

Tour to Mapungubwe and the Cradle of Human Mankind

5 day tour from 27th September till 1st October 2017

Introduction to the tour

We fly from Cape Town to Lanseria Airport where we will go on a guided tour at the Cradle of Human Mankind. From the Cradle of Human Mankind we will make our way to north of Pretoria where we will spend the night at a Southern International Hotel. See below for more details of the Cradle of Human Mankind



We will then drive to Mapungubwe where we will spend 3 nights at Leokwe Camp. From the comfort of balcony of your cottage it is likely you will see game. There is an amazing rock pool on the edge of a cliff in the small camp. The cottages have on suite bathroom and your own Lapa or Balcony.

Mapungubwe is one of the most beautiful game reserves in South Africa as well as the site of incredible archaeological interest. Mapungubwe was declared a World Heritage Site by

the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in July 2003

While in Mapungubwe we will do game drives including some in an open vehicle.

The group will go on a guided heritage archaeological tour to the top of Mapungubwe Hill (see below).

We will also visit the Mapungubwe Museum.

Rudyard Kipling wrote in *The Elephant Child* "Go to the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever-trees, and find out."

Well we follow in his footsteps and lunch next to the great grey-green greasy Limpopo River



After lunch we will do a treetop walk, a boardwalk that gently slips over the electrified border fence and leads to a great hide overlooking the Limpopo. The vegetation changes completely in the space of a few hundred metres. From stunted mopane trees on the other side of the road, and scarcely a tussock of grass to be seen, there is this lush riverine forest, with towering trees and long grass, in which bushbuck lie contentedly.

On Day 5 will leave Mpaungubwe and drive to OR Tambo Airport stopping for lunch near Polokwane. Details of the cost of the tour and how to book is shown at the end of this write up.

Mapungubwe Historical Background

The ancient city of Mapungubwe (meaning 'hill of the jackal') is an Iron Age ancient city on the border between South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana.. It sits close to the point where the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers meet. One thousand years ago, Mapungubwe appears to have been the centre of the largest known kingdom in the African sub-continent. The civilization thrived as a sophisticated trading center from around 1200 to 1300 AD, trading gold and ivory with China, India and Egypt.



The site was 'discovered' on 31 December 1932, when a local informant, Mowena, led E.S.J. van Graan (farmer and prospector), his son and three others, to Mapungubwe Hill. On the hill they discovered stone walls and recovered gold and iron artifacts, pottery and glass beads.

The find initially received wide publicity in the media, but soon the archaeological digs and discoveries made by the University were kept fairly secret and were only made public after

1994. Possibly because the discovery provided evidence of a civilization that existed and flourished years before European occupation.



Mapungubwe hill is 300m long, and it is only accessible by means of two very steep and narrow paths that twist their way to the summit. Somehow 2 000 tons of soil were been artificially transported to the very top by a prehistoric people of unknown identity.

On the hill the remnants of numerous dwellings, which had been built on the ruins of predecessors over many generations, resulting in a series of habitation phases. Radiocarbon dates show that the first buildings were erected

below the hill at the beginning of the 11th century AD.



Adjacent to Mapungubwe is the sister site of Bambadyanalo, which was settled even earlier. It seems that the centre of the state shifted from Bambandyanalo to Mapungubwe hill in about 1045 AD, when the town most probably became overcrowded. It was also at about this time that hills and mountains became associated with royalty and the noble classes began to build their structure on high ground. This is an important

observation as it provided evidence of the extensive wealth and social differentiation of the people of Mapungubwe, in other words this ancient civilization was class-based. The gold findings are also evidence of early gold smelting. A large amount of artifacts from the royal family were discovered at Mapungubwe. The best known of these objects is the golden

rhinoceros. All in all, the amount of gold from this burial amounted to 7 503 ounces. It is also probable over the centuries items were stolen.

In the 1400's it appears that all the citizens of the kingdom left leaving palaces and the settlements behind. We don't know exactly why the people of Mapungubwe moved away, but the ruins give us a good idea of how these people lived and how their society and political structures grew over the years. Scholars believe that the climate in the area changed, which made it much harder to grow crops and feed animals, this might have caused the civilization to move.

Wild Life in Mapungubwe



Most of the large game species with the exception of buffalo occur in the park. There is a lot of movement of game between the three countries, and game numbers fluctuate. Mammals found are as below:

Elephant, Eland, Kudu, Blue Wildebeest, Zebra, Waterbuck, Impala, Bushbuck, Klipspringer, Duiker, Steenbok, Red Hartebeest, Gemsbok, Warthog, Baboon, White Rhino, Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, Brown and Spotted Hyena, Badgers, Civets, Porcupine, Caracal, Vervet Monkeys, Aardvark, Wild Dogs and host of smaller species.

There is varied reptile fauna and Pythons and Black Mamba are common.

There are a number of well preserved fossils found in the area including flowering plants and insects. Dinosaur footprints and fossilized terminate mounds have also been found in the area.

Leokwe Camp in Mapungubwe



We are staying in Cottages with on suite bathrooms at Leokwe Camp. The camp has an amazing swimming pool with wonderful views.

Cottages have air conditioning, ceiling fan, Open plan Kitchen Shower and WC. All are twin beds.

There is a communal boma area and the cottages have either a braai lapa area or balcony.

Flora in Mapungubwe

There are at least 24 Acacia species and 8 Commiphora species, amongst other. Other vegetation of the area is a typically short fairly dense growth of shrubby Mopane trees, generally associated with a number of other trees and shrubs and a somewhat sparse and tufted grassveld. 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.

The most striking trees in this community fever trees, Ana trees, Leadwoods, Fig trees and acacias. Extensive patches of this vegetation have been cleared for cultivation elsewhere along the length of the Limpopo River. The Limpopo floodplain has allowed some trees to grow to massive sizes. Nyala berries and Ana trees can get particularly big.

There are also some very large baobabs in the park, with one specimen having a circumference of 31m.

Birding in Mapungubwe

Because of its new status, the park is relatively unexplored bird wise and with its proximity to Botswana and Zimbabwe , all sorts of species could turn up.

Along the Limpopo specials for South Africa such as *Meve's (Longtailed) Starling*, *Tropical Boubou* and the reclusive *Pel's Fishing Owl* should be searched for. There is a high density of *Verreaux's (Black) Eagle* in this craggy landscape and other raptors are also prominent.

Particularly enticing is an abundance of cuckoo species in summer with up to eleven different species being found, including the rarer *Common* and *Thickbilled Cuckoos*.

An interesting attraction of the park is the occurrence of species typical of the arid western regions of the country (e.g. *Southern Pied Babbler*, *Crimson-breasted Shrike* and *Black-faced (Black-cheeked) Waxbill*) occur alongside species associated with the moister Lowveld habitat of the Kruger National Park .

At Leokwe Camp *Verreaux's (Black) Eagle* nest on the cliff face above the reception block.

The most prominent bird is probably the *Cinnamon-breasted (Rock) Bunting*, but other species associated with bush and rocky environments are common too. *Blue Waxbill* and *Black-backed Puffback* are also particularly common.

The Limpopo Tree-top Boardwalk and hide is a magnificent facility allowing the visitor into the trees alongside the birds or looking down on those that forage on the ground and lower strata. *Meyer's Parrot*, *White-crested Helmetshrike*, *Meve's (Longtailed) Starling* and some flycatcher species will be seen. Both *Tropical* and *Southern Boubou* occur.

Birding from the hide in the riverbed will vary depending on water levels in the river and can be very rewarding. *Pel's Fishing Owl* are around, so hope for some luck. White-fronted Bee-eater breeds in the river banks and are very prominent. *African Fish Eagle* will make their presence known too.

