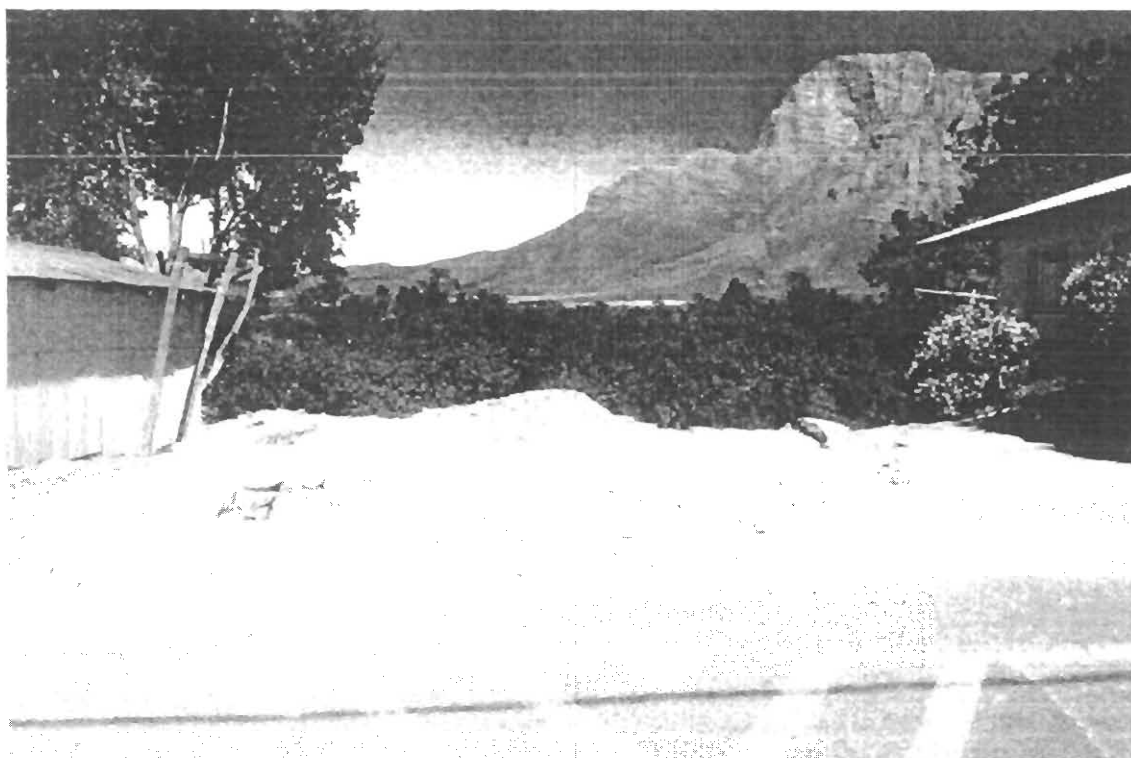


# **FARM LIVES**

## **A REPORT ON THE THIRD SEASON OF FIELDWORK**



**GAVIN LUCAS**

Report prepared for the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research  
December 2001

# FARM LIVES: A REPORT ON THE THIRD SEASON OF FIELDWORK

## Background to Project

This report presents the results of the third and final season of investigations into the historical archaeology of the lower Dwars River valley in the Western Cape, South Africa, which took place in late October and November 2001. Funded throughout by the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, the aims of the project have been discussed in previous reports, but generally involve an investigation into the material culture of diaspora and creolization in the context of colonial and post-colonial South Africa. The specific objectives of this season were threefold:

- further excavation of the silver mine complex (site 2) on the Simonsberg, where the focus of the fieldwork had been in 2000
- a programme of test pitting on the farm of Goede Hoop (site 3)
- excavation of a property in the town Pniel (site 4)

Due to heavy vegetation growth on the mountainside over the past year, the first objective was abandoned as it would have involved intensive and time-consuming clearance before excavation, using up too much of the limited time available for fieldwork. Consequently, more time and energy was directed to the second and third objectives, and in hindsight, to much better use. Test pitting at the farm of Goede Hoop proved far more rewarding than anticipated in terms of the recovery of structural remains, when only some clearer characterisation of material assemblage composition and general occupation span was aimed at. Additionally, the excavation of a property in Pniel was performed in greater detail and again, where only the recovery of a material assemblage associated with an early ex-slave household was intended, we also came away with full house plan and structural sequence of buildings on the property.

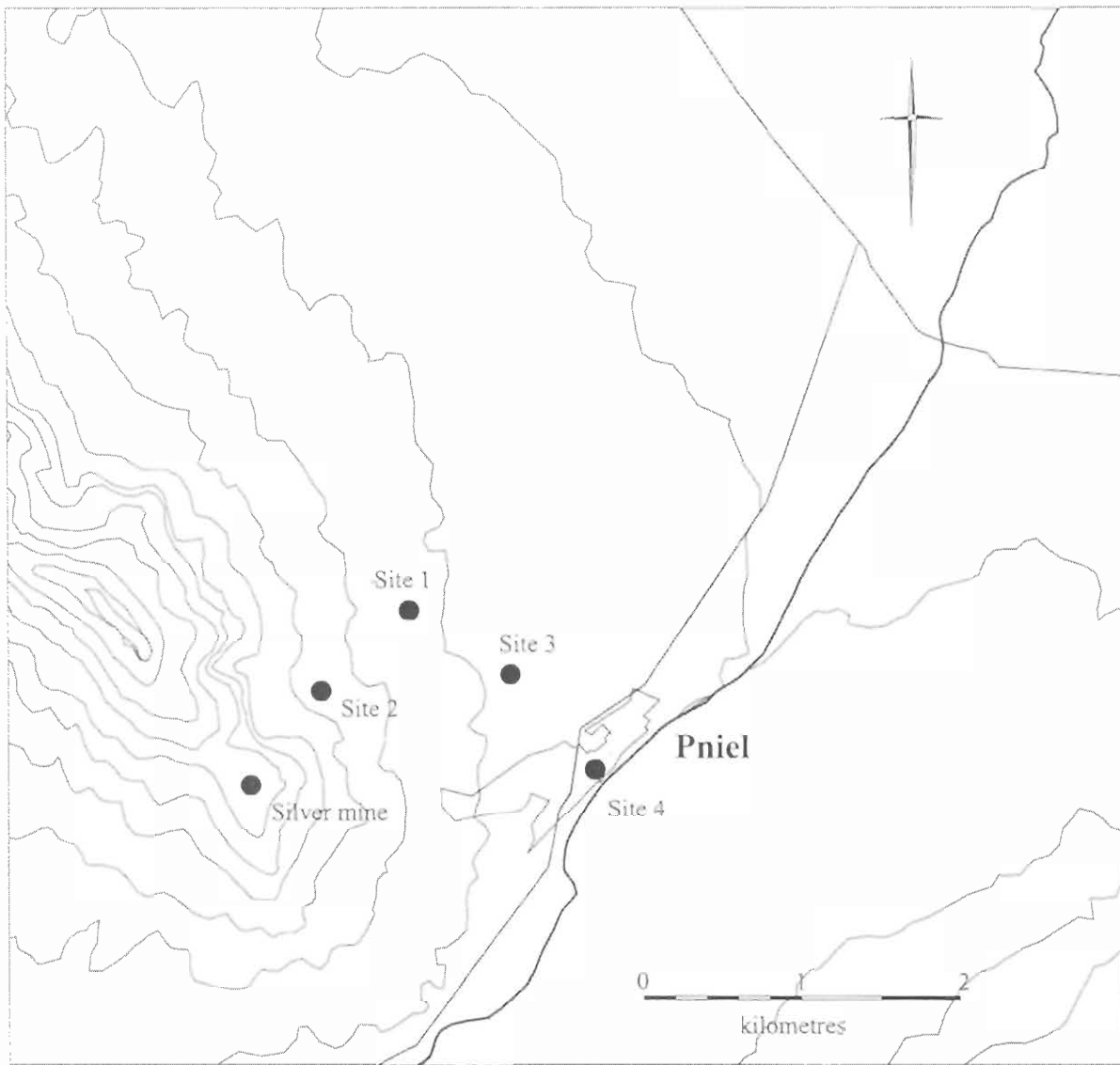


Figure 1. Location of Sites

The project, as in previous years, has benefited from the close co-operation and friendship of the local community, in particular Quintan Fortuin of Stellenbosch Municipal Council and Marianne Gertenbach of AmFarms. In addition, Antonia Malan and Jane Klose of the Historical Archaeology Research Group at the University of Capetown have continued to provide generous support to the project. The fieldwork was carried out by the author, Marcus Abbott and Andrew Hall, with the assistance, once again, of Olivia Cyster and Odile Peterson as well as Quintan Fortuin. We are also greatly appreciative of the support and help of a number of pupils from Bridge House school, Franschoek and especially their teacher Gill Sutton.

## **Results of the 2001 Season**

Two sites were investigated this season, sites 3 (Goede Hoop) and 4 (Pniel). A summary of the fieldwork and results are given below but post-excavation work is still in progress, including analysis of the ceramics by Jane Klose (UCT) and the faunal remains by Peter Nilsson (South African Museum).

### **Site 3. Goede Hoop Farm**

Fieldwork at Goede Hoop farm was confined the area around the farmstead, with particular focus in the area between the farmhouse and an annexe behind it. This area was identified in 2000 as one of two zones within the farm werf with high concentrations of ceramics, glass and other artefacts in the garden soils and it was anticipated that some closer characterisation of the material assemblage composition and span of occupation at the farmstead would be gained. Two other areas were selected for investigation - the area in front of the stables and the exterior of the northern werf wall. Generally, 1m square test pits were excavated, but in a few cases more strategically dimensioned sondages were cut.

## *The Farmstead*

Ten test pits were dug behind the farmstead, a core group of 5 on a regular grid with additional ones placed either according to available ground conditions or for more specific purposes. Below the garden soil, which contained a high density of artefacts, either natural was reached (weathered yellow sandstone) or structural remains. Two structures were located, both on the same alignment to each other but quite different to the alignment of the present farmstead and other buildings in the werf, with the exception of the stables. Significantly, the alignment of the stables, always a curious feature and anomaly, matches closely the alignment of the two buried structures found in the test pitting. This strongly suggests the stables comprises the oldest standing architectural fabric on the site and may even have been an earlier farmhouse (see below).



Of the two structures whose foundations were found in the test pits, the easternmost lies beneath the present annexe building and may have mostly been truncated, only its southern end surviving which projects beyond the limit of the annexe. The base of a main stone wall and an internal stamped brick fragment/dust floor was found close to the present ground surface. Two pieces of 18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese export porcelain were found directly lying on the floor surface. The other structure which lay to the west was found in the garden between the annexe and the present farmhouse. Remains of stone walls with internal timber post-settings recessed into the wall (with the rotted wood still *in situ*

in one case) were found in one test pit as well as a stamped brick fragment in mortar floor.

