Lesotho

In 1971, the archaeologist Patricia Vinnicombe conducted an interview with two old residents of Khomo-ea-Mollo village, near the well-known rock shelter near Sehonghong in the Senqu River Valley in south-eastern Lesotho (Vinnicombe 2009b:165-190). One of these men – Liselo Rankoli – who was born in 1880 or 1881, told her that the people very much liked to eat the animal known as *sele*, (described as being like a jackal, but black and white). In his notes, added at the end of the chapter (p. 184), P Mitchell writes: "This is the honey badger (*Mellivora capensis*)". 'Sele' is the Sesotho name for the honey badger.

A recent survey of the mammals did not produce any honey badger records for Lesotho (Lynch 1994), and Ambrose (2006:26-27) does not list any recent records (but see *Lesotho* under 'Written records'). The honey badger is included in a recent list of the mammals of Lesotho (Ambrose and Talukdar 2000:38).

Overview: historical incidence of the honey badger

The incidence of the honey badger in the area covered by this book, during the early historical period, is open to conjecture. Going by the lack of archaeological records (for the "4 000 yrs BP-Recent" period) and the general lack of recent records, and also the information in Skinner and Chimimba (2005:502-503), it could perhaps be argued that it was absent, from the Free State Province, at least. However, the early, written records and recent records that are provided in this account, some or all of which may be reliable, could indicate that it did in fact occur in the area that concerns us, during the early historical period. If this was the case, it obviously went largely unrecorded, i.e. it was simply ignored, or overlooked, by the early observers.

There appears to be no good reason, or reasons, for the honey badger to not have been present in the Free State Province and large parts of Lesotho, since it seems that its habitat requirements would have been met there, especially in the former territory, and also in the low-lying parts of the latter.

During the 1900s, particularly, honey badgers were readily persecuted as problem animals, being accused of raiding poultry runs and beehives, and this probably led to local extinctions, and hence a paucity of recent records. It appears that the Basotho people favoured the honey badger as a source of food and, if this was the case, the badger population would have come under huge pressure as the rural human population of that country increased exponentially from the latter-1800s through the 1900s to the present day. This could easily have led to its extermination in Lesotho, and hence a lack of recent records. There is, however, no evidence that this species was exterminated across the area covered in this book. Thus any current populations that may exist are considered to be natural.

In terms of the historical incidence of the honey badger in the broader Eastern Cape Province, to the south of the area that concerns us, Skead (2007:321) writes: "A fairly wide coverage, on the whole". Information for the broader Northern Cape Province, to the south-west, west and north-west of the Free State Province, indicates that the honey badger was probably widespread there during the early historical period (Skead 2011:211).

Rowe-Rowe (1992:8) provides records for the honey badger in the Giant's Castle Game Reserve, in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg, between 1917 and 1923, thereby indicating that this species did occur historically just to the south-east of the area covered by this book.

RHINOCEROSES

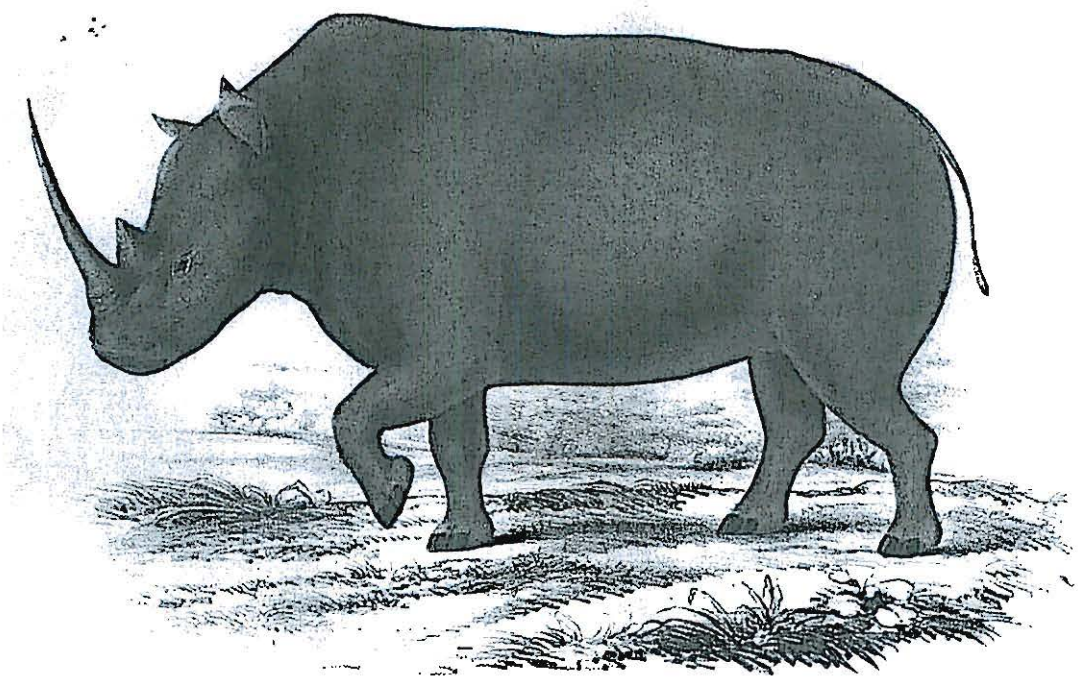
During the 19th century there was much confusion in scientific and popular circles regarding the exact number of species of rhinoceros that occurred in southern Africa. However, by the turn of the century it was widely accepted that there were only two species in this subregion: commonly, the white rhino *Rhinocerus simus*, eventually to become *Ceratotherium simum*, and the black rhino *Rhinoceros bicornis*, eventually to become *Diceros bicornis* (Rookmaaker 2007:168-177).

2.27 WHITE RHINOCEROS WITRENOSTER TŠUKULU*

Ceratotherium simum

The white rhino, a grazer, has a number of specific habitat requirements, notably flat or gently undulating terrain, permanent surface water for drinking and wallowing, and adequate bush cover for shade and shelter from inclement weather (Apps 1996; Skinner and Chimimba 2005). Consequently, this large herbivore is not a species of extensive tracts of pure grassland but rather one of woodland or tall-shrub savannas.

Although essentially a solitary animal, the white rhino does occur in family groups of between two and five individuals. While this huge animal is unmistakeable in the field, inexperienced observers often confuse it with the black rhino *Diceros bicornis*.



