

Big Mystery Of Tunnel Under Mombasa Island

DESPERATE PORTUGUESE MAY HAVE DUG ONE AND HALF KILOMETRE

Portuguese in the First World War!

Until this point, I thought I knew my history quite well and was sure that there was no Portuguese presence in Mombasa in that period.

Fortunately, I was right as this was a misnomer in the article.

A quick discussion with welcoming staff from the National Museums has

helped provide some answers and wet my appetite for more.

The story uncovered so far does begin during the Omani siege of Fort Jesus.

When resident archaeologist, Hans Martin began investigating the tunnel, it made him realise

that this might have been one possibility as to how the Portuguese were able to survive the siege for so long.

The Omanis had surrounded the fort blocking critical food and ammunition supplies from entering.

"Nobody is asking the question as to how the Portuguese got food and ammunition supplies into the Fort during this period.

"They must have brought some in through small boats but I don't think that would have been enough," suggests Hans.

The Portuguese must have been very determined or desperate to dig through one and half kilometres of solid coral rock which connects the well at Fort Jesus to Fort St. Joseph in Rasarani, although Mr. Martin

does suspect that they could have been assisted by natural formations:

"When you go down to the ocean front along Fort Jesus up to Mombasa hospital at low tide you will notice that there are several caves.

"I think the Portuguese used some caves and covered them."

Nevertheless, this simple engineering feat

Adding to the intrigue
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Special Report by
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series of other tunnels that run in several different directions.

One has its source at the old Manor Hotel where one section goes westwards towards Little Theatre Club to the Likoni channel;

another goes north in the direction of Mwembe Tayari, while the other goes eastwards to Fort Jesus and St. Joseph.

However, the Museum's archaeological team are quite certain that the other tunnels are much more recent and can be credited to British fears of invasion either during the First or Second World War.

REALLY EXCITING

There is still a lot of work to be done once the Museum can consolidate and gazette all the tunnels under one title.

"Somebody really needs to get into the tunnel to demystify what its purpose was," says Hans Katana, the Principal Curator.

Plans for excavation and restoration are under way with Mombasa hosting the Africa 2009 in August. Heritage Management.

"It is really exciting because this has been a long discussion for some time."

"Right now most of it is speculation.

"We know a little about the one from Fort Jesus and Rasarani but we don't know anything about the other



Archaeologist Hans Martin took this photograph of the tunnel entrance leading to the coral cliffs near Fort Saint Joseph on the Mombasa Island sea front.