

9/21/00/00014 or 0002.

**RECOVERY OF SKELETON
I & J ABALONE FARM,
DANGER POINT, GANSBAAI,
SOUTHERN CAPE COAST**

Prepared for

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By

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**FEBRUARY
2000**

1. INTRODUCTION

On 2 February 2000, Mr Nik Loubser of Irvin and Johnson (I&J) Abalone Culture Division at Danger Point, Gansbaai, requested that the Agency for Cultural Resource Management visit the farm in order to advise on the recovery of a skeleton which had been exposed as a result of earthmoving activities.

The single skeleton, presumably from the wreck of the HMS Birkenhead (1852), had been unintentionally uncovered from the edge of a high frontal sand dune during earthworks. Human bones were only noted while the sand was being spread about the site.

About a third of the skeleton was subsequently recovered by I&J personnel. The bones, which included limb and arm bones, skull and jaw fragments with teeth, shoulder, hip, toe and finger bones, ribs and vertebrae, were collected and kept for safekeeping.

It was established that the skeleton was exposed from a vegetated dune about 25 metres northeast of the research and development (R&D) building, currently under construction on the abalone farm.

A portion of the dune had already been disturbed during trenching activities for a pipeline route located behind the R&D building, as well as other earthwork-related activities. The trenching and earthworks were monitored by the Agency for Cultural Resource Management, as part of a monitoring and archaeological rescue excavation programme, which took place on the I&J farm in November/December 1999.

Shell midden material was exposed during monitoring of trenching and earthworks, but a systematic archaeological sampling and excavation (Kaplan 2000 in prep.) programme mitigated against the disturbance of the archaeological material.

The dune from which the skeleton was exposed will, according to Mr Nik Loubser, be stabilised by Loffelstein blocks and rehabilitated.

After the site visit on 4 February 2000, it was recommended that a full recovery programme be implemented in order to recover as much of the remaining skeleton as possible.

2. THE RECOVERY PROGRAMME

A permit was received from the National Monuments Council on 8 February 2000 (Permit No. 80/00/02/001/51), to recover the remains of the skeleton.

Recovery of the skeleton took place over a period of three days from the 9-11 February 2000. A photographic record of the recovery programme was made, and the site was recorded given a GPS location (S 34°37.641 E 19°17.726).

All the disturbed sand/material above and below the dune was sieved through a 1.5 mm wire mesh sieve, sorted for human bone and bagged.

Relatively large amounts of additional human bone were collected during the recovery programme, including ribs, vertebrae, skull fragments, toe, finger, foot and limb bones.

3. CONCLUSIONS

It is anticipated that about 90% of the skeleton has been collected as a result of the recovery programme. Some of the bone, that which was not recovered during the initial disturbance, has most likely been spread around and crushed by development-related activities.

After curation, the skeleton will be kept in temporary storage at the National Monuments Council Office in Cape Town, and will later be reburied at the Simonstown Military Cemetery, as per the requirements of the international agreement between South Africa and the United Kingdom.

4. REFERENCES

Kaplan, J. in prep. 2000. Archaeological excavations at Danger Point, Gansbaai. Report prepared for Irvin and Johnson Abalone Culture Division, Gansbaai.