Painting of the white rhinoceros "Rhinoceros simus" *(now* Ceratotherium simum*), by Dr Andrew Smith (from Smith 1849).*

Written records

Free State Province and Lesotho

Despite the presence of a number of literate early travellers, explorers, hunters and settlers in many parts of the area covered by this book, from the 1830s onwards, no firm records from the early literature have been found for the white rhino in this region (see Rookmaaker 2007). While there are records of rhinos from the northern part of the Free State Province from the 1830s and 1840s (see Chapter 2.29), there is no information to identify them as white rhinos.

W Cornwallis Harris, the English soldier, hunter and explorer, who travelled in parts of South Africa in 1836 and 1837. Harris (1840:105) states that the white rhino "Inhabits variously, being found in equal abundance on open, grassy plains, and in hilly or thinly wooded regions".

Of the white rhino, FC Selous, the well-known English hunter and soldier, who developed a good knowledge of game in central and southern Africa, had the following to say (in Bryden 1899:52-53): "I do not know whether the emigrant Boers, when in 1836 they first encountered the country now known as the Orange Free State, met with the white rhinoceros, but I am inclined to believe that they did, as I have had places pointed out to me just north of the Vaal River, on the open grassy plains of the Southern Transvaal, where examples of this species were encountered by the early Dutch pioneers; and as the pasture to the south of the Vaal is very good and that stream is easily fordable at many points during the dry season, there is no reason why some of these animals should not have crossed it at certain times of the year".

Notes on the written records

If the white rhino did occur in places, in suitable habitat, the lack of historical written records may,

*per Ambrose (2006:31)

to a certain extent, be a reflection of the naturally low density of this highly territorial animal. The possible role of early, commercial hunters in the lack of written records for this animal is discussed in Box 2.1.

Supporting records

Palaeontological records

Both of the palaeontological records for the Free State Province, originally thought to be white rhino skulls (Skead 2007:322-323), have subsequently been shown to be skulls of black rhinos (see Chapter 2.28 for details).

Archaeological records

White rhino remains have been found in archaeological samples, from sites in southern Africa, within two of the five time periods defined for the "4 000 yrs BP-Recent" era that concerns us, i.e. the mid- to late-Holocene (Plug and Badenhorst 2001:5-6,20). Thus, archaeological data can provide useful information on its pre-historical distribution.

For this era, no white rhino remains have been found in archaeological samples from the Free State Province and Lesotho. This, of course, does not mean to say that the animal was not present in the area or region (see Plug and Badenhorst 2001:1).

Recent records

There are no recent records of naturally occurring white rhino populations in the area covered by this book. There are white rhinos in the Free State today, but information on their locations and numbers is kept confidential, to prevent poaching (Janecke 2011:16). These rhinos have been brought in by man. For example, Watson (2006) lists the white rhino as one of the species that was translocated to the Tussen-die-Riviere Provincial Nature Reserve, in the southern Free State Province, by wildlife managers.

Overview: historical distribution of the white rhinoceros

A combination of the lack of archaeological records (for the era in question) and the absence of reliable, early, written records suggests that the white rhino was absent from, or perhaps only marginally present in, the area covered by this book. This broadly supports the findings of a review of the distribution records for the white rhino for this same area, for the period 1795-1875 (Rookmaaker 2007:185). Of course, the possibility exists that some of the 'rhinoceros sp. indet.' records (see Chapter 2.29) could be of white rhinos. It is not known if, or to what extent, the activities of early commercial hunters contributed to the lack of written records for this rhino (see Box 2.1).

Given its specific habitat requirements, the white rhino can be expected to have been absent where extensive tracts of pure grassland covered the plains and montane areas of the Free State Province and Lesotho, and that it would have occurred, or potentially occurred, only in those relatively limited areas where savanna vegetation was present. The latter comprise a band of Eastern Kalahari Thornveld in the far western and north-western parts, and small areas of Central Bushveld in the northern parts, of the Free State Province (see Figure 1.5).

It is difficult to offer informed comment on the assertions of WC Harris and FC Selous, namely that the white rhino was found on open, grassy plains. Perhaps these were temporary incursions, or woodland occurred nearby.

In areas adjacent to the Free State Province-Lesotho region, the white rhino is known to have been present historically in the Eastern Kalahari Bushveld (a savanna type) where it occurred in the Northern Cape Province to the west of the Free State Province, and also to the north-west in the western reaches of the North West Province (see Rookmaaker 2007:186; Skead 2011:215-216). It was also present where elements of the Savanna Biome occurred in Gauteng Province, to the north of the Free State Province (Rookmaaker 2007:186). According to Rowe-Rowe (1994:2), the white Rhino was absent from the area to the south-east of the area covered by this book, namely southern KwaZulu-Natal Province.

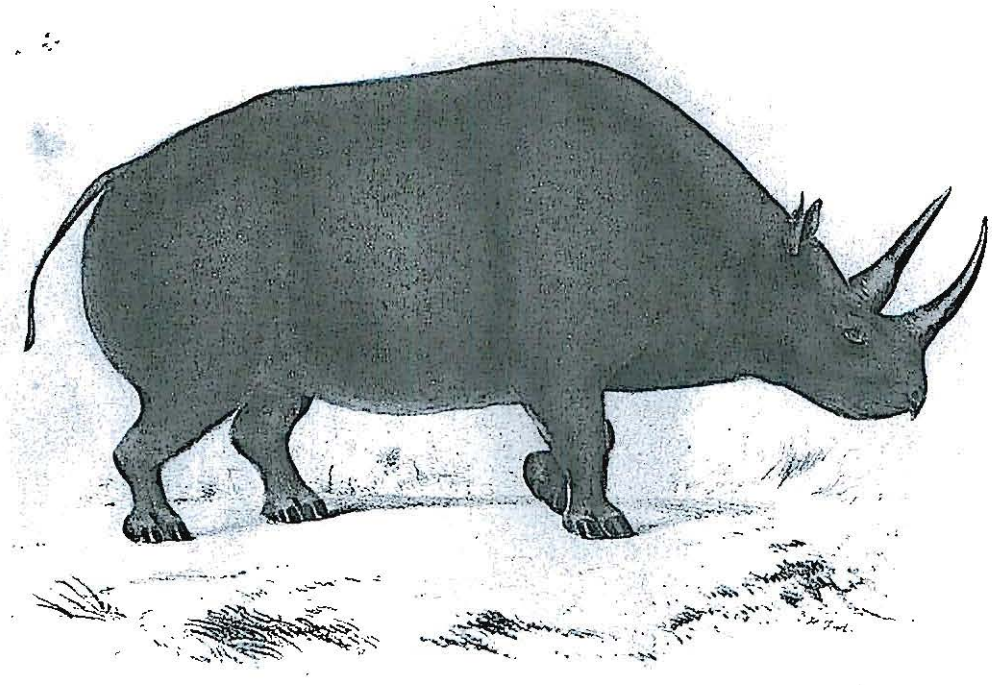
It is thought that if any white rhino populations did occur, these were exterminated by 1850.

