

A FIRST PHASE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF BEKBAAI, PATERNOSTER

Prepared for

Brandt Crous Steyn & Burger
Town and regional planners

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Report by:

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report contains the findings of a first phase archaeological survey of an area to be developed at Bekbaai (Paternoster B 32), Paternoster, south western Cape. Members of the Archaeology Contracts Office at the University of Cape Town were commissioned by Brandt Crous Steyn & Burger (Town and regional planners) to undertake the survey to locate and evaluate archaeological sites that could be endangered by development. The survey revealed that some 12 Later Stone Age¹ sites exist in the development zone. Options for the mitigation of their destruction are discussed in the following pages.

2. BACKGROUND

The Vredenberg Peninsula has been the focus of a number of research excavations by archaeologists over recent years. It is now accepted that the area with its unique granite geology and shoreline formations was favoured by prehistoric people. Prior to 1800 years ago the south western Cape was inhabited by hunter/gatherers (San) 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 who introduced domestic animals (cattle and sheep) into the Cape which resulted in a new economic order. The Vredenberg peninsula subsequently became a center of the prehistoric herding economy - the local shales and granites providing vital nutrients for domestic stock that are not available on the Cape Peninsula or the sandstone mountains of the Cape Fold Belt. To this day unresolved questions about the origins, ecology and lifestyle of early pastoralists have attracted the interest of historians, archaeologists and anthropologists alike.

The Vredenberg Peninsula is now considered to be particularly rich in cultural resources that need to be conserved or rescued - especially in the light of the increasing pressure on land that is impacting the west coast at this time. The destruction or disturbance of an archaeological site represents a loss of information about the past, which unlike other environmental resources, can never be renewed. The less the disturbance of an archaeological site, the better the quality of information it will provide.

The best means of conserving archaeological sites is to leave them alone or actively protect them. Should this option not be available, the loss will have to be mitigated through the acquisition of an excavation permit for systematic removal of the site. Such permits are issued by the National Monuments Council to persons qualified in this respect. All shell middens are explicitly protected by the National Monuments Act.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

The locations of the 12 sites described in the following pages are plotted on Figure 1.

¹ A broad term referring to the last 20 000 years of prehistory in South Africa.

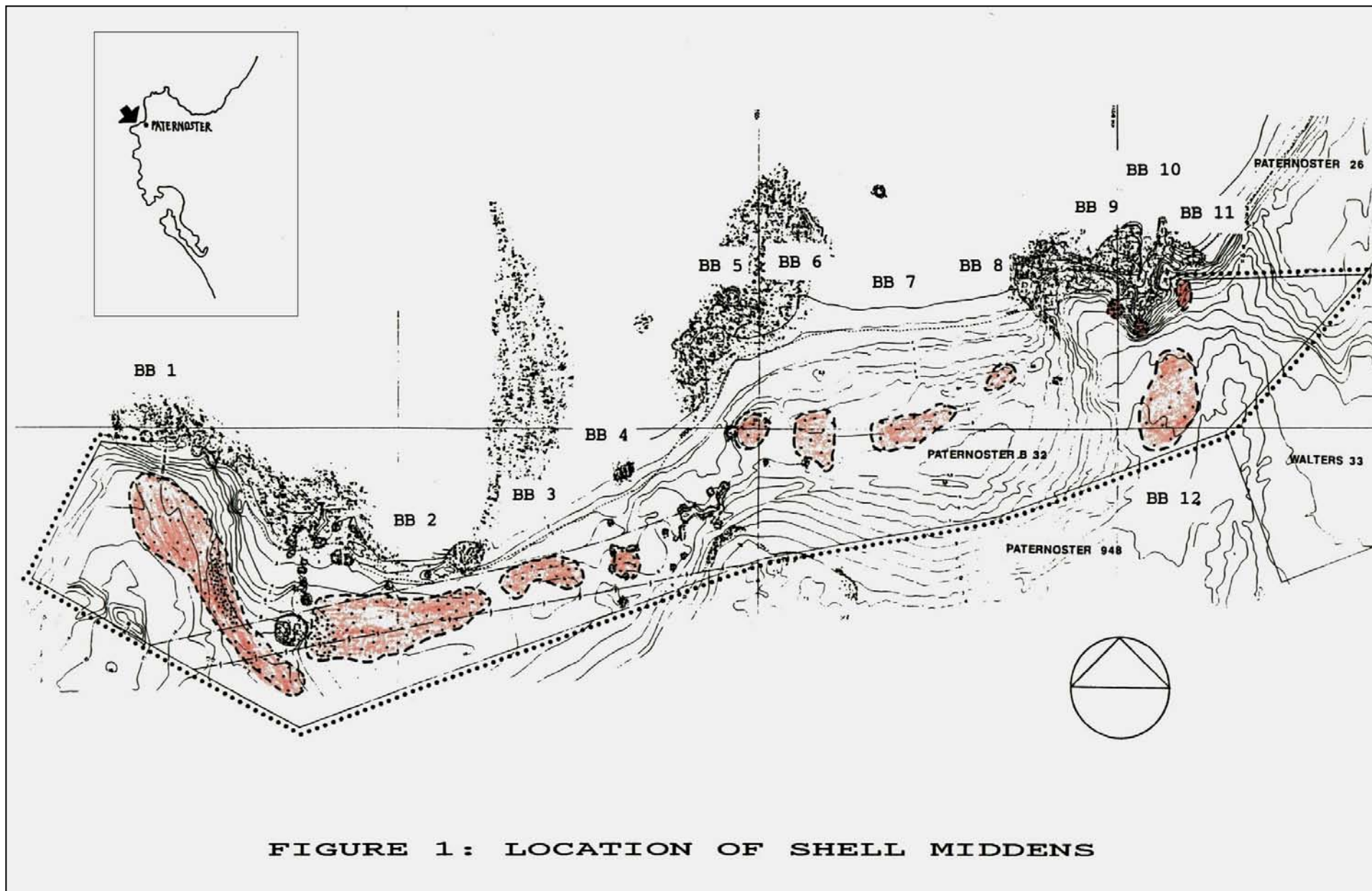


FIGURE 1: LOCATION OF SHELL MIDDENS

3.1 BEKBAAI 1 (BB1)

The site consists of a large scatter of shellfish extending over a large area of the bluff at the western edge of the development zone. The shell is particularly dense immediately adjacent to an exposed calcrete ridge on the east side of the bluff. The jeep track which cuts over the bluff has caused the exposure of a lense of archaeological material that lies some 50 cm below the present ground surface.

Visible archaeological material on this site consists primarily of shellfish. Also present are a number of artefacts. Marine species noted on the site include the limpets *Patella granatina* and *Patella granularis* which seem to be dominant. Other species present are *Patella argenvillei*, *Patella barbara*, *Patella cochlear*, *Choromytilus meridionalis*, *Burnupena* sp, *Turbo* sp, *Haliotis midae* and *Argobuccinam postulosum postulosum*. Artefactual finds include fragments of flaked quartz, quartzite, a hammerstone, silcrete flakes and cores. Some fragments of highly fired, orange slip decorated pottery indicate that some of the occupation debris here accumulated after 1800 years ago. Small quantities of ostrich egg shell are also present.

Research potential: High. The denser slope portions of this sites as well as the buried lense on top of the bluff hold the potential to provide spatial and sequential information.

Test excavation, sampling and dating are suggested.

3.2 BEKBAAI 2 (BB2)

This is a scatter of highly fragmented shell of variable density which continues for some distance through scrub parallel to the shore. No artefacts were seen on the surface.

Research potential: Low. The western portion of this scatter has been disturbed by modern earthmoving activities. This means that the information content of the site has already been damaged.

No excavation is suggested.

3.3 BEKBAAI 3 (BB3)

Dense patches of unfragmented shell brought to the surface by dune mole rats indicate the presence of a buried shell midden. No cultural remains were seen on the site. The dominant species include *Patella granatina*, *Patella granularis*, and *Choromytilus meridionalis*. Other species present are *Patella barbara*, *Patella cochlear*, *Burnupena* sp. and *Donax serra*.

Research potential: Medium.

Minimal excavation (test pit and sampling).

3.4 BEKBAAI 4 (BB4)

This is a rather more eroded and exposed site (similar in content to BB3) scattered among some low granite rocks. A single neck fragment of prehistoric pottery was found nearby indicating that the site could date within the last 1800 years.

Research potential: Medium.

Excavation (test pit) and sampling are suggested.

3.5 BEKBAAI 5 (BB5)

This is a small scatter associated with a sandy granite hump. The shell remains are a mixture of *Patella granatina* and *Patella granularis* and *Choromytilus meridionalis*. *Patella argenvillei*, *Patella barbara*, *Patella cochlear*, *Burnupena* sp, and *Haliotis midae* were present to a lesser extent.

Research potential: Medium. Undisturbed material may be buried in the sandy mound.

Test excavation is suggested.

3.6 BEKBAAI 6 (BB6)

The shell here is a highly fragmented general mixture. The area appears to have been well used by people in recent times judging by the quantities of modern rubbish. No prehistoric cultural remains were seen.

