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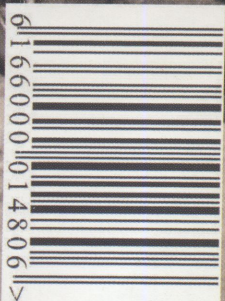
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WRESTLING WITH RHINOS PART 10

THE ADVENTURES OF A GLASGOW VET IN KENYA

by Dr Jerry Haigh

In part 9 of Old Africa's condensed version of Jerry Haigh's book Wrestling with Rhinos, the author and his wife Jo hosted Wilfred Thesiger at their home in Meru. You can order the full book from the author's website www.jerryhaigh.com or from amazon.com

The next morning we said good-bye to Wilfred Thesiger. Jo went to her work at Tigania Hospital and I went to the veterinary office. By lunch time I was on top of most of the paper-pushing work, when the phone rang. It was a radio call, but at an unusual time.

"Good morning Jerry. Peter Jenkins here from the park. Over."

"Morning Peter, what can I do for you? All well? Over."

"Oh, pretty good, but we do have one problem that I think needs your attention. A white rhino has been injured. Can you get down here this afternoon? Over."

"How badly injured? Will I need to sedate it? Over."

"Possibly. It's been in a fight, and has a very swollen rear end. The askari (guard) tells me that it has not passed water or faeces for over two days. It's now off its feed. Over."

"Right Peter, I'll see what I can organize here. It'll take me a couple of hours to reach you, and I can't get away right away, but I should be with you before dark. I hope that's OK. Over."

"Fine Jerry. We'll look for you. Have the guard at the gate radio me when you get there. Over and out."

"OK. Over and out."

I organized my drug boxes, trying to think of all the things that I might need for this unusual patient. I had treated one rhino previously, but that one had died, and I did not have much idea of the 'normal animal' when it came to white rhino.

It seemed that I might be able to combine work and pleasure. When I got back to the house Jo had just returned. She soon organized our daughter Karen's paraphernalia for a visit to our favourite game park.

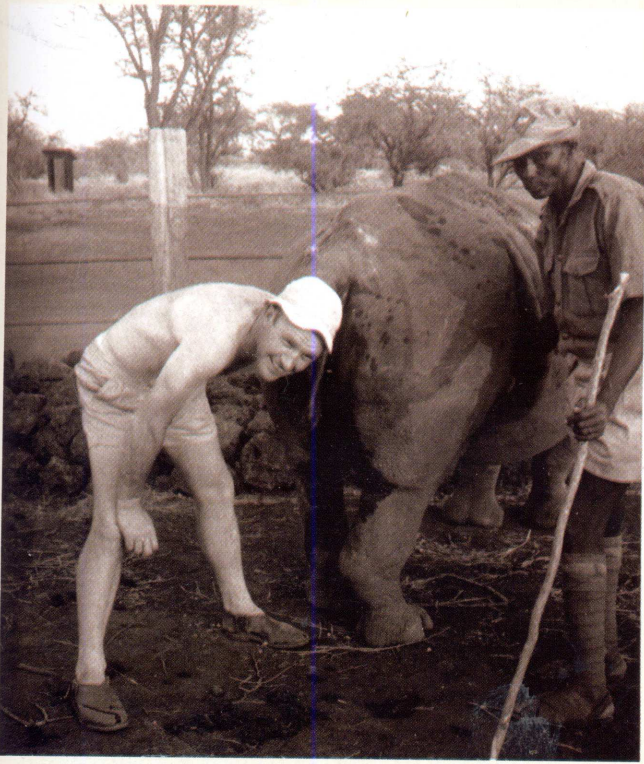
We set off down the dusty road, back past Tigania, the Nyambeni hills to our right. In Kianjai we slowed down for some roadside donkeys. How they avoided being killed by greed-crazed miraa transporters was a mystery. Karen stayed asleep, the rattling of the Toyota acting as a soporific. After the village of Kangeta we climbed up again through a pass in the hills at about 6,500 feet. Miraa trees stood out against the skyline, and on the higher slopes small patches of tea, growing near the lower limit of their optimum climate, dotted the shambas. Thatched mud-and-wattle houses showed how small each shamba actually was, a few acres at the most. The tea bushes grew within a couple of yards of each building, leaving little space for anything else.

