

AN INSPECTION AND ASSESSMENT OF SPECIFIC ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES ON DE BEERS OWNED PROPERTIES: NAMAQUALAND

Prepared for

De Beers Namaqualand.

March 2001



Prepared by

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1. INTRODUCTION

An inspection of two sites on De beers properties was undertaken on the 23rd and 24th March 2001. These included:

- An exposure of ESA (Early Stone Age) artefacts at Sandkop, just outside the town of Kleinsee;
- A site containing multiple pre-colonial human burials in the high security area south of Koingnaas;
- An MSA (Middle Stone Age) site containing artefacts and bone at the mouth of the Groen River.

The ESA site at Kleinsee is the only one of the three likely to be impacted by mining, but the Groen River site is being impacted by uncontrolled 4x4 use on the dunes by trespassing members of the public. This site will be subjected to basic test excavations in April 2001 and will be discussed in a separate report when the results of those excavations become available.

The approximate location of the sites is shown in Figure 1

2. SITES

2.1 Sandkop ESA site

29°40.749'S 17°04.824'E (WGS84)

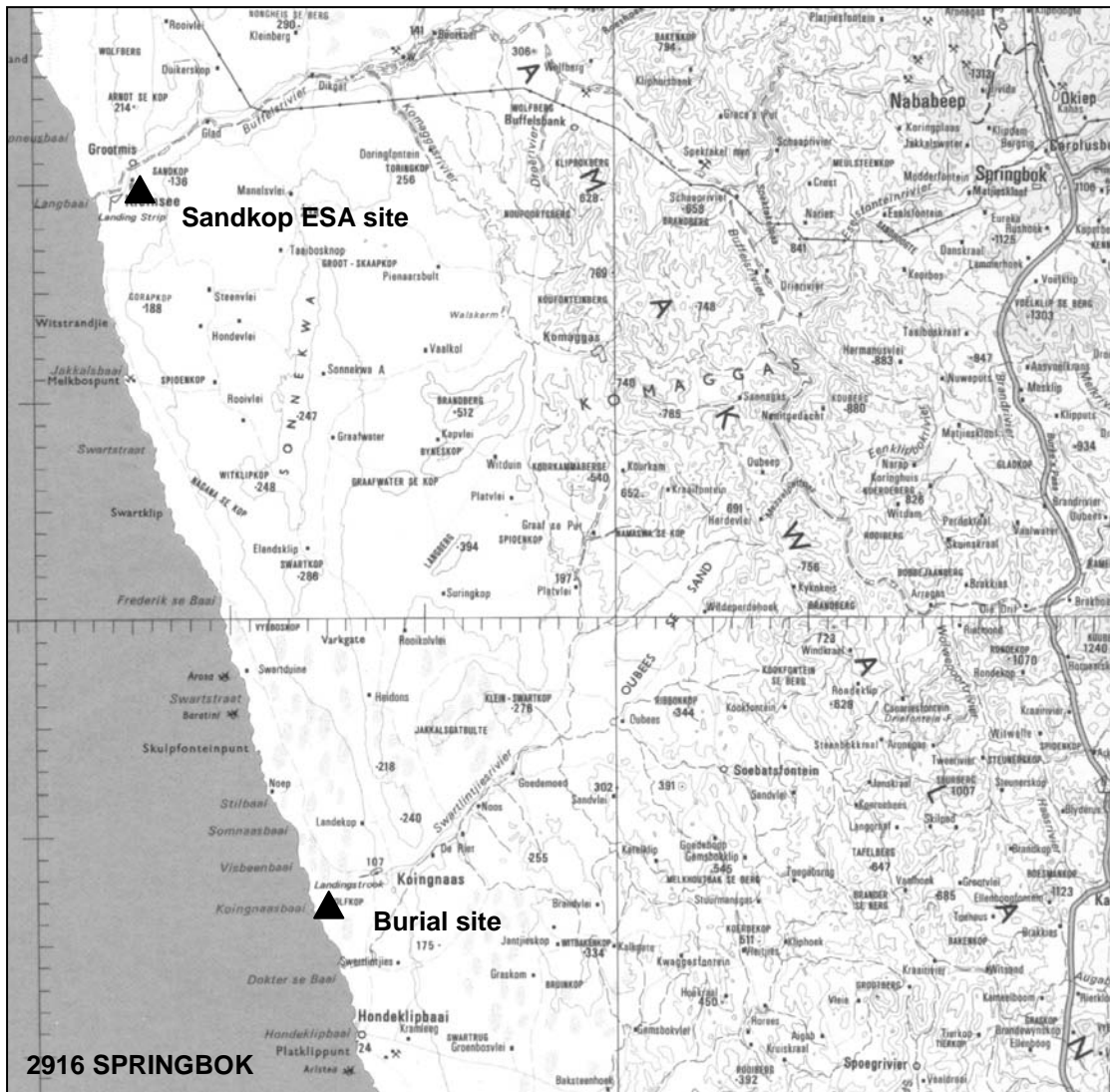
2.1.1 Context

The site consists of an extensive (though not dense) scatter of ESA waste/debitage and occasional bifacial pieces lying on a hard surface below approximately 1-1,5m of loose aeolian sands. The artefactual material was exposed when the topsoil was removed several years ago, but it is only recently with renewed interest in the area for mining that the archaeological material was noticed by the environmental officer undertaking a preliminary inspection of the area.

