

AN INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF ENGRAVINGS ON CALCRETE RIDGES AT BORDJIESRIF, CAPE POINT NATURE RESERVE

Prepared for

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1. INTRODUCTION

During January 2000, a group of overseas visitors noticed the above-mentioned engravings while hiking in the reserve. The matter was apparently reported to a government department at the time but no action appears to have been taken. Recently, Mr. Jackson, one of the group who found the engraving, approached representatives of the South African Heritage Resources Authority (SAHRA) and Cape Peninsula National Park (CPNP) in this regard.

As a result, the Archaeological Contracts Office was requested by the CPNP to visit the site and to offer some preliminary comments on the finds, and to suggest some possible ways forward in managing and understanding the origin of the engravings. No comprehensive literature survey has been possible at this stage and conclusions are therefore preliminary in nature.

2. DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT OF THE FINDS

The finds occur on a calcrete/limestone outcrop in a "valley" behind Bordjiesrif at co-ordinates 34°18'42.0"S, 18°27'33.0"E, in an area which for many years was infested with thick alien vegetation. The engravings consist of a cross (± 100 mm high, 65mm wide in a prepared area 150x110mm), and symbols or text within a rectangular outline immediately adjacent (± 190 x140mm)(Plate 1) (some damage or erosion makes it difficult to determine what is represented). The face on which the engraving occurs (± 1100 x800mm) is not quite vertical (Plate 2) and signs of chisel work indicate that the face may have been prepared. The engravings have patinated to the same colour as the background rock and are not immediately visible except when light plays over the surface at certain times of the day.

A vertical 'slot' is located immediately to the right of the engravings (± 500 mm left edge x 360 width x 630 height from path x 700 right edge) (Plate 3) and may relate to quarrying activities. Several places on the outcrop show evidence of quarrying and in some cases, the quarried blocks still seem to be lying below where they were removed (Plate 4). There appears to be one particular strata of limestone, harder than others, that was targeted for quarrying (Plate 5). At present a hiking path runs immediately adjacent to the engravings making them highly accessible and vulnerable to vandalism.

3. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDS

The engravings occur on a calcrete outcrop, formed as a capping on an old dune. Certain strata of the calcretes in the vicinity of the engravings were obviously recognised to be of suitable hardness to permit the removal of blocks for building purposes, and evidence of quarrying activities are numerous and very obvious. These quarrying activities have always been believed to be related to the lime burning operations at Buffels Bay and Bordjiesrif, where local materials were used extensively in the building of the kilns. While the use of Table Mountain Sandstone in those structures is prominent, blocks of calcrete are also noted. In addition to use in building, calcrete was also used for the production of lime, and chunks were burned in the kilns. It is believed however that such material would have been removed in a more casual manner than what seems to be indicated by the quarrying marks in the area.

The overall patina that covers both the engravings and quarried edges makes it difficult to immediately assess relative age of the different events. A geologist familiar with weathering of such materials may be able to offer more comment in this regard.

In 1977, members of the Archaeological Field Club of the University of Cape Town undertook excavations at a site that was believed to be a quarry, about 300 meters NE of the engravings (3418'39"S, 1827'43"E) (Mazel et al 1980, see Appendix 1). Although the findings of the excavation were inconclusive in terms of age, blocks of stone with chisel marks were located in the vicinity and is an added indication that quarrying is widespread in this area.

Similarities between the quarrying marks immediately behind the Bordjiesrif lime kiln, and those at the engraving site (particularly vertical slots) suggest that the two quarry areas may be associated. The extensive quarrying of the calcretes seems at this point to be most likely to be associated with the erection and operation of the lime kilns in the vicinity. It has been reported that a metal chisel was once seen in the area (Jim Hallinan, pers comm.). It would be useful to examine such artefacts to determine if they could give an indication of age.

4. CONCLUSIONS

At this point in time It is difficult to say with any certainty if the engravings are of Portuguese origin. Mr. Jackson in his letter dated 14th January 2002 to Mr. Hart at SAHRA, has presented evidence from literary sources which he argues points towards the engravings being of Portuguese origin. The location of these engravings close to what was believed to be the southern tip of Africa does indeed seem to be more than co-incidental and certainly warrants a detailed archaeological investigation of the quarrying activities in the area in conjunction with an investigation of archival resources pertaining to the erection and placement of *Padraos*.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

As it stands at present, it is difficult to ascribe these engravings to any particular nationality. If the mystery is to be unraveled, a number of aspects need to be investigated.

