

Adventure Tourism in the Apartheid Era: Skydiving in Mafikeng-Mmabatho

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Abstract

Present-mindedness is a defining characteristic of the majority of research on niche tourism. In many respects this is unsurprising as interest in niche tourism has been driven by policy imperatives and potential contributions to destination development. Adventure tourism is one of the more well researched forms of niche tourism in South Africa. The existing South African literature is overwhelmingly dominated by contemporary issues. This study builds upon an emerging tradition of research in South African tourism scholarship which explores past tourisms by applying an archival approach and a key stakeholder interview. Extant studies on the development of adventure tourism in South Africa have demonstrated the geographical dominance of activities in the 'white' areas and the almost complete lack of the sector in 'black' areas. This paper presents historical evidence from Mafikeng-Mmabatho, the capital city of the former Bophuthatswana Bantustan from 1977-1994, which shows that skydiving at Mmabatho airport, in particular the international event marketed as the 'Mmabatho Boogie', was an important niche offering in the town's tourism portfolio and a welcome contributor in terms of hotel accommodation and tourist spend. Skydiving in the area declined after 1994 as the main organiser driving the Mmabatho Boogie left, which coincided with Bophuthatswana's re-incorporation into South Africa. Overall, the research contributes to an emerging historical scholarship in tourism studies in South Africa and represents one of the first such investigation to be undertaken concerning adventure tourism.

Keywords: Adventure tourism; historical approach; skydiving; Bantustans; Bophuthatswana

Introduction

Niche tourism emerged as a significant focus of academic debate during the early 2000s with the works of Novelli (2005) and of Ali-Knight (2010) viewed as highly influential. Niche tourism products are a counterweight to the undifferentiated mass tourism product and refer to specific tourism products that focus on meeting the needs of particular market segments. Connell (2009: 203) maintains that during the decade of the 2000s a number of "new and significant niches in tourism have steadily appeared and evolved". This trend continued over the following decade with a further burst of niche tourism offerings making an appearance across both urban and rural spaces. In the COVID-19 environment, the tourism sector is

experiencing changes in mobilities and consumer demands and it is anticipated that significant future growth will occur in various forms of ‘niche travel’ which will be driven primarily by the confidence of travelling in a less risk-prone environment and in smaller groups (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021a, 2021b). Scholarship on niche tourism has burgeoned and several contributions have documented these developments both in the contexts of the Global North and Global South (Agarwal et al., 2018; Pforr et al., 2021; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e). In the case of South Africa, Rogerson and Rogerson (2021f) provide an overview of current research debates on niche tourism and pinpoint the importance of variously gastronomy, heritage tourism, creative tourism and adventure tourism as niche tourism offerings.

Although the international literature on niche tourism is of relatively recent origin, it must be acknowledged that niche tourism is not a new phenomenon and that many forms of niche tourism, for example mountaineering, have a long ancestry. Nevertheless, ‘present-mindedness’ and a concentrated focus on *contemporary* issues is a defining characteristic of most international scholarship on niche tourism. In many respects this is unsurprising as research interest in niche tourism has been driven mainly by policy imperatives and potential contributions to destination development (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021f). The aim in this paper therefore is to address a knowledge gap in current niche tourism literature by exploring an aspect of the neglected past of niche tourism.

Specific attention is upon excavating particular historical episodes in the history of adventure tourism in South Africa, namely for the apartheid period in Mafikeng-Mmabatho in what was then the ‘independent’ state of Bophuthatswana. Over the past decade the niche of adventure tourism has expanded greatly in South Africa and accorded considerable attention in several useful investigations (McKay, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2020; Giddy, 2018a, 2018b, 2020a, 2020b; Giddy & Rogerson, 2018; Giddy & Webb, 2018; Venter & Kruger, 2018). Themes of concern in these studies have included motivations of participants, organisation and spatial dynamics, the character of sector employment, and tourist experiences. Minimal discussion is given in any of these works to the detailed examination of the historical development of the niche of adventure tourism. There is a paucity of historical studies on niche and adventure tourism and this paper contributes to addressing this lacuna.

Methodology

In terms of methodology this paper applies an archival approach using documentary and newspaper sources. In particular, the *Mafikeng Mail* newspaper collection was investigated at the National Library of South Africa in Cape Town. A semi-structured interview was also conducted in January 2022 with the organiser of the Mmabatho Boogie and General Manager of the Molopo Sun Hotel and Casino from 1986-1994, Mr Adrian Penny. For Ventresca and Mohr (2017), archival research includes a broad range of activities which are applied to investigate documents and textual material. Used in its classic sense, archival methods are those that involve the scrutiny of historical documentary sources “that is, documents created at some point in the relatively distant past, providing us access that we might not otherwise have to the organisations, individuals and events of an earlier time” (Ventresca & Mohr, 2017: 805). Among others, Power (2018) stresses that archival research is a much underused yet potentially highly effective research strategy for qualitative research in tourism and hospitality research. In adopting an archival approach this paper therefore adds to a growing literature in South African tourism which interrogates various issues in the country’s tourism past both in urban and rural spaces (see e.g. Grundlingh, 2006; J.M. Rogerson, 2017, 2020; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2018, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2021g, 2021h, 2021i, 2022a, 2022b; C.M. Rogerson, 2020, 2022; Rogerson & Visser, 2020). An original contribution of this analysis is that it turns

the historical lens upon the former rural Homelands that were created under apartheid and which were disestablished with the transition to democracy. The analysis falls into two major sections of discussion. The next section locates the analysis in an understanding of the making of the Homelands or Bantustans and of their role in the political economy of South Africa. Attention then narrows to the setting of Bophuthatswana, the development of tourism led by gambling and casino resorts, and finally to the rise and fall of particular forms of adventure tourism in the Mafikeng-Mmabatho area.

The establishment of the Homelands or Bantustans

A sketch of the historical development of Bophuthatswana must be contextualised more broadly within the literature and debates surrounding the formation of, and planning for, the Homelands or Bantustans (Wolpe, 1972; Ramutsindela, 2001; King, 2006; Ally & Lissoni, 2017; Phillips, 2017; Lissoni & Ally, 2018). The territory of what would emerge as the Homelands largely comprised of the land of the ‘native reserves’. The implementation of the policy of ‘Bantu Homelands’ became a mainstay of apartheid planning (United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, 1970). These geographically marginal areas became cheap labour reserves which were nurtured by colonial segregation policies and reinforced under apartheid planning.

The ethnic homelands were cast as a decolonisation project as these territories “would be guided towards independence by the white South African government” (Evans, 2012: 3). From 1948 onwards black South Africans were systematically stripped of their citizenship and forced to accept “false nationalities” as citizens of one of the ten ethnically-based and nominally self-governing Bantustans or tribal Homelands (van der Merwe, 2017: 7). The definition of these Homelands was anchored “on racist views of African cultural systems and organisation that divided the diversity of the African population into separate groups, each with its own distinguishing characteristics” (King, 2006: 81). The ten ethnic homelands were to be led “to a flimsy political independence” (Evans, 2019: 372). The fragmented undeveloped Bantustans were supposed to offer opportunities for advancement of the black population and could even attain ‘independence’ thus giving a veneer of legitimacy to white rule in the rest of South Africa. Phatlane (2002: 401) contends that by “introducing the concept of homeland independence, a new way of justifying the white monopoly power in the economic heartland of South Africa was being prepared... instead of justifying discrimination against blacks purely on grounds of race, it would now be done on the grounds that they were citizens of separate states”.

Beinart (2012) points out, however, that the homeland policy was implemented relatively slowly and unevenly during the early apartheid years. This was achieved by the initial consolidation of the native reserves and subsequently by providing the imagined territories with self-governance. The Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 was the original piece of legislation that provided the legal foundation for the establishment of the Bantustans (United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, 1970). According to Schutte (2003: 474) the apartheid state established the homelands “on the basis of its definitions of peoplehood” which drew upon the work of government ethnologists and politically conservative anthropologists to form “the idea of peoplehood in terms of a discrete cultural, linguistic, and political identity”. In 1959 South Africa’s parliament passed Act no 46, the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act, which inaugurated “a period of what was termed ‘grand apartheid’, in which segregation and exclusion was no longer ad hoc but based in the ideology of separate development” (Jensen & Zenker, 2015: 940). The 1959 Act provided for the “gradual development of self-governing Bantu units” (United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, 1970).

Arguably, under apartheid planning the Homeland areas experienced economic neglect, underdevelopment, forced resettlement and overcrowding (Phillips, 2017). The formation of

these ethnically defined enclaves fulfilled multiple economic and political objectives for the apartheid state, most importantly enabling and sustaining the low-wage economy for the urban-industrial heartland of South Africa. Many of these marginal spaces became the sites of the forced exodus of established communities and their ‘dumping’ as ‘surplus people’ in remote and often barren rural slums, a massive exercise in social engineering which was one of the cornerstones of apartheid planning (Platzky & Walker, 1985). In terms of grand apartheid planning for racialised spaces, the Homelands were encouraged to be self-styled autonomous states ‘separate’ from so-termed White South Africa.

In an effort to provide a facade of economic legitimacy to these rural areas from the late 1950s and through to the early 1980s these areas became a focus for regional industrial development policy in South Africa (Rogerson, 1998). The programme of industrial decentralisation has its genesis in the report produced by the Tomlinson Commission (appointed in 1950) which conducted a major investigation into the question of social and economic planning in the reserves, producing its findings in 1955 (Union of South Africa, 1955). The essential development challenge in the reserves was identified as the lack of non-agricultural wage opportunities. The Tomlinson report recommended that private enterprise be permitted to invest *inside* the reserves to create labour-absorbing manufacturing jobs, a proposal that was rejected by government as subverting the racial purity of the reserves (Union of South Africa, 1955). Government preferred to focus incentives upon the ‘border area’ industrial programme which involved offering incentives to develop industrial estates situated on the borders of the reserves but situated in so-termed ‘white’ space. The goals of regional development planning were conflated with those of apartheid social engineering.

The apartheid state introduced a strategy for industrial decentralisation which included controls on the employment of black (African) workers in factories in the country’s major cities in order to encourage labour-intensive industry to relocate at ‘growth points’ in the Homelands (Rogerson, 1998). To support this programme during the 1970s and into the mid-1980s generous government funding was made available to attract both domestic and international investors and for them to employ the cheap labour trapped in these areas. Despite its criticism Beinart (2012: 16) argues a need to recognise that “the ‘homeland’ policy overall transferred central state resources to neglected rural areas, established infrastructures where there had been none and helped to create a new more devolved social geography in a country dominated increasingly by its metropolitan areas”.

Bophuthatswana: From industrial hub to tourism mecca

One manifestation of this new social geography forged by apartheid planning was the territory of Bophuthatswana, the ethnic Homeland established for the Tswana population. Jones (1999a: 579) argues, apartheid Bantustans, most notably Bophuthatswana “reflected extreme forms of territorial fragmentation and (neo)colonially-derived dependency”. The ‘pseudo-state’ of Bophuthatswana was granted nominal self-rule in 1972 before acceding to nominal independence in 1977 (Jones, 1999a). The 1977 ‘independence’ ceremony for Bophuthatswana was held in Mmabatho, the newly built capital city. It included tribal dancers, acrobat displays, a 101 gun military salute at midnight and the formal lowering of the South African flag with its replacement by the new flag of Bophuthatswana (van der Merwe, 2017). According to van der Merwe (2017: 9) despite the pompous ceremony, dancers and speech from ‘President’ Mangope, “the birth of Bophuthatswana lacked the kind of euphoria that independence celebrations usually inspire”. The ‘independence’ of Bophuthatswana was not recognised internationally and was condemned at the United Nations. In terms of economic development the territory of what would become known as Bophuthatswana initially was the focus of industrial decentralisation programming in terms of border area planning and later of the

establishment of industrial growth points – most notably at Mogwase – endowed with lavish incentives targeted to lure investors (Rogerson, 1998; Phalatse, 2000). Although manufacturing was the prime focus of government planning because of its perceived labour-absorptive opportunities, at the heart of the Bophuthatswana economy was platinum mining (Manson & Mbenga, 2012).

For almost the first two decades of apartheid planning the national government devoted little attention to the development of rural tourism in the Homelands (Rogerson, 2014). From the 1970s, however, tourism became implicated in the apartheid project through the close linkages of major tourism enterprises and non-tourism capital with the political leadership of the Homelands (Grundlingh, 2006; van Eeden, 2007). At the heart of the nexus of Homelands and tourism was casino developments which occurred in the Bantustans, taking advantage of the abolition of gambling in South Africa following the introduction of the 1965 Gambling Act (van der Merwe, 2017). Underpinning the expansion of tourism in the Homelands was that the apartheid government retained a highly restrictive attitude towards what they styled as 'morally dubious' activities such as gambling, pornography or inter-racial relations. Accompanying the progression of planning for 'grand apartheid' and the concession of putative 'independence' to several Bantustans, new opportunities for South African tourism capital were opened up for establishing casinos and resorts (Rogerson, 2004). The grant of 'independence' to Transkei (1976), Bophuthatswana (1977), Venda (1979) and Ciskei (1981) re-defined the function of these areas within South Africa's space economy (Crush & Wellings, 1983). Phillips (2017) points out that sections of the white population of South Africa benefited from dubious dealings with the Bantustans; one of the most infamous examples was Sol Kerzner's hotel and casino resorts across the Bantustans. Rural tourism in the homelands now was boosted by the programme of casino developments in the Homelands (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). The Tswana homeland, Bophuthatswana was the first to receive such casino developments (van der Merwe, 2017).

