

# FRESH LIGHT ON THE LITTLE STONE HOUSES OF THE LEGHOYA

## PRIMITIVE HOMES OF THE FIRST MINING PEOPLE WHO CAME TO THE RAND



Spearheads manufactured by the Leghoya, with one of the crucibles in which they smelted their iron.

THE discoveries in the Transvaal occur in the triangle, Standardton-Johannesburg-Vereeniging. Very few whole huts have been found, but the remains are sufficient to betray the hands of the builders. The foundations and heaps of stones enable us to recognise the layout and, having studied undisturbed villages, it is not always a difficult matter to reconstruct those that now lie in ruins.

The villages are interesting not only on account of their original, kraaled lay-out, but also because in them we have the huts in which lived men who were primitive miners and metal workers.

The first photograph shows a typical hut, the most outstanding feature of which is the corbelled of the domed roof. There can be no doubt that the erection of such a hut required a great deal of skill. The can-

tilevering of each successive course over its fellow below is straightforward, but it is difficult to know how the builders supported the upper courses as the dome neared completion. Many intact huts have been examined and in none of these do we find evidence of the use of any form of mortar.

The densest area of settlement in the Transvaal appears to be the hilly country round Greylingstad, while the nearest distinguishable settlement to the Rand—a settlement now unfortunately in utter ruin—nestles in the hills of the Suikerboschrand some 20 miles south of Germiston. It was characteristic of the builders—the Ancient Leghoya, who are sometimes described as having been the forerunners of the Bechuana migration—that they always chose hills on which to build their villages.

Still nearer Johannesburg there is an encampment that might possibly once have been

occupied by the Leghoya. This, however, has been so disturbed, first presumably by the plundering Matabele

and then by Europeans, that it is impossible to say definitely who established it. Here and there among the old fallen-in walls and foundations, all heavily overgrown, are remains that certainly appear to be those of huts—as shown in the second photograph. This old village lies in the hills between Baragwanath and Jackson's Drift. It is quite probable that it was founded by the Leghoya and that the Matabele razed it and rebuilt on the old site such kraaled encampments as they left on the hills between Fontainebleau and Witpoortje.

Now the Leghoya are of especial interest not only as the builders of these rare huts, but also as the first Bantu arrivals from the north and, incidentally, as the first mining people to have reached the Rand.

The only inhabitants south of the Sabi River, which lies immediately south of Zimbabwe, up to about 1000 A.D. were the aboriginal "Bush" or San folk, the "Wak-wak" of the early Arab writers. It is usually considered that up to about 900 years ago these Stone Age folk held supreme sway from the Sabi to the Cape, but at or about that time the Bantu

began, or rather continued, their slow southward march.

Bechuana tradition says that

named after him the Barolong, and they took "tsepe" (iron) as their emblem or "soboko" and danced in honour of iron.

These Barolong were the first inhabitants of Bechuana land and they were the stock from which the Bechuana sprang. In the course of time further pioneers reached the Vaal and these, from the name of one of their chiefs, came to be known as the Leghoya. The earliest arrivals here comprised bodies that were small and weak and these,

largely if not wholly in self-preservation, fraternised and in the course of time actually intermarried with the aboriginal San

THE year before last there appeared in *The Star* a short discussion on rare and peculiar stone huts of beehive shape—huts known in no other parts of the world than the Union. They had at that time been found only in a portion of the northern Free State, one of the most remarkable discoveries having been made at Vegkop, in the Heilbron district, famous as the scene of the great fight between the Voortrekkers and the Matabele.

The report evoked a great deal of interest and discussion, particularly in view of the fact that the presence of these curious little structures had been quite overlooked, though they exist in long settled parts of the country. Mr. van Riet Lowe, who made the initial discoveries, has now ascertained that the area over which the huts are found is much greater than was thought at first, and that they even exist quite close to Johannesburg. In giving this further information he also discusses the evidences of primitive mining and metallurgy which are associated with them.

during the 14th century the smith of Mosito, Morolong forged iron with his son Noto (Hammer). His subjects were



The remains of one of the huts found on the Rand: the site is quite close to Jackson's Drift.



A hut in almost perfect preservation found in the Free State. It will be seen by comparison with the native standing beside it, who is by no means a tall man, how small these buildings were.

offered, practised their mining and metallurgical work, leaving the aboriginals in undisputed possession of the large open spaces between, but continuing on terms of friendly relations with them.

After crossing the Vaal the Leghoya trekked up and occupied the valleys of those rivers that drain the north-eastern Free State, notably the Spruit Sonderbergdrift, the Wilge, the Lieberbergsvlei and the Rhenoster. The most popular area seems to have been the valley of the Rhenoster, immediately south of Heilbron. It is here that the well-known "Stone Huts of Vegkop" occur—huts that, by the act of the present generous Government, now belong to the nation. Similar occurrences are not recorded in any territory other than that included in the Southern Transvaal and the north-eastern third of the Orange Free State.

But for a few well-preserved villages near Heilbron, the vast majority of the others now lie in utter ruin and we cannot always be sure that we recognise the hand of the builder. Those ruins on the Witwatersrand south of Baragwanath fall into this category. Large trees grow from the foundations of the old, tumbled-down walls and the entire scene is one of considerable disturbance, but the remains of a few huts are clear and we are led to the conclusion that the Leghoya trekked over the Rand and therefore that

they are the earliest known mining people to have reached this area. Only they mined for iron, not for gold, and it is highly improbable that they did any actual mining here.

That they knew the art of extracting iron from the ore is undoubted, for from the ruins of their villages come remains of furnaces, stone crucibles, heaps of slag as well as the iron tools and weapons they manufactured. The crucible shown is a typical specimen in sandstone. The surface is highly vitrified and obviously was subjected to great and prolonged heat. The tools and weapons recovered are all of iron extracted from natural ores. Their spear points show the makers to have been masters in the art of handling and shaping this metal.

It is difficult to know when these people crossed the Rand, but we do know that they occupied Vegkop, the classic site, in the 18th century and that they lived there peaceably until ejected by the Matabele early in the 19th. It is therefore probable that they trekked over, and maybe occupied, portions of the Rand over a century ago, at or about which time they were forced to flee before the plundering and remorseless hordes of Matabele who passed this way on the great march from Natal to Matabeleland just about 100 years ago.

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