



Encounter with Rhino

Written and illustrated by DAN WYLIE

Extracts from a Diary

7 June

There are only black rhino in the Zambezi Valley. Just our luck to be landed with the cheeky variety.

11 June

Close brush with rhino last night, moving into our sleeping position in the close moonlight. Mother and calf. Game Scout Chawada, up front, rattles his rifle, and Roger whistles and snorts at them, while we five are loosening pack straps and choosing our trees. Chawada and Roger start backing up, and five little soldiers vanish down the path in a blur of starlight. Eventually, Mother goes left and Junior right, and we sneak nervously in between. I bring up the rear — walking backwards.

21 June

Last night. The last taint of daylight across the Zambezi, the moon still down but paling the sky. We're bedding down in an area of dry jesse bush, brittle, thorned. There comes a rhino, breaking through the sticks, snuffling close. Game Scout Small throws sticks into the dusk. Charley urinates in the general direction, as that seemed to chase off the last one. Rhino is unimpressed, snorts. Heavy trampling. The boys scatter like startled baboons. Small and I stop to listen. Unaware that the rhino is crackling off and round to the right, the others continue scrambling for trees.

Ian is scuttling back and forth wondering how he's going to climb a tree with a machine-gun.

A crack and thump as Gary falls out of a tree.

A fierce whisper floats out of the sky. "Alan, Alan!"

"What?" from another disembodied patch of sky.

"How high do you have to go?"

"Hey?"

"I'm ten feet off the ground. Is that high enough?"

"What do you think rhinos can do — jump?"

Small is having hysterics. After a while, the baboons hesitantly descend:

"Gary, you can come down now."

"Push off!"

"No, it's all right, it's gone. Come down."

"Get lost!"

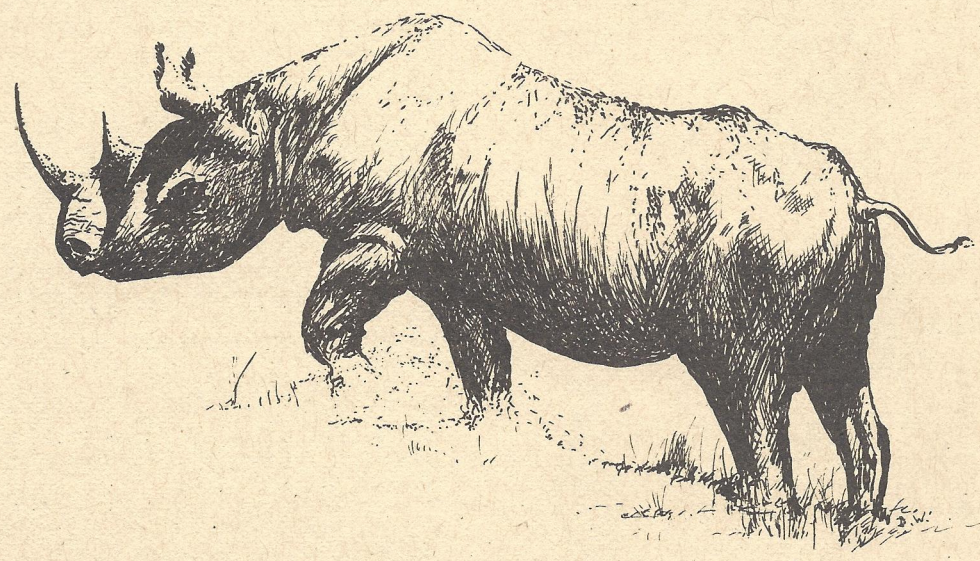
Eventually he decides not to spend the night in a tree and comes down, torn and bleeding, because it was a thorn tree, comes stumbling, cursing through the snapping jesse.

"Gary, you can't get through there, you'll have to go round."

"Hey?"

"You can't get through. Go round!"

Pause. "I'm going home."



10 July

The time is 0005, and the boys are sitting in trees again. The rhino was really close this time, just the other side of the bush, and got the fright of its life when Charley coughed, snorted and thumped off twenty or thirty metres. There was silence for a moment, then a great crackling of brush which sent everybody scuttling for branches. I stood at the bottom while Charley clung to the trunk getting cramp; there was nothing for five minutes or so, so I went back to bed. The others took about ten minutes to follow, bunch of old grannies. Come morning Gary doesn't even know whether he dreamed it all or not: "Now did I climb a tree last night or was I dreaming?"

8 August

About ten minutes out of 'gonk posi' we bump into a mother rhino and child. The latter whines, mews plaintively before they launch into the attack, and I am for the first time ignominiously perched up a mopani tree. Roger attempts to get his camera out, hears rumbling, and flees for trees. The rhino stop, presumably because their intended quarry has entirely disappeared, and in a flurry of dust gallop off in the opposite direction. All very heart-stimulating. Indeed twould be unfortunate to be impaled upon that slender horn!

4 October

A rhino browses at the water's edge. We circumnavigate. Rhino comes steaming up over the bank, snorting. We run. Rhino trundles on past, stops blindly a hundred metres further on, sniffing, rumbles off at a tangent.



10 October

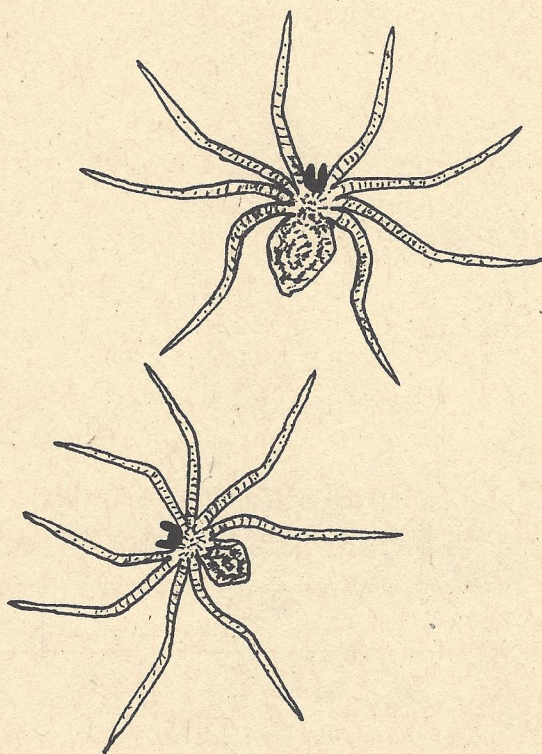
Looking for an appropriate "Mana Pools" T-shirt design, I hit on the ideal: a black rhino chasing a National Serviceman!

Riverside Ripples

"Flatties"

(*Hersilia spp.*)

by Arion



In almost every house in the whole of Rhodesia, there exists a strange, flat, species of spider, known as "Flatties" or "Shilling" spiders. They are capable of slipping through incredibly narrow spaces, and are frequently to be observed running between the ceiling and the wall, and sliding into cracks of the skirtingboard and floor, or even behind cupboards and pictures.

Some people ruthlessly kill them, but we have found that they do only good, as they hunt and eat mosquitoes, midges, gnats, flies, and even moths, and are quite harmless to man. I have occasionally picked one up, and suffered no harm from it.

Closer examination reveals that these spiders are striped black on brown, and have fearsome-looking hairs on their legs. All spiders are members of the Arachnida Family, having eight legs, and pedipalps to guide their food to their mouth-parts. They have varying numbers of eyes in disconcerting places, like on their foreheads, or at the ends of the antennae.

The "Flatties" spin a rudimentary sort of a web in which the female lays her eggs. Thousands of baby flatties hatch out, growing bigger by a succession of moults. When our flatties wish to moult they grow sluggish and creep into a safe place, such as behind a cupboard or picture. The whole creature becomes lifeless-looking for a few days, until suddenly its skin splits right down the back. It strains and heaves and withdraws its legs, finally vacating the old shell, to emerge in a bright new skin, and just that bit bigger. Even the casings round the hairs on its legs are left intact with the old skin.

These spiders don't spin a web to catch their prey. They rely on their speed to run upon it, and the element of surprise, popping out of a crack in the ceiling without warning, to pounce on an unsuspecting mosquito or whatever they are hunting.

Even when they have lost legs, as they seem to do fairly regularly, the flatties can run very fast. We regard them as "good" spiders and part of the household.