



Comprehensive and Professional Solutions for all Heritage Related Matters

CK 2006/014630/23

VAT NO.: 4360226270

**1ST REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION, EXHUMATION AND
RELOCATION OF A NUMBER OF KNOWN
AND UNKNOWN GRAVES IMPACTED ON BY EXPANDING OPENCAST
MINING OPERATIONS (WONDERFONTEIN COLLIERY)
WONDERFONTEIN 428JS, NEAR WONDERFONTEIN
MPUMALANGA**

For:

**Crossdale Projects & Mining Supplies
P.O.Box 937
MIDDELBURG
1050**

A. J. Pelser
Accredited member of ASAPA & Principal Investigator of Graves
Professional Member of SASCH

REPORT: APAC014/11

February 2014

P.O.BOX 73703

LYNNWOOD RIDGE

0040

Tel: 083 459 3091

Fax: 086 695 7247

Email: pelseranton@gmail.com

Member: AJ Pelser BA (UNISA), BA (Hons) (Archaeology), MA (Archaeology) [WITS]

©Copyright

The information contained in this report is the sole intellectual property of APELSER ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTING cc. It may only be used for the purposes it was commissioned for by the client.

DISCLAIMER:

Although all possible care is taken to identify all sites of cultural importance during a survey of study areas, the nature of archaeological and historical sites are as such that it is always possible that hidden or subterranean sites could be overlooked during the study. APELSER ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTING and its personnel will not be held liable for such oversights or for costs incurred as a result thereof.

SUMMARY

Anton Pelser (of APELSER ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTING cc) was appointed by Crossdale Projects & Mining Supplies (on behalf of Shanduka Coal) to undertake the archaeological investigation & exhumation of nearly 200 graves older than 60 years of age and unknown on various sites on the farm Wonderfontein 428JS. These graves will be impacted on by expanding mining operations (opencast coal) of their Wonderfontein Colliery.

After all due processes were followed (which included extensive social consultation) a permit was obtained from SAHRA to conduct the required work (Permit ID: 1101). This first report discusses the first phase of work done during early December 2013 on Site GN1, which contained a possible 2 graves earmarked only with a few stones. It was uncertain if these were graves but the Mine indicated that the possibility should be investigated in order to remove all possible liabilities. No individuals came forward to claim these as graves during the social consultation process.

After investigating the area where these possible graves were located it can be concluded that there were indeed no evidence for the presence of any burial pits or human remains. Mining operations in this area can therefore continue.

The next phase of grave exhumations and relocations will commence in February 2014, after which a final report will be submitted to both SAHRA, Crossdale and Shanduka.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

AIMS

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

METHODOLOGY

DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA & SITES

INVESTIGATION AND RELOCATION OF BURIALS

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REFERENCES

1ST REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION, EXHUMATION AND RELOCATION OF A NUMBER OF KNOWN AND UNKNOWN GRAVES IMPACTED ON BY EXPANDING OPENCAST MINING OPERATIONS (WONDERFONTEIN COLLIERY) WONDERFONTEIN 428JS, NEAR WONDERFONTEIN MPUMALANGA

INTRODUCTION

Anton Pelser (of APELSER ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTING cc) was appointed by Crossdale Projects & Mining Supplies (on behalf of Shanduka Coal) to undertake the archaeological investigation & exhumation of nearly 200 graves older than 60 years of age and unknown on various sites on the farm Wonderfontein 428JS. These graves will be impacted on by expanding mining operations (opencast coal) of their Wonderfontein Colliery.

After all due processes were followed (which included extensive social consultation) a permit was obtained from SAHRA to conduct the required work (Permit ID: 1101). This first report discusses the first phase of work done during early December 2013 on Site GN1, which contained a possible 2 graves earmarked only with a few stones. It was uncertain if these were graves but the Mine indicated that the possibility should be investigated in order to remove all possible liabilities. No individuals came forward to claim these as graves during the social consultation process.

