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Quaggas and Diamonds: The Possible Relationship Between Diamond Mining and Species Extinction

The world's last living Quagga (*Equus Quagga Quagga*) died in the stables under the library of Amsterdam Artis (Zoo) on the 12th of August 1883.¹ Although we do not know what her name was, we do know that she allowed herself to be stroked in the presence of her keeper.² Her remains were prepared by a taxidermist and put on display in the zoo and later in the Natural History Museum in Leiden. After many years on display her now rather tatty remains have recently been placed in the depot of *Naturalis Biodiversity Center*, the successor museum in Leiden. The Quagga was a stunningly beautiful equine, with a coat that reminds one of russet coloured autumn leaf. Similar in build to a Plains Zebra, to which it was related, the Quagga was distinguished by only having stripes on its forequarters.

Equus Quagga Quagga was literally shot out of existence as a species in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the last attested reports of Quagga in the wild dated to 1878, in what is today the Free State province of South Africa.³ The story of the quagga is fairly well known, but the connection of its demise and final extermination in relation to the rise of diamond mining in South Africa after 1865 has not been explored; yet the growth of the one appears to be closely related to the passing of the other.

Traces of Quagga litter the landscape of contemporary South Africa, perhaps not in the sense of physical remains, but certainly in the naming of its many and varied features. South Africa has farms named Quaggafontein, Kwaggasnek, Kwaggasrand, Quagga Vlake, Quagga's Kloof, Quaggaskop, Quaggashoek, and Quaggasrust. There are passes named Quagga's Poort, Kwaggas Nek and Quaggasrand, a Quacha River, a toll gate called Quagga Road, and countless thoroughfares and paths named Quagga Straat, Weg, Street, Road, and Close. There is a hiking trail named Quagga's Pad, a Quagga housing estate, an industrial suburb of Bloemfontein called Quaggafontein, and a weekend retreat north of Cape Town pretentiously named L'Ermitage Quagga. Further to the North in the arid reaches of Namaqualand the farm Quaggas Kop is the site of the now defunct Quaggaskop Diamond Mine where 3,000 carats were recovered between 1976 – 1998.⁴ There is a commercial hunting company, Quagga Safaris, and an extremely well-known, albeit expensive, Quagga Bookshop in Kalkbaj. To top it all, Quagga's feature in successful Springbok rugby squads. Albertus Stephanus "Kwagga" Smith is part of the squad that won the 2019 Rugby World Cup, and Eddie "Kwagga" Boucher is a former South African rugby union player, turned wine-farmer. It is clear that the Quagga was ubiquitous in south Africa prior to the 1860s, and that its traces linger on into the present.

1 <https://www.amsterdam.nl/stadsarchief/stukken/archiefvondsten/allerlaatste-quagga/> (Accessed 15 November 2021).

2 Reinier Spreen, *Monument voor de Quagga: Schlemiel van de Uitgestorven Dieren* (Amsterdam: Fusilli; 2016), p. 12.

3 Frederick William Fitzsions, *The Natural History of South Africa* (London: Longmans; 1919), Vol. III, p. 178..

4 Cole, D.I., *The Metallogeny Of The Calvinia Area*. Council for Geoscience, Pretoria, South Africa, 2013.

5 <https://www.amsterdam.nl/stadsarchief/stukken/archiefvondsten/allerlaatste-quagga/> (Accessed 6 December 2023).



Postcard of the stuffed remains of the last Quagga to die in captivity⁵

In his five volume study on the natural history of South Africa, the naturalist and herpetologist Frederick William Fitzsimons, who was employed as the director of the museum in Port Elizabeth, wrote of the Quagga in 1919 that:

The Quagga was the first of South Africa's large fauna to become extinct, for the reason that it was a dweller of the plain, and its range was very limited. The Voortrekkers shot these animals to provide meat for their Hottentot and other native servants, and also for the skins, which made excellent leather for veldschoens (home-made shoes). The skin was also used for making large bags or sacks, in which they stored dried fruits and biltong.⁶

Surprisingly Fitzsimons did not appear to be aware of the Bloubok (*Hippotragus leuconphaeus*), an antelope that was related to the Roan and Sable antelope, and which existed on the grassland plains of the southwestern Cape in South Africa, before being exterminated in the late 1700s; with four mounted skins remaining in existence in Europe.⁷ All the same, Fitzsimons expressed the hope that there were still true Quagga living in the wild in the South West African Protectorate, contemporary Namibia:

A local animal dealer received a letter from a man in South-West Africa who alleged there were real Quaggas in the hills in his neighbourhood. He asserted in most positive terms that they were genuine Quaggas, and not Burchell's or Mountain Zebras, and gave a minute description of them. I read the letter carefully, and his description undoubtedly related to the true Quagga. He offered to capture some for a price.⁸

Indeed so strong was the hope that wildlife dealers were actually commissioned to capture and bring a pair of Quagga to South Africa, and when this failed Fitzsimons endeavoured to secure, "through two well-known hunters in the South-West Protectorate, a skin and skull of one of these alleged Quaggas with a view to settling the question one way or the other."⁹

On the basis of DNA sourced from dried flesh and skin scraps from Quagga remains gathered by the German South African taxidermist, Reinhold Rau, scientists were able to show in the early 1980s that the Quagga was a sub-species of the Plains Zebra.¹⁰ Inspired by these findings the Quagga Project, which would attempt to breed back the Quagga from selected Plains Zebra, began in 1987.¹¹ Possibly inspired by Fitzsimons writings, it was in Namibia that Rau and the project began looking for suitable Zebra which would enable them to breed back the Quagga.¹² The foal Henry, born at the improbably named Pampoenvlei (Pumpkin Valley) in the Western Cape in 2005, fulfilled the criteria established by the project and was classified as a Quagga.¹³

