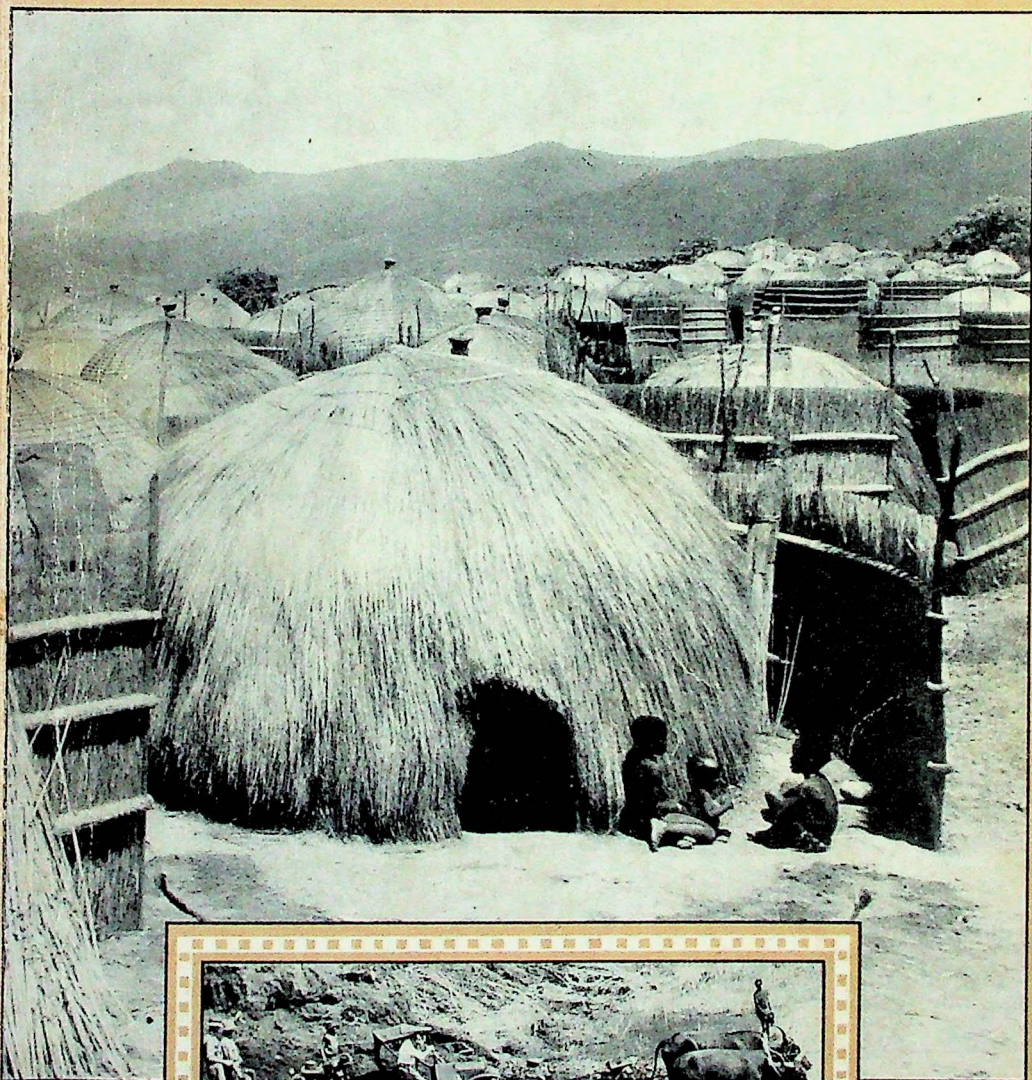
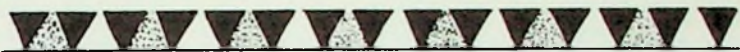


— a historical tour —
of the Ngwane and Ndwandwe kingdoms
IN THE TRACKS OF THE SWAZI PAST



by Michael Westcott & Carolyn Hamilton



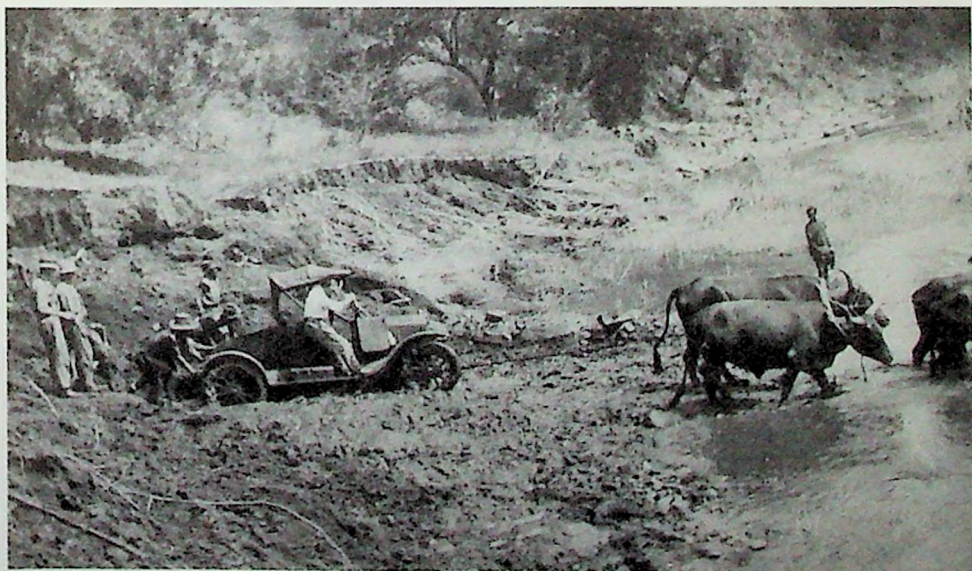


In the tracks of the
Swazi past:

**a historical tour of the Ngwane
and Ndwandwe kingdoms.**

**Compiled by Michael Westcott for the
Swaziland Oral History Project**

Editor: Carolyn Hamilton



In the tracks of the Swazi past:
a historical tour of the Ngwane and Ndwandwe kingdoms.

1992

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Preface

The heart of Swaziland lies between its two largest towns, Mbabane and Manzini. Here, in the eZulwini Valley, are Lobamba (the late King Sobhuza II's royal residence) and Ludzidzini (a new residence of Mswati III), the House of Parliament, the National Museum and Archives, and the Somhlolo National Stadium. In the 1830s, King Sobhuza I erected the first capital of the Swazi kingdom here.

To find out how this happened we are going to take you on a journey into

the past. We will visit historical sites in southern Swaziland and northern Natal (in the Republic of South Africa).

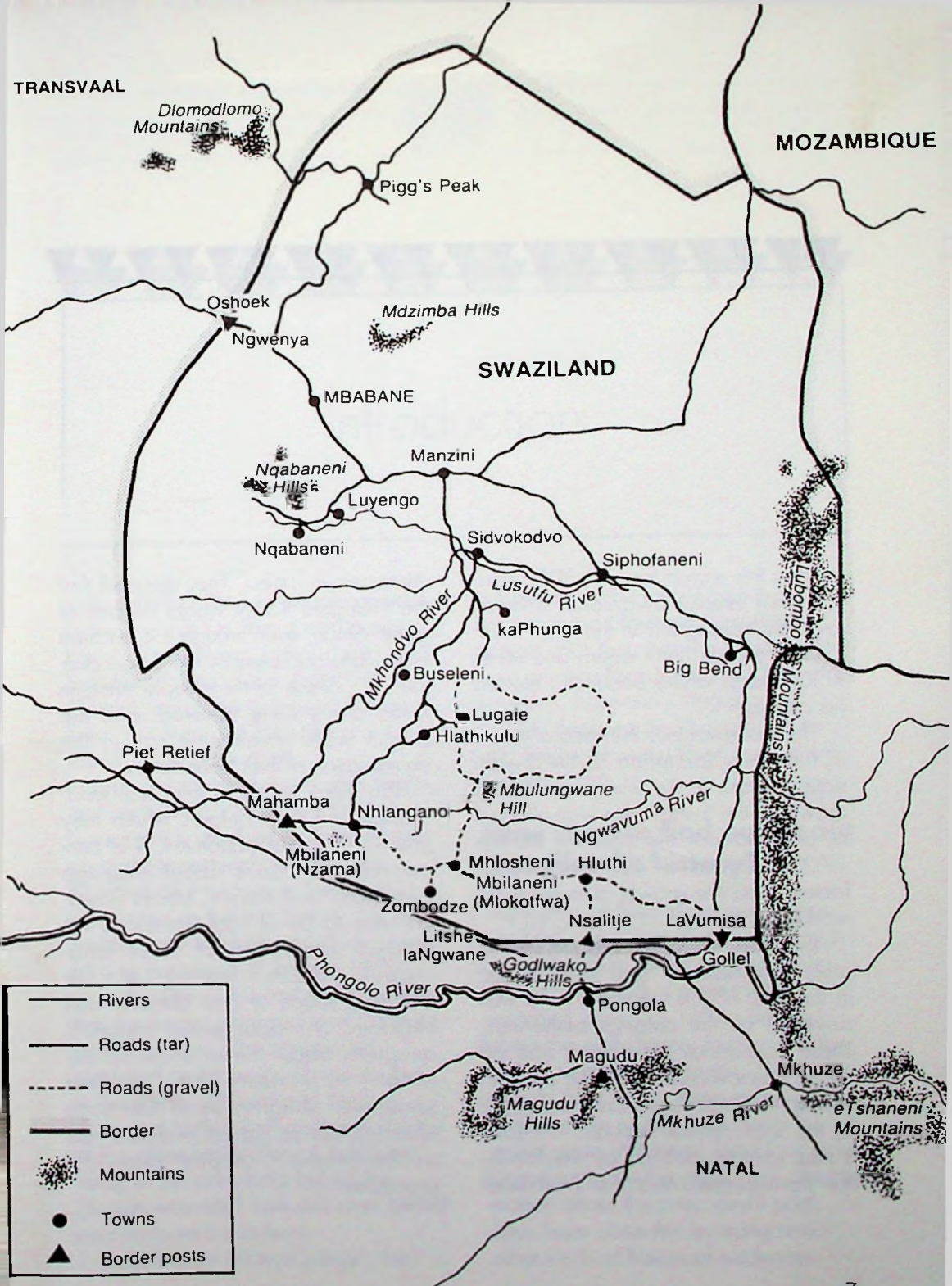
Our tour follows the migratory route of the ancestors of the people who are now the ruling house of Swaziland – the Dlamini. En route we will also look at the history of the many peoples encountered by the Dlamini on their journey.

The tour starts at Lobamba, and then proceeds southwards across the border into South Africa. Swazi people have



▲ Lobamba in the eZulwini Valley, showing the House of Parliament (far left), the National Museum (centre), and the National Church (right). The Mdzimba Mountains form the backdrop.

Map of the area covered by the tour ►





lived in this region for over 300 years. We then re-enter Swaziland, heading towards Nhlangano in the south west. Finally, we go north again and return to Lobamba, where Sobhuza I erected his capital.

The tour examines the various stages in the early formation of the Swazi state. It looks at the way in which the growth of the Swazi state was affected by other states in the region in the late 1700s, as well as by environmental factors, and the growth of trading networks.

The map shows the present boundaries of Swaziland. They were formed in the late 1800s when the land was surveyed by the colonial authorities. These boundaries have been, and still are, a controversial issue. The southern border of Swaziland was proclaimed by the South African Republic in 1868. It was formally defined by the British, the Portuguese, and the Transvaal

Afrikaners in 1880. They decided that the Phongolo Valley would be part of South Africa, even though it is an area historically occupied by the Swazi people. The needs of the people living in these areas were ignored, and the Swazi were given little say in the demarcation of their boundaries.

This book is about physical landscapes and the contours which they give to historical narratives. It is concerned with stories about long-ago migrations and travels, stories which continue to be of vital interest to the modern inhabitants of these landscapes. In its tracing of the changing shape of past domains and kingdoms, the book poses important questions about the relationship between territories and national identities, obliging us to see such identities, not as natural or innate, but as the products of past historical processes.



Introduction

When the first Dlamini people arrived in the late 1700s, they found a number of clans already living in the Swaziland area. Some joined the Dlamini, and other clans arrived much later. The history of Swaziland is the history of all these clans.

Many clans are named after important ancestors. The Dlamini people were once a small group named after an early ancestor called 'Dlamini'. Together all the clans in Swaziland are known as the *emaSwati*. This name comes from Mswati II, a powerful king who lived in the mid-1800s.

In the time of Mswati II, the country that the Swazi inhabited was far larger than it is today. The boundaries extended as far as the Phongolo River in the south, and well into the Transvaal to the north and west. Many of the clans under Mswati had been living in this area long before the Dlamini extended their rule over central and northern Swaziland.

Long before Mswati's reign, the

people under the royal Dlamini were known as the Ngwane. They were named after King Ngwane, who ruled over an area far smaller than Mswati's kingdom. Ngwane's kingdom lay roughly between the Phongolo River and the Ngwavuma River in the south of Swaziland.

How can we find out about Swaziland's history?

The history of Swaziland began thousands of years ago. But it was only in the mid-1800s, when the first white traders arrived, that events were recorded in writing. Little is known about the early history because of the lack of **written** evidence, and some people think that nothing exciting happened in precolonial times. In recent years, however, historians have begun to find out a great deal of information about the precolonial past. They have done this by using two other kinds of historical evidence:

oral traditions and physical evidence.

The term 'precolonial' is used in this booklet to refer to the period of history before (pre) the widespread advent of writing, associated with colonialism. 'Precolonial history' is a handy, but unsatisfactory, term. It suggests that the thousands of years before colonial rule were a single historical period, unbroken by important changes. In fact, as we shall see, precolonial times themselves can be divided into several periods of major change.

Oral traditions

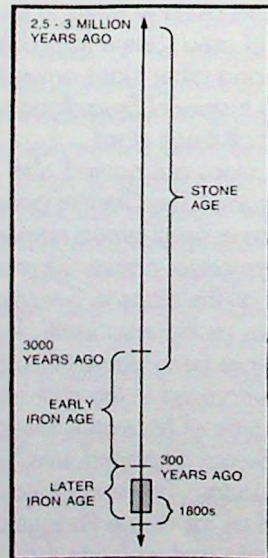
Oral traditions are the spoken accounts of peoples' history that are passed down from generation to generation. This means that we can **hear** about the way people lived, and where they came from centuries ago.

Swazi society has an extensive body of oral traditions. These oral traditions are filled with rich descriptions of historical sites which we can still see today. Seeing these places adds to our experience of hearing or reading about them.

The historical information contained in this booklet is based on oral

Archaeological remains

Archaeologists have divided the precolonial past into the Stone Age and Iron Age. The Iron Age has been divided further into the Early and Later Iron Age. The diagram gives some idea of the divisions involved. On this tour we shall be looking at the short period shaded in the diagram, namely the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. (See also *Physical evidence* on page 11.)



▲ Time-line showing divisions between the Stone Age, Iron Age and the period immediately before colonial rule in Swaziland.



Members of the Swaziland Oral History Project interviewing a Swaziland oral historian.

traditions collected and recorded by the Swaziland Oral History Project (SWOHP) between 1983 and 1987. This information was gained from the oral historians – the old people of Swaziland – who recall what their grandparents told them about the past.

The old people narrate the history of Swaziland through constant reference to the landscape and to special sites. Historians today call such sites physical evidence, but to the old

people they are more than that. The landscape and the sites are their map of the past.

Physical evidence

Physical evidence enables us to test the accuracy of oral traditions and to create a fuller picture of the past.

Physical evidence includes: archaeological remains; sites of old settlements; graves and caves; and the environment. On this tour we will **see** all of these different types of physical evidence.



**Remains of a stone-walled enclosure
in the Highveld of Swaziland.**

In Swaziland there is some archaeological evidence for the precolonial past. Most of it concerns the Stone Age, although some Iron Age mines, stone-walled enclosures and furnaces have also been found.

(See also Archaeological remains on page 10)

Environment

The physical surroundings in which people lived influenced the early history of Swaziland. On this tour we will see the importance of the environment for human activities in the past. Height above sea-level, terrain (hills or plains), rainfall, and the quality of the soil, all affect the way in which people use land. The environment has a direct impact on human activity.

By examining environmental conditions we discover why people in the past chose to live in particular places. Some people lived on steep, rugged mountains because they needed to defend themselves from constant attack. Others, who settled on flat plains, probably had no enemies to disturb them.

In Lowveld areas where soils were good, grazing was available all year round, but summer diseases and pests killed off many cattle. In the hills there were fewer diseases, but the grass was too poor for winter grazing. The ideal area for settlement was one where cattle could feed in the Lowveld in winter and on the hillsides in summer. An area consisting of both hills and plains within a short distance



of each other was the perfect environment. These conditions exist around Mhlosheni in the south of Swaziland, and this was one of the reasons why

the early Nguni people chose to settle there. They also chose to live in river valleys where the soil is fertile.

Swaziland is made up of three environmental regions



Typical Swaziland Highveld.

