Interview with Alpheus Thomani Mudzanani
This took place at Musunda village, mostly Makahane people, there were 4 men
(Joseph Makahane, Justice Makahane, Edward Nthangeni Makahane and
Alpheus), and 2 women (Phophi Munzhelele and Nyambeni Phungo) present
plus Madzhuta, Leonard, Lindsay and Lynn. It happened on the morning of June
6, 2004.

Madzhuta introduces us individually and our project and interests to the group.
Previously he has asked if it is all right to conduct the interview, to record it in various
ways and what can and cannot be said, to make sure everyone is comfortable.

A: Have you (meaning us) ever come to speak to Makahane people before?

M: No, this is the first time.

A: I’m surprised because two groups of researchers have come before to ask for
information and they never came back to tell us.

LMM: I can show them these photographs and video immediately?

M: Is it OK to take these photos, video?

A: Since we are not stealing information it is alright (they are talking about themselves,
their property). This is our information. We are giving it to them. (These are our
stories).

M: Mr Mudzanani, what can you tell us about Thulamela and Makahane?

A: Thulamela is just ruins of Makahane people. It’s not only Thulamela, its Makahane,
and Magovhani as well. These are the ruins inside KNP.

M: Where is Magovhani?

A: It’s west of Thulamela.

M: Are there wallings there?

A: No, there are no walls there. We can only see the middens and grinding stones,
maguyo, and metals hoes from plowing and graves.

M: Who was the ruler at Thulamela?

A: There were many people who ruled, from the Makahane claim. Although it was a
long time ago, Mashande was one ruler.
M: Who was the most cruel Makahane chief at Thulamela? I've heard they were cruel. Was it Mashande?

A: No, the most cruel was Makahane?

M: Was the mountain named because of his cruelty? It wasn’t named Mashande.

A: Yes.

M: Why do people think he was so cruel?

A: During the ploughing time, both men and women would be ploughing, naked. He instructed them this way. If a woman was found pregnant, he would call all men and women to his field, they would be uprooting the weeds up front and then men would be plowing behind. If any man got erect from watching these women, Makahane would shoot them. This would be the man who made he pregnant. (M thinks this really happened). Makahane also sent people over the cliff on a rope to fetch birds, when he sent you, to see if the young birds are fully grown. People are holding the rope so you do not fall. You show them one by one that they are grown up. You kill them and put it in the basket, then you are finished you tied the chain around the basket and sent the birds back. They then send the rope down for you and you come back. If the birds were not fully grown, then Makahane could kill you for that. This man doesn't know his job and then you die. (This happens at Makahane, not necessarily Thulamela, thinks this happens 1500s or 1600s AD)

M: Whose fault is that, if the birds are not fully grown?

A: He won't listen to you.

M: Who holds the rope?

A: Not the chief, it's his servant.

A: After the slaughtering of the cow, they want to use the cowhide, maybe for sleeping. The Makahane people would prepare it, which is different, other people would stake it out and smear it with salt. The Makahane used people to do it, rather than just leaving it staked out. As they’re doing it, chief Makahane would be there watching people and if a person was weak, not pulling it strongly, there would be a punishment. It should be dried in one day and should be ready this way. Bandola-Makahane is a punishment, the name given for a punishment after the chief himself.

M: I never saw such beautiful walling. Who built the walling at Makahane?

A: For the royal family there is one person chosen to be responsible for building the walls.
M: Where did he get the stones?

A: The chief will get them to go get the stones from other places, the one in charge chooses the best stones to be used.

M: If your cattle have eaten the crops from other people’s fields, would you have to build the walls as punishment?

A: No there are special people chosen to build the walls. But there could be another punishment. If your animals destroy the crops your punishment might be a chicken, because money was very scarce. Or else you go and plough on that person’s field. Money was scarce, might be 1 Rand (so this is in a time of money)

M: Since Makahane was a great chief, how many wives did he have?

A: He had 5.

M: And children?

A: Plenty of children.

M: When did he Makahane died? What killed him?

A: I don’t know when, but his younger brother killed him.

M: For what reason?

A: It was because of the way he was ruling people.

M: Who succeeded Makahane after his death?

A: The person was Madadzhe.

M: Was he the headman I knew of at Tshikonelo village?

A: No, but maybe he was his great, great grandfather.

M: How did he kill him, poison, spear?

A: He killed him with a big knife.

M: Im told that Makahane and Thulamela are one place since Makahane people used to stay there. Did you start at Thulamela and then move to Makahane?
A: First we stay at Thulamela and then we moved from Thulamela to Makahane and then we moved back to Thulamela and then to Makahane. That is why we do not have any ruins because we only stay in those 2 mountains.

M: What was the reason to leave Thulamela and move to Makahane and then move back again?

A: The reason why, during those days, a chief wasn’t allowed to stay for a long time.

M: Were there taboos?