2.28 BLACK RHINOCEROS SWARTRENOSTER TŠUKULU*

Diceros bicornis

The black rhino, a large herbivore, is predominantly a solitary browser, and it occupies a fairly wide variety of habitats, in semi-arid to high rainfall regions. It requires a permanent source of surface water, for drinking and wallowing, and well-developed stands of shrubs and low-growing trees, or thicket, for food, *shade and shelter* from inclement weather (see Skinner and Chimimba 2005). This broadly accords with the observation by W Cornwallis Harris, the English soldier, explorer and hunter, who travelled in parts of southern Africa in 1836 and 1837. Harris (1840:82) states that the black rhinoceros "Inhabits variously, but is most usually met with on thinly wooded plains".

While this large animal is unmistakeable in the field, inexperienced observers often confuse it with the white rhino *Ceratotherium simum*.



Painting of the black rhinoceros "Rhinoceros keitloa" *(now* Diceros bicornis*) by Dr Andrew Smith (from Smith 1849).*

Written records

Free State Province and Lesotho

No firm records from the early literature have been found for the black rhino in the area covered by this book (Ambrose 2006; Rookmaaker 2007). There are records of unidentified rhinos from the northern part of the Free State Province (see Chapter 2.29) which may refer to black rhinos but, owing to a lack of details, this cannot be confirmed.

Rowland Ward (in Lydekker and Burlace 1914:466) lists a black rhino specimen from the "Orange River Colony" from the pre-1910 period in the British Museum (Natural History); this specimen was donated by "Major-General Sir William Crossman". Unfortunately, there is no other information about this intriguing record in Ward's book. William Crossman was an officer in the Royal Engineers in the British Army, before becoming a British politician. Amongst other activities in the British colonies he was, in 1875, in charge of the Royal Commission (appointed by Lord Carnarvon) into the Black Flag Rebellion in Griqualand West and he sat in Kimberley in January 1876. It was presumably around this time that he shot the black rhino that was registered in the British Museum. The black rhino is known to have occurred during early historical times in Griqualand West, in today's Northern Cape Province (Skead 2011:216-220). While it is considered possible for the black rhino to have occurred in the karoo vegetation of the adjacent western and south-western "Orange River Colony" (see 'Palaeontological records', below), there are no written historical records for this animal from this region. Perhaps it was there but nobody thought to record its presence?

The last written record of the black rhino in the Northern Cape and the western part of the North West Province was made in 1846 (Skead 2011:219). The mid-1870s is very late for the black rhino to have survived the colonial hunting onslaught and the increasing settlement of the land by White farmers and, therefore, until further informa-

*per Skinner and Chimimba (2005:807)

tion comes to light the Crossman record must be treated with caution. This is supported by the following statement: "It appears that the Black Rhinoceros was exterminated in the Cape Colony and the Orange River Colony by the year 1853" (Dollman 1921:82).

Notes on the written records

The lack of historical written records may be, to a certain extent, a reflection of the naturally low density of this highly territorial animal species. Although there is no information available to support the hypothesis, it may be that, as in the case of the white rhino, excessive hunting by early commercial hunters may have been largely or partly responsible for the paucity of written black rhino records (see Box 2.1).

Box 2.4 San rock art and the black rhinoceros

Rock paintings by the San that depict the black rhino are rare. An important such painting was first recorded by the well-known traveller, artist and hunter Thomas Baines. After leaving Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape Province on 8 February 1850, Baines and his companions passed Aliwal North, on the south bank of the Orange River, and then proceeded to Rouxville, in the southern Free State Province, and then skirted the village of Smithfield. Baines takes up the story in his journal (Kennedy 2,1964:29-30): "At twenty minutes past three we came to a range of high mountains stretching nearly east and west, and, turning eastward along their southern face, halted at a quarter to four in a kloof called Klip huis – or Rock house – from two or three caves in the layers of rock which shewed themselves at intervals along the face of the hill, and had formerly been the haunt of wild [San]. We visited one rather high up in a kloof and found several drawings of different animals. I copied one of a black rhinoceros, said by my companion [the elephant hunter Joseph McCabe] to be a very good representation of the animal for which it was designed, but unfortunately, like many more of the few sketches I had the opportunity of making, it is in the missing book".

The Kliphuis caves, which are some 35 km south-east of Reddersburg, were visited in October 2001 and the black rhino rock painting referred to by Baines was re-discovered (Ouzman 2002:6-7). Despite the temptation to do so, it is unwise to use rock paintings to construct the historical ranges of the larger mammals (see Chapter 1.3.2). Thus, while the habitat in the vicinity of Kliphuis may have supported black rhinos in the past, we cannot be sure that that is where the San artist observed the animal that he or she painted on the wall of the cave.

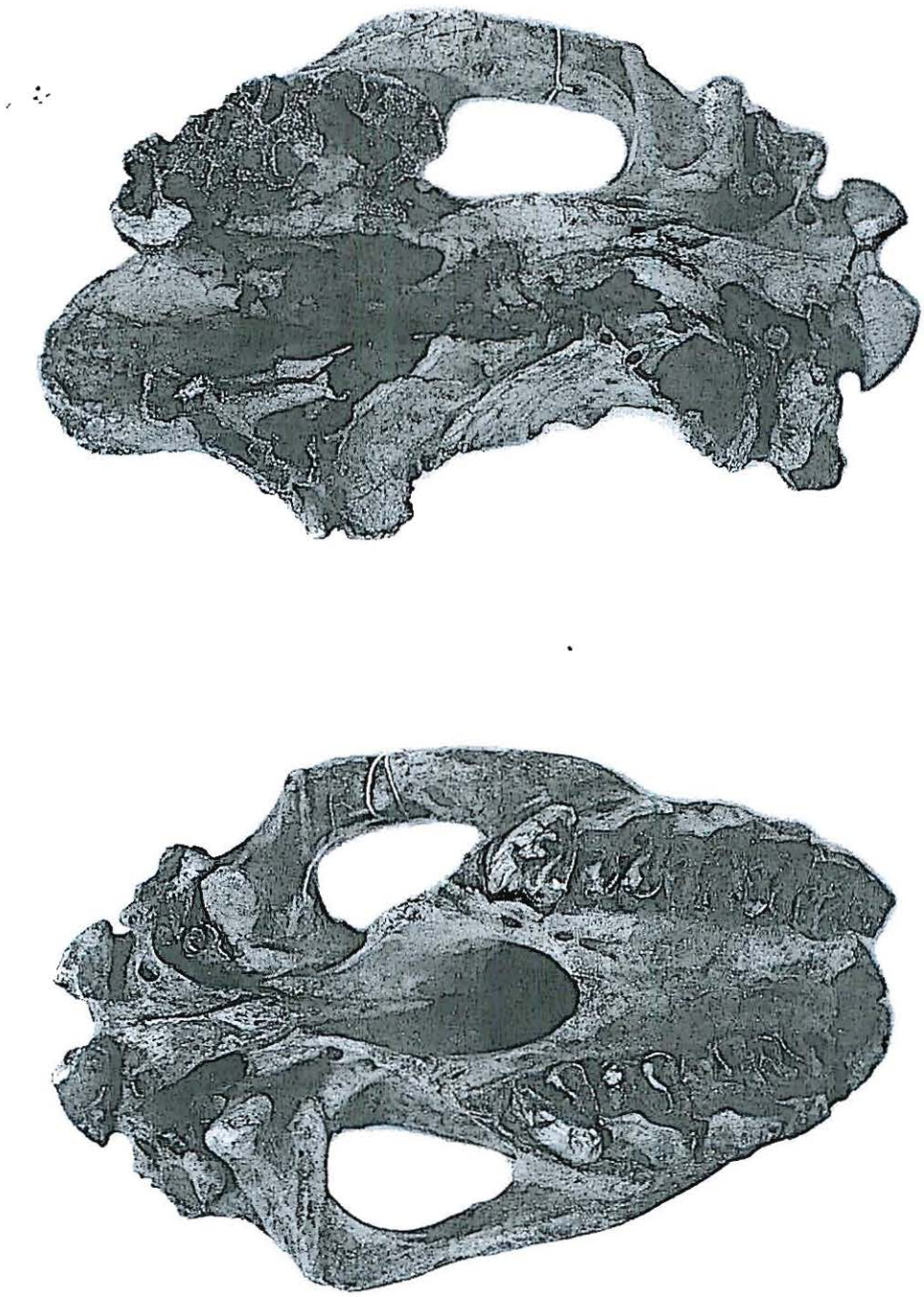
Supporting records

Palaeontological records

CJ Skead (2007:322-323) notes that "Bigalke (1963:7) refers to a white rhinoceros skull, found in 1961 by Dr A.C. Hoffman, Director of the National Museum, Bloemfontein, in the Valsrivier, near Kroonstad. From Mr C.D. Lynch, mammalogist at the museum, it was learned (in litt. 18.6.1974) that 'A white rhino skull without mandibles (No. m623) was found in the Vals River in 1958 on the farm Letitia (no. 1367), district Kroonstad. It was donated by Mr Bester. This is probably the skull Dr. Bigalke is referring to as found in 1961'". The farm Letitia (27° 45'S; 27° 30'E) lies on the north bank of the Vals River, 26 km east-south-east of Kroonstad. This skull is in the collection of the National Museum in Bloemfontein and has been confirmed as being that of a black rhino (Lynch 1991b:6; James Brink, osteologist, National Museum, Bloemfontein, in litt., December 2011). There would have been suitable habitat for the black rhino along the course of the Vals River, and on the rocky hills (koppies) in the general area. This age of this skull has not been accurately determined but, based on its state of preservation, it is estimated to be no older than a few hundred years.

Of a rhino skull unearthed on the farm Telegraafsfontein (29° 03'S; 25° 07'E), on the south bank of the Riet River, 32 km north-west of Fauresmith and 18 km south-east of Koffiefontein, in the south-western Free State Province, CJ Skead

(2007:323) writes that "... according to Mr C.D. Lynch, mammalogist, National Museum, Bloemfontein (in litt. 18.6.1974) this is 'a half-fossilised skull (without mandible) No. m622 found in 1934 by F. Rabie ..... However, this skull appears to be that of a black rhino ...'". This skull is also in the collection of the National Museum in Bloemfontein (Lynch 1991b:6) and has been confirmed as that of a black rhino (James *Brink, osteologist*, National Museum, Bloemfontein, in litt. December 2011). There would have been suitable habitat for the black rhino in the south-western Free State Province. As with the previous specimen, the age of this skull has not been determined but, based on its state of preservation, it is estimated to be no older than a few hundred years.



Ventral views of black rhinoceros skulls and upper jawbones unearthed at two sites in the Free State Province (see the text). The age of these items has not been accurately determined but, based on their state of preservation, they are estimated to be no older than a few hundred years. This material provides evidence for the occurrence of the black rhino in the Free State relatively close to the start of the historical period.

Photos: National Museum, Bloemfontein

Archaeological records

Black rhino remains have been found in archaeological samples, from sites in southern Africa, within four of the five time periods defined for the "4 000 yrs BP-Recent" era that concerns us, i.e. the mid- to late-Holocene (Plug and Badenhorst 2001:5-6,20). Thus, archaeological data can provide useful information on its pre-historical distribution.

For this era, no black rhino remains have been found in archaeological samples from the Free State Province and Lesotho. This, of course, does not mean to say that the animal was not present in the area or region (see Plug and Badenhorst 2001:1).

Recent records

There are no recent records of naturally occurring black rhino populations in the area covered by this book. There are black rhinos in the Free State today but information on their locations and numbers is kept confidential, to prevent poaching (Janecke 2011:16). These rhinos have been brought in by man.

Overview: historical distribution of the black rhinoceros

A combination of the general lack of reliable, early, written records and supporting records suggests that the black rhino was absent from, or was only locally present in, the area covered by this book during the early historical period. This broadly supports the findings of a review by Rookmaaker (2007:183-185) of the distribution records for the black rhino for this same area, for the period 1795-1875. It is not known if, or to what extent, the activities of early, commercial hunters, in search of ivory and hides, contributed to the lack of written records for this rhino (see Box 2.1).

Given its specific habitat requirements, the black rhino can be expected to have been absent where extensive tracts of pure grassland covered the plains and montane areas of the Free State Province and Lesotho. If present in the region covered by this book, its ecological requirements would have dictated that it was restricted to the area of Upper Karoo vegetation in the far western part of the Free State Province, and also where savanna vegetation was present in this province, in form of the Eastern Kalahari Bushveld in the north-western parts, and in the form of small areas of Central Bushveld in the far northern parts (see Figure 1.5).

