



UCLA Extension

DISCOVERING THE WORLD'S EARLIEST MOUNTAIN DWELLERS AT SEHONGHONG, LESOTHO

Course ID: ARCH XL 159

May 7- June 11, 2017

DIRECTORS:

Dr. Brian Stewart, University of Michigan (bastew@umich.edu)

Dr. Genevieve Dewar, University of Toronto Scarborough (gdewar@utsc.utoronto.ca)



INTRODUCTION

Sehonghong is a rockshelter in the Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains of Lesotho, southern Africa. The landscape is rugged and remote, a vertical topography where dramatic river valleys slice deeply through southern Africa's very highest peaks. For tens of thousands of years people used this broken landscape in diverse ways, from a year-round home to seasonal hunting and fishing grounds. The mountains were at different times no doubt a help and a hindrance, offering hiding places to ambush game, for example, or avoided altogether when the climate turned especially cold and dry. The changing roles the mountains played in the lives of the many generations who lived here are preserved in a variety of forms, including deep archaeological sequences in rockshelters, some of which are beautifully painted with San rock art. Sehonghong is one of the most impressive and historically significant such shelters in the whole of southern Africa.

Our work at Sehonghong is part of a larger comparative project entitled, *Adaptations to Marginal Environments in the Middle Stone Age* (AMEMSA). This project aims to understand how some of the world's earliest fully modern human societies adapted to challenging African environments. Project AMEMSA is exploring two such environments: (1) the Lesotho Highlands and (2) the Namaqualand desert (in northwestern South Africa). We are particularly interested in the evolution, over the past 200,000 years, of the behavioral flexibility that so epitomizes our species – flexibility that enabled us to colonize the globe and in the process out-compete our less versatile archaic cousins, including the Neanderthals, Denisovans and Hobbits.

The Sehonghong sequence stretches back some 60,000 years. Preliminary excavations in 2011 revealed superb stratigraphic integrity, extremely rich cultural remains and truly spectacular organic preservation. Finely bedded strata comprised of countless ancient fireplaces and living structures come along with animal bones from long-gone meals and beautiful multi-colored stone tools that remain sharp to this day. And trapped beneath rocks in layers dated some 35,000 years ago are perfectly preserved grasses, seeds and sedges. The goal of the 2017 field season is to continue excavating Sehonghong, and to conduct archaeological and geomorphological surveys in the surrounding area. Integrating these rockshelter and open-air archaeological and paleoenvironmental datasets will help us reconstruct early modern human strategies for coping with highland environments.

ACADEMIC CREDIT UNITS & TRANSCRIPTS

Credit Units: Attending students will be awarded 12 quarter credit units (equivalent to 8 semester units) through our academic partner, UCLA Extension. UCLA is a top ranked research university and its archaeology program is ranked amongst the best in the country. All IFR field schools instructors and curricula are approved both by the corresponding academic department and the Academic Senate at UCLA. This field school provides a minimum of 160 direct instructional hours.

Transcripts: Transcripts are available through UCLA UnEX and instructions for ordering transcripts may be found at <http://bit.ly/2bD0Z3E>. Grades will be posted and transcript available usually within six weeks after the end of this field school. All IFR field schools are designated XL classes – courses that are equivalent to undergraduate courses offered by the UCLA regular session. All XL courses are transferable for unit and subject credit toward the Bachelor's Degree at all campuses of the UC and CSU systems. Classes numbered 100 to 199 are considered upper division (junior/senior). For more information, go to <http://bit.ly/2bjAqmy>.

UCLA students: Students can take classes through UCLA Extension to complete requirements. However certain considerations must be taken into account. For more information, go to <http://bit.ly/2bJWeHK>.

Credit Units Transfer: Most universities accept UCLA credit units – there are very few exceptions. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss the transferability of the credit units with school officials BEFORE attending the field school.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this field school are to educate, engage and empower students through archaeological fieldwork. After receiving a firm, lecture-based background in southern African prehistory, the environment and culture of Lesotho, and archaeological method and theory, students will put this knowledge into practice at the ancient Sehonghong Rockshelter in Lesotho's rugged Maloti-Drakensberg Mountains. In the process, students will receive training in archaeological excavation techniques, laboratory skills, and survey methods. Students will be engaged with the prehistoric archaeological record through rockshelter excavation and landscape survey, and with the directors, TA's and their peers through the very nature of living together in a camping environment. Finally, the experience of working together towards generating high-quality archaeological data will empower students to be confident in future studies and improve life skills.

Specifically, students will participate in the following research activities:

Excavation - Students will learn to excavate the rockshelter sediments by working closely alongside the directors and TA's. Students will have the opportunity to work on various archaeological units to gain broad experience dealing with different issues that can arise when conducting single context recording. Students will also have a chance to use the total station to piece-plot *in situ* artifacts >2.5 cm.

Survey – When high valley winds prevent us from excavating carefully, which happens frequently, we will conduct foot surveys of the immediate surroundings to identify open-air occupation sites, lithic scatters, raw material outcrops and other geomorphological features of interest.

Drawing and note taking – Every student will be responsible for completing detailed electronic context sheets as they excavate, including sediment, feature and artifact descriptions, and profiles and plan views illustrations of the excavation unit. This will all be verified by one of the directors.

Photography – Students will have a chance to assist with the photography of all contexts as well as artifacts of importance.

Laboratory – Students will learn about the various artifact types by spending time sorting through the sieved material. This will familiarize the students with the artifact classes as well as laboratory techniques.

Students will fly to Johannesburg for three days of lectures, museum visits and tours of historic sites of interest. From there, we will transport everyone to Sehonghong, with one night on route spent in Maseru, the capital of Lesotho. At Sehonghong we will engage in the hands-on aspect of the field school. Students will learn dynamically by working on the excavation of the site, conducting survey in the surrounding landscape and organizing the resulting material during laboratory sessions.

There will be scientific specialists who join us and if students have an interest in their work, you will be able to assist them in collecting samples, such as paleobotany and micromorphology. We will also be conducting field analysis of the faunal material during which students will learn about zooarchaeology. We work six and a half days a week, with Sunday afternoons completely free. The team’s specialties include lithic analysis, zooarcheology, GIS, and palaeoenvironmental reconstruction through the use of pollen, phytoliths and sediment analysis.

DISCLAIMER – PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

Archaeological field work involves physical work in the outdoors. You should be aware that conditions in the field are different than those you experience in your home, dorms or college town. This program operates in a mountainous environment in Lesotho. While it will be autumn, the temperatures during the night can reach below freezing. Warm winter clothing, a negative zero rated sleeping bag and an inflatable air camping mattress (thermarest) are all essential. Humidity is relatively low in this season, but raingear is also necessary.

Vaccinations for Yellow Fever, Hepatitis A and B are common requirement throughout the region, and students should carry their international vaccination cards with them.

If you have medical concerns, please discuss them with your doctor. All other concerns may be discussed with project director – as appropriate.

PREREQUISITES

None. This is hands-on, experiential learning and students will study on-site how to conduct archaeological research.

Archaeology involves physical work and exposure to the elements and thus, requires a measure of acceptance that this will not be the typical university learning environment. You will get sweaty, tired, occasionally cold, and you will have to work and live in the outdoors. Students are required to come equipped with sufficient excitement and adequate understanding that the archaeological endeavor requires real, hard work – in the sun, on your feet, and with your trowel.

GRADING MATRIX

- 60%: Participation** – Being actively involved in the excavation of the site, lab work and survey.
- 20%: Field notebook** – You will keep a daily journal of your excavation progress, thoughts and discoveries.
- 20%: Short assignment** – At the end of the field season you will submit a short essay on the progress of the excavation, discoveries that were made and how they contribute to the interpretation of the site and cultures who deposited it.

TRAVEL & MEETING POINT

All students will be met at the Johannesburg O.R. Tambo International Airport (JNB). Please arrive by May 7. Classes will begin at 9:00 am on May 8 and we shall meet at the foyer of ‘Melville International Backpackers’ (<http://www.melvillebackpackers.co.za/>).

We will spend three days in Johannesburg (May 8-10), leaving for Lesotho the morning of May 11. The night of May 11 we will spend in Maseru, Lesotho’s capital, arriving at Sehonghong the following day, May 12. At the conclusion of the field season, we will return to Joburg on the evening of June 10. Students may depart Joburg beginning the following day – June 11.

If your flight is delayed or you miss your connection, please call/text/email immediately to the project directors. The project local cell phone numbers will be provided to enrolled students.

VISA REQUIREMENTS

U.S. citizens entering Lesotho must present a valid passport with at least two blank (unstamped) visa pages. Visas are not required for U.S. citizens visiting for 180 days or fewer. Vaccinations for Yellow Fever, Hepatitis A and B are common requirement throughout the region, and students should carry their international vaccination cards with them.

Citizens of other countries are asked to check the Embassy of Lesotho website page at their home country for specific visa requirement.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Johannesburg – In Joburg, students will stay at ‘Melville International Backpackers’ (<http://www.melvillebackpackers.co.za/>) situated in the safe and vibrant neighborhood of Melville. The Backpackers has an airport shuttle that will collect you directly from O.R. Tambo International Airport. The Backpackers is an approximately 30 minute drive from the airport. We will stay at the same venue on the night that we return to Joburg from the site (June 10).

Maseru – In Maseru (Lesotho’s capital), students will stay at ‘The Trading Post’, a historic bed and breakfast situated in the suburb of Roma, where Lesotho’s National University campus is also located.

Sehonghong – On site, where the majority of the field school will take place, we will be camping. You will be required to bring your own tent, sleeping bag, air mattress etc. You will receive an information package before we leave detailing the equipment for which you will be responsible.

We bring all food into the field. Water, which is pure and fresh, is brought down from the nearby village by local people whom we employ. This is a rugged mountain environment with very limited resources and no major supermarkets in the immediate area. We cook our own meals in the field. We take turns cooking and doing the washing up, allowing budding chefs an opportunity to wow us all. We eat very well with typical meals consisting of risotto, pasta, curry, chili and stew. As we do not have a fridge so most meals are vegetarian with the exception of tinned tuna and dried meat (jerky, known locally as *biltong*). We do, however, have the occasional barbeque on days we return from a larger town with fresh produce and meat (approximately twice per season). Those who enjoy milk in their coffee/tea will

also be happy to know we do have long life milk in camp. We can accommodate vegetarians, people with lactose intolerance, or who require Halal or Kosher food.

Toilet and shower facilities are very basic but functional. Our toilets are frequently renewed, open-air (but secluded) long-drops. We wash using solar showers, which everyone is required to bring. There is enough water for everyone to wash at the end of every workday.

EQUIPMENT LIST

- Tent (preferably four-, but by all means three-season)
- Sub-zero sleeping bag (it must be able to handle temperatures below 0°C – I recommend -7 or -10°C).
- Camping mat (preferably thermarest type inflatable mat – keeps the chill out – this is essential)
- Small pillow
- Solar shower
- Hiking boots
- Soft bottomed shoes (i.e. trainers/sneakers)
- Headlamp and/or torch/flashlight
- Plenty of back-up batteries for any electronics (esp. headlamps)
- Work clothes
- Warm and cold weather clothing, including clean evening wear (i.e. non-working clothes) and sleeping wear
- Toiletries including sunscreen, lip balm, soap, shampoo and moisturizing cream
- Hat (both sun and warm) and sunglasses
- Raingear
- A small backpack (for hiking)
- Water bottle/canteen
- Camera (if you want!)
- Work gloves for digging
- Bathing suit
- Any prescription medicines
- A towel!

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (May 8-14)

Monday	Morning: Lecture – Introduction to Project AMEMSA Morning: Lecture – The Early Stone Age of southern Africa Afternoon: Visit the Cradle of Humankind Readings: Mitchell 2002, Chapters 1-3; Aldenderfer 2006; Stewart & Dewar n.d.
Tuesday	Morning: Lecture – The Middle Stone Age of southern Africa Morning: Lecture – The Later Stone Age of southern Africa Afternoon: Lecture – Southern African rock art Readings: Mitchell 2002, Chapters 4-8; Lewis-Williams et al. 1982
Wednesday	Morning: Lecture – Lesotho: environment, history and culture Afternoon: Visit the Origins Centre Readings: Mitchell 2002, Chapters 9; Carter 1976; Fitchett et al. 2016; Loftus et al. 2015; Mills et al. 2009; Mitchell 1990; Mitchell 1996; Mitchell 2009; Mitchell 2010; Stewart et al. 2012; Stewart et al. 2016)

