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**A REPORT ON THE PHASE 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL MITIGATION
OF OPEN-AIR STONE AGE SITES ON A PORTION OF THE FARM
MIDDELPUNT 420KS
IMPACTED ON BY THE BOKONI PLATINUM MINE COMMUNITY BRIDGE
DEVELOPMENT NEAR BURGERSFORT, LIMPOPO CAPE PROVINCE**

For:

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REPORT: APAC023/38

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

SUMMARY

APelser Archaeological Consulting cc (APAC cc) was appointed in 2022, by Red Kite Environmental Solutions (Pty) Ltd, to conduct a Phase 1 Heritage Impact Assessment for the proposed Bokoni Platinum Mine Community Bridge Project. The proposed development & study area is located on a portion of the farm Middelpunt 420KS, north of Lebowakgomo and in the Sekhukhune District Municipality in the Limpopo Province (**See Report APAC022/57**).

Background research indicated that there were some cultural heritage (archaeological & historical) sites and features in the larger geographical area within which the study area falls, while some sites with an archaeological origin & significance were identified and recorded in the study area and proposed development site boundaries during the June 2022 field assessment. Three of these – Sites 1 to 3 – were located in the direct impact area of the proposed bridge. These sites (or find spots) are located on the surface of large-scale erosion dongas that characterize the area, and contained scatters of material dating to between the Middle & Later Stone Ages. As the sites were to be directly impacted by the proposed development of the Community Bridge it was recommended that Phase 2 Archaeological Mitigation be conducted here prior to destruction. Bokoni Platinum Mines subsequently appointed APAC cc to undertake the recommended work.

SAHRA agreed with the recommended mitigation measures in their Final Comments Letter dated to September 2022 (**under CaseID#19154**). A permit for the work was issued to APAC cc (**Permit ID#3771 & Case ID#19705**) in February 2023. Dr. Tim Forssman, Senior Lecturer in Cultural and Heritage Studies at the University of Mpumalanga agreed to act as Principal Investigator for the project, while the University of Pretoria's Archaeology & Anthropology Department will be the Curating Institute for the cultural material (Stone Age artifacts) recovered and sampled from the area during the field work.

This report focuses on the results of the fieldwork phase of the Archaeological Mitigation work that was conducted during March 2023, as well as the required Specialist Analysis of the stone age material sampled on site. The results of the expert analysis are contained in a Specialist Report that will be included and provided to the client and SAHRA as well as a separate document.

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1. INTRODUCTION

APelser Archaeological Consulting cc (APAC cc) was appointed in 2022, by Red Kite Environmental Solutions (Pty) Ltd, to conduct a Phase 1 Heritage Impact Assessment for the proposed Bokoni Platinum Mine Community Bridge Project. The proposed development & study area is located on a portion of the farm Middelpunt 420KS, north of Lebowakgomo and in the Sekhukhune District Municipality in the Limpopo Province.

Background research indicated that there were some cultural heritage sites and features in the larger geographical area within which the study area falls, while some sites with an archaeological origin & significance were identified and recorded in the study area and proposed development site boundaries during the June 2022 field assessment. Three of these were located in the direct impact area of the proposed bridge. These sites are located on the surface of large-scale erosion dongas that characterize the area, and contained scatters of material dating to between the Middle & Later Stone Ages. As the sites were to be directly impacted by the proposed development of the Community Bridge it was recommended that Phase 2 Archaeological Mitigation be conducted here prior to destruction. Bokoni Platinum Mines subsequently appointed APAC cc to undertake the recommended work.

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This report focuses on the results of the fieldwork phase of the Archaeological Mitigation work that was conducted during March 2023, as well as the required Specialist Analysis of the stone age material sampled on site. The client indicated the location and boundaries of the Project Area, and the fieldwork focused on this area and the archaeological sites and material identified during the Phase 1 HIA work conducted here.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Terms of Reference for the Bokoni Platinum Mine Community Bridge Phase 2 Archaeological Mitigation were to:

1. *The sampling of representative Stone Age Material from the site that will be impacted by the development and construction of the Community Bridge;*
2. *The analysis of the collected material by a Stone Age Specialist for inclusion in the Final Phase 2 Report; and*
3. *The curation of the collected material in a recognized Institution (in this case the University of Pretoria's Archaeology & Anthropology Department).*

3. LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

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).

3.1. The National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999)

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

- a. **Archaeological artifacts, 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
- 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 paleontological importance**
- g. Graves and burial grounds
- h. Sites of significance relating to the history of slavery
- i. **Movable objects (e.g., archaeological, paleontological, meteorites, geological specimens, military, ethnographic, books etc.)**

Archaeology, palaeontology and meteorites

Section 35(4) of the Act deals with archaeology, palaeontology and meteorites. The Act states that no person may, without a permit issued by the responsible heritage resources authority (national or provincial)

- a. destroy, damage, excavate, alter, deface or otherwise disturb any archaeological or paleontological site or any meteorite;
- b. destroy, damage, excavate, remove from its original position, collect or own any archaeological or paleontological material or object or any meteorite;

- c. trade in, sell for private gain, export or attempt to export from the Republic any category of archaeological or paleontological material or object, or any meteorite; or
- d. bring onto or use at an archaeological or paleontological site any excavation equipment or any equipment that assists in the detection or recovery of metals or archaeological and paleontological material or objects, or use such equipment for the recovery of meteorites.
- e. alter or demolish any structure or part of a structure which is older than 60 years as protected.

The above mentioned may only be disturbed or moved by an archaeologist, after receiving a permit from the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). In order to demolish such a site or structure, a destruction permit from SAHRA will also be needed.

3.2 The National Environmental Management Act (Act 107 of 1998)

This Act states that a survey and evaluation of cultural resources must be done in areas where development projects, that will change the face of the environment, will be undertaken. The impact of the development on these resources should be determined and proposals for the mitigation thereof are made.

Environmental management should also take the cultural and social needs of people into account. Any disturbance of landscapes and sites that constitute the nation's cultural heritage should be avoided as far as possible and where this is not possible the disturbance should be minimized and remedied.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Literary Research

Research in applicable and available literature was undertaken in order to place the study area in an archaeological and historical context. The sources utilized in this regard are indicated in the bibliography.

4.2. Mapping & Sampling of Material

The Stone Age open-air surface sites (Sites 1 - 3), situated around the area where the proposed Bokoni Platinum Mine Community Bridge will be constructed, were to be sampled, with the material sampled recorded onto a map of the area as well.

Surface sampling was undertaken by collecting Stone Age material scattered around the three sites (surface scatters of material identified during the Phase 1 HIA fieldwork). The sampling was done in a random fashion, collecting individual tools and denser concentrations of material identified at each find spot (scatter). The sampling was done at and around the original GPS coordinate points taken for each site, and from there covering approximately 10m from the center point. The material collected was bagged and labeled and will be

submitted to Department of Archaeology & Anthropology at the UP for curation once the specialist analysis has been completed.

4.3. Documentation

All sites, objects, features and structures identified are documented according to a general set of minimum standards. Co-ordinates of individual localities are determined by means of the Global Positioning System (GPS). The information is added to the description in order to facilitate the identification of each locality.

5. DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA

The proposed Bokoni Platinum Mine Community Bridge Project development & study area is located on a portion of the farm Middelpunt 420KS, north of Lebowakgomo and in the Sekhukhune District Municipality in the Limpopo Province. The proposed project entails the construction of a bridge over a tributary of the Rapholo River. Currently the community has to cross the river on foot or vehicle using a dirt road at this crossing point.

The topography of the study area is relatively flat and open and although vegetation cover on the banks of the river is fairly dense in sections, visibility on the ground & access to the location that had to be assessed was not limited. The larger area is also used for livestock grazing, while the area around the study site has been impacted by rural/urban residential settlement and associated activities. The dirt road that crosses the river/stream at this point has also impacted to some degree on the proposed development location. Large-scale erosion (dongas) caused by water flow (flooding) and overgrazing characterizes the area as well. A few sites with cultural heritage material (archaeological) were identified in the larger area & close to the proposed development (bridge) site during the assessment.



Figure 1: General location of the study and development area (Google Earth 2023).

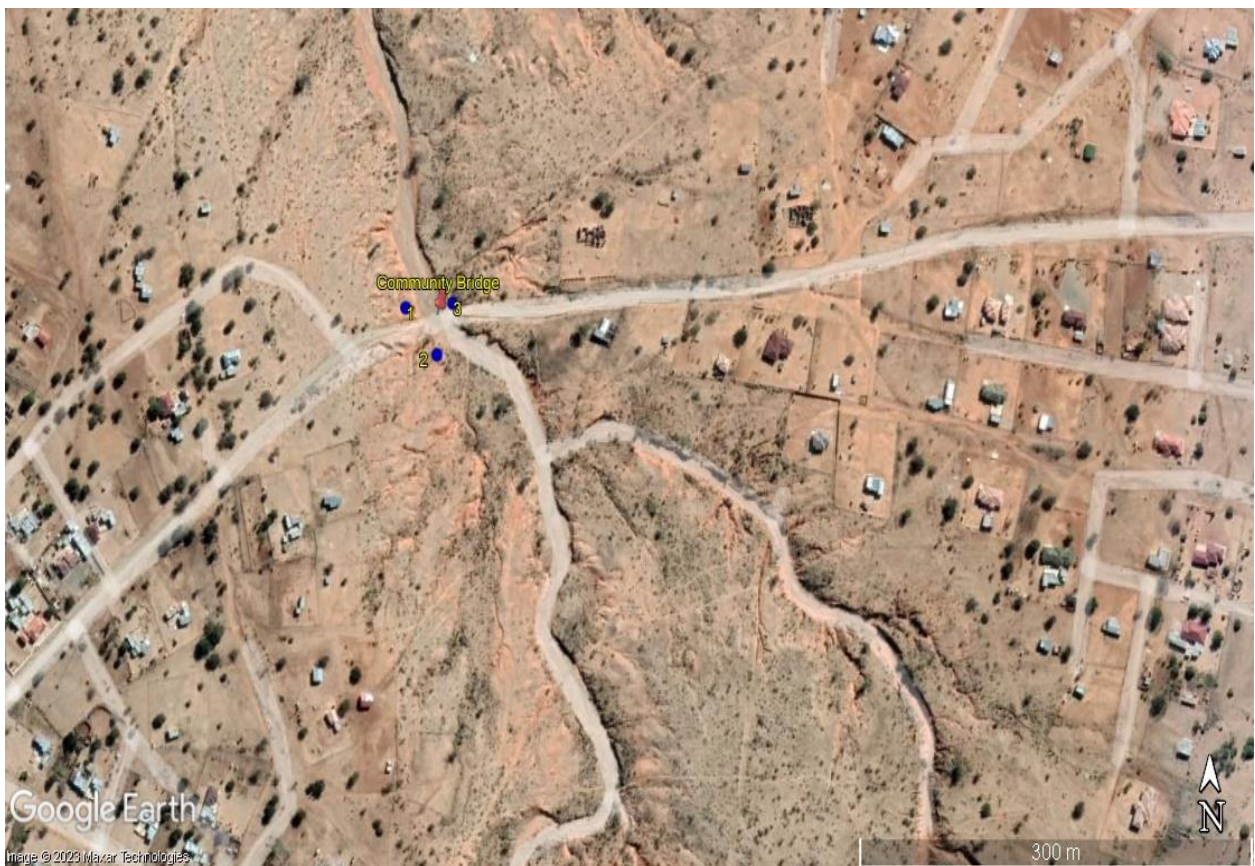


Figure 2: Closer view of the location of the proposed Bridge, as well as the 3 sites sampled (Google Earth 2023).



