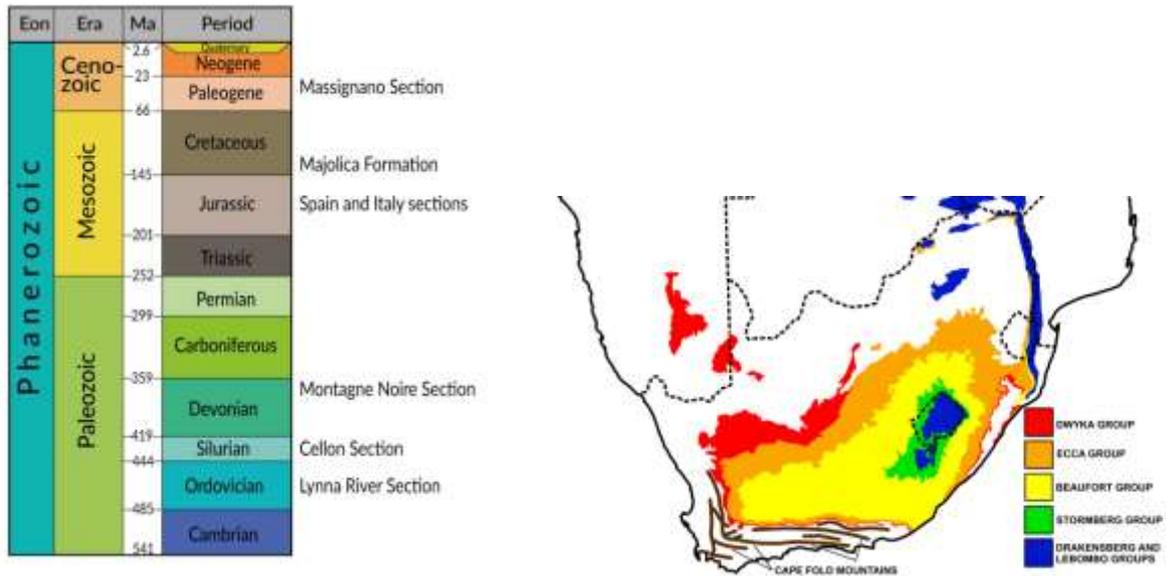


THE CRADLE OF MAMMAL KIND – FOSSILS OF SUTHERLAND

Sutherland itself and the triangular area between it and its neighbouring towns, Williston and Fraserburg belong to the Beaufort Group of the Permian period. This is a geological column of time spanning 50 million years from 300 mya to about 250 mya. The Beaufort group represents a 12 to 10 million year unbroken succession of sedimentary (rock that was once sand and mud) rocks from 264 mya to 251 mya occupying the upper half of the Permian in Karoo



What really makes the Beaufort Group special is its remarkable rich fossil content. Preserved in the rocks is a more or less unbroken record of a group of terrestrial vertebrates (animals with a backbone on dry land) known as the Mammal like reptiles or Proto-mammals. They represent the first fully functional terrestrial ecosystem on earth and they show the development of the first primitive mammalian skeletal features, hence the term proto-mammals. They probably still laid eggs and superficially resembled reptiles but the journey to mammals was well underway.



The Beaufort group is divided into eight vertebrate bio zones according to the most common type of animal occurring at that time interval. Sutherland falls in the Tapinocephalus bio zone, the second most lowest of the eight zones. This zone, in the Sutherland area contain all the iconic members of the Beaufort Group.



The ubiquitous dicynodonts which formed the base of the food chain like the modern hyrax.



The Therocephalians which were the jackal and wolfs of their time.



The Dinocephalians which were the largest kind of protomammal

On your visit to Sutherland you will be able to view fossils of all the major players in the cast of proto mammals of the Sutherland area. A qualified palaeontologist with extensive field experience is available for lectures of varying duration in time and intensity (amateur to professional) and fossil viewing fieldtrips are also offered via prior arrangement.