



HORST GOES AROUND THE HORN

By Christopher Munnion

For most of his life, Horst Klemm, acclaimed international photographer, has been an adventurer, seeking challenges in the remotest corners of the world and pitting his wits and skills against man and beast and surviving otherwise life-threatening situations.

He will admit that the narrowest escape from death he has ever experienced came in his own beloved Africa when he was attacked by a Black Rhino named Richard in August, 2009.

Richard attacked at speed, tossing Horst 15 feet in the air and causing severe injuries.

Had the animal pressed the attack, Horst would have died.

I was surprised when I heard of the attack as I have spent many months with Horst Klemm in the African bush and have admired his skills in “reading” the behaviour of any given wild animal before he sets up his photograph. He has spent years working in the African wild and has finely tuned his bushcraft.

When I visited him in hospital I suggested that he might like to put his experience on record. Horst wrote the following:

“On foot and armed with a camera, I am a soft-shelled target for sudden aggression, very aware of being a trespasser in the territory of powerful and quick-tempered Richard, an East African Black Rhino about to be returned to the Serengeti. Collecting reference material for the production of a bronze sculpture, Richard the Rhino attacked me in August 2009. His well-developed sense of smell and hearing detected me too soon and gave me little chance to reach my hiding place. “Saliva snorting Richard moved his 2.3 ton massive bulk in a burst of surprising speed. I stumbled in a hole in the ground and lost my footing and the camera. A split-second later, I found myself flying very high through the air landing short of my life-saving trees. I broke my left upper thigh and had a huge, gaping wound on my right backside. Lying on my back, camera to my right and my leg 90 degrees to the left, all I knew then that I would need more than just luck to survive this situation. The Rhino had disappeared.”

A typically laconic Klemm account but I felt the episode deserved far more background on how Horst and Richard came together in the first place as well as a far more detailed account from Horst himself of the attack and its aftermath.

Richard, it transpired, is almost as famous in Rhino conservation circles as Horst Klemm is in the photographic world.

He is the top stud of an ambitious venture to repopulate Tanzania’s renowned Serengeti reserve with the highly-endangered sub species of Black Rhino, *Diceros bicornis michaeli* found only in the Serengeti and Ngorogoro Crater regions of East Africa. In 1970, it was estimated that there were some 60,000 Black Rhino in Africa but uncontrolled poaching reduced the species to fewer than 2,300 by 1993. One night in August, 1995, gunfire was heard in the Ngorogoro Crater south of the Serengeti. A search party of wardens ventured out at first light and came across an all-too-familiar dreadful sight: the butchered remains of a female Black Rhino, her horn having been brutally removed. An orphaned eight-month-old calf – a young bull later to be named

Richard – was found wandering around the area. He was too small to survive without his mother’s milk and incapable of defending himself against the many predators in the region. It was essential that he be rescued immediately and taken to a place of safety. With no qualified vet or immobilization equipment available, the baby bull had to be captured manually and taken into “protective custody”. As he started to grow, conservation groups in conjunction with the Frankfurt Zoological Society, agreed that the Rhino (named ‘Richard’ by the children at the sanctuary) should have as little human contact as possible in order to keep him wild. Richard the Rhino spend eleven years in Addo National Park South Africa until the decision was reached to release him back to the Serengeti. TANAPA, the Tanzanian National Parks authority and the Frankfurt Zoological Society, were commissioning a bronze statue of Richard and in order to assist the sculptor, detailed photographs of the Rhino were needed. Who better to obtain such photographs than one of Africa’s most acclaimed wildlife photographers. Horst traveled to the reserve in Limpopo Province where the Rhino was kept, setting aside a few days to track Richard and take the shots he knew the sculptor would need – detailed close-ups. Accompanied by two trackers, he finally located the Rhino. Fully aware that the Black Rhino is bad-tempered he was cautious and patient and was finally rewarded with some excellent close-ups of the big bull. Always a perfectionist, Horst decided to try for even better shots on the second day when catastrophe happened in a matter of seconds. “I remember seeing flashes of the sky as I turned three times in the air and then I landed on my back with a great thump. My now broken left leg was at 90 degrees to my body and I had this huge gaping wound in my right buttock. My biggest fear was that Richard would return to finish me off. I reached up and grabbed a bush, trying to pull my leg back into the right position”. The trackers made radio contact and help came quickly. A small helicopter used for game spotting was deployed and Horst was flown to the nearest hospital in a small northern town. No aircraft or helicopter with night rating was available so Horst then had to endure an agonizing three-hour journey in an ambulance to Pretoria. “I know just how lucky I was to have survived the attack” he said. “The doctors told me that if the Rhino’s horn had pierced me an inch or so either side it would have been fatal.”

Horst is now fully recovered.

Does he hold a grudge against Richard?

“Not at all,” he laughs “He’s my buddy.

He was doing what any good Rhino would do when he suspects a threat.

Good luck to him!”



POSTSCRIPT

Today, considering his severe injuries, Horst Klemm has made a remarkable recovery and is pursuing his “normal” activities. It was almost forgotten that the original idea was to produce a bronze sculpture of Richard the Rhino before his release back to his birthplace.

Finally Richard is going to be released into the Serengeti and once he is gone back into the wilderness no one might ever see him again.

“Exactly one year after the attack I decided to produce a bronze sculpture of Richard the Rhino myself and commissioned renowned wildlife artist and sculptor, Johan Hoekstra, to craft it. The photographic reference-material existed, after all that is why I photographed Richard in the first place.”



Black Rhino “Richard” by Johan Hoekstra, edition 1/9 bronze, 580x325mm, 22kg incl.base