

Tanzania:

A visit to the Selous Rhino Trust

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handover of the Solar torches for the night patrol from the gift from the Harry Shubart estate

small waterhole. He studies the ground intently to decipher tracks that have been criss-crossed a number of times. "The place is good for rhinos, close to here we had a sighting..."

Lucas Goroi is the Selous Rhino Coordinator for the Tanzania Wildlife Division and a lucky man. Not only does he love his work with a passion, but he has had six rhino sightings, including one caught on camera. Later he shows me the snapshot with two grinning rangers in the foreground gesturing to an adult rhino twenty metres distant.



sculpture showing a "crash" of rhinos charging through the lodge at Sand Rivers

They diligently collect dung samples, footprints, evidence of rhino browsing and favourite drinking holes. And they mount the vital anti-poaching activities.

We have stopped the Land Rover on the way to the Kidai Ranger Station as Lucas Goroi wants to examine spoor around a

But more often the sightings in the Selous are of spoor. Which makes the dedication of the twelve rangers even more impressive.

The Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania is one of the largest wild areas in the world and glories in an extraordinary amount of game and a small but growing black rhino population with at least two new young. But the Selous rhinos are expert in concealment in the thick bush, most probably a reaction to the destructive poaching of the past. Thanks to Lucas and his colleagues, we can now speak about rhino poaching in the past tense.

As we approach Kidai Station, we are met by smartly turned-out rangers. Set on the rocky banks above the Rufiji River, the beautifully positioned post is only the occasional home for the rangers who spend most of the time out on week-long patrols. I have the happy task of handing over a dozen solar-powered torches for night patrols, part of the legacy from my late father Harry. I only recently discovered that when my father and Lucas met in the Selous in 2003 they were swapping recipes as well as rhino tales! Lucas explained to my father - who fancied his cooking abilities - how to make ugali (a sort of maize porridge) in the bush.

The Kidai Visitors' centre, built in the memory of the dynamic Lizzy Theobald who waged a campaign for the Selous black rhinos, holds the evidence of much rhino spoor; the tracings of prints, all carefully catalogued; dung samples; and

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the famous lodge-climbing rhino with desert boots at Sand Rivers



rhino skulls: one that died naturally & one with horn that had been cut out by poachers

some prize photos of sightings. Two rhino skulls are on display - one who died a natural death and the other whose mutilated skull shows it didn't. Another grim sight is the heavy wire snares that have been seized by the rangers.

I have just missed meeting Fraser Smith, the new Technical Advisor, who like his predecessor Friedrich Alpers, is obviously an inspiring man. He inherits a great team who not only possess amazing field skills but have become computer literate to record their data on solar-powered PCs.

On my final day in the Selous, we had an excellent sighting of that rare creature; the lodge-climbing rhino. A much-used Save the Rhino suit, veteran of many marathons and other adventures, had arrived at a new home, Sand Rivers Lodge. Persuading the rhino to take residence in the rafters above the lodge entrance provided an entertaining time. And the proper footwear was found - a worn pair of desert boots which look quite fetching.

The rafter rhino has initiated many conversations and provoked much interest from safari guests and created many new rhino friends and supporters. Hopefully the excellent programme of the Selous Rhino Trust will ensure that in the future visitors will see the sort of rhinos who don't require desert boots.



Kidai Ranger Station seen from the Rufiji River

Donation

The Shubart family has made a donation of US \$11,300 in memory of their father Harry, which will help to pay for a wildlife diploma for Lucas Goroi, in addition to donating the solar-powered torches.