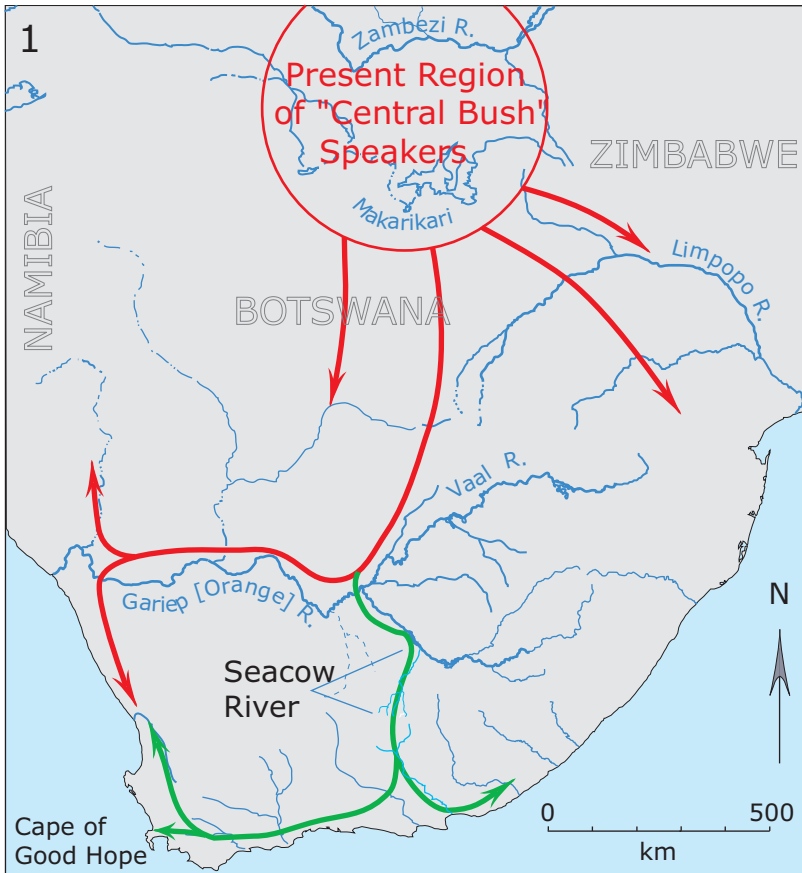


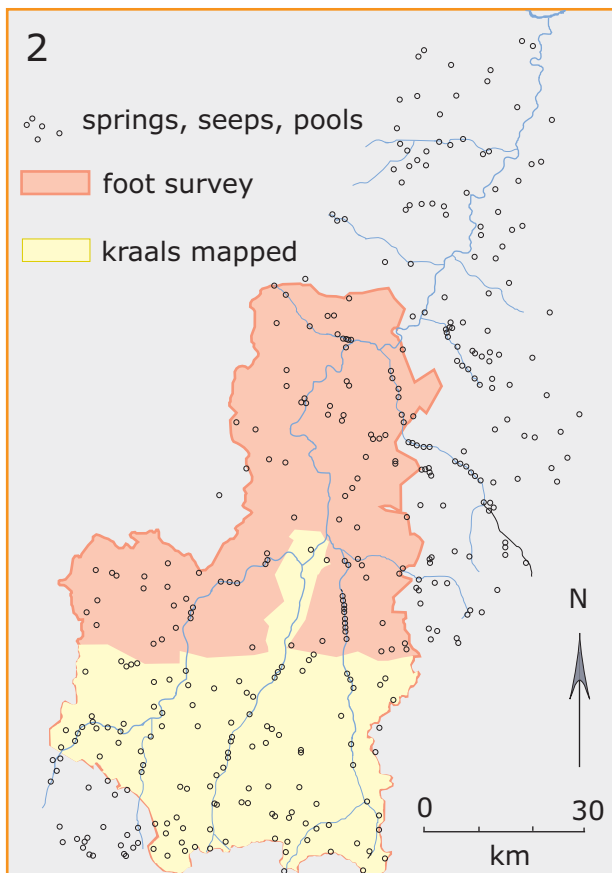
PREHISTORIC LIVESTOCK HERDERS IN THE UPPER SEACOW RIVER VALLEY

C.Garth Sampson



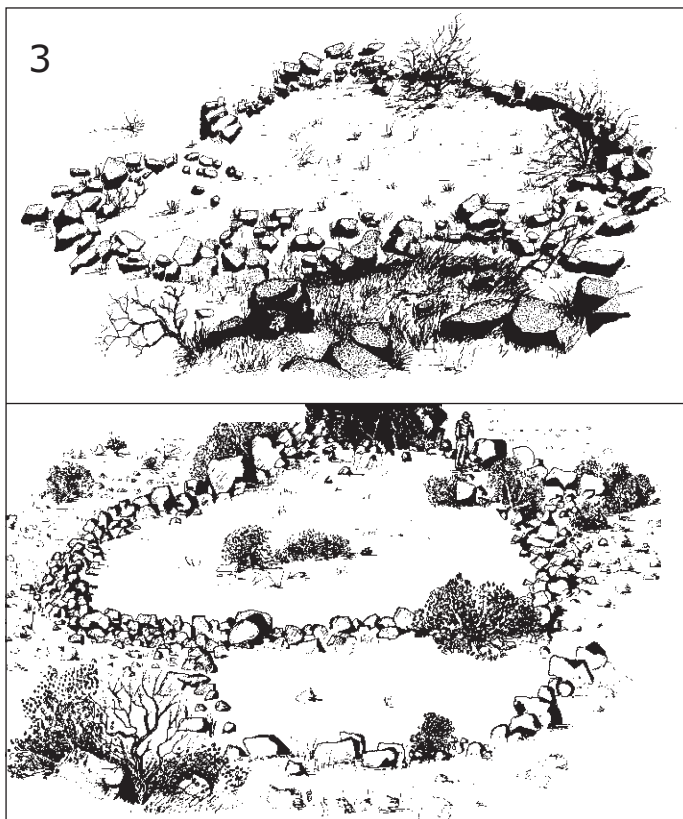
1. In 1977 the ethnohistorian Richard Elphick was the first to propose a southward migration of Khoekhoe stockherders that was more complex than the traditionally accepted route (in red). He suggested that internal strife caused the main group to split up near the Gariep/Vaal junction. The larger faction moved *up* the Gariep (green) seeking a passage through the arid mountain ranges blocking their way to the south. They found this, so he proposed, up the well-watered Seacow River valley that funneled them through the high Sneeuwberg Mountains and eventually to the more fertile lands of the Eastern Cape, then on to the Southern and Western Cape.

At the time of his claim there was neither eyewitness nor archaeological evidence that Khoekhoe herders had ever been in the Upper Karoo. The force of his argument rested upon the fact that Dutch *trekboeren*, seeking a passage northward through the same arid mountains, had also used the Zeekoerivier as a gateway to the north, starting in the late AD 1780s.



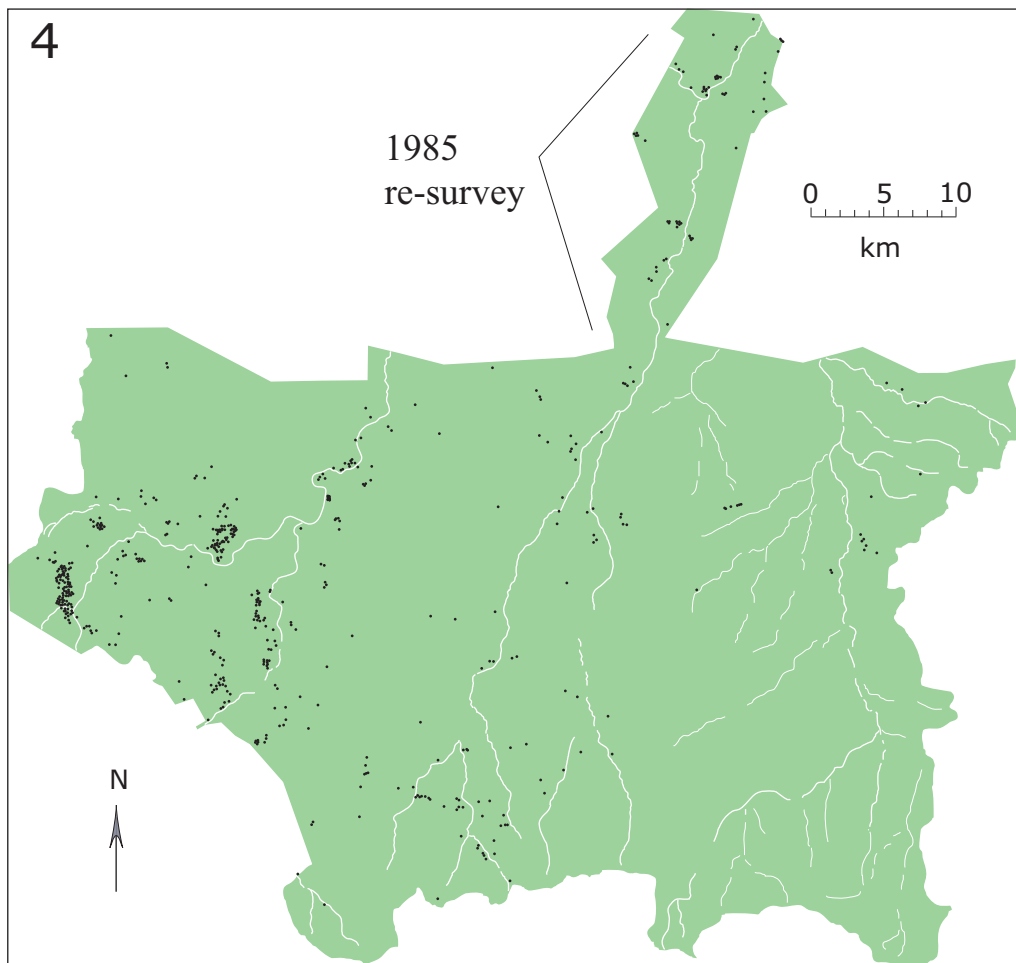
2. As this map of the Zeekoe (also Seacow, Seekoei) River shows, its attraction for stockherders was the great number of natural surface waterpoints. Today, almost all of these are gone thanks to the lowering of the watertable by windpumps, most of which cluster around former *fontaine* or spring eyes. The waterpoint distribution shown here (based mainly on archival sources) is certainly incomplete, as a recent search of our own field records reveals.

Our records derive from a 1979-81 archaeological survey of the area shown in light red, supplemented by much more intensive re-survey of selected patches in the yellow area. The whole area (~5,000 square kilometers) was searched on foot by teams of archaeologists who mapped and inventoried surface concentrations of stone tools, chipping waste, grindstones, pottery sherds and occasional fragments of foodwaste (shell, bone fragments) left behind by the Seacow River Bushmen and their ancestors, going back about 2,000 years in age. We plotted several thousand such surface scatters, called 'sites.' In the course of this work several thousand more sites were identified as belonging to much older periods. To date, this appears to be the largest single archaeological map ever constructed.



3. These are field sketches of large, collapsed circles of low, dry-stone walling typical of several hundred such examples that we encountered in the upper Seacow survey area (yellow in 2). Most are made of dolerite cobbles (shown here), some of sandstone slabs. A unique intact section stands less than a meter high. Many are oval in shape with maximum diameter from ~5m up to ~30m. Many also have a smaller stone circle attached to the outside, or just inside the entrance way. All are located on rocky slopes, and many butt against natural rock outcrops which then serve as the upslope wall. Thus they invariably occur in natural rubble and the wall itself was built from the rocks cleared from the interior floor. Multiple gaps in the walling are quite common, and were probably stopped up with thorn brush.

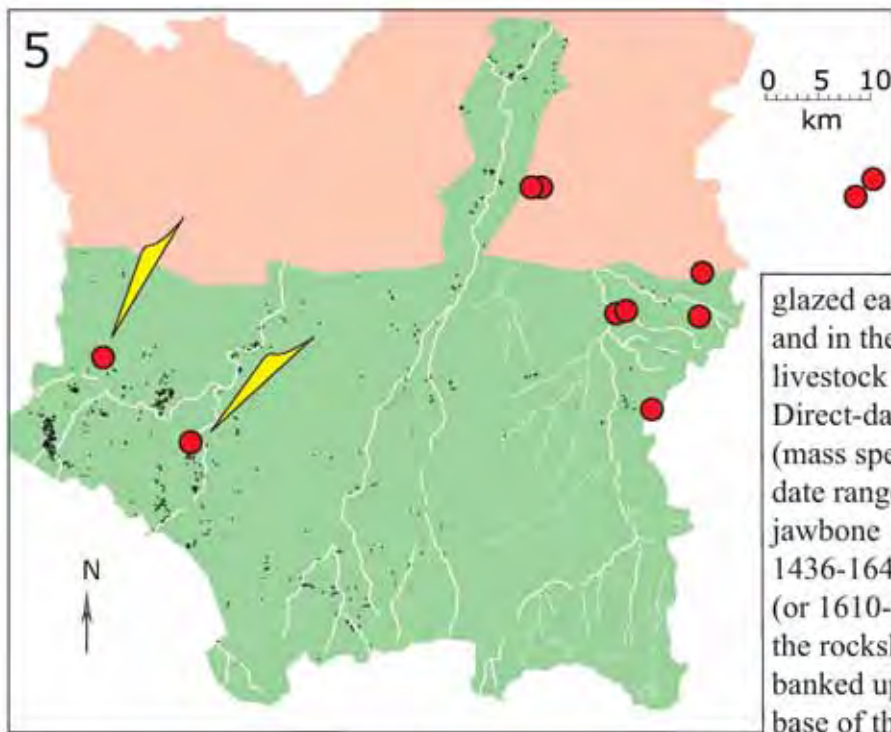
They closely match descriptions by early travellers, (e.g Pringle in 1834) of stock enclosures (*kraals*) made of thornbrush with a smaller *lammerhok* attached, where lambs and/or kids could be separated from their mothers to regulate the milk supply.



