



TRANS-!GARIB NEWS

South African Archaeological Society: Trans-!Garib Branch

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Public Archaeology and Archaeology for the Public: the Trans-!Garib Branch, Northern Cape and Free State, getting going again.

David Morris

The South African Archaeological Society's Trans-!Garib Branch (Northern Cape and Free State) has been active only to a limited degree during the last several years, hosting or co-hosting occasional talks/excursions such as those around the recent heritage vs mining issues at Canteen Kopje. George Leader, Matthias Brenzinger and Silvia Tomášková gave public talks.



George Leader at Canteen Kopje.

An enormously significant turning point for archaeology in Kimberley and the Northern Cape will surely have been the establishment of Sol Plaatje University in the city, with its key heritage focus, and the start of formal teaching in archaeology in 2017. This year the archaeology courses cater for first and second year students, while third year BA students graduating in heritage at the end of this year will have several modules under their belts that have touched, to greater or

lesser extent, on archaeology and/or the prehistory of the Northern Cape. A specialisation in archaeology will be one of the options when the Honours programme begins next year.



Driekopseiland-like engraved images worked into the fabric of Sol Plaatje University.

The staff complement at the university has grown as these programmes have expanded – and several of the staff are members of the Archaeological Society. At the McGregor Museum, staff who are members of the Society are currently joined by an intern who is a member transferred from the Western Cape. The site manager at Taung Skull World Heritage Site is also a member. All in all, our numbers are somewhat swelled.

In an informal meeting in February a small group of us committed ourselves to getting Society activities back onto a more formal footing. We will host an event on 10 April in order to get together, to meet and greet as a Branch, after an illustrated talk to be given by David Morris about an unusual cluster of Karoo rock engravings, “The vultures of Kalabasput”. The venue will be at SPU – more precise details, as to time and place, to follow. All are welcome to attend – and new members will be welcome to join!

It is our intention as a branch of the Society to present a programme, through the year, of talks as well as excursions to local archaeological sites; also inviting visiting researchers to address us.

We're delighted to note that Kimberley is to be hosting the Biennial Conference of the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists (ASAPA) in 2019 (the third time it will be in Kimberley).

Our area enjoys burgeoning research interest, which builds, on the one hand, on research trajectories set by the McGregor Museum (part of the legacy of the late Peter Beaumont) – pre-eminently at Wonderwerk Cave, Kathu and Pniel – and, on the other hand, through new research initiatives such as that at Gamohana near Kuruman, and the Cambridge-UP-SPU-McGregor project 'Re-collecting the Mission Road', focusing on the Moffat Mission and its surrounds. There are various projects in the Karoo. Northern Cape rock art continues to draw attention. These various projects would probably provide some of the themes for the ASAPA Conference. Delegates will no doubt be interested in the new university itself which, as conference venue, and in terms of its teaching programmes, is certain to be a major draw-card. Through the images from Driekopseiland (picture above), archaeology is literally built into the fabric of the university! As Archaeological Society, we may well have some role in the hosting of this conference.

All in all, 2018 (and beyond) promises an auspicious new beginning for the Trans-!Garib Branch. We're about public archaeology and archaeology for the public. We hope our members – and non-members! – will derive benefits and satisfaction, and that our talks and excursions will stimulate wider interest and engagement.

Sol Plaatje University students on Karoo fieldwork

David Morris

Seven second year archaeology students from Sol Plaatje University, with lecturer Prof David Morris, were invited to join a team from Digby Wells Environmental in March, conducting heritage impact assessments at the SKA project site near Carnarvon in the Karoo.



Students Gomolemo Mmusi, Tlotlo Oliphant, Patience Setlholoeng, Tiny Kars, Lovedelia Mabilo, Talisa Pieterse & Zola Daniels.

This was a tremendous opportunity for the students, receiving their first hands-on real-time archaeological survey experience, in a landscape rich in archaeological and heritage traces.

Three days were spent walking across the vlaktes and up koppies, locating and recording a variety of archaeological and historical sites. A nearly 8 km walk on the first day, in the heat of the Karoo (though tempered by the approach of autumn...), gave them a taste of this particular aspect of archaeology which for many is quintessentially an outdoor science. The students learnt to use GPS units to locate and record sites and to complete data-capture forms which later in the week they were trained to cross-check and transfer into a computer database.



Talks were given by archaeologists on the team and other heritage specialists including architects assessing historic buildings and vernacular corbelled houses on or near the SKA site. There were Later Stone Age scatters with evidence of ostrich eggshell bead-making; a background noise of widely dispersed Middle Stone Age material; and even heavily-weathered dolerite Acheulean bifaces and flakes that turned up in three locales. Finger paintings were seen at the mouth of a ravine, with pools of seeping water further upstream provoking discussion about !Khwa, the ‘waterslang’ or ‘noga ya metsi’ – and the very different conception of the world that infused the thought and beliefs of the |Xam people, whose descendants still tell stories in Afrikaans that echo those told in the |Xam language 140 years ago.



The region overlaps what had been defined some years ago as a |Xam heartland that was placed on the tentative list for World Heritage inscription. It is the area reflected in the archive of lore and legends collected from |Xam people by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd in the 1870s-80s. The preserved stories of that time, the corresponding archaeological traces in the landscape, and the living stories that resonate with those in the now extinct |Xam language make for a unique combination that deserves that level of recognition.

This may well be a thread emerging from the heritage management plan that would result from this project. Possibly SPU and McGregor Museum archaeology would have an on-going role in this connection.

Whatever the outcome, it was an experience the students will surely value going forward (and the accommodation and the food was excellent!).



Particular thanks to Justin du Piesanie and Shannon Hardwick of Digby Wells Environmental with Jaco van der Walt, and heritage architects Yasmin Mayat and Brendan Hart



Kathu Pan handaxe in Dallas

The handaxe from Kathu (McGregor Museum Collection), which travelled to London, New York and Berlin a decade and a half ago, and was on the British Museum exhibition *South Africa: the art of a nation* (2016-7), has travelled yet again. It was chosen by curators Thomas Wynn and Tony Berlant for the exhibition *First Sculpture* at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, USA. Provocatively probing modern human assumptions about our art, ourselves and other beings, the exhibition has drawn the attention of many reviewers, including the *New York Times*. One reviewer suggests *First Sculpture* “is likely to be one of the most important shows of 2018, a landmark exhibition that will be discussed and debated for decades.”