



The US Witsie



Wits Fund Newsletter October 2024

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OUR PLANET IS THE HERITAGE WE LEAVE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION. We all want to ensure that we leave the world better than we found it, and work towards a better future by living our lives in service to others. How can we support the next generation to do the same?

**Navigating A Path Back to a Better Future:
Wits Review profiles the World-Changing Work
of US Witsie, Dr Phoebe Barnard**



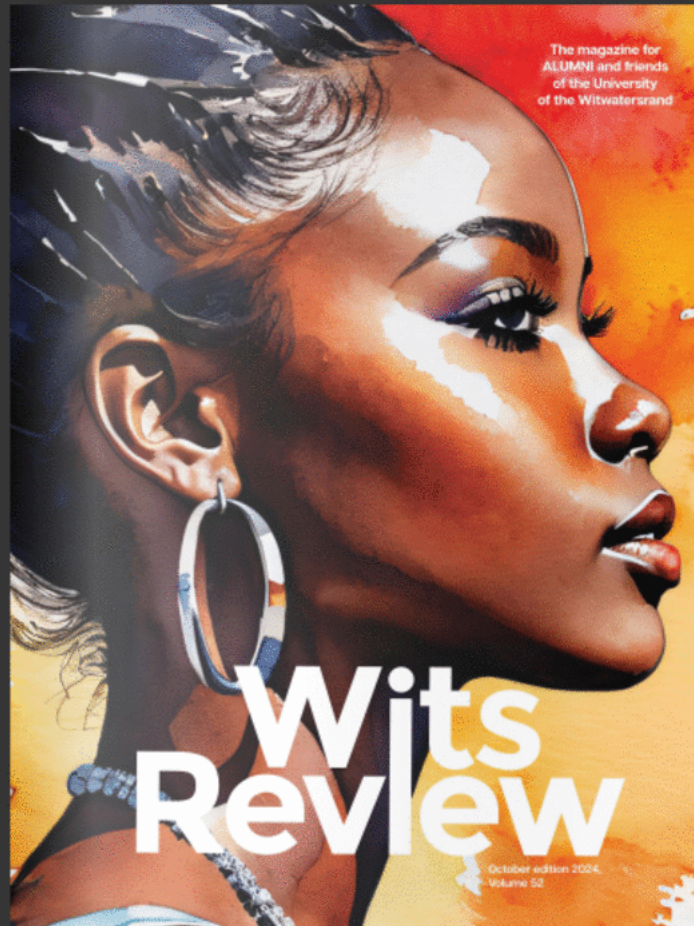
"We are close to the edge of social disaster and destroying our planet, but it doesn't need to be this way.": Dr Phoebe Barnard.

These are the words of biodiversity and global change scientist Dr Phoebe Barnard (Wits MSc 1990), co-founder and former CEO of the Stable Planet Alliance.

Based in the US, the alliance is a coalition of organizations and experts around the world, dedicated to large-scale social and environmental change. Phoebe and her husband, filmmaker John Bowey, are co-producing a four-part documentary series titled *The Climate Restorers*. In June they launched Episode 2 in Berkeley, California.

"In the global restoration campaigns I'm working with, thousands of scientists worldwide are collaborating with innovators, activists, traditional leaders, faith leaders, women's groups, government policy makers and citizens to navigate a path back to a better future – where people and the planet actually matter," says Phoebe.

Read more [here](#).



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Cover feature – The Piano People Everywhere it goes, the amapiano train creates a stir, captivating the world and giving a glimpse of what it means to be South African – a people who do so much with so little. Dr Palesa Nqambaza offers a perspective on the allure of this music genre | **Profiles** – Highlights from a few alumni finding solutions in South Africa now | International Witsie co-founder and former CEO of the Stable Planet Alliance, Dr Phoebe Barnard, says a biodiverse world is possible | **Books** – The transformative power of a father's love in Kevin van Wyk's memoir *Irascible Genius* | **Joburg Spaces** – The Centre for the Less Good Idea – what can it teach us? **The Bioscope** – the city's independent cinema has clocked up 14 years | **Wits End** – former news editor, Peter Sullivan, returns to university and is humbled by the experience.

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WITS RESEARCHERS: SAN ROCK ARTISTS MAY HAVE PAINTED 250-MILLION-YEAR OLD ANIMAL



Ancient San rock art reveals earliest known depiction of extinct Dicynodont

Rock painting suggests San people were engaging in palaeontology long before Western scientists.

San rock artists may have painted an ancient animal that used to roam southern Africa more than 250 million years ago. The painting in a cave on the La Belle France farm in the Free State province of South Africa, may be the world's oldest known piece of paleo-art depicting an extinct mammal-like reptile called a dicynodont, predating the creature's official scientific discovery by at least a decade.

Professor Julien Benoit, a palaeontologist at Wits University, has reinterpreted this mysterious rock art, that has previously been misidentified as a walrus-like creature or even a surviving sabre-toothed cat. His research was [published in Plos One](#).

"While the image strangely looks like a walrus, there are no such animals in Africa," says Benoit.

Dicynodonts are ancient relatives of mammals that roamed the Earth between 265 and 200 million years ago. The Karoo region of South Africa, where the painting was discovered, is renowned for its rich fossil deposits of these creatures.

"The San lived and hunted among Karoo fossil footprints, bones, skulls, and teeth of long-extinct reptiles," says Benoit. "This painting provides compelling evidence that they not only discovered these fossils but also attempted to reconstruct the living animal in their art." Read more [here](#).

WITS STUDENT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE CALLS FOR ETHICAL LEADERSHIP, INTEGRITY, ACCOUNTABILITY



The University of the Witwatersrand hosted its inaugural Student Leadership Conference on 4-5 October 2024 at the Great Hall. The event themed *Leading with Integrity* was held over two days, with students and emerging leaders engaged in robust discussions.

They had a chance to interact with leaders from various sectors, including academia, business, politics, arts and civic society to engage in critical discussions on leading with integrity in an increasingly complex and volatile world, in line with the [Wits2033 strategy](#) towards fostering graduates to be leaders with integrity.

Professor Garth Stevens, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for People Development and Culture, opened the ceremony by highlighting the importance of servant leadership, emphasizing that it must be accompanied by strategic skills, authenticity, and collaboration.

The keynote address was delivered by former president Kgalema Motlanthe. He stated that: “True leadership requires resilience and a commitment to serve the people, not personal gain.” He stressed the importance of transparency and integrity in leadership.

Read more [here](#).

As we feel gratitude for the blessings in our lives, one way to pay it forward is through making an impact in a person's life that will uplift them, and their families, for generations to come.

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WATCH: WITS' LATEST NEWS IN SIXTY SECONDS - Did you know that African men are at a higher risk of developing prostate cancer earlier due to unique genetic factors? Find out more about this ground-breaking study in this week's episode. Top learners from across SA explain why Wits is their top choice, the Kuamsha app, targeting adolescent depression through a game and peer mentor system is revolutionising mental health support, and the Wits Centre for Deaf Studies launched a film internship for Deaf youth fostering artistic expression and inclusion. Finally, a Wits water expert provides vital tips on purifying water at home after cholera was found in the Vaal River system.

Read the full stories [here](#).

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Vision

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