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**A REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
OF LATE IRON AGE STONE WALLED FEATURES
IMPACTED ON BY THE ESKOM STEELPOORT-TUBATSE-MARBLEHALL
POWERLINE: T15 & T17 PYLON POSITIONS.
LOCATED ON PORTION 1 OF THE FARM STEYNSDRIFT 145JS,
NEAR TIEGERSHOEK, MPUMALANGA**

For:

***Savannah Environmental (Pty) Ltd
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REPORT: **APAC015/06**

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Field Work conducted: ***December 2014 & February 2015***
Report: ***February 2015***

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**I HEREBY DECLARE THAT I AM AN INDEPENDENT
SPECIALIST APPOINTED BY THE CLIENT ON A CONSULTANCY
BASIS**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Heber". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small dot at the end.

SUMMARY

APelser Archaeological Consulting was appointed by Savannah Environmental (Pty) Ltd, on behalf of ESKOM, to undertake the Phase 2 Archaeological Mitigation Late Iron Age (LIA) stone walled sites that will be impacted by the development of ESKOM's Steelpoort-Marble Hall Powerline. The sites were identified by Van Schalkwyk in 2012, and reported on in an amended report in January 2013. Two Pylon locations (T15 & T17) are situated on features (circular enclosures) associated with larger LIA settlements in the area, and will therefore only impact on relatively small footprints in both cases.

The archaeological work for both T15 & T17 comprised mainly mapping of the features directly impacted by the Pylon footprints, as well as some of the other stone walled features situated in the area. Archaeological excavations were not conducted, with very little cultural material deposit present, although some material was recovered from the general surface of the area. Previous excavations in the larger area (for the Tubatse Switching Station) by the same author on similar and related sites were used to interpret the archaeology of the T15/T17 sites and features impacted.

This report discusses the results of the fieldwork, and provides recommendations on the way forward in terms of the destruction of the sites for development purposes. It is believed that the work was done successfully and that the erection of the two Pylons can now proceed once the Destruction Permit has been issued by SAHRA.

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A SAHRA permit (No.1274) was issued for the work. Fieldwork was conducted during two sessions in late October 2014 and early February 2015. Dense grass cover made visibility difficult, but it is believed that the mapping and interpretation of the stone walled features was done successfully.

AIMS

The aims of the Archaeological Investigation were the following:

- (a) to determine the type of settlement, possible time-frame of occupation and material culture
- (b) to map the sites and features on it in detail to help with determining settlement layout and extent
- (c) the analysis of any possible cultural material recovered from the sites
- (d) the drafting of a detailed report on all the findings and recommendations on the way forward and finally,
- (e) obtaining permission for the demolition of the site features situated at the T15/T17 Pylon positions

METHODOLOGY

The methodology comprised the following:

Background Research – This included background research on the area and its archaeology.

Photographic - Photographs of the sites and area were taken, while all identifiable features and individual objects were also photographed for recording purposes.

Mapping

All identifiable features were recorded and a map produced.

Archaeological Excavations

No excavations were conducted, as there was no discernible deposit on the sites and at the specific features to be impacted by the T17/T17 Pylon positions. Also, previous detailed excavations in the area, on similar sites and features related to and dating to the same time-period, have provided ample material and evidence for the proper interpretation of these sites and features.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The larger study area (for the Steelpoort-Marble Hall 400kV Power line and Steelpoort Integration projects) involves two sections of power line corridors, most of which follows existing corridors. The longest power line runs eastwards from south of Marblehall, across the Nebo plateau, across the Lulu Mountains and down into the Steelpoort River valley, where the development of a substation is proposed. The second line runs from this substation in a north-westerly direction to the farm Syferfontein 136JS, where a new substation will be constructed. To be expected with such a large study area, the environment changes drastically from west to east. The west forms part of a Highveld area typified by an undulating landscape. Going down the escarpment to the middle veld, the area is typified by mountains. In contrast, the eastern section is marked by mountains and hills, creating a broken type of environment (Van Schalkwyk, 2013:2).

