

MWALUGANJE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY

By Susie Day

The Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, at the foot of the northern boundary of the Shimba Hills, will soon be opened to the public as Kenya's first community involved game park.

For the first time in Kenya the human and wildlife conflict has been jointly solved by the local community, landowners, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), the Kwale County Council and local politicians in an effort to contain a normally volatile situation by establishing a wildlife sanctuary.

The essence of the project is the electric fence which protects the wildlife and the local people and surrounds a third of the park area. Through generous support from the 'Dances for Elephants' tour, essential funds were raised for part of the fence.

Only two years ago the Mwaluganje Forest Range was conceived as a conservation area both for local cultures and as a game sanctuary. The Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary is 60,000 square acres of indigenous hardwood forest, with age-old cycads, valleys and a meandering river prolific with birdlife. Elephants appeared from as far afield as Tsavo (due to the ivory poaching wars), and other wildlife abundant in the area a hundred years ago will be re-introduced.

The Sanctuary has been designed to keep the inherent wilderness intact, but to allow access to the entire park through a well-maintained road which enables the visitor to come as close as possible to the land, its people and wildlife and to experience fully the inspiration and awareness they instil.

The local cultures, the Duruma and the Digo, have become involved not only through the daily management and general maintenance but also through educational activities for the children in nearby schools. In the future they will share benefits from entrance fees.

Visitors will soon be able to go on arranged walks into the Mwaluganje Forest (which is a *Brachystigia* forest) and view a Digo/Duruma *kaya*, (sacred site).

Mr Onesmus Macharia, the warden of Shimba Hills National Reserve who facilitates the Sanctuary, said; 'Basically the Mwaluganje Forest adjacent to cultivated farmland had around 200 elephants inhabiting it and in conflict with the pastoralists. As the Shimba Hills National Reserve was too far from the Mwaluganje to re-direct the elephants we had a situation.

'With the creation of the Community Wildlife Service department of KWS, we thought we would encourage the landowners between the two conservation areas (Shimba Hills and Mwaluganje) to utilise the elephants as an attraction to visitors and generate money to compensate them for any loss of land/agriculture use. Through a series of education *barazas* (meetings) we sold the idea to the landowners and it was accepted as a viable project.

'We began developing the community Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary as an ecotourist elephant park - and we anticipate the new park will open during the second half of 1995.'

RHINO CHARGE FOR THE ABERDARES

By Roz Clark

After a gruelling 10 hour drive off-road, through some of Kenya's wildest territory, the Rhino Charge, an annual car endurance event (held this year in the semi-desert terrain of Northern Kenya) raised Ksh 9 million (US \$170,000) for conservation.

The Rhino Ark Trust raises funds for a project to fence in the entire Aberdare Rain Forest, providing a sanctuary for indigenous wildlife and protecting the forest itself from gradual erosion. One species in particular has already seen an increase in numbers since this massive fencing project began - the black rhino.

In 1970 Kenya had a population of 20,000 black rhino. By 1990 less than two percent were still alive - only 390 black rhino survived in Kenya.

Since 1991, thanks to conservation and anti-poaching efforts, a five percent annual increase has been recorded. In the Aberdare Forest itself numbers of black rhino have risen to 60.

Since the first Rhino Charge was held in 1989, the Rhino Ark has raised money for 78 kilometres of fence as well as funding supporting services including a Kenya Wildlife Service assistant warden's house.

It is not just the rhino which is benefitting. Even with another 300 kilometres of fence to build, local farmers are seeing the results of the restriction of wildlife movement on the fringes of the forest, which in the past led to animal crop raids, damaging their sole means of livelihood.

By protecting the forest itself, vital water reserves are being safeguarded for local areas and for Nairobi's entire water system.

Thanks to its record breaking fund-raising, the Rhino Charge looks set to go from strength to strength. Before waving off competitors at this year's event, Dr Perez Olindo, Trustee of the Rhino Ark and former Rhino Charge competitor, announced that there will be a UK rhino charge, to be held next year in tandem with the Kenya event.

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