



UMJINDI
Local Municipality

Strategic Overview

From Barberton Mountainlands to World Heritage

19 May 2006



Local artist Nukain Mabuza is know world wide as an "outsider" artist. It has been said that Mabuza is to African art what Nelson Mandela is for humanism.

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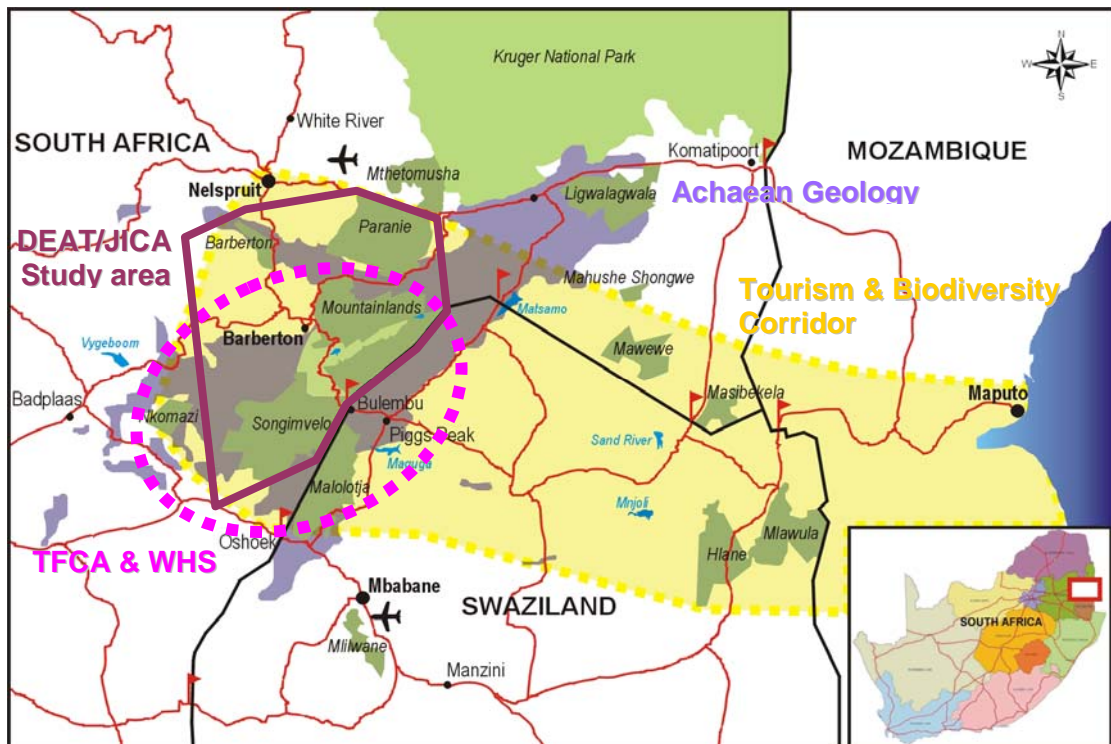
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1 Introduction

The Makhonjwa Mountains have defined the Swazi frontier for as long as human memory. They stretch from Jeppe's Reef to Oshoek and all the hills between, from Shiyalongubo to Queen's river and Jambila to Songimvelo and Elukwatini. Geologists and historians refer to this area as the Barberton Greenstone or Barberton Mountainlands. They are renowned for their ancient green rocks with their **unique scientific record of the pre-history of the earth** and for the human stories in pursuit of hidden gold.



Map indicates the underlying Achaean geology (Barberton Greenstone belt) and the nature reserves and some of the spatial initiatives underpinning the future development of the area.

This small and beautiful mountain range has a global reputation. Also referred to as the 'Genesis of Life', its geology includes the best preserved truly ancient rocks on earth. Despite the rocks being 3.5 billion years old they are so well preserved that their fossils faithfully record the **earliest life forms on the planet** as well as evidence of the first recorded massive meteorite impact. Here, when gold was discovered over 120 years ago it was the site of one of the milestones marking the industrial development of South Africa. And those mines are still producing the oldest gold on the planet.

For years Barberton has attracted teams of **international scientists** who return annually to research and interpret the story of the earth's beginnings and the

evolution of life. This is because it is only in the beautifully preserved rocks of the Makhonjwas where they are able to find the clues that science needs to learn about the earth's earliest history and the way life began.

The Makhonjwa Mountains are also a veritable treasure trove of other heritage values of great significance. Biologically, they are home to an incredible variety of native plants and animals, and is one of the recognized 'Centers of Biological Endemism' in South Africa. They contain very important high-rainfall mountain catchments which are protected in terms of several proclaimed Nature Reserves. The **historic and cultural history** of the region is of great importance to the Swazi Nation as well as that of the early colonial era. Its beauty and accessibility makes it a **natural destination for tourism** where visitors from southern Africa and overseas can enjoy an enjoyable inspirational and educational experience.

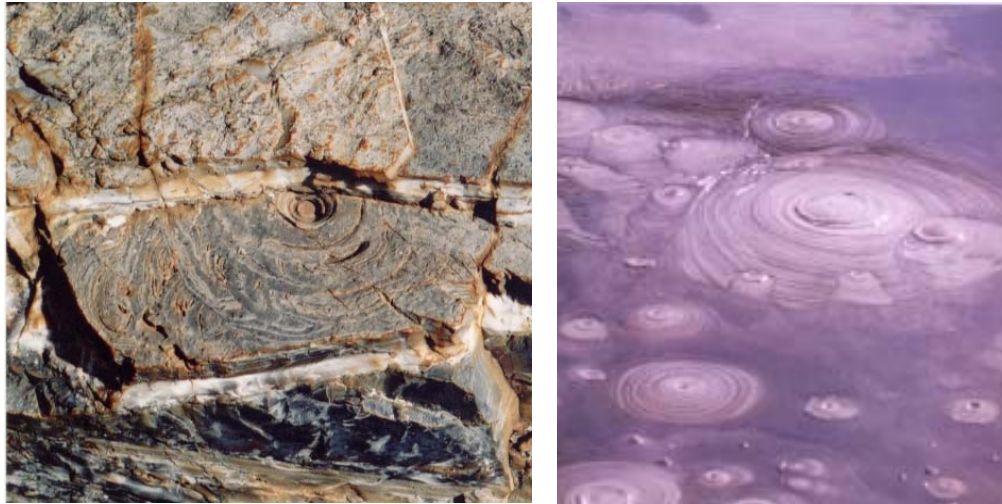
2 Natural and cultural heritage

The region is important from a natural and cultural heritage point of view. Highlights include,

- **Regional location** – Located on Swaziland border and close to Mozambique; Barberton is close to two national capitals (Maputo 200km, Mbabane 120km); and the provincial capital of Nelspruit (45 km).
- Multi-national and Regional heritage for **culture and history** – the original peoples of the region, the Swazi, Bapedi, Mbayi and Shangaan all played a role competing for this land. In the last 150 years these people were disrupted further by Boer and British colonists with their technology, their laws and domination. A rich array of archaeological sites dating back over 2000 years, are scattered over the area and indicate the presence of mysterious earlier civilizations.
- The **world-class heritage of the region's geology** – 3 billion to 3.6 billion year-old rocks, in unsurpassed state of preservation, contain the best sequence of the world's oldest geological record available on earth. Scientific research from the Barberton Mountainlands has provided the earliest records of how the earth's crust was formed. It is currently in the process of re-defining the date for the **first occurrence of life on earth** – an astonishing one billion years earlier than previously estimated. Here evidence has been found of one of the first massive meteorite impacts possibly related to the formation of our moon. **Tidal traces billions of years old** are so precisely recorded they allow for calculation of changes in the distance between the earth and the moon. The Barberton Mountainlands is the **only place on earth where the development of the early earth crust and evolution of life itself can be studied**. This is truly the place where life began more than 3.6 billion years ago.



Several archaeological sites indicate the presence of earlier inhabitants. Various sites from Early, Middle and Late Stone age through to San drawings to the theories on routes and temples of Dravidian and Phoenician merchants and even Egyptians slave traders can be found.



