

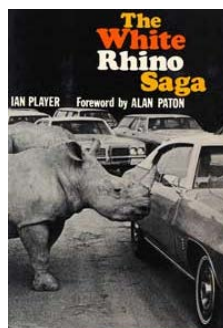


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Ian Player Perspective – The Horn

April 21, 2009 by [Ian Player](#)

I remember very clearly my first encounter with the White Rhino, in the Imfolozi Game Reserve, which I have described in some detail in my book *'The White Rhino Saga.'* But some years after that experience I was talking with the renowned South African ecologist Jim Feely (living in Australia now for many years), and he mentioned that the largest horn of a White Rhino had come from what is today Namibia. I then acquired a copy of [Rowland Ward's](#) 'Record of Big Game – Fourth Edition' and I started to look for the record of the size of the White Rhino horn, and there it was in the book. The length of the posterior horn was 62¼" and there was an amazing photograph in the book. Roualeyn Gordon Cumming had shot the animal, but I'm not certain of the date because it is not recorded in Rowland Ward, but I understand it was in the 1840's – if memory serves me correctly; 1847.



My next encounter with this horn was a real one, inasmuch that while organizing the [3rd World Wilderness Congress](#) with Vance Martin, which was held at Findhorn, Scotland, in 1983, I heard from one of the residents that the ancestral home of [Roualeyn Gordon Cumming](#) was not far from the local village of Forres, and there were two huge horns in the house. I contacted the great grandson, Gordon Cumming, and asked if I could come and see the horns. I told him that I had worked in the [Imfolozi Game Reserve](#) in Zululand with the White Rhino and was very interested in seeing this record horn illustrated in Rowland Ward. He kindly agreed to me visiting and I left immediately. Both the anterior horn and posterior horn were enormous, and although I had seen many white rhino cows in Imfolozi Game Reserve, their horns were minute compared to these two. While the photographs tell the story of their exact size, one can only imagine how enormous must have been the female who carried these horns.

It was quite an emotional experience to have the opportunity of going into the ancestral home of this illustrious family. I remember the day very clearly because it had been snowing heavily and we had to take the horns outside to get a good photograph.

Regrettably, the story of the anterior horn is a tragic one. A few years after I had been there I received a telephone call from the current Gordon Cumming and was told that the horn had been stolen and taken to Hong Kong. It had been cut up and ground down to be used for Chinese medicine. Gordon Cumming asked if I could give him some idea as to the value because he needed to claim on the Insurance. I remember telling him that the value of an ounce of rhino horn at that time was equal to an ounce of gold. However, it was impossible to give a true value because it was a unique trophy that had never been equaled.

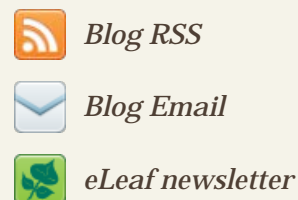
Perhaps this story is pertinent at this particular time in the history of the White Rhino in Southern Africa. [Poaching has reached alarming figures](#), and foreign embassies being used to smuggle out



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rhino horn is yet another example of the need for the conservation authorities to be vigilant. I constantly remind fellow wildlife conservationists and the general public of Professor John Phillip's words, many years ago, that have given structure and focus to my life: "There will never be a Waterloo in wildlife conservation, only a long, drawn-out guerilla war."

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