

# THE DIGGING STICK

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## MUMMIFIED HUMAN REMAINS FROM THE KOUGA MOUNTAINS, EASTERN CAPE

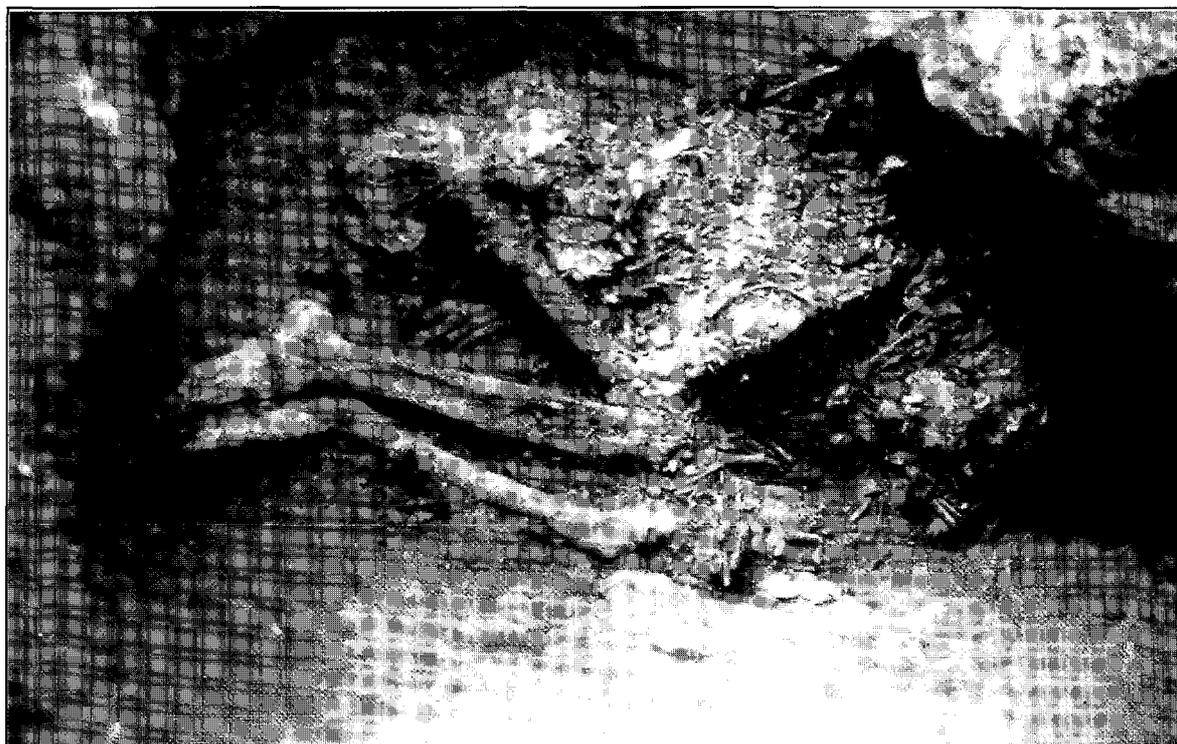
Johan Binneman

During April 1999, while I was busy with routine conservation work at a rock shelter in the Kouga Mountains near Joubertina in the Langkloof, the mummified remains of a San hunter-gatherer were discovered.

The shelter deposit was disturbed by a number of large holes, dug along almost the entire back wall. It was while cleaning up one of these holes that I found a large flat slab of stone with San paintings in yellow on it. This was the first recording of a painted stone used for marking a prehistoric grave found during controlled excavations. Before 1970 some 40 painted stones were reported mainly from the Southern and Eastern Cape coastal belt and adjacent mountains (Rudner

1971). It had been speculated that they were cover stones for burials, but unfortunately most were removed unsystematically, and little is known of their precise provenance and contexts. None of the 12 painted stones recovered from excavations since 1970 was associated with a burial, or even found close to a burial (Binneman & Hall 1992).

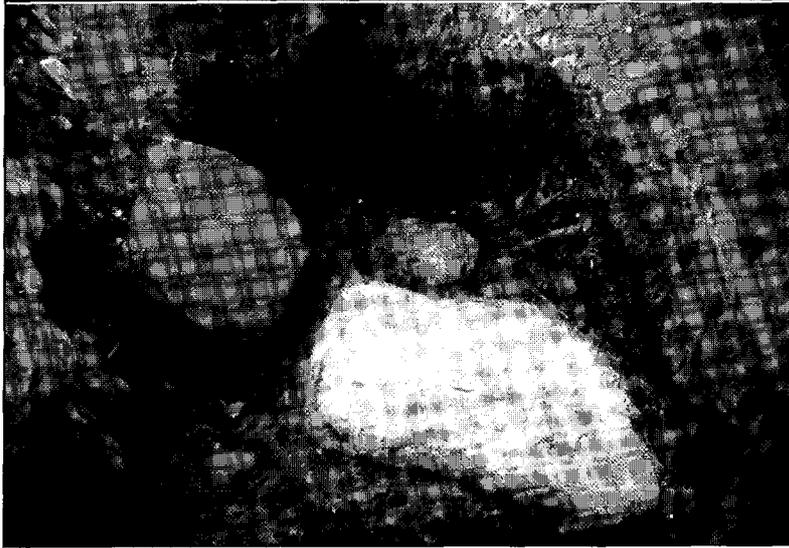
Underlying the painted stone were two layers of sticks and branches. When



Mummified burial from a cave in the Kouga Mountains

these were removed a large quantity of leaves of a medicinal plant, called *Boophone disticha* ("gifbol") became visible. This plant is widely used for a

it known as yet how much more of the skin and tissue is preserved in parts of the burial still covered with "gifbol" leaves. Bundles of geophyte, mainly *Babiana/Freezia* spp. remains, were also placed with the body, indicating that the person was buried during August or early September. Branches from the grave were radiocarbon dated to 1930 ± 20 years old.



Painted burial stone before being lifted

It would appear that the medicinal qualities of the leaves, together with the very dry condition of the deposit, were responsible for the preservation of the skin tissue.

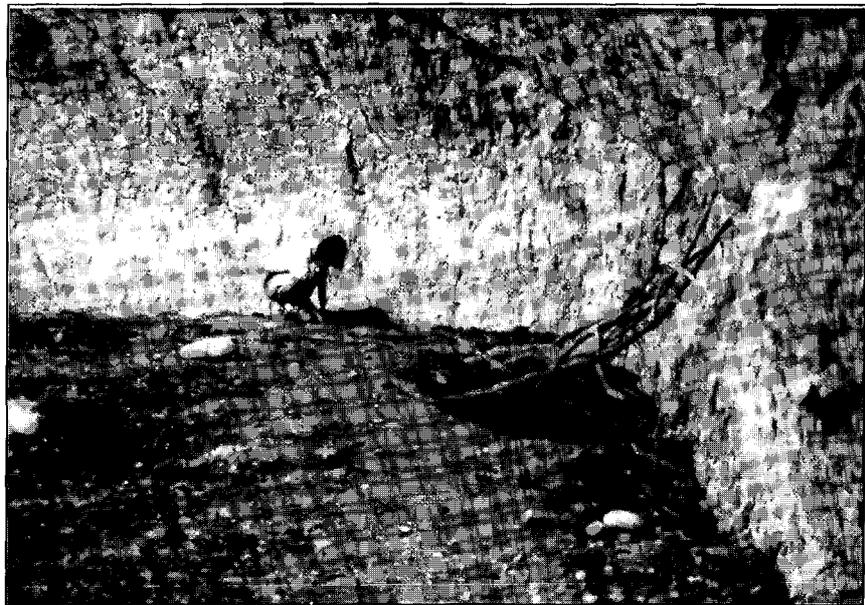
range of medicinal purposes among indigenous people.

Further careful excavation exposed the feet and lower body of a buried individual whose skin tissue was still well-preserved.

The rest of the body between the pelvis and the skull remained covered by a thick layer of "gifbol" leaves.

The burial was against the back wall of the rock shelter in a grave hollow some 0.8 metres deep. Placed in the traditional flexed position, the body lay on its left side, orientated in an easterly direction, and faced the back wall of the shelter. The individual's sex is not yet known and will only be determined once the body is examined by a team of specialists. Nor is

The body was removed *in toto* and transported to the Albany Museum with relatively little damage. A period of two years will be allowed for study,



The burial was found in the large disturbance visible in the foreground

whereafter negotiations with local communities will determine the final destiny of the remains.

Due to the sensitive nature of the find, the remains will not be displayed.

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## Further reading

Binneman, J. & Hall, S. 1993. The context of four painted stones from the Eastern Cape. *Southern African Field Archaeology* 2:89- 95.

Rudner, J. 1971. Painted burial stones from the Cape. *South African Journal of Science* 2:54-61.

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## VAL WARD RECEIVES PRESIDENT'S AWARD OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY\*

Val Ward has been awarded the President's Award of the South African Archaeological Society. Appropriately, the presentation took place in a rock shelter in KwaZulu-Natal - the kind of setting in connection with which she has done so much for archaeology and this society.

Val Ward has served the Natal Branch of the Archaeological Society for many years, and was a member of staff in the Archaeology Department of the Natal Museum.

Val's first involvement with archaeology was in 1972. Her then husband was based at the Hong Kong Medical School. "As an expatriate wife," she said, "I was not allowed to work. Afraid of being swallowed up by the lunch-tea-cocktail-dinner-party circuit I took non-degree courses at the university. 'A' for archaeology, 'B' for Birds of Hong Kong, 'C' for China, its land and its people, etc." Soon hooked on archaeology, she joined the Hong Kong Archaeological Society, which carried out research in the territory. Working as field finds supervisor and photographer, she also became secretary and editor for the Society, and workshop supervisor for the Hong Kong Museum. She wrote a monograph on *The stone adzes of Hong Kong*.



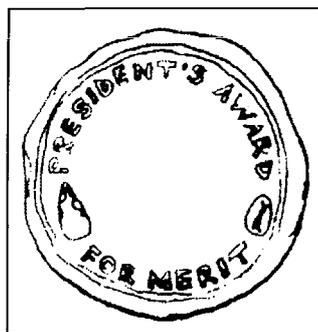
Val Ward receives her Award from Society President John Parkington during the INQUA Congress visit to Sibudu Shelter on 8 August 1999. She was on the organising committee for INQUA.

Home leave to South Africa in 1974 found her joining a Natal Museum rescue team working at the now submerged Driel Shelter on the Thukela River. When she returned to live here in 1977 she steeped herself in matters archaeological and, the following year, undertook the first phase of a major survey of Drakensberg rock art, coordinating the existing but scattered records prior to Aron Mazel's fieldwork for the project. She worked voluntarily for the Museum until 1980 when her energy and efficiency were finally rewarded with the post of technical officer in the Archaeology

Department. She remained in this post until 1998 when financial constraints at the Natal Museum forced early retirement. Typical of Val, she still contributes to the work of the Museum, as Honorary Associate and as a freelance research assistant.

In her earlier years Val Ward trained and worked as a medical technologist. She has also been actively involved in a wide variety of interests including women's and self-help groups, amateur theatre, the built and green environment, garden and tree clubs, ratepayers associations, history, genealogy, music, literature and crafts. Her first committee experience was at age 18 and she has served on committees concerned with most of her interests.

The Natal Museum Archaeology Department takes pride in the state of its collections, documentation and regional site recording system. "This is in no small measure due to the efforts of Val over two decades," the Natal Branch committee said when nominating Val Ward for the Award. "The systems she has put in place and her painstaking attention to detail have made this probably the best archaeological archive in South Africa. She has also done a great deal to assist research in areas varying from the numerous demands of fieldwork to processing and analysis of finds, drafting research reports, photography and illustration. Her contribution as a technical officer in these respects has been quite exceptional as is demonstrated by the fact that she has frequently been author or co-author of research publications from the Department. Her writing and editorial skills have long been recognised and she has been Assistant Editor of the *Natal Museum Journal of Humanities* since



1992. She is also a copy editor for the University of Natal Press. Over the years she has also rendered assistance to many archaeologists from other institutions and helped with archaeological issues such as displays and the documentation of collections in the smaller museums of the region. It is generally accepted in archaeological circles that if quick, efficient service is needed in KwaZulu-Natal, Val Ward is the person to go to."

Val Ward became involved in the organisation of the Natal Branch of the South African Archaeological Society soon after returning to Natal in 1977. For two decades she has served on the committee, and for most of this time as the hard-working secretary, assisting with treasurers' duties, and singlehandedly conducting fund raising projects. The Branch's programme of lectures, excursions and museum visits has largely been organised by her.

From 1987 to 1997 she was editor of *Gnews*, the Natal Branch newsletter. She "always managed to get it out, often with little help from us other committee members". She has also been a frequent contributor to *The Digging Stick*. From 1996 to 1998 Val Ward served as Vice President of the Society.

Val Ward is one of those special people "who are highly motivated and willing to put in long hours to curate those important aspects of our work that fall outside centre-stage, limelight archaeology."

"For more than two decades she has been a major force in support of field research, collections management, and documentation for archaeology in KwaZulu-Natal. She has contributed substantially to the spreading of

archaeological education through her work on museum displays and popular articles. She has also contributed more than any other member to the success of the Natal Branch of our Society. What could better illustrate this point than the fact that she is

currently both Chairperson and Secretary of the Natal Branch.”

\* Based on the Nomination for President's Award: Valerie F. Ward, by Natal Branch Committee and Tim Maggs.



## RIGHTS OF THE SAN

Frans Prins\*

Human Rights Day appropriately saw the handover of almost 40 000 hectares of the Kalahari to the formerly dispossessed Khomani San. The same weekend, which saw (then) Deputy President Thabo Mbeki sign a historic land restitution settlement, also witnessed another important occasion heralding the achievements of South Africa's "First People" in another part of the country.

The spectacular and world renowned San rock paintings at the renovated Main Caves in Giant's Castle were officially opened to the public. This occasion represented the first phase of a project which will ensure an effective and tourism friendly rock art management plan for the Natal Drakensberg Park.

Given the fact that the Natal Drakensberg Park has been nominated as a World Heritage Site, largely on account of the more than 500 rock painting sites known in the area, such initiatives must be welcomed.

However, in contrast with the weekend celebrations in the Kalahari, the function at Giant's Castle saw no San representatives in attendance. In fact, while the rock art of

Main Caves was displayed as an important part of our national heritage the direct descendants of the Drakensberg San were going about their normal routines as farm labourers and squatters, totally unaware of happenings in their former homeland.

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***“..While the rock art of Main Caves was displayed as an important part of our national heritage the direct descendants of the Drakensberg San were going about their normal routines as farm labourers and squatters, totally unaware of happenings in their former homeland.”***

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Unfortunately for them, they had already lost their land (the Drakensberg) during 1879, well before the 1913 cut-off date in terms of present legislation for land claims restitution. The “trek” of these Drakensberg San to the Ermelo area of the present Mpumalanga province has been well documented by Father Filter, who was then attached to the Hermannsburg Mission Station. Here in a cave they produced paintings

in a similar style to those of the Natal Drakensberg which they had to leave behind as a result of being pursued by angry white farmer commandos.

Sadly, the Drakensberg San have been forgotten in the pages of history books and their absence at the Main Caves celebration can conveniently be explained away by their assumed extinction. The fact is that there are still two viable

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communities (albeit very small in number) of Drakensberg San descendants alive today.

These communities have experienced tremendous social change since their departure from the Drakensberg now more than a century ago. However some members still have a strong emotional attachment to rock art which they regard as their only link with the past and their true identity.

The activities of government officials and "others" (vis-a-vis rock art) is regarded by them as an ongoing form of colonialism and appropriation of their very own heritage. By excluding these communities from official rock art initiatives, we are

losing wonderful opportunities truly to transform the art into a national heritage. Too often do we as museum workers and heritage officers conceive our cultural heritages only in terms of material items and "dead" collections. Less tangible aspects such as people's views, beliefs and their very existence are often overlooked in favour of an object-centred attitude. Like their relatives in the Kalahari, the rights of the San descendants of the Drakensberg also need recognition - for now access to the art of their ancestors may be all they have left.

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From a column in the *Natal Witness*, 25 March 1999.



## BETHSAIDA: IDENTITY CRISIS BIBLICAL STYLE

by Miriam Feinberg Vamosh\*

A curse is usually not the best way to sustain a relationship. On the other hand the malediction invoked by Jesus on three cities, Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin, ("Woe to you Chorazin, Woe to you, Bethsaida!" [Luke X,13]) put them on the map forever. Literally. Cursed by Jesus because they did not accept his teachings, these cities are the three points of what has become known as the "evangelical triangle", roughly twenty square kilometres in area, north of Israel's Sea of Galilee in which the New Testament says most of the miracles and teachings of Jesus took place.

Pilgrims have been visiting Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee for hundreds of years. Chorazin too, excavated and restored in recent years and now a part of Israel's National Parks system, has taken its place on Galilee itineraries. Only Bethsaida seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth.

The third most frequently mentioned city in the New Testament after Jerusalem

and Capernaum, Bethsaida began to expand in 30 CE (Common Era) just about the time Jesus began to preach in Galilee. Herod Philip, son of Herod the Great, embellished the town, naming it Julias in honour of the wife of his patron, Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus. The Apostle Peter was a native of Bethsaida, so were Andrew and Philip. According to tradition Bethsaida was also the home of fisherman

Zebedee and his sons James and John. Here Jesus healed a blind man and Luke reported that Jesus multiplied two fishes and five loaves of bread to miraculously feed five thousand people.

After the time of Jesus, Bethsaida played a part in the Great Revolt of the Jews against the Romans. In 68 CE Josephus, best known as the chronicler of that revolt, prepared to ambush the Romans there

in order to maintain control over the rebels' main supply route from the Galilee to the Golan. In his autobiography, Josephus relates that his forces lost the ensuing battle - largely because he fell off his horse. In later rabbinical writings Bethsaida - whose name means "house of food" - appears to have been a prosperous town that served as a way station for Jews plying the road between the two important centres of their life in those days after the fall of Jerusalem, Galilee and Babylonia.

By the Middle Ages, however, all trace of the city had vanished. As travel in the region became precarious, Christian pilgrims were still shown a site called Bethsaida, but on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, unlikely to have been the true location according to New Testament descriptions.

Now Bethsaida is finally back in the public eye. But like apparently everything else in Israel, it is the subject of heated debate, revolving around the city's true location.

About three kilometres from the north shore of the Sea of Galilee in the Jordan River delta stands a twenty-acre archaeological mound known as a-Tel. In 1987 archaeologist Dr. Rami Arav began to survey ancient sites in the Jordan delta, and finally focussed on a-Tel. Among other

things, he discovered that during the Iron Age (1000-586 BCE) a-Tel was surrounded by walls of unparalleled dimensions in military fortifications of the period. Eventually joining the University of Nebraska and heading up the Bethsaida Excavations Project with Dr. Richard Freund at the University of Nebraska, he and his team unearthed a residential quarter with a house they identify as a fisherman's residence because of numerous implements of the trade found within. They also discovered a winemaker's house, containing wine jars and pruning hooks. Above the city gate was a structure they believe to have been a temple dedicated to the Roman imperial cult of Julia-Livia.

The most obvious question, why a fishing village would locate itself three kilometres from the source of its livelihood instead of right on the shore, may be explained by "somewhat simple geological events", says Wendi Chiarbos, co-ordinator of the Bethsaida Excavations Project. "Landslides, flooding, subsequent erosion, as well as earthquakes, caused the swamp area between Bethsaida and the Sea of Galilee to fill in." The evidence pointing to a-Tel as the site of New Testament Bethsaida soon convinced the State of Israel to mark it as such on official maps. Funds

contributed by the Vatican and matched by the Archdiocese of Omaha, Nebraska, made possible the construction of two open-air chapels on the site. In March of 1998, a Ministry of Tourism ceremony marked the official opening of the site, the first to open in honour of the approaching Millennium, and the visitors began to arrive.

But tantalisingly, another candidate for Bethsaida has emerged not far from the official Bethsaida. The identification of this alternative site is the brainchild of the region's best-known explorer, octogenarian Mendel Nun. Though not formally educated in archaeology, Nun's intimate knowledge of every nook and cranny of the Sea of Galilee shore and of its ancient fishing traditions, gained over nearly six decades as a fisherman and member of lakeside Kibbutz Ein Gev, is legendary. Nun also believes that Bethsaida is located in the Jordan delta, but closer to the Sea of Galilee shore than a-Tel, at a site called el-Araj.

Little remains to examine at el-Araj, says Nun, because changes in the southern outlet of the lake have caused the water level to rise over the last thousand years, resulting in the obliteration of ancient fishing villages that once hugged the shore, including Bethsaida. "When the water is low, the

foundations of buildings can still be seen in the mud." He points out that surveys at el-Araj have revealed pottery of the Roman period, as well as large building blocks, carved stones and capitals, indicating the remains of a sizeable community here as opposed to a-Tel, where he says Roman-era finds are not plentiful enough to indicate a town of the size Bethsaida was. "Someone once said 'if Emperor Augustus found out that someone had named the poor city that stood on a-Tel for Bethsaida-Julias - named to honour the imperial wife - he would have order him executed'", says Yoel Ben Yosef, an aide to Nun.

