

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/317/0002
	Site Name	Vegkop Battlefield, Vegkop Battlefield, Heilbron
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-27.477720, 27.913996
Page No: 1	SiteAutoID: 26471	

Site Category: Battlefield, Monuments & Memorials

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: On the left of the Lindley road, twenty kilometres south of Heilbron, one sees a long, narrow ridge. This is the famous Vegkop on the farm officially named Vechtkop Oost, where the Voortrekkers were attacked by a strong Matabele force in October, 1836. The Voortrekker party under the leadership of Andries Hendrik Potgieter crossed the Orange River at Winterhoekdrift near Bethulie in February, 1836. They trekked northwards as far as the Sand River, intending to settle eventually in the north-eastern Transvaal. In May, Hendrik Potgieter and eleven other men set out from there on an expedition to make contact with the 'people in front' under Louis Tregardt who were already at the Zoutpansberg. During Potgieter's absence the rest of his party scattered about the countryside as far as the Vaal River. Some of them, the Liebenbergs, even went north of the Vaal opposite Parys where they were unexpectedly attacked and almost annihilated by a Matabele impi on 25th August. Fearing another attack, the Voortrekkers who were furthest to the north came together and formed a laager to the south of this ridge which was to become known as Vegkop. On 2nd September, Potgieter and his companions joined this laager. Potgieter chose the site for the laager strategically on the rising ground at the foot of the hill. Twenty-six wagons were drawn up in a circle and tied together with chains, while the spaces between them were filled with thorn-bushes. Within this outer circle, a smaller circle consisting of seven wagons was drawn up to protect the women and children. Inside the laager there were altogether 33 able-bodied men and seven boys. On 9th October Mzilikazi, the Matabele king, sent out a force of nearly 6 000 men from his kraal at Mosega, south-west of where Zeerust is situated today. They were under the command of a certain Kalipi whose orders were to 'eat up' the Voortrekkers. The date of the attack on the laager is uncertain, but it was about the 19th October. Potgieter with a small commando rode out for an hour and a half to meet the Matabele and tried unsuccessfully to persuade them by peaceful means to turn back. They had to fall back on the laager, shooting as they went, and eventually retired into it. Thereupon the Matabele launched a fierce attack on the laager, but the heroic defence stood firm. Eventually the Matabele had to break off the action, having lost 430 men. The Voortrekker losses were two killed and fourteen wounded. Eleven hundred and thirty-seven assegais were collected in the laager. Many of the riding horses in the laager were wounded and numbers of wagons were damaged but the most serious calamity was that the Matabele had captured all the cattle and sheep. The trek was rendered immobile and the Voortrekkers were threatened with starvation. Messages were sent to Thaba Nchu and the Barolong Chief Moroka sent oxen from there to bring the trek back to Thaba Nchu. In 1883 a monument was erected near the place where the laager had stood. Besides its historical importance, Vegkop is also of archaeological interest. The top of the hill was once the site of a large Leghoya settlement and the scattered remains of their corbelled stone huts can still be seen there. Visual Description: The area is an open terrace with an entrance gate and inside is a monument situated on rocks. Colours: Site Features: Condition: Good Construction Date: 1929-04-06 Materials: Catalogue: , No: Nil, Significance Category:

Damage Types: