



# ADANSONIA HERITAGE CONSULTANTS

**t/a CHRISTINE ROWE**

P.O. BOX 75, PILGRIM'S REST, 1290

CELL: 0828719553 / E-MAIL: christinevwr@gmail.com

MEMBER OF ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN PROFESSIONAL ARCHAEOLOGISTS

ATT: SAHRA Burial Grounds and Graves (BGG) Unit  
DATE: 30 November 2018  
FROM: Christine Rowe

Dear Ms Thingahangwi Tshivhase

## **ACCIDENTAL LIA HUMAN REMAINS DISCOVERED AT BURGERSFORT**

### **BACKGROUND:**

A shallow grave was accidentally discovered on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT (fig. 1). The grave is currently within the Municipal servitude for pipeline infrastructure (fig. 2). The grave is suspected to be of the Late Iron Age as it is in the vicinity of a LIA site where Phase 2 excavations were conducted in 2009.<sup>1</sup> Potsherds and upper grinders were visible during the surface survey at the already disturbed site (see figs. 4 & 5). A site visit was conducted on 10 November 2018 by the author. An initial Phase 1 Archaeological / Heritage Impact assessment was conducted in 2005 (J. Pistorius),<sup>2</sup> and another in 2009 (C. Rowe).<sup>3</sup>

<b>SITE: Leeuwvallei</b>	<b>GPS South</b>	<b>GPS East</b>
<b>Accidentally discovered human remains (LIA)</b>	S 24° 39' 47.87"	E 30° 18' 31.20"

The aim for this assessment was to investigate and assess the accidentally discovered human remains which were discovered at this site, and to determine a possible age in order to make a recommendation for the correct mitigation measures and processes involved.

<sup>1</sup> C. VW- Rowe & A. Pelser: A Report on the Archaeological investigation of a poorly defined LIA stone wall located on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT, to be impacted upon by residential development Site LB/3, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> J.C.C. Pistorius, Phase 1 HIA for the proposed New Burgersfort Development, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> C. VW- Rowe: Phase 1 AIA/ HIA sections 1a, 2, 3, & 4 of Leeuwvallei 297KT, Burgersfort, 2009.



**Fig. 1:** The human remains which were accidentally discovered is marked with stones.



**Fig. 2:** The “grave” is within the pipeline servitude (see red line which indicates the direction of the pipeline infrastructure and manholes; the R555 to the north is indicated by the arrow). The image is taken from the accidentally discovered grave.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA AND SITE

The site is located on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT. It is situated south of the R555 road from Burgersfort to Steelpoort. The Steelpoort River is situated towards the west. Extensive disturbances to the physical landscape include road infrastructure, industrial, residential and informal settlements (recent and current) in all compass directions of the site. Sections of the property also show evidence of digging / quarrying activities. The site is vacant except for informal settlements and graves on the property, and zoned as residential 2. The study area falls within the Limpopo Province.

An industrial development is planned for this site and will include a Hospital facility. Site preparations have already started and pipeline infrastructure has been established (fig. 2). A Google image of 2010 indicates extensive disturbances such as housing infrastructure on the site (see Map 2). The site is flat and open and visibility was excellent.

Various settlement layers were identified on the site. Recent homesteads and industrial areas are currently visible to the south and east. Mr. John Matladi, who resides to the south on portion 39, was interviewed on 15 September 2014. His house is near grave site LB:GY01 where several of his family members are buried.<sup>4</sup> One of the dates on a grave is from 1958 (See Map 2).

Other recent grave sites, LB:GY02 & LB:GY03 were also identified during the two surveys,<sup>5</sup> and are clearly visible on the property. These are all maintained by family members. GY02 consist of three graves (fig. 3), and belongs to the Mkhonto / Nkambule family, who regularly visit the site.<sup>6 7</sup>

Another graveyard (LB:GY03), was identified to the west, and consists of approximately 18 – 20 graves. The burial site was still in use up to the 1990's, as one of the dates on a grave suggests. This burial site is associated with the Mnisi family.<sup>8</sup> (See Map 2 for the location of the grave sites).