THE HIGHVELD (for example: Pigg's Peak)

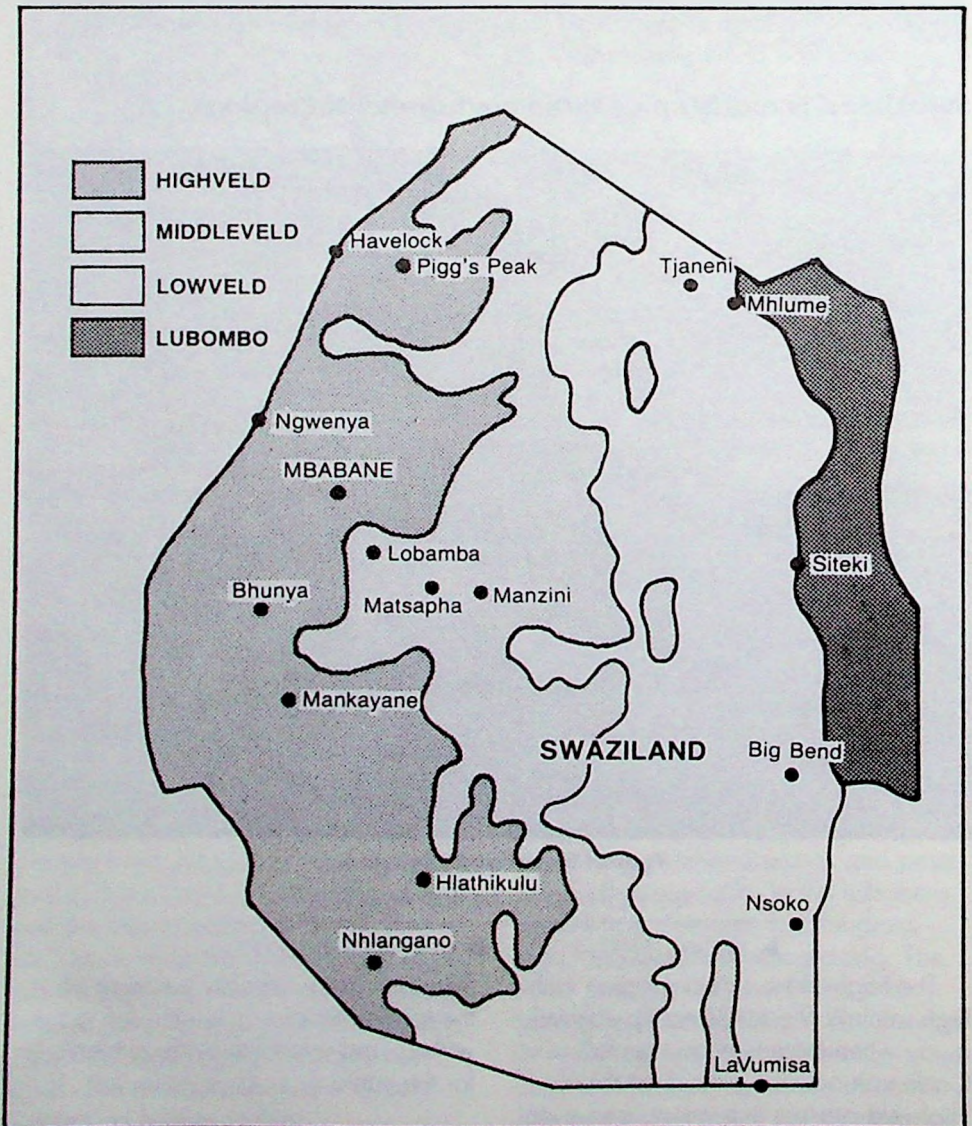
▶ **HEIGHT:** 1100 - 2100m

▶ **RAINFALL:** 750 - 1000mm

The Highveld is a rocky region with high rainfall. The soil is easily washed away when there is heavy rainfall. Cattle can only be grazed on the Highveld grasses in summer, and even

then with great difficulty because of the rugged terrain. In winter, the grass withers and cannot provide nutrients for the cattle.

Relief map of Swaziland.





THE MIDDLEVELD (for example: Manzini)

Typical Swaziland Middleveld.

▶ **HEIGHT:** 300 - 1050m ▶ **RAINFALL:** 500 - 750mm

The hills of the Middleveld are lower and more rounded than the mountains of the Highveld. Although

the soil is inferior to that of the Lowveld, this region has the best relief for grazing.



Typical Swaziland Lowveld.

THE LOWVELD (for example: Mbuluzi Loop)

▶ **HEIGHT:** 150 - 300m ▶ **RAINFALL:** 500 - 750mm

The Lowveld is a shallow relief plain with good soils, but cattle diseases and malaria are prevalent.

The annual rainfall is low. There is not enough water for cattle during six out of ten summers.

Heading South on a Journey into the Past

Sobhuza I built Lobamba in central Swaziland in about 1830. From this capital he controlled a kingdom which extended beyond the present boundaries of Swaziland to the Sabie River in the north, the Steenkampsberg in the west and the Phongolo River in the south. To trace the origins of this kingdom we must look to the east, beyond the Lubombo Mountains. We must begin this journey into the past by taking the road south from the eZulwini Valley to Siphofaneni.

Manzini

A few kilometres after the turn-off to Siphofaneni is the town of Manzini. It is the largest town in Swaziland. Manzini began as a small settlement around a trading store in a tent, on the banks of the Mzimnene stream about 14 kilometres away from King Mbandzeni's capital, Mbekelweni. The trading store was set up in 1885 by a man called Bob Rogers. The fol-

lowing year Rogers was bought out by two concessionaires, Albert Bremer and W Wallenstein. They built another trading store and a hotel on the site of the original store.

Old trading store, Manzini.



The settlement became known to the Swazi as Manzini. The Swazi historian, J S Matsebula, notes that there is a debate about where this name came from. One suggestion is that the name comes from that of Chief Manzini Motsa, who was in charge of the area in which the settlement was built. However, there were also two



other Swazi called 'Manzini' who had their homesteads near where the town now stands, Manzini Motsa and Manzini Mkhathjwa. Yet another suggestion is that the name comes from that of 'Mantini' or 'Manzini', a Portuguese bottle store owner. Matsebula records the following:

To all Swazis all whites came from water (the sea); hence they were regarded as watermen – mantini or manzini. Mantini first had a bottle store near the king's residence at Mbekelweni. One day the king's regiments became rowdy, and investigations revealed that the men were drunk. The king thereupon ordered the removal of Mantini's shop to a spot where the town was later to develop. The king maintained that if his regiments got drunk they would be sober by the time they walked to his residence.

Other sources claim that 'Manzini' was Albert Bremer's Swazi name. Bremer was an early trader and hotel owner in Swaziland. When the first official white Government was set up in Swaziland in 1894, Bremer's hotel was bought and became the administrative headquarters of the Government. Bremer sold his hotel on condition that the township which was to be built there should be known as 'Bremersdorp'. The town continued to have two names, Manzini and Bremersdorp, until 1963 when the official name became Manzini.

Lubombo Mountains

The first stop on our tour is Siphofaneni, 36 kilometres south east of Manzini, on the banks of the Lusutfu River. Here we see a marked change in the landscape. The small hills and plains of the Middleveld give way to the flat land of the Lowveld. There is little rain in this area, so for much of the year the vegetation is brown and dry. This area is known as the 'bushveld' because of the scattered thorn trees and stunted bushes that grow here. However, the soil is good because rich minerals, that are important for plant growth, are not washed away. This means that grass for cattle grazing is abundant.

East of Siphofaneni the Lubombo Mountains emerge like a pale blue wall in the distance. They stretch along the length of Swaziland's eastern border. In the north they separate Swaziland from Mozambique; in the south they separate Swaziland from the Ngwavuma region of South Africa. The Lubombo Mountains form an escarpment and a plateau that slope steeply westwards into the Swaziland Lowveld. At their highest point they stand 700 metres above sea-level. Deep river gorges breach the mountains at intervals.

The name 'Lubombo' derives from the word *umbombo* meaning 'the bridge of the nose', and indeed it is



View of the Lubombo Mountains from across the Lowveld.

an apt description for this largely unbroken range. A dramatic physical feature, and a natural barrier between the coastal plains and the interior of south-east Africa, the Lubombo Mountains are often mentioned in Swazi oral traditions.

In the early 1700s the ancestors of the royal Dlamini lived on the east side of the Lubombo Mountains under their early kings, Sidwabasilutfuli, Mswati I, Ludvonga I, and others. Their home was at Mavaneni, near the modern town of kwaMkhwanazi. The royal house split into a number of groups who travelled separately across the Lubombo Mountains. There are two stories of how this split happened:

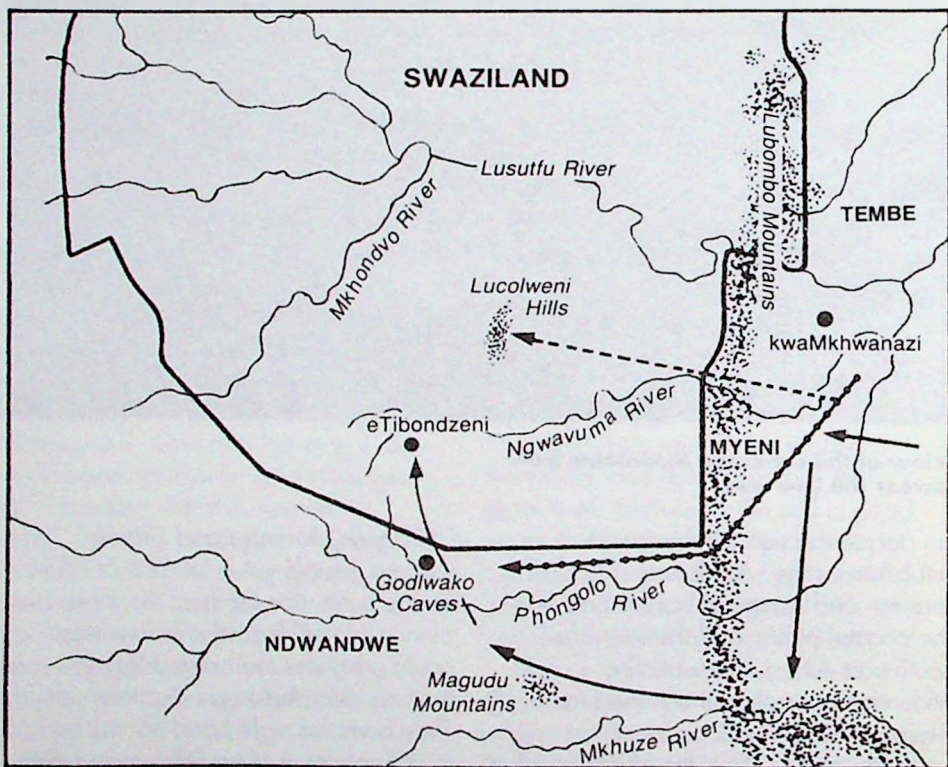
i) **Simbimba Ndlela** told this story:

Hlubi was the son of the early king, Ludvonga. Hlubi had three brothers,

Loziyingile, Mamba and Dlamini. Certain people were jealous of Hlubi because he was the heir. So they planned to kill him. But before they could carry out their plan Hlubi's mothers decided to protect their son. They burnt his right hand so that he could not use it. As a left-handed person cannot become king, Hlubi's brother, Dlamini, was chosen as king instead. The people who were Hlubi's followers decided to seek a new home. They climbed the Lubombo Mountains and stayed on the top. They stayed with the Myeni people. Ndlela, from whom my people get their name, was born there.

ii) **Logwaja Mamba** told a different story:

Dlamini was the son of the early king, Langa. He had one brother



- ← - - - - Hlubi's journey
- ← ······ Ngwane's journey
- ← ———— Mamba's journey

Map showing the early journeys of the various sections of the royal house.



called Hlubi. Langa felt that even though Dlamini was the eldest son, he was not suitable for the kingship. So he thought up a plan to take the kingship away from Dlamini and give it to the younger son, Hlubi. He ordered Hlubi and Dlamini each to skin one head of cattle. The one who skinned their beast quickest would become the king. But Langa gave a blunt knife to Dlamini and a sharp knife to Hlubi. Hlubi finished skinning his beast first

and so gained the kingship. Then the two groups left their home in the east. We Mamba people, the descendants of Dlamini, went up the Ngwavuma River on our journey. The descendants of Hlubi went up the Phongolo River.' The groups who later became known as 'bakaNdllela' and 'bakaDlamini' travelled southwards, skirting around the bottom edge of the Lubombo Mountains. The people who later became known as 'bakaMamba'



Ngwavuma breach: the route through the Lubombo Mountains taken by Mamba and his people.



The Ngwavuma River and breach

The Ngwavuma River rises in the eastern Transvaal and flows eastwards across Swaziland. It cuts through the Lubombo Mountains to form the Ngwavuma breach, between the Nyawo chiefdom and its Myeni neighbour.

'Breach' or 'poort' (Afrikaans) is a term describing the channel cut through a mountain range by a river. The Ngwavuma breach can be seen clearly from the LaVumisa road, about 10 kilometres south of Big Bend.

The Ngwavuma breach is mentioned in many Swazi oral traditions as it forms a route through the Lubombo. Early travellers used the breach as a kind of 'highway' connecting the coastal plains around modern-day Maputo with the interior of south-east Africa.

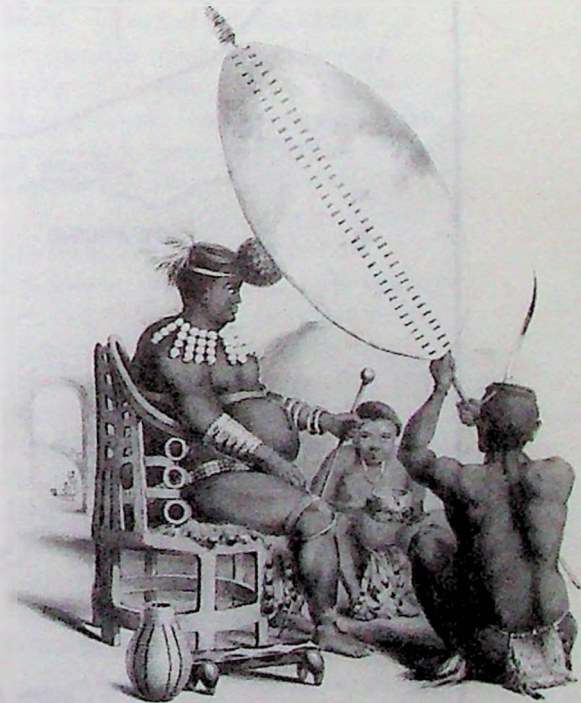
migrated westwards from Mavaneni and crossed the Lubombo through the Ngwavuma breach in about 1750. They settled in the Lowveld, west of the mountain range in a wide area around the Lucolweni Hills.

Chiefdoms on the Move: the Matsenjwa, Mngometulu, Nyawo and Myeni Peoples

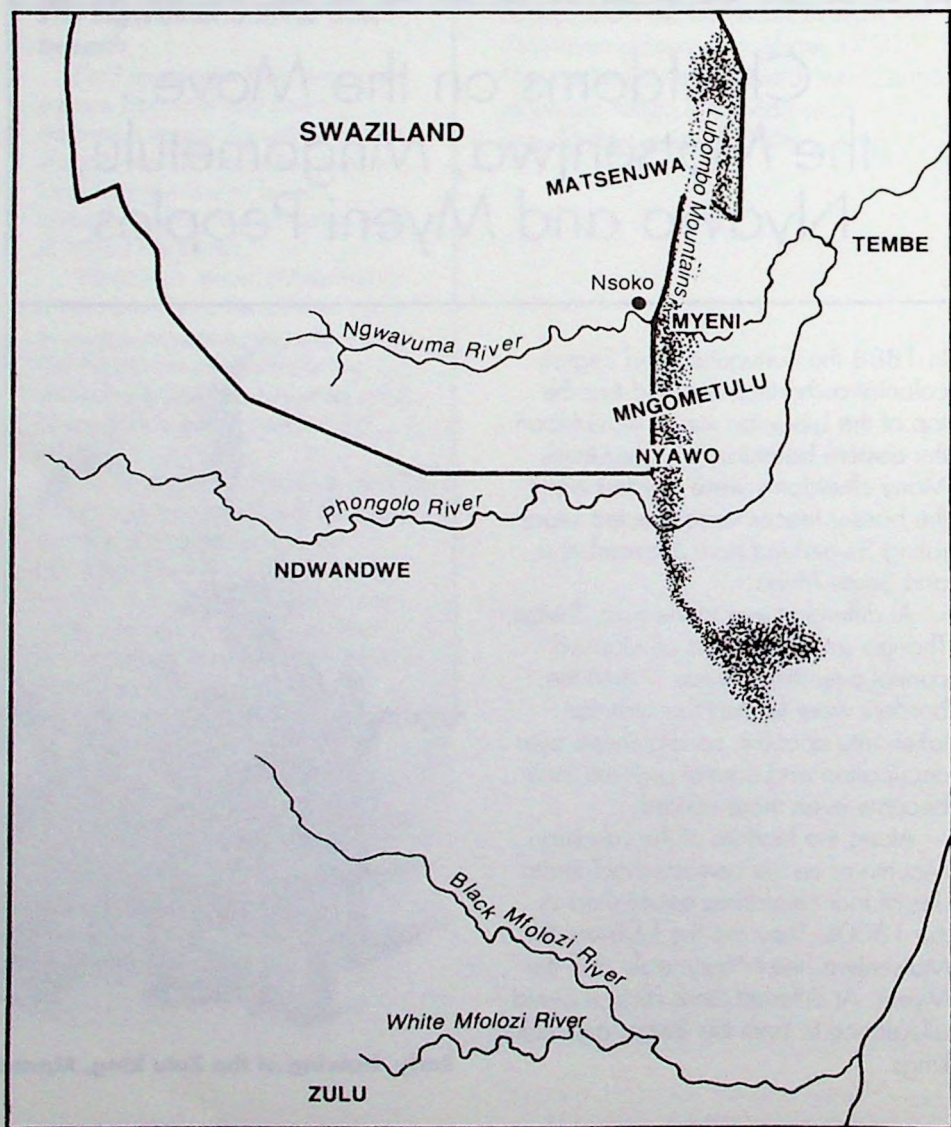
In 1888 the Portuguese and English colonial authorities decided that the top of the Lubombo range would form the eastern boundary of Swaziland. Many chiefdoms were divided when the border fences were erected separating Swaziland from Mozambique and South Africa.

At different times in the past, Swazi, Thonga and Zulu rulers all claimed control over these areas. When the borders were formed this was not taken into account, so arguments over occupation and control over the land became even more heated.

Along the foothills of the Lubombo Mountains lie the contested old territories of four chiefdoms established in the 1800s. They are the Nyawo, the Matsenjwa, the Mngometulu and the Myeni. At different times all four owed allegiance to both the Swazi and Zulu kings.



Early drawing of the Zulu king, Mpande.



Present-day Lubombo chiefdoms.



The Matsenjwa people

The Matsenjwa lived immediately south of the Lusutfu River. They settled in this area before the arrival of the royal Ngwane from the east.

The history of the Matsenjwa people is linked to that of both the Mngometulu and the Zulu. In the mid-nineteenth century they were attacked by the Mngometulu chief, Lubelo. They were forced to flee southwards to Zululand where they gained permission from King Mpande to rebuild their homesteads. After Lubelo's death in about 1860 they returned to settle in the Lubombo Mountains. They were not left in peace for long. In the late 1800s, Mpande's son, Cetshwayo, seized their mountain stronghold which he planned to use as a base for Zulu expansion into southern Swaziland. The Matsenjwa were forced to move east of the Lubombo into the area that is today Mozambique. When the British took control of this area in 1887, the Matsenjwa returned once again to their Lubombo home.

The Mngometulu people

One branch of the Mngometulu people are to be found on the flat land below the Lubombo Mountains, just east of the Ngwavuma River. Another branch of the Mngometulu live on top

of the mountain range in South Africa. The Mngometulu claim to have lived in the north-eastern Transvaal before they came to the Ngwavuma River. They probably arrived in this region before the ancestors of the present rulers of Swaziland crossed the Lubombo in about 1750.

About two hundred years ago the Mngometulu were very powerful. They attacked many of their neighbours and seized their land. Some, like the Vilane, accepted the rule of the Mngometulu chief after they were defeated in battle. Others, like the Mphukhunyoni, were pillaged by the Mngometulu army and fled far to the south of Swaziland.

By about 1815, under their chief Zondiwe, the Mngometulu had become so strong that people fleeing from the Ndwandwe kingdom in the south begged them for land. People like the Myeni sought protection after being pushed northwards by the Ndwandwe. In the 1830s, Ndwandwe refugees escaping from Zulu armies, asked for Zondiwe's help. The Mngometulu gained cattle from the many refugees who passed through their territory. In this way, they became wealthy and powerful.

Zondiwe feared that he would be the Zulu's next target and he and a section of the Mngometulu people joined the refugees fleeing northwards.

The bulk of the Mngometulu people



Cattle that were stolen twice

Cattle passed through many hands on the Lubombo. Oral tradition relates that Zondiwe once stole a herd of cattle from the Ndwandwe that had, in turn, been raided from the Nyawo people. This herd was known as 'the cattle that were stolen twice'.

remained behind, but the Zulu did not attack them. By 1850 the Mngometulu had sufficient military strength to control a number of neighbouring chiefdoms along the Lubombo. Under their new leader, Lubelo, they also forced groups like the Myeni and the Matsenjwa to flee southwards to Zululand.

Their strength did not last. By about 1860, the Mngometulu had been defeated in battle by the Nyawo people. Lubelo ran for his life, but he chose the wrong direction and went straight into territory controlled by the great Swazi king, Mswati II. There he was killed by one of Mswati's *emabutfo* (regiments).

Subsequently, the Mngometulu people came under the control of the Swazi kings. Today one section of the clan lives within Swaziland, and another in South Africa. The boundary defined by the colonial powers in the

1880s cuts through the territory of the Mngometulu people.

The Nyawo people

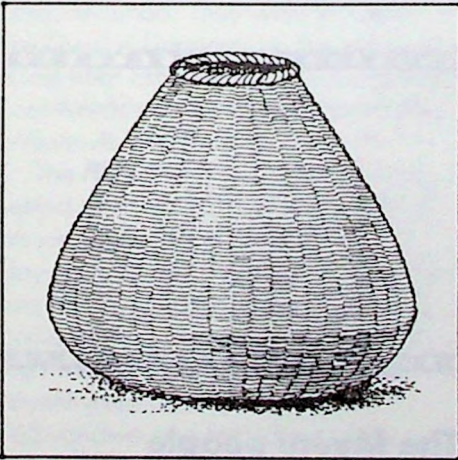
Like the Mngometulu, the Nyawo people also live on both sides of the border. They did not always live on the Lubombo. Nyawo historians claim that their people came 'rolling in a *silulu*', from a place called Sothaka, far to the west of present-day Swaziland. We do not know when they moved to the Lubombo, or why they did so.

According to oral tradition, the Nyawo were skilled in the preparation of medicines. They were particularly expert in preparing medicines to cure people bitten by poisonous snakes. They gathered all the plants that they needed for their medicines in the thick bush along the slopes of the Lubombo. In this way they became famous as *tinyanga*, or healers.

The Zulu king, Dingane, met his end in the Nyawo chiefdom in 1840. He fled there after he was defeated by his brother, Mpande, and the Natal Boers. Nyawo informants stated that their people discovered Dingane in the dense Hlathikulu bush and reported his presence to a royal military patrol led by Sonyezane Dlamini. The patrol surrounded Dingane, who was helpless because he had few men to protect him. Dingane was reputedly killed by



A silulu (pl. tilulu) is a large woven grass basket with a dung lid. In the past, tilulu were used for storing grain. A number of people, such as the Nyawo, Simelane and Hlophe, speak of 'rolling in a silulu' from their places of origin, and coming to settle in Swaziland. Today, these people cannot explain the meaning of this unusual and puzzling tradition. For more about the silulu origin tradition, see p 56.



A silulu: traditional grain basket.

Silevana Nyawo, brother of the Nyawo regent at the time.

In the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the Nyawo, under their chief Sambane, attacked and defeated the

Mngometulu people. The Mngometulu, in turn, summoned the assistance of a powerful Zulu chief, Zibhebhu. Faced with this grave threat, the Nyawo fled deep into the Lubombo Mountains. Here, hidden in the forests and the caves, they eluded their Zulu attackers.

It is in this forested area that the Nyawo remain today. Their chiefs are buried in the Hlathikulu forest which is on top of the mountain range.



Chief Zibhebhu kaMapitha.



Chief Sambane Nyawo (left) and Mahlasela Nyawo (right) from whom many of the details of Dingane's death were originally obtained.

The site of Dingane's grave on the Lubombo Mountains, located by (from left to right) J Fenwick, Acting Chief Zibunu, Acting Native Commissioner L Conyngham and H C Lugg, on 27 February 1947.



The grave site is known as eSikoleni (variant: eSankoleni). There is a deep ravine just below the grave that runs into the Hlathikulu forest. The site overlooks the laVumisa railway station and is marked by a large fig tree (umkhiwane) with three large stones around the trunk.

The Myeni people

The Myeni are another of the chiefdoms located along the Lubombo. One section lives at the foot of the Lubombo Mountains in the Swazi Lowveld. Another section lives on the east side of the Lubombo in the Jozini area of South Africa.



A long time back, say the Myeni, they lived in the area around Babanango in Zululand. Since then they have moved many times. The travels of the Myeni are recorded in their praises:

You of the south, you crossed the Mkhuze and recrossed it... you Ntsinde of the elephants... you of the house which is not opened by idle people, but is opened by industrious people... you also crossed the Mfolozi and little Mfolozi.

During the eighteenth century, the Myeni left Babanango, under their chief, Mlambo. They went to live in the Qwabe kingdom, on the Zululand coast near Eshowe. Later, they moved northwards into the rapidly expanding Mithethwa kingdom.

The Mithethwa leader, Dingiswayo, settled them on the northern border of his kingdom, in the area of modern-day Mtubatuba. Dingiswayo hoped to use the Myeni as a buffer against his powerful and aggressive neighbours, the Ndwandwe. Before long, the Myeni were attacked by the Ndwandwe and forced out of the area. They moved on to the top of the Lubombo Mountains where they settled under the Mngometulu.

In about 1840, when Mpande became king of the Zulu, one section of the Myeni left the Lubombo and settled on the flat land around the Mkhuze River. Here water was plenti-

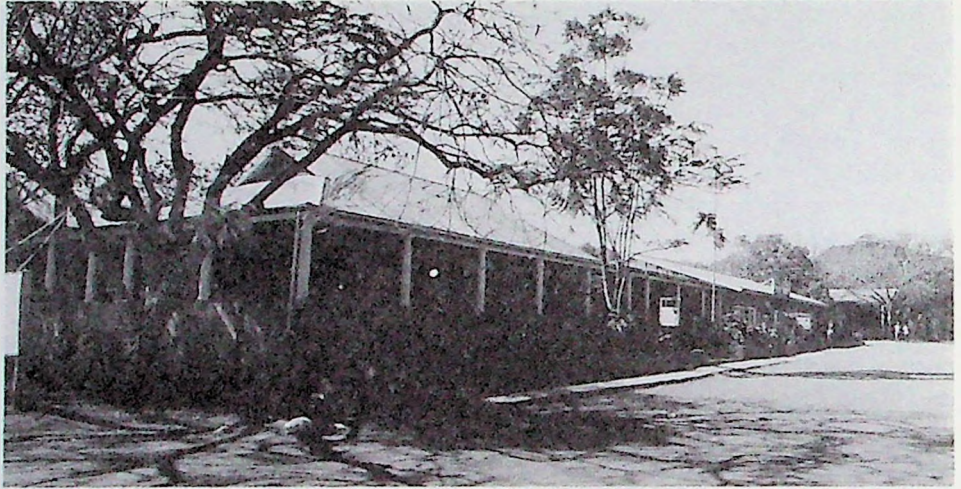
ful and the soil better than in the mountains, so the Myeni prospered.

About twenty years later, the other section of the Myeni which had remained on the Lubombo, were forced out by the Mngometulu. They too, travelled south into the Zulu kingdom, and were given land by Mpande.

In the 1880s, the Myeni people returned again to the Lubombo region. Some stayed with the Nyawo people. Another group under the leadership of Sipike I moved back into the Mngometulu chiefdom with permission from Mbandzeni (1884–1889), king of the Swazi. The Myeni have remained there ever since. Like the Mngometulu, the Myeni were divided when the Swaziland boundary fence was put through the middle of their chiefdom.

LaVumisa

Leaving Big Bend behind us, we travel south to cross the border into South Africa at the town of LaVumisa. LaVumisa is divided by the border with half the town in Swaziland, and the other half in South Africa. In 1969, a year after Swaziland gained independence, the name of the Swazi half was changed from Gollel to LaVumisa. At that time many Swazi people wanted to replace English or Afrikaans town and street names with *siSwati*



Old hotel (still standing), LaVumisa.

ones. The name 'Gollel' is still used for the town on the South African side of the border.

The Swazi side of Gollel was renamed 'LaVumisa' after one of the wives of Sobhuza I, the Swazi king who ruled in the early nineteenth century. LaVumisa was a royal Ndwandwe woman of high standing: her father was the brother of Zwide, the Ndwandwe king. Together with Tsandzile, one of Zwide's daughters, she was chosen as a wife for Sobhuza. Special envoys were sent by the Swazi king to the Ndwandwe to make the marriage arrangements and bring the women back to the royal capital.

One tradition has it that Sobhuza himself travelled to the Ndwandwe country. On the night of his arrival at the Ndwandwe capital, Magudu, rain was falling in great torrents. The rivers were flooding and the sky was black. Zwide would not see Sobhuza that night. The following morning, when the rain stopped, Zwide sent a message that he was prepared to see Sobhuza, but he was jealous of Sobhuza's rain-making powers.

At first he planned Sobhuza's death. Ntombazi, Zwide's mother, heard of this and successfully pleaded with the Ndwandwe king to spare his Swazi visitor. Then Zwide decided to make an alliance with Sobhuza. He offered the Swazi king three women – Tsandzile, File and LaVumisa – to take



back to Swaziland as his wives. In Swaziland, LaVumisa bore a son called Malambule. Many years later, in 1846, Malambule tried to overthrow Sobhuza's successor, Mswati II.

Malambule the rebel

LaVumisa wanted her son, Malambule, to be king when her husband died. But Tsandzile's son, Mswati, was named instead. Mswati was still a child when he was appointed, so Malambule ruled in his place until he was old enough to become king. After Mswati II had been circumcised, he took on some of the powers of kingship. As Mswati was still not old enough to take on the full authority of a king, Malambule continued to rule as the regent. Indeed, Malambule did not want to give up the authority he had gained.

The two men started quarrelling, and in 1845, they reached a point of open conflict. In 1846 Malambule called on the Zulu army to help him attack the young king. Mswati appeared to be in great danger. The Zulu king, Mpande, agreed to send half of his army into Swaziland, but he needed a reason to attack the Swazi. He waited until Mswati had defeated Malambule's rebel forces. Then, when Mswati pursued them into Zulu

territory, he unleashed a large Zulu army deep into Swaziland. The army failed to engage the Swazi in battle as they were hiding in mountain fortresses in the north. Eventually the Zulu army had no option but to return home.

They did not even capture any cattle as these too had been hidden by the Swazi in the cave fortresses. After this, Malambule lost Mpande's support and ceased to be a threat to the Swazi king.

Tsekwane

The area around the town of LaVumisa is known as 'kaTsekwane', the place of Tsekwane. Tsekwane was another of LaVumisa's sons, who fled with Malambule to Zululand. Twenty years after their flight, when Mswati II was close to death, the king began to fear that Tsekwane had been wrongly implicated in the Malambule rebellion. He gave instructions that Tsekwane be pardoned and given land in the kingdom. This was done, and Tsekwane became chief in the area which still bears his name today.

Gollel

The name of the town Gollel, comes from 'Golela' (the gathering place of animals), which was the name of the favourite hunting resort in this area of




Sambane, the nineteenth-century Nyawo chief. Original 'Gollet bush'

can still be seen in places along the road leading south from Gollet.



'Gollet bush', Sambane's hunting ground.



The Early Ngwane and the Powerful Ndwandwe Kingdom

In the early 1700s, many of the original Ngwane people, including the Dlamini, lived in the Tembe-Thonga country east of the Lubombo. This area is now part of Mozambique.

After about 1750 the Ngwane were forced to move first south, and then westwards, into what is now Swaziland. They were pushed out of the Tembe country by the Mabhudu chiefs living around Delagoa Bay (now Maputo).

In the eighteenth century the Mabhudu chiefdoms had grown powerful because of their monopoly over trade at the port. Once the Mabhudu had grown stronger through trade, they wanted more land. For this reason they pushed out smaller, weaker groups like the Ngwane.


The Ngwane moved in small groups towards the Lubombo. They travelled slowly and stopped at many places on the wide plain between the coast and the mountains. When they reached the Lubombo, these groups

moved gradually around the base of the mountain range.

This early journey down the Mozambique side of the Lubombo is mentioned in the oral traditions. We can trace the origins of the royal Dlamini through the words of their praises: *lowacedza Lubombo ngekuh-lehletela etfwele umfuntl* (the one who skirted the Lubombo carrying his little bundles of medicines). This praise tells us that the Dlamini people travelled slowly around the mountain before they crossed at the southern end into the Mkhuze area. They were only forced to cross the Lubombo Mountains when they were attacked by their enemies.

The Mkhuze River

The Mkhuze River is named after the aromatic trees growing along its banks that were used for medicinal tea and as timber for cattle byres. The Mkhuze flows eastwards through the Lubombo



range and then veers sharply south into Lake St Lucia, or 'eCwebeni' (the lagoon), on the Natal coast.

The Ngwane people claim to have come from a place called Mavaneni, near present-day kwaMkhwanazi (see map p20). One section of the Ngwane ancestors, under the leadership of Hlubi, left Mavaneni and crossed the Lubombo Mountains into the Mkhuze River valley. Oral tradition claims that Hlubi's objective was to take his people back to the home of his grandfather, Mswati I, at 'kaBhaca'. The site of kaBhaca meaning 'place of the hideaways', is not known today.

The Mkhuze gap provided a convenient route for the travellers and their cattle. The land they found west of the Lubombo was fertile and rich, but their way was blocked by the powerful Ndwandwe kingdom, ruled at that time by Langa, father of Zwide.

Like the Ngwane under Hlubi, the Ndwandwe also traced their origins to the Tembe-Thonga country around Delagoa Bay, and they jealously guarded their territory near Mkhuze.

In a mighty onslaught at the confluence of the Mkhuze and Nkunzana Rivers, the Ndwandwe *imphi* bore down on the newcomers led by Hlubi. When the two groups clashed the river waters are said to have turned dark from the blood of the dead and wounded. The battle is recorded in a

famous line from the praises of Hlubi: 'Blood of men that made the Mkhuze murky'. The battle turned Hlubi's people from their route to kaBhaca. Instead they moved westwards towards Magudu Mountain.

eTshaneni

At the southern end of the Lubombo, eTshaneni stands up like a giant dog's tooth. It is set apart from the rest of the mountain range.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s a branch of the Ndwandwe, the Gasa people, lived in the eTshaneni area. They take their name from an early ancestor called Gasa, who settled at eTshaneni at much the same time as the earliest Ngwane were crossing the Lubombo mountains (i.e. about 1750). We know little about Gasa himself, except that he was buried on eTshaneni Mountain.

Soshangane and the Gasa people

Oral tradition tells us more about Gasa's grandson, Soshangane. From the late 1700s Soshangane was chief of the Gasa people. The Gasa were the *ikhohlo* or 'left-hand' branch of the Ndwandwe, barred from the Ndwandwe kingship by traditional law. Soshangane was a very powerful chief, even though he was under the



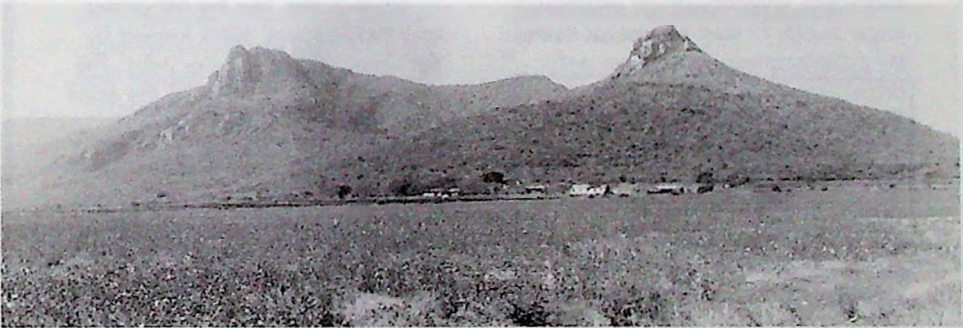
rule of Zwide, the Ndwandwe king at Magudu. Soshangane controlled the Mkhuzi breach, which lay on the trade route between southern Mozambique and the Ndwandwe kingdom. At that time, control over trade was a key to power.

Gasa power

From the top of eTshaneni Mountain, Soshangane's spies could watch peo-

ple approaching from a great distance. No traders could pass through Soshangane's territory without his knowledge. In this way, he was able to dominate the trading relations between the chiefdoms to the south of Ndwandwe, and the merchants at Delagoa Bay.

On top of the eTshaneni stronghold, Soshangane's spies could also watch for an approaching enemy. It was difficult for an army to attack the Gasa



eTshaneni Mountain: the Gasa stronghold.

You can get very close to eTshaneni Mountain by taking the road out of Mkhuzi village to the farm 'Marvarn Estates'. Prior arrangements with the proprietors of the farm will enable you to walk through their estate to the mountain.

It is a steep and rough climb to the summit, but well worth the effort. There is a breathtaking view of the Phongolo Valley and of the winding course of the Mkhuzi.



Trade and power

Trade in south-east Africa became important in the middle of the eighteenth century. At that time many British, Portuguese and Dutch ships stopped at the port of Delagoa Bay, now Maputo. There they exchanged goods which were scarce in Africa like brass, cloth and beads for ivory, a commodity highly valued in Europe, and sometimes for slaves.

Ivory was obtained by hunting elephants. Wealthy chiefs organised large bands of men to hunt for them by promising to reward them with brass, beads and cattle. Even after the rulers had rewarded the bands of hunters sufficiently to retain their loyalty, they still managed to keep most of the trade goods for themselves. They also tried to exclude their neighbours from engaging in the trade. In this way they became even wealthier, and more powerful.

The rulers who already had the largest share of the ivory trade were able to give the biggest rewards to their hunters. They knew that if the rewards were high enough these hunters could be persuaded to fight for them against other hunters who were engaged in the ivory trade. Fierce battles were fought over the control of this trade. It is likely that trade in slaves also led to increased conflict.

Large states, like the Mihethwa and Ndwandwe, were formed by the rulers who won these wars. The states were made up of all the small chiefdoms and groups that had existed before the trade wars began.

By the end of the 1700s, the European traders at Delagoa Bay wanted cattle instead of ivory.

The trading port of Delagoa Bay in the nineteenth century.



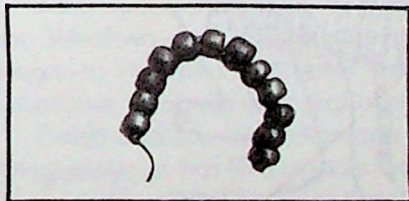
Leaders, like Soshangane, began to exchange cattle for trade items.

However, Soshangane found it more difficult to obtain cattle than ivory. People like the Ndwandwe had no use for ivory. Cattle, on the other hand were valued as a source of food and a form of exchange. As a result, leaders began to raid cattle from their neighbours. With the cattle that they raided, the Gasa people under Soshangane were able to continue with the trade. Their chiefdom became wealthy and powerful. Many people joined Soshangane's army, and with their help he was able to raid even more cattle.

Leaders like Soshangane probably had a great deal of control over the slave trade at Delagoa Bay. After 1823 large numbers of slaves were shipped by the Portuguese from Delagoa Bay to

plantations in Brazil. The slaves were captured from a wide region inland of the bay. It is likely that Soshangane and other rulers in the area were responsible for controlling this trade in the same way that they managed to control the trade in ivory and cattle. They would have been responsible for organising bands of men to capture slaves who were then traded for items like brass and beads.

Izindondo (anklets made of brass beads).



successfully. These advantages gave Soshangane a measure of independence from the Ndwandwe king, Zwide.

The Gasa people did not actually live on eTshaneni Mountain. It is steep and there is little water on its slopes. They were spread out over the fertile plains around the mountain in the area that today includes Mkhuze Game Reserve. Then in 1819, Ndwandwe power collapsed and the Gasa peo-

ple moved up into the southern Lubombo Mountains.

This was a temporary refuge. They continued beyond the Lubombo Mountains into the Thonga country beyond Delagoa Bay. Here they eventually became so strong that even the Zulu could not defeat them.

With the collapse of the Ndwandwe kingdom, eTshaneni became part of the Zulu kingdom. Much later, in the mid-nineteenth cen-



Sketch of a 'Zulu refugee' who was probably one of Soshangane's followers.

tury, the Myeni were granted permission to live there by the Zulu king, Mpande. They had travelled all the way from the Ngwavuma region to settle in the rich land around the Mkhuze River.

Soshangane died in 1856 while the Myeni were still living in the eTshaneni region. His body was carried back from the Thonga country to

his original home. The Myeni placed him in a burial cave high up on the mountain slopes. Soshangane's father and his grandfather had also been buried on eTshaneni. The mountain remained an important ritual site for the Gasa, even after they had moved away.

At the height of their power, the Ndwandwe were the strongest kingdom in south-east Africa with a history as rich and varied as that of the Zulu. The story of Soshangane and other Gasa is only a part of that history. What of the rest of the Ndwandwe, based at Magudu in the west?

Magudu

Like the Ngwane, the Ndwandwe originated in the Thonga country, east of the Lubombo Mountains. They too were forced out of the area by the expanding Tembe-Thonga people. They migrated into the interior and settled around Magudu Mountain, which lies about 40 kilometres west of Mkhuze.

Zwide, the most famous of the Ndwandwe kings, lived together with his mother Ntombazi, on the top of Magudu Mountain. An old story has it that the floor of Ntombazi's hut can be seen shining in the sun from as far away as present-day Hluthi in southern Swaziland. One oral historian claims



that it was years of dancing that made the hut floor so bright and shiny!

From the Mogudu Hills, the Ndwandwe ruled a kingdom that stretched south as far as the Black Mfolozi River, and east to the Lubombo Mountains. The kingdom was not always as big as this. In the early 1700s Ndwandwe was probably a fairly small chiefdom, but it grew more powerful because of trade.

However, the Mthethwa, to the south of the Ndwandwe, were even stronger. Their kingdom extended across some of the most productive areas in south-east Africa. The Mthethwa had been involved in the trade with Delagoa Bay far longer than the Ndwandwe, and, as a result, by the late 1700s, Mthethwa was one of the most prosperous kingdoms in

south-east Africa. More than thirty chiefs lived under the rule of the Mthethwa king, Dingiswayo.


The Ndwandwe, by contrast, occupied an area of low annual rainfall and relatively poor soils. Droughts and famines were far more detrimental to the Ndwandwe than to the Mthethwa, who lived on the wetter coastal plains. Survival for the Ndwandwe was therefore dependent on access to fertile coastal lands. As the Ndwandwe were prepared to stake much to gain this land, a confrontation was looming.

In the early 1800s both Zwide and the Mthethwa chief, Dingiswayo, began to increase control over their respective *emabutfo* (age regiments).

Zwide had one big advantage over Dingiswayo in that his kingdom was closer to the port of Delagoa Bay. This meant that he was able to get hold of

Magudu Hills viewed from the east.





the valuable goods brought by the traders before Dingiswayo. As the volume of trade to Delagoa Bay increased, so too did Zwide's power and influence.

Zwide was a warlike king. He was praised as 'the one who crouches over people so that they may be killed'. Zwide is also said to have been 'very ferocious with an assegai'.

Zwide and Dingiswayo also set about expanding their territories. The Ndwandwe went to war often and conquered chiefdoms such as the Ngwaneni and Ntshalini in the south. This brought them closer to the Mthethwa. The Mthethwa meanwhile gained the co-operation of powerful chiefdoms like the Hlubi, which lay between themselves and the Ndwandwe. In this way, the Mthethwa were able to strengthen their western and southern boundaries. Dingiswayo was confident that he could defeat Zwide in battle.

His hopes of success were raised further when Zwide went to battle with the Ngwane to his north. Dingiswayo thought that Zwide would not be able to fight on two different fronts at the same time. In about 1818,

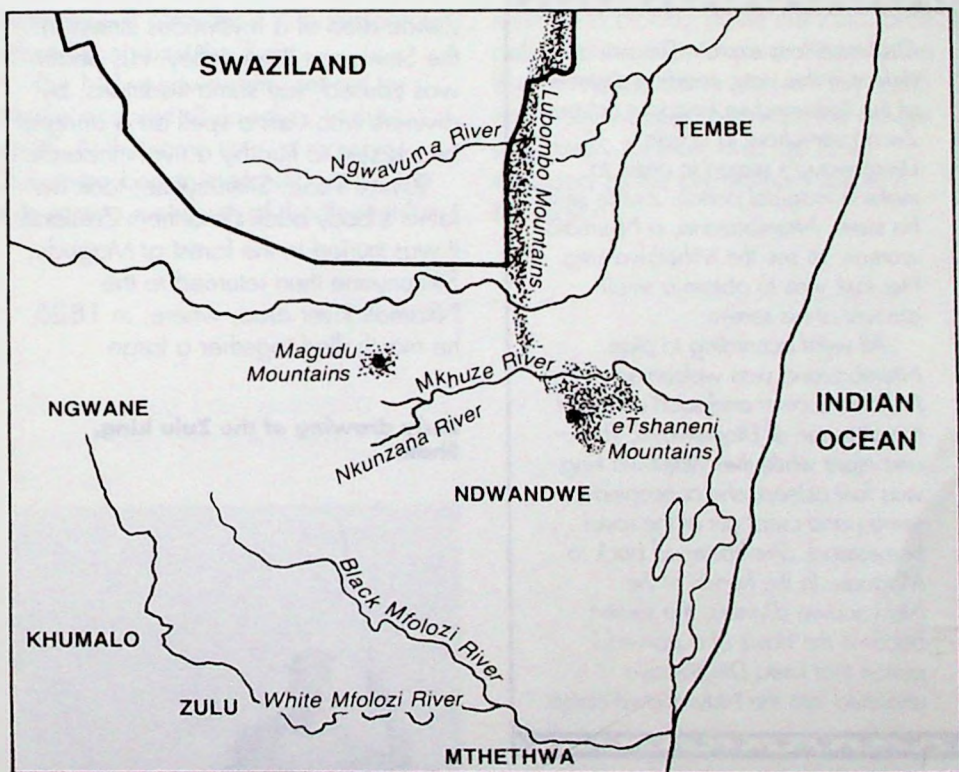
Dingiswayo assembled his army. The two great states of south-east Africa were poised to do battle for dominance in the region.

In 1818 the Mthethwa and Ndwandwe armies met at Mbuzi Hill, about 40 kilometres south of Magudu. Before the battle even began, Dingiswayo was captured by the Ndwandwe. He was taken to the Ndwandwe royal homestead where his head was cut off and sent to Zwide's mother, Ntombazi. It was said that she placed it at the back of her hut along with the heads of other rulers whom the Ndwandwe had killed. Soon after this, the Mthethwa army was defeated and Dingiswayo's kingdom destroyed.

The Ndwandwe seized Mthethwa riches, and by 1818 Zwide was the most powerful ruler in south-east Africa.

Zwide's next campaign was to attack Shaka who was, at that time, one of Dingiswayo's lieutenants, in charge of the western periphery of the Mthethwa kingdom. Up to this point, Shaka had avoided a military confrontation with the powerful Ndwandwe, but in 1819, he came under attack from the Ndwandwe. Shaka's armies fought hard and managed to keep the Ndwandwe forces at bay, but they lost many cattle to the Ndwandwe marauders.

Later in the same year the Ndwandwe attacked again. This time



Area occupied by the Ndwandwe kingdom.

the Zulu under Shaka were warned and managed to devise a plan. They withdrew towards the Mhlathuze River in the far south, destroying crops and killing cattle as they went. The Ndwandwe army was in hot pursuit, but after a few days their enthusiasm to do battle had waned. Days without food had weakened and exhausted them.

The Zulu, meanwhile, had recuperated their strength in the hills above the Mhlathuze River. After dark, when the Ndwandwe lay down for some much-needed sleep, the Zulu descended from the hills and quietly slipped into the Ndwandwe camp. There they slaughtered many of the sleeping men. Immediately after this they attacked Zwide's capital, which fell quickly

Oral traditions explain Dingiswayo's defeat in this way: Leading diviners of the Ndwandwe kingdom advised Zwide somehow to obtain Dingiswayo's semen in order to make a magical potion. Zwide sent his sister, Niombazana, a Nxumalo woman, to see the Mthethwa king. Her task was to obtain a small amount of his semen.

All went according to plan. Niombazana was welcomed at the Mthethwa court and soon attracted the attention of Dingiswayo. Then, one night while the Mthethwa king was fast asleep, she concealed his semen and crept out of the royal homestead. She hastened back to Magudu. In the hands of the Ndwandwe diviners, the semen became the basis of a powerful potion that lured Dingiswayo unarmed into the Ndwandwe camp.

because there was no army there to defend it.

The Ndwandwe suffered a heavy defeat, but their power was not yet broken. Zwide and a large group of the scattered Ndwandwe survivors regrouped and travelled northwards. By 1825 they had settled amongst the Pedi in what is today the eastern Transvaal. There they waited for a chance to regain their homeland. They had been there barely a year when

Zwide died of a mysterious illness in the Steelpoort River valley. His death was caused, say some traditions, by diviners who cast a spell on a string of beads sent to him by a rival monarch.

Zwide's son, Sikhunyane, took his father's body back to northern Zululand. It was buried in the forest at Magudu. Sikhunyane then returned to the Nkomati River area, where, in 1826, he marshalled together a large

Early drawing of the Zulu king, Shaka.





Ndwanwwe army for a final desperate offensive against the Zulu.

The Ndwanwwe army set out for Shaka's capital, Bulawayo, in the south. At the same time, a massive Zulu force began marching north. The two armies met south of the Phongolo

River. In a bloody battle the Zulu force defeated the Ndwanwwe. Sikhunyane fled to Manukusa in present-day southern Mozambique. Ndwanwwe power was finally broken, and the Zulu emerged as the pre-eminent force in the region.

Mubi and his people
enter the Phongolo
Valley

Shaka's Zulu army
defeated the
Ndwanwwe army
south of the
Phongolo River
in 1824. The
Zulu emerged as
the pre-eminent
force in the
region.

Received of the Treasurer of the State of New York the sum of \$100.00 for the year 1875.

Witness my hand and seal of office at Albany, New York, this 1st day of January, 1875.

John T. Hoffman, Treasurer of the State of New York.

Received of the Treasurer of the State of New York the sum of \$100.00 for the year 1875.

Ngwane and the Phongolo Grainfields

Hlubi and his people enter the Phongolo Valley

In the late 1700s, the Ndwandwe and Hlubi's people had fought on the banks of the Mkhuze River (see p34). Defeated, Hlubi and his people left the bloodied battleground behind them and headed west in the direction of Magudu. They urgently needed a place to settle and to raise crops for the following year, but Magudu was still in Ndwandwe country and could not be settled without another hard fight. So, Hlubi and his people pushed on to Hohoba.

It was then that Hlubi's scouts returned to him with hopeful news. They had found rich and fertile lands along the valley floor of the Phongolo River, just north of Hohoba. They also found a secure mountain fortress adjacent to these fertile lands, the caves of Godlwako. However, the area was

already occupied by a number of Besutfu (otherwise known as Sotho or Basotho), who had settled in the area many years before.

Hlubi's *imphi* set out one night to take possession of the new fields and fortresses. After crossing the Phongolo River, the moon appeared, rising late. The *imphi* advanced towards Godlwako. When the Besutfu inhabitants of the area, the Sukati and the Nkambule, woke the next morning, they found that the *imphi* had surrounded them. They surrendered without a fight.

It seems that Hlubi did not stay long at Godlwako, but moved directly northwards to the superior grazing area around present-day Mhlosheni. He settled there at eTibondzeni.

While at eTibondzeni, he received a plea for help from his brother, Dlamini, who lived east of the Lubombo with the main branch of the family. Dlamini was under attack from



Artist's impression of Hlubi's imphi crossing the Phongolo River.

another of his brothers, Loziyingile. Hlubi took his *imphi* to Dlamini's rescue, and afterwards helped Dlamini

to relocate himself on the Lubombo Mountains, near the Hlathikulu forest, in a homestead called Nkhanini. It was at Nkhanini that Dlamini's heir, Ngwane, was born.

Godlwako (or Godlwayo) is a craggy mountain with caves about 20 kilometres outside of the present-day town of Pongola, along the road to Piet Retief. The mountain lies just south of the main road.

Ngwane and his people enter the Phongolo Valley

Dlamini died round about 1770, apparently of smallpox. His heir, Ngwane, was still a child at the time. After the mourning period was over,

young Ngwane and his people descended from the Lubombo into the Phongolo Valley. Guided by a messenger from the Godlwako area, they rested first near present-day LaVumisa and then continued westwards, to the Godlwako caves, and safety. Like the Nkambule, the Hlophe people also lived near Godlwako. They knew of many deep caves in which to hide from an enemy, and these they showed to the newcomers from the Lubombo.