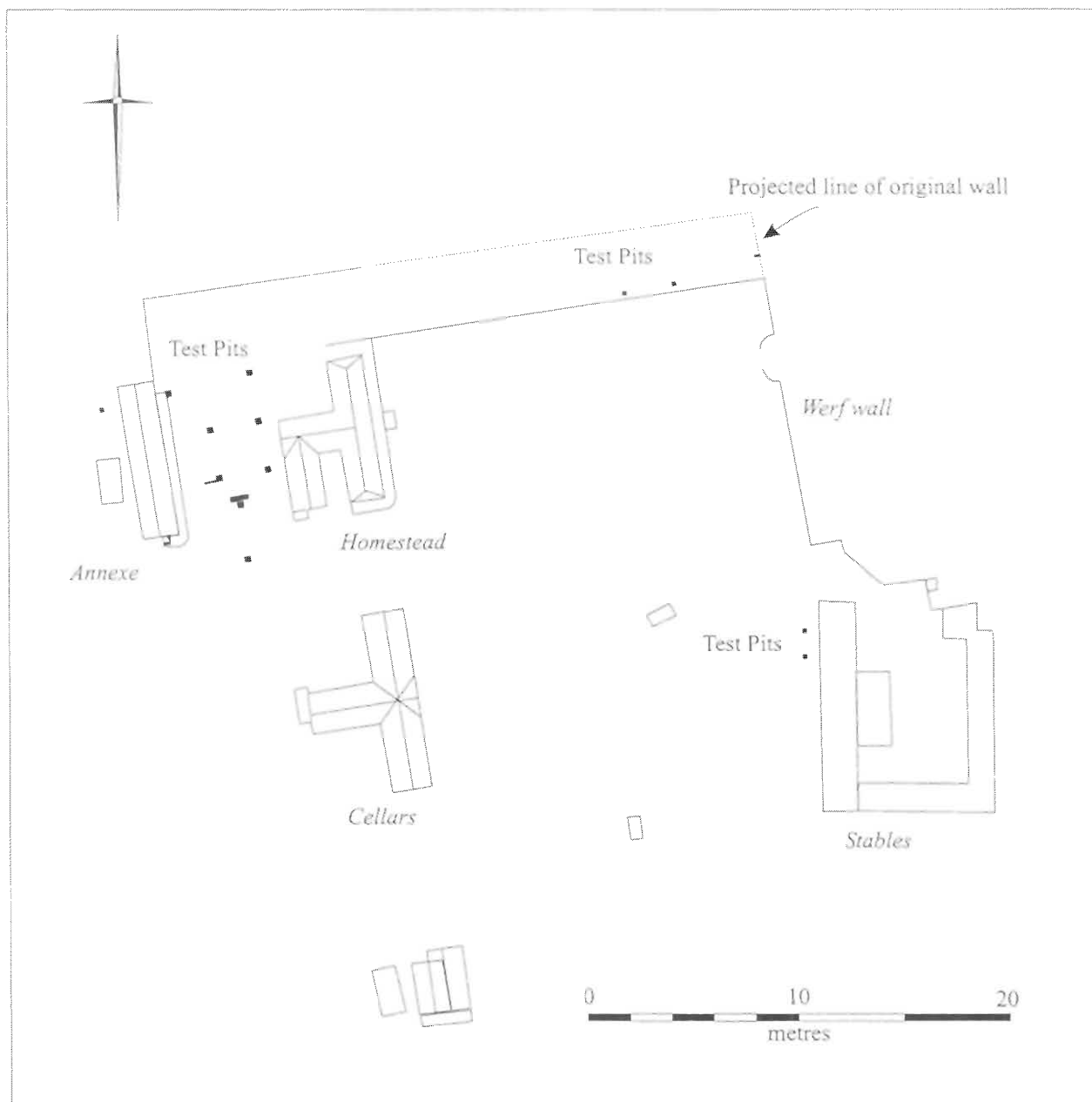


Figure 2. Site 3 (Goede Hoop Farm)

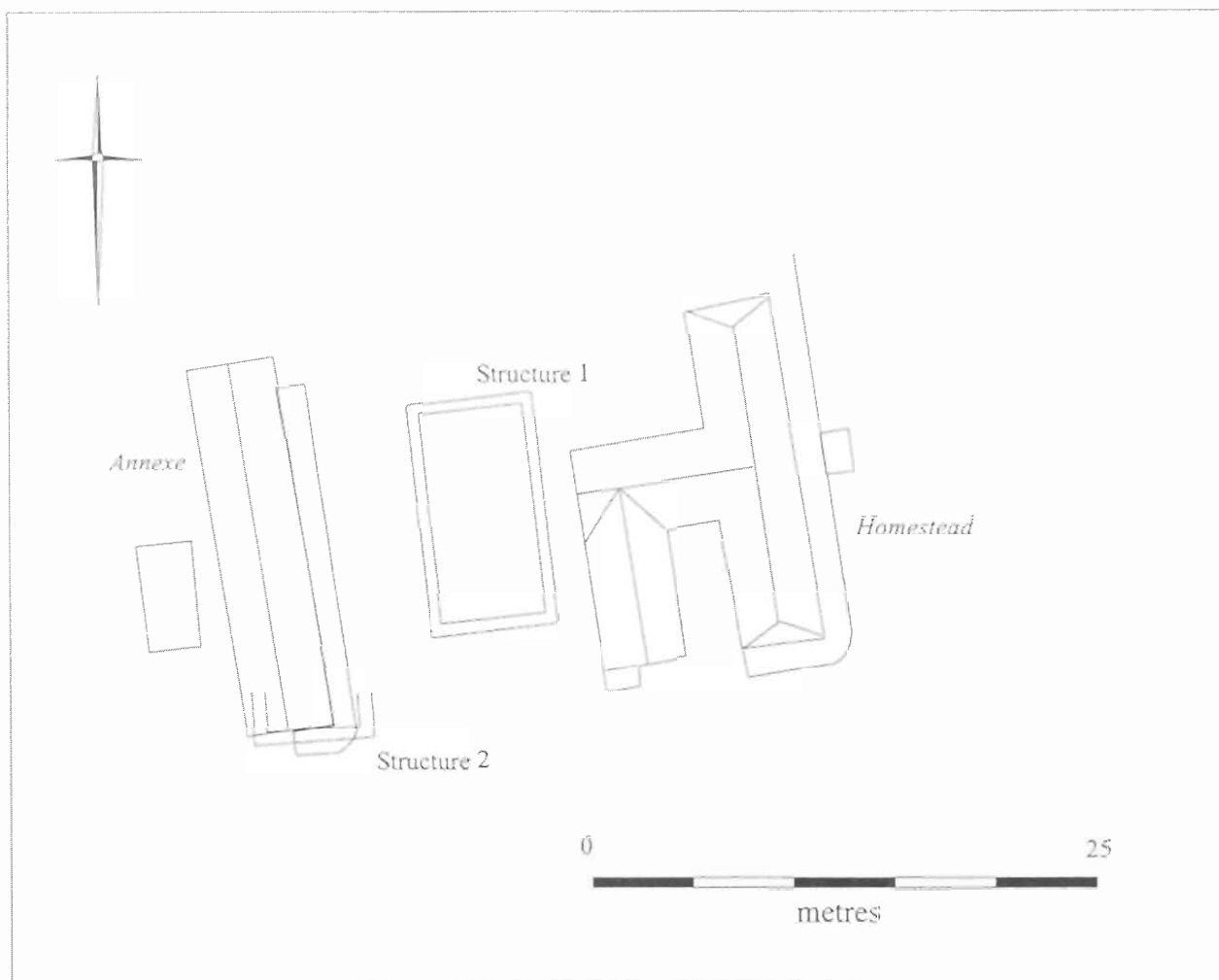


Figure 3. Site 3 (Goede Hoop): projected extent of earlier structures

Beneath this floor was a make-up layer which contained some 18<sup>th</sup> century Asian provincial ware, while in the abandonment deposits over the floor, further 18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese porcelain and other artefacts were found. Sections of a stone wall were also located in two other test pits on the far west side which may be part of the same structure or an earlier revetment wall for the garden. Additionally, robber trenches were located on the southern side and further north on the east side, and it does appear as if this second structure was subject to quite extensive demolition and may only be preserved in a small area.

An augur survey to trace the full extent of the second structure was conducted and with some success; together, the test pits and augur survey suggest a rectangular structure about 6m wide by 12m long, oriented north-south. Given the date of the material culture in deposits associated with both structures, it seems plausible to suggest they represent the remains of the earlier farmstead, and most likely date at least to the early 18<sup>th</sup> century if not the late 17<sup>th</sup> (the farm was first settled in the 1680s). The present standing buildings are all dated to the first half of the nineteenth century, but without investigation, one cannot know if these structures were rebuildings or renovations of earlier structures on the same site. However, given the different alignments and the results from our test pits, it seems likely that most of the present standing buildings are in fact built from new, with the annexe occupying a similar plot to that of an earlier structure. The only exception to this is the stables which may be older as mentioned.

### *The Stables*

Two test pits were excavated at the back of the stables; here the soil profile proved to be very shallow, with natural reached at very close to the present ground surface. Exposed in the test pits was a cobbled surface associated with the stables, which is still visible in places on the surface. It had clearly been repaired, including fairly recently as concrete had been used as a bonding agent. There appeared to be no great depth of soil horizons in the area of the stables, which is unfortunate in terms of finding possible deposits which might have helped to demonstrate its age, but it is conceivable the area had been landscaped during the renovation of the stables. A fabric survey was conducted on the stables and associated yard and it was found to clearly consist of a complex history of repairs and additions - it even appeared as if



this structure may have stood as a ruin for a period. This, along with its anomalous alignment, strongly supports the argument for it being the oldest standing fabric on the site, and contemporary with the two buried structures found in the test pits.

