



Introduction

Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site is the ideal location for anyone interested in the park's wildlife and birds, to those in search of serenity, identity and the extraordinary history of this World Heritage Site...

Come and join these diverse pilgrims and share unforgettable moments sipping sundowners at the confluence of the legendary Limpopo and Shashe Rivers, watch the eagles soar over Botswana and Zimbabwe's skies, hear the echo of elephant trumpets, take a tree top walk or just relax and absorb the surroundings... Mapungubwe National Park and World Heritage Site is rich in biodiversity, great scenic beauty and the cultural importance of the archaeological treasures of Mapungubwe.

Areas of Special Interest

The Lost City: Visit Mapungubwe Hill, where a far developed African civilisation prospered between 1200 and 1270 AD. The area was already inhabited by a growing Iron Age community from 900 AD and became rich through trade with faraway places like Egypt, India and China. This is the place where archeologists excavated the famous golden rhino and other evidence of a wealthy African kingdom.

Wildlife and Mystic Scenery: Sandstone formations, mopane woodlands and unique riverine forest and baobab trees form the astounding scenic backdrop for a rich variety of animal life. Elephant, giraffe, white rhino, eland, gemsbok and numerous other antelope species occur naturally in the area. Lucky visitors might spot predators like lions, leopards and hyenas. Birders can tick off 400 species, including kori bustard, tropical boubou and pel's fishing owl.

The Mapungubwe Interpretation Centre : The Centre which is built near the main gate of the Mapungubwe National Park won the building of the year competition in 2009 and is home to the famous Golden Rhino. The Centre provides both day and over-night visitors the opportunity of a tour, showcasing the amazing landscape that the National Park has to offer.

Joining Nations: The Iron Age civilization of Mapungubwe was not limited by the Limpopo river and animals have always been able to wander around in the area of present-day South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe. This is why South Africa signed a memorandum of understanding with Botswana and Zimbabwe on June 22nd setting out principles for the Limpopo-Shashe Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA).

Accommodation

*****Guests at any of the park's camps must check in at the main gate reception area.*****

Camps

[Leokwe Camp](#)

This is Mapungubwe's main camp, located in the eastern section of the Park in the spectacular sandstone hills. Close to the camp guests can enjoy the Treetop Hide and the Confluence View Site & Picnic Area. The camp itself has a swimming pool and sundeck, as well as a central braai area.



[Limpopo Forest Tented Camp](#)

This camp, situated in the Limpopo riverine forest which offers excellent birding, is located in the western section of the Park. The camp is close to the Maloutswa Pan hide.

[Tshugulu Lodge](#)

This luxury lodge sleeps 1 x 12 in the guest lodge with 6 x bedrooms, a bath, en-suite swimming pool and an exclusive eco-trail.

[Vhembe Wilderness Camp](#)

In the eastern section of Mapungubwe National Park, Vhembe Wilderness Camp has been built on a small ridge within a valley, within walking distance of the Limpopo River and Mapungubwe Hill. Bookings can be made online.

[Mazhou Camping Site](#)

The Mazhou Camping Site in Mapungubwe National Park is situated close to the Limpopo Forest Tented Camp in the Western Section of the Park caters for 10 caravans or tents, and each camping site is equipped with a powerpoint.

Guests intending to stay over at Mazhou Camping Site check in at the Mapungubwe Main Gate. A Pensioner Discount is available from Sunday to Thursday nights within the normal Pensioner Discount Periods.

General Information

To view the accommodation prices, refer to [Tariffs](#)

- [Park contact information](#)

Activities

Visit the Interpretation Centre

The Centre which is built near the main gate of the Mapungubwe National Park won the building of the year competition in 2009 and is home to the famous Golden Rhino. The Centre provides both day and over-night visitors the opportunity of a tour, showcasing the amazing landscape that the National Park has to offer.

[Gallery images of the Interpretation Centre](#)

Visit the Confluence

Enjoy a view over the confluence of the Shashe and Limpopo rivers where three countries meet...

