

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/068/0001
	Site Name	Cango Caves, De Kombuis, Oudtshoorn District
	Date	30/12/2013 - 09:50
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.392290, 22.214380
Page No: 1	SiteAutoID: 28110	

Site Category: Geological

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: It is generally accepted that the Caves were discovered in 1780 by a herdsman of a farmer called Van Zyl of Doornrivier (now Herold) while he was looking for lost cattle. Later, this man paid a second visit to the caves accompanied by a schoolmaster and finally Van Zyl himself went with eight slaves to investigate the hole, taking a long rope with him. This is how the largest hall in the caves came to be known as the Van Zyl Hall. The ceiling of this hall is about 20 metres above the floor and the diameter is more than 80 metres. "The caves were formed by erosion of the limestone by underground water along natural fissures in the rock. The main chambers lie in a nearly straight line and were formed at the intersection of joints. They occur along what was formerly an underground river system. Water containing carbon dioxide is a solvent of limestone, and the channels formed in the rock by such waters would tend to increase in height in places owing to falls of the roof with the resultant formation of large wide chambers communicating one with another by narrower and lower passageways. The channel-ways were subsequently deserted by the streams for others at a lower level. The stalactites and stalagmites were formed by percolating waters dropping from cracks and fissures in the roof; their rate of growth is slow." Bushman paintings, unfortunately now obliterated, and stone implements recovered near the main entrance to the Caves, show that they were once inhabited by men of the Stone Age. In 1828 the old farm "Combuis aan de Cango" passed into the possession of Pieter van der Westhuizen, but the Caves were reserved by the Government and the field cornet of the Cango was permitted to charge entrance fees, and to impose fines upon offenders. The income from the Caves was to be used for educational purposes. In 1891 a gate was erected at the entrance. Herman van der Veen was appointed as the first custodian and Van Wassenaar (who had been exploring the caves since 1880) became the first guide but there were few visitors before the first good road to the Caves was built in 1897. In 1921 the Municipality of Oudtshoorn took over the control of the Caves. Electric lighting was installed in 1928 and at some places special effects are obtained by the use of coloured lights. Guides are constantly on duty. For many years a small tea-room near the entrance provided refreshments for visitors, but this has recently been replaced by an imposing building on the terrace below in which all modern amenities are provided. Proclaimed 1938" Visual Description: This famous attraction is situated in the Cango ward 29 kilometres north of Oudtshoorn. The entrance is in the face of a hill beside the Grobbelaar's River. The maze of caves with their beautiful stalactite formations are most impressive. Massive stalactites reach down from the lofty ceiling to meet the corre ponding stalagmites; great curtains of rock hang every where, while smaller formations add charm and daintiness to magnificence and splendour. In the Christmas number of the Cape Times for 1906, C. Wyndham wrote: "No penned description is capable of conveying an adequate idea of the magnificence and infinite variety of nature's cunning and clever workmanship in this great subterranean abode of perpetual night, this profoundly dark home of the beautiful snow-white and cream crystal-calcite, formed into millions of different designs and images, stately and fantastic, gorgeous and grotesque, massive and delicate, by the filtration, through the super incumbent dolomite, of lime-impregnated water falling slowly, drop by drop, with infinite steadiness and infinite persistence through centuries of time. The caves are described as follows by a leading geologist: "These' caves are among the finest stalactite caves in the world. The walls and roof. . . are particularly beautiful owing to the number, form and brilliance of the stalactites attached to them, while the floor is partly made of debris cemented with calcareous tufa and stalagmite. The main cavern is nearly one kilometre long," but the passages have been explored for over three kilo- metres. Colours: Site Features:

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Condition: Construction Date: Materials: Catalogue: , No: , Significance Category:

Damage Types: