

TREC-ing 1000km in order to raise awareness about rhino conservation

While there are many projects in place to help raise awareness about the plight of the rhino, few walk the talk...literally. When Tintswalo Lodges launched the Tintswalo Rhino Extreme Campaign (TREC) in May, Tintswalo Safari Lodge's Head Ranger, Fritz Breytenbach, pledged to walk 1000km to help raise further awareness.

Now just over 800km into his journey, Breytenbach shares his ups, his downs and why he decided to take on this challenge.

"I know that many people want to help save the rhino population, and I really wanted to do something that would not only benefit TREC but would allow me to contribute in my own way. So I decided to volunteer to walk 1000km," explains Breytenbach.

TREC was designed to increase awareness of the massacre of the rhino population in Southern Africa. This project forms part of Tintswalo Safari Lodge's commitment to facilitate growth in the rhino population in the Manyeleti Game Reserve and Western Kruger National Park.

Along with the assistance of the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) and Game Reserves United (GRU), TREC will create a comprehensive intelligence network that will pre-empt and warn the partnership of any attempted rhino poaching in the area. This will be coupled with a fully trained and effective team of field rangers, ready to respond to any threat of poachers entering the reserves.

Walking through the Manyeleti Private Game Reserve has certainly been no walk in the park. Breytenbach admits that it has been much harder than he expected it to be, saying that one has to be both mentally strong and physically prepared before undertaking such an expedition.

Not even encountering many of the big five on foot as well as a run-in with Africa's longest venomous snake, the black mamba, or torn ankle ligaments have deterred Breytenbach from his walk. "Upon examination, I was certain I would be strongly advised to stop walking for several weeks, something which was and is unthinkable. Therefore, when I visited Dr Scheepers from Acornhoek, a highly skilled and respected practitioner, I pretended 'not' to be in pain," he chuckles.

The rhino population has depleted drastically in South Africa in recent times, with the country having lost over 1 632 rhino to poaching in only four years. Last year saw the worst period in the modern era, with a

total of 668 animals recorded to have been poached in South Africa, a 50% increase from the previous year's total of 448.

As such, initiatives like TREC have become vitally important to not only protecting the rhino and promoting repopulation, but also for informing communities on how they can do their part in saving these majestic beasts.

Breytenbach hopes that his walk, along with the work that TREC is doing, will make a noticeable impact on rhino conservation.

"The wild rhino population is under severe threat, and I would gladly walk 2000km next time, if it meant that even one person became more aware about the plight of these amazing creatures. I am extremely proud to be part of the TREC initiative, and look forward to continuing to play my part in contributing positively to the survival of the species."

For more information about how you can become a TREC supporter or sponsor, contact TREC directly on +27 15 793 9015 or email them at trec@safari.tintswalo.com. If you would like to sponsor the campaign contact Yvonne@tintswalo.com or call 082 602 3042.

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