

REPORT ON PRE-COLONIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES (OLDER THAN AD 1652) ON LOURENSFORD, SOMERSET WEST, JANUARY 2015

Dr Janette Deacon

Janette@conjunction.co.za

At the invitation of the farm manager, Koos Jordaan, and following an e-mail from CPUT student Sally Reece in December 2014 reporting that rock paintings had been located on the farm Lourensford, we visited the farm on Sunday 11 January 2015. I was accompanied by Mrs Mary Leslie, who is a Council member of Heritage Western Cape and Chairperson of their Archaeology and Palaeontology Permit Committee, and by my daughter Melissa Deacon, her husband Rob Hey and their children Max and Charlotte. We met Koos and Kitty Jordaan, Johan West and Sally Reece at 08:30 and at the end of the visit I undertook to send a report on four archaeological sites as follows.

- Rock paintings on the bank of the Sneekop River.
- Stone artefacts that I saw in January 2010 on the slopes of the hillside on Uitkyk.
- A statement on heritage features submitted by the Nature Conservation Corporation as part of a management plan for Lourensford in 2008.
- Circular stone structures that Johan West had photographed at Diepgat, below the source of the Lourens River.

1. Rock paintings on the bank of the Sneekop River

In 1941, the Director of the Bureau of Archaeology in Pretoria, Prof C. van Riet Lowe, published an official list of rock paintings and rock engravings in South Africa. Amongst the 1,766 sites was one listed in the Somerset West magisterial district as 'Hottentots Holland Mountains (obliterated).' The list was updated and re-published in 1952 with a total of 1,938 sites, and this time there were two in Somerset West:

'Breakfast Rock: Somerset Sneekop Gorge, Hottentots Holland Mountains' and

'Heidelberg Cave: Above Lourensford. Crown Land' [this should probably have been Helderberg rather than Heidelberg Cave].

With directions from Ron du Toit in Somerset West, Koos and Kitty Jordaan and Sally Reece of Lourensford had located a site on the northern bank of the Sneekop River on Lourensford in December 2014. It is thus not clear from the two descriptions whether they apply to two different sites or perhaps to only one that was described by different informants. The farm road leading to the western slope of Sneekop crosses a small stream near the top and the road has been washed away at the second stream a few metres further on. This is the Sneekop River, which feeds into the Lourens River further down slope. If one walks up the northern bank (on the left hand side above the road), keeping above but close to the river bed, the site is about 100 m from the road (Figs 1 and 2).

The following GPS co-ordinates were obtained on a Garmin Legend CX:

Latitude: 34.04523 south; Longitude: 18.96462 east. Elevation: 1089 m



Fig. 1. Approach to the site from downstream. It is behind the tree trunk on the left of the photo. The stream is a few metres down to the right.



Fig. 2. The paintings are on the rock face on the left, above the sandy patch on the floor.

The paintings consist of two clusters of red dots made with a finger. The upper cluster consists of two sets of 6 dots just below the scale. The second consists of four sets of horizontal dots and two 'strings' that hang down from them, with a total of 48 dots. It is possible that a third set, now barely visible, was at bottom right of the second set

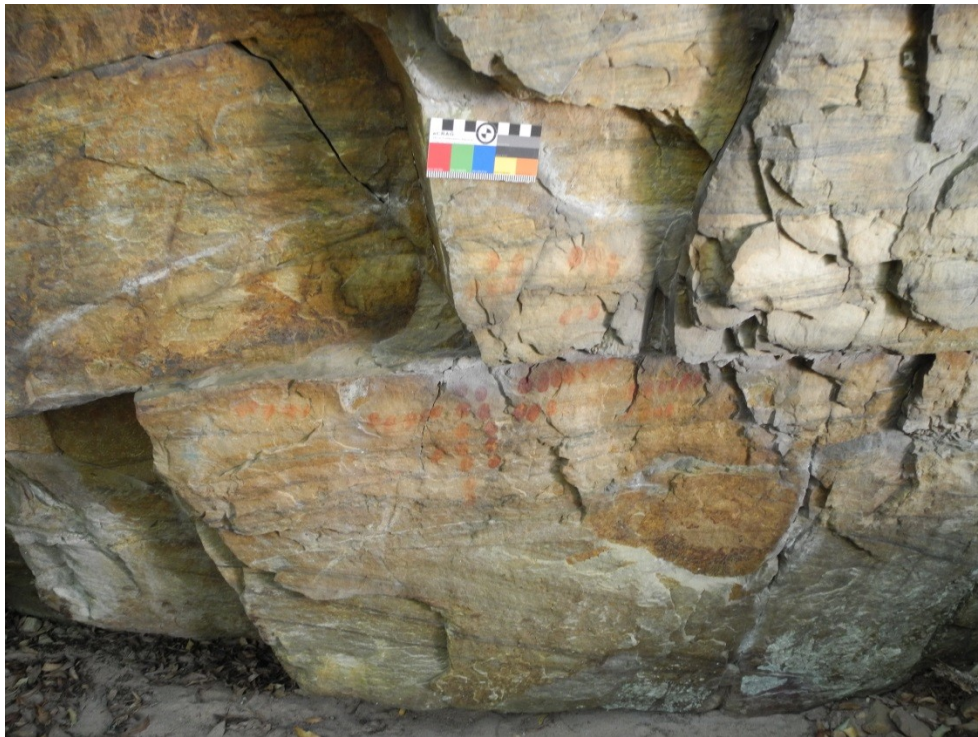


Fig. 3. Two clusters of finger dots, one above the other. The scale is 10 centimetres.

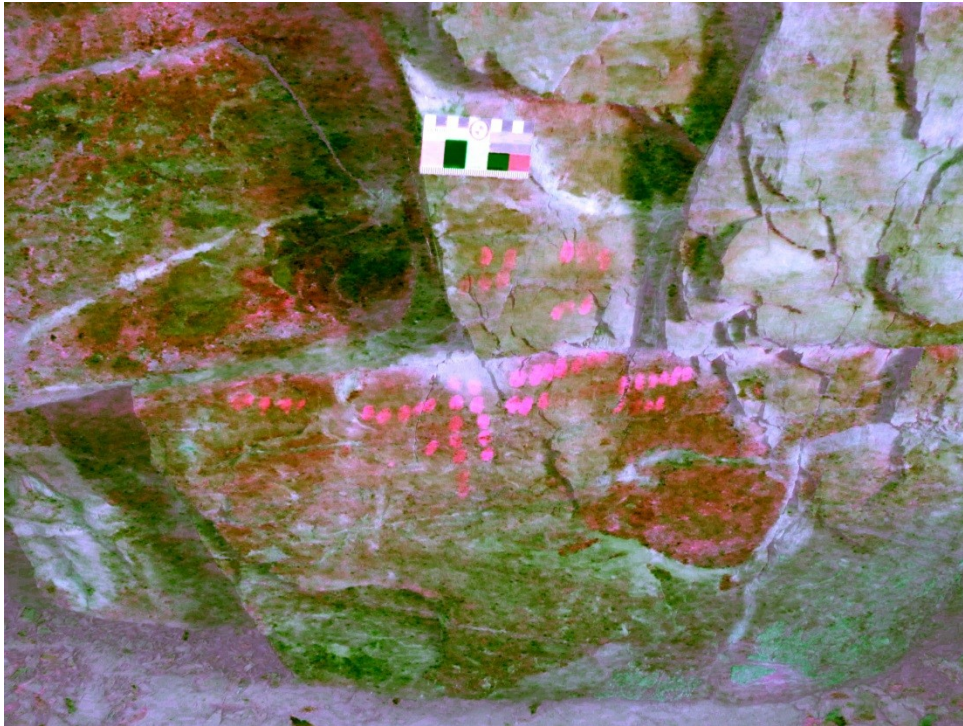


Fig. 4. Enhancement of paintings in Fig.3 using D-Stretch to highlight the artificial colour of the paint and distinguish it from natural red stains in the rock.

The floor below the paintings is sandy. No stone artefacts were noted. After heavy rains the water level in the river rises and sweeps close to the site.

Several studies of rock paintings in the south-western Cape have shown that finger dots tend to be found on top of earlier paintings of people and animals. This consistent pattern suggests that they are therefore likely to have been made after the typical naturalistic paintings attributed to San (Bushman) hunter-gatherers, and were most probably made by the Khoekhoe herders who moved into this region around 2000 years ago. They introduced earthenware pottery and domesticated sheep, and later cattle, gradually displacing the hunter-gatherers or employing them as herdsmen. The Khoekhoe (pronounced Kwekwe) had acquired domesticated animals from the Bantu-speaking Iron Age farmers who originated in eastern and central Africa and gradually migrated southwards from about 2500 years ago (about 500 BC), crossing the Limpopo around AD 200.

By the time of European colonisation in 1652, at least 1500 years after they first arrived, the Khoekhoe were well established in the western half of what is today South Africa, particularly along the coastal plain and in Namaqualand, while the Bantu-speaking farmers had settled in the east as their crops (sorghum and millet) needed summer rainfall. The San tended to live in more mountainous areas and in the Karoo, but there was constant interaction between them and the Khoekhoe.

Several theories have been put forward for what the finger dots might represent. Some suggest that the painters were counting something but there is no

consistency in the numbers of dots clustered together. Others believe they represent the flashes of light that people see when they go into trance to speak with ancestral spirits or make rain. Most recently, Dr Jeremy Hollmann has made a persuasive case for linking them and other patterns to the initiation ceremony for girls practised by several Khoekhoe groups such as the Nama, Griqua and Korana.

While there are differences amongst them, published descriptions of the girls' initiation ritual conducted in the 19th and early 20th centuries show similarities as well. In most instances, after her first menstruation a girl would be taken by other women in the community to a pool in a river. Her body would be decorated and covered with red ochre and clay. The clay was then taken off her body and placed in a leather bag. In some cases, the pelvic bones from a sheep or goat slaughtered for the occasion would be placed in the bag as well. The bag was then thrown into the pool together with buchu and other sweet-smelling herbs to calm the mythical Watersnake that lived in the pool. If the bag sank into the water without any trouble, the people believed that the Watersnake was happy with the girl and she would lead a peaceful life. However, if the bag did not sink successfully, it was a sign that the Watersnake did not approve of her.

After a positive message had been passed on by the Watersnake, there was general celebration and the girl received many gifts such as beaded necklaces, a front and a back apron decorated with beads, and decorated bags and ornaments. The shapes of these gifts and decorations are often repeated in the arrangements of finger dots, wavy and zigzag lines, and concentric circles. As the finger dots in the shelter next to the Sneekop River are close to a pool, and we know from historical records that Khoekhoe groups lived in this area before the Dutch settled there, it is very possible that they represent some of these gifts. They perhaps represent a decorated apron, or the dots used to paint a girl's face, or they might mark a place where an initiation ceremony took place. Similar patterns have been recorded in rock engravings as well as paintings in the western half of South Africa where the Khoekhoe lived.

2. Stone artefacts on Uitkyk, Lourensford

In January 2010 I was invited by Cecelia Wolmarans and staff at Lourensford to comment on a cluster of boulders (on the part of the property originally known as Uitkyk and later subdivided and named Republiek) that Dr Cyril Hromnik had claimed were placed there in the past by Khoekhoe as an astronomical observatory. He has made similar claims for other natural rock formations elsewhere in South Africa but they have not been independently verified. In my professional opinion it is highly unlikely that they were constructed prior to AD 1700 for such a purpose.

In the vicinity of the boulders we found numerous stone artefacts, some relatively recent and probably dating to the Later Stone Age (the last 20,000 years), some possibly Middle Stone Age (20,000 to 250,000 years ago) and a few that could have been made in the Earlier Stone Age (between 250,000 and one million years ago). It is difficult to be more precise because there were only a

small number that would be classified as the 'formal' tools that characterise the different stages of the Stone Age. The majority are flakes and cores that were produced during the course of stone tool manufacture, i.e. discards and waste. See Appendix 1 for an overview of the Stone Age.

This type of debris typically occurs where there is a good source of fine-grained rock used as raw material for making stone tools over tens or even hundreds of thousands of years. People would not necessarily have lived there, but would have come to break off pieces of rock for making tools either on the spot or at another place. As a result, there is often a wide range of artefact types, and of different ages, at one place. In this case, there has been mixing of artefacts of different ages through erosion of the slope following construction of the gravel road.



Fig. 5. A collection of flakes of fine-grained raw material used for stone tool-making, including two lumps of red ochre. The size range is typical of the Later Stone Age.



Fig. 6. Flakes and cores in fine-grained raw material of the size typical of the Middle Stone Age, or possibly the Earlier Stone Age, but as there are no formal tools it is difficult to be certain of their age.



Fig. 8. An alignment of rocks on Uitkyk claimed to be part of an ancient astronomical observatory, but more likely to be natural or related to construction of the nearby road.

3. **A statement on heritage features submitted by the Nature Conservation Corporation as part of a management plan for Lourensford in 2008.**

The statement about 'heritage features' copied below, which refers to the stone artefacts at Uitkyk, was not written by a person with professional experience in Stone Age archaeological sites. Note that:

- The correct terminology is Stone Age, not stoneage.
- There are no Stone Age middens on the property as far as I am aware. A midden by definition includes the remains of food consumed at the site, such as shell and bone. None of the sites I have seen were associated with shell or bone.

