

BONES

"MONEY FOR BONES: We need big quantities dry bones."

"BONES REQUIRED: Top Prices Paid."

The advertisements help to proclaim a little-known fact. There is a national shortage of bones in South Africa. Yes, bones, ribs, shins, jaws and clavicles of dogs, goats, donkeys, horses, cattle. Bone merchants cannot get enough cracked skeletons, and outbid each other to obtain supplies. They will pay R75 a tonne for three tonnes or less, and R110, R120, R140 a tonne for larger quantities.

It was not the money that drew the CAP project, Msinga, into the bones business, however. It was drought. Four years ago, when the drought started at Msinga, 12 000 cattle died, and more than 300 tonnes of bones were left lying on the veld.

In October 1980 Mrs. Gezekhile Mkhize arrived at Mdukutshani, headquarters of the project, carrying a sack with the bones of her dead ox. She had heard bones could be used as fertilizer. Would we give her mealie meal for her bones? The following week there were 25 people with bones, then 94, then 461 . . . Ever since, sporadically, when there have been funds to buy mealies, there have been queues of bone pedlars. We have now had 51 collections, a total of more than 10 000 people in the queues, and more than 375 000 kilograms of bones.



Bonequeue 2

Paul Weinberg

Bone collection is nothing new at Msinga. For more than 100 years bones have been articles of trade, one of the only commodities produced in an area regularly afflicted by drought. Long ago the bones went by ox wagon to Durban harbour to be loaded onto waiting ships for export. For 40 years Natal was a bone exporting country, the record year being 1870, when 276 tonnes fetched R2 252. As agriculture in the Colony expanded, however, bone exports came to an end, for bone dust was "the only known form of artificial fertilizer in use," according to the Natal Agricultural Journal of 1898.

Bones were much more than fertilizer, however. They were also a source of phosphate for cattle grazing on African pastures deficient in this essential mineral. Without phosphate, cattle die.

By 1900 there were not enough bones to go round. S.B. Woollatt, the Colony's veterinary surgeon, complained that "In the matter of bones the demands of the colonial agriculturalist have for several years been at the cost of the pastoralist. Since bone dust became locally popular as a fertilizer the bones of dead animals which used to strew the veld have been most assiduously collected both under the direction of the farmers, and by the natives on their own account for sale."

Msinga traders were still buying in bones in the 1960's, when the fertilizer companies decided to discontinue their rounds because of the heavy costs of transport. City abattoirs were more accessible.

However bonemeal has remained an irreplaceable constituent of stocklick — and the country's abattoirs don't provide enough bones.

CAP never wanted to sell its bones, believing Msinga's fertility should remain at Msinga. The first 300 tonnes were ground into meal, and some was distributed as stocklick to local cattle owners, some is being used to fertilize gardens along the Tugela River, and a large quantity is in storage, awaiting the day when the rains return.

"Recently, however, we have been forced to change our minds about selling bones," says Mr. Petrus Majozi, the chairman of CAP. "We no longer have room to store a single bone — and we cannot find sufficient funds to buy the mealies which pay for the bones." (The R57 000 spent so far has been covered by drought relief donations).

In September, therefore, CAP railed a consignment of bones to the highest bidder, a firm in Warrenton, in the Cape. The company wants "unlimited quantities" — so CAP's Bone Exchange has a longterm future. Which has brought a sigh of relief from the 1 000 women and children who are now regulars in the queues. Some bring their bones 60 kilometres, trekking with their donkeys, sleeping along the way. Some carry their bags on their heads, across the mountain, an hour's walk away. Each brings, on average, 35 kilograms of bones, taking away half the weight in mealies.

Nobody gets past the scale without answering some questions, and the census figures, over the years, have added up to one disturbing fact: If it rains, there will be an end

to the drought, but not to famine. While it has been convenient to use the drought as a reason for famine relief, drought is not the real cause of hardship in black rural areas. The people in greatest need are those without fields, without livestock, and often without men. Recession, removals, a pension budget that leaves thousands of old people without pensions . . . all are factors contributing to poverty that is barely affected by whether or not it rains.

CAP has always regarded its bones queue as a barometer of hardship. The following analysis reflects something of the people who have queued.

(Editor's Note: The second table is a copy from pages of the CAP bone book on two different days. The first column records the approximate age of the person bringing bones. The second column indicates the number of children

at school in the family, e.g. 1/10 means 1 out of 10 goes to school. Column 3 indicates the situation of the head of the family, i.e. Father or Husband. In this column **W** means the family head is dead; **WW** means war-widow, the family-head died as a result of the Msinga fighting; **UE** means "unemployed"; **Goli** means working in Johannesburg; **TE** means working in some other town; **Para** means paralysed; **JWar** means in jail as a result of fighting; **D** means deserted by family head; **S** means "sick", often chronically; **P** means pensioner. Column 4 records whether the family has access to fields for cultivation and Column 5 whether they own any stock, **C** meaning cattle and **G** meaning goats. If these figures are in brackets it indicates the number of stock lost through drought or theft. Thus the family of Lindiwe Madondo (No.35) have lost 14 head of cattle and 10 goats and are left with 2 goats. The "Bones" column shows the weight of bones delivered that day.)

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF BONES QUEUE STATISTICS – May, June and July 1983

People in queue	832	941	1111
Total bones	24 961 kgs	36 029 kgs	37 948 kgs
Total maize swapped	14 377 kgs	26 851 kgs	19 371 kgs
Total children at school	28,9%	29,5%	30,29%
Fieldowners	15,4%	15,5%	31,5%
Stockowners	31,25%	12,93%	39,52%
Average cattle per stockowning family	2,17	4,09	1,72
Average goats per stockowning family	3,6	8,03	2,71
Widows	23,56%	26,43%	22,85%
War widows	10,82%	10,12%	12,17%
Deserted by father	2,76%	2,58%	3,09%
Sick	4,93%	6,74%	6,98%
Cripple – no pension	8,05%	9,89%	12,17%
TB	9,73%	7,87%	9,28%
Blind – no pension	2,76%	1,19%	1,29%
Mad	2,52%	3,59%	3,49%
Town employed	13,7%	10,46%	11,57%
Farm employed	4,8%	1,91%	2,49%
Unemployed	13,94%	14,84%	10,87%
In jail	2,16%	2,13%	1,59%
Old/pensioned	0,96%	1,34%	2,09%

TABLE 2

NAME	Approx. Age	Children at school	Husband/Father	Fields	Stock C	Stock G	Bones Kgs.
1. Nomazwane Ngubane	50	0/1	Induna	Yes	3	20	131
2. Sono Ngubane	11			42
3. Mamgaga Mdluli	64	1/3	TB	Yes	—	(25)	102
4. Kulilile Mdluli	53	2/4	W	No	—	—	50
5. Tibulile Mdluli	13			20
6. Manjamane Mdluli	30s	0/2	WW		(5)	(40)	22
7. Siyaphi	13	2/3	WW	Yes	3	8	25
					(6)	(10)	
8. Catherin Njamane	52	2/5	UE	Yes	—	6	47
9. Landeleni Mdluli	13						41
10. Nhlumo Mdluli	13	2/10	WW	Yes	2	9	25

TABLE 2 – continued	NAME	Approx.	Children	Husband/	Fields	Stock		Bones Kgs
		Age	at school	Father		C	G	
11.	Mashabalala Mdluli	50s	2/3	UE	Yes	—	2	43
12.	Masibande Njamane	?	1/2	Goli	No	—	—	25
13.	Mgeni Mdluli	13	0/4	UE	Yes	—	2	45
14.	Khosiphi Ndamane	14	4/7	UE	Yes	1	6	45
15.	Mashezi Ndamane	70s	0/4	W	No	(2)	(30)	82
16.	Bakhohliswe Zwane	50s	1/5	TB	Yes	(6)	2	45
17.	Mathombi Mdluli	10	1/5	TB	Yes	3	4	40
18.	Seniphi Mpanza	40s	2/2	TE	No	4	—	25
19.	Elvina Ndamane	60	2/2	UE	No	3	10	30
20.	Mandondo Shezi	?	4/7	TB	No	—	—	30
21.	Manhlula Qwade	?	0/3	WW	Yes	2	5	45
22.	Mandawonde Xulu	?	0/3	WW	Yes	2	6	50
23.	Ntombi Sithole	?	0/5	WW	No	(45)	(25)	2
24.	Mxewana Hadebe	?	4/all died	mad	Yes	(4)	—	65
25.	Nyoni Mthethwa	?	3/7	Para.	No	(3)	(8)	45
26.	Mamkhize Gumede	14	3/5	JWar	Yes	(30)	(8)	46
27.	Gezile Gumede	?	0/10	Blind	Yes	(3)	—	87
28.	Sicelaphi Gumede	?	0/3	WW	Yes	—	—	60
29.	Tandobani Gumede	10	1/5	UEW	Yes	—	—	45
30.	Qomsile Dlamini	14	0/5	TB	No	(8)	—	41
31.	Mambomvu Gumede	?	—	WW	No	—	(10)	130
32.	Magumede Nzimande	?	0/8	W	No	(12)	(14)	66
33.	Mantuli Mvelase	?	3/6	WW	Yes	—	—	20
34.	Mamtwala Shabane	?	0/5	WW	No	(5)	—	45
35.	Lindiwe Madondo	14	2/8	WW	No	(14)	(10)	35
36.	Nozipho Mvimbi	10	0/12	Blind	No	(2)	—	2
37.	Nomusa Ndawonde	10	1/5	mad	No	(6)	(10)	45
38.	Mamana Mabaso	50s	—	WW	No	—	—	4
								40
								145

FOOTNOTE: Between them this group travelled 1 500 km each way to deliver their bones.

727.	Mamvelase Mboshe	60	2/3	W	No	1	—	100
728.	Mlawu Mavundla	8	3/6	TE	No	—	—	40
729.	Mamvelase Dladla	40	0/10	Para	No	—	—	95
730.	Macule Mbatha	8	1/6	TB	Yes	2	—	50
731.	Masithole Duma	40	2/4	D	No	—	—	95
732.	Mqanquza Nyawose	8	0/5	S	No	—	—	10
733.	Xazaleni Mapumulo	12	0/6	Para	No	—	—	25
734.	Esther Dlamini	40	0/3	W	No	—	—	36
735.	Mhla Xulu	8	0/5	W	No	—	—	10
736.	Hlengile Hlatshwayo	40	5/7	D	No	1	—	64
737.	Andrina Sithole	50	4/8	TB	No	—	—	36
738.	Tobile Zwane	12	0/3	W	No	—	—	41
739.	Andrina Tabethe	30	5/6	W	No	1	—	32
740.	Bono Shengu	14	4/8	TB	No	2	—	32
741.	Mamvelase Shabalala	40	4/8	Blind	No	4	5	38
742.	Masithole Dladla	30	3/6	Para	No	—	—	32
743.	Alvina Majola	40	0/3	TB	No	3	—	10
744.	Madonsela Shengu	30	0/5	Para	No	—	—	64
745.	Gladys Malinda	30	1/1	TB	No	—	—	10
746.	Zandile Ngcobo	12	2/4	W	No	—	—	2
747.	Ngane Mayisa	10	0/4	W	No	—	—	5
748.	Ntombenhle Nxamane	12	3/6	TB	Yes	—	—	40
749.	Nokuthule Cashule	20s	0/6	W	No	—	—	65
750.	Delile Mbono	?	0/7	W	No	—	—	32
751.	Mambele Hadebe	40s	3/6	P	No	2	5	40
752.	Mamajola Xaba	60	2/5	W	No	5	4	40
753.	Maxaba Shelembe	30s	3/6	WW	No	—	—	38
754.	Mamcunu Hadebe	20s	2/3	WW	No	—	—	86
755.	Macashule Siqubu	?	6/8	WW	No	—	—	66
756.	Fihliwe Miya	?	3/6	W	No	—	—	44

Footnote: The people in this table travelled a total of 650 Kms each way to deliver their bones.