

**An archaeological landscape study of forager and farmer interactions at the  
Motloutse/Limpopo confluence area, South Africa.**

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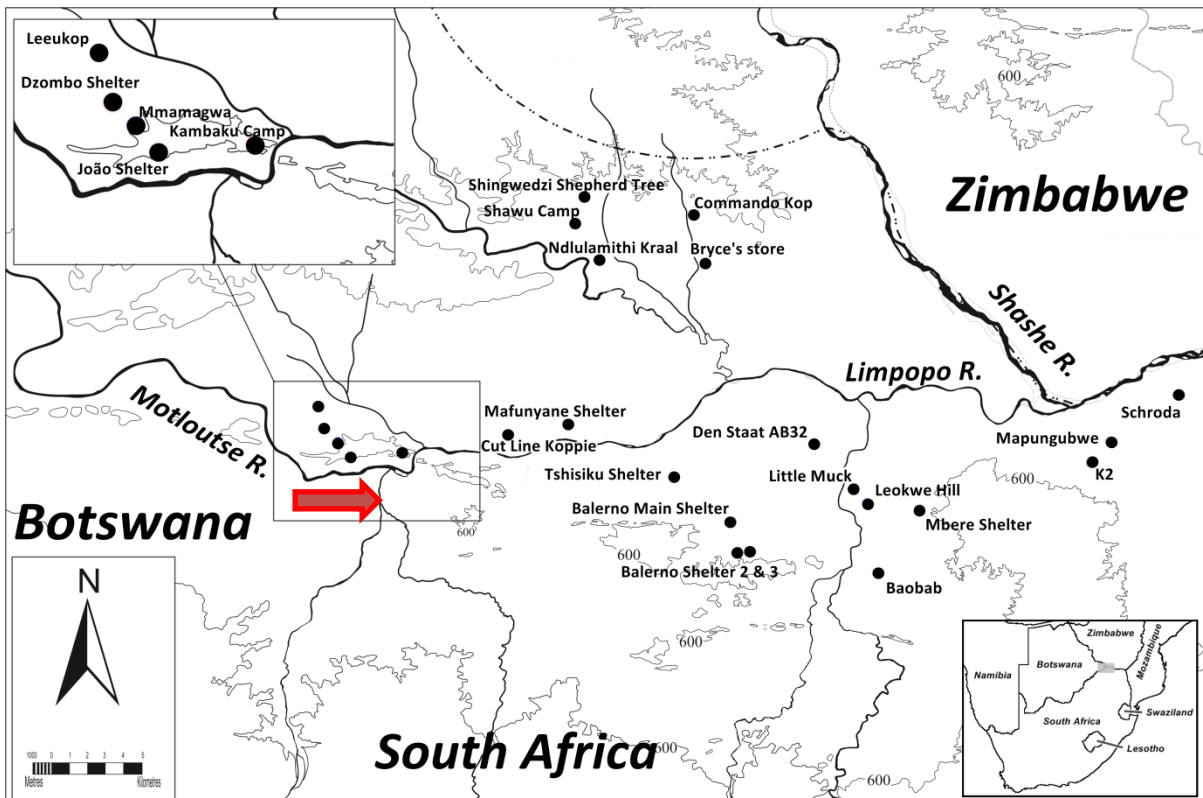
**2014**

**1. Introduction**

The last 1600 years of the Later Stone Age (LSA) in southern Africa are of particular interest to this project and excavation. Assemblages from this period contain a great deal of material diversity and variability (Hobart 2004; Sadr 2013). This is even more evident on the Mapungubwe landscape which has a particularly unique LSA record. It was here that the incumbent foraging community witnessed and took part in the farmer economy, which from AD 900 onwards saw massive social developments, affecting vast changes in the LSA cultural record. About 35 km west of Mapungubwe, one finds the Motloutse and Limpopo river confluence area, there has been little work done in this portion of the Greater Mapungubwe Landscape. There is however evidence of foragers in and around agricultural homesteads; this indicates a closer relationship of foragers and farmers than previously understood on this portion of the landscape. To understand the role foragers played in farmer communities, we need to consider the foragers role in farmers homesteads, economic systems and spatial planning. The site for which this permit application is made addresses these key concepts. This project has the potential to archaeologically represent the indigenous foraging people who once occupied this influential landscape, mostly overlooked in Iron Age excavations on the Mapungubwe landscape.

## 2. Archaeological background of the extended region

This study focusses on the farms of Breslau and Ratho, immediately west of Pont Drift border post just south of the Motloutse-Limpopo confluence. At present, there has been no study of the foraging occupants on the landscape, let alone their relationship with incoming herder and farmer communities. There have been studies performed in the surrounding area; notably north in Botswana by Forssman (2014) and to the east of this confluence area by van Doornum (2005). Thus this area sits in an ideal location to facilitate an interregional study, comparing interaction in South Africa to interaction in Botswana.



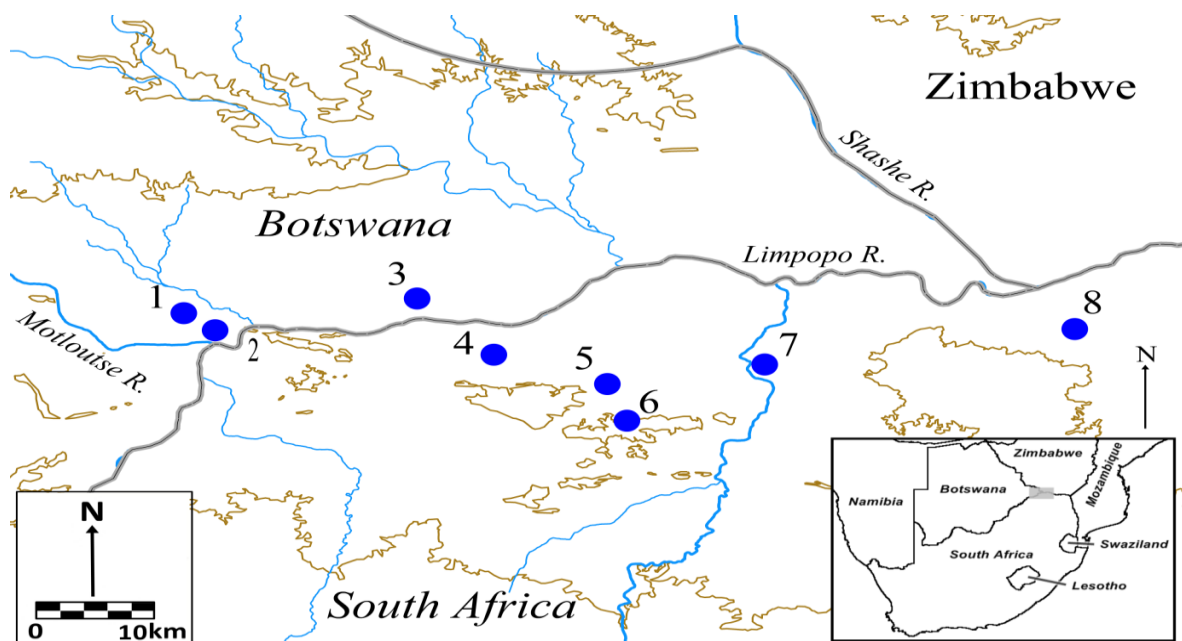
**Figure 1: The Greater Mapungubwe Landscape with sites mentioned in the text: Pointing to the position of Breslau's position of the Mapungubwe landscape.**

There have been multiple LSA excavations in the Greater Mapungubwe area, each with a unique archaeological record focusing mainly on shelter sites (Figure 1 for site locations). At Little Muck Shelter there are changes in the LSA assemblage such as: an increase in stone scrapers, ostrich eggshell beads, bone points and evidence of their manufacture as well as an increase in faunal species that correspond with the appearance of farmer ceramics on the site (Hall & Smith 2000). The increase of LSA artefact density and the dominance of scrapers have also been recorded at Balerno Shelters 2 and 3 and Tshisiku Shelter (van Doornum 2005). While this same trend was noted at Balerno Main Shelter, the site exhibits a greater degree of material continuity in the LSA sequence, possibly, as van Doornum (2008) suggests, because the site was located further from any farmer settlement (under 3km from any homestead) and used as a refuge or aggregation camp.

In north-eastern Botswana there are several comparable sites with the exception of: Dzombo Shelter which shows an unusual pattern, "in that before AD 900, scrapers dominate the assemblage, but

thereafter, until about AD 1100, backed tools tend to dominate and then back to scrapers until the site was abandoned” (Forssman in press). At another nearby site, João Shelter, foragers began living with farmers and started marginalizing their hunting and gathering lifeways from AD 1000 (Forssman 2014). The combined LSA picture of the Mapungubwe landscape is particularly diverse, with a range of outcomes spread across the landscape, many of which are related to the relationship that existed between foragers, herders and farmers. The initial view of Euphorbia Kop looks to be of a similar layout and nature to João Shelter.

Thus, by comparing the excavations in both Botswana and South Africa we find little consistency. LSA change between these regions cannot be reconciled and suggest that upon this landscape is a complex network of material change, which largely appears to relate to the local Iron Age sequence. To test this, we need to look between the study regions, which is precisely where my study area occurs.



