Comments from the conference

Tizzie Mangiagalli, Worcester museum
The success in which Historic Environment Education and Time Travels has taken root over the past three years in the Western Cape is reflected in the conference at the Worcester museum on 8 - 10 October 2008.

The conference attracted a diverse group of international and Southern African delegates and the sponsorships from the Winelands Regional Municipality, the Department Cultural Affairs and Sport and Bridging Ages International contributed much to the success of the program.

The conference presentations and workshops gave the delegates the opportunity to share their experiences of working in their communities. It also served to inspire those who are new to time travels.

"I was impressed with how schools and museums in South Africa have embraced Time Travels" Jon Hunner, Vice President of Bridging Ages, Department of History, New Mexico State University

South Africa is a complex and wonderful country -- that is the consensus of the "foreigners" that I talked with at the Bridging Ages conference in Worcester. With approximately 120 participants from three continents and seven countries, the multiple conference presentations and the two Time Travels provided a wealth of opportunity and experiences to learn about Historic Environment Education even for those of us who are veterans of the technique. For me, I was impressed with how museums and schools in South Africa have embraced Time Travels. I wonder if this due to the ability of Time Travels to recapture the lost history of South Africa, that history lost to colonialism and Apartheid. Granted, since 1994, South Africa has undertaken an extensive revision of its educational curriculum, but as those changes slowly address the lost history of South Africa, perhaps Time Travels is a more immediate and accessible way to present this past to learners and the museum public.

Ebbe often asks us at the end of these conferences what we remember the most. Out of the many moments, two emerge. One is the healthy debate that arose over how the contested history of South Africa should be interpreted. We all have contested histories. How South Africa settles this will be instructive for us all. The other is looking at Nelson Mandela's prison cell on Robben Island and wondering how anyone could keep his or her sanity after being held captive for 27 years in such a small cement and metal box. I look forward to working with our friends in South Africa to help make history come alive.

"The most important for our survival is being able to share." Bo Hellström, The Global School, Sweden

In October the Swedish state sponsored programme "The Global School" was represented in the international seminar on the theme "Bridging diversity" organized by the organization Bridging Ages. Teachers from different areas of the school system including the museums were invited to Worcester in Western Cape, South Africa. In total there were about 100 participants from Nicaragua, USA, Uganda, South Africa and quite a few European countries. We were gathered for three days in the museum in Worcester listening to lectures, participating in workshops and being part of a time travel.

Time travels

During the seminar week there were two time travels possible to take part in. The first one to the year 1773 with a meeting between the settlers and the indigenous people and later in the week a time travel going back to the San culture 2000 B C.

Wolwekloof 1773

The time travel back to 1773 showed the situation for a group of settlers with slaves and servants during a one day stop in the pass giving maintenance to vehicles and repairing things before the next day's very tough continuation of the journey through the mountain pass Wolwekloof. During this day slaves, servants and indigenous people meet. There are also some drosters from the mountains and even a foreigner from northern Europe namely the disciple of Linnaeus, Thunberg who actually came through this pass in 1773.

The key questions to discuss and try to answer after the time travel are how to solve the conflicts between the different groups and can they be solved without violence?

250 kilometres - 4000 years back in time

The second time travel takes us back to 2000 years BC to the area of the San culture some 250 kilometres north of Cape Town on the way towards Namibia. The setting of the time travel this time means we are two different groups within the San people, one group coming from the sea and one from the mountains. We meet at the river to see our relatives and friends, to socialize and maybe to meet your future partner.

The key questions now are how to use our resources, how we depend on each other, that we need each other knowledge and experiences. The most important for our survival is being able to share. Apart from us, participants in the time travel, a group of local school kids 10-11 years old join us. This immediately makes it more real and it doesn't take long until both adults and youngsters go into our roles.

Myself, I'm Kurri-Ten and a good trekker and very skilful using bow and arrow. I'm also the father of the girl twins Tsau and Neisha. We are divided into groups and our group begins with testing how to make arrowheads and other sharp material of flint. Our teacher is Qing who is a very skilful craftsman and a good rock painter. After some time he asks us if we would like to see some paintings he made in a cave last week.

"Qing's" real name is John Parkington and he is a professor of archaeology at Cape Town University and one of the greatest experts of the San culture and of the thousands of paintings in the area we are in and the surroundings. The paintings "he did last week" are real rock paintings and maybe as old as 4000 years. For us, as well as for the students, it's the first time we see it. Lying on the ground in the cave "Qing" asks the pupils what they think the paintings symbolize, how they were made and why.

When we return to our hostel in the light of the full moon over this historic soil it feels like we've gained some more knowledge about from where we come because it's from this area man develops.

"The first thing I did when I came back to La Dalia was to talk to my boss and the teachers about the Time Travel method." Marlon Rivera Aldana, Olof Palme Secondary School, La Dalia, Nicaragua

Hello everybody. I am still surprised for the long trip I have made to South Africa. It was very interesting to meet old and new friends and to see very nice places.

I have learned many things from this trip, specially with the Time Travel Method, it's really nice to be and feel part of a story, wherever and whenever.

The first thing I did when I came back to La Dalia (my school) was to talk to my boss (Martin) and the teachers about the method (Time Travel). They were very interested in it, and they told me they are also interested in take part of a Time Travel in La Dalia. Now I think they understand what the Time Travel Method means.

I have also talked to Claudia, she is the Ministry of Education Representative in La Dalia. The good thing is that she told me we can put this method in our local programs (curriculum). When we were in the meeting in South Africa, I explained that we are working in this project (to have a local curriculum to work with, according to our own necessities in our own community, La Dalia), so that's a possibility. The positive thing is that I am a member of this project, with voice and vote, because I am the General Secretary of the Teachers´ Union in La Dalia.

I want to tell that it was really nice to meet all of you in Worcester and I hope we can meet once again some day, somewhere, because every place has a meaning.