Arav's response to Nun's claims is succinct: "It is not

easy to relate to these arguments because none is based on any scientific research or any reasonable data..."

Who is right? Like an ancient talmudic sage of the Galilee where he makes his home, archaeologist Yosef Stepanyk, inspector and surveyor of the eastern Galilee for the Israel Antiquities Authority answers tactfully. "They could both be right", he says. "We would need to excavate el-Araj to know for sure. The question I imagine millions of people around the world would like to answer is where is the Bethsaida of Jesus. It doesn't bother me that a-Tel has been identified as Bethsaida by the Ministry of Tourism. It

certainly has not been proven not to be. And perhaps the first-century fishing village of Bethsaida was down by the water."

Cursed and lying in ruin, Bethsaida has brought at least one modern-day blessing to the region: multitudes of new and curious visitors anxious for a look at yet another site where Jesus walked - wherever it may be.

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## CAGN AND THE BABOONS

**a tale by "Ou Coba", early twentieth century,  
as related by Helen Paton of Newlands farm near Barkly West\***

It was a wild, wet afternoon, and the children had been kept inside all day. Consequently, when they had made unmitigated nuisances of themselves to all the grown-ups they finally wandered disconsolately through to the kitchen, where Ou Coba squatted on the floor in front of the fire busily grinding snuff on her maalklip.

"Tell us a story, Coba," demanded George.

"A story, myn baasie! I don't know any stories for white children."

"Yes, you do, Coba," said Jenny, hugging the kitchen cat, "you know lots. Nice ones, that you used to tell Daddy when he was little. He told me so. All about Bushmen and snakes and ghosts and animals and thieves and - and - oh, heaps of other things!"

Old Coba sat back on her heels and thoughtfully took a large pinch of snuff while she considered the matter. She did not as a rule encourage the children in her kitchen, but they did look rather a forlorn little party standing in a row in front of her;

besides, she felt flattered and the wet afternoon had seemed long to her too. At last she made up her mind.

“Well, kleintjes, if you sit quite still and keep as quiet as mice, I shall tell you about Cagn and the baboons.”

The children promptly sat down on the floor, Jenny still nursing the cat, the boys scuffling a little and giving each other sly digs till Coba glared at them, and squatted as close to the stove as she could get.

“Who was Cagn?” asked Jenny.

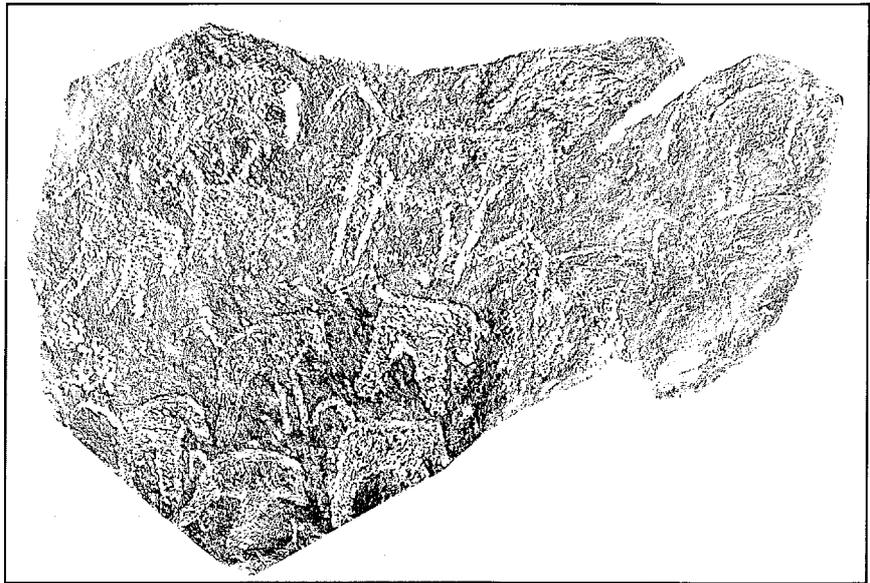
“Cagn was a Bushman,” answered Coba. “Now, if you say anything more or ask questions I won’t tell you the story.”

The threat was effective, and presently she began, grinding her snuff and talking at the same time, to the steady thump! thump! of the maalklip.

