

HERITAGE STATEMENT ALPHA ONE AND PUMP HOUSE.

INTRODUCTION.

The document is supplementary to the application for a permit made by Robben Island Museum and the Department of Public Works to the South African Heritage Resources Agency in terms section 27 of the National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999.

DESCRIPTION.

Situated on the south eastern corner of the island overlooking Table Bay towards signal hill. Consists of a number of structures and an associated, although disjointed, cultural landscape. A structure known as the pump house, a bar area with open patio, water tank attached to bar area, vehicle turning circle, toilets added later as a temporary measure as well as septic tank. Prominent and very visible foundations and ruins immediately opposite vehicle turning circle, disused sewer outfall pipe, stainless steel inflow pipe for pumping sea water to desalination plant. Pumping equipment.



NOMENCLATURE

The name 'Alpha One' is a modern 1980's version for the site known historically since 1858/ 1860 as Ladies Rock. Prior to this the site was known as 'Vogelklip' although it was perhaps erroneously referred to as 'De Franse Kelder' by later historians. The name Alpha One historically also only refers to the building which was the 'officers club' at the site designated as Ladies Rock. It consists of a designated core square from ca 1942-1948

with wings added to the sides and front in the mid 1980's and pump house from the 1940's. The name 'Alpha One' is not well recorded apart from the wooden sign above the main entrance to the building itself. There may be 3 interpretations for its use, viz:

1. A 1939 survey of the island recorded 3 core areas of military significance, one of which was centred around the lighthouse and the general area of Ladies Rock.
2. In the early 1980's it was one of 3 radar stations operated on the island by the prison services.
3. The towers at the main prison are also designated Alpha numerically.

The more likely interpretation is point two but more research is required.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Tangible:

Significance is related to the pumping of sea water for use on the island from WWII to the present.

Intangible:

The intangible heritage significance lies in its aesthetics. It is on a part of the Island which appears to be the closest physically to the mainland with an exceptional view over Table Bay to Signal Hill and Table Mountain.

EXPANDED STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE.

ARCHITECTURAL

The structures at Ladies Rock, on the face of it, have little architectural or aesthetic appeal. It consists of two buildings on the rocks overlooking the sea, a relatively new 'temporary' toilet block and an associated landscape. Maps prior to 1942 show no visible modern structures at Ladies Rock. From 1948 onwards two structures are clearly demarcated. No direct evidence as to the use of these two structures prior to the 1970's is available at this time. Some inferences can be made about both prior to the 1960's, but only the pump house comes out clearly as being used for its primary purpose. It may be inferred that the structure known as Alpha One housed the pump house engineer during the military period.

This section looks at 3 specific areas:

1. The structure known as Alpha One.
2. The structure known as the Pump House.
3. The associated landscape.

1. The Structure known as Alpha One.

The ad hoc additions to the current bar area known as Alpha One dates from the mid 1980's, of what was more than likely a square core prior to takeover of the island from the Defence Force by the Prisons. The interior alterations, however, provide some insight into prison workmanship in the detailing of the knotty pine paneling, light fittings, benches, upholstery, ceiling and the metal and wood work on the bar counter.

Further additions during this period, such as the brick braai [mostly demolished and now the base for the display on African slave history], the open patio, the wing that now houses the toilets, the south eastern wing and the west facing wing, the water tank and associated ladder form part of the architectural heritage value of the structure. Some other visible features, such as the closed off shute into the sea on the eastern side is only understood when the social history aspects unfold.



Shute on seaward side of Alpha One.

2. The structure known as the Pump House.

Industrial heritage is almost always neglected to the extent that the interpretation of the pump house with its many features may be the only way at present to interpret it. Interviews conducted clearly show very little if any memory of the structure. Interviewees vividly remember aspects of the Alpha One clubhouse but appear not to have any recollection of the pump house despite it being there from the mid to late 1940's.

Close inspection shows two [20 centimetre diameter] large rusted iron inlet pipes equidistant from one another on what can be seen as the original level of the floor from the outside. Neither can be seen on the inside. It would appear that perhaps both may still be under the raised floors of both the current pumping section to the east of the building and the second section to the west. By inference it would mean that two very large pumps were housed in the building from the time it was built during the war. It is also highly likely that wartime and later defence exigencies did not allow for disclosure or only allowed limited disclosure of activities in and around the pump house.

Other inlets have been added in time as each corroded from the sea to the extent of becoming dangerous or unuseable. The current inlet was provided ca 2005 and consists of a stainless steel [although of poor quality as it is already rusting] pipe for use by the desalination plant on the island. Concrete and brick pillars of various shapes and sizes to support the pipes are still evident. Some are still in use.

What is interesting is the possible conversion in the mid 1980's by senior officers of the prison system of half of the pump house to a tiled area to service the braai area. More research is however required on this aspect.

Structural remains requiring thorough archaeological assessment next to pump house and below the WWII gun emplacement.



3. The associated landscape.

The associated landscape consists of a number of ruins and structures of archaeological and historical significance. Added to this is the aesthetic and natural environment because the site is on the rocks at the south eastern part of the island known as Ladies Rock. Of note is the WWII structure immediately opposite the present vehicle turning point. This may have been the site of an anti-aircraft gun emplacement. A pillbox is also clearly visible towards the north eastern or Blouberg side of the island [looking towards Murray's Harbour]. Two features shown on maps, namely a cow shed and the slaughter house may be found with good archaeology. There are two features that may be the foundations for either of these. Thorough archaeological investigations are required.

Some structures from the defence period are also visible without roofs, windows and fittings. The so called 'van Riebeeck' Quarry is some 300 meters away, as is a stone with a date from the 1800's and a rubbish dump identified and excavated by H. Vos during the late 1980's.



Anti-aircraft gun emplacement.

HISTORICAL

Period prior to Dutch settlement prior to 1652.

Evidence is lacking for this period for the use of the associated landscape around Alpha one.

Dutch settlement period 1652 to 1795, 1803 to 1806.

The 'van Riebeeck' quarry is situated close to Alpha and the present road would more than likely have been the route taken to transport the Malmesbury shales from the quarry to the loading site between the present Faure Jetty and the modern Murray's Harbour.

Alpha One can be seen on maps from 1785 with the area roughly referred between the names 'De Franse Kelder' [roughly translated as The Frenchman's Store] and 'Vogelklip' [Bird Rock]. One 1785 map is a nautical map of depths around the Island. The area of Alpha One was clearly not seen as a practical landing site for boats, nor does it appear to have any other provenance at the time.

A map produced by the VOC land surveyor Leysten and the engineer Barbier shows both names but while the name Bird Rock appears obvious the name of 'De Franse Kelder' is less so but may provide a clue to the activities of two Frenchmen who worked for the VOC to render the oil from seals and penguins in the late 1600's. Both seal and penguin oil and products require a place far enough from other activities to cope with the smell and waste generated by these activities. A storage place would also have been essential in the preservation of the oils and other products from these animals. By the late 1600's and early 1700's seals and penguins were no longer on the island and the Frenchmen shipped off to other areas for their harvest and brought their kill back for rendition on Robben Island. More research is required however on this aspect.

British period 1796 to 1803, 1806 to 1910.

The area became known as 'Ladies rock' between 1858 and 1860. In 1891 a Butcher's shop is mentioned. A map of 1894 shows a cow shed and a slaughter house to the west of

Edmonds Pool in the general area of alpha 1. The 'van Riebeeck' quarry also features on this map.

A rubbish tip was also established on the south of the island in 1893 for the village and the asylum. This may be the tip that was excavated by H N Vos in 1987. His dating of the material is for ca 1900 but not accurate enough and more research needs to be done.

A map from 1906 shows the area covered in plantations as a source of wood and possibly a windbreak from the winter winds. [blowing from the North West] A structure is visible on the map [photocopy indistinct. Check original in libsa or archive ref. A.G. 5691] These plantations and planted belts were financed by the well known Cape brewer and parliamentarian, Ohlsson. The plantation in the vicinity of Alpha One and its associated landscape no longer exists.

An individual incident of bravery is recorded on 10 July 1894 when a nun named May Harvey drowned in an attempt to save the life a fellow nun. The incident is attributed incorrectly to be the reason for the name 'Ladies Rock'.

The Union of South Africa 1910.

Mention is made of the Butts or the shooting range in the vicinity, but this is far away from the site and may be because of poor oral testimony. Ladies rock has a wishing well in the memory of Jack Keet between the 1880's and the 1920's. The Butts is mentioned elsewhere and needs further research. Between 1915 and 1919 commissioner Brunt was known to fish in Edmonds Pool and a picnic site was placed somewhere between Edmonds pool and Ladies rock.

The removal and destruction of the male and female leper precincts in the mid 1920's may have seen the demise of the slaughterhouse and the cow shed at Alpha One. More research is required.

Defence period 1936 to 1962

It would appear that the two buildings situated at Alpha One, the club and the pump house, date from WWII. When the Union Defence Force took over the administration of the island in 1936 there is no evidence of any buildings on the site. The same can be said for the survey done in May of 1939. The map produced from this survey shows a structure close to but not in the position that the two buildings occupy at present. The remains of a structure are very visible across the road and car park from Alpha One. They may be the foundations of the cow shed shown on earlier maps. It is possible that later defence intrusions obscure this original structure. Indications are that an auto site was erected close by here during the war to calibrate the guns. It is also very likely that a large anti-aircraft gun was mounted on the site opposite the present turning circle. More research is required on these ruins.

In 1942 the structures are not shown but by 1948 the two buildings are there and designated by the numbers 253 and 252 on survey map 8132/71 of that year. During the war Alpha one was visible from the defence trenches and called the 'Den' by the warders. The Den was used for braais and overnight stays. Both buildings appear with the same numbers and an additional notation of A139 on a survey map of 1962 when the prisons took over.

It would appear that the original core of the building now housing the bar area was in disrepair and/or vacant after the 1950's.

Prison period 1962 to 1990's

Between 1975 and 1983 the site was known as the 'kak tip' because all waste went there. In 1978 the prisons closed down the piggery on the island. Leftover food, dunnage and agricultural produce could no longer be disposed of by feeding the pigs. The answer was to dump it at Alpha One. The shute for this is still visible and the area where the present toilets are next to the bar area was the ramp used by trucks to offload the waste. During the early 1980's the site was also converted for the use of officers. Sewage may have been dumped here with the use of a bucket system initially but later the outfall was created elsewhere. From 1983 to 1985 a radar station was situated here as one of 3 on the island.

1990's to present.

In 1993 the pump house is mentioned along with a survey of the dominant vegetation being a large Blue Gum forest. The bar area is described as a 'radar huisie'.

Photographs from 1996 show the asbestos water tank. What is also clear on the outside patio is an elaborate braai with chimney. This no longer exists. The same photographs show that the present removable toilet block in the vehicle turning circle did not exist.

Photos taken prior to and during 2001 show that the Bar area was being used as a kiosk/tuckshop/ refreshment area. This was then discontinued some time later in about 2006. Photo's from October 2009 show it to be in an unused state. It was revived again as a Coffee shop and snack bar in December 2009.

Subsequent to the 2001 photographs the site was renovated and an exhibition of the history of slavery provided along open patio. This resulted in the loss of the typical outside sophisticated brick and mortar 'braai'. Sometime after 2001 the asbestos water tank was replaced with a plastic green one. Extensive renovations were also carried out some time after the 2001 photos were taken.

PROPOSED CONSERVATION POLICY

Appropriate minimal intervention.

Appropriate and sustainable alternate use strategy. ['use it or lose it']

Appropriate, effective, efficient and sustainable maintenance.

Appropriate interpretation and presentation within the associated landscape.

CONSERVATION CHALLENGES

The sites situation on the rocks at the sea provides a number of challenges to the historic fabric as well as the natural environment.

Weather weathering.

Both structures are on the rocks next to the sea. High seas, storms and strong south easterly and north westerly winds prevail. The sea both at low and high tide is eroding the foundations of both structures. The older water and sewer systems may pose problems later if left to the elements.

Plants and animals.

Plants do not pose a major threat to the structures if continuous maintenance is carried out. Birds may fly into windows that are transparent. Rabbits and penguins are not evident. Rodents are a problem for insulation and electrical wiring.

Fire.

Fire poses a threat from activities within the buildings. Very little threat is evident from bush fires.

Appropriate alternative use strategy.

No alternative use strategy has been provided. The buildings are being used as a comfort stop for visitors and alleviates some of the above challenges but new ones take their place. Visitor numbers if not controlled may overwhelm the current and future facilities. Vehicle emissions may affect lime based mortar and concrete.

Vandalism and theft.

Appropriate action should be taken to prevent vandalism and theft.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

The recommendations are based on the fact that the Robben Island busses stop off here for visitors.

1. A permit should be issued for the necessary repairs, alterations and maintenance on the structure and its associated components as specified by the project architects. The structures have through neglect over the last decade been allowed to deteriorate to such an extent that urgent work is required to save the historic fabric.
2. The temporary toilets in the vehicle turning circle must be removed. New toilets are to be installed in the pump house as per architect's specifications.
3. The aesthetics of the area must be improved. Sympathetic and appropriate landscaping should be looked at in terms of indoor and outdoor furniture, dust bins, benches for visitors to sit on, etc. The green plastic water tank should be camouflaged.
4. Appropriate interpretation and presentation of the history of the structures and the associated landscape should supplement the current presentation of the history of the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trade.
5. That the structure must not be treated in isolation but placed within its associated landscape. This will require a determined effort by Robben Island Museum and Department of Public Works to produce and implement a holistic management plan for the structures and their associated landscape.
6. An alternate use strategy must be provided. Although Alpha One is being utilized at present much of this is ad hoc with no proper planning. If Alpha One is to remain as a refreshment stop then the kiosk should be upgraded to serve this purpose.
7. The contractor appointed to do the work must adhere to sound environmental practice for the disposal of waste and not damage culturally significant vegetation.