Not surprisingly the rebred Quagga, commonly referred to as the Rau Quagga, is of great interest to commercial farmers in contemporary South Africa, where "Game Farming" has become a viable and profitable option.¹⁴ Commercial Zebra hunting continues unabated in Africa with a dedicated website stating: "Zebra are a popular first time hunter's trophy, once they get over the 'shooting a horse' hang-up. It's a great animal for a first timer to learn to track quietly and use cover and the wind efficiently."¹⁵ The commercial hunting company Quagga Safaris, which is located in Limpopo Province of South Africa, has a pricing for Zebra at \$900,-, excluding tax, accommodation, tracking, transport and the like.¹⁶ Given that Rau Quagga were sold at auction for between \$50 – 100.000 in 2017, the possible trophy costs of a Quagga, even if it is rebred, are astronomical.¹⁷

Prior to the arrival of Europeans at the Cape, the Quagga was of importance to the societies that co-existed with it primarily to the south of the Vaal River. In the vicinity of Kimberley, Petroglyphs exist of the Quagga, that clearly display its remarkable coat.

6 Frederick William FitzSimons, *The Natural History of South Africa* (London: Longmans; 1919), Vol. III, p. 180.

7 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluebuck> (Accessed 29 November 2021).

8 Frederick William FitzSimons, *The Natural History of South Africa* (London: Longmans; 1919), Vol. III, p. 179.

9 Frederick William FitzSimons, *The Natural History of South Africa* (London: Longmans; 1919), Vol. III, p. 180.

10 <https://www.quaggaproject.org/the-project/> (Accessed 19 November 2021).

11 For further scholarly analysis of the project see, Sandra Swart, "Frankenzebra: Dangerous Knowledge and the Narrative Construction of Monsters", *Journal of Literary Studies*, 2014, 30:4, 45-70; Sandra Swart, "Zombie Zoology: The Quagga and the History of Reanimating Animals. In: Nance, Susan (ed.) *Animals & History*. (Durham: Duke University Press; 2015) pp. 54-71; Peter Heywood, "The Quagga and Science: What Does the Future Hold for This Extinct Zebra", *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, Volume 56, Number 1, Winter 2013, pp. 53-64 & Jennifer A. Leonard, Nadin Rohland, Scott Glaberman, Robert C. Fleischer, Adalgisa Caccone and Michael Hofreiter, "A rapid loss of stripes: the evolutionary history of the extinct quagga", in: *Biology Letters*, 2005, 1, 291-295.

12 <https://www.quaggaproject.org/quagga-project-founder/> (Accessed 19 November 2021).

13 Jay Ferreira, "Quagga rebreeding: A Success Story" in, *Farmers Weekly*, 21 march 2014, pp. 50-53.

14 Femke Brandt, *Tracking an Invisible Great Trek: An Ethnography on the Re-configuration of Power and Belonging on Trophy-hunting Farms in the Karoo*. PhD Thesis, Free University of Amsterdam, 2013.

15 <https://www.shakariconnection.com/zebra-hunting.html> (Accessed 19 November 2021).

16 <https://quagga.co.za/facilities/> (Accessed 19 November 2021).

17 Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Spierenburg and Harry Wels (Editors), *Nature Conservation in Southern Africa: Morality and Marginality: Towards Sentient Conservation?* (Leiden: Brill; 2019), p. 13.

18 https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Af1886-1123-1 (Accessed 30 November 2021). Fock, G.J., 1965, Two Rock Engravings from South Africa in the British Museum, *Man*, Vol.65, Nov-Dec 1965, 194-195.

19 David Morris, personal communication October 2021.

20 David Morris, personal communication November 2021.

21 A.R. Willcox, *The Rock Art of Africa*, Based on Goodwin 1936. Beaumont, Peter B., and John C. Vogel. "Patterns in the Age and Context of Rock Art in the Northern Cape." *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 44, no. 150 (1989): 73–81.

22 Reinier Spreen, *Monument voor de Quagga: Schlemiel van de Uitgestorven Dieren* (Amsterdam: Fusilli; 2016), p. 25.

23 Reinier Spreen, *Monument voor de Quagga: Schlemiel van de Uitgestorven Dieren* (Amsterdam: Fusilli; 2016), p. 76.

24 The following has been removed from the quote:

Throughout the Scriptures, the inspired poets make frequent allusion to the similar habits of the Asiatic congeners of this animal; and in the vivid and startling picture of the effects of drought, given in the book of Jeremiah, we are told that "the wild asses did stand in the desolate places; they snuffed up the wind like dragons, and their eyes did fail because there was no grass."

25 Captain W. Cornwallis Harris, *Portraits of the Game and Wild Animals of Southern Africa, Delinated from Life in their Native Haunts, during a Hunting Expedition, From the Cape Colony as Far as the Tropic of Capricorn in 1836 and 1837, with Sketches of the Field Sports* (London: W. Pickering; 1840), p.7.

26 See in this regard the work of Martin Legassick and Ettore Morelli.

27 Sam Challis, Runaway slaves, rock arte and resistance in the Cape Colony, South Africa. *Azania: archaeological research in Africa*, Volume 55, number. 4, pp.475-491. DOI: 10.1080/0067270X.2020.1841979.