---

<sup>4</sup> C. VW- Rowe: 2009, Phase 1 AIA/ HIA sections 1a, 2, 3, & 4 of Leeuwvallei 297KT, Burgersfort, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> C. VW- Rowe: 2009, Phase 1 AIA/ HIA sections 1a, 2, 3, & 4 of Leeuwvallei 297KT, Burgersfort, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication: Mr. Buks van der Wal, e-mail access: 2018-11-29.

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication: Mr. John Matladi, 2018-11/15.

<sup>8</sup> C. VW- Rowe: 2009, Phase 1 AIA/ HIA sections 1a, 2, 3, & 4 of Leeuwvallei 297KT, Burgersfort, p. 13.



**MAP 1:** The location of the accidental grave within the wider context of Burgersfort.



**MAP 2:** 2010 Google image of the location of grave sites GY01, GY02 & GY03 as well as the LIA stone walled site LB/3. The accidentally discovered single LIA grave, is also indicated. The red ovals indicate housing infrastructure (shacks), roads and excavations (2010). John Matladi's house is indicated by the arrow.



**Fig. 3:** The three marked graves (GY02) of the Mkhonto / Nkanbule family, on the site.

Rectangular stone, mud and lime foundations were observed in the direct vicinities of burial site LB:GY03, and opposite the LIA stone walled site (LB/3). These foundations are associated with recent settlement. The remains of this settlement are spread out over the entire section, but it was difficult to establish the number of houses.<sup>9</sup> Surface material included rusted tins and other remains associated with recent settlement. These foundations were rated as of no significance during the previous assessments.<sup>10</sup>

The Phase 1 HIA's of 2005<sup>11</sup> & 2009,<sup>12</sup> identified an indistinct Late Iron Age stone wall (LB/3). The LIA stone wall (LB/3) was poorly defined and level with the surface, and falls within Section 1a, as described in the Phase 1 investigation (C. Van Wyk Rowe: 2009), and directly borders the town of Burgersfort (residential extension 11). No surface material, apart from one broken upper grinder, was identified.<sup>13</sup> The site was extensively disturbed by robbing of the walls to build recent square structures in the surrounding area. The 2005 & 2009 reports recommended

---

<sup>9</sup> C. VW- Rowe: 2009, Phase 1 AIA/ HIA sections 1a, 2, 3, & 4 of Leeuwvallei 297KT, Burgersfort, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> C. VW- Rowe: 2009, Phase 1 AIA/ HIA sections 1a, 2, 3, & 4 of Leeuwvallei 297KT, Burgersfort, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> J.C.C. Pistorius, Phase 1 HIA for the proposed New Burgersfort Development, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> C. VW- Rowe: 2009, Phase 1 AIA/ HIA sections 1a, 2, 3, & 4 of Leeuwvallei 297KT, Burgersfort, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> C. VW- Rowe & A. Pelser: A Report on the Archaeological investigation of a poorly defined LIA stone wall located on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT, to be impacted upon by residential development Site LB/3, 2014.

a Phase 2 investigation which was conducted in September 2014. No features of significant archaeological value were excavated on this site.<sup>14</sup>



**Figs. 4 & 5:** The 2018 surface survey revealed upper grinders near the accidentally discovered human remains.

## DISCUSSION

An interview with John Matladi, who lived at the site since 1966, was conducted on 13 September 2014. The interview revealed some information on the history of the area.

According to him, his ancestors were Sotho (Pedi) origin, and stayed at the site. They were the initial inhabitants of the poorly defined stone walls. During the South African War (1899 – 1902), (or possibly the Sekukuni War, 1876/7) the site was in the firing line of the battle, as a canon was placed in the hill behind the site, facing Fort Burgers (towards the north). The inhabitants moved away to Ohrigstad (Klipfontein) and settled there. After the War, they moved backed to the original site but were also followed by Tsonga and Swazi groups. Subsequently, square houses were built on top of the stone walled settlement. There were grinding stones and clay pots present at the site, but these were used and removed by the latter groups. The entire area was inhabited by these groups and the stones of the LIA settlement were used as building material for the more recent units. It was further trampled and scattered by livestock.<sup>15</sup> See Appendix 2 for a further discussion on the Late Iron Age in this area.

---

<sup>14</sup> C. VW- Rowe & A. Pelsler: A Report on the Archaeological investigation of a poorly defined LIA stone wall located on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT, to be impacted upon by residential development Site LB/3, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> C. VW- Rowe & A. Pelsler: A Report on the Archaeological investigation of a poorly defined LIA stone wall located on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT, to be impacted upon by residential development Site LB/3, 2014.

The accidentally discovered human remains were covered immediately by workers on site. During the site visit, the pit was not opened up and left intact. It is believed that the burial dates to the Late Iron Age, possibly belonging to the ancestors of John Matladi. All the other burial sites on the property are accounted for.

Human remains or graves are regarded as a high priority by the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA). Graves which were identified on the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT, Burgersfort are protected by the NHRA (no. 25 of 1999, Sec 36), which states:

**“Section 36 of the NHRA**

Section 36 of the NHRA stipulates that no person may, without a permit issued by SAHRA, destroy, damage, alter, exhume or remove from its original position or otherwise disturb any grave or burial ground older than 60 years, which is situated outside a formal cemetery administered by a local authority. It is possible that chance burials might be discovered during development of road infrastructure or agricultural activities.”<sup>16</sup>

**CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION**

ADANSONIA HERITAGE CONSULTANTS (in association with APELSER Archaeological Consulting cc) were appointed to conduct a Phase 2 Archaeological investigation of the Late Iron Age stone wall on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT in 2014.<sup>17</sup> The municipality have put a pipeline infrastructure in place and accidental human remains were discovered during these operations. ADANSONIA HERITAGE CONSULTANTS were approached to investigate and assess the discovery of this previously unknown burial in a municipal servitude which is also next to the main road (R555) to Steelpoort (see Map 1 & 2).

The aims of the assessment were to investigate and assess the uncovered burial and human remains (which were covered by the workers on site), as well as to determine a possible date for the site, so that correct mitigation measures and processes may be recommended.

Workers at the site exposed skeletal remains which were covered after the discovery and left intact. The site was marked and fenced (the fence around it has since been stolen). The area was ripped in preparation for the future development, and the only surface material visible on the site were upper grinders and fragments of clay potsherds (see figs. 4 & 5).

---

<sup>16</sup> National Heritage Resources Act, no. 25 of 1999. pp. 12-14

<sup>17</sup> C. VW- Rowe & A. Pelser: A Report on the Archaeological investigation of a poorly defined LIA stone wall located on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT, to be impacted upon by residential development Site LB/3, 2014.

There are currently three burial sites on the property which are all accounted for. The recent burial site, GY01 belongs to the Matladi family, who still resides near the burial site. The three graves of GY02, belongs to the Mkhonto / Nkambule family who regularly visit the site, and GY03 is associated with the Mnisi family.

The accidentally discovered human remains to the north, which are unaccounted for, support the argument that it belonged to an older settlement phase (Late Iron Age) on this site. John Matladi, who resides on the site, stated that his ancestors were of Sotho (Pedi) origin, and stayed on this site (see the interview in the section *DISCUSSION*, above). They were the initial inhabitants of the poorly defined stone walls which were on the site before later settlement, and also of the poorly defined LIA stone wall (LB/3), which was excavated in 2014 by the author.

During the South African War (1899 – 1902), (or possibly the Sekukuni War, 1876/7) the site was in the firing line of the battle, as a canon was placed in the hill behind the site, facing Fort Burgers (towards the north). The inhabitants of the site moved away to Ohrigstad (Klipfontein). After the War, they moved back to the original site but were also followed by other groups such as Tsonga and Swazi groups. Subsequently, square houses were built on top of the LIA stone walled settlement. Archaeological material such as grinding stones and clay pots were used and / or removed by the latter groups. The entire area was inhabited by these groups and the stones of the LIA settlement were used as building material for the more recent units which were observed during the Phase 1 investigations.<sup>18</sup> John Matladi also claims that he will have no objection that the accidentally discovered human remains be moved to his family graveyard (GY01).<sup>19</sup>

The shallow grave which is suspected to be of LIA origin, may be handled as a grave rescue operation.

---

<sup>18</sup> C. VW- Rowe & A. Pelsler: A Report on the Archaeological investigation of a poorly defined LIA stone wall located on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT, to be impacted upon by residential development Site LB/3, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Personal communication: Mr. Buks van der Wal, e-mail access: 2018-11-29.



## REFERENCES:

### ARCHIVAL SOURCES

- PRMA: Information file 9/2. *Prehistory & Archaeology*.
- PRMA: Information file 10/1. *Ethnology & Anthropology*.
- SAHRA Review Comment, Arc. Ref. 9/2/236/0032, 12-10-2010.
- SAHRA (Permit no.: 1840) 2014.

### GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS:

#### • National Legislation

- Republic of South Africa, *National Heritage Resources Act*, (Act No. 25 of 1999).

### LITERATURE

- BERGH, J.S. (red.), *Geskiedenis Atlas van Suid Afrika: Die vier Noordelike Provinsies*. J.L. van Schaik, 1999.
- COLLETT, D.P., 1982. Excavations of stone-walled ruin types in the Badfontein Valley, Eastern Transvaal, South Africa. *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, vol 37, no 135: 34-43.
- DE JONGH, M. (red.), *Swatini*, UNISA, 1987.
- EVERS, T.M., 1975. Recent Iron Age research in the Eastern Transvaal, South Africa, *The South African Archaeological Bulletin*, vol 30, no 119/120: 70-83.
- HAMPSON, et al., 2002. The rock art of Bongani Mountain Lodge, SA Archaeological Bulletin 57.
- HUFFMAN, T.N., 2007. *Handbook to the Iron Age. The archaeology of pre-colonial farming societies in Southern Africa*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press: Scottsville.
- MAKHURA, T., Early Inhabitants, in Delius, P. (ed)., *Mpumalanga: History and Heritage*. Natal University Press, 2007.
- THEAL, G.M., *History of South Africa from 1873 – 1884*, Cape Town, unknown.
- VAN WARMELO, N.J., *A Preliminary Survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa*, Pretoria, 1935.
- VAN WARMELO, N.J., *A genealogy of the house of Sekhukhune*, Pretoria, 1944.
- ZIERVOGEL, D. *The Eastern Sotho: A Tribal, Historical and Linguistic Survey with Ethnographical notes on the Pai, Kutswe and Pulana Bantu Tribes*. Pretoria, 1953.

## LITERARY SOURCES

- Pelsler, A., 2014: *Report on the first phase archaeological investigations on LIA stone walled sites located on portion 7 of the farm Rooidraai 34JT to be impacted by commercial and residential developments: sites RDR 7 & 1C, Lydenburg, Mpumalaga.*
- Pistorius, J.C.C., *A Phase 1 HIA study for the proposed New Burgersfort ext 30 residential and the Burgersfort ext 31 industrial development projects near Burgersfort*, February 2005.
- Rowe, C., 2009. *Phase 1 Archaeological and Heritage Impact assessment on sections 1a, 1b, 2, 3, and 4 of Leeuwvallei 297KT, Burgersfort, Limpopo Province.*
- Rowe, C. 2009. *Heritage Management of Archaeological, Historical and Industrial resources on the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve*, MA dissertation. Pretoria: UP.

## ELECTRONIC INFORMATION

- SAHRA, Burial sites, [Http://www.sahra.org.za/burial.htm](http://www.sahra.org.za/burial.htm), Access, 2008-10-16.
- The Sekukuni Wars, <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol1025hk.html>, Access, 2009-06-25.
- Military history: (<http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol1025hk.html>) Access: 2009-06-25.

## PERSONAL INFORMATION

- Personal information: Mr. B. Van der Wal, Cell 0822590204, 2009-03-28 / 2014-07-21 / 2018-11-29.
- Personal information: J.P. Celliers, 'HIA, Lydenburg Townlands, reply', [jcelliers@thabachweu.org.za](mailto:jcelliers@thabachweu.org.za) 2009-06-18.
- Personal information: John Buti Matladi, 2014-09-13.

## APPENDIX 1

Extract from:

***C. Van Wyk Rowe, (PI, Anton Pelsler, APAC), 2014: A report on the Archaeological investigation of a poorly defined LIA stone wall located on the remainder of portion 58 of the farm Leeuwvallei 297KT, to be impacted upon by residential development: Site LB/3***

The Late Iron Age spans a period between AD 1300-1840, and is associated with groups like the Ndebele, Bakoni and BaPedi in the area. Sites in the area are characterized by widespread stone walling such as the Badfontein type that were used to define homestead areas, agricultural land (terracing) and cattle tracks. Maize was introduced into southern Africa by the Portuguese during the Late Iron Age contributing to an increase in population. Its cultivation is linked archaeologically to special grindstones (Huffman 2007; Pelsler 2014: 8). Huffman (2007: 32) place the stone walling in the Burgersfort area into the Badfontein tradition (fig. 6).

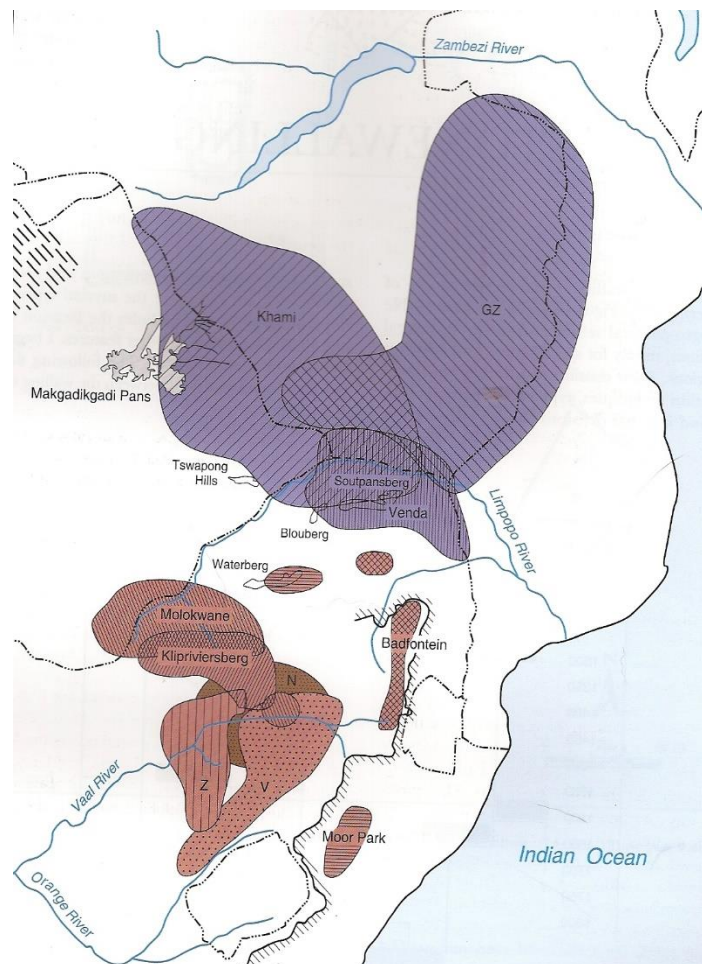


Fig. 6: Distribution of LIA stone walled complexes (Huffman 2007: 32).

The Pedi is the most famous group to have inhabited the Lydenburg / Steelpoort / Burgersfort areas in historic times. The area in which these people settled is historically known as Bopedi but other groups resided here before the Pedi came onto the scene. Among the first of these were the Kwena or Mongatane, who came from the north and were probably of Sotho origin. A second tribe to settle in Bopedi, before the arrival of the Pedi was the Roka, followed by the Koni (E-mail reply: JP Cilliers 2009-06-18).

Some Koni entered the area from the east and others from the north-west. According to historians, most Koni trace their origin to Swaziland and therefore claim that they are related to the Nguni. After the first Koni settled in the southern part of Bopedi, the area became known as Bokoni. Many people who were previously known as Roka also adopted the name Koni as the name "Roka" was not always held in esteem by other groups.

Historically the Pedi was a relatively small group who by various means built up a considerable empire. The Pedi are of Sotho origin. They migrated southwards from the Great Lakes in Central Africa some five centuries ago. The names of their chiefs can be traced to a maximum of fifteen generations. Historical events can be deduced reasonably well for the last two centuries, while sporadic events can be described during the preceding centuries (E-mail reply: JP Cilliers 2009-06-18).

According to oral tradition the BaKoni were already in the area of the escarpment before the arrival of the Pedi (a northern Sotho group), which would indicate a date of before AD 1650 for some of the settlements. Therefore, the BaKoni clans were some of the earliest people to settle in what are today the Mpumalanga / Limpopo Provinces. They most likely followed a central route of migration out of northern KwaZulu-Natal, becoming 'Sotho-ized' along the way (Pelser 2014: 10). Later, the Badfontein Koni became allied to the Pedi. This is reflected in the archaeological evidence, which shows that ceramics associated with the Badfontein walling are historic Pedi pottery of the Marateng facies. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the Pedi ruled an extensive area that included areas surrounding Lydenburg / Burgersfort, although Swazi and Ndebele groups also occupied some parts of the region – mainly in caves referred to as refuge sites. They were shortly followed by the first European settlers in the area (Pelser 2014:10).

Recent research has linked the LIA stone walled settlement in the Mpumalanga escarpment more specifically to the Bakoni. During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries the Bakoni built a vast complex of stonewalled settlements in this area. These cities were carefully planned around terraced farms and roads that were built to lead cattle to pasture while keeping the cows out of

the gardens. In the late 1700's the sites had populations of between 30 000 to 50 000 people (Rowe 2013:10).

During the Difaqane (a period of great instability and migration in the interior of South Africa) the various groups living in the area were ruthlessly conquered by Mzilikazi, around 1826. At that time the BaKoni were under the chieftainship of Makopole. He was a son of the Pedi chief Thulare. After first warding off an attack led by his brother, Makopole was then faced by the full onslaught of Mzilikazi's Ndebele. The invaders were responsible for destroying the Lydenburg-Ohrigstad settlements of the BaKoni people (Pelser 2014: 10).

Stone walled ruins are a common feature found across the region and have been extensively mapped and researched, both through archaeological excavations and aerial photography. As a result of these various studies, three settlement types can be identified in the area:

- Simple enclosures – consisting of two concentric circles. The inner one was probably the cattle kraal and the huts were built in the space between the circles;
- Complex enclosures – includes several enclosures generally consisting of a large central one with two opposed entrances and a number of smaller circles around part of, or the whole of, the perimeter. Huts were built between the area of this complex and the outer ring wall;
- The third type of settlement in an agglomeration of small circles. It does not seem to conform to the basic pattern of the first two.

