

Excavation of a Late Holocene Cave Deposit in the Southern Namib Desert

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INTRODUCTION

The southern Namib Desert forms a longitudinal dune sea extending northward from the lower Orange River in southwestern Africa. Broad gravel plains, representing ancient outwash fans, lie along the eastern margin of the dune sea, at the foot of a precipitous escarpment formed by the Huib-Hoch Plateau. Archaeological investigations in the highland zone have revealed a Holocene sequence with a hiatus of approximately 5,000 years, followed by re-occupation in the first millennium AD (Sievers 1984; Wendt 1972). It has been suggested that this gap in the sequence corresponds to a period of sparse occupation throughout southern Namibia (Vogel & Visser 1981).

Generally an inhospitable environment, the southern Namib receives an average of less than 100mm precipitation per year, mainly in the winter months. The vegetation of the desert responds rather prolifically to the rainfall, resulting in a flush of annual grass cover that is exploited by migratory antelope, including *Oryx gazella*, and a wide variety of other species such as ostrich *Struthio camelus*. In the past, such movements would have attracted hunter-gatherer communities to foray into the desert during the winter months. Until recently, however, no archaeological surveys had been conducted on the margins of the dune sea to the west of the escarpment in the southern Namib Desert.