



Moving Rhino!

A Personal Account of
Relocating Rhino in the 1970's

By Mike Behr

Compliments of Nikela



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

These are true stories.

They happened over 40 years ago, when during Dr. Ian Player's initiated Operation Rhino, the white rhino was relocated and reintroduced to save the species from extinction.

Today, they are once again in serious trouble due to the rising demand for rhino horn in Asia and the resulting illegal killing of them in South Africa.



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

For several years now we at Nikela have been publishing free ebooks and ereports to raise awareness and share information pertinent to the protection and survival of wildlife in Africa.

This personal account by Mike Behr of his direct involvement with relocating rhino in the 1970's gives us a very unique glimpse into the very soul of a rhino and the heart of a man who cares for them deeply.

If by sharing this story we (Mike, you and I) can save the life of one rhino, then again maybe many, it will have accomplished its purpose.

Feel free to share this ebook
www.Nikela.org/ebooks



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

***This ebook contains two separate stories
about Moving Rhino...***

Relocation: From South Africa to the USA

Reintroduction: From South Africa to Botswana

Please note that the author Michael Behr is solely responsible for the accuracy of this content and Nikela simply shares it to offer insight into the life of rhinos and the game rangers who preserve and protect them.



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's



Moving Rhino from Africa to Texas

It was while I was stationed at the Midmar Dam with the then Natal Parks Board, that I was informed of a pending White Rhino shipment to the USA and that I had been selected to take charge of the ten animals at the capture pens at the Umfolozi Game Reserve.

PREPARATIONS

This procedure was followed by all the Rangers who were selected to accompany captured animals to overseas destinations.

Making oneself familiar with the conditions of the capture pens, the feeding, watering and general care given to the Rhinos was, and is, essential for the individual so as to start a relationship with the animals before embarking on a long trip, especially overseas. Getting to know each animal and all its little quirks and habits is of paramount importance.



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

Placing these animals in restrictive crates where their only movement is a few steps forward and a few steps back with little space on the side. The crates are spacious enough for the Rhino to lie down and do half rolls as if in a mud hole in the wilds.

They must be slowly introduced to the plastic watering basin (baby bath) which is inserted between the vertical steel piping at drinking time. Lowering of their feed from an opening on top of the crate must be done carefully so as not to spook them. (Feed consisted of baled grass from their habitat and Teff grass hay.)

The animals must gently be introduced to the long-handle rakes used from an opening in the rear of the crate to remove the droppings, excessive moisture or trampled grass.

Then there is clinic time.

When any injuries are taken care of, with either prepared liquid medication... sprayed on by using an oil can for accessible wounds or inserting a sharp surgical needle



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

with a syringe attached for antibiotic jabs. (This was applied during the trip on board ship.)

Hand feeding, fondling their faces and ears helps create trust which is so important for the rhinos safety during the long cramped journey. After a while one senses that the Rhino realize that they are dependent on you.

A minimum ten-day period is spent at the capture pens before loading and departure to America. It is during this time that the necessary bond is established between the Ranger and the animals.

I remembered from my earlier dairy farming days in East Africa that the Milkmen would talk soothingly and whistle tunes to the animal being milked so as to calm it down, making the milking task easier. From day one, I applied the same principle with the Rhino, and quickly they responded to my familiar whistle at feed and watering time.

This proved to be vital in the weeks that lay ahead.



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

ALL ABOARD

The ten Rhino consisted of 7 females and 3 males. They were all young sub-adults with one female about three quarter grown. She had developed quite a sizeable horn and was the liveliest of the herd. I named her Phondo. All the others had their names as well. I only remember the youngest female as Ntombi.

The Rhino were loaded onto trucks and transported to Durban harbour to be loaded onto the SS Jesse Lykes. This was a ship that was used extensively during the 2nd world war to run supplies and troops to Europe, so she was getting on in years and the oft heard creaking of riveted plates in heavy weather... had me wondering a bit!

The loading of the rhino went off without too many hitches and the crates were all secured on the foredeck in full view from the Bridge. The feed bales were secured in a dry storage hold.

The sailing date was delayed for three days because of bad weather. The Rhino were exposed too all the dock and



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

harbour noises causing much snorting and squealing. Fortunately the crates were closely positioned with the fronts facing one another so the animals were aware of one another.

The time spent conditioning them at the holding pens at Umfolozi proved to be invaluable as there were definite signs of reassurance as I went amongst them whistling their tune and soothing them.

The crates had to be cleaned daily and the harbour authorities insisted that the refuse be carted away and not dumped into the bay. This was seen to by some willing Parks Board employees.





MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

CROSSING THE OCEAN

On the afternoon of the third day we set sail. No sooner than leaving the smooth waters of the harbour mouth, we were met with huge swells coming in off the Indian Ocean.

