



NEW PREMISES?

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
HISTORY WORKSHOP

THE KADITSHWENE PROJECT

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Mmbatho High School
Bophuthatswana.



The History

Khaditshwene lies at Tswenyane, north-east of modern Zeerust. The site was originally occupied by stone age hunter-gatherers. An abundance of stone flakes and tools lie scattered across the area.

By 1500 A.D. it had become one of the bases of the Bahurutshe, an iron age culture whose influence gradually expanded until, by the late Seventeenth Century, Khaditshwene was the recognised capital of the region.

The Rev. John Campbell was the first European to visit the site. He found a city of more than 20 000 people sprawling across the Tswenyane hills - the biggest urban concentration in southern Africa outside Cape Town at that moment. The king's residence looked from the summit of a hill across the plains which roll today to the Botswana border.

Campbell faithfully describes the city and its surroundings, in the record he kept of his travels.

In 1823 disaster struck Khaditshwene. The Mantatise people, fleeing from the ravages of the Difaqane (Mfecane), struck at the city and burnt it to the ground. A year later Moffatt travelled through the area and found it deserted.

The location of what was once a proud city was quickly forgotten and the problem of finding the exact site has recently become a minor controversy. We are proud to be part of the debate.

David van Wyk: Project Co-ordinator.

The Project

The project forms part of the Integrated Studies approach used at the school. The in-depth study of the Khaditshwene site involves the students in the integration of various disciplines and affords them the opportunity of learning more about a part of pre-colonial southern African history.

The project aims to promote a better awareness of environmental, historical, geographical, biological, anthropological, ecological and cultural factors amongst students and the wider community. It has already enjoyed wide local media coverage.

The fact that the actual site of Khaditshwene is disputed by respected academics allows students to participate in an academic debate of some importance.

The students involved are expected to organise every aspect of the project, from shopping for stores, raising funds and finding transport to and from the site, to ensuring that the exploration is conducted correctly. A member of staff acts as facilitator and project co-ordinator.

Thus far the investigation has established that the site is easily capable of having supported the 20 000 people that Khaditshwene is known to have housed, that the geography of the area matches that described by early visitors to the city, and that close investigation of artefacts found there points clearly to this being the site of the ancient capital.

The investigation of the site and the promotion of the project continue...

The School

Mmabatho High School is a non-racial, multi-cultural school committed to affordable educational excellence.

In order to prepare students to face the challenges of a non-racial and democratic society, the school uses projects such as this to encourage personal growth and initiative and the ability to think critically.

The multi-disciplinary approach as used to study the Khaditshwene site is used in Standards 5 - 7 to prepare students to cope with the Joint Matriculation Board syllabus in Standards 8 - 10. In the 11 years since the school was founded, its students have achieved marked success in the JMB exams.

The school regards itself as a community resource and has initiated several projects aimed at serving the educational and cultural needs of the region.

With 24 nationalities represented amongst the students and nine amongst the staff, no one set of cultural norms is accepted as "correct". Instead, respect for and tolerance of differing cultural and religious values are stressed. Of the 530 students, roughly half are boarders. The school is co-educational and admits students from Standard 5.

A new Media Centre, Library and Auditorium are being constructed at present as part of a phased development programme funded by private sector companies. The school is a member of the Southern African Association of Independent Schools.

Mark Briston: Principal

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INTRODUCTION

The 1992 project represents a continuation of our work over the previous two years. During the 1991/92 period we were fortunate enough to attract through our publicity campaign, the attention of the archaeological fraternity in South Africa who are consequently showing a great deal of interest in our work.

We have obtained the services of Mrs Caronien Louw, who has, after one of our exhibits in the foyer of a supermarket chain, offered us her services as a qualified archaeologist. She is in the process of setting up a code of conduct which would satisfy the requirements of both the South African Archaeological Association as well as the Monuments Council. She has also assisted us in drawing up a budget for a three year development programme and has helped us to draft a proposal in cooperation with Bop National Parks to acquire the land in which the ruins are situated with the aim of establishing a game reserve and archaeological theme park. We are hoping that Mrs. Louw will assist us in the accurate surveying of the site and the drawing of a site plan. We do not foresee ourselves at this stage becoming involved in any excavations as the documentation and interpretation of what is on the surface as well as the research of written and oral records will keep us occupied for the foreseeable future.

We were also greatly honoured to act as guides to the site for two very eminent personalities in the archaeological fraternity in the persons of Dr. I. D'C Maggs and Dr. J. Sealy from Natal Museums and U.C.T. respectively. We greatly appreciated their advice and in sharing in their immense knowledge of the subject.

Generally, financial support for archaeological projects is very skimpy. We see the concept of conservation in a very holistic sense rather than in the traditional narrow sense. For us conservation does not only entail natural conservation but also as cultural, historical conservation. We would like to see how we can bring to bear all our skills and knowledge on the field of conservation. It is for this reason that we draw our membership from not only history pupils, but from pupils who are strong in all subject areas and we attempt to see the relevance of each subject to the project, how the subject can address and inform the project and how the project in turn can influence our subject knowledge. From our reading of primary source documents we have found for example that French missionaries operated in the region of the site soon after it was destroyed.

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Those pupils who do French as a subject had to write letters to the French Embassy to try and obtain the archival documents produced by these missionaries and will have to translate them for us once obtained. Those who do Setswana as a subject did interviews with old Bahurutshene people in our search for oral traditions that might relate to the site. Setswana pupils also assisted with the traditional names of plants space associated with Tswana towns. Art students contributed the and animals, the traditional Tswana terms for various identifiable features in the stone enclosures of the ruins, as well as the traditional Tswana terms for the very unique division of urban space. Art students are responsible for graphics of the project, making pictures of plants, animals, potsherds, other artefacts and features. Geography students investigated the geology of the site, recorded the nearest water supply, river systems, climatic conditions and topography.

