

## **PROGRESS REPORT 11: June 18, 2012**

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### **A REASSESSMENT OF Towers 99, 65, and 56-55 400KV TABOR-WITKOP TRANSMISSION LINE, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

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<b>3</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>TOWER 99</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>TOWER 65</b>
4	Original Assessment
6	Re-assessment
8	Recommendations
<b>9</b>	<b>TOWER 56-55</b>
9	Original Assessment
11	Re-assessment
13	Recommendations
<b>13</b>	<b>Towers 58-57, 50 and 23-13</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The archaeologist first visited this part of the Tabor-Witkop transmission line on April 18 and May 02, 2012 in the company of the Environmental Officer of Stefanutti Stocks Power, Mr P Reitz. On plotting the findings on the Google Earth map, it became clear that some of these sites would have to be revisited since some features relating to habitation are clearly visible on the map. Since very little cultural material was retrieved from the sites, it was difficult to identify the approximate period of habitation. The second visit on June 17, 2012 was thus firstly to confirm that the archaeologist's recommendations pertaining to some features had been heeded and secondly to amend some of the recommendations where applicable.

## TOWER 99

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**Figure 1.** The stone-walled farm dam. The retaining wall consisted of roughly stacked rock. Only a small area (indicated by the brace) was moved to make place for the foundation of the tower's one leg.



**Figure 2.** Only a small part of the dam was compromised when the stacked rocks were moved a few metres. The original position is indicated with the brace.

**Recommendations:** Since this is not considered to be an architectural feature of archaeological importance, it was advised that as little damage as possible should be incurred. The recommendation was regarded, and no further recommendations are needed, however care should be taken not to disturb the feature any further during stringing of the conductor while the access route should circumvent it.

## TOWER 65

Original assessment (See *PROGRESS REPORT 05: April 18 – May 08, 2012*)



**Figure 3.** S23°36'19.0" E29°44'45.7". A historic multi-component site. Indicative of human habitation and activity is the distinctive light grey colour of the soil, suggesting a cattle byre or midden. Its location is delineated with a brown circle to show the extent of it. The arrow points to Site A, a clump of sisal (see figure below). While on site, the archaeologist could find no signs of habitation, but an aerial view clearly shows distinctive circular structures at the points marked "B" and "C" (the pink tinted areas). Point "A" is rectangular in shape.



**Figure 4.** A clump of *Agave sisalana* (American agave or sisal). These plants have become naturalised in South Africa. It forms an impenetrable barrier and is still used for that purpose around cattle byres.



**Figure 5.** The area indicated with a “B” on the map. It is covered in grass and surrounded by trees in a circular shape. The slight rise in the foreground could be due to dung or midden accumulation.



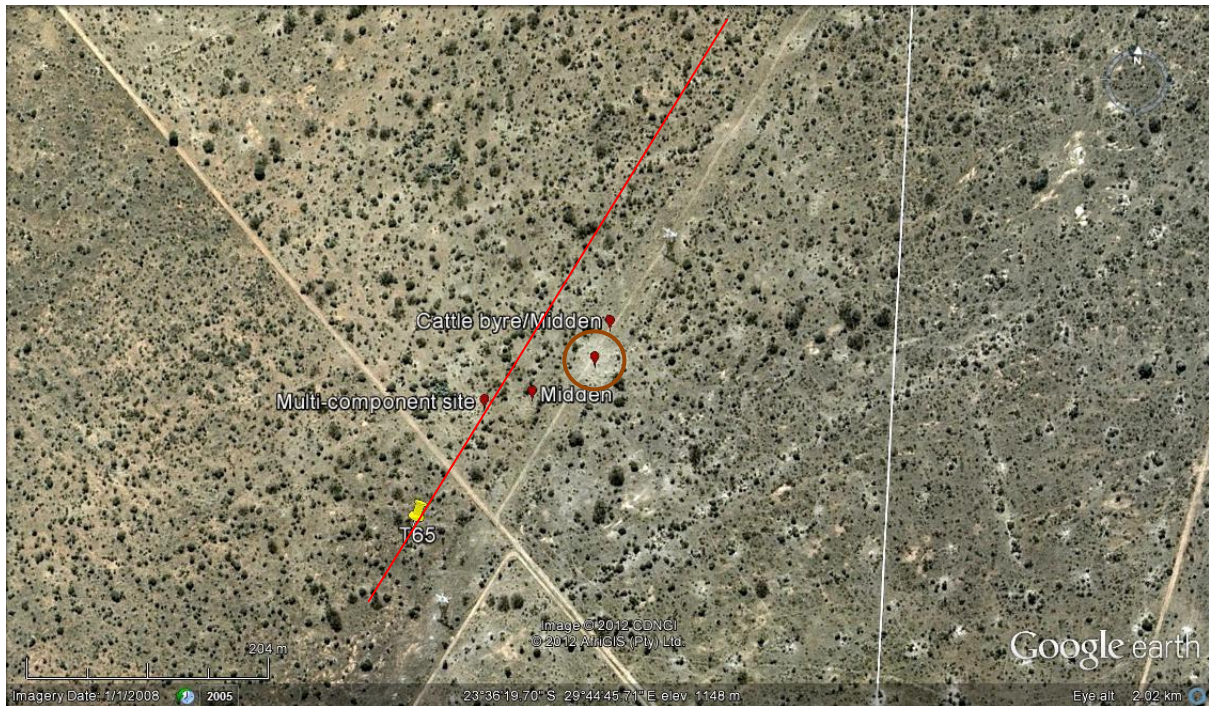
**Figure 6.** A flat stone with several indentations on its upper surface. Its function is unknown, but it shows human skill and activity.



