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Merweville-Prince Albert Road 'Far North' Quarry Site Archaeological/Palaeontological Assessment

Executive Summary

The proposed quarry site was surveyed. A stone slab with engravings of three female figures was known to occur on the property. This has been marked on the ground and it is recommended that left *in situ* and protected a covering of geotextile, sand and rock stabilised as a cairn by lime plaster. The position will need to be taken into account in the erection of plant and protection will need to be managed through the life of the mine. No certain graves or burial mounds were recorded. There are isolated occurrences of stone artefacts but none in a context that would warrant further investigation. No occurrences of palaeontological significance were noted.

Background and brief

A suitable quarry site for sandstone road material for upgrading the Merweville-Prince Albert Road 582 has been identified in the 'Far North Cutting' 10 kilometres from Merweville but within the boundaries of the Western Cape (SitePlan Map Fig.1). The site, which will include a quarry, plant, stockpiles and facilities areas, is east of the main road on the farm Wakkerstroom. The west side of 'Far North Cutting' offers a possible extension of the quarry area, which will only be used if additional material is required. The total area that will be impacted by activities is under 10 ha and the main quarry will be 1 ha in area.

The botanical and ecological assessment by Sue Milton reported a rock with engravings on the east side of the main road and rocks marking what was thought to be a grave on the west side marginal to the possible quarry extension. Given the size of the area and the known presence of some cultural remains an archaeological and palaeontological assessment was carried out on 25-26 January 2005 on behalf of Site Plan, the agency appointed by Kwezi V3. The brief was to document the known findings and, in the absence of any prior archaeological assessment of this specific location, the site in general.

Description of the property

The area is underlain by rock of the Beaufort Group. Ridges are formed by outcrops of sandstones on the northern and southern margins of the area with a colluvium cover on the pediment slopes leading to an incised stream that bisects the area. The vegetation cover is sparse outside the stream course. The area adjacent to the main

road at the main quarry site is particularly disturbed due to previous road building activities

The stockpiles, facilities and plant will be located on the gently sloping pediment below the ridge that forms the southern boundary (Fig. 2) and on either side of the Wakkerstroom farm road. Development will not directly affect the course of the stream. The main quarry will be adjacent to and east of the main road. Material will be transported from the quarry along a haulage road following the northern ridge to crushers and across the stream by conveyor to the plant located in the south east of the property.

Methods

On 25 January the period from 11h00 to 17h00 (6 hours) and on 26 January the period from 6h00 to 14h00 (8 hours) was spent on site. The known cultural occurrences were relocated and the area of potential impact traversed on foot. GPS readings refer to setting WGS84. A particular search was made for features that may indicate graves and for the presence of Stone Age artefacts that would indicate a human presence in prehistoric times.

Description of reported occurrences

The **engraved slab** (32°45.734 S; 21°35.314 E) is 730 by 340 mm in size making it a substantial object. Overbank discharge of the stream after recent rain (the bed of the stream is only 15 m from the slab) had partly covered the engravings with silt and some detail may have been obscured. There are three incised line stylised female figures with legs as noted by Sue Milton in her report although the details of the upper portions of the figures, the 'wings', are less clear. A tracing of the engraving was made as a record (Fig. 3). The surface is evenly weathered suggesting the engraving is not recent. There are no associated materials to indicate the age.

The find is significant and conservation worthy. The plotted position is on the edge of the area designated for the plant but it would be impacted by the development. There are two options protection, *in situ* or removal. The former is the preferred option recommended here. By covering the slab with about three layers of geotextile the surface would be protected from abrasion. It could be covered with a layer 50-100 mm thick of fine sediment to keep the geotextile in place and then packed with rocks to form a low cairn. A lime plaster mix (1 part lime and 4 parts sand) can be used to keep the rocks in position and the white of the lime plaster will make the cairn prominent and avoidable. Marked in this way the engraving can be protected cheaply and effectively during the operation of the plant and be uncovered again on the rehabilitation of the area at the end of the life of the quarry in 10 years. A concern is that its position is close to that of planned surge pile and conveyor. The large and bulky slab has study rather than display value and therefore removal to a museum like that at Prince Albert is not recommended. To aid locating the engraving a metal fence dropper and small stone cairn serve as markers.

The possible **burial cairn** reported (32°45.660 S; 21°35.063 E) is on the edge of the Far North Cutting (West) area that will only be quarried if additional material is required. The cairn is a ring of larger stones (~ 400 mm) resting on a solid sandstone outcrop with fine stones (~60 mm) packed within the ring. The dimension is 700 by 600 mm. It is a roughly circular, artificial feature. The solid base and limited height (300 mm) above the base makes it improbable it was a grave. The fragments of

porcelain insulator and the telephone pole nearby may be associated with it. It is not considered culturally significant.

Description of other areas (refer to Fig.2)

Far North Cutting (West) Area is a ridge top with little soil cover and good visibility. A single Later Stone Age core was noted (32°45.674 S; 21°35.064) but no other cultural materials. As an isolated find this is not significant. The area was searched for possible stone features that might mark burials but none were seen. If the quarry is extended to this area the impact would be minimal.

The surface of the **Far North Cutting (East)** or main quarry area shows disturbance by previous road building activities. It is a ridge top with outcrops and surface rocks have been moved to form piles as markers. The area was searched for any older stone features that could be associated with graves. There are two heaps of stone, 2 m apart, 1.7 and 1.2 m in length and orientated N/S at 32°45.674 S; 21°35.064 E that may be artificial. They are vegetated and therefore not recent and are associated with quartz float. They lie to the east of the line of stone cairns that appear to mark the quarry boundary and thus would fall outside the area of impact. Although the lack of soil depth makes it improbable these are burials they are best left undisturbed.

The planned **Haulage Road** parallels the north bank of the stream and no cultural remains were recorded along its track although visibility is low due to vegetation cover.

The **Plant Area** includes the engraving as the main feature. Surface wash has eroded a section outside the eastern edge of the demarcated Plant Area and a simple core with two flake removals (32°45.740 S; 21.35.381 E) and unassociated with this several flakes were noted. There is no defined artefact scatter and the significance is low.

The **Stockpile Area A** and **Facilities** areas are to be located at the base of base of the ridge running along the southern boundary of the site. No occurrences of cultural material were seen on the ridge or its slope. There is an abrupt change in slope at the base of the ridge where the pediment sloping down to the stream starts. The pediment is mantled with colluvium. Individual stone artefacts were noted in the colluvial slope deposits in very low density. Only one typologically distinctive early Holocene type end scraper (32°45.782 S; 21°35.354 E) was recorded. The significance is rated as low.

The **Stockpile Area B** has been affected by overbank flooding of the stream. The surface is stony and there are no significant scatters of artefacts.

Palaeontological assessment

In the course of the survey no remains of palaeontological interest were noted.

Conclusions

The main cultural feature of concern is the engraving. It is recommended that this be adequately protected and retained on site. The protection of the feature will have to be managed through the life of the mine. There are no certain grave sites on the property. There are stone artefacts within the area but none form an occurrence of significance meriting further investigation.

