

RESEARCH PROPOSAL FOR THE EXHUMATION OF HUMAN REMAINS AND THE INVESTIGATION OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL MIDDEN IN BAKENBERG LIMPOPO PROVINCE

BACKGROUND

An Eskom contractor exposed the remains of a human in Erf No F0097 Mugget Street in the Marulaneng village in Bakenberg in the Limpopo Province on 20 February 2014 during the electrification of the town of Marulaneng. The incidence was reported to Eskom who contacted the author for assistance. It was established that Eskom received exemption from LIHRA for a Phase I Heritage Impact Assessment study for the electrification of several villages in the Limpopo Province.

The pre-historical background of the Bakenberg area in the Limpopo Province has not yet been documented or investigated although the author and other heritage consultants have completed several heritage impact assessment studies in the wider region (see e.g. Geiger 2004; Pistorius 2002a-2002f in 'Select Bibliography'). The oral history of the Langa Ndebele who occupies the region for the last five hundred years has been thoroughly researched whilst that of the North Ndebele (including Langa Ndebele) was also documented (Jackson 1969, 1982; De Beer 1986). The oral history of the Kekana Ndebele who is neighbours to the Langa Ndebele was also reviewed and reinterpreted, particularly with regard to the siege of the Makapans Caves during the second half on the nineteenth century (Esterhuysen 2008).

From these historical and ethnographic accounts it is clear that two sections of the Langa Ndebele chiefdom are the most dominant groups in the region and that several of their previous capitals can still be recognised from as far as Bagagamatlala in the Masebe Nature Reserve in the north to Fontane (Moordkoppie) in the south. These capitals are associated with mountains which serve as prominent beacons on the landscape.

The nature of the remains

The skull of a human was exposed when Eskom's contactors excavated a trench for an earth leading to one of Eskom's transformers. The grave was immediately closed and demarcated with red cautionary tape. The find occurs in an erf (yard or homestead's confines) directly next to the fence separating the pavement which adjoins Mugget Street. The remains are situated near an Eskom's transformer (No 2 on Pole GKK36SA/4/9). The remains were found when the trench for the earth wire leading to the transformer was excavated. The remains therefore occur in direct proximity of electric infrastructure.



Figures 1 & 2 – Location of human remains in a midden in Erf 0097 near Transformer No 2 on Pole Nr GKK36SA/4/9 in the village of Marulaneng in Bakenberg in the Limpopo Province (above and below).

The author did not witness the remains first hand as it were already sealed when the site investigation occurred. However, it was established beyond any measures of doubt that the remains are those of a human as at least three spokespersons were interviewed who were present when the remains were exposed (see 'Spokespersons consulted').

It seems as if the human was buried in a midden that is currently covered with a layer of natural soil. The matrix of the deposit mainly consists of ash although other archaeological material may occur, e.g. faunal remains, pottery, metal items, etc. The subsurface presence of the midden is also noticeable in the road, adjacent to Erf 0097's pavement, where activities of ants have brought the contents of the midden to the surface of the road.

Aim with the investigation

The aims with the investigation are the following:

- Excavating the human remains where after the remains will be analysed and conserved in the museum and repositories of the Department of Anatomy of the University of Pretoria.
- Approval has been received from the Department of Anatomy at UP for the storage of the human remains as well as any associated archaeological material. The archaeological remains are expected to be limited in extent and in numbers and may only include funerary goods such as (broken) pots or potsherds.
- Excavating part of the midden (archaeological deposit) in which the human was buried in order to attempt to establish a possible temporal context for the remains. Together with the known spatial context of the remains (within the sphere of the Langa Ndebele) the excavators may be able to elaborate on the possible cultural-historical affiliation and context of the remains.
- Publish a report on the results of the research findings.

Future conservation of the archaeological site

The remains occur within the confines of the Erf 0079 (homestead) of Mr Johannes Mautla. The remains may be part of an archaeological settlement whose extent is unknown and which is currently being covered by the village of Marulaneng. This situation is common to numerous other villages and towns in the former domains of the Venda, Pedi, Ndebele and other clans in the Limpopo Province as such settlements were established on top of older settlements or represent the remains of historical settlements of long standing (historical continuation) in the region.

No specific conservation measures apply to these remains other than the 'normal' or standard procedures which are followed whenever accidental discoveries of archaeological remains are made in these towns and villages.

Spokespersons consulted

Ralph Kanyane. Liasing Officer. Kashane Electrical Contractors.

Prince Manamela. Construction worker. Kashane Electrical Contractors.

Elvis Nkanyane. Construction worker. Kashane Electrical Contractors.

Anna Mautla. Mother of Johannes Mautla.

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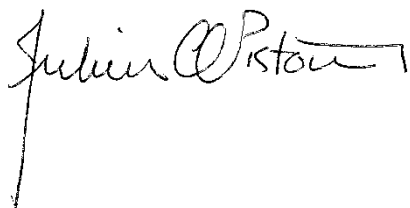
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julius CC Pistorius', with a long vertical line extending downwards from the end of the signature.

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