The two Eskom electric Pylons (T15 & T17), is located on Portion 1 of the farm Steynsdrift 145JS, and is situated in the Steelpoort Valley around 40km west of Steelpoort. The topography of the site is relatively flat, although very rocky, and is surrounded by mountain ranges (Lulu Mountain). Dense tree cover and grass makes identifying sites and features difficult, although during one of the fieldwork sessions conducted in October 2014 the veld had burnt recently and individual features and sites were fairly visible.

The sites are located at approximately **S25 06 29.48 E29 50 30.66 (T15) & S25 06 09.11 E29 50 37.61 (T17)**.



Figure 1: Google image of study area location (Google Earth 2013).



Figure 2: Closer aerial view of site location. Note the dense tree cover. Google Earth 2014.

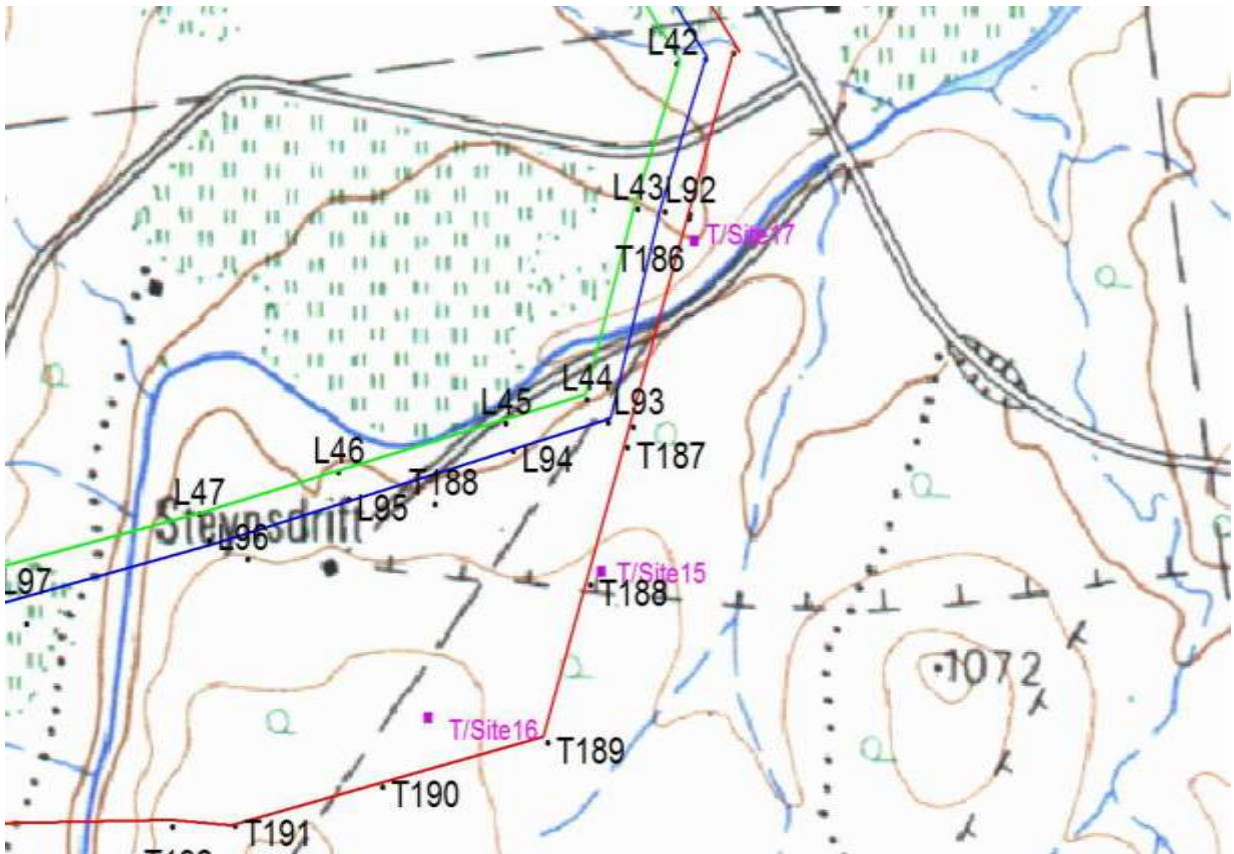


Figure 3: Topographic location of sites T15-17. Note the power line corridors. (From Van Schalkwyk 2013:p.9).