The first of nine hotel/casino complexes in Bophuthatswana, the Mmabatho Sun, was constructed at the capital city of Mmabatho and completed to coincide with the 'independence' ceremonies of December 1977 (Mafikeng Mail, 1989a). The Mmabatho Sun and the other eight hotel/casino complexes were developed by Sun International Bophuthatswana Limited, a hotel and casino resort chain (Mafikeng Mail, 1989a). The Mmabatho Sun hotel and casino was followed closely by the much larger and more ambitious Sun City complex, proclaimed to match Las Vegas, which opened during December 1979 (Hall & Bombardella, 2005). In terms of the social production of space it was critical that Sun City was "literally established in another country" (van Eeden, 2007: 184). The hotelier Sol Kerzner "used the apartheid government's segregation policy of supposedly independent homelands to construct an entertainment resort in Bophuthatswana because it was conveniently situated for visitors from the metropolitan areas of Johannesburg, Pretoria and Vereeniging" (van Eeden, 2016: 209). As described by van Eeden (2003: 5) the mega-entertainment complex of Sun City was viewed as "an anaesthetised Sodom for suburbia, a glitzy getaway for middle South Africa seeking respite from the Puritanism of Christian nationalism; a place just 90 minutes' drive from Johannesburg where they could indulge in otherwise illegal activities like gambling, topless revues and arty soft-porn movies". Sun City was a fantasyscape and the first equivalent of a Las Vegas model of entertainment in South Africa, which was followed in 1992 by the opening of The Lost City theme park (van Eeden, 2016).

Sun City assumed a vital role in promoting Bophuthatswana as a state 'independent' from South Africa. Van der Merwe (2017) maintains that this was largely achieved through the tourism attractions offered by Sun City and supported further by those of the proximate game reserve, the Pilanesberg National Park. Although casino tourism and the entertainment

complexes of Sun City and Lost City massively dominated the tourism economy of Bophuthatswana and have attracted the interest of tourism scholars writing about the area, it must be recognised that other ‘niche’ forms of tourism made an appearance. One example was the slow growth of colonial heritage tourism based upon the historical significance of Mafeking with its associations with Baden-Powell and site of the Siege of Mafeking (Drummond et al., 2021a). Deliberate but limited and disappointing attempts to involve a more African and Batswana cultural heritage were promoted through the Mahika Mahikeng Cultural Festival, which is no longer operating (Drummond et al., 2021b). Another example, the focus of detailed discussion here, was the rise (and fall) of adventure tourism in the surrounds of Mafikeng-Mmabatho, the capital city area of Bophuthatswana.

Skydiving tourism and the Mmabatho Boogie

Skydiving tourism became popular in the Mafikeng-Mmabatho area from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s through the annual Mmabatho Boogie. A boogie refers to a gathering of skydivers, both novice and expert, in a specific area where they can undertake a number of jumps over the boogie period which can range from a weekend to over a week. The main aim is recreation and community rather than competition. Formation jumps are a key feature of boogies with skydivers linking up to form shapes in the sky before delinking to safely pull their chutes and drift down to the ground. National, regional and world records are also often attempted at boogies in relation to the number of skydivers that jump from a plane at once and complete a variety of formations. Training workshops are also often held with skydiving champions so that participants can learn new styles and techniques and improve their skills.

During the December 1986-January 1987 period, the first Mmabatho Boogie was held in the Bophuthatswana capital. It would soon become the biggest parachuting event on the African continent and in the southern hemisphere with approximately 500 skydivers attending the boogie at its peak in 1988-1989 (Penny, 2022). The boogie had a significant economic impact on the Mafikeng-Mmabatho area and helped to put South Africa on the international skydiving events map for the time that the Mmabatho Boogie ran, as well as raising the profile of skydiving in South Africa and becoming a prestigious event for Bophuthatswana. The Mmabatho Boogies were held annually in the December-January period from 1986-1994 with a revival attempt made in 2005 that was unsuccessful.

The origins of the Mmabatho Boogie can be traced back to a similar event that had taken place in Phalaborwa on the borders of the Kruger National Park for a number of years previously. Some of the participants had become dissatisfied with the organisation of the Phalaborwa Boogie and approached Adrian Penny - the General Manager of the Molopo Sun Hotel and Casino - a skydiver himself, about holding a boogie in the Mafikeng-Mmabatho area (Penny, 2022). As a venue for a boogie, Mafikeng-Mmabatho fulfilled the requirements of having an airport with low flight volumes, good weather conditions for skydiving and good accommodation and entertainment options for participants at the Molopo Sun which was adjacent to the drop zone (Penny, 2022). The Bophuthatswana Parachute Club was opened at the drop zone as a result of the Mmabatho Boogie and helped to improve the facilities available for boogie participants including a clubhouse with a bar, canteen, swimming pool, camp site, ablution facilities and grassed and shady parachute packing area (Ward, 1992; Penny, 2022).

