

Time Travel, Klipgat Cave, 1800 years ago

Topic: Sustainable living, proper use of marine resources

Goals

To make participants reflect on limited availability of marine resources, such as fish and to find common solutions for sustainable use.

Develop a Landscape Education program for Cape Nature at the Klipgat Cave

Facts

The shore line of South Africa has vast nutritional potential and has always been very attractive to people. Large amounts of food are concentrated along a narrow intertidal strip. Marine food and a wide variety of shellfish, well within reach of anyone, are regularly exposed by low tides. The daily tides also have washed up a range of dead or dying animals – whales, seals, seabirds and fish that people have used.

There are archaeological sites and shell middens all along the coast, more than 1000 are reported but it is likely that the actual number is nearer 3000, one for every kilometer, though not evenly distributed.

One such site is in a cave at Die Kelders, Southern Cape. The site was excavated between 1969 and 1973 by Frank Schweitzer of the South African Museum and again in the early 1990s by a team from the USA and Graham Avery of Iziko South African Museum. Middle Stone Age people visited the site between about 70 000-50 000 years ago, at a time when the sea level was 45 meters lower and the coast was 7 km away from the cave.

The site was also used in the Later Stone Age from 2000 to 1100 years ago and the Time Travel is focused on that time period. The many finds from the Later Stone Age include tools like stone scrapers, borers, knives and adzes. There are grindstones and hammer stones, beads of ostrich eggshell and bone; bone points, pottery and traces of red ochre and also bones of fish and mollusc shells that the people ate along with tortoises and buck. Bones of sheep, cattle and dogs and pottery indicate the presence of herders as well as hunter-gatherers.

Walker Bay is sheltered and productive; marine food is easy picking. The Stone Age people had no boats and fished with lines and spears. They may also have used tidal fish traps, boulder-walled enclosures built in the intertidal zone further down the rocky shore. The tide is about 1,4 metres. Maybe people moved here annually for the rich marine resources, John Parkington has suggested that young seals at Eland's Bay cave on the west coast indicated that people moved from the inland to the coast in winter. Graham Avery extends this to early summer, some time between October and January. At Die Kelders the seals were taken over a longer period and the birds over much the same time as on the west coast.

Hunter-gatherers did not only use coastal resources but were highly mobile with few permanent possessions. They took advantage of seasonally changing water resources, movements of game and changing plant foods. Nutrients, such as carbohydrates for energy, essential vitamins and fibre could be found inland in edible plants and game. They lived by sharing, through mutually agreed arrangements that in the long term benefitted all.

The herders were also mobile, but not to the same extent as the hunter-gatherers. They carried materials for their huts with them and lived in larger groups, following grazing and water for their stock. Sometimes they stayed at the same site for a longer period of time. Their stock, often large

groups of sheep and cattle provided a food surplus and gave some opportunities to accumulate wealth. The herders were inclined to regard themselves as more powerful than the hunter-gatherers and less in need of respectful arrangements. It happened that hunter-gatherers allied themselves with particular herder groups for protection. The groupings were often in conflict with each other.

Scenario, the cave by the coast 1800 years ago

A group of hunter-gatherers arrived at the cave a few days ago. Every year they live in the cave for some weeks at this time. They have done this for generations, so they consider this place as theirs. The area is rich in marine resources and the clan most often congregates here. This year is no exception. Everybody is looking forward to the gathering, to meet their friends again, catch up on news and listen to the traditional stories. There will be singing, dancing and some painting and lots of food. Ostrich shell beads and maybe a better stone knife will be made. The small advance group that has arrived will prepare for the big feast.

The last years have been more difficult for the hunter gatherers. More groups are coming to the area with numbers of sheep and some cattle. The groups are bigger and also stay longer. The hunter-gatherers are concerned. The newcomers use the same resources as them and they take more of them. Could there be a risk for less fish and marine food in the future? A few years ago the resources seemed to be unlimited. But what will happen if more people keep coming? Will the shellfish and fish continue forever or decrease? Are the resources enough for so many? Could we share them?

The herders do not seem to bother much about if whether the resources are sustainable. They have found a good place with lots of marine food and good grazing for the sheep nearby. Food and water seem limitless, so they continue to bring more people and sheep here. They are powerful and seem to have no need for alliances or agreements with the hunter-gatherers regarding the use of the place. They have already taken over several of the best sites along the coast from the hunter-gatherers.

In recent years there have been quite a few conflicts between the different groups and the clashes seem to increase. The hunter-gatherers are concerned that they might have to leave this site, as happened to other clan members along the coast. The small group of hunter-gatherers arrived at the cave a couple of days ago and now the herders are coming. A conflict seems to be inevitable. Without any doubt, there is increasing competition for space and access to the resources.

What will happen when the groups meet today? Will there be a conflict and a big clash? Or will it be possible to resolve the issue in some other way? Perhaps through careful negotiations and an agreement? Even do something together? There is a lot of anxiety and tension in the air today. Anything can happen

Roles

Half the group are hunter-gatherers and the other half are herders, meeting at the cave. (20 students from De Bron Primary school, teachers, Cape Nature staff and two Swedes)

Key Questions

- Can we stay here together and use the same resources? Is there enough? Is there a limit of resources?
- Do we need an agreement to establish the best use of the resources for the future? What kind of an agreement? Can we share skills in order to make life easier for everyone? Maybe even do something together?

Activities

- Bead making (ostrich egg shells)
- Make a stone knife
- Painting on stones
- Story telling (what stories?)
- Make fish equipment: bone spear point, fishing gorge
- Make pots?
- Prepare food, marine food, mussels, abalone, dry fish, bokoms (wind dried mullet/harders), sour figs, edible plants, berries
- Shell collecting (for food or ornaments)
- Songs and dances

Time Plan

- 07.30 Set up the site
- 09.00 Learners arrive, welcome, background
Dress up, characters, rules
- 09.45 Initiation, the groups meet
Activities and discussion
- 11.30 Meal and negotiations, solution, agreement? dance
- 12.15 Ending, reflection
- 13.00 Learners leave
Clean up the site

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