
RHINO MUSEUM IN THE WATERBERG MOUNTAINS OF NORTHERN PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

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The Waterberg Mountains, situated some 300km from Johannesburg in the Northern Province of South Africa, is a 15,000km² mountain range in the shape of an inverted saucer. The late Eric Rundgren, a former Kenyan professional hunter and warden, was the first person to attempt the introduction of white rhino into these mountains back in 1975. Today, there is an estimated 200 plus white rhino, mainly located in Welgevonden Game Reserve, Lapalala Wilderness, Touchstone and Kwalata Game Reserve. The newly established National Park, Marakele, is to be found in the south-west corner of the mountain range and it too, has seen the introduction of white rhino.

In addition to this, the first black rhino ever to go onto private land in South Africa, took place here in August 1990 and since then, three founder populations have been established; two private and one State (Marakele National Park). In 1989 the Waterberg Nature Conservancy was formally established and presently comprises 25 landowners, controlling some 130,000ha where conservation has become the priority activity. Fifteen years ago, there was very little conservation activity, other than the traditional private hunting which had gone on for three decades. Since that time there has been a dramatic shift away from agricultural practises, which have become increasingly unprofitable, resulting in significant change in the land-use of this unique area. There are few or no areas left in South Africa of comparable size that still have the potential to go across to wildlife with a habitat that is largely intact. There is no forestry or industry and as a consequence, pollution is absent and mining prospects are zero. These dramatic land-use changes have resulted in a serious attempt at tourism development and with it a highly professional hunting community, many of whom still practise traditional farming activities, which they combine with hunting during the dry, winter seasons. Future areas for rhino conservation, therefore, are most encouraging.

The Chairman of Rhino & Elephant Foundation of Africa, who is also the Chairman of the African Rhino Owners Association and a representative member of

the African Rhino and Elephant Specialist Groups, has been at the forefront of the drive to establish the area as important future rhino habitat and is responsible for the founder population of black rhinos on private land, whose numbers are steadily increasing.

An important component of the activities carried out in the reserve for which he is responsible, is the environmental school established in 1981, with expansion in 1985 which has enabled the governing body, namely the Wilderness Trust of Southern Africa, to provide no less than 2,500 children and teachers with the opportunity of environmental courses in an outdoor classroom. The school is run throughout the year and can accommodate up to 100 course participants at any one time.

An important component of the course participants visit is the opportunity to view a tame black and white rhino at the same time, have their field officers explain the history of rhino conservation in Africa to the present day. Children from as far afield as Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia, Tanzania and numerous West African countries have attended these school courses, which have expanded into game farm management for final year school leavers, as well as specialised teacher training courses.

The Lapalala Wilderness School operates through the Wilderness Trust of Southern Africa, a non-profit, non-governmental organisation, which works closely with both the government of the Northern Province and various institutions — particularly those that deal with students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Between 500 and 800 participants per annum are sponsored by the organisation.

The idea of a Rhino Museum has occupied the author's mind for many years. Therefore, when the opportunity presented itself to acquire a farm boarding school, which closed in 1962, the decision was taken to approach the Rhino and Elephant Foundation to take the running of this establishment under

their auspices. The Board agreed, and plans are well underway, together with the renovations of the facilities, which comprise large dormitories up to 21 metres long x 6 metres wide — an ideal venue in which to establish a museum.

The museum is based directly on the route to Lapalala Wilderness and will cater to the needs of the rapidly developing tourism industry, and is close to one of the main tarred roads to Botswana and the Limpopo Valley. The museum will largely take the form of displays and high quality photographs, but will also include artifacts related to the rhinoceros. This will include both species of African rhino and a section will be devoted to the three Asian species.

Anna Merz, founder of the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary at Lewa Downs, now known as Lewa Conservancy, has kindly agreed to be the Deputy Director and a number of prominent rhino specialists have agreed to assist: Peter Jenkins from Kenya, Peter Hitchins from South Africa, Dr. Anthony Hall-Martin of the National Parks Board of South Africa, Dr. Esmond Bradley Martin from Kenya and Dr. Eugene Joubert formerly of Namibia, now working in Saudi Arabia.

The exhibits will depict the following lines:

- Evolution
- Past and present distribution (including aspects of early hunters)
- The threat to the rhinoceros (rhino wars)
- The use of rhino horn (medicinal purposes/ornate dagger handles)
- The present position
- The illegal trade
- Private rhino sanctuaries (AROA)
- Men and women in rhino conservation (all aspects)

Artists who will support the project are David Shepherd, Robert Bateman, Keith Joubert, Paul Bosman, Keith Calder and Clive Walker. There will also be a collection of traditional African carvings of the rhinoceros. It is further planned to establish a library and archival facilities for rhino researchers.

The museum will be open seven days a week and apart from the educational value and public awareness, it is hoped that through this medium, funds will be generated for rhino conservation.

Photo credit: Tim Oloo

