

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/003/0070
	Site Name	Governor's Kop Signal Tower, Albany District
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.259830, 26.668292

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SiteAutoID: 76

Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: At regular intervals on the hills east of Graham there is a line of interesting structures, some of them visible from the national road, that attracts the traveller's attention. These are the signal towers erected in 1843—44. It stands to reason that, apart from forts, attention was given to establishing a signalling system by which the military headquarters in Grahamstown could be informed of events along the border. Consequently Lt.-Col. Griffith George Lewis, Officer Commanding the Royal Engineers, who was responsible for the design and erection of fortifications on the eastern frontier after the Sixth Xhosa War, decided to establish a telegraph system—the first in South Africa. Two lines of signal towers were built: one extended northwards to connect Grahamstown with Fort Beaufort, the other stretched eastwards to provide communication with Fort Peddie. The key point of the whole system was the signal tower on Governor's Kop, nine miles east of Grahamstown. Being 823 metres above sea level, it commanded an excellent view over the whole terrain right up to the distant Fish River area. One line ran northwards from Governor's Kop, with towers at Graskop near Fort Brown, Botha's Post between the Kat and the Koonap Rivers, Danshoogte about 11 kilometres from Fort Beaufort and a final one just south of Fort Beaufort. Another line extended eastwards from Governor's Kop via Fraser's Camp tower and Piet Appel's Tower on the Fish River to Fort Peddie, with a branch from Fraser's Camp to Bathurst. The signals received at Governor's Kop were to be passed on to Fort Selwyn on the slope behind the Drostdy in Grahamstown so that the military headquarters could immediately take whatever steps might be necessary. During the years 1843 and 1844 a certain Henry Hall built the towers at a cost of R1 000 each, but when the War of the Axe broke out only the towers of the northern line had been equipped with signalling devices or semaphores. However, the system proved to be a total failure. In the first place, the semaphores were unsuited to the terrain and the climate. In the early mornings when they were most needed, most of the towers were covered in the bright arms of the semaphores played the strangest tricks and rendered the signals undecipherable. Besides this, the towers were completely isolated at the first attack, so that the troops who manned them could obtain neither supplies nor water. Consequently they were abandoned by the troops and set alight by the Xhosa. In their book A Narrative of the Kaffir War of 1850—1851, Godlonton and Irving record that these towers, built with great trouble at great cost, never were, or would be of the slightest use. In 1847 British Kaffraria was incorporated by Great Britain and the towers fell into disuse. Most of them were handed over by the War Ministry to the colonial government. Visual Description: The signal towers were 9 metres high, well fortified and each had two rooms, one above the other, to house the men. Each tower was equipped with signalling apparatus or semaphore of a type which was already in use in France and England. Some of these towers were built at existing forts. Colours: Site Features: Condition: Fair Construction Date: 1843 Materials: Catalogue: , No: , Significance Category:

Damage Types: