

# HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE FOUNDERS ESTATE, BOSCHENDAL

Prepared for

BAUMANN AND WINTER HERITAGE CONSULTANTS

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## 1. Introduction

The Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town was appointed by Baumann and Winter Heritage Consultants to undertake a phase 1 archaeological impact assessment of Rhodes Fruit Farms, Boschendal with particular reference to an area known as the Founders Estate. The *terms of reference* for the project required us to focus on colonial period archaeology only as pre-colonial archaeology, social history and built environment is being handled by other consultants. This report is therefore a contribution to a broader general heritage impact assessment.

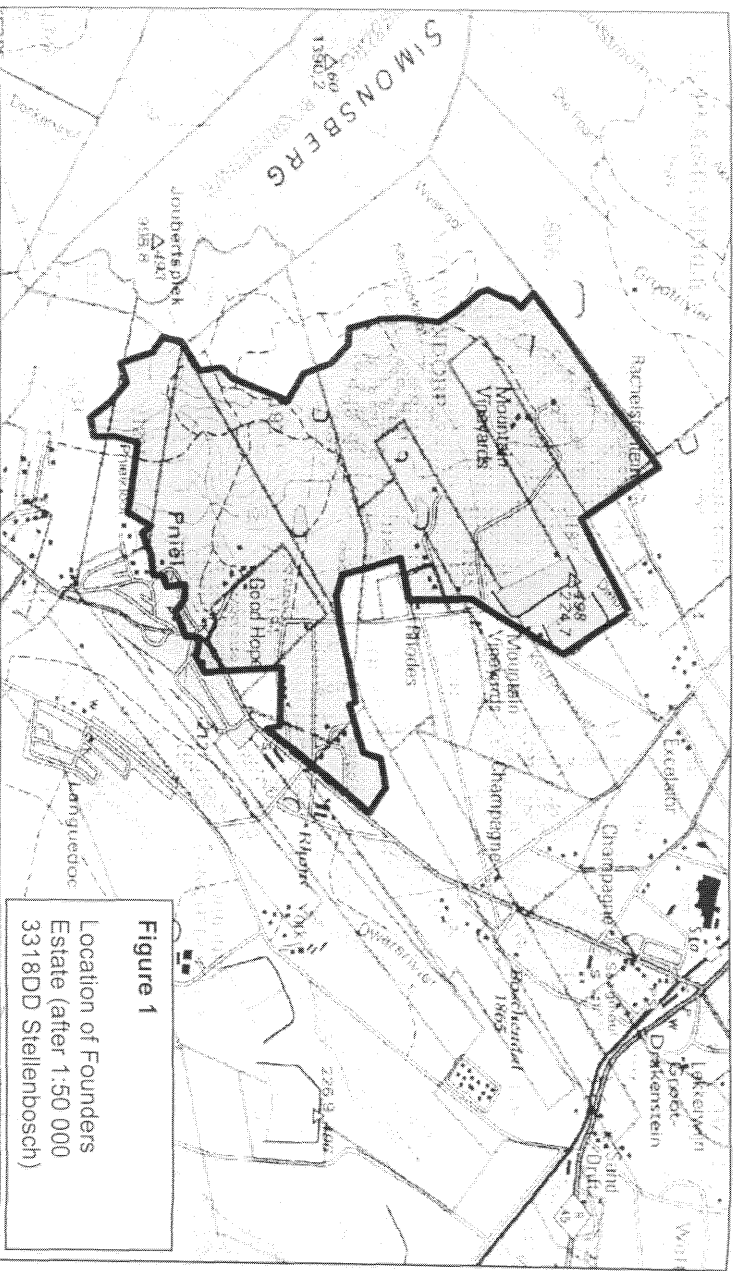


Figure 1

Location of Founders  
Estate (after 1:50 000  
3318DD Stellenbosch)

### 1.1 Description of the study area

The history of the study areas has been extensively described by Tracy Randal for the purposes of this study and is included in the HIA as a specialist report. By way of introductory summary Boschendal or Rhodes Fruit Farms is a collection of farms in the highly fertile Dwars River/Pniel Valley between the towns of Stellenbosch and Franschoek. The area which incorporates almost the entire town of Pniel is highly historically significant as it was here that some of the earliest Cape Farms were granted to both Dutch Colonists and French Huguenots in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Also in the study area are the remains of the old Simonsberg VOC mining complex consisting of shafts into the mountain and a series of associated buildings and features. The present day community of Pniel has its origins associated with early slavery on the farms and mine. Cecil John Rhodes was responsible for consolidating many of the early land grants into an extensive estate which for the duration of the 20<sup>th</sup> century remained in the ownership of Anglo-American Farms. In general the area has a long history of cultivation which has continued until the present day. There are extensive vineyards (which encroach up the slopes of the Simonsberg), orchards as well as cereals grown in certain areas.

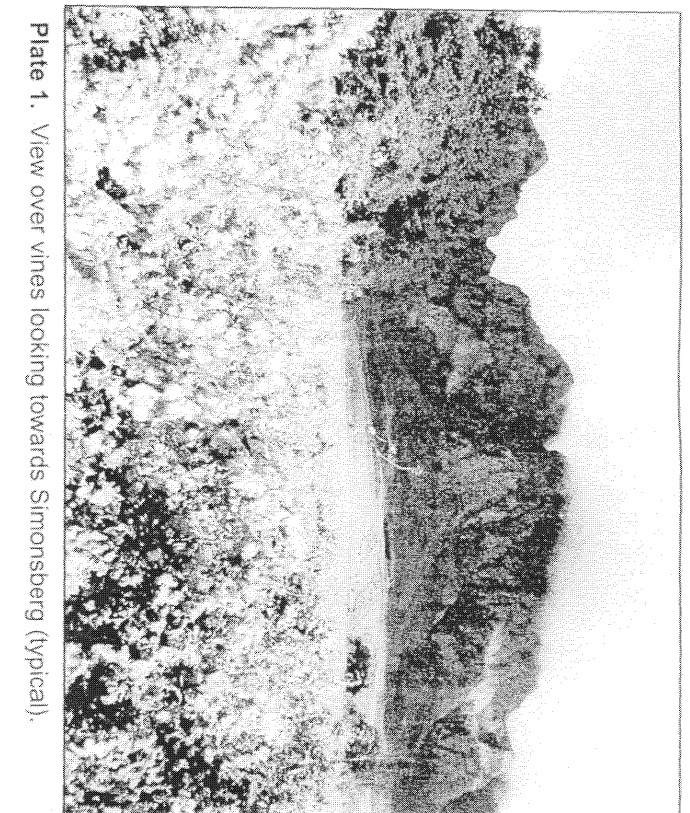


Plate 1. View over vines looking towards Simonsberg (typical).

The Founders Estate consists of some 412 hectares of land on the western side of the valley (Figure 1). The landscape is characterized by a mosaic of vineyards and orchards (Plate 1), while the higher slopes of the Simonsberg is uncultivated but overrun with dense thickets of invasive alien plants, mostly Black Wattle. The area contains several significant building complexes, namely the Goedehoop Homestead and *Wef*. Rhodes's cottage as well as buildings associated with what used to be the old Nieuwedop Farm complex. There are many structures scattered around the vineyards and orchards, some of which are protected by the NHRA but not of major historical significance. Most of the historic settlement areas are associated with groves of Oak or Bluegum trees. Typical landscape features are tree lined roads, while most of the numerous streams and springs which originate in the Simonsberg have been captured by formal *leiwater* (furrow) systems through the orchards and fields. The remains of the old VOC silver mine complex lie partially within the Founders Estate and is considered to be the most important archaeological heritage site on the property.

Anglo-American is in the process of disposing of Rhodes Fruit Farms with the Founders Estate being the first portion earmarked for development. The estate is to be subdivided into 20 hectare (or more) agricultural subunits, each with a dwelling house situated on 1 hectare of land, which include the historic farms buildings of Goedehoop and Nieuwedop. These "Gentlemen Estates" would thus become shareholders in the general farming operation which would continue under its own management. In this way the vineyard and orchards of the Founders Estate will become an elite series of high class small holdings situated to exploit the vineyard ambience, the prestige of wine making and the outstanding visual qualities of the valley and Drakenstein Mountains. Obviously where land uses are changed affecting access to heritage sites, or new structures and heritage sites physically encroach on remains of previous settlement, impacts can be expected to occur.

## 1.2 History of previous research

The historical archaeology of this river valley has been relatively solidly studied and published compared with other rural communities in South Africa. Gavin Lucas conducted a series of surveys and excavations in the valley 1998-2001 which resulted in the publication of his book, "An archaeology of Colonial Identity".<sup>1</sup> This archaeological research has covered this history of the VOC mining operation (Founders Estate), Goedehoop *wef* as well as Pniel itself. The publication explores the archaeological signatures of historical settlement at these various sites and comments on the identity of the communities who lived and worked in the

<sup>1</sup> Lucas, G. 2004. *An Archaeology of Colonial Identity. Power and Material Culture in the Dwaars Valley, South Africa*. London: Kluwer Academic.

area. The publication has added enormous value and significance to the study area through the process of discovery and the linkages it illustrates with not only neighbouring communities but also the context the sites within the VOC hegemony, and later on the British Colonial period. Hennie Vos of Stellenbosch Museum has also produced a number of unpublished reports on the historic farms and recently, a conservation commentary on the Silver mine complex. In essence the archaeological significance of the study area is well established. Given this, it is not within the scope of this report to furnish new knowledge but rather to frame what is known within the context of heritage impact assessment and further conservation.

Lucas  
Vos

## **2. Study Method**

Founders Estate was visited over a period of a week by Archaeologists Tim Hart (MA archaeology) and Liesbet Schietecatte (MA, Msc archaeology). Background studies undertaken by specialist consultants on built environment and history were extremely useful in isolating areas of potential historical significance. The previous studies by Gavin Lucas were invaluable resources as many of the archaeological sites identified by his team could not be relocated today given the intense black wattle growth on the slopes of the Simonsberg.

### **2.1 Restrictions**

The owners provided unrestricted access to the Founders Estate, most parts of which were accessible through a network of farm roads. Being a well watered area, plant growth is intense and in many areas the ground surface was covered by grasses. Ground surface was visible in vineyards and orchards. The site of the silver mine complex which lies on the upper slopes of the Simonsberg is mostly uncultivated but over grown by virtually impenetrable stands of invasive alien plants. Lucas was extremely fortunate to be able to exploit the aftermath of a veld fire which made ruins and other long lost archaeological material visible. In the last three years alien plant growth in the wake of the fire has accelerated enormously obscuring the bulk of archaeological sites found by Lucas. We were only successful in relocating the more conspicuous larger sites. Vegetation clearing will be necessary to achieve anything further.

## **3. Findings**

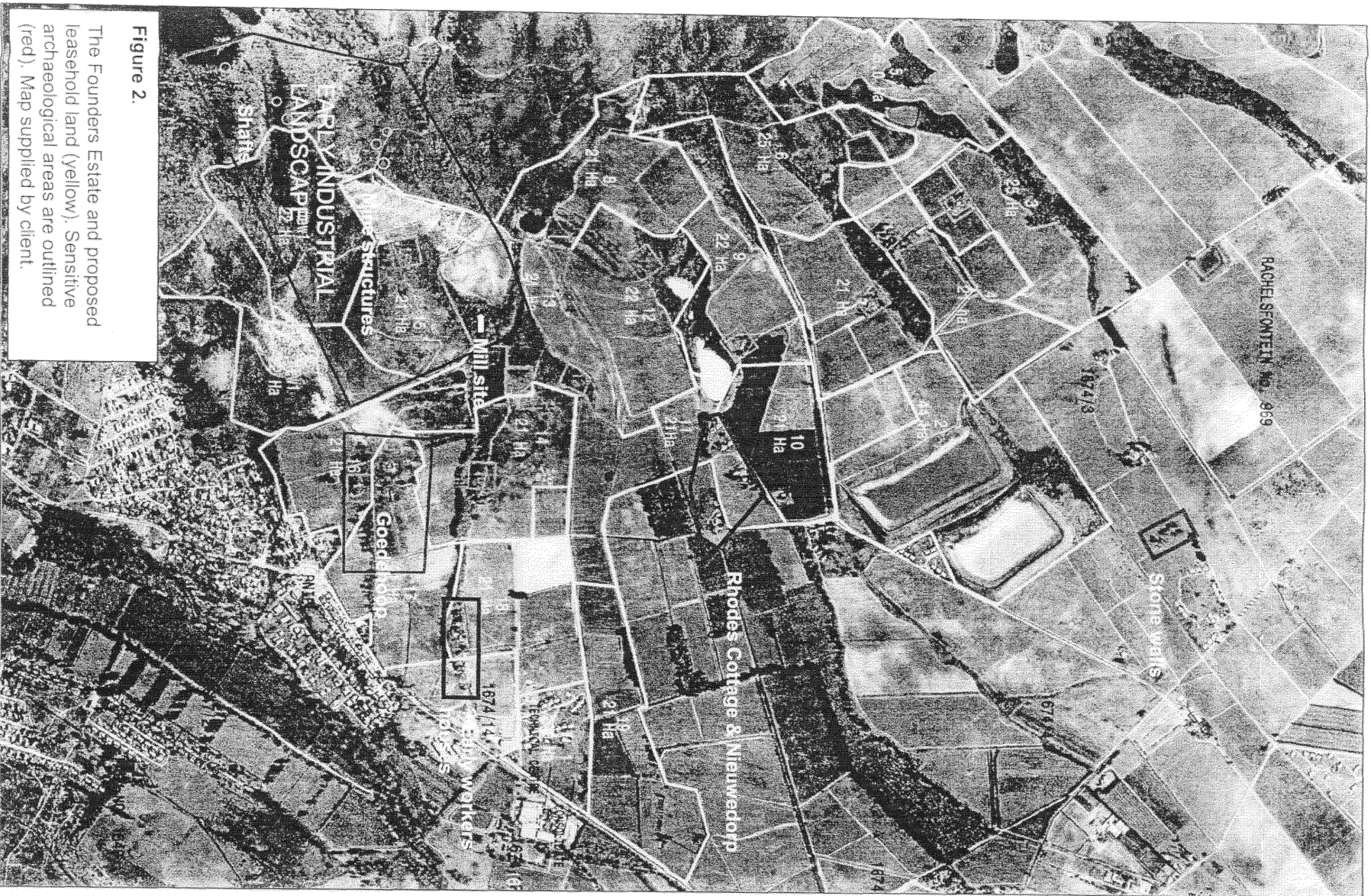
### **3.1 Areas of historical archaeological sensitivity on the Founders Estate.**

As defined by the NHRA 25 of 1999 archaeological material consists of the remains of human settlement and activity which is more than 100 years of age. Since complete built structures are separately addressed, this report will focus on historical artifact scatters, activity areas, ruins and foundations.

### **3.2 Nieuwedorp**

#### **3.2.1 Rhodes Cottage and surrounds**

It has been hypothesized that the original Nieuwedorp homestead was built on this site in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century but demolished when Sir Herbert Baker built Rhodes's Cottage in 1902. Unfortunately there are no visible traces of archaeological material on the surface in the immediate vicinity of the cottage. The survey diagramme of the 19<sup>th</sup> century suggests that a structure existed roughly immediately behind or on the site of Rhodes Cottage. This is a likely candidate for the original Nieuwedorp homestead and *werf*. There are no immediate



**Figure 2.**  
 The Founders Estate and proposed  
 leasehold land (yellow). Sensitive  
 archaeological areas are outlined  
 (red). Map supplied by client.

surface indications of this structure, however it is quite probable that foundations exist below surface.

### 3.2.2 The Annex of Rhodes Cottage

This small separate cottage contains early elements. It is said to have been a mill that was once associated with Nieuwedorp farmstead. A nearby *leiwater* may once have led water to a mill race, although there is no immediate evidence of this. A closer examination of the Annex that involves excavation and fabric analysis may be able verify if the structure was in fact a mill in the past.

### 3.2.3 Barn

The area around the Nieuwedorp Barn appears to contain old building rubble and evidence of earlier construction in the general vicinity. Within the barn there is the possibility that original architectural details exist below the floor surface. Archaeological excavation and fabric analysis will be able shed light on the early phases of the structure and reveal its uses.

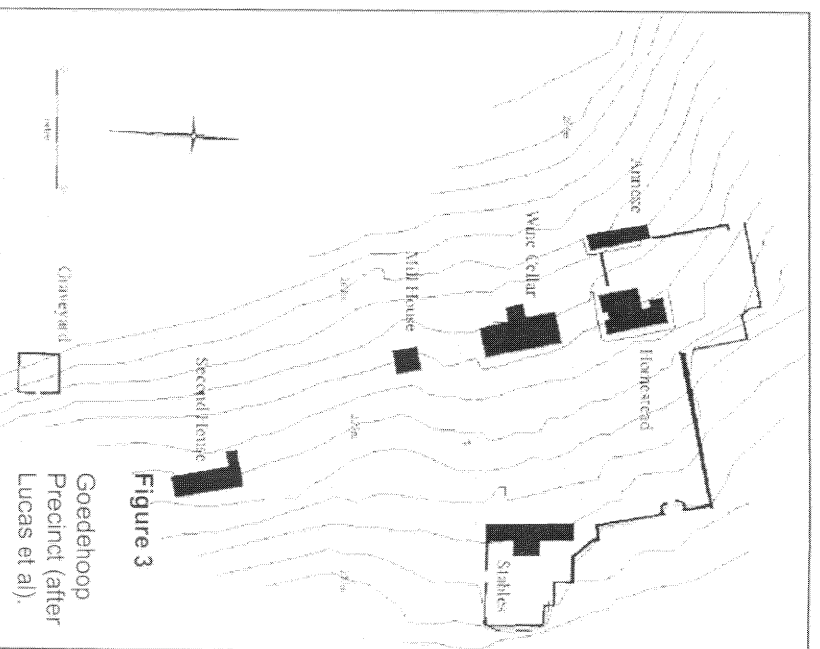
### 3.3 Other possible areas of sensitivity

Certain areas marked on Figure 2 are considered to be potentially sensitive in that there may be below surface features and deposits that could be impacted by development activities. There are areas where there are alignments of oak trees which may indicate the presence of a demolished structure or fragments of walling. Zones (red lines) have been marked around these areas. Development activities within the demarcated zone need to be preceded by a focused archaeological sensitivity assessment which could involve trial excavations.

### 3.4 Goedehoop

The Goedehoop homestead, *werf* and associated structures as a complex have already been demonstrated by Lucas and Vos to be of high archaeological sensitivity. The main reason for this is that complex has been shown to contain a more or less complete archaeological sequence from the earliest period of the farms existence until the present day. Lucas located what he believes to be the buried remains of one of the earliest structures situated between the Slave lodge (annex) and the 1821 homestead. Furthermore artefactual material is plentiful both within and outside the existing *werf* wall. As yet, little is known about the developmental sequence of various individual structures such as the main house, annex, stables and mill building – all of which have high archaeological potential.

On a site such as Goedehoop impacts to heritage material can occur as result of even minor interventions: for example replacing



plasterwork within any of the structures may result in damage to hidden wall paintings. The addition of a new bathroom may cause damage to sub-surface archaeological deposits through injudicious placing of service pipes. This site is considered so sensitive that we recommend that a Heritage Conservation Plan be drawn up that in itself will be a focused study which articulates the significance of the site, details the way in which the site is vulnerable and determines acceptable limits of change.

### 3.5 Silver mine complex

The silver mine complex is an early industrial landscape (Figure 2), which according to Vos<sup>2</sup> must surely be one of the earliest colonial period mines in South Africa. The background history of the mine was researched by Lucas and his colleagues.<sup>3</sup> The "discovery" of precious metals in the Simonsberg Mountains by Frans Diederick Muller led to him motivating the development of a mining society or association which involved many prominent members of the local VOC who funded the operation. The mining operation commenced in about 1743 employing up to 20 VOC employees and 19 slaves. Despite the sinking of two complexes of mine shafts (upper and lower slopes of the Simonsberg) and substantial investment of funds by senior politicians, no metals of any value were found. Muller, who was the driving force who motivated the mining operations, was exposed as a fraud, and in 1750 was deported to Batavia without his possessions.

The mining operation, albeit relatively short lived, left a substantial imprint on the landscape. This took the form of several shafts and a plethora of buildings, roads and a mill. The archaeological footprints of a number of these have survived, while other may still lie hidden in the dense thickets of the Simonsberg. The ruins and shafts are very well known to the Priel community who visit regularly and identify closely with the sites as local heritage.

The mines have never been mapped or described in detail, however, Lucas and his team were responsible for substantial historical research on the subject. Muller's house, the ruins of which still stand today has been excavated (along with other mining associated structures) by Lucas and forms a component of his book.

Much of the silver mine industrial landscape lies on land which will be donated to communal open space, however the lower aspect of the site which consists of a mill (discussed below) which lies within the proposed private leasehold land of the Founders Estate and is particularly relevant to this study.

#### 3.5.1 Factory/mill

On the lower slopes of Simonsberg is the lowest structure believed to be related to the mining operation. Lucas has suggested that this was a crushing plant where "ore" from the mining was brought for processing. Vos however is not convinced by this hypothesis alluding to the fact that the mining operation and the mill may not be contemporary. The site was inspected during this study. It is a substantial structure hidden in dense alien forest. Built from stone and calcrete mortar the building contains 3 floors, the lowest of which contains several large mountings of an industrial nature. The openings are arched and finished with well fired brick. No woodwork or joinery has survived however beam rests and socket are visible in the masonry. Dense plant growth has severely impacted the structure through root movement. A fallen tree has collapsed a large section of walling in recent past.

<sup>2</sup> Vos, H. 2004. Zilvermijn in Simonsberg. Unpublished report.

<sup>3</sup> Lucas, G et al., 2003. Farm Lives





has restricted root movement in the foundations of the structure, greater exposure to driving winter rains has also resulted.

### **3.6.2 Kraal, stores, labourers cottages**

Peripheral structures such as these have been mapped by Lucas however, by the time that this particular study was commissioned, dense vegetation growth prevented their relocation. Quinton Fortuin and Jill Sutton kindly directed us to the location of the Kraal and an oven which were both hidden in dense black wattle stands. There is a concern that root action will affect integrity of foundations of these structures in the short term. While we were unable to locate the other structures recorded by Lucas and his team, it is expected that being built of similar materials, they too, will be subject to similar impacts.

### **3.6.3 Shafts**

Mine shafts were not subject to assessment as this part of the study, however they have been inspected by Vos and Lucas under the guidance of Quinton Fortuin. Several of the shaft openings have been subject to many years of graffiti, which while it is offensive to the tourist or casual visitor, represents a legacy of visitation over the years by the local community. Vos mentions issues of safety in that there are vertical shafts with drops in excess of 20 m. This is clearly a hazard that will need to be managed once the land is under formal control as this is a source of risk to the visitor and liability to the land management authority.

Although the mine shafts are well known to locals, they need to be properly documented and mapped, and some sort of a system put in place to see to management and safety issues. Apart from occasional collapses in places, unlike the built structures the mine shafts are relatively safe from impacts caused by exposure and weather.

Note: Subdivision no 15 (Figure 2) may be located on or close to an old shaft.

### **3.6.4 Old roads**

Lucas has documented old wagon tracks associated with the mining operations, however thanks to the dense vegetation growth, these are no longer visible.

## **3.7 General issues relating to the mining site**

### **3.7.1 Land management and landscape**

The developers have indicated willingness to "donate" upper slopes above Founders Estate to public open space allowing free access to the upper historic mining sites. The exception to this is the mill site, which being situated down slope is included within the private leasehold estate land. Until otherwise disproved, the mill site should be considered to be part of landscape of mining and is thus all part of the same site. In order to preserve the integrity of the site, it is essential that linkages be maintained through:

- Ensuring that the mill area is accessible via a servitude
- or incorporation into public land.

These measures will help maintain the cohesiveness of any visitor experience should a future tourism industry be developed around the Simonsberg mines.

### **3.7.2 Veld Management**

It is clear that the unproductive land above the proposed Founders Estate has been somewhat neglected in the past in that alien plant growth has been allowed to proliferate without control. This has diminished the significance of the heritage material by:

- Hiding heritage sites under impenetrable plant cover
- Impacting heritage sites through root movement and falling trees and branches
- Creating circumstances where high temperature veld fires crack stone work and plaster and diminish indigenous plant cover leading to fabric erosion and degeneration
- Obscuring ancient roadways and disrupting connectivity between site elements.

Unfortunately alien growth has reached such proportions that control of this is going to be a major long term operation. There is a concern that donation of the land to public use is an abrogation of responsibility to good land management and that the *status quo* will continue. It is likely that alien control in this situation has reached a point where eradication is beyond the scope of volunteer weekend hacking groups or volunteer community organisations. With the best will in the world, community organizations may be able keep selected ruins clear of plant growth on an ongoing basis provided that there are continuous commitments to do this. In reality effective control is going to require long term mitigation, substantial capital, equipment and professional input.

