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HUMAN RESPONSES AND CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE: A REPORT ON ON-GOING RESEARCH IN SOUTH EASTERN ZIMBABWE

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the archaeological survey and excavation work carried out in the Mateke Hills and the adjacent farming areas of southeastern Zimbabwe. Research sought to ascertain the existence of past settlements in an area now generally regarded as hot and unattractive to human habitation. While the Mwenezi area is generally regarded as hot and dry, the Mateke Hills constitute a unique circumscribed environment. Although smaller in area than the Matopos Hills south of Bulawayo, they have like the Matopos, attracted considerable human settlement at least since Late Pleistocene times.

Research also sought to fill in the archaeological gap between the fairly well researched area around Great Zimbabwe to the north and the Shashe-Limpopo valley to the south and southwest. Newly found sites would be expected to show the link between the Mapungubwe state which developed in the Shashe-Limpopo basin and the Great Zimbabwe state, its successor to the north. Research in the Mateke Hills and Mwenezi area aims at gaining a better insight into the development and decline of Mapungubwe and the rise of the Zimbabwe states. Archaeological sites in different environments have been documented and the data were used to conduct spatial and temporal analysis of the development of settlement systems in relation to environmental change. Field surveys have been used to define the parameters of settlement location as well as determining long-term shifts in the utilization of available resources.

Archaeological research in the Mateke Hills and the surrounding Mwenezi ranches was carried out within the framework of the regional project entitled *Human Responses and Contributions to Environmental Change*. The project examines the relationship between culture, bio-geography and climate in southern and eastern African regions from Late Holocene times, especially the last 2000 years. Specifically the project aims at identifying those periods in the late Holocene where environmental change is most apparent. It also aims at conducting spatial and temporal analysis of the development of settlement systems in relation to environmental change and understanding patterns of resource utilization adopted by foraging, farming and urban communities, and the long term effects of these upon the various landscapes.