

Phase 1 Palaeontological and Archaeological Impact
Assessment of the proposed Homestead Township
extension at Thabong, Matjhabeng Local Municipality,
Free State Province.



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Executive Summary

- A Phase 1 Heritage Impact Assessment was carried in Thabong where anticipated development calls for the development of 778 erven for the proposed Homestead Township extension.
- The site is situated near and within a densely populated residential area where the landscape has been severely disturbed by suburban development and prior farming activities.
- There is no evidence of intact or capped Stone Age archaeological material or Quaternary fossil remains within the confines of the affected areas.
- There are no indications of prehistoric structures or rock engravings within the affected areas.
- There is also no evidence of graves, graveyards or historical structures within the confines of the affected areas.
- It is also unlikely that the proposed development will significantly impact on potentially fossil-bearing bedrock. However, in the event where deep trench excavations could affect underlying Adelaide Subgroup sediments, it is advised that newly uncovered objects of palaeontological significance must be reported to the relevant heritage authorities (SAHRA or FSPHRA).
- There are **no major archaeological or palaeontological grounds** to suspend the proposed development.
- **The site** has been sufficiently recorded, mapped and documented in terms of conditions necessary for a Phase 1 heritage impact assessment and **can be accessed for development**.

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Introduction

At the request of Phethogo Consulting in Bloemfontein, a Phase 1 Heritage Impact Assessment was carried out at a 115 ha site demarcated for the development of 778 erven for the proposed Homestead Township extension in Thabong in the Free State Province (**Fig. 1**) The extent of the proposed development (over 5000 m²) falls within the requirements for a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) as required by Section 38 (Heritage Resources Management) of the South African National Heritage Resources Act (Act No. 25 of 1999). The site visit and subsequent assessment took place during October 2013. The task involved identification of possible archaeological and paleontological sites or occurrences in the proposed zone, an assessment of their significance, possible impact by the proposed development and recommendations for mitigation where relevant.

Description of the Affected Area

Details of development and the area surveyed

Locality data

1:50 000 topographical map 2726 DD Riebeeckstad

The affected area is made up of 115 ha of flat, open veld situated east of Bronville and north of the Saaiplaas goldmine on the farm Homestead 668 between the R73 and R70 national roads (**Table 1, Fig. 2 - 4**).

Geology

From oldest to youngest, the geology in and around the affected area is made up of Permian Ecca shales (Volksrust Formation, *Pvo*), late Permian sandstones and mudstone layers of the Adelaide Subgroup (*Pa*, Beaufort Group) Jurassic dolerite intrusions (*Jd*, Karoo Dolerite Suite), Quaternary calcretes, surface limestones, calcified pandunes (*Qc*) and aeolian sands (*Qs*). Outcrops of Volksrust Formation shales (Ecca Group) and Adelaide Subgroup rocks are indicated to the east and south of the affected area and except for dolerite intrusions, the affected area is mainly covered by Quaternary-age surface deposits and residual soils (**Fig. 5**).

Methodology

The baseline study involved a pedestrian survey of the area. A Garmin Etrex Vista GPS hand model (set to the WGS 84 map datum) and a digital camera, were used to

record relevant data. Relevant archaeological and palaeontological information were assimilated for the report and integrated with data acquired during the on-site inspection.

Background

Karoo Fossils

Although there are no records of fossil occurrences from the Volksrust Formation in the vicinity of the study area, the formation is characterized by the presence of plant fossils, with six genera, representing the glossopterids and possibly other seed fern groups (Bamford 2003). A pelecypod bivalve have been described from the distal sediments of a prograding delta, at the Beaufort Group–Ecca Group boundary (Cairncross *et al.* 2005) and beetles (Coleoptera) have been recorded from the formation in Kwazulu-Natal (Ponomarenko & Mostovski 2005). Reptile fossils are absent from the formation. The Volksrust Formation is generally considered to be of low palaeontological sensitivity.

