



Of all the petrol stations in all the world...

BY FELIX PATTON

We drove thousands of kilometres in six days in search of some of Kruger Park's famous 10,000-strong rhino population. But we found only five. My article about our South African safari appears in the Conservation section of this edition of SWARA.

So we set off for the 500 km drive to Harrismith on the edge of the Drakensburg Mountains after an early morning, last-ditch game drive. Again no luck in the rhino department, so we left Kruger a little disappointed.

Within a few minutes of leaving the Park we were racing along the main N4 with no hope of seeing any more of South Africa's rhinos. Lunchtime was soon upon us so the decision was made to stop at the next opportunity.

We were some 10 km from Malelane, between Belfast and Middelburg. The sign read ALZU Petroport, offering petrol, food and WC, which sounded ideal. Clearly a new service area, opened in September 2010, the slip road led straight to the TOTAL fuel station and then next door to the Bonjour convenience store, Steers Express restaurant and Mugg and Bean coffee shop. A typical service station – or was it?



PHOTOS BY: FELIX PATTON

TOP: The white rhino mother and calf walking in the enclosure.
BOTTOM: The white rhino male sharing the waterhole with zebra.
TOP RIGHT: The tower of the ALZU Petroport
BOTTOM RIGHT: Zebra and ostrich can be seen in the game enclosure.

As ever, the toilet was the most required facility. Nice and airy, the Men's had a unique feature as the urinals were against a wall with a large long window to the outside world. And what was to be seen through the window but WHITE RHINOS!

The toilet looked out over a game enclosure containing rhino, buffalo, eland, blesbok, ostriches and zebra. The white rhinos were a mother, its calf and a male. The adults had been dehorned for security against poachers. Eating our picnic lunch on one of the bench seats overlooking the enclosure watching the white rhinos eating theirs was a surreal experience.

With apologies to the film Casablanca – of all the service stations in all of South Africa, (possibly even in the whole World) we had found the only one with rhinos! ●