

AN ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS ON HERITAGE SITES AT WESTFORD, KNYSNA.

Prepared for

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Prepared by

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO) at the University of Cape Town was asked to provide an assessment of the impacts of Phases 1 and 2 of proposed development on heritage sites on a piece of land known as Portion 45 of the farm Westford 191. The location of the property is shown on Figure 1.

A number of historic features have been identified by the development team and include:

- the “Old Drift” crossing of the Knysna River and the old track leading from it to the Phantom Pass;
- an old farmhouse and outbuildings
- an old cottage (19th/early 20th C)
- an old school house/cottage (19th/early 20th C)
- the remains of an old slipway where George Rex launched the brig “the Knysna”;

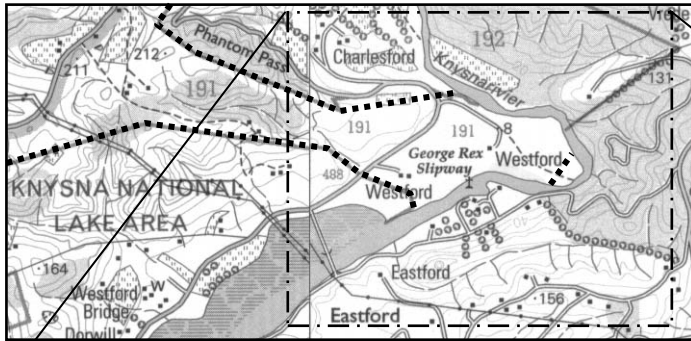
The ACO undertook to visit the site and undertake a foot search of the areas to be developed to determine if there were any additional historical features or any pre-colonial sites present on the site that had not been identified, and to provide an assessment of those features.

2. METHOD

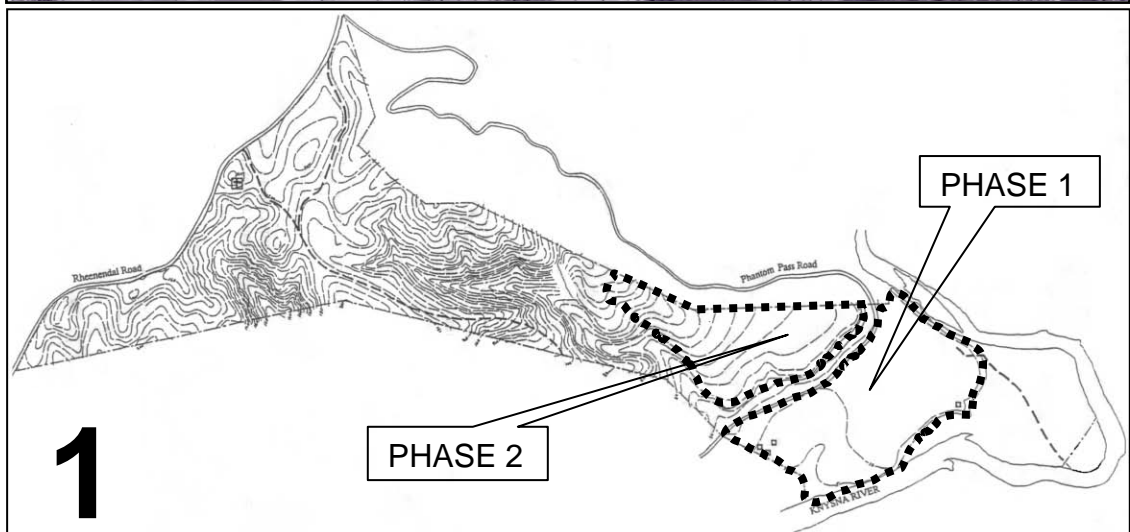
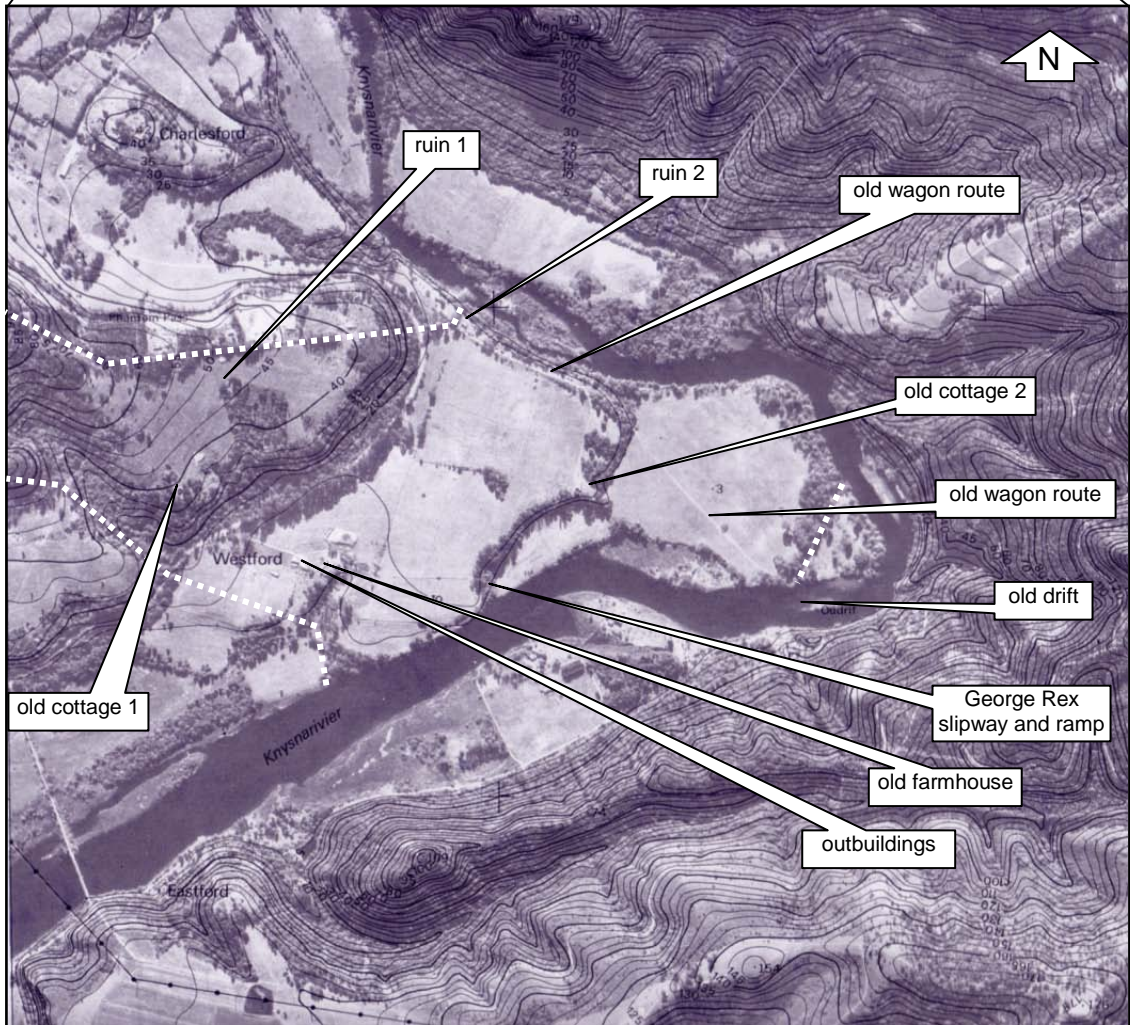
The site was inspected on foot. Identified features were visited and assessed for significance and photographed. Locations were recorded with a handheld GPS. No archival or deeds work has been undertaken but we have consulted secondary sources for information regarding the slipway. Some areas had been ploughed in the past.

2.1 Limitations of the survey

The area was covered by thick grass and thick bush in places. This reduced surface visibility to an extent. In our opinion however, we do not believe that the loss of visibility has greatly affected the results of the survey.



