

Archaeo-Info Northern Province

**Heritage Impact Assessment
for the Proposed Main- and
Wilderness Rest camps as
well as the Main entrance
and Road at the Vhembe –
Dongola Trans-frontier Park**



*Evaluation of the heritage component of the Environmental
Impact Assessment for the Vhembe – Dongola Tourism
Infrastructure Developments - Limpopo Province.*

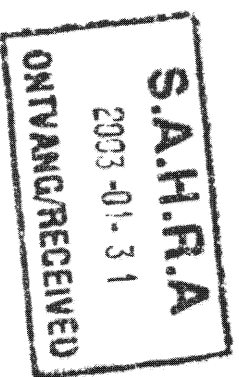


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Vhembe – Dongola Tourism Developments

Evaluation of the Heritage Potential of the Project

Executive Summary

Site name and location: Vhembe – Dongola Trans-frontier Park, infrastructure development.

Magisterial district: Mussina

Developer: SANParks

Consultant: AINP, PO Box 7296, Thohoyandou, 0950, South Africa

Date development was mooted: July, 2002

Date of Report: 07 October 2001

Proposed date of commencement of development: October 2002

Findings: No prominent sites of heritage potential were identified. Provided the recommendations outlined in the report are followed and no objections are received from relevant academics, the development may continue.

Introduction

Archeo-Info Northern Province (AINP) was contracted by Yuka Environmental Management Services to conduct a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) on the proposed development of two rest camps as well as the main entrance and the access road at the Vhembe – Dongola Trans-frontier Park.

This HIA forms part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as required by the Environmental Conservation Act (ECA) 73 of 1989, the Minerals Act, 50 of 1991 and the Development Facilitation Act (DFA), 67 of 1995. The HIA is performed in accordance with section 38 of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), 25 of 1999 and is intended for submission to the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

Location

The Vhembe – Dongola Trans - frontier Park is situated around the northern border of South Africa in the Limpopo Province. The core area of the park is situated around the confluence of the Shashi- and Limpopo Rivers and forms the connecting point between South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe. The specific co-ordinates are as follows (co-ordinates were taken with a *Garmin, Legend GPS*, using the WGS84 datum):

Site name	Longitude (S)	Latitude (E)
Main Gate and access road	22° 14' 36,3" - 22° 14' 30,9"	29° 23' 58,7" - 29° 24' 05,5"
Wilderness camp	22° 11' 33,8"	29° 24' 29,4"
Main camp	22° 13' 07,7" - 22° 13' 07,3"	29° 21' 59,5" - 29° 21' 48"

Fieldwork

Members of AINP met with Mr. A. Spies of VUKA during September 2001 on site. Following this the survey was performed a professional archaeologist.

The extent of the site was determined as well as the extent of the areas to be affected by secondary activities during the construction of the camps, gate and access road. Sites were plotted with GPS readings and photographed using colour prints in 800 ASA format. All sites apart from those directly beside the road were surveyed on foot.

Methodology

The area was surveyed using standard archaeological surveying methods. The area was surveyed using directional parameters supplied by the GPS and surveyed by foot because of the inaccessibility of the area due to the undulating terrain. This technique has proven to result in the maximum coverage of an area.

Standard archaeological documentation formats were employed in the description of sites. Using standard site documentation forms as comparable medium, it enabled the surveyors to evaluate the relative importance of sites found. Furthermore GPS (Global Positioning System) readings of all finds and sites were taken. This information was then plotted using a *Garmin, Legend*, GPS (WGS 84 datum).

Indicators such as surface finds, plant growth anomalies, local information and topography were used in identifying sites of possible archaeological importance. Test probes were done at intervals to determine sub-surface occurrence of archaeological material. The importance of sites was assessed by comparisons with published information as well as comparative collections. All sites or possible sites found was classified using a hierarchical system wherein sites are assessed using a scale of zero to four according their importance. These categories are as follows:

Degree of significance (DoS)	Justification	Score
Exceptional significance	Rare or outstanding, high degree of intactness. Can be interpreted easily.	4
High significance	High degree of original fabric. Demonstrates a key element of item's significance. Alterations do not detract from significance.	3
Moderate significance	Altered or modified elements. Element with little heritage value, but which contribute to the overall significance.	2
Little significance	Alterations detract from significance. One of many. Alterations detract from significance.	1
Intrusive	Damaging to the item's heritage significance.	0

Cultural Importance and Oral History

The investigation of site for heritage components should not only look at the material remains that are found on sites, but there should also be looked at the intangible aspects of cultural importance for the local communities. Furthermore there should also be looked at the possibility of culturally important areas being found in the study area. These could include graves, places of power or initiation schools and any other area that is seen as culturally sensitive to the local communities. Due to the fact that most of the areas under investigation are found within a former military area there was little or no occupation there during the last 40 years. For this reason no persons could be found to be interviewed concerning cultural sites in the area.

The only other indicator of occupation in the area is the remains of the military structures found close to the proposed wilderness camp (specifically the bomb shelters close to *Poachers Corner*). Although these are not strictly speaking under protection of the NHR Act they do make up an important part in the areas history and it is recommended that they be included in the history of the park and not damaged.

The Study Areas

Three areas were investigated as part of the project. These are the following;

- The main gate on the Pondrift – Messina tar road, close to the *Hamilton* homestead.
- The proposed *Wilderness* camp.

- The *Main* camp.

Each of these sites will be discussed separately in the next sections.

The Main Entrance Gate and Access Road

Site Description

The main access gate on the Messina – Pontdrift (photo 1) road will be the first infrastructure seen by visitors to the park and therefore the positioning of it is very important in an effort to conceptualize the *Genus Loci* of the park as a whole. The final position was chosen just west of the outcrop (photo 2) on which the *Hamilton* homestead is located. The gate will consist of a large entrance gate with reception and ablution facilities. The construction will be placed between two baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) trees close to the existing game fence of the park. These trees are approximately 100 meters apart and will form an integral part of the design of the entrance gate. Most of the area between the two baobab trees has been disturbed in the past by the construction of the Eskom power line service road (photo 3).

The access road from the main entrance to the world class information center will run north from the entrance gate for approximately 200 meters before turning east towards the *Hamilton* homestead where 500 meters further it meets up with the site for the world class information center. The road will be a surfaced asphalt road with a five-meter extent. Although the exact alignment of the road is not yet clear the whole possible affected area was investigated for any sites or artifacts of heritage potential.

Results of the Survey

The area that will be affected was investigated on foot to determine if there were any sites or artifacts of cultural heritage potential. After a comprehensive investigation of the indicated area the following artifacts were identified at;

- Undecorated potsherds (photo 4) (D0S – 2)
- Middle to Late Stone Tools (photo 4) (D0S – 2)
- A stone with a grinding groove for ostrich eggshell bead production. (photo 5) (D0S – 3)

It is obvious that there are a number of artifacts in the area that have cultural significance. However no sites of cultural value was identified in the study area. No areas with ash deposits were found in context with the potsherds. Only complete stone tools were identified in the area. No cores or flakes were identified to justify the classification of a Stone Age site and only a few complete tools were recovered and replaced.

A few agate and quartz microlithic Late Stone Age tools were identified on the road alignment. These did not however constitute a site. (D0S – 2)

These microliths were situated at;

22° 14' 30,9" S
29° 24' 05,5" E

These tools were found in an area of approximately 10 m².

Wilderness Camp

Site Description

This site is situated on the farm *Greyswald*, close to the flow of the Limpopo River. The site will be developed to hold ten safari tents to be constructed on wood decks. Septic tanks will be placed down from the tents on the slope of the plateau (photo 6). The impact of this camp will be minimal as they will be built on decks and will not entail heavy construction. The position of this camp will be at:

22° 11' 33,8" S
29° 24' 29,4" E

Two non-diagnostic potsherds were recovered from the site (photo 7) (DoS - 0). These were however not *in situ* and could not be connected to a site in the study area. No other indicators of human activity were identified on the surface or sub-surface in the study area.

Results of the Survey

No sites indicating human occupation were identified in the indicated study area. The only human made objects recovered from the site were two non-diagnostic potsherds. These could not however be placed within a cultural industry or connected to a site in the area.

Main Camp

Site Description

The main camp for the new park will consist of forty units built from concrete and stone. These will be placed within a natural amphitheater formed by a curved sandstone ridge on the farm *Greyswald* (photo 8&9). Due to the exclusivity of the proposed camp it will encompass a large area along the southern side of the ridge. The camp will follow the base of the ridge from:

22° 13' 07,7" S
29° 21' 59,5" E up to
22° 13' 07,3" S
29° 21' 48 " E

The whole area within the amphitheater is covered in red Kalahari type sand with small trees and scrubs (photo 10). This substrate makes the identification of the sites easier as the normal grayish ash deposits of archaeological sites shows up clearly.

Results of the Survey

Although several rock shelters are located along the sandstone ridge at this site, none of them showed any indications of occupation.

One area showed indications of a possible ash concentration at (DoS - 0):

22° 13' 07,3" S
29° 21' 59,5" E

Closer investigation of this area however produced no other cultural material to indicate that the discoloration was the result of human activity (photo 11). It is presumed that this area is the result of a turf concentration, as it is located close to a dry riverbed containing a turf base.

Recommendations

In this section recommendations will be outlined for the sites identified in the section on site descriptions.

Main Gate and Access Road

Although no specific sites of human occupation or activity was identified in this area it is still recommended that a surface collection of possible artifacts be performed before construction continues. As indicated in the section on site description some interesting artifacts were noted in this area. Due to the archaeological importance of this area it was deemed necessary to collect all cultural material in a low-resolution survey before construction. High-resolution documentation is not deemed necessary as the artifacts located here are not connected to a specific site and are therefore seen as not being in context.

Wilderness Camp

No sites of cultural heritage importance were identified in this area. The potsherds retrieved from the site proved to be the only ones located here and can not be connected to a site in the area.

Main Camp

No sites of cultural importance could be identified in this area.

Conclusion

Although this area is very rich in archaeological sites, an exhaustive survey of the proposed areas for development produced no sites of any significance. Provided the recommendations regarding the ex-situ deposits are followed it is the opinion of the consultants that the development can continue.

To ensure that no sites of major importance are visually adversely affected by the proposed developments, the GPS co-ordinates of the different developments will be sent to all relevant researchers for comment.