“Once upon a time, in the days long, long ago, Cagn sent his son Coghay out to the veld to cut sticks to make bows. Coghay went a long way before he could find the kind of tree he wanted, and then he saw some bees flying past and thought he would follow them to find their nest and get the honey, for both he and Cagn were very fond of honey. Presently he met Honey-bird, who flew in front of him towards the big krantz, where the baboons live now. Coghay hurried after Honey-bird as fast as he could, without looking where he was going, when suddenly, as he was pushing through the thick bush just below the krantz, he heard Old Man Baboon say ‘Bougham! Bougham! Bougham!’ just behind him. He sprang round to run, but before he could even start the baboons had caught him.

They called all the troop together to hear what he had to say, and sat in a circle round him while Old Man Baboon asked him why he had come there. Coghay said his father had sent him to cut wood to make bows and that he had followed the bees to the krantz to get honey.

“Yes,” said Old Man Baboon, strutting up and down, leaning on a big crooked stick, ‘Your father thinks he is very clever and that he will make bows to shoot us, and you think you are very clever and will steal our honey, but we will show you that we are more clever than either of you! Bougham! Bougham! Bougham!’



Engraving of 14 baboons near the Patons' farm. Copy by G. & D. Fock.

“Then the baboons sprang on Coghay and killed him, and hung his body up at the top of a big tree, and began to dance up and down and round the tree, singing, ‘Bougham! Bougham! Bougham! Cagn thinks he is clever but we have killed Coghay! Bougham! Bougham! Bougham!’

“Cagn waited for Coghay to bring the sticks, but at last he got impatient and went to look for him. He met Honey-bird and called to him,

“Oh, Honey-bird, where is Coghay?”

“And Honey-bird called in answer, ‘He went this way, following the bees, but he

never reached the hive, though I waited for him there. I saw his body hanging in a tree with the baboons dancing round it.'

"So Cagn went on through the bush and by-and-bye he heard the baboons singing as they danced, and went towards them.

"When they saw him coming they changed their song, leaving out the words about Cagn and Coghay, but a little baboon girl called out 'Don't sing that, sing as you sang before.'

"Cagn said, 'Yes, sing as the little girl wishes.' Then the baboons went on dancing and singing and Cagn listened and nodded his head and said, 'Yes, that is what I wanted, that is the song I heard before. Go on singing and dancing until I return.'

"Cagn ran home as quickly as he could and he and his wife cut a big bundle of wooden pegs, and, with them in a basket, he hurried back to where the baboons were still dancing and singing, and making such a dust and such a noise that they neither heard nor saw him as he went behind each one in turn and drove a wooden peg into its back with a crack that fixed it fast there forever, and made it run on four legs instead of two. Then he

chased them all off to live in the mountains, and eat lizards and beetles and scorpions. Before that baboons were like men and could talk, but now they have tails that hang crooked, and they skip up and down in the mountains and say, 'Bougham! Bougham! Waagh! Waagh! Waagh!' and turn over the stones to look for spiders and worms to eat.

"But Cagn took Coghay down from the tree and blew into his nose and mouth and put medicine on him and in a little while he came alive again, and they went home, dancing and singing.

"The baboons thought they were clever, but Cagn is more clever than they! Coghay is alive again and they run on the mountains and have tails, and the tails hang crooked!"

"And all the baboons stood on the big krantz and watched them go, and said, 'Bougham! Bougham! Waagh! Waagh! Waagh!' because that was all they could say."

\* From a manuscript in the Paton Papers at the Africana Library, Kimberley. Baboons still strut and bark on the krantzes of the Ghaap Escarpment, near the Paton farm of Newlands.



## BRIEFLY

### El Niño and Archaeology

Early prediction of the 1997-1998 El Niño event gave heritage authorities in Peru time to effect strategic protective measures at a few major archaeological sites. Flood impacts were minimised. But other sites of lower priority were damaged or erased from the archaeological record. Daniel H. Sandweiss, writing in the *SAA Bulletin* (17(1), 1999), says El Niño 1997-1998 offered valuable lessons on the future of archaeological heritage in Peru.

The affects of El Niño on archaeological sites have been many and varied. Direct impacts include the stripping away of sites by erosion, and the pooling of water, soaking into deposits and accelerating the destruction of remains. Flash floods carried some sites to the sea and inundated others with silt. Vegetation flourished with increased moisture, and the roots of plants could further damage archaeological deposits. In the longer term, sediment that was swept down to

the coast eventually gets re-deposited inland by constant on-shore winds, so that "sites and even landscapes...can be covered within a few decades."

The impacts include the human responses to this periodic occurrence: flood victims take refuge on high points, including *huacas* (pyramid mounds), that often have archaeological remains. These temporary "Niño camps" often persist for more than a year and occasionally have become permanent. The activities of inhabitants can have a major impact on underlying sites. In

the face of crop failure and general economic disarray, out-of-work refugees have been known to turn to looting of archaeological sites as one way of making

a living.

"Even for archaeology, however," says Sandweiss, "El Niño's clouds do have a silver lining." Erosion channels through

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**"Flood victims... have been known to turn to looting of archaeological sites as one way of making a living."**

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sites cut sections that are "generally impossible to achieve with standard excavation techniques and funding levels". Another spin-off is that temporary Niño camps, and abandoned ones from previous occurrences, provide potential analogues for recognising and understanding the archaeological signature of past human responses to El

Niño. "El Niño is not only a component in scenarios for cultural change, it is also a critical formation process for the local archaeological record."



## MEDIEVAL TRADING CITIES IN WEST AFRICA

"The medieval empires of West Africa, Ghana, Mali and Songhai literally fuelled the Muslim world economy between the tenth and sixteenth centuries AD." This is the view of researchers headed by Dr Timothy Insoll, Research Fellow of St John's College (*University of Cambridge African Newsletter Lent*

1999), following their recent excavations in Gao and Timbuktu. The enormous range of artefacts reflects the ideal trading situation of these cities, to receive trans-Saharan camel caravans into the region of the River Niger. Trading parties crossing the desert from well to well brought finished goods from North

Africa - cloth, weapons, paper, spices and beads; returning north again leading slaves, laden with gold and ivory. Amongst the finds at Gao was a cache of over 50 hippopotamus tusks. And sherds of glazed pottery matching vessels from Tunisia, Spain, Egypt and even China.



## CORRECTION: DATING THE DABOUS GIRAFFES PROJECT, NIGER

The editor apologises that a typographical error crept into the article on the Dabous giraffes in the April 1999 issue of *The Digging Stick*. The date given as "3000" should have read "8000": "The engraving's style and method of execution suggest it may be between about 8000 and 6000 years old." Alec Campbell has commented further that "The most likely date is in the neighbourhood of 6000 years, although it could be earlier; I would very much doubt it could be later, and there is no possibility that it could be as young as 3000 years."

**THIRD AURA CONGRESS**  
**"Millennium: a Fresh Start"**

10 - 14 July 2000, Alice Springs, Australia

The Australian Rock Art Research Association (AURA), established in 1983, is the largest of the thirty three member organisations of the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations (IFRAO). It publishes the Federation's journal, *Rock Art Research*, and hosts the premier academic event in the discipline, the AURA Congress.

The AURA Congress has convened twice before, in Darwin in 1988, and in Cairns four years later. The Third AURA Congress is to be held in July 2000, in Alice Springs, in the very centre of Australia. Coinciding with the beginning of a new millennium, "it will provide a summary of what has been achieved in this discipline so far, and an indication of where it may be heading in the new century."

The conference will include the 2000 IFRAO Meeting, 16 symposia and an extensive field excursion programme, both before and after the academic programme. A group of traditional Aboriginal site custodians will stage a sacred sand painting ceremony in honour of the assembled scholars. The congress is expected to attract the world's foremost researchers in the field.

"The oldest surviving word for convention is 'corroboree'. For tens of millennia, the Aborigines of the Northern Territory have gathered under the timeless sandstone cliffs of a dramatic and thoroughly sacred landscape to exchange ideas and information. AURA's international corroboree of 2000, with its five days of academic sessions, will continue this ancient tradition with the participation of the land's traditional custodians".

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Website <http://sunrise.sli.unimelb.edu.au/aura/Welcome.html>

The South African Archaeological Society was founded in 1945 to promote archaeology through research, education and publication. The *South African Archaeological Bulletin*, for publication of current research in southern Africa, is issued to members twice a year. Occasional publications in the *Goodwin Series* appear from time to time. *The Digging Stick* is the Society's general interest newsletter, with three issues per year.

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

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