Thursday	All day: Drive to Maseru
Friday	All day: Drive to Sehonghong
Saturday	All day: Remove backfill from archaeological trench, clean trench in preparation for excavation
Sunday	Morning: Continue preparing for excavation (cleaning, equipment set-up etc.) Afternoon: Student training – principles of excavation & ‘trench etiquette’

Week 2-4 (May 15-June 4)

Daily Schedule with a half day on Sundays

7 am	Breakfast
8 am	Begin work
12 pm	Lunch
1 pm	Return to work
5 pm	Discussion of findings of the day
7pm	Dinner

Week 5 (June 5-11)

Monday	Photographs & Drawing & Sampling
Tuesday	Drawing & Sampling
Wednesday	Backfill
Thursday	Backfill
Friday	Drive to Maseru
Saturday	Drive to Johannesburg
Sunday	Fly home

READINGS

- Aldenderfer, M. (2006). Modelling plateau peoples: The early human use of the world's high plateaux. *World Archaeology*, 38(3), 357-370.
- Carter, P.L. (1976). The effects of climate change on settlement in eastern Lesotho during the Middle and Later Stone Age. *World Archaeology*, 8, 197-206.
- Fitchett, J.M., et al. (2016). A multi-disciplinary review of late Quaternary palaeoclimates and environments for Lesotho. *South African Journal of Science*, 112, Article #2016-0045.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2016/20160045>
- Lewis-Williams, J.D. (1982). The economic and social context of southern San rock art. *Current Anthropology*, 23, 429-449.
- Loftus, E., et al. 2015. Stable isotope evidence of MIS 3 to middle Holocene palaeoenvironments from Sehonghong, eastern Lesotho. *Journal of Quaternary Science*, 30, 805-816.
- Mills, S.C., et al. (2009). Recognition and palaeoclimatic implications of late quaternary niche glaciation in eastern Lesotho. *Journal of Quaternary Science*, 24(7), 647-663.
- Mitchell, P. J. (1990). A palaeoecological model for archaeological site distribution in southern Africa during the Upper Pleniglacial and Late Glacial. In C. Gamble & O. Soffer (Eds.), *The World at 18,000 BP: Low latitudes* (pp. 189-205). London: Unwin Hyman.
- Mitchell, P.J. (1996). The Late Quaternary landscape at Sehonghong in the Lesotho Highlands, southern Africa. *Antiquity*, 70, 623-638.

- Mitchell, P.J. (2002). *The Archaeology of Southern Africa*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Mitchell, P.J. (2009). Gathering together a history of the People of the Eland: Towards an archaeology of Maloti-Drakensberg hunter-gatherers. In P.J. Mitchell & B.W. Smith (Eds.), *The Eland's People: New Perspectives in the Rock Art of the Maloti-Drakensberg Bushmen* (pp. 99-139). Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Mitchell, P.J. (2010). Making history at Sehonghong: Soai and the last Bushman occupants of his shelter. *Southern African Humanities* 22: 149-70
- Stewart, B.A. et al. (2012). Afromontane foragers of the Late Pleistocene: site formation, chronology and occupational pulsing at Melikane Rockshelter, Lesotho. *Quaternary International* 270: 40-60.
- Stewart, B.A. et al. (2016). Follow the Senqu: Maloti-Drakensberg paleoenvironments and implications for early human dispersals into mountain systems. In Jones, S. & Stewart, B.A. (Eds.), *Africa from MIS 6-2: Population Dynamics and Paleoenvironments*, pp. 247-271. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Stewart, B.A. & Dewar G. (n.d.). *Adaptations to Marginal Environments in the Middle Stone Age (Project AMEMSA): Research Design and Goals*. Unpublished report.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Barham, L. & Mitchell, P. (2008). *The First Africans: African Archaeology from the Earliest Toolmakers to Most Recent Foragers*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Gamble, C. (1994). *Timewalkers: the Prehistory of Global Colonization*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.