

# Casino robbers linked to heists in Gauteng

A gang of robbers who stole an estimated ZAR 250 000 from the Boardwalk casino in Port Elizabeth at the weekend may also be responsible for several brazen heists at casinos in Gauteng.

Police are investigating a possible link because the modus operandi used in robberies at Monte Casino and Carnival City in Johannesburg last year closely matches that used in Sunday's dramatic heist.

Also, one of the getaway cars abandoned in Summerstrand after the incident was reported hijacked in Gauteng on Friday.

A police officer close to the case said: "We have interviewed the guards and cashiers of the casino, who told us that the dialect of Xhosa spoken by the robbers was not a local one. We suspect it could be a group that had come from Gauteng."

On October 22, five men entered Monte Casino in an attempt to rob it while five other men waited outside. They became involved in a shoot-out with security guards, which resulted in the wounding of three robbers and led to the arrest of two others.

A similar robbery took place on September 9 at Carnival City, where 16 heavily armed men robbed the casino of an undisclosed amount of money. Like the Boardwalk heist, the robbery took place early on a Sunday.

While official police spokesmen refused to reveal any details of the case yesterday, a police source said: "We've been looking at the footage from the casino. We have clear images of the robbers' faces.

"From what we have seen on the footage, five men entered the

casino and five others waited at the entrance armed with R4 rifles. The five inside, armed with pistols, went to the cashier's desk and tried to pry open the bars. When that failed two of the skinny men slid under the gap in the bars and loaded the money into bags, and they all left via the entrance again. The robbery took about five minutes."

The robbers then fled to the Boardwalk parking area, where four men were waiting with two getaway cars, a white Opel Corsa bakkie and a BMW which had been hijacked in Johannesburg the previous night.

The men then drove to the parking lot entrance and opened fire on the security guards at the boom gate.

"The armed security guard was forced to take cover and the robbers then smashed through the closed boom," the police source said.

He said the police had been able to pull fingerprints from the scene as well as images of the robbers' faces from the CCTV footage.

Boardwalk spokesman Ed Richardson said: "A lot of questions are being asked about how 10 heavily-armed men were able to get from the car park to the casino without an alarm being raised.

"From what we have seen on the CCTV, the men forced guards along the way to the casino to lie on the ground. When they reached the casino entrance they showed the firearms to the security guards there, who ran away.

"Our primary concern is for the patrons and staff. We do not have armed guards as we feel that should there be an armed robbery, the likelihood that the robbers would start shooting would be higher if guards were armed.

"We are giving staff and patrons trauma counselling as the

robbery has left many shaken. We would like to offer counselling to anyone who witnessed the robbery.”