

# **A RE-EVALUATION OF PROPOSED MITIGATION OF THE SITE GMK 1, GAMKA WILDERNESS RESERVE, LITTLE KAROO**

Prepared for

**Withers Environmental Consultants**

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COPY

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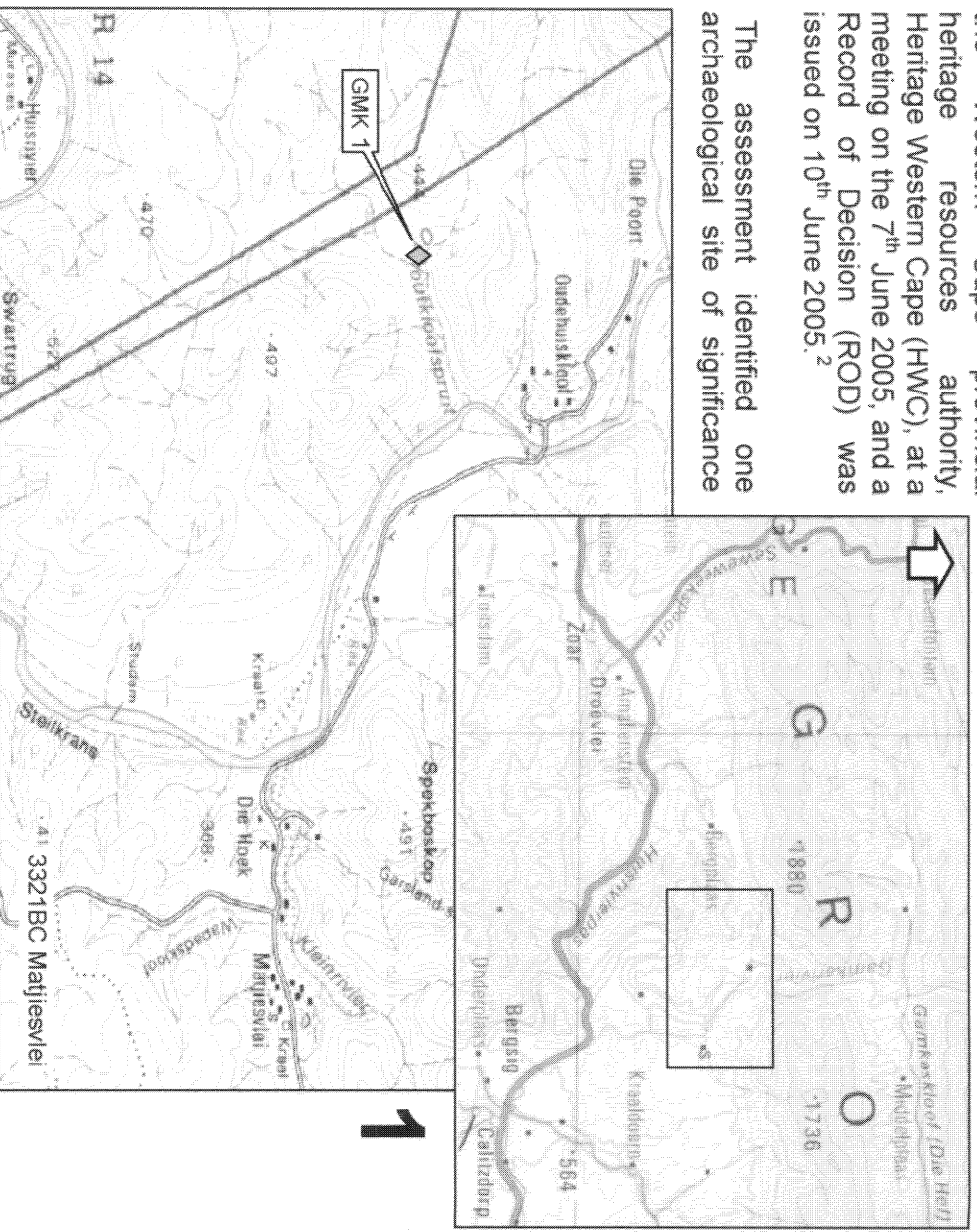
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

An Archaeological Impact Assessment of the proposed development on the farm Huisrivier, (Figure 1) was undertaken by the Agency for Cultural Resource Management in April 2005.<sup>1</sup> The report was discussed by the Archaeology, Meteorites and Palaeontology Committee of the Western Cape provincial heritage resources authority, Heritage Western Cape (HWC), at a meeting on the 7<sup>th</sup> June 2005, and a Record of Decision (ROD) was issued on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2005.<sup>2</sup>

The assessment identified one archaeological site of significance



Mapping information supplied by: Chief Directorate Surveys and Mapping. Website: w3sl.wcape.gov.za

(GMK 1). In the executive summary to the report, Kaplan describes the site as: “a possible Later Stone Age herder site”, containing “archaeological remains comprising of large numbers of stone tools in quartz, dolerite, quartzite, silcrete and chalcedony in an area of about 0.5 Ha in extent.” In addition he says: “it is also very significant that several elliptical grindstones were found on the site”. He explains that the significance is due to the fact that: “recent research suggests that such grooved stones date between ca. the 11<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.” He concludes that: “despite the fact that the immediate surrounding area is highly degraded and eroded (as a result of overgrazing), and the archaeological remains occur in a visibly disturbed context, indications are that the site is possibly the first pre-colonial herder

<sup>1</sup> Kaplan, J. 2005. Phase 1 Archaeological Impact Assessment, proposed Gamka Private Wilderness Reserve, Calitzdorp. Prepared for Withers Environmental Consultants by Agency for Cultural Resource Management, Riebeeck West.

<sup>2</sup> HWC ref. no. C13/3/6/2/1/1/1/C15

camp to be located in this region of the Klein Karoo." In the description of the site within the report he says;

"no clear evidence for spatial patterning occurs, but there is ample evidence for flaking activity at the site". He makes a specific observation that no pottery was found, and though not directly stated, it appears that there is a complete absence of organic archaeological material with the exception of a large ostrich eggshell bead.

Kaplan reports that one house is proposed in the vicinity of GMK 1 and that the footprint does not directly impact the archaeology.

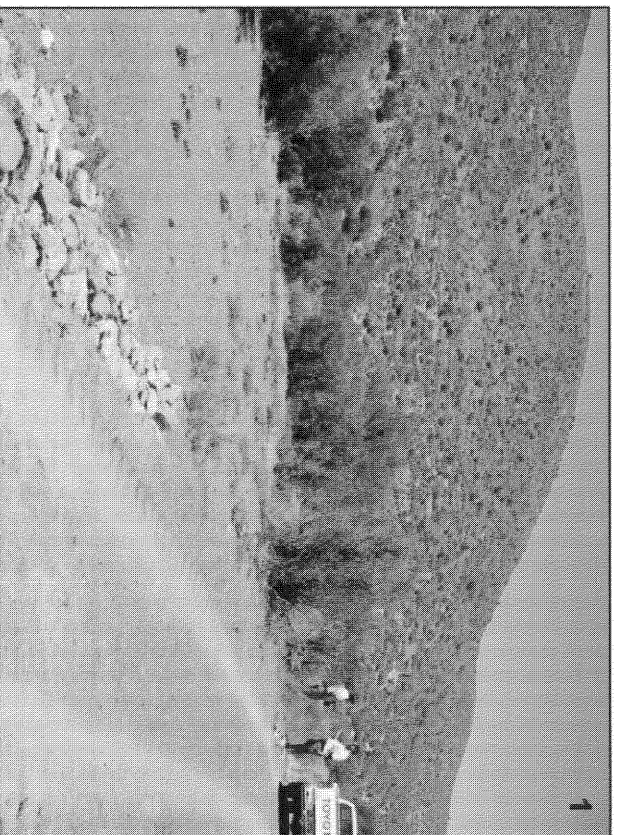
The relevant recommendations based on his observations included:

- A controlled surface collection of archaeological heritage remains must be made from GMK1;
- A small excavation could also be considered as a means of determining the age of archaeological remains that occur on the site;
- Should any human remains be disturbed, exposed or uncovered during earthworks, these should immediately be reported to the South African Heritage Resources Agency (this is a general recommendation for the development as a whole).

The owner, unhappy with the scale of the proposed work recommended for the mitigation of the site and the costs that this entailed, approached the Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO) through his environmental consultant, Mr Aubrey Withers<sup>3</sup> for a second opinion. The ACO agreed and Mr. D. Halkett of this office visited the site on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 2006 accompanied by both the owner and Mr. Withers.

## 2. OBSERVATIONS

The site lies immediately to the east of an existing farm road (Plate 1). Of importance is the fact that the area lies at the junction of at least 3 drainage systems (north, west and south) which has for a number of reasons resulted in the build up of water borne sediment at this point. GMK 1 lies on this sediment mound.

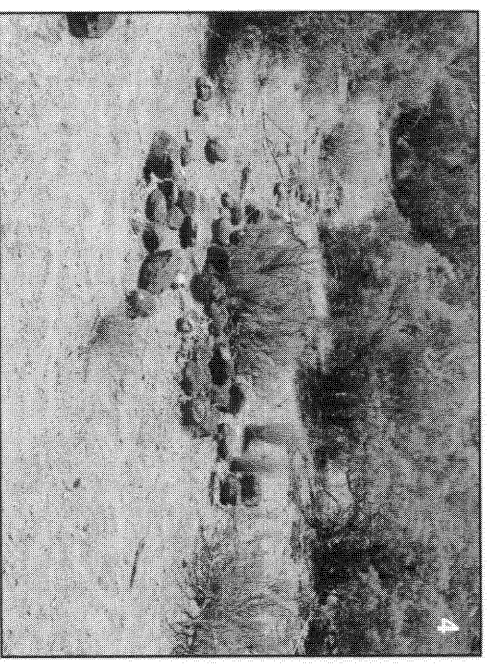


A quick foot traverse across the site quickly confirmed some of Kaplan's observations. I noted the presence of quartz flakes, chunks and cores, upper grindstones, lower grindstones, quartzite cores and heavy edge damage pieces. Flakes of hornfels were also noted. Material did appear to be

