

Written for the International Geological
Society's visit to Sekukuniland, in Aug 1929

Some Notes on Native Warfare and Customs in *Basuto*
SEKUKUNILAND.

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While passing through a country so rich in the native history associated with the struggles of the first settlers, and so full of interest from the point of view of native life, a few remarks on these subjects may be welcome.

The term Sekukuniland is applied rather loosely to certain parts of the Eastern Transvaal extending from the Olifants river on the west and north to the Steelpoort river which forms its south-eastern boundary; The Lulu range runs across this country roughly from north to south and marks off Western and Eastern Sekukuniland, where members will spend several days.

The great bulk of the natives living in Sekukuniland belong to the Bapedi section of the Basuto race. They used to be a warlike and virile tribe constantly fighting their neighbours and in the days of their greatest chief Tulare who died in 1824 were the predominant tribe in the Transvaal. In the middle and second half of last century they were in almost constant and active opposition to the white settlers. These struggles culminated in the so-called Sekukuni War in 1879, during which the final issue was fought round Sekukuni's stronghold, known since then as Wolseley's Fighting Kop.

The Voortrekker Boers who appeared in these parts in 1840 under Hendrik Potgieter failed to subjugate the Bapedi. One story goes that the Swazies offered the Bapedi country "clean of Bapedi" to the Boers for 100 head of cattle but the Boers refused to let them "clean" the country, even if indeed they could have done so which is ~~improbable~~ ^{improbable}.

It was soon after the early fighting with the Voortrekkers that the Bapedi Chief Sekwati moved his headquarters

and made his stronghold on Dajate under the eastern slope of the Lulu range. Though this Chief was of a peaceful disposition himself there was constant skirmishing with the white settlers, till in 1857 an Agreement was entered into making the Steelpoort river the boundary between the Bapedi and what was then the Lydenburg Republic.

Sekwati died in 1861 and his son Sekukuni at first tried to keep peace with the whites but as his tribesmen had by that time bought muskets from Delagoa Bay those of them who were still living ^{on the Lydenburg side of} across the Steelpoort soon gave trouble and this brought on the "war" of 1876.

On this occasion President Burgers collected a force of over 2,000 Burghers, a few Krupp guns and 400 wagons. He attacked Sekukuni's stronghold but failed to take it and the commando retired and broke up.

In February 1877 a peace was fixed up under which Sekukuni agreed to pay 2,000 cattle, though he remained defiant and openly stated that he still claimed to be independent to the Republic.

These native troubles were among the reasons given for the annexation of the Transvaal by the British in April 1877.

As Sekukuni was still recalcitrant and continued to attack neighbouring whites and natives General Sir Garnet Wolseley, after the close of the Zulu war, decided to deal with Sekukuniland. He reported in September 1879: "The condition of affairs there is a scandal; Sekukuni, being elated at the failure of the British to bring him to account, robs and plunders as he pleases, and the country is deserted by white settlers."

The terms offered by General Wolesley having been rejected, a column was formed, made up of six companies belonging to the 21st Royal Scots Fusiliers, ~~of~~ six companies from the 94th Connaught Rangers, a detachment of Royal Engineers, Ferreira's Horse, and four guns of the Transvaal artillery. A volunteer contingent from Rustenburg was added, while a force of 8,000 Swazies advanced from the Lydenburg side under Major MacLeod of MacLeod.

The decisive action was the storming of Sekukuni's stronghold on November 28, 1879 - a low but conspicuous norite kop (Wolseley's Fighting Kop), rising as an isolated feature from the surrounding plain. It is geologically remarkable from the fact that the little hill is built up of many large irregularly disposed blocks of norite, between which there are numerous narrow clefts or larger cave-like spaces, many of which ~~are~~ ^{were} occupied by the enemy and fortified, so that the defence of the Kop was carried ^{on} on from its interior, to the surprise of the attacking force.

On three sides of the stronghold a well-timed attack was delivered, while the Swazies also assaulted the main Kraals. These operations resulted in many of the Bapedi being killed, including three of Sekukuni's brothers, all his sons and several of his indunas. Sekukuni himself surrendered shortly afterwards on the Lulu Mountains; (his grandson Sekukuni II is the present chief).

