

Human remains discovered at the Kusile Invest 133 (Pty) Ltd mining development to the north of Giyani, Limpopo

Introduction

Kusile Invest 133 (Pty) Ltd operates a gold mine to the north of Giyani in the Limpopo Province. Mr Mzamani Mdaka of Kusile Invest 133 contacted Mr Tobias Coetzee on 25 August 2021 regarding the presence of bones at the Giyani Gold Mine plant area. According to Mr Mdaka, bones were unearthed during the excavation of a foundation trench for the construction of a feed bin. Four mine workers allegedly unearthed the bones in April 2021, but failed to report the incident to Mr Mdaka, who was only made aware of the findings during the third week of August 2021. A site inspection was conducted on 30 August 2021.

Location and Receiving Environment

The Giyani Gold Mine Project is located 9 km northeast of Giyani and falls within the Greater Giyani Local Municipality and Mopani District Municipality in the Limpopo Province (Figure 1). The project area is located on un-surveyed state land of Greater Giyani 891 LT.

The location where the remains were found has been disturbed by current mining activity (Figure 2 & 3). According to historical Google Earth imagery, some clearing appears to have taken place between 5/2017 and 11/2017 (Figure 4 & 5), while the vegetation of the larger surrounding area was completely cleared by 4/2018 (Figure 6). According to Mr Mdaka, when the area was initially cleared, no surface indications of a burial site existed.

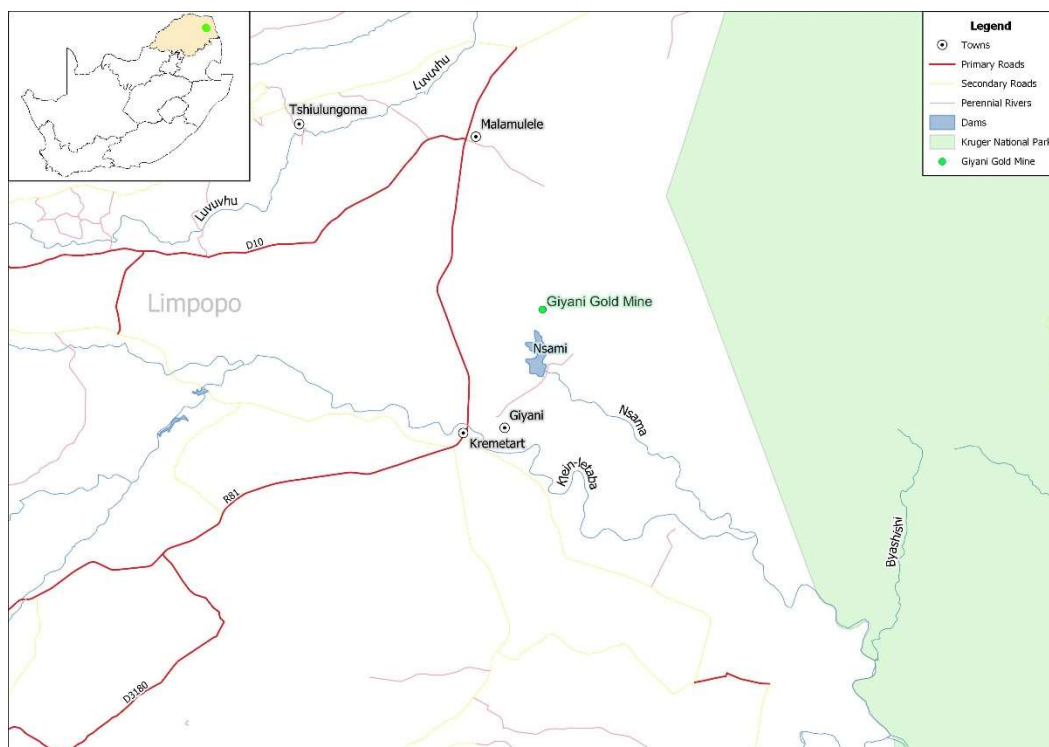


Figure 1: Giyani Gold mine location.

