

TIMBILA

RHYTHMS OF THE EARTH

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SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL PARKS



**XAMINA XAWENA — 100 YEARS OF KRUGER NATIONAL PARK
GREAT STIMELA SAFARI • OLIFANTS WILDERNESS TRAIL • KENNETH
NEWMAN • MADAGASCAR'S RANOMAFANA NATIONAL PARK •
WIN! A WEEKEND FOR TWO AT MOPANI REST CAMP**

RHYTHMS OF THE EARTH

THE BLACK AND WHITE OF RHINOS

IT'S A WHOLE new beginning for rhinos, black and white. The Rhino and Waterberg Museum complex in the Northern Province opened at the end of last year as the first and only one of its kind in Africa. Its purpose is to allow visitors to delve deeper into the complexities of this amazing and gravely threatened species.

The rhinoceros family is not as black and white as it sounds. There are in fact five branches in the rhino family: black, white, Indian, woolly two-horned Sumatran and Javan rhinos. The surviving numbers of the last three species, found in Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam, are perilously low and there's little indication of any commitment to their conservation.

The aim of the new Museum is to improve knowledge on all five species through the presentation of interesting facts on rhino evolutionary history, biology, habitats and population distribution. The illegal trade in and use of rhino horn are also dealt with. Interesting displays also reveal the extent to which rhinos have exercised the imaginations of artists and writers through the centuries. The role of individual men and women and of various NGOs involved in the conservation of rhinos are also lucidly set out in this museum.

An important function of the Museum is that of education, as it will facilitate the exchange of information locally and internationally on the latest research and activities in this vital field. The Museum houses an extensive library compiled



The Rhino and Waterberg Museum in the Northern Province is the only one of its kind in Africa.

over many years by its curator, Dr Kees Rookmaker. This valuable collection constitutes an important part of the Museum's ever-growing database of information on every aspect of the five rhino species. It is the world's most complete compilation. The institution is an international catalyst in the continual updating and upgrading of information, which is instantly accessible to students, researchers and wildlife enthusiasts, through the Internet. It is therefore a potent force in the international drive for the conservation of the species.

The Museum came to fruition through the foresight and initiative of Clive Walker, chairman of the Rhino and Elephant Foundation and the Wilderness

Trust of Southern Africa, and director of Lapalala Wilderness. He seized an opportunity which presented itself to acquire the culturally historic site of the Old Melk Rivier School, which had been closed since 1962, and which now provides a venue for the continuing research and education in environmental appreciation. This centre advances research on the ecology of the Waterberg and is simultaneously a venue for the display of artifacts and information on the anthropology and culture of the area.

The realisation of this project also benefits the local people by generating tourist interest. The Museum Centre dispenses information on sights and activities within the area, while its craft and gift shop allow the visitor to make purchases of locally pro-

duced craft items and various other goods which generate revenue. The Centre is restoring a traditional Pedi homestead, to give visitors an insight into the traditions and lifestyles of this indigenous population. The old dormitory section of the school has been restored and adapted for meetings and conference facilities and a restaurant and tea garden have been built.

The Rhino Museum is definitely not a static display. It is a living organism which promotes research, collates and disseminates knowledge at the cutting edge and boldly promotes the message of conservation, while making a noteworthy contribution to ecotourism and gainful local activity.