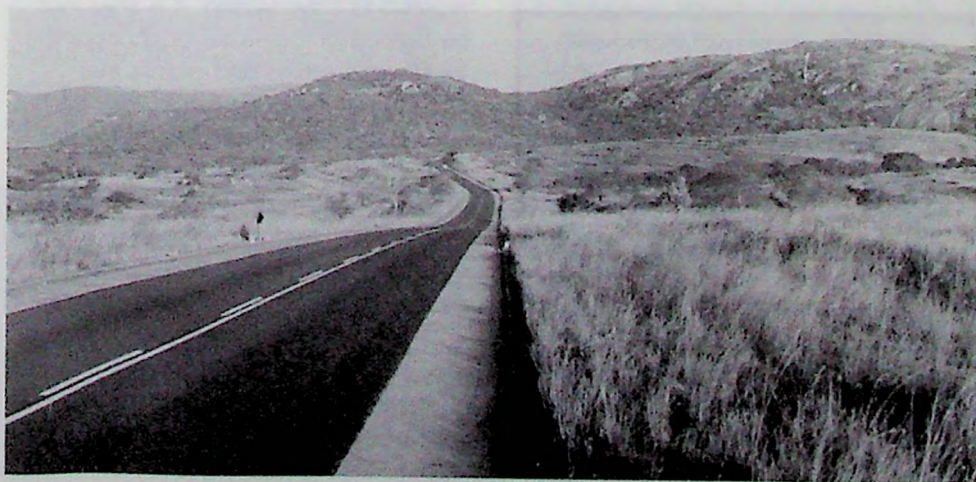
During Ngwane's youth, he and his people lived under threat of attack from the Ndwandwe. At stake were the fertile lands of the Phongolo Valley.


The late eighteenth century saw a

serious drought in south-east Africa. The Ndwandwe kingdom, centred on Magudu, lay in a particularly low rainfall area and suffered severely from the effects of this drought. Access to the Phongolo Valley, one of the best-watered areas in the immediate vicinity of Ndwandwe, became vital to Ndwandwe survival. This led them to attack the Ngwane in an attempt to control what became known as the 'Phongolo grainfields'. Today this area is covered by the Pongola sugar-cane fields.

The young Ngwane grew up in the Phongolo Valley during these troubled times. An *umuti* (homestead), was erected for him near Godlwako, at Matsapha, between the present-day town of Pongola and the Salitje border

Godlwako Mountain viewed from the west.





post. The Matsapha residence lay just south of the present Swaziland border, between the Ncoishane and Mzimvubu Rivers, near the present kaMshayi store.

The history of this period is etched in the landscape of the area.

The 'Phongolo grainfields' today

Historians can understand some of the reasons why the Ngwane and Ndwandwe people fought each other by looking at the environment in which they lived. Compare the landscape at Magudu with the area around the Phongolo River. It is immediately obvious that the valley floor is much greener than the hilly country. There are more crops in the Phongolo Valley, though instead of grainfields you will see large sugar-cane farms today.

In general it is not wise to draw conclusions about the environment of the past in intensively farmed areas. Farming transforms the living environment: soils may be artificially enriched, leached or eroded; natural vegetation may be cleared, or replaced with exotic plants. Over the centuries these kinds of intervention bring about enormous changes in the appearance and productivity of the land.

In the case of the Phongolo Valley however, the presence of the sugar-cane fields tells us something about the past environment. Sugar-cane requires a lot of water all the year round. This water is provided by the Phongolo River. The same river provided water for the rich grainfields that grew in the late 1700s. In this case, the fact that we can easily see why the sugar-cane grows so well today helps us to understand more about this environment two centuries ago. In understanding the environment, we can also understand why people wanted this land so much, and why they fought to control it.

The Phongolo Valley is filled with places that the young Ngwane is reputed to have visited. It is said that he bathed in rainwater pools near the Godlwako caves and across the Mzinsangu River. Further away, on the Mvunyane River, there is a hot-water spring where Ngwane apparently used to swim.

Just north east of Godlwako, there is a large rounded rock with steep sides, called 'litshe laNgwane'.

Swazi oral traditions relate that this rock was a favourite haunt of the young king. When his people saw Ngwane climbing this rock, they would shake their heads and exclaim,



Litshe laNgwane: a favourite haunt of the young king, Ngwane.

'What's wrong with our king? He goes climbing a rock which is almost unclimbable!' They would become curious, and watch his next moves. At the top of the rock, Ngwane would gather together a pile of stones of many different sizes and shapes. He would then sort the stones so that the larger ones were separated from the smaller ones. This was preparation for

a game of *emagwadla*. In this game, the stones were soldiers arranged in regiments. Ngwane used to pretend that the *emabutfo* (regiments) were fighting each other. He would crash the stones together, 'Gwa! Gwa!' Perhaps he was practising for the time when he would be old enough to lead his own armies into battle!

When Ngwane was installed as king, his homestead was moved from Matsapha to Zombodze, about 7,5 kilometres north west of Godlwako. In precolonial times people would have walked straight there. Today, of course, the border fence separates the two sites. We have to travel westwards along the border to the Mahamba border post, re-enter Swaziland and travel eastwards again until we are close to Godlwako once again. The distance from Godlwako to

Litshe laNgwane (the rock of Ngwane), also known as 'litshe lejuba', is located about 35 kilometres outside of the town of Pongola, along the road to Piet Retief. The rock lies just south of the main road.

Zombodze via Mahamba is about 65 kilometres.

Mahamba — 'place of the runaways'

To get to Zombodze, we have to take a detour through Mahamba and past historical sites associated with the reign of Mswati II. Mahamba is one of the main entry points into south-western Swaziland. In precolonial times, the ancestors of the people who are Swazi today, were living on both sides of the border at Mahamba. The area was an important route between Swaziland and Zululand.

Mahamba Hill lies on the border, slightly north of the control gate. In the early years of Mswati II's reign,

Mahamba was associated with battles waged by rebel forces against his authority. In 1840, Fokoti, a brother of Mswati's, attempted to get the people of this area to help him take the Swazi kingship by force. Fokoti marshalled a small force but this was not strong enough to overthrow Mswati. His army was defeated by the royal army on the slopes of Mahamba Hill. Most of the rebels were killed and those that survived fled to Zululand.

Some years later, in 1846, two more of Mswati's brothers, Malambule and Tsekwane rebelled (see p31). They also based themselves at Mahamba Hill. From there they tried to enlist the help of the Zulu king, Mpande, in their efforts to overthrow Mswati. They also attempted to raise support from Swazi people living in the area. In the meantime, they were

Mahamba Hill.



given protection by a European missionary, James Allison, who had built a mission station called Hovunga (or Dlovunga) a year earlier.

The Reverend James Allison.



Mpande did not send the Zulu army into Swaziland until 1847, too late for the rebels who were defeated by Mswati in the middle of the previous year. Many of those who had helped Malambule and Tsekwane were also killed by Mswati's forces. In the wake

of the conflict, Allison and the other members of the mission fled in fear to Natal. They were joined by a large number of local inhabitants who were scared that Mswati would attack again. Those who remained in the area watched this group running south and decided to call the place 'Mahamba', which means 'the runaways'.

Makhosini — 'place of the kings'

Before travelling on to Zombodze, we leave the Nhlanguano–Mhlosheni road to stop at Makhosini. Makhosini means 'place of the kings', and refers to the areas where Swazi kings are buried. The oldest royal burial place in Swaziland is the Nzama grave site, also known as Mbilaneni, in the Mashobeni area.

The graves are kept under special guard, and cannot be approached by unauthorised persons. The graves can be identified by the thick vegetation on the hillside. As with all royal graves, the trees and shrubs around the Nzama graves cannot be cut or uprooted.

Ngwane II was buried at Mbilaneni. His grandson, Sobhuza I, was also laid to rest here. Sobhuza actually died near present-day Mbabane, but his body was later brought back to Shiselweni and put



Makhosini: the Nzama royal graves.

close to that of Ngwane. Mswati II was buried there too, as was the late king, Sobhuza II.


When a Swazi king dies, his body is first interred in a cave. The body is then taken to the hillside at night, so that only those close to the king can

see where it is placed. Royal burials take place in winter. The body of Sobhuza I, for instance, was kept in the Dlangeni cave in the Mdzimba Mountains throughout the summer. In winter, the corpse was carried back to Shiselweni and buried at Mbilaneni.

Not all Swazi kings are buried at Mbilaneni. Bhunu was placed at

The Nzama royal graves, also known by the name 'Mbilaneni', can be found 8 kilometres south of the modern town of Nhlangano. They lie in the Mashobeni chiefdom of Maphumzane Mdluli. The Mdluli main residence lies close to

Mbilaneni and can be reached by taking the road westwards from Nhlangano to the airfield. Some 6 kilometres along this road, a track branching to the left will bring you close to the Mdluli residence.



Dlangeni, and Ndvungunye was laid to rest at Mlokotfwa, near Mhlosheni. Mlokotfwa is another royal grave site also known as 'Mbilaneni'. This is a special burial place as King Ndvungunye was the only king buried here (see p61).

Custodians of the royal graves

The Mdluli people care for the royal graves at Mbilaneni, near Nhlanganano. It is their duty to make sure that nobody disturbs the remains of the kings. They also stop people from cutting wood or uprooting plants on the hillside and they prevent the lighting of grass fires in the area.

During the late 1700s, when Ngwane II was king, the MkhaliPhi people were the custodians of the royal graves. The MkhaliPhi are a section of the Vilakati clan. They were found living in the area when the Ngwane arrived and for this reason they were asked to look after Makhosini. They later lost the job when they allowed a grass fire to burn in the area. According to one oral tradition, the MkhaliPhi did not notice the flames because they had become dizzy from smoking too much dagga.

After the MkhaliPhi were disgraced by their fire, the Mdluli were asked by the king to look after the royal graves. They were taken out of the *sigodlo* (inner royal enclosure), where they were looking after the king's wives, and placed at Mbilaneni, near Nhlanganano. The Mdluli chiefdom is still in this area today.

The Mdluli perform many services for the Swazi kings. As well as being custodians of the royal graves at Mbilaneni, they are grinders of the

The Mdluli entered the Phongolo Valley in the company of the Ngwane. It is said that when the Ngwane left their home in the Tembe country, they met a man in their path. They stopped and asked him to join them on their journey. They called him 'Mdluli' because he had been found along the way and picked up ('ngeNdlulenyaye'). It is not clear exactly where Mdluli was found, but the Mdluli people speak of a place called 'kaTembe', which is east of the Lubombo Mountains.


The Mdluli used to be part of the Matsebula, but they 'dzabuka'd' (separated) from them a long time ago to form a separate clan. The Mdluli are also related to the Lukhele and Nkambule peoples.



Artist's impression of the forging of spears in precolonial times.

The MkhaliPhi people were renowned spear-makers. One oral tradition has it that a man called MkhaliPhi used to dig iron out of the ground, smelt it over red-hot coals with bellows, and beat it into spearheads. He gave these spears to the king. The place where the spears were forged is said to be still visible

near modern Mhlosheni, on the banks of the Ngwedze River, at Mabhudlweni. The name MkhaliPhi came about, it is said, because the king used to call the man who forged the spears, 'Ndvodza lekhaliphako lekhandza tikhali' (Man who is sharp, who forges spears).



kings' medicines and snuff. Part of their praises are, 'Mbokodvo lenhle legaya ligwayi lemakhosi' (Beautiful grinding stone to grind snuff for the kings). It is also claimed that the Mdluli once made rain for the royal Ngwane.

Today the Mdluli are *tinsila* (sing. *insila*) of the king. The task of the *insila* is to prevent any part of the king's body from getting into the wrong hands where it could be used for magical purposes, as happened, for example, in the story of the semen plot on p42. An *insila* follows the king wherever he goes in order to collect his body waste. He has the important job of protecting the king from his enemies, including those within the royal family itself. To prove their own loyalty, the Mdluli *tinsila* have to exchange blood with the king. The Mdluli share this important role of *tinsila* with the Motsa people.

Zombodze: Ngwane's first residence

Present-day Zombodze lies between Nhlangano and Mhlosheni in southern Swaziland, but the site of Ngwane's Zombodze *umuti* (residence) was at the headwaters of the Mzinsangu River nearby.

Ngwane was installed as king at Zombodze. His chief wife, LaMndzebele lived at Zombodze, and it was here that a number of neighbouring groups came to acknowledge his leadership.

The Ngwane kingdom in the later 1700s was a great deal smaller than present-day Swaziland. Zombodze was its centre. From there the kingdom extended east towards Mhlosheni, west towards Mbilaneni and southwards as far as the Phongolo River.

To get to Zombodze from the Nzama royal graves, take the Mhlosheni road from Nhlangano. You will pass some wattle plantations and will reach Dwaleni village. Some 3 kilometres beyond Dwaleni there is a turning to Zombodze on the right.

About 2,5 kilometres down this road you will find Ngwane High School, which is close to the original site of the Zombodze royal residence. Note that the Mkhonta and Nsibandze chiefdoms lie between Dwaleni and the Zombodze turn-off.



The Zombodze residence today.


One large group which acknowledged the leadership of Ngwane at this time was the Hlophe. But this was not always the case. The Hlophe chief, Tigodvo, is remembered in his praises as having also acknowledged the leadership of the Ndwandwe king: '*Uhlabela emakhosi lamabili, uhlabela uZwide ka Langa*' (You fought for two kings, you fought for Zwide, son of Langa [as well]). When Ngwane and his people needed protection, the Hlophe chief, Tigodvo, showed them the Godlwako caves near the Phongolo River.

The Hlophe people originated at Ngogweni from where, they say, they came 'rolling in a *silulu*' (see Nyowo history, pp 26-7).

Other Swazi people, like the Mkhonta, also say that they came 'rolling in a *silulu*'. All those who speak of 'rolling in a *silulu*' may have been forced to leave their original homes because of quarrels which split up groups of people and scattered them in different directions.

The Hlophe people are related to the Mndzebele and the Mkhabela people. One story relates how these groups split off from one another and in so doing got their names:

There was once a man named Mabhengu who had three sons. Mabhengu's first son was born during a time of famine. He cried out that he had no food for his son. He said, 'Maye ngimhlophe' ('Alas I am white', meaning he had no food to feed his son). He was named 'Hlophe', and



his descendants became the 'bakaHlophe'.

Mabhengu's second son was born after a good harvest. Friends and relatives of the old man asked him to give them food. Mabhengu shared his food with them. They said, 'Uyendzelisa' (He caused them to be satisfied) and he named his second son 'Mndzebele'. The Mndzebele people are named after him.

Mabhengu's third son was born after an even better harvest. He had plenty of food to share with his friends and relatives. They said, 'Bese alawula asanenala, sewuyakhaphela' (He had prospered, had a good harvest, and a large surplus). Mabhengu named his last son 'Mkhabela', and those who followed him became known as the Mkhabela people.

Mkhonta: tinyanga of the kings

In the late 1700s the Ngwane were becoming increasingly powerful. It was during this period that the Mkhonta people arrived in Shiselweni.

Way back in the past, the Mkhonta lived south of the Thukela River at a place called Manyiseni. At first they were under the rule of the Mithethwa, and later that of the Ndwandwe. The Mkhonta fled north when the Ndwandwe kingship crumbled. After


a long journey and some five years of warfare with Hlubi, they finally reached the Magudu area.

The Mkhonta relate that it was here that their spies met with a people whose king had a red feather in his head – the Ngwane. The Mkhonta, tired of fighting, prepared fifty head of cattle as a present and shouted, 'Let us not fight, we are here to *khonta* (pay allegiance to) you.' The king of the Ngwane took their cattle and welcomed them to his land. This is why they are called the Mkhonta.

The Mkhonta were famed for certain skills. It is said that they were able to divine things of the future. By 'beating the bones', they maintained that they could see events before they happened. They also had knowledge of important wild herbs and medicines. The king, Ngwane II, became aware of their skills. He made them his *tinyanga*. This meant that they cured the king when he was ill and prepared potions for certain rituals. The Nkambule people were also *tinyanga* in Ngwane's time. In fact, they had this role before the Mkhonta.

Nsibandze: tindvuna of the kings

The Nsibandze were another group who arrived in the Shiselweni area during the early years of Ngwane's rule. They say they came from a place



called Ngcangca, east of the Lubombo Mountains. Lohhiya was the first Nsibandze to arrive in Shiselweni. One tradition has it that he came to visit his cousin, Ndzata Mkhonta. While he was there he was summoned by the king to the royal residence. Lohhiya had special medicines with him, but these he left with Ndzata Mkhonta when he obeyed the summons. In Lohhiya's absence, Ndzata learnt how to use these medicines and later became the king's *inyanga*.

Lohhiya, meanwhile, was made an *umfana* (literally: boy, attendant) of the king. While he was serving Ngwane in this way he crafted beautiful plates out of wood. He cooked some buck meat and served it to the king on one of these plates. Ngwane was so pleased with the offering that he made Lohhiya his *indvuna* (pl. *tindvuna*, governors). The Nsibandze became *tindvuna* of the royal residences. They replaced the Vilakati people at this task. The Vilakati had been the *tindvuna* until then, but they were given the task of slaughtering calves for the king instead. When this happened, a section of the Vilakati became known as the Nkonyane, which means 'calves' in *siSwati*.

Zombodze was built under the authority of Lohhiya Nsibandze, and his son, Masenjana, became its first

indvuna. The Nsibandze have kept this duty since then.

The Nsibandze were also responsible for the preparation of medicines to strengthen and cleanse the king for ritual ceremonies. They brought these skills with them from the Tembe-Thonga country.

The environment

The environment at Zombodze is very different from that of the Phongolo Valley. This is a transitional zone between the Middleveld and Lowveld. There are more hills here than in the Lowveld, but their slopes are gentler and their valleys wider than in the Middleveld.

The environment here was ideal for the needs of the early Ngwane people. cattle could be grazed in the large, open valleys in winter; during summer, when there were diseases on the plains, cattle could be grazed on the fresh, newly-grown grass of the hill-slopes. The distance between the hills and plains is not great, so cattle could be moved every season. There is also more rainfall here than in the Lowveld region around LaVumisa. These are some of the reasons why the early Ngwane chose to live here.

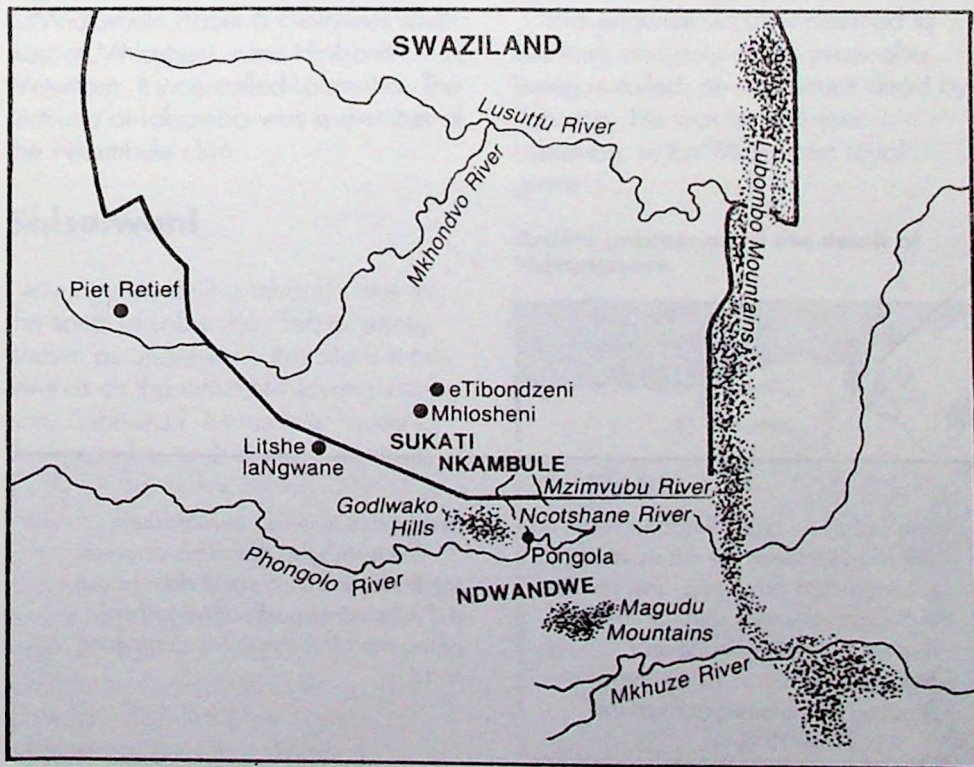
Hhohho: Ngwane's second residence

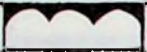
A second *umuti* called Hhohho was erected on the eastern periphery of Ngwane's domain. Hhohho was situated squarely in the area occupied by Hlubi and his people, and it seems fairly certain that, from some time in the late eighteenth century, Hlubi acknowledged Ngwane as his leader.

The first *indvuna* of the Hhohho *umuti* was Mdvuna Shiba. The Shiba people originated from Mtubatuba, south of Mkhuze. They joined Hlubi at Magudu and subsequently moved northwards into the Mhlosheni area. Another group under the rule of Hlubi, the Vilakati, also came to recognise Ngwane as their overlord at this time.

Ngwane died towards the end of

Area occupied by the Ngwane.





the eighteenth century. His reign had seen the first steps in the creation of a Swazi kingdom. The fragments of the royal line who had preceded the Ngwane into the Phongolo region – the people of Hlubi (later known as the Ndlela), and the Shabalala – were reunited under the authority of Ngwane. They were joined by the groups they found just north of the Phongolo River. These were the

Vilakati, Nkambule, Sukati, Nsibandze, Mkhonta, Hlophe and Nkonyane. Together, they made up an embryonic kingdom.

However, the new state that emerged under Ngwane was fragile. It could not withstand internal power struggles and external aggression from strong neighbours, like the Ndwandwe.

The exact site of the Hhohho umuti is still marked today by the existence of a compacted ash dump. The site lies 3,5 kilometres due south of the confluence of the Ngwedze and Ngwavuma Rivers. To get there proceed 8,5 kilometres from the

Zombodze turn-off, to Mhlosheni.

The turning to the site is a rough track marked by a small dam about 6,5 kilometres north of Mhlosheni, along the Mhlosheni–Mbulungwane road.

The Times of Ndvungunye

Ndvungunye, a son born of the chief wife, LaMndzebele, succeeded Ngwane. An *umuti* was erected for LaMndzebele about 6 kilometres south east of Mhlosheni, near Hlobane Mountain. It was called Lobamba. The *indvuna* at Lobamba was a member of the Nkambule clan.

Shiselweni

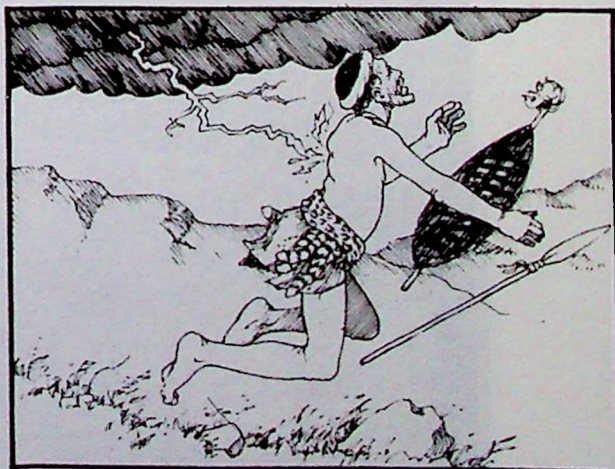
Ndvungunye built a second *umuti* to the south of Lobamba. Subsequently known as Shiselweni, this site is more famous as the *umuti* of Ndvungunye's son, Sobhuza I. It was later razed to the ground in an Ndwandwe attack.


When he became king, Ndvungunye sent a messenger to the Simelane people asking for a wife. At that time the Simelane people lived under Ndwandwe rule at a place called Nkalaneni, about 150 kilometres south of Shiselweni. The Simelane heeded Ndvungunye's request and sent two women back

with the messenger to Shiselweni. The names of these women were Lojiba and Somnjalose Simelane.

Ndvungunye was not destined to live long and only a few years after being installed, he was struck dead by lightning. He was buried near Lobamba, in the Mlokotfwa royal grave.

Artist's impression of the death of Ndvungunye.






The body of King Ndvungunye lies in a burial mound on Mlokotfwa Hill (also known as 'Mbilaneni II'). Ndvungunye was buried there because he had been killed by lightning. The elders felt that there must have been a reason for the unusual circumstances of his death – perhaps he had made the royal ancestors angry! This is why they did not place his body together with that of his father at Mbilaneni I. Instead, Ndvungunye's body was burnt, and the ashes placed beneath the earth. The bodies of other members of the royal family (like that

of Hlubi) were buried nearby, 'to pass the time with him'. Today, the custodians of the Mlokotfwa royal graves are the Ngwenya people.

When Ndvungunye's chief wife, Lojiba, did not produce children, her *inhlanti* (co-wife, often a younger sister of the main wife), Somnjalose, bore Ndvungunye's heir. At first, Somnjalose miscarried, but when Ndvungunye died, she was pregnant for the second time. Her child was reputedly born with an unusual feature: an especially soft crown to his head. A piece of goatskin had to be placed on the child's head to protect it. Some traditions claim that the child was

Makhosini: Mlokotfwa royal graves viewed from the south.





given the name 'Somhlolo' (prodigy) because of this unusual body feature.

Another oral account explains the reason why he was also called 'Sobhuza'. It was said that there was a lot of argument after Sobhuza became king. Many questions were asked. Hence his name 'Sobhuza' which means 'asker of questions'.

The Simelane people arrive at Shiselweni

The Simelane people wanted to leave their home at Nkalaneni. Life was difficult under the Ndwandwe. Warfare had broken out in the area and the Simelane were looking for a place where they could live in peace. A short while before their troubles began, their sisters, Lojiba and Somnjalose, had left Nkalaneni to marry Ndvungunye. The Simelane decided to join their sisters and by so doing gain the protection of the Ngwane king. Maweni Simelane was sent as a messenger to the Ngwane

royal residence at Shiselweni. He was welcomed by Ndvungunye and promised land on which his people could settle. Ndvungunye needed people to build a strong army to fight the Ndwandwe and to work in his fields.

Maweni returned home with this news. The Simelane set off. When they reached the Phongolo River they were attacked by the Ndwandwe and the Simelane chief, Mabonya, died in the fighting. After the battle, they continued on their way. They were led by Mabonya's chief wife, Magala, who carried the young heir, Bhozongo, on her back. When they arrived at Shiselweni, they were given land on which to build new homes. Bhozongo grew up to become the chief, and the Simelane became part of the Ngwane kingdom. The women tilled the king's fields. Young boys looked after the royal cattle, and men fought in the army. Today, the Simelane people live in an area north of Shiselweni called KoNtshingila. This is just south of present-day Hlathikulu.

Mlokotfwa royal graves

These graves can be reached from the Hluthi-Mhlosheni road. Return from Mhlosheni to the Nhlngano junction

and turn left across a bridge. The Mlokotfwa royal graves are on your left, about 5,5 kilometres along this road. As at Mbilaneni, the hill can be recognised by its thick vegetation.



The first part of the book is a history of the...
The second part is a collection of...
The third part is a collection of...
The fourth part is a collection of...
The fifth part is a collection of...
The sixth part is a collection of...
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The Simons people twice at Shiloh

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Sobhuza I under Pressure

Somnjalose Simelane lived at Shiselweni and this was where Sobhuza was born. Sobhuza I became king in the early decades of the 1800s and in the early years of his reign this was Sobhuza's most important residence. However, Lobamba was the place where he danced the *incwala* or 'first fruits ceremony' performed by the king every midsummer in the main cattle byre. The *incwala* served to reaffirm the king's power over his people by demonstrating his ability to make rain so that their crops could grow.

Shiselweni: site of Sobhuza's residence, viewed from the north. The clump of trees marks the site.



The site of the Shiselweni royal residence lies 6,5 kilometres from the bridge on the Hluthi road, just past the Mhlosheni-Hluthi junction. About 4 kilometres from the bridge there is a store. Shortly after the store a tiny

track to the left leads to Shiselweni. The site of the royal residence is on the right of the track, on a gentle, uphill slope. It is marked by a small tree standing next to an acacia thorn bush.



The flight of Sobhuza I and the burning of his *umuti*

The conflict between the Ngwane and the Ndwandwe that began during the time of Ngwane II, escalated during the reign of his grandson Sobhuza. The Ndwandwe sent increasingly powerful armies against the Ngwane. Sobhuza tried to defuse Ndwandwe aggression. He proposed that a daughter of Zwide should become his own chief wife. The Ndwandwe king grudgingly agreed, but warned that this would not stop him from attacking Sobhuza if he wanted to in the future. On that gloomy note Zwide's daughter, Tsandzile, journeyed north to meet her future husband.

Zwide did not, in fact, wait for long. The marriage did not deter him: a new dispute soon erupted over

grainfields on the south side of the Phongolo River. Zwide struck out to destroy Ngwane power once and for all.

Zwide's invasion north, in the early nineteenth century, almost destroyed Sobhuza's political organisation in the Shiselweni area. The king was forced to flee north, leaving most of his followers behind. His capital was burnt to the ground and the area came to be called 'Shiselweni' (from *kushisa* - to burn). Even today, some of the older Hlophe people who live in the area remember finding the ashes of the *umuti* when, as youngsters, they used to till the fields. For this reason Shiselweni is sometimes called 'Mlotseni' (the place of ashes).

The Mhlosheni caves

The Hlophe were one of the groups that stayed behind in the Mhlosheni

The site of Lobamba can be seen from Shiselweni. Turn your back to the Hluthi road, and face a low hill with some white-washed homes at the top. This is where the old Lobamba was built. Nearby lies

the residence of Sobhuza II's mother, Lomawa, where the late king was born. We can see his residence if we turn towards Mhlosheni. It is a hill about a kilometre from Shiselweni.



Artist's impression of the razing of Shiselweni.

area. They were continually on the watch for signs of an approaching enemy. Their lookouts used to stand at the top of the Mhlosheni Hills where they had a good view of the land to the south of the Phongolo River. When they saw the dust of an *imphi* in the distance, a Hlophe messenger would run off to warn the others of the coming of the Ndwandwe.

The Hlophe were in charge of the cave fortresses at Mhlosheni after Sobhuza had left. When they saw the

Ndwandwe approaching, the Hlophe hid deep inside the caves with their cattle. Sometimes they remained hidden for days while they waited for the Ndwandwe to leave.

Throughout the history of the Swazi people, caves have been used for protection in times of war.

The Nsibandze also remained behind when Sobhuza left, as *tindvuna*, or governors, of the Ngwane territory in the south. Other groups that stayed included the Simelane, the Shiba, the Madonsela, and the Kunene. These groups were not strong enough to take on the might



Mbali Hlophe points out an entrance to the Mhlosheni caves.

of the Ndwandwe army. Most people remained in their homes, hoping that they would be spared. A few carried out small, heroic acts of resistance. For instance, the Shiba stealthily killed an Ndwandwe *indvuna* whom they saw approaching the area with his *imphi*.

Mamba

Only the Mamba people were able to defend themselves against the

Ndwandwe in open battle. They came to be the most powerful group in the Shiselweni area during Sobhuza's absence. It is said that the famous Mamba chief, Maloyi, actually forced the Ndwandwe army to retreat to Magudu during one of their attacks.

Sobhuza's flight

From Shiselweni, Sobhuza sped northwards to Mbulungwane Hill. It seems that Sobhuza did not stay at

Mbulungwane Hill is near a road junction about 20 kilometres north of Mhlosheni. It is easy to recognise as it rises steeply from the flat ground around it.

In addition to its association with Sobhuza's travels, Mbulungwane also appears in the history of the Zulu wars. It is said that when Shaka attacked the Ngwane people, the Zulu army rested in the hills behind Mbulungwane. These are the Lucolweni Hills. Today Mbulungwane is part of the Simelane chiefdom. This chiefdom stretches northwards beyond Hlathikulu. The Mamba chiefdom is further east. As you will see later, the Mamba played an important part in the return of Sobhuza to Shiselweni.



Mbulungwane Hill: one of Sobhuza's stopovers.

Mbulungwane long enough to build an *umuti*. The Ndwandwe attacks pushed him still further north to kaPhungalegazi (place of the smell of

blood). Sobhuza erected an *umuti* here. Some traditions relate that he gave the place its name when he received the news that the Ndwandwe had attacked and burnt Shiselweni.

On the way from Mbulungwane to

The modern town of Hlathikulu is slightly off the tour route, but it is probably worth stopping here before proceeding to kaPhungalegazi. The name 'Hlathikulu' is a siSwati word meaning 'big bushes', a name which is clearly applicable to this forested hilltop town. To reach kaPhungalegazi from Hlathikulu, return along the Mbulungwane road for a short distance, until you reach the Kubutha turning to the right. About 4 kilometres from

the junction, you will see two mountains, one on each side of the road. The mountain on the left is Mtsambama and the mountain on the right is called Mavukutfu. Both were important in the battle of Lubuya. Some 10 kilometres from the Hlathikulu junction, a track turns off to the right. It is marked by two green signs on either side of the road. A few hundred metres down this track you will see the Lubuya Valley.



kaPhungalegazi, you will pass the site of the battle of Lubuya which was fought against the Zulu at the end of Sobhuza's reign.

The battle of Lubuya

From the time of Shaka, the Zulu were one of the most powerful peoples in south-east Africa. They invaded the Ngwane kingdom on a number of occasions, but the Ngwane usually hid away in caves. In 1839, a huge battle was fought between the Zulu and the Swazi on the banks of the Lubuya River.

In 1838 the Zulu army had been defeated by the Boers at Blood River. This was their worst defeat. The following year the Zulu king, Dingane,

Lubuya battlefield viewed from the north, framed by Mtsambama (right) and Mavukutfu (left) Mountains.

wanted to prove to his people that the Zulu armies were still as strong as they were in Shaka's time. At the same time, he desired to conquer the Swazi kingdom. His chance to fulfil both aims finally came.

Dingane sent an army led by Masiphula Ntshangase across the Phongolo River. They marched northwards to Mavukutfu Mountain. Here they set up a military camp. Men and women in Swaziland knew the threat was great. They came together in huge numbers at Mtsambama Mountain to defend their land. Under their commander, Mngayi Fakudze, they prepared for battle.

The two armies met in the valley between the mountains. They fought fiercely, spreading out over a large area along the Lubuya River. After two days of battle the armies had almost





Early drawing of a Zulu warrior.

destroyed each other, but it was clear to the Zulu that the Ngwane army would not surrender. Realising this, the Zulu soldiers who had survived the battle returned home. Their departure turned the battle into a huge victory for

the Ngwane. Dingane's failure to conquer the Swazi proved to be decisive in his downfall; in 1840 his weakened army was defeated by soldiers loyal to his half-brother, Mpande, and he was forced to flee from Zululand.



Brave deeds were carried out by men and women in the Lubuya battle, but many people died. Today, some one hundred and fifty years later, people still talk of ancestors who were killed at Lubuya. One man who lives in the area says that his grandfather, Bongabheni Dlamini, fought at Lubuya. Bongabheni, who was a chief, apparently died of shock and horror when he saw how many of his people were being stabbed by the Zulu warriors.

For three days after the battle nobody could drink water from the Lubuya River as so much blood had been spilled on its banks. Most of the bodies of the dead warriors were washed away when the river flooded. Even today people say they still find human bones near the river!

Lubuya to kaPhungalegazi

Historians today are not satisfied knowing *where* Sobhuza I lived, and *where* he moved to. They want to know *why* he lived there and *why* he moved. So they study the environment to find answers to some of these questions.

You will notice that the terrain in this area is very steep. KaPhungalegazi is the highest point for many miles. There is a good view of the surrounding countryside in all directions. On a clear day, you can even see Manzini, 35 kilometres away to the north. Enemies would have been spotted while still a long way off, and Sobhuza's people would have had enough time either to prepare for battle or to flee.

To get to kaPhungalegazi from Lubuya, continue along the Kubutha road until you reach a right turning. This road is 10 kilometres from Lubuya, and 2 kilometres before the Mhlathuzane River bridge. After this turning, travel northwards into the Sinceni Mountains. About 8-10

kilometres further on, the road descends and a school sign marks a turning to the right. Follow the track which forks to the left until you reach a large rock. KaPhungalegazi is a few hundred metres beyond this rock, on the same track, at the summit of the hill.



It was difficult to graze cattle at kaPhungalegazi as the terrain is rough and water is relatively scarce.

Shiselweni, by way of contrast, was not easy to defend against an enemy although the land there was good for cattle. Historians conclude that Sobhuza left the better cattle country at Shiselweni for the more defensible

kaPhungalegazi because he was under threat of attack.

As the Ndwandwe danger grew, Sobhuza and his people were forced to move to the even more secure refuge of Buseleni.

Buseleni

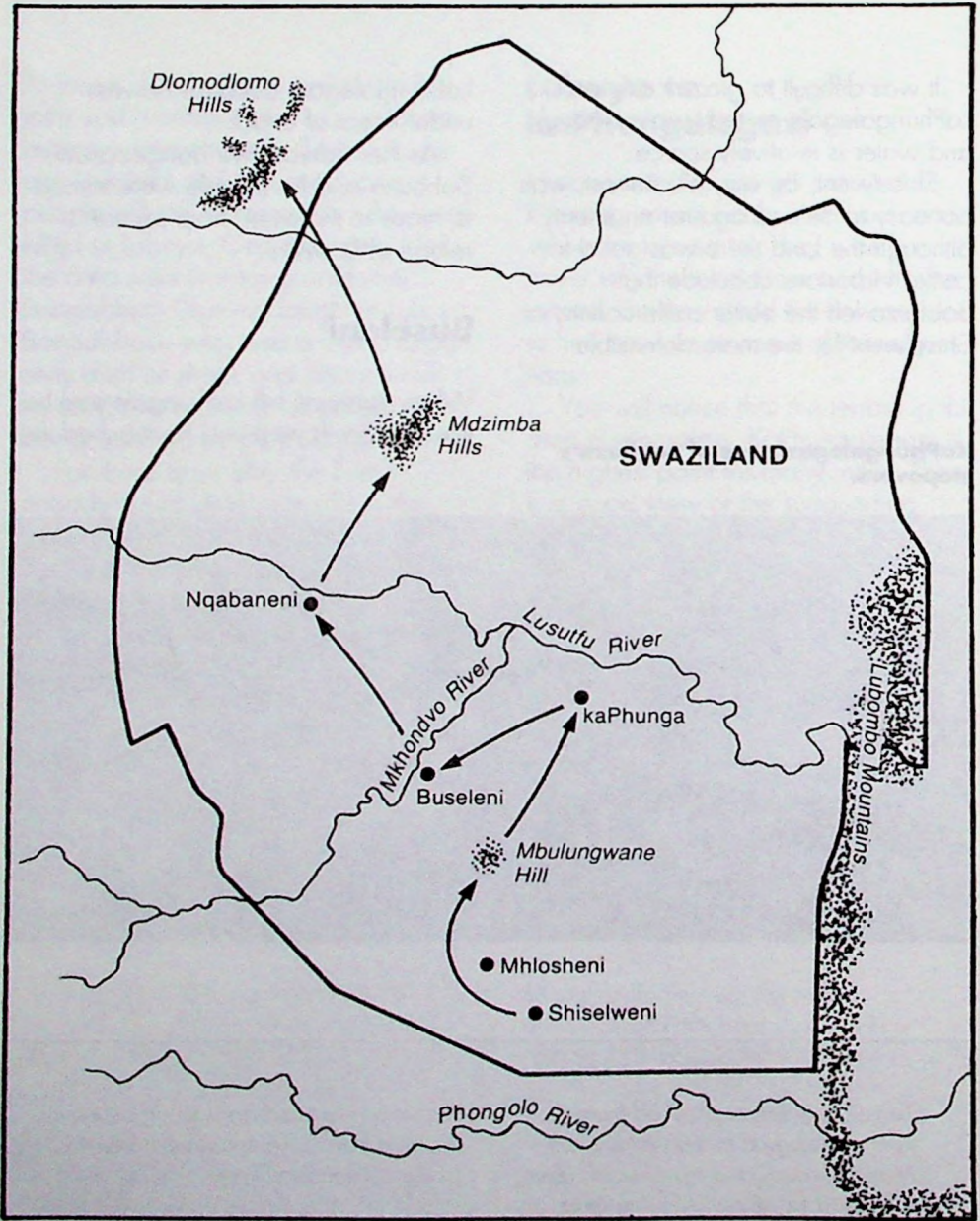
When Sobhuza left kaPhungalegazi he travelled south west until he reached the

KaPhungalegazi: one of Sobhuza's stopovers.



To get to Buseleni proceed from kaPhungalegazi to the Nhlangano–Manzini road, and travel south along that road for about 35 kilometres.

Buseleni is located on your right, on the east bank of a pronounced curve in the Mkhondvo River.



Map of Sobhuza I's journey.



rocky hills near the Mkhondvo River. There, at Buseleni, he found a steep hill with caves where he could hide from Ndwandwe incursions. He remained at Buseleni for a while and then moved northwards towards Nqabaneni, via Mahlanya.

Mahlanya

The Mahlanya market is the site of an anecdote about Sobhuza's flight from the Ndwandwe. The story has it that Sobhuza became tired, and so he sat down and stretched himself out on the ground. Just as he was about to fall asleep a madman came running up and sat down near him. The man was so crazy that Sobhuza's followers wanted to take him away, but the king said that he should be left alone. Sobhuza predicted that the madman would bring them good luck. He was right. Soon afterwards, the Maseko came and showed Sobhuza the

impressive cave fortress at Nqabaneni on the Lusutfu River.

Nqabaneni

Sobhuza was related to the Maseko: a daughter of his grandfather, Ngwane, had married a Maseko chief. In addition, Sobhuza's mother, Lojiba Simelane, was also related to the Maseko. So, because they were cousins, the Maseko welcomed Sobhuza when he arrived and offered him shelter. At this time Sobhuza and his followers were weak, and the Maseko, under their leader, Mgazi (also known as Cece), were strong. In fact, the Maseko were amongst the most powerful peoples in central Swaziland at this time.

Mgazi agreed to allow Sobhuza's people to stay at Nqabaneni, but he did not want to antagonise the Ndwandwe by doing this. So, when the Ndwandwe army threatened to

To reach Mahlanya, retrace your route northwards on the Nhlangano-Manzini road. When you reach the T-junction, turn left towards

Mbabane. The Mahlanya market is on the junction between the Malkerns road and the main Mbabane-Manzini highway.



attack Nqabaneni, Mgazi asked Sobhuza and his people to leave. Knowing that Sobhuza was a stranger in his land, Mgazi supplied the Ngwane king with a guide who was instructed to show him another cave fortress. The guide's name was Lanqabane Mnisi. He took Sobhuza north of Nqabaneni, to the Mdzimba Mountains.

Mdzimba Mountains

Lanqabane Mnisi took Sobhuza to caves in the Mdzimba Mountains. But his enemies did not leave Sobhuza in peace. They discovered where he and his people were hiding, and launched a heavy attack against them. It is said that on one occasion an Ndwandwe *imphi* found a woman hiding in a cave. They tried to seize her, but because there was only one entrance she managed to stab the warriors as each one attempted to enter the cave. She killed five warriors before they

retreated. As they backed off, the story has it, the warriors complained bitterly amongst themselves that they had been repulsed by a woman!

The Mdzimba caves were virtually impregnable, but the invaders persisted. Each time they came, they would burn the villages below the mountains. Some informants claim that the fires destroyed all the homesteads except the main residence, which would mysteriously remain standing.

The Mdzimba Mountains, which stretch from Mbabane to the Loziha royal residence, can be seen lying just north of the Manzini-Mbabane road.

The Mdzimba Mountains got their name before the Ngwane arrived. 'Mdzimba' is a seSotho word, the meaning of which has been lost to the post.

To reach Nqabaneni, travel about 25 kilometres along the Sidvokodvo road towards Manzini. Turn left at a

place called Mhlaleni, on the Lusutfu River, and proceed to the Nqabaneni Mission.

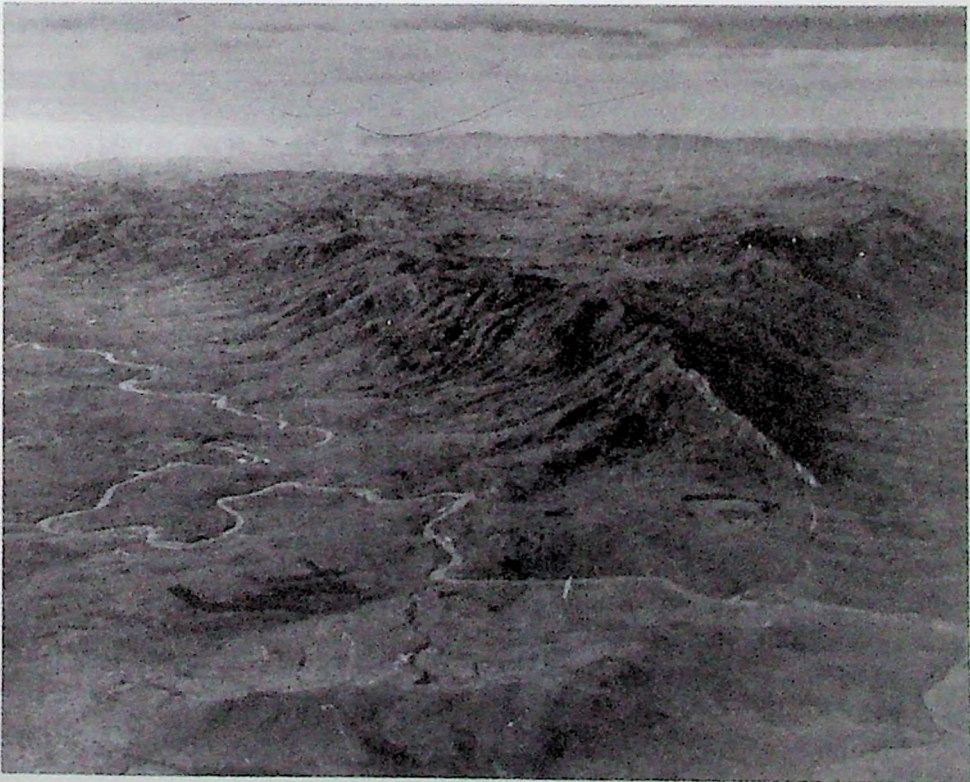


Dlomodlomo Mountains

Many of Sobhuza's followers had been lost on the journey north. Others, who had tried to reach him from Shiselweni, found their way blocked by the Ndwandwe army. Sobhuza did not have enough warriors to engage the Ndwandwe in open battle. Even though he was protected by the caves, he knew that they would get him in the

end. He had no choice but to flee even further to the north. Sobhuza finally retreated to the Dlomodlomo Mountains, north east of Swaziland, and beyond the reach of this tour, where he lived quietly under the protection of an Umsotfu chief called Magobhoyi until the Ndwandwe were finally defeated by the Zulu.

Aerial view of the Mdzimba Mountains.



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The Building of the Swazi Kingdom

Maloyi Mamba and Sobhuza's return to Shiselweni

Time went by, and Sobhuza remained at Dlodlomo. Many people thought he would never come back. A brother of Sobhuza's, Ngwekazi, claimed the Ngwane kingship in Sobhuza's absence. Maloyi, the Mamba chief, did not accept Ngwekazi's leadership. Others, who also rejected the usurper, wanted Maloyi to be king. Maloyi apparently declined. He wanted Sobhuza to return and take up the kingship at Shiselweni.

His chance came in 1819 when Zwide was defeated by the Zulu king, Shaka. The Ndwandwe no longer attacked Shiselweni, so Maloyi journeyed north to fetch Sobhuza. He located the king high up in the Dlodlomo Mountains. Sobhuza was brought back so that he could rule his people once again. Ngwekazi was removed from power by the Mamba

people and killed for his wrongful actions.

While Maloyi was away in the north, the Nhleko people raided cattle from the Mamba chiefdom. Maloyi heard of this when he returned, so he attacked the Nhleko and forced many of them to flee. Their land then became part of the Mamba chiefdom. However, Maloyi did not get his cattle back because the Nhleko had already eaten them!

Maloyi was rewarded for his loyalty by Sobhuza. He was given special rights which conferred on him almost as much power as the king himself had. He could raise his own regiments and go to war without getting permission from the king. He could also give asylum to people fleeing from Sobhuza, and he did not have to attend royal meetings and ceremonies as other of Sobhuza's followers were required to do. The Mamba chiefs have held this special position ever since.



Ndwan-dwe refugees in Swaziland

In about 1819, after Zwide had been defeated by Shaka, groups of Ndwan-dwe refugees fled from their homes to escape from the Zulu army. Some of these groups, as well as many frightened individuals, found their way into Ngwane territory where they begged for land and protection from Sobhuza. He was pleased to take them under his 'armpit' since they increased his fighting force. He was anxious to strengthen his kingdom in case of a Zulu attack.

Many important members of the Ndwan-dwe royal family came to Swaziland. Even Shemane, the heir to the Ndwan-dwe throne, came to seek Sobhuza's protection. Another son of Zwide's, Madzanga, was only a boy when he left the Ndwan-dwe lands and crossed the Phongolo. He was adopted by the Magagula people who gave him the job of scaring birds from their grainfields. Later, he was given a place of his own on which to settle.

Old Lobamba

Sometime after 1820 Sobhuza moved the centre of his kingdom into the eZulwini Valley, far from Shaka's sphere of influence. He arranged for the queen mother, *iNdllovukati* Lojiba, to leave Shiselweni so that she too could be placed in an area of safety. A residence was built for her at Mahlanya. This residence became known as Lobamba, and it was the place where Sobhuza danced the *incwala* (or 'first fruits ceremony') every midsummer.

Mawelawela Island

Sobhuza incorporated the Maseko people into his kingdom after a decisive battle on Mawelawela Island. This is how it happened:

In about 1819 the Ndwan-dwe were defeated by Shaka, and Sobhuza regained his kingdom. He then tried to expand the area under his control. He began by moving his capital to the centre of Swaziland. Many of the Besutfu groups in central

Mawelawela Island is in the middle of the Lusutfu River. The

island is about 2 kilometres from Luyengo, along the Bhunya road.



Lobamba: the residence of the queen mother.

Swaziland either submitted peacefully to Sobhuza, or were conquered by his army.

The Maseko people, however, proved more difficult to handle because they were so powerful. They inhabited a large chiefdom in central Swaziland, under the control of Mgazi, and they gave protection to many smaller Besufu clans in their area. In 1820 Sobhuza tried to bring them under his 'armpit' by offering one of his daughters, LaMbombotsi, to be Mgazi's main wife. This plan failed when Mgazi chose another woman,

LaNdzimandze, to be his main wife. Mgazi had thought ahead. He did not want Sobhuza's daughter to be the mother of his successor. He knew that this would have paved the way for the extension of Ngwane rule over the Maseko.

Mgazi built a village for LaMbombotsi far away from his own residence (near the present-day agricultural research station). LaMbombotsi was deeply insulted by Mgazi's actions, and decided to return to her father. She knew Sobhuza would demand an explanation for her decision, so she soaked her leather skirt in the Mhlambanyatsi River and put it on,



creased and misshapen, before she arrived back at the royal residence. When Sobhuza saw the condition of her clothes, he thought that she had been badly treated by Mgazi. He decided to punish the Maseko, but he had to be careful how he set about doing it. The Maseko could not be easily beaten.

Sobhuza and his advisors hatched a plan: they invited the Maseko to join them on a friendly hunt, but their intentions were sinister. It was the Maseko, rather than the impala and elephant, who would be hunted.

The hunt took place in the Maseko chiefdom. The participants moved on to Mawelawela Island, where animals were abundant. There the Ngwane hunters fell on their unsuspecting human prey.

It was a terrible day for the Maseko. Many, including Mgazi, died. Others fled, some as far away as present-day Lesotho, where their descendants live today. One section of the Maseko remained at

Mawelawela and joined the Ngwane, fighting against their own people. Maseko power had been broken at last.

ELangeni and eZulwini: residences of Sobhuza I

Sobhuza returned to his kingdom in about 1820 with the help of Maloyi Mamba. Soon afterwards he decided to move the main royal residence from Shiselweni into the eZulwini Valley. ELangeni was established as his administrative capital, or *lilawu*. ELangeni was built beneath the Mzimba Mountains, within easy reach of the mighty rock fortresses. Sobhuza wanted to be safe from a Zulu attack.

By the 1820s the Zulu had become one of the most powerful peoples in south-east Africa. Shaka had conquered most of the chiefdoms and kingdoms around him, including the Ndwandwe. Miraculously, the

ELangeni is situated on the road between Lobamba and the Lozitha royal residence. To reach eLangeni proceed from the National Archives

building across the Lusushwana River. The first dirt road to the left after crossing the bridge leads to eLangeni.



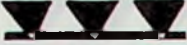
EZulwini.

Ngwane were not the object of his attention, but Sobhuza knew that the Zulu army would march across the Phongolo River to attack his people. This is why he sought the cover of the Mdzimba caves.

The Zulu did attack. In 1827 the Zulu army crossed into Sobhuza's kingdom to recover stolen cattle. However, they found few people to fight. Many Ngwane had hidden in the cave fortresses when they saw the Zulu army approaching. War was averted, the Zulu withdrew.

EZulwini is on the main road from Mbabane to Manzini. Opposite the eZulwini village turn-off there is a dirt road leading into the Mdzimba

Mountains (the 'Tea-road'). The site of the eZulwini royal residence lies about one kilometre along this road.



The cave fortresses continued to be used during the reign of Mswati II, when the Zulu attacked with greater force. They killed many Swazi people in battle during 1852, but they never succeeded in defeating them because they could not enter the caves where the Swazi were hiding.

Today the eZulwini Valley is a popular tourist area, but its main importance in history lies in the fact that Sobhuza built a home at eZulwini for his mother, Somnjalose Simelane. Nyezi Nkambule was the senior *indvuna* of this residence. Like elangeni, eZulwini was within easy reach of the caves in the Mdzimba Mountains, so the people living there were able to find protection during times of war.

There are other reasons why Sobhuza chose to settle at the foot of these mountains. For instance, 'eZulwini' means 'place of the heavens' and indeed this area has some of the best rainfall in Swaziland.

The Magagula and other Besutfu groups

It was not easy for Sobhuza to move into central Swaziland, as many Besutfu groups resisted Ngwane incorporation. Some of these groups occupied strongholds amongst the rocks in the mountains. Sobhuza could not attack them directly. He had to trick

them instead. We saw how he tricked the Maseko people at Mawelawela Island. He did a similar thing to the Magagula.

There were two branches of the Magagula. One branch was ruled by Moyeni in the Nkomati River area of northern Swaziland. The other branch was ruled by Mnjoli, who lived in the Mdzimba Mountains. Mnjoli had special rain-making powers, which had been passed on to him by his forefathers. Sobhuza knew that if he could get these skills, he would be a much stronger king. He would be able to extend his rule over all the Besutfu people in central Swaziland.

Sobhuza sent four messengers to ask Mnjoli for the rain-making charms. Mnjoli could not believe his ears! The messengers were asking him to give away the charms that made him the most powerful chief in the whole region! To show what he thought of Sobhuza's strange request, Mnjoli beat the messengers before he sent them home.

Sobhuza then had to think of another way to get the charms. The story goes that he decided to play a trick on the Magagula. He told his warriors to put cows' hides on their backs and to pretend they were cattle. This they did. Then they quietly hid themselves amongst the Magagula herds which were grazing at the foot of the mountains. When the cattle

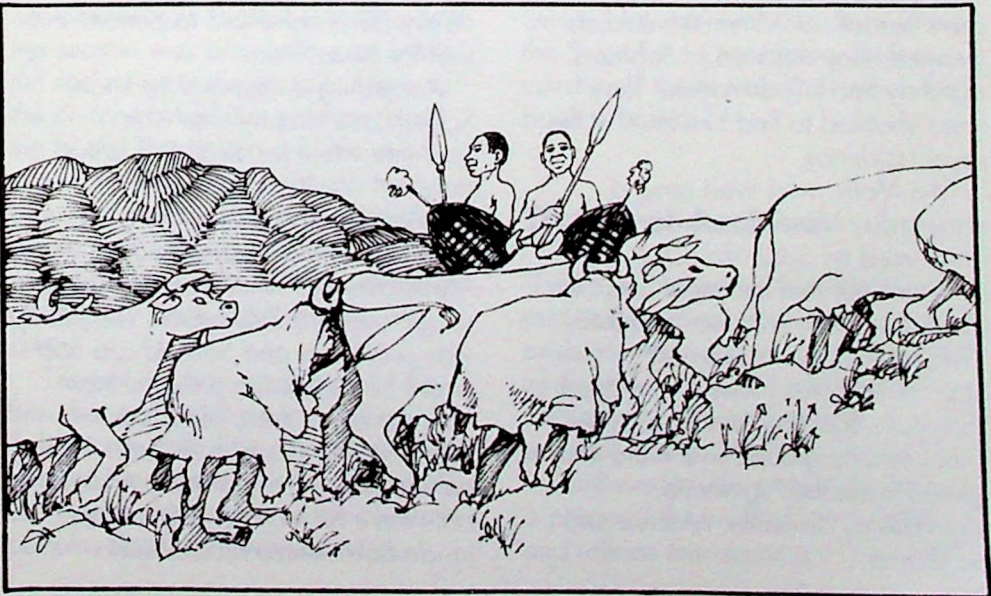



were brought into Mnjoli's mountain fortress for the night, the Ngwane warriors stealthily entered, hidden in the herd. As soon as they were inside, they attacked the Magagula people. Mnjoli tried to run away, but he was old and his rheumatism was so bad that he could only crawl. The warriors threw spears at the old man and killed him. However, they could not find the rain-making charms, so they split open his stomach to see if he had swallowed them. But Mnjoli had given them to his sons, Dvokolwako and

Sibhungu, for safe-keeping. The sons ran away to Mliba Mountain with Sobhuza's army in hot pursuit.

According to one oral tradition, Sobhuza then tried to steal Dvokolwako's protective charm – a penis sheath (*umvunulo*) – so as to break his power. He sent a young woman to Dvokolwako's residence hoping that he would be attracted by her. The plan worked. She stayed at Dvokolwako's place, and when she found the *umvunulo*, she hid it beneath her skirt and ran to Sobhuza. The king then sent his army to defeat Dvokolwako, who, without the

Artist's impression of the Ngwane warriors sneaking into Mnjoli's fortress.





umvunulo, no longer had the power to protect his people. It is not certain whether or not Sobhuza did finally get the rain-making charms from Dvokolwako.

Mnjoli's brother, Moyeni, decided to 'stiffen his neck' and to resist Sobhuza. He and his people climbed to the top of a mountain called Mkhutsali. Sobhuza's army surrounded the rock, but they could not climb it. More soldiers were sent. Moyeni knew that he could not hold out, so one night, he descended the mountain with his son. The son, who was following in his footsteps, was killed on the way, but Moyeni managed to escape by burrowing into the long grass. He went straight to Sobhuza's place and gave himself up. When the soldiers returned, they reported to Sobhuza that they had killed Moyeni. They were shocked to find him alive at the royal residence.

The Mnisi, who lived around present-day Mbabane, were also conquered by Sobhuza. Oral traditions say that the Mnisi had the ability to vanish from their attackers! When the Ngunwane warriors approached them, they would often find a cloud of fog, but no people! Other Besufu groups who were conquered were the Ngwenya, Mavimbela, Dhladhla, Mncina and the Gama.

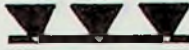
The death of Sobhuza I

Sokhukhuza Hlophe was a guardian and close friend of Sobhuza's in his old age. Sokhukhuza had often helped the king through difficult times in dangerous places. When they were on the move he would hide the king in a safe place before going on ahead to spy out for enemies. They would continue travelling only when the way was clear.

Sokhukhuza also looked after the king's head-rest, which he carried with him wherever they went. The head-rest was made of stone so it was not an easy thing to carry over long distances. However, Sokhukhuza managed very well, in fact, so well that his descendants continued to perform this task for Swazi kings.

According to one oral tradition, Sokhukhuza Hlophe was with Sobhuza when he died. This is the story:

Sobhuza was pricked by a sharp thorn near a mountain called Mampondweni where he was taking refuge during a Zulu attack. The plant was poisonous and Sokhukhuza had to use his assegai to prise the thorn from the king's flesh, but it was too late. The king became ill. Sokhukhuza carried him to the top of the Mdlanku Hill where he found a cave. Once inside Sokhukhuza rubbed sticks



together to make a fire to warm the king. They remained here for a while because the king was too ill to move. The king had contracted a fever which became worse when they left the cave and continued travelling. Not long afterwards Sobhuza died.

Sokhukhuza took the king's body to a hiding place near Dlangeni, where an Umsotfu man called Mabaleka Mncina had built his home.

Sokhukhuza stole a cow's hide from Mncina's place and wrapped the king's body in it. He then hid the body in a cave and kept the death a secret from the people. He did not want to lower their morale; it was summer and crops had to be sown for the people to have food in the coming months. So, Sokhukhuza waited until the planting season was over before he broke the sad news to the people. Many of the princes asked him to show them the body. This he did and he also showed them where Sobhuza had been pricked by a thorn and the cave where they had made a fire. When winter set in, they took the body south, all the way back to Mbilaneni, for burial.

Throughout the region most of the Besutfu people did not recognise Sobhuza as their king. They had been defeated in war but they did not really see themselves as part of the Ngwane people. Sobhuza's warriors were

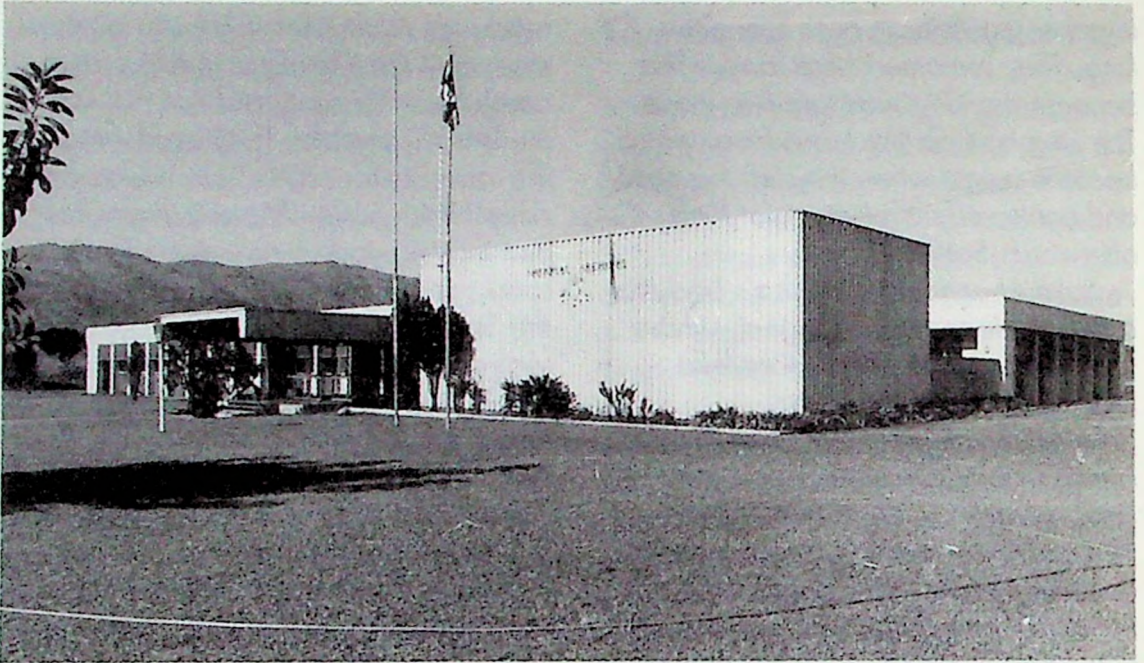
ready for war with the Besutfu all the time, and the Ngwane families who came from the south did not mix with the Besutfu people. They lived amongst the warriors for protection. It was only after 1845, when Mswati II was king, that the Ngwane were able properly to incorporate the Besutfu peoples into the Swazi kingdom. A lot of blood was spilled before this happened, but that is the topic of another history, one which begins in the centre of Swaziland and spreads out with the growth of the Swazi nation, to end in the far north of the country.

Our tour, which has looked into the early formation of the Swazi state and taken us to many of the important sites of this period, now ends back at the Swazi National Archives, from where the Swaziland Oral History Project conducted the research on which this book is based.

The Oral Archive

There are few written records from precolonial times, and since written evidence has, until recently, been seen as the main source of information about the past, precolonial history has been paid scant attention.

Furthermore, documented evidence is primarily the work of white settlers and reflects *their* point of view and

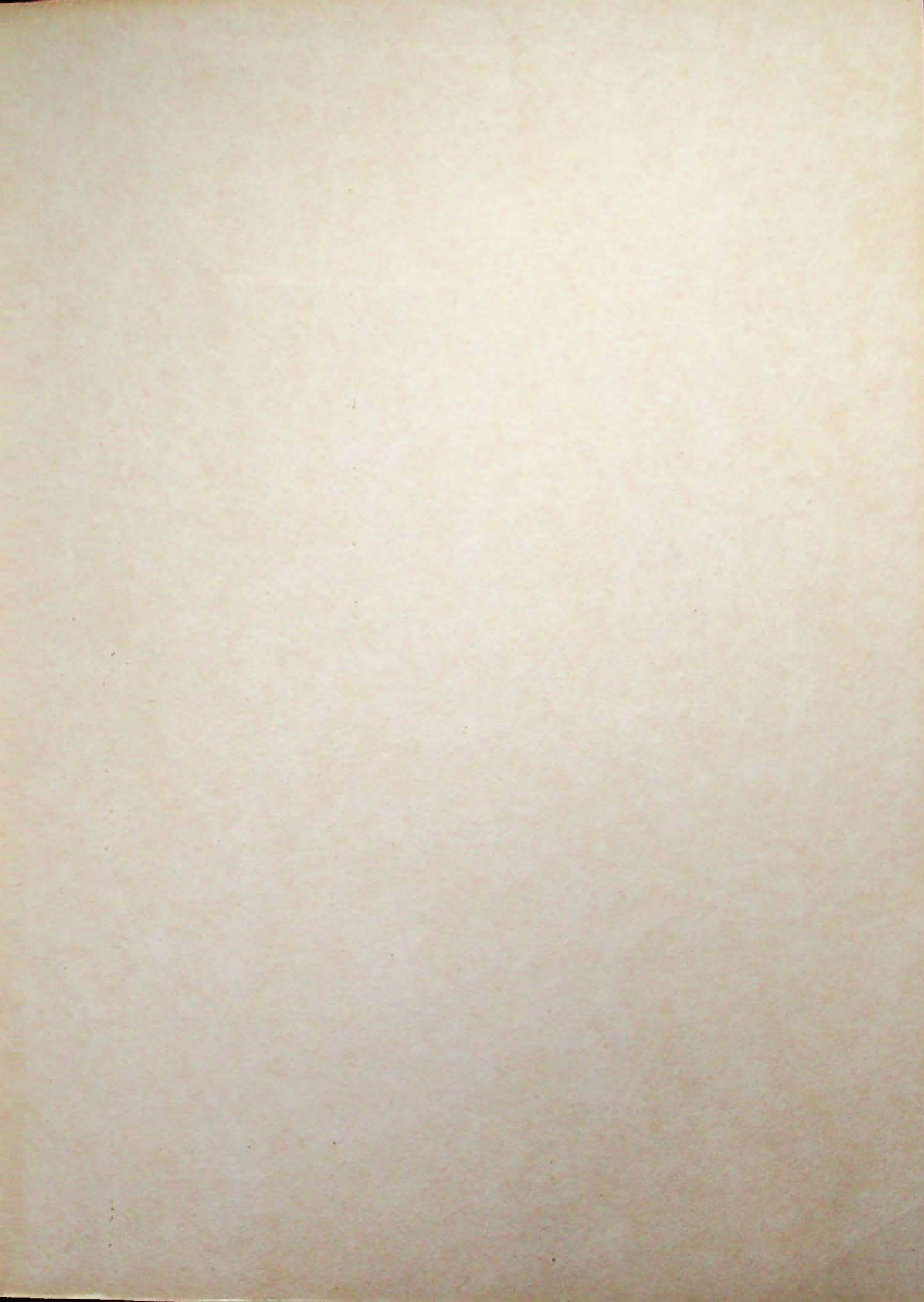


The Swaziland National Archives.

their ideas about the time when they were living in Swaziland. Oral traditions tell us a great deal about Swaziland's history before the arrival of the Europeans and more importantly, they reflect the concerns and experiences of the Swazi people themselves.

The traditions exist on tape, in the exact words in which they were told to the interviewers. They have also been transcribed on paper in written form. The main purpose of the Swaziland

Oral History Project is to make the oral traditions permanently accessible to people in Swaziland. By recording them anybody who wishes to, can hear or read these fascinating and important stories of the past. The tapes comprise the Oral Archive of Swazi history, a necessary and important corollary to the documents preserved in the National Archives. The tapes that make up the Oral Archive can be consulted at the University of Swaziland.



In the tracks of the Swazi past takes a journey back into the precolonial history of the people who live in Swaziland today. It starts at the traditional capital of modern Swaziland and proceeds eastwards to the Lubombo Mountains, the home of peoples such as the Nyawo, the Mngometulu and others. The text explains the origins of these peoples and relates how they came to settle along the Lubombo.

The tour continues south into modern South Africa to pick up the story of the migration of the Dlamini people into the rich Phongolo Valley and details their conflict with the mighty Ndwandwe kingdom. It passes the early royal sites of Ngwane IV, the initial founder of the Swazi kingdom, and looks at the circumstances under which he was joined by peoples like the Mkhonta, Nsibandze, Mdluli and others. It then follows the path of the flight of Ngwane's grandson, Sobhuza I, after he abandoned southern Swaziland in the face of Ndwandwe attacks.

Finally, the tour returns to the heartland of the Swazi kingdom to visit sites of historical significance in the process of the consolidation of the Swazi kingdom under Sobhuza I.

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