AIMS

The main aims with the investigation and exhumation of the graves (in this case) on Site GN1 situated on a portion of the farm Wonderfontein 328JS were the following:

- (a) the detailed investigation of all possible burials located on the site,
- (b) the successful exhumation and relocation of each burial to a municipal cemetery

During the next phases of work a Final Report or Reports will be produced for all graves exhumed and relocated from the various sites on the farm to be impacted by mining operations.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Aspects concerning the conservation of cultural resources are dealt with mainly in two acts. These are the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999) and the National Environmental Management Act (Act 107 of 1998).

1.1 The National Heritage Resources Act

According to the above-mentioned law the following is protected as cultural heritage resources:

- a. Archaeological artifacts, structures and sites older than 100 years
- b. Ethnographic art objects (e.g. prehistoric rock art) and ethnography
- c. Objects of decorative and visual arts
- d. Military objects, structures and sites older than 75 years
- e. Historical objects, structures and sites older than 60 years
- f. Proclaimed heritage sites
- g. **Grave yards and graves older than 60 years**
- h. Meteorites and fossils
- i. Objects, structures and sites of scientific or technological value.

Archaeology, palaeontology and meteorites

Section 35(4) of this act states that no person may, without a permit issued by the responsible heritage resources authority:

- a. destroy, damage, excavate, alter, deface or otherwise disturb any archaeological or palaeontological site or any meteorite;
- b. destroy, damage, excavate, remove from its original position, collect or own any archaeological or palaeontological material or object or any meteorite;
- c. trade in, sell for private gain, export or attempt to export from the Republic any category of archaeological or palaeontological material or object, or any meteorite; or
- d. bring onto or use at an archaeological or palaeontological site any excavation equipment or any equipment that assists in the detection or recovery of metals or archaeological and palaeontological material or objects, or use such equipment for the recovery of meteorites.
- e. alter or demolish any structure or part of a structure which is older than 60 years as protected.

The above mentioned may only be disturbed or moved by an archaeologist, after receiving a permit from the South African Heritage Resources Agency.

Human remains

In terms of Section 36(3) of the National Heritage Resources Act, no person may, without a permit issued by the relevant heritage resources authority:

- a. destroy, damage, alter, exhume or remove from its original position or otherwise disturb the grave of a victim of conflict, or any burial ground or part thereof which contains such graves;
- b. destroy, damage, alter, exhume or remove from its original position or otherwise disturb any grave or burial ground older than 60 years which is situated outside a formal cemetery administered by a local authority; or

- c. bring onto or use at a burial ground or grave referred to in paragraph (a) or (b) any excavation, or any equipment which assists in the detection or recovery of metals.

Human remains that are less than 60 years old are subject to provisions of the Human Tissue Act (Act 65 of 1983) and to local regulations. Exhumation of graves must conform to the standards set out in the **Ordinance on Excavations (Ordinance no. 12 of 1980)** (replacing the old Transvaal Ordinance no. 7 of 1925).

Permission must also be gained from the descendants (where known), the National Department of Health, Provincial Department of Health, Premier of the Province and local police. Furthermore, permission must also be gained from the various landowners (i.e. where the graves are located and where they are to be relocated) before exhumation can take place.

Human remains can only be handled by a registered undertaker or an institution declared under the **Human Tissues Act (Act 65 of 1983 as amended)**.

Unidentified/unknown graves are also handled as older than 60 until proven otherwise.

1.2 The National Environmental Management Act

This act states that a survey and evaluation of cultural resources must be done in areas where development projects, that will change the face of the environment, will be undertaken. The impact of the development on these resources should be determined and proposals for the mitigation must be made.

METHODOLOGY

Background information – The results of previous work carried out in the area (Heritage Impact Assessments) are normally used to provide background to the project and the graves identified and recorded in the area under discussion.

Mapping and Photographing – A Google Earth image of the area, providing a location for the area and grave site, was produced. Photographs of the area, as well as each individual burial, any skeletal remains and grave goods that are recovered are also taken as part of the documentation process.

Investigation and Exhumation – Normally graves are exhumed by hand using picks and shovels and where possible remains are documented photographically in position. Remains are then removed, placed in coffins, described and documented. In cases where no skeletal remains or cultural material are found in a burial a soil sample is taken for reburial as standard practice. In this case, an earthmoving machine (TLB) was used to open up the trenches up to the level of the possible burial pits.

Burial Forms – A Burial form for each individual burial is completed. Basic information on burial position, grave goods, general preservation and other general observations are included on these forms. These forms will not be reproduced in this report while the information on the burials will be summarized and interpreted at the end. The forms will however be archived for future reference if required. Photographs of all the burials will be provided as well.

The various burials to be exhumed and relocated are situated on a number of graves sites on portions of the farm Wonderfontein 428JS, near Wonderfontein in Mpumalanga. Approximately 200 graves in total are affected.

GPS Coordinates for GN1: **S25 50 53.4 E29 52 24.7**

Figure 1: Location of GN1 and various other grave sites to be relocated (courtesy Shanduka Coal).



Figure 2: A view of Site GN1. The individuals are standing on the approximate position of the possible graves.



Figure 3: One of the possible graves.



Figure 4: Another possible grave on GN1.

INVESTIGATION AND RELOCATION OF THE BURIALS

Very little surface evidence for the existence of any graves is present, with only a few individual loosely placed stones in two or three locations close to each other indicating the possibility. As indicated earlier the client (Shanduka) requested that these features and the area be tested for the possibility of burial pits being present.

Prior to the TLB being employed to open up trenches in the various locations, the area was cleaned by hand to expose the stones and to determine if there is possibly better indication of formal graves demarcated by stone cairns. This proved not to be the case (no further indication was found) and it was found that the stones were in fact not purposely packed, but just loose stones randomly situated here.

It was then decided that the area where these features were identified should be investigated further by digging a trench or trenches with an earthmoving machine up to the level of where evidence of disturbance (dug burial pits) or human skeletal and cultural material (coffin wood etc.) or sterile levels are reached. A 30 square meter section was trenched in this fashion, moving in an E/W direction (the normal direction for the placement of graves here). Three trenches were dug diagonally next to each other for this purpose.

No evidence for any disturbance was found in the trenches, with the soil stratigraphy remaining homogenous throughout. The stratigraphy consisted of a few centimeters (approx. 20cm) of dark brown humus (Present Surface Level) and grass cover, followed by a reddish and yellowish clay up to a harder sterile clay layer. The clay was also fairly damp. The depth of the trenches was between 1.50m and 2.00m up to the sterile layers. No cultural material was recovered as well.

Based on this evidence it was concluded that there was in fact no graves or burials in this area and no reburials were therefore needed.



Figure 5: Clearing the area by hand before the TLB moved in.



Figure 6: The TLB busy with the trenching.



Figure 7: The one trench showing the stratigraphy with the dark brown humus followed by the clay.



Figure 8: The 2nd trench.



Figure 9: The third and final trench.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion it can be said that the investigation of the possible burials located on Site GN1 (on the Remaining Extent of Portion 1 of the farm Wonderfontein 428JS near Wonderfontein in Mpumalanga) was conducted successfully. No evidence for any burials on the site was found and it can be concluded that there are none present.

Mining operations in this area can therefore continue. However, it should be mentioned that although all possible efforts are made to locate any possible burial pits in cases such as these (where there are scant surface evidence for the possibility), there is always a chance that unmarked graves could have been missed. Therefore, should any be uncovered during the development and mining activities, an expert should be called in to investigate. This could include archaeological and historical remains and artifacts as well.

REFERENCES

Location of grave sites and Mine Layout Plan: Courtesy Shanduka Coal.

Pelser, A.J. 2013. **A REVISION OF PHASE 1 HIA FOR THE PROPOSED WONDERFONTEIN COLLIERY NEAR BELFAST IN MPUMALANGA.** Unpublished Report APELSER ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSULTING cc. APAC013/33. For: Usimbithi Mining (Pty) Ltd. July 2013.

Pistorius, J.C.C. 2008. **A PHASE I HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT (HIA) STUDY FOR THE PROPOSED WONDERFONTEIN COLLIERY NEAR BELFAST IN THE MPUMALANGA PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA.**
Unpublished Report. For: Jaco-K Consulting. August 2008.