

REPORT ON THE EXCAVATION OF TWO LATER STONE AGE BURIALS FROM THE FARM LORRAINE NEAR CLANWILLIAM

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1. SITE DETAILS

Map sheet: 3219 AA Pakhuis
Magisterial district: Clanwilliam
Farm name: Lorraine
Owner: Strauss
Site No.: LOR 16
Local Name: Eland Cave
Location: 32°03'05" S, 19°01'19" E

2. BACKGROUND

Eland Cave was discovered by Ginger Townley Johnson, Hyime Rabinowitz and Percy Sieff in the early 1960s. The site was named after the prominent frieze of eland paintings on the back wall. Eland Cave contains several hundred rock paintings mainly in a state of good preservation. The lack of graffiti and other signs of disturbance is undoubtedly due to the isolated position and difficulty of access to the site.

The site has been recorded twice by the Archaeology Department at the University of Cape Town. The first occasion was in 1980 when the rock paintings were recorded and photographed by a group of students under the guidance of Tim Maggs. The second occasion was in 1991 as part of the Spatial Archaeology Research Unit (SARU) site recording programme. The site is known as Lorraine LOR 16 in the SARU data base. On neither of these two occasions, or on subsequent visits, were we aware that the site contained burials.

The burials were first noticed by Richard Davies when he visited the site in 1995. The bones were eroding out of the surface but did not appear to have been disturbed. As the skeletons were in a potentially vulnerable condition it was decided to mount a rescue operation. Accordingly an excavation was carried out in September 1995. The team consisted of Tony Manhire, Royden Yates, Judy Sealy, Tim Maggs, Richard Davies and Bronwyn Davies.

3. THE EXCAVATION

Very little of the skeletal material was visible on the surface and credit must go to Richard Davies for detecting the burials. There was a single, ochre stained, lower grindstone (made from quartzite) lying face down above the burials. The positioning of the grindstone suggests that it was related to the burial process. The surface deposits were removed and it was soon apparent that there were two burials. These were both young children, lying side by side in flexed positions. They both faced east towards the front of the cave.

The burial hollow was shallow, roughly egg-shaped and was larger than seemed necessary for the size of the burials. It was a scooped hollow rather than a pit and was dug directly into white ashy deposits. The ash layer was very thin at the base of the hollow. Below the white ash was a thin, crusty, brown humic layer lying directly on bedrock. Both the ash and humic layers showed evidence of termite activity.

The burial hollow was lined with grass and plant material. Traces of charcoal and corn residues were present in the grass which suggests it may have been recycled bedding material. The burials were laid on what appeared to be a the remains of a leather kaross, probably made from the skin of a small antelope. Although very fragmented, the position of the remaining pieces of leather showed that it had underlain both burials. Pieces of the leather showed scored cross-hatching and delicate stitching holes. These features were also present on the leather garment recovered with the Faraoskop burials (Manhire 1993).

Other finds with the burials included a single, very small, ostrich eggshell bead and some fragments of black mussel shells, *Choromytilus meridionalis*. It was not possible to determine whether these were associated with the burials or part of the fill.

4. THE BURIALS

The two skeletons were described in detail by Susan Pfeiffer and her associates. Two reports, the initial descriptive analysis from 1997 and a re-evaluation from 1998, are attached. The following is a summary of the main points.

Burial 1

This was an almost complete skeleton apart from the skull of which only a few fragments were recovered. The lack of cranial material is puzzling especially with the excellent preservation of the post cranial material. A space where the skull should have been was noted during the excavation. A possible explanation is that the skull would have been uppermost when buried and suffered damage subsequent to burial. The lack of cranial material has been observed in other south-western Cape burials (Manhire 1993).

The skeleton showed no evidence of chronic health problems and no suggestions regarding cause of death could be discerned. The age at death was estimated to be between 2 and 3 years.

Burial 2

The skull and mandible were totally absent. A few loose teeth which can be attributed to this individual are all maxillary. This suggests that the mandible was lost intact. The post cranial skeleton was well preserved although not as complete as burial 1. The lower left leg and foot were in a mummified condition.

There was no evidence of health problems and no suggestions as to cause of death. The age at death was estimated to be between 6 and 7 years.

Radiocarbon Date

Body 1, the more juvenile and more complete of the two skeletons was dated to 2145 ± 50 BP (Oxa-6217). The other individual is clearly the same date as they were buried together.

Reference

Manhire, A.H. 1993. A report on the excavations at Faraoskop rock shelter in the Graafwater district of the south-western Cape. *Southern African Field Archaeology* 2:3-23.
