

**MEDIA RELEASE - 9 May 2004**

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**South African National Parks launches a new national park - the Mapungubwe National Park**

**DURBAN, Indaba 2004.** - Following months of preparations and construction, South African National Parks today announced the launch of the organisation's newest park - the Mapungubwe National Park.

Previously known as Vhembe Dongola National Park, the Mapungubwe National Park is situated in Musina, north west of Polokwane, the capital town of Limpopo Province. It is located at the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers.

The Mapungubwe National Park comprises the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape and the Mapungubwe World Heritage Site in an area covering well over 28 000 hectares.

The park forms part of an ambitious project to develop a major transfrontier conservation area, the Limpopo/Shashe Transfrontier Park which will include Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. This would link the Mapungubwe National Park with Botswana's Tuli Block and the Tuli Safari area of Zimbabwe.

"We are very excited about this newest addition. Our decision to develop the Mapungubwe National Park is based on the rich biodiversity of the area and its scenic beauty. The area is also of immense cultural and historical significance because of the archaeological treasures of Mapungubwe," said David Mabunda, chief executive of SANParks.

Artefacts found at Mapungubwe rank among the most important pieces of ancient art yet found in sub-Saharan Africa. They also document the rise of the Zimbabwe culture.

The finding of gold artefacts, beads, burial grounds and other remains indicate that Mapungubwe was one of the major centres of this culture and bear testimony to the way of life of African people more than 1 000 years ago.

The whole area around Mapungubwe National Park boasts a substantial amount of San Rock Art sites, dating from 15 000 years back.

Together with its surrounding areas, Mapungubwe National Park has a potential to be a sanctuary for viable populations of some of the most threatened large mammals on earth such as the black and white rhinoceros, wild dog, and the continent's flagship species, the African elephant.

SANParks believes the development of Mapungubwe National Park will also serve as a (southern African) regional growth point for tourism and conservation because of its positioning on the international border of Botswana, South African and Zimbabwe.

A major infrastructure development programme in the area was undertaken in the last couple of months, with substantial funding from the South African government through the national Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism.

This infrastructure development that saw the establishment of new road network, a main rest camp, Leokwe; the Limpopo forest tented camp and a trails camp, the Vhembe Trails Camp.

The park's tourism facilities will be available to tourists from August 2004.

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