Figure 3: View of the general area around the Rapholo River.



Figure 4: Another general view showing the erosion dongas characteristic of the landscape. It is in and around these dongas that the Stone Age material is scattered.



Figure 5: View of the road section crossing over the river at the location of the proposed New Bokoni Platinum Mine Community Bridge.



Figure 6: Closer view of the (currently) dry Rapholo Riverbed at the location where the new bridge will be constructed.

6. DISCUSSION

Stone Age is the period in human history when lithic (stone) material was mainly used to produce tools. In South Africa the Stone Age can be divided in basically into three periods. It is however important to note that dates are relative and only provide a broad framework for interpretation.

A basic sequence for the South African Stone Age (Lombard et.al 2012) is as follows:

- Earlier Stone Age (ESA) up to 2 million – more than 200 000 years ago
- Middle Stone Age (MSA) less than 300 000 – 20 000 years ago
- Later Stone Age (LSA) 40 000 years ago – 2000 years ago

It should also be noted that these dates are not a neat fit because of variability and overlapping ages between sites (Lombard et.al 2012: 125).

No known Stone Age sites or artifacts are present in the specific study area, while some sites are known from the larger geographical area (Pistorius 2008; Coetzee 2017; Pelsers et.al 2010; Pelsers 2017 & 2019). Most of these sites are however open-air surface sites located in and around erosion dongas. These tools date to between the Early and Middle Stone Ages mainly. Some Stone Age material was identified in the area during an October 2021 assessment for the Bokoni Platinum Mine Rapholo River Rehabilitation Project, not far from the proposed Community Bridge development (Pelsers 2021: 14-21).

The information below is from Forssman 2023: 5-6 (see Specialist Report):

The Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces have seen less Stone Age research than most other South African provinces or neighbouring regions. As a result, we know less of the Stone Age past from these areas, which demands a greater need for archaeological research at sites with archaeological potential and a greater risk of losing Stone Age heritage without an opportunity to better understand it.

One of the challenges with the Stone Age of the region is the sites' contexts. Most are open air, surface scatters (e.g., Pistorius 2008; Coetzee 2017; Pelsers 2017 & 2019). These site types are common and hold significant information that will aid in our reconstruction of the past. However, they pose several challenges that include, but are not limited to, post-depositional movement, assemblage mixing, erosional influences, and human interactions. These forces, and others, threaten our ability to understand the past and record these cultural assemblages before they are dispossessed of their scientific potential.

There are some sites in the extended region that have provided insights into the last several thousand years of Stone Age history in the region. Well-known examples are Bushman's Rock Shelter and Heuningneskrans (Porraz et al. 2015). At the former, excavations began in the 1960s and the site has more recently been re-investigated. The shelter has an incredible 7m of deposit that span the mid-Holocene until approximately 100,000 years ago. Stone tools from the Later Stone Age but more so the Middle Stone Age are preserved at the site with exceptional examples of stone points, Middle Stone Age technological reduction strategies, excellent faunal preservation, and worked bone and shell beads. Heuningneskrans is also an impressive site with a deposit in excess of 6m in depth (Porraz and Val 2019). It was also

excavated in the 1960s initially and has an occupation sequence that mostly spans 27,000 to 8000 years ago and a later Iron Age use. The site possesses rare combustion features that are assisting with understanding palaeoclimatic information, which will aid in generating an environmental context for the region.

Another well-known site in Limpopo Province is Cave of Hearths (Latham and Herries 2004). The site possesses Earlier, Middle and Later Stone Age deposits as well as an historic occupation. Also found here are early hominid fossils. Although there are other sites in the two provinces and there have been Stone Age studies investigating the sequences of different areas (Korsman and Plug 1992; Kuman, Kathleen et al. 2005; Forssman 2020), there is still much to learn of these regions. Future studies and Phase 2 archaeological mitigations are necessary to grow our local understanding of the Stone Age.

Results of the March 2023 Mitigation Work

The fieldwork part of the Phase 2 Archaeological Mitigation work was conducted in March 2023. The work entailed the surface sampling of Stone Age material (stone tools) from the area around the proposed Bokoni Platinum Community Bridge development location (from Sites 1, 2 & 3) identified during the Phase 1 HIA conducted in June 2022.

The sampling was done randomly on the surface of each site/location, with the collection of material done from the original GPS point of each site, and working around that point in a radius of between 10m to 15m from the original point. No excavation of material was done, and only visible Stone Age material (formal tools, waste flakes, cores, etc.) was sampled. As the Heritage Specialist was constantly harassed by community members, requesting work, money and demanding answers on when the development will be completed, doing very detailed sampling was hampered. It should therefore be noted that the sample size could probably have been larger if the specialist were allowed to conduct his work with more freedom. However, it is still believed that the material collected is representative of the Stone Age period here.

Finally, the sampled material was given to Dr. Tim Forssman (the Principal Investigator for the Mitigation Project) for specialist analysis and the drafting and submission of a Specialist Report. The results of the analysis are incorporated into this document, with both reports to be submitted to SAHRA as part of the Archaeological Permit requirements.

Site 1 Sampling

A total of 15 confirmed Stone Age artefacts were collected from around the Site 1 location. Details on the analysis of these are contained in Forssman's report and will be summarized in another section of this document.

GPS Coordinates: S24 17 46.60 E29 50 34.80



Figure 7: A view of the Site 1 location.



Figure 8: Closer view of the Site 1 location.



Figure 9: The Stone Age artefacts sampled from Site 1.

Site 2 Sampling

A total of 20 confirmed Stone Age artefacts were collected from around the Site 2 location. Details on the analysis of these are contained in Forssman's report and will be summarized in another section of this document.

GPS Coordinates: S24 17 47.60 E29 50 35.70



Figure 10: A view of the Site 2 location.



Figure 11: A closer view of the Site 2 location.



Figure 12: The Stone Age artefacts sampled from Site 2.

Site 3 Sampling

Only 4 confirmed Stone Age artefacts were collected from around the Site 3 location. Details on the analysis of these are contained in Forssman's report and will be summarized in another section of this document.

GPS Coordinates: S24 17 46.50 E29 50 36.10



Figure 13: A view of the Site 3 location.



Figure 14: A closer view of the Site 3 location.



Figure 15: The Stone Age artefacts sampled from Site 3.

The findings from the Specialist Analysis of the material sampled from the three open-air surface sites at the proposed Bokoni Platinum Mine Community Bridge can be summarized as follows (from Forssman 2023: 16-18):

It is not known whether the small artefact sample recovered from the study area is a representative sample of the larger original assemblage from elsewhere, which is likely due to the sites' context. Being alongside a watercourse, it is very possible that the artefacts have moved post-depositionally or have had components of their assemblage removed by fluvial action. This possibility is supported by the lack of various stages of production in the assemblage, notably smaller pieces less than 30mm. However, the tools are mostly fresh and exhibit negligible weathering except for two quartzite and one hornfels flakes.

The tools' freshness may indicate little movement of those tools in place, but this would need to be further assessed with additional spatial data and a larger assemblage. The assemblage is very limited in its size and in the types of artefacts that are represented. This in itself also suggests that the artefact sample is non-representative of the original source location. Namely, this is suggested by a lack of production evidence. Had the artefacts been produced at the location from which they were retrieved, one might expect to find small flaking debris, additional cores, and specimens with cortex. It therefore seems possible that the artefacts were at least initially flaked elsewhere and deposited on site, however this would need to be further assessed by additional investigations at and around the site including identifying raw material source outcrops.

