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ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF GROTTO BAY.

Prepared for Van Niskerk Kloof and Edwards
Consulting Engineers and Urban Planners

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INTRODUCTION

This report contains the findings of a first phase archaeological survey and impact assessment of an area to be developed (61.5 hectares of the farm Modderivier), at Grotto Bay, Cape West coast. The Agency for Cultural Resource Management was commissioned by Van Niekerk Kieyn and Edwards (Consulting Engineers and Urban Planners) to: 1. undertake an archaeological investigation to locate and evaluate archaeological sites that could be endangered by the Grotto Bay housing development and 2. survey for possible archaeological sites on state land on the seaward side of the development. ~~This land is subject to a rezoning proposal to be submitted by the developer.~~ The developer aims to take over management of the land in order to rehabilitate it, by encouraging the revegetation of the natural coastal fynbos and the rehabilitation of shellfish communities.

The survey revealed that some eight Later Stone Ageel sites exist in the state land in front of the development zone, while no visible sites occurred in the actual development area. Archaeological visibility of the proposed development area was reduced to almost zero. This situation transpires when plants or vegetation, (in this case coastal fynbos), completely obscures the ground surface. However, although no sites were found in this study area, the likelihood of sites or burials being uncovered during the construction and servicing phases, should not be ignored.

The majority of the sites investigated have been damaged or destroyed as a result of the unrestricted access to the area by 4 x 4 vehicles, the building of access roads and footpaths to the beach, holiday houses and shacks, and the construction of a public parking lot on top of a large midden at the entrance to Grotto Bay. Three of the sites have been disturbed as a result of natural processes, such as erosion and runoff.

METHOD

The method of survey which we follow for a first phase study of this nature is a thorough foot survey of the affected area. Depending on the size of the survey area, this constitutes a nearly 100% sampling strategy of the affected area.

BACKGROUND

The archaeology of Grotto Bay is not very well known. Archaeological sites do occur both north and south of Grotto Bay along the coastline, but the region has not been subjected to a systematic search for archaeological

They have any controlled excavations taken place south of Grotto Bay in 1991 at Grotto Bay. A survey south of Grotto Bay in 1991 at Grotto Bay revealed the existence of some 15 archaeological sites. A number of sites are also known to occur at Ysterfontein north of Grotto Bay. These sites are known as shell middens (ancient rubbish heaps), the most commonly occurring archaeological site in the South African coastal zone.

About 1800 years ago the southwestern Cape was inhabited by hunter-gatherer people whose economy was based upon exploitation of wild animals, indigenous plant foods as well as marine animals. This changed with the arrival of Khoi herding groups onto the landscape who introduced domestic animals (sheep and later cattle), into the Cape.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

The location of the eight sites described in the following pages are plotted on Figure 1.

GROTTO BAY 1 (GB1)

The site consists of a scatter of fragmented shell on a steep eroding cliff overlooking Grotto Beach. A few stone flakes, broken cobbles, bone and pieces of pottery, were found on the site. The pottery is typical Cape coastal ware; burnished red and made of clay with a quartz and shell temper. The most commonly occurring shell are the *Isopur* species, *P. argenvillei* and *P. granatina*.

Research potential: Low. Site information content has already been damaged due to erosion and runoff. This has reduced the archaeological potential of the site.

GROTTO BAY 2 (GB2)

The site is about 10 metres south of GB1 and consists of a wider spread of fragmented shell on the same steep eroding slope as GB1 overlooking Grotto Beach. Shell, mainly limpets (*P. argenvillei* and *P. granatina*), some stone flakes including a hammerstone and a few pieces of Cape coastal pottery, were found on the surface.

Research potential: Low. Natural erosion and runoff have reduced the archaeological potential of the site.

GROTTO BAY 3 (GB3)

The site is about 30 metres north of GB1 and is located on the outermost limit of the development area in a footpath going down to Grotto Beach. Unidentifiable fragmented shell, one Middle Stone Age flake and two broken shale cobbles, were found.

Research potential: Low. The site is completely destroyed due to it been cut by a small footpath leading down to Grotto Beach. All information content has been lost.

GROTTO BAY 4 (GB4)
The site is about 20 metres south of GB2 and consists of a fairly wide spread scatter, of fragmented shell, yet fairly widely spread scatter, of fragmented shell, yet fairly limpet (P. argenvillei), a few small pieces of mainly Cape coastal pottery, a broken flake and a few unburnished Cape coastal cobbles. The site is disturbed on a steep cliff overlooking Grotto Beach.

Research potential: Low. Runoff and erosion have reduced the archaeological and informational content of the site.

GROTTO BAY 5 (GB5)
This site consists of widespread scatter of fragmented shell on yellowish sands on a small hillock toward the northern edge of Grotto Beach. Some whole and broken stone cobbles, 2 stone flakes, a few small pieces of Cape coastal pottery, modern glass and plastic, were found. A footpath down to Grotto Beach cuts through the midden.

Research potential: Low. The footpath which cuts through the site has significantly reduced its informational content. There is also disturbance due to more recent fire building and modern pollution.

GROTTO BEACH 6 (GB6)
The site consists of a fairly widespread scatter of fragmented and whole shell located at the southernmost edge of Grotto Beach. A small, relatively undisturbed patch, of in-situ midden material is visible. The shell consists mainly of limpet species, P. argenvillei and P. granatina, being the dominant limpets. Some stone flakes are scattered around the site, as well as a few small pieces of Cape coastal pottery and some bone. Numerous footpaths cross the area, as well as some recent fireplaces, contribute to the disturbance of the site.

Research potential: medium. Only insofar as the site contains a relatively undisturbed small patch of in-situ midden material. The site, however, is unlikely to yield much information.

GROTTO BAY 7 (GB7)
The site, close to the southernmost edge of Grotto Beach, has been severely damaged due to 4 x 4 vehicle activity. Trampling and other human activities including trampling and pollution contribute to its disturbed context. Two chunks, one flake and some small pieces of pottery, including a large complete pottery lug (recessed handle), were found on the surface.

Research potential: Low. The site has been disturbed by modern activities, particularly the presence of a well-used 4 wheel drive track. All archaeological information has been displaced.

GROTTO BAY 8 (GB8)
This once fairly large midden has been cut through by a number of tracks and a road back to the beach.

near the rocky shore, and it appears as if the back of the house has been built on the edge of the beach. Midden material can be seen at the back of the house, and along the track leading toward it. Midden material can also be seen in the track and footpath leading down to the beach. No artefactual material was noted.

potential Low. The site has been severely damaged due to the construction of the public carpark, and tracks which lead down to the beach, and house construction.

Most of the sites described above are fairly discreet occurrences. However, fragmented scatters of shell (some of it possibly the remains of middens), can be found throughout the area surveyed. It also appears that some of the first houses which are located on the beach to the north of the car park at Grotto Bay, may have been built on, or close to, middens.

DISCUSSION

Most of the middens located during the archaeological investigation of Grotto Bay contain components (ceramics) that date to the last 1800 years. Those that are without pottery, it can be argued, are probably contemporary with those with pottery. Middens were short-term occupation areas devoted to the periodic exploitation and processing of marine foods. It is possible that people were visiting the coast during periods of low tide to collect and process shellfish. The Grotto Bay middens are similar to and probably contemporary with middens located further south at Jacobsbaai (Ganzekebaai). These middens were also small, containing mainly limpets, and some of them with pottery.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the eight sites which have been located and described at Grotto Bay, only one (GB 6), is worthy of some attention, but is not considered likely to yield much information. The rest of the sites are disturbed or severely damaged, either due to recent human activity and natural erosional processes. Damage as a result of four wheel drive activity is particularly evident throughout the area and has probably destroyed a number of now invisible sites. Uncontrolled public access to the beach has also disturbed the middens. The lack of cultural remains on most of the sites may also be the result of "trophy hunting" by picnickers and day trippers. Uncontrolled and unsympathetic house construction has also disturbed and destroyed some middens. Footpaths leading from the car park down to the beach cut through

sites located on state land at Grotto Bay are thus considered to be to disturbed to warrant any archaeological excavation or sampling programme to be undertaken there.

I would, however, make one recommendation:

It is that there is the very real possibility of earthmoving activities uncovering human burials and buried middens in the proposed development area. Archaeological visibility in this area is reduced to zero because of the thick ground cover. Should burials and midden material be uncovered, an archaeologist should be immediately engaged. Building contractors and landscapers should therefore inform their personnel as to the possibility of this occurring, and the procedure to be followed. An archaeologist may be called onto site to inform building contractors and landscapers and their personnel, as to the sensitivity of coastal development on archaeological sites, prior to construction activities proceeding.