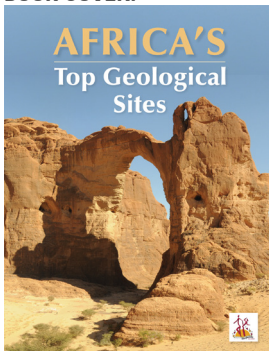


BOOK TITLE:
Africa's top geological sites

BOOK COVER:



EDITORS:
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and R.P. Viljoen

ISBN:
978177584488 (softcover)

PUBLISHER:
Struik Nature, Cape Town;
ZAR390

PUBLISHED:
2016

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HOW TO CITE:
Henry G. Showcasing
Africa's wonderful and
varied geoheritage. *S Afr
J Sci.* 2017;113(3/4), Art.
#a0196, 1 page. [http://dx.doi.
org/10.17159/sajs.2017/a0196](http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2017/a0196)

Showcasing Africa's wonderful and varied geoheritage

The prestigious 35th International Geological Congress (IGC) was held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre from 27 August to 4 September 2016. This event, last held in South Africa in Pretoria in 1929 (the 15th IGC), was a resounding success, and congratulations must be extended to the Council for Geoscience of South Africa and the Geological Society of South Africa (GSSA) who undertook the bulk of the organisation.

As part of the event, the Geoheritage Committee of the GSSA saw an ideal opportunity to showcase Africa's superb geological heritage by producing a commemorative volume. An IGC Publications Panel, under the editorship of Professors Carl Anhaeusser, Morris Viljoen and Richard Viljoen, was constituted to canvass for articles from geoscientists who are experts in their fields with regard to the geoheritage of Africa. The editors are all noted geologists, now heading towards retirement, who have contributed much to the understanding of the geological history of South Africa, especially that of the Archaean period (greater than 2500 million years ago). They have made great strides in studying some of the oldest rocks in South Africa in the Barberton Mountain Land, as summarised by Professor Anhaeusser in Chapter 9 of the book.

The result of this collaborative effort is the publication under review. And it is overall a very good publication. A total of 41 authors contributed to 44 chapters in a full-colour, 312-page book that is profusely illustrated with photographs, maps and diagrams. It is impossible, as Professor Richard Viljoen states in his preface, to give an account of all of Africa's geoheritage in a single publication, but this is a mouth-watering sampling that leaves one hungering for Volume 2. It is not a publication to read from cover to cover (as there is too much information to digest in one go), but one in which to dip in and savour when one has the wanderlust and inclination to do so.

The book is more about Africa's geoheritage than it is about particular geological sites – despite the catchy title – which is exemplified by Chapter 13: 'Glossopteris in South Africa' by Dr Rose Prevec. Most of the chapters have concise geological and geomorphological descriptions of the geoheritage topics, and some have too-brief archaeological, historical and ecological paragraphs. Nevertheless, there is a bibliography for those who wish to delve further into the subject. As announced on a red and white sticker on my copy, 25 southern Africa sites are included, leaving many others elsewhere in Africa to be documented. As I am busy watching 'Voetspore' on television – an episode in which the adventure team is in Madagascar – it strikes me as a pity that the Publication Panel could not find a suitable author to document some of the island's varied geological make-up. The tsingy limestone terrain in the Bemaraha National Park would surely have made the list.

The style of writing is aimed at the informed layperson with an interest in things geological. Nonetheless, each article has undergone the strict academic review process to ensure scientific integrity. Some sections are not easy to read, but there is a glossary included that should assist overall comprehension. As a geologist myself, I understand that writing jargon-free popular articles is not easy, so I commend the authors on their effort, although some succeeded better than others.

The main criticism I have with the book is the question of scale. As a geologist, it is second nature to include a suitable scale bar – usually a standard geological hammer (about 33 cm in length), in all our photographs of rocks. But when I shared the photographs of the gold artefacts on Page 26 and was asked the size of the famous golden rhinoceros, I couldn't answer! Consequently, I was on alert for similar instances of a lack of a scale, and am sad to report that I found quite a few that need redressing in a second edition. Space precludes me from listing them all. The photograph of the fascinating orbicular granite at Diana's Pool in Zimbabwe has no indication of the size of the outcrop, but fortunately I know because my third-year Wits Geology class visited the site in 1975. Ah, the nostalgia!

Other niggling things include minor errors such as 'prophyries' for 'porphyries' on Page 28, 'Lembombo' on Page 52, and the disappearance of Rwanda and Burundi in Figure 33.1 on Page 226. These are not serious, unlike the edition of the Bible in 1631 that omitted the word 'not' from the seventh commandment! I hope that not many more will surface when I continue my perusal of the book and am overcome by the urge to fire up my temperamental 15-year-old 4x4 vehicle, affectionately named Daisy Disco, and hit the road...

I thoroughly recommend the book to all who have an interest in our continent's rich geological heritage. And hope that it will inspire visits to the more accessible sites as well as the more difficult to access ones. This book will certainly be kept in Daisy's glove compartment with my travel books for when I get the chance to do some leisurely geotourism.

The Acacia Gold Mining Company is to be thanked for the sponsorship of the publication, which has significantly reduced its price. Finally, the IGC Publications Panel and the production team at Struik Nature are to be congratulated on putting together a publication that deserves to be a bestseller.



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