### **3.7.3 Conservation of standing ruins**

Ruins are notoriously difficult conserve, not only in terms of the maintenance of the physical fabric of the ruin, but also defining the underlying philosophy. Conserving a ruin means attempting to stop the passing of time in its tracks, or at best slowing down natural and inevitable processes. To achieve this always requires some form of modern intervention using contemporary material and skills, which immediately compromises the originality of fabric depending on the extent of the intervention. If a person or a community decides that a ruin should be conserved, it must be accepted that overtime the ruin will change with additions of necessary modern material, and that eventually it can become a modern construct. The payoff of this is that although original fabric may be altered, the place remains significant and the material remains, whether they are original or contemporary represent an historical course of events.

The only way to slow down the deterioration of a ruin is to construct a weather proof housing around it which is a costly exercise which can involve visual impacts. The next best thing to do is to ensure that eroded areas are checked, walls are capped with modern cement (as opposed to trying to fake original material) and if necessary, walls are pointed with modern mortar. Generally the process of maintenance can be expected to be ongoing.

## **4. Conclusion**

The development of Founders Estate will have limited direct impacts to historical archaeological material. This mostly controllable through appropriate mitigation measures and good conservation practice. What is of concern are indirect impacts that can result from the way in which those portions of the site that contain historical resources are managed and utilised in the future. Particular reference is made to maintenance of the mill ruins and ensuring that there are rights of access across private leasehold land to the mill site. It is important that linkages are maintained between all the elements of this early industrial landscape.

Goedehoop is a site of established archaeological significance. Any intervention, in or near the Goedehoop weef has the potential to impact archaeological material. Services would need to be laid under a permit issued by SAHRA for excavation on an archaeological site.

Rhodes cottage and the Nieuwedorp barn area may be elements of a related historical site. Major interventions in this area must be preceded by a focused archaeological investigation to check for buried deposits.

#### **4.1 Recommendations**

##### **4.2 Mill site**

Given that the mill site is not well understood a further phase of research is needed to establish its historical significance. This would necessitate selectively clearing vegetation from the site, excavating its interior as well as conducting archival research. Once the purpose of the building is established, a policy to safeguard its fabric and historical significance needs to be developed and implemented. This will involve the development of a Conservation Plan for the site which details the measures that need to be put in place to safeguard fabric, details acceptable uses of the site and the way it should be managed.

If community endeavors result in some form of heritage tourism enterprise, it is essential that linkages between the broader silver mining site and the mill be recognized. Access servitude across private land to the mill site would be a minimum requirement.

##### **4.3 Rhodes Cottage and Annex, Nieuwedorp Barn**

This is a site of potential archaeological significance which needs to be verified. If any form of development is planned in this precinct of Rhodes Cottage or the barn, it needs to be subject to a pre-disturbance archaeological assessment which must involve:

- Fabric analysis within the annex to determine if it was a water mill
- Excavation on the exterior to determine if a mill race existed adjacent to the structure
- Trial excavations in lands immediately behind Rhodes Cottage to check for subsurface features that may have been part of or related to the original Nieuwedorp farm house.
- Trial excavations and fabric analysis inside and outside the Nieuwedorp Barn.

##### **4.4 Goedehoop**

This farm requires its own focused conservation plan before any modification to structures or landscape take place. See note below on conservation plans.

##### **4.5 Other areas (as marked on base map)**

A number of areas in the Founders Estate area should be subject to focused pre-disturbance assessments prior to commencement of any construction areas. This will involve:

- Pre-disturbance proofing of final footprints of houses to be built on the estate (either physical inspection in a sensitive area or by reviewing plans).
- Pre-disturbance inspection of any area of the estate that is subject to extensive landscaping.

#### 4.6 Essential elements of a typical Conservation Plan

- Understand the material remains of the site/place/object and its history.
- Identify and assess the significance of the site/place/object within the local, regional and international context.
- Identify the ways in which the site/place/object is vulnerable.
- The plan will define issues in terms of the current status of the site/place/object - its physical state, ownership, legal status and management issues.
- The plan will outline scenarios for maximum acceptable intervention (reconstruction, restoration or adaptive reuse) in terms of identified significance and vulnerability.
- The plan will setup a conservation policy containing guidelines for alteration of fabric, reconstruction of components, and presentation of the site to the public and adaptive reuse of associated structures.
- Depending on the outcome of discussions with the various groups involved, the plan will suggest a way forward in terms of management, heritage contracts and agreements with the property owner.