### *The Werf Wall*

Finally, a series of three test pits were dug alongside the outer edge of the northern werf wall. This was done for two reasons: first, to establish the depth and nature of midden material which had been collected from the surface in 2000, and second, to ascertain if the werf wall had originally extended further north than its present position, as suggested by a former head gardener of the farm, Roger Jones. Regarding the midden, this was found to be all surface - no finds were found at all in the test pits suggesting this was a very thin spread of material, most of which had washed out onto the track which runs alongside the werf wall. More success was met in terms of the wall - a sondage cut to traverse the line of the eastern wall if it did once extend further north revealed probable stone footings on this line. Due to robbing and deep ploughing (the area is currently under cultivation), the stones were very disturbed with no clear foundation cut, but their presence and position is taken to confirm that the werf wall did in fact extend further north than at present. This would also make the werf more regular than at present. This alteration is fairly recent and probably dates to the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially as the werf wall is probably contemporary with the present farm buildings which date to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Site 4. Pniel**

### *Santa Rosa Crescent (ref 776)*

Pniel is the main settlement in the valley and was established in 1843 as a mission station for newly emancipated slaves. The earliest part of the town lies on the northern side, the plots (or erven) laid out on a regular grid system. The southern part of Pniel is more irregular and organic in its development, and while most of the plots here are later in date, there are houses which appear to date to the beginning of Pniel. This marginal location may be significant,

especially in terms of their relation to the mission station and possible status. The house investigated archaeologically lies in this marginal area; a house stood on the plot until the mid 1980s when it was razed but local memory recalls it as an old structure, made of mudbrick on stone foundations (Fortuin, pers. comm.). Upon our arrival, the plot was empty but due to be re-developed in the near future. Removal of a demolition layer exposed the base of all internal walls (of mudbrick on cobble base) and the floor (layers of linoeloum over a stamped brick fragment and mortar floor), while the external walls had been demolished quite extensively and only the stone foundations remained which were revealed in the course of excavation.



Excavation after removal of the demolition layer, proceeded through a number of sondages in strategic areas of the house, to ascertain its structural sequence. In brief, it was found that originally a small, two cell structure stood on this

plot, oriented east- west and dating probably to sometime in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Later on in the same century, this was expanded into a four room house, now oriented north-south (the same as most other properties on the street). This later house underwent some internal modification, probably quite early on, mostly affecting the northern end, and thereafter, seems to have remained unchanged until its demolition (though additional elements may have been added to its back). The house as recalled by the owner's daughter, consisted of a large central living room through which access to and from the street was made and off this a bedroom to the south, and a kitchen and other bedroom to the north (Louisa Adams, pers. comm.). The house would have either had an outdoor privy or used chamber pots.

Beyond the trenching in the house, which recovered a moderate amount of finds, further test pits were dug at the back of the property which sloped steeply down to the river (Dwars). The

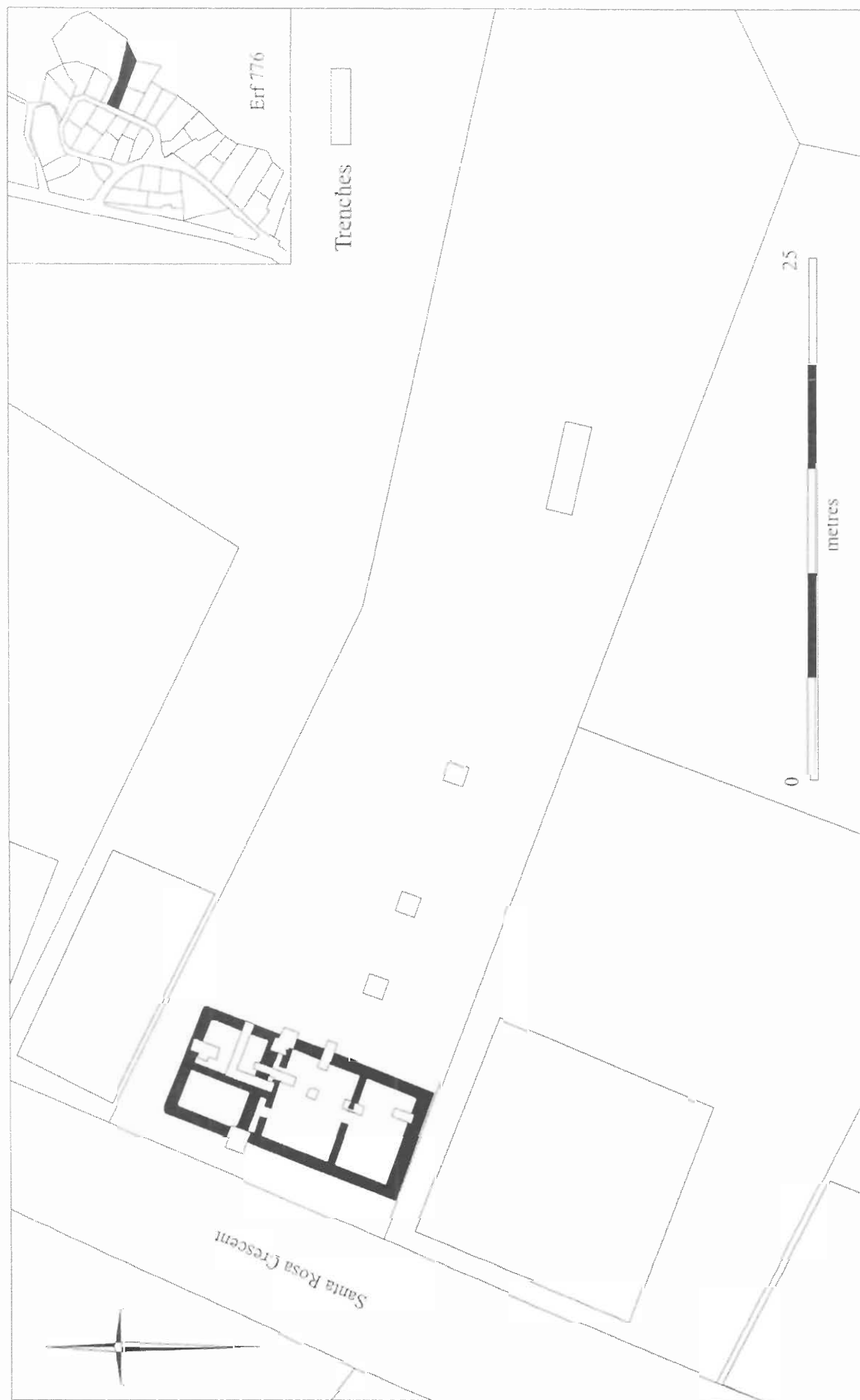


Figure 4, Site 4 (Pniel)

upper test pits recovered little material and showed a shallow soil profile, but the lower test pit and long sondage at the base of the slope had a much thicker accumulation of soil. The main midden lay at the bottom of the slope according to local memory and this was evident from surface inspection. A large assemblage of ceramics, glass, tin and some bone among other finds were retrieved in the long sondage we cut at the base of the slope, the majority of the material dating to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the base of the sequence, only a small amount of 19<sup>th</sup> century material was recovered.

### **Documentary and Oral History**

Work is in progress on the documentary research and oral history by Jaline de Villiers. Interviews with a former resident at Goede Hoop in the 1950s, (Mrs Dressler) and a former resident of the house in Pniel (Mrs Adams) will be conducted, as well as research into the property history of the house in Pniel.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This third season brings the fieldwork phase of the project to a close. Investigations at four sites have given a cross-section of a range of contexts and assemblages from which to construct a narrative of settlement in the area since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century up to the present day. A farm settled by French Huguenots (site 3), a VOC sponsored industrial complex (sites 1 and 2) and a post-emancipation household (site 4) offer contrasting examples of the rich heritage and complex history in the Dwars valley. Linking this with documentary material as well as the broader context of archaeology and history at the Cape, the objective is to produce a monograph on the project, drawing out the larger themes and issues as well as presenting in detail, the results of our investigations.