As part of the fossil-rich Beaufort Group strata, the overlying Adelaide Subgroup rocks (*Pa*) in the region are assigned to a biostratigraphic biozone called the *Dicynodon* Assemblage Zone (**Fig. 6**). This biozone outcrops continuously around the Karoo Basin and is characterized by a varied and abundant therapsid fauna, including the presence of both *Dicynodon* and *Theriongnathus*. Therapsids from this biozone are generally well-preserved in mudrock horizons and are usually found as dispersed and isolated specimens associated with an abundance of calcareous nodules. Other vertebrate fossils include fish, amphibians and amniotes. Molluscs, insects, plant (*Dadoxylon*, *Glossopteris*) Trace fossils (arthropod trails, worm burrows) have also been recorded in this biozone.

Karoo Dolerites

Dolerite (*Jd*), in the form of dykes and sills are not palaeontologically significant and can be excluded from further consideration in the present palaeontological evaluation. It is however moderately significant from an archaeological point of view as many Stone Age quarry sites (knapping sites) are found at the foot of dolerite hills where hornfels outcrop occur as a result of contact metamorphism following the intrusion of dykes and sills.

Late Cenozoic Deposits

Exploratory surveys along fluviially derived overbank sediments of the Sand, Doring and Vet Rivers and their tributaries to the south of Thabong, indicate that these river systems contain fossil remains of a variety of extinct mammals. In addition, the alluvial sediments are also valuable sources of open-site Stone Age archaeological assemblages. The Stone Age archaeological footprint in the region is largely represented by the occurrence of open-site, Middle Stone Age (MSA) and Later Stone Age (LSA) assemblages that are occasionally discovered, in association with mammal fossil remains, in a series of erosional gullies along the Sand, Doring and Vet Rivers between Virginia and Theunisen (**Fig. 7 no. 1 – 5**).

Ancient pan sites in the region, such as the one at Whites near Hennenman, have equally produced abundant Quaternary-aged mammal fossil remains (**Fig. 7 no. 6**). The discovery of *in situ* proboscidian fossil material, consisting of a lower molar, the proximal half of an ulna and a large part of a tusk from fluvial sediments over 40 meters, above the riverbed of the Sand River near Virginia, has highlighted the potential antiquity of the gravel terraces flanking the modern Sand River (**Fig. 7 no. 7**). The fossiliferous fluvial deposits are tentatively dated to the Pliocene based on the occurrence of specimens included in this taxon, in beds of early to middle Pliocene age from the Vaal River terraces and Langebaanweg.

There are no records of rock engravings in the vicinity of the survey area. The survey area is situated at the western periphery of distribution of Late Iron Age settlements in the Free State. Ruins of Late Iron Age settlements are found on several farms to the east, such as the large settlement complex at Strydfontein (OXF 1, Maggs 1976) between Hennenman and Ventersburg (**Fig. 7 no. 8**).

Results of Survey

The site is blanketed by Quaternary-age aeolian sands and residual soils (topsoils) (**Fig. 8**). The natural terrain has been extensively altered by previous crop farming activities and subsequent use by the local residents (**Fig. 9**). There is no evidence of intact or capped Stone Age or Iron Age archaeological material or Quaternary fossils within the confines of the footprint. There are no indications of prehistoric structures or rock engravings within the footprint area. There is also no evidence of graves, graveyards or historical structures older than 60 years within the confines of the footprint.

Statement of Significance

Potential impacts are summarized in **Table 2**. The nature of the proposed development will almost certainly have an adverse affect on residual topsoils (Quaternary sediments) that are largely disturbed as a result of prior farming activities and overgrazing. It is unlikely that the proposed development will result in any significant palaeontological or archaeological impact at the site. It is also unlikely that the proposed development will significantly impact on potentially fossil-bearing bedrock. However, in the event where deep trench excavations could affect underlying Adelaide Subgroup sediments, it is advised that newly uncovered objects of palaeontological significance must be reported to the relevant heritage authorities (SAHRA or FSPHRA).

Recommendation

There are no major archaeological or palaeontological grounds to suspend the proposed development. The site has been sufficiently recorded, mapped and documented in terms of conditions necessary for a Phase 1 heritage impact assessment and can be accessed for development.

