REPORT No. 2: ROBBEN ISLAND BLUE STONE QUARRY; CONCRETE PLATFORM INSIDE QUARRY

INTRODUCTION

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.

A brief survey on 19 December 2012 revealed a small section of a concrete platform inside the quarry towards the western end close to the remains of the packed stone wall of the quarry. The sea dyke is to be rehabilitated.

An application for a permit to remove the debris and uncover the slab was submitted to SAHRA. The SAHRA BELCom assessed the application on 28 January 2013. A letter was received from SAHRA on 15 February 2013 confirming that the platform could be excavated.

This report records the findings of the work carried out from 26 to 28 February 2013.

Methodology

Desk top study

The drawing made by Natoo Babenia was used as the basis for the provenance of the platform. Autobiographies of ex-political prisoners who worked in the quarry, recordings of their memories as well as discussions with RIM staff assisted with the provenance and use of the slab.

The Matenga survey of 2004 did not pick up on the platform.

Excavation and site recording

The initial aim was to remove the debris from the entire platform. This was not possible considering the amount of material that would have had to be removed and the timeframes within which the site survey was conducted. Standard archaeological excavation practice was

then employed to uncover sections of the platform to confirm its extent, the materials used and state of conservation.

A datum line was run on a north south axis along the outer edge of the slab on the eastern side. A square of 4 metres by 6 metres was then measured. Sections of this square were excavated and a trench was run from north to south on the western side of the square. A trench was then run along the southern edge of the slab towards the remains of the packed stone wall. The trench was ended when it reached a collapsed section of the wall. The collapsed section was retained in situ although the likelihood of reconstructing the wall by means of reverse stratigraphy may be very small.

A test excavation of 1 metre by 1 metre was made adjacent to the remains of the wall to determine whether the further extent of the slab. A trench was then excavated from the south trench towards the test excavation on the north-south axis to link the trenches.

A trench 1 metre wide was also excavated along the north edge of the slab for 2 metres. A Test trench of 1 metre by 1 metre was then made 2 metres from the edge of the remains of the packed stone wall along the north edge datum line.

A photographic record was made of the excavation and the results. No stratigraphic recording was made as the material covering the slab is completely out of context. Normal collapse of a dry packed stone wall was exacerbated by wave action moving the wall materials out of context.

Findings

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 breach in 2001, the reunion of ex-political prisoners in 2002 and the 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. Two bricks were also uncovered adjacent to the charcoal of the fireplace. 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.

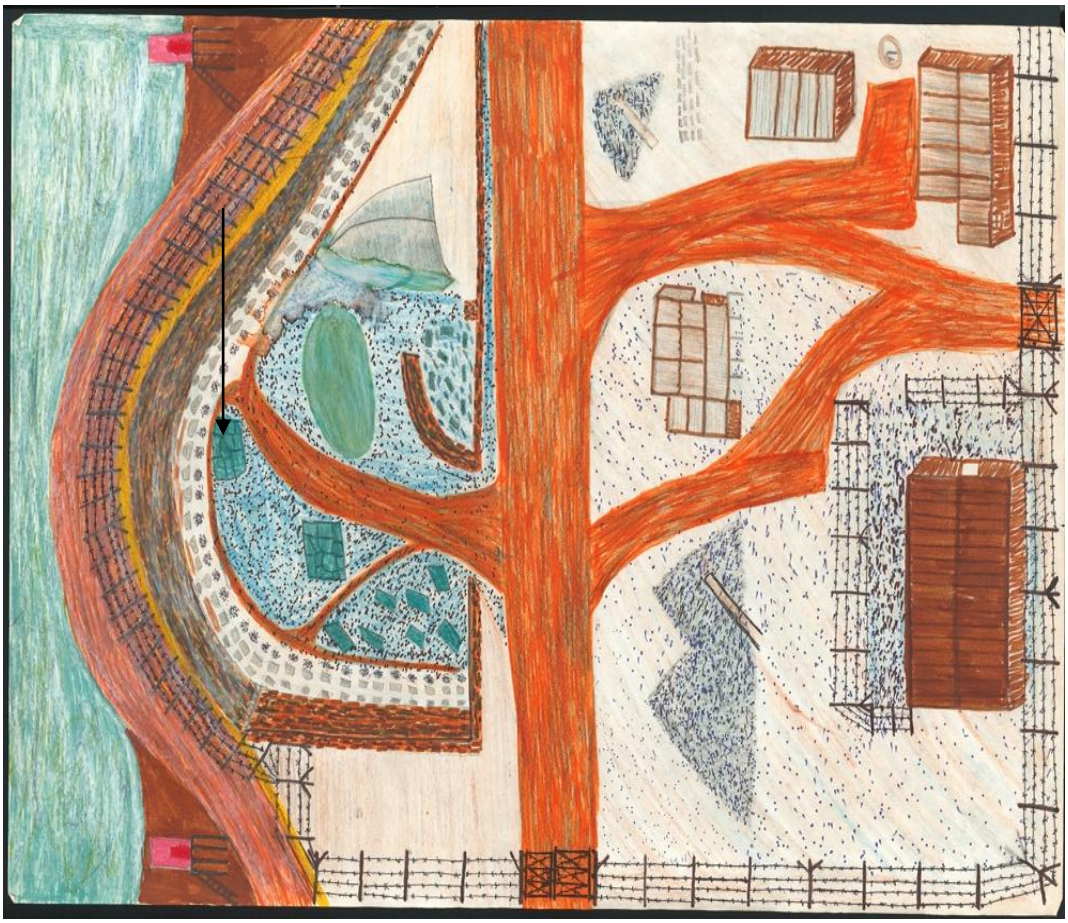

Fig. 1. Drawing by Natoo Babenia ca. 1970's showing a feature next to the dyke inside the quarry.

A section of the slab on the NE corner is damaged with the sections embedded in the debris some 6 metres from the NE corner. The damaged section is possible due to a mechanical front loader used when the contractor for the rehabiliatation of Murrays Bay harbour pre-empted a SAHRA decision to start work on the quarry in ca 2004/2005. Marks were also made by the machine on a section of the slab.It would also appear as if the slab was cast instages as cracks show where extensions were made. Thickness of the aggregate varies between 10 and 20 cm.

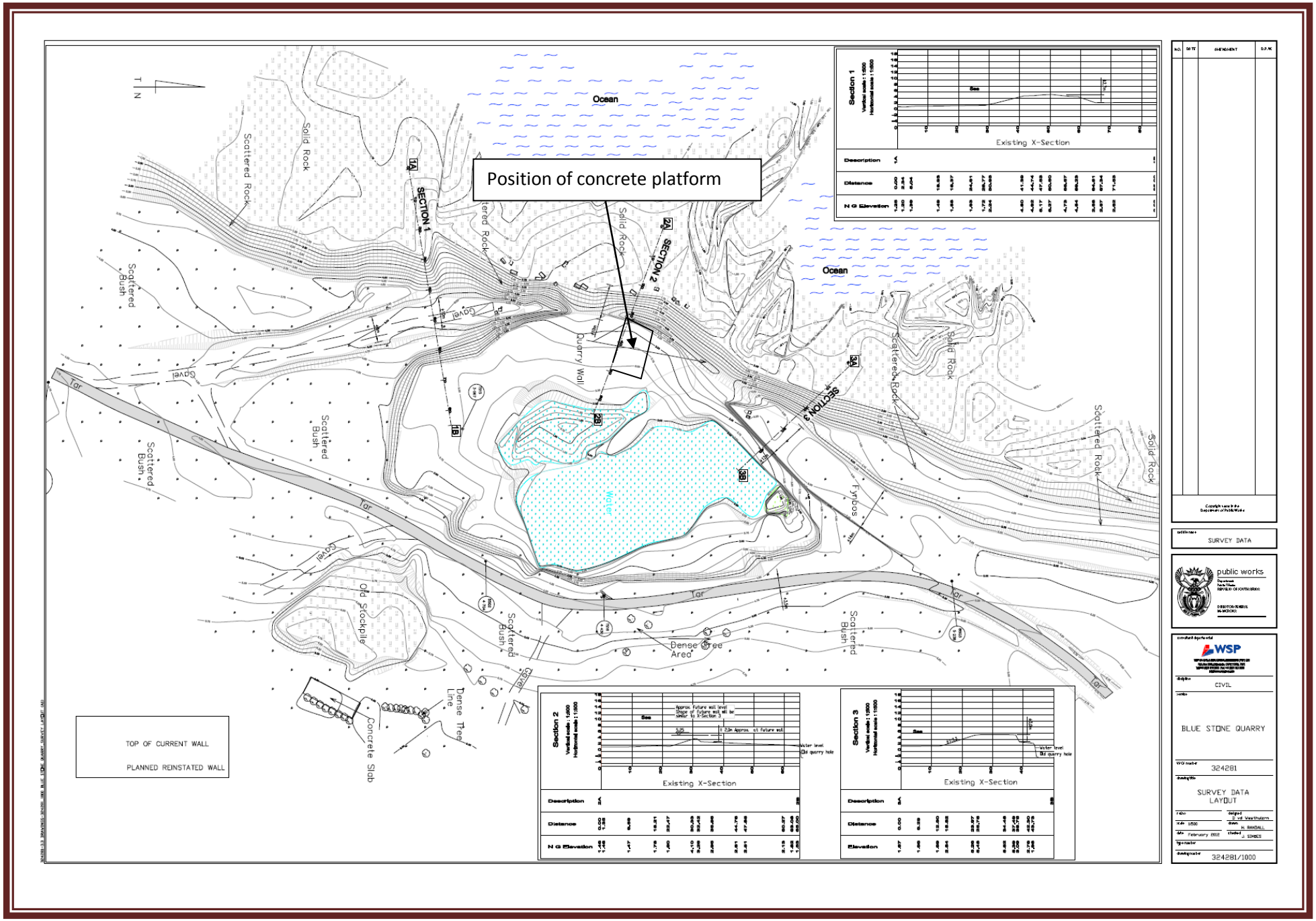

Fig.2. Survey diagram 34281/1000. The concrete platform is situated inside the quarry adjacent to the wall.