On the left is the petrified evidence of an ancient hot spring from the Mountainlands Nature Reserve found together with others in the Onverwacht formation. On the right is a modern-day hot spring in the Yellowstone Park (USA) indicating the process of forming. Such evidence indicates the life forming conditions that existed in the area, which likely led to the development of early single cell life forms also found here.

- A number of **high value water catchments** - up in the high rainfall valleys of the Makhonjwa's. Several of these have reduced water yields due to timber plantations but others are well secured within major Nature Reserves. These pristine rivers with their patches of forest provide sparkling focal points in wilderness landscapes of high tourism value. These rivers also provide priceless water to local communities, farmers and towns.
- National **biodiversity heritage** – the Barberton Centre of Endemism is recognized as an area where South Africa's world renowned plants and animals are particularly abundant and diverse. The sharp change in altitude between cool grassy hill slopes through rocky escarpments to warm wet lowveld provides for a diversity of plants and animals exceeded only in the specialized ecosystems of the Cape Floral Kingdom.
- **Outstanding scenery** provides the foundation for a unique tourism destination - a result of combining geology catchments and high biodiversity. The Makhonjwa mountains provide a beautiful, ever-changing backdrop to virtually every road in the region. Even the main tar roads are tourist attractions in their own right. Once off the main roads, there is a secondary road network that allows closer access to these fascinating mountains. Opportunities also exist to leave the roads and get up close and experience these wonders of nature and our rich cultural heritage through 4x4 trails, hiking and biking routes, horse riding, paragliding and other more adventurous activities.
- Limited competing land uses - the mountains have steep rocky slopes with high rainfall and leached soils and therefore have **low value for other forms of use** such as agriculture and urban development. Large areas are already planted to timber but the catchments are now at full capacity for this water hungry form of production as evidenced by the moratorium on issuing of further planting permits. But for a wilderness tourism area, access and accommodation is readily available in the towns of Barberton and Badplaas. Both the towns and rural areas of the district have significant untapped potential for nature and adventure based recreation and accommodation facilities. All this potential is situated in the heart of some of Mpumalanga's identified poverty pockets. These **rural communities will be the primary**

beneficiaries of development through the existing strategies which can be implemented.

- Information on the region is widespread. Although special interest articles about the region are available, most are not readily accessible or written and presented in user-friendly form. This remains one of the tasks ahead if the development of the region and the tourism potential of the Barberton Mountainlands are to be realized.

3 Socio economic conditions

Since 1996 there has been a marked **increase of people living in poverty** in the Umjindi Municipal area, rising from 42% in 1996 to 51.2% in 2002. Below is a summary of the poverty profile of the area compared to that of Mpumalanga:

	Project area:	Mpumalanga
Formal employment	37.8%	48.9%
Informal employment	11.8%	11.6%
Unemployed	50.4%	39.5%
Household income less than R1500 pm	78.7%	

Source: DBSA

The traditional economic sectors of mining, forestry and agriculture in the area have been in steady decline for the past 15 years. This has caused a general economic decline as reflected in the above statistics. It is therefore appropriate that over the last six years **natural resource and heritage based tourism** has been identified as a **high potential growth** sector which will be the area's future economic mainstay.

4 Where are we now?

What provisions and facilities are already in place? What **building blocks exist** as a foundation to build on for the sustainable exploitation of our world renowned natural and cultural heritage?

- Three or four substantial **provincial nature reserves** – Songimvelo, Mountainlands and Barberton Nature Reserves in Mpumalanga, and the Malolotja Nature Reserve in Swaziland - are well established but **under developed and under utilized**. There are also several special botanical Nature Reserves located on State Land within the area. Beside these there are substantial private land areas such as the Nkomazi Wilderness near Badplaas, which also contribute to

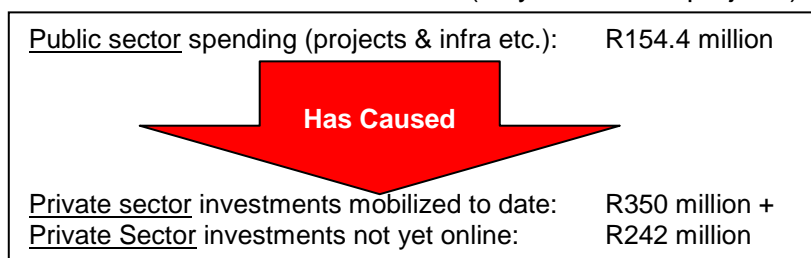


The area contains one of the oldest known mines in the world. Iron has been mined in the area for centuries. Here a Swazi traditional ironsmith tends to the task of making a spear the way they have been made for centuries.