4. The distribution of stone kraal ruins is uneven, with huge hilltop or ridge-top clusters at the west end of the upper valley. There was a preference for riverside hills, and the high mountains of the Sneeuwberg watershed were avoided.

When two of us with the longest experience with kraal ruins decided to re-survey the banks of the central tributary of the Seacow in 1985, we found 20+ structures in a month's searching. Clearly the team had not yet learned to spot such ephemeral features back in 1979-80, and were not expecting to encounter them. By the 1981 season when we reached the upper valley, we were on the alert for them and rapidly developed the skills needed to spot kraal ruins.

There is no telling how far downriver they may be found, but our records hint that they are present (but rare) even at the far north end of our survey (light red in 1)



5. Our next task was to prove that there really were prehistoric (pre-AD 1780) livestock in the upper valley. From archaeological excavations in these 11 caves, rockshelters and overhangs (red circles) we at first encountered European litter (e.g. cartridges, lead shot, glass, glazed earthenware) along with livestock on the surface and in the topmost levels. At two shelters (pointers) livestock remains came from below European levels. Direct-dating of the deepest teeth and bones by AMS (mass spectrometry) radiocarbon dating produced these date ranges: a cow's tooth of AD1381-1512; a sheep's jawbone of AD 1420-1460; a sheep/goat bone of AD 1436-1642; an cow's neck vertebra of AD 1500-1598 (or 1610-1674). This last specimen came from outside the rockshelter, buried deep in rocky fill that had banked up behind a stone kraal wall. It was near the base of the wall.

Animal bones and teeth only survive in recognizable form under the protective roof of a cave or rockshelter. Indeed, all 11 shelter fills were stuffed with wild animal remains, but notice that the only two with prehistoric livestock are in the area with the highest density of kraal ruins. It would be better proof that the stone circles were all livestock kraals if we could find sheep and cow teeth inside some other kraal ruins, but none has survived out in the open.



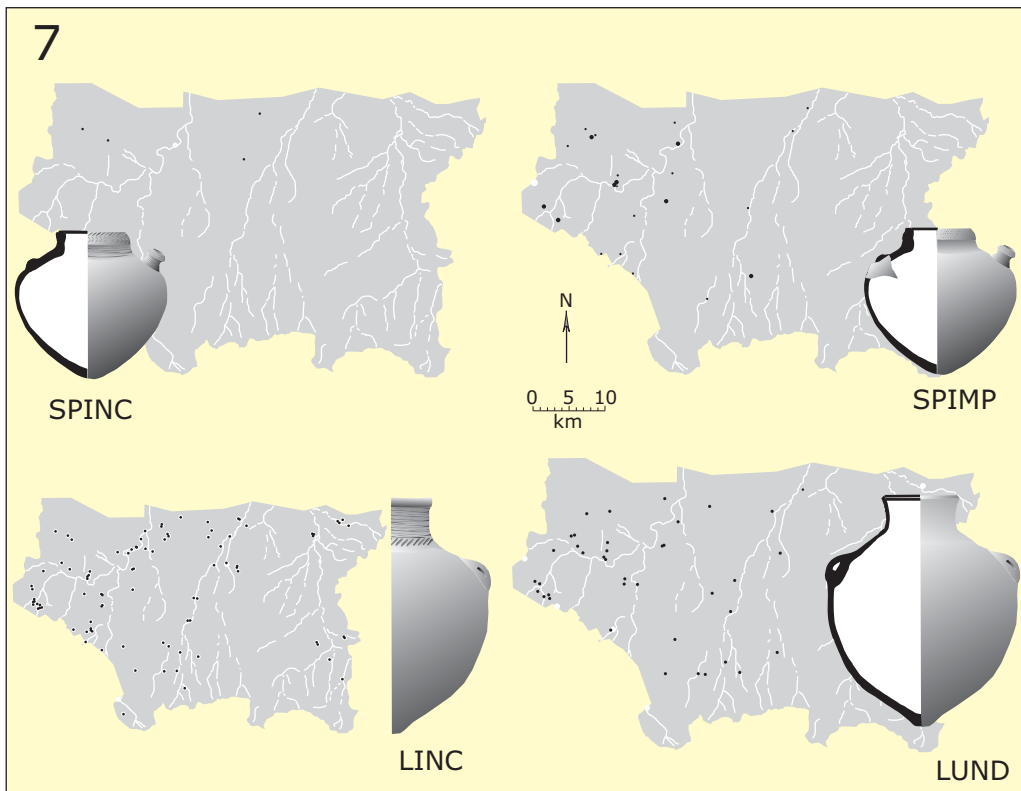
6. While animal remains do not survive at the kraal ruins, the broken sherds from two kinds of indigenous pottery do.

One is associated in early traveller records with the Karoo "Bushmen" hunter-foragers. Flat-bottomed cooking bowls with vertical sides, these were formed by joining a thick roundel of grass-tempered clay (the bottom) to a cyclinder made from thick slabs of the same clay. They were fired in the open after being sealed with sprinbok blood and fat. Several kinds of stamp-impressed decorations were applied to the outside surface. Direct AMS 14C dates of the grass inclusions in these sherds tells us that (undecorated) bowls show up in the upper Seacow drainage as early as 100 BC. Decorations first appear around AD 900. They continued to be made here until ~AD1830, during which time the styles of decoration changed.

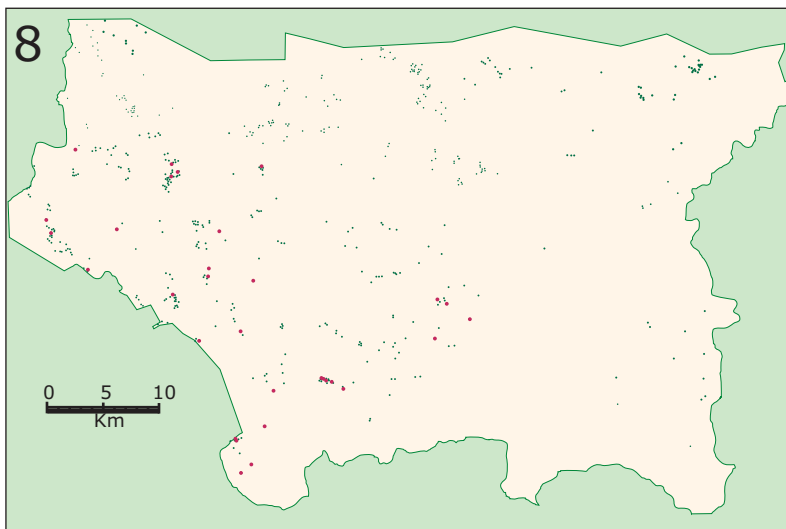
The second type of pottery resembles in every way the vessels reported by early travellers as belonging to "Hottentot" (now Khoekhoe) stock-herders along the Western Cape coast.

There are no such reports from the Upper Karoo. These pots were built up from coils of sand/grit-tempered clay to thin-walled amphora-like shapes with pointed base, shoulders, neck, and optional spouts and lugs. They were finished with a buff coloured slip wash and fired hot, but not in a kiln. Decorations and dates are discussed in the next section.

These two pottery types differ in all aspects of construction and finish, yet they are found mixed together at hundreds of sites.

