

A sketch of a white rhinoceros from John Campbell's expedition 1821

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In the November issue of the *Calcutta Journal of Politics and General Literature*, a correspondent who called himself EKALBB wrote a letter about Campbell's rhinoceros. In 1820, John Campbell (1766–1840) travelled from Cape Town to the small town of Mashow (north of the current Zeerust) as Director of the London Missionary Society. His hunters shot two rhinos six miles to the east of the town on 18 May 1820. When the head of one of these animals was brought to Campbell, he saw that it was different from other rhinos, having a straight horn projecting three feet from the forehead and a short horny substance of eight-inches representing the posterior horn. Campbell brought the skull with him to London, where it was widely acclaimed in both the scientific and the popular press as an African unicorn (Rookmaaker 2008). The skull was later transferred to the American Museum of Natural History in New York, where it may still be available (Heller 1913).

The pseudonymous correspondent 'Calcutta' passed the Cape of Good Hope in September 1821, just a few months after Campbell's return from the interior. Here he talked to the missionary John Philip (1775–1851), who showed him the head of a rhinoceros brought from the interior by Campbell's party. He was also shown a sketch of the animal, which he copied, and subsequently engraved for the *Calcutta Journal*. In the accompanying text, it is stated that the sketch was a 'faithful representation of the size and position of the horns as corresponding with the skull' seen in Cape Town. The dimensions of the body of the animal were said to be as follows:

From the point of the larger horn to the root of the tail—12 feet

Height to the withers—6 feet

From the back to the lower part of the belly—4 feet 3 inches

Circumference of the thickest part of the body—12 feet 9 inches.

There are also some dimensions written on the

plate, in feet and inches: length of anterior horn along the curve 2–3, anterior horn in straight line 1–9, length of posterior horn along curve 0–2.5, distance from tip of anterior to tip of posterior horn 1–5, distance from tip of anterior horn to shoulder 3–2, length of head 3–5.

It is worth reproducing the plate from the *Calcutta Journal* of 1822. The shape of the horns and the sizes provided on the plate differ from other representations of the head of Campbell's unicorn, so it is likely to be another animal drawn during the same expedition. The specimen clearly is a white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*) and hence is probably the first published plate of the species published since its description by William Burchell (1781–1863) in 1817.

References

- EKALBB, 1822. *Rhinoceros bicornis*. *Calcutta Journal of Politics and General Literature* 6 (264, November 4): 1, pl. 86.
- Heller, E., 1913. *The white rhinoceros*. *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collection* 61 (1): i, 1–56, pls. 1–31.
- Rookmaaker, L.C., 2008. Encounters with the African rhinoceros: a chronological survey of bibliographical and iconographical sources on rhinoceroses in southern Africa from 1795 to 1875, reconstructing views on classification and changes in distribution. *Munster, Schöningh Verlag*, pp. 1–148, figs. 1–157 [68 in colour], maps A–I [2 in colour], tables 1–47.

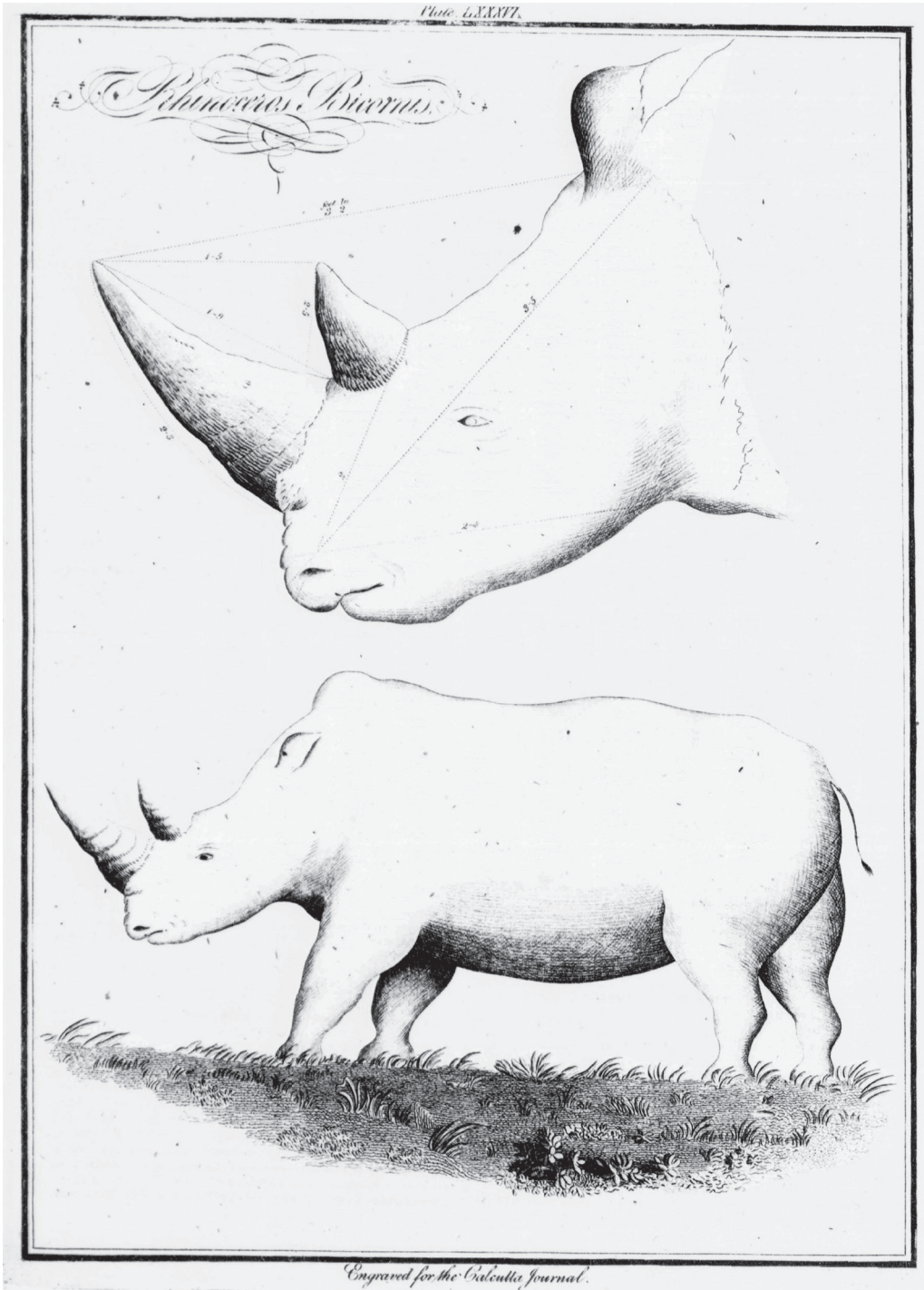


Figure 1. *Rhinoceros bicornis*, showing a rhinoceros shot in South Africa near Zeerust in 1822 by the party accompanying John Campbell. From the Calcutta Journal of Politics and General Literature of 4 November 1822.