The Makapansgat Australopithecus Caves Site
By Anna Smillie, Joe Kavulich, Michael Dial, and Isabela Cannon
GEOL 204 The Fossil Record - Spring 2019 - Section 0102

Location
Makapansgat is located in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The habitat consists of hilly and rocky terrain, grassland, and savannah.

Geologic Time and Paleoclimate
In order to find out the kind of habitat *A. africanus* lived in, scientists used teeth of several taxa found at the site to find out what their diet consisted of.

Types of fossils found at the site were:
- Teeth
- Adolescent pelvis + jaw bone
- Part of an infant skull
- Fragments of facial bones

35+ specimens in total!

Since it was found that the mammalian species that lived 3.3 million years ago were mostly grazers and browsers, scientists could conclude that the fauna lived in a mosaic bush, woodland habitat, and grassland habitat.

The Makapansgat Pebble
The Makapansgat Pebble is the most well-known artifact from the site. It was found near various *A. africanus* bones, and is therefore believed to be a face carved out by the early hominins, or found near a stream by them and seem as "special."

This pebble, discovered by Wilfred I Eizmanin in 1925, is symbolic because it suggests that *Australopithecus africanus* may have been self-aware.

Raymond A. Dart
Raymond Arthur Dart was a significant researcher in hominin studies, and his insights led to more development of human evolution theory. He did most of his work in South Africa, and first discovered traces of *A. africanus* in Makapansgat.

Dart's claims in 1924 that the ape-like species he discovered were similar to those of humans was very controversial at the time, and supported the theory that early human life started in Africa, and not Europe.