Richtersveld declared a World Heritage Site

The Richtersveld in the Northern Cape has been awarded world heritage status, becoming the eighth such site in the country, Environmental Affairs Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk said on Thursday. Covering 160,000 hectares in the Northern Cape, the "dramatic mountainous desert" featured harmonious interaction between humans and nature, and migration patterns by the Nama people that had lasted for at least two millennia, said the World Heritage Committee in Christchurch, New Zealand on Wednesday.

It was the only area where the Nama still constructed portable rush-covered, domed houses.

The Nama were descendants of the Khoi-Khoi who once occupied southern Namibia and most of the present-day Western and Northern Cape provinces. Over a century or more, those in the south were pushed north by the spread of farms from the Cape.

The Nama presently live in three small villages established as mission settlements outside the proclaimed area: Kuboes to the north, Lekkersing to the south-west and Eksteenfontein to the south.

The site joined the Isimangaliso Wetlands Park (Greater St Lucia Wetlands Park), uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, Robben Island, Cape Floral Region Protected Areas, Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape, Vredefort Dome and the fossil hominid-bearing sites of South Africa (Cradle of Humankind, Makapan Valley and Taung Skull Fossil Sites) as places of outstanding universal value, said Van Schalkwyk.

The Richtersveld was returned to the ownership of the people under the land restitution programme a few years ago.

"It is remarkable that within a few short years this community has not only aspired to management of its cultural and environmental assets to the highest international standards, but that it has through acquiring world heritage status succeeded in achieving the highest level of recognition for this."

The Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape was 'buffered' by the following protected areas: the Richtersveld national park to the north, Nababiep provincial nature reserve to the east, and communal grazing areas to the south and west owned by the Sida !hub community property association.

Responding to the announcement on Thursday was Carmen Cloete of the Richtersveld Community

Richtersveld declared a World Heritage Site (Published: 28 June 2007)
http://www.sagoodnews.co.za/environment/richtersveld_declared_a_world_heritage_site.html
"Very, very glad and excited," she said. "The community has been involved in the nomination from the start and we are very, very exited."

Cloete hoped that the new international status would bring more economic befits for the people in the region.

The community had helped with the charting of the heritage area's 162,000 hectares.

The community would be looking into further social beneficiary projects like more camping sites for tourists in the area. The area already had two guest houses and a few camping sites.

"The national and provincial government have been helping us a lot over the years and we hope it will continue."

The Northern Cape government earlier announced that pending the finalisation of the Richtersveld nomination it would convene a meeting of stakeholders to consider the nomination of Kimberley's Big Hole as a World Heritage Site, which has provisionally been offered as South Africa's nomination slot for 2009.

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