

MATOBO



SOCIETY

PO Box FM 648, Famona, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com

Welfare No: W/O 30/94
www.matobo.org

NEWSLETTER 104 / JULY 2018

1 – NJELELE SHRINE BOMBED

The sacred Njelele rainmaking shrine in Matobo district was attacked on Friday 29th June by yet-to-be-identified suspects, who used mining explosives to blast the main rock that covers the shrine.

Njelele is situated at Matobo in Kezi, Matabeleland South province, and has since time immemorial been used by people from various parts of the country and abroad for rainmaking ceremonies and healing of various ailments that affected their communities.

A source and villager from Matobo, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the shrine was bombed on Friday night and the attack was discovered by the shrine caretaker Solifa Ncube on Saturday morning.

“Njelele Shrine has been bombed. Khulu (Solifa Ncube) said on Friday he left all in order at the shrine. I went on Saturday and we discovered that the rock, which covers the shrine, was bombed using mining explosives. They also destroyed the pots in the shrine and looted most of the traditional artefacts which were stored in the shrine,” he said.

“They went inside the cave and destroyed the pots and also put explosives, destroying the stuff inside. Khulu said during the week, he found salt sprinkled all over the shrine and there are a lot of men from apostolic sects who are claiming to be praying on Matobo mountains and we wonder if it’s only in Matobo where there are mountains. Our tradition and culture is being destroyed in front of us.”

The source said the incident was reported to the police and when they left the shrine on Saturday, the detectives were investigating the matter.

National Museums and Monuments visited the site on Monday 2nd July, whilst the matter was reported to UNESCO’s World heritage Bureau that was meeting in Bahrain at that time.

The Matobo Conservation Society issued a statement condemning the attack, noting that it was not just an attack on Zimbabwe’s heritage, but an attack on the World Heritage itself. The Njelele shrine and practice are one of the key elements of the Matobo Hills World Heritage status.

Also read articles 8 and 9 below on Njelele and the “bombing”

2 – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING/25th ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND

This year marks our 25th Anniversary and so we plan to hold a special weekend’s programme of activities at Maleme Rest Camp, amongst which will be the Annual General Meeting. The programme is:

Fri 16 th Nov	18:00	Bring and Share Braai at Maleme tennis courts
Sat 17 th Nov	09:00	We will travel south to Wona Cave and then onto the ringing rocks, planning to be back by lunch time. In the afternoon, there will be a climb up Pomongwe, or a walk to Maleme Dam depending on your preference
Sat 17 th Nov	18:00	“Formal” anniversary dinner under the stars at Maleme tennis courts. We have engaged an outside caterer, and cost will be \$15 per head, which you can pay at the same time as your 2018/2019 subscriptions. Dambari will do a presentation on their Matobo camera traps
Sun 18 th Nov	10:00	AGM at the Maleme tennis courts. Only PAID-UP members will have voting rights at the AGM

The remainder of the day is unplanned so folk can arrange their own activities

The whole weekend will be self-catered, except for the Saturday dinner

We hope that we will enjoy the support of our members at this special occasion. You are welcome to attend just the AGM, or to make a weekend of it. Please make your own Maleme accommodation reservation if you want to stay at Maleme Rest Camp – or you may choose to camp at the Maleme Dam camping ground. Contact details for ZPWMA Reservations at Bulawayo Regional Office: Florence Loretta Tafeni, cell: 0774 913 109, 0712 760 569, landline: 63647/61018, Email: ftafeni@zimparks.org.zw. Parks will accept payment for accommodation by RTGS or Ecocash

Please contact the Vice-Chairman on matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com if you require more information.

3 - NEXT EVENT

Date	Sunday 16 th September 2018
Venue	Eastern Matopos
Meet	8:15am to leave by 8:30am, Ascot Car Park
Travel	All Vehicles
Details	Provide own chairs, tables, meals and drinks. Don't forget your hat, sunblock

September comes around and with it an explosion of colour as the *Brachystegia tamarandoides* in the Eastern Matopos burst into leaf. Once again, members have asked for a trip out to see this kaleidoscope of colour, and so we will be travelling out to the Eastern Matopos to enjoy a spring day in the hills. We will be very privileged to have Meg Coats-Palgrave join us for the day – so not only will we enjoy the splendour of the *Brachystegia*, but we will enjoy Meg's knowledge and company. This promises to be a memorable day out.

4 – REPORT BACK

Twenty-five members, ranging in age from 8 to over 80 assembled at Cresta Hotel and made their way out through the National Park, and southwards to the area dominated by Mount Silozwe. Travelling south, the first signs of a cold front could be seen – but surprisingly it never quite reached the Matopos and so a delightfully warm winters day was enjoyed by all. Tradition dictates a cup of tea on arrival, and shortly thereafter we commenced our climb to Silozwane cave. With some pushing, pulling and cajoling we got EVERYONE to the cave! And it was well worth the effort. Silozwane is truly one of the great caves – not just in outlook, structure and location, but for its breadth, variety and density of rock art – with a little Bantu art thrown in for good measure. Its famous pictures of flying ants, with translucent wings, giant figures, mythological snakes, fish and a range of animals is simply breathtaking. You need to spend an hour or more to appreciate the detail of the art – every minute more being exposed to the naked eye. After some time enjoying the art and views, Rob agreed (with little persuasion) to give a talk on the site, that until relatively recently had been a rain making site. Moira followed up with National Museums' plans for the area. This was followed by more time to appreciate the cave, before members started the descent – well not quite all members as some elected to climb to the summit and enjoy the near 360-degree views in this land of giants. Some massive granite domes and ridges fill this part of the Matopos landscape. Picnic lunches were unpacked, G&T's flowed and a good time was had by all.

After lunch a few more daring members elected to take on Mount Silozwe, tackling it from the northern side. Whilst we all know it to be the largest single mountain in the Matopos, it is not quite appreciated until you are lost within the fingers and folds of the northern face. And then after climbing steadily, a look around shows the enormous drops that have opened up on each side and the spectacular views in all directions. On reaching the summit, there is a grand spectacle of the Matobo Hills lying largely across the north of you. The northern descent is always tricky but at least it's rapid! Some of the climbing party ventured up a new climbing route, which for those watching was a little hair raising! Late afternoon tea, drinks and then the last of the party would their way north as the sun set Silozwe aglow in a softer light. A magnificent day out, enjoyed by all.

5 – RAINFALL

ERRATA – In our last newsletter we got our figures and locations mixed up. We now correct them – After a prolonged dry spell over Christmas, good rains were recorded in February and March. At the end of the season, the following had been received; eastern Matopos 859mm, western Matopos 505mm and Bulawayo 576mm.

6 – CALLS FOR WETLANDS PRESERVATION GET LOUDER

HARARE, June 27 (Newsday). Human rights lawyers have challenged the government to establish a national environmental council to help preserve wetlands and bar politicians from illegally allocating residential stands in swamps. Addressing journalists in Harare yesterday, representatives of the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) and Harare Wetlands Trust said the proposed advisory council would work hand-in-glove with Environment, Water and Climate minister Oppah Muchinguri.

7– ZIMPARKS FUNDS ABUSED

Parks authority revises stinky deal

HARARE , June 17 (The Sunday Mail). The Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, which is battling to sanitise a stinky 25-year lease agreement with a South African company, has approached the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning to have the irregular arrangement restructured under the Joint Venture Unit. This comes after ZimParks had violated State tender procedures in awarding a long lease for a total of 20 of the authority's premium lodges in Victoria Falls to Adage Safaris of South Africa, an anomaly picked by the then State Procurement Board (SPB). The State tenders regulatory body, which was last year renamed Procurement Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (PRAZ), fined Zimparks \$900 for the offence and ordered it to cancel the agreement, but this instruction has not been obeyed due to legal complications. Zimparks was ordered to end the flirtation with Adage after failing to justify how the authority had picked the investor.

8 – SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND THE NJELELE SHRINE

Cultural Heritage Pathisa Nyathi. This article was published in our Newsletter in 2014, but with the shocking events at Njelele we thought it apt to reproduce it again.

From far to the south the prominent hill stands above the rest. Distance has given it a sky blue hue. It is a cut above the rest. In comparison, other numerous hills pale into oblivion, save for Silozwi which is also a towering rock massif. The hill is known as Njelele, a Tjikalanga name that is thought to refer to some type of birds.