At the park entrance the ranger contacted Peter on the radio-phone, and he was waiting for us at headquarters. He stood just under six feet tall, and wore standard field dress: a pair of khaki shorts, and a meticulously ironed, jungle-green bush jacket which had been sun-bleached to a greyish tone. The chupplies (leather sandals) on his feet looked polished by wear, as they gleamed through the layers of fine dust. The lock of hair swept over the top of his balding head gave little or no shade to his pate. The rhino askari explained the problem.

The animal, a female, had come into heat on Monday. The aggressive male had started to show interest in her condition. On Tuesday they had begun to get serious. The male had tried to get behind the female. She had played hard to get and kept spinning around and threatening him.

Eventually the frustrated male managed to get in a couple of vigorous horn thrusts from directly behind the cow. The enormous force generated had all been concentrated at the end of his three-foot-long horn. The damage that he had done was plain to see.

The dejected patient stood under a scrawny thorn tree in the middle of the boma. The whole area under her tail was swollen. A couple of deep puncture wounds below her vulva were



Jerry Haigh in sandals and shorts at Meru National Park with his arm out of sight up the injured female rhino's backside.

weeping a clear fluid, and her anus had almost disappeared in folds of swollen skin.

"When did she last urinate or pass manure?" I asked.

"On Tuesday evening. Since Wednesday morning she has passed nothing."

"And eating?"

"She ate a little hay on Tuesday, also some grass." He pointed to the flake of lucerne that lay untouched on the ground beside her. "She ate some hay yesterday, but nothing at all today. She has also not taken any water today."

I had read that foreplay and mating in rhino is a pretty energetic affair, but I had not realized that it could get this violent.

I had acquired a new kind of drug for capturing animals, but I only had a small supply. I had no real clue as to the rhino's size. I estimated her at about two-and-a-half draft horses, and hazarded a dose based on that.

Things did not go smoothly. Four top-up doses and 45 minutes later, she finally condescended to stop against a small tree. Every time I had tried to approach her from behind or touch her tender rear end before this, she had simply walked away. After the third dose she started to walk in a circle. The circle got smaller and smaller. The fourth dose seemed to do the trick. Best of all, she did not fall over.

The next hour was a steady stream of hard

work. I soaked my arm with lots of soap and water, as well as a slippery lubricant, and emptied out the rear end of the patient. At first it was like breaking concrete. By the time I had reached in up to my shoulder, and changed arms a couple of time to rest my hand, my fingers were bruised and tender.

The rhino was showing signs of waking up, and I had no notion of what to give as a further top-up dose. Calling over my shoulder to Jo, who was holding Karen in her arms, I said, "Can you make me up an enema, Jo? I'll probably need at least four gallons."

I asked the askari to bring a bucket, and turning to Peter I said, "Can you find me about six feet of hose, and a large funnel? I'm going to try and get as much soap and water into this beast as I can." He took his straight-stemmed pipe from his mouth he gave orders in Swahili. While the various bits and pieces were gathered, I prepared a couple of injections. First, large doses of antibiotic. A short-acting drug to attack the infection that was already starting to show in the deep wounds, and another to hopefully last two or three days and ensure a safe recovery. Then another injection to help reduce the swelling.

My emptying of the rectum would help, but she still needed to empty her bladder.

We administered the enema in the deepening dusk.

Back at Peter's house, Jo sat chatting with Sarah, Peter's attractive blond wife. I headed for the shower and a much-needed clean-up. We listened to the night sounds, led by a chorus of cicadas, and I sipped a cold beer.

Jo shuddered as Sarah recounted the terrifying story of Mark's close run-in with the lion. She recounted how his arm had swollen up and how the removal of the stitches had saved the day.

We spent the night in the park's guest house, only 30 yards from the Jenkins's beautiful thatched home.

After breakfast we returned to the rhino boma. The askari greeted us with a happy grin. "She is much better," he said. "She has passed a lot of manure." He took us into the boma. My only regret is that I failed to take a photo of the results of the enema. We do have a grainy old black-and-white print of me standing in sandals and shorts, my arm out of sight up a rhino's backside. A follow-up picture of the manure pile would have made a fitting end to the story.

To be continued...