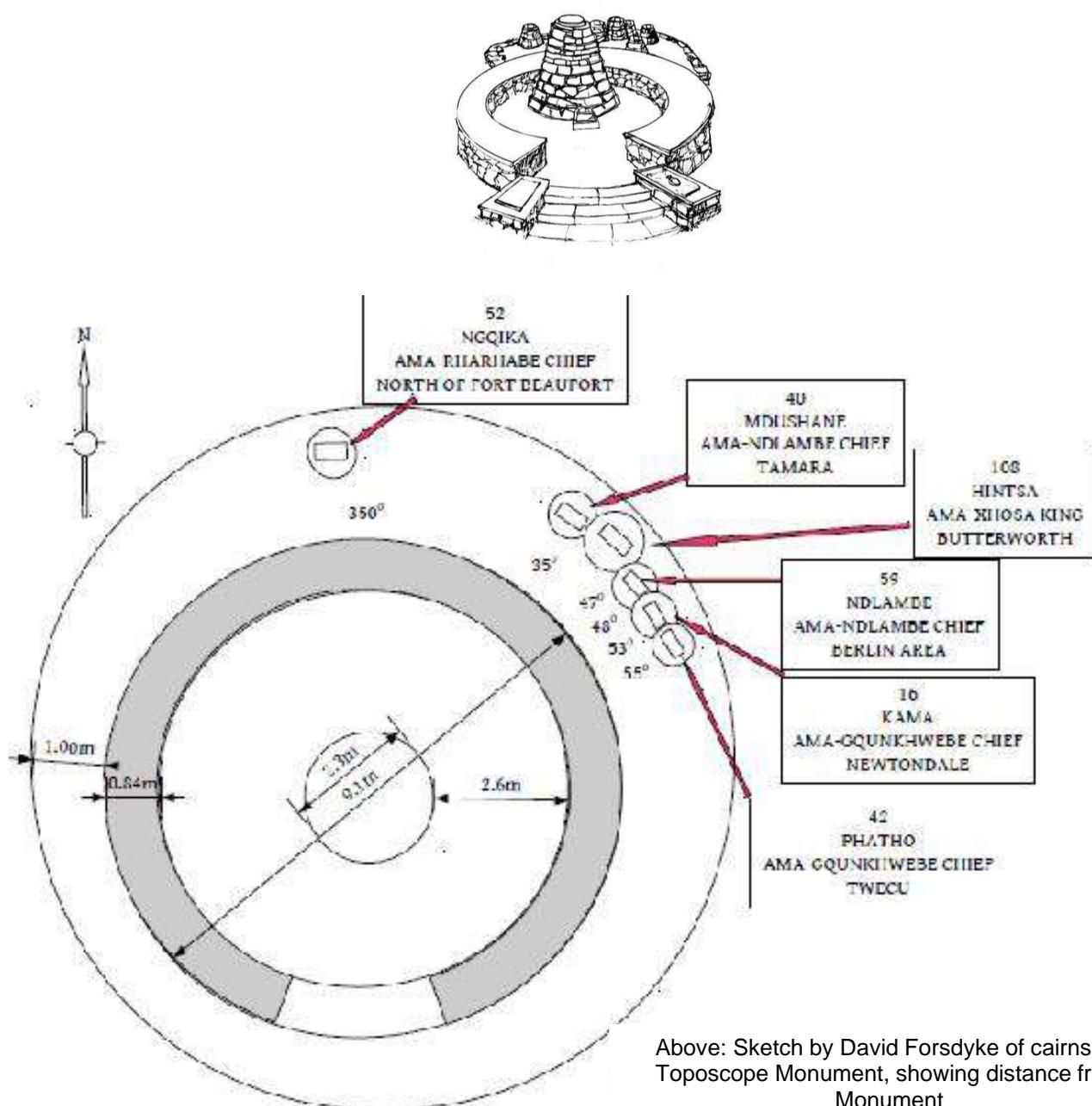


A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE XHOSA CHIEFS AND KING REPRESENTED ON CAIRNS ON TOPOSCOPE MONUMENT, BATHURST

compiled by Margaret Snodgrass



INTRODUCTION

The 'Xhosa' people are those people who claim descent from an ancestor named Xhosa, that is the amaGcaleka and amaRharhabe of the present day. [Peires, J, *The House of Phalo*, Preface 3]

Rharhabe was the founder of the Rharhabe sub-group of the Xhosa nation and the second son of Phalo. Rharhabe died near present day Dohne in the Eastern Cape and from his second wife, he had two sons, Mlawu and Ndlambe.

NDLAMBE (d 1828)

Rharhabe and his heir, Mlawu, were both killed in 1782. Control of the clan transferred to Mlawu's son, Ngqika. Although the clan took Ngqika's name, he was too young to rule and according to Xhosa tradition, Rharhabe's other son, Ndlambe, served as regent until Ngqika matured. As second son, Ndlambe had title, but no real authority – as soon as he was old enough, Ngqika took control. Nevertheless, by 1809, soon after his arrival in the Zuurveld, Ndlambe had established himself as the most important chief in the area. Ngqika began challenging his position and sporadic civil war between Ngqika and Ndlambe continued for the next twenty years. Ndlambe remained in the Zuurveld until he was forced by Colonel Graham and the Cape Regiment to move across the Fish River. He died on 10 Feb 1828, at ninety plus years old – '*the perfect specimen of a powerful chief of the olden times before intercourse with the colonists.*' [Mostert, N, *Frontiers*, p.608]

When he was born the colonists had scarcely moved beyond the Cape, although they had already encountered Xhosa on their cattle-bartering journeys to the east. He had been a witness to the great schism in the Xhosa nation between his father, Rharhabe, and his uncle, Gcaleka, and had been regarded, unfairly, as the principal committed enemy of the Cape Colony.

He had seen more of the early formative history of South Africa than any other man; he died at the very moment it began to enter the most decisive stage of that evolution. But he took with him the formidable power of the Ndlambe, his people, for he left them no clearly designated heir. His rightful heir had died in battle against the colony, possibly at the Battle of Grahamstown, where he had lost three sons. The logical successor was his son, Mdushane, who, in his father's old age, had taken over many of Ndlambe's powers. But Mdushane himself died just over a year after his father. Mdushane was, William Shaw said, *a native of no ordinary mind*, and the missionary rightly predicted that the Ndlambe would go into a decline without an efficient leader. There was no one else of any stature. What they got was a minor son of Ndlambe named Mhala, who was said to have usurped the chieftancy by dispossessing the better-placed heir through a false accusation of witchcraft.

[Mostert, Noel: *Frontiers*. 1992, Jonathan Cape, London]

NGQIKA (1778-1829)

Ngqika was chief of the Rharhabe clan of Xhosa-speaking people in the Ciskei region of South Africa from 1775 to 1829. He made a treaty with Cape Governor Lord Charles Somerset, who came to his aid at Grahamstown during the 1818-1819 Frontier War. His recognition by the British resulted in his being declared paramount chief, but many Xhosa considered him a collaborator with the Colonial authority, and he lost the right to significant stretches of Rharhabe land as a result of war with his uncle Ndlambe. He died 14 November 1829 at Burnhill near Fort Cox.

HINTSA (1789-1835)

Hintsa was Paramount Chief of all the Xhosa peoples - even the Rharhabe recognised his authority. He assisted Ndlambe to defeat Ngqika at the Battle of Amalinde in 1818. During

the 1820s he allowed refugees from the north, the Mfengu, to settle in his territory. With the outbreak of the War of 1834-1835, Hintsa strongly advised his chiefs against becoming involved. However, Sir Benjamin D'Urban invaded his territory and in the subsequent treaty which he was forced to sign in April 1835, Hintsa was ordered to pay a large indemnity of 20 000 head of cattle and allow the Mfengu to leave his territory.

Hintsa and his son Sarhili were taken prisoner. When the cattle were not handed over, Hintsa was ordered to find them. While he and the British were attempting to round up the livestock it was said that he tried to escape. He was riding alongside Harry Smith who warned him that escape would be an act of treason. Hintsa supposedly lunged at Smith, retaliating. Colonel Southe, who was in the search party, then shot at Hintsa who was severely wounded. He crept towards a stream where he attempted to hide – a final bullet, however, killed him. The exact facts of the killing were, and still are, under dispute. An official enquiry was launched into Hintsa's death. Although the true facts will remain shrouded due to a lack of evidence, Hintsa has since been seen as a heroic symbol of Xhosa Nationalism.

Ama-GQUNUKHEBE XHOSA

The Gqunukwebe were a mixed blood Khoikhoi-Xhosa chiefdom formed in the reign of Chief Twisho early in the eighteenth century. They occupied a part of the Zuurveld, the rectangular territory between the coast, the Sunday's and the Fish Rivers. [Mostert p.226.] They were driven out of the Zuurveld by Colonel Graham in 1812 and with the Ndlambe crossed the Fish River.

Phatho and **Kama** were the sons of Chungwa who died in 1812. The Wesleyans focussed their missionary efforts on the Gqunukwebe and Kama became one of the most celebrated of all the Xhosa converts.

Kama was six feet tall and when young, a 'fine handsome' man. He was married to one of Nqika's daughters and although it would have enhanced his political powers as chief, he refused three young women who were offered to him, the last one being the daughter of an important Tembu chief. He threatened to abandon his people rather than indulge in polygamy.

Although Phatho was well-disposed towards Europeans and their culture, he never converted to Christianity as Kama, his younger brother. Kama was also moving from autonomy to independence. Fighting broke out between the two brothers and Kama took his people to a place further north of Peddie.



Left: Mrs Africa Maxongo Fishile, Heritage Officer of EC Provincial Heritage Resources Authority, embraces the cairn of her ancestral Ama-Gqunukhebe chief, Phatho
(Photo: Tom Barrett)

REFERENCES

- Mostert, Noël; (1992) *Frontiers* (Jonathan Cape, London).
- Peires, Jeff; (1981) *The House of Phalo* (Jonathan Ball Publishers, Johannesburg & Cape Town)