

PREHISTORY

EVIDENCE OF EARLY MAN IN BUFFALO CITY

Homo sapiens sapiens are believed to have walked the dune areas of Buffalo City approximately 200 000 years ago. Trace fossil footprints of a young child were discovered in 1964 in an eroded overhang of aeolianite (dune-rock) at Nahoon.

Light rain had created conditions which were just right for a human track-way of footprints to be left in the damp wet sand, which over time fossilized, to be revealed thousands of years later after wave and wind erosion had exposed the ancient dune surfaces. Large slabs of sandstone containing these fossil footprints are housed at the East London Museum.



Description

Similar footprints of an earlier age were discovered at Langebaan in the Western Cape in 1995. This discovery led to the revision of the dating of the Nahoon footprints consisting of three human trace fossil footprints, a number of small mammalian prints and some avifaunal fossil footprints, all of which are quite unique. The context of this association has yet to be revealed. Current thermo luminescence dating places the age of the dune rock at an age 83 000 years older than the Langebaan trace fossil footprints (117 000 years old), making the Nahoon footprints the oldest human fossil footprint evidence of mankind in the world.

Current theories of evolution construct the family tree of modern man as having two precursors, archaic *Homo sapiens* and anatomically modern *Homo sapiens*.

The Nahoon trace fossil footprints are of archaic humans.

Location

Nahoon Point is a close marker to the proximity of the site where the footprints were originally discovered. The Point is west of Nahoon Beach and east of Bat's Cave (another archeologically significant site). Ancient dunes which have been fossilized and eroded are evident in this area.

Access



The area is open to all types of visitors at present and is mostly utilised by the rock angling fraternity. The infrastructure surrounding Nahoon Point was upgraded a number of years back to accommodate an international wave-ski event. The road is tarred to the Point and access is not controlled at present.

Access to the footprint site is via a well traveled footpath from an established car park close by.

Condition

Dune-rock is susceptible to the weathering action of wind and rain. Evidence of this erosion is to be seen on some of the rocky outcrops on the area.

The excavation site has been secured from the elements but is still susceptible to vandalism. This is one of the reasons why the site has not been included on any palaeoanthropological itineraries to date.

Facilities

There are two car parks in the area of the footprint site – a lower section which is utilised by the surfing community and an upper section which is used by fishermen. The car park built above a boulder beach has ablution facilities whereas the top section does not. The latter car park is unfortunately also deemed unsafe for visitors.

Tour guiding

The potential exists for guided walks in the area as it is quite extensive. Many natural and cultural history aspects could be interpreted with the emphasis on the history of early man. A number of middens are also exposed providing further evidence of man's activity along this part of the South African coast.

Specialist geological, rocky shore, sandy beach, dune forest, mammalian, avifaunal and historical (shipwreck) tours can be conducted, to name a few.

Recommendations

Presently negotiations are under way with Buffalo City to secure the area under an official proclamation as a nature reserve (municipal by-law). Access will be by permit and controlled with regular beach patrols by trained coastal rangers.

The potential also exists for a resident guide to interpret the footprint site and a permanent education officer to instruct visiting tourist and school groups alike.

The car parks could also centralize some tourist facilities such as a tea-garden and a curio shop.