28 Jack Goody, *Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa* (Oxford: OUP, 1971), Ch. 3; Swart, *Riding High* & Wilson and Thompson, *South Africa*, 242, provides reference to the acquisition of horses by Amakhosa in the early 1800s.

29 Examples would include the Kingdom of Lesotho (which on account of the Gun War came to be administered directly from London in 1880), the Bakwena polity under Sechele (that defeated Boer attempts to subjugate it), and, perhaps most famously, the Pedi for many years managed to fight off the South African Republic prior to their demise at the hands of the British army in 1879.

One of the petroglyphs is currently in the possession of the British Museum in London, which acquired it in the nineteenth century.¹⁸ The petroglyph, which is estimated to be between 1000 to 2000 years old, was taken from the Wildebeest Kuil site north of Kimberley.¹⁹ Another petroglyph of a Quagga surrounded by dancing people has been described and photographed in the vicinity of Prieska in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa²⁰ South of Prieska at the farm Keurfontein near Vosburg, Wilcox describes a number of images of Quagga, which were believed by the archaeologist Goodwin to have been excised chemically using bird dung.²¹

Following the arrival of the VOC at the Cape in the 17th Century, first official reaction from the *Heren XVII* in Amsterdam to reports of the Quagga suggested that an attempt should be made to domesticate Quagga. This, it was hoped, would negate the necessity of expensive horse imports from the Dutch Indies.²² Unfortunately, for the continued existence of the Quagga it was not to be, and hunting and extinction would be its lot.²³

The English hunter Cornwallis Harris travelled through southern Africa at the time of the expansion of Dutch Afrikaans speaking farmers from the Cape Colony into the interior (Great Trek 1836) and published an account, which became the oft quoted benchmark description of the Quagga in the Colony and beyond:

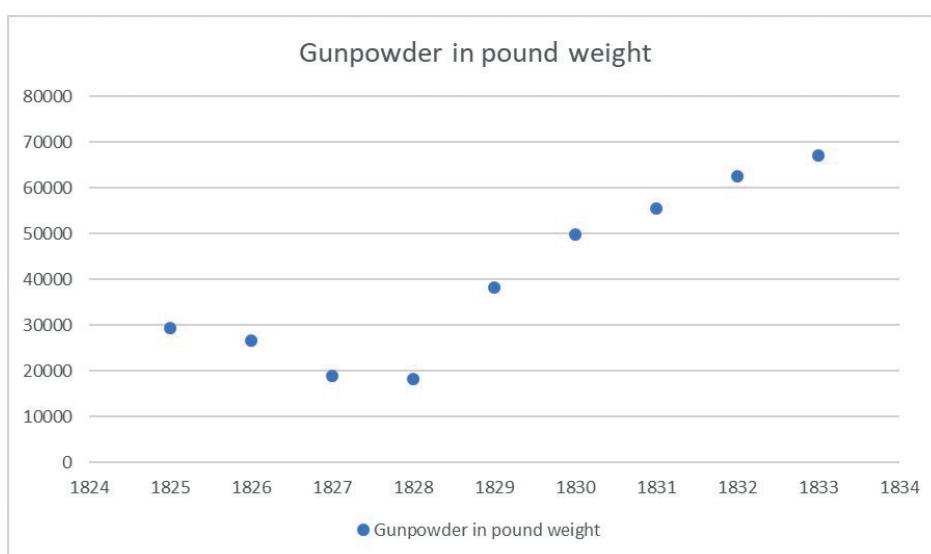
The geographical range of this species of the Quagga does not appear to extend to the northward of the river Vaal. The animal was formerly extremely common within the Colony, but vanishing before the strides of civilization, is now to be found in very limited numbers, and on the borders only. Beyond, on those sultry plains which are completely taken possession of by wild beasts, and may with strict propriety be termed the domains of savage nature, it occurs in interminable herds; and although never intermixing with its own more elegant congeners, is almost invariably to be found ranging with the white-tailed Gnöö, and with the Ostrich, for the society of which bird especially, it evinces the most singular predilection. Moving slowly across the profile of the ocean-like horizon, uttering a shrill barking neigh, of which its name forms a correct imitation, long files, of Quaggas continually remind the early traveller of a rival caravan on its march. [...] Bands of many hundreds are thus frequently seen during their migration from the dreary and desolate plains of some portion of the interior which has formed their secluded abode, seeking for those more luxuriant pastures, where, during the summer months, various herbs thrust forth their leaves and flowers, to form a green carpet, spangled with hues the most brilliant and diversified.²⁵

Generally obscured in the literature and often completely ignored is the fact that long before the "Great Trek" commenced, the Cape Colony was already having a direct and disruptive impact upon the interior.²⁶ Apart from diseases, particularly Smallpox, it were men on horses, armed with guns, that wrought the most destruction beyond the Colony from the late 1600s onwards.²⁷ Ownership of guns and horses, "the means of destruction" as Jack Goody famously quipped, enabled Southern African communities to devastate others, whilst maintaining the independence of their own.²⁸ Firearms were important because they enabled, not only the subjugation of others, but also the maintenance of independent African polities.²⁹ They enabled the acquisition of commodities that had hitherto usually lain beyond the reach of people. Firearms made it possible to hunt elephants, rhinos, buffaloes and lions in a manner that did not immediately endanger the life of the hunter. In addition, they made it possible to harvest the wildlife of Southern Africa on a scale hitherto unseen, and to transform it into the ivory, hides, pelts, feathers and dried meat.