The black rhino was present historically in the Nama Karoo Biome to the south-west of the Free State Province, and in the Eastern Kalahari Bushveld to the west and north-west of this province (Rookmaaker 2007:186; Skead 2011:219-220). Rowe-Rowe (1994:4) reports that it was historically absent from southern KwaZulu-Natal Province, i.e. to the south-east of the area covered by this book.

It is considered possible that black rhinos may have penetrated the pure grassland areas adjacent to the karroid and savanna areas by following, for some way, major river courses where the riparian vegetation would have provided some suitable habitat. However, since this would only have been possible when permanent water was available in these rivers, such incursions would probably have been of a temporary nature.

Similarly, some grassland areas contain hills ('koppies') and low ridges that have a good cover of shrubs and thicket, and even low-growing trees. Good examples of this habitat occur in south-western, central and northern Free State Province. These areas possibly offered additional, albeit fragmented, habitat for the black rhino. However, proximity to permanent surface water would have been a key factor, and the palatability of the local trees and shrubs for black rhinos is not known.

It is thought that if any black rhino populations did occur, these were exterminated by around 1850.

2.29 RHINOCEROS – SPECIES INDETERMINATE

White rhinoceros *(Ceratotherium simum)*
or Black rhinoceros *(Diceros bicornis)*

There are passages in the early literature that contain reference to the rhinoceros in the Free State province but, unfortunately, they do not contain information that enables us to determine to which of the two species – white rhino *Ceratotherium simum* or black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* – the writer is referring. These records are presented below.

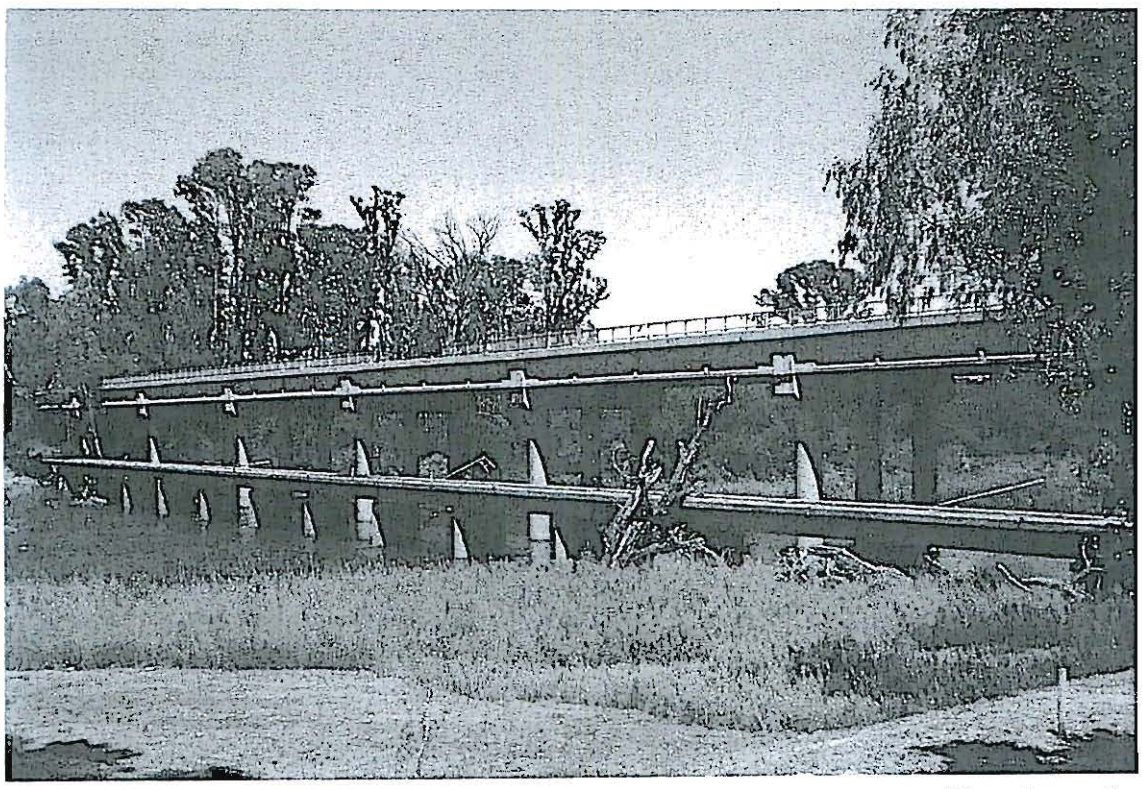
Written records (Figure 2.21)

