

THE RIDDLE OF FITZSIMONS' 'TZITZIKAMA CAVE'

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Introduction

Many archaeologists and anthropologists (Clark 1959; Woodhouse 1971) have referred to the interesting information and material obtained from collections along the Tsitsikama coast between Coldstream and Groot River, by F. W. FitzSimons, Director of the Port Elizabeth Museum (1906–1936). This area now falls within the boundaries of the Tsitsikama Coastal National Park, Republic of South Africa. A wealth of material including 23 human skeletons, were apparently collected from one rather large shelter which has, subsequently, become known in the literature as the 'Tzitzikama Cave' (Schauder 1963).

The exact location of this cave has, however, never been established. Because of the importance of the material and knowing that it was within the boundaries of the Tsitsikama Coastal National Park, a search for the 'Tzitzikama Cave' was made.

Investigation and discussion

Probably inspired by the part he played in the creation of a new physical type 'Boskop Man', FitzSimons started exploring the caves along the Tsitsikama coast. The 'Boskop Man' had materialised from a sizeable skull cap unearthed near Potchefstroom and the unusually large brained and robust skeletons found in the 'Coldstream Cave' by J. Drury in 1909 (Woodhouse 1971). The 'Coldstream Cave' was discovered by C. J. Whitcher Sr, an energetic explorer of Tsitsikama and founder of the small community at Coldstream. Prior to Drury's visit, 1909.07.14, Whitcher had obtained seventeen skeletons from the southern end of the 'Coldstream Cave' which is situated at the mouth of the Lottering River. Drury, with Whitcher's assistance, extended the excavation and found an additional three skeletons and stated in his report – "The cave still contains a great deal of debris, and it is estimated that at least fifty skeletons may still be found. Up to the present over twenty skeletons have been discovered in this cave" (Peringuey 1911).

In 1921 FitzSimons stated in an article which appeared in the *Illustrated London News* that he had explored "all the known rock dwellings from Coldstream to Groot River". Photographs and a diagram of the 'Tzitzikama Cave' accompanied this article which was later published in a scientific journal (FitzSimons 1923).

Rather surprisingly in these articles, although FitzSimons mentions being assisted by Whitcher, he does not once make any reference to the excavation in the 'Coldstream Cave' by Drury which he visited (discussed later) and of which Whitcher, surely must have spoken, having put so much effort into the collection of material including more than 20 human skeletons. He does, however, refer to 'amateur curio-hunters' who had spoiled some of the shelters. It is unlikely that he was referring to Drury's work in this description.

In an interesting article Schauder (1963) tries to identify the 'Tzitzikama Cave' and concludes that the most likely cave fitting FitzSimons' description was the one close to the mouth of the Groot River. Woodhouse (1971) is in agreement with Schauder's findings and credits FitzSimons with a little poetic licence.

Accepting that FitzSimons was rather superficial and inaccurate in his descriptions, I cannot agree that his diagram of the 'Tzitzikama Cave', resembles the cave at Groot River. This is based on the following reasons:

- (a) the diagram of the 'Tzitzikama Cave' shows it as being on the western bank of a river or promontory (the cave faces east) – the Groot River cave is on the eastern bank, facing west;
- (b) the diagram shows the cave as an overhang shelter – the Groot River cave extends into the promontory and, in fact, has an opening on the south-eastern side of it as well. Even the most amateur of archaeologists would have made mention of this and not have depicted it as FitzSimons supposedly had;
- (c) none of the dimensions remotely fit those of the Groot River cave;
- (d) FitzSimons annotated the material between the sea and the shelter as 'overflow of rubbish from rock shelter for 100 yards down to beach' – The Groot River cave is much nearer to the sea and the obvious description here would have been 'into the sea'; and
- (e) prior to the establishment of the township the Nature's Valley, a farmer tilled the lands and A. C. Whitcher (*pers.comm.*) believes that he used the guano from the Groot River caves on his farm. This cave is by far the biggest along the stretch of coastline mentioned by FitzSimons and I believe that it is to this cave that he is referring when he states "One large rock shelter which was expected to yield rich results, had been dug out by a farmer, who utilised the contents as a fertiliser for his land, and many skeletons and implements of prehistoric man were, in consequence, lost to science."

Having discarded the Groot River cave, the photographs in FitzSimons' article were studied and in one he shows the position of a

shelter, which, although not specifically stating that it was the 'Tzitzikama Cave', seemed a reasonable starting point in the search for this cave. While traversing the coast in a boat, the overhanging rock in the photograph was noticed. This was in the Lottering River gorge. A search was conducted below this overhanging rock but with no success. This particular rock has very little shelter and there are no signs of any human occupation (kitchen middens). However, it was obvious that Fitz-Simons had taken a photograph of this rock and in an effort to reconstruct where FitzSimons must have stood to take this photograph I found myself standing at the entrance to the 'Coldstream Cave'. From the tracing of FitzSimons photograph (Fig. 1) compared to the one taken from the 'Coldstream Cave' entrance (Fig. 2), it can clearly be seen that he must have taken this picture while excavating or visiting the cave. He must subsequently have forgotten about the details and when reporting on it, put the "X" under the overhanging rock in his photograph.