STATEMENT of the Quantity of GUNPOWDER imported into the Colony of the *Cape of Good Hope* by Merchants and other Private Individuals for Consumption, or sold to the Colonists from the Ordnance Stores, from the Year 1825 to 1833, both inclusive.

YEAR.	Sale by the Ordnance Department.		Importation by Merchants and others.			Total Annually.	Importation at Port Elizabeth from Table Bay.
	Cape Town.	Graham's Town.	Cape Town.	Port Elizabeth.	Simon's Town.		
	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.	lbs.
1825 - -	26,379	- -	3,000	- -	- -	29,379	—
1826 - -	24,000	- -	1,100	- -	1,000	26,700	—
1827 - -	18,232	- -	650	- -	- -	18,882	—
1828 - -	17,735	- -	400	- -	- -	18,135	—
1829 - -	21,942	13,804	950	1,200	240	38,136	10,400
1830 - -	25,625	11,299	2,100	8,641	2,100	49,765	2,600
1831 - -	22,606	9,309	13,625	10,025	- -	55,565	9,000
1832 - -	14,900	414	30,700	16,500	42	62,556	11,975
1833 - -	9,289	199	44,750	12,910	- -	67,148	16,525

Table showing Gunpowder imports into the Cape Colony.³⁰



Imports of Gunpowder into the Cape Colony.³¹

30 Cape of Good Hope. *Papers Relative to the Condition and Treatment of the Native Inhabitants of Southern Africa, within the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, or beyond the Frontier of that Colony. Part I. Hottentots and Bosjesmen; Caffres; Griquas.* Ordered, by The House of Commons, to be Printed, 18 March, 1835, p. 84.

31 Table compiled on the basis of tax returns culled from, Records of the Cape Colony, *Annual Report Cape of Good Hope, 1824 through to 1835.*

32 Robert Ross, Adam Kok. *Griquas: A Study in the Development of Stratification in South Africa.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

33 On the power of the Commando, see Brigitte Lau, *Namibia in Jonker Afrikaner's Time* (Windhoek: Archeia, 1987). Cases include Boer, Griqua, Nama, Sotho, Tswana and Herero communities.

34 See in this regard the innovative work of Sam Challis.

The coming of the British to the Cape, the growth of the British Empire, especially in the sphere of the Indian Ocean, and in particular the liberalisation of gunpowder imports radically transformed the harvesting of wildlife resources in southern Africa. Beginning in 1806 there was an exponential growth in gunpowder imports into the Cape, which translated into an equally enormous increase in the export of wildlife products. In this the harbours of Lorenzo Marques, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Walvis Bay and Durban, all effectively under British control, as well as the markets of Grahamstown and Pietermaritzburg played a central role.

In the borderlands of the Cape, new polities emerged from amongst the many and varied people who had fled or chosen to operate beyond the boundaries of the Colony, and yet were integrally bound to it through family ties and trade.³² These societies developed by being based on hunting and raiding from the 1700s onwards, and transformed southern Africa.³³ The bulk of these men were illiterate, and more often than not their activities were considered illicit by the colonial authorities, not surprisingly few written records remain of their activities.³⁴ Beyond the colony these people, many who became known as Griqua, attempted to build up stable clan-based patriarchal communities, based on trade that rested for a large part on the exchange of hunted and raided goods for gunpowder. Writing in the early 1800s the German traveller Lichtenstein stated that:

They lived by breeding cattle, or by the chase; [...] they had good fire-arms in their possession; and [...] they obtained powder and ball, with other necessities of civilised life, by a traffic in elephants' teeth (and ostrich feathers) with the inhabitants on the northern borders of the colony. This trade for powder was considered as very dangerous [...] It was secretly carried on by some citizens at the Cape Town, through agents on the borders.³⁵

Nearly twenty years later a Cape Colonial agent noted:

A great part of them are provided with fire-arms and horses, and have a sovereign contempt of danger. They despise the farmers. They are all sharpshooters and accustomed to bush-fighting.³⁶

In the course of the first years of the nineteenth century the Griqua established a polity centred on Griquatown, to the west of contemporary Kimberley, led by Kaptynne, (captains) governed by laws derived from the bible interpreted by missionaries, and legislated by patriarchs drawn from the Kok, Waterboer, and Berends clans. In the early 1820s the Cape colonial administration appointed a government agent to the Griqua.³⁷

Throughout the 1820s and early 1830s these Griqua hunters and raiders scoured the highveld of southern Africa. At times Griqua raiders were bested, as in the case of Barend Barends who was defeated by the impis of Mzilikazi in 1831, and Peter Davids (Barends successor) whose daughter and nephew were captured by Matabele warriors near the Vaal river in 1835.³⁸ Hardly one to consider self-reflection, the hunter Gordon Cumming, who traversed the region where diamonds would be found twenty years later, wrote despairingly of the presence of Griqua who had preceded him, noting:

It is a first-rate district for game when the country has not been ransacked by Griqua hunters.³⁹

Mlambo and Parsons note that by the late 18th Century Griqua raiders and hunters were operating near Lobatse in present day Botswana.⁴⁰ Tlou recounts Griqua hunters active as far North as the Okavango Delta and Zambezi Chobe confluence in the 1830s. Eldredge saw raiding for cattle and labour by groups associated with "the Griqua ... [as] the main marauders in the area of the Orange River from the time they arrived there, ... [and] a major cause of demographic dislocation". But beyond the demographic effects upon human communities, the impact of Griqua society, based as it was to a large extent on hunting, was equally disruptive on other populations.