Extract from: 3423AA Knysna & 3422BB Sedgefield, 1:50 000



3. RESULTS

A few additional heritage sites were located. These include 2 ruined buildings, a possible ramp associated with the George Rex slipway, and one stone age artefact. These will be discussed below along with the other features. The positions of the features are shown on Figure 1. The precise ages of the buildings cannot be ascertained without archival and deeds searches. However, this does not prevent broad assessment with respect to the legal requirements for the various buildings

3.1 Ruin 1 (34°00'26.5"S, 23°00'16.0"E)

This is the ruin of a rectangular mud brick structure (3x5 meters) on stone foundations with 2 associated square water tanks. One of the tanks has the date 1949 scratched into the plaster. It appears to have been a single roomed dwelling with a small stoep on the northern side where 3 steps are preserved. One of two small square features attached to the back of the structure may be the remains of a fireplace. There is some evidence for a stone floor. The main structure has completely collapsed while the 2 tanks are still standing and are probably later additions. Rusty corrugated iron sheets observed at the site were probably used as roofing.

Significance: The building probably dates from the late 19th/early 20th century and may represent the remains of a labourers cottage. Apart from an indication of habitation the building in its ruinous state has little value.

mitigation: no mitigation is required.

3.2 Ruin 2 (34°00'22.0"S, 23°00'34.9"E)

Only the western end of this building has survived probably as a result of having been



rebuilt with harder brick than the mud brick used in other parts. The placement of the chimney and gable are reminiscent of the building that we refer to as "old cottage 1" found on the upper slopes of the property .

Significance: The building probably dates from the late 19th/early 20th century. In its ruinous state the building has little value.

Mitigation: No mitigation is required.

3.3 Old cottage 1 (34°00'32.8"S, 23°00'12.3"E)



Description: Located on the upper slopes of the property in a forest clearing, this small cottage is still in relatively good condition and the presence of PVC downpipes and gutters, and presence of litter suggest use until fairly recently. Partition walls and ceilings made from matchwood define 3 rooms. Generally the interior is in poor condition with wooden floors having been largely removed.

Joinery varies from opening to opening suggesting modification over the years. The roof pitch is moderate and thus may have been designed for corrugated iron rather than thatch.

Significance: The building probably dates from the late 19th/early 20th century and is a good example of vernacular building style. The use of matchwood paneling in addition to ceilings has been seen in other south coast vernacular buildings dating to the late 19th C (A. Malan pers com)

Mitigation: Adaptive re-use is an option. Demolition will require permission from SAHRA.

3.4 Old cottage 2 (34°00'32.0"S, 23°00'43.8"E)

Description: Located on the edge of the "escarpment" defining the old floodplain, this cottage is still occupied. The presence of an attic or *solder* is indicated by the door on the north facing gable.

Significance: The building probably dates from the late 19th/early 20th century and is a good example of vernacular building style.



Mitigation:

Adaptive re-use is an option. Demolition will require permission from SAHRA.

3.5.1 Old farmhouse (34°00'37.6"S, 23°00'23.4"E)



Description: A building that has been called the old farmhouse. It consists of two similar buildings placed side by side with a common internal long wall in which doorways have been constructed. Attics are present in both sections. It would appear that the sections were built at different times. The structure on the northwestern side (facing Phantom Pass) has had buttresses added to the northern end suggesting structural differences. In addition, an additional beam has been placed down the length of the interior wall to carry the roof trusses of this section. Moulded joists are still present in places. The pitch of the roofs may indicate that thatch was used at one time. A “scarf” joint was noticed in a section of this beam. This style of joint is used commonly in shipbuilding and may suggest the origin of some of the timber used, or imply that the carpentry was done by someone familiar with shipbuilding. The presence of a covered stoep on the eastern side and additions at the southern end, and joinery are similar to those of the old cottage #2 and suggest a degree of temporal continuity in as far as those features go. A hole covered by corrugated iron observed in front of the stoep may be the remains of a well.



has unfortunately been modified with the addition of newer walls and removal of old. Some aspects however appear to be original.