Today - as we survey from the summit of Sekukuni's stronghold a landscape of incomparable beauty amid the eloquent solitude that is so typical of Africa's vast spaces, on one side the sombre Lulu Mountains towering over us, on the other the bold outlines of Thaba Mosago, sacred to the memory of departed chiefs, while in front of us a plain dotted with the peaceful labours of native husbandry - how can the mind realise the fierceness of primitive passions or the sounds of hatred which the mountains echoed ~~during~~ ^{during}.

during that great struggle, of which the following is an account by one of Ferreira's Volunteers ^{who} was present:-

....."The camp having been pitched in front of Sekukuni's, all arrangements were made for an attack at daybreak. We went to bed in a very expectant state, and 'thought of the morrow'. At half-past two next morning the whole camp was quietly astir. At three o'clock all the Volunteers left the camp on foot to several posts assigned to them, including Commandant Ferreira, to whom was given the honour of opening the attack. They proceeded quickly and quietly towards the foot of the mountain, hoping to get under cover of the boulders before daybreak; but when about 500 yards from their cover at the foot of the 'berg', daylight enough appeared to allow the Kafirs on the mountain to see them, who instantly poured in a tremendous volley from all sides which was returned with interest by all the volunteers and soldiers. Thereupon the signal was given to charge the mountain. Ferreira's men were the first on the mountain, and worked their way up from stone to stone, from krantz to krantz, until they had taken a large krantz overlooking the whole of the King's part of the stad, and commanding another large one on the other side of the mountain, from which the Kafirs were pouring a very heavy fire on other portions of the attacking party. This latter krantz had to be at once silenced, which was speedily done by a few well directed and heavy volleys by Ferreira's men; others at the same time pouring a heavy fire down on the stad, and driving the whole lot of the Kafirs before them to take shelter in higher parts of the mountain. Now came a well-timed and splendid volley of musketry, accompanied by a deafening cheer from the top of the mountain, which at once told us that the red-coats and Swazies from the other side of the attack had reached the top. And now began the grand chase, as the Kafirs had all taken refuge in the higher parts of the fastness. The 8000 Swazies set to with a will to 'rouse' them out, and drove them before them like flocks of sheep, stabbing them as fast as they could come up to them, the Makatees staying occasionally in their flight to turn round and discharge their guns, dropping a few of their pursuers. In the meantime one half of Ferreira's men had gone below to set fire to the stad; the others with the rest of the volunteers firing at the enemy as they fled before the Swazies, wherever they could see them. By half-past ten the whole stad was in flames, and the entire position was ours, when a few British and Swazie yells told the people at the camp that everything had been successful.

All then mustered on the flat round the Vecht Koppie, which the artillery had been shelling with two guns since 4.30 in the morning, but with no more effect than had they been blowing peas against an iron target. When the koppie was surrounded by the volunteers, Swazies, and red-coats, two rockets were sent up as a signal to charge, and with a deafening cheer everyone rushed on to the koppie. And now appeared the grand sight of the morning, when 7,000 Swazies spread themselves into open order, and 'swarmed' up the koppie like cats. But we must not forget Ferreira's men, who were here very much to the force, with their Commandant at their head. They were the first on the kopje, and received a heavy volley from the Kaffirs, who remained on the krantzes until the attacking party were within a few yards

of them, when the Kafirs took refuge in their caves, the entrances to which were natural clefts in the granite boulders. From thence they shot a large number of the attacking party as they forced their way up. But they were very soon silenced by a heavy fire of musketry from our fellows at the mouth of the caves, and took refuge further in. The kopje having been cleared of the enemy on the outside, the blasting was then commenced by the Engineers, and large charges of gun-cotton were fired at the entrance. The only visible effects were the disturbance of a few of the blocks at the mouths of the caves. Towards evening the kopje was surrounded by strong picquets of volunteers and soldiers. The night came on very dark, with heavy rain, which, favouring the Kafirs in the cave, they fired a heavy volley and numbers of them made a charge to get away, in which nine of them were shot, while a number of them escaped to the mountain. On Saturday morning, the 29th, the blasting was commenced again, and about ten o'clock 400 or 500 of the enemy came out and gave themselves up, together with a number of women and children.....

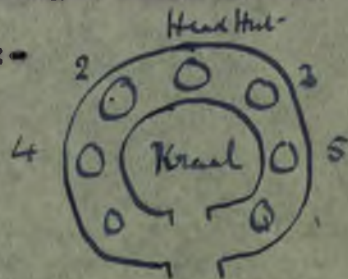
.....
During the whole of the morning half a million shots must have been fired, as bullets were flying about like hail. Some of the prisoners taken say that there was an immense number of Makatees on the mountain - many more than all the force engaged on our side. As to the kopje it is about 300 feet long and 200 broad, composed of huge granite boulders, one on top of another, and wherever any natural entrances appeared they were closed up by built schanzes."

Our loss was 42 whites killed and wounded, the 21st Royal Scots Fusiliers being the heaviest sufferers. Upwards of 500 Swazies were killed. The Bapedi losses were difficult to ascertain but are known to be very heavy.