The sketch and painting, by the artist Thomas Baines, entitled "Wagons on Market Square Grahamstown (1850)", is a sumptuous illustration of the wealth that could be made by hunting in the southern African interior. In this case the hunter offered, in addition to piles of ivory, "Zoolu dress. Crocodiles, Pangolin, Rhinoceros horns. Vlake verk [sic], flat pig's tusk, Lions and panther skin. Eland's horns. Elephant tail. Koodoo horns. Swartbok. Buffalo horns. Karosses".⁴² By the 1860s more than fifty-three tons of ivory alone were being exported annually from the Transvaal, much of it via the market in Grahamstown.⁴³ Between 1820 and 1920 southern Africa was transformed as the naturally available wildlife was shot out in a process that entailed the commodification of wildlife products for use goods, luxury goods, consumptive goods, and scientific collecting.⁴⁴

Until the development of DNA technology and genetic testing in the 1970s hunting and collecting were essentially one and the same. In southern Africa the activities of many VOC and later British officials involved in hunting at their postings in the Cape, India and Indonesia sought to capitalise on their scavenging of natural products by offering

35 M.H.C. Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa 1803* (Cape Town 1930) Volume II, pp. 301-302.

36 J. Melvill, Government agent at Griquatown, quoted in Rev.J. Philip, *Researches in South Africa*, (London 1828), p. 75

37 Robert and Mary Moffat, *Apprenticeship at Kuruman, being the journals and letters of Robert and Mary Moffat, 1820-1828*.

Edited by Isaac Schapera. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951)

38 Captain Sir William Cornwallis Harris, *Wild Sports of Southern Africa; Being the Narrative of a Hunting Expedition from the Cape of Good Hope, through the territories of the Chief Moselekatse, to the Tropic of Capricorn* (London: Henry G. Bohn; 1852), pp. 118-119.

39 R. Gordon Cumming, *A Hunter's Life in South Africa* (London: John Murray; 1850), p. 365.

40 Alois S. Mlambo, Neil Parsons, *A History of Southern Africa* 2018, p. 88.

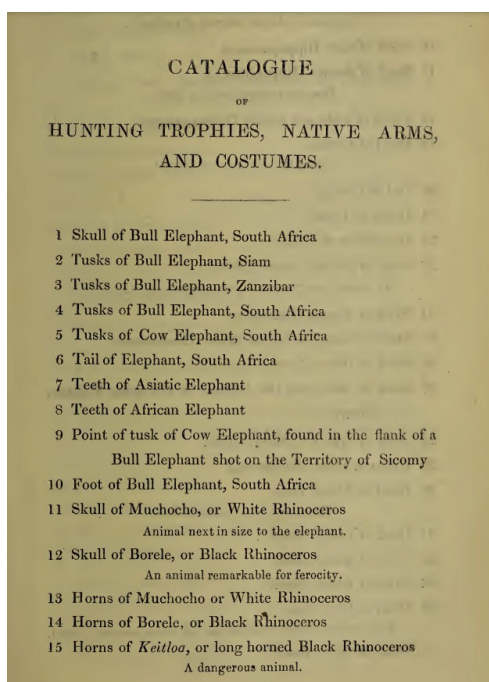
41 Elizabeth Eldredge, "Sources of Conflict in Southern Africa, c. 1800-30: The 'Mfecane' Reconsidered", *Journal of African History*, Volume 33, Issue 1 March 1992, pp. 1-35, p. 15.

42 Jane Carruthers, Marion Arnold, *The Life and Work of Thomas Baines* (Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press: 1995), p. 120. Hunting and hunting produce, coupled with Grahamstown's strategic position as a military base, served to transform it into the principal town in the Eastern Cape Colony, second only to Cape Town.

43 L.M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (Yale University Press: 2001), p. 134.

44 Lance van Sittert, Bringing in the Wild: The Commodification of Wild Animals in the Cape Colony/Province c. 1850 - 1950. *Journal of African History*, Volume 46, Issue 2, July 2005, pp. 269 - 291. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853704009946>.

them for sale in scientific collections that were being established in Europe at the time. As such Robert J. Gordon transported a Quagga, springbuck and a full giraffe skeleton to the Netherlands as a gift to the King.⁴⁵ As the Cape became an integral part of the British Empire, British Military Regiments and Officers were rotated and deployed in African and Asian colonies, where, more often than not, the officer class engaged in extensive hunting, often under the guise of scientific endeavour. A striking example of these hunting officers was Roualeyn Gordon-Cumming, who served in India and southern Africa, and displayed his hunting trophies at the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851, and established a permanent Museum at Fort Augustus in 1866.⁴⁶



First page of a listing of 172 display attributes collected by Gordon-Cumming.⁴⁷

45 Siegfried Huigen, *Knowledge and Colonialism: Eighteenth-Century Travellers in South Africa* (Leiden: Brill: 2009).

46 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roualeyn_George_Gordon-Cumming (Accessed 2 December 2021).

47 R. Gordon-Cumming, *Catalogue of hunting trophies, native arms, and costumes, from the far interior of South Africa* (G. NORMAN, PRINTER, MAIDEN DANE, COVENT CARDEN, 1850).

48 Henry H. Methuen, *Life in the Wilderness: Or Wanderings in South Africa* (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1846), p. 132.