The Molopo Sun, one of Sun International’s six hotels at the time in Bophuthatswana opened on 15 October 1986 to become the second hotel/casino complex in the capital (Mafikeng Mail, 1986a). As a newly opened hotel, there was no expectation of a large tourist demand over the peak period of December-January. Consequently, when the General Manager was approached about organising and hosting a Mmabatho Boogie, he saw it as a good business opportunity and agreed to take the booking and fill what would otherwise have been an empty

hotel (Penny, 2022). At that stage, he had only done about half a dozen jumps, part military and part private, and so had some background knowledge of what would be needed to organise a boogie. Consequently, for the first boogie in 1986, he was more involved with the accommodation and recreation side of the event while a second organiser, who had been involved in the organisation of other boogies, was in charge of the skydiving side (Penny, 2022). However, from the second Mmabatho Boogie in 1987 until 1993, Adrian Penny was the sole organiser of the event.

As the General Manager of the Molopo Sun and the local organiser, Penny was also responsible for the infrastructure and getting the permission and support of the Bophuthatswana government from the first event onwards. At the time, Bophuthatswana president Lucas Mangope was driving a development agenda of which tourism was a major focus through the building and promotion of state-of-the-art facilities related to governmental, cultural and sporting institutions, gambling, leisure and entertainment venues, as well as events tourism (Sindani, 1986; Drummond & Drummond, 2021). Mangope was also seeking to enhance the international profile of Bophuthatswana to legitimise it as an independent state and thus eager to present Mmabatho as a new capital city with all the trimmings and trappings that could be expected of an African capital (Drummond & Drummond, 2021). As such, Penny was able to secure the direct support of Lucas Mangope for the Mmabatho Boogie. This was based on the prestige to Bophuthatswana that such an event could bring on the international stage and its potential to attract large numbers of skydiving tourists to the area annually with spillover benefits for the hospitality and tourism sectors in the area more broadly. For instance, whilst participating in the boogie, many skydivers and their families would visit nearby game reserves, the Mafikeng museum and other cultural heritage sites in the Mafikeng-Mmabatho area, do day trips to South African heritage sites such as the Big Hole in Kimberley, visit Sun City, as well as purchase African arts and crafts souvenirs and patronise local restaurants (Penny, 2022). The support from the top level of the Bophuthatswana government helped to ensure the success of the event and a relatively smooth planning process with the cooperation of the ministries of State Affairs, Finance, Tourism, Sport and Defence as well as the Mmabatho International Airport for which full dispensation was granted and the skydivers were given preference over other air traffic (Penny, 2022).

The support of Sun International Bophuthatswana was also key to the success of the event as they helped with seed funding in order to reap the benefits of a full hotel during the duration of the boogie – 150 to 200 rooms a night over the peak period for 10 to 18 days depending on the length of the boogie in a particular year (Penny, 2022). The period of December-January was chosen for the boogie as the summer months have good weather for skydiving and are attractive to tourists from the northern hemisphere looking to escape the winter chill. The event dates were usually from the week leading up to Christmas into the first week of January in order to appeal to a wide range of participants and coincide with when many people were able to take leave over the festive period. South Africans would often attend the boogie before Christmas and many of the Europeans would join in just after Christmas. The Molopo Sun was adjacent to the drop zone and so participants mainly stayed in the hotel, though some also camped near the drop zone and would attend the themed evenings and special events at the hotel, which were also open to local residents of Mafikeng-Mmabatho. These included themed cuisine nights, dances, live music as well as Christmas and New Year parties as advertised in the Mafikeng Mail (1991). There were thus direct and peripheral income streams associated with the Mmabatho Boogie which made private investment into the event an attractive option.

The financial support from Sun International Bophuthatswana and the Bophuthatswana government was crucial in being able to source the aircraft needed to operate the boogie. Over

the nine years the Mmabatho Boogie ran, a number of different aircraft were used which were hired from various organisations and could accommodate varying numbers of jumpers. For the first few events, a C-130 Hercules configured for passengers was chartered from Safair (a parastatal airline company at that time). The aircraft was capable of carrying almost 200 jumpers at a time (Penny, 2022). In 1986, chartering a C-130 Hercules cost R12 500 a day, not including the transport costs of flying it from Johannesburg to Mmabatho and back as well as the hourly rate of about R2 500 to operate the aircraft (Penny, 2022). There was thus a huge financial risk involved in hosting a boogie. This meant that it was crucial to get large numbers of participants and do the appropriate number of jumps every day in order to cover the costs of the aircraft and make a profit on hospitality.

Following the C-130 Hercules, the boogie also chartered DC-3 aircraft which could carry about 30 jumpers; Russian aircraft which were flown in from Beira and Maputo in Mozambique were cheaper to charter, though smaller aircraft; and finally, a CASA 212 (20 jumpers) and CASA 235 (35 jumpers) were hired from the Bophuthatswana Air Force (Penny, 2022). The chartering of aircraft represented a large leakage from the Mafikeng-Mmabatho area with approximately a quarter of a million Rand leaving Bophuthatswana each year that the boogie was held. A proposal was thus made to use the Bophuthatswana Air Force CASAs so that this spending could be recaptured. However, negotiating the use of the CASAs took some time as the Bophuthatswana Air Force wanted to ringfence the income for their own use, since the planes belonged to them, rather than the payment being made to the Treasury for general use (Penny, 2022). A compromise was reached where the charter fee was directed to the Wives and Children's Fund of the Bophuthatswana Air Force (Penny, 2022).

In order to attract the numbers of skydivers needed to cover the costs of the Mmabatho Boogie, international marketing was key. The boogie was advertised in international and local skydiving magazines like Sport Parachutist and the South African Aeronews, and was covered by the top skydiving journalists and photographers. For instance, Norman Kent, one of the world's foremost skydiving photographers and filmmakers, attended and photographed the 1988 Mmabatho Boogie (Mafikeng Mail, 1988). World and national champion skydivers were also invited to attend the boogies and would often offer training to other boogie participants. For example, Deanna Kent, an expert in free-style skydiving which resembles aerial ballet, attended the 1988 Mmabatho Boogie (Mafikeng Mail, 1988). The coverage in international skydiving magazines by top journalists and photographers as well as attendance by skydiving experts and champions offered an element of credibility to the event as they were able to attract the crème de la crème of the skydiving community who had international followings and meant that their presence at the Mmabatho Boogie encouraged others to attend (Penny, 2022). A number of African record attempts were made at the Mmabatho Boogies which also helped to increase the prestige of the event and market it internationally (Penny, 2022; Mafikeng Mail, 1988).

The approach of international marketing and bringing in the top skydivers and skydiving media people was instrumental to the success of the event. This can be seen in the increasing participant numbers as well as global representation of those participants:

“The largest skydiving boogie ever held in Southern Africa, with more than 400 competitors from 14 countries, drops in on the Molopo Sun from December 24 for a week of high-flying fun... The Molopo Sun was asked to host its first Boogie in 1986, when there were 80 entries from three countries. In just two years, its reputation for superb organisation and camaraderie has spread so rapidly that, according to SATOUR, the international skydivers arriving for this year's event are the largest single group to have visited Southern Africa in the last five years. 'Its success is due to the excellent location, the tremendous facilities and organisation laid on, and the liaison we have established with local and national authorities,' explains Adrian Penny” (Mafikeng Mail, 1988: 3).

The Mmabatho Boogie quickly grew to become the second largest international sporting event in South Africa with regards to the number of international participants. At its peak, the event attracted 400-500 skydivers from several countries including the United States of America, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, China, Argentina as well as South Africa (Penny, 2022; Mafikeng Mail, 1988, 1991). Initially, approximately 80% of the participants were international, but the popularity of the event amongst South Africans grew over time so that it became about a 50/50 split of international to South African skydivers (Penny, 2022).

In part, the Mmabatho Boogie event can be credited for the increased popularity and quality of skydiving in South Africa. Many Mafikeng-Mmabatho locals and South Africans were inspired to try skydiving after learning of and seeing the Mmabatho Boogie skydivers in action. For example, it was reported that watching the “explosion of aerial colour as parachutes of hundreds of skydivers fill the skies over Mmabatho with day-glo brightness” inspired Joyce Thembi Merafe, restaurant hostess at the Molopo Sun, to become the first black woman in free-fall in Southern Africa as she completed her first tandem jump in 1987 (Mafikeng Mail, 1988: 3; Sehume, 1987). By 1988, 21 other members of the Molopo Sun staff had also tried skydiving. The introduction of the sport to new participants was maintained throughout the period that the Mmabatho Boogies operated (Mafikeng Mail, 1988; Truman, 1994). The instruction from world and national champion skydivers available at the Mmabatho Boogies was a major attraction and “upped the standard of South African skydiving phenomenally” (Penny, 2022). Adrian Penny’s son, Will Penny, started to jump at the Mmabatho Boogies and received instruction from skydiving experts at these events, becoming a World and European champion skydiver himself.

The Bophuthatswana Parachute Club opened at the airport drop zone as a spinoff from the boogies and was busy during the year with 30-40 permanent members (Penny, 2022). Over weekends, the club could accommodate the skydiving activities of 70-80 people who came for recreation and training (Penny, 2022). The club had the use of Adrian Penny’s small private aircraft in order to make the jumps and at one stage, it was the busiest private aircraft in Southern Africa making 100 hours of flying time every three and a half weeks (Penny, 2022). As a further spinoff from the boogies and the increased popularity of skydiving in the area, two more parachuting clubs opened in Bophuthatswana, at Pilanesberg near Sun City and in Thaba Nchu near Bloemfontein (Penny, 2022). All three clubs have since closed. According to Penny, the success of the aviation activity around the Mmabatho Boogie, the good weather conditions, the facilities at the airport and the accommodation and hospitality options had the additional spinoff of attracting the attention of related adventure tourism activities.

