



an agency of the
Department of Arts and Culture

COMMITTEE MEETING**DATES:**

GDRC: 14/06/2022

EXCO: TBC

HRM: TBC

COUNCIL: TBC

DECLARATION SUBMISSION

SUBMITTED BY: Heritage Protection Unit

DATE: 06 June 2022

FILE REF: 9/2/236/0034

SAHRIS SITE ID: 93055

SAHRIS SITE CATEGORY: Archaeological Site: Rock Art Site

SIGNIFICANCE CATEGORY (THEMES): Historical¹, Scientific², Aesthetic

ENQUIRIES: Ms H. Weldon

ITEM: Proposal for National Heritage Site Declaration: The Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex; Lydenburg, Ehlanzeni District, Mpumalanga

A1. BACKGROUND

A1.1. The Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex is one of a number of similar sites in the Lydenburg area of Mpumalanga, where Late Iron Age farmer art is displayed on large boulders. The engraved boulders at Boomplaats are numerous and clustered together at a number of locations scattered across the Farm Boomplaats 29 JT, with two clusters situated on Boomplaats 24 JT Lydenburg.

¹ Historical Value: It is important in the community, or pattern of history; it has a strong/special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in the history of South Africa; significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa.

² Scientific Value: its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage

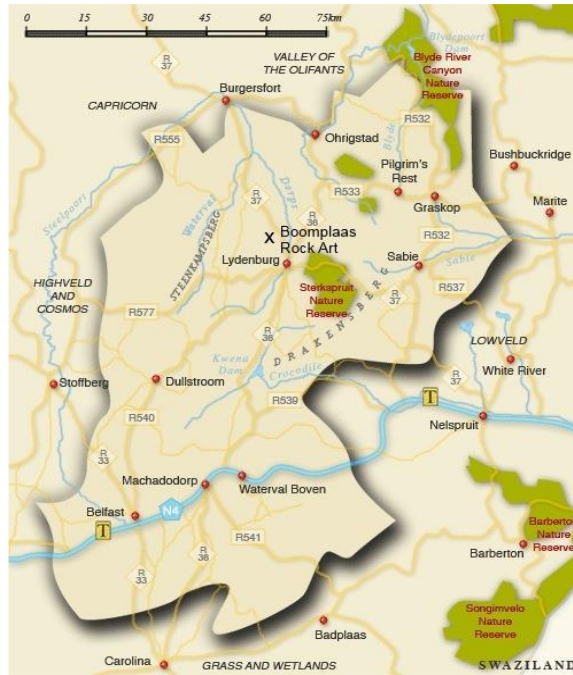


Figure 1: Map showing the location of the Boomplaas Rock Engraving Site Complex

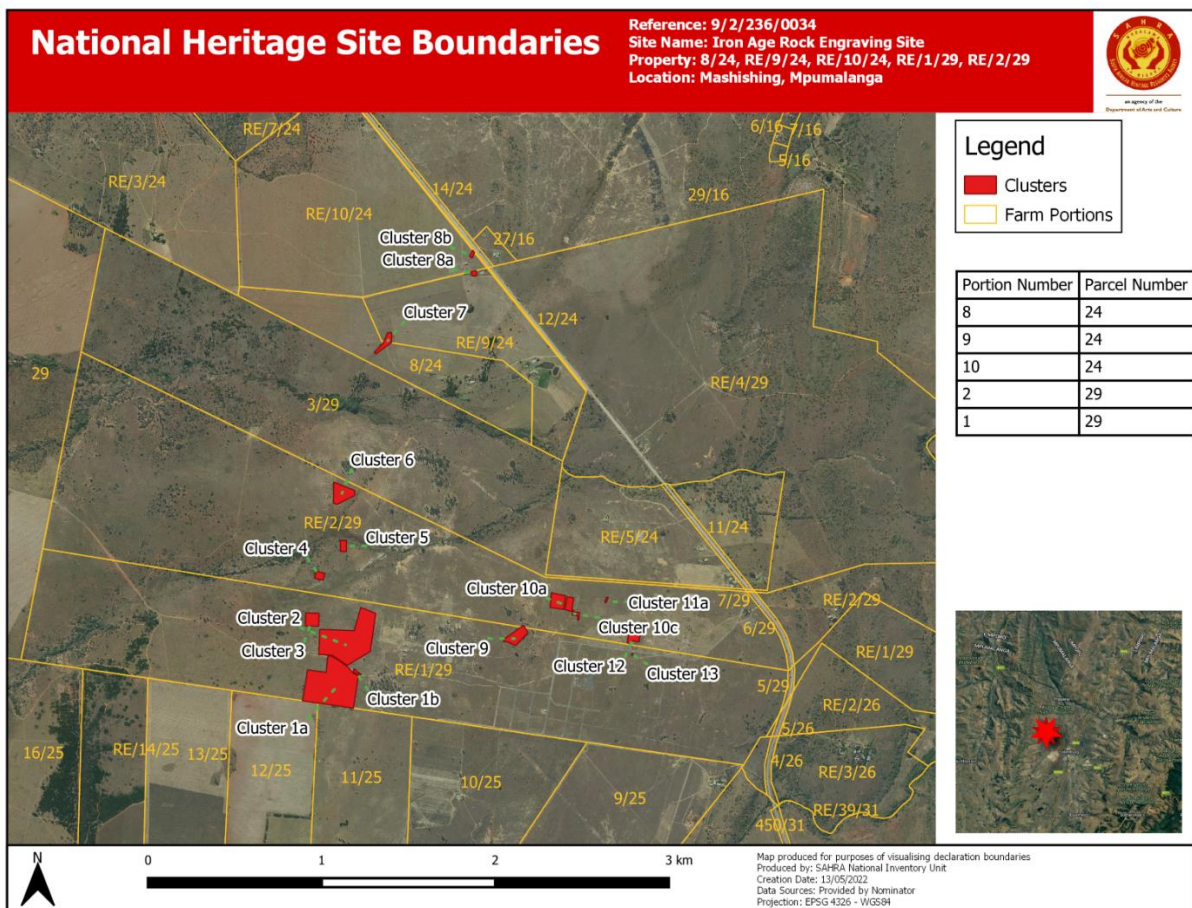


Figure 2: Map showing the cluster distribution on the property

- A1.2. The extent of the site complex and number of engravings make Boomplaats the most significant archaeological site of its kind in South Africa. 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. As much as the site has scientific research value, it is also of significance to the local Dinkwanyane Community, who identify strongly with site.
- A1.3. Following the increased conflicts due to the expansion of the Pedi Kingdom, Mzilikazi and Ndwandwe, the Koni people began to scatter. Some took shelter at the Berlin Mission Station, Botshabelo. Here they met with Dinkwanyane, who was a member of the Pedi Royal family. When Dinkwanyane left the Mission Station with a mixed group of Koni and sePedi followers, he settled at Mafolofolo. The community bought Boomplaats farm in the early 1900s and were forcefully removed between 1957 and 1961. Following a successful land claim, the property was returned to the Dinkwanyane Community in 2001. The Dinkwanyane Community, therefore, associate strongly with the site and it serves as a physical embodiment of a deep-rooted cultural identity associated with the landscape.
- A1.4. 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.
- A1.5. 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.
- A1.6. 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.
- A1.7. The rock engravings are part of the material culture of Bokoni and represent typical late iron age stone walled settlement patterns specifically central stonewalled cattle enclosures, as well as animals and human figures. However, the cultivated crop terraces are notably missing from the engravings. Agricultural activity was a female oriented activity in Late Iron Age times whereas the building of stone walls a male responsibility. This suggests that the engravings were created by males and represented the male world view of Late Iron Age farmers.

A1.8. Through the work that the University of the Witwatersrand and the Lydenburg Museum, the Dinkwanyane Community are in full support of the preserving the rock engravings and are willing to manage the site. They would like to fence the engraving sites to protect them from livestock, and people. There has also been work towards establishing tourism benefit form the site through training community members as guides.



Figure 3: Dinkwanyane Community Members with Lydenburg Museum Curator (photo courtesy of the Lydenburg Museum)

A1.9. Due to the economic impacts of COVID and the closure of a nearby smelter, there has been an increase in the settlement on the farm over the last year or so. However, following a community meeting where the rock engravings were discussed, the community has committed to preserving the sites.

A1.10 There are stone wall remains on the property however these sites do not currently form part of the propose declaration (although a few may end up within the bounded clusters). This is mainly due to the uncertainty of the contemporaneousness of the art and the stonewalled sites.

A1.11. The significance of the rock engraving site complex of Boomplaats, comprising of an extensive area of engraved boulders lies in its representation of an outstanding record of the pre-colonial agro-pastoral society that flourished 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. In addition, th local community identifies and associates strongly with the site, which serves as a physical embodiment of a profound cultural identity associated with the landscape.

A1.12. Currently there are no formal structures for the management of the site. However the Lydenburg Museum compiled and submitted a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) which will be implemented by the Dinkwanyane Community with the support and

guidance of the Lydenburg Museum. The Dinkwanyane Community are also attempting to have the engraving sites fenced to protect them from livestock. A heritage agreement between SAHRA, the Boomplaats Steering Committee and the Lydenburg Museum is also currently being negotiated.

- A1.13. Following the assessment of the site, the site was graded as a Grade 1 site by the GDRC on 03rd November 2020. The national significance of the site is based on its historical, scientific, social and aesthetic values.

