

ARCHAEOLOGY

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Available information.

The archaeology of the Soutpansberg covers the time period from about 1 000 000 years ago to the beginning of the historical/colonial period in the area at about 1840. The following list is of archaeological cultures that occur in the area. The area discussed is defined as per the supplied map. According to our present state of knowledge, none of these early cultural traditions are endemic to the mountains and occur over a wide area to the north and the south of the range.

- Early Stone Age (1 000 000–200 000 years ago)
- Middle Stone Age (200 000–20 000 years ago)
- Late Stone Age (20 000–1 000 years ago)
- Rock Art (is synthesized separately)
- Early Iron Age Traditions (300–700 AD)
 - Happy Rest
 - Silver Leaves
 - Eiland Early Iron Age
 - Uncertain
- Middle Iron Age Traditions (900–1 300 AD)
 - K2/Mutamba
 - Mapungubwe
- Later Iron Age Traditions (1 300–1830 AD)
 - Moloko (Early Sotho)
 - Zimbabwe
 - Khami
 - Early Venda
 - Early Tsonga
 - Unidentified (often referred to locally as Vha-Ngona sites)

While the above is a fair reflection of what is known about the cultural history of the area, exceedingly little Archaeological research has been done and an estimated 5–10% coverage has been done. From the point of view of Venda history the period from Mapungubwe through to early Venda, is of great importance as this is the formation period for the cultural groups that eventually amalgamated to form the Venda. The database is the result of work done from about 1972 through to 1995.

Summary statistics

Individual archaeological sites have been recorded in various parts of the Soutpansberg, particularly in the north-eastern area. At this stage, densities cannot be plotted as no complete systematic survey has been done. However the following serves as a broad guideline:

Stone Age

Early Stone Age is rare, Middle Stone Age more common and Late Stone Age better documented as these sites frequently occur with rock art sites.

Early Iron Age.

These sites are very scarce, and only seven are known. One of the reasons for the low numbers is that most of the sites appear under an overburden of soil and are not easily visible.

Middle Iron Age

These known sites relate to cultural traditions originating to the north of the mountain, and expanding south. These are more common than the early Iron Age, and an estimated 30 are known from the area.

Late Iron Age.

The different traditions that form part of the Late Iron Age occur in different amounts throughout the area. Moloko occurs along the southern and western foothills, while only three Zimbabwe sites are known from the northeastern section of the mountain. Khami and early Venda are often interlinked and form the majority of the sites to be found, with at least 50 known. Early Tsonga sites are found in the south-eastern corner of the area.

Major studies and publications

Lists of the known documented sites are available from the South African Heritage Resources Agency in Cape Town, as well from their regional office in Polokwane. Another source of sites, particularly for the Blouberg area can be found at the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria. Access to this information is restricted to researchers.

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Recommendations for priority studies required to fill any gaps identified

There are large gaps in our archaeological knowledge of the area, and much more work needs to be done. This is particularly true of the period of time leading up to the origins of the Vhavenda people, as much of the documented

ethnographic history has been based on the history of the last clan to enter the area, i.e. the Singo, and does not cover the full history of the various clans that arrived earlier in time.

“Hot spots” of particular importance

All archaeological sites are potential hot spots, in view of the fact that they are a non-renewable resource, and once lost can never be recovered. However, the following are more vulnerable than others; Dzata; Mutulowe near Tshiendeulu; Tshitaka tsha Makoleni near Mianzwi; Tshaluvhimbi in the Thengwe area, Mukumbane and the various Tshiungani ruins.

Although the National Heritage Resources Act protects all archaeological sites, many are being damaged through the ignorance of the local populace of the legislation and this state of affairs is deteriorating rapidly in many areas.

Other participants who should be consulted in future

- Archaeology of the Blouberg:
 - Dr J. A van Schalkwyk, National Cultural History Museum, Pretoria.
- Archaeology of the Soutpansberg:
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