

# MANGGAUNG

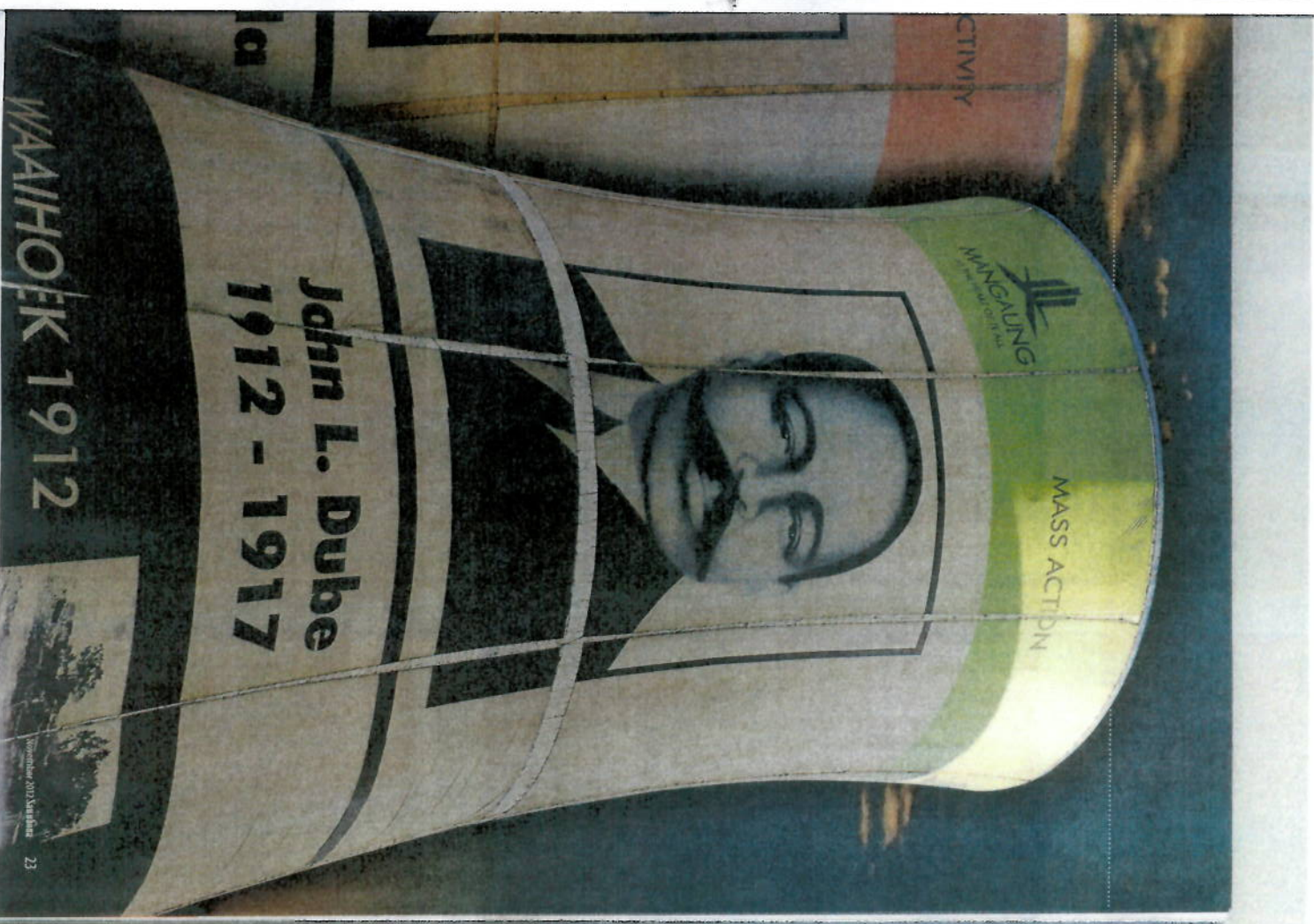
## A HOME TO PRESERVE

**O**f special value and worthy of preservation is how the Oxford English dictionary explains the word "heritage".

I was caught up in a vortex of disappointment as I waited for my plane after a two-day whirlwind tour of the Free State Province. In my attempts at recreation, this word "heritage" just would not be left as I grappled with the overload of experiences encountered on my visit. As I gave in to this notion of

