

WHO WE ARE

About PAST

PAST – the Palaeontological Scientific Trust – is a Johannesburg-based public benefit organisation dedicated to the preservation, protection and promotion of Africa's ancient cultural and natural heritage for the benefit of Africans and humankind in its entirety.

PAST's objectives are to ignite interest in the origin sciences in Africa, to advance the research output of African origin scientists, and to preserve our continent's unique fossil heritage for future generations.

How we started...

In 1994 the world-famous Sterkfontein Caves in South Africa (what was to become the UNESCO World Heritage site known as the Cradle of Humankind) was on the verge of being shut down due to lack of funding and resources. Local land-owners and fossil lovers rallied together to establish the Palaeontological Scientific Trust or PAST – a non-profit trust that would be dedicated to preserving Africa's rich fossil heritage, and promoting ongoing scientific research in the region.

The funding and public support that PAST subsequently received ensured not only that the Sterkfontein complex remained operational but ultimately translated into spectacular finds like Little Foot (a near complete *Australopithecus africanus* skeleton) and the recent discovery of Karabo (*Australopithecus sediba*). PAST has also been broadly involved in supporting research on the full range of South Africa's unparalleled fossil record of prehistoric life, from the Iron Age back to the mammal-like reptiles and dinosaurs of the Karoo.

What we do...

Based at the Palaeosciences Centre at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, PAST is the only African-based organisation that brings together government, business, academic institutions, research institutions and civil society with the aim of raising awareness and funding support for the origin sciences, which include archaeology, palaeontology and palaeo-anthropology.

PAST's goals are to promote education and research in these and related fields. To do this, PAST supports science education from primary to postgraduate levels. At a tertiary education level, PAST supports origin science students at the Honours, Master's and Doctoral levels. PAST also funds large research projects involving fossil exploration, excavation and laboratory analysis, and provides support for origin sciences conferences and academic publications.

Our organisation

As a non-governmental, public benefit organisation, PAST is registered as a Trust with section 18a tax status. Audited by Thomas Maher & Associates, PAST has produced unqualified audits since its inception and has a meticulous record of receiving and distributing local and international donor funds.

The current Chairman of PAST is respected business leader and trained geologist Rick Menell who, together with the Board of Trustees of PAST, determines the strategic direction of the Trust.

PAST's Board of Trustees is made up of prominent African business leaders, government representatives and scientists. The full Board meets quarterly, while a core group of Managing Trustees meets frequently to oversee the daily conduct of the Trust.

PAST's small executive operational team includes the Chief Executive Officer and a Chief Educational and Scientific Strategist, who are supported by an administrative assistant. Within its educational theatre project it also employs, on a part-time basis, two directors and three cast members. PAST's Scientific Advisory Committee is led by a Chief Scientific Coordinator and a team of three scientists who advise the Executive and Board on the scientific merits of the many funding proposals PAST receives for research and student training.

PAST's champions include its Chief Scientific Patron, internationally renowned Emeritus Professor Phillip Tobias, as well as the award winning singer, songwriter and anthropologist Johnny Clegg, and the iconic South African Jay Naidoo.

For more information about our people go to PAST's People.