

# Border Cave



## Ingodini



### Introduction

People have used Border Cave as a living site for about 200000 years.

The site was first investigated by Prof. Raymond Dart during the 1930's. Subsequent excavations over the next half century yielded several outstanding archaeological discoveries.

### The Cradle of Humankind

The hominid sites of East and South Africa are well known for the evidence they have yielded supporting the theory that humans evolved in Africa. The earliest upright-walking hominids were present in both East and Southern Africa between 4.5 and 1.5 million years (my)ago. They are believed to have spread from Africa into Europe and Asia. About 1.8 my ago a newly evolved hominid, *Homo habilis* appeared in East Africa, followed by *Homo ergaster* about 1.5my ago. It was at this time that the first controlled use of fire occurred in Southern Africa. By 1.7my ago, a similar hominid, *H. erectus* had populated most of Europe and Asia, surviving until about 0.3my ago. It is believed that *H. erectus* evolved into *H. neanderthalis* ( Neanderthal) at about this time, surviving until about 30 000 years ago.

What sets human evolution in Africa apart from that in Europe is that evolution to "*anatomically modern Homo sapiens*" occurred about 150 000 years ago. While some believe the Neanderthals of Europe were slaughtered by modern H.Sapiens moving in from Africa, it is more likely that they were simply assimilated through interbreeding with anatomically modern people.

The human skeletal remains from Border Cave represent what is believed to be some of the oldest evidence for anatomically modern humans in the world. Various radiometric dating techniques suggest that Middle-Stone Age people were living at Border Cave in excess of 110 000 years ago

### Ritual Burials

In 1942 an infant skeleton was discovered at Border Cave. The find was of note because the child had been buried with a shell ornament. The bones of the child were stained red, suggesting that the body had been painted prior to burial. Both of these factors point to the deliberate burial of the infant. Burial with 'grave goods' suggests That these people were



capable of abstract and symbolic thought. This in turn implies that a fairly complex language was in use. While this ability is taken for granted today, it tells us a lot about the cognitive development of the people who lived at Border Cave 100 000 years ago.

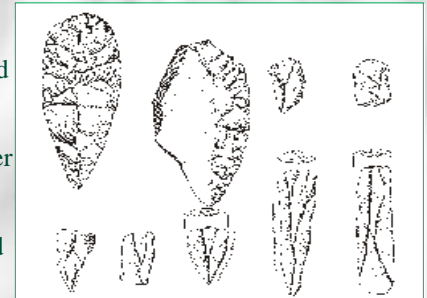
### Stone and Bone

A huge amount of animal material was recovered from the cave deposit. Because of the isolated nature of the cave, most of the bone from larger animals can be assumed to have been brought there by humans. This gives an indication of the food preferences of the prehistoric inhabitants. Bushpig, warthog, zebra and buffalo bone have been recovered from the cave. Analysis of owl pellets from dated layers within the deposit has enabled archaeologists to determine environmental fluctuations over time in that area.

Over one million stone artefacts were excavated at Border Cave.

Analysis of the stone tools has yielded another important date - that of the introduction of composite tools ( hafted blades and points) around 100 000 years

Ago. Various other tools made from bone, warthog tusk and thorns were also recovered.



### The Dating Game

Border Cave has one of the most continuous stratigraphic records, and this coupled with the fact that much of the organic material within these layers has been dated, has made it possible to date other items found in the layers. There are only a few sites in the world where such a complete record exists. Apart from the use of radio-carbon dating on organic material up to 40 000 years old, other techniques such as electron spin resonance and thermoluminescence dating have been successfully used at Border Cave.

### Conservation

The responsibility for conservation of heritage sites within KZN rests with Amafa / Heritage KwaZulu Natal. After the last excavations in 1987, the cave was sandbagged to prevent deterioration of the deposit. During 1998 the site was visited by representatives from the IUCN, and due to the great value of

## Border Cave / Ingodini interpretive Centre

With the financial assistance of Tourism KwaZulu Natal, Amafa has built an interpretive centre at Border Cave. Dioramas and models tell the story of prehistoric life at the cave as well as the excavations. Apart from the interest offered by the archaeological site, the area around Border Cave is spectacular, overlooking a 500m drop into Swaziland. There are toilets on site and braai and picnic facilities have been constructed. Entry to the interpretive centre is free, but a small guiding fee is charged for the optional walk to the cave. Currently a short trail to the cave exists, but one and two day hiking trails are soon to be opened, followed by rustic hiker accommodation.

Hours: 9.00 am to 4 pm, Mon to Sun (except Christmas Day and Good Friday)

### Getting there

1. From Mkuze take the N2 towards Pongola (10km)
2. Turn off and travel to Jozini (20km)
3. Cross the Pongola dam and travel towards Kosi Bay (40km)
4. At the Bambanani T junction turn left.
5. Travel for 8km and turn right to cross over the Ingwavuma River bridge.
6. Shortly after the bridge turn left onto the D1842 - from here the site is signposted
7. Travel 21km along the scenic D1842, passing the rural clinic on the left. About 1km after the clinic bear left onto the signposted track and follow this for 1km.

The road has recently been upgraded and the interpretive centre can be reached in a sedan, though a sturdier vehicle is recommended. The road may become difficult in the rainy season, and during this time an off-road vehicle may be necessary. We recommend that you contact Amafa during the rainy season to find out about the condition of the road.

### For further information:

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Interpretive Centre and braai area



Diorama



Border Cave