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THE ACQUISITION OF THE RHINOCEROS FOR THE EL PASO ZOO

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Never did anyone at the El Paso Zoo ever think of seeing a pair of Rhinos, much less owning and caring for some, but as a result of a drink or two we do now.

In 1975, Charles Bieler, Director of the San Diego Zoo, made Ray Arras, Director of the El Paso Zoo, an offer he couldn't refuse, it being, that if he would buy him a drink he would give him a pair of White Rhinos on breeding loan. Knowing staff limitations and housing Ray had to decline the offer.

Mr. Bieler not being satisfied with that answer made the offer again in February of 1976. This time Ray consulted with Dr. Ed Daniels, Zoo veterinarian, who has had previous extensive experience with Rhinoceros at Warner Brothers Jungle Habitat in West Milford, New Jersey, on the possibilities of us housing a pair of them at the El Paso Zoo.

Obvious questions asked were: Where can we exhibit them? And once there; would we be able to contain them and regulate them properly to minimize danger to specimens and staff.

Location was easy enough, as we had an empty pen in our hoofstock area, but the problem of keeping them in was a different story, as the only barrier that would be separating them from other animals, keepers, and the public would be six feet high number five gauge chain-link fence.

After six months of thoroughly studying the situation and figuring out the problem of transforming the facilities to accomodate Rhinoceros, Ray called Mr. Gieler to ask him how soon could we pick up the animals. It was sooner than expected. During the first week of September, we began to prepare our facilities for the Rhinos.

In preparation for the big animals we had to sell our herd of Black-Buck Antelope, so the Rhinos could have two pens next to each other. We constructed a gate separating the two pens to give them more room, and for transferring them from one side to the other for cleaning purposes. The total area would be 105' by 65'. As for the chain-link fence, Dr. Daniels felt that if we were to lay large jagged rocks about six to seven feet from the fence, the Rhinos would not be able to step on them and up to the fence. This is known as the false-footing principle. That idea called for 55 tons of large rock. Everyone at the El Paso Zoo including the Director and veterinarian, worked all day hauling rocks. We also lined the fence with burlap to keep the Rhinos from seeing beyond their enclosure. To make them feel a little more comfortable we dug a large hole and filled it with water so the Rhinos could have a place to wallow in.

Meanwhile, Ray had already made arrangements with the El Paso Street Department to lend him a trailer and drivers to go to San Diego along with him and Dr. Daniels.

They went down not really knowing what to expect. The female was loose among the herd, and in the process of capturing her, she wrecked two vehicles. The male who had a reputation for being mean had been in a Boma for five weeks and anxious to get out, had to be tranquilized.

It took two days for Ray, Dr. Daniels, and the San Diego Zoo Staff to put the animals in their individual crates. The Rhino crates were loaned to us by San Diego and later returned.

The trip back took twenty-four hours, and unfortunately, the zoo was open when they arrived. There were people in the way of everything. We had a crane on hand to lift the 5 ton crates into the new home for the Rhinos.

Both animals fought the crates for a while. The male stuck his horn through a 4' by 8' plank, and the female cracked her horn in the crate. They remained in the crates for ten days giving them a chance to settle down and to get use to the everyday noise and smell of their new homes. They were fed and watered in the crates everyday except for the last two days before their release. Reason being that we wanted them interested in food and water upon releasing them.

The Rhinos were released at approximately 0700 while everything was nice and quiet. They were released by temperament, first the female then

the male and there were no problems. We had plenty of hay layed out for them and a little water as we did not want them to drink too much as they tend to bloat.

The Rhinos, which had lost some weight, came out, looked around and seemed confused and went straight to the hay. The crates were removed after a while without any problems.

The first few days they went about getting a feel of the new surroundings and in the process bent a few posts, but nothing serious.

El Pasco experienced a real bad winter, something the Rhinos had never experienced before, and they took to the cold real well.

As of now, they are both doing very well and have adjusted perfectly to their new environment. Days are spent wallowing in their pool and basking in the sun.

Keepers have found the Rhinoceros very easy to work with as they are very cooperative. When it comes to cleaning their pen, they are transferred from one pen to the other by placing their hay in the desired pen.