

# SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



# GNEWS

KwaZulu-Natal Branch Newsletter

Mary Funivall, Chrissie Sievers & Gavin Whitelaw (Editors)  
c/o Natal Museum  
P. Bag 9070  
Pietermaritzburg  
3200

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## SECRETARY'S NOTES

It is with great sadness that we note the passing of Alan Barnes, Rob Guy and David Green. We send our deep condolences to their families.

We warmly welcome new members Kelly Coetzee John Hilton, Annalie Kleinloog, Pholoso Ndaba, Craig Rabie and Ruth Teer Tomaselli. Tessa Dewsbury emigrated and John Wright transferred to the Trans-Vaal Branch. Our membership now stands at 69, which is the same as last year.

To all our members, we thank you for your subscriptions and we hope you will continue as members of the society in spite of the difficult financial times. Subscriptions for 2009 will be due in January and are as follows: R210 for Ordinary, R225 for Joint or Family and R150 for Fulltime Student Membership. Renewal forms will be sent to you directly by the head office in Cape Town.

We congratulate Chrissie Sievers, committee member of the KwaZulu-Natal Branch on being elected as Vice-President of the Society for the period 1 July 2008–30 June 2010.

## Trace your origins

Those who attended Prof Himla Soodyall's fascinating talk on our genetic history, may recall her extremely generous offer to chart the DNA of members of the KwaZulu-Natal Branch and donate the costs to the local branch coffers. The procedure is that a member wishing to have a DNA test deposits R1200 (for a man) and R800 (for a woman) into the savings account of SA Archaeological Society (Ntl Branch), ABSA Bank, Longmarket Street, Pietermaritzburg, account number 27696376. Send confirmation of the deposit to Robbie Cameron, our treasurer, at [robby@midlandssolar.co.za](mailto:robby@midlandssolar.co.za) or his cell 082 933 7208. Robbie will then contact Himla to send the relevant person a test pack and detailed instructions. To make it easier for Himla, there will be a cut-off date of 15 February, when Robbie will send all the applications to her.

## Obituaries

It is with great shock and sadness that we learnt of the violent deaths by shooting of two staunch KwaZulu-Natal Branch members. David Green of Estcourt, died at his home on 20th December 2007 and Rob Guy of Underberg was at a family gathering in Johannesburg when he was shot on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2008. The committee and members of the Natal Branch extend their condolences to Dorothy Green and family as well as Bella Guy and family.

**David Green** (70) joined the Archaeological Society in 1976 because of his interest in the archaeology on his farm and in the area. He was a frequent visitor to Natal Museum excavations and scouted for sites whether fossil, Stone Age, Iron Age or engravings for the museum's researchers. He hosted many groups to the sites on his and neighbouring farms. David received an Honorary Associate award from the Natal Museum in November 1988 in appreciation of his interest and assistance to staff of the Natal Museum. His own collection of archaeological material is in the Fort Durnford Museum, Estcourt.

**Rob Guy** (75) was a member of the KwaZulu-Natal Branch since the early 1980s. Besides birding, he had a big interest in San rock art. He probably knew every rock art site recorded by Pat Vinnicombe and was a great help to Aron Mazel when his rock art recording project took him to the Southern Berg. He hosted the Natal Branch on outings and even provided accommodation. More latterly he assisted Penny Letley, Adrian Flett, Mary Furnival and team in re-locating Pat Vinnicombe's sites in the southern Berg.

Rob and David were always ready to assist the KwaZulu-Natal Branch on outings and the Natal Museum archaeologists whenever they were asked. Members of the KwaZulu-Natal Branch and archaeologists at the Natal Museum will miss them.

Val Ward

## PAST ACTIVITIES

### ***SHAKA: Unearthing the reality* by Dan Wylie, 17 October 2007 (Christine Sievers)**

Dan Wylie's talk was fascinating. He showed us how much we do not know about the legendary Zulu King Shaka. He also suggested that popular knowledge of the King may not be that accurate and discussed the role of lies in historical consciousness, the interface between fiction and factuality, and history (the past) as opposed to historiography (the writing of history). He used as an example, E.A. Ritter's book, *Shaka Zulu* (1955). He believes that Ritter fabricated the Battle of Qqokli Hill in 1818/19. No writings previous to Ritter's mention warrior numbers and Dan is seriously concerned about the source of Ritter's figures. He questions why people are not asking the basic questions or doing fundamental research about the figures. Ritter's book presents a detailed description of Shaka and his life, whereas Dan suggests there is a lot more uncertainty - we do not know when Shaka was born, what he looked like, or when he died. Dan suggests though that uncertainty is what makes research into the past intriguing and pleasurable.

What did Shaka look like? Dan believes the classic image of a tall imperious man with spear and shield <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:KingShaka.jpg> is a palimpsest of European ideals and the opposite of what Nathaniel Isaacs wrote when he described a man with a big nose, and big buttocks that befitted a king. The words Dan used to describe Nathaniel Isaacs include

‘ferocious, ruthless and brutal’ and Dan suggested that because the man could not even write a letter, it is likely that his records were written down by a ghost writer. Henry Francis Fynn was also not of the highest moral calibre and Dan proposes that he and other White people may have been involved in Shaka’s death. Fynn’s diary, a transcript of a notebook, was published 150 years after Shaka’s death. The original document, written in the 1820s and wrapped in an elephant ear, apparently disappeared about 8-10 years before the notebook was put together.

Dan Wylie’s book *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History* is a biography of Shaka, created from a critical examination of Isaac’s, Fynn’s and other early traders’ reports, as well as information in accounts by Zulus, such as those recorded in the *James Stuart Archive*. It contains details of Shaka’s strategies, for example the making of alliances, rather than conquering of people, and his development of various military techniques: the short stabbing spear was in use before his time, but he may have refined its use. In his talk Dan spoke about these and Shaka’s rise to power after taking control of the Mthethwa people. Dan interspersed the saga with details such as the suspicion that Shaka’s father Senzangakhona was not circumcised when he impregnated Nandi, Shaka’s mother, but then hastily underwent the ritual; and that during the years Shaka spent with the Mthethwa he may have married and had children. At least two sons are named as being his, but he disavowed them. The present Zulu royal house does not descend from Shaka. Nevertheless the legend of Shaka lives on, and Dan’s talk brought a great deal of it to life. The lecture was well attended and widely appreciated.

### **Christmas Party: *The mysteries of Egypt* by Robbie Cameron & Raymond Wilkinson, 14 November 2007, 18h00, Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg**

On the 2 September 2007, Raymond and I joined 21 other South Africans for a specialised tour of Ancient Egypt. The tour was organised by Kim Lings of Nile Travel and our guide for the trip was Eman Bahaa. Eman is an Egyptologist who had recently led Bill Clinton on a tour of Egypt.

After a long flight from Johannesburg and a short rest, the tour started in the chaotic city of Cairo, the home to about 18 million people. We visited the world-famous Cairo Museum and spent hours in awe and wonder looking at artefacts including the gold of Tutankhamen.

The following day we travelled by train to the city of El Menia, which would become our home for the next three nights. Not many tourists venture to this part of Egypt as the population is quite militant. We visited rock tombs of high ranking officials from the 11th Dynasty (2000 BC) at Beni Hassan and also went to Tel El Amarna. Tel El Armarna is the site of Akhetaten, the capital city during the reign of the monotheistic and strange-looking pharaoh Akhenaton (1360–1343 BC).



Over the next couple of days we saw a number of tombs, boundary stele and were accompanied by armed guards during all of our travels around El Menia.

From El Menia we travelled by train to Luxor where we would spend the next four nights in the luxurious Sheraton hotel. Our first stop in Luxor was the Valley of the Kings where 62

tombs have been discovered. We entered six of the tombs and were greeted by spectacular art works which have survived the ravages of forty centuries. Unfortunately we could not take any photos inside the tombs. One of the tombs, 'KV 5' is still being excavated by Dr Kent Weeks and has over 95 chambers. Over the next few days we visited a number of ancient temples including the massive complex of Karnak. The size, workmanship, paintings and carved hieroglyphics of these structures is awe inspiring, especially when one considers their age.



From Luxor we flew back to Cairo and spent our last day at the Giza plateau and the Saqqara necropolis. The Great Pyramid is the only one of the seven wonders of the ancient world still standing and it is by volume the largest manmade object. We were fortunate enough to enter the king's chamber and see for ourselves the empty sarcophagus and the perfectly cut granite blocks that the walls of the chamber are made from.

Saqqara is one of the richest archaeological sites in Egypt. This vast desert necropolis was built for the kings and nobles of the old Kingdom. We visited the centre piece of Saqqara, the Step Pyramid and surrounding enclosure of Pharaoh Djoser who reigned from 2667–2648 BC.



Unfortunately all good things come to an end and on the 13th September we bade farewell to the land of the Pharaohs and headed back to the land at the tip of Africa.



***Rooiberg – a tin smelting site by Charlize Tomaselli, 30 January 2008, Durban Natural Science Museum***

As an Honours student at the University of Cape Town, Charlize worked at Rooiberg under the supervision of Simon Hall. The Rooiberg area, in Limpopo province, is mineral-rich and well known for its iron and tin ore deposits. Archaeological evidence shows that these deposits were important to Iron Age farmers from at least AD 500. A couple of years ago Tom Huffman of Wits University and Gavin Whitelaw worked on three sites there, an Early Iron Age site dating



*Madikwe smelting furnace, ~AD 1650*

to the 500s, a Late Iron Age site (AD 1500–1700) made by Madikwe Sotho-Tswana speakers, and, fascinatingly, a mine that followed a seam of iron ore underground for perhaps as much as 500 m. There was some debate over its age, but there are good reasons to accept that it was mined by Iron Age miners. There is, for instance, no known record of its mining in any colonial period documents. A most exciting site. *Madikwe*, incidentally, is an archaeological category of Sotho-Tswana that gave rise to Tswana speakers.

But there's more, as Charlize told us. The site Smelters' Kop was originally excavated by Revil Mason of Wits. His team located tin smelting residues, which fit well with the evidence for precolonial tin mining that modern miners found at Rooiberg. The site is on top of a hill and has stone walls. New research there by Simon Hall's team (of which Charlize was part) showed that the arrangement of the walls is similar to that of Moor Park sites near Estcourt, which were

occupied by Nguni-speaking people between 1300 and 1700. This was evidently a time of troubles, because both in the Estcourt area and at Smelters' Kop, the hilltop locations suggest that people were concerned about attacks from others – the hilltop locations are defensive. The Nguni were preceded at Smelters' Kop by Madikwe Sotho-Tswana speakers, whose presence is marked by a thin 'smear' beneath the stone walls. Presumably they were linked somehow to the people occupying the sites on which Tom Huffman and Gavin Whitelaw worked.

Rooiberg Sotho-Tswana tin smelters subsequently re-occupied the hilltop periodically. *Rooiberg* is another archaeological category derived partly from *Ntsuanatsatsi*, which is associated with the Fokeng of the Free State. Tom Huffman believes that the Fokeng were originally northern Nguni speakers (that is, north of the Moor Park area). The Rooiberg tin smelters converted the walled site into a workcamp where they carried out intensive tin production. The tin was intended for trade to neighbouring Tswana and Shona chiefdoms and to foreign traders on the east coast. The new excavations yielded white-heart glass beads, which were made in Europe from the early 1800s onwards. The beads therefore confirm an optically stimulated luminescence date of that time from the site. Possibly the intensive tin production at Smelters' Kop began earlier, in the late 1700s. Certainly, the evidence indicates that earlier Madikwe and Nguni people in the area also produced tin.

The history of Smelters' Kop is therefore complex: first, Tswana speakers settled in the area. They were joined by Nguni speakers related to Moor Park people. Subsequently, different Sotho-Tswana people, who were possibly at least partly northern Nguni in origin, settled in the area and carried out large-scale tin production. Because of the metal-ore richness of the Rooiberg area and the trade it stimulated, the Madikwe people there were among the earliest farming folk of the southern African interior to adopt maize – a Central and South American crop – as a food staple, at around AD 1650.