The Confluence is a great place to scan for passing raptors, while several other species will be easy to locate here.

At the Limpopo Forest Tented Camp the environment is very similar in appearance and atmosphere to the Pafuri Picnic Site in Northern Kruger.

And the cacophony of birds calling in the morning suggests it will be as productive.

Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Meve's (Long-tailed) Starlings, Black-backed Puffback and *Tropical Boubou* should be seen, and *Southern Pied Babbler* and *Natal Spurfowl (Francolin)* are very vocal as are *Orange-breasted* and *Grey-headed Bush-shrikes* and *Grey-backed Camaroptera (Bleating Warbler)*.

At night one should hear several species of owl including *Barn, African and White-faced Scops, Verreaux's (Giant) Eagle* and *Pearl-spotted Pel's* are also not infrequently seen in the area.

This human intervention has created a different habitat type and is rewarding from a birding perspective. *Kori Bustards* are prominent while *Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark* and *Wattled Starling* are nomadic, but may be abundant. *Temminck's Courser* and *Ground Hornbill* may also be seen in this habitat, as will a number of swallows.

Crimson-breasted Shrike are resident in the area by the hide's parking area. *Red-billed Buffalo Weaver* and *Meve's (Long-tailed) Starlings* will be among the most evident of species seen from the hide, but anything is possible. Leopard and Bushpig are regular evening visitors.

The Limpopo Floodplain in flood is a paradise for aquatic birds when in flood. *Grey-crowned cranes*, up to 7 stork species and several wader, heron, crane and duck species will be seen in these wet times.

Rarities are always on the cards. It is reported that *Boulder Chat* has been seen and when one looks at the habitat (particularly around Leokwe) and considers the proximity to the Matobos and other known locations, it would appear a distinct possibility.

There are many stands of Lala Palms (although the elephants do hammer them) and *Collared Palm Thrush* has been recorded.

Other specials that one should look out for include *Great White Pelican, White-backed Night Heron, Bat Hawk, Augur Buz za rd, African Hobby, Dickinson's Kestrel, Green Sandpiper, Three-banded Courser, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Grey-headed Parrot, Senegal Coucal, Pennant-winged Nightjar, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Broad-*

billed and *Racket-tailed Roller*, *African Golden Oriole*, *Olive-tree Warbler* and who knows what else.

INTRODUCTION TO YOUR VISIT TO THE CRADLE OF HUMANKIND WORLD HERITAGE SITE



The universe was formed about 14-billion years ago. The Earth is about 4.6-billion years old.

Life first emerged about 3.8-billion years ago. Our journey begins in South Africa, where fossils of some of the earliest known life forms on Earth have been found.

South Africa has yielded fossils of some of the earliest known dinosaurs, at least 200-million years old.

Fossils of our distant mammal-like ancestors, which lived more than 200-million years ago, have been found in South Africa.

Africa is the birthplace of humankind. This is where our collective umbilical cord lies buried.

Hominids – the ancestors of modern humans – first emerged about 7-million years ago, in Africa.

Many significant fossil finds have been made in the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site, including the famous fossils “Mrs Ples” and “Little Foot”.

The first stone tools were made and used in Africa, at least 2.6-million years ago.

Our ancestors were able to use and control fire at least 1-million years ago in the Cradle of Humankind.

Homo sapiens, the species to which we all belong, evolved in Africa approximately 200,000 years ago.

Africa ignited humankind’s imagination. Some of the oldest rock art in the world has been discovered in Southern Africa. All of humanity shares an African heritage. We are one, diverse species across the globe, with our roots in Africa.

Costings and How to Book

The land package is R 9995 per person sharing. This includes all meals, guides, accomadation and land transport.

Flights are an extra R 2300. You may be able to reduce the have reduced flight cost by using Avios or Voyager miles or Discovery etc, Please contact me for help.

Please email Doug Gardner at doug@ddinfo.co.za or phone 084 419 0027.