Observations made

During the site inspection, a feed bin mounted on six concrete blocks and two open trenches were observed (Figure 7). The structure measures approximately 3 X 3 m and the trenches 40 cm X 3 m (Figure 8). The depth of the trenches is approximately 50 cm. One trench is located to the west of the feed bin and the other underneath. Both trenches are oriented in a north-south direction. A small disturbed section directly to the east of the feed bin was noted as well. According to the mine workers, this is the location where the bones were unearthed (Figures 9 & 10). No indication of any cultural or human remains were observed on the surface.

The unearthed bones were transported to a location approximately 40 m to the southwest of the feed bin, were placed in a metal container and covered by heavy equipment (Figures 11 – 14).

Accounts according to Mr Mdaka and the mine workers

Four mine workers discover bones during April 2021 while manually digging four trenches for the construction of a platform for a feed bin. The first team started the digging of the trenches during the day and did not observe any bones. The second team continued digging the trenches during the night, working with torches. At close to 1 m, the team consisting of 4 people, encountered bones in one of the trenches. The mine workers also noted that the soil was softer compared to the surrounding area. The bones were removed and the trenches left open. The following morning, a third team backfilled the trenches with the material that was excavated from the trenches. Only the nightshift team saw the bones. Accordingly, the mine workers who discovered the bones were unsure what to do and decided to place the bones in a metal container and covered it with heavy equipment to keep it secure. New trenches were then dug directly to the west of the trench where the bones were observed and the construction of the structure was completed. During the third week of August 2021, the mine workers who discovered the bones informed Mr Mdaka of the discovery of the bones.

Actions taken

Mr Mdaka was instructed to secure the location where the bones were unearthed, as well as where it is currently stored in order to prevent any additional disturbance or impact. Photographs of the bones were taken and sent to Ms Louisa Hutten, who confirmed the bones to be human remains (Appendix A).



Figure 2: General mining development.



Figure 3: Satellite May 2021.



Figure 4: Satellite May 2017.

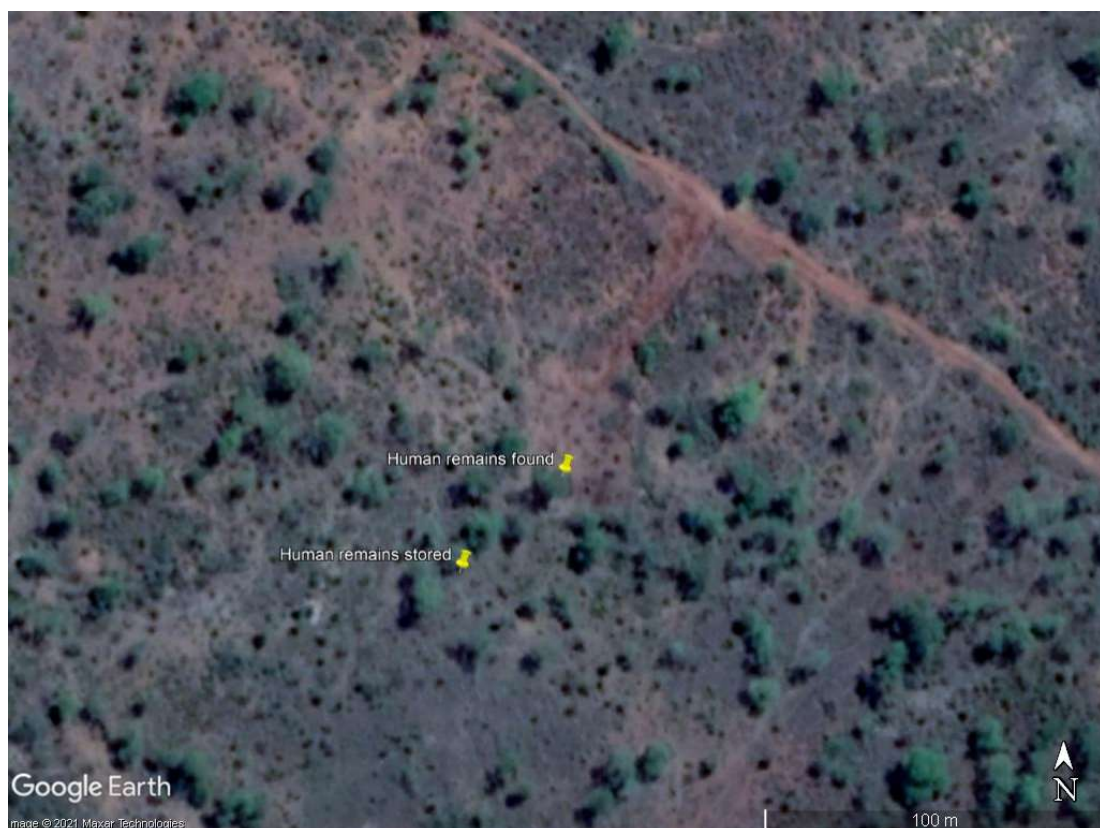


Figure 5: Satellite November 2017.