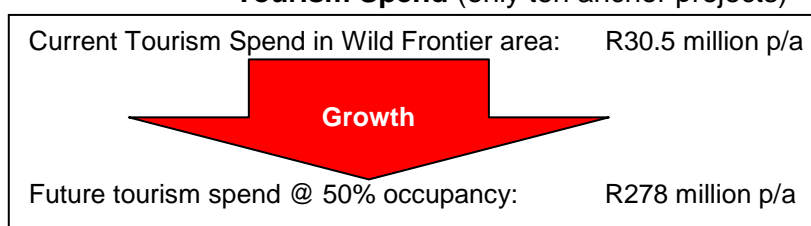
biodiversity conservation and tourism potential. These protected area assets are suited to low density wilderness style use and therefore should be developed as an inter-dependent cluster, not individually in isolation. Additionally, an extensive programme exists to ensure development of and **beneficiation of rural areas between and adjacent** to the above reserves in an integrated approach.

- Over the last five years around 200 projects have been identified from the various development strategies. Of these around 30 are in different stages of implementation and completion with **key infrastructure** upgrading also in the pipeline. This includes SANRAL upgrading of the **R40 from Nelspruit** to Barberton and the long awaited surfacing of the **Bulembu road** to Swaziland by the Mpumalanga Department of Roads. These two road projects will remove critical constraints to the development of the area. The Bulembu road is key to opening up the development potential of the Barberton Mountainlands area and providing a link to Swaziland. Its completion will boost tourism and business between northern Swaziland and Barberton and improve access to the region as a whole.
- Much **development planning** has already been completed that provides frameworks and concepts to attract development that will be integrated with the region's natural assets. In the main, these plans simply await implementation.
- The **Tourism Biodiversity Corridor (TBC)** spatial development initiative focused on the development, promotion, and support of sustainable, collaborative and internationally competitive tourism and conservation initiatives between Swaziland and Mpumalanga, South Africa. Ultimately, this Corridor is intended to extend eastwards into southern Mozambique. The TBC has grown from one or two small project specific investments into a substantial programme with tourism development projects as well as a number of projects focused on the development of infrastructure, facilities and capacity building. Of specific interest is the identification of the ten anchor projects to drive the TBC. Below diagrams indicate the economic impact of only the ten identified anchor projects of the TBC and serves as an example of the **scale of economic impact** that is possible through a focused programme in this area:

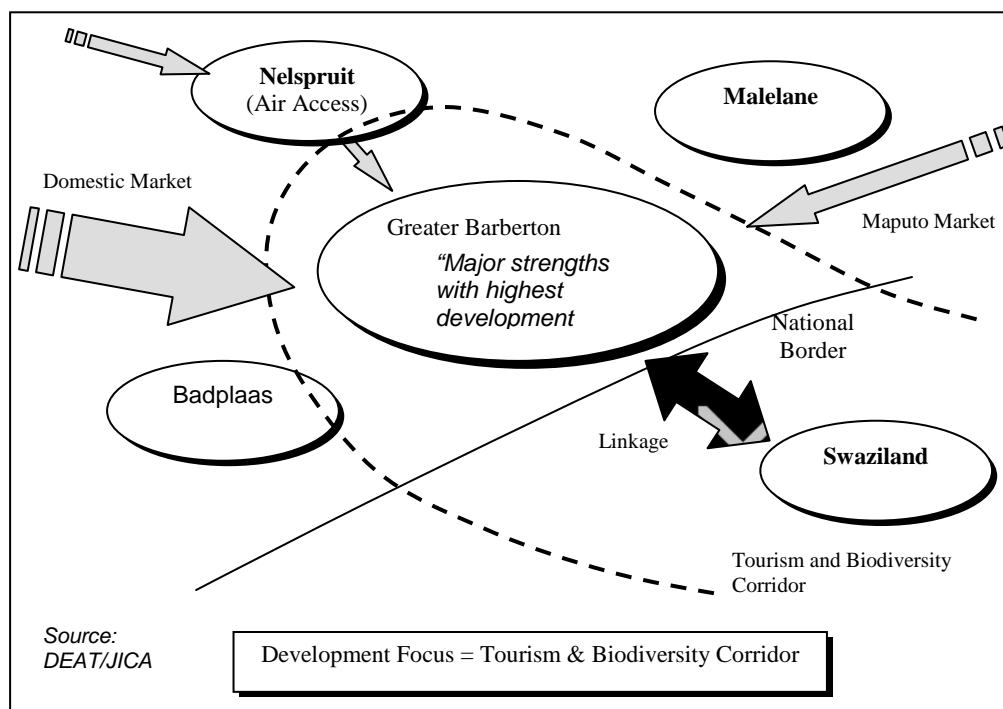
Investment (only ten anchor projects)