## **21<sup>st</sup> Oliver Davies Memorial Lecture: *Human ancestries and migration: reconstructing human history in Africa* by Prof Himla Soodyall, 11 March 2008**

The dramatic technological advances over the last few decades have produced powerful tools for studies of the complex patterns of genetic variation in humans. In particular, studies of mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) and Y chromosome DNA data have advanced to the extent that it is possible to examine the genetic affinities within and between populations. These genetic data are then combined with historical, linguistic, anthropological, and archaeological data to reconstruct the history and evolution of living people.

World-renowned researcher, Prof. Himla Soodyall, of the MRC/NHLS/WITS Human Genome Diversity and Disease Research Unit in Gauteng, returned to her roots in Durban to give us a detailed explanation of the methods used in genetic research and the nature of the results. With the use of many brightly coloured 'trees' she showed the various destinations of people as they moved out of Africa, the cradle of humankind, in the past. And then more recently, back to Africa again. Southern Africa has seen repeated immigrations and there is a complex pattern of diversity resulting from admixture between the original hunter-gatherers and the descendants of three major immigrations: Bantu-speakers in the last 2000 years, sea-borne European immigrants in the last 350 years, and slaves/labourers/immigrants from India and the Malay Archipelago in the past 100–150 years. However, Prof. Soodyall was at pains to stress that genetic and cultural characteristics are separate entities and should not be confused. Our genetic code does not

determine our culturally-determined social behaviour: people of varied genetic background may subscribe to similar customs and behaviour.

Many members of the audience were fascinated that geneticists, by taking a swab with an earbud in the inside of one's mouth, can determine one's genetic history. Women can trace only their maternal genetic ancestry (mitochondrial DNA or mtDNA), whereas men, who sport both X and Y chromosomes, can trace that of their fathers too. Prof. Soodyall, citing her love of her hometown Durban, then made the generous offer to donate all the proceeds of genetic determinations of local members of the Archaeological Society to the society. This is indeed an extremely generous offer: testing for women is R800 and for men, R1200. Any members who are interested in pursuing these investigations should please contact the secretary. We extend a huge vote of thanks to Prof. Soodyall for this offer and for the fascinating lecture she gave us.

### ***The Full Circle? – My Genetic Ancestry by Val Ward, Pietermaritzburg.***

It is currently argued that humans originated in southern Africa rather than East Africa. If this is so then the little brown daughters of Eve, including my maternal ancestor N, set out from somewhere in South Africa between 65 000 and 80 000 years ago. It is tempting to suggest that they left from Sibudu near Tongaat or Umhlatuzana between Durban and Pietermaritzburg, archaeological sites with which I am familiar. These early people moved up along the African coast into the Indian subcontinent.

About 20–30 000 years later, in about 45–50 000 years ago the clan of Ursula (U), a daughter of Eve, was founded by the first modern humans *Homo sapiens* as they established themselves in eastern Europe, possibly near Mount Parnassus in modern-day Greece. This is the oldest of the seven native European clans. Over thousands of years skin colour became lighter, the body became less hairy and sweat glands developed, as people adapted to their new environment.

The mitochondrial (DNA passed down from mother to daughter) group U has eight subgroups: U1–7 and K. My particular subgroup U2 is found in Indian and Iranian Persian peoples. Its subgroups are found in the Middle East, Pakistan and India. The subgroup U2e is the west Eurasian sub group and is found in Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Caucasus. It is thought that the Indian and western Eurasian U2 lineages split approximately 50 000 years ago.

I do not know when my maternal ancestors reached Germany, Holland and Britain, but I would suggest about 11 500 years ago at the end of the Ice Age. Before then, they may have ventured into the area during warmer periods, but were forced out as the ice advanced again.

Then in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, my maternal ancestor, as the wife or daughter of a soldier or religious refugee, came to the Cape of Good Hope from France, Holland or Germany. At present the furthest I have gone back in my direct maternal lineage in South Africa is to the descendents of the seventeenth-century French, Dutch and German settlers – Marie Grillion; daughter Elizabeth Malherbe; daughter Susanna Cordier; daughter Susannah Johanna Van Vuuren; daughter Christina Susanna Minnie and the latter's daughter Christina Gertruida Scheepers. A century later, in 1820, my ancestral British families Wainwright, Rennie, Bentley, amongst others, settled in the eastern Cape. Here it was that Christina Gertruida Scheepers married the settler Edward Wainwright. Their daughter Ann Maria Wainwright married John Brown Rennie. Their daughter Hannah Tamplin Pringle Rennie married Evelyn Randall Bentley. Their daughter Gwendoline Hope Bentley came to Natal in 1929 to train as a

nurse and married Victor Reginald George Higgs. My sister and I are the products of that marriage.

Lynette and I were born in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, not far from the ancient sites Sibudu and Umhlatuzana. Has our maternal DNA made a full circle?

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mtDNA certificate of my maternal ancestry.

## **Weekend excursion to Injisuthi and Battle Cave led by Boyd Escott, 16–18 May 2008 (John Hart)**

This was a sort of *déjà vu* experience for me as the 1992 branch excursion to what was then termed Injasuti (led by Aron Mazel) was, I think, my first Arch Soc ‘field trip’. I have the dim recollection of being conveyed up there on that occasion at a rather alarmingly high speed in Rodney’s swish GLI-6. It must have been very swish for I’d quite forgotten the mega-potholed road. And it must have been summer because the weather was mild enough to gather around in true grit style for a very large braai party outside one of the chalets. This time it was rather too cool for that, but we made up by *ad hoc* inter-chalet visits (joined by some of the tented peasants) in order to drink Friday-night mampoor.

Boyd claims that May is the best month to walk in the Berg and the glorious day proved him right. After a good Saturday morning eggs-and-bacon start we set off along a tarred walkway when Boyd hesitated at a sign which read ‘Battle Cave’. Consulting with Escott junior, alias Daniel aged all of 2 years and 9 months, he announced confidently that we should now strike out into rugged terrain. While I seem to remember many members boulder hopping across the river in 1992, this time I noticed there were only one or two klipspringers amongst us. Not being one of these, I was soon reminded of just how cold Berg streams are. With Dan setting a cracking pace we arrived at the Cave around noon. The walk was an amazing de-stresser. In this valley, more than in other parts of the Berg, there is a sense of remoteness and solitude.

It was four or so years since Boyd himself had visited Battle Cave and he asked us to take photos of the paintings and send these to him so he could compare them with his earlier record. He was concerned that some damage might have occurred to the painting of the famous battle scene itself. Chief site photographer was Tim who amazed me by hauling out a veritable array of photographic equipment from a video camera to a GPS receiver. Having completed the official/business/professional part of the excursion, we settled down among bits and pieces of rock and shade to enjoy our picnic lunches. Before setting back Boyd pulled out some duct tape which he skillfully used to re-attach the sole of Helen’s shoe (which had earlier come adrift in the headlong dash to be first at the gate in the fence around the Cave). Next time you go to the

Berg carry some duct tape: apart from bandaging shoes, it apparently prevents blisters if applied early enough.

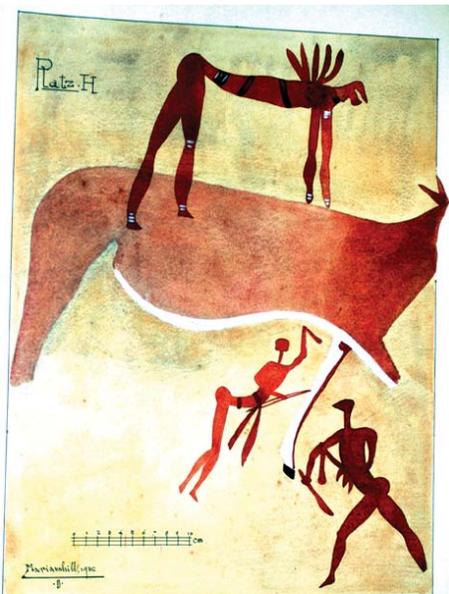
That evening, after an early-ish braai, we landed up in the chalet containing the only DSTV in the camp. Usually, the ranger in the office had told me, the chalet stood empty as people 'don't want to go there'. Sensibly so, I thought. However, such environmentally correct thoughts were dashed to the ground as a crowd of us (including the nephew of Tiny Harries, the owner of the former Solitude) cheered the Sharks to glorious victory against some team from the other side of down under whose name I can't remember.