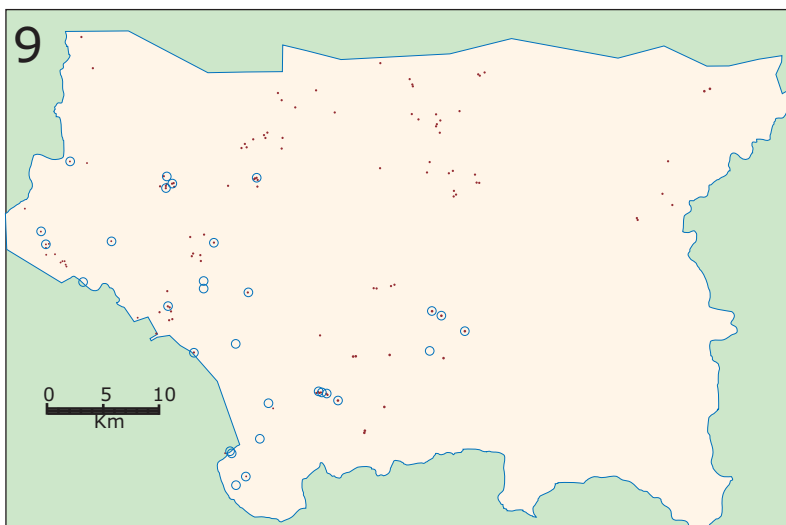


7. In the archaeology of herders in the Western Cape, four vessel designs are recognized, known by the acronyms shown here. SPINC (Spouted Incised) and SPIMP (Spouted Impressed) are the oldest and LINC (Lugged Incised) is the youngest. They were made there between ~AD 450 and ~AD 1750. All four types are present in the upper Seacow (see maps) suggesting long and possibly continuous connections with the Western Cape. Experimental, low-accuracy luminescence dates taken from five Upper Seacow sherds gave mid-range values of AD 1120, 1200, 1395, 1590, and 1680. These overlap nicely with the dates from "Bushman" sherds with stamp decorations (see 6).



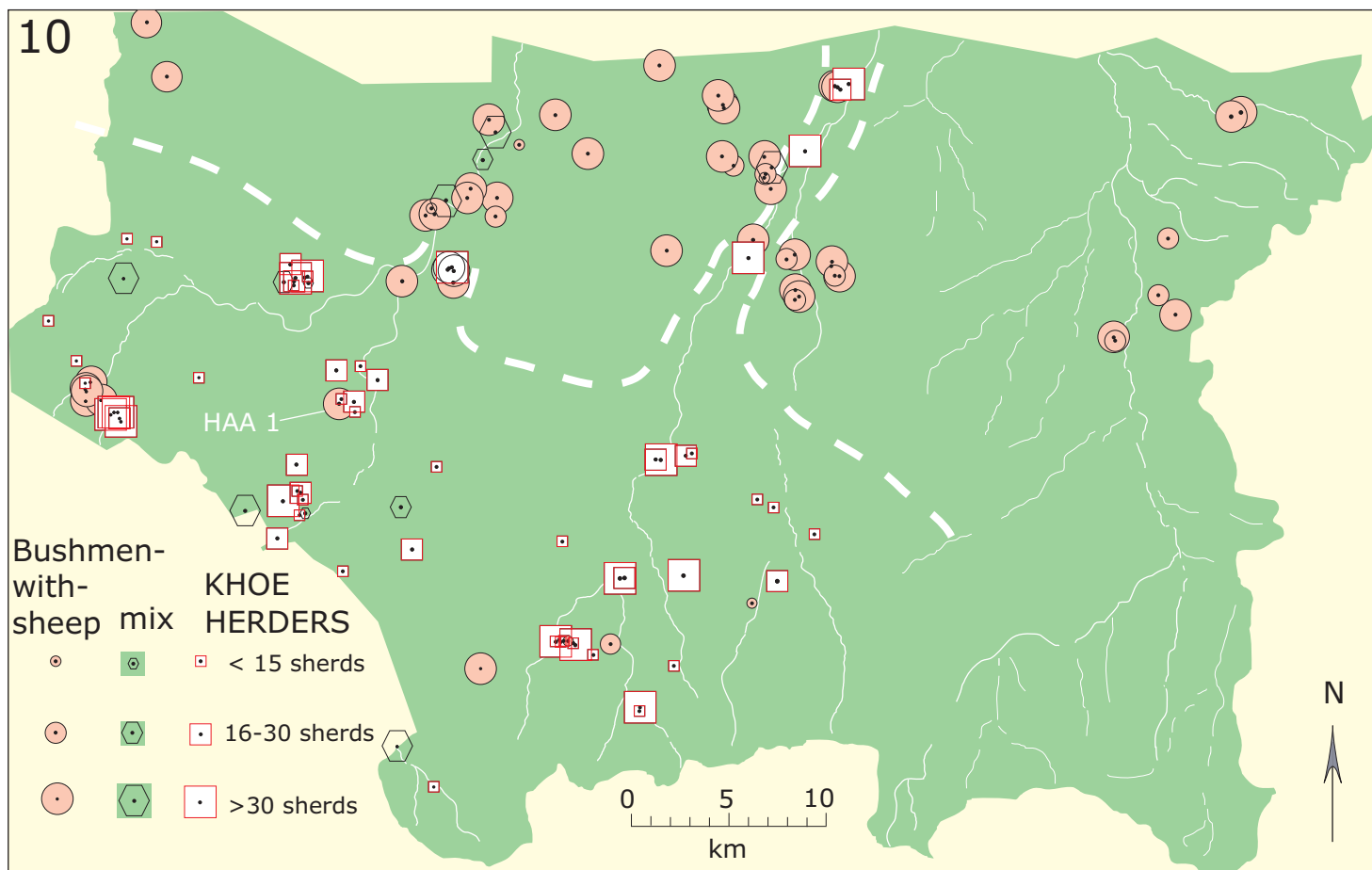
8. Even the foremost authority on Khoe pottery (Prof. Karim Sadr of Wits University) hesitates to ascribe all four types to the Khoekhoen of Van Riebeeck's time - except perhaps the last (LINC). So I use "Khoe" ware to describe the upper Seacow sherds without meaning to imply that their makers necessarily spoke Khoekhoe.

