

PHASE 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF CONSTANTIA NEK AND CONWAY REDOUBT

Prepared for

Piet Louw Architects

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1 Introduction

The Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town was commissioned by Piet Louw Architects to complete a phase 1 archaeological investigation of the Constantia Nek area with particular reference to the Conway Redoubt, a small fortification built by French troops during the Dutch East India Company occupation of the Cape. Harris and Loos have completed a broader heritage impact assessment aimed at gaining a strategic understanding of the heritage significance of Constantia Nek. The ever-increasing popularity of Hout Bay as a residential area and a tourism destination has subjected the Constantia Nek area to increased vehicular pressure, a situation requiring remediation. The assessments, including this report, are aimed at isolating potential impacts, constraints and design informants in the planning of Constantia Nek.

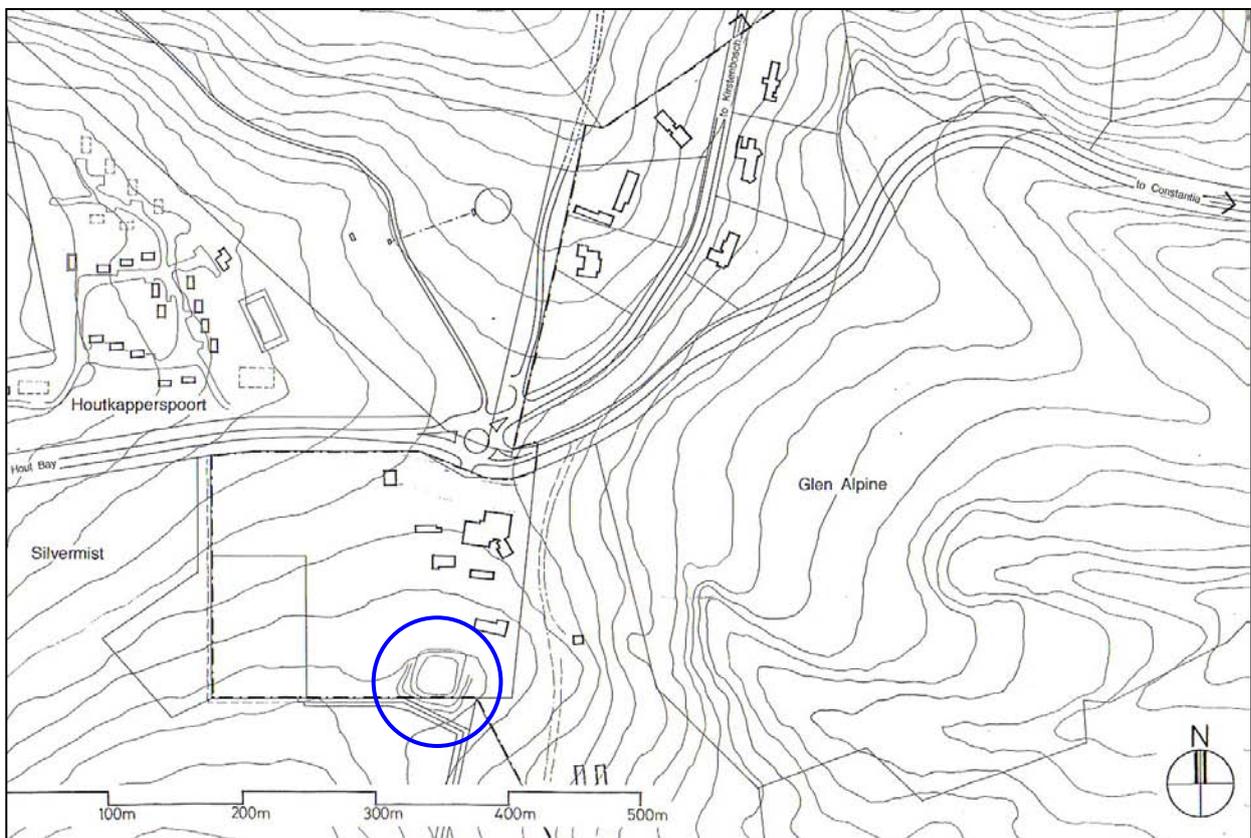


Figure 1 The study area with Conway Redoubt indicated (blue circle). After plan supplied by Piet Louw Architects.

While Harris and Loos have commented on the broader heritage environment, this archaeological report is a more focussed study concentrating on the material remains of human activity (Archaeology) as protected by the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999.

2 General archaeological survey of Constantia Nek

The vicinity of the traffic circle, picnic area and informal parking area was subject to an archaeological survey for surface remnants of archaeological material. The area has been subject to disturbance in the past as a result of construction activities, levelling of the area for building the roads and traffic circle. Fill material has also been imported into the informal parking area.

2.1 Findings

A single irregular core made from quartzite dating to the Early Stone Age (300 - 1 million years ago) was found in the informal parking area (Figure 3) to the north of the traffic circle. There are unsubstantiated reports of a hand axe being found in the same area some years ago. The occurrence of such material in the area is not unexpected as Early Stone Age artefacts are fairly common in the nearby Constantia Valley.

It is likely that other structures such as a lodge, magazine and barracks may have been associated with Conway Redoubt. No surface indications of any remains were noted.

2.2 Significance

The find consists of a single artefact in a dubious context. It does not warrant further investigation.

3 Conway Redoubt

3.1 Historical Background

France and the United Provinces of the Netherlands recognised the American Declaration of Independence of 1776. This resulted in hostilities between Britain and France. The French being in alliance with the Dutch, feared that Britain would attempt to take the Cape of Good Hope to further their trade with the East Indies. This resulted in the French Pondicherry regiment being dispatched to the Cape in 1781 under the leadership of Colonel Conway. A French report on the defences at the Cape identified the gaps in the Dutch defence system. The regiment then set about upgrading the facilities around the Peninsula. One of their important achievements was increasing the effectiveness of the flag and cannon signalling system that communicated information about the movements of ships to military headquarters at the Castle of The Cape of Good Hope in Cape Town.¹ The Conway Redoubt was built to signal the arrival of ships and defend Constantia Nek from any enemy who attempted to march over the Nek after landing at Hout Bay.

Smith², together with students from UCT Archaeology and UCT Surveying Department, investigated the site in 1978, mapping it and conducting trial excavations. He describes the remains of the fort as an earth wall enclosure (about 5 m thick) built by piling soil excavated from the surrounding ditch towards the interior. The fort is about 35x35 m in size and was probably supplemented by a wooden palisade surmounted on the

¹ Military Observations on the Existing Conditions at the Cape of Good Hope (1781). Original manuscript housed in Library of Parliament Published by Smith, A.B.1981 *In* The French period at the Cape, 1781 - 1783:a report on excavations at the Conway Redoubt. Military History Journal. Volume 5 No 3.

² Smith, A.B.1981 The French period at the Cape, 1781 - 1783:a report on excavations at the Conway Redoubt. Military History Journal. Volume 5 No 3.

earthworks. De Vries³ maintains that it was equipped with at least one six-pounder muzzle loading cannon, an example of which is located close to the entrance to the Constantia Nek Restaurant. The small garrison that manned the fort probably lived in separate barracks close by but no evidence of this exists today. When the French troops were withdrawn from the Cape in 1783, the fort seems to have been abandoned. By 1786 it appears that the palisades around the earthworks had been stolen by the locals and burned for firewood.

3.2 Current State of Conway Redoubt

The fort currently lies within the boundary of land owned by the Constantia Nek Restaurant, which is protected by a high security fence. The hiking trail running between the Silvermist Estate and the Constantia Nek Restaurant land passes within a few meters of the redoubt, however it is virtually unrecognisable due to the security fence and dense alien vegetation (Figure 2). This means that to all intents and purposes Conway Redoubt is not physically or visibly accessible to the public.

Access to the site is by courtesy of Constantia Neck Restaurant. It lies within the security fence at the southernmost extreme of the property. The site takes on the appearance of a large earth mound with a slightly sunken interior. It is heavily overgrown by young Eucalyptus trees that will eventually impact any structural integrity that the site may still retain. Smith reports that when he excavated at the site in 1978, the walls of the fortification had eroded to the point that they had probably lost a great deal of their original form.

At present, Conway Redoubt is unrecognisable to the untrained eye as a heritage site. It is completely inaccessible to the public, uncelebrated and slowly deteriorating.

3.3 Significance of Conway Redoubt as a heritage site

Fabric: The surviving fabric of Conway Redoubt is unspectacular and according to the archaeological excavations conducted by Smith, contains little by way of unique elements. The site is difficult to interpret without supplementary explanatory material and prior knowledge of the role it played in the past.

Place: The humble remains of the Conway Redoubt are nevertheless significant as an element or place on the historic landscape of Constantia Nek - a strategic pass that controlled access of friend and foe alike to the greater Cape Peninsula. It directly signifies the way in which colonial possessions such as the Cape, despite their remoteness from Europe became embroiled in the international politics of the time.

Military Landscape: The current endeavours of the Hout Bay Heritage Trust are focused on the military history of Hout Bay with their initiatives to develop and showcase East Fort. This has the potential to highlight the significance of other smaller fortifications such as Conway Redoubt by bringing them into the public eye. Conway redoubt is a small element of the military landscape of the Peninsula having played a significant role in the signal cannon system that regulated military activities throughout the Cape.

³ Devries, G, and Hall, J. The Muzzle Loading Cannon of South Africa. Durr Cannon Research. Private Publication.

3.4 Conservation and development guidelines

- Although the remains of the fort are somewhat austere and unspectacular, the place is historically significant and protected by National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999.
- The site of the Conway Redoubt and the surrounding area of 50m radius should be protected from impacts of development activities, and ideally actively conserved.
- The fact that the site lies entirely on private land precludes any development of the site as a heritage resource without the full co-operation and goodwill of the owner. Incorporation of the site as a feature of interest on the nearby walking trail would require that the boundary fence be moved around the north side of the fort, or that the fort be separately fenced with access through a gate into the Constantia Nek Restaurant property.
- Tree growth on the fort has, and will continue to cause gradual damage. Ideally the trees should be removed and the earth walls of the fort planted with grass to control erosion.
- Archaeological excavations by Andrew Smith in 1978 did not reveal much by way of artefactual material, but he was able to determine how the fort was built. It is possible that further archaeological excavation may reveal more as Smith indicated that his investigation was limited trial holes. If the site were ever opened to the public, archaeological excavation may succeed in making more visible the original extent of the earthworks and the ditch around the exterior.
- An illustrated sign placed close the hiking path would go some way to indicating the historic significance of the Nek and the role played by Conway Redoubt.

4 Conclusion

- Conway Redoubt is a significant heritage feature that should not be impacted by development activities. Celebration of the site as a showpiece or feature of interest for tourism purposes is difficult as the site lies entirely on private land and is not visible from any public space and hardly recognisable from the hiking trail.
- It is possible that there are buried remains of a barrack building located somewhere between the traffic circle and the lower slopes of Constantiaberg (Silvermist). Anyone involved in development activities in this area need to be alert to this possibility and have an archaeologist contracted to be on site during earthmoving operations.
- The informal parking and picnic areas to the north of the circle are not archaeologically sensitive.



Figure 2. View of Conway Redoubt from the hiking trail behind Constantia Nek Restaurant.



Figure 3. Informal parking area at Constantia Nek