The T15 site consists of stone walling which possibly originally formed part of a homestead with a cattle kraal. Van Schalkwyk estimated in 2012 that it was approximately 80 x 50 meters in size. T17 consists of a strategically located stone walled site on a ridge overlooking the Steelpoort River, and consists of a large cattle kraal and possible smaller stone circles on the periphery. The site was estimated to be 150 x 80 meters in size.



Figure 4: View of general area taken during October 2014.



**Figure 5: View of circular enclosure at the T15 Pylon location.
Taken in October 2014.**



Figure 6: View of the same feature taken in February 2015.



Figure 7: A second enclosure identified close to T15.



Figure 8: The same feature photographed in February 2015.



Figure 9: View of T17. The Maroela tree is situated roughly in the centre of the stonewalled cattle enclosure.



Figure 10: Part of the stone wall visible at T17.

The origins of the first Bantu-Negroid farming communities who practised agriculture, live-stock herding and metal working can be traced to the SteelpoortValley. These Early Iron Age farming communities, whose settlements have been recorded on amongst others Hendriksplaats 281 and Derde Gelid 278, were related to Early Iron Age communities who, contemporaneously, from AD500 to AD900, settled further towards the east in the Lydenburg Valley. One of the settlements belonging to the Early Iron Age Lydenburg culture won international acclaim as the so-called Lydenburg Heads (clay masks) were discovered at this site near the Sterkspruit, south of Lydenburg (Pistorius 2013: 18).

The historical period in the Steelpoort Valley is associated with the second millennium AD when a predominantly Northern Sotho-speaking population occupied the Steelpoort. These people are part of a larger Northern Sotho-speaking community who occupy a vast area between the Limpopo River in the north, the Drakensberg in the east and the Sekhukhune Mountains in the west. Numerous divisions and groups or clans occupied this vast region. The history of the people of this area can be divided into several periods:

The earliest period of settlement is characterized by small groups of Bantu speaking people who started to drive the San and Khoi Khoi from the area and who are difficult to identify. From approximately AD1700 ancestral groupings of the present inhabitants of the land began to arrive in the area. Groups that can be distinguished include:

1. A large group of Sotho who came from the north-eastern parts of the Lowveld and who settled on the plateau to the north and to the south of the Strydpoortberge.
2. Small groups of Kgatla and Huruthshe-Kwena origin moved from the Tswana area (Brits and Rustenburg) into the territory. Amongst them were the present Pedi (or Rota) who moved into what is now Sekhukhuneland, where they subjected the Sotho already living there.
3. During these times Sekhukhuneland was also penetrated by Sotho arriving from the south-east.
4. After AD1600 the Northern Ndebele arrived from the south-east and settled in what is now the Mokerong district (Pistorius 2013: 19).

It is assumed that during the period from AD1700 to AD1826 the Pedi took political control over the territory previously known as Lebowa, but to the south of the Strydpoortberge. The Pedi chiefdom reached its zenith during the reign of Thulare who died in 1824. During the disruption of the difaqane (AD1822 to AD1828) Mzilikazi attacked the Pedi from the south-east in 1826 and in 1827/1828. This caused large-scale depopulation of the southern part of the Northern-Sotho territory. The Pedi sought refuge in the Soutpansberg in 1822 and only returned in 1828. After the wars with Mzilikazi there were wars with the Swazi. The Voortrekkers arrived in the Steelpoort area in the late 1840's. Several armed struggles between the Voortrekkers and the Pedi ensued (Pistorius 2013: 19-20).

