

Anna Merz

Dies at the age of 81



Anna studied politics and economics at Nottingham University before reading for the Bar at Lincoln's Inn but her adventurous nature soon led her to Ghana where she married twice, owned a crankshaft grinding workshop and developed a love of riding, worked as an honorary warden in the Ghanaian game department and took part on many expeditions in the Sahara and around Uganda and northern Kenya.

Anna retired to Kenya in 1976 where she met David Craig who leased her 5000 acres to set up a rhino sanctuary surrounded by a ten foot high electrified security fence. Soon this was doubled to 10,000 acres and later expanded to 62,000 acres to form the Lewa Downs Wildlife Conservancy which now has 70 black rhino and 56 white rhino and many other species of wildlife.

I first met Anna in 1989 – I had just returned home from a wildlife holiday in Zimbabwe where I had been approached by some farmers to help establish a black rhino conservancy in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe and had heard that Anna had built a rhino conservancy at Ngare Sergio. in Kenya.

I rang up Anna to ask for some advice and she immediately said why not come and see for yourself so I flew to Nairobi, hired a car and went to Ngare Sergio which lay in the foothills of Mount Kenya. On arrival I was asked if I would like to see some rhino and off we went in a Jeep, but I was not able to watch from the safety of the vehicle for long, as we soon stopped in thick bush and went on a walk to get a close up view of rhino. Anna seemed fearless of these large animals.

Back at her house I met Samia, a black rhino who Anna had hand reared from birth as her mother Solio had no milk. Samia was very tame and followed Anna like a dog. But she soon took a dislike to the bumper of my car and on my return to Nairobi I had to explain to the car hire firm how it got damaged.

Samia was born in February 1985 and Anna reared her until she was about six years old. She then encouraged her to return to the wild where she became pregnant. After having her baby rhino, Samia would come back each day to show off her calf to Anna. One day two bulls were fighting and Samia and her calf were pushed over the edge of a cliff and both were killed. Anna was heartbroken and soon afterwards she decided to move to South Africa with her seven dogs and built herself a house in Vaalwater. However she remained a board member of Lewa Downs and also travelled extensively – usual on horseback or riding on camels.

Anna was a formidable lady whose determination and inspiration to create a rhino conservancy was unrivalled - nobody argued with Anna. She loved opera and on her visits to the UK, we would always try and book tickets for her to watch opera but she preferred the Three Tenors to Billy Elliot. She wrote books about rhino and was a prolific letter writer to her circle of friends. Annie and I would get regular letters about her travels in Africa and her lecture tours in the States and her encounters with snakes in South Africa.

Anna made a major contribution to the conservation of the black rhino in Africa and we were honoured that such a great lady agreed to become a patron of the Sebakwe Black Rhino Trust. We will all miss her, and be always grateful for her friendship and wise advice.