In times gone by the hill was the spiritual centre for people from far and near. Every year in about August pilgrims trekked on foot to perform rain rituals. Women in particular were the supplicants. Putting on their black spiritual attire the women, with men providing security to them, brought with them a variety of items, gifts and artifacts that were used in the ritual.

Black cloth and gourd cups (mikombe) are to be used in the symbolic manipulation of the environment to induce it to release the rains. We shall see later how, in the process of rain making, these items were used. They also carried items such as dagga, beautifully coloured skins of wild cats, beer and sometimes black or blue beads. The two colours are associated with rain.

Njelele is actually a disabled hill. Part of its power derives from this very fact. Within it there is a vast cavern where supplicants are led into. Within the big cave there is a recess where items deposited from several decades are lodged. This is the equivalent of the holy of holies. From above a booming human voice was heard. Whatever language people spoke Mwali was able to respond. As the pilgrims approach the sacred hill the shrine adept extols the praises of Mwali.

Thobela

Mbedzi nkulu

Dziba levula!

There are a lot more that he chants. It turns out the praises correspond to those of the Malaba people. That does not come as a surprise as all the shrine adepts are of Venda extraction. Kumile Masola has preserved the full rendition of the praises and, working in liaison with Professor Wentzel of the University of South Africa, he produced a book.

At one time David Sitwanyana Ncube was the shrine adept. He had taken over from his wife Ngcathu Ncube. Sitwanyana from Mahetshe (a corruption of the Sebirwa name Moekejo) near Maphisa once worked in South Africa and later embraced Christianity. He was a member of the Amapostoli, who perform the "dress" type of whirling and spinning dance. His father was Matshokodo while his mother was Luthe Mpofu. Tjobuta was his grandfather. The better known Mbikwa was his great grandfather. Tengani was the earliest known ancestor.

More importantly though is the fact that his ancestors originally came from VhuVenda. The shrine at Manyangwa in Bulilima is in the hands of the Dubes. They too trace their origins to Vendaland. It is the same story at Ntlogwa in Botswana where the Habangana Dubes are in charge. They too are Venda. Oral traditions are unanimous, at least in Matabeleland South, that the Mwali spiritual phenomenon was

brought into the Matobo Hills by the VhaVenda, regardless of whether they were Ndlovu, Ncube or Dube.

When the Lozwi became the rulers they recognised the Mwali deity and worked with it. It worked to counterbalance the political authority though at times there was conflict between the two sources of power. We pointed out in an earlier article that although the Ndebele became rulers as from about 1839 they did not provide the counterbalancing political authority to the Mwali phenomenon.

The Lozwi remained the last political authority over Njelele. This is the source of confusion today when people approach the shrine. They forget the political side to the shrine which is and can only be provided by the last qualifying political authority. That happens to be the Lozwi rulers.

We need to remember that there had been earlier political powers that ruled over the area. Mwali shrines as we said coincide with the arrival of the VhaVenda in the Matobo Hills. It is likely that, that happened during the days of the Togwa State that was headquartered at Khami (nkami wepfumba dzisina mulu). Today as you approach the hill you will see a sign that reads “KoThobela” The locals will also refer to the place as “Kokhulu”. This is a reference to the grandfather’s place. To the people it is known that the place belongs to someone male. There is a spiritual figure who lives there and is approached by people from various places. Daneel has done research that indicates the catchment for Njelele.

Due to colonisation and the advent of Christianity the catchment has shrunk. We, however, need to know who historically came to the shrine. First it is important to know there was specialisation within the shrines. Njelele as we shall see later was a fertility shrine. It was to do with the regeneration of the land.

Dula on the other hand dealt with war issues. It was to Dula that Joshua Nkomo turned when he was launching the campaign for independence in 1954. In the company of Grey Mabhalane Bango son of Luposwa and William Tjivako he approached the shrine. The story is documented in his book, “The Story of My Life.”

The catchment is best understood when we get to know who the spiritual figure at the shrine was. How was he perceived by the people? That demands that we perceive Mwali as a spirit who many years ago was a man of flesh. He was a historical figure who many descendants today recognise as their ancestor. Who are the descendants of Mwali?

9 - REPORT ON THE VANDALISM AT NJELELE SHRINE 29 JUNE 2018.