After the British annexed the Transvaal (AD1877 to AD1881) the Pedi was subjugated by the British who were supported by the Swazi during the war of Sekhukhune in 1879. In 1842 Andries Hendrik Potgieter wished to move from the British sphere of influence and to establish trade relations with Delagoa Bay. He moved with his followers from Potchefstroom to the Eastern Transvaal and founded Andries Ohrigstad (named after himself and Gergios Gerhardus Ohrig, a merchant from Amsterdam who was well disposed towards the Voortrekkers). The name was later abbreviated to Ohrigstad. The town also served as the seat of the Volksraad. During 1848 to 1849 Ohrigstad was

abandoned when many people died of malaria. The town of Lydenburg was founded further to the south near the confluence of the Sterkspruit and the Spekboom River. This area was located on higher ground and was therefore healthier than Ohrigstad. The railway line between Steelpoort and Lydenburg was constructed in 1924 due to an increase in the mining of chrome and magnetite. The name Steelpoort is derived from a hunting expedition that took place either in the late 19th century or the early 20th century. When a group of Voortrekkers from Natal under Frans Joubert had settled there, a man called Scholtz shot an elephant at dusk and on returning next morning found that the tusks had been removed. When the wagons were searched, the tusks were found in the possession of a man called Botha, after which the farm Bothashoek was named. Because an elephant had been killed there, the poort was named Olifantspoort. The river flowing through the Poort was called Steelpoort River ['steel' meaning steal] (Pistorius 2013: 20).

The Pedi were governed by Thulware until his death in 1824. His main village was Monganeng on the banks of the Tubatse River. His son, Sekwati, fled to the Soutpansberg in the north during the raids of Mzilikazi in 1822. He returned in 1828 and occupied the mountain fortress Phiring, his capital from where he united the Pedi. The Pedi initially maintained good relations with the Voortrekkers who arrived in Ohrigstad from 1845. However, after a clash with Andries Hendrik Potgieter in 1852 Sekwati moved his capital to Thaba Mosego. Border disputes with the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) were settled in 1857 with an accord that stated that the Steelpoort River served as the border between Pedi land and the Lydenburg Republic. Sekwati gave the Berlin Missionary Society permission to establish the Maandagshoek missionary station in Pedi territory. After Sekwati's death in 1861, his son Sekhukhune succeeded his father and also established his village at Thaba Mosego. He ordered the Berlin Missionary Society to discontinue their work and the mission station was burn down. Alexander Merensky, one of the missionaries, thereafter established the well-known Botšabelo missionary station at Middelburg (Pistorius 2013: 21).

The good relationship between the ZAR and the Pedi was gradually weakened. The period from 1876 to 1879 was one of conflict and war, first with the ZAR and then with the British who annexed the Transvaal in 1877. During the First Sekhukhune War in August 1876, the Voortrekkers attacked Thaba Mosego and partly destroyed the settlement. The Second Sekhukhune War followed in November 1879 during which Sekhukhune was captured in the Mamatamageng cave and sent to prison in Pretoria. Two divisions attacked the Pedi. The main division, comprised of 3 000 whites and 2 500 black allies, attacked from the north-east. The Lydenburg division consist of 5 000 to 8 000 Swazi Impi, 400 other black allies and 400 white soldiers who attacked from Burgersfort in the south. The Second Sekhukhune War is associated with the settlements of Thaba Mosego and Tšate, a new village established by Sekhukhune close to Thaba Mosego (Pistorius 2013: 21-22).

The stone walled sites/features located at Pylons T15 & T17 are most likely associated with the Pedi and later Iron Age and historical period of settlement in the Steelpoort Valley.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The archaeological investigations at the T15/T17 sites aimed at obtaining as much information as possible on the settlement layout, function, time-frame of settlement and material culture deposit present here. The methodology employed comprised mainly mapping of the sites and settlement features located at these positions, as well photographic documentation. A small collection of surface material was also made. The detailed archaeological excavations carried out at the Tubatse Switching Station

previously by Pelsner (on similar and related sites) were used to interpret the archaeology of the sites at T15/T17.

Mapping

The mapping was done during two sessions - one in October 2014 and then a final session in February 2015 in order to determine the extent and nature of the sites and individual features that will be impacted on by the erection of the T15 & T17 electric pylons. The mapping aimed at determining settlement layout where possible, their functions and the different features located on it.

T15

There is a single circular enclosure located on the position of the T15 pylon, of around 5m in diameter, while there are two smaller ones (approximately 3m in diameter) in the larger area around the pylon position. One of these enclosures also have small platform attached to it that could possibly be a granary stand. In close vicinity (around 50 meters north of the T15 pylon) there is a large open area with evidence of cattle dung deposit, but it is possibly the result of current cattle farming in the area.

