

Archaeological Impact Assessment at Taabosch Fontein near Plooyburg, Northern Cape.

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Introduction

The author was contacted by Mr Hendrik Snyman to carry out a phase 1 archaeological impact assessment with respect to proposed mining at Taabosch Fontein, which lies south of the Riet River downstream from Driekopseiland, near Plooyburg.

The farm was visited on 16 April 2005. Observations made and recommendations are given in this report.

Significance criteria, where applicable, are based on tables in Deacon and Whitelaw 1997, as adapted for the Northern Cape.

Legislation

The National Heritage Resources Act (No 25 of 1999) (NHRA) provides protection for archaeological resources.

It is an offence to destroy, damage, excavate, alter, or remove from its original position, or collect, any archaeological material or object (defined in the Act), without a permit issued by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

Section 35 of the Act protects all archaeological and palaeontological sites and requires that anyone wishing to disturb a site must have a permit from the relevant heritage resources authority. Section 36 protects human remains older than 60 years. In order for the authority to assess whether approval may be given for any form of disturbance, a specialist report is required. No mining, prospecting or development may take place without heritage assessment and approval.

SAHRA at national level acts on an agency basis for the Provincial Heritage Resources Agency (PHRA) in the Northern Cape, where archaeological sites are concerned. Permit applications should be made to the SAHRA office in Cape Town.

Methods and limitations

A background literature/museum database search provides indications of what might be expected in the region.

During the site investigation, areas of proposed mining were inspected.

In this environment sediments of archaeological significance are frequently well below the surface. Old diggings or quarries do provide sections that may be

inspected, and dumps of gravel give an opportunity to assess the potential archaeological content of underlying sediment.

Background: archaeological resources in the region

The Northern Cape has a wealth of archaeological sites (Beaumont & Morris 1990), with locales along and adjacent to the major river systems being of particular note (see also Burkitt 1928; Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929).

Stone Age material found in this area spans the Earlier, Middle and Later Stone Ages through Pleistocene and Holocene times. Of particular interest are Pleistocene sites along the Vaal River (e.g. Beaumont & Morris 1990; Beaumont & McNabb 2000), and similar material is known to occur along the Riet River. Late Holocene material with pottery is known to occur on the river banks, while rock engravings are richly distributed in the region, the site of Driekopseland being of particular renown (Wilman 1933; Morris 1988; Morris 2002).

Terraces along the rivers have long been known for their association with archaeological and Plio-Pleistocene fossil material (e.g. Helgren 1979).

Observations

The area examined was on the plain above the present river channel and separated from it by a ridge of dolerite. Upslope of this ridge the surface sediments consist of calcrete which, drilling has shown, overlies, at several metres depth, a linear deposit of gravels apparently trending across the farm from a known point on the adjacent farm Abrahamoos Fontein, towards the present Riet River channel.

Part of the area was mined sporadically in the past, but the bulk of the area of intended mining is undisturbed, with the gravels lying well below the calcrete.

Archaeological traces:

An area adjacent to the road at 29°02.129' S 24°03.092' E was examined.

No archaeological material was found. But on present evidence it cannot be said that any significant archaeological feature is present. It is recommended that inspection of material from similar sediments elsewhere on the farm should take place from time to time when gravels are exposed by mining.

Recommendations

No significant archaeological traces were noted on intended mining sites and on present evidence there is no reason for mining not to proceed as planned.

It should yet be noted that sub-surface archaeological sites/traces/features may occur. Closer to the river or in softer silts, these could include Later Stone Age burials, such as have been found at Weltevrede and Driekopseland, nearby. The gravels to be mined may contain localised accumulations of Earlier Stone Age

artefacts. In the event of such materials/features being found during mining, an archaeologist should be consulted immediately.


Archaeologists of the McGregor Museum should be allowed to carry out visual inspections of sections opened up by mining in order to assess the nature of sedimentation and possible cultural stratigraphies once these become available for study.

Acknowledgements

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