

# Paleoanthropologist writes 'untold story of our salvation'

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Inside caves near Mossel Bay, South Africa, a team of explorers have been piecing together an account of survival, ingenuity and endurance -- of the species known as *Homo sapiens*. Team leader Curtis Marean, a paleoanthropologist with the Institute of Human Origins at Arizona State University, writes of their discoveries at Pinnacle Point in the cover story of the August issue of *Scientific American*.

In “When the Sea Saved Humanity,” Marean asks the reader to imagine that *Homo sapiens* once were an endangered species in Africa, struggling to survive cold, harsh, dry conditions. Yet, during this [ancient climate](#) crisis — at some point between 195,000 and 123,000 years ago — humans survived along the southern coast of Africa where shellfish and edible plants were plentiful.

“With its combination of calorically dense, nutrient-rich protein from the shellfish and low-fiber, energy-laden carbs from the geophytes, the southern coast would have provided an ideal diet for early modern humans during glacial stage 6,” writes Marean in the cover story billed by *Scientific American* as the “untold story of our salvation.”

“The discoveries Curtis and his team have made at Pinnacle Point are not only important from a scientific standpoint, but they also tell an incredible story about our origins,” said Kate Wong, the *Scientific American* editor who asked Marean to write the story.

“What makes Curtis’ project so compelling is that it weaves together

evidence from archaeology, paleoclimatology and genetics to answer the question of how our species eluded extinction during a climate crisis,” Wong said.

The use of fire by early modern humans to engineer tools, as well as evidence that pigments, especially red ochre, were used in ways believed to be symbolic, are among the discoveries documented by Marean and the SACP4 team (the South African Coast [Paleoclimate](#), Paleoenvironment, Paleoecology, Paleoanthropology Project, funded by the National Science Foundation and Hyde Family Foundation).

**More information:** The multimedia feature is found at [www.scientificamerican.com/art ... -seas-saved-humanity](http://www.scientificamerican.com/art...-seas-saved-humanity).

Provided by Arizona State University

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