Lichtenburg100

Background

Next year marks 100 years since the discovery of diamonds north of Lichtenburg. Although diamonds had been found in 1922 at Twee Buffels northwest of Coligny, the first north of Lichtenburg were found in 1926. First at Manana in March and later in August at the Donkie Gat on Elandsputte. This generated several diamond rushes in the area, like the one at Grasfontein in 1927 where some 25,000 runners took part. The Bakerville town sprang up and developed over a very short period of time and at one stage supported 250 diamond buyers' offices as well as bioscopes, cafes, shops. At the height of the digging activities there were 17 schools on the diggings.

The Lichtenburg discovery produced over 2.5 Mcts between 1926 and 1927, which led to a jump in world production in the 1920s. This and the discovery of diamonds in Namaqualand were seen as a major threat to the world diamond market. Although there are still a few small-scale miners active in the area, production is minimal. Up to the present day, the Lichtenburg diamond fields produced nearly 8 Mcts in total.

The older gravels occur as linear runs that have been preserved on the horizontally bedded platform carbonates of the Chuniespoort Group (Transvaal Supergroup). Karstification of this surface has facilitated them to be preserved but has also complicated the local stratigraphy, particularly where sinkholes have formed. Reworking of these older gravels has generated a series of younger deposits. Geologists like Draper, Harger, Du Toit, Williams, and Sinclair have published extensively on them, and several geological models have been produced. These are mostly associated with palaeo-river systems, both surface and subterranean. However, more recently it has been suggested that these runs are in fact associated with the Dwyka glaciation.

There are two populations of diamonds in Lichtenburg, and speculation on the origin of the stones is still debated. The vast majority are smaller and of poor quality that are concentrated around some of the sinkholes in the area. Then there is a background of larger and better quality stones that are similar to the ones found in the Ventersdorp area. There is strong evidence to argue that the poor-quality diamonds have been derived from local Cambrian-age primary sources which are associated with some of the sinkholes. The better-quality stones have been transported during the Dwyka glaciation, and it is suggested that these have close links to the Cullinan Mine near Pretoria.

We want to celebrate this centenary with a two-day conference focused on the geology of these diamond fields, on the 10th and 11th September 2026, followed by a two-day field excursion to this diamond field on the 12th and 13th of September.

Conference on 10th and 11th September 2026

The conference will be held at the Auditorium of the Council of Geoscience in Pretoria. The following experts in their respective fields of expertise will give key note addresses:
Dr. Edgar Stettler (Geophysical application to the Lichtenburg Fields)
Dr. Ingrid Chinn (Diamonds from Lichtenburg)
Dr. Mike de Wit (Geological model for Lichtenburg)
Dr. Khodani Matshusa (Bakerville as a Geoheritage site)
Dr. John Ward (Geological model for the regional diamond distribution)

The conference will be open to diamond-related talks and/or posters preferably focused on the North West Province but is also to alluvial diamonds in a broader geographical context. Talks will be 25 minutes (20 minutes talk and 5 minutes Q&A). Student participation and presentations are encouraged. Submission of abstracts will be accepted until the 31st March 2026. These can be sent to dewit@icon.co.za.

Field Excursion on 12th and 13th September 2026

The field excursion will visit all the main and famous sites on the Welverdiend-La Ryes Stryd and Manana diamond runs north of Lichtenburg. We will meet on the morning of the 12th in Lichtenburg. Attendees are required to use their own transport and make their own accommodation arrangements for the evening of the 12th (A list with suitable options will be provided shortly). Field guide, lunch packs, water, and an evening braai on the 12th will be provided.

Several students will be sponsored for this event with transport and accommodation requirements, as this conference provides an opportunity to share the geological/geophysical knowledge of the Lichtenburg Diamond Fields with the younger generation.

Fieldtrip numbers will be limited – book early to prevent disappointment.

Costs

	GSSA/SAIMM/GASA/SAGA Members	Non-members	Students/Academics and Retirees
2-day conference	R 3,200	R 4,300	R 1,500
2-day Field excursion	R 2000		

Click **HERE** to register