A: No, but an enemy should not know where a chief was all the time. He had to move around. People always fight in the olden days.

M: According to my observation, Thulamela and Makahane are not of the same height. Makahane is a little higher. Why did the chief always want to stay on top of the mountain?

A: The reason is for the security to see the enemies in the distance. People were always fighting. There are two hills (around Pafuri) that were used for guard posts, to see in advance, they stayed there to look for enemies so they can alert the chief, tell him to get ready. They name it Thantangalala. The enemies surrounded during the night and killed them, the name means ‘surrounded us and killed us while asleep’ (lala means sleep).

M: Who was the worst enemy?

A: Shangaans and Swati.

M: This place, I found some rock paintings there at Thantangalala. Do you know who painted them?

A: I know nothing about that.

L: What about access to Thulamela, what does he think about excavation, the removal of burials and the like? What would he like to see done?

M: Do you want to perform rituals there at Thulamela?

A: Yes, we have asked for the park management and we have been given access. We have been there once in 1999.

M: It means only once you have done rituals, but you’d like to keep coming?

A: Yes
M: When do you want to conduct ritual ceremonies?

A: After harvesting our crops, so as to share them with our ancestors who are underground.

M: Things might be different from family to family. What do you do, kill cattle, a white chicken, a black goat?

A: The Makahane people use a black bull cattle, but if there is none, they use a black male goat. We also use sorghum beer, mahafhe.

M: At Thulamela, its quite big, where do you do this ritual?

A: We do it next to the two big baobabs, inside the wallings. *(near the monoliths inside that main wall)*

M: The outside is the courtyard. As you are entering this walling, there is a tall standing stone, what were the uses of this stone

A: Those tombo *(monoliths)* it was a sign, that each and every person when you arrived there. Before you can get inside you have to pull off your shoes, since it was not allowed to enter with the shoes.

M: What would happen if you didn’t?

A: That would be a very big fine. There was a person who stayed there. You would be heavily charged for this.

M: As someone from the royal family, what are the daily activities of the girls and boys?

A: Tshigombela, Tshifasi are the dances. There were no schools.

M: You sound like someone who is educated.

A: No, not at all. People started to go to school after we were moved from the park in 1946. The park extended to where they used to stay at Magovhani in 1926. In 1946 that people started remove people.

M: Who removed you?

A: White man called Botha.

M: What was the reason?
A: That portion of the land is now for game, if you stay your cattle will get foot and mouth disease.

M: Did they treat you well?

A: No, we were never treated well and from that day we lost our chieftanship. People spread to other places, countries.

M: When Botha moved you, the government wanted to move you, they might check the quality of your house or animals and compensate you?

A: They didn’t give us anything, not even transport. We were using our own donkeys to move.

M: What type of crops did you plough?

A: Maize meal and sorghum, mainly maize.

M: Did you ever work in the park?

A: No, but my father worked at the park as a chief ranger. That is why even when other people were removed from the park, my father was moved a little later than other people, out of respect. When other people were moving, the park said they should go and dip cattle at Mhinga. As they took cattle to Mhinga, they arrived at a place called Tshihaheni, the white people shoot all those cattle and burn them (fear of disease?). They say which one is fit and then they can have this for eating, the rest are burned.

M: You know that Thulamela had excavation, the chief and the wife’s graves. There will also be an environmental center at Punda Maria, with objects, gong, ostrich egg shells, and so on. In as far as Venda culture is concerned, should those things be on display? Is it important for the children?

A: It wasn't allowed in our culture, since the Venda have respect. This idea of putting a cross on the grave of the chief, this is not allowed.

M: What's your opinion about displaying things at the museum? Should they know or not?

A: Because our children want to learn more and get a job, it’s important they are put on display. We accept that, its already happened. They have already been shown. Let our children know about those things. But we have lost our land, our chieftanship, but what about us? We don’t get even a single cent.

M: You are not the only person who has lost their land. Other people also have complained that they have lost theirs too under the apartheid regime. I don’t know whether it was the park management that was undermining people in those days. We
were living under apartheid, and now there will be a lot of changes, because we are living under democracy. Look now, people now have access to the park and can perform ancestral rituals, like at Thulamela.

In Venda culture, if someone is trying to excavate the burial of someone who has passed away a long time ago, should I contact the traditional healer, pour the snuff, what should I do?

A: In Venda culture, graves had more respect than a living person. Even if they wanted to put a road through, the road would rather turn and leave the grave untouched. It wasn’t allowed to see the graves of the dead person. Even young people were not allowed to see the corpse. We don’t want them to see what the person looks like. During the olden days, the commoners can spend 3-4 days not knowing that their chief has passed away.

M: Why did so many of the chiefs get buried on Friday during the night?

A: On Friday only the royal family will bury him and only the commoners will come on Saturday.

M: If you think about Kruger Park then and now, what are the differences?

