

ACQUISITION OF EUROPEAN LIVESTOCK BY THE SEACOW RIVER BUSHMEN BETWEEN AD 1770-1890*

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ABSTRACT

Published and archival records are surveyed for eyewitness accounts of European livestock passing into the hands of the Seacow River Bushmen. On the northeast border of the Colony systematic Bushman raids on trekboer herds were common in the late 1700s. Amnesty after 1798 drew Bushmen groups into the vicinity of each farmstead, where they received regular handouts of offal and occasional whole sheep or goats. Client herders and full time shepherds were drawn from this fluid labour pool. Wages included whole sheep or goats and occasionally cattle. Mission Bushmen and some farm Bushmen became herd owners in their own right. These indigenous herders disappeared from the landscape after 1880 when the last of the Crown Lands were sold off and the first fences were erected. Archaeological implications of these events are explored in terms of livestock remains to be found in local rock shelters.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 18th century the Seacow River valley had become a small but strategically significant segment of the Cape Colony's expanding frontier. Here, the northward spread of Dutch trekboer settlement was first effectively halted by spirited resistance from resident Bushmen, especially in the valley headwaters of the Sneeuberg Mountains. (Fig. 1 top). An uneasy peace was achieved after 1800, and scores of trekboer farms were established in the upper and central valley. Bushmen were drawn by gifts and food to live near the new farmsteads and some were recruited as farm labour. Others lived on Crown Land between the farms, their numbers being steadily reduced as trekboer farms proliferated. Mission stations just beyond colonial borders flourished briefly, generating a new class of "oorlams" Bushmen, but the stations were shut down. When the border was moved up to the Orange River, further land seizures submerged these mission communities. By the 1840s when the first towns sprang up around the valley, most unattached Bushmen were partly acculturated and some were drawn into slum communities where they lost their ethnic identities. By the 1870s, when the last of the Crown Land was sold off to stock farmers, unattached Bushmen could only survive as stock thieves.

During the hundred years between 1770-1870, all Seacow River Bushmen became acquainted with classic

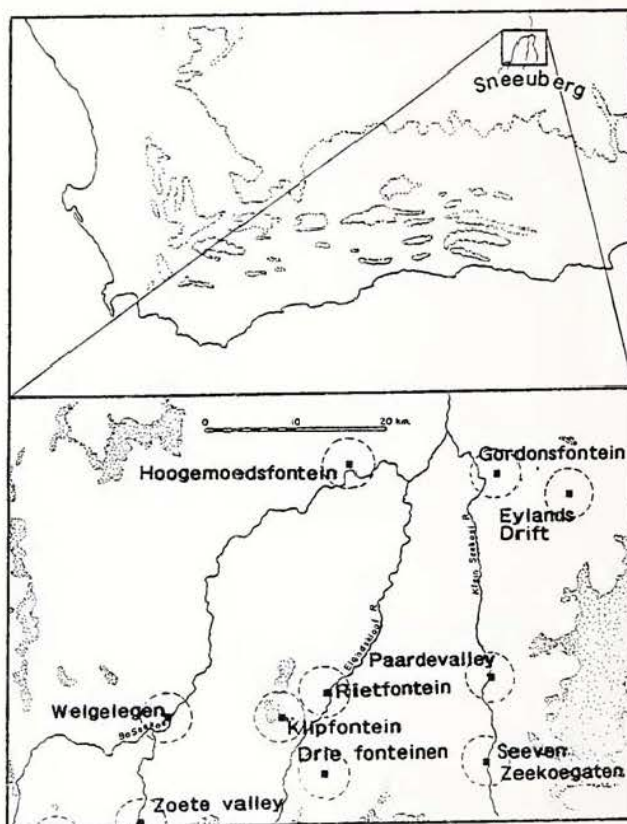


Fig. 1. Farms registered (but not all occupied) on the north eastern rim of the Colony at the end of the 18th century.

European livestock and many individuals completed the transition from hunter to herder, a process of general interest to prehistorians. Here, the several pathways by which frontier Bushmen obtained domestic animals are explored, together with their archaeological implications.

PATHWAYS TO STOCK OWNERSHIP

The processes by which livestock came into the hands of Seacow River Bushmen were varied and complex. An early phase of stock raiding between 1770 and 1790 dwindled to episodic raids by robber bands. After about 1825 such stock thieving had become a minor if persistent feature of frontier life. Between about 1800 and 1830 great numbers of livestock were passed to Bushmen in the form of organised subscriptions by local farmers, but this process declined between about 1830-1850. Meanwhile, individual farmers were regularly handing out offal and whole sheep to the Bushmen in the immediate vicinity of their own farmsteads. These same farmers were using certain Bushmen as part-time shepherds and these gradually spent more of each year in service and less in foraging activities beyond the farm. Unattached Bushmen were also entrusted with whole flocks while unclaimed grazing land was still available. Running parallel to these trends, both attached and unattached Bushmen began to build their own herds. Unattached Bushmen started with the surplus handouts from subscriptions or from systematic training at the brief-lived mission stations. Attached farm Bushmen accumulated livestock more slowly from annual wages, but were more successful as they had the protection of a trekboer patron.

Early stock raids

The first Dutch trekboers to establish farmsteads in the upper Seacow valley (Fig. 1) were repeatedly attacked by Bushmen whose tactics were to systematically steal and destroy the livestock (State Archives 1770-1775). This was but a small part of their larger campaign to rid the Sneeuberg Mountains of Europeans (Van der Merwe 1937). Loan Place records show that most farmers were driven off in 1777-1778 and some places were repossessed, often by new farmers, in the 1780s.

Raids on some of these farms were documented. The earliest recorded cattle raid in the valley was in April 1773, but the report (Moodie 1960 III:65) indicates that it was not the first. In 1775 the same farmer again lost beasts, this time 18 working cattle and a few months later 200 sheep were stolen. In January 1776 he repelled a night attack, but in March he lost saddle horses (*ibid.*:43, 67, 52-53). In November 1777, he lost four cattle to poison arrows and another four were stolen (Raper and Boucher 1988:82), after which he gave up.

By January 1776 the second farmer was already in regular pursuit of robbers (Moodie 1960 III:52). Having lost more than 1500 sheep in a snow storm in August 1776 (Raper and Boucher 1988:180), he suffered further attacks. By October 1778 he had lost everything and

abandoned the farm (Godée-Molsbergen 1932:39).

The third farmer lost his cattle herd in 1775, with one animal left severely wounded by arrows and two of his dogs killed (Moodie 1960 III: 44). In August he lost his whole sheep flock. Then in January 1776 he lost 23 cattle and two of his herdsman were murdered. In March of that year he lost some saddle horses. There are no further reports until March 1780 when he again lost livestock (*ibid.*:46, 52-53, 103), although it is not clear from which of his Sneeuberg farms they were taken.

Stolen livestock from these and several neighbouring farms were being driven beyond the limits of European settlement. At this time the upper and middle reaches of the valley served as a base from which to raid southwards and a refuge into which to flee from pursuing commandos. Rock shelters were particularly useful for these purposes. A commando of 1775 overran one such cave on the east flank of the upper valley, yielding "the hides of cattle, and fresh mutton and suet" (Moodie 1960 III:45). Picking through the possessions of Bushmen they had massacred on the banks of the river they found "ox hides and horns", and at a camp farther downstream "the head of an ox, which had been slaughtered by the Bosmans, but the flesh of which [had been] consumed" (*ibid.*). Another attack on shelters on the east flank of the valley produced "more hides and sheep skins than we had ever been accustomed to find in any field of battle ("verslagen plekken")" (*ibid.*: 46). In the same year another commando in the valley headwaters overran a kraal with "the hides, horns and fat of cattle" (*ibid.*:67). A further report in 1779 tells of a commando attack on an open camp to the west of the upper valley which yielded "great numbers of hides and skins of cattle and sheep, of which the flesh had been consumed". They travelled down stream, attacked another open camp, finding "as before mentioned, hides and skins" (*ibid.*:82).

Later patterns of stock theft

The war for possession of the Sneeuberg dragged on into the 1790s, culminating in two decisive commando raids which partly broke the Bushman resistance (Van der Merwe 1937:18, 49-50) after which attacks on stock in the mountains tailed off (De Kock 1965:261). By 1797 there was a nervous group of families farming together in mid-valley (Barrow 1806:253-4), but there were still only five occupied farms in the valley as a whole by the end of the century (Van der Merwe 1937:115).

In the late 1790s stock theft was still a constant concern (Barrow 1806:231) and in 1803 Lichtenstein reported "The smallest loss that can be expected from their maraudings must be estimated at five out of every hundred sheep and oxen annually. The inhabitants of the outer Snow Mountains are more particularly exposed to their incursions; and many a farmer has on single occasions suffered such heavy losses as to throw him several years behind hand in his circumstances" (Plumptre 1815 II:5).

By 1803 there were a few new farms in the upper valley and several in the middle reaches (Sampson *et al.* 1994). Although 1804 was a drought year, it is notable

in that there were no robberies (Plumptre 1815 II:74). In 1808 a minor land rush on the east side of the valley brought settlement right up to the colonial border. Although a fragile peace prevailed by then, memories and grievances were still fresh and visitors were warned that "some kraals ... continued ill-disposed" (Moodie 1960 V: 2). Tensions never fully subsided (Burchell 1824 II:80) and gradually rose again throughout the area. A Circuit Court report of 1813 (a drought year) nicely summarizes the state of affairs: "It is extremely difficult to say whether one lives in peace or war with the Bosjesmen. They are sometimes quiet for a long while, ... but all of a sudden they appear ... plundering and destroying everything" (Van der Merwe 1937:82).

Stock thieving rates inevitably increased during drought years (Reyneveldt 1835:114). The years 1815-1818 were especially harsh and again in 1821-22 (Van der Merwe 1937:179-185). There were major thefts in the upper valley in 1821 (Meyburgh 1835a:95). Armed thieves returned musket fire on their pursuers in 1822 (Van der Walt 1835a:58, 1835b:89). A robber band was operating on the west side of the valley in 1824 (Oberholzer 1835:90), the same year a robber kraal was overrun. It contained 12 horses and 24 sheep and goat's heads (Meyburgh 1835b:100).

By 1843 Bushman stock raids were only the subject of storytelling (Cumming 1850:95) and local farmers writing of their experiences in the 1840s (Nicholson 1848, Orpen 1908) make no complaints of stock theft.

Stock thieving rates in the second half of the 19th century have yet to be studied in detail, but anecdotes and common sense dictate that overall losses would have gradually decreased between 1840 and 1890 to isolated thefts by individuals operating in the most difficult terrain (e.g. Anon 1869). Court records reflect a low level of stock theft by farm Bushmen, usually on those farms nearest to the towns. Thefts on more distant farms probably never made it to court and most thefts by unattached Bushmen went untried (G. Silberbauer pers. comm.). After 1890 nothing more is heard of them in the local court records (Gutsche 1968:190).

Livestock subscriptions

Earl Macartney's proclamation of July 24 1798 from Cape Town (the Colony was by then in British hands) spelled out alternative strategies for dealing with the Bushmen. There were to be no more commandos except as a last resort and the taking of children was outlawed. Local authorities were ordered to assign land to Bushmen, to appoint Bushman leaders with whom to negotiate and to levy sheep from farmers to be distributed at intervals among the Bushmen.

The Seacow valley farmers complied promptly, as shown by a sheep distribution list dated 1798 (State Archives 1/GR/14/6). The farmers would have been introduced to this new approach by their landdrost A. Stockenstrom Snr. of the Graaff-Reinet district. A Circuit Court entry of 1811 notes "... it is plainly to be seen that this system (namely the making of collections) and the helping of the Bosjesmen, which was promoted and

encouraged by the late landdrost Stockenstrom, who frequently went for that purpose to the boundaries of his district, has had the most desirable effect". (Reyneveldt 1835:114). Evidently farmers quickly grasped the good sense of this strategy and needed little persuasion to carry it out; "... several of the inhabitants who reside at the boundaries, for the sake of their own peace and safety, make a point of assisting the Bosjesmen who live in the neighbourhood: now and then a subscription was made of goats and sheep which were divided among them at different times ... and especially that such like collections of cattle were necessary in dry years, when it was not possible for the Bosjesmen to penetrate in to the ground, and who therefore cannot procure their usual food" (*ibid.*:113). Farmers also doled out livestock on their own initiative, for example, "Van Heerden residing at Sneuberg had another grazing place at the boundary of the colony ..." gave the surrounding Bushmen various gifts "and now and then a goat or a sheep" (*ibid.*). Although this same report of 1811 notes that Bushmen and trekboers "at present live at perfect peace", this was short lived.

Others dreaded the long term consequences. Collins, for one, told Parliament "the practice of subscribing sheep and cattle for the Bosjesmen ... should be put an end to. It tends to make them suppose that the colonists fear them; and besides, it would be impossible to supply all their nation with a sufficient number for its consumption, even if they were careful of them, which they are not; and by giving them to those on the borders such as are more distant, are induced to come nearer, and consequently increase the evil" (Moodie 1960 V:37).

One effect of this new strategy was that Bushmen began to spend more time near the farmsteads where there was now a dependable source of meat. When Collins and Stockenstrom Jr. rode through the valley in 1809; "on every farm between the great Sneeuwberg Chain and the Orange River, we found a Bushman family, or kraal" (Hutton 1887:39). On approaching a farmstead, the riders were greeted by "the welcome songs of the numerous Bushmen scattered among the rocks above the Hartebeest [reed] hut, for substantial buildings were few indeed ..." (*ibid.*). At some farms, whole bands were gathered, for example; "Having understood that some Bosjesmen were in the neighbourhood, they were sent for, and a party of 13, mostly women, arrived". (Moodie 1960 V:2), so that the outlay in livestock could be quite large at times.

In spite of the costs, distributions remained a feature of frontier life long after the colonial frontier was moved up to the Orange River. Surviving lists dated 1827 (State Archives 1/GR/14/6) show that donations of sheep and goats were still being made in all parts of the valley.

Passing travellers were rare enough to be insignificant contributors. Although Governor Janssens in 1803 (the Colony was then briefly under Batavian rule) rewarded Bushmen "with a couple of sheep" (Blommaert & Wiid 1937:237), this was for rescuing one of his retinue from drowning. Apart from this exceptional case we have found no other examples of livestock handouts by

travellers, who usually gave tobacco and trinkets.

Part-time shepherds and client herders

Farm servants, including shepherds, were recruited out of the new symbiosis brought about by the periodic distributions. Thus in 1811; "At Sneuberg ... the Bosjesmen live mostly with the inhabitants, where they serve as herders, with full as much care and attention as the Hottentots themselves". (Reyneveldt 1835:113). At first, this service may have been erratic; "We found many of those Bosjemen ... at different places, and also in the service of the inhabitants, partly tending their cattle; but who, being as yet completely wild and bordering on barbarism [nonetheless] several of them actually live ... even at and with the inhabitants; (*ibid.*:114). And again in 1813; "At Sneuwberg ... met with Bosjemen in the families of several of the inhabitants; at some places the whole of the servants consisted of those people, some of whom performed the household work, and others again took care of the cattle." (Berrange & van Ryneveld 1901:95). In 1823 Thompson still found Bushmen in the lower reaches of the Seacow valley "living on friendly terms with the boors and doing little services occasionally, they also come in for the offals of the cattle killed for food" (Thompson 1827:61). Bonamy and Stockenstrom Jr. were at about this time fixing the new colonial boundary line in the same area and could report that "all the [Bushmen] we saw lived with the inhabitants [trekboers] who fed them and hunted for them to keep them on good terms; in return for which they assisted in herding cattle in as far as they pleased, being bound by no engagements, fully at liberty to stay as long as they liked, and to go away when they thought proper ..." (Stockenstrom 1835:117).

It was quickly observed that certain Bushmen were excellent and skilled shepherds who knew where the best grazing was to be had beyond the limits of the farmer's boundary. Evidently parties of unattached Bushmen were on occasion used by the trekboers as client herders, especially when local grazing was poor. When Collins' party in 1809 passed by a Bushman kraal "Many of them followed us and took charge of our sheep and spare teams; a trust often reposed in that people by the farmers, and which they have never been know to abuse" (Moodie 1960 V:2).

Melvill reported in 1821 a conversation with a lower valley farmer who told him that "... for a few years past [t]his plan was to keep a flock of goats to supply the Bushmen with food in seasons of great want ... but they became very serviceable to him in taking care of his flocks in dry seasons. He said that on such occasions, when there was no pasturage on his own farm, he was accustomed to give his cattle entirely in to the hands of a Chief of a Tribe of Bushmen, who lived near him, and after a certain period they never failed to be brought back in so improved a condition that he sometimes scarcely knew them to be his own" (Melvill 1825:2).

After the great drought (and temporary exodus of trekboers across the Orange River) in the 1830s, these

patterns of dependency may have been disrupted because there are no more references to part-time or client-herders. Permanent farm staff still walked off the job periodically (*e.g.* Steedman 1835 I:135; Orpen 1908:8), so it must still have been possible for them to forage for part of the year on unclaimed land. After about 1850 it seems that farm shepherds were more or less permanently employed (Nicholson 1848:61).

Full time herders

Three different pathways led the Seacow River Bushmen to become herders in their own right. These led from the subscription system, from staff wages, and (briefly) from mission education. The first route involved farmers giving unattached Bushmen more livestock than they could ever eat at a sitting, then encouraging them to husband their new-found surplus. Herding by subscription seems to have worked. By 1811 Reyneveldt (1835:113) could report "... that formerly the Bosjemen could never be brought so far as to keep breeding cattle of their own, but that there were now kraals which had small flocks of goats, which had been divided in that manner, and which had already bred". This was not always an unqualified success, and Bushman herders were themselves attacked by other ethnic groups.

Thus in 1826 we have Stockenstrom Jr. complaining; "Often voluntary contributions have been made in cattle to set particular peaceable kraals going as breeders. In 1818, I retook from the Caffres upwards of 2,000 sheep and goats, which had from time to time been given to Bushmen by Boors, and taken by the Caffres from the kraals which they have destroyed ... that flock was again distributed among their kraals, and subsequent collections were made, but of all this little is left. Last year the Coxannas took the whole flock belonging to one kraal; the chief of these applied to the field cornet for a commando against the Coxannas, which of course could not be granted" (Stockenstrom 1835:119). A rock painting on the east rim of the central Seacow valley, showing Bushmen driving off cattle with Bantu men in hot pursuit (Wyley 1859:38), suggests a longer history of mutual stock raiding between Bantu and Bushmen.

From across the Orange River the Korannas also stole livestock from the Bushmen; again in 1818 Stockenstrom (1902:35) reported "Several parties of [Bosjesmen] which I met with complained of having been attacked by the Bastards, the few cattle which they had from time to time received from the Colonists taken away".

The second and safer pathway to independent herding was within the confines of domestic service to a trekboer. Early on it became standard practice to pay farm labour partly in livestock, and some servants patiently built up their own herds. Thus Collins to Parliament in 1809; "... they are paid by a determined quantity of clothes, by food for themselves and families, and a certain number of sheep and cattle annually" (Moodie 1960 V:37). By 1839 a few private herds had been built, under the protection of the trekboer employer, into large numbers, for example, "... some of them have accumulated stock, by receiving in addition to their small wages and food,

three or four sheep, or a cow, once a year. These have increased and in the lapse of time, the property of some of the Bushmen has become considerable. One of them, in the employment of one of the Field-cornets of this district [Colesberg] whom he had served thirty years, was said to possess sheep and cattle to the value of about £1,000 (Backhouse 1844:341-2). It is quite likely that some of the "bywoner" houses, the ruins of which are common in the Seacow valley, belonged to such Bushmen staff members. Already by 1839 Backhouse, who was less squeamish about calling on such people than were most contemporary travellers, went up to "a few Bushmen's huts, and the remains of two mud houses, at a little spring ... some milk was obtained" (*ibid.*:477).

In 1844 the complaints of a Sneeuberg farmer about the expense and trouble of his farm staff sound as if they were uttered yesterday, with one important exception; his remark "... besides giving them pasturage for their little flocks of goats and sheep" (Nicholson 1848:61) would not be heard today. Perhaps the advent of fencing and the steady deterioration of pasture due to drought and grazing put pressure on farmers to put a stop to their own staff owning flocks. In any event, they are not a feature of the modern landscape.

The third process by which Bushmen converted to independent herders was through the short-lived mission stations at Toverberg and Hephzibah in the lower reaches of the Seacow valley. Toverberg [at modern Colesberg] was opened and in 1814. In October of that year there were "... 38 oxen, 61 cows, 459 sheep and goats, and 11 horses" (Sales 1975:60). Bushmen were encouraged to settle there and "... were supplied with some cattle and sheep. These were probably donated by well-wishing members of Kircherer's Dutch congregation at Graaff-Reinet" (*ibid.*:61). Hephzibah was open in 1816, when two kraals were built for cattle and sheep (Gutsche 1968:34). At their peak in 1817 the two stations concentrated 1600-1700 Bushmen, a density which doomed them both. They were ordered closed by the authorities, under pressure from suspicious Boers who saw them as safe havens from which to launch raids. "Wild" Bushmen also stole regularly from the mission herds.

After closure, the now unprotected mission community was driven out by trekboers (Philip 1828 II:30) and some members of these stations were savaged by Bantu-speakers and Griqua raiders in the drought year of 1818 (Van der Merwe 1937:155). Others survived to 1820 and still tended their own livestock (Campbell 1822:31). A year later another traveller reported "Seeing a Bushman village or kraal about a quarter of an hour's ride from the road, I went to it ... on the brow of the hill were seen grazing a flock of goats, and a number of young kids were tied to stakes around their huts ... they had belonged to the late Hephzibah ... one or two spoke a little Dutch ... van der Walt ... to whom, I believe, they were indebted for the goats I had seen". (Melville 1825:2). It remains uncertain whether any of these "oorlams" mission-trained herders eventually became "bywoners" on Seacow valley farms, but some of them certainly became the stockless retainers (Philip 1828:28).

Second half of the 19th century

The villages of Richmond, Middelburg and Hanover were established around the rim of the upper valley in mid-century, while Colesberg had been in place since 1830. Farm Bushmen drifted in to form squalid settlements on the edges of the new centers. Here, their original identity was gradually eroded as they mingled with Khoi Griqua, Fingo, Basuto, Tswana (Gutsche 1968:135). Some of these outsiders were recruited as farm labor. In the slums they became easy prey to epidemics (Le Fanu 1860:194-5; Slome 1929). Although the countryside fared better, some communities of farm Bushmen were also decimated (Gutsche 1968:124). The village stores rapidly drew the whole valley into a cash economy, although stock was still used as legal tender (Casalis 1889:133).