The next morning, before leaving, a comradely circle waxed quite lyrical about our Injisuthi experience and vowed that we 'should do this sort of thing more often'.

### **Mariannahill monastery tour led by Penny Letley & Adrian Flett, 9 August 2008 (Mary Furnivall)**

Mariannahill Monastery developed from small beginnings. Our tour started in what was the smallest Mission in Africa. The small room with corrugated iron walls and roof, complete with altar, desk and chair, books and bed, took us back to those early days when Prior Francis Pfanner arrived from Austria in 1882, to take-up the disciplined, frugal life of prayer and work as a Trappist monk. He chose the name Mariannahill in honour of his mother Marianne (and Mary and Ann, her mother) and the 100 hectare situation on a hill, and pursued his missionary work with zeal. Bricks were made on the property and utilised in the building of accommodation and workshops.

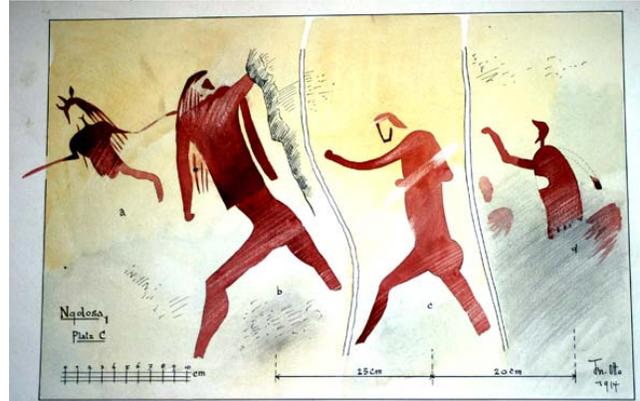
The exhibits in the Museum left us spell-bound! It became obvious that one cannot do justice to such a treasure of relics from the past in one short visit. Our well-informed guide, Sharon Burdett, shared her passion for 'Mariannahill'. The historical exhibits, photos, and paraphernalia of Roman Catholic significance included the clothing worn by the Brothers and monks, and Sisters of the Precious Blood, who came to Mariannahill in 1885 to care for the rural community when the Monastery became a Mission. Nature lovers' collections of insects and snakes preserved in glass jars are stacked on wooden shelves alongside beautifully carved wooden handcrafts, tools and beadwork. Large machinery includes the first printing press, whose laborious methods progressed to a more advanced model with a keyboard, both of which were used to publish early editions of the UmAfrica magazine, which is still in existence. A bookbinding apparatus was soon put into use and the craft continues at Mariannahill to this day. Samples of fine embroidery were created from antique sewing machines. All paid testimony to the industry, skills and dedication of those early settlers.



A corner gallery devoted to Bushman rock art includes watercolour prints and exquisite painted images on rocks. Penny Letley and Adrian Flett gave a fascinating insight into the work of Brother Otto Maeder, who, having been a painter in Europe, arrived in South Africa in 1889. In spite of his heavy workload as a Trappist monk, his interests were wide and the accuracy of his rock art research, including his paintings and detailed drawings and maps (copies of which were on view) have been recognized and appreciated. His teaching and special skills took him to other Missions including Reichenau near

Underberg and Keilands on the Great Kei River. He died in 1937 aged 74 years, and is buried in the cemetery at Mariannhill. Penny and Adrian`s most interesting research paper on “Brother Otto” is published in the December edition of *Southern African Humanities*.

Moving on to the cloisters, we marvelled at the intricate Romanesque Revival brickwork, sublime arches and decoration around a peaceful formal garden, leading to the church, with its 40 metre campanile. Its high ceiling, beautiful woodwork, and delicate filigree-work on the windows complimented the ornate altar decoration, with its cleverly constructed painted shutters which are folded back to reveal other sacred paintings for the periods of Lent and Advent.



In her vote of thanks, Chrissie Sievers alluded to the fact that when the male-orientated Mariannhill Monastery became a Mission, they could not manage without women, so it was appropriate that our visit coincided with Women`s Day. We were able to linger longer enjoying tea and scones in the restful surrounds of the Monastery Tea Garden, bringing to a close a most fascinating morning.

***“Their village is where they kill game”*: Nguni interactions with the San by Gavin Whitelaw, 10 September 2009, Natal Museum**

Much is made of the expertise of San rainmakers in discussions of interactions between hunter-gatherers and farmers. Farmers are meant to have been in awe of their special skills and dependent upon them in many areas, so much so that some scholars have suggested that San rainmakers exercised control over the farmers` economy. Yet the evidence for such control is non-existent, while the evidence for farmers employing San rainmakers is limited. Scholars who take this point of view generally quote the case of the Mpondomise and other southern Nguni speakers.

Some southern Nguni farmers certainly used San rainmakers. What was the nature of their relationship? How widespread was it? What were the circumstances in which it arose?

Gavin drew on the work of the late David Hammond-Tooke who showed that much of the linguistic and cultural impact of the San on the Nguni world was a result of the unusual form of Nguni divination. Most Nguni diviners are women. Nguni divination is rooted in the strongly exogamous nature of Nguni marriage – generally Nguni men marry clan strangers rather than relatives. Wives, as strangers, pose a potential threat to their husbands` clans. They are therefore tightly controlled with a range of restrictive practices – the practise of *inhlonipho* (respect), for instance. (Gavin was referring to ways of life relatively unaffected by the modern world.) The diviner`s role provides an ‘out’ for women (and some men) who find these restrictions too disempowering. Diviner`s are able to achieve a measure of independence, wealth and power greater than might otherwise be possible.

Some San were able to exploit this opening for disempowered people in the Nguni world. Like wives, the cattleless, homeless (in the eyes of farmers) San were outsiders. Some became

diviners and so contributed to the adoption by Nguni people of various San words and cultural practices.

Nguni rainmaking is rather different. Rainmakers work on behalf of chiefs, performing rituals to create smoke that becomes rain clouds. They must be ritually pure or, it is believed, the rainmaking effort will fail. Consequently they are always respected members of society, always married and, in the case of women rainmakers, past child-bearing age. They cannot be outsiders (like fertile wives and San hunter-gatherers), who are by definition ritually impure.

How then were some San rainmakers accepted by Nguni chiefs? It could have been the result of idiosyncratic decision-making by some chiefs. But Gavin speculated that it was something more – perhaps San rainmakers became incorporated in farmer society. He argued that this might have happened in a time of great stress, such as seems to have occurred during the Little Ice Age between AD 1300 and the 1700s. It was in this period that farmers built defensive settlements on hilltops and possibly lived in rock shelters. More recent oral evidence shows that impoverished farmers in such circumstances lived off the land “like the Bushmen”.

Also during this time, farmers first settled in the grasslands which were closely associated with the San. Gavin wondered if the difficult circumstances brought on by climatic stress might have resulted in mixed communities of San hunter-gatherers and impoverished Nguni speakers. Such close relationships might have endured, to the extent that they were retained after the climate improved and people returned to earlier ways of living – farming and hunter-and-gathering. The use of San rainmakers might then originate with these ‘socialized’ San.

It is a speculative scenario that draws on a various and different data. The challenge will be to further supportive archaeological evidence.

### ***Unearthing the Mutiny: the Meerman Story* by Jaco Boshoff, 8 October 2008, Durban Natural Science Museum**

We were most fortunate to have Jaco Boshoff, one of only four maritime archaeologists working in South Africa, to tell us the fascinating tale of drama on the high seas in the eighteenth century. The account started with slavery, one of the oldest human (inhuman) institutions. The need for labour to support plantations in the New World brought about an expansion in the slave trade and the transport of slaves across the oceans. Many slaves passed by the strategic watering hole of Cape Town, where at one time, there were more slaves than free people. The slaves came from many sources, but the ready supply of slaves because of the war and famine in Madagascar was the incentive for the *Meerman*, probably one of the earliest specially-built slave vessels, to leave Cape Town for Madagascar in 1766. The slaver spent a couple of months sailing up and down the coast of Madagascar buying up slaves, before heading back towards Cape Town.

On board the *Meerman* was a merchant who collected indigenous weapons. When he gave the weapons to his servant to clean, the servant thought to get the slaves to help him. Bad idea – in a few hours half the crew had been killed and the rest of the crew had locked themselves up. Unfortunately for the slaves, they had no idea how to sail the ship, so they had to bargain with the crew that if the crew sailed them to Madagascar, they would give them their freedom. The crew agreed and sailed towards Madagascar, but craftily, using the stars at night, made more headway towards the African continent. As the *Meerman* approached the Agulhas coast, the slaves were surprised to see gannets, but the crew allayed their fears by saying that because they, the slaves, were from the west coast, they did not recognise birds from the east coast.

On reaching the coast the slaves agreed that 80 of them would go ashore to reconnoitre and then light a fire if all were well. In the meantime, farmers along the coast saw the unusual sight of a ship in the bay and because there was no flag flying, knew there was a problem. Thus they formed a commando behind the dunes. As soon as the slaves landed they were captured by the farmers.

After a week, those on the *Meermin* began to build a raft to send another party ashore. The farmers did not see them, but the slaves noticed a shepherd running away, which they took as confirmation that the landmass was Madagascar, for, in Madagascar, an approaching ship meant slavers, so it was essential to flee as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, the crew aboard the *Meermin* had been writing messages in bottles and two of these reached the local magistrate. Instructions in the bottles were to light three signal fires and this was subsequently done. Seeing the fires, the slaves on board thought the previous landing party had lit these 'all safe' signals. Many slaves thus jumped onto the raft and the anchor line of the *Meermin* was cut. Too late however, did the slaves still on board see farmers attacking their compatriots. The ship, cast adrift, drifted inshore and all the surviving slaves were captured and taken to Cape Town.

How do we know all this fascinating detail? The loss of a large ship called for a court case to be held. These court records and the reports that the magistrate wrote regularly to Holland, record a ship running aground on the soft, sandy soil at the mouth of the 'Soetendals Vallei' now known as the Heuningnes River mouth, presently situated in Die Mond Reserve.

But location of the wreck has been very difficult. Both the picture by Andries Spaarman in 1770 and aerial photographs in 1939 show that the river mouth has moved a great deal, and at the time of the wreck the river mouth could have been 2 km either way from its present position. Dune reclamation has stabilized the previously mobile dunes and the river mouth has been kept open artificially to prevent the hinterland from being flooded and for the breeding of steenbras. All this has complicated the search.

Initial searches for the wreck employed a magnetometer. It was first towed behind a boat, but waves prevented coverage of the first 200 m from the shore. Subsequently the magnetometer was towed on a surfboard, also unsuccessfully, because the instrument needs to be kept pretty stable. In the end, Anglo-America provided an aerial survey complete with a geophysicist, and an operator to walk with the magnetometer (one of only two in the country) over the identified likely areas. The positions of six to seven shipwrecks, but not their depth below the sand, were located. Excavation of these wrecks is difficult because of high tides, as well as other occasional hazards such as blue bottles. Nevertheless, various Heath Robinson-type solutions were found to allow some excavation, but the *Meermin* has yet to be located.

All excavated timbers were sent to Stellenbosch University for identification. Records of the *Meermin* indicate that it was made of oak and oak remains will be a factor in the identification of the wreck. Plans for the ship also exist, which will help. Further clues could be Malagassy spears or other weapons, shackles and the presence of pollens from Malagassy plants. The search will be continued under the auspices of the Southern Africa Slave Wrecks Project, supported by the Ford Foundation and in partnership with George Washington University. The project will cover the coast line of Angola, South Africa and Mozambique, and although the project is directed at promoting tourism, a large component will involve education. We certainly received fascinating enlightenment on a dark part of our history and the trails and rewards in uncovering it.