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# A REPORT ON PRELIMINARY EXCAVATIONS IN TARZAN'S CAVE, SIMONSTOWN

CLIVE STANNARD  
*Attwell's Flats, Simonstown*

Waterfall Road, Simonstown, leads through the main Coloured residential area and, having dwindled to a gravel path, continues via the Naval Arsenal into 'Waterval Kloof.'

The waterfall which accounts for this name and which flows for most of the year, stands at the head of this kloof. As one faces this, a steep cliff rises perpendicularly on one's right. In this is situated Tarzan's Cave, otherwise known as Soutgat, Donker-gat, Geraamtegat or Geraamtekopgat, (these latter two names referring only to a white skull and cross-bones daubed in the cave mouth by local children.)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE CAVE

Access to the site is, to say the least, limited. One has to climb the screes to the right of the cave and then turn left along a fault in the cliff face. At one spot passage is very restricted and necessitates extreme caution but, once past this, the going is relatively easy and the path leads directly into the cave, from the mouth of which there is an uninterrupted drop of some 300 feet.

The cave is some 60 foot wide, 45 foot deep and about 40 foot high. At the rear a bare, sloping rock floor flows up to meet the roof in a deep and low overhang. The deposits extend from this spot to the cliff-edge and imbedded in the soil and lying on it are numerous heavy boulders, fallen from the roof.

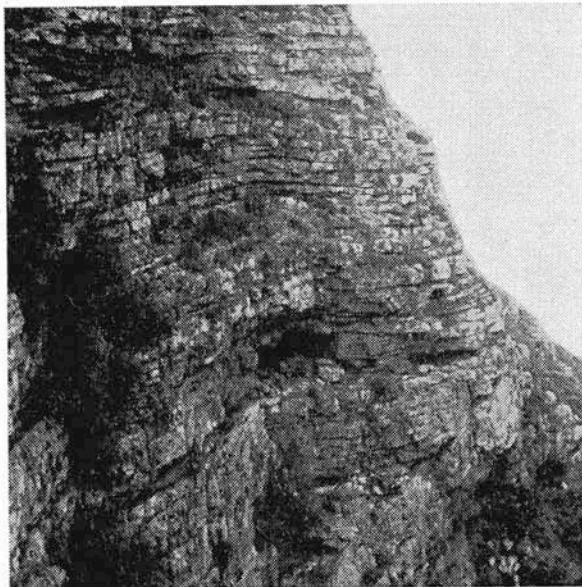


Plate 1. Tarzan's Cave, illustrating the difficult mode of access, and the rock-falls.

These are especially heaped up in the centre of the floor and leave little space clear for excavation. (See Plate 1). The deposits in the rear of the cave are impregnated with much decomposing grass and shrub, which may be the remains of bedding material. A few shells (almost exclusively limpets), many small chips of white and crystalline quartz, some man-made, and many natural flakes litter the surface.

## THE EXCAVATION

The floor was roughly gridded and a spot in the mouth, just before the talus began, was selected. An area approximately 6 foot by 3 foot was staked out, swept clear and then, in part of this, a 3 foot square pit was sunk. Bed-rock or perhaps an imbedded boulder was struck at a depth of 17 inches. A layer of charcoal dust,  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick, occurred 2 inches below the surface, but apart from this, no stratigraphy was discernable and the material recovered varied little from depth to depth. (This layer was most probably wind deposited, after a bush-fire.) On completion of the work, the pit was lined with flat stones and filled with rubble but this has been disturbed by vandals or baboons and the pit's walls have crumbled. All material excavated was passed through an  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch mesh sieve and a dump was formed on a flat rock; this, too, has been scattered.

## MATERIAL RECOVERED

The stone of the cave and cliff, is an extremely friable and brittle form of Table Mountain Sandstone, with many natural faults rendering it almost useless for artefact manufacture. Thus large quantities of alien stone were carried into the cave for knapping. White and crystalline quartz, fine grained quartzite, silcrete and more homogeneous forms of T.M.S. were all used. By far the greatest number of artefacts are of such stone, facilitating their initial identification. For this reason, such stone was judiciously collected.

The table below shows both the material obtained by excavation and that gathered from the talus, where it lay exposed by dripping water.

Of interest is the large quantity of quartz present, in chunks and flakes. Of this the writer only felt justified in positively identifying three artefacts: the two pieces listed as a side flake and a 'chisel' both retain facets of the original crystalline form. The latter, in particular, shows much bruising on the cutting edge. (See Figure I, No. 1).

Only a very few shells (all limpets) were recovered.