Mitigation: Adaptive re-use is an option. Demolition will require permission from SAHRA. It should be established if this building has any connection with the Rex slipway (see section 3.6), based on the joinery on one of the beams. It should be established if the hole at the front of the house is a well or not. If it is, it may contain artefactual material that will reflect the age of the house.

3.5.2 Outbuildings

3.5.2.1 Outbuilding 1



Description: Lying at right angles to the old farmhouse, this is probably an old barn that was modified for milking/penning of animals. May originally have been thatched.

Significance: Probably dates to late 19th/early 20th century. interior has been highly modified.

Mitigation: Adaptive re-use is an option. Demolition will require permission from SAHRA.

3.5.2.2 Outbuilding 2



Description: Non-descript building located between the old farmhouse and barn and facing north. It has a flat roof.

Significance: It is difficult to estimate age owing to modifications, but probably dates to the 20th century.

Mitigation: Mitigation: Demolition will require permission from SAHRA.

3.6 George Rex slipway and monument (34°00'39.9"S, 23°00'36.9"E)

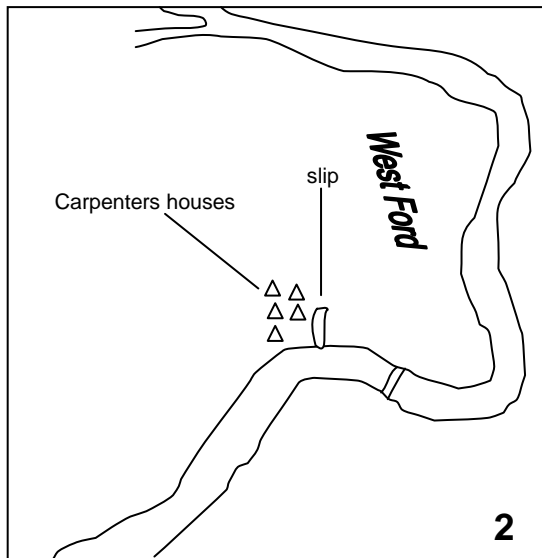
Description: Emerging from below a bush covered mud bank are the remains of what has been described as the remains of the George Rex slipway on a nearby monument. Constructed in 1826 at the instigation of George Rex, it was used for the building and launching in 1831 of the brig "Knysna". Visible at low tide is the inner edge and several cross (see photos), still maintain does not



slats/beams of the slipway which although heavily eroded, their original forms. There appear to be any sign of the

outer edge, probably a result of the salvage and removal of the valuable wood in earlier years (Parkes et al 1988:70; Metelerkamp 1955). The location of the slipway and associated buildings for the workers are shown on the plan drawn by Capt. Richard Roe in

1828 (Knysna Museum). A photograph made of this chart is unfortunately unusable because of poor light, but a sketch of part of the content is shown in Figure 2.



Significance: These remains are highly significant in terms of the early economic development of Knysna, and the link to one of the prominent early colonial inhabitants. This may be the oldest “preserved” slipway in the country.

Mitigation: The presence of thick bush and mud cover prevent anything more than a casual inspection of the site. The shipbuilding activities that reputedly took place here are unlikely to have happened in isolation. In other words, there are likely to be traces of the building process nearby e.g. an iron forge. We have already speculated that there may be connections between the boatbuilding activities and at least one of the

extant buildings on the site, and a nearby ramp cut into the old flood embankment.

The development of the area will undoubtedly increase the number of people using the river bank for recreational activities. The site will need to be protected in some way to prevent further degradation. A more detailed study of the slipway should be commissioned to establish the extent of the wooden remains and to establish if there are traces of associated activities. The study should include background archival work and archaeological excavation.

The results of such a study could form the basis for a site museum, where the model of the “Knysna” made from some of the removed stinkwood could be displayed (if it could be acquired from the Knysna Municipality).



additional information: According to Margaret Parkes (1988) the remains of the slipway were rediscovered in 1946 by a Mr Robert Veldtman. With others, he pulled 7 of the wooden beams from the mud. These were stinkwood beams were 14ft long, 9inches thick and 9-22inches broad. 15 chairs and a triangular table were made out of the wood for the old Municipal Council chamber where they are still found today. The nearby monument was erected by the Historical Monuments Commission (precursor to the National Monuments Council and South African Heritage Resources Agency).

