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A SHORT NOTE ON THE NAMAQUALAND DIARY ENTRIES OF W.G. ATHERSTONE RELATING TO BUSHMEN BOWS AND ARROWS

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Dr William Guybon Atherstone was a nineteenth century medical practitioner and astute natural scientist who resided in Grahamstown but visited Namaqualand in 1854 to investigate the rapidly expanding copper industry. His diaries are housed in the 1820 Settlers Memorial Museum, Grahamstown. In diary Number 29 he records his encounters with a Bushmen group and briefly discusses their bows and arrows.

While prospecting for copper he visited !Kosis (29.06.40S; 17.34.05E) some 35 km north-west of Kookfontein (later named Steinkopf). !Kosis refers to a settlement named Kosies which is near the Kosiesberg. According to Atherstone he "awoke at dawn by wild singing, jumped up and saw two or three women walking off singing merrily to the Bushman's huts in the next valley to see if there was any beer left" (page 73). These Bushmen, he noted, came from the 'Am Alip' Mountains which were situated some three miles to the east of !Kosis and were the highest mountains in the region. It is possible that the 'Am Alip' mountains refer to the nearby

Rooiberg.

His diary continues (page 74), "got the Bushman arrow, lit a fire and got a lot of information, respecting their bows and poison (see end of book), and got him to dig up one of the so-called poisonous worms, they say they never use snake poison". One page 76 he notes "I bought some real Bushman arrows for Johnny and tried hard to get the bow, but the man wanted it to shoot wild horses to eat".

His description of the bow and arrow is in the back of the diary and commences on page 10 (Figs 1 & 2).

I saw a real Bushman bow at (the name is omitted here). The arrow is 2 ft 6 inches, bow 4 ft 8 inches long, when strung. The string made of sinews of ostrich legg (3 strands) fastened at one end and coiled into 10 or 11 coils at the other end, bow tightened by turning the coils. When strung the end of the bow just came up to my chin. About one and a half

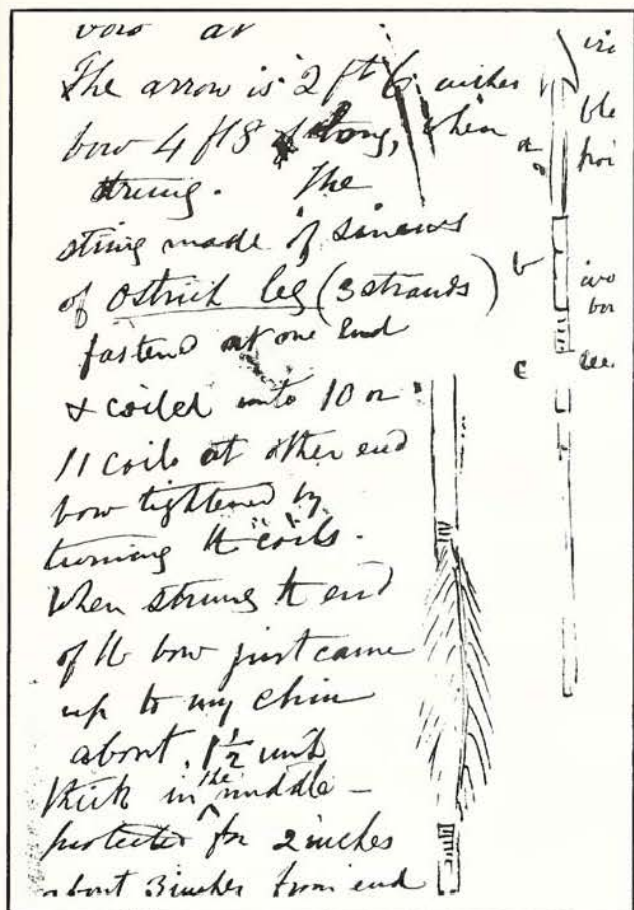


Fig. 1. The proximal end of an arrow shaft on the left and a complete arrow with linkshaft and arrowhead on the right.

inches thick in the middle - protected for 2 inches about 3 inches from end by smooth honey (?) bark of a succulent plant put on green and allowed to dry like the spiny pelargonium. The feather is glued to the arrow with a red resin. The poison (they say) is made from an insect (insect is deleted and 'grub' inserted) (?) which is found in a succulent resinous plant, with a very thick stem and strong smell of Turpentine, and frequently a bulbous thickening towards roots. These grubs are stamped with the milk of the Euphorbium and some other

The description continues on page 12: "Bushmen Bow. Held vertical the thumb and finger of right hand grasping string with the forefinger quite over the string, its full length to bend it when is drawn aside as the string slips past" (Fig. 3). Page 16 continues,

the tip of Black aasvogels feather is used for the arrow, the feathers on the shoulder. They use a cryalis like a yellow maggot in a round covering which I saw and put one into the ventilation of my helmet - it is found under the tree of which I got the seed. They say it is deadly poisonous and they pound a number of

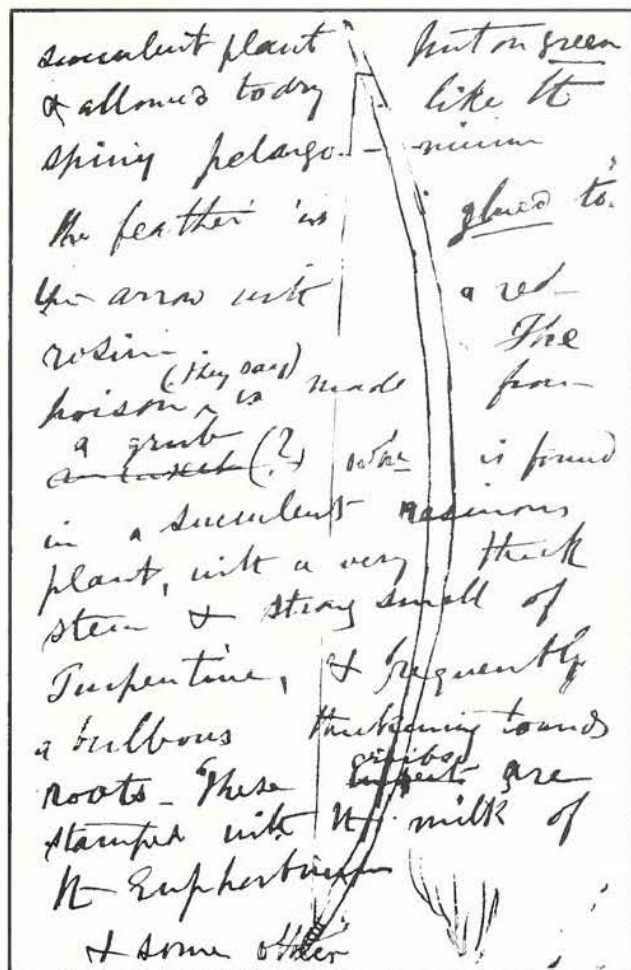


Fig. 2. A strung bow.

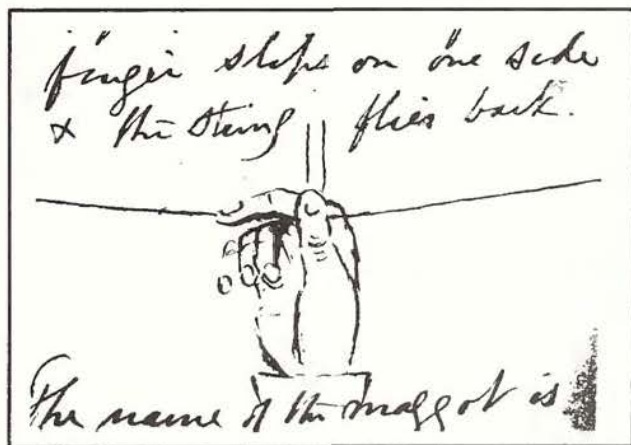


Fig. 3. The position of the fingers when drawing the bow is indicated in this sketch.

these maggots and mix them with the watery juice of the Euphorbia after the milk has been roasted out and with some of the burnt dry euphorbia shoots which renders it black - they have never tried the euphorbia juice alone - but knows instances of death from the bite of the worm! The bone of the leg of a quagga is used

for the shank of the arrow and is of this shape going into the reed by the sharp end or the blunt. The spear head with the poison fixes on this bone for which purpose it has a small piece of reed attached to the wood in which the spear head is fixed - the arrows are straightened by heating either on a piece of cow dung in fire (without flame) or a heated stone - the bone is always put in about 4 inches from a joint so that

the bone goes into it halfway to the joint. The string is pulled by the first joint of the fore finger so that not the slightest strain is put on the arrow which is lightly kept in its place by the thumb and when it full stretch the fore finger slips on one side and the string flies back. The name of the maggot is "Aap" - the cement for the feather is euphorbid milk and red clay.

REPORTS

THE XI BIENNIAL SASQUA CONFERENCE

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The McGregor Museum hosted the XI Biennial Conference of the Southern African Society for Quaternary Research from 12 to 14 July 1993. Comment on the conference and three associated excursions has already been made (Avery 1993; February 1993; Kershaw 1993; Scott 1993), but for the benefit of non-SASQUA folk we highlight a few aspects.

The conference attracted 58 delegates who presented a packed programme of 39 papers and 6 posters, amongst which were notable contributions by overseas guests, from both hemispheres. These provided comparative insights into palaeoenvironmental features and research elsewhere, and useful measures against which to gauge local problems and progress. From south of the equator, Peter Kershaw (Victoria) presented impressive data on long palynological sequences from Australia; while Martin Iriondo (Argentina) put across a detailed account of Late Pleistocene to Holocene environments in South America. From the north, Yolanda Fernandez-Jalvo (Madrid) provided results of small mammal taphonomy studies at Atapuerco in Spain; and Lars Larsson (Sweden) illustrated a minutely documented and dated sequence of ice movements, sea level changes and human exploitation of rapidly shifting environmental opportunities in southern Scandinavia during Younger Dryas times.

Local papers and posters addressed an enormous wealth of Quaternary features ranging through periglacial to coastal, marine, fluvial, lacustrine, interior plateau and desert environments in southern Africa - viewed from perspectives as diverse as geomorphology, sedimentology, macro- and micro-faunal analysis, isotopic studies, palynology, dendrochronology and, not least, archaeology. Spatially, the focus took in much of the coastline from Namibia to Zululand (Ward, Burkinshaw, Illenberger, Hattingh, Zhang, Brink, Scharf, Maud and

others - see below), some of the adjacent hinterlands (Jacobs and others - see below), the escarpment areas (see below), and the inland plateau (Thackeray *et al.* and others); while chronologically the papers ranged from Mio-Pleistocene times to the present. The 90 metre core from the Pretoria Saltpan (Tswaing) impact crater (Partridge), recently dated by interpolation from a 220 000 year fission track age on the impact event, has yielded pollen, diatoms and a sediment sequence which together document pronounced moisture fluctuations over the past 200 000 years. In conjunction with other data, this remarkable sequence holds promise of providing more accurate palaeoclimatic models for the last glacial cycle in the southern hemisphere than presently exist. Preliminary results were presented of pollen analysis (Scott) from the Pretoria Saltpan as well as from a 20 000 year Cedarberg hyrax midden sequence, and palynological evidence from other sites in the subcontinent. Multi-disciplinary work including major archaeological input at Verloren Vlei and the south Cape coast covered terminal Pleistocene through Holocene to colonial times (Cohen, Jerardino, Meadows & Baxter, Parkington), while a number of papers addressed archaeological and archaeozoological aspects of the Late Pleistocene up-country (Behrens, Brink, Esterhuysen, Mitchell, Opperman). These were interestingly contrasted with studies of contemporary periglacial phenomena in the high escarpment areas of the eastern Cape (Lewis and Drakensberg (Grab).

A keynote synthesis from the 1991 Conference (Tyson & Lindsay 1992) provided the springboard for 'theme papers' on the final day, devoted entirely to the last two millennia. Several presenters considered in closer or amplified detail the data sets used in Tyson and Lindsay's synthesis, for example, a review of several