Settlements are characterized by terrace walls, cattle lanes and circular enclosures and are generally referred to as Badfontein walling. The cattle lane (track) would normally lead to a central enclosure (an area for milking and slaughter). On the opposite side an exit provided access to cattle kraals, which were attached to the central wall. Stone walling were used to define homestead areas, agricultural land (terracing) and cattle tracks. Crops were cultivated along the terraces where lines of stones were laid out parallel to the contour of the landscape. In cases of very steep ground proper walls were built. Stone-walled cattle tracks protected crops from being trampled by livestock (Pelser 2014: 10).

Two settlement traits from the Badfontein type point to people with Nguni origins. Firstly, the circular homestead arrangement emphasized the centre/side axis associated with the Central

Cattle Pattern, a characteristic of Nguni people from northern KwaZulu-Natal. Secondly, the Badfontein cattle track leading to a central enclosure with an exit on the opposite side corresponds to the Nguni left-hand / right hand division (Pelser 2014:11).

Pottery types which are associated with the Lydenburg / Burgersfort area settlements, are named Mzonjani (EIA), Doornkop (EIA), Klingbeil (Middle Iron Age) and Marateng for the Late Iron Age (Huffman 2007: 127-207).

The LIA Marateng facies pottery, from the Moloko branch of the Urewe tradition, dates most likely from AD 1650-1840. This pottery has incised arcades on the upper shoulder separating black and red colour (Pelser 2014: 12).

Metal and iron in particular were important commodities during the Iron Age. Several metal artifacts have been found in association with the settlements. Collett's excavations at Badfontein revealed metal wire rings, an iron razor, an adze and a spear head. Iron slag was also discovered, pointing to possible metal working in the area. Many stones among the terraces show evidence of metal tools being sharpened on them (Pelser 2014:13).

Upper and lower grindstones are commonly associated with Iron Age settlement and several were found during Collett's excavations at the Badfontein site. These are regarded as indirect evidence for agriculture and the two different types may indicate which crops were cultivated (Pelser 2014: 13).

Beads were a trade commodity and were obtained via long distance trade routes in exchange for metal, ivory and animal skins. The most common types are royal blue hexagonal and round glass beads. Badfontein excavations revealed beads in yellow, blue, white, pink and red with white eyes, a translucent green bead, one made of soapstone as well as a large black wire-wound bead with white spots (Pelser 2014;13).

Bones of cattle and sheep / goats, found in association with cattle tracks and kraals, underline the pastoral lifestyle of the inhabitants. It also indicated that Iron Age people were responsible for introducing domesticated animals into the area (Pelser 2014:13).

Some 150 years before the *Voortrekkers* entered the area, some battles took place between the Koni (Zulu under Makopole) and Swazi (under Moselekatse). At that time the BaPedi resided in the Steelpoort area. The Bakoni (Koni) were attacked and defeated by the Matabele and their chief, Makopole, was killed. The Matabele, not yet satisfied with their victory, moved further north towards the BaPedi headquarters. At Olifantspoortjie the whole BaPedi regiment was wiped out as well as the sons of Thulare, the BaPedi chief (except for Sekwati who managed to

escape) (E-mail reply: JP Cilliers 2009-06-18).

After four years, Sekwati together with a few followers who had also managed to escape the Matabele, now slowly started to rise. In 1830 Sekwati invaded some of the smaller groups and eventually the Koni (under Marangrang) were ambushed and defeated. Now the empire of Maruteng (Bapedi) ruled the Koni.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, groups such as the **Pedi, Roka, Koni** and **Tau** densely populated the immediate areas of Lydenburg, Steelpoort & Burgersfort. This was confirmed by ethnographical and linguistic studies by early researchers such as D. Ziervogel and N.J. Van Warmelo (Van Warmelo 1935: 111). The 1935 map of Van Warmelo, indicated the presence of various Sotho groups (baPai and Pulana) as well as Koni in the direct study area surrounding the town of Burgersfort. Van Warmelo also indicated a small presence of Nhlangu groups (fig. 5).

The Pedi (who had their roots in the baKgatla, near the current Pretoria) moved under Thobele (who was banished from the Kgatla) to Sekukuneland in ca 1650, where they settled alongside the baKoni. There was initially peace, but soon the Koni had to submit to the Pedi. In time, the Pedi also ruled over the baRoka, baTau, Matlala, baMohlala, and others. They ruled over the whole of Lydenburg, Pilgrim's Rest, Middelburg and Polokwane (Pietersburg) districts. This was understandably met with a lot of resistance (De Jongh 1987: 28).

The Pedi of chief Sekwati (ca 1860) lived at Phiring (near Polokwane). Sekwati lived in constant fear of the Zulus. The country was unsafe, and in an attempt to survive, some of the Koni turned to cannibalism (Van Warmelo 1944: 47). This area was heavily under attack during the *Difaqane*. The Ndebele attacked this area in ca 1822, and Zwide (Swazi) attacked the Pedi in ca 1825 (Bergh 2009: 10-28).

- **European settlement**

The *Voortrekkers* passed the northern boundary of the Leolo mountains (Pedi area) in 1837 when Trichardt looked for a route to Delagoa Bay (currently Maputo) (Bergh 2009: 14).

Trichardt met the Pedi chief Sekwati (Theal no date: 257). When more Europeans settled in the area from 1845, conflict was inevitable.

The *Voortrekkers* under Andries Hendrik Potgieter, settled at Ohrigstad in 1845. Soon conflicts arose between them and the Pedi leader, Sekwati. The smaller black groups also turned to Sekwati for help against the *Voortrekkers*. Sekwati moved his capital to the Leolo mountains at *Mosego hill*. Eventually they signed a treaty and it was decided that the Steelpoort or Tubatse River, would form the border between the Pedi and the *Voortrekkers*, and peace followed for a while (De Jongh 1987: 29).

The conflict in the eastern parts of the country between white and black was of a more forceful nature than in the central areas of the country. The Kopa, Ndzundza-Ndebeles and Pedi were more able to resist European onslaught.

The stressful relationship between the Pedi and Europeans since 1850, continued throughout the 1860's and 70's which lead to war. Sekukune, who took the reign after Sekwati in 1861, played an important role in this. After the Swazi attack on Sekukune in 1869, he moved his capital from *Thaba Mosego* to *Tshate* (Bergh 2009: 31).

The relationship between the Pedi and the Afrikaners stayed stressful. In 1876 the Afrikaners attacked the Pedi. A huge part of the Pedi capital was burnt down. In December 1876, the Pedi submitted to the Republic, as it was time to plant their crops and they could not afford to lose this valuable time (De Jongh 1987: 30).

A plan had to be constructed to secure the borders of Sekukuni's country, by placing volunteer mercenaries at the Steelpoort River. A fort was built within the junction of the Steelpoort and Spekboom Rivers – Fort Burgers, named after President Burgers. The fort was manned by the Lydenburg Volunteer Corps who were placed under the command of Captain von Schlickmann (<http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol1025hk.html> :3).

On 29 September 1876, Sekukuni attacked Fort Burgers with the object of recovering cattle supposedly looted from the Bapedi. They killed two of the volunteers (<http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol1025hk.html> :3) (A monument currently at the site, marks graves of the *Voortrekker* era, and the location of the historic site of Fort Burgers is directly towards the west of this monument) (Van Wyk Rowe: 2009).

The British under Shepstone took over the Transvaal on 12 April 1877. At first Sekukune



pretended to welcome them, but soon started raiding their cattle and other domesticated animals. In November, the British, with the help of the Swazi, attacked the Pedi, and Sekukune's son and heirs were killed. Sekukune fled to a cave in the Leolo mountains, but was later captured and taken prisoner. He was succeeded by Mampuru (Middelburg district) and Ramoroko (Sekukuneland). Sekukune was killed in 1882 by Mampuru, after his release (De Jongh 1987: 30).

Several forts were erected to protect the Europeans during this time. Fort Burgers was only one of these. The area around Fort Burgers, eventually became known as the town of "Burgersfort" (Bergh 2009: 31).