

Report on Shongweni North excavation permit

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Introduction

Geeske Langejans and Gerrit Dusseldorp obtained the excavation permit to excavate at Shongweni North and South in 2015. They were only able to secure research funding in December 2017. In the meantime, in response to a successful land claim of the Zwelibomvu community, the management of the nature reserve in which the sites are located was transferred in 2018. We were advised to liaise with the new managing authority Conservation Guardians to plan future work.

Due to the delay in securing research funding and changes in land management, we have not conducted excavations at Shongweni North and South Caves under the permit. We did study the materials from the Davies excavations (Davies 1975; Davies n.d.) in the KwaZulu-Natal Museum in Pietermaritzburg.

We have established contact with the new managing authority, Conservation Guardians of Shongweni Nature Reserve and we aim to apply for a new permit to conduct excavations at the site.

Site assessment

We conducted a site visit of the sites on 14 August 2018. The approach to the sites from the Shongweni Reserve pickinck area was overgrown, but the sites are regularly visited by livestock. We saw many hoofprints and encountered a mother goat with her baby.

We surveyed the materials housed in the KwaZulu-Natal museum in Pietermaritzburg to determine the character of the Pleistocene assemblages and are currently analyzing the results and preparing a paper on these collections.

Outlook

Our initial analysis of the museum materials suggests the site represents an important location to gain a greater understanding of the early phases of the Later Stone Age and the origins of the Robberg industry. A limited excavation to clarify the chronology and environmental context of the Pleistocene deposits would be welcomed by the managing organization Conservation Guardians.

References

- Davies, O. (1975). Excavations at Shongweni South Cave: The oldest evidence to date for cultigens in southern Africa. *Annals of the Natal Museum* 22, 627-662.
- Davies, O. (n.d.). Excavations in the large caves in the Shongweni reservoir park. Unpublished manuscript.