A2. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- A2.1. *“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.*

A3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A3.1. The Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex has been identified as having historical, scientific and social significance, as a type-site for the LIA rock engravings, the depictions of Bokoni male world views, the future research and training potential of the site. In addition, the Dinkwanyane Community associate strongly to the site.
- A3.2. The Lydenburg Museum nominated the site to SAHRA in 2019 and have been working closely with Dinkwanyane Museum in conserving the sites. The Museum have also developed a conservation management plan. The farm was returned to the Dinkwanyane Community 2001 and they will be implementing the Conservation Management plan with the support and guidance of the Lydenburg Museum
- A3.3. Public notification letters were sent to the relevant stakeholders on the 14th June 2021. There was a request from a neighbouring farm for the maps and written motivation for the declaration, which were duly submitted to them. In addition, a video presentation of the proposed declaration was presented to the Dinkwanyane Community on 5th February 2022, and the community accepted and supported the proposed declaration. SAHRA did not receive any objections to the declaration.
- A3.4. It is recommended that the site to be declared as a national heritage site.

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1. PURPOSE OF THE SUBMISSION

- 1.1.1. The submission is made to discuss and recommend the declaration of the Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex situated on Farms Boomplaats 24 JT & Boomplaats 29 JT; Lydenburg, Mpumalanga as a National Heritage Site.

2. LANDOWNER'S DETAILS AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS DECLARATION

- 2.1. The Farms on which the rock engravings are situated were returned to the Dinkwanyane Community in 2001 following a successful land claim. The Boomplaats Steering Committee was established and functions as the official communication channel with the Community.
- 2.2. The Community strongly to the site and are in support of the declaration and are represented by:

Mr B.M. Ncongwane
Per Email: bmncongwane@gmail.com

Mr E. Makua
Per Email: nexor@telkomsa.net

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND NOTIFICATION

- 3.1. The notification letters were sent on 14 June 2021 to the following stakeholders as well as the owners as stated above:

- Mr D. Winterbacj (neighbouring farm)

- Kudu Ranch (neighbouring farm)
- Lydenburg Mashisheng Business Chamber
- Mpumalanga Heritage Interest Group
- Prof. Tim Maggs
- The University of the Witwatersrand & The Rock Art Research Institute
- Department of Sports Arts and Culture
- Mpumalanga Department of Cultural Sport and Recreation
- Mpumalanga Provincial Heritage Resources Authority
- Ehlanzeni District Municipality
- Thaba Chweu Local Municipality
- Lydenburg Museum

3.2. SAHRA received comments via email and formal letters from the following:

- The Mpumalanga Heritage Interest Group acknowledged the receipt of the letter.
- Two emails in support of the declaration were received from the Wits Rock Art Research Institute. The Archaeology Programme at the School of Geography, Archaeology and Environmental Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand has been assisting the nominators in mapping and recording the rock engraving sites. They also posted our intention to declare the sites on their social media platforms.
- Kudu Ranch requested both the written motivation for the declaration and maps of the area to be declared. Both were provided. A request was then submitted to have engravings on their property also considered for declaration as they are of the opinion that the Rock Engraving Complex stretched to parts of their property as well. The nomination form and requested information were sent to them.

3.1. In addition, SAHRA published a public notice on the SAHRA website, all our social media platforms and SAHRIS.

3.2. A video presentation of our intention to declare the site was presented to the Boomplaats Community through the assistance of the Boomplaats Steering Committee and the Lydenburg Museum on 5th February 2022. The Community accepted the proposed declaration and have committed to looking after the rock engravings.