49 Henry H. Methuen, *Life in the Wilderness: Or Wanderings in South Africa* (London: Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street, 1846), pp. 134-5.

50 Jane Carruthers and Marion Arnold, *The Life and Work of Thomas Baines* (Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press, 1995), p. 30.

51 Jane Carruthers and Marion Arnold, *The Life and Work of Thomas Baines* (Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press, 1995), p. 116 (fig. 7).

Numerous accounts exist, in the historical literature, of the extensive hunts undertaken against the Quagga, and almost inevitably the Quagga is practically always presented solely in terms of hunting. Traveller Methuen noted of the closely related Burchell's Zebra, that it "is not swift, and can be easily ridden up to on a good horse, but is very vicious when wounded, biting and kicking furiously". Further, Methuen described how one his party shot a Quagga foal, after which, "The barking neigh of the poor mare in search of her foal was frequently heard during the night".⁴⁸ In another instance Methuen, "rode down and caught a quagga foal, about two months old, which was taken to the waggons, where for the first day it neighed loudly for its mother, especially when it heard the neighing of any other quaggas". Methuen continued, "it soon, however, became tame, and followed the horses, but not having ceased sucking, and being unable to live by grazing, it pined on the gruel which we gave it, and ultimately died".⁴⁹ It is symptomatic of the times that in a painting completed in 1848 by Thomas Baines, Quagga are shown being shot at by men on horses, whilst attempting to flee in mountainous terrain.⁵⁰

It is in the painting, *The Greatest Hunt in Africa near Bloemfontein* (1860), by Thomas Baines that one gets an indication of the sheer scale of the slaughter of wildlife that was taking place at the time in southern Africa.⁵¹



Detail of *The greatest hunt in history near Bloemfontein 1860*, Thomas Baines ⁵²

The painting depicts an enormous hunt that was arranged for Prince Alfred, the second son of Queen Victoria, on his visit to the Orange Free State in 1860. In the hunt, that covered a vast area and took place over a number of days, around a thousand BaRolong were recruited to drive about 20.000-30.000 animals within range of the Prince's hunting party. Sir John Bisset, who accompanied the Prince, attempted to describe the massacre in words that consciously evoke images of war:

The extensive plains in the Free State are intersected here and there by belts and cross-belts of mountains, with only gaps between, through which the countless herds of large game pass from one plain to another. For days before we arrived the natives had been concentrating from distant points towards Reit Vley, leaving men in the 'several necks,' as they passed on, to prevent the game from escaping back to the plains, from which they were being driven towards a common centre.

[...]

[...]

The hunting party advanced up the plain in extended order, a few yards apart, and masses of game kept breaking through as the pressure of the coming streams of antelopes, quaggas, zeebras, bles-boks, eelands, ostriches, hartebeasts, wildebeasts, koodoos, &c. &c. came pouring on towards us, and, checked by our fire, commenced to whirl. The plain in which we were was of vast extent—I dare say nearly a hundred miles in circumference—and the whole of this extent was one moving mass of game. The gaps between the mountains on all sides of this plain were stopped by a living line of men, and we were in the midst of this whirling throng firing at great game at not twenty-five yards' distance as fast as we could load. The Prince fired as fast as guns could be handed to him, for Currie rode on one side and I on the other, and we alternately handed guns to him as he discharged his own. As the circle narrowed there really was considerable danger from the game breaking through, for when a stampede took place so much dust arose that you were in danger of being trampled to death. It became very exciting to see great beasts larger than horses rolling over from right and left shots not ten paces from you, and also charging down with their great horns lowered as if they were coming right at you and then swerving to one side or the other.

[...] the mass of game became so dressed together at last, that the Prince and Currie took to their hunting hog-spears and charged into the midst, driving home the 'Paget blades' into the infuriated animals. [...]

[...]

Six hundred head of large game were shot on this day, besides numbers speared by the natives, and most of the sportsmen looked more like butchers than sportsmen, from being so

⁵² Iziko William Fehr Collection (Castle of Good Hope).

covered with blood. His Royal Highness and Currie were red up to the shoulders from using the spear. I cannot myself boast of many trophies, as I generally handed my double gun to the Prince as fast as I could load it; nevertheless I could not resist now and then bowling over a couple of great antelopes as they whirled past me. It was a very exciting day, and were His Royal Highness to live for a hundred years I do not believe he could ever see such a scene again, for the game in South Africa is fast disappearing.⁵³



The Prince and his First Wildebeest⁵⁴

Bisset's estimated figure of animals killed is an underestimate and does not include Springbok and smaller animals. Drawing on a letter from Bloemfontein, capital of the Orange Free State in 1863, a Dutch newspaper listed "no less than 4800" deaths when it reported on the gigantic hunt carried out between the farm Bain's Vley and the Modder River, an area approximately the size of North Holland.

Large hunt. Incredible slaughter of wild animals. The estates "Bain's Vley", belonging to A.H. Bain Esq., have once again been witness to one of the most memorable hunts [jagtpartijen], of which one will seek in vain in history for a second example. ... This hunt was carried out on a number of days and the slaughter was astounding in this case. From a good source we have gathered that no less than 4800 individual wild animals were killed, consisting of Wildebeest, Quagga, Blesbuck, Springbuck, and Ostriches, in addition 30 Wolves [hyenas] and 11 Wild Dog were exterminated [afgemaakt].⁵⁵

Given that "most of the sportsmen looked more like butchers than sportsmen" and that the sixteen year old Prince was "red up to the shoulders from using the spear", it will be clear that sentiments regarding other than humans were particularly blood thirsty. But, although mass slaughter counted as sport for many, it was also an activity engaged in to make financial profit.

⁵³ John Bisset, *Sport and War: Or Recollections of Fighting and Hunting in South Africa from the years 1834 to 1867* (London: John Murray; 1875), pp. 194-197.

⁵⁴ The Progress of His Royal Highness, Prince Alfred Ernest Albert, Through the Cape Colony (Saul Solomon, Cape Town: 1861), p. 84.

⁵⁵ JBG's translation of *Leydse Courant*, 10 April 1863, accessed via <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten>.



Advertisement for the auction of hides in Rotterdam, 1877⁵⁶

Hides for Europe

Writing at the beginning of the 20th Century, when the Quagga had been shot into extinction, Fitzsimons provided an anecdote which underscores the money that was to be made in hunting Quagga:

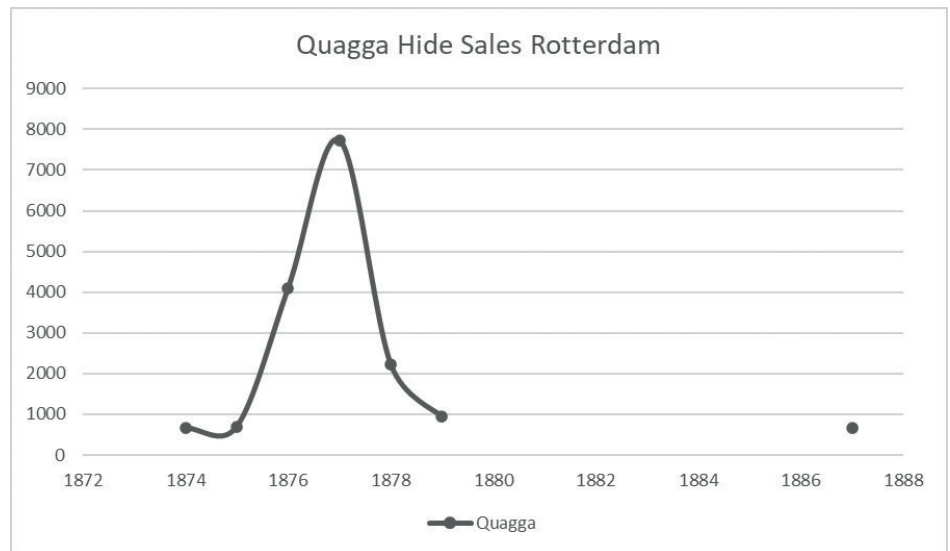
An old Dutchman told me that his father and several uncles made their living solely by shooting Quaggas, Zebras and large antelopes, and selling their hides. In this way his father accumulated about £5000, which he invested in a large farm and stock.⁵⁷

A survey of Dutch newspapers between 1850 and 1920 indicates that there was a flurry of specific Quagga hide sales in the Netherlands between 1870 and 1890, which was centred on the port city of Rotterdam. Here the hides of Quagga, Wildebeest and many others were sold in auction according to weight. The trade appears to have been maintained by the *Handels-Compagnie “Mozambique”*, which was run by Stefanus Mostert and sons, who placed large advertisements in a number of the main and regional newspapers of the Netherlands.⁵⁸ The export of Quagga hides to the Netherlands did not proceed in a steady or consistent flow, instead, judging by the dates of the auctions held, the export proceeded in a series of abrupt stops and starts, that reflect the particular socio-political circumstances in South Africa at the time.

56 Provinciale Noordbrabantsche en 's Hertogenbossche Courant 30 oktober 1877.

57 Frederick William FitzSimons, *The Natural History of South Africa* (London: Longmans; 1919), Vol. III, pp. 180-81.

58 Provinciale Noordbrabantsche en 's Hertogenbossche Courant 30 oktober 1877.



Graph plotting Quagga hide sales at Auction in Rotterdam, 1872-88 ⁵⁹

The graph of sales indicates a tremendous surge in sales beginning in 1875, peaking in 1877, dropping away in 1880, and with a final burst in 1887. In the top year of 1877 no less than 7730 Quagga hides alone were sold in Rotterdam. Considering that the Netherlands was but one of many countries, and a minor one at that, importing goods from southern Africa, the amount of Quagga skins put up for sale in Rotterdam, reflects but a small part of the number of Quagga killed at the time. The graph neatly reflects the demise of the Quagga as well as the political turmoil in southern Africa at the time. It is more than likely that the Anglo-Zulu war of 1879, the Bapedi war of 1879, the Anglo-Transvaal War of 1880-1881, as well as the BaSotho Gun War of 1880-1884, disrupted trade from southern Africa and that this is reflected in the total absence of Quagga hide exports to Rotterdam between 1879 and 1887. It is probable that the blip of 656 Quagga hide sales in 1887 reflects the hides of animals already shot before the wars, and represents the very last remnants of Quagga as they became extinct.