Between the Fighting Kop and the main road are two prominent hills. The more easterly one with a rounded summit is Modimolle a sacred hill, over which the grass was never allowed to be burnt and on which rain doctors used to practice their arts. The one nearer to Fighting Kop is somewhat elongated and has a sharply pointed peak at one end. This Thaba Mosego a very sacred landmark, on which Chief Sekwati was buried in 1861. The actual spot is the site of an old cattle kraal on the neck between the two peaks which can be seen on the summit. Even today in times of drought or calamity local natives bring meat and pour out offerings of kaffir beer on his grave and ask his spirit for help. On the south side the footslopes of Thaba Mosego include a large outcrop of norite forming an extensive bare patch, across which can still be distinctly seen a footpath worn into the solid stone by the bare feet of crowds of natives, who pass upwards to join in the sacrificial offerings to the spirits of their ancestors.

Native Life, etc. At the foot of Welseley's Fighting Kop are a few native dwellings known as Kopjane's kraal occupying a corner of the ground on which in 1879 stood Sekukuni's Stad which was completely wiped out in the fighting on November 28th of that year. The huts, though not so well built as most, are fairly typical of the Bapedi style, with roofs pointed and no pole in the centre instead of the semi-circular beehive style of the Swazies and Zulus. Note also the characteristic reed fence surrounding the courtyard, and the narrow opening through the former. The ground between the fence and the huts is generally made more or less smooth and usually smeared over with cattle dung. The roof of the hut may be carried a little distance downwards so as to allow for a shallow verandah all round, partly concealing the small low placed entrance. In the courtyard one usually sees some domestic implements, such as a hollow ended stump and long wooden club used in the manner of pestle and mortar for crushing mealies, drinking cups of quaint shape made from the kalabash, a kind of *gourd* ~~ground~~, several earthenware belly-pots ornamented in black with local graphite for holding water or beer, stones for grinding corn etc.

A Mopedi with plural wives assigns huts to his wives according to their seniority thus :-



though the actual plan often has to alter according to the lay of the ground.

Altogether the Bapedi in their native surroundings display habits of life distinctly more tidy and cleaner than one is led to believe, to judge from the condition under which the natives often live in the outskirts of some of the larger towns of South Africa.

Plate II.



Escarpment of Magaliesberg Quartzite, overlooking the valley of the Waterval River, north-west of Lydenburg.

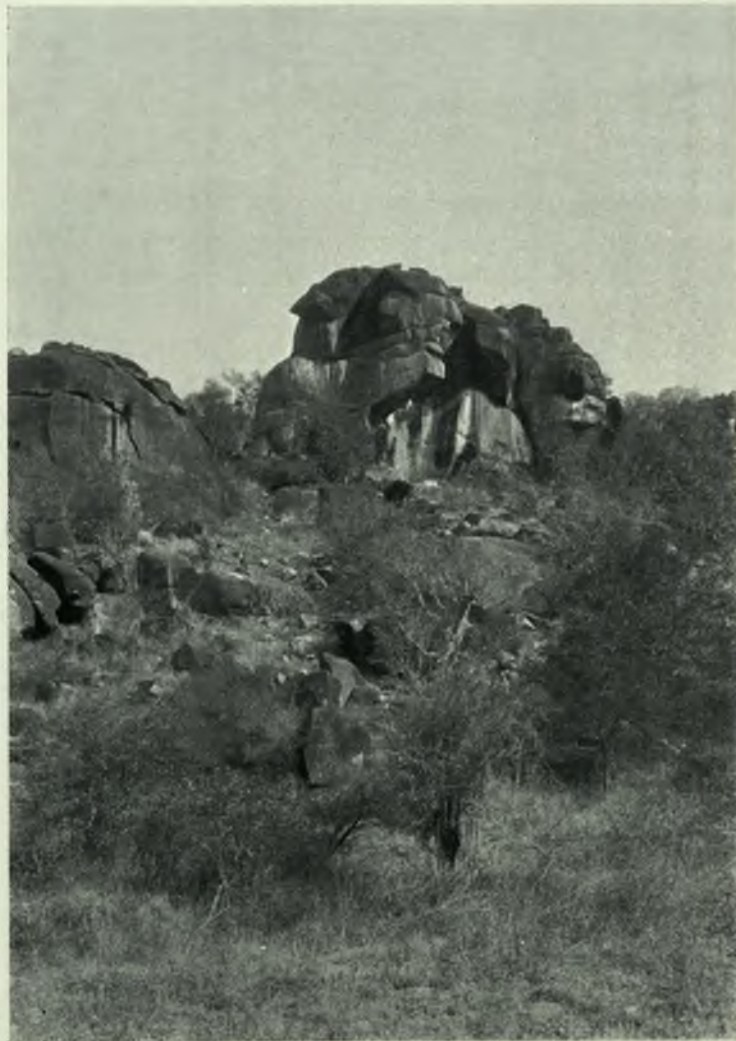


Fig. 1.—General view of Bushveld country in Secoecoeniland.



Fig. 2.—Escarpment of Daspoort Quartzite, overlooking the Oliphant's River near its junction with the M'Thlapitsi.

Plate IV.



Norite Kopjes, Secoecoeniland.

Plate III.



Bands of Magnetite, near Magnet Heights.

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