Mr T Runganga and Ms S. Khumalo; National Museums and Monuments

Introduction

Njelele is a prominent rainmaking shrine located outside the western boundary of Matobo National Park. However, the site falls inside the area prescribed as Matobo World Heritage Landscape. The site is approximately 100km south of Bulawayo city. The shrine is believed to be residence of Mwari (God) whose presence was shown by his voice. In Shona tradition, Mwari is the highest and final authority behind the ancestors. As such, Njelele is a highly revered site across southern Africa. The site is currently under the custodianship of Solifa Thobela Ncube of Venda origin.

Although the physical extent of the shrine is difficult to establish, the core of the site are the granite outcrops in Khumalo communal lands. The outcrops are on a mountain range that runs from east to west. The shrine is made up of several tunnels which lead and connect various scared chambers. Entrances to these chambers are closed with wooden poles. Several artefacts such as, iron hoes, clay pots containing liquids, cloths and piles of tobacco are found in the chambers. These artefacts could have been offerings to God. There is also a revered small granite boulder of approximately 1 meter high which is used as an altar by the traditional priests to present prayers and offerings.

Vandalism at site

The monuments department visited Njelele shrine on the 3rd of July at about 2pm we visited the home of the custodian with the hope of assessing the shrine. The visit followed reports in the local press which insinuated that the shrine had been bombed. We were told to come back on Thursday as the sacred shrine is visited early in the morning before noon. We were also told that Wednesday is a sacred day so there are no visits to the Njelele shrine. On the 5th of July 2018 we went back and arrived at 6am and proceeded to the site. The monuments team was led to site by the custodian and several *wosanas*. The custodian highlighted that several acts of vandalism were done at the site on 29 June 2018 by yet to be identified suspects.

Sacred Altar

The area around the altar was dug using a sharp tool, probably a pick or mattock. The custodian suspects that the culprits were searching for cracks to set up explosives. In the previous week the custodian highlighted that he had found salt sprinkled on the boulder- the acts he suspect to have links with members of the apostolic faith.

Sacred Cave

Inside the sacred granite chambers, several traditional artefacts were destroyed. These include four big clay pots which had liquids inside. Small pots which could not be quantified were also crashed into pieces. The custodian highlighted that a small pot which had fine gold was stolen.

Traditional ceremony

The custodian highlighted that the acts of vandalism did not only affect the physical fabric of the site but also the cultural and traditional values of the nation. As such he is in the process of organizing a traditional ceremony to be held at the shrine on 28 July 2018. The ceremony will be graced by local chiefs, spirit mediums and interested government departments.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Njelele be declared a national monument. A desktop study revealed that several attempts to accord the site national monuments status were resisted by the local communities. By then the locals argued that declaring Njelele would mean opening it up to tourists. They also feared that they will lose control of the site as traditional custodians to government organization and authorities. However, accordingly the site national monuments status will open up more interaction between government departments and traditional custodians towards better protection of the site. Additionally, in the last two decades, heritage management practices have changed to embrace traditional custodianship of sites. Moreover, during the visit, the site custodian recognized NMMZ as the legal custodians of Njelele. Therefore we can try to revive the nomination process for the site.

It is important to support traditional ceremony scheduled for 21 July 2018. This will help to cement institutional relationship with traditional custodians of the site.

It is important to keep track of police investigations on incident.

10 – GOVERNMENT TO ESTABLISH ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

By *Newsday*; - June 22, 2018; acknowledgment *Veneranda Langa*.

Parliament has recommended the establishment of an Environment Commission by January next year to protect the environment, including wetlands.

The issue was suggested in a recent report by the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Environment chaired by Proportional Representation MP Yeukai Simbanegavi. It was in response to a petition by lobby group Blue Agenda on behalf of residents of Kambuzuma Section 3, who had asked Parliament to compel the Environment minister to revoke the Environmental Impact Assessment certificate for a service station in the high-density suburb.

The residents felt that the project would harm the environment and should be abandoned. “The Executive should consider establishing an Environmental Commission in the manner of the Independent Commissions by January 2019, which should be responsible for the appointment of the Environmental Management board in order to secure the board’s independence from executive interference,” the committee report said.

“While the establishment of the commission is being considered, the National Environmental Council should be constituted as required by law by end of July 2018.”

Other recommendations by the committee were that the Environment minister should review and update the environmental plan by the end of January 2019 as required by the Environmental Management Act.

