

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED
UPGRADING OF THE OUTENIQUA PASS, GEORGE

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January 1991

INTRODUCTION

We have been asked to investigate what the impact of the upgrading of the Outeniqua Pass might have on the archaeology. Our brief is to:

1. Identify and map sensitive areas along the route,
2. Comment on the effect of upgrading on the archaeology along the route,
3. Recommend mitigating measures that should be introduced to minimise the impact of the upgraded road and associated construction activities on the archaeology along the route.

METHOD

The method which we have followed for this type of investigation is a thorough foot-survey of the area. This is standard archaeological procedure.

SURVEY

The area surveyed is the Outeniqua Pass from km 6.4 to km 25.7. The road is being upgraded because of road pavement distress, an increase in traffic between George and Oudtshoorn, and delays to light vehicles caused by heavy vehicles. Various alternatives are being considered. These include cutting or filling in order to increase road width, cantilever or retaining walls vs cutting, and the "do-nothing" alternative. We have been asked to recommend the best alternative for different areas along the route, so far as the archaeology is concerned.

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Seven archaeological occurrences were located during the survey, one of which (OP 5) will be directly affected by the proposed upgrading (Figure 1). Upgrading of the pass will not directly impact on the other six sites. They were nevertheless plotted as they are close enough to the existing road to be potentially affected by the upgrading process. All seven sites were located on the Waboomskraal side of the Outeniqua Pass.

No archaeological occurrences from the Blanco end of the Outeniqua Pass, to the beginning of Waboomskraal, were located during the foot-survey. Where the upgraded road will have surfaced shoulders and auxiliary lanes, there is very little gravel surface left to survey. Our random foot-survey of six locations along the route failed to identify any archaeological occurrences. We are confident that any such occurrences no longer exist along this section of the pass.

All the old gravel pits, previously dug for laying part of the pass, were searched for archaeological material. Material of considerable antiquity is often found in old river gravels. However, none of the gravel pits searched along the route yielded any evidence of archaeological significance.

THE SITES

OP 1. is a small, north-east facing rockshelter on the kopje Palmietkrans, on the west side of the Klip River. The rockshelter is approximately 25 metres long and 10 metres wide, while the talus slope extends at an angle of about 45 degrees. An extensive but partly faded panel of rock paintings is visible in the rockshelter. The paintings are in red ochre and include geometric designs including circles, triangles boxes, dots and enigmatic figures. The deposit is fairly shallow, not more than 20 cm deep. The artefacts found on the surface include pottery, some of it decorated, stone tools and debitage. One Early Stone Age handaxe and a large core was found at the bottom of the talus slope. The site, being visible from the main road, has been vandalised.

OP 2. is a panel of rock paintings on a small, exposed east-facing rock face on the kopje Palmietkrans. The paintings are in red ochre and include human figures, and a line of six antelope, but are quite faded. Some silcrete and quartz flakes and chunks were found close to the paintings.

OP 3. is a small panel of very faded paintings on a north-east facing rock face. The paintings are in red ochre and include a small antelope and some unidentifiable art.

OP 4. is a stone walled structure, possibly a stock pen, three metres in diameter, on the kopje Palmietkrans. There is no visible entrance to the structure, but some of the stone walling has collapsed, possibly obscuring what may have been an entrance. The structure may date to either the late precolonial or historical past.

OP 5. is an extensive, but ephemeral scatter of Early Stone Age (ESA) and Middle Stone Age (MSA) material in a ploughed field, at the junction of the Oudtshoorn and Camfer roads. The field is part of a large area of old river gravels which extends both north and east of the ploughed fields. The artefacts found in the field are made exclusively in fine-grained quartzite and include large flakes, some utilised and retouched, large disc and irregular cores, and crudely manufactured handaxes and choppers. Some of the flakes have faceted platforms indicating their MSA association. The site, being in a ploughed field, is in a disturbed context. A few artefacts of MSA and Later Stone Age (LSA) origin were

found on the surface of the river gravels to the north and east of OP 5.

OP 6 is a thin scatter of artefacts in a ploughed field on the east side of the existing road, and about one kilometer from the turnoff to Camfer. Some of the artefacts found include a few large quartzite flakes and chunks of MSA or possibly ESA origin. The site has been considerably disturbed due to ploughing activities.

OP 7 is a thin scatter of MSA and possibly ESA artefacts in a ploughed field on the east side of the existing road and about 1.5 kilometers from the Camfer turnoff. The artefacts found include some large quartzite flakes and a few chunks. The site, being in a ploughed field, is in a disturbed context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is unlikely that the proposed upgrading of the Outeniqua Pass will have a significant impact on the archaeology along the route. Where the proposed detour at the junction of the Oudtshoorn and Camfer road is to be built, only OP 5 will be directly affected. This site, however, is not significant enough to be rescued, nor a reason to reconsider the proposed detour.

Although OP 1-OP 4 will not be directly affected by the proposed upgrading of the Outeniqua Pass, or the proposed detour at the Oudtshoorn-Camfer junction, the sites are close enough to where construction activities might take place to impact on the sites. It is important that their safety is guaranteed during the upgrading and detour construction.

OP 6 and OP 7, presently located along the existing route, are too disturbed to warrant rescue. All the ploughed fields adjacent the existing road on the Waboomskraal side of the pass are likely to have some evidence of archaeological activity, but these ephemeral scatters do not warrant any further investigation.

With regard to securing river gravel deposits for laying of surfaced shoulders and auxiliary roads, it will be important to establish where these gravels will be taken from. Our experience has shown that material of considerable antiquity is often found in association with these gravels. However, if it is the intention of the road contractors to reutilise the old gravel pits along the existing road, or the river gravels to the north of OP 5, then it would not be necessary to conduct any further follow up work.

In conclusion, we are of the opinion that whatever construction alternatives stated in page 2 of our brief, are considered by the road contractors regarding the upgrading process, the archaeology of the Outeniqua Pass should not hinder any decisions which are made to this effect. However, should other options regarding construction activities be considered by the road contractors, we recommend that an archaeologist be approached to assess what impact this might have on the archaeology.

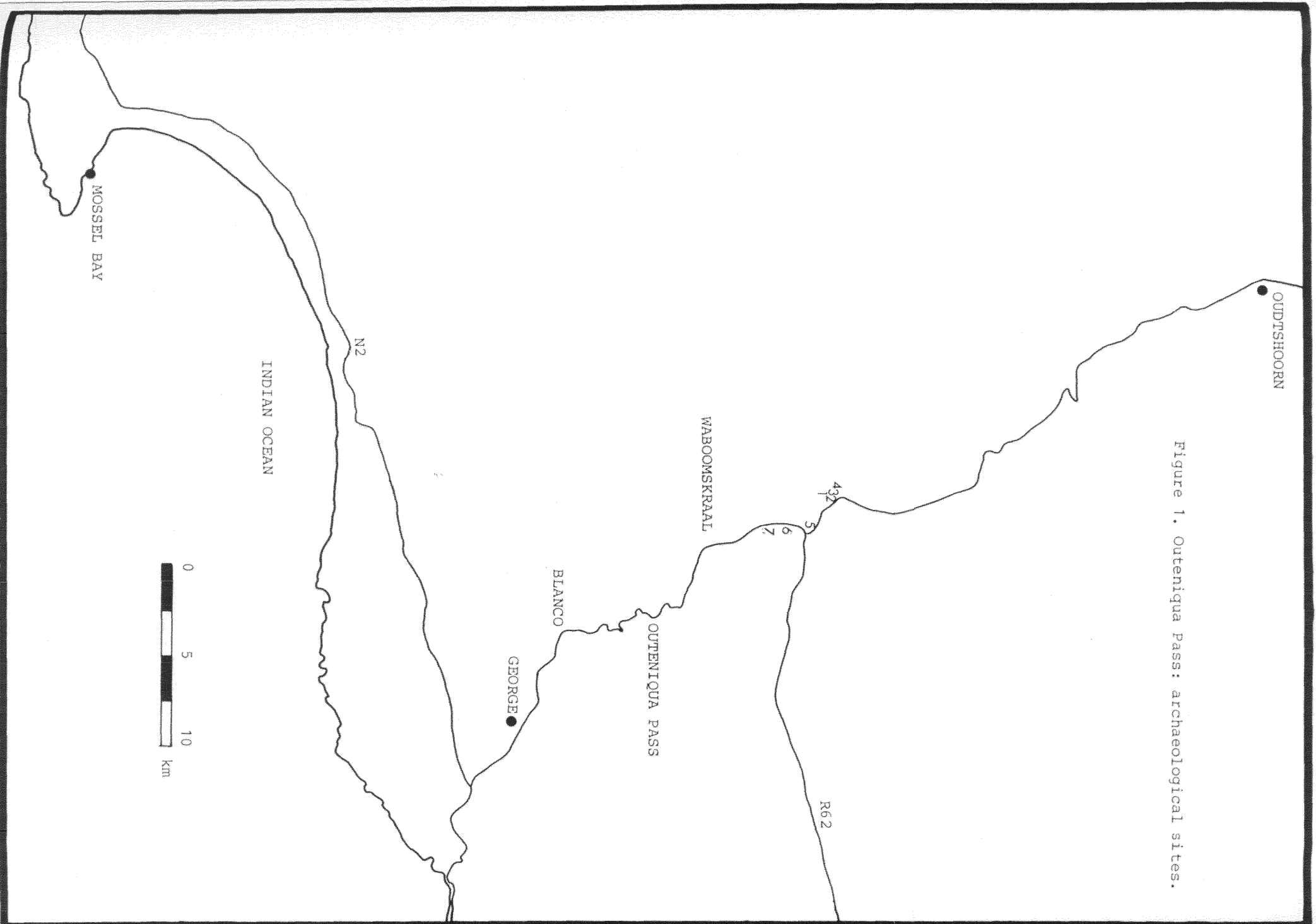


Figure 1. Outeniqua Pass: archaeological sites.