



THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

# ARCHSOC SYMPOSIUM 2026

*Organised by the Northern Branch*

## NEW SOUNDINGS *in the* ARCHAEOLOGY *of* SOUTHERN AFRICA

*featuring talks from Professor Sarah Wurz, Dr Ghilraen Laue &  
Professor Alex Schoeman*

Saturday **22 August 2026**  
**09:45–13:00**

**Delta Environmental Centre**, Victory Park, Johannesburg  
R230pp members | R50pp students | R290pp non-members

# NEW SOUNDINGS *in the* ARCHAEOLOGY *of* SOUTHERN AFRICA

**Archaeology in South Africa** covers a period of millions of years, from the time of the formation of Earth to the era of our ancestral hominins, the evolution of Homo sapiens, the adaptations made by the hunter-gatherers of the Stone Age, and the coming of herders and farmers over the last 2000 years.

**The Northern Branch's** annual symposium brings society members, their families and friends, academics and students together for a series of fascinating lectures in a variety of these fields.

In our programme this year, three leading archaeologists will talk respectively on recent developments in **Middle Stone Age studies, rock art studies, and studies of interactions between farmers, herders and hunter-gatherers.**

*Over the last 20 years, new ideas have been crowding into all these fields. The speakers will aim to do some catching-up for the benefit of the audience.*



# GENERAL INFORMATION

**REGISTRATION** 09:45 – 10:00

**VENUE** Delta Environmental Centre, Delta Park, Road  
No. 3, Victory Park, Johannesburg

**PARKING** Secure parking at the Centre

**CATERING** Bring your own picnic lunch and drinks to enjoy  
with the other participants at the tables outside  
the Environmental Centre.

*Tea, coffee and fruit juice will be served mid-  
morning.*

**BOOK TABLE** A wide selection of new and second-hand books  
will be available for purchasing before the  
symposium starts and during the morning tea  
break and at the end of the symposium.

**Dress warmly** as the Delta Hall can get chilly in August.

This year we are starting the programme **slightly later than in previous years** to avoid  
the parking problems (from people exiting the Park Run) that surface if we start earlier.



# PROGRAMME

*Saturday 22 August*

- |              |                                        |
|--------------|----------------------------------------|
| <b>09:45</b> | Registration                           |
| <b>10:00</b> | First speaker: Professor Sarah Wurz    |
| <b>10:50</b> | Second speaker: Dr Ghilraen Laue       |
| <b>11:40</b> | Tea and Coffee Break (30 mins)         |
| <b>12:10</b> | Third speaker: Professor Alex Schoeman |
| <b>13:00</b> | Thanks and Closure                     |
| <b>13:10</b> | Self-catered Lunch                     |



# The Middle Stone Age of southern Africa under the lens

The past twenty years have seen new insights into the biological development, behaviour and cognition of Middle Stone Age populations in southern Africa, with new understanding, of the paleoclimate and environment developing concomitantly. The increased research focus has cemented southern Africa's long-standing reputation as a hotspot for research into modern human origins, whilst also showcasing the adaptability and innovative capabilities of people living between 300 000 and 26 000 years ago. This talk will discuss selected case studies from the region to highlight how reconstructions of ancient landscapes and genetics, excavations and microscopic analyses have contributed to deeper knowledge of our deep past.

**Sarah Wurz** is a Professor of Archaeology at the School of Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies at Wits. She is affiliated with the Centre of Excellence on Early Sapience Behaviour at the University of Bergen. She is passionate about archaeological heritage management and previously filled positions at the Iziko Museums of Cape Town and the South African Heritage Resources Agency. She is currently the director of excavations and research at Klasies River main site, a key site for understanding the origins of modern humans or *Homo sapiens*. Her academic background and expertise include archaeology, music education, music science and psychology.



