

**REPORT ON EXPLORATORY EXCAVATION IN A SMALL ROCK SHELTER
ON TIERBERG, PRINCE ALBERT**

Between 26th September and 5th October G. Avery and D.M. Avery, assisted by two students (A. Heynes, University of Stellenbosch and J. Nelson, UNISA) conducted an exploratory excavation in a rock shelter on the farm Tierberg. The aim of the project was to obtain micromammalian and other remains that would be suitable for investigating recent palaeoenvironmental change. It was hoped that this would provide additional information on natural versus human-induced change in karoo vegetation that could be compared with results already obtained by DMA from Abbott's Cave in the Richmond area (excavated by C.G. Sampson, Southern Methodist University). We had been notified of the site and requested to consider working there by R. and S. Dean (Percy Fitzpatrick Institute for African Ornithology, UCT). They wished to place their modern observations (5-10 years) on animals and vegetation on the farm (Karoo Biome Project) into the context of longer-term fluctuations.

The shelter is some 8 m long and 3 m deep and testing by A. Mazel (Natal Museum) indicated a depth of some 70 cm. A single metre square was excavated to a depth of 40 cm, using Sampson's method of removing 25 x 25 cm subdivisions, in 2.5 to 3 cm spits where obvious stratigraphy was absent. In this manner better control over small-scale horizontal and vertical changes can be maintained. The area selected proved to be capped by the remnants of a crust of sheep dung which included some sheep bones. This was underlain by heavily calcined dung and then ash from fires. A significant feature of the deposit was the enormous quantity of ostrich eggshell, even within calcined areas; bone had virtually disappeared, however, although stone artefactual material was relatively common and there were a few pot sherds. We were very pleased to recover remnants of plant material, including grass, resin fragments and some food debris in the form of a few corn cobs, in the upper units. A 30 cm deep pit dug from a previous surface was exposed; it contained twigs and other plant remains blown into it and, at the base, two lumps of chert, the common raw material type in the samples. These pieces, which are locally available from the chert bands typical of this region, may represent the remnants of good quality material cached in the pit for later use. Adzes, which showed some differences in older levels, were the most common formal tool noted during digging, only one backed blade and a side scraper being noted in addition. The use of quartz crystal increased notably in the lower levels. Preservation of bone was improving in the lower levels as the degree of burning diminished; fragments of a bone projectile point were recovered and animal remains included snake, tent tortoises and a single leopard tortoise, a small antelope and a canid. Isolated fragments of freshwater mussel occurred. Bones of micromammals also started to increase and there is promise that useful samples will be recovered below 40 cm and in the upper levels of adjacent squares away from the destructive influence of the fires. Relatively large quantities of charcoal were recovered and retained throughout, their study being the most promising potential source of palaeoenvironmental information so far. Funding was provided by DMA's FRD grant and we were given free use of the nearby Karoo Biome Research Station. We are grateful to the owner of Tierberg Mrs P. Hobson for permission to excavate and for the assistance of her son Chappie, and R. and S. Dean.

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18 October, 1990