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**A REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION, EXHUMATION  
& RELOCATION OF ACCIDENTALLY DISCOVERED IRON AGE REMAINS  
FROM LEEUWALLEI 297KT, BURGERSFORT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

For:

***All About Projects (Pty) Ltd***

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REPORT: **APAC020/01**

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Field Work conducted: **12 December 2019** Report: **January 2020**

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**I HEREBY DECLARE THAT I AM AN INDEPENDENT  
SPECIALIST APPOINTED BY THE CLIENT ON A CONSULTANCY  
BASIS**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Feber". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line at the end.

## SUMMARY

APelser Archaeological Consulting (APAC) and Adansonia Heritage Consultants, in conjunction with Roseleigh Funeral Home was requested and appointed by All About Projects (Pty) Ltd, to undertake the investigation, exhumation and reburial of an accidentally discovered burial located on a portion of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT, in Burgersfort, Limpopo Province. The remains were uncovered during the digging of a pipeline servitude for development in the area.

After an initial site visit to establish the origin and age of the remains and the burial where it originated from it was determined that the remains and burial most likely date to the later Iron Age time-period. Pottery, grinding stones and other material in the proximity of the find, led to this conclusion. **The archaeological work was conducted under SAHRA Permit No.3048 and Case ID#14572.** Although this permit made provision only for this one burial, the remains of a 2<sup>nd</sup> individual was also recovered in close proximity to the original one during continued work on the servitude by contractors and presented to the specialist team on arrival at site. It was decided to rebury these remains as well at a new burial location not far from the site on Portion 8 of the farm. Mr. Buti John Mathladi, who resides on this portion and has a Family Graveyard here, gave permission for the reburial of the remains in a section at his graveyard.

The fieldwork was done on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2019 and it is believed that the requested work was concluded successfully and to the satisfaction of all parties. This document represents a report on the results of the work undertaken.

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# **A REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION, EXHUMATION & RELOCATION OF ACCIDENTALLY DISCOVERED IRON AGE REMAINS FROM LEEUWVALLEI 297KT, BURGERSFORT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

APelser Archaeological Consulting (APAC) and Adansonia Heritage Consultants, in conjunction with Roseleigh Funeral Home was requested and appointed by All About Projects (Pty) Ltd, to undertake the investigation, exhumation and reburial of an accidentally discovered burial located on a portion of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT, in Burgersfort, Limpopo Province. The remains were uncovered during the digging of a pipeline servitude for development in the area.

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## **AIMS**

The aims of the work were the following:

- (a) The successful exhumation, recovery and relocation of any possible human and cultural remains from the accidentally discovered Iron Age burial/s and its successful reburial at the Mathladi family graveyard on Portion 8 of Leeuwvallei 297KT in Burgersfort.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology comprised the following:

**Background Research** – Information on the archaeology of the area were sourced from a report on earlier archaeological work on the site completed by Van Wyk-Rowe et.al.

**Photographic** – Photographs of the site location; the excavation process; any possible material recovered and burial pit/s were taken as part of the exhumation process

### **Excavations**

All the work was done by hand, while the new grave locations were dug by earthmoving machine (TLB) and the remains then placed in the graves before being covered up again.

## SHORT BACKGROUND

At the end of 2018 a shallow grave was accidentally discovered on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT. The grave is located within the Municipal servitude for pipeline infrastructure. The grave was suspected to be related to the Late Iron Age as it is in the vicinity of a LIA site where Phase 2 excavations were conducted in 2014. Potsherds and upper grinders were visible during the surface survey at the already disturbed site. An initial Phase 1 Archaeological/Heritage Impact assessment was conducted in 2005 (J. Pistorius), and another in 2009 (C. Rowe).

The site is located on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT. It is situated south of the R555 road from Burgersfort to Steelpoort. The Steelpoort River is situated towards the west. Extensive disturbances to the physical landscape include road infrastructure, industrial, residential and informal settlements (recent and current) in all compass directions of the site. Sections of the property also show evidence of digging/quarrying activities. The site is vacant except for informal settlements and graves on the property, and zoned as residential 2. The study area falls within the Limpopo Province.

An industrial development is planned for this site and will include a Hospital facility. Site preparations have already started and pipeline infrastructure has been established. The site is flat and open and visibility was excellent. Various settlement layers were identified on the site. Recent homesteads and industrial areas are currently visible to the south and east. Mr. John Matladi, who resides to the south on portion 39, was interviewed on 15 September 2014. His house is near grave site LB: GY01 where several of his family members are buried.

Other recent grave sites, LB: GY02 & LB: GY03 were also identified during the two surveys, and are clearly visible on the property. These are all maintained by family members. GY02 consist of three graves and belongs to the Mkhonto/Nkambule family, who regularly visit the site. GY03) consists of approximately 18 – 20 graves. The burial site was still in use up to the 1990's, as one of the dates on a grave suggests. This burial site is associated with the Mnisi family.

Rectangular stone, mud and lime foundations were observed in the direct vicinities of burial site LB: GY03, and opposite the LIA stone walled site (LB/3). These foundations are associated with recent settlement. The remains of this settlement are spread out over the entire section, but it was difficult to establish the number of houses. Surface material included rusted tins and other remains associated with recent settlement. These foundations were rated as of no significance during the previous assessments.

The Phase 1 HIA's of 2005 11 & 2009, identified an indistinct Late Iron Age stone wall (LB/3). The LIA stone wall (LB/3) was poorly defined and level with the surface, and falls within Section 1a, as described in the Phase 1 investigation (C. Van Wyk Rowe: 2009), and directly borders the town of Burgersfort (residential Extension 11). No surface material, apart from one broken upper grinder, was identified. The site was extensively disturbed by robbing of the walls to build recent square structures in the surrounding area. The 2005 & 2009 reports recommended a Phase 2 investigation which was conducted in September 2014. No features of significant archaeological value were excavated on this site.

An interview with John Matladi, who has resided at the site since 1966, was conducted on 13 September 2014. The interview revealed some information on the history of the area. According to him, his ancestors were Sotho (Pedi) origin, and stayed at the site. They were the initial inhabitants of the poorly defined stone walls. During the South African War (1899 – 1902), (or possibly the Sekukuni War, 1876/7) the site was in the

firing line of the battle, as a canon was placed in the hill behind the site, facing Fort Burgers (towards the north). The inhabitants moved away to Ohrigstad (Klipfontein) and settled there. After the War, they moved backed to the original site but were also followed by Tsonga and Swazi groups. Subsequently, square houses were built on top of the stone walled settlement. There were grinding stones and clay pots present at the site, but these were used and removed by the latter groups. The entire area was inhabited by these groups and the stones of the LIA settlement were used as building material for the more recent units. It was further trampled and scattered by livestock.

The remains of a second individual were uncovered by contractors just prior to the December 2019 fieldwork. These remains were most likely from a burial pit similar to that of the originally discovered burial (located a few meters to the north of the second set of remains. Digging on a section of the pipeline servitude uncovered these remains but only a few skeletal parts (skull and some long bones) were recovered with all other traces of the original burial destroyed. The results of the removal and reburial of the two burials and the remains will be discussed in more detail below.



**Figure 1: General location of study area & Burials (Google Earth 2020).**



**Figure 2: Closer view of the location of the 2 Burials as well as the New Location where the LIA remains were relocated to (Google Earth 2020).**



**Figure 3: The location of Burial 1. After the discovery of the remains the contractors covered the remains and left it where it was found.**





**Figure 4: The general location from where the remains of the 2<sup>nd</sup> individual was recovered (Burial 2).**

## **PHYSICAL INVESTIGATIONS**

The physical investigations, exhumations and relocations were undertaken on the 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2019 by a team of Adansonia, APAC cc & Roseleigh Funeral Home. The team was assisted by the On-site Contractor. The aims with the physical investigations were the successful recovery of all possible remains (both human skeletal and possible cultural material from the burial pits, in order to facilitate their successful reburial in the location.

### **Excavations**

The physical excavations were conducted by hand, using picks, shovels, trowels and brushes. The burial pit locations were documented photographically prior to excavation, while the burial pit/s, the remains from it and other cultural material were also recorded.

### **Results**

#### **Burial 1**

Although the burial pit and the skeletal remains were fairly disturbed by the previous trenching for the pipeline, most of the human skeletal remains were recovered and in fairly well-preserved. It seems as if the individual was buried in a sitting position in a pit (possibly in a cattle kraal), although this is at best an hypotheses as most of the context of the original burial was extremely disturbed. The individual was most likely a male (based on the possible cattle kraal location of the burial, as well as the pelvic & cranial

characteristics). A few pieces of undecorated Iron Age-type pottery were also found in the pit area.

### Burial 2

Burial 2 is represented by a few skeletal parts only. The remains were recovered just prior to fieldwork during ongoing trenching work for the pipeline related to the development here, and the on-site contractors had removed the remains away from site for their protection and handed it over to the team on the day of work. The location from where these remains were recovered was indicated to the specialists, but no further indication of remains or remnants of the original burial pit could be traced.

### **Reburial of the LIA remains at the New Location**

As indicated earlier the remains from the two LIA burials were relocated to the Matladi Family Cemetery. The remains were not placed in coffins as traditionally during the Iron Age coffins were not used. Instead the remains were wrapped in mortuary plastic and placed in two separate trenches dug by a TLB. They were then covered by soil and stones from the area. At head of each a metal plaque identifying them as unknown Iron Age burials were then erected.



**Figure 5: Excavating Burial 1.**



**Figure 6: Working on Burial 1.**



**Figure 7: Exposing the edges of Burial 1's pit.**



**Figure 8: Some of the human skeletal remains still in situ.**



**Figure 9: Sorting the remains from the 2 burials.**



**Figure 10: Close-up of the remains from Burial 1.**



**Figure 11: The remains of the 2<sup>nd</sup> individual (Burial 2).**



**Figure 12: Pottery & a broken grinder from Burial 1.**



**Figure 13: Reburying the remains.**



**Figure 14: Reburying completed. Note the Metal Plaques.**



## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion it is possible to say that the archaeological investigation, exhumation and relocation of the two accidentally discovered Iron Age burials from Leeuwvallei 297KT in Burgersfort in the Limpopo Province were completed successfully.

The skeletal remains from Burial 1 were fairly well preserved and complete although it and the original burial pit was extensively disturbed by the trenching for the pipeline servitude. The remains from Burial 2 consisted only of a skull and some long bones, with no other remains or traces of the original burial pit found.

Besides some fragments of undecorated pottery and a broken upper grinding stone from Burial 1, no other cultural material was recovered. The individual from Burial 1 was most likely buried in an upright position in a pit in a cattle kraal. This, and some characteristics on the pelvis and skull identified the person as a possible adult male.

The possibility of more similar Iron Age burials located in the area exists, Should any be uncovered during the ongoing development activities here, then an expert should be called in to investigate and provide recommendations on the way forward.

## **REFERENCES**

General and Closer views of the location of the study area, burials and new burial location: Google Earth 2020.

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