

# THE DIGGING STICK

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## THE MALEOSKOP ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT Groblersdal District, Mpumalanga

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The Maleoskop area represents a diverse collection of archaeological sites. Included are scattered Middle and Late Stone Age sites, ancient mining sites, a Late Iron Age settlement at Thabantšho and the remains of a mission station named Gerlachshoop.

This was the first mission station to be established by the Berlin Missionary Society north of the Vaal River. Furthermore there are the remains of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century trader's settlement, post point and wagon route. The sites, concentrated on the farm Rietkloof JS166 south-east of Groblersdal in Mpumalanga, previously formed part of an SAPS training base called Maleoskop. The area has since been returned to the Bakgaga Bakopa tribe after a successful land claim.

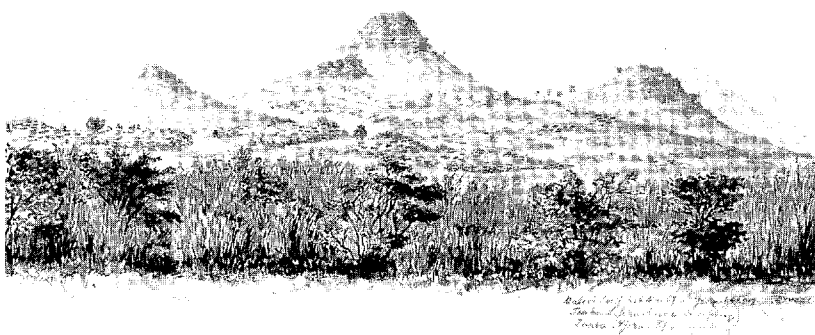
### The historical context

In 1859, the Bakopa moved from their previous settlement at De Oude Stadt to settle in the vicinity of a prominent hill named Thabantšho. A tumultuous and complex situation existed in the area during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and various political forces, including the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR), the Ndzunza-Ndebele under Mabhoggo, the Lydenburg government and the Bakopa under their chief, Boleu, exacted a toll on the fragile political situation of the time. This resulted in constant attacks and counterattacks, also on the Bakopa, who, on 10 May 1864, were almost annihilated

by a combined Swazi and Boer force. It was this attack that ended the Bakopa occupation of Thabantšho.

### The Maleoskop Archaeological Project

Unisa's Maleoskop Archaeological Project got underway in 2001. Despite the rich variety of archaeological remains in the area, it was decided to focus attention on the settlement area at Thabantšho and the Gerlachshoop mission station. Thabantšho comprises several distinct features: the highest hill Thabantšho, the settlement areas at its base and the flanking hills to the north and west. A surface survey (2001 to 2003) yielded circular fortification walls on the three hills and numerous demarcation walls in the valley, a huge *kgoro* (meeting place), many con-



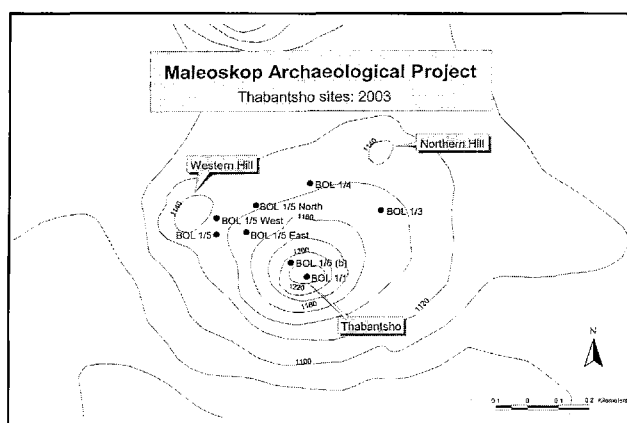
*'Maleo's Kopf' and its flanking northern and western hills, as painted by Theodore Wangemann in 1867*

centrations of burnt hut remains, grind stones, middens and many other features.

Archival research (2001 to 2005) has brought to light extensive reports of the work and experiences of the German missionaries at Maleoskop. This includes an eyewitness report of the massive attack on the settlement by the combined Swazi-Boer force in 1864, in which not only Kgoši Boleu, but also a substantial number of

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*Thabantsho archaeological sites (2003)*

Bakopa soldiers and civilians died. Many women and children were taken captive. Also in the reports were found drawings of both Thabantsho, the Bakopa settlement, and the Gerlachshoop mission station by Theodore Wangemann, who visited the area three years after the battle, in 1867.

### **A surface study of Thabantsho**

During the first archaeological season in August 2001 a series of test trenches were excavated on the summit of Thabantsho (BOL 1/1), on a large midden (BOL 1/3) and in the living area (BOL 1/4 and 1/5). Although several stone walls were found on the summit, the excavations did not reveal any habitation. The midden brought to light a substantial number of faunal artefacts, pottery, cultural objects, beads and charcoal. The test trench in the living area exposed clear signs of red hut clay, pole imprints and broken pottery. Carbon-14 data provided by the animal bones and charcoal has indicated habitation dates during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, because of the historical character of the site, C-14 dates are not decisive, and such recent dates are not very reliable.

Our second season (August and October 2002) and third season (August 2003) focused on a single living area to the east of Thabantsho. Included in the focus area were hut remains, a large stone enclosure and a stone circle with embedded pots. Excavations of the hut remains brought to light a large quantity of sorghum, which appears to have been stored in the hut, probably for security reasons. The test trench in the large stone enclosure revealed no evidence of cattle dung and this area could thus not have served as a cattle kraal. A variety of embedded pots in the stone circle included a whole pot, filled

almost two thirds with ilmenite, which is still today used by Bakopa women for traditional personal make-up. Some ilmenite was also found in decorated pots, but final analysis of the material is still outstanding.

In October 2003 and August 2004 we concentrated our efforts on a rectangular building situated on the northern slope, near the summit of Thabantsho. A test trench revealed several artifacts, including glass beads and metal objects, as well as bone material that proved to be human. Prof. Maryna Steyn of the Department of Anatomy at the University of Pretoria and members of that department became involved in the research of the human remains. The bones are believed to be the remains of at least 12 individuals, including small children, who were killed during the 1864 attack. All human remains will be reburied in a manner that is satisfactory to the Bakgaga Bakopa Tribal Authority. Kgoši Ram-mupudu and his council have been involved in the research since the inception of the project and have been consulted on several occasions. Our research findings will also be informed by oral traditions gathered from older Bakopa people.

### **Gerlachshoop mission station**

Although documentary evidence has provided a wealth of information on the mission station at Gerlachshoop, and writings refer to the buildings that formed part of the mission station, the information is vague and contradictory. As a



*The Gerlachshoop Mission Station as seen by Theodore Wangemann in 1867*

result the functions and locations of the structures that were visible were unclear. The objective of the August 2004 season at Gerlachshoop was to identify the various structures and by means of excavation of the main rectangular structure, the foundation of which is still clearly visible, to obtain an indication of the purpose of the building. Valuable information on the building materials used was collected.

*[Continued on page 12]*

## ANSWERING THE BURNING QUESTIONS OF OUR PAST THROUGH 'HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY'

Philip Bonner

*In October 2005, the Trans-Vaal Branch of the South African Archaeological Society held its Annual School in Johannesburg on the theme 'New Perspectives as History Meets Archaeology: The last 400 years in the southern African interior'. Edited versions of two of the nine papers presented on that day are reprinted here. One is Phil Bonner's introductory talk, in which he argues for the greater application in South Africa of 'historical archaeology', that is 'an archaeology informed and buttressed by other historical sources,' which can be either documentary or oral in nature. The other is that by Joanna Behrens, who in her paper 'Digging the Great Trek' illustrated the application of historical archaeology in her research.*

Historical archaeology is a well-developed subsector of archaeology in some parts of the world. In South Africa, however, it has been relatively neglected, despite some quite extensive and sophisticated engagements within this field by Martin Hall's unit at the University of Cape Town. But these have confined themselves to documented periods of the area around Cape Town. Here, historical archaeology means the archaeology of the colonial, of white masters and brown slaves. Outside of Cape Town's colonial past the record is far more patchy.

What do I mean by historical archaeology? Although I am not sure that it is the best term to use, what I mean is archaeology informed and buttressed by other historical sources. These can be documentary as in the case of Cape Town, or they can be oral – that is to say oral histories or oral tradition – passed down by word of mouth. Now that opens up the terrain of the pre-historical and autonomous black societies either independent of white control, pre-dating white control or somehow retaining some autonomy within a framework of white rule. These societies once possessed and in some instances still retain oral traditions about their pasts, including lists of kings, capitals, movement, conflict and

sometimes material concerning the subsections of which they have been composed.

Such traditions were in many cases committed to print many years ago by missionaries – of the Berlin Missionary Society, notably – by government commissions, by government ethnologists, by social anthropologists and by amateur folklorists and historians. Consequently, even where oral traditions no longer survive in and have been lost by the populations that they purport to describe, they still exist. In the areas I know reasonably well – the old Transvaal and the Northern Nguni area – there are a host of such written traditions languishing in obscurity in long forgotten journals on dusty library shelves. They no longer remain in the academic, let alone the heritage domain. I recently conducted a review of the literature on the Mapungubwe area since 1300 and I was utterly astonished at the rich diversity of oral traditions that I found, which had not been visited in 30 years.

Since the brief upsurge of interest in African history in the late 1960s and 1970s these traditions have been largely ignored by South African historians and have not been nearly adequately utilised by anyone else. These oral traditions in many instances stretch back several hundred years – often to within 200 years of the start of the Late Iron Age (at least on the Highveld), that is to say maybe as far back as 1500. Now these, as I have found, plot sites identify peoples and kings and tell of major vicissitudes like droughts, diseases and wars. They at the very least provide a set of starting points for archaeologists that have not been exploited to the extent they should.

One reason for this is the perfectly understandable attraction exerted by the whole subject of origins – the desire to expose firsts in the human experience. The Early Iron Age represents one such dawning, one such first, and archaeology has revealed over the past 30 years, often in a quite spectacular fashion, episodes and moments at the opening of this new age. No such thing can be said about Later Iron Age societies, whose beginnings can be traced to 1200–1300 on the Highveld and sever-

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al hundred years earlier in KwaZulu-Natal. While these have been the subject of some highly significant digs, they are, in relation to the total canvass, few and far between.

However, a strong case can be made that Later Iron Age societies are just as important to understand and plot as earlier epochs, since they represent the building blocks of early modern and recent black South African ethnic groups such as the Pedi, Kgatla, Hurutse, Koena, Sotho, Venda, etc. Unfortunately, within that very perception – the idea of the existence of distinct defined identities – lurks a potential trap. Social anthropologists, missionaries and certainly government ethnographers were prone to see African tribes as bounded and relatively homogenous ethnic units. They tended to take the cultures and the histories of the ruling lineages as representative of the entire group that collectively described itself by a single name. Museum exhibits likewise reified monolithic ethnic groups, portraying typical bushmen, typical Tswana and sometimes getting it wrong.

There remains a stereotypical view – maybe more an unstated assumption in many disciplines – that Later Iron Age societies were bounded, small or smallish in scale, exhibiting particular clusters of cultural traits and markers of material culture, and assuming a relatively cyclical or static character. There is also a tendency for specialists in whatever discipline to focus on particular tribes, particular places, or sites, and not see them in their broader perspective – I myself must plead guilty to this charge. However, there is a growing tendency now, I believe, to place local studies within a wider context, though I also believe that this has not gone far enough. Even so I think we may well be on the brink of a major shift in our intellectual agenda and our understanding of the past.

It is becoming increasingly clear that much of the interior of South Africa – let us confine ourselves to the old Transvaal for the moment – was in a ferment from 1600 at least, which is not so long after the Later Iron Age epoch began. A variety of events such as major drought like that of 1720, along with initiatives in the field of mining or trade, were producing a swirl of movement in the interior. One example of these was the movement of so-called Ndebele west across the Drakensberg from the more densely settled areas (by Later Iron Age peoples that is) of KwaZulu-Natal. Oral traditions of a host of Sotho, Tswana and

Ndebele groups collected by Breutz, among others, reveal multiple shifts of location and intensive interaction of the groups to which they refer. Archaeology increasingly shows complex networks of interregional trade. These bound the whole area into a common sub-region with much wider horizons than our conventional assumptions tend to allow.

The central point, or perhaps the point of departure, that I believe emerges from this finding is that these societies were in a constant or repeated state of blending and mixing. There were few clearly bounded or fixed ethnic groups. The dominant picture was hybridity. Lineages of multiple origins attached themselves to and sought the patronage or protection of more powerful or dominant lineages, or at other times became detached. This is all too often obscured in histories of the pre-colonial and the associated archaeologies. Oral traditions privilege the histories of dominant/chiefly lineages and tend to project a picture of homogenous ethnic groups, but when scrutinised carefully they can reveal subsidiary traditions or even partly buried alternative versions of the core account. Archaeology likewise is prone to seek out dominant expressions of material culture and then label it as typical and relegate to the margins other kinds.

If we now shift the focus of our attention – as I think we are beginning to do – we can give appropriate consideration and attribute appropriate weight to that which has hitherto been relegated to the peripheral. Viewing our subject through this lens, and combining the strengths of archaeology and oral tradition, we can develop a significantly different and, I believe, more satisfactory picture, and perhaps even transform the face of historical archaeology of African societies in South Africa, to the extent that it exists.

I will conclude with one final observation. Students of more recent 20<sup>th</sup> century South African history are beginning to recognise how distorting familiar apartheid categories have been. Societies in many parts of South Africa have been historically much more mixed than is conventionally allowed. One achievement of apartheid is that it has successfully hidden this from view, but the very word apartheid should in fact alert us to the possibilities of the opposite. Apartheid – separation – logically assumes that something previously existed that was mixed or was in danger of mixing, which then had to be set apart, and that of course is what it did. Now if this is true

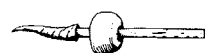
of the 20<sup>th</sup> century prior to the era of apartheid, it is even more true of the periods that preceded it, especially the period of multiple frontiers. Contact archaeology and history, to a lesser extent, presumes a dominant white culture in a contact situation, but this far from the case. What we see in the old Transvaal, for example, in the mid to late-19<sup>th</sup> century is hybridity – the movement of ideas, material culture, values across ethnic boundaries – interpenetration.

Perhaps the starkest expression of that hybridity was the coloured raiders and hunters who preceded the Great Trek by so many decades. These simply have not been the object of study or enough study by historians and archaeologists, despite the fact that their impact was seminal. The Kgatla and Ndebele are other classic examples of assimilation and acculturation. These groups are hugely important, but incredibly poorly documented in the secondary historical record and not much better by archaeologists. It seems obvious to me that this theme of mixing pushes deep back into South Africa's history. Geoff Blundell's historical rock art study of the Elliot region offers clues as to how to trace this back into a much earlier period of contact between San, Khoi and early Later Iron Age societies. Such work must be broadened to other areas. We still know for example next to nothing about evolving relationships between early and later Iron Age groups.

All this, of course, is all too singularly appropriate to the values and the political agenda of post-1994 South Africa and such a convergence should immediately sound warning bells of sliding into an alternative form of political correctness to that which functioned under apartheid. The way forward for historical archaeology, it seems to me, must be to continually problematise and contest. The notion of hybridity, of which I make so much play, itself needs to be carefully unpacked and interrogated and not simply instated in the place of cultural homogeneity. Hybridity connotes instability. Hybridity typically arises in contexts of flux. Hybridity can not be considered a constant but implies change and instability. Hybridity may be recurrent, but particular combinations of diverse cultural components cannot be viewed as stable or enduring.

The challenge facing historical archaeology is therefore to understand the balance of hybridity and homogeneity, the traffic, the movement between these two poles. This presumably varies

from time to time and place to place. It seems quite conceivable that a cultural drift occurs from hybridity to homogeneity, perhaps typically, perhaps over distinct and specific spaces of time, and probably periodically punctured by new infusions of hybridity from elsewhere. It undoubtedly shifts according to the scale of unit that the historical archaeologist is considering. Oral histories identify sites associated with leading lineages and core identities, but also often offer more fragmentary and partly hidden clues about fluidity and cultural diversity. Archaeology now needs to make more systematic use of these clues, these hints, these identifications offered by oral history, and to develop techniques through which to explain the drift, the shift in balance, the changing internal dynamics between hybridity and homogeneity. This will probably require more focussed and smaller-scale studies – and naturally more resources. We will then be able to begin to answer some of the burning questions of our pasts.



## ARCHAEOLOGY IN BRIEF

### **Tomb of King Edward the Confessor pinpointed**

The ancient tomb of Edward the Confessor, one of the most revered of British saints, has been discovered under Westminster Abbey 1 000 years after his birth. The original burial chamber of the Anglo-Saxon king, who died in 1066, months before the invasion of William the Conqueror, was revealed by archaeologists using the latest radar technology. A number of other royal tombs dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries were also discovered beneath the abbey, the venue for nearly all coronations since 1066. The forgotten, subterranean chambers were located during conservation work on the abbey's medieval Cosmati mosaic pavement around the high altar.

*The Telegraph, 2 December 2005*

### **Amazons fought for Britain's Roman army**

Confirmation that the remains of two women found in a Cumbrian cemetery are those of warriors serving with Britain's Roman army have astonished archaeologists since there has been no previous evidence of women having served in that army. The women are thought to have come from the Danube region of Eastern Europe, which was where the ancient Greeks said the fearsome Amazon warriors could be found. Believed to have died some time between AD 220 and 300, the soldiers were burnt on pyres upon which were placed their horses and military equipment. The women are believed to have been part of the *numerii*, a Roman irregular unit, which would have been attached to a legion serving in Britain.

*Timesonline, December 2004*

# DIGGING THE GREAT TREK

Joanna Behrens

## The Great Trek: Historiographical legacies

All nations harbour historical traditions, pivotal moments and key characters that are held up as decisive to the country's larger chronicle. In South Africa, 'The Great Trek' exemplifies such convention and recounts the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century migration of thousands of Voortrekkers from the eastern Cape Colony into Natal and the inland territories (Fig 1). Although the exodus is widely touted as one of South Africa's 'central events' (Etherington 2001), historical understandings boomeranged for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century between competing narratives. In 'traditional' accounts, the 'spirit' of the trek was traced to the semi-nomadic *veeboers*, or wandering farmers, who had traversed the landscape of the Cape Colony from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. This independent lifestyle was believed to have fostered a deep connection to the land and a rugged individualism that in more extreme accounts was held as innate, a 'condition of the blood', that inspired a perennial restlessness (e.g. Oliver Ransford; Johannes Meintjies).