heritage I became more and more aware of the value of my existence and more importantly, of the value of those who came before me. This awareness caused me to reflect on whether my visit had afforded me a glimpse of the past, or whether I was in the past and had been given a glimpse of the future. Such was my dilemma.

In an uncontrollable surge of emotion and excitement, I realised that during my visit, I had become acquainted with



WAAIHOEK 1912



MEC for Economic Development and Tourism,  
Maniki Qabathe.

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**Their connection to and respect for the environment is depicted in the rock paintings that can be seen in Clarens, Bethlehem, Ficksberg, Ladybrand and Wepener.**

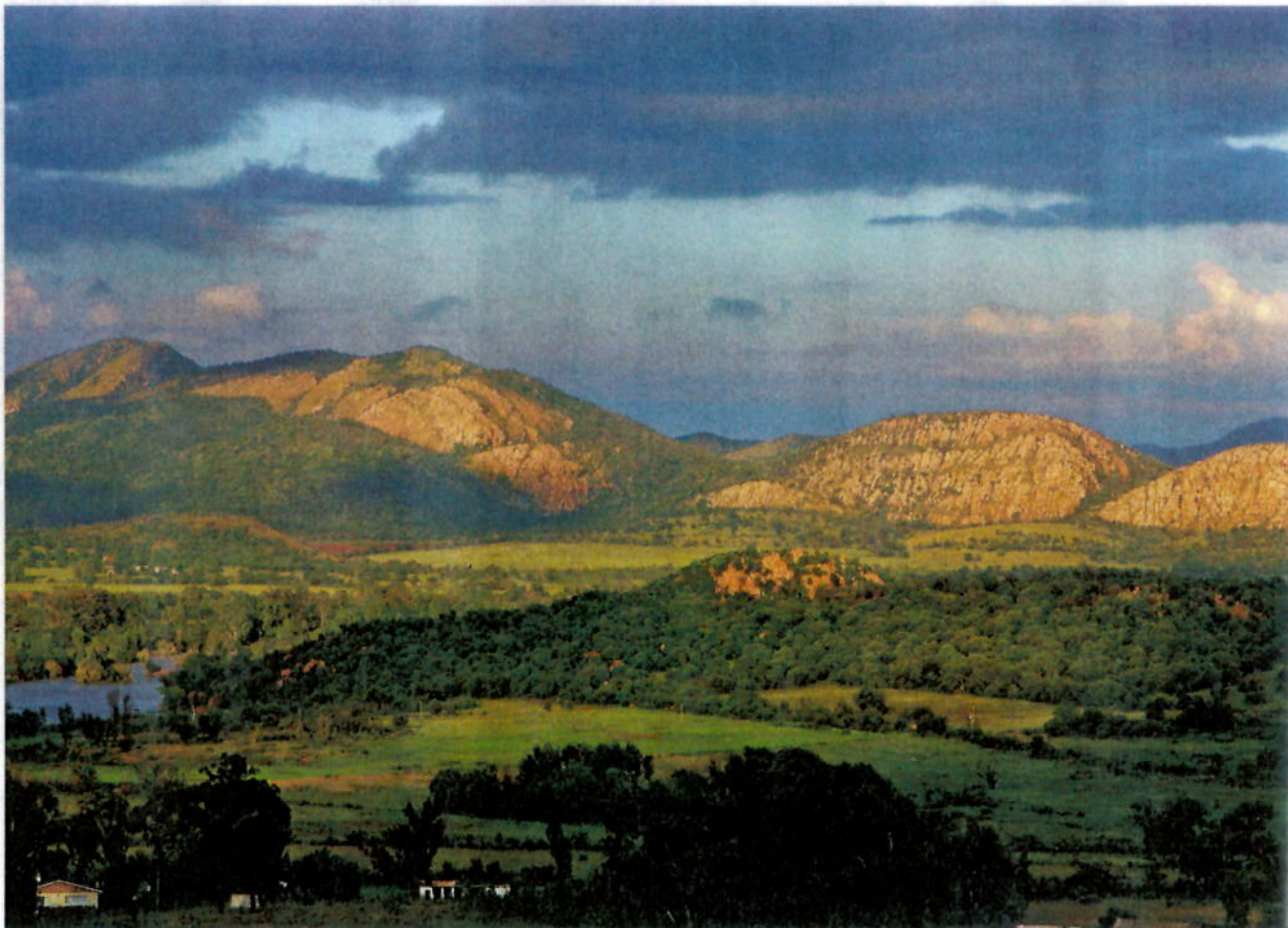
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the midwife of the diverse cultures and heritage of not only the Free State Province, but also of South Africa. Where else on this planet would you be able to explore the largest meteorite crater (90 km wide and 20 km deep). This crater in Vredefort, now named the Vredefort Dome and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was the result of a meteorite the size of Cape Town's Table Mountain crashing into the earth and releasing energy of 1 000 megatons. It could be classified on the same scale as a nuclear catastrophe. The seismic episode resulted in the formation of diamond- and gold-bearing rock formations and according to anthropologists, destroyed the dinosaur age and gave birth to new life, as we know it today. This earth-shattering event is estimated to have occurred some two thousand million years ago. The fossil sites that abound in this area and the complete skeleton of

*Euskelosaurus* found in the National Museum in Bloemfontein are evidence of this heritage. My imagination sees this place as the Garden of Eden and an authentic site for any future films themed around the origins of our birth.

It is therefore no accident that new life in the form of man, namely the Bushmen, thrived in this region enjoying their leisurely lives as hunters of abundant game and gatherers of the edible vegetation that thrived in the fertile soil. Their connection to and respect for the environment is depicted in the rock paintings that can be seen in Clarens, Bethlehem, Ficksberg, Ladybrand and Wepener. These paintings show us the spiritual connection we have with Earth and all it has to offer and with the heavens that gave us life. The message from the indigenous people of preservation should become a pilgrimage for us all, a reconnection with our ancestry. ■■■

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Vredefort Dome, South Africa, World Heritage Site.



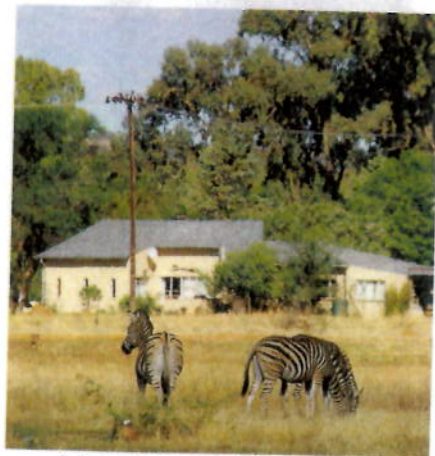
Lake near Clarens, eastern Free State



Gravestone of Annah Mantsopa.



Bushman paintings near Ficksburg, eastern Free State



Zebras wandering around Moya Estate.

It is estimated that some 300 rock art sites have been discovered; anthropologists have dated these communities back some 130 000 years.

Peter Maloro, the museum officer at the Old Presidency Museum, further stimulated my rampant imagination as he narrated the recent clashes and conflicts of the various cultures that evolved in the not too distant past. As we stood at the bust of Jan Hoffman, the first President of the Free State Republic, Peter turned back the pages of history through the oral versions of the cultural journey we have travelled.