2.1.2 Artefactual content

A number of small outcroppings of silcrete are present in the cleared area. In some instances it appears as if the smaller silcrete rafts have been moved from their primary context by earthmoving operations, but in other cases these seem to be *in situ*. It is therefore no surprise that artefacts appear to be made predominantly on silcrete, of a colour and texture consistent with the rafts. Before disturbance, the site may have closely resembled artefact scatters surrounding other silcrete outcrops in the area. Scars on some of the *in situ* rafts are consistent with flakes having been removed. Quartz and quartzite has also been used, and some chunks of chert are also noticed. These latter materials would have to have come from the coast or from the Buffels River. Quartzite cobbles were most frequently used as hammerstones.

As with other artefacts scatters surrounding silcrete outcrops, artefactual material consists largely of byproducts of the manufacture of formal tools (handaxes). The size of the pieces, and lack of Middle Stone Age (MSA) flake characteristics, suggest that this material is of ESA age. In addition, 3 handaxes were seen to confirm this conclusion about the age. It would appear that the scatter continues beyond the exposed area and is therefore quite extensive.



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Location of sites



I have inspected the bone which is scattered across the site and conclude that this is of relatively recent age. Most of the pieces are from domesticated animals and show evidence of sawing and chopping. These may well relate to the town abattoir which is in the vicinity. No fossilised bone or ostrich eggshell was observed.

2.1.3 Action/Mitigation

In my opinion, the fact that the site has been disturbed by earthmoving activities where the aeolian sand has been cleared, as well as the fact that there is no preserved organic material directly associated, means that the material has limited significance.

It is suggested that a limited collection of the artefacts be made as a record of the site content. The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) should issue a permit for collection.

An application should also be made to SAHRA for permission to destroy the portion of the site that is exposed.

2.2 Koingnaas multiple burial site 30°13.929'S 17°14.674'E (WGS84)

2.2.1 Context

The site was discovered by members of the security staff in a mobile dune region within the high security area south of Koingnaas towards the end of the year 2000. The site is periodically covered by moving dunes, as are many others in the immediate vicinity. Digital photographs of the site were sent to the Archaeology Contracts Office for comment. It was immediately evident that there was more than one individual buried at the site, and that they were associated with artefactual material of the type that would suggest Late Stone Age (LSA) origin. Of additional interest was that a number of artefacts of colonial age were also present on the site.

As there was unlikely to be an impact from mining, it was decided not to undertake any mitigation. An opportunity arose recently to inspect the site during a trip to assess the ESA site at Kleinsee.

2.2.2 Human bone and artefactual material

During the short time that was spent on site it was determined that there was evidence to suggest that four individuals were buried at the site. This assessment is based on the presence of 3 adult mandibles, and post-cranial bones from a young individual (pre-teen) which would not have matched with any of the mandibles. One virtually whole cranium, and several cranial fragments are present, along with numerous post-cranial remains. All are heavily bleached by the sun and blasted by wind borne sand. These have led to deterioration of many of the bones and suggest periods of extended exposure. No signs of trauma were observed on any bones. The bone is scattered across the surface in two areas and it was not possible to determine whether all the bones were in a common grave. This may be possible with additional excavation.

The associated artefacts are consistent with those of the LSA. Several lower grindstones and manuports, a portion of an indigenous ceramic vessel with a lug and numerous

fragments of ostrich eggshell were observed. Numerous patches of dense marine shell midden are present as well. The shell species represented are *Patella granatina*, *granularis* and *argenvillei*. A single bottleneck from a 19th century green bottle was found on the site. No other 19th century ceramics which appeared on the original digital photographs were seen but it may be due to the fact that sand has begun to re-cover the site.

2.2.3 Action/Mitigation

The site is not under threat from mining and thus does not require mitigation as a result. The site has high significance from an archaeological research point of view and so should be highlighted on plans of the area (GIS), so that in the future the site can be relocated and protected from mining damage should this occur in the area.

3. CONCLUSIONS

These 2 sites are another indication of the wide range of age and content on archaeological sites in the mining area and show the need for constant vigilance with regard to heritage resources in areas that are affected by mining.

A fine handaxe specimen collected from the surface at the Sandkop site. The artefact is made on silcrete that is found in abundance around the town of Kleinsee.



Human remains exposed on the surface of a shell scatter at Koingnaas



The burial site showing its location amongst the active dunes. It will soon be covered by the dune in the foreground.