Khoe sherds (green dots) occur all over the upper valley (many are plain body sherds of no specific type). These nearly all occur alongside fiber-temper sherds from Bushman bowls. Only 33 "pure" Khoe sites - with 100% Khoe sherds - are restricted to the SW of the study area (red dots).

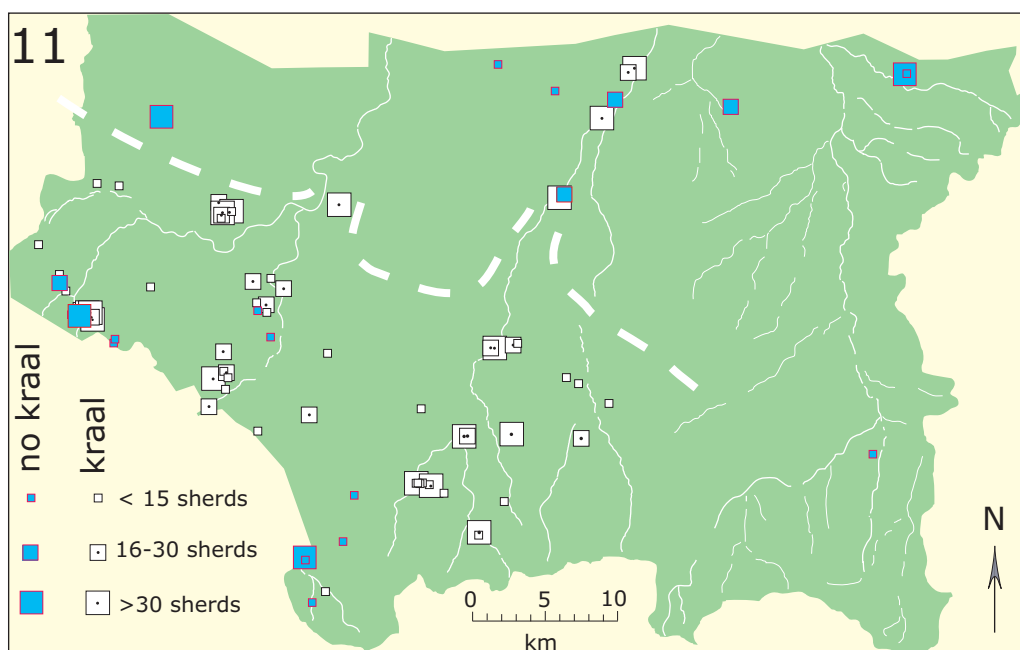


9. Occupants of many "pure" Khoe sites (dark blue circles) built stone kraals (brown dots), but some did not (open circles). This map shows all the sites with pottery sherds *and* a stone kraal either in the middle or at the very edge of the sherd scatter. All the uncircled brown dots mark true herder sites with a kraal surrounded by (and sometimes surrounding) a mixture of Khoe and Bushman pottery.

This pattern hints that we may be dealing with incoming (Khoe?) herders who are interacting intensively with resident Bushman hunter-foragers, and that some Bushmen were acquiring livestock of their own. Let's explore this possibility further.



10. If so much pottery was being exchanged between the two groups, then Khoe kraals should be those with the most Khoe sherds. When we take an arbitrary cutoff at $>60\%$ Khoe sherds to mark any Khoe kraal [white squares], and less than 34% Khoe sherds (i.e. 66% fiber-temper sherds) to mark a Bushman kraal (pink circles), a clearer pattern emerges. The incoming Herders are in the headwaters, and the Bushmen kraals are farther down-river i.e. north of the dashed white line. Khoe herders also penetrated downstream along the banks of the central tributary. Sites with $59\text{--}35\%$ Khoe sherds (faint hexagonals) fall into the either-or mixed (or overlapping) category. The smaller sherd samples (<15 sherds) yield statistically less reliable percentage values.