In 1856, the Crown Lands were criss-crossed by wagon tracks (Neville *et al.* 1994) and contained only sparse game; Bushman vagrants were seldom seen (Spies 1952:135-137). Bushmen still using the unclaimed land for grazing, hunting and gathering continued to be forcibly removed by annexures (Backhouse 1844:342). The seemingly endless supply of game animals, after a century of relentless hunting, began to collapse. Communal game drives (Steedman 1835:138) had taken their toll and game was being shot for export (Bryden 1889:293). The last lions were shot out by 1865, making life easier for the herdsman. The last migrating springbok passed through the lower valley in 1872 (Gutsche 1968:191), further easing the herdsman's worries. However, the loss of food plants to overgrazing and erosion (Shaw 1875) and further game extinction (Holub 1881:38) offset these advantages.

The last unattached Bushmen survived the drought-locust-springbok cycles of 1861-1865 by increasing their rate of stock theft. In 1880 the last patch of the Crown Land was taken (Sampson & Sampson 1994). Borehole and windmill technology swept through the Karoo (Noble 1886:233; Bryden 1889:429). Pioneer attempts to divide farms into grazing camps with stone walling was superseded gradually after 1880 by wire fencing (Noble 1886:241-243). Jackal-proof mesh fencing (Bryden 1889:249) spelled the end of the night-kraaling tradition and also the end of the traditional shepherd. No published mention has been found of independent Bushman herders during these rapid and radical changes to the valley's cultural landscape.

SOME ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Given all the above, we may reasonably expect to find sheep, goat and cattle remains in rock shelter deposits in the Seacow valley. Domesticated remains should first appear at the base of the upper (post-European Contact) accumulation in any excavated rock shelter, but the frequency of finds and subsequent fluctuations in numbers can be expected to vary with local circumstances. As a general rule, shelters near pioneer trekboer farm houses can be expected to contain more remains than shelters surrounded by Crown Lands, at

least until the 1870s when the latter were sold off. Shelters in Crown Land, but near to unregistered (or hired) grazing posts or close to main wagon roads could still absorb livestock remains. However, eyewitness accounts of such interactions are not forthcoming.

Post-Contact levels dating to 1770-1800 will contain domestic remains largely resulting from stock raids. Remains of stolen stock in 1800-1825 accumulations will be supplemented by specimens from periodic subscription handouts, by regular local handouts from the nearest farmer and by specimens given as wages to part-time, full time, and/or client herders. The mix of all these sources with stolen livestock will depend on distance to the nearest farm and on local farmer/Bushman relations in the vicinity of the accumulation. Rare specimens of own-herd livestock remains may appear at this level, and could proliferate in some shelters frequented by private herders.

Obviously it will not be possible to identify remains deposited from specific sources or via specific pathways, but the forgoing may help to infer the range of sources in certain dated lenses of domestic remains. It helps if the position of the shelter containing the deposit is firmly mapped into the cultural landscape of the contemporary frontier.

During all this time it was essential to kraal livestock at night to prevent losses to predators, particularly lions. Bushman shepherds who knew the terrain would naturally select shelters that might serve as kraals or, as all rock shelters are very small, they would build stone walled kraals close to rock shelters in which they themselves could sleep. As shepherds became more attached to their employers, so the frequency of shelter use by unattached Bushmen must have declined. Consequently livestock remains from fills post-dating the 1850s are more likely to be residues from shepherds meals.

After about 1840 the frequency of livestock remains should increase as the remains of game start to decline in the shelter fills. More cheap English goods should appear with the livestock remains, reflecting increased local availability. The principal occupants of the shelters would be shepherds, but their ethnic identity becomes less certain with time. By the 1890s shepherds were less likely to be using the shelters, although some shelters may have been briefly used by the first wire fence builders.

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