

On the 18th of June 1990, Natal Parks Board made history by auctioning a founder population of five black rhino, two bulls and three cows, for which Dale Parker successfully bid R2.2 million, the highest price ever paid for the species, thus making Lapalala Wilderness the first private nature reserve in South Africa to obtain black rhino.

Previously the black rhino did not have an economic value which now, from a legal point of view, has great significance and in addition, has provided the Natal Parks Board with important funding for their various conservation management programmes. The five black rhino, under the supervision of Dr. Martin Brooks of the Natal Parks Board, were immobilized on the 8th of August and checked out by the Parks Board's Veterinarian, Peter Rogers. The front end of each rhino's horn was cut off as a precaution against injury to one another when they are eventually released some time during September. The rhino horn tips are to be used in an isotope (finger print) research programme being undertaken by Dr. Anthony Hall-Martin of the National Parks Board of South Africa. Blood samples and body measurements were taken and each rhino had its ears notched according to a coded programme for later field identification. The rhino were then loaded into a Natal Parks Board special rhino transporter, which was pulled by a M.A.N. diesel, specially loaned for the event and departed the same day, travelling over a distance of 900 kilometres to Lapalala Wilderness, in the Waterberg mountains of the north-western Transvaal.

This event signalled the return of the black rhino to these mountains after an absence of over 100 years. The rhino were escorted by Mr. Apie Strauss, chief Rhino Capture Officer of the Natal Parks Board and Keith Meiklejohn, head of the Board's Game Capture Programme. The rhino travelled throughout the night, arriving on the morning of the 9th of August and were released into specially constructed pens in a 10 000 h.a. game-fenced section of the 24 400 h.a. Lapalala Wilderness, where they will undergo a settling-in period before final release.

Lapalala was one of eight private reserves considered suitable for black rhino introduction, having been assessed by the Natal Parks Board's representative and Mr. Peter Hitchins, a black rhino specialist.

Clive Walker of Lapalala Wilderness states: "This is a great responsibility for us at Lapalala Wilderness. The opportunity arises from the confidence that Natal Parks Board have placed on the private sector in allowing these animals to go onto private land. We are only too aware of what has happened to the black rhino across Africa; Southern Africa is their last stronghold and we are happy to be part of their conservation. A great deal will be expected of us and we will have to measure up to those expectations".

New Move In Black Rhino Conservation

