

## RESEARCH NOTES

### METALWORK FOUND IN LATE STONE AGE CONTEXTS IN THE WESTERN AND SOUTHERN CAPE

DUNCAN MILLER, TONY MANHIRE, ROYDEN YATES,  
ANTONIETA JERARDINO & JOHN PARKINGTON

*Department of Archaeology, University of Cape Town,  
Rondebosch 7701, Cape Town*

#### INTRODUCTION

Surprisingly few metal artefacts of either indigenous or European origin have been found in Late Stone Age contexts in the known areas of earliest contact in the Cape. This research note puts on record nineteen such artefacts for comparison with similar material found elsewhere in South Africa. It is remarkable that so little by way of metalwork has been recovered from Late Stone Age contexts in the western and southern Cape, an area in which vigorous trade in copper and iron between colonists and indigenous people is well documented.

In August 1993 David Crass and Garth Sampson published a paper in *Marteva* No. 9 (the Newsletter of the Cape Historical Archaeology Association) illustrating a small, triangular piece of copper sheeting with two perforations from Abbot's Cave, and noting that "no documented analogue has been found" (Crass and Sampson 1993). In the following issue (*Marteva* No 10) Tim Maggs wrote to suggest that the perforated copper sheet was an item of personal adornment similar to those known to have been worn by Khoisan and Sotho-Tswana people (Maggs 1994). This prompted us to look at the small collection of metal artefacts assembled over the years from Later Stone Age contexts by archaeologists at the University of Cape Town. This research note is intended to illustrate this material in order to make it accessible to other archaeologists for comparative purposes. It represents artefacts collected over the past twenty years by various people. The items are listed in Table 1 and what information accompanies them or we have managed to obtain is reproduced below.

#### **Copper pendant - KP 15/1, Kleinplaas, Gifberg (31.28.48S; 18.28.12E)**

This is a small triangular copper plate, 20 mm long and 18 mm wide and about 0,5 mm thick (Fig. 1). It is only lightly corroded with a light green copper oxide coating. It is slightly concavo-convex and has one slightly irregular but symmetrically positioned perforation. This

artefact closely resembles the one illustrated from Abbott's Cave (Crass & Simpson 1993) except that the latter had two small perforations. This artefact was collected by Duncan Miller under NMC permit 9/2/097/5 dated 23 October 1991. It was found in the dripline of a very small rock shelter, which had several disused upper grindstones lying on the surface, as well as indications of recent intermittent use like fragments of Hessian sacking.

#### **Brass cartridge case - KP 15/2, Kleinplaas, Gifberg, (31.28.48S; 18.28.12E)**

This artefact consists of a reworked spent brass cartridge shell. The base is 18,5 mm in diameter and the total remaining height is 28 mm. There are two parallel and horizontal score or chop marks on the one side (shown in Fig. 1) and several shorter ones on the other side, but the casing was not severed by these. The bulk of the shell has been torn away, leaving a jagged edge which was folded over, trapping a layered material like sheets of paper inside. This has not been sampled or identified. This object was found in the dripline of the same shelter as the Kleinplaas pendant described above. They are not necessarily coeval.

#### **Copper button - Pepper Tree Hill PTH/9, 16/11/81, (32.21.10S; 18.29.40E)**

This is the remains of a heavily corroded copper button (Fig. 1) from Pepper Tree Hill (spot height 143 m asl) on the north east side of Verlorenvlei, opposite Diepkloof Cave. The site is on the farm Matjiesgoeddrif and is 4 km north east of the farmhouse. There are several small deflation bays at Pepper Tree Hill and the button was collected on 16/11/1981 by Tony Manhire from the surface of the deflation bay PTH 9. The site is of interest as apart from the normal range of LSA stone tools there were many pieces of pottery and several trade beads, indicating a late occupation date. The button was originally about 22 mm in diameter, with an inverted rim. The inner surface still retains impressions of fibres preserved in the copper corrosion product, indicating that it was buried while still attached to fabric.

