

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/034/0003
	Site Name	Irrigation tunnel, Hankey District
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.821605, 24.847920

Page No: 1 **SiteAutoID:** 28544

Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: At first irrigation-furrows leading from the Klein River were dug to irrigate the fields in the immediate vicinity of Hankey, but William Philip had a far more ambitious plan in mind. About a kilometre from the missionary post a small, steep and rocky ridge forces the Gamtoos River to make a considerable horseshoe bend in a northerly direction and then to continue to the immediate west of the village. A valuable piece of arable land lay in this bend of the river, below the ridge. This was the piece of land William Philip aimed at irrigating out of the Gamtoos. To be able to do this he decided to cut a tunnel through the ridge at the very spot where the river starts turning northwards and where the ridge was at its narrowest. William Philip made an accurate survey of the land and in 1842 the Hottentots of his congregation with himself as engineer, surveyor and supervisor tackled the task. Such faith did Philip have in his measurements that the Hottentots started tunnelling from opposite sides of the ridge which is 90 metres high. The greater part of the tunnel passed through solid rock and progress was very slow because the instruments at their disposal—pick-axes, hammers and chisels—were very primitive. After almost a year the one group of labourers could hear the digging of the other. Then they continued all the more keenly until Jan Bosman, one of William's most trusty old workers, pierced the wall with his pick-axe from the river's end. He was so excited that he ran back along the tunnel from force of habit and then across the ridge to Hankey to break the good news to William Philip. The latter has left us the following comment: "At about two o'clock on Tuesday night, 13th August, 1844, a shot was fired at my bedroom- window. I knew that the signal meant 'the tunnel is finished.' I looked out of the window and saw the messenger running toward the town, torch in hand and shouting all the time." Then pandemonium broke out in the village. The villagers shouted, wept, rejoiced and laughed confusedly. The church-bell was rung, fires were kindled, torches were carried everywhere, while pots and pans served as orchestral instruments. William Philip made the following comment on the completion of the project: "The measurements were far more accurate than I supposed, so that my first attempt in practical engineering was successful." The tunnel is 94 m in length, 88 m of which passes through solid rock. The total cost was estimated to be £2 500 (+R5 000) and this included wages, food and oil. The Society paid £500 of this sum and William contributed £200 from his meagre salary. The rest was obtained through voluntary donations and the increase of the lease of the land. On the evening of 13th August William went to let the water through. He opened the inlet only partially and even then the rush of water was unstoppable. It was, according to Philip, a little river which could turn the largest mill in the country. All along the ridges a canal was then dug from the outlet across the farms of Michael Ferreira and Van Rooyen to lead the water on to the grounds of the missionary post. Hardly a year later the designer and builder of this historical tunnel was mysteriously drowned in the Klein River which flows through the village. His brother, Durant • Philip, succeeded him.' Shortly after their father, Dr. John Philip, a disappointed and broken man, also came to live at Hankey where he died in 1851. The history of the tunnel does not end with William's death. In 1847 there was a devastating flood. The Gamtoos overflowed its banks to a height of almost 9 metres above its usual level. Almost the whole of Hankey was under water. Thirteen people were drowned. The tunnel suffered serious damage. The flood washed away the ground and rocks in front of the tunnel and 4 000 cubic metres of the overhanging rocks fell down into the tunnel. However, the people of Hankey did not despair. As soon as the flood water had run down, they began to clear the tunnel and a year later it was in full use again. In 1867 Hankey was once more ravaged by a flood when the Gamtoos, according to oral tradition, rose to 20 metres above its usual level. The

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tunnel was damaged again, but it was dug open for the second time. Shortly after the missionary who was then in charge, lengthened the aqueduct. This took the surplus water, which usually flowed back into the river below Hankey, through a pipe underneath the river to irrigate the land on the eastern side of the river. Ere long the Koughapoort Dam will be completed and a new network of canals will irrigate the fields in the Hankey area. The old tunnel which has now been in use for more than a century and is the first of its kind in our country, will then fall into disuse. The Historical Society of Port Elizabeth drew the attention of the Historical Monuments Commission to the fact that the old tunnel would fall into disuse and oblivion and the Commission therefore decided to preserve it. Proclaimed 1969" Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Construction Date: 1844 Materials: Catalogue: , No: , Significance Category:

Damage Types: