

PROGRESS REPORT 03 – April 10, 2012

Assessment of Archaeological Site at Tower 146

**PROPOSED 400KV TABOR-WITKOP
TRANSMISSION LINE, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

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SITE INSPECTION – TOWER 146

On April 02, 2012, the archaeologist first visited the archaeological site at Tower 146. It was obvious that the position of the tower is located on a pre-colonial archaeological site. Some parts of the stone wall will be destroyed in the process of foundation excavation and further damage will be caused during construction of the tower. Since this site is a prime example of the transitional phase between the pre-colonial and historical period, the assistance of another archaeologist was requested for a second opinion regarding the preservation of the site. This visit took place on April 07. The entire site was inspected, including the areas in the vicinity of Towers 145 and 146.

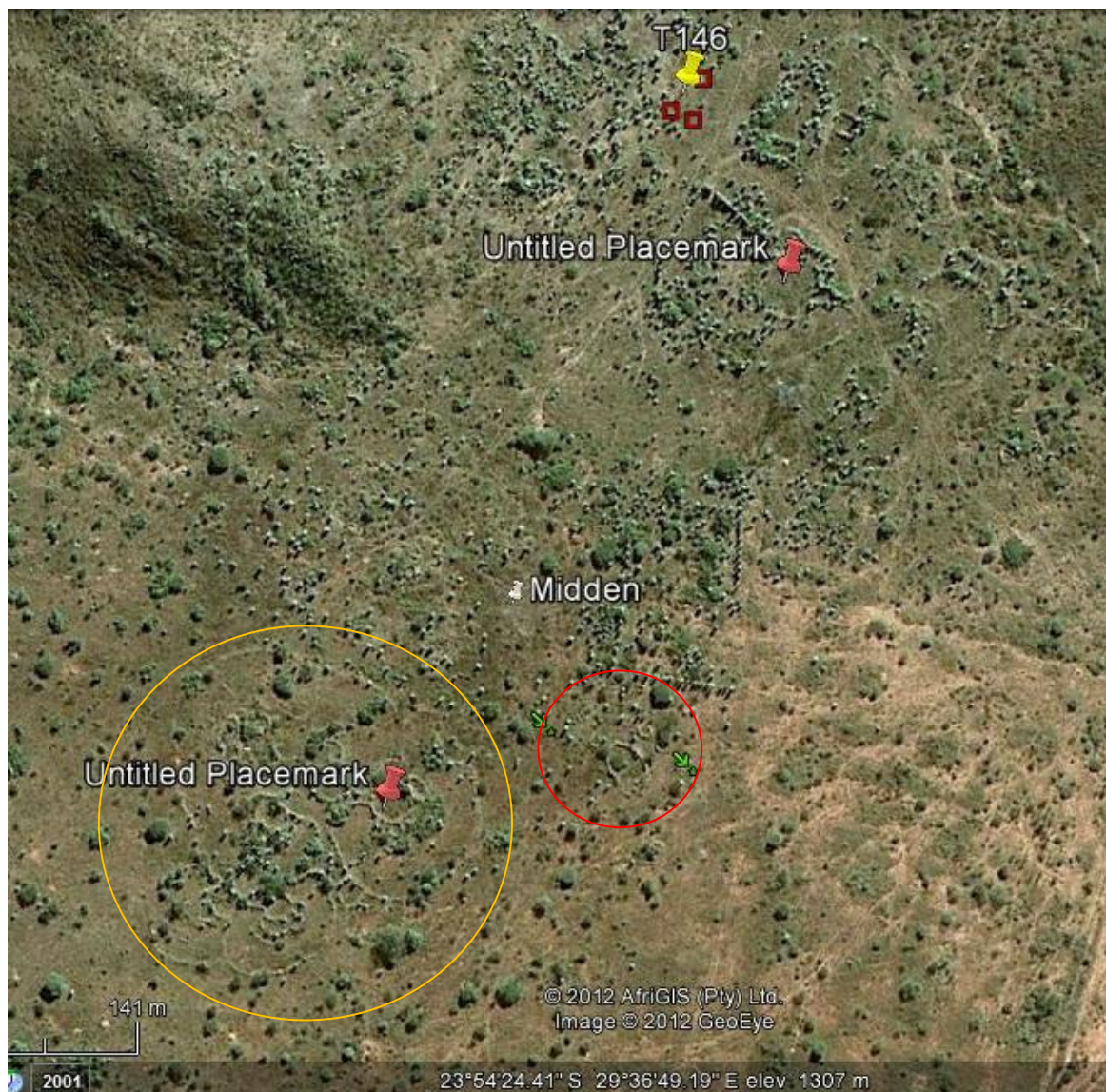


Fig 1. Three of the foundation markers for Tower 146 could be located. The one foundation at the bottom, right hand corner will afflict damage to a wall. Not visible on the Google map are many of the robbed foundations of the pre-colonial habitation, however, in some areas it is still visible, such as the one in the bottom left hand corner, roughly delineated in yellow. The red encircled area is another similar but smaller area. The green arrows indicate its borders.



Fig 2. The foundation stones of a pre-colonial occupation are still visible in this image. Although it is clearly seen in this image as well as on the site, it is not visible in the Google Earth imagery. It was customary for later occupants of an area to rob the stones for their own dwellings. Proof of later occupation is seen elsewhere on the site.

The wall is approximately a metre wide, and was possibly a perimeter wall. Construction of such walls encompasses large stones for the outer facing, the core being filled in with rubble. Upright stones, such as the one behind the gauge, usually mark an entrance.

Fig 3. In the image below, the continuation of the wall is seen by the slightly raised surface.





Fig. 4. Stone rubble, as seen in this image, could indicate the presence of a structure or was left behind by the wall robbers. This apparent featureless section of the settlement could have contained thatched huts during pre-colonial times. No evidence of such structures would be recovered unless it had burnt down: the floors consisted of clay and dung and would have been fired; charcoal around the perimeter of a hut would indicate the withes used for the supporting structure. Unless excavated, the use of this particular space is speculative.



Fig 5. The access road ($23^{\circ}54'19.70''S$ $29^{\circ}36'49.90''E$) intrudes on the perimeter wall in at least two places. This image was taken in the vicinity of the planned Tower 146.



Fig 6. Another viewpoint of the intrusion of the access road. It is easily seen by the slight raise of the soil on the surface.



Fig 7. Visually more striking than the remains representing the occupation during pre-colonial times, are the stone structures a bit higher up the slope of this hillock. These not only represent the later inhabitants, but would also contain the stone robbed from the older site.



Fig 8. Some of the units still contain clay plastering on the external as well as internal surfaces. The approximate co-ordinates for this structure are 23°54'18.80"S 29°36'46.80"E.



Fig 9. Another characteristic of this later occupation is the mud/clay used in between the stone coursing.

These structures were possibly houses. In the earlier structures, stone walls would indicate a sheep/goat/calf enclosure or the demarcation of a living unit, but not a house. The fact that these walls were plastered also indicates that these were houses.



Fig 10. This cylindrical structure ($23^{\circ}54'11.10''S$ $29^{\circ}36'47.30''E$) apparently stood on its own. It is mainly built with quartzite. Except for a possible ritual purpose, its function remains speculative unless excavated.



Fig 11. Straight rows of aloes are located in a few areas on the site. The aloes mainly grow from the foundations of the stone walling. The remains of some circular houses are located close by ($23^{\circ}54'21.00''S$ $29^{\circ}36'49.50''E$). Similar aloe growth ($23^{\circ}53'55.40''S$ $29^{\circ}36'59.00''E$) on straight walls also occurs close to Tower 145.

Straight walling is also characteristic of the historical period after contact with the white settlers had occurred.



Fig 12. Two graves, one with a modern headstone, are located within one of the original complexes ($23^{\circ}54'27.00''S$ $29^{\circ}36'43.90''E$) closer to Tower 147. It is not endangered by the transmission line or a tower. Important though is that this place probably has some relevance to the history of the site. It is, however, also evidence of intrusion on a historical site older than 60 years.

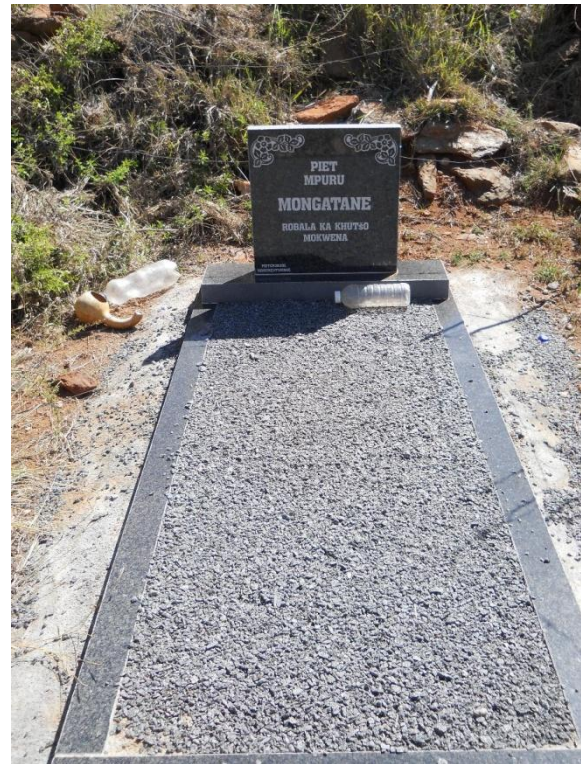


Fig 13. The one headstone is totally illegible, although some engraving is still visible on its surface. The more modern looking gravestone has the name of Piet Mpuru Mongatane on it, without any dates of birth and death. The calabash next to the headstone indicates that the person is still honoured as an ancestor and would have contained beer as a libation.



Fig 14. This historical homestead ($23^{\circ}54'08.2''S$ $29^{\circ}36'53.00''E$) consists of a lapa, circular houses and a cattle kraal (in the image above). It is possible that the inhabitants' graves will also be located here.

CULTURAL FINDS



Fig. 15. A small surface collection of pottery sherds from the communal midden ($23^{\circ}54'25.10''S$ $29^{\circ}36'47.20''E$). Typical of the Letaba pottery is the burnished, red ochre colour and/or graphite; this doesn't show up well in the image. Incised bands on the shoulder (see the example top left) and diagonal incisions forming triangles in a band are key features.

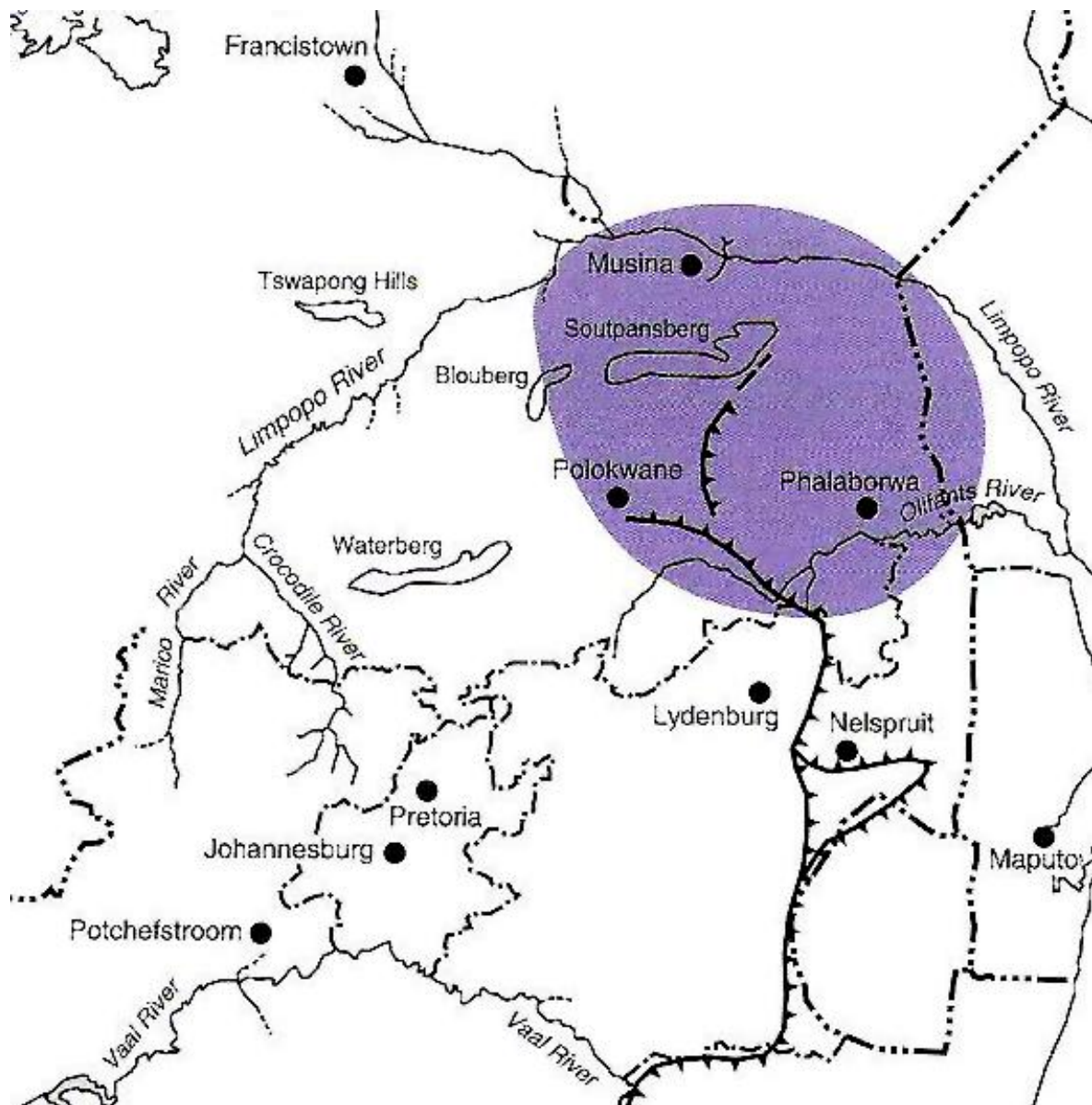


Fig 16. The Letaba facies is widespread in the Limpopo Province and include Musina in the north, the Phalaborwa area, Polokwane and southwards towards the Mpumalanga border. (Map from Huffman TN 2007. *Handbook to the Iron Age – The Archaeology of Pre-Colonial Farming Societies in Southern Africa*).

BACKGROUND TO THE SETTLEMENT OF THE AREA

During the 16th century the Shona speaking *Khami* facies (*Kalundu* Branch) merged with the Sotho-Tswana speaking *Icon* facies (*Moloko* Branch) in the Soutpansberg area to become the *Tavhatshena* facies. By the early 17th century *Tavhatshena* developed into the *Letaba* style, associated with the Venda and related peoples. The Venda influenced most of the eastern Lowveld as far as south of the Olifants River and the people living there, such as the *Ba-Phalaborwa* and *Ba-Lovedu*, who adopted the *Letaba* style pottery.

The Polokwane (Pietersburg) plateau was inhabited by a succession of *Ndebele* and *Koni* people since the early 17th century. Both these groups originated in KwaZulu-

Natal. The *Koni* seems to have been Sothonised quite early; “*Koni*” for example means “*Nguni*” in Sesotho. Although the *Koni* generally followed a more central route along the escarpment over Badplaas and Belfast to Lydenburg, the *Ndebele*, and probably the *Bakoni ba Matala*, followed what is known as the “Langa route” (Langa was a legendary ancestor from who they claim descent) north through Swaziland to the Leydsdorp area in the lowveld before they turned west onto the plateau. *Letaba* pottery was introduced in the Polokwane area, probably by both groups because both had interactions with the eastern Lowveld (Phalaborwa – Leydsdorp) where the *Letaba* style dominated. The Ledwaba people are a late example of the Langa Ndebele, and settled in the Polokwane area around AD 1840.

Koni and *Ndebele* lived in stonewalled settlements referred to as “*Badfontein*” walling by Huffman (2007). These settlements are a variation of the Central Cattle Pattern, emphasising a central axis. Seen from above, the walling characteristically forms concentric circles describing terrace walls and cattle lanes, with circular units. The cattle lanes usually lead into a central enclosure which was probably committed to milking and slaughtering of the animals. From this central area an exit on the opposite side allowed access to byres attached to the central wall. The next circle would mark the men’s court, and the outer ring the housing area.

The site at Tower 146 is a perfect example of the *Badfontein* walling.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to its widespread distribution many of these sites had suffered at the hand of development prior to the implementation of the NHR Act in 1999. Archaeological research was thus hampered to a certain extent. Although some research had been conducted on these sites, e.g Loubser in the Pietersburg area in the mid 1980’s, funding didn’t allow for much more than a reconnaissance of a limited area and restricted excavations. His research area excluded the present site.

The integrity of the deposits of the Iron Age site at Tower 146 and its immediate surroundings is almost undamaged due to the fact that no previous development had destroyed the stratigraphy, except for a tower previously erected which also cut through walls and archaeological deposits.

The only intrusion into this site is the more historic occupation of people who utilised these same structures and stones. Some of these structures are an adaptation of the earlier style, while more recent structures could be linked to farm labourer occupation who already had adapted to straight walling. The importance of this site thus lies not only in the early occupation, but also in its transitional character where several phases can be distinguished. Information such as this is extremely important in the interpretation of South Africa’s past when the indigenous population still relied on oral history.

It must be remembered that the National Heritage Resources Act (No 25 of 1999) stipulates the following, which has relevance to the archaeological site in question:

35. Archaeology¹, palaeontology and meteorites

(4) No person may, without a permit issued by the responsible heritage resources authority –

(a) destroy, damage, excavate, alter, deface or otherwise disturb any archaeological or palaeontological site or any meteorite;

(b) destroy, damage, excavate, remove from its original position, collect or own any archaeological or palaeontological material or object or any meteorite;

(c) trade in, sell for private gain, export or attempt to export from the Republic any category of archaeological or palaeontological material or object, or any meteorite; or

(d) bring onto or use at an archaeological or palaeontological site any excavation equipment or any equipment which assist in the detection or recovery of metals or archaeological and palaeontological material or objects, or use such equipment for the recovery of meteorites.

and

34. Structures

(1) No person may alter or demolish any structure or part of a structure which is older than 60 years without a permit issued by the relevant provincial heritage resources authority.

(2) Within three months of the refusal of the provincial heritage resources authority to issue a permit, consideration must be given to the protection of the place concerned in terms of one of the formal designations provided for in Part 1 of this Chapter.

(3) The provincial heritage resources authority may at its discretion, by notice in the Provincial Gazette, make an exemption from the requirements of subsection (1) within a defined geographical area, or for certain defined categories of site within a defined geographical area, provided that it is satisfied that heritage resources falling into the defined area or category have been identified and are adequately provided for in terms of the provisions of Part 1 of this Chapter.

(4) Should the provincial heritage resources authority believe it to be necessary it may, following a three-month notice period published in the Provincial Gazette, withdraw or amend a notice under subsection (3).

and

45. Compulsory repair order

(1) When the heritage resources authority responsible for the protection of a heritage site considers that such site –

(a) has been allowed to fall into disrepair for the purpose of –

(i) effecting or enabling its destruction or demolition;

(ii) enabling the development of the designated land; or

(iii) enabling the development of any land adjoining the designated land; or

(b) is neglected to such an extent that it will lose its potential for conservation, the heritage resources authority may serve on the owner an order to repair or maintain such site, to the satisfaction of the heritage resources authority, within a reasonable period of time as specified in the order: Provided that the heritage resources authority must specify only such work as, in its opinion, is necessary to prevent any further deterioration in the condition of the place.

¹ NHR Act (No 25, 1999) defines “archaeological” as material remains resulting from human activity which is in a state of disuse and are in or on land and which are older than 100 years, including artefacts, human and hominid remains and artificial features and structures.

(2) Subject to subsection (3), upon failure of the owner to comply with the terms of an order under subsection (1) within the specified time, the authority which served the order may itself take such steps as may be necessary for the repair or maintenance thereof and recover the costs from the owner.

(3) If the owner can show good cause, he or she may, within 21 days of the service of a repair order under subsection (1) –

(a) apply to the heritage resources authority which served the repair order for the extension of the time specified in the order; or

(b) appeal to the Minister, in the manner prescribed under section 49.

It is thus advised that either of the following solutions should be considered for the preservation of the archaeological site:

- The tower should be moved outside the sensitive area. If necessary, one tower (self-supporting) could be erected on each side outside of the archaeological area.
- The area where the tower is to be placed should be excavated at the expense of the developer. This would include, inter alia, analyses such as radio-carbon dating, pottery, faunal and floral analysis, and if any human remains is recovered, human skeletal analysis. Eskom / Stefanutti Stocks Power could thus contribute to scientific research into the history of South Africa and set a good example for other similar companies.

or

- The representative from SAHRA should be invited to inspect the site. The officer would then decide the future of the site, which could be any of the following: the site should be totally avoided and any development could be prohibited; a repair order could be issued for damage already done and or the responsible party would be fined for trespassing; a destruction permit could be allocated.
- The history of the site should still be remembered in the oral history of the descendants. It is therefore advised that a social consultation process be initiated in order for this history to be recorded to enable the identification of the original occupants.

SOURCES

- **Changuoin L** 1986. *Pietersburg – Die Eerste Eeu 1886 – 1986*. V&R Drukkery (Edms) Bpk: Pretoria.
- **Government Gazette**, Republic of South Africa 1999. *National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (Act No 25, 1999)*. Vol 406, No 19974. Cape Town.
- **Huffman TN** 2007. *Handbook to the Iron Age – The Archaeology of Pre-Colonial Farming Societies in Southern Africa*. Univ of KwaZulu-Natal Press: Scottsville.
- **Loubser JHN** 1994. Ndebele Archaeology of the Pietersburg Area. *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein. Vol 10, Part 2*.



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