A: Now we can enter the park, without cost, there is a mutual benefit between the Makahane family and the park. The disadvantages are that we are now busy with this land claim issue, but we haven’t had a response from the park management. We want to take our grandchildren to the park, to show them the ruins of their ancestors, the graves. We want to tell them stories of how we used to live. But we don’t have a chance to show them because what we have requested from the park has never been done.

M: Do you like to show them your ruins?

A: Yes, we like to take our grandchildren.

M: Showing your children you ruins and getting your land back are two different things. If you want to show them you can ask me to take them to the ruins, because you have good communication channels with the management.

A: What you’re saying is right. But we didn’t willingly move from the park, we were chased from where we were living.

M: If you were given a chance to go back and live where you did, would you?

A: yes, but there would need to be some sort of negotiations. Because the rivers and dried out and the springs are dry, we need to have water, it needs to be supplied. It would be great, if we could have water, because this is our land.
M: Would any of you here like to ask questions of us? Is there anything we can tell you?

Joseph?: Would it be possible to employ one person from the Makahane family in the park?

M: I don’t know what the park considers when it employs people. We don’t have the power in People and Conservation to hire people. The park also considers you are from a community closeby. I cannot come straight to your question. I will appreciate if the Makahane people can be employed in the park, your knowledge will be important because it is linked to places and you can tell people.

Justice: Next time we would appreciate if there was any project at Thulamela going on, the Makahane family should know before.

LMM: Can you explain that we believe in consultation, that this is done elsewhere and we believe its important.

A: Another problem with the park, whenever we want to take the children to see the ruins, the park always says the roads are not ready, and give excuses.

M: Whom do you contact when you want to go to Makahane?

A: We contact Mr. Leonard Luula and Mr. Reckson Seani (an interpretive officer who has now left).

M: You must contact our department who will liaise with the other department, through the right channel. I’m happy to hear that people have an interest, things are changing. Just follow the right channels. We want to have people feel proud. I was at Makahane last week and the roads are accessible. I will be grateful if you can come with me, because you can show me things and explain them for me. Please book in advance, so we can arrange the ranger and everything.

Justice: Can it be possible for Kruger National Park to know that we want to come every date, this day of this year, they should know that we will come every year. So not to keep applying, they will know.

Leonard: Yes, that can be possible.

A: Since 1946 we have not moved anywhere, we moved to the village.

M: Who is the headman.

A: Khosi Kiinda.
M: Is he related to Makahane people?
A: No.

M: Is there village that Makahane rules, is there a chief?
A: No, there is nowhere since we lost our chieftanship.

M: Are the Makahane people Lembethu?
A: Yes, they are Lembethu. We are related to Karanga language and we are from there.

M: What about this chief Makuleke? Is he Makahane? Is there any war between the Makahane and Makuleke people?
A: No, there they didn’t get into contact because we were separated by the Luvuvhu river. Everyone was afraid of Makahane, because of his cruelty. But as time goes on, Shangaans raised war because they were in need of animal skins.

M: What was the need for skins?
A: They needed the hides for wearing. During this time of fighting, Chief Makuya asked the Vendas there, what’s the problem? The Venda related that the Shangaans were constantly making war for hides. He asked, ‘where are they?’ The Venda replied they are at Matukwane, where the chief Ramashia was ruling (Venda chief). Before he was known as Makuya, this chief was known as Muofhe. After they showed Makuya where their enemies were, Makuya went back and gathered soldiers, upon his return, he went to the place where the Shangaans were camping, to kill him. He killed all the Shangaans and their children. At the Shangaan’s camp, they had clay pots and green beans from the field. After Makuya had killed everyone, he cooked the children in the big clay pots. First he puts the corpses of the young children, then he piled on some beans and salt. When the children were cooked, he went back to his place. While Makuya was killing, some of the Shangaani ran away, and they returned to find the pots of beans, and just started eating, without realizing that it was their children. They slowly realized that it was human flesh, so they stopped, and they were very bitter. The corpses of the elders were scattered around the area. Hence, the name Makuya comes from the meaning, ‘he who grinds the Shangaans and their children’. This occurred within the KNP area, at Matukwana hill.

A: Nyambeni is the sister to Alpheus, by the same mother. Pophi is a sister to Justice and Edward (blue coat). Joseph and Justice and Pophi are siblings. Edward is a younger brother to Justice’s father. This Alpheus is cousin to the Makahane’s people’s fathers. Alpheus’ grandmother was the sister to a Makahane.
M: What is the role played by the Makhadzi. This person is a woman, not allowed to be married. Her house was between the chief’s palace and the principle wife. Her husband should be someone from the royal family, maybe a cousin.

A: My grandmother was the Makhadzi, her name was Nyamkuvha—the sister to chief Makahane.

Note: Makahane (known as Phandembili – means two poles, forked) all the old men refer to the site as such, the Venda name.