

Site name: Emseni

Coordinates: S 28° 51' 47 E 30° 98' 16

B: PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

Site information

The site of Emseni (S 28° 51' 47 E 30° 98' 16) is an open-air site located on the original farm Baviaans Krantz in KwaZulu-Natal. It is an Early Iron Age site dating from AD 550 to AD 800. This is based on surface scatters from both Msuluzi ceramics and Ndongodwane ceramic phases. In the early 1990s, Tim Maggs and D Green identified and reported on the site. They noted several buried features, which included pits that were rich in cultural material. The surface scatters also included heaps of slag and a pile of furnace walls visibly discarded in a pit. Other artefacts include a solid animal figurine, ceramics balls, tuyeres, and iron ore. Gavin Whitelaw revisited the site in 1996, where he further identified and reported grain bin remains, stone foundations, thick pieces of daga with grass impressions and pits. Whitelaw also identified a piece of a ceramic mask that was part of a surface scatter associated with a possible midden.

The preservation of the daga remains, grain bins, stone foundations, pits, and possibly cattle byres at the site of Emseni is unusual for the Early Iron Age of KwaZulu-Natal. Often, such archaeological features and remains are fragmented, deflated, or have eroded over time, limiting our understand and interpretations of domestic spaces and their relation to the spatial organisation during this period. The site of Emseni provides an opportunity to reconstruct the organisation of domestic spaces and their association with other features such as pits, kraals and middens. The site provides an avenue to test existing hypotheses on Early Iron Age settlement organisation, identify areas where specialised activities occurred, and understand interaction relations between people and their environment.

Early Iron Age Archaeology in KwaZulu-Natal

The Iron Age period in KwaZulu-Natal is divided into the Early Iron Age (AD 400 to 1050) and the Later Iron Age (AD 1050 to the early 1800s). By the 1980s, the occupation sequence of early farming communities in the region was well established using ceramic and radiometric dating. The

earliest occupation is associated with farming communities that produced Mzonjani ceramics, which dates to AD 400. This is followed by the Msuluzi phase (AD 550 to 800), then Ndongodwane (AD 800 to 950), and later by Ntshekane (AD 950 to 1050) (see Maggs & Michael 1976; Hall 1980; Maggs 1980a; 1980b; Maggs 1984).

Early Iron Age communities preferred to settle at the bottom of valleys, on patches of deep colluvial soils, besides rivers and streams, in savanna-bushveld vegetation. Such areas provided deep arable soils required for crop cultivation (Maggs 1980; Whitelaw 1994). Most of the excavated sites in the region have evidence of structures such as houses, ceramic sherds, furnaces, forge bases, iron slag, animal byres, and pits and middens (Maggs 1984; Whitelaw 1994a; 1994b).

Previous excavations at Early Iron Age sites such as KwaGandaganda, Nanda, and Msuluzi Confluence has illustrated that these farming communities had mixed economies and possibly interacted with other farming and hunter-gatherer communities (Maggs 1980; Van Schalkwyk 1994; Coutu *et al.* 2016). Later Stone Age elements such as stone implements and bone points at Msuluzi Confluence and Mamba Confluence sites indicate interaction relations between farmers and hunter-gatherer communities (Maggs 1980; Van Schalkwyk 1994). Further investigations are fundamental in reconstructing the types of interactions between farming communities and hunter-gatherers in the region.

C: SIGNIFICANCE

1- Status of the site:

Archaeological Site

3 – Archaeological Significance

Since the 1970s, archaeological investigation at several Early Iron Age sites such as KwaGandaganda, Ntshekane and in the Thukela Basin has resulted in a complete revision of our understanding of the chronology of Iron Age KwaZulu-Natal. Previous research has also allowed a reinterpretation and understanding of the spatial organisation, particularly with the debates on whether these communities followed the Central Cattle pattern.

The Emseni site provides an opportunity to learn more about early farming communities. In particular about the social dynamics between households, homesteads and within settlements. The research questions posed in this project are different to those from previous research. Early research primarily focused on settlement and their sequence and allowed us to ask further questions on skill specialisation, contact and interactions between culturally distinct communities. In essence, the project will contribute to more knowledge on craft specialisation and specialised skills relating to social status during this period.

D2: PROPOSED WORK

Details of the proposed project

The proposed project encompasses standard archaeological methods that will target residential features such as daga remains, houses/floors, granary foundations, pits, and central areas such as middens and animal byres. Due to the presence of both Msuluzi and Ndongodwane ceramics, it is unclear if the site represents a single long-term occupation or a series of multiple occupations between the fifth century and eighth century. The project will attempt to separate the occupation sequences by mapping all these features and their associated ceramic phases, allowing more detailed analysis and interpretation of the site, and permitting further investigations on the changes (if any) of the spatial organisation over time (Msuluzi and Ndongodwane).

Based on ethnographic data and archaeological evidence, the central area is associated with male activities (see Loubser 1981; 1985). This is evident at the many Iron Age site, for example, at the site of KwaGandaganda, where fragments of ceramics sculptures and ivory fragments were recovered from central-middens and animal byres. These artefacts and the production of these crafts are traditionally associated with men and their space (Whitelaw 1994). Their presence in these archaeological contexts elucidates that a separation of male spaces and residential areas already existed during the Early Iron Age period.

Craft production at these sites indicates that specialists were part of the early farming communities and possibly attached to different households. Besides craft production, other specialised skills may have involved hunting and processing wild animals, processing skins and bones, forging metals, and herding strategies and their connection to different households during the Msuluzi and

Ndondodwane occupation periods. The goal is also to understand how the procurement of raw material such as eggshell, iron ore, ivory and other material transpired during these periods—allowing for better understanding and interpretation of how specialisation informs and relates to social status and ranking within these Early Iron Age settlements.

D 5: SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED WORK

Methodology

The proposed project will employ standard archaeological techniques. These methods include establishing a coordinating grid over the site, mapping all exposed features on the surface, photography and excavation. Excavations will proceed with small handheld trowels, dustpans and brushes within the framework of sub-grids or trenches of 2x2m and following archaeological or natural stratigraphy. The excavations will target residential areas with the main focus on daga features, built structures, granaries and midden areas and pits. The researchers will collect approximately 20g of soil sample for phytolith analysis and a 10lt of soil sample (where possible) from each layer; this is to retrieve microscopic charred botanical remains (sometimes hard to identify during excavation). All collected archaeological material will be bagged, labelled and stored for further analysis in the laboratory. Specialists' analysis will be conducted on both the collected archaeological material (fauna, flora, radiocarbon dating, isotopic and X-ray Fluorescence analysis) following the standard heritage and archaeological procedures.

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