

## Kruger National Park

Kruger National Park is an international icon that represents the remarkable natural heritage of South Africa. For over a century the unique flora and fauna of the park has invited protection and conservation, institutionalized under a government mandate formalized by Paul Kruger himself. While enormous efforts have been undertaken to protect, study and present South African natural heritage in KNP, only now has the cultural heritage of the park attracted serious attention. Mounting pressure in the new South Africa for cultural expression of the African Renaissance has resulted in the promotion of Kruger sites such as Thulamela, an outstanding archaeological site that has become a nascent focus for education, community participation and economic empowerment. This forms the basis for our interdisciplinary digital archaeology project, founded by the National Science Foundation.

On recent calculation KNP could yield more than 1000 archaeological sites within its boundaries, from Stone Age tool scatters to Iron Age villages and impressive rock art. Many recognize that it is time to engage in a renewed archaeological investment in the park that includes GIS mapping of previously or newly identified sites, reassessment of current site presentation and a detailed analysis of cultural heritage and its presentation to various stakeholders and publics.

Our proposed project at Thulamela encapsulates and reinforces the programmatic statement made in the 1996 government white paper regarding the responsibilities of the Nation Heritage Council. These are to

- 1) record living heritage practices
- 2) develop an inventory of living heritage resources
- 3) encourage awareness programs amongst communities whose heritage has been neglected and marginalised
- 4) encourage museums to conserve living heritage through audio-visual media.

KNP is a unique national site with a complex political history. Developments from within suggest a new climate of inclusivity and empowerment, encapsulated in the motto *It's Mine, It's Yours* (also translated in Tsonga). At KNP new initiatives around social ecology are tacitly aimed at empowerment, education and encouraging communities to embrace conservation ethics. Archaeology can become a vital component in the current social ecology plan within Kruger and part of the new environment of dialogue and partnership must include an historic and cultural component as central. This process has obvious socio-economic interventions whether the economic imperatives of craft production, land claims, human rights issues or intellectual property concerns: all of which implicate KNP. Part of the new environment of dialogue and partnership must include an historic and cultural component as central.