

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/106/0003
	Site Name	Anglo-Boer War blockhouse, Wellington District
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.629428, 18.992178
Page No: 1	SiteAutoID: 27196	

Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: Some of the historical monuments in the Berg River Valley link the history of the area with that of the far interior of the country. This is especially true of the blockhouse on the farm Versailles just north of Wellington railway station. It guarded the railway bridge over the Berg River and is reached from the road to Hermon. The Anglo Boer War dragged on for three years. The system of blockhouses began to take shape early in 1901, a few months after Kitchener had taken over command of the British forces. The original intention was to establish a protected area round Pretoria and to ensure the safety of the railways by means of lines of blockhouses. Gradually the system was extended. In July, 1901, the strategic roads were brought under the protection of the blockhouse system and at a later stage the main battle areas were divided into sections by means of blockhouses in order to counter the guerilla tactics that the republican forces adopted after the surrender of Pretoria. The blockhouses were at first built about three kilometres and later about one kilometre apart so that each was in sight of its neighbours. It was hoped that in this way the mobile republican forces could be isolated in small groups and thus rendered harmless. These blockhouses were generally made of two concentric corrugated iron walls with a filling of earth between them. They stood on artificial mounds and were surrounded by barbed wire entanglements. The standardised parts could be easily put together, and three blockhouses (or six at the utmost) could be erected per day. Each round blockhouse was garrisoned by seven men. General Christiaan de Wet was one of those who poured scorn on this system as being far less effective than the cheaper method of throwing a ring of troops round an area occupied by the enemy, and drawing the net closer until the trapped forces were taken. These blockhouses, naturally, did not lend themselves to preservation, and much of the corrugated iron and barbed wire was used after 1902 in connection with the British repatriation scheme in the Free State and the Transvaal. There were also blockhouses of a much more massive and permanent type, erected to defend key positions like bridges, entrances to towns, and so on. They were built of stone, were double-storeyed, could be entered only by the use of ladders and had loopholes, to facilitate defence against attacks by night. Proof of their value is the fact that during Kitchener's command not a single important bridge was destroyed by the republican forces. Many of them can still be seen along the main South African railways and the blockhouse at Wellington belongs to this type. Although these blockhouses were built for specific purposes, they were integrated in the network of thousands of blockhouses that by 1902 encompassed the two Republics, Natal, Bechuanaland and the Cape Colony. The situations of these lines may be summarised as follows: In the Cape Colony: A line stretched from Lambert's Bay on the west coast of the Cape Colony to Clanwilliam, and from there on to Calvinia (a line which was still under construction in 1902); then from Willistown to Carnarvon, Victoria West, and on to the main line from Beaufort West to Warrenton. A detached line extended from Wellington (where the proclaimed blockhouse protected the railway to the north of the station) northwards through Porterville to Modderfontein. Between Wellington and Beaufort West there were scattered garrisons and constabulary posts everywhere with blockhouses at strategic points such as that at Tulbagh Road. A blockhouse line extended from De Aar to Naauwpoort and through Rosmead to Cradock. From this line another, beginning at Middelburg, stretched through Steynsburg to Molteno. A line extended from Queenstown through Molteno to Burghersdorp, and further, beyond the Orange River to Bethulie. A branch line ran eastwards along the river to Aliwal North and Lady Grey. This region was the gateway for the republican invasions, and there were military posts and garrisons, outside the lines at Bethulie, Venterstad, Stormberg, Lemoenfontein, Myburgh, James town,

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Maraisburg, Dordrecht and Indwe. The formidable blockhouse line stretching from Naauwpoort to Colesberg and Norvalspont followed the railway to Bloemfontein and Kroonstad. To the north of Kroonstad it was strongly reinforced as far as Vereeniging, and this stretch (favoured by De Wet for breakthroughs) was also patrolled by armoured trains. This "backbone" stretched from Naauwpoort north wards through Johannesburg to Pretoria and beyond, to Pietersburg. In the Orange Free State a hne ran from Wolwehoek (north of Kroonstad) on to Heilbron, Frankfort, Tafelkop, Vrede, Botha's Pass and Mount Prospect in Natal. From Vereeniging a line ran eastwards on the Free State side of the Vaal River with a junction to Greyling stad. A third line ran eastwards from Kroonstad to Lindley, Bethlehem and Harrismith on to De Beer's Pass in the Drakensberg. The network in the north eastern Free State was completed by a line stretching from Bethlehem via Fouriesburg to Ficksburg, and another from Bloemfontein via Sannaspos to Lady- brand. Moreover, there were fortifications and military posts in the western Free State, extending from the railway to Kimberley all along the Modder River, and from Kimberley through Boshof and Bultfontein to Winburg Road together with a blockhouse line to Winburg. From the Vaal River ran another line, through Hoopstad to Winburg Road. Along the western boundary of the Republics, from Warrenton through Mafelcing to beyond the Malopo, there was a series of military posts, and the railway was patrolled by armoured trains. Transvaal: Most of the Transvaal lines were concen trated in the south and not always alongside the railway. A blockhouse line stretched from Mafeking through Lichtenburg to a point south of Ventersdorp. Then there was a quadrangular system of blockhouses extending from Ventersburg to Klerksdorp, on to Potchefstroom and a point north of Frederikstad. Another line stretched from Potchefstroom to Krugersdorp and on to Springs, 94 and yet another from Potchefstroom to Rustenburg, along the Magaliesberg to Pretoria, and from there along the Delagoa Bay railway to Kaapmuiden where it was supple. mented by an armoured train operating as far as Komati. poort. In the Eastern Transvaal and the Highveld (General Botha's field of activity) there were further lines from Machadodorp to Lydenburg; from Kaapmuiden to Bar. berton; from Wonderfontein (west of Belfast) to Carolina and Ermelo with a branch line to Amsterdam; from Ermelo to Standerton, and a line of fortifications stretch. ing from south to north, from Greylingstad to Standerton and on to the Great Olifants River, west of Middelburg. Then too there was an important line stretching from Johannesburg along the railway (which was reinforced with armoured trains) to Volksrust and on through Wakkerstroom and Piet Retief eastwards to Derby. Natal too had its blockhouse lines: from Volksrust southward to Newcastle and from Vryheid to Dundee. Proclaimed 1937" Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Construction Date: Materials: Catalogue: Lillie, 1994 (a), No: 01, Significance Category:

Damage Types: