

## The Archaeology of the Anyskop Blowout of the West Coast Fossil Park

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An important, open-air, archaeological locality known as the Anyskop Blowout is located within the boundaries of the West Coast Fossil Park in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. Archaeological materials were first discovered in the late 1970s atop a prominent hill called Anyskop, located about one kilometre south of the famous fossil beds of Langebaanweg. In 2001 and 2002 a team of researchers from the Department of Early Prehistory and Quaternary Ecology of the University of Tübingen, Germany conducted extensive collections and detailed excavations of the archaeological sites atop Anyskop.

The unique location of Anyskop in the Atlantic coastal plain offers an excellent vantage point to view the surrounding landscape of the Saldanha Bay region. The archaeological remains collected here provide clear evidence that archaic and modern humans occupied this elevated setting during all of the South African archaeological periods, including the Earlier Stone Age (ESA), the Middle Stone Age (MSA) and the Later Stone Age (LSA). The ESA at Anyskop is characterized by stone handaxes that are scattered across the landscape. While these stone artefacts show no clear focus of human activities, they document the periodic use of this place by archaic humans about 500,000 years ago. The MSA is marked by the more frequent occurrence of Still Bay bifacial tools and Howiesonspoot segments. These types of stone tools were typically used by modern humans for hunting between 80,000 and 55,000 years ago. At Anyskop, the LSA is characterised by numerous, small, microlithic stone tools that also show a focus on hunting activities between 8,000 and 1,000 years ago. In addition, LSA hearths composed of burned stones show clear focal points of human activity where people camped out and roasted food.

For people of all time periods, this unique vantage point would have afforded an excellent place from which to view the movements of animals, and perhaps other groups of people. Evidence that wild game was brought here is demonstrated by the fossilised remains of large animals such as the African elephant, white rhinoceros, eland and Cape zebra, all of which are no longer present in the West Coast region. Small game is also abundant and includes steenbok, Cape hare and unguulate tortoise.

In summary, the research at Anyskop addresses patterns of changing land use in the west coast region of South Africa during the last 500,000 years. The isolated finds from the ESA attest to low-intensity occupations that are not linked to water sources, while MSA and LSA occupations appear more frequently. The sites of the MSA are ephemeral and document a highly mobile settlement system based on a diversified economy, while sites of the LSA, particularly from the mid-Holocene onward, provide more numerous and richer occupations. Thus, in conjunction with the ongoing palaeontological research at the Langebaanweg fossil beds, the archaeological study of Anyskop complements our understanding of the overall palaeoenvironment of South Africa and adds to the rich cultural history of the West Coast region.

## References

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