

**TRIAL EXCAVATION TO EXAMINE STATE OF
HISTORIC FURROW (*LEIWATER*) AT ERF 162247,
SILLERY, CONSTANTIA, SOUTH WESTERN CAPE
PROVINCE.**

Prepared for

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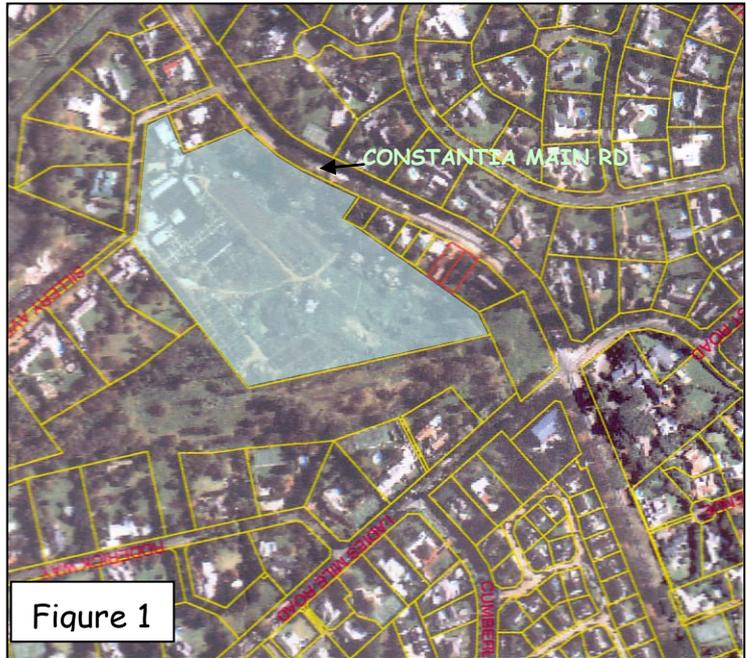
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1. INTRODUCTION

The Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town was appointed by to investigate the state of preservation of an historic irrigation furrow (*Leiwater*) on land known as “Sillery” (erf 162247) situated in Constantia, Southwestern Cape Province (Figure 1). A proposal is currently in place to develop the land for housing purposes – activities which could impact historic features on the site. A heritage impact assessment conducted in 2002 identified several furrows that still exist on the site. The main furrow, which runs along the northern boundary, was filled in during the late 20th century and is no longer visible apart from in public open space on the eastern boundary of the development area.



We were requested to conduct a brief trial excavation to determine if the furrow was still present and appraise its state of preservation.

The furrow system in Constantia was built during the 18th and 19th century. Designed to follow the contours of the landscape these watercourses were the principal mechanisms of bringing water for both domestic and agricultural use to the farms of the Constantia Valley. The furrows fell out of operation during the 20th century with urban densification of the area, and as a result are only visible in a few undisturbed places on the landscape. The main furrow, which ran through Sillery no longer has a water supply and was filled with domestic rubble in the late 20th century. A small portion of it remains visible in Public Open Space over the north east boundary of the property.

2. FINDINGS

The archaeological trial excavation took the form of a single transverse cut across the alignment of furrow a resident of the area (see Figure 5). After some 5 hours of excavation the furrow was clearly visible. It took the form of a large “v” shaped ditch cut into the surrounding clays. There was no evidence of any stone lining on the base or sides of the feature. The ditch was filled with recent debris including glass bottles, plastic bags, blocks of concrete and other builder’s rubble.

The furrow is a visually unspectacular structure and fairly informal, but is nevertheless very well preserved as a result of its buried state (Figure 4). It is highly likely that aspects of the furrow are present across the northern edge of the proposed

development area, and could be easily identified through further archaeological excavation.

Figure 2

The alignment of the furrow lies roughly on the left hand side of this path along the northwest border of the erf. The furrow remains visible on the border of the property in the distance.



Figure 3

All that is visible of the furrow in the public open space is a sunken area over grown with vegetation.



Figure 4

The clay bottom and side of the furrow is clearly visible in the trial excavation. The rubble fill is easily distinguishable.



3. CONSERVATION STATUS

The furrow is well conserved by virtue of the fact that it is buried. From a long-term conservation point of view this is a desirable situation provided that any services or foundations do not impact the alignment during future development activities.

Opening the furrow is optional. In conservation terms this is not considered a necessity, but will have benefits in terms of education, and adding value to the neighborhood. Along with reuse of the feature are measures that must be put in place with respect to its future operation. Erosion of the earth banks will have to be controlled and debris/pollution will have to be removed from time to time. An additional water source will need to be identified with which to feed the furrow. If opening the furrow is considered, only a limited stretch should be put into use and the rest retained as an archaeological archive in its currently buried state.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- It must be noted that the furrow is visible in Public Open Space. It is however, un-commemorated and choked with vegetation. An option that should be considered is to focus on a portion of the furrow in this area by creating a purpose built path, brush clearing and information signage to explain the significance of the feature (see Figure 3).
- Opening of the furrow within the development area is not a conservation necessity (as the feature is stable while buried) but an option that could be considered by the developer in negotiation with the local community and Heritage Western Cape.
- In terms of conservation of the furrow in its buried state, it is recommended that any future property owners should be made aware of its presence and be discouraged from building foundations across the alignment or establishing services in its immediate vicinity.

The dotted blue lines indicate the remains of the furrows (leiwater) which approximate the boundary. The red dotted line roughly indicates the buried furrow and blue arrow, the trial excavation.



Figure 5

