

Coal mining compromises 1100-year-old Heritage Site

The Mercury reports that South Africa came under a scathing criticism by UN World Heritage Committee experts for failing to protect one of the nation's oldest cultural treasures, the 1100-year-old Kingdom of Mapungubwe World Heritage Site in Limpopo, which has been compromised by opencast coal mining.

The committee noted 'with concern' that the SA Department of Minerals and Energy recently authorised more than 20 other mine prospecting leases in the area -ignoring previous pleas to put the mining on hold. It is expected the government will be called upon to halt any further opencast mining in the area, as well as to strengthen protection measures as a matter of urgency, says *The Mercury*. The Committee meeting heard that opencast coal mining by Australian mining house Coal of Africa Limited poses a "major threat" to the integrity of Mapungubwe.

According to *The Mercury*, Mapungubwe is an ancient stone citadel kingdom dating from around 900CE. Archaeological artefacts collected from royal graves suggest the kingdom once enjoyed lucrative trading relations with China, India and Arabia.

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