References

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List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. General coordinates of the area surveyed.

Loc.	Coordinates
NW corner	27°59'8.18"S 26°49'49.86"E
NE corner	27°58'42.40"S 26°50'55.01"E
SE corner	27°58'56.36"S 26°50'59.76"E
SW corner	27°59'25.86"S 26°49'55.05"E

Table 2. Summary of potential impacts at the site.

Rock type / Age	Duration of Development	Overall Palaeontological significance	Overall Archaeological significance	Palaeontological Impact at site	Archaeological Impact at site
Aeolian sands, Alluvium, Residual soils (Quaternary)	Permanent	Low	Moderate	Low	Low
Dolerite Suite, <i>Jd</i> (Jurassic)	Permanent	None	Low - Moderate (Stone Age quarries)	None	None
Mudstone, Sandstone; Adelaide Subgroup, <i>Pa</i> (Permian)	Permanent	Moderate - High	None	Low	None
Shale, siltstone, Sandstone / Eccu Group, <i>Pvo</i> (Permian)	Permanent	Low	None	None	None

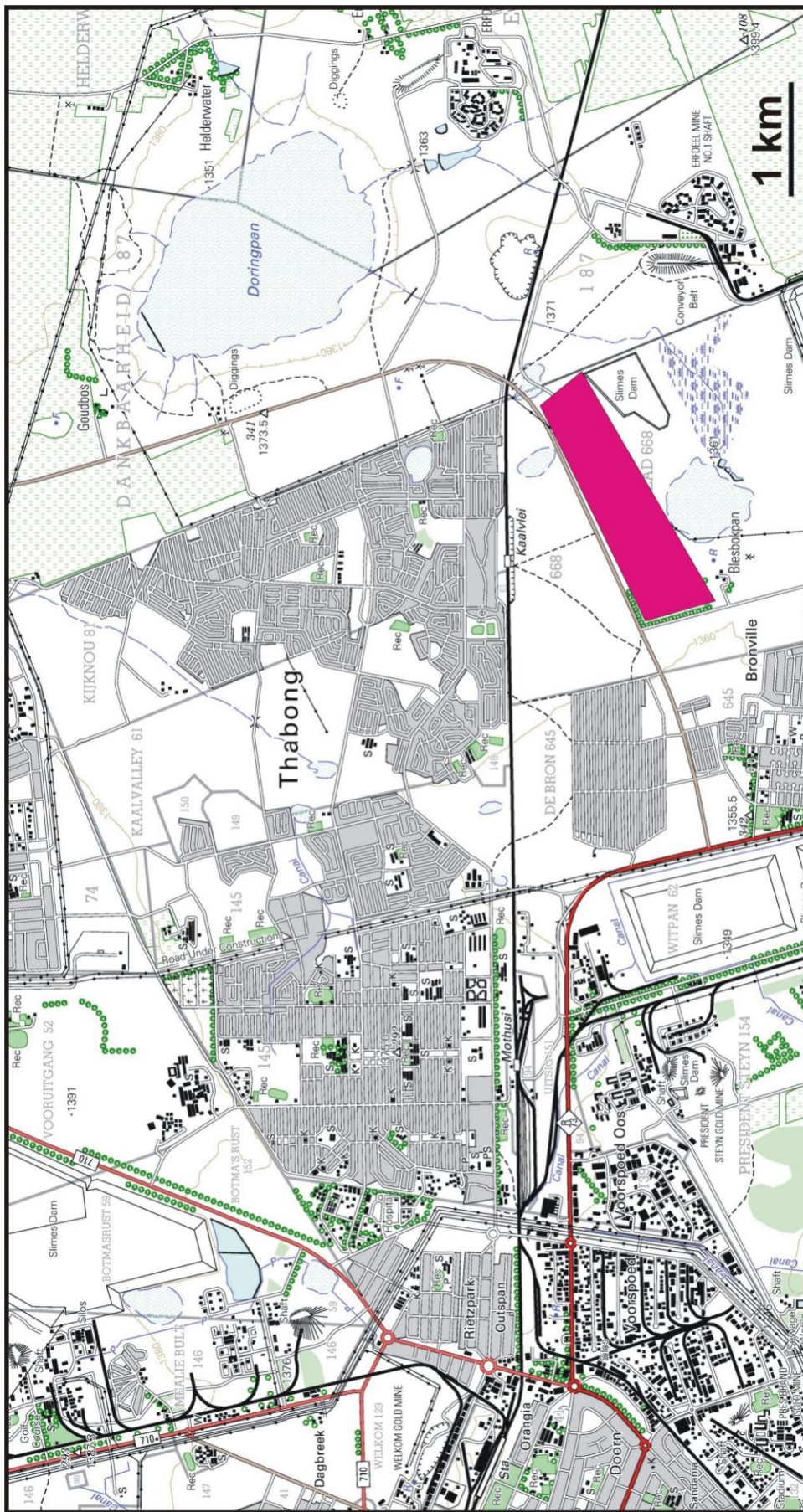


Figure 1. Locality of the proposed Homestead Township extension (portion of 1:50 000 scale topographic map 2726 DD Riebeeckstad).