Recent excavations at Klasies River main site



# New directions in southern African rock art research: interpretation and beyond

In the 1970s Patricia Vinnicombe and David Lewis-Williams ushered in a strongly anthropological approach to understanding southern African hunter-gatherer rock art, helping establish South Africa as a world leader in rock art research. Building on this foundation, the field has expanded in many new and exciting directions. This talk explores interpretive approaches that consider performance, soundscapes, hunting, initiation rituals, artist biography, and the experience of rock art sites as a whole, both in the field and digitally. Drawing on recent work from the Drakensberg, Waterberg, Lesotho, and elsewhere, the talk highlights a vibrant field full of new questions.

**Ghilraen Laue** is a Curator at the KwaZulu-Natal Museum and an Honorary Research Fellow in the Rock Art Research Institute at Wits. She holds a PhD in archaeology and specialises in southern African rock art. Her particular interests are in regional variation and the relationship between imagery and ritual practice. She has conducted research across South Africa, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe, with current projects in the Waterberg, Drakensberg and southern Cape. She is co-author, with Lyn Wadley, of the recently published book *Rock Art of the Waterberg: Rites and Transformation*.



Waterfall Shelter, Kamberg Nature Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal



# Beyond the Iron Age? Novel techniques and new insights into the archaeology of the last 2000 years

South African Iron Age archaeologists have excelled at ceramic classification. Unfortunately, at times, using ceramics to define archaeological cultures has taken precedence over social and relational interpretations. Over the past two decades, significant theoretical and methodological developments have prompted a reassessment of the factual and theoretical underpinnings of cultural packages, and the use of concepts based on technological 'ages' – 'Stone Age', 'Iron Age' – in multi-agent landscapes. I reflect on insights from regional-scale studies, before exploring the renewed interest in human and animal origins, as well as human-animal relationships, and foodways that underpin research on first and second millennium sites in Botswana, Zimbabwe, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and northern KwaZulu-Natal.

***Alex Schoeman** teaches archaeology at the University of the Witwatersrand, and is part of the AGRI-DRY network, which is training ten doctoral candidates at six universities in new interdisciplinary approaches. She also leads two multidisciplinary research projects. The first explores the deeper history of the //Xegwi-speaking Tlou-tle of southern Mpumalanga, including the development of their wetland-based economy and its connections with Bokoni and international trade. This research is entangled with the work of the South African Farmscapes & Food team, which uses novel archaeobotanical and bioarchaeological techniques to develop a more nuanced understanding of farming, food production and consumption in northeastern South Africa.*



Welgelegen Shelter, Mpumalanga – one of the Footprints of the Tlou-tle research sites



# REGISTRATION DETAILS

To register, email your details to [anner@mweb.co.za](mailto:anner@mweb.co.za) and attach **only THIS PAGE** of the Symposium notification.

Please provide the following:

1. Your name and those of any other people accompanying you to the Symposium.
2. Whether you and those accompanying you are members of ArchSoc, or not.
3. Your telephone or cell phone number.

**Names of attendees: (Title, First and Surname):**

| Title, First and Surname | Member   |
|--------------------------|----------|
|                          | Yes / No |
|                          | Yes / No |
|                          | Yes / No |
|                          | Yes ? No |

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell-phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Fees payable, by EFT if possible**

|                                                                          |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Members @ R230 pp                                                        | R |
| Non-members @ R290 pp                                                    | R |
| Students @ R50 pp                                                        | R |
| If depositing cash, please add R50 to your payment to cover bank charges | R |
| <b>Total amount due</b>                                                  | R |

**Fees are payable in advance to:**

**SA Archaeological Society, Standard Bank, Rosebank**

**Account No: 001945920**

Include your name and the reference 'Symposium' on the Deposit Slip.

**E-mail proof of payment** to Anne Raeburn at [anner@mweb.co.za](mailto:anner@mweb.co.za)

If you wish to check on your booking, please phone Anne Raeburn on or after  
12 August 2026 on **072 349 6507** during business hours.