**Figure 7.** Some fragments of rectangular bricks were also recovered not far from the indented stone (Fig 55) which indicates recent historical presence.

**Recommendations:** The tower is not located on these sites, however, the transmission line will cross it and the access road will pass through it. Care should be taken not to damage the structures when the line is being spanned. Access routes should preferably avoid these areas and its location should be mitigated with the archaeologist.

## Re-assessment



**Figure 8.** Various GPS readings indicate where features such as middens and cattle byres exist. These were only spot checks, and other features still remain to be inspected.

During the first reconnaissance very little cultural material was retrieved from the site due to the thick grass cover. The presence of *Agave sisalana* (American agave or sisal) and the presence of some fired bricks are clear indicators of historical occupation, while the circular shapes formed by the trees and shrubs could point to earlier habitation.

When the site was reconnoitred the second time, the distribution of the various GPS readings for features such as middens and cattle byres led to the conclusion that the site consists of two different components, namely a historical component which **probably** relates to farmworkers, whose identity is unknown. Secondly, the deposit marked with the sepia coloured circle (to the east of the historical remains) is a separate unrelated archaeological site, which has not yet been identified, although it is likely to be a Tavhatshena period site.

TAVHATSHENA POTTERY is derived from a merger between *Icon* facies pottery (Sotho-Tswana) and *Khami* facies pottery and dates to the period AD 1450-1600. Tavhatshena pottery developed into the *Letaba* facies pottery at about AD 1600, which is associated with the Venda people of today. Research has shown that the Tavhatshena period forms an important phase in the development and formation of

the Venda identity. **This site is one of the most southern Tavhatshena sites recorded to date.**

This site has already been compromised by the previous Eskom line running parallel to the Tabor-Witkop transmission line, but should not be affected by the new transmission line.

Tower 65 doesn't affect any of these sites, but irreparable damage will occur to the site during stringing operations and by the inspection/access route. The historical remains are sensitive for unmarked burials.



**Figure 9.** *This photograph was taken while standing approximately in the centre of one of the cattle byres. As previously stated, cattle byres usually contain burials and are therefore sensitive to any development.*



**Figure 10.** *Little cultural material is visible on the surface due to the grass cover, but recent animal activity has brought these pottery sherds to the surface. These sherds do not resemble Venda pottery (Letaba facies), but rather Sotho-Tswana pottery.*

## Recommendations

- Although the tower is not located on these sites, the transmission line will cross it and the access road will pass through it. Care should be taken not to damage the structures and/or other features (e.g possible burials) during stringing of the conductor.
- Access routes should preferably avoid these areas and its location should be mitigated with the archaeologist. This should be clearly marked and indicated.
- During **all construction related activities** on site an archaeologist should be in attendance to monitor it.



## TOWER 56-55

Original Assessment (See *PROGRESS REPORT 05: April 18 – May 08, 2012*)



**Figure 11.** A large midden or cattle byre is roughly delineated here. The site extends beyond the dirt road at left as well as the access route of the previous Eskom line.



**Figure 12.** The grey ashy composition and colouring of the soil, characteristic of cattle byres, is clear in the image.



**Figure 13.** A cluster of pottery sherds were located on the surface at co-ordinates S23°34'14.8" E29°45'18.6". The rest of the site would undoubtedly relinquish more and similar samples.



**Figure 14.** A grinder or polishing stone was recovered from co-ordinates S23°34'13.7" E29°45'18.4" together with more pottery sherds.

**Recommendations:** The same as for Tower 58: The archaeologist should be present when the foundations for Tower 56 are excavated, since human skeletal material could be retrieved. Great care should also be taken not to damage cultural remains when the transmission line is spanned. Since the previous access route has already damaged the site, it is advised that this route should also be utilised for the Tabor-Witkop transmission line and that the shortest possible access route or a route which will cause the least disturbance should be demarcated from the original access to the tower.

## Re-assessment



**Figure 15.** The light grey colouring and grainy texture of the soil is characteristic of a cattle byre. Cattle byres are particularly sensitive to the development of a site, since these were traditionally the preferred sites for the interment of the male members of the community. Vehicular traffic will damage the underlying skeletal material.



**Figure 16.** Some of the diagnostic pottery found on the site from various locations as well as one of several upper grinders/polishing stones.



**Figure 17.** Diagnostic pottery found on the site. After analysis of the pottery sherds, it was identified as Tavhatshena facies.



**Figure 18.** Another part of the site which comprises a midden. Middens are usually a rich source for cultural materials and therefore important for the reconstruction of a way of life of a specific group: much information relating to social, political, religious, etc systems can be acquired from features such as this.

This site is now identified as a Tavhatshena period site and is regarded as significant from a scientific perspective (see page 6 for a description of the *Tavhatshena facies*). The site is large with a span of approximately 180 meters and contains middens, cattle byres and stone features. It will undoubtedly contain unmarked burials that could be disturbed and damaged by construction activities.

The site has been compromised by the existing power line and the access road. Nevertheless, it retains its integrity as an archaeological site from which valuable data and cultural material can be obtained.

## Recommendations

- A phase 2 assessment should be mitigated in the areas that are to be affected by the development.
- All activities on site must be monitored by an archaeologist.
- A site management plan must be developed for the future protection of the site which should bind both ESKOM and the landowner.

## TOWERS 58-57, 50, AND 23-13

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This part of the line still needs to be examined. In light of the newly identified Tavhatshena habitation, the areas around Towers 58-57 and 50, both of which contain evidence of past habitation, will have to be re-examined.

## REFERENCES

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