

Media Release Fact Sheet

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POVERTY RELIEF PROJECTS: VHEMBE DONGOLA NATIONAL PARK

The poverty relief programme funds were allocated for a number of reasons:

- As a result of the success of a pilot project in the park in 2001
- Vhembe Dongola National Park is in a SDI (Spatial Development Initiative)
- It is to become a World Heritage Site, and possibly a Legacy Site
- It is part of a Transfrontier Conservation Area – and the establishment of this TFCA would be in line with President Thabo Mbeki and the SA government's vision regarding the African Renaissance.
- The oldest known southern African kingdom, Mapungubwe, is found inside the park

VUKA Project Management Services (VukaProms), a private consulting company, are the implementing agent for all development projects in the park, i.e. they manage the process of making the projects a reality. The Park Manager, Bernard van Lente, is the Project Manager. Private contractors are appointed through a tendering or quoting process. The contractors are contractually bound to employ local unemployed workers from the adjacent towns and communities.

SOME OF THE PROJECTS TO BE UNDERTAKEN:

- **Road network:** 37 km gravelled only, ± 150km Ecoroute (4x4 trail)
- **Entrance Gate and facilities** (at Hamilton, a SANParks farm on the southern park boundary)
- Establishment of **Main Rest Camp** – 48-bed (at Greefswald farm)
- Establishment of 2 – 16-bed **Tented Camps** (at Tuscanen and Schroda farms)
- Establishment of **Wilderness Trails Camp** (at Greefswald/ Schroda farms)
- **Building of staff housing** (at Rhodesdrift and Hamilton farms)
- **Archaeological Rehabilitation Work** – the rehabilitation and stabilisation of the old excavations, and the creation of tourism infrastructure at the archaeological sites
- **Fencing** of the East and West sections – the park currently consists of two sections, to be consolidated in the near future
- Establishment of 2 **game hides** (at Little Muck, Den Staat)
- Establishment of **tree top walk** (Greefswald- Limpopo river)
- Establishment of a **confluence viewpoint** (at Greefswald)
- Establishment of **picnic sites** at the confluence viewpoint
- **Eco trail** – 4x4 trail at Little Muck farm

OTHER FACTS:**Culture**

The park has literally hundreds of archaeological and cultural sites, both from the stone and iron ages, including Mapungubwe, K2, Schroda and Leokwe. There are also numerous San Art sites in the rocky sandstone hills. This is one of the reasons the whole park need to be protected.

World Heritage Site Nomination

Vhembe Dongola National Park is currently up for nomination as a World Heritage Site, and will be referred to as the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape. This process should be completed by June 2003. The Mapungubwe Archaeological Site is already a declared National Heritage Site.

TransFrontier Conservation Area (TFCA)

The park will form part of a TFCA, incorporating private and state land in South Africa, as well as land in Botswana and Zimbabwe. The national park will form the core of this TFCA, to be about 800 000ha in size.

Climate

The climate is semi-arid, i.e. the annual rainfall ranges between 350 – 400 mm. Rainfall is highly variable and usually falls during the summer months. Extended periods of below average rainfall occur. In the summer temperatures sometimes rise to 45°C. The winters are mild, although frost may occur.

Geomorphology

The area is between 300 m and 780 m above sea level. South of the Limpopo the ground tends to be flat with sandstone and conglomerate ridges and koppies. Nearer the Limpopo the flats give way to a more rugged hilly terrain.

Vegetation

The area under consideration includes typical Mopani-veld, which includes other trees and sparse grass. The riparian fringe of the Limpopo is of prime importance from the point of view of conservation. It is a dense vegetation community with a closed canopy, which occurs, in the rich alluvial deposits along the river, with a number of very large tree species. The baobab tree is also typical of the area. Extensive patches of this vegetation have been cleared for cultivation elsewhere along the length of the Limpopo River.

Fauna

The region has excellent potential for a "big five" park. Viable populations of lion, leopard, cheetah and spotted hyena still occur in the area. The habitat is suitable for both white and black rhinoceros. The permanent pools in the Limpopo offer refuge to crocodile and hippopotamus, as well as a variety of indigenous fish species.

A number of well-preserved fossils, including flowering plants as well as whole-bodied insects, were recovered from the fine-grained mudstones.

Contemporary

On the South African side the predominant form of land use is extensive cattle farming or combined cattle and game farming. The carrying capacity of the land is about 17 ha per large stock unit. The land use is slowly changing to an Eco tourism type of land use.