

A PHASE 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF PORTION 44 OF THE FARM BRAKKLOOF NO 443, PLETTENBERG BAY

Prepared for

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Prepared by

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INTRODUCTION

The Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town was appointed by Barry Doël Associates (on behalf of their client) to undertake a phase 1 archaeological assessment of portion 44 of Brakkloof 443 at Plettenberg Bay. The area, which lies at the junction of Robberg Peninsula and Plettenberg Bay beach has been subject to limited development in the past, namely the construction of 2 private houses by Mr J. Jerling. It was during the construction of the older of these houses that substantial archaeological remains relating to the wreck of the Sao Goncalo were exposed (Smith 1986).

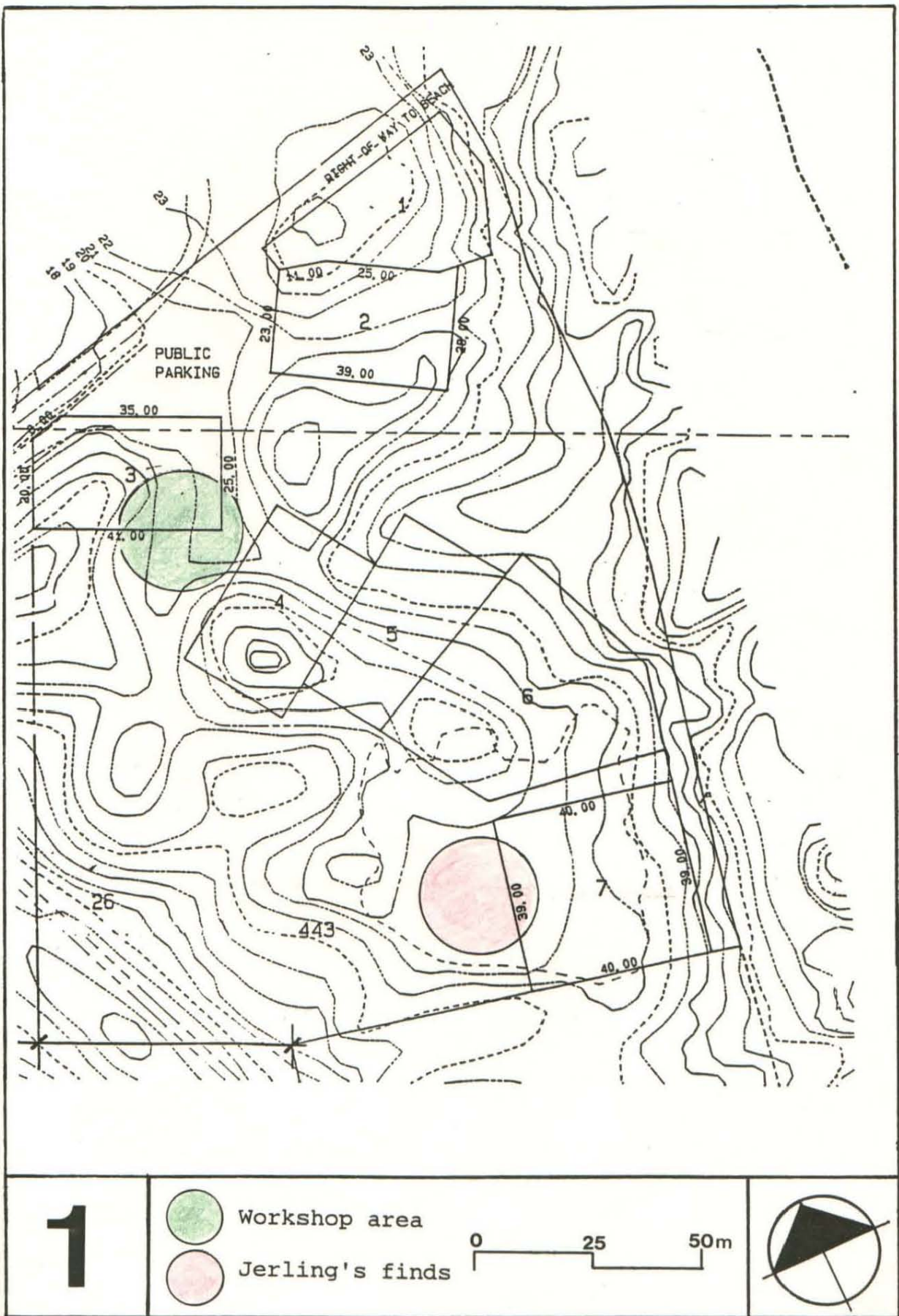
At a site meeting on 31/4/93 the architect provided a plan of the site and the lots that are to be developed. These (Figure 1) lie on the densely vegetated coastal dune area north east of the property of Mr Jerling, while a second development area is situated on the slope below the Robberg Peninsula access road. The archaeological survey was aimed at assessing both the prehistoric and historic archaeological potential of the areas to be affected by the development. At the time of undertaking the survey, plans of proposed services or access roads were not available. The assessment concentrated on the area of the lots which are to be built on.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Most of the coastal zones of South Africa are archaeologically sensitive as prehistoric people were attracted to these areas because of the reliable supplies of marine foods. This has resulted in an accumulation of archaeological sites - some as old as 120 000 years, while most date to the Late Stone Age (LSA) period of the last 10 000 years. The Robberg Peninsula in particular has attracted a large amount of prehistoric activity. This is evident at the famous site of Nelson Bay Cave as well as other open sites on the peninsula (Inskeep 1965). In more recent times this coastal area was the site of the first European settlement in South Africa, which in turn was the scene of early interactions between Europeans and pre-colonial people.

The area under study has already been subjected to archaeological excavations. These have been described by Smith (1986). In 1980 Mr J. Jerling discovered a large collection of oriental ceramics, metal fittings from clothes as well as ships navigational instruments in the top of a sand dune while he was building his first home on the property. Little is known about the context of the finds as no archaeologist was present. The ceramics have been analysed and dated to the late Ming period (1623-1635). This has led to the conclusion that the find related to the camp of the survivors of the heavily laden Portuguese vessel, the Sao Goncalo which sank with 130 hands off Plettenberg Bay in 1630. The remaining 100 survivors remained at Plettenberg Bay for some 8 months during which time they appear to have established a small settlement and built two more ships (pinnaces) in which the survivors eventually set sail in hope of reaching home.

In 1981 a team from the University of Cape Town Archaeology Department followed up the Jerling finds with further excavations. Smith (1986) and his team located the remains of what appeared to be a workshop area where iron was being smelted and forged - probably for the manufacture of components of the pinnaces. Several associated concentrations of mussel shell and small quantities of porcelain lying some 50cm below



surface, were interpreted as being the remains of meals of the survivors who were working on the forge site. Smith (1986) hypothesised that Jerling's find site on the dune top was probably the remains of the survivors camp while the slag finds discovered by the U.C.T team represent the remains of a workshop area.

SURVEY METHOD

Particular attention was paid to the areas indicated for development by Barry Doël Associates. Some of these had already been delineated with surveyors pegs. The phase I assessment method involved a close surface search of the sites, trial excavation of areas close the Jerling's old house and in other areas where shell could be seen on the surface. A metal detector survey of the area was undertaken to establish if there were any zones of high signal strength which could indicate sub-surface metal working.

RESULTS

Plans furnished by Harry Doël Associates shows that both Jerling's original find site (GPS location 34° 05'5170S, 23° 22'2637E) and the 1981 U.C.T site lie on, or close to lots that are to be developed.

Mr Jerling's find site is directly associated with his old home which will be demolished to make way for the development of Lot 7. It was while the dune top was being levelled for the construction of the Jerling's first house, that the cache of porcelains and other artefacts were discovered. Although shallow trial excavations failed to reveal any material near the surface, it is possible that more exists in the dune body. It is very likely that it will be destroyed by earthmoving activities resulting from the demolition of the old house and the preparation of other lots for building. The workshop site, part of which lies within the boundary of Lot 3 will almost certainly be adversely impacted by construction site preparation. Besides the material excavated by Smith (1986), it is very likely that further features may exist under the sand and measures will have to be taken to mitigate their destruction.

A thorough inspection of the lots to be developed on the dune cordon failed to reveal any pre-historic shell middens of significance. A thin disturbed scatter of mixed shell was noted adjacent to the garden of the Jerling's old house. Trial excavations failed to reveal the presence of any in situ lenses. An inspection of the slope below the existing Robberg Road where lots 9-25 are to be developed did not reveal any archaeological material that would be adversely impacted by the development. Middle Stone Age (MSA) artefacts are present along the rocky slope close to the Robberg road. It is unlikely that these will be affected.

DISCUSSION

Smith (1986) hypothesised the original camp of the Sao Goncalo survivors was excavated during the course of the preparation of the Jerling home, while a workshop area for the manufacturing iron was situated close by. If Smith is correct, we must conclude that the camp and its contents have already been destroyed and that the area holds little archaeological potential.

Very little is known about the Sao Goncalo settlement. The wreck of the ship has never been located despite an exhaustive marine survey. None of the graves of the 130 people who died when the ship foundered, have been identified. Furthermore, the Jerling find site is open to further interpretation. The area of the scatter as depicted by Smith (1986) is too small to accommodate the needs of 100 people (and the structures which they erected) who were living off the land and sea for 8 months. Although some bone was found on the site, only a small amount appears to have been described. Recent archaeological studies up the West Coast (Reeler 1992) have shown that a small group of people living off marine resources for only a few months caused the accumulation of a substantial midden - the likes of which have not been seen in the vicinity of the Jerling house.

It is possible that the porcelain scatter was not the remains of an entire camp, but perhaps a storage/loading area or a cache established a convenient distance from the launching site of the pinnaces. Possessions which could not be accommodated were left behind here, perhaps to be collected on a subsequent voyage. We therefore suggest that the entire camping area of the survivors of the Sao Goncalo has not yet been identified. The flat lands behind the dune cordon are well watered, sheltered and more suited to the cultivation of vegetables. The activities of the survivors of the Sao Goncalo probably extended over a very wide area as substantial resources would have been required to build the ships, smelt iron, maintain the settlement and feed the survivors.

CONCLUSION

The area commented on in this report, as well as adjacent properties inland should be considered to be historically sensitive despite the fact that previous investigations have taken place. Archaeological material is known to exist in the vicinity of lot 3. In addition it is possible that artefacts and midden material may lie buried in the dune bodies. Other possible finds are human skeletal material, which if encountered will have to be systematically removed if they will be disturbed by the development. All historic sites, and pre-colonial archaeological sites are protected by the National Monuments Act. These may not be disturbed unless under the auspices of a permit which is issued to suitably trained personnel only. The fact that an historic site has already been identified in the development area, precludes any excavations taking place until the requirements of the National Monuments Act are met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The publication of the results of the previous research has attracted international comment and interest. Other interested parties are potentially the Plettenberg Bay community, the Portuguese community and local researchers who have been involved in the previous projects. Although this survey has not shown any indication of near surface archaeological material, strong measures must be taken to guard against the eventuality that more archaeological sites buried under the dune sand could be destroyed as a result of the development. Failure to do so may not only result in the developers being in violation of the National Monuments Act, but assertive public comment could result if important historic material were destroyed. The following measures to mitigate such an eventuality are suggested:

1. A second phase of archaeological investigations must be conducted on and in the area of Lot 3 where Smith (1986) located the workshop area.
2. An archaeological team should be contracted well in advance of the implementation of the development. They will need sufficient time to extensively trench the dune body in the areas that will be affected so as to locate and excavate material before it can be damaged by any earthmoving. The team will probably require in the region of 15 working days to complete this task. A further 10 day contingency must be budgeted should any finds of significance require systematic removal.
3. Depending on the results of recommendation 2, the demolition of the Jerling's old house and the land remodelling of Lot 7 must be monitored and a contingency allowed for the rescue of archaeological material.
4. The development of Lots 9-26 do not require any mitigation.
5. Further development of areas adjacent to the property in question should be subject to a minimum of a phase 1 archaeological survey.

REFERENCES

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