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REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURFACE COLLECTION AND TEST EXCAVATION: SALDANHA STEEL MINI MILL

Prepared for

SALDANHA STEEL (Pty) Ltd

By

AGENCY FOR CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
P.O. Box 159
Riebeek West
7306

July
1996

Executive summary

A surface collection of late nineteenth to early twentieth century glass and ceramics and a small test excavation, were undertaken at the Saldanha Steel Plant (SSP) site on 3 June 1996.

The historical site, located within the site of the planned SSP construction camp, consists of the walled remains of a shepherd's hut (veewagterhuis). A scatter of cultural artefacts including glass, ceramics, buttons, a lead pencil (griffel), pieces of a slateboard (leyklip), a salt cellar top, a copper door handle and a drinking cup, were collected from the surface of the site.

A large amount of bone including mainly tortoise, but also fish (snoek), bird and medium-sized bovid (possibly springbok or even sheep), was also noted. In addition, Stone Age artefacts including three quartz chunks, a quartz flake, a piece of ochre and five fragments of ostrich eggshell, were also collected.

A small one metre square archaeological test excavation was also undertaken about 15 metres west of the veewagterhuis. Bone (tortoise, bird, fish, springbok/sheep), and a few pieces of glass and ceramics, were recovered. The excavation finds are directly related to and are contemporaneous with the collected surface finds.

The veewagterhuis does not retain much architectural integrity as it has been almost completely demolished. It consists of the remains of a retaining wall of a two-roomed building, constructed of locally available, rough calcrete blocks. A covered stone-lined well was also located about 50 metres directly east of the hut, and is most likely related to it.

The area surrounding the historical site has been disturbed as a result of overgrazing and earthmoving. The site is within the area of the planned construction camp, and would eventually be severely negatively impacted as a result of the planned activities. This necessitated the need for the surface collection and test excavation.

As a result of archaeological mitigation, further work at the historical site is not considered to be necessary and activities of the Saldanha Steel Plant construction camp can proceed as planned.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and brief

The Agency for Cultural Resource Management (ACRM) was requested by Saldanha Steel (Pty) Ltd to undertake a monitoring programme of the preparation of the site, as well as the construction activities of the mini-mill and the planned construction camp.

The monitoring programme was recommended by ACRM at the conclusion of a detailed archaeological study of the plant site prior to site preparation and construction activities commencing (Kaplan 1996:3).

The aim of the monitoring programme is to check whether any archaeological remains are uncovered by site preparation and construction activities, and to propose measures to mitigate against the negative archaeological impact of the development.

The terms of reference for the archaeological programme are:

1. to monitor site preparation and construction activities of the Saldanha Steel Plant site,

2. to identifyand assess any sites of archaeological interest that may be exposed during the above activities, including their status and significance; and

3. to identify measures to maintain or rescue any valuable sites that may be exposed during the above activities.

1. 2 Study site

The study site for the proposed Saldanha Steel Plant at Saldanha Bay is on land belonging to Iscor. The proposed site is situated north-east of the Portnet terminal and alongside the Sishen-Saldanha railway line.

2. Results of the initial impact assessment

A few stone tools were found on the surface of the site during the initial detailed archaeological study of the Saldanha Steel Project site (Kaplan 1996). The artefacts, consisting of both Later Stone Age[1] and Middle Stone Age[2] flakes and chunks, were out of primary context as a result of severe disturbance of the site.

The archaeological finds located in the study were therefore in a very disturbed state. The new planned site was already severely disturbed on account of road grading activities and overgrazing.

The archaeological significance of the study area was considered to be low. The impact of the Saldanha Steel Project development on above-ground archaeological sites was similarly considered to be low to negligible. The material found was of little scientific, historical or cultural value. As a result no archaeological mitigation was considered necessary (Kaplan 1996).

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1. A term referring the last 20 000 years of precolonial history in southern Africa.

2. A term referring to the period between 200 000 and 20 000 years ago.

However, it was pointed out that secondary activities, including earthmoving and excavation, may possibly impact on below surface cultural resources, such as Stone Age burials, prehistoric and fossil sites (Kaplan 1996:1).

Among the recommendations made by ACRM were that a professional archaeologist should be instructed to monitor excavation and construction activities of the site in order to assess for archaeological material (Kaplan 1996:3). Any sites or features which may be uncovered during these activities should be closely assessed by a professional archaeologist, who should be permitted to intervene where necessary.

ACRM was instructed by Saldanha Steel (Pty) Ltd to undertake a controlled monitoring programme in May 1996.

3. Monitoring of site preparation and construction activities

The archaeological monitoring programme of the Saldanha Steel Plant site commenced on 6 May 1996. Thereafter, weekly visits to the site took place on 13, 20 and 27 May 1996.

Isolated finds of Middle Stone Age (MSA) and Later Stone Age (LSA) flakes and chunks, as well as some pottery and ostrich eggshell, were found in disturbed contexts during monitoring of the site preparation activities within the steel mill site and the main construction camp. Due to their disturbed context, these finds were not considered to be of much cultural or scientific value and no mitigation was considered necessary.

On a site visit to the plant on May 27 1996, the remains of a walled shepherd's hut (veewagterhuis) were located within the planned construction camp (Figure 1). The two-roomed hut was in a severe state of disrepair, with only part of a retaining wall remaining. The building was constructed of locally available, rough calcrete blocks and cemented together with a coarse sand, stone and shell mortar.

A fairly large scatter of surface finds, including bone, ceramics and glass, were found associated with the hut. This scatter was concentrated mainly to the west of the building. The area surrounding the site was already disturbed, and survey poles within the site suggested that more severe disturbance of the site was imminent. The remains of a stone-lined well were also located about 50 metres east of the hut.

It was therefore recommended (facsimile dated 28 May 1996) that a controlled surface collection and a small test excavation take place at the site prior to preparation and construction of the main camp.

4. The surface collection

A controlled surface collection of the site was undertaken on the 3 June 1996. The majority of the archaeological finds were in a disturbed context as a result of overgrazing and earthmoving activities. A small in-situ concentration of surface material was located about 15 metres west of the building.

4.1 Surface finds

The following is a brief description of the cultural assemblage collected from the surface site. A selection of surface finds is illustrated in Figure 2.

4.1.1 Glass

The collection includes approximately 24 vessels, plus some decorative table ware, including what appears to be a tumbler or drinking glass.

At least three vessels are embossed. Embossing was first introduced at the beginning of the nineteenth century and became popular by the end of the century. Embossing gradually declined from the turn of the century in the face of competition from mass produced machine-made bottles and the cheap printed label.

Embossed vessels from the surface collection include a square based whiskey bottle, an old `Oros' bottle, as well as vessels produced in the United States of America and Australia.

At least two wine or beer bottles were found. One has a base with a high kick up and is made in the dark green glass, typical of British glass. This cylindrical vessel has straight sides and dates to the mid-nineteenth century or possibly earlier. A different vessel has a crown finish neck introduced at the end of the nineteenth century.

A `club sauce' type glass stopper was found that dates to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

There are various small bottles which probably contained medicine or were food containers. This collection includes two blue glass vessels and one small emerald green bottle. The one blue vessel has a two part finish used in glass factories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The long necks and shape of the fragmentary blue vessels are characteristic features of castor oil bottles.

A cylindrical tapered tumbler with a heavy shallow concave base was also found. It has a strip of engraving around its sides.

4.1.2 Ceramics

The surface assemblage has ceramics dating from the second half of the nineteeth century into the early twentieth century (see Appendix 1). Date of manufacture of these cermaics relies on back marks/trade marks, of which there are only three, and these are not complete enough to recognise easily and use for dating.

The variety of wares available in South Africa from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards make ceramic identification of this assemblage extremely difficult. The ceramics from the Saldanha surface site are all cheap, low quality tea, table and kitchen wares. Even the procelain is cheap and of a poor quality.

Most of the white-bodied wares found are vitreous (post 1840s) and are of British manufacture. The absence of oriental wares, cream coloured wares, pearlwares and shell edged plates in the surface assemblage, also suggests that the Saldanha ceramics date from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards.

Sponge ware and annular ware which are also represented at the site were considered to be amongst the cheapest types of decorated wares in North America and were imported to South Africa in large quantities in the late 1800s.and early 1900s There is one possible Asian handpainted cup. The rest of the material is probably of European (English) origin.

The fragment of a porcelain doll's head was also found.

4.1.3 Buttons

Two bone buttons (one burnt and broken), two metal buttons and one wooden button were found.

4.1.4 Lead pencil and slate board

A griffel (lead pencil) and five pieces of leyklip (slateboard) were found. Four of the pieces of slateboard have fine line grooves scratched into the surface.

4.1.5 Metal

One salt cellar top, one round (copper) door handle and one aluminium drinking cup were found. A number of adiagnostic pieces of corroded metal was also found, but these were not collected.

4.1.6 Stone

Three Later Stone Age quartz chunks and one quartz flake was found on the surface of the site.

4.1.7 Ostrich eggshell

Five pieces of ostrich eggshell were found.

4.1.8 Ochre

One piece of red ochre (haematite) was found.

4.1.9 Bone

A large amount of bone occurred on the surface, but was not collected. The majority of the bone consists of tortoise (Chersina angulata), with many of the pieces burnt. Fish (snoek), bird (possibly commorant) and small to medium-sized bovids (ie: grysbok, steenbok and springbok size), and possibly sheep, were also noted.

5. The excavation

A one square metre test excavation was undertaken in a small mound about 15 metres west of the veewagterhuis (Figure 3). Four stratigraphic units were excavated in the deposit (Figure 4). The deposit was sieved through a 1 mm mesh sieve. All the excavated material was sorted for glass, metal, ceramics, and bone.

Surface is a wind-blown white sandy deposit with grass and twigs. Bone, two pieces of glass, some undiagnostic pieces of corroded metal and two pieces of ceramics were recovered.

Below Surface is a greyish sandy deposit with grass and twigs. Bone and three pieces of ceramics were recovered.

Brown Sand is a brown coloured sandy deposit with bone and four pieces of ceramics.

Brown Sand 2 is a brown coloured sandy deposit with bone and only one piece of ceramic.

5.1 Cultural assemblage

The glass, ceramics and bone finds from the test excavation have been subjected to a preliminary analysis. A more detailed analysis of the finds was not considered necessary.

5.1.1 Glass

Only two pieces of diagnostic glass were recovered from the excavation. These include the remains of a wine bottle and a beer bottle from the Surface deposit, dating to the early twentieth century.

5.1.2 Ceramics

Ten pieces of ceramics, including diagnostic rim fragments were recovered from the excavation, all dating from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century (Appendix 1). These inlcuded some possible plates, cups and a dish.

5.1.3 Bone

The majority of bone recovered from the excavation was tortoise (Chersina angulata), with some medium-sized bovid (probably springbok) occurring as well. Sheep may also possibly be represented in the sample, as are fish (snoek and other) and bird (commorant). Some of the tortoise bone was also burnt.

An interesting observation made is the number of sheep/springbok bones which show butchery chop and saw marks. This suggests selected and controlled dismembering of body parts.

6. Discussion

The glass and ceramic assemblage collected from the surface and that recovered from the test excavation, are contemporaneous and date from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. All the other surface finds (buttons, cup, door handle, griffel, etc.), are also associated with the walled remains of the shepherd's hut and to the nearby stone-lined well.

The Later Stone Age flakes, chunks and ostrich eggshell, are probably the remnants of an earlier precolonial site which occurred there. Several pieces of ostrich eggshell, some quartz chunks and silcrete flakes, were found elsewhere during an inspection of the planned construction camp site on the 27 May 1996.

The two-roomed veewagterhuis was most likely a shepherd's hut, located some distance from the main farm house. Here a shepherd and perhaps his family, lived and looked after the farmer's sheep. Their diet included fish (snoek) and poorer cuts of sheep, and was also probably supplemented by tortoise, small to medium-sized antelope and birds, which they managed to snare.

Veewagterhuise (shepherd's huts) were a feature of the strandveld landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where farms were large and often isolated and farmers employed shepherds (usually farm labourers) to look after sheep.

7. Recommendations

No further archaeological mitigation is considered necessary at the historical veewagterhuis site. The hut does not retain much architectural integrity and is not worthy of conservation. Development of the Saldanha Steel Project main construction camp can therefore proceed as planned.

8. Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Mr Daniel Van Resnburg for his assistance in the surface collection and excavation. I would also like to thank Mrs Glenda Cox (glass), Mrs Jane Klose (ceramics) and Mr Peter Nillsen (bone) of the Department of Archaeology, University of Cape Town, for analysing the surface and excavated finds.

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A large amount of bone including mainly tortoise, but also fish (snoek), bird and medium-sized bovid (possibly springbok or even sheep), was also noted. In addition, Stone Age artefacts including three quartz chunks, a quartz flake, a piece of ochre and five fragments of ostrich eggshell, were also collected.

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7. Recommendations

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The terms of reference for the archaeological programme are:

1. to monitor site preparation and construction activities of the Saldanha Steel Plant site,

2. the identification and assessment of any sites of archaeological interest that may be exposed during the above activities, including their status and significance; and

3. the identification of measures to maintain or rescue any valuable sites that may be exposed during the above activities.

1. 2 Study site

The study site for the proposed Saldanha Steel Plant at Saldanha Bay is on land belonging to Iscor. The proposed site is situated north-east of the Portnet terminal and alongside the Sishen-Saldanha railway line.

2. Results of the initial impact assessment

A few stone tools were found on the surface of the site during the initial detailed archaeological study of the Saldanha Steel Project site (Kaplan 1996). The artefacts, consisting of both Later Stone Age[1] and Middle Stone Age[2] flakes and chunks, were out of primary context as a result of severe disturbance of the site.

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1. A term referring the last 20 000 years of precolonial history in southern Africa.
2. A term referring to the period between 200 000 and 20 000 years ago.

The archaeological finds located in the study were, therefore in a very disturbed state. The new planned site was already severely disturbed on account of road grading activities and overgrazing.

The archaeological significance of the study area was considered to be low. The impact of the Saldanha Steel Project development on above-ground archaeological sites was similarly considered to be low to negligible. The material found was of little scientific, historical or cultural value. As a result no archaeological mitigation was considered necessary (Kaplan 1996).

However, it was pointed out that secondary activities, including earthmoving and excavation may possibly impact on below surface cultural resources, such as Stone Age burials, prehistoric and fossil sites (Kaplan 1996:1).

Among the recommendations made by ACRM were that a professional archaeologist should be instructed to monitor excavation and construction activities of the site in order to assess for archaeological material (Kaplan 1996:3). Any sites or features which may be uncovered during these activities should be closely assessed by a professional archaeologist, who should be permitted to intervene where necessary.

ACRM was instructed by Saldanha Steel (Pty) Ltd to undertake a controlled monitoring programme in May 1996.

3. Monitoring of site preparation and construction activities

The archaeological monitoring programme of the Saldanha Steel Plant site commenced on 6 May 1996. Thereafter, weekly visits to the site took place on 13, 20 and 27 May 1996.

Isolated finds of Middle Stone Age (MSA) and Later Stone Age (LSA) flakes and chunks, as well as some pottery and ostrich eggshell, were found in disturbed contexts during monitoring of the site preparation activities within the steel mill site and the main construction camp. Due to their disturbed context, these finds were not considered to be of much cultural or scientific value and no mitigation was considered necessary.

On a site visit to the plant on May 27 1996, the remains of a walled shepherds hut (veewagterhuis) were located within the planned construction camp (Figure 1). The two-roomed hut was in a severe state of disrepair, with only part of a retaining wall remaining. The building was constructed of locally available, rough calcrete blocks and cemented together with a coarse sand, stone and shell mortar.

A fairly large scatter of surface finds, including bone, ceramics and glass, were found associated with the hut. This scatter was concentrated mainly to the west of the building. The area surrounding the site was already disturbed, and survey poles within the site suggested more severe disturbance of the site was imminent. The remains of a stone-lined well were also located about 50 metres east of the hut.

It was therefore recommended (facsimile dated 28 May 1996) that a controlled surface collection and a small test excavation take place at the site prior to preparation and construction of the main camp.

4. The surface collection

A controlled surface collection of the site was undertaken on the 3 June 1996. The majority of the archaeological finds were in a disturbed context as a result of overgrazing and earthmoving activities. A small in-situ concentration of surface material was located about 15 metres west of the building.

4.1 Surface finds

The following is a brief description of the cultural assemblage collected from the surface site. A selection of surface finds is illustrated in Figure 2.

4.1.1 Glass

The collection includes approximately 24 vessels, plus some decorative table ware, including what appears to be a tumbler or drinking glass.

At least three vessels are embossed. Embossing was first introduced at the beginning of the nineteenth century and became popular by the end of the century. From the turn of the century in the face of competition from mass produced machine-made bottles and the cheap printed label, embossing gradually declined.

Embossed vessels from the surface collection include a square based whiskey bottle, an old 'Oros' bottle, as well as vessels produced in the USA and Australia.

At least two wine or beer bottles were found. One has a base with a high kick up and is made in the dark green glass, typical of British glass. This cylindrical vessel has straight sides and dates to the mid-nineteenth century or possibly earlier. A different vessel has a crown finish neck introduced at the end of the nineteenth century.

A 'club sauce' type glass stopper was found that dates to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

There are various small bottles which probably contained medicine or were food containers. This collection includes two blue glass vessels and one small emerald green bottle. The one blue vessel has a two part finish used in glass factories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The long necks and shape of the fragmentary blue vessels are characteristic features of castor oil bottles.

A cylindrical tapered tumbler with a heavy shallow concave base was also found. It has a strip of engraving around its sides.

The absence of obviously recent bottles with paper labels and machine made techniques or manufacturing dates this collection to the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries.

4.1.2 Ceramics

The surface assemblage has ceramics dating from the second half of the nineteeth century into the early twentieth century (see Appendix 1). Date of manufacture of these cermaics relies on back marks/trade marks, of which there are only three, and these are not complete enough to easily recognise and use for dating.

The variety of wares available in South Africa from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards make ceramic identification of this assemblage extremely difficult. The cermaics from the Saldanha surface site are all cheap, low quality tea, table and kitchen wares. Even the procelain is cheap and of a poor quality.

Most of the white-bodied wares are vitreous (post 1840s) and are of British manufacture. The absence of oriental wares, cream coloured wares, pearlwares and shell edged plates, is indicative of the ceramics of the second half of the nineteenth century onwards.

Sponge ware and annular ware which are also represented at the site were considered to be amongst the cheapest types of decorated wares in North America and were imported to South Africa in large quantities. There is one possible Asian handpainted cup. The rest of the material is probably of European (English) origin.

The fragment of a porcelain dolls head was also found.

4.1.3 Buttons

Two bone buttons (one burnt and broken), two metal buttons and one wood button were found.

4.1.4 Lead pencil and slate board

A griffel (lead pencil) and five pieces of leyklip (slateboard) were found. Four of the pieces of slateboard have fine line grooves scratched into the surface.

4.1.5 Metal

One salt cellar top, one round (copper) door handle and one aluminium drinking cup were found. A number of adiagnostic pieces of corroded metal was also found, but these were not collected.

4.1.6 Stone

Three Later Stone Age quartz chunks and one quartz flake was found on the surface of the site.

4.1.7 Ostrich eggshell

Five pieces of ostrich eggshell were found.

4.1.8 Ochre

One piece of red ochre (haematite) was found.

4.1.9 Bone

A large amount of bone occurred on the surface, but was not collected. The majority of the bone consists of tortoise (Chersina angulata), with many of the pieces burnt. Fish (snoek), bird (possibly commorant) and small to medium-sized bovids (ie: grysbok, steenbok and springbok size), and possibly sheep, were also noted.

5. The excavation

A one square metre test excavation was undertaken in a small mound about 15 metres west of the veewagterhuis (Figure 3). Four stratigraphic units were excavated in the deposit (Figure 4). The deposit was sieved through a 1 mm mesh sieve. All the excavated material was sorted for glass, metal, ceramics, and bone.

Surface is a wind-blown white sandy deposit with grass and twigs. Bone and a few pieces of glass, undiagnostic corroded metal and ceramics were recovered.

Below Surface is a greyish sandy deposit with grass and twigs. Bone and a few pieces of glass were recovered.

Brown Sand is a brown coloured sandy deposit with bone and one or two pieces of glass.

Brown Sand 2 is a brown coloured sandy deposit with bone.

5.1 Cultural assemblage

The glass, ceramics and bone finds from the test excavation have been subjected to a preliminary analysis. A more detailed analysis of the finds was not considered necessary.

5.1.1 Glass

Only two pieces of diagnostic glass were recovered from the excavation. These include the remains of a wine bottle and a beer bottle, dating to the early twentieth century.

5.1.2 Ceramics

A few pieces of diagnostic ceramics and some adiagnostic fragments were recovered from the excavation, all dating from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Only one white undecorated rim plate was identified.

5.1.3 Bone

The majority of bone recovered from the excavation was tortoise (Chersina angulata), with some medium-sized bovid (probably springbok) occurring as well. Sheep may also possibly be reperesented in the sample, as are fish (snoek and other) and bird (commorant). Some of the tortoise bone was also burnt.

An interesting observation made is the number of sheep/springbok bones which show butchery chop and saw marks. This suggests selected and controlled dismembering of body parts.

6. Discussion

The glass and ceramic assemblage collected from the surface and that recovered from the test excavation, are contemporaneous and date from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. All the other surface finds (buttons, cup, door handle, griffel, etc.), are also associated with the walled remains of the shepherds hut and to the nearby stone-lined well.

The Later Stone Age flakes, chunks and ostrich eggshell, are probably the remnants of an earlier precolonial site which occurred there. Several pieces of ostrich eggshell, some quartz chunks and silcrete flakes, were found elsewhere during an inspection of the planned construction camp site on the 27 May 1996.

The two-roomed veewagterhuis was most likely a shepherds hut, located some distance from the main farm house. Here a shepherd and perhaps his family, lived and looked after the farmers sheep. Their diet included fish (snoek) and poorer cuts of sheep, and was also probably supplemented by tortoise, small to medium-sized antelope and birds, which they managed to snare.

Veewagterhuis (shepherds hut) were a fairly common feature of the strandveld landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where farms were large and isolated and farmers employed shepherds (usually farm labourers) to look after sheep.

7. Recommendations

No further archaeological mitigation is considered necessary at the historical veewagterhuis site. The hut does not retain much architectural integrity and is not worthy of conservation. Development of the Saldanha Steel Project main construction camp can therefore proceed as planned.

8. Acknowledgments

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9. References

Kaplan, J. 1996. Archaeological investigation: Saldanha Steel Project. Report prepared for Van Riet and Louw Landscape Architects on behalf of Saldanha Steel (Pty) Ltd. Agency for Cultural Resource Management: Riebeek West.

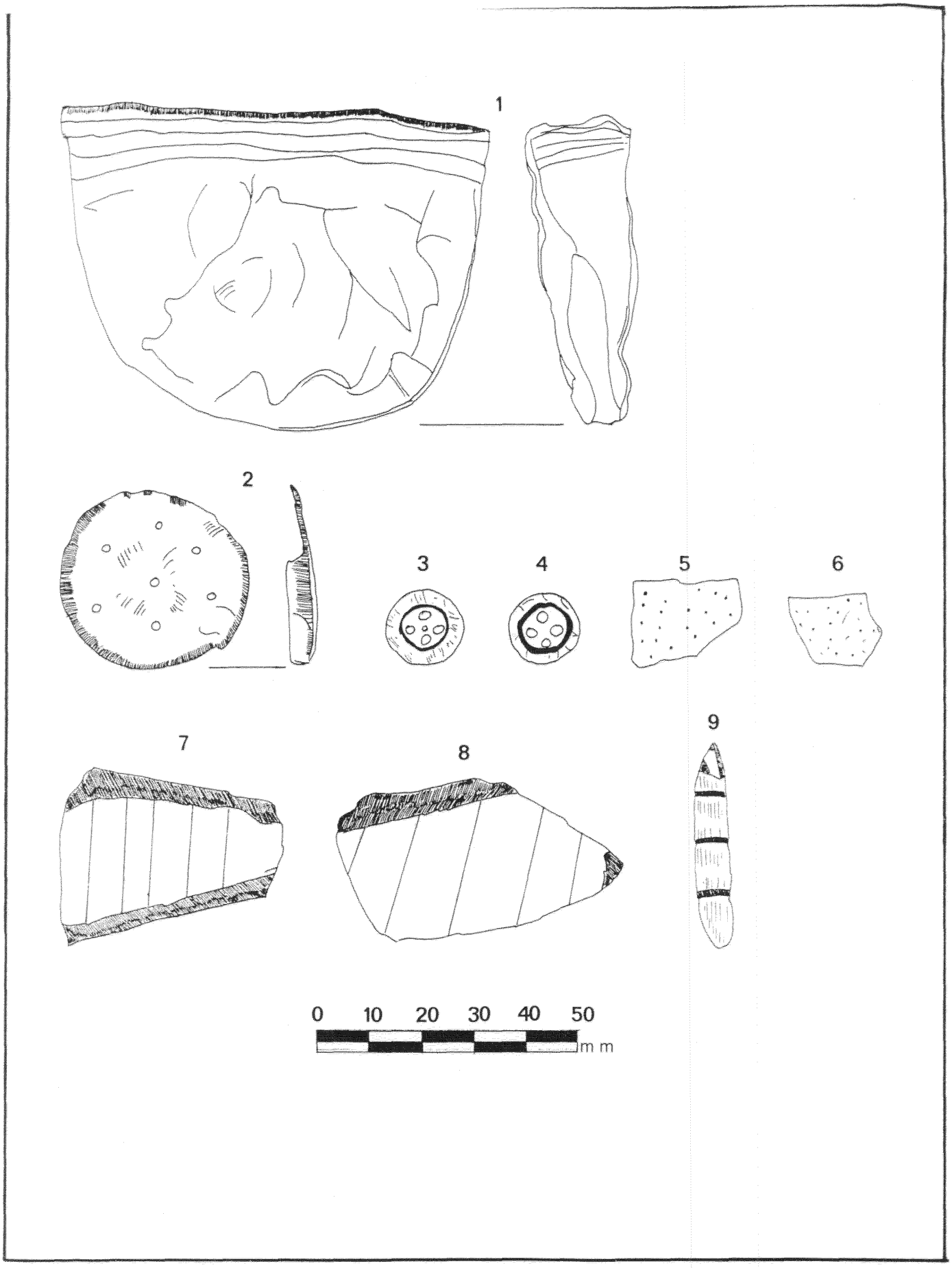

Figure 2. A selection of surface collection finds. 1. cup. 2. salt cellar top. 3-4. buttons. 5-6. ostrich eggshell. 7-8. leyklip (slateboard). 9. griffel (lead pencil).