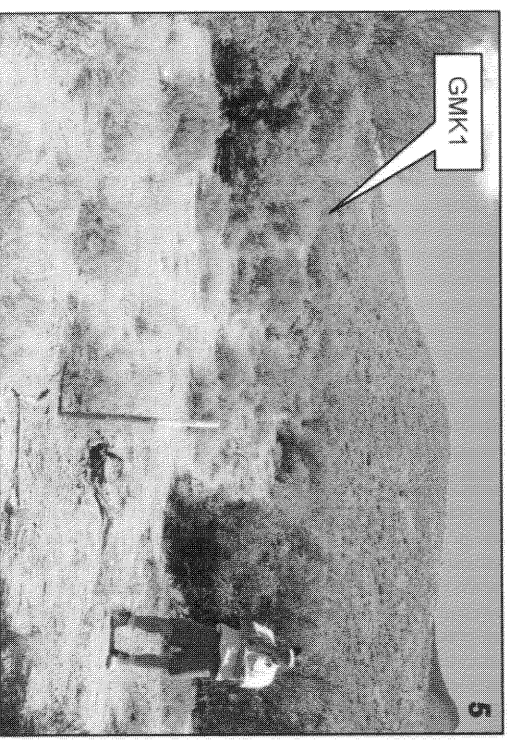
<sup>3</sup> Withers Environmental Consultants, PO Box 6118, Uniedal, 7612

more numerous in a clearing closer to the road, but was not limited to that area. The scatter was of low density. I also noted the almost complete absence of pottery (I eventually located 2 sherds), and other organic material (apart from relocating the large bead that Kaplan recorded). A single fragment of marine shell (S. argenvillei) was found near the pot sherds. The numerous erosion gulleys crossing the site were examined to see if additional potsherds were exposed. This proved negative.

Three stone features were observed on the site (#1. 33°26'26.1"S 21°36'48.8"E, #2. 33°26'25.9"S 21°36'48.1"E, #3. 33°26'25.3"S 21°36'47.4"E). These are undoubtedly stone alignments marking the presence of graves (Plates 2 - 4). Although partially disturbed, I believe that the layout of the stones indicates the



graves to be of colonial age. I noted that both the locally available rock (dolomite) and more exotic material (finer shale) had been used in the mounds (see plates 2 & 3). The location of graves at this site is not unexpected since silt deposits (outwash fans) at the junctions of rivers have often been used for this purpose in the past. These locations provide a depth of soft deposit whereas the surrounding landscape is rocky and hard.





The distance between the proposed house and the closest grave is approximately 60 meters. The approximate relationship between the features is shown in Plate 5. It is possible that more unmarked graves could be present.

The presence of these graves was not noted by Kaplan.

The owner reported that a kraal was located here in the past. There was no evidence of that on the ground now. No ceramics or glass of colonial age were observed.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

The archaeological site at GMK 1 has raised certain questions. The interpretation as a herder site is possible, but the paucity of pottery and organic material suggests that this is not a domestic site. The presence of at least one ostrich eggshell bead and a fragment of marine shell suggest that poor preservation is not responsible for the absence of more organic debris. There is no doubt that lithic reduction took place at the site as evidenced by cores on a variety of materials. The presence of hammerstones is further evidence of that process. The number of upper and lower grindstones (while not excessive) is seen as unusual given the lack of other domestic debris. The question must be asked if these grindstones are at the site as a result of them having been placed on graves. The fact that they are not now associated with stone mounds may be as a result of the stones having been recycled into the still extant colonial graves? This being the case, it is not impossible that other unmarked burials will be found in the vicinity.

## **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 Graves**

The Record of Decision issued by HWC was based on the information supplied in the 2005 Kaplan report. As no mention was made of graves, the ROD must be seen as incomplete. Since burials and burial grounds fall under the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), they will need to have input into the ROD in terms of the proposed development at GMK 1. It must be taken into account that additional unmarked burials may be found where the silt deposit is sufficiently thick to have allowed burial to take place.

### **4.2 Pre-colonial artefactual material**

There is clear evidence for some pre-colonial use of the site. The presence of only a single large bead and two fragments of pottery make the interpretation of this as a herder site equivocal. It is argued that the presence of grindstones may not result exclusively from primary use of the site. It is not believed that either surface collection or excavation of the site will contribute greatly to scientific knowledge. Similarly there would seem to be little point in just collecting the grindstones. We suggest that the grindstones be documented at the site by way of photographs and drawings but following that are left behind. The management plan must address the issue of potential illegal collection.

#### **4.3 Site management plan**

If building is permitted in proximity to the archaeological site, it is imperative that a simple management plan be prepared that is implemented by the developer, and subsequently by the owners of the house. The dwelling will need to be sited in a way that complies with SAHRA set back requirements in respect of the graves.

The management plan should address the following:

- the building phase (access track, building footprint, collection of building material)
- the ownership phase (area off limits to vehicles, collection of artefacts, conservation of graves)

**Fieldwork and report: Dave Halkett**