Biology students investigated the ecosystem noting the present fauna and flora and comparing it to inventories extracted from the accounts of early missionaries. Science and Chemistry students studied the soil types and tested slag from furnace features for iron or copper after finding reference to these metals in the mission accounts.

It is obvious that our project is of immense educational value as it allows us to break down the artificial barriers between the various subjects we do at school and shows us the important ties that link them together. The project is therefore, as far as we are concerned a unique educational institution which we would like to share with all other children in Southern Africa.

We have sought to make the project one which would bring us as teachers closer to the pupils we teach, to bring about a better understanding of the cultural historical background of our pupils. We have also sought to break down the barriers between our school and the wider community that it serves, and importantly we have sought to investigate together the striking absence of the important historical contribution of this community to South Africa as we know it today. Finally we have investigated through oral history recording and through reading the accounts of missionaries, traders and hunters the condition of the environment in our region at the time of the height of the Bahurutshene, and have asked ourselves how this environment became as degraded as we now find it to be, and we have made a number of proposals to National Parks:

- That our pupils become involved in a peer tutoring programme concerning natural and cultural historical conservation;

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- That the site of Gaditshwene be declared a national monument, and that a game reserve and educational theme park be created there;
- That an integrated approach be followed in the teaching of conservation, and that children be allowed to discover and teach through the realisation that they are not just simply empty vessels thirsting after knowledge that could only be obtained from adult educators in the classroom context;
- That the school, the Parks Board and the Museum should seek to be educated by the community, rather assuming that the community is just an ignorant mass to be moulded and manipulated.

As a school we have also taken these lessons to heart and have thrown out the old official history syllabus at standard six and seven levels and have introduced a much more relevant and interesting syllabus to which our pupils and community can relate. We are also hoping to influence the manner in which the history syllabus is adapted nationally in South Africa.

THE GADLISHWENE PROJECT

The underlying theme in most of the deliberations of those concerned with the future of museums in South Africa is how transform museums to keep pace with what is perceived to be the increasing democratisation of the wider society.

Museums as institutions are rather alienating for ordinary people, they are experienced as mysterious almost sacred places, where you tread softly, do not touch any of the icons, and speak in a whisper. The cultural objects are displayed in lifeless fashion torn from their vibrant often noisy environment, indeed in the museum, out of the functional everyday context of their use these common tools appear alien, and would most probably appear so most to those from whose cultures these objects were collected. Museums are the places where the white middle class come to view the strange and mysterious objects of the quaint traditional societies whose reality has been reinterpreted in the history books, by archaeologists, anthropologists and social scientists, collected, sterilised and objectified, pacified out of the vibrant noisy setting of their origins, processed and packaged into an environment that the white middle-class can digest.

How may we make museums noisy, vibrant places, lived in places, places that would unite the objects of cultures with the creators of culture? This is very difficult in South Africa, where while we have objectified the objects of culture in museum displays we have denigrated and trampled the creators of that culture through the dehumanising system of Apartheid. We could start by removing Apartheid, but all our structures still reflect Apartheid, our schools, our hospitals, the way we arrange our living space, the content of subjects like history, our libraries, galleries and museums and as individuals we are all very race conscious, and for that matter class conscious.

We believe that we have found a partial answer to the problem in the History Department of Mmabatho High School. We have decided to place the creators of culture and cultural objects at the centre of a unique project, the aim of which is to break down barriers rather than to erect them. We have identified our region and its people, from whom we draw the majority of our pupil population as important historical subjects, as actors that made a significant contribution to the complex picture of modern South Africa.

As teachers we have discovered that we can best teach our subject by being taught by the community we serve and the region in which we work. We had to humble ourselves and accept that the content of our knowledge is largely

irrelevant but that the skills of the historian could be put to great use. We decided to move away from the content based syllabus to a skills based syllabus that would create a content relevant to our pupils and the community. This new approach which puts the child and his or her experience of local culture, religion, language and history at the centre of our focus and widening out from there to the regional, the provincial the national and the international had its roots in the Gaditshwene Project.

This project uniquely combined local history, the childrens first language, Setswana, the skills obtained from history, geography, science, biology, art, English, Afrikaans and French with input from the white farming community, National Parks, the local museum and the Archaeological Association of South Africa in a process of total integration of all involved be it the teacher and the pupils, the school and the community or seemingly exclusive subject disciplines such as French and Setswana, or seemingly exclusive people such as black school children and conservative white Western Transvaal farmers.

The project was started in 1990 by Mr. Clive Smith, then Deputy Head of Mmabatho High School and almost immediately involved the curator of the local Mafikeng Museum, Mr. Geoff Phillips. Mr. Smith identified a number of iron age stone ruins related to the peak period in the history of the Bahurutshe people. Also known as the Batswaeneng, this community set up their capital town on the twin hills of Tswenyane, a stone walled town that rapidly grew in size to accomodate by 1823 a population of some 16 000 people.

The importance of this urban concentration was quickly realised by the London Mission Society, who had heard traders and blacks from north of the Orange River refer to it. There had been no penetration or settlement of the interior by white settlers as yet and the LMS were keen to establish mission stations in the interior and for this purpose was keen to ally themselves with influential and stable economic and political entities in the interior. The Batlapin whose capital was at Dithakong was one such community, and the LMS established the famous Kuruman Mission there. In 1823 the Reverend John Campbell was instructed to visit Gaditshwene, which he did making detailed notes during his stay concerning river systems, fauna and flora, general geography, customs, dress, agriculture and architecture. He also painted influential figures, the king's district Gaditshwene, the rainmakers house and enclosure, the interior of a hut, and of tools and objects of interest such as pots, hoes, spear heads and a smelting furnace.