4.1 As a matter of urgency, the hiking trail should be re-aligned to lessen the risk of damage to the site. This should be done regardless of who made the carvings.

4.2 Commission an archival study of the lime burning operation and the siting of a *padrao* in the Bordjiesrif area. Of particular interest would be if any evidence exists for the construction of crosses from local materials while on voyages of discovery, and also if there is any locational information as to where crosses were erected.

4.3 Undertake an archaeological investigation (including excavation if necessary) of the calcrete outcrops in the vicinity of Bordjiesrif to determine the scale of quarrying, and the characteristics of any blocks remaining on the slopes. A geologist should be consulted as part of this investigation to offer comment on the rate of weathering of calcretes.

5. REFERENCES

Mazel, A., Moore, P. & Robey, T. 1980. Excavation of a possible quarry site in the Cape Point Nature Reserve, 1977. Simon's Town Historical Society Bulletin. v11 no1: 20-25.



Appendix 1

EXCAVATION OF A POSSIBLE QUARRY SITE IN THE CAPE POINT NATURE RESERVE, 1977.

Aron Mazel, Patrick Moore and Tim Robey. Archaeological Field Club, University of Cape Town.

INTRODUCTION

The site (Map Ref. S 34°18'39" E 18°27'43") was found in early 1977 by the Archaeological Field Club members working on a survey of stone age sites in the Cape Peninsula. It is situated on a ridge on the False Bay coast just north of Buffels Bay, overlooking the parking area at Black Rocks, at an elevation of 50m above sea level. The first thing found was a rectangular block of stone, about 25x25x40cm in size and chiselled to shape on at least three sides. Later it was seen that a nearby rock surface also bore chisel marks. Here a part of the exposed rock had been removed, leaving a clear, irregular step bounding an area of about 14m². A heap of broken stone on one side was apparently derived from the site. It was suggested to us that this might have been part of a whale poacher's hut or a quarry of some sort, but whether Dutch, English or even Portuguese it was impossible to say.

In an attempt to find out more about the site, the Archaeological Field Club decided to excavate it at the end of August 1977. Permission was obtained from the Chief Ranger, Mr G Wright to excavate in the reserve, working under a permit held by Professor J Parkington.

EXCAVATION

Survey

The excavation grid was based on a taped 10m base-line running through the centre of the site (A8 - K8). From this line a series of metre squares formed by lines 4 - 11 and D - J (to allow for expansion in any direction) was set out. Each square was designated by the lines forming the eastern corner of the square. A dumpy survey of the site was then made before excavation began.

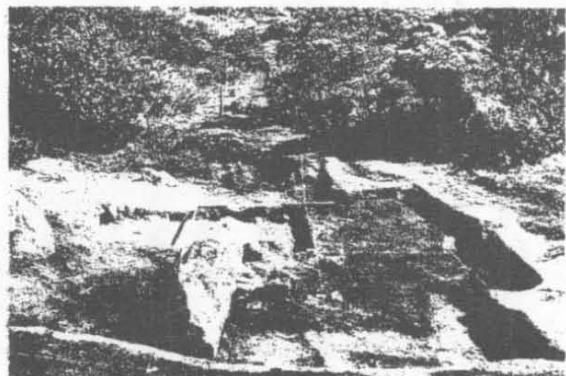
Method

Our intention was to expose the full profile of the step and remove some of the soil from within the area bounded by it, in an attempt to find clues as to the purpose and age of the structure. To this end we removed the deposit from the squares adjacent to the kerb (D6 - 9, E9, G9, H9, H8, 18, 17.) and others (E7, E8, F7, F8, H7.) The deposit was initially put through two sieves, of 13mm and 6,5mm mesh, but the smaller mesh sieve was eventually discarded.

23.



Stone block showing natural bedding surface (top) and a chiselled surface.



The quarry site on completion of excavation looking west.

22.