“The plan should proscribe any development on wetlands other than in exceptional cases of a public interest which overrides the need for the wetlands, and under strict conditions,” the report added.

The committee also called for alignment of the Environmental Management Act with the Constitution. “This would provide for an absolute prohibition of construction on wetlands other than in the case of overriding public necessity when another constitutional right would be infringed if the development did not proceed. This would also advance the constitutional right to clean water and obligations to protect biodiversity,” the report said.

On environmental violations, the committee said government should establish an environmental tribunal to investigate them by the end of July. “The tribunal should be composed of legally qualified

commissioners with expertise in environmental issues and have punitive jurisdiction. It should take over the functions of the EMA board. The Environment minister should bring a new Bill to Parliament governing wetlands and covering the problem of private individuals holding title deeds over wetlands by May 2019,” the committee said. Harare, in particular, and other urban settings across the country have suffered untold environmental degradation, with politicians blamed for the sprouting of settlements and building on wetlands.

11 – SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

31 st August 2018	Matopos Classic MTB
16 th September 2018	Field trip into the eastern Matobo Hills
18 th November 2018	25 th AGM, 10:00am; Maleme Rest camp
6 th April 2019	Matopos 33 Miler Ultra Marathon
20 th March 2019	Matopos Heritage MTB Challenge
17 th May 2019	Matopos Heritage Trail Run
8 th June 2019	World Environment Day; annual Matopos Clean-up

12 – WHAT TREE IS THAT?

Meg Coates-Palgrave has released an App that can be downloaded onto either an Apple or Android device. This is the play store link for the app

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.credencys.treeapp>

Based on keys the app enables people to identify trees. Having done so there is a full description of the tree including the origin of the name, a distribution map and photos. There is an illustrated glossary, easily accessible to explain terms.

13 – SADC BRACES FOR ANOTHER EL-NINO INDUCED DROUGHT

August 14, 2018, Joseph Ngwawi Correspondent

Southern Africa is bracing for another season of normal to below-normal rainfall, amid indications that the region will again be affected by the El Niño weather pattern.

Head of the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Directorate at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat, Domingos Gove, said the forecast is that the 2018-19 rainfall season could be affected by the El Niño phenomenon, which is usually associated with droughts in the region. “The coming season may be heavily impacted by the El Niño weather phenomenon. This will have an impact on outcome of the next agricultural season,” Gove said while briefing journalists ahead of the 38th Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government taking place in Namibian capital, Windhoek.

Every year, the October to April rainfall season largely determines the main summer harvest for the region as crop agriculture is mainly rainfall dependent and irrigation is minimal. The forecast of another possible dry season comes as the food security situation in Southern Africa has been subdued this year due to a low harvest during the 2017-18 agricultural season.

14 – MEMBERS NOTE BOOK

Subscriptions for the year 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019 fall due on 30 September 2018. Please ensure that your subs for 2019 are up to date. There has been no increase in rates.

US\$ 20	Individual/Family
US\$ 5	Special Member (Pensioner/Student)
US\$100	Corporate

We have initiated an electronic register of members, and an electronic means of applying for membership. We have written to all our members asking them to complete the easy, and simple, application form! It takes a few minutes – and even if you are a member, you need to reapply so as to re-populate the data base. We ask you to please participate. If you think you are a member, and we have missed you out, please contact the Vice-Chairman on matoboconservationsociety@gmail.com

15 - MCS APPAREL

You are reminded that the Society has a stock of fleece sleeveless jackets, in olive green with orange MCS logo. They are ideal for the cool mornings and evenings. These are available at \$20 each. We still have stocks of hats and caps (at \$10 each). CD’s are also available.

16 – WEB SITE & FACEBOOK

The web-site for the Society www.matobo.org has been updated, so make some time to visit the site. Contributions are welcome. We have also revamped our Facebook page “Matobo Conservation Society”. We continue to update our Facebook page; we welcome any contributions from Members. Go to “Matobo Conservation Society” on Facebook, and “like” the page to ensure you get regular updates. Nearly 1,000 people are following us on Facebook.

17 – CONDOLENCES

We send our heartfelt condolences to Betty Blake on the passing of Ken Blake in August. Ken will be well remembered for his keen interest in botany, and served on our Committee in the early days.