TABLE 1

	Excavation			Talus		
	Sub-total	Total	Showing Usage	Sub-total	Total	Showing Usage
Large prepared discoid cores ( $4\pm''$ ) bifaced.		2				
Small prepared discoid cores ( $2\frac{1}{2}''-1\frac{1}{2}''$ ). Bifaced.	4	6			1	
Unifaced.	2			1		
Flakes.		14			24	
Standard.	1					
End.	9			18		
Side.	2		1	6		1
Blade.	1					
Faceted platform: Small point.	1					
Worked quartz.		3				
Small prepared core.	1					
Side flake.	1		1			
"Chisel."	1		1			
		25			25	
Quartz (possibly utilized)		30			170±	
Small cores (?).	7					
Chips: quartz + alien rock.	23			170±		

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Artefacts and Culture Type

Of the fifty pieces recovered, none bears secondary trimming: thus the assemblage includes no finished or even discarded implement. Apart from this, usage is discernable in only 4 cases. Due to these facts

and, mainly, the limited size of the collection, the only conclusions that can be drawn about the culture is that it dates to the Middle Stone Age, is characterised by small discoid prepared cores (See Figure 1, Nos.2 and 3) and belongs to a people who, though they lived by the sea, were not much given to shell-fish

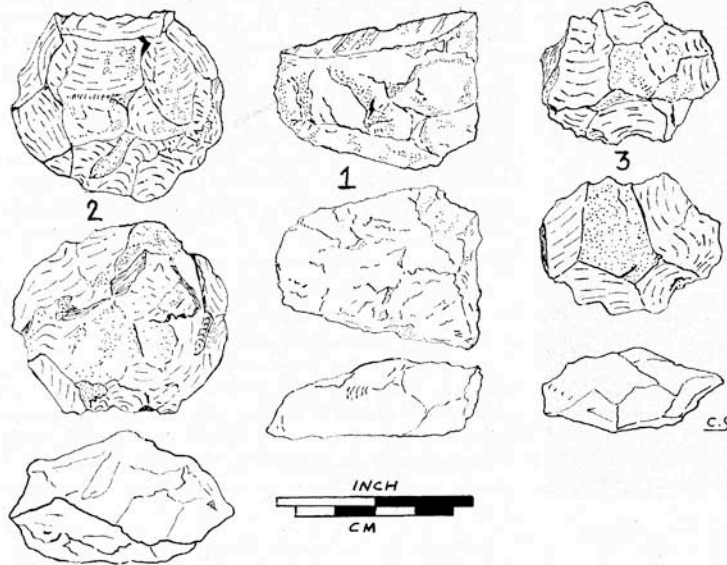


Fig. 1. Stone implements found at Tarzan's Cave, Simonstown.

gathering, unless they devoured these away from the site. Whether or not the cave possesses deeper levels containing similar (or, perhaps, different) cultural material remains an unanswered question.

#### **The Cave Site**

What factors encouraged human inhabitation of such a difficult environment? If defence was the chief aim, here was a natural fortress but surely men had little to fear from other men at this stage, although predatory beasts would have posed a danger.

As noted above, a waterfall plunges into the valley below and, even in the driest season, water can be found. This is presumably one of the few permanent watering-places in the area for (as the writer knows from bitter experience), a troop of baboons has the rather disconcerting habit of clambering down to drink in the late afternoon, in dry periods. Then, too, the kloof, with its rich, moist soil, may have been a suitable gathering-ground for roots and bulbs, while the sea is not far away.

Though this is the largest cave in the area, (the other few are mere rock-shelters without deposits) one cannot but wonder at the concept of human families living here for any length of time.

#### **FURTHER EXCAVATION AND CONCLUSION**

The deposits are rather shallow. At their deepest they may be estimated at three to five feet thick.

Extremely little excavating space exists because of the huge rock-falls (See Plate I): similar earlier falls seem to be embedded at all levels and thus, at best, an imperfect stratigraphy could be hoped for. Blasting is impracticable because of the very nature of the cave-rock, because the rubble would be difficult to dispose of and due to the fact that a large naval arsenal lies in the valley below. Add to this the knowledge that the cave-rock has the disconcerting habit of flaking off in shapes precisely designed to baffle the archaeologist and the picture is not very encouraging or promising. Even so the writer entertains the hope that he, or some suitable body, will one day have the necessary resources to complete the scientific exploration of this interesting site.

The artefacts and excavation notes have been donated to the South African Museum, Cape Town.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The writer would like to extend his thanks and appreciation to Mr. R. R. Inskoop for his advice, help, enthusiasm and guidance, to Mr. J. Rudner for kindly checking this paper, to sundry friends for helping in the work, and lastly to his younger brother Andrew, whose archaeological activities led to a serious fall, a broken foot and a spinal injury.