

We walk the line... ...every morning and every afternoon

One guard will walk 5 km one way and back again along the fence surrounding the Rhino Sanctuary, and then another guard will walk for 5 km the opposite way and back again. Sometimes we don't get back until nearly 1 pm only to go off again shortly afterwards to check the same section again.



The Mkomazi fence is eight-foot high with a three-stranded cantilever, and 16 strands of high-tensile wire electrified up to 7,000 volts

Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary Fence Personnel | George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust

As we walk, we are looking for tracks, interferences with the fence, broken poles, weak strainer posts, and insulators that have snapped whilst also checking that the cantilever hasn't drooped too much. After the rains we also have to cut the grass

beneath the line so that it doesn't short the fence out. All the time we are in radio contact with our outpost and the security officer in charge at the main office.

Each outpost covers 10 km of fence and we have four outposts covering the entire 40 km fence line.

We are the main perimeter

security for the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary and the independent tracking teams working inside the Rhino Sanctuary rely on us for information; whoever wants to get into the Sanctuary has to go through the fence.

If there is a short on the fence and the alarms go off, we start walking

immediately in the direction of the problem, usually meeting up with the Rhino Sanctuary Manager on his motorbike or a vehicle sent down by the Kisima base camp coming the other way. Sometimes the alarms go off in the middle of the night and we have to go out with the manager and a vehicle to check the source of the alarm.

We don't take any chances. We know it's difficult for someone to break in, find a rhino in the thick bush, kill it, get the horn off and get out undetected. But we know it's not impossible.

Most of us here have been working in or around the Rhino Sanctuary since it started. A lot of us put up the initial fence line and now we do all the maintenance on the existing fence and we put up fences in new areas. If we are putting up a new fence, Tony [Fitzjohn, Field Director] and Elisaria Nnko come in first and survey the area; then a small track is cut and surveyors poles put in place; then the JCB comes in to clear the line; then the grader comes in to clean the line; then all the materials are brought to the site; then we put the fence up. We have our own little workshops for drilling all the poles, fitting the insulators and storing the tons of wire that are needed for fencing.

After the rains we often see wild animals: cheetah; leopard; sometimes a lion; giraffe; kudu; bushbuck; eland and, every now and then, buffalo. Buffalo have ambushed only one man so far, but that's enough to keep us alert.

We are self-contained. Rations come in once a week and we cook our own food. Large water tanks are filled every fortnight and the technicians are sent out if we have any faults on our equipment. We live in uniports – tin huts. They are spacious and comfortable enough but not so solid that we are cut off from the sounds outside. Even when we are sleeping we hear the clicking of the energizers in the background that ensure a steady stream of power to the fence line.

There are no short cuts. This is what we have to do to protect the rhino and to demonstrate to would-be poachers that we are protecting these rhino. If we make it through the night without interruption, we wake up in the morning, have some tea and uji (local porridge) and then... we walk the line.



Above: A security outpost under construction

Below: The finished thing!

Grants

We would like to thank Chester Zoo very much indeed, which has just awarded £9,313 for the purchase of two uniports and the construction of new security outposts for the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary. Chester also then granted £9,600 for the purchase of a new water bowser, to replace the 40-year-old Bedford water tanker that finally died.