The “Knysna” was a brig, which on registration in Cape Town was described as having:

1 deck, 2 masts, stern square, carvel built, no galleries, and being in length 73’10”, breadth 21’, depth 12’4”, Tonnage 139. She sailed South African waters for a

number of years but was eventually sold and met her end by running aground in 1844 at Crackington Haven near Bude (British Isles). Two models of the “Knysna” were made from the salvaged slipway wood. One of these is housed in the Municipal Offices in Knysna, while the other is at the Anne Bryant Gallery in East London.

3.7 The old drift (34°00'39.2"S, 23°00'58.8"E)



Description: The old drift is still very visible at low tide, even though the rocks have become a little scattered over time. The wagon track and drift are clearly seen on the extract of a 1904 plan showing proposed railway routes. Originally the site was probably chosen because it was a naturally shallow

spot due to the presence of surface rock outcropping. This seems to have been enhanced by additional rocks.

Significance: This was the only place where the Knysna river could be crossed in earlier days and so was crucial to the development of the town of Knysna. Many travelers report watching the progress of the construction of the brig on the slipway nearby while waiting for the tide to recede to enable crossing of the drift.

Mitigation: The drift will technically not be impacted directly by the developments. The point of the river bank where it exits is state land presently managed by the South African National Parks Board. However, the increase of recreational use of the river brought about by the Westford development may well have impacts. The conservation of the drift should be dealt with as part of an overall management plan for heritage sites in the area. It could be an additional point of interest if ever the slipway museum idea comes to fruition.



3.8 the old wagon track

Description: A track that today connects the Phantom Pass to the piece of state land next to the river, probably marks the route of the old wagon trail. The route can be seen on Figure 3 and the present road can be seen on the orthophoto in Figure 1. The track as it appears today is well used (see at right) and does not show any particularly visible traces indicating that it is old. All we have to go on to suggest that the new and the old are one and the same is the broad similarity of the alignment to what is shown on plans.

Significance: This track was also crucial to the development of Knysna.



Mitigation: If possible, the old wagon route should be preserved and could form a part of a heritage route.

4. CONCLUSIONS

A number of heritage sites exist within areas earmarked for development. Apart from two isolated stone artefacts of Early Stone Age origin, all the sites date from the recent colonial period. Various buildings in varying stages of repair are present. A combination of factors makes some more conservation worthy than others. Nevertheless, permission will be required from SAHRA before any of these can be demolished or altered. Where, possible and appropriate adaptive re-use should be considered. An architect with experience in conservation should be consulted in this regard.

Perhaps the most important site is that of the old George Rex slipway. As we have indicated we believe that has great local significance both as a result of its links to George Rex, and contribution to the growth of the local economy. It is closely linked to the drift and old wagon road, and possibly to the old farmhouse. The remains of workers houses and workshop areas are also likely to be found beneath thick bush and mud near the slipway site.

The increase in the local population as a result of the development will inevitably lead to increased recreational use of the river. There is a strong likelihood that this use will impact the remains of the old slipway and drift. No developments or modifications should be permitted in this area until appropriate additional studies have been undertaken and a plan to preserve these features has been prepared that will meet the requirements of SAHRA.

We have suggested that the site of the slipway be further investigated to establish the full extent of the remains, and to establish if there are any links to some of the buildings that have been looked at during this study. Such a study should include excavations and archival work. The results of such a study could be used in the future if the sites are developed as part of a local tourist route.

5. STUDY TEAM

Fieldwork and report

Dave Halkett
Tim Hart

6. REFERENCES

- Metelerkamp, S. 1955. George Rex of Knysna: the authentic story. Cape Town, Howard Timmins.
- Parkes, M. & Williams, V. 1988. Knysna the forgotten port: the maritime story. Knysna, Emu Publishers.