

African Quaternary in the February Sun – AfQUA 2015

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On the 31st January – 7th February, 160 Quaternary Scientists from 26 countries gathered in Cape Town for the inaugural African Quaternary (AfQUA) meeting and thanks to support from the BSG Postgraduate Conference Attendance Grant I was able to attend.

The AfQUA conference was established to fill the gap between the four-year INQUA cycle and allow researchers working on Quaternary environments across the African continent to meet and share their research in a friendly and accessible environment. It was the first international conference I have attended and it certainly did not disappoint! The community was friendly and welcoming and the conference provided a fantastic opportunity to meet many people with similar research interests and to learn about exciting and fascinating ongoing research. Although a fairly niche research area, the conference covered a large breadth of work with sessions on archaeology, chronology, climatology, ecology and geomorphology. Within these, research was spread across the entire continent and utilised an expansive range of techniques and methods.



Figure 1 University of Cape Town, location of AfQUA 2015

Some of the geomorphological highlights included Hayley Cawthra's very interesting talk on the offshore geomorphology of South Africa and Frank Ekardt talk on the contemporary tectonic evolution of the Kalahari basin. Dave Thomas gave an insightful talk stressing the importance of scale when looking at aeolian landforms, suggesting it is the dune field, not the dune which contains the palaeoenvironmental signal.

My personal highlight was listening to Sharon Nicholson's plenary talk about rainfall variability over the African continent since 1800. Although my work typically deals with timescales at least an order of magnitude longer it was fascinating to learn about modern variability in rainfall and think about the role of short term climate variation in the past and the implication for dryland geomorphology.

Despite a healthy dose of nerves I presented on my ongoing PhD research. The talk was entitled "Exploring the use of sand ramps as novel archives of Late Quaternary environmental change in Southern Africa" and discussed preliminary results on characterising the formation of sand ramps and what these geomorphological features can tell us about past environments.

After my talk I had some valuable discussions with scientists I otherwise would not have met were it not for the funding provided by the BSG. These provided interesting ideas about what could be influencing sand ramp formation and gave me even more to think about especially regarding wind dynamics and sediment supply.

Following the conference there was the opportunity to participate in several free workshops on isotopes, ecological analysis in R, Q-GIS or frequency analysis. I attended the Q-GIS course and am now using it to produce the maps for my thesis.

Overall, AfQUA was an interesting and informative conference in a stunning location which has improved my plans and ideas for writing up my thesis no end. Thank you BSG!