



## Past Projects

### Ysterfontein

South Africa is unique for the discovery of deeply stratified shell middens that predate 50 thousand years ago. Sites of similar antiquity in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Lebanon, Italy, France, and Gibraltar have produced small numbers of intertidal shells, sometimes with bones of coastal vertebrates, but only the ancient South African sites have provided true shell middens. In Africa, most of the Holocene shell middens are associated with Later Stone Age (LSA) technology, but in South Africa the much older shell middens have Middle Stone Age (MSA) association, unlike the Holocene middens that have been found on every inhabited continent (Erlandson 2001; Erlandson & Moss 2001),



---

**Phone:** 021-7064104

**Fax to e-mail:** 086 6037195

**www.aco-associates.com**

**Postal:** C/O 8 Jacobs Ladder, St James, 7945

**ACO Associates cc**  
Archaeology and Heritage Specialists



Ysterfontein 1 (YFT1) is located on the west coast of South Africa, 70 km north-northwest of Cape Town. There are four other known MSA middens on the west coast namely Boegoeberg 2, Hoedjiespunt 1 and 3, and Sea Harvest. Mining disturbance indicates that more middens lie deeply buried below coastal sands (Parkington 2003; Parkington 2006). However, Ysterfontein 1 has produced by far the largest artefact and faunal samples, and it is likely that further excavation will provide even larger samples.

In the early 1980s, contractors enlarging the parking lot for the small boat harbour in the town of Ysterfontein (also known as Yzerfontein) cut back the slope along the access road and exposed 3–4 m of sands resting on a diorite platform 7 m above mean sea-level. Shortly afterwards, Avery observed the infrequent presence of marine shells, bones, ostrich eggshell fragments and MSA artefacts in the sands. In February 1998 and April 1999, John Parkington and University of Cape Town students collected artefacts and shells that had eroded from the exposure. Inspection of the section indicated that continuing erosion threatened the deposit, and that safe excavation required the placement of 6-m-high scaffolding against the diorite platform. So in May 2002, the ACO, along with Royden Yates, began the difficult excavation on the face of the cliff at Ysterfontein, and follow up seasons took place until 2008, totalling over 32 weeks.

The extensive mitigation showed that the shelter had been inhabited during different periods by various wildlife: notably hyaena and mongoose, and humans. This is evidenced by the type of bone accumulation and coprolites, and humans artefacts such as bone, marine shell, stone artefacts; ostrich egg shell, ochre and ancient fireplaces. These assemblages have been studied in response to questions about MSA



marine exploitation or coastal foraging, and its implications for population size and modern human expansion out of Africa (Halkett *et al* 2003 & Avery *et al* 2008). Wurz (2011) discussed the Ysterfontein stone artefacts in comparison to those from Klasies River, and their implications for MSA stone tool technical innovation and typologies. The site was featured in the documentary series “Shorelines”.

---

**Phone:** 021-7064104

**Fax to e-mail:** 086 6037195

**www.aco-associates.com**

**Postal:** C/O 8 Jacobs Ladder, St James, 7945

**ACO Associates cc**  
Archaeology and Heritage Specialists