3.3. SAHRA received no objections to the declaration of the site

4. OFFICIAL DESCRIPTION OF THE RESOURCE (AS PER THE TITLE DEEDS)

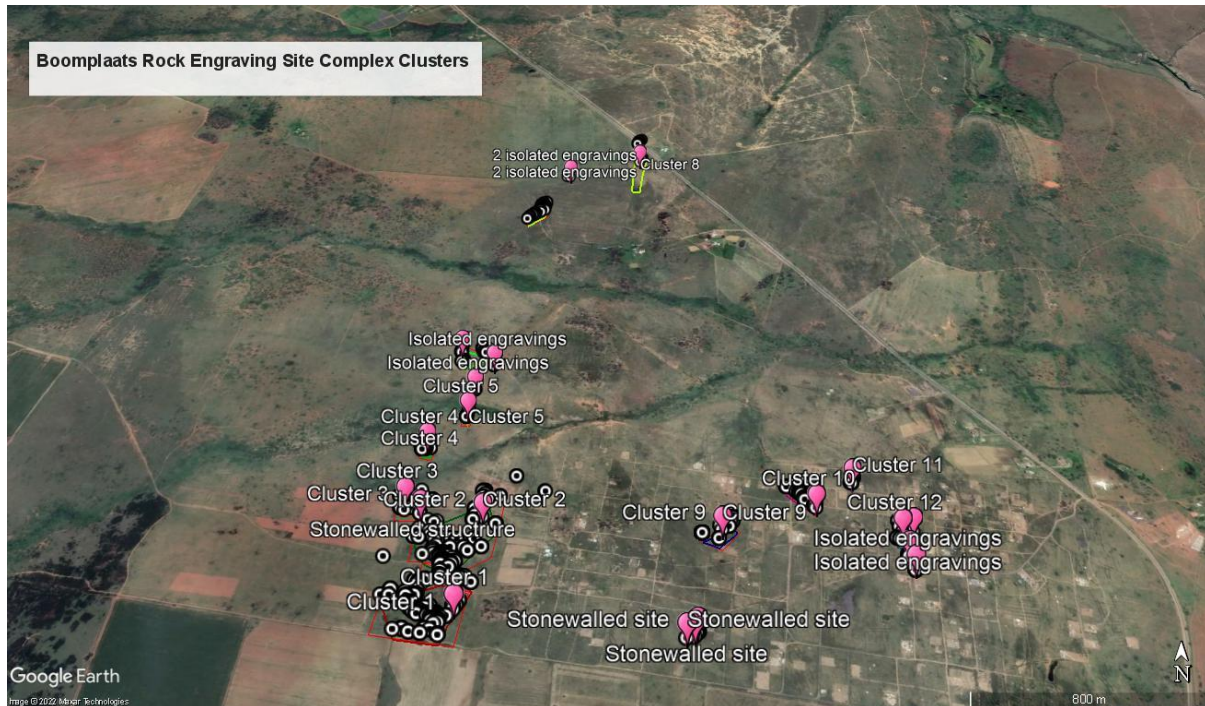
4.1. The various rock engravings are scattered across the farms, Boomplaats 24 JT and Boomplaats 29 JT, Lydenburg.

4.2. The engravings have been grouped together into 13 clusters based on the proximity of the engravings to each other.

4.3. Following the economic impacts of COVID and the associated lockdowns, as well as the closure of the nearby Lydenburg smelter, the pace of community members settling on the farm increased in 2021. The community members are aware of the rock

engravings. However, developments, such as the construction of dwellings and roads have taken place within the proposed boundaries.

- 4.4. The initial boundaries were determined by research and would guide the erection of fences around the engravings. SAHRA worked on revising the boundaries considering developments that took place and the mapped rock engravings as below:



5. DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA TO BE DECLARED (SITE BOUNDARIES)

- 5.1. Please see Appendix A for Schedule of site to be declared together with maps of the boundaries.

6. CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT OF THE RESOURCE

- 6.1. The Boomplaats Community as owners of the property are the original custodians of the site. Currently there are no formal structures in place for the management of the site. Through the structures of the Boomplaats Steering Committee and with the guidance of a Conservation Management Plan, the Community will manage and monitor the rock engravings.
- 6.2. In preparation towards establishing the management of the site, the Lydenburg Museum assisted the Boomplaats Community in drafting a Conservation Management Plan submitted together with the nomination (Appendix B)
- 6.3. In addition, a heritage agreement between SAHRA, the Boomplaats Steering Committee and the Lydenburg Museum (in a community supportive role) is being negotiated. (Appendix C)

7. RESOURCE UTILIZATION

- 7.1.1. The property on which the Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex is situated was returned to the Boomplaats Community. The Boomplaats Steering Committee is established to assist in managing the resettlement and community development of the farms.
- 7.1.2. The economic impacts of COVID and the closure of the Lydenburg smelter has increased resettlement on the property. However, the rock engraving sites are considered to have a high tourism potential.
- 7.1.3. The University of Witwatersrand and Lydenburg Museum with funding from the National Heritage Council have trained local community members focused on heritage tourism and guides. In addition, in generating income for the community, the guided tours and education about the rock art will increase its conservation by both the community and avoiding irresponsible tourism.
- 7.1.4. In addition, there is substantial academic interest in the site and it will continue to be used for academic research, student training and school visits.



Figure 4: Image of student training with Wits University (photo courtesy of the Lydenburg Museum)

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1. It is recommended that the declaration of the Boomplaats Rock Engraving Site Complex as a National Heritage Site is approved.

9. REFERENCES

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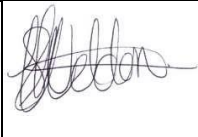
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Date:

Recommendation supported by Council		Recommendation not supported by Council	
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Mr Moses Themba Makhweyane Chairperson: Council	Signature
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