



an agency of the  
Department of Arts and Culture

**COMMITTEE MEETING**

**DATES:**

GDRC: 03 November 2020

EXCO: TBC

HRM COM: TBC

COUNCIL: TBC

## **GRADING SUBMISSION**

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SUBMITTED BY: Archaeology, Palaeontology and Meteorites (APM) Unit

DATE: 03 November 2020

FILE REF / SAHRIS SITE ID: SAHRIS Case Id: TBC

SAHRIS SITE CATEGORY: Archaeological - Rock engraving site

Significance Category (THEMES): Archaeological and Historic, Aesthetic, Research, Socio-economic

ENQUIRIES: Andrew Salomon, Heritage Officer: APM Unit

ITEM: Proposed Nomination of Site for Grade 1 National Heritage Site Status: Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex, near Lydenburg, Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga

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### **A1. BACKGROUND**

- A1.1. A large cluster of boulders on the farm Boomplaats are covered in Late Iron Age (AD 1650) farmer art. These engravings depict Bokoni settlement patterns, which represent central stonewalled cattle enclosures, as well as animals and human figures.
- A1.2. The extent of the site complex and the number of engravings make Boomplaats the most significant archaeological site of its kind in South Africa.
- A1.3. The site and its visually striking engravings are in an excellent state of preservation and provide an invaluable resource for archaeological research into the world of precolonial farming communities in South Africa.
- A1.4 The farm on which the site is located was returned to the Dinkanyane Community in 2001, following a successful land claim, and the local community

identify associate strongly with the site. Boomplaats therefore serves as a physical embodiment of a deep-rooted cultural identity associated with the landscape.

- A1.5. This submission serves as motivation for the approval of Grading, by SAHRA Grading and Declarations Review Committee, of the Boomplaats rock engraving site as a Grade 1 National Heritage Site.

## **A2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- A2.1. This submission provides a description and location of the archaeological rock engraving complex of Boomplaats.
- A2.2. A brief history of the site and a description of the significance of the archaeological research that has been undertaken at Boomplaats, is given.
- A2.3. A SWOT analysis is provided, as well as a motivation for Grading as a National Heritage Site.
- A2.4. A statement of significance conveys the heritage values associated with the site.
- A2.5. The landowner's attitude and current management arrangements are discussed.
- A2.6. The SAHRA Archaeology, Palaeontology and Meteorites Unit is of the opinion that the Boomplaats rock engraving site is worthy of Grading as a Grade 1 National Heritage Site.

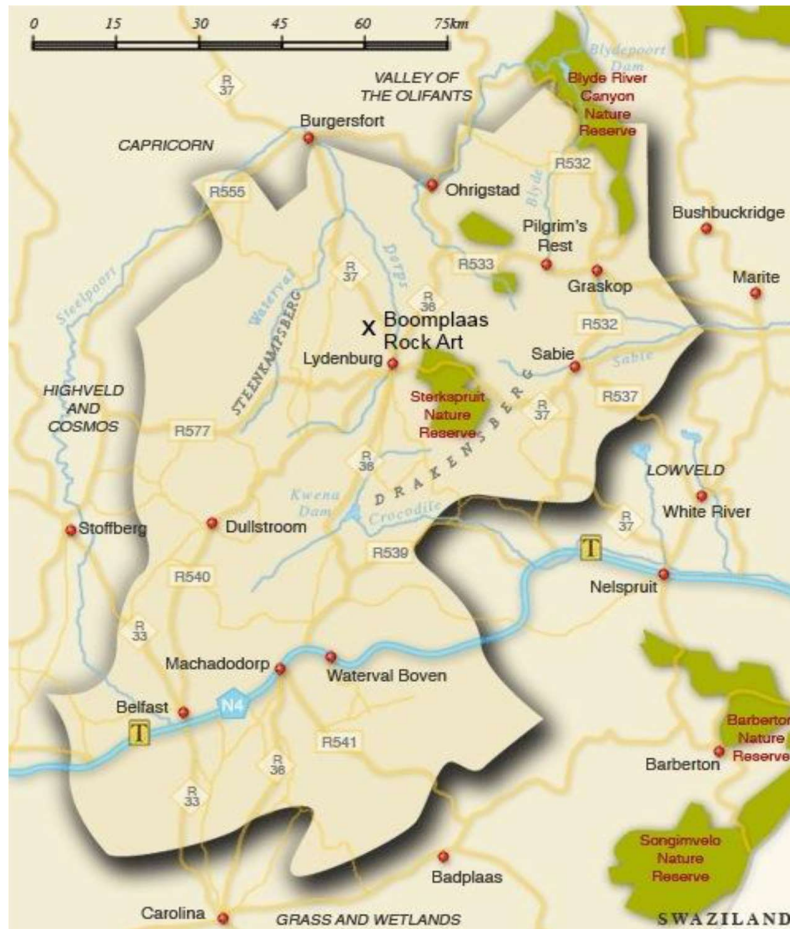
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**1. PURPOSE OF THE SUBMISSION**

1.1 The purpose of this submission is to request approval from SAHRA Grading and Declarations Review Committee to support the grading of Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex as a Grade 1 National Heritage Resource.

**2. DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION OF THE SITE**

2.1. The Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex is situated in Mpumalanga’s Lydenburg area and comprises numerous clusters of engraved boulders spread across farm Boomplaats 29 JT, Lydenburg, which belongs to the Boomplaats community.



Map showing the location of the Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex



Engravings represent the BaKoni settlement landscape. (Courtesy of the Lydenburg Museum)



Engravings at Boomplats represent Bokoni stone-walled settlements which are abundant in the immediate region. (Courtesy of the Lydenburg Museum)



Bokoni stone walling observed at ground level (Image: The Heritage Portal/Delius, Maggs, Schoeman)



Aerial view of Bokoni settlements (Image: The Mail and Guardian)

### 3. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SITE

3.1. The Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex was the original site of this type discovered in 1918 by Pijper and later described by Van Hoepen of the Bloemfontein Museum in 1936. A large cluster of boulders on the farm Boomplaats are covered in Late Iron Age (AD 1650) farmer art. These engravings depict Bokoni settlement patterns, including circles, which represent central stonewalled cattle enclosures, as well animals and human figures. In later years other researchers focused their attention on this site for its significance in understanding the psyche and cultural identity of the Later Iron Age inhabitants of the area, including Tim Maggs (1995) of the Natal Museum and also Richard Mbewe (2007) and Peter Delius (2007) from the University of the Witwatersrand. Boomplaats has been the focus of this sustained scientific research attention due to it being the preeminent site of its kind.

#### 3.2. Selected references

In terms of Iron Age settlement rock engravings, Boomplaats is likely the most researched site in South Africa. For more than a century, the site and its rock engravings have been the subject of historical and archaeological research and it has contributed significantly to our understanding of Later Iron Age agro-pastoralists settlement patterns and worldview. Scientific research at Boomplaats is ongoing and promises to continue well into the future.

Delius, P. (ed). 2007. **Mpumalanga. History and Heritage**. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Delius, P. and Schoeman, M.H. 2008. **Revisiting Bokoni: Populating the Stone Ruins of the Mpumalanga Escarpment**, in Swanepoel et al (eds). *Five Hundred Years Rediscovered*, pp. 135-68.

Delius, P. and Schoeman, M.H. 2010. **Reading the Rocks and Reviewing Red Herrings**. *African Studies* 69: 235-54.

Maggs, T. 2017. Boomplaats-Lydenburg. **Report on Recordings of Rock Art Engravings**. Unpublished report.

