

INTRODUCTION

The Soutpansberg is a prominent quartzite mountain range situated just north of the Tropic of Capricorn. It extends from the town of Vivo in the west to Punda Maria in the Kruger National Park in the east. The mountain forms a geological unit with the Makgabeng Plateau and Blouberg Mountain to the west of Vivo and with sandstone ridges that extend to the Limpopo Valley and across into Zimbabwe north of Pafuri in the Kruger National Park. The Soutpansberg (or Greater Soutpansberg) as referred to in this report includes all of these geological regions (see Fig. 1). The area extends in an east-west direction for about 210 km, with a width of up to 60 km and a surface area of 6 800 km². Moist maritime air blowing in from the Indian Ocean precipitates against the southern slopes of the mountains and dissipates in valleys and on the northern slopes thus creating a mosaic of climatic conditions varying from areas with an annual precipitation of over 2 000 mm to semi-desert conditions. This, together with variations in temperature, and geomorphology, has resulted in a remarkable plant and animal diversity. Man has been associated with the mountain since his origin and the area is rich in archaeology, including some of the most spectacular and diverse rock art found in South Africa and important Iron Age cultures such as Mapungubwe. The history of European settlement and influence over the past two centuries is extremely interesting and important within the South African political context. Due to the remoteness of the area, indigenous culture and technology have been better preserved than in

most other parts of South Africa and provide fascinating material for the scientist and the eco-tourist.

The workshop emanated from the concern of a group of private landowners about the conservation status of this unique area. The synthesis of information on the Mountain was seen as an essential first step in a process that could lead to the establishment of a biosphere reserve.

An exceedingly encouraging aspect of the workshop was the enthusiastic participation of a delegation from the Biodiversity Management Section of the Provincial Department of Finance, Economic Affairs and Development. They demonstrated their willingness and capacity to database these resources and to work closely with all partners in conserving and promoting them. This relationship holds much potential for the future.

This report is by no means a synthesis of all extant information on the Soutpansberg! It represents a synthesis of information generated by experts who could attend, or submit written contributions to, the two-day workshop. The exclusion of other experts and potential contributors was not by design, but was due merely to the constraints of time and distance. Any contribution which could broaden our knowledge base of the Soutpansberg, or which would improve this document, will be welcomed. Contributions can be sent to:

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