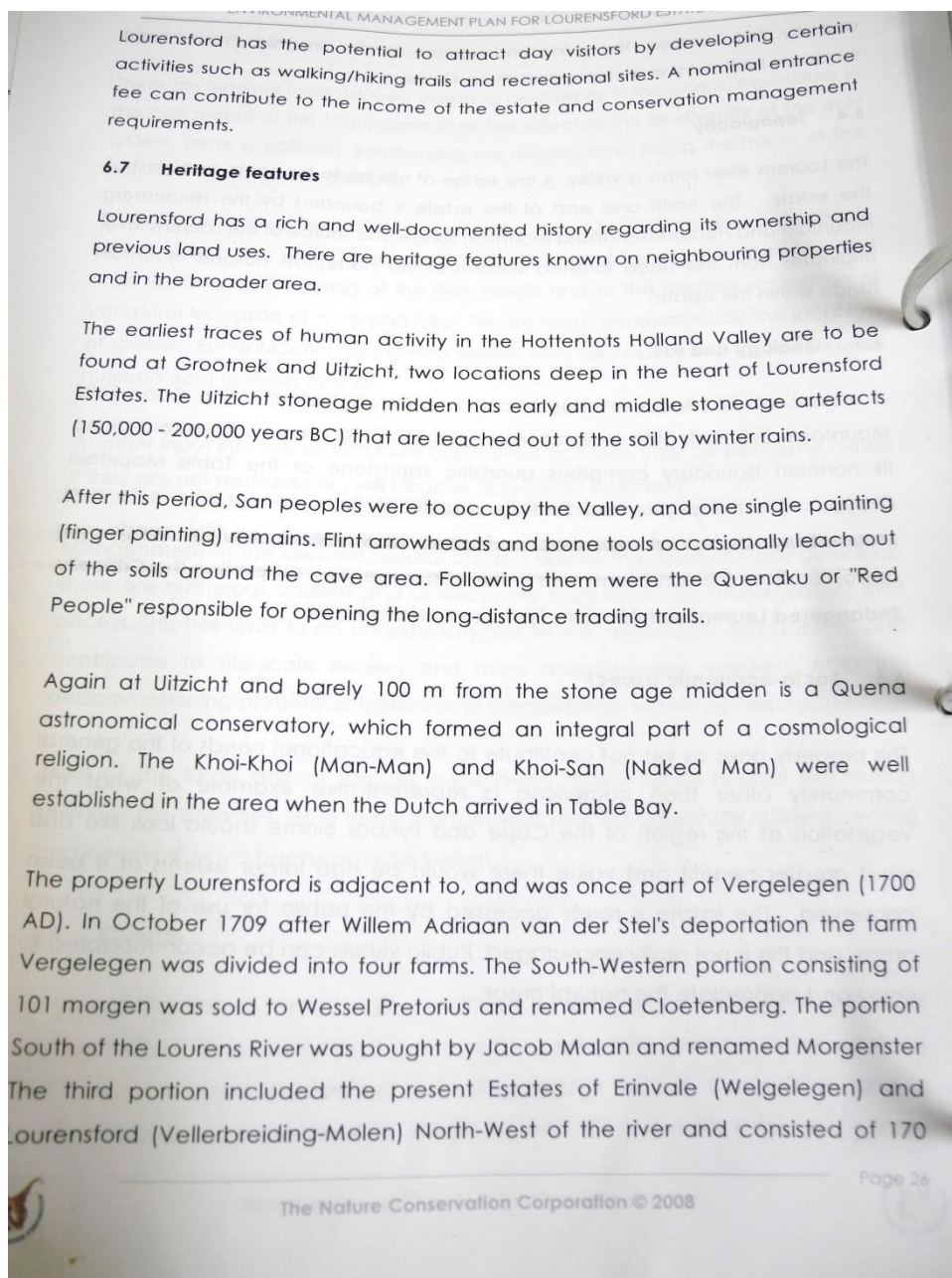


Fig. 9. Extract from Lourensford Management Plan by The Nature Conservation Corporation, 2008.

- The Stone Age artefacts I have seen are at what is usually termed 'workshop' or 'manufacturing' sites because the only evidence found there is for stone tool-making.
- Although there might be Earlier Stone Age artefacts at Lourensford, I have not personally seen any and they would in any case be considerably older than 250,000 years. They are usually found in old river gravels.
- A few of the artefacts I saw at Uitkyk could have been made during the Middle Stone Age which dates between about 250,000 and 30,000 years ago, but the majority seem to have been made during the Later Stone Age, and probably within the last 12,000 years. Appendix 1 lists the various stages and ages of the Stone Age in South Africa.
- The term 'leached out of the soil by winter rains' is incorrect for the process described. Leaching is a chemical process, whereas the process that has exposed the stone tools is a mechanical one that is better described as 'erosion'. The making of the road de-stabilised the slope and the soil in gravel deposited there from the surrounding area has been washed away by rain, exposing the stone tools and re-depositing them.
- Flint is a rock type that occurs in chalk deposits, mainly in Western Europe, and is not found anywhere in South Africa. The rocks used at Lourensford for stone tools is quartzite and silcrete.
- There was no evidence of stone tools at the Sneekop rock painting site and it is unlikely they would have survived as the river level rises substantially after heavy rain and clean river sand has been deposited by the river on the floor in front of the paintings.
- It is highly unlikely that bone tools have been found at the rock painting site for the same reasons as the lack of evidence for stone tools mentioned above.
- The purpose of the comment that Quenatu or 'Red People', traders, followed those who made the finger paintings is obscure. All the indigenous herders traded cattle and sheep widely amongst themselves before the Dutch settlement, and continued after Van der Stel and others claimed the land around Lourensford. One or more of these tribes, perhaps Cochoqua or Chainouqua, could have been responsible for the finger paintings which are found at many sites to the north, east and south of Cape Town.

