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## PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE LATE HOLOCENE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE AWASIB-GORRASIS BASIN COMPLEX IN THE SOUTHERN NAMIB DESERT

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Archaeological evidence from the Awasib-Gorrasis basin complex confirms the late Holocene occupation hiatus observed elsewhere in the southern Namib Desert. The second millennium AD re-occupation of the study area is related to the development of specialized hunting and gathering strategies which maximized the opportunities of a highly episodic environment.

Des preuves à partir d'une reconnaissance archéologique montrent que pendant les deux derniers millénaires des chasseurs-cueilleurs du Désert Namibien méridional se sont déplacés entre la côte Atlantique et l'escarpement. Ils ont suivi des stratégies très spécialisées pour chasser l'antilope migratrice, et pour exploiter d'autres ressources telles que les cachettes enterrées de graines d'herbe sauvage accumulées par les fourmis moissonneuses.

### INTRODUCTION

The southern Namib Desert is a hyper-arid zone lying between the interior escarpment and the Atlantic coast of Namibia. A vast treeless erg, a sea of shifting sand, occupies much of the desert, but there are a number of rocky mountain ranges, too, and several drainage systems that lie dormant for years on end. In this landscape, sparse stands of camelthorn trees *Acacia erioloba* survive from episodes of high rainfall, and the most characteristic large mammal of the southern Namib, the oryx *Oryx gazella*, migrates between escarpment and desert in search of pasture and water.

Archaeological evidence presented in this paper shows that late Holocene occupation in the Awasib-Gorrasis basin of the southern Namib was limited to sporadic and short-lived hunting and gathering expeditions. Our investigation sought to establish a chronological framework for the archaeological evidence, as well as to identify key relationships between the archaeological sites as evidence of human responses to ecological opportunities in an unpredictable environment. To this end, we carried out a detailed survey of the Awasib-Gorrasis area, recording a total of 38 archaeological sites, of which four were selected for detailed investigation in the 2005 field season covered by this report<sup>1</sup>.

Previous investigations in the southern Namib Desert have yielded a consist-

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<sup>1</sup> In the field documentation, Sites 1-38 are designated QRS 42/1-38.