

By Advocate De Waal Lubbe

It has been said that the fascinating history of Mossel Bay grants the town its status as the historical capital of the Garden Route and one of the most significant towns in South Africa. ♦ Ancient, stone-age fish traps and cutting edge fuel from gas technology, Khoi-San herders and European traders ♦ the history of Mossel Bay is a microcosm of the history of South Africa herself. ♦

Mossel Bay has always been associated with early European explorers. Bartholomeu Dias, the Portuguese Navigator, was the first European to discover the Southern tip of Africa while searching for a spice route to the East. Having missed the Cape during a storm his first landfall was Vleesbaai where he was prevented from going ashore, either by hostile Khoi cattle herders or by the rough surf, So he continued around the Point and landed in what is now Munro's Bay on 3 February 1488, (165 years before the first settlement in Cape Town). ♦ The Portuguese used this Bay for about 150 years until the Dutch Fleet forced them off the Indian Spice Route. But Mossel Bay's history goes back many thousands of years, which explains the presence of our many archeological sites. ♦ This early seafarers found 3 tribes here, the Gouriqwas, the Outeniqua of Attaqwa, and the San. ♦ The Khoi and San are both believed to be descendants of early man in Africa. ♦ The San were hunter gatherers, while the Khoi, also called Strandlopers, were herdsman and fishermen. ♦ They kept cattle for pack animals and for riding on. ♦ The Khoi possessed a good knowledge of healing herbs and were often called upon to help sick sailors left in their care.

Excavation of a series of caves at Mossel Bay since the year 2000, done by an International team, headed by prof. Curtis Marean from the Institute of Human Origins of the Arizona State University as well as researchers from the South Africa (UCT), Australia (UNSW, UoW), Israel and France, revealed occupation by middle Stone Age people 164,000 years ago, where the earliest evidence of the systematic exploitation of marine resources (shell fish), symbolic behavior, evidence of heat treatment of rock to make stone tools and the use of ochre to beautify, have been documented. It is believed that between 400 ♦ 700 of these early modern thinking men and women, survived the ice age, here in Mossel Bay and coastline to the West, which was habitable due to the known mild climate, by eating roots, seeds, etc. of the very hardy, diverse plant species, and then shell fish as protein. Shell fish is believed to may have been crucial to the survival of these early humans, as they roamed the coastline of Mossel bay.

In an article in the Scientific American, under the heading When the Sea Saved Humanity, prof. Curtis Marean, who also gave a lecture on his findings at a recent NOBEL Scientific Conference, writes as follows and I quote: ♦ Shortly after homo sapiens arose harsh climate conditions nearly extinguished our species. ♦ Recent finds suggest that the small population that gave rise to all humans alive today survived by exploiting a unique combination of resources along the southern coast to Africa (Mossel Bay, own insertion).

With the global population of humans currently approaching seven billion, it is difficult to imagine that homo sapiens was once an endangered species. ♦ Yet studies of the DNA of modern-day people indicate that, once upon a time, our ancestors did in fact undergo a dramatic population decline. ♦ Although scientists lack a precise timeline for the origin and near extinction of our species, we can surmise from the fossil record that our forebears arose throughout Africa shortly before 195,000 years ago. ♦ Back then the climate was mild and food was plentiful; life was good. ♦ But around 195,000 years ago, conditions began to deteriorate. ♦ The planet entered a long glacial stage known as Marine Isotope Stage 6 (MIS6) that lasted

until roughly 123,000 years ago.

A detailed record of Africa's environmental conditions during glacial stage 6 does not exist, but based on more recent, better-known glacial stages, climatologists surmise that it was almost certainly cool and arid and that its deserts were probably significantly expanded relative to their modern extents. While the planet was in the grip of this icy regime, the number of people plummeted perilously from more than 10,000 breeding individuals to just hundreds. Estimated of exactly when this bottleneck occurred and how small the population became vary among genetic studies, but all of them indicate that everyone alive today is descended from a small population that lived in one region of Africa sometime during this global cooling phase.

In the Arizona State University, ASU News (Science and Tech), in August 2010, Carol Hughes, under the heading Paleoanthropologist writes untold story of our salvation, writes as follows: With the combination of calorically dense, nutrient-rich protein from the shell fish and low-fibre, energy-laden carbs from the geophytes, the Southern Coast, (Mossel Bay), would have provided an ideal diet for early modern humans during glacial stage 6, writes Marean in the cover story billed by Scientific American as the untold story of our salvation. The discoveries Curtis and his team have made at Pinnacle Point, are not only important of scientific standpoint, but they also tell an incredible story about our origins said Kate Wong, the scientific American Editor who asked Marean to write the story.

What makes Curtis' project so compelling is that it weaves together evidence from archaeology, paleoclimatology and genetics to answer the question of how our species eluded extinction during a climate crisis Wong said.

It is generally accepted that when a species in number goes down to a few hundred, it is considered to be absolutely endangered. If Prof. Marean is correct, and all indications are that he in fact is, our species, Homo sapiens, during one of severest ice ages, the Marine Isotope Stage 6, in numbers dropped to a few hundred that survived. To quote Barry Evans in an article The Skin of Our Teeth, September the 9th, 2010, North Coast Journal: It may well be that this food-rich oasis, (Mossel Bay) Coastline, discovered by early humans was responsible for the survival of our species, and it was there (Mossel bay) Coastline, that we made it through the worst period of glaciation - by the skin of our teeth.

Only time will tell, but in view of Prof. Marean's findings, the indications are that Mossel Bay is indeed, not only the Historic Capital of the Garden Route, South Africa, but indeed the Origin of Modern Humans / Modern Human Origins, but also the Historic Capital of the World.</p></div><div style="text-align:center"> <table border="0"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center; vertical-align:top;">
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