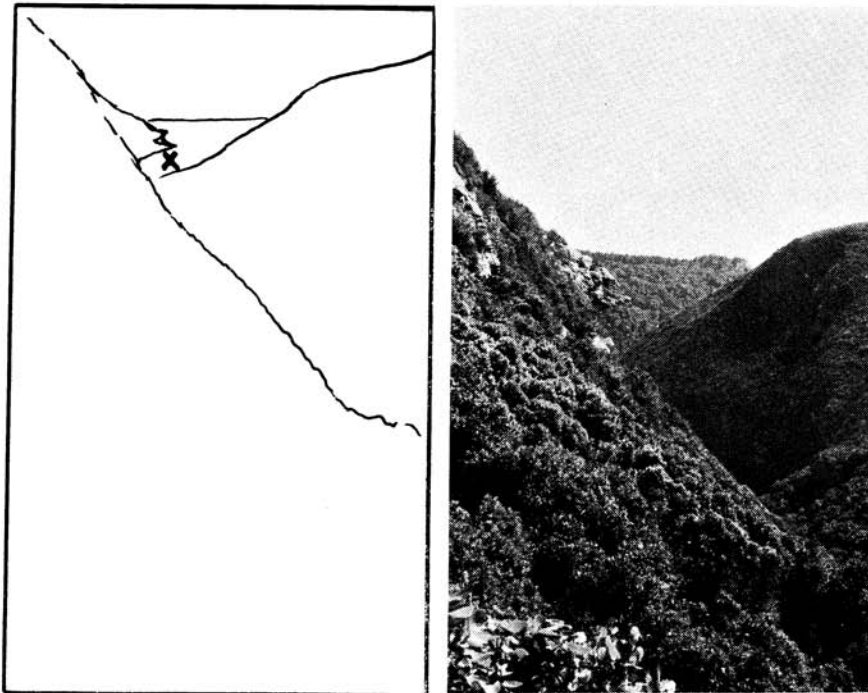


Fig. 1. (Left) A tracing of FitzSimons' photograph published in the *Illustrated London News* (1921). The caption to this photograph was – "showing the position of a shelter marked by an overhanging rock (X): The Tzitzikama cliffs". Note the cliff between the two hills above the overhanging rock.

Fig. 2. (Right) Lottering River as seen from the entrance of the "Coldstream Cave". Note the cliff between the two hills above the overhanging rock.

The above establishes the following:

- i) where the photograph was taken; and
- ii) that FitzSimons visited the 'Coldstream Cave'.

Other caves along the coastline between Lottering and Groot River were visited. All of them had been excavated at some stage by archaeologists, 'curio-hunters' or 'amateur archaeologists', but none fitted FitzSimons' description and diagram of the 'Tzitzikama Cave'. The 'Coldstream Cave' being larger than these caves was therefore revisited and more attention was paid to the general surroundings and to FitzSimons' description. The collapsed face of the earlier excavation(s) was cleaned in order to obtain an impression of the original stratification of the deposit. Figure 3 represents a diagram showing a section through the shelter and should be compared with FitzSimons' diagram (FitzSimons 1921; Schauder 1963).

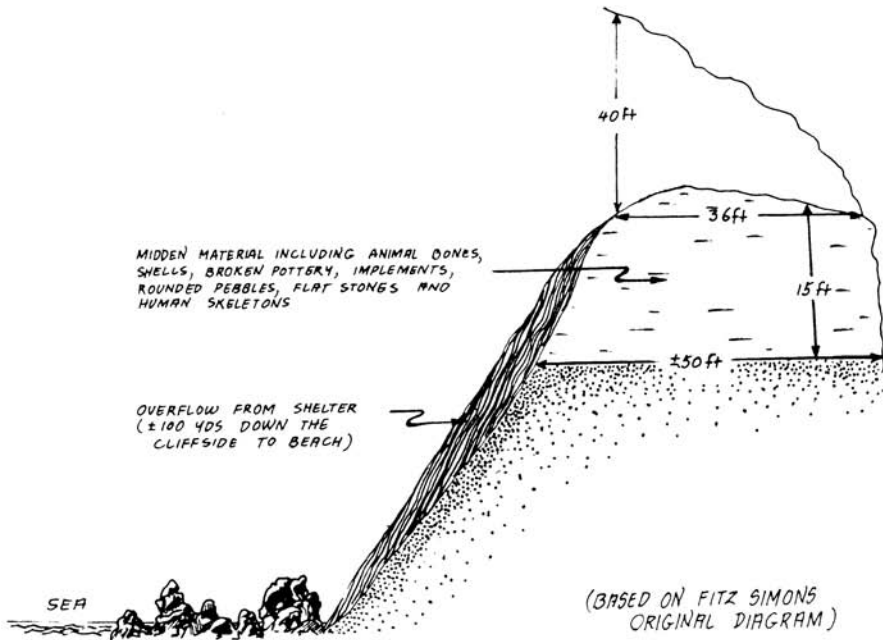


Fig. 3. Section through the "Coldstream Cave".

The following analogies can now be made:

- (a) FitzSimons states that the cave shelter was 'a third of the way up the cliff from the seashore in Plettenberg's Bay' – the 'Coldstream' could quite likely be described as such, the Lottering River runs into an extension of this bay;

- (b) the 'mountain stream of crystal-clear water gushed musically down the cliff near by', fits the general description of the water which cascades down the cliff near the 'Coldstream Cave' (See this cliff between the two river banks in both Fig's 1 and 2); and
- (c) the general dimensions are in agreement with those of 'Coldstream Cave' and the entrance to the cave in particular, is similar. The 'rubbish' does tumble down to a small beach. FitzSimons does seem to have exaggerated with both the length and the breadth of the cave.

Conclusions

1. The cave near Groot River on the promontory overlooking the sea is not the 'Tzitzikama Cave'.
2. FitzSimons visited the 'Coldstream Cave' and must have known or heard about Drury's work in this cave.
3. The description of the 'Tsitsikama Cave' including the dimensions is in general agreement with that of the 'Coldstream Cave'.
4. It seems plausible that C. J. Whitcher helped Drury obtain material from the 'Coldstream Cave' initially and later assisted FitzSimons in a more extensive excavation of the same cave which was then termed the 'Tzitzikama Cave'.

Acknowledgements

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