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Comprehensive and Professional Solutions for all Heritage Related Matters

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**2021-06-18**

To: Me. Daisy Kotsedi  
**KMFE Environmental**

**RE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF ACCIDENTALLY DISCOVERED HUMAN REMAINS – 97 URANIUM ROAD, VULCANIA EXTENSION 2, BRAKPAN, GAUTENG**

APelser Archaeological Consulting cc (APAC cc) was appointed by KMFE Environmental, on behalf of Ezee Tile Adhesive, to undertake a site visit and assessment of accidentally discovered human remains found at the location (Erven 178 & 179, Vulcania Extension 2) of the new Ezee Tile Adhesive Facility.

### ***Background to the Project***

KMFE Environmental was contracted to apply for an Environmental Authorisation from the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) for the construction of an Ezee Tile Adhesive Facility in Vulcania (Brakpan). The physical address is 97 and 98 Uranium Road. The site is zoned as industrial and the previous land use of this site was manufacturing of precast concrete units.

An Environmental Authorisation for the Eeze Tile Adhesive Facility was issued GDARD on the 13th of April 2021. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2021, during site preparation, the Contractor discovered what appeared to be human remains on the site. The Contractor was then informed to cease all construction activities until SAHRA had been informed of this discovery. The Contractor also took the liberty to inform the South African Police Service and a case (Case Number 121/06/2021) was also opened. The found remains (a tibia and femur) were taken by the Brakpan SAP for analysis and safekeeping.

After SAHRA was contacted by KMFE Environmental, they informed the client to appoint an archaeologist to assess the bones and provide recommendations on the way forward. Anton Pelser of APAC cc was then contracted to undertake this assessment, with a site visit conducted on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2021. Representatives of KMFE Environmental and the Contractor accompanied the Specialist on the day of the site assessment.

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

Beatrix Bed & Breakfast Trading as A Pelser Archaeological Consulting



**Figure 1: The human remains found on site by the Contractor & removed by the SAP. This is a tibia and femur of an adult individual.**

### ***Relevant Legislation***

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).

### **The National Heritage Resources Act**

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

- a. Archaeological artefacts, 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; and
- i. Objects, structures and sites of scientific or technological value.

**The National Estate includes the following:**

- a. Places, buildings, structures and equipment of cultural significance;
- b. Places to which oral traditions are attached or which are associated with living heritage;
- c. Historical settlements and townscapes;
- d. Landscapes and features of cultural significance;
- e. Geological sites of scientific or cultural importance;
- f. Sites of Archaeological and palaeontological importance;
- g. **Graves and burial grounds;**
- h. Sites of significance relating to the history of slavery; and
- i. Movable objects (e.g. archaeological, palaeontological, meteorites, geological specimens, military, ethnographic, books etc.).

***Results of the June 2021 Site Assessment***

The area and site where the remains were discovered has been extensively disturbed by current and ongoing ground clearance and compacting related to the approved Ezee Tile Adhesive Facility development. Prior to that the area and site was used for industrial purposes (most recently the site was used for the manufacturing of precast concrete units). As a result of these recent historical developments and industrial activities the original natural and historical landscape was completely altered and disturbed, and if any cultural heritage (archaeological and/or historical) sites, features or material would have existed here it would have been destroyed or completely disturbed. This would include unknown and unmarked graves and burials.

The human remains discovered by the Contractor were located on spoil heaps taken from another section of the development site, used for leveling and compacting the area where the new Facility will be constructed. It is clear from this that the human remains found were not in an in situ position but that it had originated from another location. This location would most likely be from the area where soil material was removed for use to another point on the site. It was this area that was assessed to see if a possible grave or burial pit could be identified.



**Figure 1: Spoil heap where the human remains were identified by the Contractor.**



**Figure 2: The area where the soil was taken from is visible around the tree line.**



**Figure 3: A closer view of the area where the material was removed from.**



**Figure 4: Another view of the cut from where the soil was taken and dumped at the location where the human remains were 1<sup>st</sup> discovered. No evidence of a grave or burial pit was visible.**

The assessment then focused on trying to find any further disturbed or loose human remains in the area where material was taken from, as well as the spoil heaps where soils was taken to for use in levelling and compacting. A few pieces of old wood and nails were identified and although it is not possible to conclude without a doubt, these are very similar to wood and nails that were used in coffins during historical times. Similar objects were found at the both the soil cut (trench) and the spoil heaps around 120m to the north-east of the cutting.

A single calcaneum (ankle bone) was identified close to the cutting. This is definitely human and also from an adult individual. It is assumed that this bone could be close to the origin of the grave/burial, but that the grave itself has been totally disturbed.

GPS Coordinate: **S26 15 43.90 E28 22 59.70**

No other human remains were found in this area, but it is possible that it is covered by loose soil and it was recommended that an area around this find be cordoned of for further investigations once a permit has been obtained from SAHRA. The Contractor agreed to do this.



**Figure 5: The 1<sup>st</sup> calcaneum found on the site.**



**Figure 6: Possible coffin wood fragments and cloth pieces found in the area.**



**Figure 7: Wood fragments found on some of the spoil heaps.**

The area around the spoil heaps were also assessed further and more human skeletal remains were found here. This was in the form of another calcaneum (ankle bone) and a phalange (toe bone).

GPS Coordinates: **S26 15 41.20 E28 23 01.30 (Calcaneum 2) & S26 15 41.00 E28 23 01.50 (Phalange)**



**Figure 8: The 2<sup>nd</sup> calcaneum found at the site.**





**Figure 9: The phalange (toe bone) found at the spoil heaps.**

It is clear from the site assessment that the human remains found here did originate from a previously unknown and unmarked grave and burial pit. The recent activities associated with the approved Ezee Tile Adhesive Facility development on the property have accidentally uncovered the remains, and as a result the grave is no longer intact and the remains have been scattered. It is however very likely that the remains are fairly localised between their origin (the soil cutting/trench around 120m to the south-west) and the spoil heaps where to 1<sup>st</sup> remains were identified on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June and the new remains were identified on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June. It was recommended that the area around these spoil heaps also be cordoned off until a permit has been obtained from SAHRA for further investigations.

Older aerial images (Google Earth) of the study and development area clearly shows that the site was extensively used for industrial purposes and that the location of the human remains were covered by various structures until fairly recently. It is therefore likely that these structures already covered the historical grave and that there was no way that it would have been visible or marked before the newly proposed development actions commenced. From the human remains itself, as well as the possible coffin wood fragments, it can be concluded that these remains have a historical origin and that it could likely be associated with either historical farming in the area (pre-industrial and the extensive urban expansion in the Brakpan area). A mining origin is also possible but cannot be determined at this point.



Figure 10: A 2008 aerial image of the site showing the location of the remains found. Various structures, as well as road/paved surfaces can be seen (Google Earth 2021).



Figure 11: The same area in 2013 (Google Earth 2021).



Figure 12: A 2018 image (Google Earth 2021).



Figure 13: The distribution of the remains in June 2021. It is assumed that the location of Calcaneum 1 is the closest to the origin of the unknown/unmarked grave (Google Earth 2021).

## **Conclusions & Recommendations**

It can be concluded that the assessment of human remains recovered at the Erven 178 & 179 (97 Uranium Road) Vulcania Extension 2 development site in Brakpan, Gauteng, was concluded successfully. Human remains recently discovered at the approved Ezee Tile Adhesive Facility on the property by the Contractor prompted the assessment as requested by SAHRA.

The Contractor was informed to cease all construction activities until SAHRA had been informed of this discovery. The Contractor also took the liberty to inform the South African Police Service and a case (Case Number 121/06/2021) was also opened. The found remains (a tibia and femur) were taken by the Brakpan SAP for analysis and safekeeping.

Anton Pelsler of APAC cc was contracted to undertake the assessment, with a site visit conducted on the 17th of June 2021. Representatives of KMFE Environmental and the Contractor accompanied the Specialist on the day of the site assessment.

It is clear that the area and development site has been completely impacted and disturbed by past industrial and recent activities related to the approved new development. Over and above the remains discovered on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 by the on-site Contractor, more scattered human remains were found during the site assessment conducted on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June.

It is clear from the site assessment that the human remains found here did originate from a previously unknown and unmarked grave and burial pit. The recent activities associated with the approved Ezee Tile Adhesive Facility development on the property have accidentally uncovered the remains, and as a result the grave is no longer intact and the remains have been scattered. It is however very likely that the remains are fairly localised between their origin (the soil cutting/trench around 120m to the south-west) and the spoil heaps where the 1st remains were identified on the 11th of June and the new remains were identified on the 17th of June.

Older aerial images (Google Earth) of the study and development area clearly shows that the site was extensively used for industrial purposes and that the location of the human remains were covered by various structures until fairly recently. It is therefore likely that these structures already covered the historical grave and that there was no way that it would have been visible or marked before the newly proposed development actions commenced. From the human remains itself, as well as the possible coffin wood fragments, it can be concluded that these remains have a historical origin and that it could likely be associated with either historical farming in the area (pre-industrial and the extensive urban expansion in the Brakpan area). A mining origin is also possible but cannot be determined at this point.

On the basis of the site assessment and discoveries made the following recommendations are made:

1. that an urgent rescue permit be applied for from SAHRA's Burial Grounds and Graves Unit (SAHRA BGG Unit) for the recovery of all possible remaining human remains at the site. Once the permit is issued this work can be concluded
2. that the area of possible origin of the human remains (the soil cut/trench) and loose soil where newly found remains were identified be cordoned off and no development activities be conducted here until the archaeological investigation has been concluded
3. that the area where the first discovered remains were identified (the soil spoil heaps) on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 be similarly cordoned off until further investigations. More human remains were identified here on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June
4. that the SAP Brakpan be contacted in order to get access to the remains they have removed from site in order to re-unit these with all the other human remains associated with the newly discovered and future recovered remains
5. as it is believed that these remains have a historical origin it is recommended that they be removed from site and be either curated in a recognized institution such as a Museum, or that

they be reburied at a location close to their origin. SAHRA's BGG Unit need to advise on this aspect

It is finally recommended that the Contractor be allowed to continue with their development activities on the site – excluding the cordoned off search areas – but that care should be taken if any other remains or archaeological and/or historical material are uncovered that these should be demarcated and left in situ. The subterranean nature of these resources (including low stone-packed or unmarked graves) should always be taken into consideration. Should any previously unknown or invisible sites, features or material be uncovered during any development actions then an expert should be contacted to investigate and provide recommendations on the way forward.

Should there be any questions or comments on the contents of this document please contact the author as soon as possible.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anton Pelser', written in a cursive style.

Anton Pelser

## References

1. General & Closer Views of Study Area & Possible Grave Site Location and Development Footprint: Google Earth 2020.
2. Site Sensitivity Map: Bokamoso Landscape Architects and Environmental Consultants CC.
3. Marais-Botes, L. 2018. **Addendum to the Phase 1 Heritage Impact Assessment for the Proposed Glenvista Residential Development. Portion 86 of the Farm Rietvlei 101-IR, Gauteng Province.** Unpublished Report. Bokamoso Landscape Architects and Environmental Consultants CC. For: A Million Up Investments 81 (Pty) Ltd. May 2018.
4. Republic of South Africa. 1999. National Heritage Resources Act (No 25 of 1999). Pretoria: the Government Printer.
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6. Chief Surveyor General Database: [www.csg.dla.gov.za](http://www.csg.dla.gov.za). CSG Document: 10AJ5D01.