Borchers), or *Jeckloa* (Barrow).

The second rhinoceros was obtained on

*Continued on page 34*

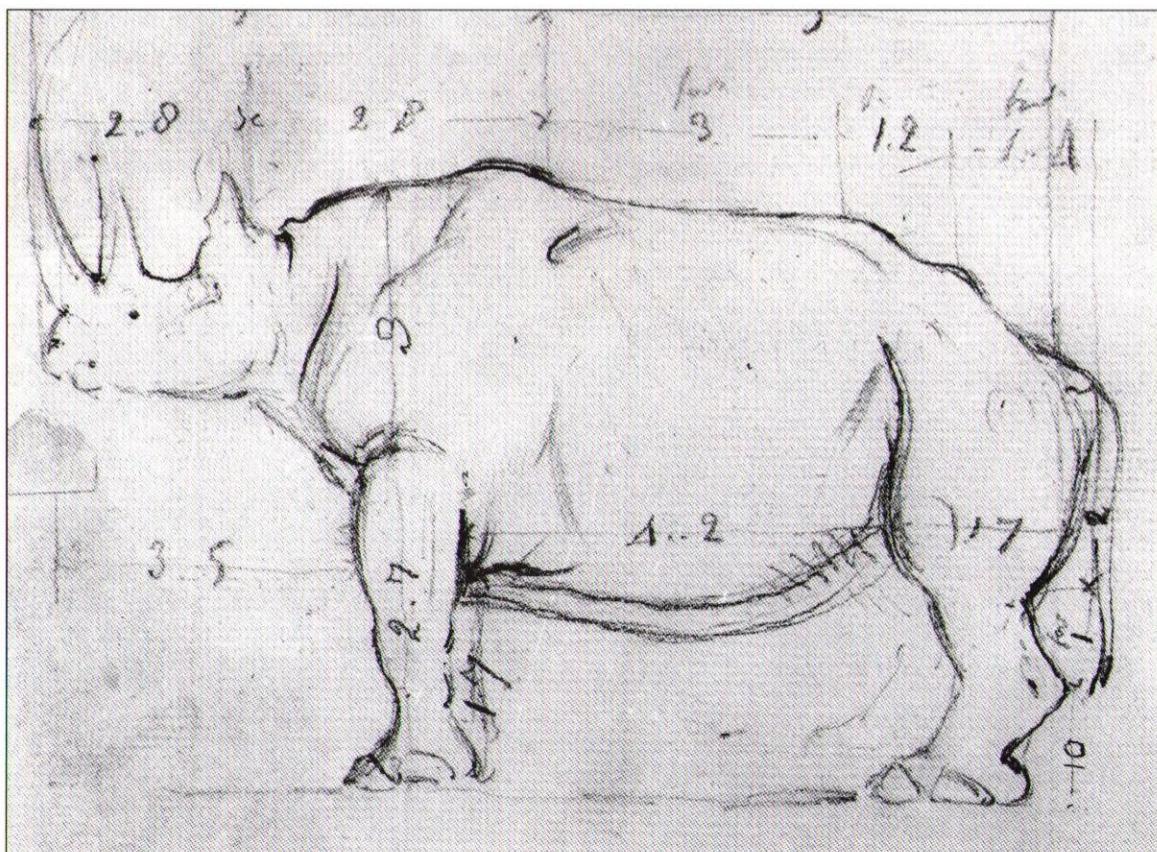
Wednesday, the 30th December 1801, not far from the first at a place called Maggaga or Yzerbergs Fontein (Iron Fountain). The official journal again is the best starting point, where Truter and Somerville write that "Jacob Kruger and Meintjes van den Berg, who had ridden on before us, had killed a rhinoceros cow, called by the Boetshouanas *magooe*, which according to their statement is of a different kind from those we had seen on the 27th instant, and of a different colour." On the next day the party examined this animal and ascertained that "it was light ash coloured, the upper lip more flat, the horns much finer and more bent to the back part, and the body was in general smaller than that which was first killed." Only Borchers provides further information, first in his letter to his father, writing that it was a female, "of the type known to us as the White Rhinoceros and known to the Boeshoeana by the name *Magveoe*. I expected this animal to be entirely white according to its name, but I found that she was paler ash-grey than the black." In his Autobiography Borchers gives us its dimensions, a length of 7 feet 10 inches (= 239 cm), height of 5 feet 10 inches (= 178

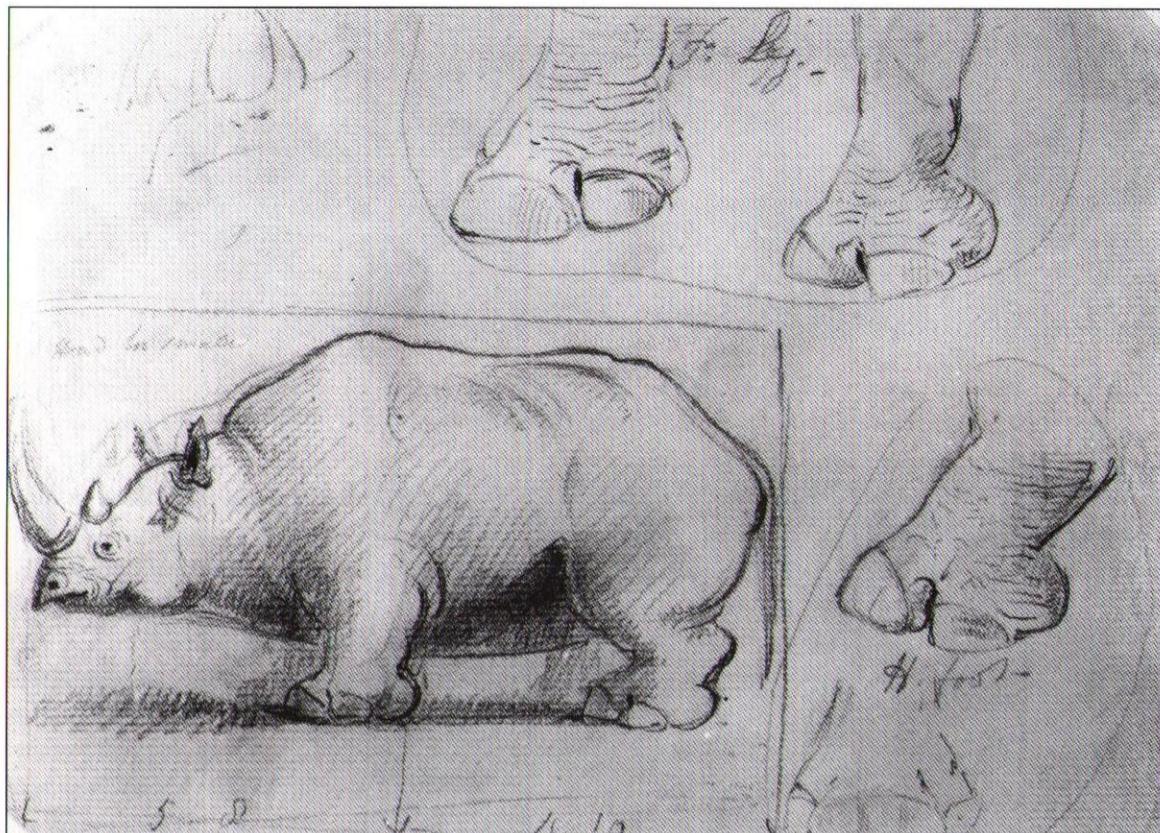
cm), with horns measuring 51 and 46 cm respectively.

According to the local inhabitants of the area, there would still be a third kind of rhinoceros, known to them as *Kemenjana*, smaller than the others and usually found in the hills. The expedition members did not encounter this animal.

The first rhinoceros obviously was an adult male black rhinoceros. The measurements and the Bechuana name fit that species without problem. The name was later formalised into *Rhinoceros keitloa* and was at first used for black rhinoceros specimens of which the two horns were roughly the same length. In this early animal, the horns were hardly of the same size, but it seems that they pointed towards each other which warranted the use of the name.

The identity of the second rhinoceros is much harder to ascertain. It seems that it was a young animal, at least the measurements cannot help us. The Bechuana name of *Magooe* or *Magveoe* also is not among those recorded later. However, the flattish upper lip and the reference to the animal's colour may indicate that this was actually a white rhinoceros, and in that case it would be the first





Rhinoceros drawn by  
Samuel Daniell in  
South Africa  
(Museum Africa,  
Johannesburg,  
65/4042)

instance in which it was recorded with any kind of certainty. Borcherts mentioned that he had heard that it was called a "white" rhinoceros, and it is likely that he heard this name from the Dutch Boers who were with the expedition for some time and who actually killed the animal. Maybe the name was already current at that time? But that assumption will need some further investigation.

One would expect that the artwork by Samuel Daniell would help us to know which species of rhinoceros were actually seen. In the text to plate 30 published in 1805, he said that the animal depicted was supposed to be a new species, "or at least, a variety of the species usually met with in South Africa, being of greater bulk and having the upper horn at least three times the size of what it generally is." It is a pity that it is not clarified whether Daniell tried to depict the first or the second rhinoceros shot by the expedition members. There are nine line drawings made by Daniell in the field, now preserved in the Johannesburg Public Library, where one group shows a rhinoceros with horns of relatively similar sizes, and a second group an animal with an anterior horn of much greater length than

the posterior one. I suppose that it is reasonable to say that these groups depict respectively the first and second rhinoceros shot during the expedition. A few of these drawings are illustrated here. All of the drawings show animals with conspicuous prehensile upper lips typical of the black rhinoceros. The published plate is much less clear in this respect. If both specimens shot by the expedition actually belonged to the species which today we call the black rhinoceros, Daniell must have assumed that the length of the horns was the actual character which made it differ from the rhinos which had lived closer to the Cape. However, it still poses the question why members of the expedition referred to the second animal as "white" or even by a distinct Bechuana name, as it obviously was just a young specimen of the common animal. It is unlikely that a true white rhinoceros was seen at that time, and Burchell remains the actual discoverer of that species.

Dr Kees Rookmaaker, Curator of the Rhino  
Museum, P.O.Box 157, Vaalwater 0530  
E-mail: [chb@ref.org.za](mailto:chb@ref.org.za)

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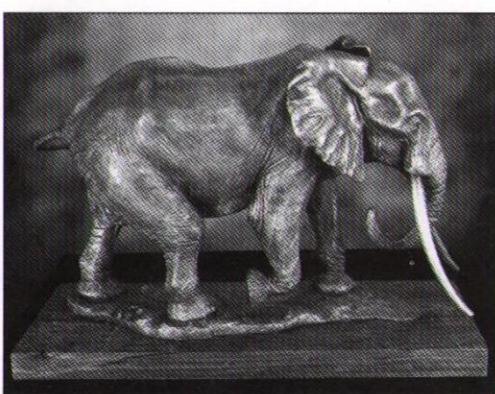
## Rhino Museum

Curator: Dr Kees Rookmaaker  
PO Box 157 Vaalwater 0530  
Tel: 014 7552 Ask 4041  
Fax: 014 7650116  
e-mail: chw@ref.org.za

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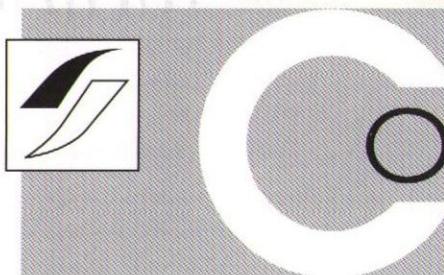
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## Cover Story: "Mafunyane"

Alan Ainslie, South African wildlife painter and sculptor, was born in Port Elizabeth and grew up on a farm near Graaff-Reinet in the Eastern Cape. His works rank amongst the finest in the world and today, his sculptures, paintings and drawings grace the homes of art collectors worldwide. Committed to the conservation of wildlife in South Africa and elsewhere in the world, Ainslie has donated part of the proceeds from his work to numerous wildlife organisations, including REF.

Details on the raffle of this magnificent bronze of Mafunyane can be obtained through [www.ref.org.za](http://www.ref.org.za) or tel: 453-9829



## Contents

Profile: Dr Hym Ebedes (B. V.Sc.) - by Clive H Walker	2
African rhinos increase to 11,000 in the wild - by Richard H. Emslie	4
Albrecht Dürer's Rhinoceros - by Kees Rookmaaker	8
Elephants on the beach: The Maputo Elephant Reserve - by Fred de Boer and Cornelio P. Ntumi	12
Exploring management of biodiversity in the Kruger National Park: Elephants as agents of change - by Angela Gaylard	16
The studbook of African rhinoceroses in captivity - by Heinz-Georg Klös	20
Rewards and incentives help rhino conservation in Assam, North-East India - by Lucy Vigne and Esmond Bradley Martin	24
Samuel Daniell's new species of rhinoceros found in 1801 - by Kees Rookmaaker	32
The Rhinoceros Library in the Waterberg - by Kees Rookmaaker	36
The Elephant Orphanage at Pinnawela in Sri Lanka and the fate of some "tourist elephants" - by Marian E Garaï	37
Book reviews - by Clive H Walker	41
Chairman's Report - by Clive H Walker	43