A farm road (dirt track) partially runs past and through the enclosure at T15. Besides the identified enclosures no other features were identified in the general area of the T15 Pylon location. The identified stone walling is on average less than 0.50m in height, although in a few sections it nearly reaches 1m. Wall construction is a line of double stones in-filled with smaller rocks and pebbles. Very little cultural material, besides a few scattered pieces of pottery, was identified in the area, while no upper or lower grinding stones were recorded. This is in contrast to the sites excavated at the Tubatse Switching Station area by Pelsner in 2013, where large numbers of upper and lower grinders were found, in conjunction with man-made agricultural terraces, as evidence of fairly large-scale agriculture (ploughing & crop growing) being practiced.

Based on the mapping undertaken at T15, it seems as if these enclosures were used mainly for cattle herding. There are no residential (hut enclosures) areas associated with the T15 features, and it is believed that this could possibly represent a cattle outpost. The one smaller enclosure north of the larger T15 kraal could be the only residential feature, possibly used by a herder or herders looking after the cattle.

Although the dense grass cover made visibility difficult, it is believed that if any further features were later identified, the likelihood is small that they would be any different to those already documented. Only one feature will be impacted by the T15 pylon erection, with all the others preserved in situ, and it is recommended that the proposed development be allowed to continue. The impact on the archaeological site will be minimal.

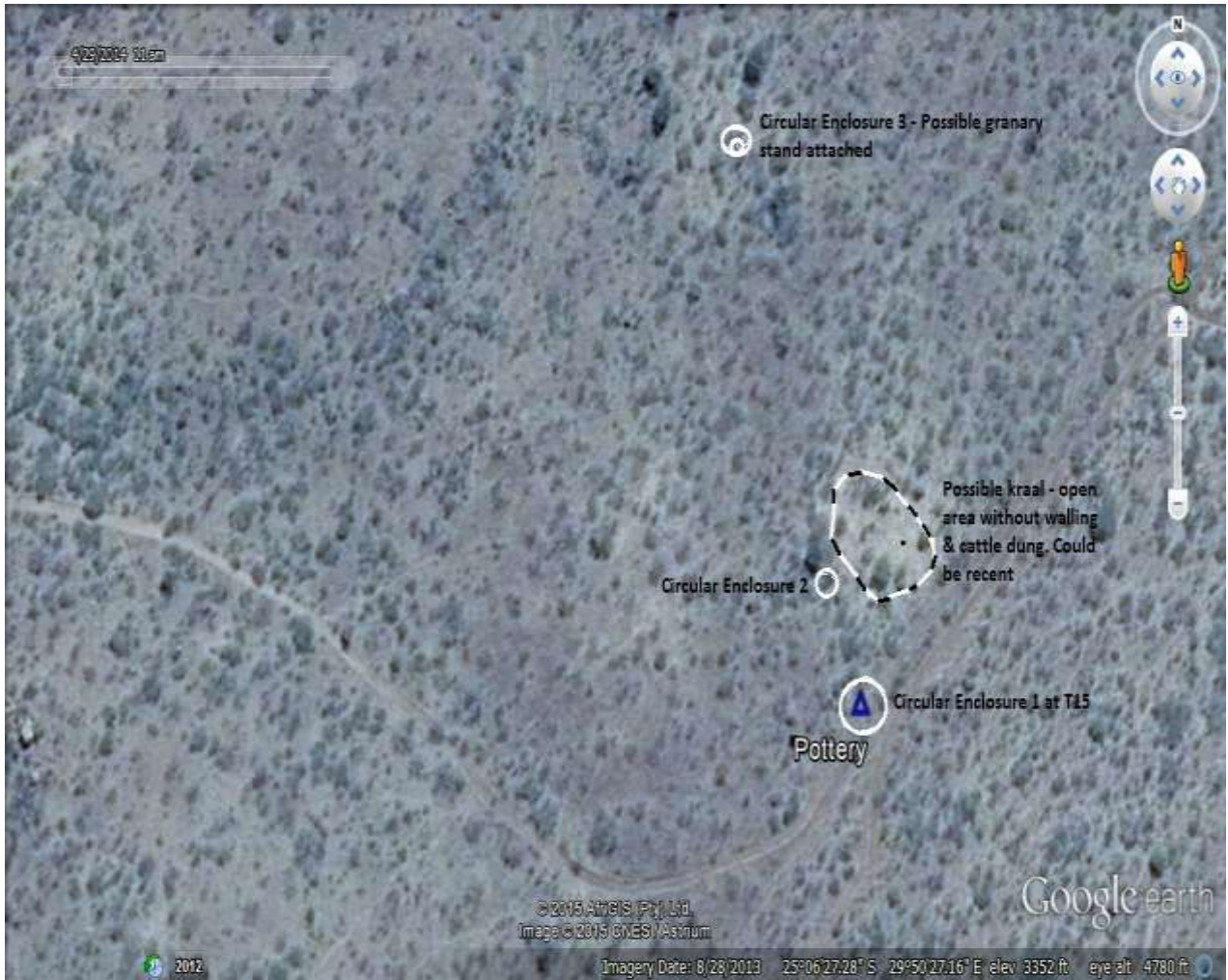


Figure 11: Aerial view of T15 location and site. The features mapped by GPS are visible. Circular Enclosure 1 is situated right at the T15 pylon position and will be destroyed, while the other features will be spanned by the electrical lines running from T15 to T16 (Google Earth 2015).

T17

The T17 site consists of a single large circular enclosure of around 30m in diameter. A stone wall adjoining this enclosure and abutting to a naturally-formed rock terrace situated to the south forms a secondary enclosure of 30m x 70m in size. The T17 site feature is located on this rocky ridge overlooking the Steelpoort River to the south of it. Although Van Schalkwyk (2012) indicated that there could possibly be other smaller enclosures located in close vicinity, none was identified during the mapping and further assessment of the site in 2014 and 2015.

It is believed that the site represents a cattle post overlooking the river below, and although it is possible that other features (possible huts/residential settlement) might be located in the general area, these would not be impacted by the erection of the T17 pylon. The stone walled enclosure located at the T17 location is not significant and it is recommended that it can be demolished by the development.

The stone walling at T17 is in general fairly low (less than 0.50m in height) although in places it is nearly 1m high. Once again it consists of a double row of large stones filled in

with smaller rocks and pebbles. No extensive cultural deposit was visible and only a few small fragments of undecorated pottery were recorded. No other cultural material, such as upper or lower grinding stones, were recorded at the site.



Figure 12: Aerial view of T17 location and features mapped.

The pylon is situated in the center of the kraal and will mainly impact on this feature only. The brown coloured section of the secondary enclosure represents the natural rock terracing to which the packed stone walling adjoins (Google Earth 2015).

Excavations

No excavations were conducted as part of the archaeological investigations of the sites, as hardly any cultural deposit was discernible on the surface of the area where the sites are located. Furthermore, with only small sections of each site affected by the footprints of the Pylons, it was decided to only map the various features and to base the interpretations of these sites on this exercise and our archaeological knowledge of the sites in the area excavated during 2013 at the location of the Tubatse Switching Station.

A collection of surface material (fragments of undecorated pottery) was made and will be shortly discussed below.

Discussion of Cultural Material

Pottery

It was possible to only sample four pieces of pottery from the surface of T15 & T17, with all four undiagnostic (no rims/profiles) and undecorated. With the pieces very small and without any decorations it is difficult to determine to which cultural grouping or Iron Age pottery tradition it belongs. Providing a relative age for the sites is also difficult. However, research in the broader Steelpoort Valley area provides some evidence.

Iron Age occupation of the region seems to have taken place on a significant scale and at least three different phases of occupation have been identified. Sites dating to the Early Iron Age are found in the Steelpoort River valley. Preliminary identification of the pottery indicates that it belong to the Doornkop phase of the Early Iron Age, and should have a date of between AD 600 – 900. These are the same group of people that produced the remarkable clay masks found near Lydenburg in the 1960s. These settlements seem to have been followed at a slightly later date by settlements linked to the Eiland Phase of the EIA (c. AD 1000). The last period of pre-colonial occupation consisted of Pedi-related and Swazi-speaking and Ndebele-speaking people that settled on stone-walled terraced sites at the foot on the mountains. At present it is not clear, but, judged on the pottery found here these sites might even date to early historic times (Van Schalkwyk 2007: 10).

Based on decorated pieces found during the Tubatse Switching Station excavations it is possible that earlier Iron Age occupation of the sites also occurred (Pelser 2013: 28). The types of decoration has similarities with Huffman's Icon facies (of the Urewe Tradition, Moloko Branch) pottery that has key decoration features that include multiple bands of incisions separated by color (either red ochre or black graphite), while also including comb stamping and punctates (Huffman 2007: 185). His research also indicates the presence of Icon in the Steelpoort area, with a most likely date range between AD1300 & 1500 (Huffman 2007: 183).

No other cultural material was identified on the sites, including both upper and lower grinding stones. This is dissimilar to the Tubatse Switching Station sites, which contained a fairly large number of grinding stones (associated with stone-packed agricultural terraces). These areas were clearly used for agricultural purposes mainly, with residential settlement located higher up towards the slopes and foothills of the mountain ranges to the north. The T15 and T17 sites were most probably used as cattle posts, with mainly cattle enclosures identified, possibly during times of stress or conflict.



Figure 13: Undecorated pottery fragments from T15.



Figure 14: An undecorated pottery fragment found at T17.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion it is possible to say that the archaeological investigation of the sites that will be impacted on by the development (erection) of the T15 & T17 electrical pylons, associated with Eskom's Steelpoort-Tubatse-Marble Hall Powerline, was completed successfully. The archaeological investigations comprised mainly the mapping of the sites and features contained on them, and determining their extent, possible layout and the impact of the development on them.

Based on the mapping undertaken at T15, it seems as if these enclosures were used mainly for cattle herding. There are no residential (hut enclosures) areas associated with the T15 features, and it is believed that this could possibly represent a cattle outpost. The one smaller enclosure north of the larger T15 kraal could be the only residential feature, possibly used by a herder or herders looking after the cattle. Although the dense grass cover made visibility difficult, it is believed that if any further features were later identified, the likelihood is small that they would be any different to those already documented. Only one feature will be impacted by the T15 pylon erection, with all the others preserved in situ, and it is recommended that the proposed development be allowed to continue. The impact on the archaeological site will be minimal.

It is believed that site T17 represents a cattle post overlooking the river below, and although it is possible that other features (possible huts/residential settlement) might be located in the general area, these would not be impacted by the erection of the T17 pylon. The stone walled enclosure located at the T17 location is not significant and it is recommended that it can be demolished by the development.

No excavations were conducted as part of the archaeological investigations of the sites, as hardly any cultural deposit was discernible on the surface of the area where the sites are located. Furthermore, with only small sections of each site affected by the footprints of the Pylons, it was decided to only map the various features and to base the interpretations of these sites on this exercise and our archaeological knowledge of the sites in the area excavated during 2013 at the location of the Tubatse Switching Station.

It was possible to only sample four pieces of pottery from the surface of T15 & T17, with all four undiagnostic (no rims/profiles) and undecorated. With the pieces very small and without any decorations it is difficult to determine to which cultural grouping or Iron Age pottery tradition it belongs. Providing a relative age for the sites is also difficult. However, research in the broader Steelpoort Valley area provided some evidence.

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Finally it is concluded that the development (the erection of the T15 & T17 pylons) will have a limited impact on the stone walled sites in the area and that only a relatively small section of each site will be destroyed as a result.

From an archaeological perspective the development should therefore be allowed to continue after the issuing of a destruction permit by SAHRA, taking cognizance of the following recommendations:

a. should any significant archaeological features, such as possible granary pits, unmarked human burials and cultural material deposits be exposed during any development actions work should be halted in the areas where they are discovered and an archaeologist must then be called in to investigate and recommend on the best way forward.

b. development work should only be limited to the area indicated originally. Should there be any amendments to the development footprint and location this should be reported and the changes investigated to determine if any new sites and features could possibly be impacted.

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