There is a picnic site with ablution facilities at the Confluence with shaded picnic spots with tables and taps. You can also hire a skottel braai and stock up on cooldrinks at the tuck shop.

Heritage Tours

As part of this tour, you will be given the opportunity to visit the elite graveyard at the top of Mapungubwe Hill, view a natural amphitheatre and the entire spectrum of the region, traverse the territory once walked upon by the ancestral Mapungubwe People - now roamed by four of the Big 5.

Please note: Meals optional @ R220 per person. These include food, drinks and snacks (No alcohol). Visitors are encouraged to bring their own food.

Do the Tree Top Walk or a Game Drive

Take a walk among the riverine forest on a raised canopy walk that takes you to a hide overlooking the Limpopo River.

*****Tariffs are effective from 1 November 2011 - 31 October 2012*****

Tours/Drives/Walks	Departure Time	Duration	Tariff per person
Heritage Tour	07:00 & 10:00	2 hours	R160
Sunset Drive	16:00	3 hours	R190 (child: R95)
Night Drive	19:30	2 hours	R190 (child: R95)

* Guided Walks are also available. Please contact the park for more information on this activity.

* Please note that all activities can be booked by e-mailing [Mapungubwe National Park](mailto:MapungubweNationalPark@sanparks.org) or calling +27 (0)15 534 2014. They are subject to the availability of qualified staff and vehicles, and thus, they may not be always available.

[Follow the Route of Lost Kingdoms](#)

The Route of Lost Kingdoms stretches from inside the gates of the Kruger National Park at the ancient stone wall site of Thulamela, follows a trail of myths and legends to the Mapungubwe World Heritage site and onwards to the small town of Alldays. The route gives tourists the opportunity to explore this undiscovered region in the north of South Africa, bordering Botswana and Zimbabwe.

History of the Park

Mapungubwe: Becoming a National Park

[1920's](#)

The Mapungubwe area became a focus of agricultural research in the 1920s through the efforts of a prominent botanist, Dr. I.B. Pole Evans. Pole Evans was instrumental in the creation of the Botanical Survey Advisory Committee which was tasked with coordinating botanical research throughout the Union of South Africa. One of the network of botanical and research stations set up by the Botanical Survey was situated in the Mapungubwe area. In 1918 the government, at the request of General Smuts, set aside a block of nine farms in this area as a preserve for wildlife and natural vegetation. A few years later this became known as the Dongola Botanical Reserve.

[1940's](#)

Pole Evans set about expanding the Dongola Botanical Reserve. By the early 1940s the reserve had grown to include 27 farms, including Greefswald, the property on which the Mapungubwe Hill is situated. Pole Evans lobbied to have the reserve proclaimed as a national park, with the support of Prime Minister Jan Smuts. In 1944 Minister of Lands, Andrew Conroy proposed the formation of the Dongola Wild Life Sanctuary which would include 124



farms, 86 of which were privately owned. This proposal was strongly opposed by the National Party, then the official opposition in parliament and the National Parks Board of Trustees. In one of the longest running debates in the history of the South African parliament, supporters argued that it was necessary to conserve the country's natural assets, that the land set aside for the proposed reserve was unsuitable for agricultural purposes and that the area had a rich archaeology which should be protected. Those opposed to the establishment of the reserve argued that it was unacceptable to alienate agricultural land for wildlife conservation, to expropriate private land or to evict people from land they had occupied for generations. The debate, which has become known as the "Battle of Dongola", resulted in the declaration of a much reduced area as the Dongola Wildlife Sanctuary, after members of the ruling United Party voted in favour of the proposal. The National Party won the elections in 1948, and the sanctuary was abolished in 1949. Expropriated farms were returned to their original farmers, farms owned by the state were allocated for resettlement and funds returned to donors.

[1960's](#)

In 1967 another proposal to protect the area was initiated and the Vhembe Nature Reserve, comprising three farms, including Greefswald, was established as a Transvaal provincial reserve.

