

ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF A PORTION OF THE FARM SANDDRIFT 371, NORTH OF PRIESKA, NORTHERN CAPE

On Monday 14 March 2005 I accompanied B Bezuidenhout of Botswere Mining and A Van Heerden of the McGregor Museum to the farm Sanddrift 371, which lies on the western side of the Orange River some way north of Prieska. The examined area on the farm was confined to the broad vicinity of a previously mined ~1.0 - 1.5 m wide vertical kimberlite fissure exposed in a cliff face facing onto the there deeply incised Orange River.

SUPERFICIAL GEOLOGY

The farmhouse is situated on a fairly flat calcrete surface, covered in places by a thin veneer of red Kalahari sands, but in the examined area this had been cut into by a deep ravine that runs down to the Vaal River just downstream of the mine. An exposure at the top of the gully indicates that the stratified calcrete sediments there are ~8 m deep and immediately overlie Karoo shales, which form the floor of the gully.

STONE AGE ARCHAEOLOGY

No artifacts were noted in the near vicinity of the kimberlite fissures, which had been much modified and disturbed by a number of previous mining ventures, including a detailed study by De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd. Further away, on a slope of the ravine, a stone circle some 5 m across was examined, but no associated artifacts were found to indicate whether it was prehistoric or related to the mining. A foot survey of the ravine produced a sparse scatter of quartzite artifacts, namely a large irregular core, a large discoid and a large flake, which are all taken to be of Acheulean age. On the calcrete surface, at the head of the ravine, I found a few amorphous flakes of some finer grained rock-type that may be either Middle or Late Stone Age. Mrs. Trien Cloete, who has lived on the farm for many decades, showed us an ostrich eggshell water container found in a sandbank next to the Vaal River and a bored stone from an adjoining farm. However, she had no knowledge of "boesman wenwe" or engraving sites on Sanddrift 371, or elsewhere in the vicinity.

CONCLUSIONS

The ancient sedimentary surface at the farmhouse and the younger eroded surfaces leading down to the river contain a sparse scatter of artifacts of many ages, that have no significant heritage potential. As for the highly disturbed vicinity of the kimberlite fissure, any further mining there would have no impact whatsoever on the archaeological resources of the Northern Cape.

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