**Table 1. Metalwork from Late Stone Age contexts in the western and southern Cape**

NUMBER	LABEL	LOCATION	OBJECT	MATERIAL	MASS (g)
1	KP 15/1	Kleinplaas, Gifberg	pendant	copper	1,25
2	KP 15/2	Kleinplaas, Gifberg	cartridge shell	brass	14,16
3	PTH/9	16/11/81 (or 83???)	button	copper	4,11
4	VV1	H6, Surface	loop	brass	0,55
5	EBC	C9, Surf and dolly	plate	brass	1,09
6	EBC (CAR 3)	C9, Level 1, B patch	plate	brass	0,44
7	EBC (CAR 3)	C8, Ash and twigs	rod	brass	7,74
8	WDSP/2	8/4/83	button	brass	0,41
9	DSM	C7, Spit 2 28/10/90	button	brass	1,52
10	TR 4	8/7/91	button	brass	0,55
11	LOR 16	7/7/91	arrowhead	iron	0,60
12	CAR 5	G3, Dung crust	pendant	brass	1,42
13	CAR 5	Andriesgrond talus stope	disc	brass	3,21
14	CAR 5	Base of 2nd bedding bottom	button	brass	1,89
15	CAR 5	I3, Hearth next to bedding 8	ring	copper	3,19
16	CAR 5	Surface 12m from ref pnt, 1m N	plate	brass	0,94
17	Langberg	rock shelter 33°53.7'S: 21°44.1'E	button	gilded brass	9,24
18	Tortoise Cave	Tim Robey	pendant	brass	2,37
19	Tortoise Cave	Tim Robey	bead	brass	0,39

**Brass loop - Voëlvlei VV1, H6, Surface, (33.24.00S; 19.04.01E)**

This is a small loop of brass, held closed by a perforated plate (Fig. 1), found at a site on the south-eastern end of Voëlvlei Dam (Smith, Sadr, Gribble & Yates 1991:81). It is only lightly corroded. The greatest dimension of the loop is 8 mm, and it is made of flat strip about 2 mm wide and 1 mm thick. It is probably the back of a European button. This artefact has been described earlier as a copper bead (Smith *et al.* 1991:84).

**Brass plate - EBC, C9, Surf and Dolly, (32.19.03S; 18.19.05E)**

This is a small, roughly rectangular brass plate, with irregular margins and a small tear at one corner (Fig. 1), from Elands Bay Cave. The maximum width is 20 mm, the height about 12 mm and the thickness about 0,5 mm. It is slightly concavo-convex and is heavily corroded. It was recovered from a surface layer dating from very close to present to around 300 years ago. No plausible items of historic European material culture were found in this level besides this metal artefact. The unit with which it was associated is highly shelly, with quantities of grass, twigs, and ash.

**Brass plate - EBC, C9, Level 1, B patch, (32.19.03S; 18.19.05E)**

This is a very corroded fragment of brass plate (Fig. 1) from Elands Bay Cave. The margins are very irregular with no trace of any regular geometric outline, and the current thickness is about 0,5 mm. It is slightly concavo-convex.

**Brass rod - EBC, C8, Ash and twigs, (32.19.03S; 18.19.05E)**

This is a slightly curved brass bar with rectangular cross section, from Elands Bay Cave. The exterior is rough, as though cast, with some adhering sand grains

and is lightly corroded with a coating of pale green oxidation product. It is currently about 63 mm long, about 6 mm wide, and 3 mm thick. It has been sampled, presumably for metallurgical analysis, but neither the sample nor analytical results appear to be available.