Free State Province

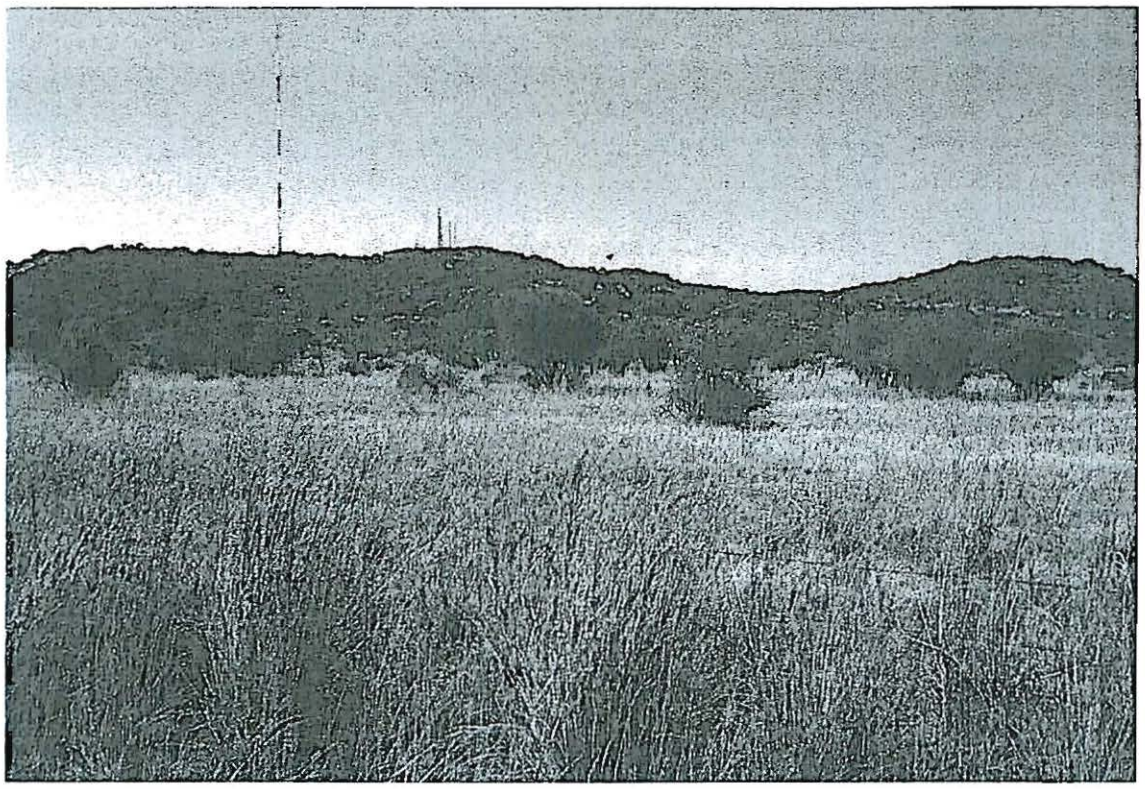
1830s

In mid-December 1836, W Cornwallis Harris, the English soldier, explorer and hunter, and reliable recorder, and his party returned along the Mooi River near Potchefstroom, in the southern part of today's North West Province, from a hunting trip to the Cashan Mountains (the Magaliesberg). They crossed the Vaal River into the northern Free State Province at a place considered by Skead (1987:546) to have been at or near Scandinavia Drift and in the vicinity of the northern border between the Vredefort and Viljoenskroon districts. Harris (1852:233) writes: "We had not advanced more than three miles [4.8 km] [from the river] before our progress was opposed by a furious storm of hail and thunder ... To me it is remarkable from the circumstance of my having there, for the last time, seen and destroyed the rhinoceros". This locality is in the vicinity of 26° 59'S; 27°01'E (Rookmaaker 2007:96). Unfortunately, Harris does not provide any clues as to the species of rhino that he killed, but he implies that the black rhino was known in the area. Shortridge (1,1934:416) provides the following statement: "1838, Harris [WC] – Shot many rhino in Bechuanaland, the Western Transvaal and the Orange Free State". A perusal of Harris (1840) and Harris (1852) does not support the "many" claim for the "Orange Free State".

There is another, intriguing, reference to the historical occurrence of the rhinoceros in the northern Free State Province. It involves Thomas Baines, the English explorer, well-known artist and avid hunter, who undertook a number of journeys in the Free State Province during the course of 1850 (Kennedy 2,1964). On 31 March 1850, Baines and his companions were travelling through the Kroonstad district on their way to the Vaal River and Potchefstroom beyond (pp. 52-53). "About five we passed Rhinoster Kop, where the Boers shot the first rhinoceros during the Emigration, and where lions still harbour in considerable force, though we heard nothing of them ..." (p. 53).



Old and new road bridges across the Vaal River at Scandinavia Drift, between Viljoenskroon (northern Free State Province) and Potchefstroom (southern North West Province). This drift was a popular fording place for 19th century wagon travellers and it is possible that it was about 4.8 km south of here that William Cornwallis Harris shot one of the last rhinos in the northern Free State, in December 1836. Photo: André Boshoff



Renosterkop (part of which is pictured here) is a long, low hill some 27 km to the north-west of Kroonstad in the northern Free State Province. The origin of this name for this topographic feature, a prominent navigational beacon for early White travellers, is uncertain. It is claimed by some that the name was derived from the killing there, in 1842, of the last rhino in the northern Free State. *Photo: André Boshoff*

Baines's "Rhinósterkop" is Renosterkop, located some 27 km north-north-west of Kroonstad, near the Kroonstad-Koppies district boundary and 17 km south of the confluence of the Renoster and the Heuningspoort rivers. The "Emigration" that he refers to is the Great Trek, which saw the large-scale emigration of Dutch-speaking farmers/Boers (Voortrekkers) from the Cape Colony to the former Orange Free State, Transvaal and Natal provinces, and which took place mainly between 1835 and 1838.

One can only assume that Baines obtained the information about the shooting of the rhino and the subsequent naming of the nearby hill ("Rhinosterkop") from local Boers, some of whom may well have taken part in the Great Trek. Baines's use of the words "first rhinoceros during the Emigration" also deserves comment. If this is interpreted to mean that the Boers, when trekking through the Free State Province, did not shoot rhinos until they reached Renosterkop, for the reason that there were no rhinos to shoot, then it supports the hypothesis that rhinos did not occur on the extensive grassland-covered plains to the south-west.

"About the end of May [1836] two [Boer] parties, headed by J.G.S. Bronkhorst and H. Potgieter, left the camp formed by some of the emigrants on the Vet River, one of the tributaries of the Ky-Gariep [Vaal River], for the purpose of exploring the country to the N E ..." (Chase 1843:71). A statement by Bronkhorst (p. 74) reads: "At the Vaale and Oliphant's Rivers we saw numbers of rhinosceros [sic], buffalos, sea-cows [hippos], and ...". The actual place where the parties crossed the Vaal River is not known but, based on the description of their journey, it was possibly somewhere in the Parys or Sasolburg districts.

1840s

According to Henry Hall (1857:7), a pioneer South African cartographer and writer, "One hill in the [Orange River] Sovereignty, à little to the south of [the] Vaal River, is called Rhenoster Kop, from the fact of the last one in that country having been killed there, in 1842 ...". This date is repeated by Sclater (1,1900:306): "... in the Orange Free State the last recorded rhinoceros was killed in 1842, at Rhenoster Kop, just south of the Vaal river in the Kroonstad district". This record was made six years later than the one by WC Harris, and this "Rhenosterkop" (Renosterkop) is some 60 km south of where Harris would have crossed the Vaal River. Sclater, appears to have had no doubt that the species was a black rhino but he does not reveal his source of date and place, both of which are of the greatest importance in this rhino

story. FitzSimons (3,1920:214) and Shortridge (1,1934:416) repeat Sclater's date and place, obviously following him.

To date, the source of the '1842 record' has not been found. However, Skead (1987:547) considers that a likely source may be "the famous hunter Johan August Wahlberg, a Swede, who crossed the Renoster River in 1842 on his way back from hunting in the Magaliesberg of the Transvaal. From 7 to 9 May 1842 he followed the course of the Renoster River without mentioning rhinos in his journal. On his way up to the Transvaal he had spent six days on the Renoster River, from 1 to 7 November 1841, and, although he describes many other species of game there, rhinos do not feature, nor do they for the rest of his treks across the northern Orange Free State from Natal, yet while at the Magaliesberg he frequently referred to a rhinoceros. However, there is nothing in Wahlberg's journal (Craig and Hummel 1994) to link him with the mystery '1842' record. "Transvaal" refers to the geo-political region to the north of the Vaal River, in the pre-1994 South African political dispensation.