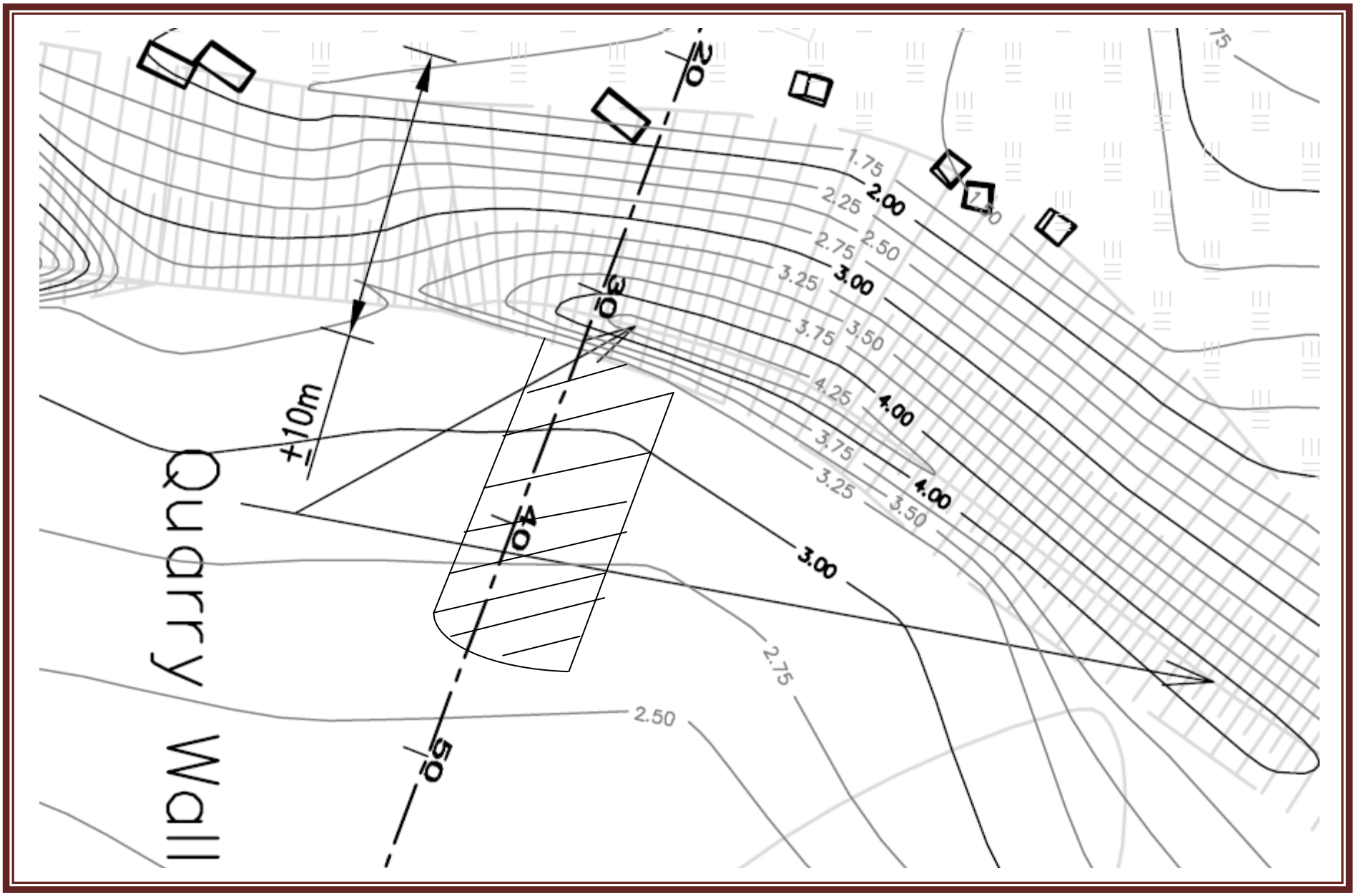

Fig.2.a. Position of slab

Fig.3. View from SE

Fig.4 View from NE

Fig. 5. View due West of uncovered platform

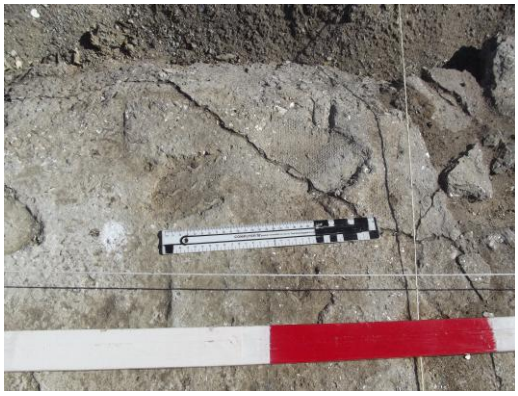

Fig. 6. Prisoner footprints on SE corner

Fig.7. View to SE

Fig.8 View to NE

Fig.6. Eastern edge looking from N to S showing damaged section

Fig.7. Parts of damaged slab shown adjacent to eastern edge

Fig.8. West trench looking S to N

Fig.9. Southern edge from east looking west

Fig.10.Collapsed walling left in situ

Fig.11.Trench connecting southern edge with test trench next to wall

Fig.12. Left. Test excavation adjacent to inside edge of packed dry stone wall showing charcoal, two bricks and the aggregate is compacted lime as opposed to the hard concrete followed on the southern edge towards the wall.

Fig.13. Right. Square post hole close to bricks and charcoal. Aggregate appears to be harder here but deteriorates to friable compacted lime

Fig.14. Left. Following the northern edge towards the wall. Aggregate has become friable compacted lime

Fig.15.Right.Northern edge 2 metres from western datum line

Fig.16. Position of test trench on northern edge

Fig.17. Test excavation showing friable compacted lime surface

Conclusion

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 compacted lime 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.

Mitigation

1. The remaining debris must be removed under supervision of a qualified professional heritage practitioner before any construction work commences.
2. The platform must then be covered with geotextile, the edges sandbagged and the inside filled with sandbags to protect the platform.
3. An alternate use strategy must be looked at.
4. A more permanent solution to the conservation of the platform must be looked at.

Acknowledgements

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Photographic images of reference group at the blue Stone Quarry by Desmond Mashaba, Robben Island Museum, 10 to 12 May 2002.

WSP Civil Blue Stone Quarry Survey Data Layout, Drawing No. 34281/1000 dd. February 2012.