

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/406/0006
	Site Name	Rorke's Drift Battlefield, Farm Oscarsberg 2254,
	Date	Dundee District
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-28.349448, 30.543365
Page No: 1	SiteAutoID: 26363	

Site Category: Battlefield

Directions:

From Greytown take the Tugela Ferry, Dundee Road and turn right to Rorke's Drift at Helpmekaar. From Situated on the farm Oscarsberg.

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: Rorke's Drift derives its name from James Rorke and is one of the oldest and best-known drifts through the Buffalo River. It is 37 km from Dundee, 18 km from Helpmekaar and 16 km from Isandhlwana. In 1876 the Rev. O. Witt established a Swedish mission station at the foot of the rocky mountain about one km west of Rorke's Drift. He called the mission station Oscarsberg in honour of the King of Sweden and built a small church, a mission house and cattle-kraals, all of stone. This was the scene, on 22nd January, 1879, of one of the bloodiest battles between the British and the Zulus, but one in which both sides showed the utmost heroism. When Lord Chelmsford invaded Zululand at Rorke's Drift on 11th January, 1879, Oscarsberg was converted into a supply depot. The mission house became a hospital which soon held 35 patients. The church was used as a commissariat store and hundreds of bags of mealies lay piled against the kraal wall. A hundred men under command of Lt. John Chard were left there to guard the place. On 22nd January Colonel Durnford, while on his way to Isandhlwana, left 300 of his Basuto troops there to strengthen the garrison. During the attack on the camp at Isandhlwana, the Zulus kept the famous Undi impi or regiment of 4 000 men in reserve. After the annihilation of the British force at Isandhlwana, the Undi impi hastened on to the Buffalo River, swam through it and launched a fierce attack on the mission station. Luckily Lt. Chard was at the pont when the first of the fugitives from Isandhlwana reached the drift. He rushed back to the mission station and immediately prepared it for defence : a long stone wall with loopholes was hastily constructed in front of the buildings, on the side facing the river, and behind it, a second barricade was built of bags of mealies; the space between the church and the mission house was closed off by placing wagons, bags of mealies and biscuit tins between the opposite corners of the buildings, and finally the doors and windows of the hospital were barricaded with heavy cases of tinned meat. These preparations had barely been completed when, at 4.30 in the afternoon, the impi stormed across the foot of the Oscarsberg and, uttering weird shouts, rushed down upon the mission house or hospital. This barbaric sight was too much for the 300 Bantu soldiers. With their White commander in the lead, they took to flight. Barely a hundred men were left in the fortifications. The Zulu warriors advanced to within 30 metres, but were met by such staggering rifle fire that they hesitated and fell back, but only for a moment. Their attack was directed mainly on the hospital. They set fire to the roof by throwing assegais to which they tied burning grass. They broke down the doors and forced an entry into the burning building. Sergeant Henry Hook and five men who were guarding the wounded retreated, fighting, from one room to the other. The interleading doors were barricaded so Hook's colleague Williams had to make holes in the partitions while at the same time shooting down the attackers one after another. At last they escaped through a small window into the inner courtyard where they joined the other defenders. Most of the patients were stabbed by the Zulus or burned to death. Fortunately the burning building prevented the attackers from getting through into the inner courtyard. The battle raged on without a break until the next morning. The Zulu warriors repeatedly penetrated between the stone wall and the barricade of mealie-bags and had to be driven out by bayonet charges. The barrels of the rifles frequently became red-hot from the incessant fire and the hands and faces of the soldiers were scorched by 'them. It was a tremendous relief

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/406/0006
	Site Name	Rorke's Drift Battlefield, Farm Oscarsberg 2254,
	Date	Dundee District
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-28.349448, 30.543365

Page No: 2 **SiteAutoID:** 26363

when the Zulus at last withdrew and an armed detachment of Lord Chelmsford's force under Lieutenant-Colonel Russell reached the exhausted garrison. The British losses were seventeen killed and eight wounded while three hundred bodies of Zulus lay scattered in and round the post. No fewer than eleven Victoria Crosses were awarded as a result of this action and the bravery of Lieutenant Chard is commemorated in the name of the John Chard Medal for bravery in the South African Proclaimed 1969" Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Fair Construction Date: Materials: Catalogue: , No: , Significance Category:

Damage Types: