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Technology

Last few early humans survived in 'Eden', scientists say

- **By Staff Writers**
- From: NewsCore
- July 26, 2010 1:28AM
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These caves located off the South African coast sustained the human population through a devastating ice-age. Pictures: Arizona State University

Source: Supplied



Researchers found ochre and evidence of shellfish - which reveal the earliest dated evidence of modern humans at Pinnacle Point
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[< Prev \(#\)](#)

1 of 2

[Next > \(#\)](#)

- African land remained continuously habitable
- Nutrient rich land sustained humans in ice age
- Survivors gave rise to humans today
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The land around the caves was nutrient rich, sustaining a small population
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A STRIP of land on Africa's southern coast became a last refuge for the band of early humans who survived an ice age that wiped out the species elsewhere, scientists maintain.

The land, referred to by researchers as "the garden of Eden," may have been the only part of Africa to remain continuously habitable during the ice age that began about 195,000 years ago.

Scientists' excavations showed how a combination of rich vegetation on land and nutrient-laden currents in the sea created a source of food that could sustain early humans through devastating climate changes.

"Shortly after Homo sapiens first evolved, the harsh climate conditions nearly extinguished our species," said Professor Curtis Marean, of the Institute of Human Origins at Arizona State University.

"Recent finds suggest the small population that gave rise to all humans alive today survived by exploiting a unique combination of resources along the southern coast of Africa."

The idea that early humans were once reduced to a tiny remnant population arose from research showing that modern humans have far less genetic diversity than most other species.

Some scientists suggested the human population could have fallen to as low as a few hundred individuals during this period, while others insisted the evidence to support this theory remains weak.

During his study, Prof Marean discovered that the isolated caves around an area known as Pinnacle Point, South Africa, 386 kilometres east of Cape Town, were rich in ancient human artifacts.

In a soon to be published paper, Prof Marean and his colleagues argued the caves contain archaeological remains going back at least 164,000 years - and possibly even further back.

The remains also showed that, despite the hardships suffered by early humans in other places, the inhabitants of Pinnacle Point were living in a land of plenty.

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