



Preserving the past

The KwaZulu Monuments Council was formed five years ago on the initiative of Chief M.G. Buthelezi, the Chief Minister. Its task was to record and care for historic and prehistoric sites in KwaZulu. At the same time the council was charged with the task of establishing a Cultural Interpretive Centre and Ondini was chosen as an appropriate historical site to develop such a complex.

Ondini, the Capital of the Zulu Kingdom from 1873 to 1879, was the Royal Residence of King Cetshwayo KaMpande. King Cetshwayo was the last of the four Kings in the Old Zulu Order. The others were King Shaka KaSenzangakhona (1816 - 1828), King Dingane KaSenzangakhona (1828 - 1840), King Mpande KaSenzangakhona (1840 - 1872). The Zulu Royal House is therefore descended from King Mpande, as the first two Kings left no heirs.

The development of Ondini as an Interpretive Centre began in 1981 with the appointment of an archeologist. The Council had formulated a plan to:

1. Expose and rebuild part of King Cetshwayo's Capital as an outdoor museum, pictured above.
2. To design and build appropriate buildings to house research facilities and administrative staff, display halls, an art gallery, lecture rooms, library and an outdoor

arena, pictured overleaf.

The archeological work started in October 1981. Because some 90% of the original Capital was ploughed up during the 1930's, the archeological team concentrated on a small area of the royal quarters which had not been disturbed.

Soon after the excavations had got under way the rebuilding programme was launched. Today 60 floors have been exposed and the beehive buildings replaced over them. The inner and outer palisades have also been replaced in this section.

Although the shape of the upper section is now evident, the rebuilding programme is far from over. The intention is to replace the whole of the outer palisade so that the actual size of Ondini can be appreciated. The screens and other features within the royal quarters will also be replaced. Meanwhile archeological research continues in the old rubbish dumps and activity areas. Within the next two years our knowledge of the dynamics of Ondini should become more clear.

However, the research on Ondini is only one part of the museum's work. Several projects are in hand while more are to be launched in the near future. Some of these projects are already well established. For example archeological excavations in the Tugela Valley on Early Iron Age sites

dated back from 500 A.D. to 750 A.D. are yielding some fascinating information on the life styles of early Black people in that area. The picture will become much clearer within the next two or three years but already the sites prove beyond doubt that people ancestral to the Nguni speaking people of KwaZulu/Natal today were well established in this part of the world over 1 200 years ago.

Other projects in hand are the development of a site Museum at Nodwengu, King Mpande's Royal Residence and grave, and a monument to King Cetshwayo and his Royal followers at his last capital some two or three kilometres from the Museum. Booklets have also been planned, with two already published, on various aspects of the history, prehistory, arts and crafts of KwaZulu and Zulu people. Those already published are "King Cetshwayo — a biography" and "Fight us in the open" which looks at the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 from a Zulu point of view.

The Museum also fosters research projects that emanate from other institutions. For example the KwaZulu Museum is actively involved with the Natal Museum, the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town. Projects include art in

continued overleaf

Zulu Society, the recording of traditional Zulu music and songs; spatial organisation of homesteads and craft work in Zulu Society (leather working, ceramics, weaving etc.)

Although the development of Ondini as an Interpretive Centre is far from over, various milestones have been reached.

The most important so far being the official opening of the Museum by Prince Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi on

April 13 last. The Museum now has several temporary displays open to the public as well as the outdoor museum.

Because education is the motivating force behind the work and research of the museum, this aspect will receive attention within the next few months.

Already a traditional Zulu homestead capable of housing 30 to 35 people has been built so the public can stay at Ondini and actively participate in the work of the museum. This could

take the form of building traditional beehive structures under the guidance of the reconstruction team, through to participating in the social spectrum of lectures by herbalists on traditional medicines and so on.

To conclude, the KwaZulu Cultural Museum is only a few years old but already the enthusiasm of the staff of the museum is making its impact on those who visit Ondini, the home of King Cetshwayo from 1872 to 1879.

