
Vesey's Horn

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Few people are aware that Kenya's Game Department appointed a wildlife biologist as early as 1948. This was the late Desmond Vesey-Fitzgerald, universally known as 'Vesey', whose first assignment was to have been a vegetation survey of the Tsavo National Park. What a calamity that it never took place, so that we would have had quantitative baseline data against which to compare the subsequent important events that took place there! That it never did take place was because about 1949 Vesey was sent on three months' secondment to the Red Locust Survey study area in the Rukwa valley in Zambia —where he remained for 15 years until 1964 when he joined the Tanzania National Parks.

During his brief term as biologist to the Kenya Game Department one of his tasks was to prepare the Game Department's stand for the annual Nairobi Royal Show. Vesey once explained to me how he had constructed an enormous rhino horn by splicing two long horns together, which he then put on display at the stand. The idea, he stated, was not deliberately to deceive people, but simply to draw attention to the

stand. What success it had was stowed away in the Game Department storeroom and forgotten about.

That is until some years later, when someone rummaging about in the store came across this jumbo-sized horn and measured it in astonishment. Even if it was not the world record, it had to be one of the longest horns ever known. Such an outstanding find was promptly submitted to Rowland Ward's Records of Big Game, where it was duly listed.

When Vesey became aware of this, much to his amusement but no doubt much to others' annoyance, either he himself or someone whom he confided in, informed the official measurer in Nairobi and it was quietly dropped from the list.

That supposedly was the end of the story. But in April, 1991, WWF issued a 'Campaign Report' entitled "Help WWF Stop the Rhino Horn Trade" that carried a photograph of Dr. Esmond Bradley Martin in the Nairobi Ivory Room. In the background of this photograph is a rhino horn of exceptional

length. I brought Vesey's little trick to have a closer look at the horn. He said that it did indeed have a crack in the middle. It was in the picture because when the Game Department started to burn their rhino horn stocks he suggested that they should keep some of the best examples from destruction.

Esmond confirmed to me later that the horn was indeed 'Vesey's Horn'—two horns glued together. So perhaps it would be best if it now was consigned to the fire, lest Vesey's Horn should raise its ugly head again at some distant, future date.

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What's the point of trying to grow the longest horn, when humans cheat!

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