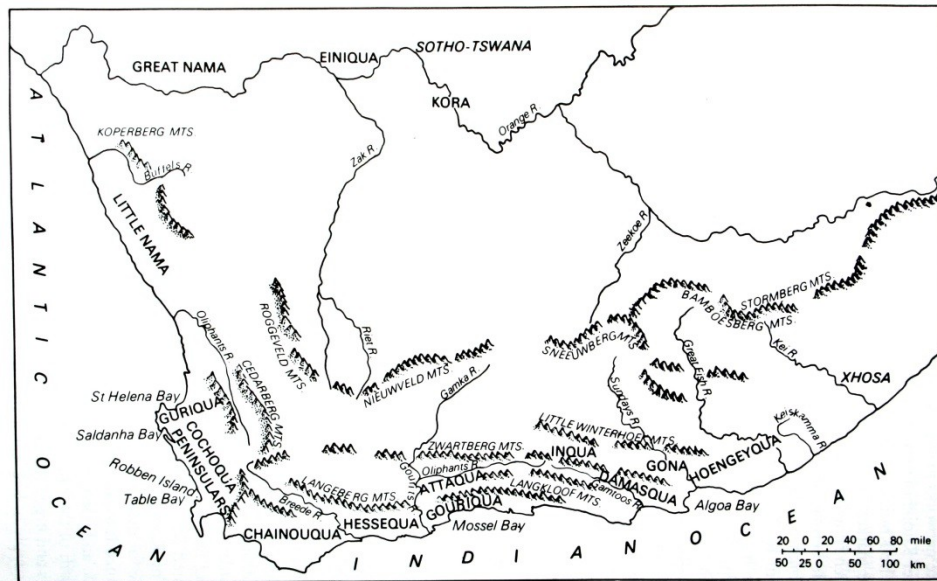


Fig. 10. Map of Khoekhoe tribes in the 18th century (1700s AD)

- The term Quena was used by Van Riebeeck in his diary in 1652 to refer to the herders who lived in the area around Cape Town. They were later referred to generically as 'Hottentots' and more specifically to tribes such as the Namaqua, Gurigriqua, Cochoqua, Peninsulars (including the Goringhaicona), Chainouqua, Hessequa, Gouriqua, Houtunqua (Outeniqua) and Attaqua. The preferred generic term at present is Khoekhoen, meaning people who spoke a Khoekhoe language. This refers to the family of languages spoken by the indigenous herders at the time of European colonisation.
- The meaning of the words Khoe, Khoekhoe and Khoekhoen (previously spelled Khoi), all of which are defined in the published Khoekhoegowab dictionary, is explained in Appendix 2 attached. The meanings given in the extract above are incorrect.

4. **Circular stone structures that Johan West photographed at Diepgat, below the source of the Lourens River**



Fig. 11. Stone structure Diepgat photographed by Johan West.

I have seen structures like this one at several places in the Cederberg and in various stages of disrepair. This is the most complete and suggests that it is not as old as the others, or that it has been recently repaired and/or used. In some cases, the structures have been identified by local people as lamb kraals, and as the base of a temporary hut or shelter used by shepherds or workmen. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, and taking into account the completeness of the walls, I would guess that it was made within the last 300 years, perhaps by European colonists and/or their indigenous or slave labourers. In pre-colonial times, structures like this were not made by San hunter-gatherers, and the Khoekhoe made huts out of reed mats (see Fig. 12). In addition to mat huts, the Nama still construct shelters known as 'kookskerms' out of bushes alongside huts to protect their cooking fires and shelter from the wind (Fig. 13).



Fig. 12. A Khoekhoe encampment with a mat hut in the late 1700s along the Orange River.



Fig. 13. A Nama family at their 'kookskerm' in the 1980s.