Importantly, the pursuit of land was conceptualised as peaceful in intent and as part of a wider Christian charge that took the light of civilisation into the wilderness of Africa. This quest became critical to the nationalist rhetoric of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that justified South Africa's racial system as divinely sanctioned. Such opinions, of course, did not go unchallenged and were countered, from the first, by 'liberal', predominantly English-speaking historians (e.g. WM Macmillan, CW DeKiewiet). For these scholars, the interpretative starting place problematised rather than accepted social hierarchies, and was concerned, specifically, with uncovering the historical origins of racial exclusion. These were traced to the borders of the Cape Colony where, instead of yielding in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to progressive European forces, they escaped northward, under the guise of trek parties. In these versions the Great Trek was viewed not as a civilising mission, but as a desperate flight from advancing intellectual tides. The result was an

irrevocable slide towards degeneracy. It was thus the isolation of the frontier that bred the problems of racial prejudice by supporting an insular, backward people out of step with modern times.

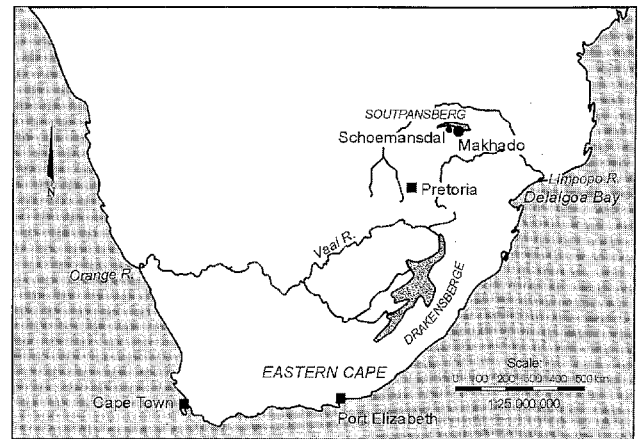


Fig 1: Regional map

Although beginning and ending in very different places, both traditional and liberal scholars produced histories of South Africa in which the Great Trek and the northern frontier assumed a central position, intricately bound up with racial hierarchies. In both schools, moreover, there was a reductive tendency to focus on cause and consequence, with matters of process customarily sidelined into the colourful vignettes that, for so many years, littered school textbooks and popular understandings. This 'frontier mentality' capsized in the 1970s with the emergence of a new, radical school of thinking. Stirred by political movements across the African continent, revisionist scholars began to question old agendas and assumptions. In a landmark paper, Martin Legassick (1980) showed how the traditions of frontier thinking had profoundly stultified understandings of South African history. Attacking the idea of the frontier as an isolated cradle of racial prejudice, Legassick argued that the frontier represented a zone of inclusion *and* exclusion, a place where relationships were characterised by both co-operation and conflict (1980:68). The implication was that the origins of the racial order needed to be re-conceptualised and sought in places other than the frontier.

The effect of these realisations was twofold. First, unprecedented attention was turned to the

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industrial revolution of the later 19<sup>th</sup> century and its effects on indigenous African communities (Marks & Rathbone 1982). Second, frontier studies expanded in scale and altered in scope as researchers responded to the gaps in histories of indigenous groups and undertook a number of pioneering studies (e.g. Philip Bonner; Peter Delius). While such works redressed imbalances, they also signalled a significant shift in South African historiography: the Great Trek, propelled centre-stage in traditional and liberal accounts of the past, now became relegated to the wings of radical histories. Although there were important political and epistemological reasons for this, the net result was a *general* neglect of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century interior and of 'White', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' histories (du Bruyn 1997). Amidst such disregard, stereotypes have persisted, with some contemporary scholars relegating early trekker communities to a state of insular backwardness (du Toit 1983; Peires 1989). Caught between fervency and rebuke, the daily lives of trekkers have contracted to stale political narratives in which social and economic facets remain curiously homogenised.

The point should not be overstated for, where trekkers have featured in revisionist writings, important steps have been taken to restore complexity, but, in general, this work has signalled possibilities rather than provided comprehensive answers. A number of reasons account for this: the fact that trekkers have usually appeared in studies that hold African communities as the primary focus; or the fact that the Marxist, class-driven approach of many radical scholars did not always stop to examine the diversity within early 19<sup>th</sup> century communities; or perhaps because of the continued fascination with questions of race

and the associated tendency to view South African history in terms of 'black' and 'white' blocks. While Legassick's critique of the frontier tradition did draw attention to the importance of margins and the interactions played out in these social spaces, a sense of discrete, if not wholly bounded, groups has remained in place, at least for trekker communities. The great value of revisionist discussions though is that they have shed new light on previously unexplored processes and have drawn attention to the remarkable degree of social fluidity *within* groups. In so doing, they have built a framework within which it becomes possible to re-imagine the Great Trek

### The Great Trek: Archaeological investigations

To pursue an investigation of the Great Trek against a backdrop of such rich and varied scholarship is, of course, no small undertaking. Archaeological efforts draw inspiration from Samuel & Thompson's (1990:29) discussion of historical myth, in which they recommend the treatment of histories, however grand, as 'arguments created by people in particular conditions'. The key perhaps, as du Toit & Giliomee (1983:20) remind us, is that however 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars have chosen to relate the event, the greatest impact of the trek was manifest in the daily lives of the participants, a scale of analysis fortuitously suited to archaeological investigation. Most trekkers, after all, probably did not see themselves as players in a 'central event' and left behind little in the way of personal documents. All trekkers, however, did leave an archaeological legacy – material objects that were carried into the interior or acquired subsequently – and, as James Deetz (1977) has shown, it is from such 'small things' that alternative histories can be written.

Practically, of course, we cannot dig the Great Trek at the level of a synthesised event, but instead must choose a place on the landscape from which to refract outwards. While many of the early trekker settlements are lost beneath ploughed fields or the edifices of modern cities, there is one extraordinary exception: a village known historically as Schoemansdal (Figs 1 and 2) in the far north of the country. The genesis of this community lay in the commercial ambitions of the recalcitrant trek leader Hendrik Potgieter, who founded Schoemansdal in 1848 at the nexus of the trans-Limpopo and Portuguese-controlled east-coast trade. Depicted as a *maat-skappy*, or company, which preserved the characteristics of patriarchal rule and lived high

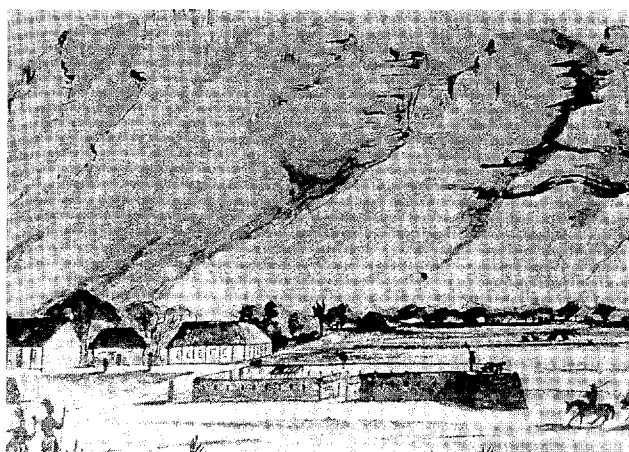


Fig 2: A sketch of Schoemansdal by Alexander Struben, a visiting hunter-trader



on the lucrative trade in ivory and slaves, the community, in fact, was riven by internal political conflicts, and complicated, demographically, by indentured servants and the traffic of hunters, traders and adventurers. Separated from the closest European neighbours by a distance of more than 360 km, residents also became intricately connected with various regional polities. In 1867 the strains inherent in these relationships forced the evacuation of the village (Wagner 1980; Boeyens 1994). Subsequently sacked, the area was never resettled and preserves a unique opportunity for archaeological investigation.



Fig 3: Unisa students excavating at Schoemansdal, July 2005 (photo by Jan Boeyens)

Current research, which is oriented around questions of socio-economic diversity, adopts a scale of analysis that moves away from the traditions of sweeping synthesis towards an engagement with the vagaries of domestic life on a frontier. This work builds upon excavations conducted at Schoemansdal in the 1980s and early 1990s, which was focused on the main community structures, specifically the redoubt, church and parsonage (Miller 1993). New excavations are targeting yard areas in order to obtain samples that can be linked to individual households or properties (Fig 3). This material, when analysed in tandem with that recovered from the community areas, will permit insight into differential consumption practices while expanding our historical understandings of the village's cultural economy. These are matters that go to the heart of domestic economies and social regulation. Perhaps more importantly, however, the investigations will facilitate an understanding of the Great Trek as a local, lived process. As Johannes du Bruyn (1997:137) wrote: 'It would be a pity ... if these remarkably enterprising and, oft-

en, eccentric frontier figures, both African and Boer, were to be ignored because they have been saddled with historians' racial theories and obsessions.'

#### Acknowledgements

My thanks to archaeologists at Unisa, UP and UCT for their support, to Sidney Miller for sharing with me his knowledge of Schoemansdal, to Laura Steyn who produced Fig 1, and to participants in Unisa's 2005 field excursion. Research at Schoemansdal is funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (Grant # 7181) and by the Trans-Vaal Branch of the South African Archaeological Society.

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**Gangrene felled King Tut.** After consultations with Italian and Swiss experts, Egyptian scientists have finally lifted the veil of mystery surrounding famed pharaoh Tutankhamun's death, saying he died of a swift attack of gangrene after breaking his leg. 'The fracture was not sustained during the mummification process or as a result of some damage to the mummy as claimed by (discoverer) Howard Carter,' according to Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities. 'The Egyptian scientists found no evidence that he had been struck in the head.'

AFP, 11 May 2005



# WHO REALLY OCCUPIED VLERMUISGAT IN THE NORTHERN CAPE? AN INTRODUCTION

Isabelle Parsons

Vlermuisgat (Fig. 1), a prominent cave in the Carnarvon District, Northern Cape, was first described by Jalmar and Lone Rudner (1968) in a publication on the distribution of rock art sites in the drier, western part of southern Africa. Generally speaking there are few caves in the Northern Cape landscape and this is particularly so in the Upper Karoo region. It may therefore be safely assumed that this easily accessible cave of approximately 6 m x 12 m would have attracted human attention in prehistoric times. Vlermuisgat is situated in a south-facing sandstone, siltstone and shale cliff adjacent to a non-perennial river and was conceivably formed by water action in the past.

Red, orange and white finger paintings occur on panels in and near the mouth of the cave. These mostly consist of geometric stripes, crosses and dots (Fig. 2), a style recently attributed to Khoekhoen herders (Smith and Ouzman 2004), although an arresting depiction of what appears to be a feline also occurs (Fig. 3). Other evidence of human activity in the area takes the form of predominantly hornfels flakes and cores on the talus slope in front of the cave, mixed with flaked glass artefacts and glazed pottery shards. The cave directly overlooks two adjoining, square stonewalled kraals and a sheep dip taken to date to the colonial period.

## Current investigations

Excavations at Vlermuisgat form part of a doctoral research project currently being conducted at the University of Cambridge. This project focuses on ways of identifying prehistoric hunting and herding activities during the last 2 000 years in parts of the Northern Cape, and aims to set the results in the broader southern African context. Building upon earlier suggestions (Beaumont and Vogel 1984, 1989; Beaumont and Morris 1990; Beaumont *et al.* 1995; Parsons 2003) that socio-economic distinctions may be reflected in stone industries of the region, the current investigation largely focuses on existing Later Stone Age assemblages housed in the McGregor

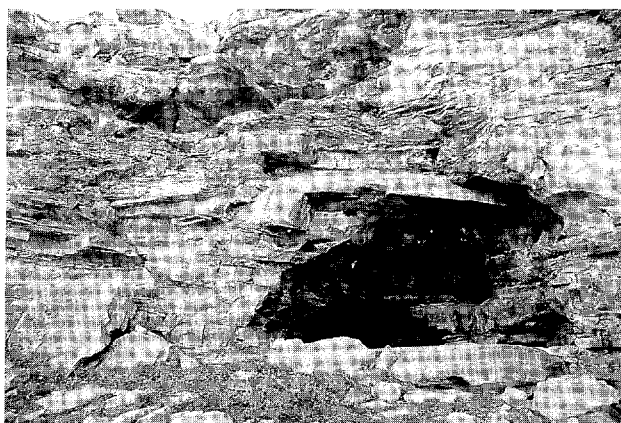


Fig. 1: Vlermuisgat, a cave site in the Upper Karoo with Later Stone Age deposits dating to the latter half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium AD

Museum, Kimberley. As these assemblages were yielded by open-air sites, the opportunity to obtain a comparative sample of lithics, excavated in association with well-preserved faunal remains and dateable material from a rare cave site, was considered ideal.

## Preliminary results

An area of 1,5 m x 0,5 m in the mouth of the cave was stratigraphically excavated (Fig. 4). The excavated deposit continued down to bedrock and consisted of several layers interspersed by four clearly identifiable hearths. A relatively small yet adequate sample of hornfels lithics, thin and burnished ceramic fragments, substantial amounts of charcoal and ostrich eggshell (OES)

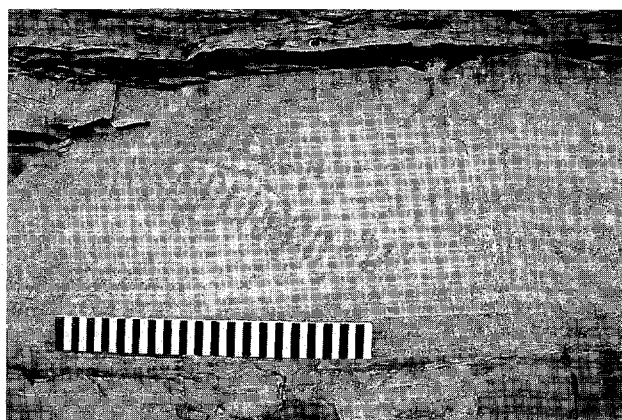


Fig. 2: Geometric finger paintings such as these occur on panels in and near the mouth of Vlermuisgat (scale in centimetres).

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fragments, and a small number of complete and incomplete OES beads were yielded by this test trench. Utilised flaked glass tools occurred in the upper portion of the deposit. Seeds, wood fragments and well-preserved identifiable faunal remains were also found. The presence of glass artefacts in an upper layer and ceramics throughout most of the deposit suggests that the site was occupied during the last 2 000 years, with the final occupation occurring after the advent of the colonial period. Indeed, three charcoal samples submitted for radiocarbon dating at the Quaternary Dating Unit (QUADRU) of the CSIR to establish a firm chronology for the site produced dates indicating occupation around the latter half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium AD.



Fig. 3: This depiction of a feline occurs on a panel close to Vlermuigat (scale in centimetres).

Preliminary results of the typological analysis of the lithic remains from Vlermuigat show remarkably low numbers of cores. This observation may very well indicate that knapping activities took place at an alternate site or simply outside the cave. Vlermuigat yielded relatively high percentages of irregular flakes and low numbers of blades and bladelets, while a decrease in formal tools occurs from the lower to upper layers. The latter may be related to the increasing availability of alternative materials, such as glass. Further investigation will, however, be required and one way of testing these tentative explanations is by increasing the sample size through further excavation. A more spatially orientated study inside the cave may also clarify this matter considerably.

Who the makers of these lithic remains were may be further elucidated by results of the faunal analysis currently being undertaken. At this early stage it is noteworthy that a wide range of bovid and non-bovid remains are present at the site, along with some fish, mussel and terrapin remains. A small number of sheep remains have also been identified from Layers 3 and 5 (EA Voigt, pers. comm.). However, the extent to which the occupants of the cave were involved in herding practices still needs further investigation.

It also needs to be borne in mind that although the rock art at Vlermuigat may well indicate the presence of prehistoric herding people, the latter would not necessarily have had any direct association with the material remains found in the cave.

The Northern Cape cultural landscape of the last 2 000 years clearly was a mosaic of fluid socio-economic lifeways as domestic animals were introduced, exploited and possibly adopted by local groups. The investigation of well-preserved sites, such as Vlermuigat, has the potential to increase our insight into the relationship between archaeological remains and socio-economic variability, and contributes to the crucial teasing apart of these issues.

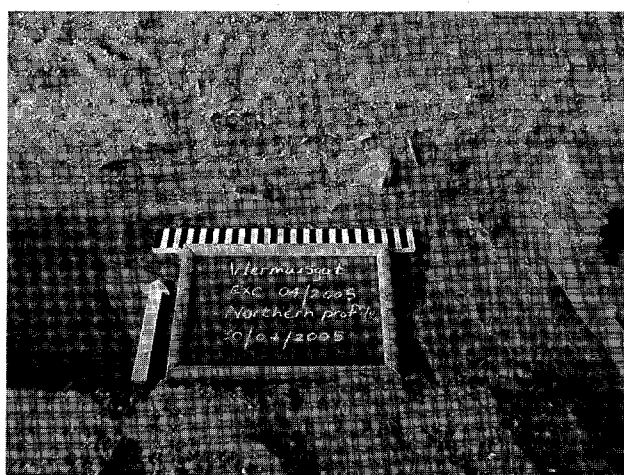


Fig. 4: The stratigraphy at Vlermuigat is visible in this photograph of the northern profile of the test excavation.

#### Acknowledgement

The South African Archaeological Society generously contributed towards the current research project in the form of a Kent Bequest grant.

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## THRILLERS AND ARCHAEOLOGY A NINTH SAMPLE

AJB Humphreys

Some 21 years ago I produced for *The Digging Stick* the first in what has turned out to be an irregularly-appearing series of lists of 'thrillers' in which archaeology and archaeologists play a prominent role. These derive from one of my own reading interests and are compiled in the hope that like-minded readers will also enjoy some of the books. As always, I only include books that are reasonably authentic (i.e. NO stories about Phoenicians in the Kalahari) and there is also the caveat that not all books are necessarily of equal literary quality or to everyone's taste. As a result of favourable comments from earlier offerings, I venture yet another list.

To begin with, the author that kicked off the series – Agatha Christie. *They Came to Baghdad* (London: Collins 1951) is not one of her typical detective novels, but more of a thriller. It concerns a major plot impacting on the post-World War II blocs – the West and the Soviet Union. Its setting provides an interesting contrast with present contestations in the area and a very different Baghdad and Basrah. A particularly absent-minded archaeologist excavating south of Baghdad plays a part in the complicated cloak and dagger action.

Moving further east, we have John Masters' *The Venus of Konpara* (London: Michael Joseph 1960), which is more a novel than an action thriller, but it does have a very authentic setting in colonial India in 1890. The leg of an ancient statue (the 'Venus' of the title) leads to archaeological investigations concerning the Dravidians and the invading Aryans around 1500 BC. Somewhat more modern is Marvin Albert's *The Last Smile* (New York: Fawcett 1988), which sees private investigator Pete Sawyer being hired to oversee the authentication of the contents of a newly discovered Etruscan tomb. Millions of dollars are involved, as are a series of shady characters, and the mission is by no means as easy as it looks. This is a better than average thriller and has good settings – Venice is particularly atmospheric.

Two high quality books are set in America. The first is Barbara Wood's *Sacred Ground* (London: Little, Brown 2001). An earthquake in California reveals the entrance to a previously unknown cave with paintings and a 2 000-year-old skeleton, as well as artefacts tracking activities focused on the cave through time. The story alternates between past and present as the events relating to the artefacts are revealed and the

story progresses. These 'time-capsules' are juxtaposed with modern attempts to identify the previous occupants of the cave so as to try to satisfy competing present-day Native American interest groups. The politics surrounding the excavation highlight the 'conflict' between archaeology and First Nation claimants. Barbara Wood is a first class writer who delivers a well-researched story with an unexpected twist at the end. She has produced other books with an archaeological component, all convincingly authentic. (One of the characters in this book has an autographed photograph of Harrison Ford inscribed 'To my favourite archaeologist. Indiana Jones!')

The second of the top rate American books is Linda Fairstein's *The Bone Vault* (London: Little, Brown 2003), which concerns the murder of a South African woman working at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. Just prior to her death she had applied for a job at the McGregor Museum in Kimberley! It is difficult to say more without giving away the plot, but suffice it to say that it raises many concerns that are current in modern South Africa. It is an excellent thriller based in the museum world – all too familiar to archaeologists – by an acclaimed author.

A classic mystery and detective story that keeps you guessing to the end is Gene Thompson's *A Cup of Death* (London: Victor Gollancz 1988). This story concerns a professor in America who finds evidence that one of the gold masks from Mycenae might be younger than the rest and could therefore genuinely be that of Agamemnon. Things are complicated when he is murdered because of a scheme to smuggle the diadem of Helen of Troy (made famous by the portrait of Sophia Schliemann wearing some of the Trojan treasures) into America for the purpose of sale.

One wonders about John Buchan's interest in archaeology. A 'bald archaeologist' makes a fleeting appearance in his classic *The Thirty Nine Steps* (1915), but archaeology features far more prominently in his *John Macnab* (London: Penguin 1956 [originally 1925]). This book details the adventures of three leading London dignitaries who, finding themselves bored with life, decide to take on the character of 'John Macnab' and challenge three landholders in Scotland to catch 'him' poaching on their property. One of the targets is an archaeologist attempting to locate the remains of Harald Blacktooth, one of the first Norsemen to travel to America. The archaeologist finds some material remains that will, according to him, 'awake an interest among the learned not less than Schliemann's discoveries at Mycenae.' The effect is somewhat spoilt, however, by the fact that

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gold objects are carried around in sacks and then strewn on the lawn by his 'henchmen'! The story does not move at break-neck speed, but it is intriguing and entertaining.

*The Mummy* (London: Severn House 1988), edited by Peter Haining, is a collection of 16 short stories that, given the theme, have an appropriate thriller element. Three of the contributors add an additional interest. Edgar Allan Poe, the acknowledged father of detective literature, provides the first story. Arthur Conan Doyle, who, apart from the Sherlock Holmes canon and many other books and stories, produced two Ancient Egyptian short stories, is also represented. A passing, but not very well informed, interest in archaeology is reflected in some of Conan Doyle's works. Indeed, this interest has led to him being one of the many accused of being responsible for the Piltdown forgery. The third author of interest is Dennis Wheatley, who, after a visit to Egypt, was inspired to write not only this short story but also the full-length book *The Quest of Julian Day* (1939), which featured in one of the earlier 'Thrillers and Archaeology' lists.

I should like to conclude this list by thanking David Morris for drawing my attention to *The Bone Vault* and several other books that are turning out to be 'archaeological' in more ways than one. So, on that note, back to the trenches!

## The Maleoskop Archaeological Project

[Continued from page 2]

During August 2005 the foundation of the church building was exposed completely. Both the extent of the building and related structures, such as the western stone steps that lead into the church, the liturgical platform and the position of the southern entrance door, were established. A serious problem that remains is an apparent discrepancy between the drawings by Wange-mann (1867) and the diary inscriptions of the missionaries (1864) in relation to existing buildings. Hopefully this will be solved when the archives of the missionary society in Berlin are visited during 2006. A fascinating but intriguing find in the church was an ox chain buried under the floor in front of the liturgical platform (on the western side). No satisfactory explanation has yet been found for this.

A series of shovel test pits in the area where the missionary house was situated has yielded a fair indication of where the ash midden of the mission station may be situated. This feature will be further investigated in the near future.

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# STRIPES AS SYMBOLIC WOUNDS IN ROCK PAINTINGS OF THERIANTHROPE IN LESOTHO?

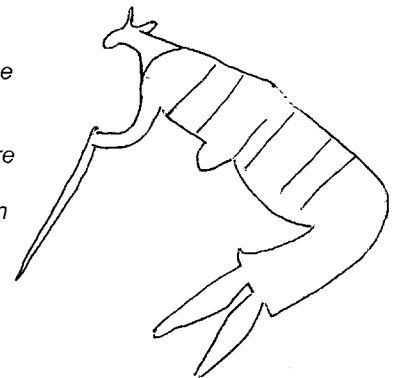
Francis Thackeray

A rock painting at Libesoaneng shelter in Lesotho, recorded by Smits (1973) and reproduced in colour by Lewis-Williams (2003, Fig. 17), includes at least eight forward-bending therianthropes with animal heads. The figures have human limbs and are shown carrying sticks. One example is shown in Fig. 1. These therianthropes are remarkably similar to others depicted at the Melikane cave, situated 8 km to the south. That cave was visited by J Orpen in December 1873 and the paintings were interpreted by an informant named Qing. Orpen's paintings were shown to the San informants in Cape Town being interviewed by WHI Bleek. The valuable ethnographic data thus obtained, including reference to the antelope-headed figures as people who had 'died', 'at the same time as the elands', reflect concepts associated with trance experiences of 'medicine-men' or shamans, as recognised by Lewis-Williams (1980; 2003). 'Death' was a metaphorical reference to trance, during which a medicine-man (*!gi: xa*) 'died' in ritual, when medicine-men accessed control over game.

Two of the therianthropes at Libesoaneng have stripes painted on the bodies of the images, apparently representing eland. This is of great interest in relation to a photograph of a person bending forward under the head and skin of an antelope, probably roan, recorded by WHC Taylor at Logageng in the southern Kalahari in about 1934 (Thackeray 2005). This person was described as a 'buckjumper' (Fig. 2), but unfortunately almost no other contextual information is available. However, close inspection of the photograph (now curated by the McGregor Museum in Kimberley – MMK 1421/292) reveals several stripes apparently painted on the skin of the antelope. These are potentially identifiable with symbolic wounds and may be comparable to stripes painted on the bodies of therianthropes in the Libesoaneng painting (Fig. 1).

How should such stripes be interpreted? One possibility is that they relate to concepts associated not only with the metaphorical or symbolic 'death' of medicine-men in trance states, but also to the symbolic death of hunters in rituals associated with the principle of sympathetic hunting magic, as suggested by Thackeray (2005). As recorded by Lichtenstein (1815), rituals were performed by hunters, one of whom took on the form of an animal and was symbolically wounded in the belief that this would contribute to success in a forthcoming hunt. It would seem that rituals of this kind may have

Fig. 1: A therianthrope at Libesoaneng in Lesotho showing a forward-bending figure with antelope head and horns, but human legs. The skin of the antelope has painted stripes on the body.



contributed to beliefs associated with Melikane and Libesoaneng therianthropes, recognising that the 'buckjumper' at Logageng was associated with the use of a head and skin of an antelope with stripes that may have represented wounds.

Fig. 2: A sketch based on a photograph of a 'buck-jumper', a person under the head and skin of an antelope recorded in about 1934 at Logageng on the southern margin of the Kalahari (Thackeray 2005). The skin of the antelope has at least three artificial stripes, apparently painted.



Roan and eland may have been analogous animals in rituals in prehistory. When an informant referred to the Melikane therianthropes as 'men with rhebok heads', he may have been thinking of rituals that involved the use of rhebok skins, although the original artist responsible for the Melikane therianthropes may have intended to represent eland.

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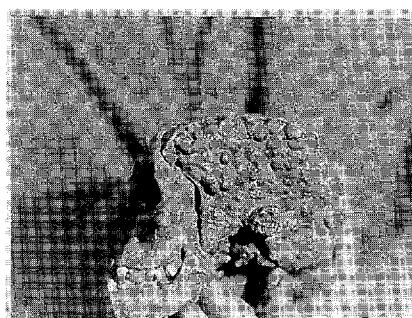
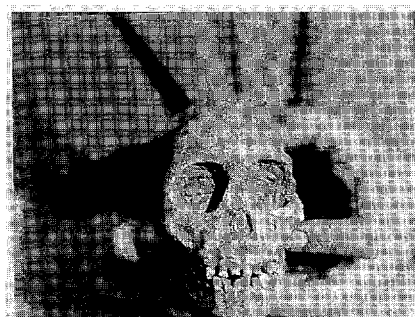
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## TWO EARLY PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE TAUNG SKULL

Goran Štrkalj

The year 2005 marks the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Raymond Dart's announcement in 1925 of the discovery of the *Australopithecus africanus* – the Taung Skull. This discovery proved to be one of the most important and, at the same time, one of the most controversial events in the history of palaeoanthropology as Dart's interpretation of the fossil was generally accepted only a quarter of a century later.



The Central Records Office (Archives) of the University of the Witwatersrand hosts Raymond Dart's papers, including many historical materials concerning the discovery of *Australopithecus* (Štrkalj et al 2005). Among these are the two early photographs of the Taung fossil shown here. The photographer is not known, nor is the exact date the photographs were taken. The associated archival material suggests that they were shot towards the end of 1924 or at the beginning of 1925. The person holding the skull is Raymond Dart himself. This becomes clear when the two photographs are compared with a third one taken at the same time. The latter photograph was recently published in Dart's biography (Wheelhouse and Smithford 2001) and shows him in full view holding the skull. Comparing the details of the three photographs leaves no doubt that they show the same person.

It is possible that these images are the first photographs of the famous fossil. They were never published, probably because of their rather poor quality. They were, however, kept in the family

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collection as mementos of one of the most important events in Raymond Dart's life. After the death of the scientist, the photographs, together with other historical materials in the Dart family's possession, were moved to the Archives of the University of the Witwatersrand.

### Acknowledgement

My thanks go to Mr Marius Cotzee of the Central Records Office, University of the Witwatersrand, for his permission to publish the photographs.

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## SKULL OF ANCIENT EUROPEAN

The skull of the most ancient man in Europe is claimed to have been discovered in Dmanisi, Eastern Georgia. Preliminary reports date the skull to about 1,8 million years old. The skull has only been partially uncovered. Georgians believe that this provides additional proof that Dmanisi was the place of settlement for the first Europeans. *RIA Novosti*, 5 August 2005

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## PHILLIP TOBIAS AT 80 AS ACTIVE AS EVER

South Africa's eminent scientist, Prof. Phillip Tobias, celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in August, but his enthusiasm for his life-long anthropological work has hardly abated. He continues to research, to supervise the work of students (over 10 000 by now) and to publish. In fact, the first volume of his autobiography, *Into the Past: A Memoir*, became available just a few weeks after his birthday.

Phillip Tobias has been a strong supporter of the South African Archaeological Society, in particular the Trans-Vaal Branch, from the time of the inaugural meeting of the 'Johannesburg Centre' on 12 September 1945. In his letter below, Prof. Tobias proudly recalls becoming a Junior Associate Member immediately upon the founding of the branch (thereby correcting an erroneous statement contained in *The Digging Stick* of August 2005).

Tobias is renowned world-wide for his meticulous work in the fields of genetics, fossils and early human origins, especially the evolutionary links between primates and early humans, and the evolution of human speech. He has published more than 1 000 books, academic articles and treatises in an amazingly prolific career. He retired as head of Wits University's anatomy department 15 years ago, but remains an honorary research fellow. In recent years he has headed up the team that discovered the 3 million-year-old hominid Little Foot at Sterkfontein.

He was drawn into the study of fossils by Mary and Louis Leaky, who asked him to write and publish a description of a hominid skull they had discovered in the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania. Subsequently, he brought what scientists say is a unique perspective to the study of human evolution by combining an understanding of genetics with paleoanthropology in an attempt to marry the messages of the genes with the messages of the fossils. Phillip Tobias was honoured at the recent opening of the new Sterkfontein Caves Orientation Centre by the dedication of the centre to him as a surprise to mark his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was lauded for his enormous contribution to and passion for this and the nearby Maropeng paleoanthropological project, which was opened shortly thereafter.

(With acknowledgement to *Business Day*)

### PROUD OF 60 YEARS' MEMBERSHIP

*Prof. Tobias' letter of 6 October 2005 to Jo Earle, Trans-Vaal Branch Chairman*

How very kind of you, on behalf of the ArchSoc Committee, to send me birthday greetings on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. I really do appreciate this. It was thrilling to learn that the ArchSoc is celebrating its Diamond Jubilee this month. I vividly recall the steps taken to set up the

Society in 1945. Indeed, I was among those present at the inaugural meeting. I was reminded of this by Neil Lee when he researched the early days of the Society, several years ago, and in the Minutes Book, he came across the list of names

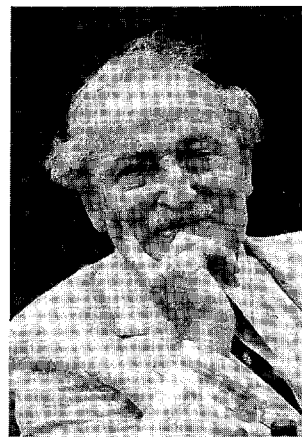
(signatures) of those who had attended and there, amongst them, he found my name. He made a photocopy of that page and sent it to me as he was very excited by it! I became a Junior Associate Member, or was it called Student Associate Member, immediately, that is about 1945 or 1946. So, if we include the category of Student Associate, I have been a member since the very beginning of the Society's Trans-Vaal Branch!

When I had studied excavation technique under 'Peter' van Riet Lowe and 'Berry' Malan of the Historical Monuments Commission (HMC) and first chairman and secretary of the Society, in their dig at Rose Cottage Cave, Ladybrand, eastern Free State, and had discovered that Mwulu's Cave had an archaeological deposit, I received a permit from the HMC to excavate Mwulu's Cave at the beginning of 1947, shortly after my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. It proved a very exciting dig with a stratified deposit yielding 3 000 stone tools being laid bare. It included the earliest signs of symbolic or artistic activity in the Middle Stone Age, in the form of a specularite pencil and an ochre pencil and other related traces, at that time the earliest signs of artistic expression available from anywhere in southern Africa or elsewhere, and probably being of the order of 100 000 years old.

My little article called 'The excavation of Mwulu's Cave, Potgietersrust [sic] district' appeared in the fourth volume of the *South African Archaeological Bulletin* published in 1949 and was noted by the editor as the first contribution by an Associate Member. As soon as I joined Raymond Dart's staff on a full-time basis in January 1951, I converted my membership to Full Membership. But I had been an Associate Member for all of five or six years before that! The little article by Janette Deacon in August 2005 issue of *The Digging Stick* was wrong in this respect, or else she had decided to ignore Junior Associate memberships. I am rather proud of the fact that I was in at the beginning and have remained on the membership roll right through to the present day.

(Professor Emeritus) Phillip V Tobias

Director, Sterkfontein Research Unit, School of Anatomical Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand





## EXCAVATIONS SUGGEST NEW HUMAN TIMELINE IN US

A wave of archaeological revisionism, fuelled in part by unfolding discoveries in South Carolina, is challenging long-held views about the first Americans. Generations of students have learned that hardy hunters crossed a land from Siberia into Alaska as the last ice age was ending 13 000 years ago and, within several centuries, had spread out across much of North and South America. But increasing evidence from archaeological excavations and new analyses of prehistoric human migrations is testing that view.

'I think we had human activity here 40 000 to 50 000 years ago,' says University of South Carolina archaeologist Albert Goodyear, who has over the last few years found signs of prehistoric toolmaking from deeper and deeper excavations along the Savannah River. 'The old ideas on New World origins are based on informed speculation and not supported by evidence,' said Smithsonian Institution archaeologist Dennis Stanford. As doubts about the 'old ideas' grow, Stanford and others at a recent conference in Columbia aired a host of emerging theories.

For a half century, archaeologists have held that the first Americans were the people who made a distinctive style of stone tools – broadly fluted, carefully crafted blades and projectile points first found near Clovis, New Mexico. Although Clovis points have since been found throughout the country, they always occur at sites generally dated to between 12 500 and 12 900 years ago, soon after the opening of an ice-free corridor through western Canada from Alaska. 'Like other archaeologists, I didn't believe there was anything earlier,' said Goodyear, 'and we didn't look for what we didn't think was there so we didn't find anything earlier.' In recent years, however, several locations along the eastern seaboard, in Central America and in southern Chile have yielded archaeological evidence, some persuasive, some disputed, that humans were widely distributed in America long before the people who developed Clovis technology.

