

**PROPOSED EASTERN CAPE ZINC AND  
PHOSPHORIC ACID PROJECT: BASELINE  
REPORT: SENSITIVITY OF CULTURAL SITES**



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## WESTBANK PRECINCT

### I. Background

A preliminary survey of this precinct was undertaken but no visible archaeological sites could be found. The reason for this is that the area is covered with dense grass. After the general survey failed to reveal any sites within the boundaries of the precinct, spot checks of antbear holes and mole heaps was carried out throughout the area. Material lying around mole heaps is usually an indicator of what lies directly under the ground surface. However, this survey also failed to produce any evidence of sites.

A large township development adjacent to the area, along the eastern end, was also investigated. The foundation and service trenches for this development was also examined but these features also failed to reveal any sites or archaeological material.

A preliminary survey along the coast, however, revealed a number of shell middens above the high-water level (Fig. 3). The immediate coastline has been badly disturbed by past development, i.e. coastal roads, a caravan park, picnic spots, recreational and ablution facilities. This area is also covered by dense grass. On the northern side of the coastal road - between the precinct boundary and the road, marine shell was found in mole heaps and a shell lense located in the side of an antbear hole, indicates that the area is contains numerous shell middens.

The location of at least four shell middens along this stretch of coast was reported by Derricourt in 1977. There are three middens adjacent to Cove Rock, and another reported from Fuller's Bay. With regard to Cove Rock (or Gompo in Xhosa), it is important to note that this rock is of sacred significance in the lives and history of the Xhosa-speaking people (Morcom 1996). In an interview with a local diviner, Morcom determined that the river people (or Abantu Bomlambo) were observed to live in the sea around Cove Rock. Cove Rock is also the meeting place of the African Independent Church or Zionist type churches. Although the development on the Westbank precinct will not destroy Cove Rock, it is advisable to consult with local villagers prior to development in the area.

Some 7 km to the northwest of the precinct, a large collection of Early Iron Age pottery (relating to the first black occupants in the region) was discovered on the farm Canasta Place. This site represents the most southerly occurrence of early black farming communities in Africa (Nogwaza 1994). Similar finds have been made elsewhere in the Eastern Cape (most notably at Kulubele on the Kei River) suggesting that the first black farmers in the Eastern Cape settled in this area between AD 700 - AD 1000 (Binneman 1996). It is quite possible that similar site(s) may be situated in the precinct, but that it will only be found when the top soil is removed.

The only archaeological features which have been found during this survey are located outside the precinct, but their presence suggests that similar features may be present inside the precinct boundaries.

With regard to historical sites, graves and monuments. The offices of the Eastern Cape branch of the National Monuments Council were consulted, but no sites are listed for

this region. G. Vernon, historian at the East London Museum, was also consulted on this area. Nearby the area under consideration is the original Grand Prix Race Track, named the Prince George Circuit. It was built in 1935 and a number of Grand Prix races were held there until 1960. The buildings comprise the main arch, a row of adjoining pit structures and a tower. This area has never been proclaimed a National Monument.

## II. Knowledge gaps

Although no visible cultural sites were recorded from the precinct, archaeological sites along the coast and further inland indicate that there exists a possibility for sites to be located during development.

## III. Cultural sensitivity and status of the precinct

Based on the visibility of sites, it would appear that the area is not sensitive to development. However, it must be strongly stressed that the ground-cover is of such a nature that it is virtually impossible to locate sites, there also being no natural erosion dongas which would help with identification. Archaeological features are often covered by thick layers of silt and sand and will only be found once the top soil is removed.

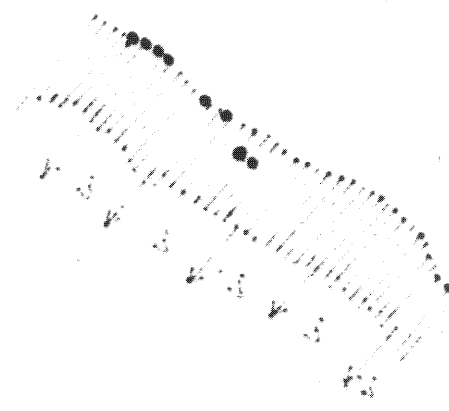
Research and surveys along the South African coast indicate that in general shell middens occur within 300 metres from the coast, but are occasionally found up-to 5 kilometres inland. It is therefore quite possible that there may be shell middens (relating to the San and Khoekhoen) on the precinct. Furthermore, in terms of the importance of discovering additional Early Iron Age sites (relating to the settlement of the first black farmers in the Eastern Cape) it is vital that the precinct be monitored closely during development.

## IV. Recommendations and procedures

It would appear that the precinct is of low cultural sensitivity and development may proceed without any delays. However, the plant is to be built close to the coast, and as indicated above, the area should be monitored by archaeologists during the initial development to make sure that no significant archaeological sites are destroyed during the levelling of the area. The monitoring time will depend on the how quickly the area is levelled and may take 2-3 days. This should be sufficient time to establish whether there are any archaeological sites of importance.

Thereafter archaeologists must be informed if any accumulations of marine shell or Early Iron Age (EIA) pot sherds are uncovered in other parts of the precinct. As the most obvious evidence for EIA settlements, these pot sherds should be easily recognised by workers on site. They are thick clay pot fragments with (or without) deep incised line decorations below the rim.

In the event of such finds, time delays in excavating or collecting material will depend on the type of site and the extent of the site. The archaeologists will obtain the necessary permit from the National Monuments Council to do the work.

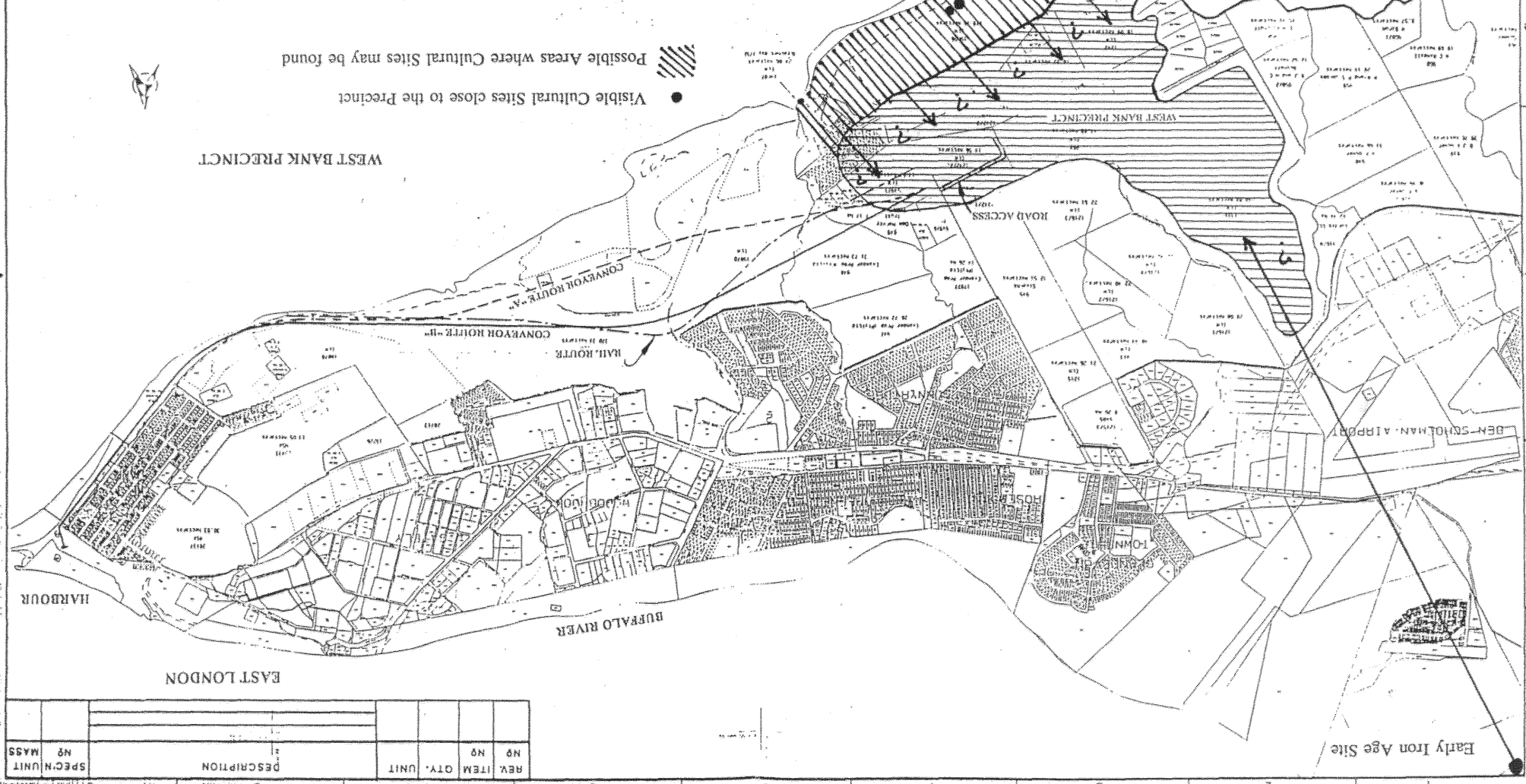


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REFERENCES

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Furthermore, the promontory of Cove Rock itself (inside a nature conservation area) is not physically threatened by the development but it is suggested that since it is of great religious significance to the Xhosa people, contact should be made with local groups to find out how they would react to the construction of a large refinery nearby.

Contact person for the above: Mrs Geraldine Morcom, Anthropologist, East London Museum. Tel: 0431-430 686

#### Costs

The costs would involve a consultant and transport fees.

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