

TIME TRAVEL AT JAN DISSELS RIVER

Archaeological background

Research into the Stone Age, hunting and gathering pre-colonial people of the Olifants River Valley and Cederberg regions, people who were known as Sonqua or San, and sometimes as 'bushmen', shows them to have been very mobile. They moved around their landscape very systematically, probably seasonally, in order to be able to exploit the variety of plants and animals upon which they depended. With very little material goods to carry, this was relatively easy for them. Although often moving in small groups, it was important to meet up in larger gatherings occasionally to renew family ties, meet new potential husbands and wives, exchange raw materials, goods and gossip and to celebrate their lives as human beings. We believe groups from the Sandveld and coast would have arranged to meet groups from the mountains regularly in the vicinity of the Olifants, then known as Tarakamma, and Jan Dissels, then known as the Tsa or eland, rivers. These gatherings may have lasted for a few weeks, certainly no longer, and would have been the opportunity for much social interaction. This time travel event reconstructs such an occasion.

Scenario, Gathering at Eland (Tsa) river, 4000 years ago

This summer, like all summers, bands of hunter gatherers from the coastal plain (Sandveld and beyond) to the west and the mountains (Pakhuis and beyond) to the east meet together on the banks of the Eland (Tsa) river (Jan Dissels river). At this time of the year water on the sandy plain by the coast or on the karoo margins is scarce but is more easily found in the Tarrakamma (Olifants) river and its tributaries, such as Eland river. People like to gather in large numbers every so often because it gives them a chance to meet up with family and friends, to dance, to spend time with people who are potential or even promised marriage partners, to exchange presents and to sit and chat with old friends. This year, fifteen to twenty of the people from the mountains have made the journey, and about the same number of people from the coast. Already the fastest persons and those in best shape have arrived at the site. They will prepare for the arrival of the others. Tomorrow some older people and mothers with their babies will turn up. Four old people stayed behind at the coast and five of the older folk from the mountains decided not to come. Two also died recently.

At the waterhole by Eland river there are some old men and women who look after the place as custodians. They also like to remind the younger people how important it is to maintain good relations between hunters and gatherers across the landscape and between them and the land upon which they depend so directly. These rules are encoded in the stories and paintings that all people know about and are reinforced at the dances and gatherings every year. Older people introduce talks about balance and harmony in the society and they will deal with acts of selfishness so as to develop good relations in these small groups. Younger people show respect for seniors.

Today some new images on the rocks are going to be painted. It is also a chance to make bangles and necklaces from ostrich eggshell pieces, to chip new arrow tips and scrapers from the local stone, set up a nice campsite by one of the river pools and socialize for a couple of weeks. No doubt people from each region will have brought things to exchange with others. A good meal is important and so are the good stories. The men recount successful hunts and the women pass on their thoughts about the state of the veld and the changing seasons. People have brought along their dancing rattles and sticks. Hopefully the women are in good voice.

At these meetings there are always some people who like to join the other group for next year because of friendship or just out of curiosity. Who will leave the gathering with new partners, relatives or friends today? We are all Eland People but we need to live in small groups so as not to damage our food supplies.

Key questions to discuss

Sharing

- How to share skills in order to make life easier for everyone?
How to make sure that people get on well together?
 - How to use our resources so that they are not damaged?
- We need one another, we need one another's skills and experience.
How do we show this in groups?

How to find and develop harmony, balance and sustainability?

- between people
- between people and the nature

Roles

Everybody keeps their age and sex. The teachers and leaders are some of the older, or even very old, members of the groups who have experience of toolmaking, painting, food preparation, beadmaking and storytelling. The learners must learn these skills by joining in and imitating their parents and grandparents.

A list of roles to be filled out by learners with their teachers before the Time Travel. 30 learners each day

For Role Cards see Excel sheet Time Travel Roles

Activities

- Building windbreaks and constructing a camp.
Make fire, collecting water from the stream.
- Making beads and necklaces.
- Flaking stone tools to make scrapers, knives.
- Making paint to draw fine line images.
- Making the meal, cook meat and fish in a pit oven.
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- Story telling: from the coast and from the mountains, reenact the hunt.
- Exchanging of presents
- Dancing the healing dance.
- Decide upon common matters

Timeplan

13.00 Preparation of the site
15.00 Learners arrive, Introduction
 Read the landscape
15.25 Changing of clothes
 Scenario, Presentation of characters, Rules
15.50 Ceremony: Story
16.00 Activities begin
18.00 Meal, stories, common decisions
18.50 Healing dance
19.10 End, Reflection
19.30 Learners depart

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