



From the MixCache.com library

SAMPLE COPY

A History of Johannesburg

MixCache.com

SAMPLE COPY

Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** The Ancient Landscape: Johannesburg Before Humanity
- **Chapter 2** Early Peoples and Stone Age Settlements
- **Chapter 3** Iron Age Communities and Tswana Settlements
- **Chapter 4** The Arrival of the Boers: Farms Before Gold
- **Chapter 5** The Witwatersrand Basin: Geological Foundations of Gold
- **Chapter 6** First Glimmers: Gold Discoveries Before the Rush
- **Chapter 7** The 1886 Discovery: Harrison, Walker, and the Main Reef
- **Chapter 8** The Witwatersrand Gold Rush and the Founding of Johannesburg
- **Chapter 9** Building a Mining City: Randjeslaagte and Early Johannesburg
- **Chapter 10** Diggers, Randlords, and Diversity: Life on the Rand
- **Chapter 11** Infrastructure and Growth: Railways, Streets, and a Pulse
- **Chapter 12** Tensions on the Rand: Uitlanders, Boers, and Political Strife
- **Chapter 13** War on the Horizon: Johannesburg and the Anglo-Boer War
- **Chapter 14** British Control and Early Racial Segregation
- **Chapter 15** The Birth of Soweto: Plague, Removals, and Urban Divisions
- **Chapter 16** Industrial Boom and the Shaping of a Segregated City
- **Chapter 17** Rising Resistance: Labor Movements and Protests
- **Chapter 18** Apartheid Entrenched: Forced Removals and The City Remade
- **Chapter 19** Sophiatown to Soweto: Culture and Struggle in Black Johannesburg
- **Chapter 20** The 1976 Soweto Uprising and Its Aftermath
- **Chapter 21** Defiance and Negotiation: The Road to Democracy
- **Chapter 22** The End of Apartheid and Johannesburg's Transformation
- **Chapter 23** Post-1994 Challenges: Urban Renewal and Continuing Divides
- **Chapter 24** A Global Financial Capital: Johannesburg in the 21st Century
- **Chapter 25** Johannesburg Today: Memory, Identity, and the City's Future

Introduction

Johannesburg—a city known the world over as the "City of Gold"—stands as a testament to the extremes of human ambition, resilience, and transformation. Its foundations, both literal and figurative, are rooted deeply in the geology of the Witwatersrand, the world's richest gold-bearing reef. But Johannesburg is not merely a product of resource extraction; it is a city layered with the stories, struggles, and aspirations of countless individuals and communities spanning millennia.

Long before the discovery of gold upended its destiny, the region was a cradle of human habitation and migration. Stone Age peoples left their mark many thousands of years ago, followed by the Bushmen, and later Tswana ironworkers whose settlements predated the European arrival by centuries. Each group, in their own era, shaped the landscape and contributed to the area's evolving human history.

The fortunes of Johannesburg changed forever in 1886, when gold was discovered on the farm Langlaagte. What followed was a dizzying transformation: a frenzied rush that drew prospectors and dreamers from around the world, a new township plotted out on the open veld, and the ascendance of powerful mining magnates known as the Randlords. In the city's first decades, fortune and hardship jostled side by side—evident in its diverse and rapidly swelling population, its patchwork of makeshift camps and grand ambitions, and its social and political tensions.

Yet the story of Johannesburg is not simply one of economic boom. The very dynamics that spurred its meteoric growth also produced deep divisions—racial, social, and economic—that structured the fabric of urban life. Segregation was enforced at almost every level, laying the groundwork for the formal system of Apartheid that would later define South Africa. The city's Black, Coloured, and Indian inhabitants, while essential to its operation, were systematically excluded from its wealth and often forcibly removed from its "white" areas.

Resistance would become another core feature of Johannesburg's identity. From early labor strikes to the student-led Soweto Uprising, the city has been at the center of many of South Africa's most critical battles for rights, dignity, and justice. It was on the streets and within the homes of Johannesburg that key leaders of the anti-apartheid movement organized, resisted, and dreamed of a different future.