Mbewe, R. 2005. **Boomplaats**. Unpublished MA Thesis. University of the Witwatersrand

Pijper, C. 1918. **Some Engraved stones of the Lydenburg District and North-East Transvaal: The occurrence of "Cup - and Ring" markings in South Africa**. South African Association for the Advancement of Science Journal 102: 413-427.

Delius, Maggs & Schoeman, June 2012. Journal of Southern African Studies. **Bokoni: Old Structures, New Paradigms? Rethinking Pre-colonial Society from the Perspective of the Stone-Walled Sites in Mpumalanga**



#### **4. SWOT SUMMARY**

- 4.1. Strengths: Boomplaats is a unique rock art site complex with a Late Iron Age farming community identity and is well-situated for visitation by local, national and international tourists. The site has relatively good access and offers ongoing research value and has been shown to be well-suited for educational tours and visits.
- 4.2. Weaknesses: The site is not formally protected, is vulnerable to damage and exploitation, is not accessible by pedestrians or public transport and has no interpretative material available for visitors.
- 4.3. Opportunities: Boomplaats has significant tourism potential with opportunities for local entrepreneurship to serve as a model open-air archaeological site which is well-managed and self-sustained by coordinated visitation of by the public. The site offers branding (tourism and education) and marketing opportunities and it has substantial research opportunities and benefits from local community participation and ownership.
- 4.4. Threats: Accidental or intentional damage to the rock art is an ever-present danger. The site lacks formal protection and management, and may be threatened by encroaching property or infrastructure development

#### **5. MOTIVATION FOR NATIONAL DECLARATION**

- 5.1 The Burra Charter refers to cultural significance as meaning "aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past, present or future generations".  
The rock engraving site complex of Boomplaats, comprising of an extensive are of engraved boulders represents an outstanding record of the pre-colonial agro-pastoral society that flourished in what is now Mpumalanga during the Later Iron Age. The site's visually stunning engravings represent settlement patterns found within its greater area and the extent and excellent state of preservation make this the premier site of its kind and the type-site for current and future scientific

research. The local community identifies and associates strongly with the site, which serves as a physical embodiment of a profound cultural identity associated with the landscape.

*The applicant describes the following values in association with the site:*

The site was the first of its kind to be recorded and therefore has historical significance, coupled to **cultural value** where the engravings at Boomplaats represent a cultural signature of the Later Iron Age (LIA) communities who utilised the fertile soils and pastures of the Lydenburg area during the 1650's and afterwards.

**Social value** through the value which the engravings have in modern times for individuals and communities alike. Descendants of the LIA farmers identify with the engravings and associate it with their cultural identity. Modern society rediscovers a different type of value when they are able to understand and interpret the engravings. This is not only true for a related culture but also within cross-cultural relations. Modern South African society embrace cultural diversity and have mutual respect for one-another's cultural identity as well as heritage objects associated with identity. Development of sites such as Boomplaats Rock Engraving site as a tourist attraction will serve to reach an even broader audience.

**Historic value** - two types of historic significance are applicable for the Boomplaats site. The first is the historic sequence of scientific discovery and recording of the engravings at the site and the second is how the site influenced the lives of local communities before and shortly after its scientific discovery. Both add value to our understanding and interpretation of the site in modern society. It serves as contextual reference when the site is introduced to a varied public audience.

**Scientific value** - the site has vastly contributed towards our understanding of LIA farmer communities' social organisation and also served to corroborate interpretations of researchers regarding LIA settlement layout and function. A number of scientific publications exist about the Boomplaats site. It is regularly referenced when academics discuss Southern African rock (engraving) art. Although relatively thoroughly researched, the engravings site still holds more potential for future

scientific scrutiny. The engravings underlines ethnographic information about BaKoni settlement layout and their world view. It is a window into their world. To the observer it has the potential to introduce an ancient society and therefore has valuable educational properties.

**Aesthetic value** - the engravings are all works of art and some images are of a more abstract nature than others. They are aesthetically pleasing to the observer and reproductions in modern media including images, artistic depictions and drawings are tools in marketing this cultural treasure. This characteristic makes the engravings easy to display for educational purposes.

## 6. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

6.1. The Boomplaats rock engraving complex contains the most significant collection of rock engravings made by pre-colonial Later Iron Age farming communities in South Africa, and serves as an invaluable historic record of a deep-rooted cultural identity associated with the landscape. This identity survives to the present day where local descendants of the Later Iron Age farmers identify with the site. The site also has significant potential to be developed for tourism and to serve as a place where this rich cultural heritage can be dispersed to visitors. Boomplaats was the first site of its kind to be recorded more than a century ago, and has been the at the centre of scientific research for this type of archaeological site ever since, greatly contributing towards our understanding of Later Iron Age farmer communities' social organisation, and also served to corroborate interpretations of researchers regarding Later Iron Age settlement layout and function, serving as a window into the world of the BaKoni. These socio-cultural, historic and scientific research values, along with the stunning aesthetic value of the engravings, coupled to their fine state of preservation, bestow on Boomplaats a site significance of national importance.

## **7. INDICATION OF OWNER'S ATTITUDE**

7.1. The farm Boomplaats was returned to the Dinkanyane Community in 2001, following a successful land claim. The community is in support of the site's nomination to be Graded as a National Heritage Site.

## **8. INDICATION OF CURRENT MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

8.1. The site is currently unprotected as there are not measures in place to protect against damage by either domestic animals or people. The Lydenburg Museum has compiled a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) in an effort to facilitate nomination for grading and formal protection of the site by the South African Heritage Resources Agency. The CMP is submitted as additional documentation with this Grading Dossier.

## **9. DESCRIPTION OF SITE BOUNDARIES**

9.1. The Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex is situated in northern Mpumalanga, east of the Dorps river and close to the town of Lydenburg and the Sterkspruit Nature Reserve.

The following latitude and longitude reference points have been provided by the nominator, and refer to clusters of rock engravings that make up the site:

S25°01,2563' E030°24,7057'

S25°01,6412' E030°25,2036'

S25°01,6165' E030°25,8605'

S25°01,8143' E030°25,1083'

S25°02,5558' E030°25,4084'

S25°02,7183' E030°24,4515'

S25°02,5841' E030°24,4020'

S25°02,4923' E030°24,3632'

S25°02,2239' E030°24,4197'

S25°01,2846' E030°24,7940'

S25°02,1144' E030°26,0052'

S25°02,4852' E030°25,9417'

In addition, the applicant has provided SAHRA with a digital kmz-file that demarcates the site boundaries.

## **10. RECOMMENDATION**

10.1. The Archaeology, Palaeontology and Meteorites Unit supports the recommendation to the Grading and Declarations Review Committee for the approval of the Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex as a Grade 1 National Heritage Resource.

**Proposed Nomination of Site for Grade 1 Site Status: Boomplaats rock engraving site, Mpumalanga**

<b>Prepared By:</b>		<b>Supported By:</b>	
Mr Andrew Salomon	Signature	Mr Phillip Hine	Signature
<b>Date: 03 November 2020</b>		<b>Date: 03 November 2020</b>	

<b>Recommendation supported by GDRC</b>		<b>Recommendation not supported by GDRC</b>	
Name Chairperson: GDRC		Signature	
<b>Date:</b>			

<b>Recommendation supported by EXCo</b>		<b>Recommendation not supported by EXCo</b>	
Name Chairperson: EXCo		Signature	
<b>Date:</b>			

<b>Recommendation supported by HRM Committee</b>		<b>Recommendation not supported by HRM Committee</b>	
Name Chairperson: HRM Committee		Signature	
<b>Date:</b>			

<b>Recommendation supported by Council</b>		<b>Recommendation not supported by Council</b>	
Name Chairperson: Council		Signature	
<b>Date:</b>			

