

Regional collection of cattle dung

Since the 1990's my students, associates and I have been systematically traversing on foot the Limpopo Valley for Iron Age sites. SAHRA as well as the NRF and SANParks have copies of our annual reports. We now have some 1160 sites on record. Among other things, we recently discovered what appears to be a cultural boundary between Shona (making Khami pottery) and early Sotho-Tswana communities (making Icon pottery). Generally, Shona speakers lived near the Limpopo, and the best agricultural land, while Sotho-Tswana lived to the south (Figure 1). We know from Jannie Loubser's work that the Venda language and group identity evolved from interaction between these two language groups, but at the time of his research, we thought the Zoutpansberg was the boundary: Shona to the north, Sotho-Tswana to the south. Now, the new boundary suggests that the two groups may not have been so widely separated.

To investigate this potential boundary further, we need to date several sites, about 40: some 20 of each group. Standard excavations are not feasible for this large number, nor are they necessary. Instead, I want to AMS cattle dung samples. For this kind of dating, the samples need to be consolidated chunks to avoid contamination. Preliminary analysis at the CSIR shows that typical chunks contain sufficient carbon for dating. If the kraal deposit is consolidated, then we only need to make a small shovel-sized hole (about 20x20 cm) that extends slightly below surface. In some cases samples can be retrieved from animal burrows. I need a regional permit, such as those issued to paleontologists. I know the farms, but not which sites have consolidated dung deposits.

I have verbal permission from all landowners and responsible authorities: P Hatty & A Rae (Breslaw 49MS, Altenburg 51MS), F Lemmer (Kilsyth 42MS, Nekel 45MS), Anglo Coal (Sardinia 43MS, Lucca 54MS, Glen Avon 57MS) and J Zymstra (Venetia Reserve). These farms and reserve appear on the 1: 50 000 map sheets 2229AB, AC & AD. None are inside the National Park.

Figure 1. Khami (A) and Icon (B) sites on record in the Limpopo Valley.