There was immediate pandemonium amongst the crated animals as they were tossed from side to side with the rolling of the ship and the pitching not helping either. I battled to find my sea legs while trying to pacify the frantic Rhinos.

Heavy seas continued until after we rounded the Cape into the Atlantic where smoother seas greeted us some distance off the Namibian coast. A problem with the ship's engines had restricted sailing speed to a maximum of 8 knots since leaving port and it was only now that the Engineer solved the problem and speed was increased to 12 knots.

Early one evening out on the Atlantic and sailing on a smoothish sea and a magnificent colourful sunset, I was out



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

near the bows of the ship being entertained by a school of Dolphins surfing alongside, when a number of flying fish landed on deck.

These I gathered and presented to the chef who prepared a delicious starter to the evening meal. The next morning saw another spectacular sunrise and again smooth sea. This tranquil moment was rudely interrupted by a huge freak wave that hit the ship on the starboard side. As I recall the force was huge and the list so severe that the railing on the portside almost touched the sea. The sound of the racing propellers out of the water was quite alarming.....The roll was severe enough that some crew below deck came rushing out. The engineer said to me, “That is the worst I have ever experienced at sea!”

The effect on the Rhino was traumatic. As it took me some time overcoming my own fright, it took more calming the stressed animals.

One of the voyages biggest challenges was handling a serious injury. Phonto knocked her horn off on the front railing of her crate which led to much bleeding and much



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

pain for the poor animal, I treated the wound with antiseptic spray to stop any infection and had to inject her in the rump every second day with a veterinary penicillin.

Not liking this much Phondo started attacking the sides of her crate with a force that cracked some of the planks. This was alarming, as I had no immobilizing drugs and I had visions of her breaking loose on deck and causing mayhem. I even considered the extreme option of lifting the crate and dropping it over the side into the ocean.

To aggravate the nose wound, Phono attacked the baby bath with her drinking water I was trying to insert. Eventually I raked all her droppings and trampled grass to a step up against the front of the crate. I then ran a hose into the crate from the back to let the water dam up against the step. That worked and she was able to drink. What a relief!

She got agitated when she heard me climbing up on the back of the crate. She knew it was injection time.

It was quite a mission. First I had to first clean the spot where I was about to plunge in the large needle. Then, fit



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

the syringe and inject 20 cc of penicillin.....All the time whistling her tune and sooth talking.

The daytime temperatures became VERY hot, and the animals were taking strain. I arranged with the captain for a sea hose to be deployed so that I could spray the rhinos down with sea water. The transformation was great to behold.....they squealed and half rolled around in their crates as if they were in their favourite mudholes back at Umfolozi.

An interesting little bird (unidentified) but an obvious seed eater, landed on deck while we were still hundreds of miles from land. It found enough seed amongst the bales of teff grass to keep him going. It was only when we were miles off Jamaica that it appeared to “jumped ship”, where he had come from remains a mystery, as he didn't appear to be a typical migratory birdperhaps another passing ship?

Apparently all Lykes Lines personnel were on strike on shore and instructions were communicated to the crew that only their essential duties were to be performed in bringing



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

the ship to its destination at Houston. The aging captain was also sailing his last voyage before retiring. There weren't many smiles during the trip and I had no help from the crew carrying bales of feed, manning the sea hose, washing down the deck after cleaning the crates or other tasks tending the animals.

The only member of the crew that was friendly was the Radio operator. I spent time with him in the Radio cabin where we were updated on weather and predicted sea conditions on route. At a point after we had reached the Carribean waters off Jamaica, all shipping was warned that a hurricane was forming in the mid-Atlantic. That was all I needed at that point of my life.

My troubles seemed endless as I was bitten by a spider no doubt in a bale of grass. This proved to be very painful with swollen glands and some infection. There was some Antihistamine in the ship's first aid box which brought about much relief. Amazingly, I still did not get any help from the crew with the work and I had to get by with one limp arm for a few days.



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

Gratefully we out ran the hurricane and arrived at Houston in the middle of a dock-strike. Only essential tasks were allowed.



Mike G. Behr, game warden from Natal, South Africa, gingerly pats one of the 10 valuable and increasingly rare African white rhinoceros he accompanied aboard the S/S JESSE LYKES which arrived at the Port of Houston last month with its well-caged animal cargo. The still growing rhinos, shipped from Durban following their capture in a game reserve, are from one to one-and-one-half years old and range in weight from 1800 to 2200 pounds. This extremely dangerous beast at maturity will weigh 7000 pounds. Eight were trucked to a newly opened drive-through game park at Mesquite, Texas, near Dallas, and two were sent to a private zoo in Brownsville, Texas.



FINALLY, THE USA

I won't bore you with the details other than TV crews constantly getting in the way as I helped get two of the Rhino loaded onto a truck destined for the Gladys Porter Brownsville Zoo. Making sure they had sufficient feed and water I gave instructions to the driver and attendant....Then reluctantly said goodbye to my charges.

The 8 other crates were loaded onto trucks and after a few TV interviews we were on our way to Dallas. This part of the journey was uneventful. We were met by Harry Tennison and the Zoo owners all much relieved at our safe arrival.....with no losses, even Phondo's nose wound had almost healed.

I spent a few days assisting with the Rhino's orientation, before being whisked off by my host on a spoilt holiday which included trips to Austin, the Texas hill country where Harry Tennison planned to establish a Black Rhino sanctuary.



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

LATER

A sequel to the story. I had occasion to attend a Gamecoin conference in San Antonio some 18 months later and I went to Brownsville to say hi to the two White Rhino there. I was astounded by the reaction of the animals when they heard my voice and their feeding whistle. They galloped around squealing in delight as they came up to me, smelt that it was me and squealed some more.....a very emotional time.





Moving Rhino to Botswana

It was 1970 and I was stationed as a section Ranger at the Mkuzi Game Reserve in Zululand living with my family at an outpost known as Mbanyana near the Nsumu pan. Layout consisted of a thatched reed-walled two bedroom house. The walls were plastered on the inside preventing moisture and cold draughts getting in.

News arrived that, because I was licenced to drive extra heavy trucks, I had to accompany the late Ken Rochat who was Ranger in Charge of Rhino capture at Umfolozi, on a translocation trip to Botswana and that I must ensure that my passport was in order. We were to fly to Port Elizabeth where two new trucks were being provided by a truck manufacturer for the venture.

John Tinley a colleague drove us to Durban airport where we joined the plane to Port Elizabeth. We stayed overnight and took delivery of the brand new trucks at the factory. After a quick run through of do's and don'ts we set off for home some 9 hours to Umfolozi.



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

We arrived after dark and grabbed a few hour's sleep. Because Ken lived near the holding pens and was in charge of the operation there, arrangements had been made for the animals to be loaded onto the trucks early at sunrise the following day. By 7.00 am we were on our way to Botswana.

Only one stop en-route for refueling, watering and feeding the Rhino and off to the Ranch motel some kilometers from Pietersburg, (now Polokwane) where we stayed overnight. The restless animals caused a bit of disturbance and complaints from other travelers, which forced us to cut short our sleep and continue our northward quest.

The journey up to the border with Zimbabwe was uneventful and the formalities of clearing Immigration and customs on the South African side were painless.....As they were expecting us at the gate. We crossed the bridge over the Limpopo river and ran into a problem with the Zimbabwe authorities.



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

They were more interested in viewing the animals through gaps in the crate sides and even climbing onto the trucks despite our efforts to keep them away as the rhino became increasingly more frantic with all the human activity and noise going on. To make it worse, besides the officials there were on-lookers galore including inquisitive children.

Eventually we got away thanks to the intervention by a police officer. We were now running late and our hope of getting to our destination during daylight faded with the onset of a dense fog and deepening twilight.

We did our bit for the animals and decided to spend an uncomfortable night resting in the trucks. First light saw us on our way again. The journey to Chobe on the Bulawayo road had to be negotiated carefully as the tarmac strips were narrow and in many places in need of serious maintenance.

However we drove through lovely rolling Mopani tree-lined country, passing the Wankie Game reserve turn off and on to Kasane and Chobe. Refuelling at Bulawayo gave us enough gas to get back there again.



MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

Pat Hepburn and his wife Mary were at the Reserve to welcome us to the Chobe Game reserve and all preparations to off-load the Rhino was in hand. Pat had erected spacious strong wooden paddocks for the animals to settle in to their new environment and with the help of his fellow workers the White Rhino set foot on solid ground.....

*"one small step for Chobe,
one huge leap for conservation"*





MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

POACHING and PROTECTION

These were the first of a number of Rhino at Chobe. By all accounts the release and monitoring of these animals went well until 1984 when there was an estimate of 190, by 1992 there were only 27 counted!

This was all attributed to poaching. To combat this scourge, a capture programme was introduced to move these breeding animals to safer controlled areas. I understand that the figure has increased to over 60 and that the well-coordinated efforts of various bodies have resulted in positive increases in the populations of both White and Black Rhino in Botswana.





MOVING RHINO! A personal account of relocating rhino in the 1970's

Care to help save the last rhinos?

Click the link to learn how you can...

<http://www.nikela.org/projects/stop-rhino-poaching/>

Thanks for caring and sharing this ebook