[1990's](#)

In 1993 De Beers Consolidated Mines, which had established the Venetia Limpopo Nature Reserve on land that adjoins Greefswald, called for the area to be declared a national park. In 1995 the South African National Parks Board and the Limpopo provincial government signed an agreement committing themselves to the establishment of the new national park. The Vhembe Dongola National Park was proclaimed on 9 April 1998.

[2000's](#)

The Vhembe Dongola National Park was renamed Mapungubwe National Park and opened officially on Heritage Day, 24 September 2004.

[Today](#)

In the 21st century Mapungubwe has been embraced as a site of significance by South Africans and the international community. The Mapungubwe National Park was declared in 1998. The Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (MCL) was declared as a National Heritage Site in 2001 and it was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2003.

The MCL was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2003 because it is believed to be of outstanding universal value for the following reasons:

- The MCL contains evidence for an important interchange of human values that led to far-reaching cultural and social changes in southern Africa between AD 900 and 1300.

- The remains in the MCL are a remarkably complete testimony to the growth and subsequent decline of the Mapungubwe State which at its height was the largest kingdom on the African subcontinent.
- The establishment of Mapungubwe as a powerful state trading through the East African ports with Arabia and India was a significant stage in the history of the African sub-continent.
- The remains in the MCL graphically illustrate the impact of climate change and record the growth, and then decline, of the Kingdom of Mapungubwe as a clear record of a culture that became vulnerable to irreversible change.

The remains of this famous kingdom, when viewed against the present day fauna and flora, and the geo-morphological formations of the Limpopo/Shashe confluence, create an impressive cultural landscape of universal significance.

Mapungubwe: An Archaeological Site

[The Discovery](#)

In December 1932, Ernst van Graan, his son Jerry and three other men searched the farm Greefswald, where both Mapungubwe and K2 are located, for a sacred hill rumoured to hold the treasure of kings. Arriving eventually at the steep-sided and seemingly unscalable hill, a local man, known only as Mowena, reluctantly pointed the way to a narrow path well concealed in a cleft in the rock. Reaching the top of the hill, the men found remnants of stone walls and large quantities of potsherds, some iron tools and copper and glass beads scattered on the ground. They returned the next day with spades and soon unearthed ancient graves, three which were different and probably belonged to royalty. The first, probably a woman, was buried in sitting position facing west. She wore gold bangles around her ankles and there were gold and glass beads in the grave. The second grave was a tall middle-aged man, also sitting up and facing west. He wore a necklace of gold beads and cowrie shells and some objects covered in gold foil, one resembling a crocodile. In the third grave, probably also from a man, a golden bowl, scepter and a golden rhino were found. This rhino has become a symbol for Mapungubwe. The men split the gold between them but one, Jerry van Graan, realising the possible significance of the find, sent a few small pieces of gold together with a letter to his former professor, Leo Fouche at the University of Pretoria. Professor Fouche immediately mounted an expedition to recover and secure the newly found treasures and the surrounding environment for archaeological research. Excavations in the 1930s unearthed 23 graves on top of Mapungubwe Hill. Three were different and probably belong to high royalty.

[The Excavations](#)

In June 1933 the government purchased the farm Greefswald, gave the University of Pretoria the right to excavate for a period of five years and constituted an Archaeological Committee at the university to take charge of the excavations. Exploratory excavations in 1933 were followed by large-scale excavations between 1934 and 1940. Unfortunately the lack of proper recording procedures during this time means that valuable evidence may have been lost. Work on the site was halted during World War II and limited, but more systematic excavations were undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s. After 1970 widespread excavations were undertaken at K2 and Mapungubwe. These were aimed at establishing a firm database by testing, correcting and supplementing the earlier research, coming to an understanding of the Iron Age settlement sequence and reconstructing the way of life of the sites'

inhabitants. This information is available in a range of specialist reports, academic publications and guide-books. In the late 1990s, after the area was designated as a National Park, extensive rehabilitation and stabilisation work was undertaken to secure the archaeological sites. Research over the past decade has focused on the material held in the University of Pretoria's Mapungubwe Collection, gathered over the 60-year period of excavations. The Mapungubwe Museum, established by the University of Pretoria in 2000, serves as a centre for the conservation and display of the collection, disseminating information about Mapungubwe in all its diversity.

[The Reburials](#)

Between 1933 and 1998 the remains of about 147 individuals were excavated from the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape. These included individuals buried on Mapungubwe Hill and in the K2 area. These human remains were excavated from their graves and placed in the collections of the University of Pretoria, the University of the Witwatersrand and Ditsong Museum where they were used for research purposes. Individuals and organisations representing the descendants of the people of Mapungubwe, including the Vhangona Cultural Movement, the Lemba Cultural Association, the San Council, the Tshivula Royal Family, the Ga-Machete Royal Family and the Leshiba Royal Family came together after 1994 to request government to facilitate the process of repatriation and reburial of these human remains. The National Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism was tasked with facilitating this process. After extensive consultation, the human remains were symbolically released to representatives of the descendants on 29 October 2007. The remains were reburied on 20 November, following a cleansing ceremony.

Mapungubwe: A Cultural Landscape

[Dinosaurs](#)

Two of the earliest plant-eating dinosaurs, Plateosaurus (Euskelosaurus) and Massospondylus, are known to have lived in the area now known as the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (MCL). Plateosaurus, the oldest South African dinosaur, lived about 210 million years ago and is believed to have grown to be about 10 metres long. Massospondylus, the most common South African dinosaur, lived about 195 million years ago and is believed to have grown to between three and six metres long. These two species are similar in many ways. They both had long tapered necks and tails and elongated cylindrical bodies and they both walked on all fours, standing upright on their hind legs in order to reach the succulent young fronds of cycads and seed ferns. Like many other dinosaurs, these used their hands to manipulate objects like branches or to prop or pull themselves up against objects.

[Early hunter-gatherers 300,000 and 2,000 years ago](#)

The first inhabitants of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (MCL) who arrived about 300,000 years ago were people of the Earlier Stone Age (ESA). They walked upright but their brains were not as well developed as ours. Many ESA stone tools have been found at open-air sites such as Hackthorne and Keratic Koppie. The tools include handaxes, picks, cleavers and scrapers that were made from local rocks such as quartz, chert, chalcedony and

occasionally dolerite. Between 250,000 and 130,000 years ago the heavy tools of the ESA were replaced by lighter and more technologically advanced Middle Stone Age (MSA) tools. At Kudu Koppie and Parma Farm these tools, made by physically modern people, include parallel-sided blades and triangular points which were hafted to make hunting spears. There is evidence from a rock shelter at Balerno that by 11,000 years ago, small groups of people of the Later Stone Age (LSA), ancestors of the San (Bushmen), had begun to live in the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape. Tools associated with this and other LSA sites such as Thudwa Shelter at Little Muck, include carefully prepared blades and scrapers made from fine grained rocks, such as quartz or chalcedony. The tools are generally smaller than those of the MSA. Towards the end of the LSA, about 3,000 years ago, people in the MCL began painting images of animals and people on the walls of rock shelters to record their beliefs and rituals. MSA and LSA tools accumulated on the floor of rock shelters, together with bones of animals they ate and decayed plant matter that built up in layers when people returned to these places repeatedly. Analysis of the remains shows that the LSA inhabitants lived mainly off small animals such as small antelope, tortoises, hares and fish caught by hunting and snaring.

[Changing populations 100 to 900 AD](#)

Hunter-gatherers living in the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape were probably surprised around the first century AD when LSA herders and early farmers entered the area. By AD 450, an even more dramatic change had taken place, as Early Iron-Age farmers moved into the area, bringing with them domesticated cattle, sheep and goats, crops such as sorghum and millet, and skills such as iron- and copper-working and pottery-making. How did these three groups interact with each other? What effect did the influx of newcomers have on the people already living there? And what effect did the newcomers have on the landscape? Excavations in rock shelters in the MCL show that hunter-gatherers did not move away during the first millennium AD, and were in fact more active. This is reflected in larger numbers of stone tools, bone tools, ostrich eggshell and Achatina shell beads and ochre, as well as new items such as glass beads and pottery. The increased activity is believed to be the result of interaction with farmers who took over land and resources previously available to hunter-gatherers in the region. The hunter-gatherers therefore stayed for longer periods in rock shelters and other places less favoured by the farmers and created new economic networks, taking agricultural produce, pottery, metal and glass beads in exchange for hides and wild meat. Hunter-gatherers continued to make rock paintings during this period to emphasise their ownership of rock shelters and their powers of rain-making.