As mentioned, due to the context of finds it is also very likely that the artefacts have been displaced post-depositional, which may have led to artefacts arriving at the sites or being removed from them. The small and non-diverse formal tool sample provides little insight into overall technological strategies. Since other types of artefacts in this assemblage have been shown to be incomplete, one must also assume that the formal tool sample is in a similar state. Miscellaneous retouched pieces are not diagnostic but these small tools resemble those found in Later Stone Age assemblages, in which formal tools are also mostly made from cryptocrystalline silicates.

The chopper is of further interest due to its occurrence in Earlier Stone Age assemblages from southern and eastern Africa. However, these tools are also found in Middle Stone Age assemblages from East Africa (Shea 2008; Blinkhorn and Grove 2018) as well as central Zambia (Barham and Smart 1996). In southern Africa choppers as well as chopper-cores, which are very similar but were unused, are known from Sangoan assemblages that date to around 300,000 BP, the end of the Earlier Stone Age. These tools are much larger than the specimen investigated here (Kuman, K et al. 2005). Nonetheless, choppers are more common in southern African Earlier Stone Age assemblages and the author is unaware of their presence in Middle Stone Age assemblages. When considering the chopper, the small formal tools, and the overall maximum length and form of the majority of the assemblage, it appears possible that tools from the Earlier, Middle and Later Stone Age are present in the assemblage, although the majority are Middle Stone Age. This timeframe spans the last two million years through until possibly the last several hundred years. However, it is not possible to determine more specific time ranges within this chronological span. Nonetheless, there are indicators that the tools represent a mixed cultural assemblage across the sites. Mixing is to be expected in a watercourse where the deposition location is unclear without considerably more research.

Taking into consideration the limitations experienced during the fieldwork, as well as the fact that the Stone Age sample collected from the 3 sites is relatively small, it can however be concluded that the Phase 2 Archaeological Mitigation work at the proposed Bokoni Platinum Mine Community Bridge development site was conducted successfully. The development of the Bridge can therefore continue.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

APelser Archaeological Consulting cc (APAC cc) was appointed in 2022, by Red Kite Environmental Solutions (Pty) Ltd, to conduct a Phase 1 Heritage Impact Assessment for the proposed Bokoni Platinum Mine Community Bridge Project. The proposed development & study area is located on a portion of the farm Middelpunt 420KS, north of Lebowakgomo and in the Sekhukhune District Municipality in the Limpopo Province.

Some sites with an archaeological origin & significance were identified and recorded in the study area and proposed development site boundaries during the June 2022 assessment. Sites 1 to 3 were located in the direct impact area of the proposed bridge. These sites (or find spots) are located on the surface of large-scale erosion dongas that characterize the area, and contained scatters of material dating to between the Middle & Later Stone Ages. As the sites were to be directly impacted by the proposed development of the Community Bridge it was recommended that Phase 2 Archaeological Mitigation be conducted here prior to destruction.

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The fieldwork part of the Phase 2 Archaeological Mitigation work was conducted in March 2023. The work entailed the surface sampling of Stone Age material from the sites around the proposed Bokoni Platinum Community Bridge development location. The sampling was done randomly on the surface of each site/location. No excavation of material was done, and only visible Stone Age material was sampled.

Three assemblages were analyzed to determine stone tool representation, features on the stone tools themselves that might assist with their context, and chronological markers. The analysis of 39 stone tools revealed a relatively fresh assemblage albeit seemingly incomplete with only some stages of production present. Some diagnostic features were identified that showed that Earlier, Middle and Later Stone age components were present. This indicates that the assemblage may be mixed. Mixing is to be expected in the context of the sites, which occur along a watercourse where artefacts are highly mobile. It cannot be determined, though, whether the tools were deposited in their final location due to fluvial action or if tools were removed from these sites under the same circumstances. The analysis of these tools is important as it represents an assemblage from a little-known landscape where comparatively fewer Stone Age studies have taken place relative to other regions in southern Africa.

Finally, it can be concluded that the Phase 2 Archaeological Mitigation work at the proposed Bokoni Platinum Mine Community Bridge development site was conducted successfully. The development of the Bridge can therefore continue.

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