Research potential: Low. A disused jeep track has penetrated deep into the site displacing archaeological material.

A small test excavation will suffice.

3.7 BEKBAAI 7 (BB7)

This site is characterised by several dense patches of virtually whole shell. It would appear that even the surface indications of this site have been minimally disturbed - mole activity here appears to be low. No artefacts were seen although fragments of ostrich egg shell (used both as a food and a commodity by prehistoric people) were seen among the shells. Shell species represented are *Patella granatina*, *Patella granularis* and *Choromytilus meridionalis*. Other species present in lesser quantities are *Patella argenvillei*, *Patella barbara*, *Patella cochlear*, *Burnupena* sp. and *Donax serra*.

Research potential: High. This site is undisturbed. Since it has been recommended that the location of this site be kept undeveloped for botanical conservation purposes, we suggest that the midden remain undisturbed along with the fauna and flora.

Should any development be planned here, we would recommend excavation, sampling and dating.

3.8 BEKBAAI 8 (BB8)

This consists of two small but dense patches of weathered shell similar in content to BB7. The site appears to be undisturbed - the bulk of the midden could be buried.

Research potential: High. Both spatial and sequential information may be buried here. As with BB7, the most desirable option would be to leave the site undisturbed, and if at all possible, protected.

Should any development be planned here, we would recommend excavation, sampling and dating.

3.9 BEKBAAI 9 (BB9)

BB9 is a scatter of dense shell that lies on a steep limestone slope opposite a gully in the granites. It is possible that this may be a talus slope that relates to what was a small limestone rockshelter that has since collapsed. No artefacts were seen. The shell sample appears to be *Patella* sp. although *Choromytilus meridionalis* is a prominent component.

Research potential: Low. Most of the shell has eroded down a steep slope.

Minimal sampling is suggested.

3.10 BEKBAAI 10 (BB10)

A shell strewn talus slope lies below a very small limestone shelter some 10 m south east of BB9. The shellfish assemblage is almost identical to that of BB9.

Research potential: Low. Most of the shell has eroded down a steep slope.

Minimal sampling of the talus will suffice.

3.11 BEKBAAI 11 (BB11)

This moderate scatter contains quantities of *Patella* sp., *Choromytilus meridionalis*, burned barnacle fragments and *Thais singulata*. Some of the shell is water rolled indicating that a component of this site is of natural beach origin.

Research potential: Low. The beach component indicates that the context of this site is dubious.

No excavation is suggested.

3.12 BEKBAAI 12 (BB12)

The land surface has been disturbed by intense mole activity with the result that lumps of calcrete, shellfish and some stone artefacts have been pushed to the surface. Both *Patella* sp. and *Choromytilus meridionalis* make up the shellfish. Artefacts seen are both quartz and quartzite flakes.

Research potential: Indeterminate. It is difficult to judge the importance of this sites as it is probably buried. The site may already be disturbed by mole activity.

We suggest test excavation and sampling.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the 12 sites we have described at Bekbaai, at least 2 (and probably others) contain components (ceramics) that date within the last 1800 years. The other sites are not rich in artefacts that could provide rough relative dates. The lack of cultural remains on these sites could be a result "trophy collecting" by picnickers. It is more likely that the sites were short-term occupation areas devoted to the periodic exploitation and processing of marine foods. It is possible that people from major occupation sites (Kasteelberg) that have been documented further inland on the Vredenberg Peninsula, were visiting the coast periods of low tide to collect shellfish. Excavation of these sites is essential to the general understanding of regional histories.

Although some of the sites located at Bekbaai are of limited value, others clearly warrant some excavation before any construction work takes place.

1) The most important of these is BB1 which contains the potential to produce some valuable dates and sequential information. This site must be subjected to an excavation programme that will involve removal of material from both the limestone slope and the area on top of the bluff.

2) BB2 is a poor site not requiring excavation.

3) BB3, BB4, BB5 and BB6 should be sampled by sinking a series of 1m² excavations.

4) BB7 and BB8 are potentially important middens. These should be protected along with the natural vegetation. If any of these sites are threatened by any kind of development, be it for placement of services, paths or ad hoc construction yard facilities, excavation should be considered.

5) Sites BB9, BB10 and BB11 do not hold much potential - excavation of these cannot be justified.

6) BB12 should be tested by sinking some 1m² test excavations.

In summary, we recommend that an archaeological team be commissioned to undertake an a programme of rescue excavation and analysis before construction work begins.

Field work and report preparation by:

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