**Brass button-WDSP/2, 8/4/83, (32.12.32S; 18.22.58E)**

This is the modified top of a Dutch brass button (Fig. 2), perforated for use as a pendant. It is a hollow dome about 13 mm long by 11 mm wide, and less than 0,5 mm thick. It has a single perforation, which has torn through the margin. The site WDSP 2 is a large shell midden banked up against a small rock shelter about 4 km inland from the sea, on the northern bank of Wadrifoutpan, the shallow vlei at the mouth of the Langvleirivier. The artefact was collected by Tony Manhire on 8/4/83 from the surface, with stone artefacts, ostrich egg shell beads and pottery suggesting terminal Late Stone Age occupation. Brass pendants of this type have been recorded distributed between the Cape and the Marico (Miller & Markell 1993). They may have been traded from the Cape, through Namaqualand, to the interior.

**Brass button - DSM, C7, Spit 2, 28/10/90, (33.06.03S; 18.00.02E)**

This is a modified top of a Dutch brass button (Fig. 2), similar to the one described above. It was excavated from the site of Drie Susters Main, in the Posberg Reserve (Smith *et al.* 1991:77). It is a hollow dome about 16 mm in diameter, and less than 0,5 mm thick, with a single perforation punched through from the inner surface.

**Brass button - TR4, 8/7/91, (32.03.25S; 19.06.30')**

This is a modified Dutch brass button (Fig. 2), consisting of a hollow dome approximately 11,5 mm in diameter and less than 0,5 mm thick, with one

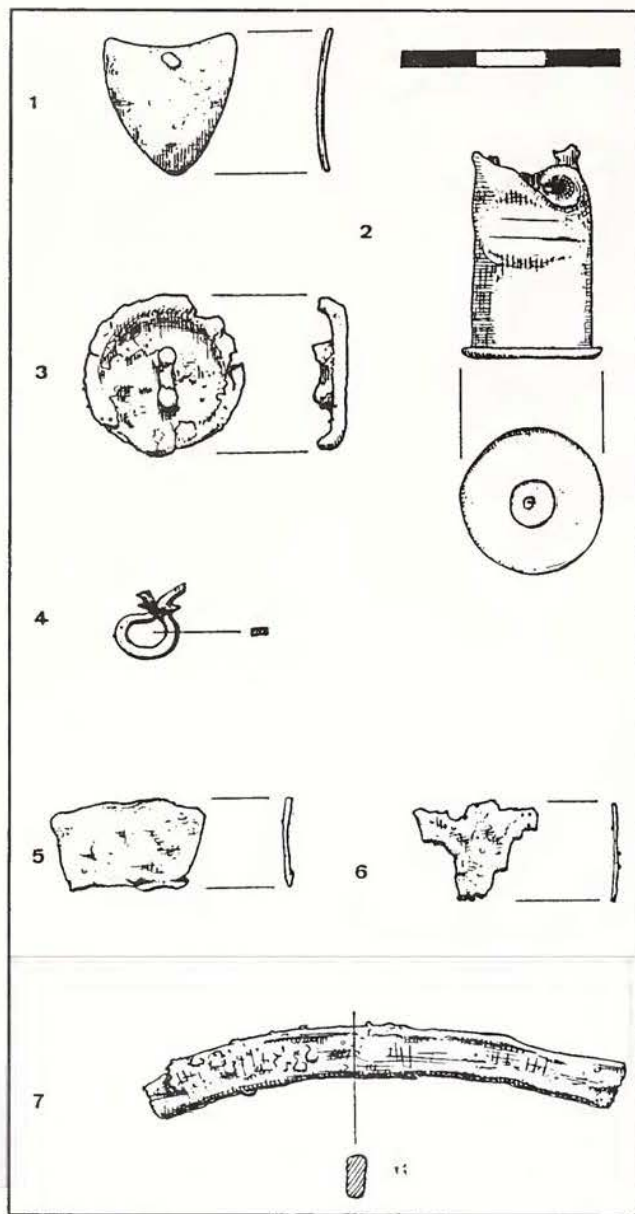


Fig. 1. 1, Copper pendant; 2, brass cartridge shell; 3, copper button; 4, brass loop; 5, brass plate; 7, brass rod (scale divisions each 10 mm).

perforation punched through from the inner surface. The site TR4 is located in the Pakhuis area of the Clanwilliam district, east of the Brandewyn River. It is a moderately sized rock shelter offering good protection from the elements. There are few rock painting, but a deep deposit and copious quantities of stone artefacts attest to a favoured place of residence. The site has not been excavated. The pendant was found on the surface in the drip-line.

**Iron arrowhead - LOR 16, 7/7/91, (32.04.10S; 19.01.35E)**

This corroded iron arrowhead is 22 mm wide, 19 mm long, and about 0,5 mm thick (Fig. 2). It was found on the farm Lorraine, on a small rocky ledge below the entrance of Eland Cave, from which it had clearly been

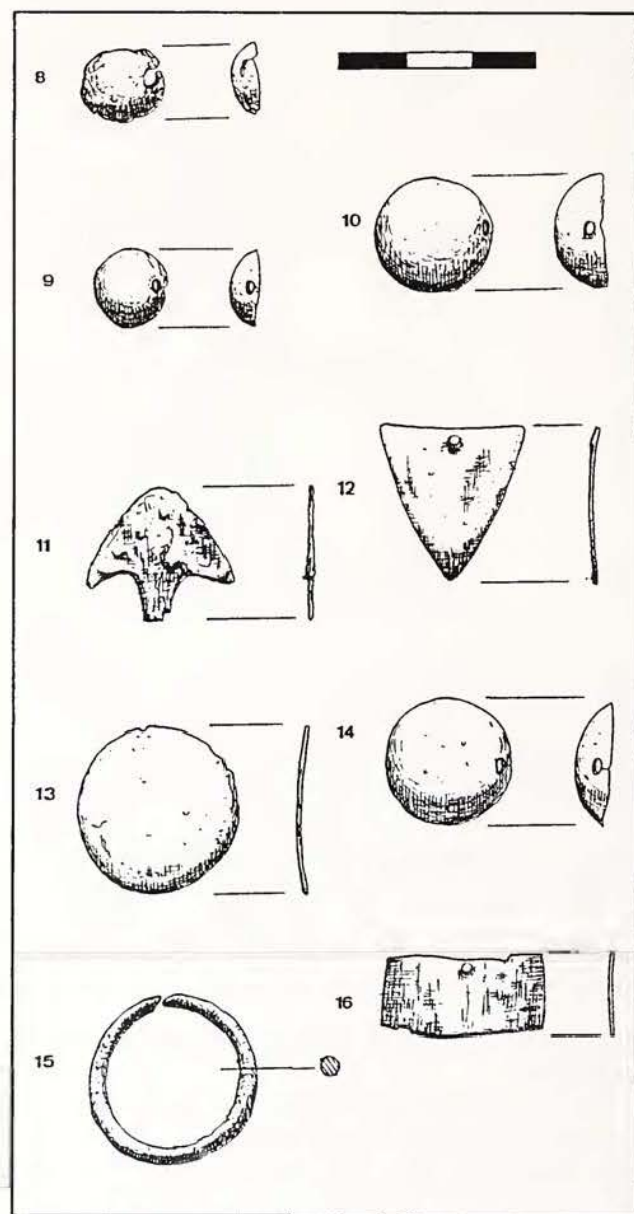


Fig. 2. 8, Brass button; 9, brass button; 10, brass button; 11, iron arrowhead; 12, brass pendant; 13, brass disc; 14, brass button; 15, copper ring; 16, brass plate (scale divisions each 10 mm).

washed. Eland Cave ranks as one of the major rock painted sites in the Pakhuis area. Set well back into the rocky heights it commands a fine view over the Brandewyn valley. The site has a shallow deposit and fair quantities of stone artefacts. Recently, a simultaneous burial of two children was excavated from the shelter deposits after they became exposed on the surface. As far as we know, this is the only example of an iron arrowhead found in a Late Stone Age archaeological site in the western Cape.

**Brass pendant - CAR 5, G3, Dung crust, (32.11.40S; 18.52.05E)**

This triangular brass pendant (Fig. 2) from Andriesgrond is very similar to the copper one from Kleinplaas

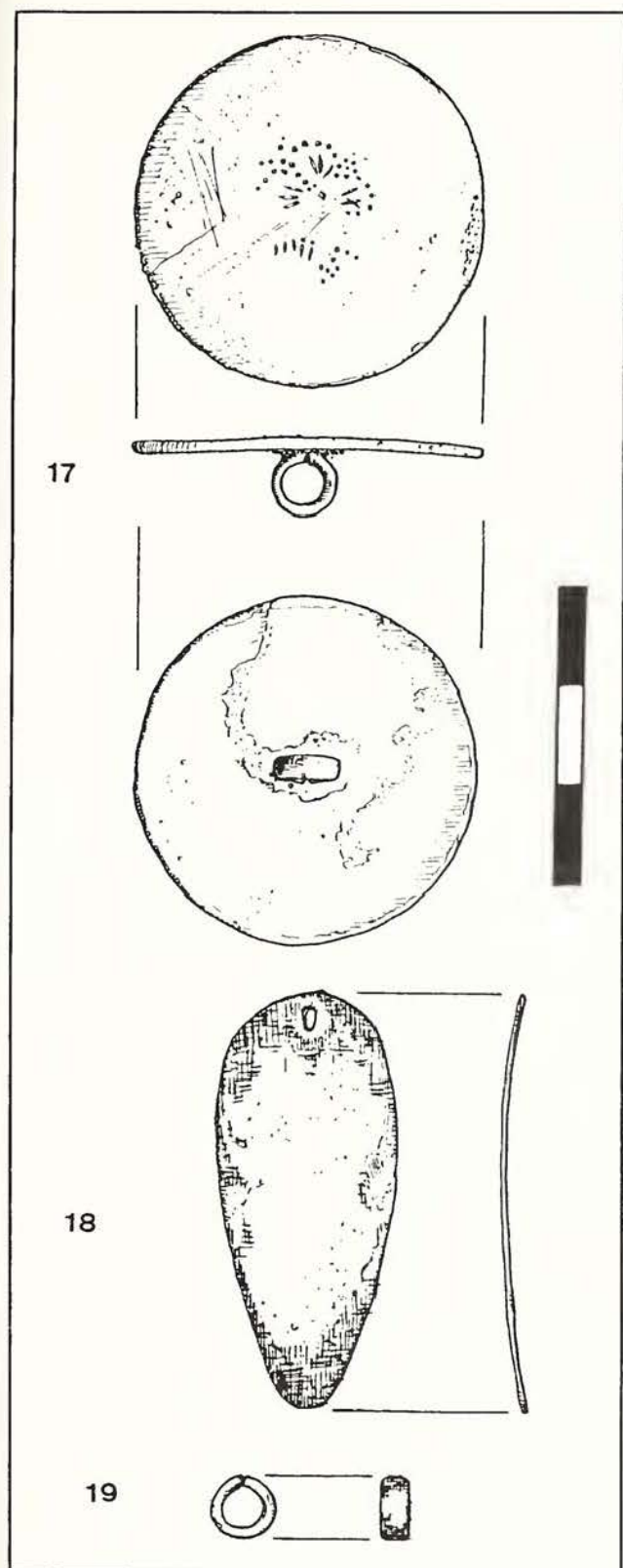


Fig. 3. 17, Brass button; 18, brass pendant; 19, brass bead (scale divisions each 10 mm).

in the Gifberg. It is an isosceles triangle 23 mm long and 22 mm wide and the metal is about 0,4 mm thick. It is only very mildly corroded with a black patina, and has a single symmetrically punched hole. It is slightly concavo-convex with the hole punched from the concave side.

Andriesgrond is a shelter with a long, but intermittent, history of use as a living site by people. A date of 180 BP has been obtained on burnt grass bedding flanking a central hearth. Besides the brass pendant, some fragments of European stoneware ceramics were recovered from the bedding, as well as a piece of a clay tobacco pipe bowl. The form of the pipe bowl indicates a seventeenth to eighteenth century age.

#### Brass disc - CAR 5, Andriesgrond talus slope

This is a slightly concave brass disc, 26 mm in diameter and about 0,8 mm thick (Fig. 2). It is lightly corroded with a green tarnish, and is unornamented and not perforated. It was found on the talus slope of Andriesgrond shelter, described above.

#### Brass button - CAR 5, Base of 2nd bedding bottom

This is a modified Dutch brass button, a low hollow dome about 19 mm in diameter and about 0,5 mm thick (Fig. 2) from Andriesgrond. It has a single perforation, punched through from the concave side, which has torn through the margin.

#### Copper ring - CAR 5, 13, Hearth next to bedding 8

This is a copper loop or ring, about 25 mm in diameter (Fig. 2) from Andriesgrond. It is made from round section wire of uneven thickness, but averaging about 3 mm in diameter, which has been flattened slightly on both sides in places.

#### Brass plate - CAR 5, Surface 12 m from reference point, 1 m N

This is a thin, rectangular, brass sheet (Fig. 2) from Andriesgrond. It is 24 mm long, between 10 mm and 13 mm wide, and about 0,25 mm thick. It is slightly concavo-convex, with the single symmetrically placed perforation punched from the concave side. It is rough in the "inside" but polished smooth on the "outside", lightly corroded with a dark brown patina. It may have been used as a pendant, or attached to a garment.

#### Brass button - Langberg, rock shelter (33.53.42S; 21.44.06E).

The site from which this artefact was collected is a rock shelter on the farm Langberg. This brass button consists of a slightly domed disc 35 mm in diameter and about 1 mm thick, with a loop soldered or brazed onto the back. The front is very worn but the remains of punched ornamentation are visible, some of the indentations still carrying a yellow pigment that looks like gilding (Fig. 3). The button was found by Sandy Gush of the Wilderness on the talus slope of a small rock shelter with rock paintings of fish-tailed figures. The button was associated with pottery and some stone tools.

#### Brass pendant-Tortoise Cave (32.19.37.S; 18.21.37E).

This brass pendant (Fig. 3) was found in March 1977 at Tortoise Cave near Elands Bay. It was found outside the shelter on the surface and was collected before

excavations started at this site. The pendant is a narrow oval, 42 mm long and 18 mm wide and made from sheet about 0,5 mm thick. It is slightly concavo-convex with an elongated hole symmetrically situated at the top.

**Brass bead - Tortoise Cave (32.19.37S; 18.21.37E).**

This brass bead (Fig. 3) was recovered during November 1981 from a unit belonging to Layer 1a ("Back of Degas"; square K3) in Tortoise Cave during excavations by Tim Robey. The bead was found a few centimetres away from seven glass beads. Layer 1A consists mostly of bedding material and is dated to  $760 \pm 50$  BP (Pta-3600). It is possibly that this layer might well contain more recent material and the date should be considered as a maximum age. The bead is about 7 mm in diameter, and made of rectangular section wire or strip which is about 2 mm thick. The join is open, although filled with corrosion product.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We wish to thank the various people who collected these artefacts for making them available, and Philip Barrett for the drawings.

**REFERENCES**

- Crass, D.C. & Sampson, C.G. 1993. Glassware and metalwork acquired by the Seacow River Bushmen. *Marteva* 9:3-13.
- Maggs, T. 1994. Letter to the Editor. *Marteva* 10:10.
- Miller, D. & Markell, A. 1993. Dutch brass buttons from the Cape to the Marico. *Southern African Field Archaeology* 2:107-108.
- Smith, A.B., Sadr, K., Gribble, J. & Yates, R. 1991. Excavations in the south-western Cape, South Africa, and the archaeological identity of prehistoric hunter-gatherers within the last 2000 years. *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 46:71-91.