

Report on a Phase 1 Archaeological Assessment of proposed mining areas on the farm Sivonel 42 near Schmidtsdrift, Northern Cape.

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Introduction

The archaeology of the Northern Cape is rich and varied, covering long spans of human history. Concerning Stone Age sites here, C.G. Sampson has observed: "It is a great and spectacular history when compared to any other place in the world" (Sampson 1985). Some areas are richer than others, and not all sites are equally significant. Heritage impact assessments are a means to facilitate development while ensuring that what should be conserved is saved from destruction, or adequately mitigated and/or managed.

The present report concerns archaeological observations on proposed mining areas in respect of an application by Ms Anne Fortune at Sivonel 42.

This report also provides background information on the archaeology of the wider region against which field survey observations may be assessed.

Terms of reference

Terms of reference were to detail observations based on a field survey at the areas in question and to assess significance of impact should mining proceed.

Legislation

The National Heritage Resources Act (No 25 of 1999) (NHRA) provides protection for archaeological resources.

It is an offence to destroy, damage, excavate, alter, or remove from its original position, or collect, any archaeological material or object (defined in the Act), without a permit issued by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

Section 35 of the Act protects all archaeological and palaeontological sites and requires that anyone wishing to disturb a site must have a permit from the relevant heritage resources authority. Section 36 protects human remains older than 60 years. In order for the authority to assess whether approval may be given for any form of disturbance, a specialist report is required. No mining, prospecting or development may take place without heritage assessment and approval.

The Provincial Heritage Resources Agency (PHRA) in the Northern Cape is renewing an agreement whereby SAHRA at national level is requested to act on an agency basis where archaeological sites are concerned. Permit applications should be made to the SAHRA office in Cape Town.

Methods and limitations

A background literature/museum database search provides indications of what might be expected in the region.

During the site investigation, areas of proposed mining were examined. When assessing archaeological resources, surface indications may be regarded as providing a fair estimate of the nature and range of material present in this environment, where soils are generally very shallow or nearly absent, in this instance.

Background: archaeological resources in the region

While much of the surrounding region has yet to be examined from an archaeological viewpoint, certain areas have been investigated in great detail (Humphreys & Thackeray 1983; Beaumont & Morris 1990; Morris & Beaumont 2004). Broadly speaking, the archaeological record of this region reflects the long span of human history from Earlier Stone Age times (more than one and a half million to about 270 000 years ago), through the Middle Stone Age (about 270 000 – 40 000 years ago), to the Later Stone Age (up to the protocolonial era). The last 2000 years was a period of increasing social complexity with the appearance of farming (herding and agriculture) alongside foraging, and of ceramic and metallurgical (Iron Age) technologies alongside an older trajectory of stone tool making. Rock art is known in the form of rock engravings.

Important sites have been researched along the Ghaap Escarpment nearby (Humphreys & Thackeray 1983).

Observations

The terrain at the two localities examined consists of a rocky surface of calcrete and Precambrian dolomite outcrops and locally associated dyke features, with extremely shallow topsoil. Vegetation is dominated by swarthaak.

The area, midway between the escarpment where there are shelters and the Vaal River, with its various ecological resources, would not have been a favoured locale for settlement or other specific spatially focused activities in the past, and hence limited archaeological traces were expected.

In the event no artefacts whatever were in fact observed at the areas inspected at 28°50.264S 23°54.270E; at 28°50.258S 23°54.353E, and (separate prospecting locality) at 28°50.145S 23°55.206E.

Assessment of impacts during construction, operational and decommissioning phases of mining.

Artefacts absent at the locales inspected, and hence expected impact is zero.

Recommendations

The proposed mining is not expected to have a negative impact on the archaeological resources of the region.

No mitigation measures are needed.

Procedure in the event of sites being found during construction or mining

In the unlikely event that sites or features are found during construction or mining, an archaeologist should be alerted immediately in order to assess the find and make recommendations for mitigation, if necessary. All archaeological traces are protected by legislation (see section headed "Legislation", above). The McGregor Museum would normally be in a position to send an archaeologist at short notice, or to recommend an accredited archaeologist for such work.

Acknowledgements

I thank Ms Anne Fortune who accompanied me to the site.

References

Beaumont, P. & Morris, D. 1990. *Guide to archaeological sites in the Northern Cape*. Kimberley: McGregor Museum.

Humphreys, A.J.B. & Thackeray, A.I. 1983 *Ghaap and Gariiep*. S.Afr. Archaeological Society.

Morris, D. & Beaumont, P.B. *Archaeology in the Northern Cape: some key sites*. Kimberley: McGregor Museum.