

THIRD PAN-AFRICA CONGRESS ON PREHISTORY

Abercorn 1955

The Third Pan- Africa Congress on Prehistory, a group of nearly 50 persons in all, visited Abercorn on August 3,4 & 5 August 1955. This was one of its principal expeditions after it had gathered in Livingstone for its inaugural Congress. Dr. J. Desmond Clark, Curator of the Rhodes Livingstone Museum, accompanied them as secretary and organiser.

Among eminent the archaeologists and anthropologists attending were Sir Wilfrid Le Gros Clark, palaeoanthropologist, Prof. Miles Birkett (Cambridge), Prof. Raymond Dart (South Africa), Dr Kenneth Oakley (British Museum), Dr. Oliver Davies (Gold Coast) Dr. H. Martin (Windhoek), Miss G. Catton Thompson (Cambridge), and Dr. Bernard Fagg. [Miss Catton Thompson is best known for her definitive work on the Zimbabwe ruins]

Some 21 persons were lodged at the Abercorn Arms Hotel and the remainders entertained privately by Abercorn residents and Settlers. Dr. Sadik Nur of the Sudan stayed with the Gamwell sisters and Mrs J. Ravel (India) with Mr J. H. Venning.

On August 4 the party visited the sites on the Kalambo River, just above the Fall opened up in 1953 by Dr. Desmond Clark. To quote the "Excursion Handbook", - "Over 70 feet of fine grained sediments exist here and have been exposed by the river – five living floors were exposed which yielded a developing sequence of industries from a final Cheles-Acheul into early Middle Stone Age. The lower part of these beds is covered with floodwater during the rains and preserved in them are partially carbonised tree trunks and wood. Fragments; the first to be found with a Cheles-Acheul industry in Africa." Members were particularly impressed by the wood exposed and by the fact that "pollens preserved in the clays are associated with lower of two floors and these suggest a fairly open vegetation cover suited to a dry climate." (Excursion Handbook)

The party spent the whole day in the neighbourhood. They found the sites the most interesting they had seen during the Congress and rated them among the most important in southern and Central Africa. They were greatly impressed with the Fall and Gorge and spent much time in photography, both scenic and archaeological.

On August 5 the party visited Mpulungu, via the Luanzuwa Falls road and were again greatly impressed with the scenic character and botanical interest of the drive. At Mpulungu they were shown a deep excavation in the shingle beach demonstrating the variations of the lake levels; the shell midden where Dr. Desmond Clarke recently found a preserved skeleton of a woman (now believed to be some 600/800 years old); and were taken along the Mbeti Bay track where they spent much time gathering examples of the Sangoan industry from the ancient raised beaches which cover a large area here. Visiting the beach at Kasakalawe, many of the party bathed. One section visited Cisanza by water under the guidance of Dr W. Watson, Research Officer. The Sites at Kalambo and Mpulungu had been exposed and excellently prepared for display by Mr Brian Williams and Mrs Hodges. Mr John Carlin, Chairman of the Tanganyika Memorial Institute, accompanied the party on their two tours and they expressed considerable appreciation of having a resident with them whose local knowledge could contribute to the general interest of the visit

Some members left by a specially diverted aircraft on August 5 and the main party left by road for Kasenga (Belgian Congo) early next morning.

Report by J. L. Carlin, Chairman of the TVMI