

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/257/0002
	Site Name	Makapans Cave, Makapansgat, Potgietersrus District
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-24.140913, 29.199523

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Site Category: Archaeological

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: The history of the caves is closely related to the events described in connection with Moord Drift. Just before the tragedy of Moord Drift, two men, K. Engelbrecht and William Robertson, trekked through this area to the north. They heard about the murders at Makapan and Mapela's kraals and at Moord Drift, and reported on these events to Piet Potgieter, Commandant-General of the Waterberg and the Soutpansberg. The news also reached Commandant-General M. W. Pretorius in the Magaliesberg at the end of September. The two Commandant-Generals immediately marched against Makapan, who, with his entire tribe, took refuge in these caves. According to Pretorius, the caves were 600 metres long and between 150 and 200 metres wide. The caves which communicated with one another and really formed one enormous cave, had two entrances in a cliff overlooking a steep kloof; these Makapan fortified by means of rough walls of stone. Ensnared in the caves and protected by them as well as by cross-walls and dark passages, they were in a position to beat off any attack with their assegais and guns, so the Boers decided not to risk an attack but to besiege the cave. The siege began on 25th October, 1854. It was during this siege that Comdt. Piet Potgieter, venturing too near the entrance, was shot and fell into a trench where a Bantu was hiding. Paul Kruger, then aged twenty-nine, was a fieldcornet of Rustenburg and a member of Potgieter's command. Coolly ignoring the danger to himself, he went in under heavy fire and rescued the body of his leader from the hands of the enemy. After a siege of 25 days the defenders were so reduced by starvation that the Boers were able to take the cave with little trouble and the tribe was practically exterminated. Scientific Many years after these dramatic happenings, more peaceful events brought even greater fame to the Makapan's Caves and others in the vicinity. It was discovered that they contain deposits of great scientific importance. The cave known as the Cave of Hearths adjoins the historic cave and indeed at one stage was a part of it. It was occupied by prehistoric men in very early times. The deposits accumulated as a result of many thousands of years of human occupation. Scientific excavations in these deposits by the Archaeological Survey revealed one of the most complete series of archaeological remains known, in which successive periods are represented and documented by stratified layers. The earliest inhabitants of the Cave of Hearths were men of the Earlier Stone Age who specialised in making hand axes, cleavers and other relatively large tools. They were eventually forced by extensive rock falls to vacate the cave. When the period of instability ended Middle Stone Age men who practised the Polokwane Culture took possession of the cave and lived in it until they in turn were succeeded by Later Stone Age people who were probably akin to the Bushmen. When these people abandoned the cave it was occupied by people who were familiar with the arts of making pottery and smelting and working metals—the Bantu. About one km below the Makapan's Caves and the Cave of Hearths are the caves known as 'the Limeworks'. Here the original caves were filled with dripstone and stalagmitic formations as well as breccias like those found at Sterkfontein. At the beginning of the present century and for a long time after that, these deposits were exploited on a large scale for the manufacture of lime. The stalagmitic material was used, while the breccia was either left untouched in the caves or thrown aside in large heaps. While the caves were still being worked for lime, interesting fossils from the breccia were submitted to Professor Raymond Dart of the University of the Witwatersrand, but it was some years after the limeworks had closed down that he was able to undertake extensive scientific researches there in collaboration with the Bernard Price Institute for Palaeontological Research and the Archaeological Survey. Studies of the manner in which the caves themselves were formed and subsequently filled by deposits have formed an important part of the

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scientific work that has been devoted to these occurrences. The breccias have yielded fragments of fossil manlike apes or Australopithecinae and prodigious quantities of other fossils which are still being studied. It was on material from these deposits, too, that Professor Dart based his controversial theory that the use of stone implements was preceded by the use of the bones, teeth or jawbones and the horns of animals. For this earliest stage of culture he coined the apt, though somewhat formidable term, Osteodonto keratic Culture' which means 'b one-tooth horn culture'. Unfortunately the public cannot be permitted to visit the caves. Not only are the caves extremely dangerous on account of the possibility of serious rock-falls, but they are seriously infested with the fungus or mould which causes cave sickness—an illness which has already been contracted by several of the scientists who have worked in them. Proclaimed 1938 Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Construction Date: Materials: Catalogue: , No: , Significance Category:

Damage Types: