

NOTES ON ARCHEOLOGICAL INDICATIONS IN
ABERCORN TOWNSHIP AND VICINITY

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It was at the suggestion of Dr. Barbour, after a trip with him to Kalambo, that we began searching round the shore of Lake Cila, within the Abercorn Township, for traces of stone age occupation.

The first artefact thus found was a flake, later identified by Dr. Desmond Clark as M.S.A., (*Mogosi Stone Age*) (picked up with a few other fragments sent him) on the surface of the Camping Site slope from Chila shore to the hill on the westerly side, some 150 yards from the shore line. As it appeared that this flake might have been washed down from the steep boulder-strewn slopes above, a search was made but revealed no likely source nor any other specimens. It may, therefore, have come from a level corresponding to the former much higher lake level but not evident to the layman from the present contour.

The old lake bed, which has been exposed in a culvert to a point on the upper side of the Tanganyika road, reaches a much higher point than even the present high water level, indicating much greater depth and extent of the lake before the progressive reduction of the present natural barrier - as is, of course, apparent from the very ~~large~~ large flood plain at its head.

Later, with the lake at the very low levels of two or three years ago, the sandy beaches were searched and yielded some hundreds of apparent artefacts, mainly debris, but considered by Dr. Clark to be of Mogosian type. These fragments were found to occur almost everywhere on the north-western and northern shores where the sand is exposed.

The shallow yellow sand layer from which they appear to come (doubtless washed from some other original site not yet located) lies under a topsoil of sandy loam passing to black peat, and above the sandy clay of the old lake bed. This white sandy clay is traversed by thin vertical channels filled with a trace of yellow sand and vegetable debris which was identified for me by Dr. Oakley ^(Dr. Oakley, T.M. Museum) as

roots of waterplanst. The surface is a sandy soil passing to black peat which overlies the thin yellow and thick white sand beds. On the south-easterly side of the lake, immediately up-stream of the diving jetty where there is a small area of sandy beach, some much better specimens have been found including a fine chalcedony flake implement with very well marked platform. These appear also to come from a sand layer at and just below the beach surface but their primary source has not been found.

Insolated sparse fragments of debris and small flakes have been collected from the surface all along this margin of the lake at points where the sand is exposed often in patches base of vegetation which have very much the appearance of old campsites.

In 1956 when lake Chila reached its lowest level within local European memory, probably its lowest level for 40 years, there were fears for the Township water supply (then pumped from a surface intake near the head of the lake) and an attempt was made by the P.W.D. to sink a well in the sand of the exposed lake bed below the built-out causeway to the water-hole tee of the golf course. Although a brick lining was attempted, this well failed owing to collapse at the bottom and influx of water creamy with fine clay.

The spoil from this well set almost like cement on account of its clay content and nothing was seen in it until the slowly rising lake waters washed its base. With the resulting softening and washing away of the clay some very fine mint condition Acheulian head axes were found, identified by Dr. Clark as identical with those exposed in the lower floors at Kalambo.

All the above sources of specimens are now well under water with the lake at a maximum level and the hand axe floor in particular is probably 20 to 30 feet below the lake surface.

Umingi Rock Shelters.

Some exploration of the Umingi Pans was made at the suggestion of Dr.

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Clark and a vertical scarp was found at the eastern margin of the westerly pan near its southern end.

The old Kasama road runs south ward between the two pans along a spine of ferricrete, the pans lying exactly like two kidneys on each side of it. Thus a short walk brings one to the edge of either pan very conveniently.

At this highest point in the spine, the pan margin consists of a vertical scarp of ferricretes which is some 20 feet high (where no collapse has occurred) and is undercut into a rock shelter where there is a floor of cave earth about 30ft by 8ft which has been prospected at one spot to a depth of about 3feet and yields small flakes, implements and debris throughout. At 3 feet the rock floor was not reached.

A strip 2 feet wide by 6 inches deep across the 8ft width has been excavated and sieved at a point where a hearth was suspected and a large number of chips, flakes etc have been recovered. Among them are a few ancient iron fragments, one or two glass beads (near surface) much fragmented corked bone, and charcoal. There was no evidence of Bantu occupation except occasional use by hunters. One spear head of modern type was found.

Traces of an iron smelting industry are abundant nearby on the ferricrete spine.

The ferricrete at this point does not appear to contain any artefacts.

Except for a small sample collection from the prospect hole (seen by Mr. Inskip) this material has not been examined.

It is hoped to go further with this strip but opportunities have been rare under present conditions. One handicap is that this shelter has been reported of lions since work there has cleared the formerly dense vegetation.

In this very slight excavation the only traces of stratification are layers of ead and grey hearth ash. Sieving is complicated by numerous heat spalls from hearth stones and pebbles from the ferricrete roof.

The talus is difficult to excavate with a view to exposing stratification

because of the ferricrete boulders from roof collapses.

An indication that there has not been recent (Bantu) occupation sufficient to have left any significant deposit is afforded by the fact that a number of undoubted artefacts were recovered at surface on the drip line. Near to this shelter is a small cave opening with a marked tabis which it is also hoped to explore.

The rest of this scrap some 300 yards or more is broken up in such a manner that it looks as if there was much undercutting throughout its length the roof of which has collapsed. Thus there may have been a substantial colony here in (possibly) Nerlihic times or earlier especially as the remaining shelter, lying some 40/50 feet above the pan floor, commands a magnificent westerly outlook over an area which even today is a favourite haunt of small game, pig and waterfowl.

The traces of iron workings include one large and apparently fairly old (pre-European) pit in the laterite near the shelter; shallower ferricrete quarries near the present cattle quarantine station, and surface finds of iron and slag.

SPRING LINE INDICATIONS.

At this quarantine station there is a marked spring-line on which shallow pits have been dug down to the old lake bed (white sandy clay) to water cattle in the dry season. This site is well above the pan surface and indicates the much greater extent of this old lake also.

In the spoil from these pits a few good artefacts have been found all heavily covered with a dense white patina. The basic material appears to have been a fine sandstone now ferruginised and perhaps altered by long immersion. These are embedded in the white clayey sand and it is thought that excavation may expose a fruitful stratum or floor at a depth of 4 or 5 feet, the only difficulty being the water from the spring line which, however, could be drained off towards the pan level.

There are certainly other similarlgi promising situations at the margins of the two pans over a total distance of perhaps several miles. Among them is a ferricrete outcrop containing stones but no artefacts have yet been recognised in it.

ITIMWE GORGE SHELTERS.

This is a narrow gorge, with vertical sides, springing from steep rubble slopes cut down from the plateau towards the level of the Saisi valley and opening about 13 miles out on a good road wouth from A₂ercorn. The gorge is cut through quartzite strata with horizontal fissuring, forming rock terraces and in the face of one of the lower terraces there are several caves. These are all apparently formed by slow weathering of a vertical fissure, the formation of the cavities being contributed to by slow solution of silica in moisture exudations which is seen by incrustation of a thin stalactitic deposit bearing small knob like formations of a very hard siliceous, rather than calcarous, substance. The incrustation looks like a coral growth, the little match-head knobs being on stalks about 1/5 inch long.

Mr. Barry Page, a research geologist recently working the area, informs me that this gradual solution of silica from the quartzite must have been active at a time of substantially warmer climate as it is only at a high climatic temperature that this occurs, in contrast with the more usual lime stone process.

At every cave the cavity deepens to a narrow pointed apex, apparently the source of the water which has helped in its excavation; but none now shows any sign of a present or recent flow. Crevices, for example, are filled with long undistrubed cave earth.

In one very narrow cavity buried pots were found but with nothing significant accompanying them.

In another rather spectacular cavity in which the strata has weathered away horizontally leaving a long, deep cave in the cliff face (Its floor some ten feet above ground level) quartz chips are present in the earth filled crevices

of the floor but the floor is broken and slipping and thus not very suitable for any but occasional occupation. All debris may be in talus at the foot of the 10 foot terrace wall. Another similar cave has been filled by the collapse of its roof behind the opening arch way.

However, there are abundant signs of a permanently occupied rock shelter at the foot of a high vertical face nearby. A large number of chips and fragments with some apparently microlithic crescents, awls and scrapers have been found in quite a cursory exploration of a few inches of the floor in the neighbourhood of a large, completely buried stone which may be an anvil stone and has been left in situ.

The vertical face slopes outward from the earth floor, thus giving good protection, and the usual small pointed apex to a cave is almost buried by the cave ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ earth deposit which is an indication that the cavity is substantially wider at depth and that the deposit may be quite a deep one. The fall of the slopes under these faces are, of course, typically of talus formation throughout so that it is not easy to say that a marked cave talus ^sexisting at a particular spot.

The stream formerly running down this gorge now runs underground, surfacing at a small pool near Itimbwe farm house, but water was formerly easily available here and in living European memory the gorge was a favourite haunt of klipspringer and similar small game.

This site is some 30 feet wide and its level surface from 6 to 8 feet wide. Owing to the gradual outward slope of the back wall there does not appear to be a marked drip-line.

It is easily accessible by a few score yards work from a reasonable (Landrover) track or within one mile of the end of the good car road where it enters the gorge.

A HILL-TOP SITE.

The sharply rising range of rocky hills just beyond and to the south of Kawimbe

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mission station has a marked summit upon which stands the beacon marking the wouth-eastern corner (I think) of the L.M.S.land.

Near this beacon there is an oval shaped roughly cleared area enclosed by a line of boulders (almost loose-stone walling) less than two feet high and containing a circular earth floor apparently the remains of a some kind of dwelling or shelter . The place has obviously been visited by serveyors and may have been some form of look-out station in the 1914-18 war. A few pieces of broken window glass were found.

However, apart from any such recent uses the surface was found to yield quite a number of obvious fragments of stone - age workshop debris and may have been a combined hunter's look-out and workshop site in late stone-age times.

This was a surprise encounter during an afternoon's walk and the site was not throughly explored, but may repay examination.

SOME GEOLOGICAL INDICATIONS

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We have been in touch with Mr. Barry Page, a young research geologist from Leeds University who spent the dry season of 1957 in the Abercorn area studying fundamental geology in the field. He was not interested in minerals or occurrences of economic value, but in indications supporting general principles, such as composition of rocks, ripple marks indicating currents and so forth.

Occurrences he has encountered which may be of archeological interest include:

1. A massive outcrop of Chalcedony behind the Indian store at Chipande farm;
2. The capping of Liamba Hill (beyond Kawimbe) which consists of the fine grained green stone (I forget the technical name, but like an indurated shale) which is a common material in the upper floors at Kalambo. It was from a Kalambo implement that he identified it.

It is possible that quarry or workshop sites may be found in these two neighbourhoods, but an opportunity to search has not yet occurred.

Two other young geological workers, who are investigating gravels, stream beds etc. for one of the mining groups, tell me that they found a good rock shelter on the slopes of Sunzu mountain, and that rocks at its entrance bear markings. They say that they found some implements in the cave earth there but I have not yet seen them.

Mr. Bra McDonnell (who as a child was brought up on Itimbwe farm) tells me that round the corner of the face of Itimbwe gorge just beyond the rock shelter described earlier in this report, there is an occurrence of mica schist which his father used to quarry for general building use on the farm.

The interest of this is that a bored stone made of this (or similar material) has been found at the Chulungoma sandpits.