11. There are also a few Khoe sites, with $>60\%$ Khoe sherds, that have *no* kraals (blue squares). These may mark the locations of Khoe foraging parties who went out from other kraal bases to hunt and to collect edible roots. If so (there are other possibilities), those northernmost Khoe herders on the central tributary must have had permission to forage in the territory occupied by the Bushman-with-sheep. There are a great many more "mixed" sites ($59\text{--}35\%$ Khoe sherds) without kraals in both territories (not shown).

Maybe from the South? Did the Khoekhoe come here from the north and move up the Seacow River as originally proposed by Elphick (frame 1)? The sequence of Khoe pottery designs (SPINC/SPIMP, then LUND, then LINC), as demonstrated in the Western Cape, has not been replicated in the upper Seacow valley. All we can say is that all four types are present (frame 7), not that they arrived in the same order. If they did, then frame 7 would certainly hint at an up-river expansion. The sequence of AMS C-14 radiocarbon dates from fiber-temper sherds at kraals shows a very similar pattern - the oldest dates are in the northwest, and they get younger as we move upstream. But these could be spurious coincidences - the archaeological record is full of such misleading patterns.

Our maps lend more robust support to a scenario in which the Khoekhoe came up through the Sneeu Berg Mt passes from the *south*, but ran into stiff resistance from the resident Upper Seacow River Bushmen. This would mimic the fate of the Dutch *trekboeren* in the AD 1790's when their northward dispersal nearly came to grief along the very same line shown in frames 10-11. But the *trekboeren* had horses and guns that enabled them to blast their way through, albeit after a decade or so of skirmishes and commando raids. The prehistoric Khoekhoe, no better armed than the Bushmen, may have negotiated a (probably uneasy) but long-lasting truce that allowed them to remain in place, but permanently surrounded by local Bushman hunter-foragers.

Frontier Give and Take. In due time the Bushmen closest to the incoming Khoe herders would have entered into all kinds of interactions with their new neighbours. They began to exchange pottery along with other gifts and payments, that soon included livestock. Certain Bushmen came to be employed as shepherds on a daily basis, and then as client-herders left in charge of flocks for whole seasons at a time. Eventually they became outright owners of their own herds and flocks. Khoe herders nearest to the boundary line were permitted to forage in the territory of the Bushmen-with-sheep (and cattle). Our data suggest that the Bushmen took it as their right to continue foraging in the headwaters, that is within the newcomers' territory, and that the latter made little or no moves to keep them out. To avoid clutter, the maps on display here omit the hundreds of Bushman foraging camps (sites with less than 30% Khoe sherds, and no kraal) scattered all over *both* territories.

Patches of Resistance. The maps shown here also omit the large number of "pure" Bushman sites (100% fiber-temper sherds, no kraals). These are also scattered across both territories and are particularly dense in the large blank area between the central and west tributaries in frame 10. It is tempting to suppose there were pockets of traditional Bushman hunter-foragers who kept to themselves and who wanted nothing to do with the new intruders, their livestock, or their fancy pots. Incidentally, Elphick also predicted such pockets of resistance.

When Did they Leave? The combined evidence from dated sherds and our excavations (frame 5) indicates Khoe pottery production ceased a little before A.D. 1700. The rockshelter labelled "HAA 1" in frame 10 also shows that Bushmen-with-sheep built kraals there around this time. This may well explain the presence of other Bushmen-with-sheep kraals deep within Khoe herder territory (frame 10). If the Khoekhoe had withdrawn, for whatever reason, Bushmen herders were able to expand into the vacated headwaters.

If archival sources are to be trusted, even the Bushmen-with-sheep had disappeared from the upper Seacow valley by the time the *trekboeren* arrived. Alas, these sources are deeply suspect because they are all commando reports in which any livestock seen in the possession of "Boschesman-Hottentoten" were deemed to be stolen from Dutch farmers and duly 'recovered' with much violence and slave-taking. One frail bit of archaeological evidence supports their case: a thin layer of deposit *without any livestock* occurs in HAA 1 immediately below the final, dense accumulation of historical rubbish containing all sorts of European livestock (even pigs and turkeys).

Once the commando phase of frontier mayhem had been stopped by the British government, there were somewhat puzzled reports by local Dutch stockfarmers describing how quickly and knowingly the local Bushmen took to livestock management. When Burchell passed through here in 1819 he was told by his Dutch host that the Bushmen had once owned their own livestock, but had lost them in some unknown calamity.