King Moshoeshoe, who ruled the region, clashed with the Bushmen when he arrived from the north. The Bushmen, being hunters, saw the cattle of the Basotho as a new species of game and set about hunting cattle rather than antelope, as it was far easier. King Moshoeshoe could not understand this strange conduct and tried to end the raiding. However, communication with each other was not possible, as the Bushmen used click language and the

Basotho used an Nguni dialect, and the raiding continued. The Basotho decided to annihilate the Bushmen menfolk and assimilate the women and children into their culture.

The Native wars, Anglo Boer wars and internal conflicts ended with the establishment of the Free State Republic, giving a homeland to the Boers. The Basotho established their homeland in Lesotho and the Bushmen numbers were reduced significantly. During these turbulent times emerged an iconic character namely Annah Mantsopa, who accurately predicted the wars, the reasons for them and their outcomes. She was declared a prophetess by her people and gained fame throughout the region. As King Moshoeshoe united the different cultures and clans he regarded Annah as a threat to his position as king and banished her and her family from Lesotho.

President Hoffman was invited to the palace of King Moshoeshoe and on his arrival the king welcomed him with a grand display of fireworks from the

gunpowder he had accumulated. The meeting ended cordially and President Hoffman was so impressed with the king that he invited him to his home. The king accepted and President Hoffman presented him with kegs of gunpowder to replace those that he had used during the welcoming ceremony. However, dissident Boers ambushed the king and his entourage and took back the gunpowder. Needless to say, the President was branded as too friendly with the natives, and his presidency lasted only a year.

During all these events cultural development continued, and the click language of the Bushmen was assimilated into the language of the various societies that included Sesotho, Zulu, Setswana, Xhosa and Tswana. Together with Free State Province and Afrikaans and English mores, these cultures have all found their heart and soul in this province.

The special cultural values were grounded in the traditions of the various clans, and when they came under threat it was Pixley ka Isaka Seme in 1911 who saw the need to preserve these special cultures, as the chiefs of all the African people were being dispossessed of their land and heritage. He called on all Africans to forget their past differences and unite in one national organisation. Pixley was of Zulu descent and from KwaZulu-Natal. Remarkably, this call was heeded by all the various cultures and they assembled in Bloemfontein (Mangaung) in 1912 to establish the South African Native National Congress, which later became the African National Congress, with John Dube as the first president.

As the MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Maniki Qabathe, observed, the Free State was the place where this significant event took place. This was the place that gave birth to all our South African cultures. Here it is that we connect with each other, spiritually and culturally. We connect with our ruralness and our modernity that will

sustain our cohesiveness as South Africans. "We still have the ability to attract the different cultures to the heartland of South Africa. We have been able to preserve the life of the old and introduce the modern to bond as intimate acquaintances," added Qabathe passionately, referring to the significance of the Free State.

I could not suppress my levels of adrenalin as I moved from my comfortable bed at the Moya Estate a few kilometres outside Bloemfontein and wandered onto the veranda. A few metres from where I was standing a variety of antelope were moving around, giraffe were feeding from the tall bushes, zebra were gambolling and yes, a pair of rhino strolled past me so close I could touch them. The words of MEC Maniki Qabathe came back to me: "We connect our ruralness and our modernity that will sustain our

cohesiveness as South Africans ..." The excitement left me astounded. In all my travels, nowhere have I experienced this connectivity. It cleansed me of the many contradictions that weigh so heavily on all of us.

It is therefore no surprise that the African National Congress will hold their elective congress here in Mangaung (the place of cheetahs). They will bring with them all that needs to be united, refreshed and reconnected, the heritage that is worthy of preservation and commands value. This is where we will re-establish ourselves with our indestructible human spirit developed through all our evolved cultures. This process started a century ago. It will have no end. Our heritage will not let the past dissipate, nor will the present overwhelm the past.

Mangaung will ensure that we have a home to preserve. ▀

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Bloemfontein, Free State.