Tourism Spend (only ten anchor projects)



- Mpumalanga Parks Board's **Strategic Eco-Tourism Development Plan for the Barberton Complex**, produced in 2002 focused on the development with the MPB reserves within the regional context.
- **Songimvelo Circle** Study done by KPMG for the then Mpumalanga Department of Economic Affairs in 1999 first highlighted the underdeveloped tourism potential of the area.
- **Songimvelo-Malolotja Trans-Frontier Conservation Area (TFCA)**, currently being spearheaded by Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism and the tri-partite TFCA committee between Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa (2006). The official recognition of the Songimvelo-Malolotja TFCA has created a foundation for further development. This TFCA area could form the core of a future World heritage Site. S-MTFCA approved by Trilateral Ministerial Committee on 2 November 2004 as 5th TFCA to function under the Lubombo Commission.
- **Mpumalanga Biodiversity Conservation Plan**, recently produced by Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency highlights the biodiversity significance and irreplaceable conservation value of the Barberton Mountainlands Area.
- The **Study on Tourism Promotion and Development Plan in the Republic of South Africa** done jointly by DEAT and JICA in 2002 found that the Barberton area had one of the highest tourism development potentials in the country and made recommendations for the development of the area:



- **Barberton Community Tourism** (Section 21 company) established as a partnership between Umjindi Local Municipality and local role-players to promote the area as a tourism destination.

- The compilation of the strategy of **Umjindi Municipality Vision for the Eco-Heritage Town**, prepared by Thami Nxasana of iZiko-Lo-Lwazi (Pty) Ltd, 2006 has laid the foundation or the repositioning of Barberton and surrounds.
 - The Barberton area was also identified by Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in their **Priority Areas for Tourism Infrastructure Investment** (PATII) programme in 1999.
 - The potential **World Heritage Site** for the Barberton Mountainlands area is already listed by the SA National World Heritage Committee and now awaits development of a funding proposal.
- **Substantial information exists** on the geology, biodiversity and modern history of the region but much of it is obscure and technical and not easy to find. The written and oral history of the region's indigenous peoples is also not readily available and needs highlighting in written and other, more material forms, that are accessible to entrepreneurs and visitors.

5 Way Forward

Over the last five years **various strategies** and integrated projects have been initiated to drive the economic and social development based on the area's natural and heritage assets. While much planning has been done there **lacks a focused, well resourced drive to bring these plans to fruition**. Ultimately, most of the plans indicated the potential for World Heritage Site status which will provide the focus and impetus required for active and integrated development . This would have the prestige of the **first World Heritage Site for Mpumalanga**.

The way forward should therefore focus on providing the **capacity and resources to implement** existing strategies. While registration of a World Heritage Site for the area would be a very significant milestone, the long-term goal is the sustainable economic development of the region based on its natural resources and tourism potential. A key approach should be to integrate projects at all levels to ensure **sustainability and maximize local benefits**. This will require the active participation of several government departments on local, provincial and national levels, and local NGO's, private and community sectors. The existing strategies already provide a clear blueprint for moving forward.

END.

All the strategies and studies referred to in this document together with substantial other background and research material is available and resides with the various departments involved. Barberton Community Tourism can assist in obtaining these if required.