

WITZANDS AQUIFER NATURE RESERVE

CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

The City of Cape Town extends from Mamre in the north, Gordon's Bay in the east and Cape Point in the south. The unique cultural and natural heritage of Cape Town contributes to the sense of place of Cape Town and our sense of identity.

The archaeology of Witzands Aquifer Nature Reserve forms part of the ancient history of Cape Town and spans many thousands of years. Archaeology is the study of people who lived in the past, and studies the things they left behind: their discarded or lost tools, food remains and the pattern of these findings in the landscape. In the Witzands Aquifer Nature Reserve the archaeological artefacts are present as thin scatters, and represent a single event. In deflation hollows these single events can overlap and one finds a mixture of artefacts that can span several hundreds of years.

Evolution and origins of early mankind

Palaentology is the study of fossils. It covers the millions of years in which life on this planet evolved. Evidence of the earliest human ancestor (of the human or homo family tree) dates to about 2-3 million years ago. Duinefontein (near Koeberg), Wolfgat and Swartklip are examples of palaeontological sites in Cape Town. The broken blade (Middle Stone Age) shown opposite is more recent (100 000 – 25 000 years ago) and is associated with early anatomically modern humans.

First Nations (hunter-gathers and herders) of the Cape

The archaeology of the last 10 000 years tells the story of the hunter-gathers of the Cape. The Khoekhoe with their herds of sheep and cattle arrived at the Cape about 2000 years ago. Stone tools, fragments of pottery, ostrich eggshell beads and water containers and the remains of food (animal bones and shellfish) tell us about their way of life. Animal bones and shellfish can also tell us about the environmental conditions of a place at a particular period.

Age of exploration and oceanic trade routes

In the 15th century, the circumnavigation of the Cape of Good Hope unlocked the oceanic trade route between Europe and the East. The Dutch East India Company established a refreshment station in 1652 and soon established a series of outposts (eg Ganzekraal and Groenekloof, later became the Moravian mission station of Mamre) where cattle was traded between the Company and the local Khoekhoe.

Expansion of the British Empire

In the Witzands Aquifer Nature Reserve we find ceramics that date to the period when the Cape was under Dutch control. The Battle of Blaauwberg (1806) saw the Cape occupied by the British for the second (and last) time. The Cape became a colony of the British Empire. In the archaeological record, one finds an increase in the ceramics produced in the British potteries. Following the end of the wars in Europe, many immigrants came to the Cape to make a new life here.

Things forgotten, lost and left behind

Each artefact or object is a clue in the story of the people who visited the dune field. The objects tell us that people visited here, and that they have been coming here for thousands of years. Why and what they were doing here is less clear. Bone of small and large bovid suggest that the hunting here was good. Marine shells usually found on rocky shorelines tell us that people easily made the journey from the coast to the dune fields, and perhaps to the nearby outpost of Mamre.



Apercula of a marine snail which was brought into the dune field by people.



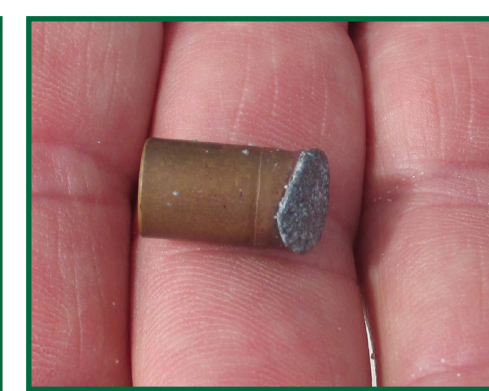
A late 18th/early 19th century Asian porcelain bowl brought to the Cape by the Dutch East India traders.



It is not possible to tell whether this horse shoe was dropped 10 years ago or 100 years ago.



A vertebra of a large bovid, possibly a cow. This animal may have died of natural causes.



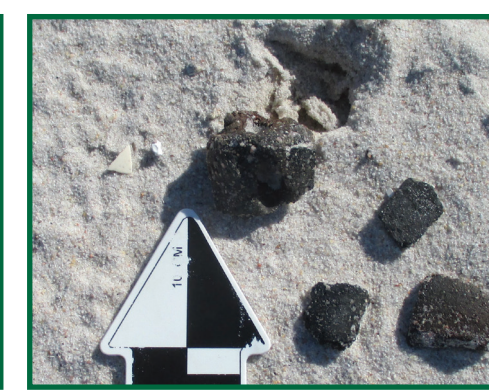
A 20th century bullet.



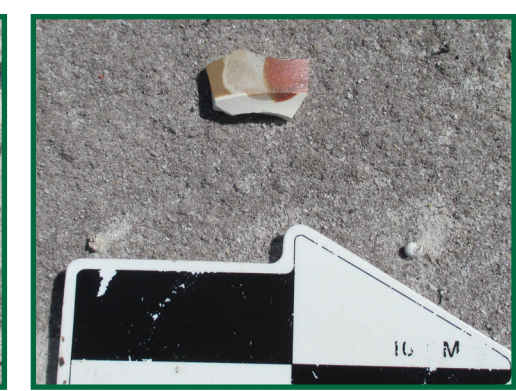
A Middle Stone Age blade (a stone tool longer than it is wide) dating to more than 25 000 years ago.



Mid/late 19th century British reneid earthenware plate with feathered edge decoration.



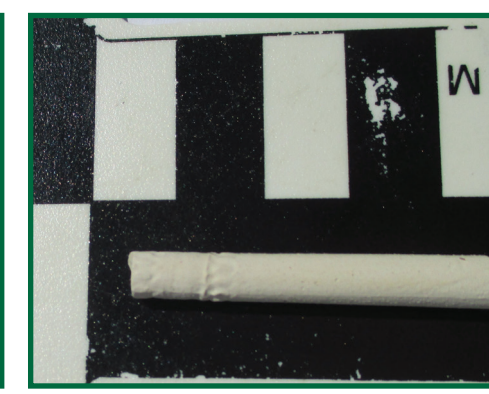
Cape coastal pottery is associated with Khoekhoe herders and were probably used for milk.



British refined earthenware dating to the mid 19th century (mochaware).



A Later Stone Age silcrete core is an indication that hunters (Bushmen or San) also frequented the dune field.



Fragment of a Dutch smoking pipe. These fragments are common in archaeological sites.



Detail of a rim shard of a Cape coastal pottery container.



Scatters of fragmented shell and bone are common in the dune field.



Scatters contain silcrete (stone) flakes, pottery, shell and bone.



British refined earthenware (mochaware) bowl and an undiagnostic fragment of transfer printed ware.



Tortoise carapace is often found in archaeological sites.



The skull of a large bovid.



Iron hinge dating to late 19th/early 20th century.



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