Writing in the 1830's Cornwallis Harris described why the Quagga was such a sought after animal:

The carnivorous savage tribes occupying the regions which now form its habitat, regard it in common with the rest of the animal creation, only as furnishing them with an ample repast when slain. By the roving clans of Bechuana huntsmen, and the voracious Bushman hordes, its disgustingly oily and yellow flesh is even esteemed a delicacy; and the Lion, which invariably follows the tide of migration towards new pastures, is not unfrequently driven from his prey at the assegai's point, by these two-legged devourers of carrion. The flesh is never used by the Colonists, except for the purpose of feeding their tame Bushmen, but the hides are valuable for making sacks to contain grain ; and the thicker portions which cover the angle of the hocks, are greatly esteemed for the manufacture of shoe-soles.⁶⁰

Thus, although it appears that the Quagga was not necessarily consumed by those who hunted them, their hides were eagerly sought after, and their flesh was used as cheap protein food for indentured and free labour.

⁵⁹ Information gleaned from newspapers accessed on Delpher.

⁶⁰ Captain W. Cornwallis Harris, *Portraits of the Game and Wild Animals of Southern Africa, Delienated from Life in their Native Haunts, during a Hunting Expedition, From the Cape Colony as Far as the Tropic of Capricorn in 1836 and 1837, with Sketches of the Field Sports* (London: W. Pickering; 1840), p. 7.

In 1865 the chance find of a diamond near Hopetown on the Orange River, heralded the further mass-slaughter of animals to facilitate the consumption of meat by diamond diggers anxious to employ and bind scarce labour to themselves. By 1869 thousands of diggers had begun congregating along the Vaal River, from Pniel Mission station, past the wonderfully named Gong Gong and Canteen Kopje, through to Dikgatlhong at the confluence of the Harts River. Prior to the discovery of diamonds at New Rush, which would become Kimberley, Klipdrift, present-day Barkly West, was the centre of the diamond rush that would transform southern Africa. Canteen Kopje lay hard against Klipdrift along an old river bed of the Orange River. It was here that not only diamonds were found, but also archaeological and paleontological assemblages that brought the renowned Abbé Henri Breuil so far as to exclaim, “You not only have enough artefacts to fill a museum here, but also enough to build the museum”.⁶¹

Following on the initial work of David Morris, students of the newly established Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley, have been involved in attempting to catalogue, document and analyse the archaeology of Canteen Kopje. In an article published in 2021 an attempt was made to archeologically describe the diamond frontier as it impacted Canteen Kopje. In this part of the faunal assemblage is of particular import:

Based on a reconstructed historical biogeography of the species, Boshoff et al. (2011) propose that the quagga inhabited hilly or mountainous terrain throughout the arid interior of South Africa. The last large herds of quagga were historically observed in the Orange Free State and this species is said to have become extinct by 1878 (Skinner and Chimimba, 2005; Hack et al., 2008). Records place large herds of quagga in the area south of the Orange, but also probably extending north up to the Vaal River. In precolonial times quagga were depicted in a rock engraving at Wildebeest Kuil (Morris, 2020). In the Canteen Kopje assemblage, a minimum number of seven quagga are recorded, based on side (left/right), repetition of tooth type and wear stage as well as the relative location of the finds in the excavation (Fig. 8 a-b). The quagga range in age from young to old adult, with no newborns or juveniles represented. The quagga remains recovered at Canteen Kopje represent some of the last members of this species to be hunted in South Africa (see also the discussion of the Koffiefontein quagga fossils in Cooke, 1948; Eisenmann and Brink, 2000).⁶²

In the present Quagga survive in petroglyphs found North of Kimberley at Wildebeestkuil, and East of Kimberley at Prieska along the Orange River. South of Kimberley rebred Rau Quagga graze in Mokala National Park, the newest addition to the stable of South African National Parks. Mokala, is Setswana for Camelthorn, a tree which prior to the diamond rushes of the nineteenth century were ubiquitous in the area.

In 1871 the first diamonds that would spark the rush to “New Rush”, contemporary Kimberley, were found at the foot of a Camelthorn tree (*Vachellia erioloba*) on a small hillock that would later become known as Colesberg Kopje, and even later as the “Big Hole”.⁶³ History relates that Damon aka Esau Demoense, a Griqua waggon-builder associated with a consortium of diggers known as the Red Cap Party had been banished from the party on account of drunkenness and told not to return until such time that he had dug a trench or acquired a diamond.⁶⁴ Demoense set up camp under the Camelthorn tree and started digging, and in so doing discovered the richest diamond mine the world has ever seen. It was not by chance that Demoense set up camp on Colesberg kopje. Pre-viously the kopje had been used by Griqua hunters as a camping spot, and it is reason-able to assume that they did so because, as hunters, it afforded them an uninterrupted overview of the surrounding flat plains.⁶⁵

In the end it is probable that the Quagga would have been shot out of existence, even if no diamonds had ever been found in South Africa. Human greed, stupidity, and lust

61 <https://www.facebook.com/canteenkopje> (Accessed 4 March 2022).

62 Michael Chazan, Alexandra Sumner, Liora Kolska Horwitz, David Morris, “Mining on the frontier: Archaeological excavation of the historical component at Canteen Kopje, Northern Cape Province, South Africa”, *Quaternary International*, August 2021.

63 Ernst von Weber, *Vier Jahre in Afrika, 1871 – 1875* (Leipzig : Brockhaus, 1878).

64 <https://www.kimberley.org.za/to-day-kimberleys-history-16-july/> (Accessed 16 November 2021).

65 Hedley A. Chilvers, *The Story of De Beers* (London: Cassell; 1939), p. 22.

were well on the way to exterminating the Quagga prior to the discovery of diamonds. It is safe to conclude that although the demise of the Quagga was concomitant with the rise of diamond mining, and may have hastened the downfall, in itself diamond mining cannot be held responsible for the extinction of the Quagga.

