

**EDITORS**  
Johan Binneman  
Lita Webley

The aim of *Southern African Field Archaeology* is to communicate basic data to professional archaeologists and the public.

Manuscripts of original research undertaken in southern Africa will be considered for publication. These may include reports of current research projects, site reports, rock art panels, rescue excavations, contract projects, reviews, notes and comments. Students are encouraged to submit short reports on projects. *Southern African Field Archaeology* also welcomes general information on archaeological matters such as reports on workshops and conferences.

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**Cover illustration:**

Decorated pottery from Jakkalsberg in the Richtersveld, Northern Cape, p. 3.

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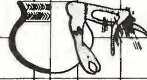
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# Field archaeology



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## OPINIONS

### ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE TRENCHES?

Southern African Field Archaeology is in its sixth year of publication. During this time a number of colleagues have aired their views in this column, which presents us with the opportunity of reviewing the relevance of their opinions in the light of the current status of the discipline. In this, and the next issue, I shall discuss some of these opinions.

In the inaugural editorial (1992:1) the editors addressed the future of archaeology in South Africa. We expressed the view that archaeology "had to re-evaluate its goals in order to remain 'relevant' in the construction of a new, non-racial society."

A similar view was expressed by Beth Wahl (1996), "archaeologists need to examine closely the emphases and structures of their research programmes" for archaeology to be socially and politically relevant in the future.

One way, we suggested, was via public educational programmes at grassroots level, geared towards schoolchildren of all ages and cultures. We were, and still are convinced that this is "one of the most important investments we as archaeologists can make in securing the future of the discipline in South Africa", and by so doing, creating an "audience that will be sympathetic to the cause of archaeology and that will in time advocate stronger support for the maintenance of archaeological posts and the creation of new ones".

After the SA3 conference in Bloemfontein in 1996, Beth Wahl reported that "it was clear that public education is a strong concern of many archaeologists. Increasing numbers of our profession are involved in *curriculum* content formulation, teacher and pupil training, and resource material production". The dramatic increase in emphases during the past few years through media of text books, popular articles, newspaper columns and television programmes on archaeology, are evidence of this new concern and awareness. In this regard the activities of the Southern



African Association of Archaeologists Education Standing Committee, have played a significant role in popularising archaeology, as did other institutions and individuals.

One of the direct results of these 'public education programmes' is the inclusion of archaeology in school text books. This in turn has resulted in a vibrant interest in prehistory throughout South Africa. Departments and archaeologists are inundated with requests to deliver talks on all aspects of archaeology, to provide resource material and to write popular articles.

Notwithstanding the successes of 'public archaeology' or 'educational/outreach approaches', South African archaeology in 1997 faces its biggest challenges to date. What must probably be the biggest shock and blow to the short history of professional archaeology in South Africa is the almost certain closure of the Archaeology Department at the University of Stellenbosch. Both editors are graduates of this department and are saddened by the thought of its possible closure. However, if this is the case, then several questions need to be asked. What are the reasons and why has this very serious matter not been brought to the attention of the Southern African Association of Archaeologists? Surely, while the decision may have been taken by the university to close the department, a formal letter of protest from the Association and members would have been the appropriate action. Although such action may not have any effect on reversing the decision, it is still better than to remain passive and silent on the issue.

There are also rumours that the Historical Archaeology Department at the Stellenbosch Museum as well as the Spatial Archaeology Unit at the University of Cape Town will shortly be closed. This, together with the incorporation of the Archaeology Department at the University of Pretoria into the Anthropology Department a few years ago, raises serious concerns regarding the future of archaeology in South Africa. The only progress made on the academic front is the recent announcement that the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of South Africa, is planning to introduce a third-year course in Archaeology. This will enable students to major in Archaeology.

The question now is, what are we as archaeologists doing wrong, or what are we not doing? Despite all the

successes with 'public outreach programmes' we are not convincing the decision-makers, especially at the universities, that archaeology is relevant in the new South Africa. This is a very serious situation with a 'snow ball effect'. General, but especially specialist training will be seriously affected. Furthermore, with fewer departments there are also less employment opportunities (see Duncan Miller 1993). This places more pressure on fewer archaeologists to be responsible for general public programmes, for outreach programmes among the disadvantaged communities and less time for research and publications.

When Hilary Deacon (1988) addressed the future of archaeology, and more specifically the problems that faced universities, we all shared his optimism (or silently hoped) that contract archaeology would be the answer to our problems. However, it would appear that almost ten years later, the goose that must lay the golden eggs has not come home to roost. We are still waiting for adequate legislation on impact assessments and although contract offices and individual units have benefitted financially from consultancies, the boom in the generation of new posts still has to materialise.

I will be continuing to discuss these matters in the next issue. In the mean time, you are welcome to send us your opinion on the future of archaeology in South Africa.

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