Sites with simpler man-made tools have been unearthed in a cave at Meadowcroft, Pennsylvania, in a sand dune at Cactus Hill, Virginia, and in a riverbed in northern Florida. Radiocarbon dates place the presence of humans at those sites somewhere between 14 000 and 17 000 years ago. Spurred by such discoveries, Goodyear decided to dig deeper at his Clovis site to see if the large outcropping of flint-like chert might have attracted earlier people to the banks of the Savannah River. Over the last several years he has unearthed what may be the oldest hints yet of humans in North America – a thin strip of burned plant material that could be an ancient hearth, and chipped and flaked chert that he believes are the oldest tools ever found in North America.

Some archaeologists have attempted to explain earlier dates by suggesting that there were earlier waves of immigrants from Asia who trickled down the coast of Alaska and California, perhaps even to South America. Genetic and linguistic similarities between today's Native Americans and the people of Siberia strongly support the notion that the first Americans came from Asia. But Stanford and Exeter University archaeologists contend that archaeological evidence of Asian origins is less convincing. They say most of the prehistoric sites in eastern Siberia are younger than Clovis sites in America. Even more perplexing, they say, is that stone tools found in Siberia have little in common with finely-crafted Clovis points.

But Stanford and Exeter do maintain that Clovis technology does resemble stone tools of the Solutrian culture, which arose in southern France and northern Spain 15 000 to 20 000 years ago. Stanford said the ice age climate was so cold that Solutrian hunters in skin or wooden boats could have easily followed seals and other game along the ice front to Labrador – perhaps reaching the shores of North America by accident. His theory explains why Clovis archaeological sites in the eastern United States tend to be older than those in the western states and Alaska. However, even this theory does not explain the much older primitive tools being found in South Carolina, provided the dates are correct and the tools really are tools.

While researchers ponder where Clovis culture came from, others are trying to explain where it went. Based on the tools by which we know them, Clovis people took the country by storm in a matter of centuries, and then faded quickly from the archaeological record. Richard Firestone, a nuclear scientist at the Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, thinks that the Clovis era may literally have ended with a bang by a supernova that unleashed a rain of cosmic debris on earth about 13 000 years ago. According to him, heightened levels of radiation and microscopic magnetic spherules recovered from nine Clovis sites suggest a major impact of space debris at about that time.

Firestone's theory is not only challenged by other physicists, but also competes with more mundane explanations. Some archaeologists contend that the disappearance of big game at the end of the ice age left the hunters with nothing to hunt. Some suspect they may have failed to adapt to a changing climate, or been decimated by disease. 'The more we know, the more we realize how complex the situation is,' said University of Tennessee archaeologist David Anderson. 'It's clear that we're going to have to start thinking of the peopling of the Americas as a process, not an event.'

*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 14 November 2005*

## PHOTOGRAPHS OF 'THE LAST BUSHMAN SURVIVING IN NATAL'

Pieter Jolly

A photograph of a San man named 'Punch', who is shown standing next to a Zulu man, is published in Patricia Vinnicombe's book *People of the Eland* (1976, Fig. 7). According to Vinnicombe, the photograph of 'Punch' was taken by HCB Wylden-Brown of Weenen, KwaZulu-Natal. Vinnicombe (1976:22) writes:

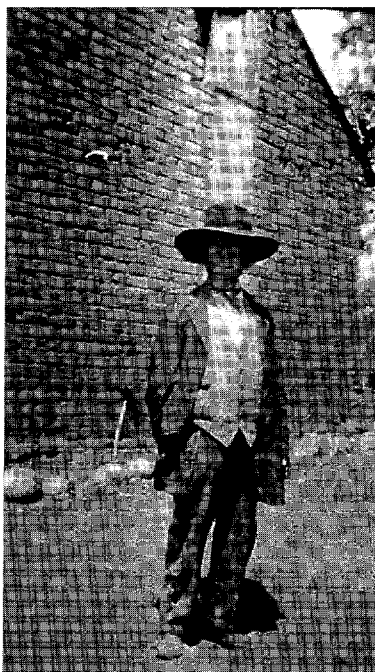
*The original of the photograph reproduced here, which was in the album of the late M.C. Burkitt of Cambridge who visited South Africa in 1927, bears no caption other than: "A Bushman – Punch – supposed to be aged 106, compared to a Zulu." The estimated age is no doubt exaggerated. Mr. Wylden-Brown's daughter, Mrs M. Runwick, remembers seeing Punch when she was a young girl in the Weenen district, but was unable to furnish any additional information.*

The photographs reproduced here are from a set of three in the Goodwin Collection, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town Libraries (BC 290, E 148-150). They show a very short man with Khoesan features who is dressed in European clothing. In two of the photographs he is shown standing next to unknown European people. Looking at the photographs, it is clear that the San man shown in them is the same person as the man in the photograph from Burkitt's album.

The photographs in the Goodwin Collection were sent to John Goodwin in 1937 by WF Bushell, who lived in Birkenhead, England. The relevant sections of Bushell's accompanying letter read as follows:

*Here are a few copies of the picture of the last Bushman surviving in Natal. The pictures are not particularly good, but they were taken by a friend and I think they are interesting. He lived at Weenen, and had the reputation of being 100 years old, though I don't suppose for a moment he was anything like that. He spoke Dutch and not English. As a small baby he had been left behind when his mother was fleeing away. I understand he died 3-4 years ago. ... His height was about (four feet, five and three quarter inches).*

Bushell's letter and the photographs he sent to Good-



win provide additional context to Burkitt's photograph and throw further light on one of the last San people known to be living in present-day KwaZulu-Natal.

### Acknowledgements

I thank the Librarian, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town Libraries, for permission to reproduce the photographs.

### Reference

Vinnicombe, P. 1976. *People of the Eland: Rock paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a reflection of their life and thought*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN BRIEF

**China finds grandest palace gate.** Archaeologists have found the grand gate of the 1 300-year-old Daming Palace, the largest imperial architectural complex of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) in Xi'an in Shaanxi Province. The Danfeng Gate, or Vermillion Phoenix Gate, had five doorways, which makes it the largest imperial palace gate in Chinese history. The famous Tian'anmen in Beijing, a gate outside the palace of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, also has five doorways, but archaeologists do not classify it as a palace gate. Historical documents show that the Danfeng Gate, built in 662, was the main gate for Tang emperors to exit and enter the palace. An arch with a high tower over the gate was used by emperors for important ceremonies. The palace was abandoned after the capital was moved to Luoyang in Henan Province in 904.

*Xinhuanet, 3 December 2005*

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### Memorable record of places special to the San

Foster, Craig and Deacon, Janette. 2005. *My Heart Stands in the Hill*. Cape Town: Struik. Hardcover, 208 pages, 198 full-colour photographs, 2 maps. Price R285 from the Trans-Vaal Branch: [www.archaeology.org.za](http://www.archaeology.org.za).

I always thought that one was asked to review a book if there was some familiarity with the subject and I was therefore intrigued to read in *The Star* of 3 November the comments of Mpho Lukoto. Although admitting to neither knowledge nor interest in the San, his interest was undoubtedly awakened by reading the book. That would seem credit enough.

*My Heart Stands in the Hill* has photo images of San superimposed on rocks, trees and landscapes. My first reaction was that this was contrived, but the sincerity of the text and magnificent photographs have made for a totally unique concept. Archaeologist and well-published author Janette Deacon's knowledge and empathy are unquestionable. Photographer Craig Foster, an award-winning filmmaker who has won international acclaim for two films on the Bushmen, has had the experience of living with San and has experimented with and experienced trance with them. He seems to have skilfully conveyed these experiences into photographic images. Together, Deacon and Foster have achieved not only a memorable record of the places so special to the San who lived there before their imprisonment in the Breakwater Prison, but have managed to make those engravings, those places of power, speak to our spirit too.

I liked the use of copies of the archival Bleek journals on the inside cover pages. We have read of them, but few have actually seen the famous notebooks. I also salute the researchers who have had to work with that spidery script. Deacon's research from those documents and sketches to the actual geographic placing of the living sites of the Breakwater Bushmen is quite amazing. To accomplish this took many physical journeys, undertaken over many years. Farmers and locals were interviewed and we can now see the remarkable results in the book's photographic images of the actual landscapes – the dolerite-boulder-littered koppies between Kenhardt and Van Wyksvlei.

We are given insights into San plant use, the eating of ant crystalids – a sweet delicacy, and the cosmetic and ritual use of specularite and ochre. Entoptics are depicted and suggestions are made as to the inspiration behind them. An historically interesting photograph is included of an elderly San woman posing to demonstrate the use of the digging stick. Perhaps the most appropriate conclusion to the project was the reaction of a group of San descendants to slides shown to them of the Bleek /Xam Bushmen. These were projected onto a screen in the veld, symbolically

'into' the veld in their area. The group watching felt it was a powerful reminder and an honour that their ancestors had been 'returned' to the landscape 150 years after their eviction.

For me there are two minor irritations. Captions for a number of the photographs are on following or preceding pages and I would like to have had the pronunciation aid at the beginning of the book, and perhaps even with the first appearance of a particular click in the text.

*Reviewed by Lilith Wynne*

### A story of life that is almost continuous

McCarthy, Terence and Rubidge, Bruce (eds). 2005. *The Story of Earth and Life*. Cape Town: Struik. Softcover, 360 pp, full-colour. Price R180 from the Trans-Vaal Branch.

South Africa, like no other country in the world, has a record of the story of life that is almost continuous. The story is contained within the rocks of the country, stretching from those in the Barberton Mountain Land and central Kaapvaal Craton to those in the Witwatersrand Basin and the Vredefort Dome. The oldest fossil-bearing rocks on Earth are found in this region and these 'time capsules' have provided the oldest evidence of life, of multi-celled animals, of the earliest land-living plants and of the most complete record of the early ancestry of reptiles and mammals. In addition, South Africa has a remarkable record of human origins and technology and cultural development. Prof. Bruce Rubidge, director of the 60-year-old Bernard Price Institute for Palaeontological Research at Wits University, and Spike McCarthy, professor of mineral geochemistry at Wits' School of Geosciences, have pulled the whole story together superbly in *The Story of Earth and Life*, from the start of its geological history 3,6 billion years ago to the present.

### A remarkable impact

Reimold, Uwe and Gibson, Roger. *Meteorite Impact! The danger from space and South Africa's mega-impact: the Vredefort Structure*. Johannesburg: Chris van Rensburg Publications. Softcover, 320 pp, over 200 colour photographs, maps and diagrams. Price R220 from the Trans-Vaal Branch: [www.archaeology.org.za](http://www.archaeology.org.za).

Just over two billion years ago, a mountain-sized asteroid or comet struck Earth in central South Africa and resulted in an exceptionally violent event. Evidence of this single greatest geological catastrophe yet uncovered on Earth abounds in the rocks of the Vredefort Dome, the spectacular ring of hills straddling the Vaal River. The story of this event, as well as its causes and its results, is recounted by Uwe Reimold and Roger Gibson of the Impact Cratering

Research Group of the School of Geosciences, Wits University. Their book investigates how the rock exposed by the violence of the impact and by aeons of erosion presents one of the most continuous records of the early evolution of Earth. But it also documents the area's rich geological, archaeological, cultural and botanical heritage. The Vredefort Dome, a National Heritage Site, has been home to humans for more than 200 000 years, including the Bushman and Sotho-Tswana, Afrikaner and British farmers. Anton Pelser of the National Cultural History Museum and Kevin Balkwill of Wits' School of Animal, Plant and Environmental Sciences cover these aspects in the book.



## WORLD MONUMENTS FUND

*The World Monuments Fund (www.wmf.org) claims to be the foremost private non-profit organisation dedicated to the preservation of historic art and architecture world-wide through fieldwork, advocacy, grants, education and training. Since 1965, the WMF has worked with local communities and partners to stem the loss of more than 400 irreplaceable sites around the world. The WMF annually produces a watch list of the 100 Most Endangered Sites. Some of the sites in Africa will be featured in The Digging Stick from time to time. A brief overview of one of the sites follows.*

### Mtwapa Heritage Site, Kilifi, Mtwapa, Kenya

With its monumental architecture, vast architectural remains, abundant wildlife and idyllic location, the ancient port of Mtwapa 25 km north of Mombasa is one of the most important sites on Kenya's Swahili Coast. Occupied between 1100 and 1750, the site covers some 8 ha. Its remains provide an important window on the evolution of town planning and the commercial development of coastal Kenya.

Since the site's abandonment, its perimeter wall has cracked in numerous places and is on the verge of complete collapse. Coral used in the construction of building walls has suffered from exposure to the elements, a situation aggravated by growth of moss. Perhaps the greatest threat to the site, however, is real estate development, as Mtwapa has become one of Kenya's fastest growing beach resort areas.



The National Museums of Kenya has sent four officers to the site to protect its remains and prepared a preliminary management plan, which includes fencing of the site, vegetation removal and documentation of its remains. Resources for the plan's implementation, however, have been limited to non-existent.



## NOTICES

### Society Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given in terms of section 8(a)(i) and (ii) of the Constitution that the Annual General Meeting of the South African Archaeological Society will be hosted by the Trans-Vaal Branch at Roedean School, 35 Princess of Wales Terrace, Parktown, Johannesburg, on 11 May 2006 at 19:30.

Members should submit items for the Agenda in writing to the Secretary, PO Box 15700, Vlaeberg, 8018, before 1 March 2006. Proposals must state in specific terms the resolution to be put to the meeting and the reasons therefor.

*Janette Deacon, Honorary Secretary*

### Membership rates for 2006

The 2006 membership fees of the South African Archaeological Society are now due. The rates for 2006 are as follows:

- ☐ Ordinary Member (Single): R150
- ☐ Joint/Family: R170
- ☐ Full-time Student\* or Pensioner: R120
- ☐ Local Institutes: R320
- ☐ Overseas Members: R320\*\*
- ☐ Overseas Institutes: R575\*\*

\* Students must provide proof of registration.

\*\*Overseas Members and Institutes must add R100 to cover bank charges.

Payment may be made by crossed cheque or postal order made payable to the South African Archaeological Society and posted together with the application form to PO Box 15700, Vlaeberg, 8018, SA.

Alternatively, a direct deposit may be made into the Society's bank account no. 07 051 0121 at Standard Bank, Cape Town, branch code 020009. Please provide name and membership number and also post or fax (+27 (0)21 481 3993) a copy of the deposit slip to the Society.

### 2006 ASAPA Biennial Meeting

The Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists will hold its 2006 Biennial Meeting from 9 to 13 April 2006 at the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria (registration on the 9<sup>th</sup>, conference from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, and post-conference tour from 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>). For details of the programme, etc. contact Johnny van Schalkwyk at tel. 012 324 6082, fax 012 328 5173 or e-mail johnny@nfi.org.za.

## ARCHAEOLOGY IN AFRICA

### Stone Age humans at Klasies often squatted

Three toe bones found at Klasies River cave reveal that humans 100 000 years ago frequently squatted, according to a paper to be published in the *Journal of Human Evolution*. The discovery suggests that Middle Stone Age humans, along with a possible human ape ancestor, already were engaged in some kind of agricultural work at this relatively early phase in human history. 'If this activity is done for long periods of time with some regularity, the (bone) surfaces that make contact become remodelled into what are called "squatting facets," which are huge on our Klasies metatarsals,' said Prof. Jeffrey Schwartz of the University of Pittsburgh.

Schwartz explained that when someone squats, 'various joints are "squeezed" together in an extreme that brings bone surfaces into contact with each other that otherwise would not.' He and his colleagues examined bones that belonged to the big toe, second toe and pinky toe of two to three Klasies River individuals. They compared the bones to those of other early humans along with data on members of existing South African populations. The big toe and second toe bones fit within the range of modern humans, although the second toe bone is on the high end of the scale because it is very large. The pinky bone, however, stands out as 'morphologically unusual in all comparisons.' Its curved, broad shaft and shape indicate to the researchers that, while it most certainly belonged to the *Homo* genus, this individual was not necessarily a modern human. Schwartz said it could represent 'something else entirely that went extinct without issue.' Philip Rightmire, lead author of the paper from Binghamton University, said: 'In my view, the Klasies people were almost modern and one hypothesis is that the South African population was evolving toward recent humans. However, it is also quite possible that the Klasies group eventually died out, without contributing to the ancestry of any living *Homo sapiens*.'

*Discovery News, 12 December 2005*

### Oldest dated evidence of cattle

Researchers have shed new light on the question of when cattle were brought to southern Africa and from where. A domestic cow bone, dated to about 2 000 years ago, excavated at Toteng in northern Botswana now provides the oldest directly-dated evidence of cattle in southern Africa. Domestic sheep bones dating to about the same age were also unearthed at the site. Historical and linguistic information suggest northern Botswana figured prominently in the arrival and dispersal of livestock in southern Africa. The new dates support this view and confirm a long-term association between people and livestock in this part

of the Kalahari. The discovery is important in the broader context of the spread of domestic livestock throughout Africa. Whereas livestock had spread into northern Kenya in East Africa by as early as 4 000 to 4 500 years ago, it took an additional 2 000 years for their eventual spread into southern Africa. This delay was largely due to the presence of the tsetse fly and diseases that kill livestock in much of the intervening area. The Toteng sites are situated near the southern edge of the tsetse fly zone.

*Current Anthropology, August/October 2005*

### Stone Age cemetery, artefacts in Sahara

Archaeologists have excavated a trove of Stone Age human skeletons and artefacts on the shores of an ancient lake in Niger's Ténéré Desert. The cemetery has one of the region's largest and best-preserved concentrations of skeletons and artefacts. Precision stone blades, harpoons, bone fishhooks, pottery and other artefacts were found in abundance in the graves. Some artefacts suggest travel and perhaps even distant trade. Tools made of pale green volcanic rock could have their source some 80 km distant in the Air Mountains, an area rich with period rock art. Some of the skeletons found in the cemetery were still adorned with jewellery. A preliminary estimate is that the area was occupied between 10 000 and 4 000 years ago by hunter-gatherers, such as the Kiffian. Large pottery and heavy grinding stones suggest the peoples may have occupied the ancient lakeside area at least semi-permanently.

*National Geographic News, 21 October 2005*

The South African Archaeological Society was founded in 1945 to promote archaeology through research, education and publication. It publishes the *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, a scientific publication of current research in southern Africa (twice a year), *The Digging Stick*, the Society's general interest newsletter (three issues per year), and occasional publications in the *Goodwin Series*.

The views of the authors are their own and the Society does not take responsibility for them.

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