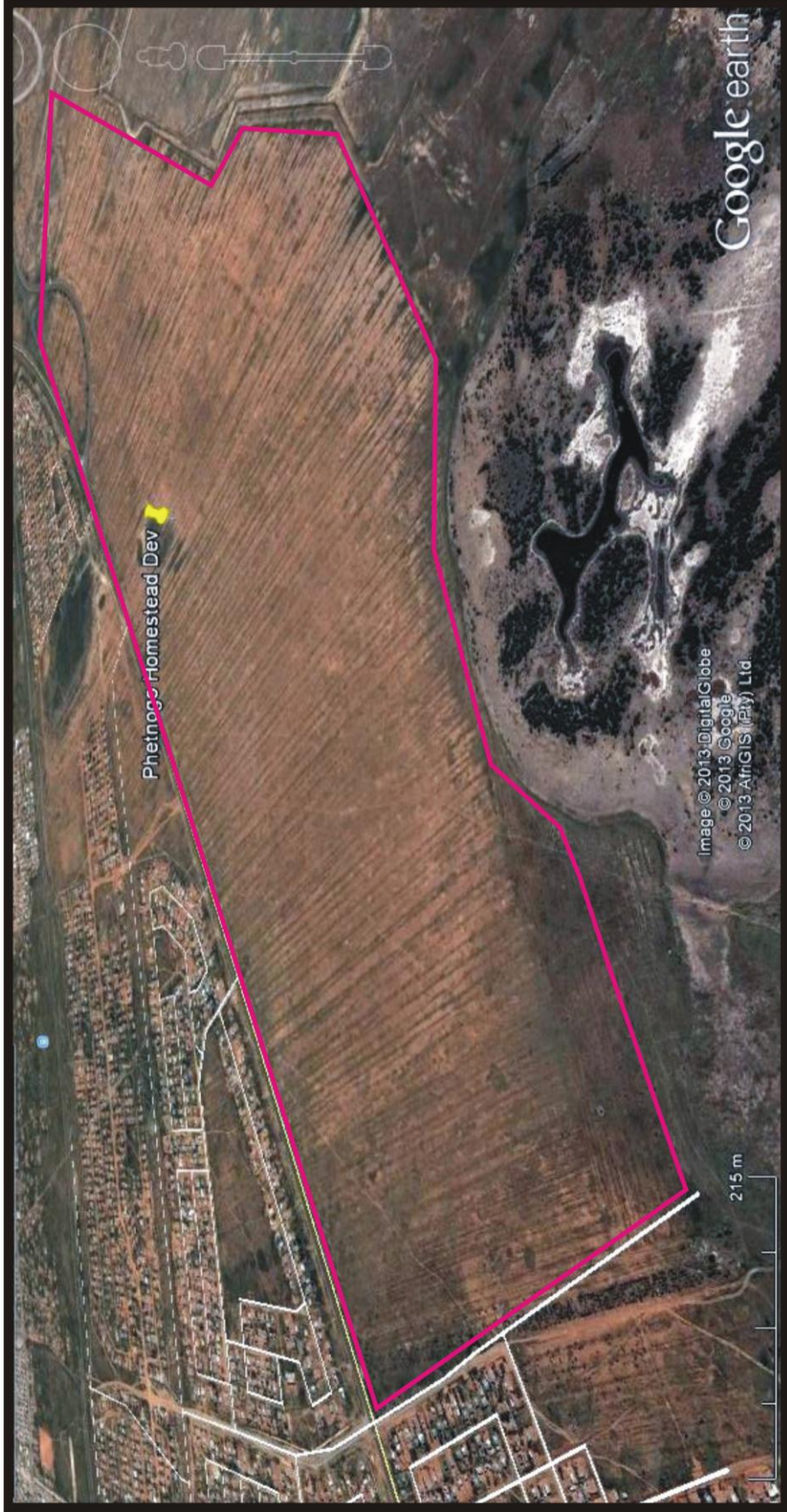


Figure 2. Aerial view of the study area.