**Figure 2: The Greater Mapungubwe Landscape with sites mentioned in the text: 1-Dzombo Shelter; 2-João Shelter; 3-Mafunyane Shelter; 4-Tshisiku Shelter; 5-Balerno Main Shelter; 6-Balerno Shelters 2 and 3; 7-Little Muck Shelter and 8-Mapungubwe.**

### **3. Problem identification**

At present there is an extremely bias view of foragers in northern South Africa, with the majority of research being restricted purely to the Mapungubwe area. However, the peripheries of the Mapungubwe state will provide a much better archaeological representation of interaction. That Motloutse-Limpopo confluence area has the potential to expand the knowledge base of the Mapungubwe area by looking at this left flank of the Greater Mapungubwe Area. This area is extremely rich in archaeological remains and the Motloutse could have facilitated a trade corridor into Botswana, connecting that landscape with the Mapungubwe landscape. This would be the first

section in the trade corridor used to deliver and obtain goods from the Indian Ocean (see Huffman 2000). How foragers interacted and engaged with farmers economically, and their rate of assimilation or rejection to farmer society is effectively unknown and unstudied in this area.

The following problems have been identified and will be addressed in this project:

- No LSA study has been performed in the region and as such we do not know enough forager-farmer interactions
- Farmers settled in the region and began interacting with foragers, there were many forms of interaction, including foragers moving into farmer homesteads.
- The Motloutsi/Limpopo confluence area is situated at the end of the Mapungubwe trade corridor, foragers living there may have facilitated the transportation of trade goods and assisted within the processing of trade goods such as hides, ivory and OES beads. Thus taking part in state development, archaeological research in this area coupled with findings from the Mapungubwe landscape is needed.
- Research has favoured a Mapungubwe to coast dichotomy and ignored the incoming trade items from the interior, placing an emphasis on East Coast Trade

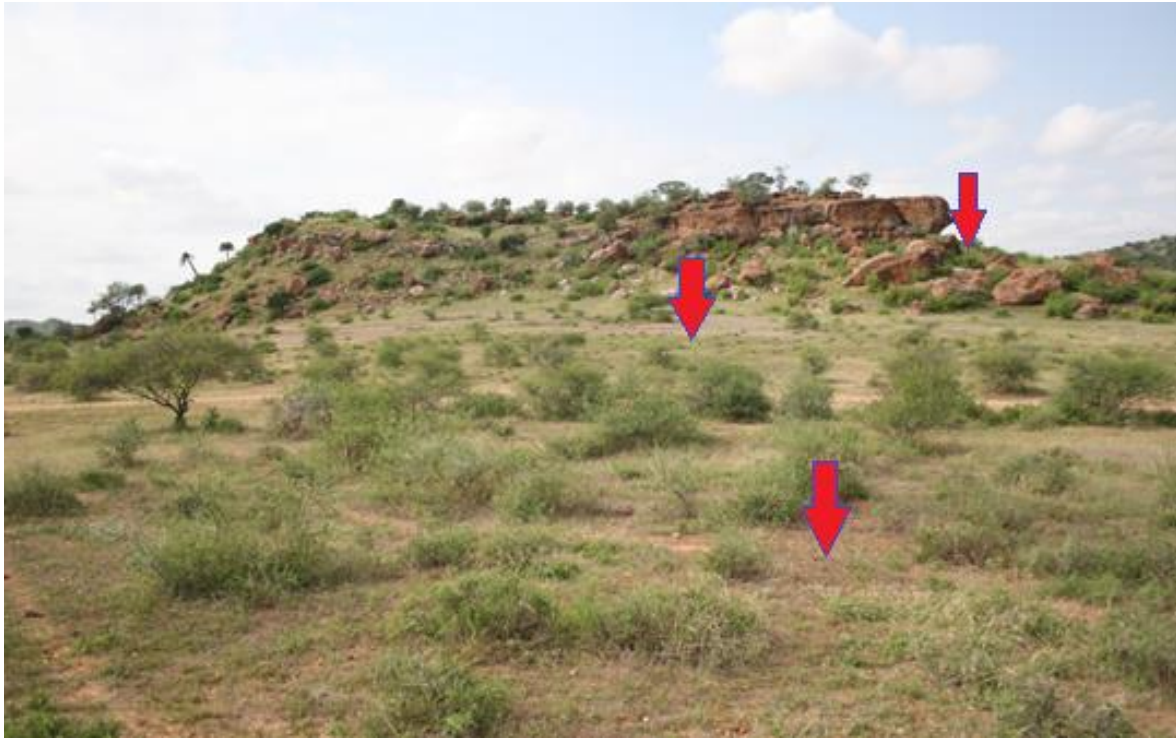
#### **4. Research Aims**

In addition to addressing the problems above, this project aims:

- To understand the economic value of foragers living in a farmer settlement and how this role relates to state development.
- To study the progression in forager settlement changes from mobile to sedentary.
- To consider the link provided by the Motloutse River with the Botswana interior and how this impact local trade.

#### **5. Research Site**

In the survey of Breslau 57 sites were identified. Of these, Euphorbia Kop (22°15'17.69"S; 29°1'54.85"E) is of particular interest as it is a farmer homestead situated at a sandstone koppie with an associated and seemingly contemporaneous forager presence. Identified on the surface was a large ceramic scatter (K2; AD 1000 – 1200), ostrich eggshell beads, K2 Garden Rollers (glass bead form) and a LSA stone tool scatter all in the same surface context. The association between the Iron Age and LSA remains suggest the producers of these two techno-complexes, namely farmers and foragers, had a close relationship and one not recorded or explored in much of the region.



**Figure 3) Photo showing Euphorbia Kop and points of excavation: top-shelter, middle-kraal and bottom-stone tool scatter.**

## **6. Methodology**

Euphorbia Kop will be excavated using standard archaeological techniques, sticking closely to the methods of Forssman (2014) and van Doornum (2005) for comparative purposes. This method is designed to integrate various components of the site in order to study the settlements organization and occupation history. Three separate 1x1m trenches will be excavated in spatially distinct components of the site; the homestead, open living area and rock shelter. The excavation will be conducted in spits (50mm) following natural stratigraphic units.

The artefact assemblage will be separated in the laboratory into its separate components (e.g. stone tools, bone points, ceramics, beads, fauna etc.) and analysed accordingly. The goal of the analysis will be to stratigraphically categorise the artefacts into different phases of interaction and test the statistical significance of artefact change through the archaeological sequence. Radiocarbon dating will be done on charcoal samples and I will then perform a material-spatial analysis to determine different occupational zones at the site. During the course of the project, and depending on the finds, different analytical techniques may be included.

Using these techniques it will be possible to achieve the aims of this project:

- A topological study is required to assess the composition of the artefact assemblage as well as the various attributes. This will facilitate the tracking of stone tool production and use over time, as well as assisting with the chronological appearance of ceramics, glass beads and other farmer material. Radiocarbon dating samples will be taking from areas where we see the greatest changes in the forager material culture.
- Documenting the changes in the usage and function of the excavated artefacts will assist in identifying shifts in forager behaviour, further assisting with understanding interaction between foragers and farmers.
- The analysis will also be done when comparing the trenches to one other, noting if there are specialised activity areas and testing whether forager access across the site was restricted.

All archaeological finds and the data pertaining to this study will be compiled in a report and a copy will be submitted to the South African Heritage and Resource Agency (SAHRA) and all practices will comply with heritage legislation. All of the recovered artefacts will be curated according to best practice and stored at the Polokwane Museum (formal request still to be sent).

## **7. Work Plan**

July 2014	Preparation for excavations	Trent Seiler
15 Aug-30 Aug	Excavation of Euphorbia Kop	Seiler and students
Sep	Analysis of material, Digital reproduction of field records	Seiler and students
October-Nov	Write up of publication	Seiler

## **8. Relevant Fieldwork Experience**

I have been a participating member of several excavations during my time at the University of Pretoria. Some of my experience includes excavations at Sudwala Caves, Steenbokpan (near Lephalale), Paul Kruger's house, Kruger Park for Gerhard Jordaan's Masters research and then two weeks excavating on Maremani for our Honours practical. I am also under strict supervision from Dr. Tim Forssman and Dr. Ceri Ashley whom I will excavate with in July as preparation for my own field season.

## **9. Final Remarks**

Euphorbia Kop Will offer a great insight into forager lifeways on farmer settlements. Used in tandem with my survey results the site will offer a much greater insight into the interactions occurring in the periphery region of the Mapungubwe state. The lack of forager research in my study area is unacceptable and needs to be rectified through studies like this one. By finding out the role foragers had to play in the trade corridor to Mapungubwe and eventually the Indian Ocean will solidify the significance of foragers in this landscape and contribute towards the reorientation of studies in the Mapungubwe area. This will result in the correct attention being paid to a marginalized group of indigenous people.

## **10. References**

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## **11. Appendix**

Showing pictures of the above mentioned section explaining the cultural material at Euphorbia Kop.





Appendix 1: Stone tool scatter in the northern side of Euphorbia Kop.



Appendix 2: Decorated ceramic with OES beads and a K2 Garden Roller





Appendix 3: Decorated ceramic with a stone tool, found at base of Euphorbia Kop.



Appendix 4: Euphorbia Kop from the northern side facing south.