

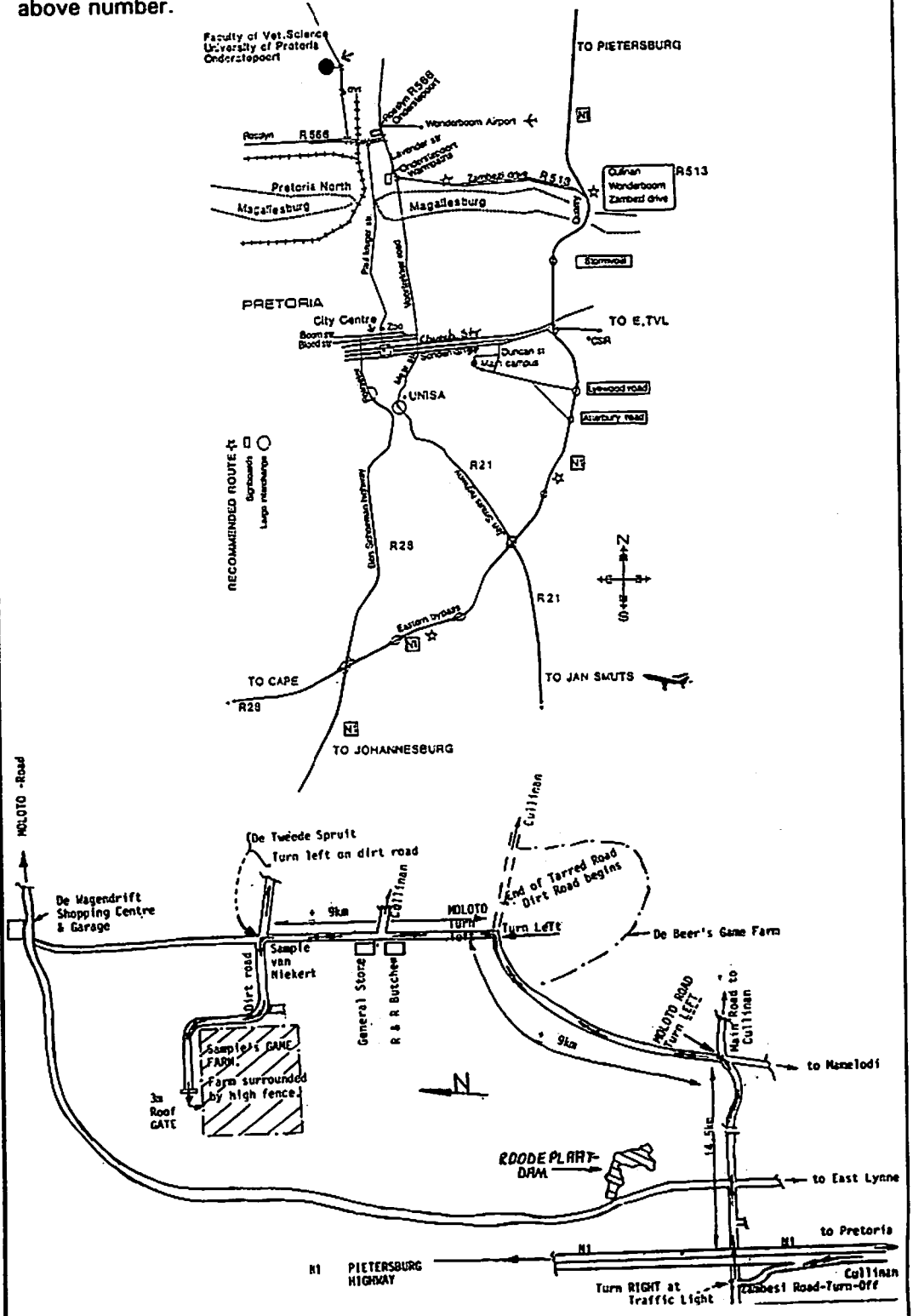


# Rhino Watch

## AROA AGM

The Annual General meeting of the African Rhino Owners Association will take place at Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute on Saturday, 2 November 1996. Tea and registration will begin at 9H30, and the meeting is scheduled to end at 12H00. A slide presentation and talk will be given by AROA Chairman, Clive Walker. Prominent speakers who will address the meeting include Dr Hymie Ebendes, Superintendent Piet Lategan and Advocate Johan Wasserman. *Please RSVP to Heather Cowie Tel (011) 453-9829.*

Prior to the meeting, members are welcome to view a rhino de-horning exercise which will take place in Cullinan. Those interested in observing this procedure are to meet at 06H30, and to proceed to the AGM thereafter. For further details contact Heather at the above number.



## Survey Shows White Rhino Are Flourishing On Private Land

Results of the survey of white rhinos on private land conducted by AROA indicate that numbers of southern white rhino on private land in South Africa have continued to increase by almost seven per cent per year since 1994. South Africa is by far the most important range state, currently conserving 94 per cent - almost 7 100 in 1995 - of southern white rhinos in the wild. Of this number, 20 per cent live on private land.

Bound copies of findings of the survey *White Rhinos On Private Land in SA* by Daan Buijs and Theo Papenfus are available from the office of the Rhino & Elephant Foundation for R10-00. (Please note that this is charged purely to cover the costs of copying and binding) Call (011) 453-9829 for further details.

## Rhino Museum For Waterberg Mountains

A proposal has been set in motion to open a rhino museum at Lapalala Wilderness in the Waterberg Mountains of the Northern Province. The museum will be the realisation of a dream, that Chairman Clive Walker has had for many years. He has worked and lived in the Waterberg for over fifteen years and is convinced beyond any doubt that the region - which covers an excess of 15 thousand square kilometres - holds great promise for rhino conservation.

Dr Ian Player and Dale Parker have kindly agreed to be the Patrons of the museum, while Anna Merz, Peter Hitchins, Stephen Bales and Dr Esmond Bradley Martin have agreed to act as Advisors and to assist in the general development of the museum.

The Rhino Museum will be devoted to the men and women who have committed their lives to rhinoceros conservation and will depict memorabilia of people in the field as well as works by well-known wildlife artists. The specific themes of the museum will include "rhino evolution" and "rhinos - past and present", with well-illustrated examples of countries with rhino populations.

Rhino Watch 2

## TV Series On SA's Conservators

Clive and Conita Walker will feature in a 13-part series on well-known conservators in South Africa. Footage of his efforts in conservation in the field has been obtained at Lapalala Wilderness and further filming will also take place at the Tuli Enclave in Botswana, where he was involved for many years in elephant research. Other notable conservators who will be part of this series include Dr Ian Player, Dr Anthony Hall-Martin and Dr George Hughes.

## Security Guidelines For Rhino Owners

### Rhino Owners

The Game Rangers Training Co-Ordination Group, in co-operation with the Game Rangers Association of Africa, is currently compiling a document on rhino security for the private landowner. The GRTCG believes that the document will be of great value and assistance to the private rhino owner, with regard to evaluating, implementing or improving security. The document will be printed with the financial support of the Rhino & Elephant Foundation and will be available in the very near future.



*The Chairman and Committee of AROA extend best wishes to Nick Steele, Director of the KwaZulu Department of Nature Conservation, for a speedy recovery following his recent illness.*

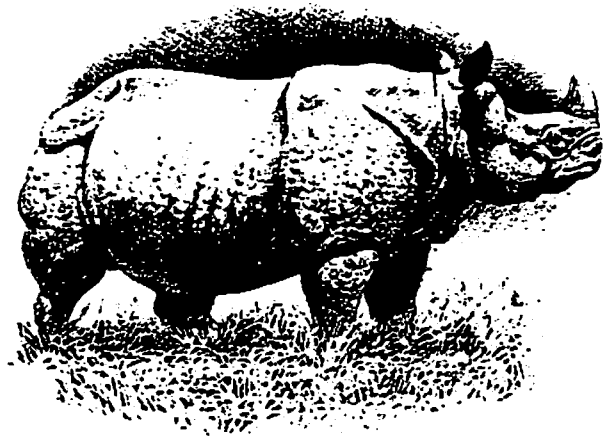
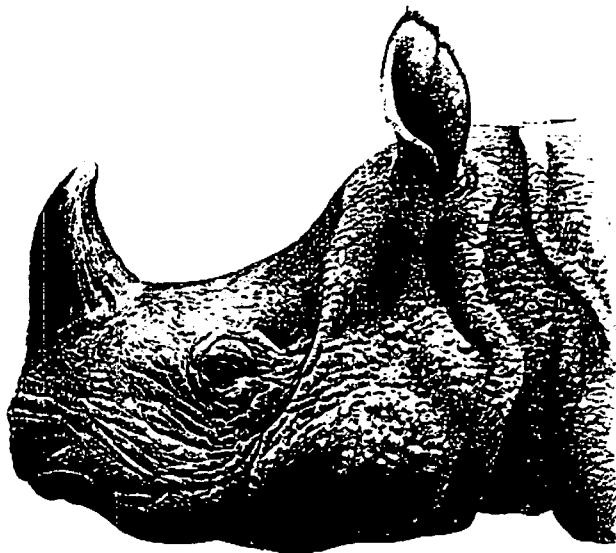
# The Rhinos of Kaziranga

Kaziranga National Park is one of the world's great rhino success stories. When the reserve was created in 1908, indiscriminate hunting and destruction of habitat had reduced the population of rhino in Assam to only 25 animals. There are now more than 1 300 one-horned rhinos (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) in the 430 square kilometres of park land. There is an ever-present threat to Kaziranga, however. Rhino horn powder, prized by the Chinese and Taiwanese as a medicine for reducing fevers, can fetch up to \$40 000 a kilo in east Asia.

Like all north-eastern states of India, Assam is poor and underdeveloped. Security forces are overstretched in dealing with tribal independence movements, and poachers are a constant menace to the survival of the rhinos. In 1992, Kaziranga's worst year, 49 rhinos were poached.

There are more than 300 guards posted throughout the park, but poachers, who travel in small groups, have the advantage of surprise. Armed with carbines and automatic weapons, they enter the park in the twilight hours of dawn or dusk, shoot the first rhino they find, hack out the horn and rip off the nails of the animal before making their getaway. One horn, which weighs about 700 grammes, can net each poacher RS10 00 (about R1 260), a small fortune in a country where the average wage is RS1 500.

The horn is then smuggled through Calcutta or across the border into Bhutan, steadily increasing in value as it sold on from trader to trader.



Barefoot, in ragged uniforms, carrying flashlights and old bolt-action rifles, the guards seem ill-equipped to deal with well-armed and determined poachers. Despite all the odds though, they are a formidable fighting force.

The Forest Department maintains contact with local villagers who sometimes tip off the guards that a poaching raid is imminent. Too often, however, the first indication that poachers are in the park is the sound of a gunshot. By then, it is too late to save the rhino, but if the guards are lucky, they can catch the poachers before they get out of the park. If they resist, the guards shoot back.

Last year, 14 poachers were killed in the park, but 21 rhinos had been poached. The guards have a stressful job. They may see their families only once a year, as they live in the park for 11 months at a time. With limited funding, however, this is the only way that the park can be policed. Funds were so short, that the Forest Department was unable to set up an adequate radio communications network linking all the camps - a vital step in improving the security of the park.

*Courtesy of Financial Times, London*

*It is interesting to note that the Rhino & Elephant Foundation recently received an appeal for funding from the Rhino Foundation in Calcutta, India, to combat the poachers infiltrating this area.*

# AROA Meeting - Report Back on White Rhino Survey

A very successful AROA meeting was held in Pretoria on 21 August, at which the results of the survey of white rhinos on private land were discussed. The meeting was one of the most significant since the inception of AROA, in that our first major project had been completed and the results were presented to the committee. AROA was very fortunate to have Dr George Hughes, Director of the Natal Parks Board and Head of the SA delegation to CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), and Richard Emslie of the African Rhino Specialist Group of the IUCN, present at the meeting. The presence of these influential and highly esteemed scientists proved that AROA has staked its claim in the rhino conservation establishment, and that AROA is considered an important participant in and contributor to the African rhino conservation endeavour.

The results of our survey exceeded expectations. Whereas the results of the first survey in 1987 showed that the efforts by the Natal Parks Board to establish white rhino on private land had to a large extent been exploited by private land owners for short-term financial gain, through hunting of breeding stock, the 1996 survey revealed that the private sector has built up viable and successful breeding populations, and that the emphasis is now on securing long-term survival and reproductive efficiency. Only surplus bulls and cows past their breeding life are now offered for trophy hunting. This has resulted in a 117% increase in white rhino on private land, despite ongoing, but responsible and sustainable, hunting.

The positive findings are a feather in the cap for game ranchers and private reserve owners in SA, and this group now manages 20% of the national white rhino population. The results of the survey are of great importance in that Dr Hughes admitted that these figures cannot be ignored by the relevant participants at the next CITES meeting, and that the contribution to rhino conservation by private owners must be acknowledged.

Dr Hughes also pointed out that state-controlled conservation areas are reaching their limits in terms of the number of rhinos they can accommodate, and that private land owners play an important role in increasing the total South

African population. Based on the rate of increase of white rhino on private land in the past decade, we project that numbers will double over the next ten years. The implications of this are that the demand for live rhinos from Natal Parks Board will decrease, and that private owners will also have to control their numbers to stay within the carrying capacity of their land. Both state reserves and private ranches will thus have to find an acceptable way of disposing of their surplus rhinos. When the supply of animals exceeds the demand and the trophy market reaches saturation, other avenues will have to be found to make it worthwhile to conserve and protect rhino populations. As rhino products - horns, skin, internal organs - are still very much a part of traditional medicines in the East, this avenue must be explored and, if viable, legalised. If alternative outlets for rhino products cannot be legalised, private rhino conservation will be limited to a few animals being kept for game viewing or trophy hunting, and no active breeding programmes will be economically viable for private owners.

Dr Hughes did stress, however, that as South Africa was a signatory to CITES, it would be highly irresponsible - and illegal - for private rhino owners to explore the trade in rhino products. He undertook to emphasise the valuable role of the private sector at the CITES meeting in Harare next year, and said that the official South African delegation to the convention will take cognisance of the needs of AROA members when finalising their proposals to the convention.

*Daan Buijs*

## The Rubbing Post

The Natal Game Marketing Association has three white rhino cows and 2 white rhino bulls for sale. All are mature animals. Enquiries: Frans Ras, Game Manager, Tel 082 491-0983.

As a service to AROA members, *Rhino Watch* will, in future, publish all requests from those interested in buying or selling rhinos. We invite our members to make use of this service and to fax the details to us at (011) 453-7649.