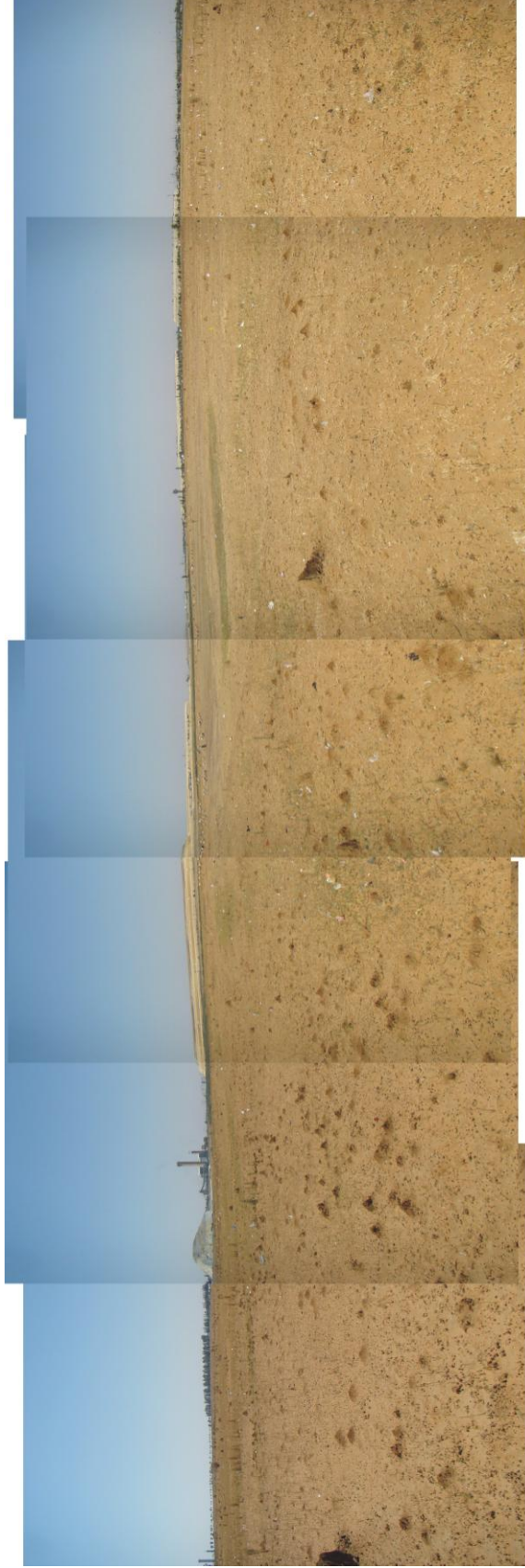


Figure 3. Panoramic view of the study area, looking south.



Figure 4. The affected area is made up of 115 ha of flat, open veld situated east of the Bronville Township (above, looking west towards Bronville) and north of the Saaiplaas goldmine (below, looking southeast towards the Erfdeel No. 1 Mine Shaft).

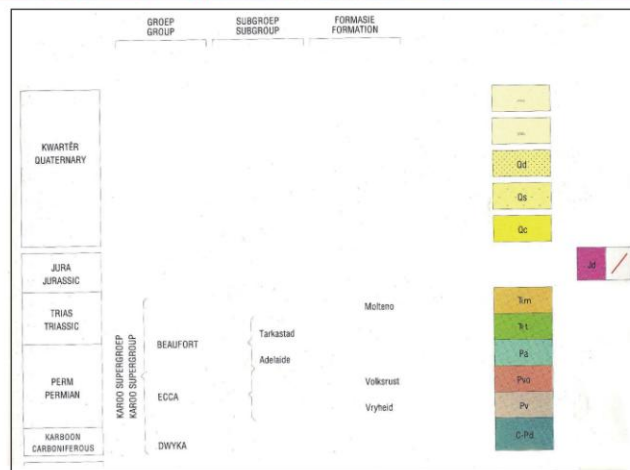
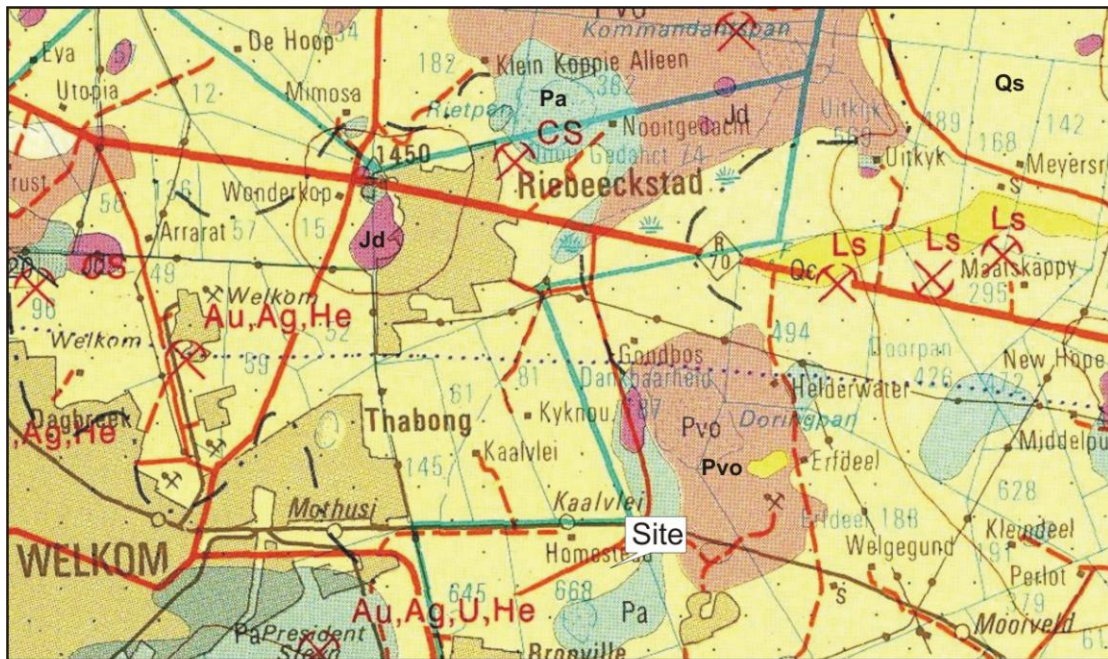


Figure 5. Portion of 1:250 000 scale geological map 2726 Kroonstad. From oldest to youngest, the geology in and around the affected area is made up of Permian Eccca shales (Volksrust Formation, Pvo), late Permian sandstones and mudstone layers of the Adelaide Subgroup (Pa, Beaufort Group) Jurassic dolerite intrusions (Jd, Karoo Dolerite Suite), Quaternary calcretes, surface limestones, calcified pandunes (Qc) and aeolian sands (Qs).

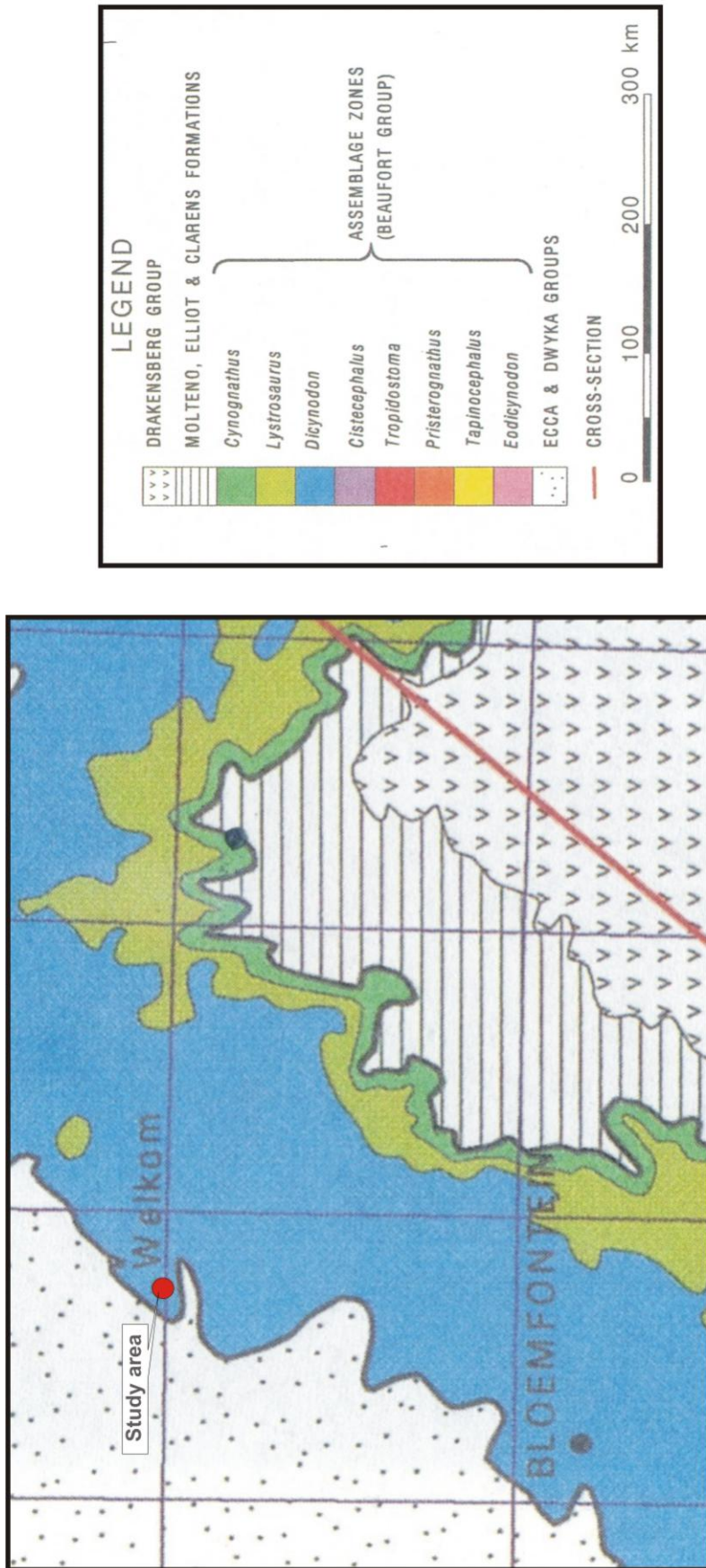


Figure 6. Geographical distribution of vertebrate biozones of the Beaufort Group between Bloemfontein and Welkom (after Rubidge 1995).

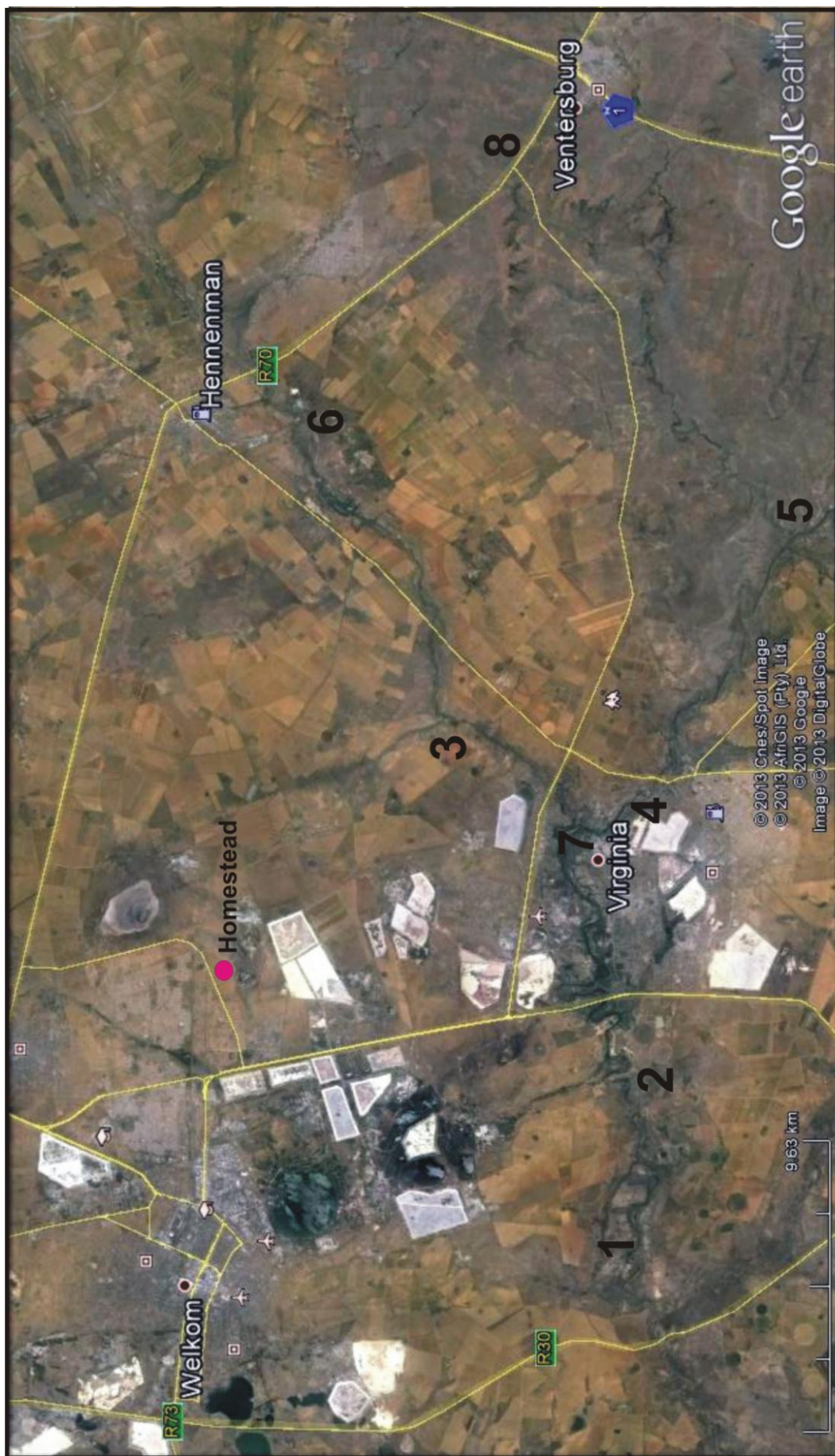


Figure 7. Map of known palaeontological and archaeological sites in the area.



Figure 8. The site is blanketed by Quaternary-age aeolian sands and residual soils (topsoils)



Figure 9. The natural terrain has been extensively altered by previous crop farming activities and subsequent use by the local residents.