

## Into Africa: The epic adventures of Laura and SRT



In May this year I was lucky enough to visit Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) in Namibia. During my time with the SRT team I was able to visit all four base camps run by the Trust. I had never tracked a rhino before, travelled to Africa before, or even travelled alone before(!) so the experience was unique for me, and a great way to learn more about rhino conservation.

Laura Adams | Michael Hearn Intern



Right: Bernd photographs rhinos in the distance.

Below: One of the springs known to be used by rhinos.



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fresh spoor but by this time it was mid-afternoon and the track was laid in the early morning. With the sun cooling off, there was only a small chance that the rhino would still be sleeping and if they continued to walk we would have little chance of catching up before dark.

Though we didn't spot a rhino every day I felt incredibly lucky to be able to see any at all in an area where there are so few wild rhino left. SRT has managed to safeguard the current population for over 15 years and continues to do fantastic work. Long may this be the case.

**T**he first week of my field work was spent at Ugab base camp. On our first day of rhino tracking we set out at 7.15am. Bernd, leader of the tracking team, drove our 4x4 whilst Johannes and Fulai, two of SRT's 19 trackers, kept watch for spoor. The team often find rhino spoor at water sources, so we headed for a known waterhole. At about 10am we found our first rhino footprint. The spoor was not completely fresh but after following it for a few metres the team concluded that a rhino had walked through the area the night before. Excitingly, there was not one track, but a pair, meaning that we were on the trail of a cow and her calf.

### We began to follow the track on foot

Once or twice we had to slow down to figure out which direction the rhinos had taken: it wasn't always a case of following footprints, but looking for signs such as dung, bitten branches and other tell-tale signs. After about 5km walk Bernd headed back to pick up the vehicle whilst we continued to track. Another 2km on and we glimpsed two ears flickering beneath an African needle hair tree (*Parkinsonia africana*).

### We had found the rhino

On my second day of tracking with the team we found a recently translocated rhino by using a telemetry machine to follow the signal from his horn transmitter. On our third day we headed out to the core area for the rhino in the Ugab eco-zone. Interconnecting valleys with springs and greenery make it a good place for the rhino and, like the surrounding area, it is situated in the protection of shallow mountains, which have generally protected the rhino from poaching. It was quite late in the morning before we spotted any spoor and all of the spoor we found were too old to follow, but they were still promising signs. From this we could tell that a cow and her calf were wandering around the area and there were signs of males too – rhino middens marking their territory had been scraped around. We did eventually find

The rhino spoor led in the direction we had already been driving and it was very

possible that we had missed the rhinos as we drove. Perhaps they were settled asleep at the far side of the river bed, or had caught our scent and moved away. However, as we continued to follow spoor, the track turned and moved away from the river bed heading up a nearby gully.

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