Given that the locality of Baines's '1835-1838' record is the same as that of the mysterious '1842 record' (i.e. the Renosterkop 27 km north-north-west of Kroonstad), it is perhaps not impossible that these two records refer to the same rhino, with Hall having an incorrect date.

Between June and August 1843, the Rev. John Bennie of the Glasgow Missionary Society in Scotland travelled from the Cape Colony into "Transorangia and the Potchefstroom-Winburg trekker republic" and back again. "Transorangia" was the name given to the region between the Orange River and the Vet River, in today's Free State Province. Bennie (in Williams 1956:6-7) provides further evidence that rhinos formerly occurred in the vicinity of the Vaal River in the northern Free State Province. "I have mentioned the Rhenoster as being, as I have supposed, the Unicorn of the Ancients. I am aware that the correctness of this opinion has been and may be questioned; but I incline to agree with those who think the Rhenoster and the Unicorn are one and the same animal, for these reasons: first, the length of the Rhenoster's one horn is remarkable as also is its strength. I saw one measured which was in the possession of Potgieter father of the Commandant, and its length was 3 feet 2 inches. When in its position the horn has a tusk near it protruding 3 or 4 inches. The horn is straight, sharp, hiary [sic] and hard. Secondly; When any thing unusual is obs[erved] by the animal in his way, as a waggon, a person on foot or on horseback, he bend[s] down his head and putting the point of his horn into the earth, he advances an[d] as he advances he plows up the ground. The remains of one which advanced in this manner to a waggon are still seen near the ford on the Vaal [River]. He came up to the waggon and entered between the hott or left fore wheel and the hott shaft ox whe[re] he got entangled and where the driver shot him. He is not reckoned a dangerous animal if one sees him advancing, and has time to get out of his way; but if otherwise he gores the person and tosses him into the air".

The rhino "remains" that Bennie saw in 1843 "near the ford on the Vaal" (Scandinavia Drift, or one of the other early fords/drifts along this section of this river) are taken to be from a different rhino to that killed "three miles" from the Vaal River by WC Harris seven years before, i.e. in 1836.

1850s

The possibility of black rhinos in the Free State Province is discussed further by Skead (1987:547). "Brand (1964) states that the black rhinoceros occurred in the Orange Free State and was exterminated by about 1853, but no reference to this could be found in any of the works of travellers who visited this area. Dr Brand, Director of the Zoological Gardens, Pretoria, when approached for his source of the year 1853 referred (in litt. 16.8.1974) to Lydekker's (1926:18) statement on the black rhinoceros. 'It appears to have been exterminated in Cape Colony and the Orange River Colony by the year 1853'. It is submitted here that Lydekker erred in combining both regions under the same date, 1853, which correctly applies to the Cape, not the Orange Free State (see Skead 1987:547). Harper (1945:398), also writing of the last of the black rhinos, was more precise in saying: 'The last one in the Cape region was said to have been killed in 1853 on the Coega River, close to Port Elizabeth, while in the Orange Free State, the last one was killed in 1842, a decade earlier in the Kroonstad district'. Here, too, Harper must have been following Sclater's published record of 45 years earlier".

Lesotho

1830s

Thomas Arbousset and François Daumas (1846:68), two French missionaries from the Paris Missionary Society stationed at Morija mission in south-western Lesotho, travelled in Lesotho and the eastern, northern and central Free State Province in 1836. Writing about the Maloti in Lesotho, they state that "The elephant, the buffalo, the giraffe and the two-horned rhinoceros, inhabit only the eastern side". This statement indicates that there were no rhinos in western Lesotho and the far eastern Free State Province, at least in the mid-1830s, and that they did occur in today's KwaZulu-Natal Province, which lies on the "eastern side" of the Maloti.

