

WELCOME TO SHOSHONG



Modern Shoshong is a village of about 10,000 people, hemmed in by picturesque rocky hills. There are walking tracks, wildflowers, wildlife, and many scenic viewpoints in these hills and it is worthwhile taking the time to explore on foot. But this is also a place steeped in history. As you explore you will find that there was also an older and much larger Shoshong in past times. At one time this was the biggest and most significant settlement in Bechuanaland.



Shoshong began life as a 'Toutswe' settlement. The great southward migration of the Bantu peoples arrived in Botswana sometime in the 6th Century AD, and the 'Toutswe' civilisation seems to have been the first home-grown, Bantu dominated socio-political organization in Botswana. The Toutswe people were named after Toutswe Mogala Hill near Palapye, just because this was the first site excavated by archaeologists. There was another major village here in Shoshong, in what is now Sung Ward.

The Toutswe people were pastoralists, keeping cattle, goats and sheep. They were skilled at smelting and working iron. And they seemed to have a vertically stratified society: the rulers liked to live on rocky hilltops, whilst the commoners lived on the plains below. So Shoshong was an ideal site, with outcrops of iron ore in the form of banded ironstone; fertile flat land; and plenty of hills to choose from for upper class residence.

These people were not just pastoralists: they were also traders. Before long items from the other side of the Indian Ocean, like glass beads and cotton fabrics, were appearing in the archaeological record.

The Toutswe civilization came and went. Shoshong next came to prominence as the capital of the powerful Bangwato tribe.



The period from 1700 to 1840 was a time of great turbulence in southern Africa. The rise of a powerful and aggressive Zulu kingdom, and the migration of the Boers saw many groups move northward to escape trouble. The Bangwato were one of the groups on the move, and they arrived in Shoshong about 1770 as refugees from the southern wars. The hilly terrain around Shoshong and the narrow valley made it an easily defended location. In the first half of the 19th Century the area was being terrorized by Matabele (i.e. Zulu) raiding parties, making off with livestock and taking people into slavery. In quiet periods the Bangwato moved elsewhere for better pasture, but in 1850 Chief Sekgoma I of the Bangwato made Shoshong his permanent capital. The last Matabele raid occurred in March 1862. By this time the Bamangwato had obtained guns. The Matabele raiders suffered heavy casualties and never returned.



Under Khama III Shoshong became a major trading centre sitting astride the old 'Road to the North'. For a time Shoshong was the biggest and most important village for a thousand kilometres in every direction and the population equalled that of Capetown. Everyone – missionaries, merchants, hunters and explorers – stopped here in their way past, and many left written accounts. By the 1880's population growth was outstripping the water supply, and Khama III decided to abandon Shoshong in favour of Old Palapye. The move occurred in 1889.

The well-to-do were instructed to lend waggons, oxen, and horses, every one was to help his neighbour, and the big population obediently set out. With its order and disorder, its children, its stuff, and its herds, it must have been a curious picture of a more famous exodus.....

On reaching Palapswe, the new capital, each man began to build on his appointed ground, till in less than a year there were streets of huts and their enclosures, shaded by trees and in regular order, that covered twenty square miles, and contained a population numbering about 30,000... there are stores for the European traders, blacksmiths' shops for waggon mending, and a little galvanised iron house, that holds the telegraph office.

From Knight-Bruce W. (1893) "The Story of an African Chief – Being the Life of Khama." Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co Ltd

The result of the exodus was that Old Shoshong was left abandoned as a ghost town: a time capsule of a 19th century Tswana village. Old Shoshong is now preserved as a national monument, and is managed by the National Museum service.

Shoshong was reoccupied a few years later by a small group of Bakaa under Kgosi Tshwene. By 1911 the population of the new Shoshong had grown to 800. But the danger of Matabele attacks was in the past. Modern Shoshong did not need to be sited for easy defence, and was instead built out on the broad valley floor.

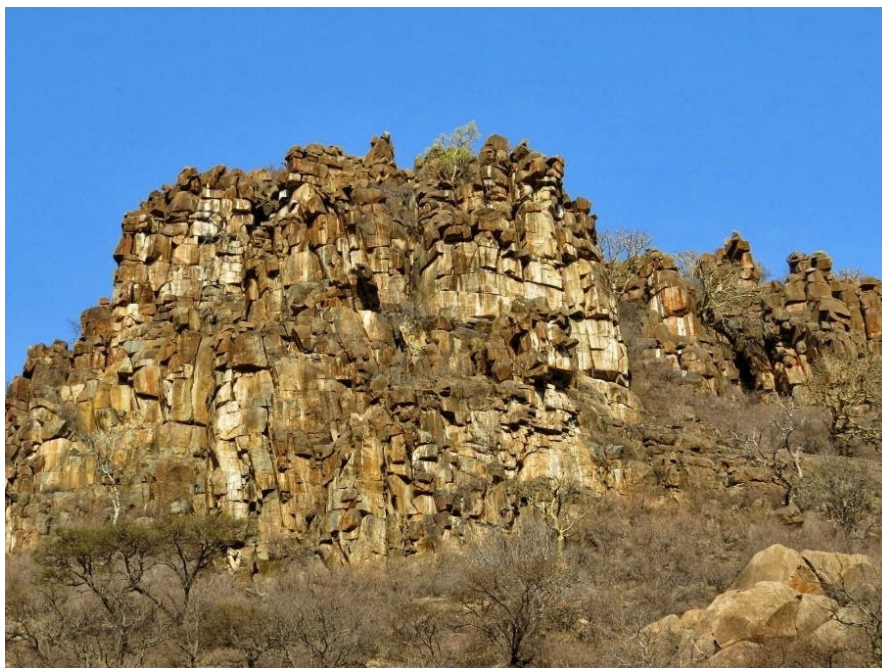
Reoccupation meant that many of the walking paths to neighbouring villages such as Kalamare remained in use. The hills around Shoshong are something of a hiker's paradise.

Shoshong has never regained its former prominence, but it remains a fascinating place to visit. For now it is well 'off the beaten track' in terms of tourism.

Accommodation and dining options are limited, and nothing is signposted except for Old Shoshong. But you can dive in and use our guide notes to help you explore.

Whilst you are staying in Shoshong you can:

- Search for some of the **oldest known trace fossils** in the world in the nearby Mokgware Hills.
- **Climb** the granodiorite buttresses in the Shoshong Gorge.





- Walk or cycle the trails through the Shoshong Hills to the nearby villages of Kalamare, Mmutlane and Bonwapitse
- Visit the site of Old Shoshong and learn about the history of this remarkable settlement.
- Hike to the deserted hilltop village on Pitsane Hill, the first Ngwato settlement, and visit the grave of Mathiba, the Ngwato chief who first settled in the area with his followers
- Visit the Matabele battlefield, and the cemetery where the Ngwato buried their fallen foes.
- Search for the red balloon trees in the hills near Shoshong – trees providing evidence of a Zulu connection



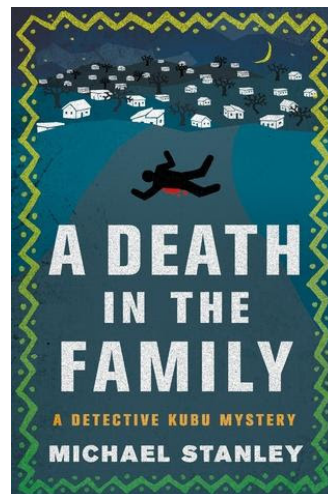
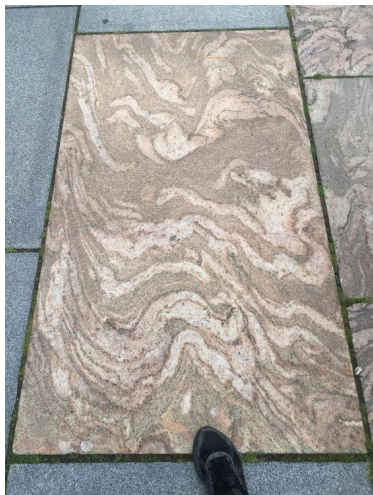
- See the **vacuum sewerage system** in action – the first ever installed in an African village.
- If you are a medical professional, visit the **Shoshong Spinal Clinic**, devoted to research on and treatment of spinal issues in a rural village setting. It is run by an NGO, 'World Spine Care', and is the only village scale spinal clinic in Africa. The clinic is always in need of qualified volunteers and it does really interesting work. You may decide that you want to return.
- Learn about **traditional Tswana village spatial design** – difficult for a vehicle to navigate but there is an underlying pattern.



- Explore the early 20th Century central business district of Shoshong, now deserted. The buildings are still standing but empty.



- Cycle the deserted back road from Shoshong to Mahalapye. The round trip is 78 km.
- Check out the beautiful migmatite outcrops in the Mokgware Hills. The photo of a polished migmatite paver below comes from Scotland. So far as we know no use has been made of the local migmatite for ornamental purposes. But there are some lovely natural pavements.



- Visit the locations mentioned in 'A Death in the Family', the fifth novel in the famous Detective Kubu series by Michael Stanley. This novel was set in Shoshong.