Stratigraphy

Five stratigraphic units were identified, and we were able to distinguish easily the derivation of each and the depositional relationships between them. The divisions were:

1. Organic Brown Soil (OBS). This formed the surface layer everywhere except in the centre. It was a dark brown soil full of rootlets, with few stones, identical to and presumably with the same derivation as the humic topsoil in the area surrounding the site.
2. Organic Stony Layer (OSL). Underlying the OBS, this layer differed from it by having less root material and far more stones. It appears to form an intermediate layer between OBS and the white sandy 'floor' beneath it. It shows a gradation from brown to creamy-white soil, with the stony element becoming smaller and more crumbly with increasing depth.
3. Top of White Sand. This probably corresponds to the OBS but occurs above the White Sand in the centre of the excavation. It was a layer 2 - 4cm deep, with few rocks but containing a considerable amount of organic material, both roots and leaves. Predominantly light in colour, it was mixed with some darker soil and appeared to phase into OBS at the edges.
4. White Sand. This was a layer basically identical in appearance to the sandy 'floor' and merging into it, but most probably formed as a depositional talus from the adjacent rubble heap. It lensed out below OBS and OSL and was apparently formed soon after the creation of the structure, before the latter layers began to form. It consisted of a loose, sandy soil with a few clods and crumbly rocks. At the top it contained a number of roots, but these decreased with depth.
5. Sandy 'Floor'. This was a well compacted, partially cemented layer of indeterminate depth which was found to underly the entire area of the excavation. The rock kerb became more crumbly with depth and eventually merged with the Sandy 'Floor', indicating that the former was simply a consolidated form of the latter. The derivation of this layer is given in full below.

Finds

With the exception of a single fragment of the mollusc *Turbo samoticus* found in OBS and presumably a later introduction, no cultural remains were recovered from the excavation. The sole evidence of human activity was the occurrence of chisel marks on the rocks, the dressed stone block and the rubble heap.

24.

GEOLOGY

The site consists of an area cut out of a thin bed of rock, overlying a layer of partially cemented sand, with consolidated dune sand at the bottom. The rock layer is part of a cap of rock which covers most of the dune-top, outcropping along the coastal front, where its continuation has presumably been eroded away by wave action. The thickness of this cap varies from 20cm to about 1m, and is probably the result of chemical reactions with percolating rain water which has cemented the dune sand into a calcareous rock. The partly consolidated material is an intermediate stage between the rock capping and the uncemented sand beneath. It was this partly consolidated sand which formed the Sandy 'Floor' of the excavation. A rock capping of this sort would occur if the dune had been built up relatively quickly and then remained stable for a long period. This is apparently the case with a number of such dunes along the False Bay coast.

The Organic Brown Soil is largely the result of the decomposition of leaves and roots from the fynbos vegetation cover and would build up rapidly in a sheltered area such as the area within the rock step.

DISCUSSION

That the dressed stone block is directly connected with the rest of the site is certain in view of its location and method of construction. It would then appear to be the finished or near-finished product of what appears to be a quarry of some description. The small area of the structure and the absence of cultural debris indicates two things: that this was not a living site and that it was not in use for very long.

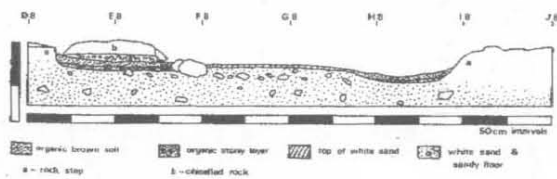
Why then was the block left behind? One can only hypothesise that it was either a surplus block, that the site was abandoned because a better source was found, or because the building project was halted.

There remain two unanswered questions: when was the quarry operational and what was it used to build? It must have been prior to the establishment of the Nature Reserve, but it is not marked on any maps of the area. As it appears to have been unknown at least since the war, it seems likely that it was made at the latest during the early part of this century. A drill hole found a short distance from the site was at first thought to be connected with the site, indicating a fairly late date, but the absence of similar holes on the site and the possibility that it could be a geological coring hole make this connection open to doubt.

The rock bears no resemblance to a piece of limestone supplied by Professor Axelsson, which we were informed, was the material used by the Portuguese for building purposes. This does not, however, preclude the possibility that the Portuguese used other, local, stone found at the site.

On the other hand, the nearby lime-kiln apparently built in the mid-nineteenth century, seems a likely candidate for the use of the rock. Indeed, some of the blocks used in its construction are superficially quite similar to the dressing stone from P A U 16.

Without further evidence, these unfortunately remain possibilities, and the stone might just as easily have been used to build a farm shed or even a whale poacher's hut. Some further information might be obtained by examining the heap of stone waste, but this seems unlikely and no further work is planned.



EAST/WEST SECTION THROUGH POSSIBLE QUARRY SITE.