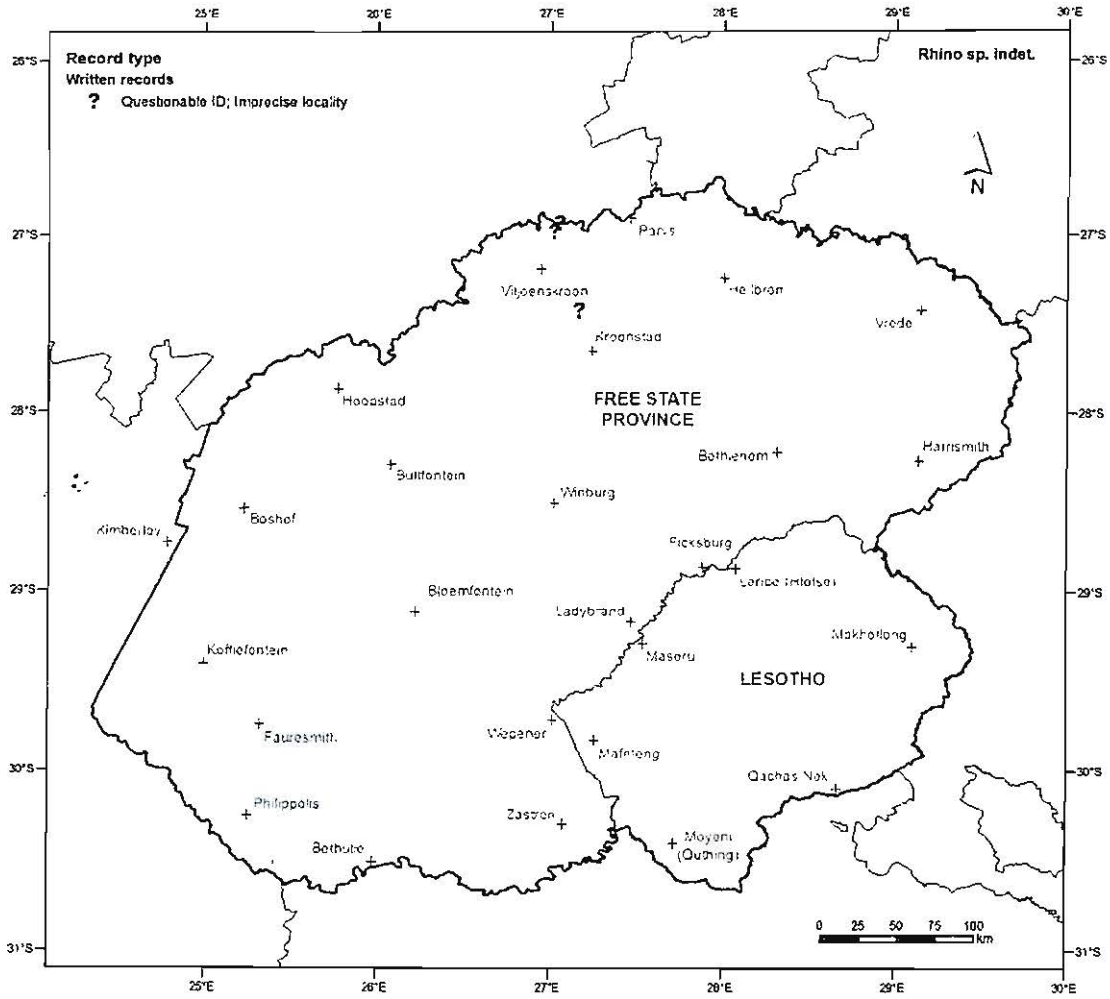


Figure 2.21 *Localities of selected, written records for 'rhinoceros' (sp. indet.) in the Free State Province (South Africa) and Lesotho, during the early historical period (1820s-1920s). Written records in the text with vague or broad locality information have been excluded from the map.*

Box 2.5 General comments on the historical incidence of the white rhinoceros and black rhinoceros

The paucity of firm written records makes it very difficult to provide strong statements about the historical incidence of the white rhino and black rhino in the area covered by this book. Their incidence, or potential incidence, has already been discussed in their respective accounts (Chapter 2.27 for the white rhino, and Chapter 2.28 for the black rhino).

It can probably be stated with some confidence, that, for ecological reasons, both were probably absent from those vast tracts of country that were covered purely by open grassland. This view is supported by the fact that although many of these areas were visited or settled by literate European travellers and colonists, only two firm, and two indirect, written rhino (sp. indet.) records could be found.

For example, large parts of the northern, north-western, north-eastern and central Free State Province, and western Lesotho, were traversed by French missionaries during the 1830s and 1840s and yet they made no mention of rhinos. Similarly, Dr Andrew Smith, the Scottish physician, zoologist and explorer travelled through parts of the southern and eastern Free State Province, as well as the western and south-western lowlands of Lesotho, in 1834 and he made no mention of rhinos in his diary (Kirby 1,1939) or in his journal (Lye 1975).

cont.

WC Harris (1852), a reliable chronicler who journeyed through large parts of the northern, central and southern Free State Province in late-1836 and early-1837, provides only a single specific record of a rhino, near the Vaal River.

The fact that the Swede Johan Wahlberg did not record any rhinos during his four journeys through the northern and north-eastern Free State Province, between October 1841 and November 1844, is a clear indication that they were either extremely scarce or non-existent in those parts. This statement is based on the fact that he regularly recorded (and shot) rhinos to the south-east of the Free State (i.e. in today's KwaZulu-Natal Province), and also to its north, and on the strong impression gained from his diary (Craig and Hummel 1994) that he had an almost pathological need to shoot rhinos, with these incidents being faithfully recorded in his diary.

Between June and August 1843, the Rev. John Bennie of the Glasgow Missionary Society in Scotland travelled from the Cape Colony into "Transorangia and the Potchefstroom-Winburg trekker republic" and back again. "Transorangia" was the name given to the region between the Orange River and the Vet River, in today's Free State Province. Bennie (in Williams 1956:5) describes the country from the "Agter Sneeuwberg", to the south of the Orange River and in the northern part of the Graaff-Reinet and Cradock districts, to that "beyond the Modder River", in central Free State Province, as being "uniform with respect to its hills and plains". Bennie continues (pp. 5-6): "In many parts if that country game is very abundant. In a valley containing sweet grass, and a brook or pool, a thousand animauls [sic], consisting of Spring and Bles bucks, Zebras, Gnous, Quaggas etc. may be seen at a glance. Tellingly, Bennie (p. 6) then writes: "I did not see the Eland ... Nor did I see the Giraffe, Buffalo, the Rhenbster [rhinoceros], the Sea cow, the [E]lephant; but all these are found not far [d]istant from Mahale's [Magaliesberg] Berg [in northern North West Province]. I saw hunting parties who had returned from hunting excursions, having their waggons loaded with Seacow fat and hide, hides and horns of the Rhenoster or Unicorn of the ancients, hides of the Giraffe, tusks of the elephant, skins of the blue gnou, skins of two sorts of bucks the name of which I have not previously heard". In other words, he apparently did not see any rhinos between the Orange River in the southern part of the Free State Province and the Vaal River (where he did see one) in its northern part.

Finally, RG Cumming, the keen English hunter, makes no mention of the black rhino when he spent about a month hunting in the western Free State Province, in 1844 (Cumming 1,1856:158-185); based on the local habitat, black rhinos could be expected to have been there.

Had rhinos been widespread in the Free State Province, and in suitable parts of Lesotho, albeit at low densities, one might have reasonably expected that the early observers mentioned above, and others, would have written about them, for one or more reasons – their large size, their being a source of meat and strong hides and thongs, and their being a potential threat to the personal safety of the early observers.

However, notwithstanding the above, there were (limited) areas with suitable habitat for both the white and the black rhino, in parts of the Free State Province. It is considered that both species probably utilised riparian habitat and shrubland on isolated hills and koppies to penetrate into the predominantly open grassland areas. Thus, for example, although the Renosterkop, to the north-north-west of Kroonstad, where rhinos reputedly occurred (see earlier) is located in a predominantly grassland-covered landscape, it is not far from the Renoster River and is itself clad with shrubs and small trees. However, the palatability of the local trees and shrubs for black rhinos is not known.

There are other places (i.e. other than Renosterkop and the Renoster River – see above) in the Free State Province that contain the word 'renoster' in their names; these are two farms (Renosterhoek and Renosterpoort) in the the Vredefort district and the Renosterspruit near Bloemfontein. However, they also cannot be firmly linked to the historical, local, occurrence of the rhinoceros.

HISTORICAL INCIDENCE OF THE LARGER MAMMALS IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE (SOUTH AFRICA) AND LESOTHO

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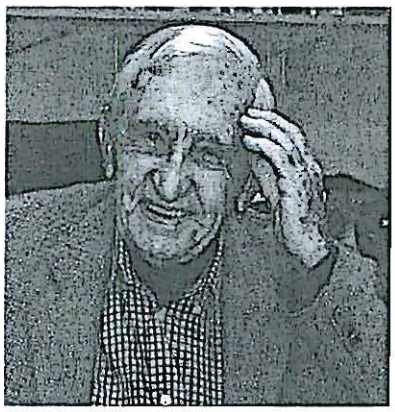
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of



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1912-2006