

REPORT No. 1: ROBBEN ISLAND BLUE STONE QUARRY; SITING OF PROPOSED BIRD HIDE.

INTRODUCTION

At a meeting of consultants held on 21 January 2013 at the WSP Goup offices the idea was mooted to construct a bird hide to allow birders to watch and monitor nesting birds in and around the Blue Stone Quarry.

The quarry's significance as part of the Robben Island World Heritage Site is defined by its intangible and tangible cultural components. The quarry itself must be placed within the broader associated landscape surrounding the quarry, the prison and landscape and the environment as a whole.

The intangible memory of prisoner's experiences at the quarry, and by implication that of the warders, is what makes the quarry landscape highly significant.

The relict tangible remains of ex-prisoners memories are evident in and around the quarry. The material extracted from here was used to build the Maximum Security Prison [MSP].

Heritage is not a static concept. Change over time needs to be acknowledged, accepted and dealt with appropriately.

Birds have chosen the quarry landscape as a roosting and nesting site. To some degree this presents a threat to the tangible heritage of the landscape. Some impact of roosting and nesting activities on the intangible may also be present, although this is more difficult to assess.

It must be accepted that the removal of the birds from this area is not an option as a number of rare and endangered species have taken occupation of the area.

To enable the sensitive protection and integration of both the cultural and natural environments at the quarry landscape the following cultural components are highlighted as preferred options for the placement of a bird hide.

Option 1.

Concrete platform adjacent to quarry dyke.

The platform is situated inside the quarry immediately adjacent to the interior of the dry packed stone wall. The wall has however deteriorated significantly since the first photographic survey done by Matenga in 2004. The wall still has a section of approximately 10 metres that is still protecting the platform from the sea.

The platform runs from the packed wall towards the east for approximately 14 metres and has a width of 8 metres. Approximately 80% of the surface is a hard aggregate of sea sand, sea shells and Portland cement with a smooth cemented finish. A smaller area immediately adjacent to the

wall stretching to about 6 metres to the east, with a width of approximately 4 metres consists of hard compacted lime. This may be the oldest part of the platform.

A small section on the eastern side is uncovered with the remainder covered by debris from the sea wall. Sections of this were removed from 26 February 2013 to 28 February 2013 to determine the extent and condition of the platform.

A structure is shown close to the wall in the Babenia drawing when the quarry was active. Ex-political Prisoners also recall an area next to the wall that was used to shelter from the winter winds. The platform may also have been used to make bricks used in the construction of buildings on the Island [Nolobabalo Tongo; pers comm.]

During the excavation a fireplace was found next to the quarry wall in the centre of the concrete platform. A square post hole was also found approximately 1 metre from the fireplace, which may indicate some sort of shelter for the fire. A set of footprints, with the tyre tread pattern used for the soles of prisoner's shoes, is embedded in the south east corner of the platform. The tangible and intangible significance of the platform is thus very high and will need appropriate treatment and interpretation.

The proposed reconstruction of the quarry wall will fully uncover the platform. Some sections of the platform are very friable and sensitive to weathering and the build up of bird guano. The harder sections will also be subject to weathering and build up of bird guano once the platform is uncovered.

The bird hide may be a means to protect the platform from future degradation.

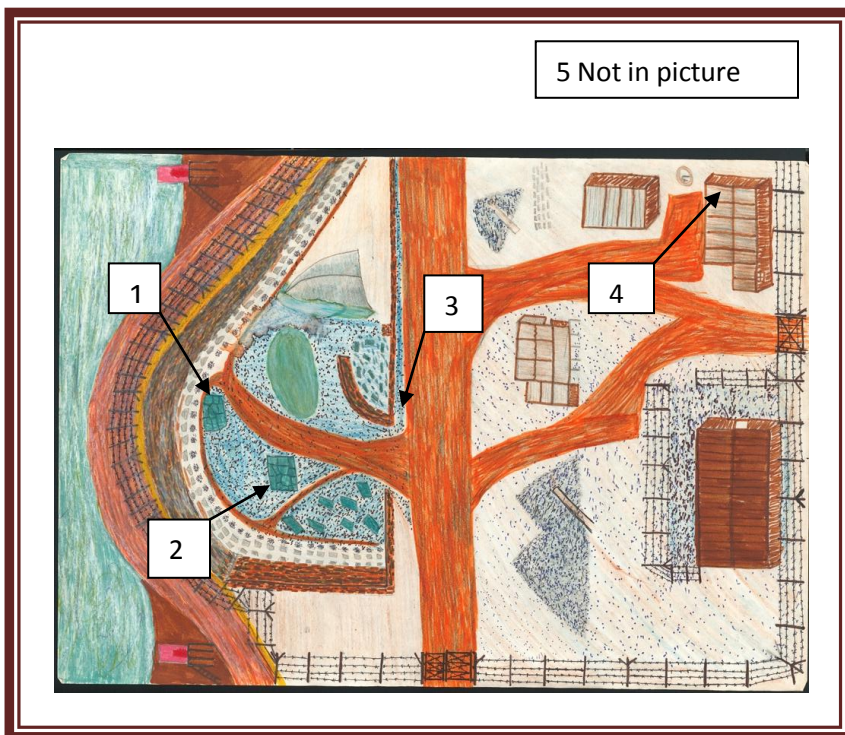
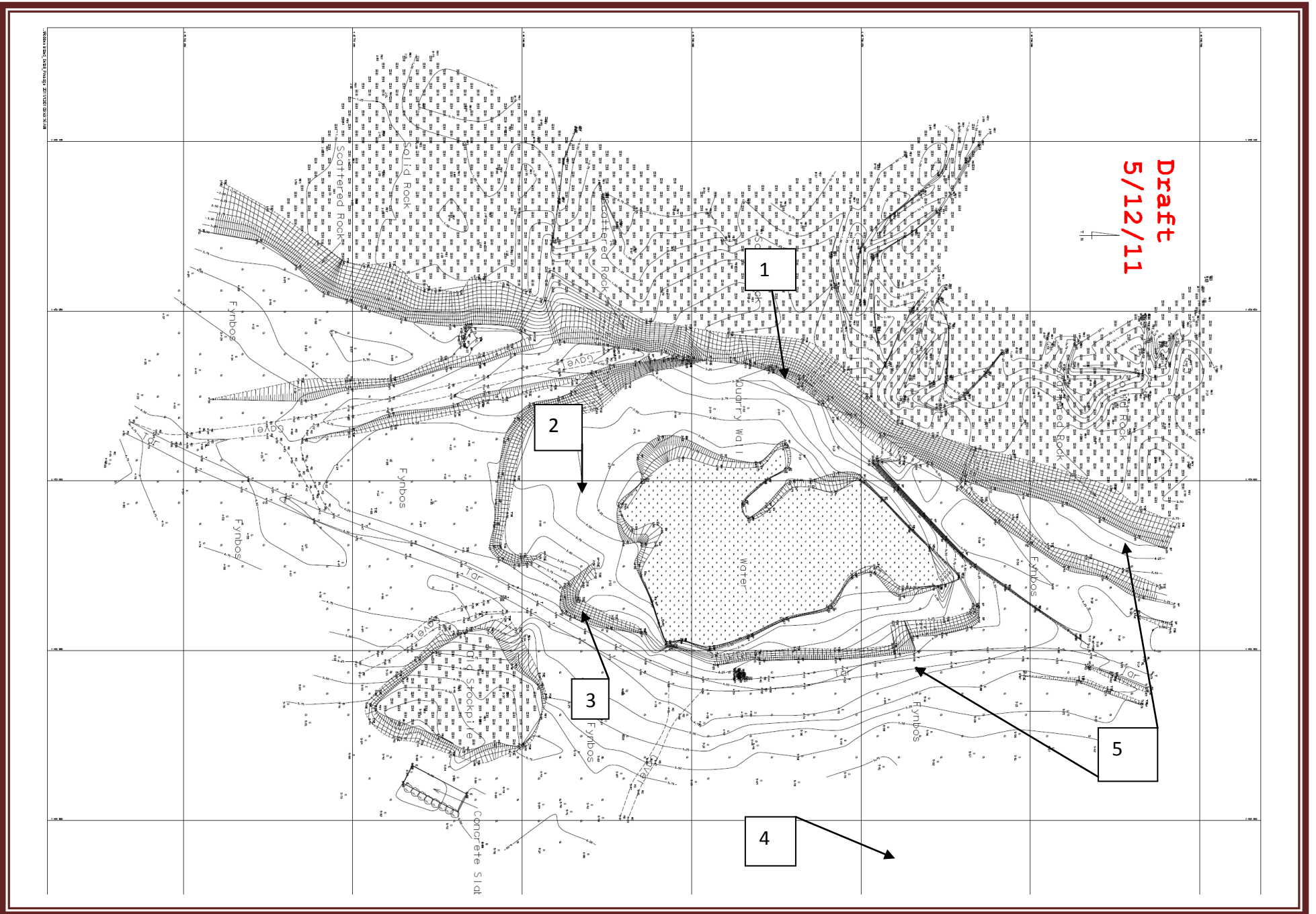


Fig. 1. Drawing by Nattoo Babenia ca. 1970's



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Fig.2.



Fig.3. View from SE for option 1



Fig.4 View from NE for option 1



Fig. 5. View due West of uncovered platform



Fig. 6. Prisoner footprints



Fig.7. View to SE



Fig.8 View to NE

Option 2.

Sheltered area inside quarry.



A large rock with packed dry stone walls about half a metre high in sections to the east and west of it is situated in the quarry approximately at the survey point TS15 3.067 on the WSP survey diagram. The walling forms a square of approximately 2 metres by 2 metres. A similar square can be identified in the Babenia drawing. The feature was used as a loading platform for finished bricks and stone work. [N. Tongo: pers. Comm.] The site is situated inside the quarry and subject to periodic flooding. No excavation was carried out to find the floor or the height and length of the walls.

Fig.9. Position of Large rock



Fig.10. View of structure from North

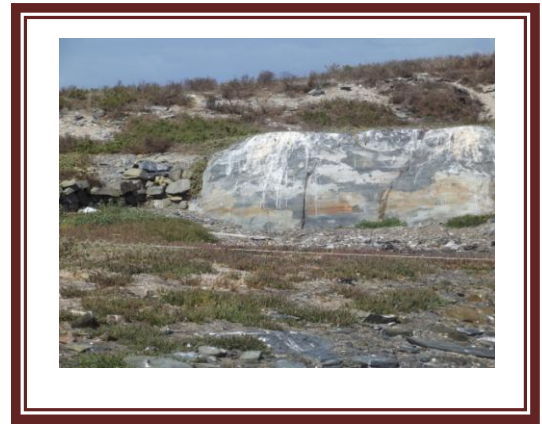


Fig.11. North face with large rock



Fig.12. NE corner



Fig.13. NW corner

Option 3.

Concrete platform adjacent to Survey mark “BSQ 2”.

A collapsed concrete platform is situated adjacent to the road one metre south of “BSQ 2” on the eastern edge of the quarry. The provenance of the platform is not known. The platform measures approximately 2 metres by 2 metres and is about 10 centimetres thick.



Fig. 14. Position view towards East



Fig.15. View towards south. Intact section



Fig.16. Collapsed west face

Option 4.

Concrete platform on North Eastern corner of quarry camp.

Sections of the platform are visible but large portions are covered with vegetation and debris. No excavation of the platform was done. The platform is also shown on the Babenia drawing as a shed and can clearly be seen on the 2009 Google image.

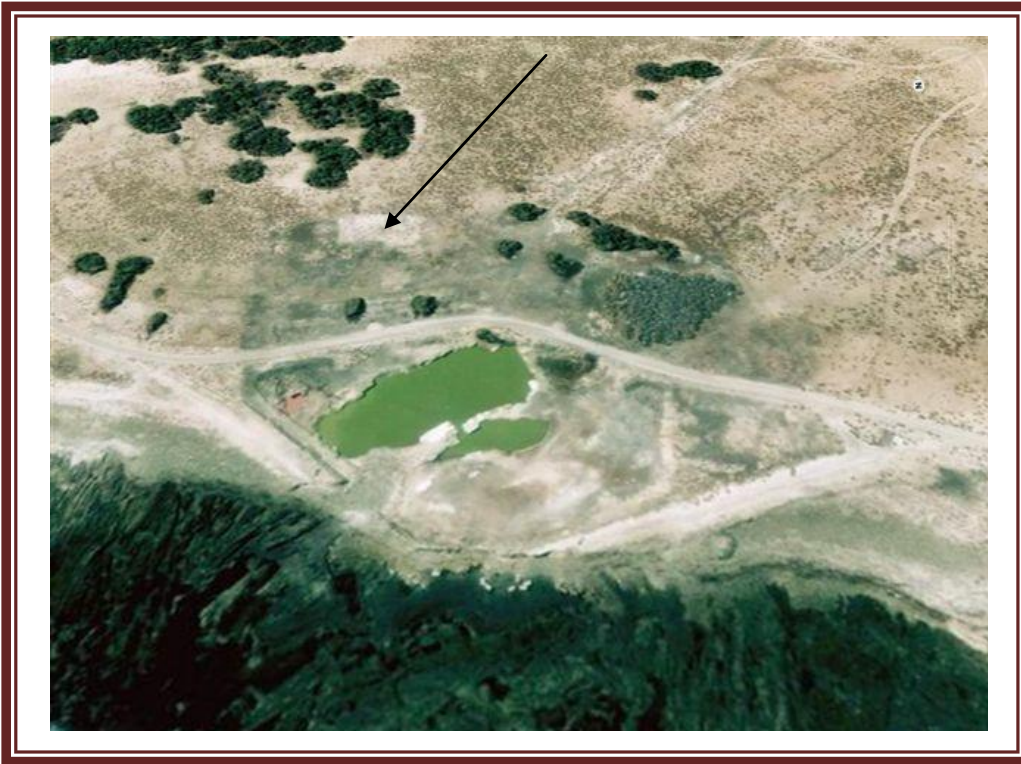


Fig.17. Google image
March 2009



Fig.18. NE view



Fig.19. View over quarry towards
the west

Option 5

New site close to Northern edge of quarry and quarry wall.

The site could not be adequately assessed from a heritage perspective as a colony of Swift Terns is nesting on the Northern section of the wall and its surroundings. There is no historical evidence for any structures, other than the wall, on this part of the quarry camp.



Fig. 20. View towards south



Fig.21. Close up of bird colony on N section of wall

CONCLUSION

1. Option 1. is the preferred option from a heritage perspective based on the following:

1. It is preferable that existing relict heritage platforms are utilised for a bird hide, especially where structures can be historically motivated.
2. The hide would be a means of protecting heritage currently threatened by weathering and bird nesting activities.
3. The concrete platforms are not conducive to nesting sites, which allows for a structure without threatening potential nest sites.
4. The platform inside the quarry is not subject to flooding from the quarry when quarry water levels are high.
5. The sea wall would form one wall of the hide.
6. The hide would be sufficient to accommodate birding tourism of up to 10 people.
7. The platform allows for 360° views of the quarry area.

2. Option 2 is subject to flooding when the quarry water level is at its highest. No covered structure can be motivated historically. Birds nest inside and around the structure.

3. Option 3, where the provenance is not known, may be visually disruptive because of its elevation and close proximity to the road.

4. Option 4 is the second preferred option as it allows for the motivation of a covered structure from a historical perspective. Views to the quarry and bird nesting sites are very favourable.

Option 5 cannot be motivated from a heritage perspective and would be an intrusion on the cultural landscape.

REFERENCES

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