AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL JOURNEY AT ROBBEN ISLAND

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In 2018, exposed human remains were discovered at Robben Island. This led to a formal investigation conducted by specialist bodies that comprised of South African Police Services Forensic Pathology Unit and officials from Heritage Western Cape on 28 February 2018.

These remains were discovered at the Maximum Security Prison (MSP) precinct, next to the Kramat. The preliminary assessment found that human remains belonged to multiple individuals or at least two human beings as there were three femoral bones discovered on the scene. Other bones found within the vicinity included vertebrae, carpals, patellas and other bone fragments. Preliminary inspection of the exposed bones by specialists from these competent bodies suggests that the bones were buried more than 50 years ago. Judging from the shallowness of the graves (10cm) it is suspected that the site was most likely levelled during construction of the prison in the early 1960s. Ex-Political Prisoners have recorded discovery of human bones during extension of buildings of the Maximum Security Prison (MSP). The forensics specialist then concluded that this is a historic/archaeological site.

Robben Island Museum has a multi-layered history that dates back as far as the 1400s. Essentially what this means is that there are undocumented and documented human remains on the Island cross-cutting across these different historical layers, hence the need to conduct an archaeological survey on the Island to establish whether there are more exposed/at risk human remains.

In line with our Integrated Conservation Management Plan (1918-2023) which calls for continuous research of the Island’s cultural and natural heritage, an archaeological survey is imperative in determining the origins of the human remains. This will further contribute in us fulfilling our mandate as a heritage site, which is to conserve natural and cultural heritage and disseminate knowledge about the Island’s rich history.
To stay up-to-date with new developments and announcements at Robben Island Museum please visit their website [http://www.robben-island.org.za/](http://www.robben-island.org.za/) or visit their social media pages:

- Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/robbenislandDAC/](https://www.facebook.com/robbenislandDAC/)
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Media contact:
Nadia Nel
nadia@reputationmatters.co.za
081 439 3912