[Middle Iron Age farmers and traders AD 900 to 1000](#)

By about AD 900, Zhizo people had moved into the area, establishing settlements in the MCL, eastern Botswana and south-west Zimbabwe. At least 25 Zhizo settlements have been identified in the MCL. In most cases these settlements are set back from the Limpopo and other rivers, in areas where crops could be cultivated without threat of destruction by floods or marauding elephants. Schroda is the largest of the Zhizo settlements in the MCL and is generally referred to as the Zhizo capital. Located on a rocky plateau close to the Limpopo River, Schroda was home to between 300 and 500 people. Zhizo presence in the MCL diminished after about a hundred years, and while some settlements remained, the chiefdom moved westwards into Botswana. The area was soon dominated by a new group, the Leopard's Kopje people.

[Zhizo farmers and hunter-gatherers](#)

Hunter-gatherers were no longer able to move freely around the landscape to gather wild plant foods and to hunt easy prey. The differences in the belief systems and social organisation of farmers and hunter-gatherers made it difficult for them to inter-marry, and the perceived benefits of the goods and services that each group had to offer probably also changed over time. Zhizo farmers may have valued the services of the 'first people' who were considered to have power over nature and the supernatural in terms of rain-control, as well as local knowledge of plants and herbal remedies. Hunter-gatherers would have valued the metal tools, cultivated grains and glass beads that they received from the Iron Age farmers.

[Leopard's Kopje people, AD 1000 to 1220](#)

People making Leopard's Kopje pottery began to live in the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape about a thousand years ago. The largest settlement was at the site now known as K2, but there were many smaller villages in and around the Limpopo floodplain. The name 'K2' was given to the site by archaeologist Guy Gardner who was trained in Egypt where the word 'Kom' means a mound or midden, a heap of discarded food remains, artefacts, etc. built up by people living in the same place over many generations. K1 is a smaller mound to the east of K2. The Leopard's Kopje farmers cultivated crops on the flat lands between the hills where they could take full advantage of the seasonal flooding of the Limpopo River and its tributaries. They made a substantial impact on the natural landscape, clearing land for the cultivation of crops, dumping refuse and burning old houses and kraals. Even today, a thousand years later, middens and kraals are still easily identifiable because very little vegetation grows on them. Animal bones excavated from these settlements show that the people ate meat from sheep, goats and cattle, supplemented with game and fish from the river. Seeds preserved from cultivated crops include sorghum, millet, beans and cowpeas. Metal artefacts included arrowheads, spearheads, hoe blades, beads, bangles and wire. Small quantities of iron and copper ore and slag show that metal working took place in and around the settlement. Almost a hundred graves were found at K2. Information about them can be found in Cairn Three.

[Mapungubwe: AD 1220 to AD 1300](#)

Between AD 1220 and AD 1300, Leopard's Kopje people settled on and around Mapungubwe Hill. This site is renowned as the centre of southern Africa's first indigenous kingdom. The kingdom flourished as the result of trade with the Indian Ocean network. The emergence of a class-based society is reflected in the separation of an elite class with a sacred leader who lived on top of the hill, and commoners who lived on the plains below. At the height of its importance, between AD 1220 and AD 1300, the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape sustained a population of at least 9,000 people. Mapungubwe is arguably best known for the gold artefacts found in graves on the hill in the 1930s. Three of these graves contained gold beads and other items confirming the high status of the individuals who lived and were buried on the hilltop.

Tariffs

- [General Tariffs Information](#)



- 2012/2013 Tariffs (