Figure 6: Satellite April 2018.



Figure 7: Feed bin.



Figure 8: Existing trench.



Figure 9: Backfilled trenches and approximate location where human remains were found. Seen from the north.

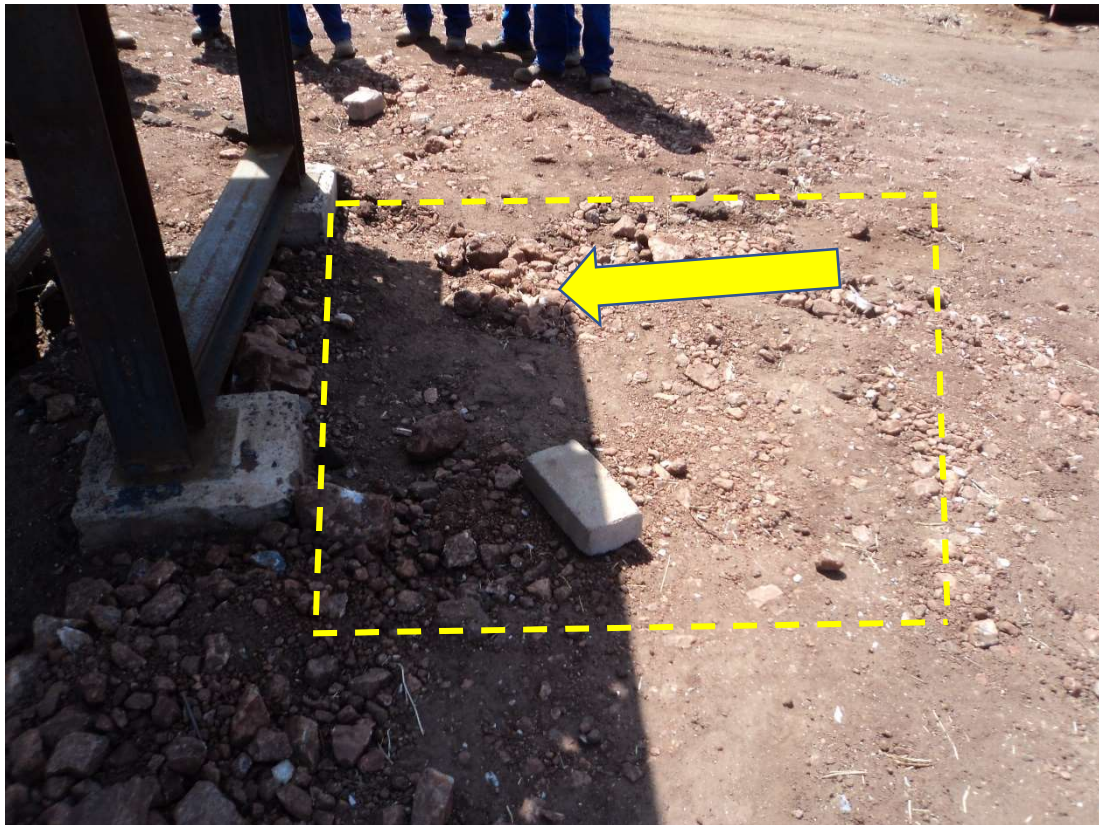


Figure 10: Location where human remains were located as seen from the south.



Figure 11: Locality where human remains are stored.



Figure 12: Metal box containing the human remains.



Figure 13: Human remains – perspective 1.

