

PRE-COLONIAL HISTORY UP TO C.1830

Introduction

The connection between archaic homo sapiens and the San (Bushmen) peoples in this area has yet to be established. From the evidence of San Rock Art, it is clear that the San were around before the Khoi and the Nguni. They tended to be inland rather than coastal dwellers and lived by hunting and gathering. Stone tools have been found in many of the shell middens along the coast, which indicates that many forays were made to harvest shell fish. It has been suggested that the Khoi (Hottentots) arrived down the west coast of Southern Africa. They were a pastoral people who displaced the San, but do not seem to have occupied much of the area east of the Kei. Most of the place names for natural features in this area are of Khoi derivation. In the Buffalo City area, Nahoon, Gonubie, Qenera, Kwelera, Quigney and Chalumna are a few examples. The Southern Nguni peoples arrived in the Buffalo City area during the 7th century and Buffalo City lies within the area which became known as Xhosaland. The Xhosas were a branch of the Southern Nguni and trace their lineage to an ancestor named Xhosa. By the 1830s, there were two groups, the amaGcaleka and the amaRharabe. The Gqunukwebe were a group of Xhosas who had inter-married with the Khoi. By the 1830s, they occupied most of the coastal area from the Chalumna to the Kwelera Rivers under their chief, Phatho. The Ndlambe occupied the inland area around the upper Gonubie River and King Williams Town under Chief Mhala, and a lesser Chief, Dyani Tshatshu.

Archaeologists have recently made exciting discoveries of early man in the Eastern Cape and it is clear that much more needs to be done. The dating of the pottery found at the farm, Canasta Place, already pushes the previously accepted date of Xhosa-speakers in this area from the 16th to the 7th century. None of the hundreds of shell and stone tool middens along the coast in the Eastern Cape and the former Transkei have been investigated. This kind of work should be encouraged as it adds to our knowledge of the previously neglected aspect of our history.

Sites selected

Abatwa Rock Art Museum, Canasta Place, Calgary, Cove Rock, Ngxingxolo's Pool.

Sites to be identified

Tool-making site,
Shell midden site

ROCK ART:

ABATWA ROCK ART MUSEUM

Introduction

No rock art sites have been discovered within the Buffalo City area, but in the Kei Road area, Mr Victor Biggs has established a small Rock Art Museum. Here photographs and interpretations of rock art can be seen as well as stone tools. Mr Biggs will organise visits to rock art sites if required.

Location:

Haddon Farm. Turn off the R26 at the Kei Road turnoff. The entrance is about 1km along. Telephone Victor Biggs 043-782 0687; e-mail biggsfam@iafrica.com. Opening by appointment.

TOOL-MAKING SITE:

This is an opportunity to develop a site, which gives evidence of the occupation of this area by the San peoples. There is a Middle Stone-Age site where cores and flakes can be found near Gonubie.

There may be others. Contact could be made with archaeologists at the Albany Museum or the universities to identify others and possibly open one to the public.

SHELL MIDDEN:

There are numerous shell middens along the coast of Buffalo City which give evidence of early peoples utilising the marine resources. Any one of these could be identified and some archaeological work done. It could then be demarcated and a guide positioned to both protect and give information about the usage. This could be both a tourist and educational attraction.

CANASTA PLACE:

The discovery of pottery sherds on this farm led to an archaeological investigation being carried out on this site. It was headed by Dr Marnie Opperman of Fort Hare University. It proved to be extremely important as the sherds were identified as having been made by people who worked in iron, the earliest previously known sites were in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The dating of the sherds to around 600 AD proved that this is the westernmost site in Southern Africa occupied by an Iron Age people.

Description

The site is on a upland area overlooking the Buffalo River. There is nothing obvious to see, but in an adjoining hay land, there are well preserved underground grain pits.

Location

The farm is about 3 kms (?) off the R346, about 10 kms from the Buffalo Pass junction.

Access

This is a privately owned farm.

CALGARY TRANSPORT MUSEUM:

The interest in this site is not due to the museum transport aspect, but to the fact that sherds of pottery have been found in mole hills. In conjunction with these, small pieces of iron slag have been unearthed. This indicates that this is very possibly another iron age site, very similar to that of Canasta Place. An archaeological investigation needs to be done here very urgently.

The point in identifying this site, is that while Canasta Place is in private hands, Calgary is in the grounds of a transport museum and is protected. It would be ideal to set up a Pre-Colonial Site Museum in these grounds.

Location:

Off the N6.

Access:

Open to the public.

NGXINGXOLO'S POOL:

This is a pool on a river on a farm in the Mooiplaas district. It is the site where Gcaleka went into the water and came out as a diviner.

It bears further investigation.

COVE ROCK/ GOMPO ROCK:

Introduction

Cove Rock/ Gompo Rock features prominently in the human history of East London. Evidence of early human habitation, most likely Khoisan peoples, is present in the form of middens containing mussel and limpet remains and sherds of earthenware. Some of the earliest documentary evidence relating to Cove Rock can be traced back to at least the 17th Century to the wreck of the Dutch ship, the *Stavenisse*. Sailors from the ship were rescued off Cove Rock in 1687 by the crew of the *Centaur*. In the log book of the *Centaur*, Cove Rock has been referred to as “Doodkist” or “coffin” because of its shape as seen from the sea (Pettman 1931:113).

The Rock has also featured prominently in the religious lives of Xhosa-speaking people. The Xhosa prophet, Nxele or Makana, was converted to Christianity in 1812. In 1817, in an attempt at mass conversion through a show of his sacred potency, Nxele assembled people at Cove Rock to witness the resurrection of ancestors and cattle from a cavern beneath the rock.

According to traditionalist Cape Nguni belief paternal ancestral spirits, *A bantu bomlambo*, are said to reside in the water beneath the Rock.

Members of African Independent Churches, more specifically Amaziyoni or Zionist-type churches, also meet and baptize in the vicinity of Cove Rock. Water is believed by Zionists to be the origin of all living things and has curative properties. Water is said to be imbued with spirit (*umoya*) and the more turbulent the water, the more powerful the spirit (Kiernan 1978:29),

Gompo Town near East London city centre derives its name from the Rock.

Cove Rock is the nexus of things historical, cultural and natural. The Rock is a breeding site for the threatened African Black Oystercatcher and is a favourite fishing spot for many East London anglers.

Physical Description

Cove Rock/ Gompo is a unique sandstone headland with good examples of wave-cut platforms, a classic half-heart bay and a large mobile dune field unique to the East London environment. The adjacent area is a protected State forest.

Location

The Rock is situated in East London about 11 kilometres south west of the Buffalo River mouth between Hickman's River mouth (east of the site) and the resort of Winterstrand (west of the site).

Access

Travel along the R72 towards Port Alfred. Take a left turn towards Cove Rock. Just before the entrance gate to Cove Rock estates, turn right onto a dirt road. Travel a few kilometers along this road until one reaches a parking area to the right. Access to the beach is via the dunes. It is about a kilometer and half walk to the rock along the beach.

Condition

Natural weathering of the rock. There is considerable litter on the rock which has been left by anglers and recreationalists.

Capacity and Constraints

The dirt road is currently accessible to ordinary sedan vehicles. However the condition of the road does deteriorate with heavy rains and excessive usage, and needs to be constantly maintained. The dune path is eroding away with increased usage.

The rock can accommodate large groups, but controlled access is recommended to prevent destruction of rock flora, fauna and historical artifacts.

Recommendations

Tarring of the dirt road to the parking area is recommended. A boardwalk to the beach through the dunes is essential to prevent further deterioration of the dune path. Paths on the rock itself must be formalized to ensure that the ecological integrity of the rock is maintained. Adequate signage on the road and at the parking area is necessary. Information boards regarding the cultural, historical and natural significance could be erected on the rock. A local resident is already employed by the Municipality to act as car guard in the parking area. Additional people could be employed and trained as site guides. Information flyers could be also distributed by guides. There is an ablution block a few hundred metres from the access path. Local residents could be employed to keep these facilities clean and keep the rock free from litter.

EAST LONDON MUSEUM**AMATHOLE MUSEUM**

Both have displays on these subjects.