Today, Johannesburg is a metropolis in transition—still bearing the scars of its divided past, but also marked by extraordinary energy, diversity, and possibility. Its skyline of glass towers rises beside sprawling townships; its global financial markets pulse alongside informal settlements; and its neighborhoods are alive with the sounds of

many languages and cultures. In tracing the history of Johannesburg, from the ancient past to the present day, this book seeks not only to uncover the origins of a great city but to explore the ongoing story of how South Africans have made, unmade, and are still remaking Johannesburg in their own image.

SAMPLE COPY

CHAPTER ONE: The Ancient Landscape: Johannesburg Before Humanity

To understand Johannesburg, the bustling, modern metropolis, one must first journey back in time, not just decades or centuries, but billions of years. Long before the first human footfall, before the earliest lifeforms stirred in primordial oceans, the very foundations of this place were being laid down in a world almost unimaginably alien. The story of the land that would one day become the City of Gold begins with the deep, slow, powerful processes of geology, a narrative written in rock and time on a scale that dwarfs human existence.

The ground beneath Johannesburg is not merely dirt and stone; it is a complex tapestry woven over eons, a product of immense tectonic forces, ancient seas, and a planet far younger and more volatile than the one we inhabit today. This ancient bedrock forms part of the Kaapvaal Craton, one of the oldest stable pieces of continental crust on Earth. These cratons are like the durable shields of the continents, having survived billions of years of geological turmoil that has reshaped other parts of the planet. The Kaapvaal Craton stabilised around 3.1 billion years ago, providing a solid base upon which later geological layers could accumulate.

The stage for Johannesburg's future destiny was set during the Archaean Eon, a vast stretch of time that lasted from roughly 4 billion to 2.5 billion years ago. This was a time of intense geological activity. Continents were still forming, the atmosphere was vastly different from today's, and the processes shaping the Earth's crust were perhaps more vigorous than those we observe now. It was within this crucible of deep time that the Witwatersrand Basin began to take shape.

Imagine a colossal depression or basin forming on the surface of the nascent Kaapvaal Craton. This was the beginning of the Witwatersrand Basin, a geological feature so significant it would one day be known for holding the world's largest known gold reserves. The formation of this basin wasn't a single event, but rather a prolonged process of subsidence and sedimentation that unfolded over millions of years, starting just shy of 3 billion years ago and lasting for about 260 million years.

Into this vast basin, sediments began to pour. These sediments were derived from the erosion of the surrounding ancient landmasses, carried by rivers and deposited in what is often referred to as the "Witwatersrand Sea" during the initial phases. This wasn't a deep, open ocean, but likely a shallow, epicontinental sea or a series of large lakes and river deltas accumulating vast quantities of sand, mud, and pebbles.

The deposition wasn't uniform; it occurred in distinct phases, resulting in different layers of rock. The lower, older layers, known as the West Rand Group, are typically composed of finer-grained sediments like quartzites and shales, interspersed with some banded iron formations. These layers reflect a time when the basin might have been more dominated by deeper water or less vigorous sediment transport. The West Rand Group alone accumulated to a thickness of 2500–4500 metres.

Following the deposition of the West Rand Group, a period of uplift and erosion occurred, suggesting changes in the tectonic forces shaping the basin. This was followed by the deposition of the younger Central Rand Group, which is of particular interest due to its association with the vast gold deposits. The Central Rand Group is characterised by coarser-grained sediments, notably thick layers of conglomerates.

Conglomerates are essentially lithified gravels, rocks made up of rounded pebbles cemented together by finer material. In the Witwatersrand, these pebbles are predominantly composed of hard, resistant quartz, rounded by their journey in ancient rivers. The presence of these thick conglomerate layers indicates a change in the depositional environment – perhaps a shift towards more energetic river systems or alluvial fans where coarse material was dumped into the basin.

The formation of these sedimentary layers, the Witwatersrand Supergroup as they are collectively known, was influenced by the tectonic activity of the time. The basin's formation has been interpreted as a foreland basin, developing in response to crustal plate movements and the formation of mountains along the northern margin of the Kaapvaal Craton. Imagine immense pressure from colliding landmasses causing the crust to flex and create a depression that acted as a sink for eroded material.

Within these ancient conglomerates lies the key to Johannesburg's future fame: gold. But how did such incredible quantities of gold end up in these specific layers of rock, billions of years before humans arrived to seek it? The prevailing scientific model suggests a "modified placer" deposit origin.

In this model, gold, along with other heavy and resistant minerals like uraninite and pyrite, was eroded from ancient mountain ranges and transported by rivers into the Witwatersrand Basin. These minerals, being heavy, would be concentrated in areas where water flow slowed down, such as in river channels, deltas, or fan systems, forming placer deposits similar to those sought by prospectors in more recent gold rushes.

However, the Witwatersrand deposits are not just simple placers. Over billions of years, the sediments were buried under kilometres of younger rock, subjected to immense pressure and heat. This deep burial led to compaction, fluid movement, and low-grade metamorphism – processes that altered the original sediments and

minerals.

Evidence suggests that groundwater and other fluids circulating through the buried rock mobilised some of the gold and other minerals, concentrating them further or precipitating them in fractures and around organic matter. Ancient microbial life, specifically prokaryotic bacteria, may have played a role. Carbon-rich materials, possibly derived from microbial mats that flourished in the ancient environment, are often associated with the gold and may have helped to trap or precipitate it.

The sheer abundance of gold in the Witwatersrand conglomerates is exceptional, unmatched anywhere else on Earth. Several factors are thought to have contributed to this unique concentration. Firstly, the source rocks in the ancient mountain ranges must have been unusually rich in gold to begin with. Secondly, the intense weathering conditions under the Archaean atmosphere, which was likely oxygen-deficient, might have facilitated the transport and concentration of gold in soluble forms that were later precipitated or trapped.

The environment in which these gold-bearing conglomerates were deposited was a dynamic one. While initial deposition might have occurred in a shallow marine setting, later stages, particularly those associated with the richest gold seams, point to braided fluvial plains and alluvial fan environments. Imagine vast river systems draining elevated terrain, carrying sediments and heavy minerals into the subsiding basin.

Over millions of years, layer upon layer of sediment accumulated, burying the gold-rich conglomerates deeper and deeper. The entire Witwatersrand Supergroup reached a thickness of 5000–7000 metres in places. These layers were not laid down perfectly flat; tectonic activity continued to shape the basin, causing faulting, folding, and tilting of the rock strata.

Evidence of early glaciations has also been found within the Witwatersrand sequence, indicating periods of significant climate change even during this remote geological era. Tillite deposits, rocks formed from glacial sediments, dating back to around 2.95 billion years ago, are present in the West Rand Group, suggesting the earliest known glaciation events on Earth occurred during the formation of these rocks.

Later, around 2.715 billion years ago, the deposition of the Witwatersrand sediments was brought to a close by massive outpourings of lava, forming the Ventersdorp lavas. These volcanic rocks cover vast areas and represent a significant geological event that marked the end of the Witwatersrand sedimentation period.

Adding another layer of dramatic history, the Witwatersrand Basin was later impacted by the Vredefort meteorite, a colossal event that occurred around 2 billion years ago, well after the gold deposits were formed. While this impact caused significant

deformation and faulting in the rock layers, its direct role in concentrating the gold is debated, although some argue it may have caused localised remobilisation of minerals through fluid movement.

So, the landscape that would eventually host the city of Johannesburg was, for billions of years, a place of immense geological power and transformation. It was shaped by the slow dance of tectonic plates, the relentless work of erosion and sedimentation, the influence of ancient atmospheres and climates, and even the dramatic force of extraterrestrial impacts. These deep-time processes created the underlying geological structure – the Kaapvaal Craton and the Witwatersrand Basin – and deposited the extraordinary gold reserves within its sedimentary layers.

Understanding this ancient history is crucial because these deep geological foundations would fundamentally dictate the human history that was to follow. The presence of that buried gold, a legacy of processes completed billions of years ago, would be the primary magnet that drew people to this specific location, transforming an ancient landscape into a bustling urban centre. The rocks tell a story of time on a scale that is difficult to grasp, a story of a planet evolving, setting the stage for events that would unfold only in its final, fleeting moments, when humanity finally arrived.

This is a sample preview. Purchase the book to read the full content.

Visit MixCache.com to purchase the complete book.

SAMPLE COPY