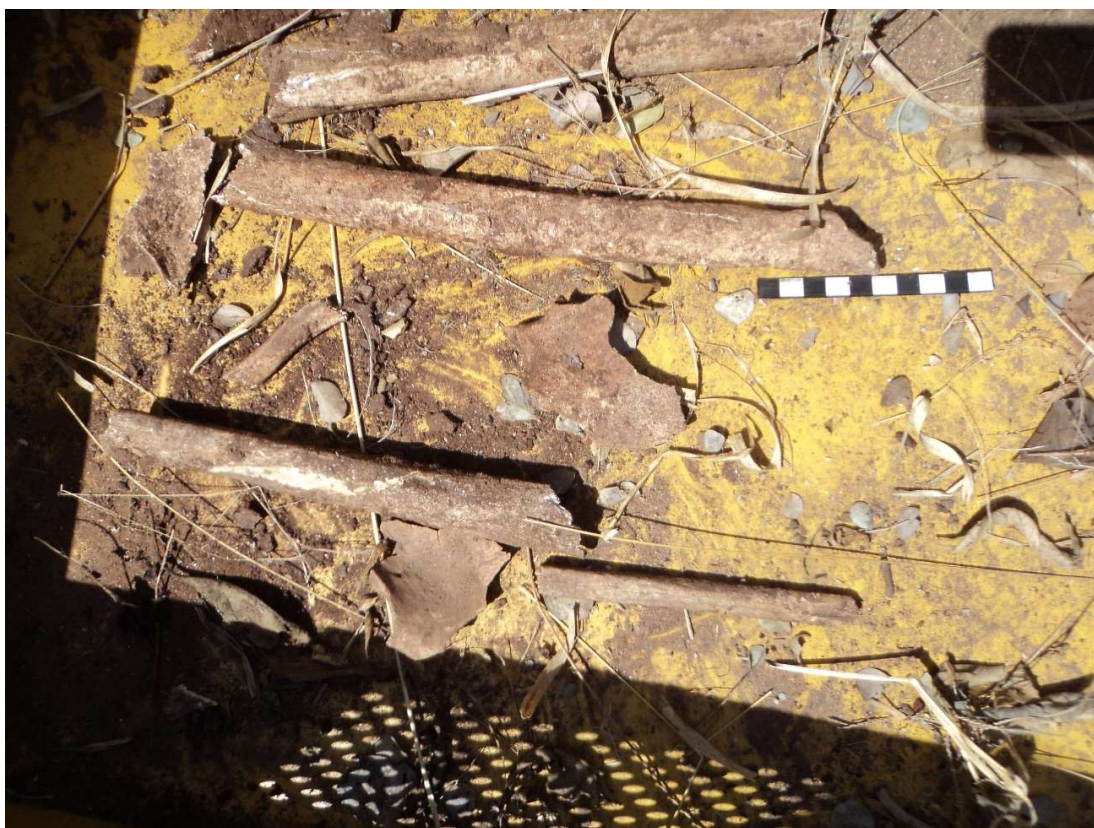


Figure 14: Human remains – perspective 2.

Coetzee
Tobias Coetzee
(Archaeologist – ASAPA
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10/09/2021
Date

Appendix A

Preliminary skeletal report

by

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for

Tobias Coetzee

and

Kusile Invest 133 (PTY) Ltd

3 September 2021

I was contacted by the archaeologist, Tobias Coetzee, to assist in identifying several bones that were found in the process of excavating a trench at a newly developed mine in the Greater Giyani area by Kusile Invest 133 (PTY) Ltd.). The Google Earth Image (Figure 1) indicates where the human remains were found and where they were temporally stored.



Figure 1. Kusile Invest 133 mining site, Greater Giyani area

By studying the photographs that were sent to me (Figure 2), I could identify fragments of a femur, tibias, parts of a pelvis, ulna, and other fragments of bone. These belong to one individual human. No animal bones were identified from the photographs sent to me.

Furthermore, I cannot say much about the individual, but I recommend that the remains should be formally analysed. I also recommend that the Burial Grounds and Graves (BGG) unit at South African Heritage Recourses Agency (SAHRA) is contacted and the archaeologist should apply for a rescue permit to retrieve all the human remains from this burial before it gets destroyed or damaged.

For skeletal analysis, you could contact Hester Roodt, roodt.hester@gmail.com and cell no. 0732224867, an archaeologist based in Polokwane.



Figure 2. Fragments of an 1:Ulna, 2:Tibias, 3:Femur and 4:Pelvis fragments