For instance, the German glider community started to visit Mafikeng-Mmabatho at the same time as the Boogie was running as the heat over December-January allowed them to travel around 1200km per day in their gliders. At its peak, there were around 10-12 gliders in the skies at the same time as skydivers. Hot air ballooning and fly-ins of small private aircraft groups were also possible throughout the year. The 4499m long runway at the airport was used also to host motoring events and timed races for the Porsche and Ferrari clubs. Peripheral parachuting and aviation activity in the Mafikeng-Mmabatho area and surrounds was conducted by the Bophuthatswana Air Force which was only loosely linked to the Mmabatho Boogie and the Bophuthatswana Parachute Club. The Bophuthatswana Defence Force embarked on a pilot and paratrooper training programme in 1985 with the first 42 members being presented with their wings by Mangope in 1986 and established a parachute training centre (Mafikeng Mail, 1989b; Mokgadi, 1989). The Mafikeng Big Air Show featured skydiving by the Bophuthatswana Defence Force paratroops as well formation flying displays (Mafikeng Mail, 1986b).



The 1993 Mmabatho Boogie was the last one organised by Penny as he resigned from the Molopo Sun in January 1994 and subsequently relocated from the Mafikeng-Mmabatho area. One final event was held under the Mmabatho Boogie banner in 1994, but apart from giving his permission to use the name ‘Mmabatho Boogie’, Penny had no further involvement in the organisation of the event. The 1994 boogie was successful as 274 skydivers attended the event, making a total of just over 3400 jumps over an 18-day period (Truman, 1994). Though there were some international participants from Germany and France (including the expert instructors), most participants were South African (Truman, 1994). This may indicate that the international marketing had not been as intense as in previous years. It was stated as follows: “You need a lot of energy and marketing, and the plane is an issue,” as is the cost of running the event (Penny, 2022).

Skydiving in Mmabatho became a memory as the boogies ceased after the 1994 event and the parachute club closed down quite soon afterwards, though no exact date could be found. In part this was due to the void created when Adrian Penny left Mafikeng-Mmabatho in 1994 as he was the main driving force and local champion behind the event and the Bophuthatswana Parachute Club, in terms of marketing the Mmabatho Boogie to international audiences, securing sponsorships to cover the costs of an expensive event and organising the aircraft. The reincorporation of Bophuthatswana into the new democratic South Africa in 1994 also played a role as new government structures were introduced which meant that the sponsorship offered by the Bophuthatswana government was not continued by the new ANC government.

A revival attempt was made in December-January 2005 under a new name, the African Freefall Convention, which followed a similar format as the Mmabatho Boogies. The new event was held at the disused military base adjacent to the Mmabatho airfield and a C-130 Hercules aircraft was used, alongside smaller planes such as an Antonov 32B, PAC 750XL, Atlas C4M and L-410 Turbolet (Parachute Association of South Africa, 2005, 2008; Cooper, 2009). The event was supported by the North West Provincial Government, the Tusk Hotel (formerly the Mmabatho Sun and presently named the Mmabatho Palms) as well as a number of private sponsors (Parachute Association of South Africa, 2005, 2008; Cooper, 2009). The African Freefall Conventions continued until 2009 and were quite successful as the 2007/08 and 2008/09 events attracted approximately 200 skydivers each from all over the world and South African records were attempted (Parachute Association of South Africa, 2008; Cooper, 2009; Tau, 2009). However, the organisers of the African Freefall Conventions were mainly international, though initially it was a local South African initiative (Parachute Association of South Africa, 2005, 2008; Cooper, 2009). There may thus have been a lack of local buy-in as well as competition from other skydiving events held around the same time of year as the African Freefall Conventions also ceased.

Conclusion

This paper represents an attempt to address the overwhelming present-mindedness of international adventure tourism scholarship. Taking an historical approach to tourism research is important in ensuring that events like the Mmabatho Boogie are not forgotten and giving a more complete view of adventure tourism in South Africa during the apartheid era as the focus has previously been exclusively on ‘white’ areas. Lessons can also be learned from the past in terms of what it takes to introduce new adventure tourism events, attempt revivals and to run successful events. Adventure tourism activities like skydiving have a large operational cost and so having a combination of committed public and private sector support is important to getting an event off the ground and securing its long-term sustainability. Having a well-organised adventure tourism event or site with a dedicated and enthusiastic organising team is also important, as is having a training programme in place so that a gap is not left if one or a few

key players leave. A diversified offering is also important to attracting participants as demonstrated in the case of the Mmabatho Boogie. It was not just skydiving on offer but also training, witnessing a spectacle, other tourism activities and a community feel that kept people coming back year after year.

It has been shown that for several years the niche of adventure tourism surrounding skydiving in Mafikeng-Mmabatho in the former Bophuthatswana was popular, attracting between 400-500 skydivers at its peak in 1988-1989. Under apartheid the Mmabatho Boogie ran for nine years from 1986-1994 and was a world class event attracting skydivers from around the world due to the state-of-the-art facilities on offer at the airport, the Bophuthatswana Parachute Club and the Molopo Sun Hotel and Casino. The existence of a local champion and organiser for the event combined with international marketing, and the bringing-in of skydiving experts, top journalists and photographers/film makers were key factors to the growth and success of the event which earned a reputation for being well-organised with a great international atmosphere and plenty of entertainment and hospitality options. The backing of both the public and private sectors through the Bophuthatswana government and Sun International respectively were additional elements for the success of the event as their sponsorship covered the costs of chartering the aircraft. Additionally, the support from the top levels of the Bophuthatswana government meant that the organising of the event was relatively smooth as the cooperation of various ministries and the Mmabatho International Airport was ensured. The local spinoffs from the Mmabatho Boogie were impressive as it offered an economic boost to Mafikeng-Mmabatho through tourist spending, improved South African skydiving standards and launched skydiving in Southern Africa onto the international stage.

Arguably, the Mmabatho Boogie and skydiving in Bophuthatswana was mainly driven by a local champion who secured the support from the Bophuthatswana government and Sun International as well as marketing the boogie to the international skydiving community and ensuring the smooth running of the event. This said, the history of this event points to the danger of an event being largely driven by an individual in that it can collapse if that person is no longer involved, as unfortunately was the case with the Mmabatho Boogie. The Mmabatho Boogie was fondly remembered in the Mafikeng-Mmabatho area and a revival was attempted in the 2000s under the banner of the African Freefall Convention which ran from 2005-2009. Though it was a successful event, it never achieved the same popularity as the Mmabatho Boogies in terms of the number of participants. Though it had the backing of both the public and private sector, the event ceased to operate. There have been more recent calls amongst Mafikeng-Mmabatho residents who remember the colourful formations and parachutes in the sky to attempt to resurrect the event again. The former organiser of the boogies believes that it is possible to restart a skydiving event in the area albeit with “the right organisers and in the right context” (Penny, 2022). The aviation infrastructure is still there, and the weather conditions are still well-suited to skydiving and other aeronautical tourism activities. This said, if a lesson is to be learned from the African Freefall Convention revival attempt, it is that whilst support from the public and private sector is necessary, also critical is a team of organisers who are passionate about skydiving and the local area.

Nevertheless, over the past two decades the hospitality and tourism infrastructure in Mafikeng-Mmabatho has deteriorated. The close relationship between the Sun International hotels and the Bophuthatswana government (Mafikeng Mail, 1989a) did not survive long into the political transition in 1994. The Molopo Sun is no longer an operational hotel, while the Mmabatho Palms (formerly the Mmabatho Sun) was severely fire damaged in September 2021 and at the time of writing is at risk of losing its gambling license as the Peermont Group, which now own the hotel, have applied to transfer their gambling license to a new destination in Rustenburg (Lepedi, 2022). In part, it was this close relationship that was able to provide an

environment which allowed the facilitation of niche tourism, in the form of the Mmabatho Boogie from 1986-1994 as well as other adventure tourism activities such as the Sun International off-road series which had a leg in Mafikeng-Mmabatho called the Mmabatho 500 (Mafikeng Mail, 1986c).

The re-incorporation of Bophuthatswana into South Africa (Drummond, 1991a, 1991b; Jones, 1999b) has been a process which has given rise to somewhat ambiguous outcomes for the local economy and tourism in Mafikeng-Mmabatho (Drummond et al., 2021a). Notwithstanding the structural role of the Bantustans in the South African space economy as outlined earlier, the tourist sector was able to create a serendipitous space for job creation and talent development for black South Africans as has also occurred in the creative and cultural sector more broadly (Drummond & Drummond, 2021). The prescient observation of Beinart (2012) that the Bantustan period did facilitate the provision of infrastructure to what were previously native reserves, and which are still relatively remote and peripheral places, would find resonance in contemporary Mahikeng. This analysis of the brief flowering of adventure tourism in the form of skydiving in Mafikeng-Mmabatho addresses an historic lacuna in the knowledge of South African adventure tourism and makes the important observation that adventure tourism did take place in at least one part of ‘black’ South Africa. There may be other destinations and niche experiences which remain to be researched and uncovered as part of tourism’s past in South Africa and elsewhere.

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