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ADDENDUM A

Photographs

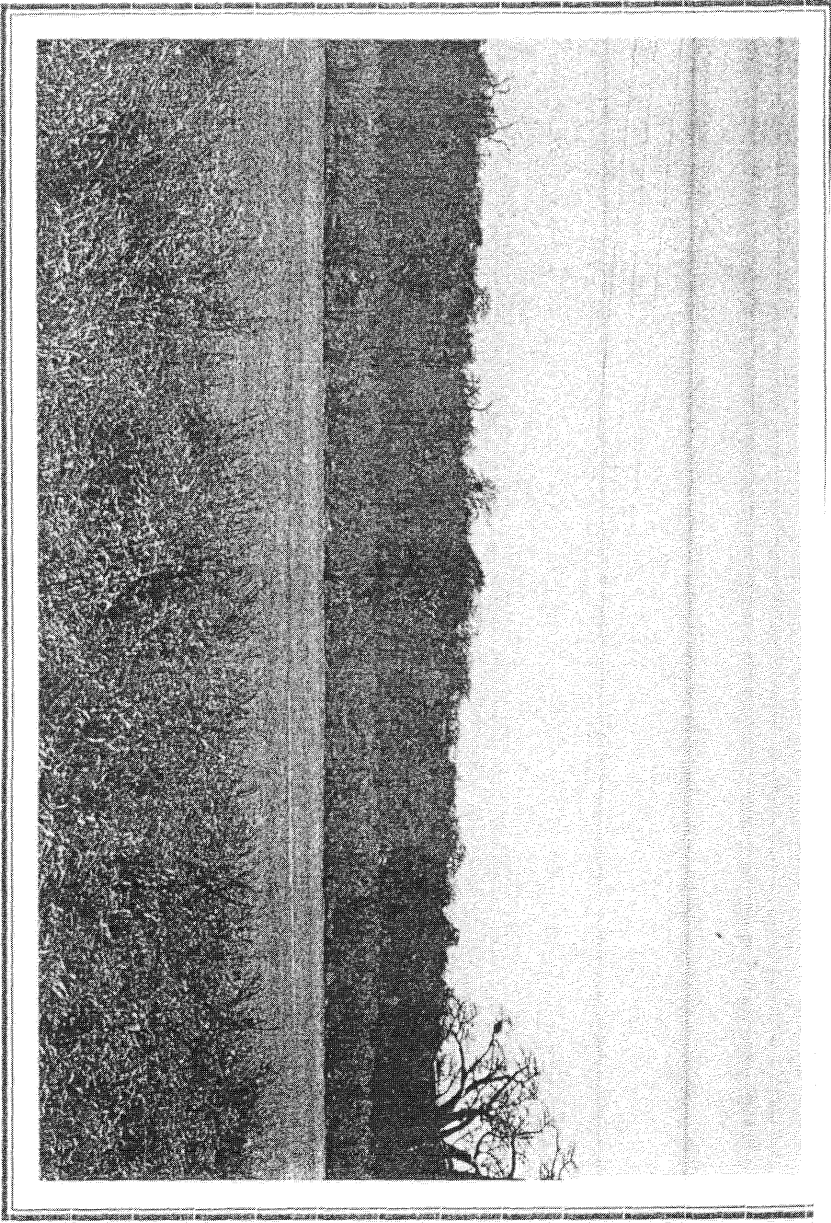


Photo 1. Site for Main Entrance Gate from Messina Tar Road (N)

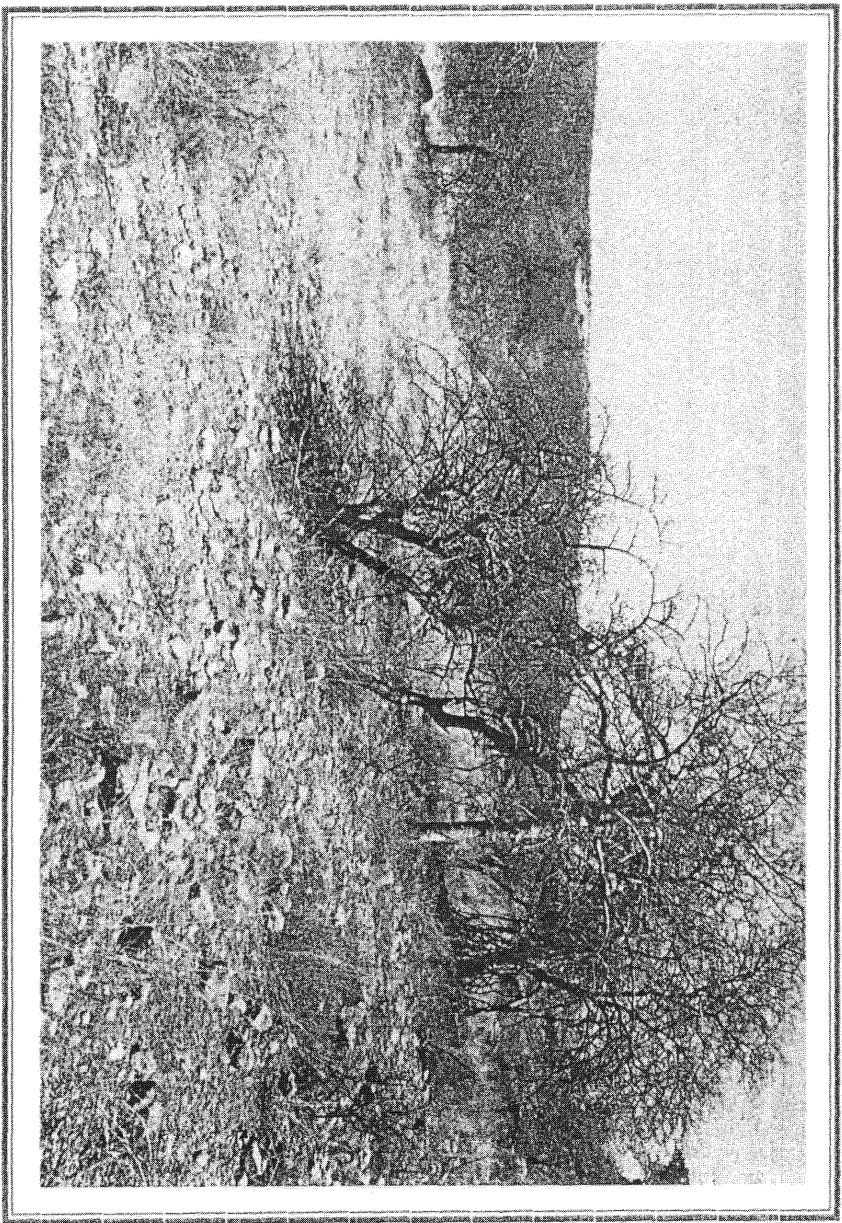


Photo 2. Hamilton Outcrop (E)

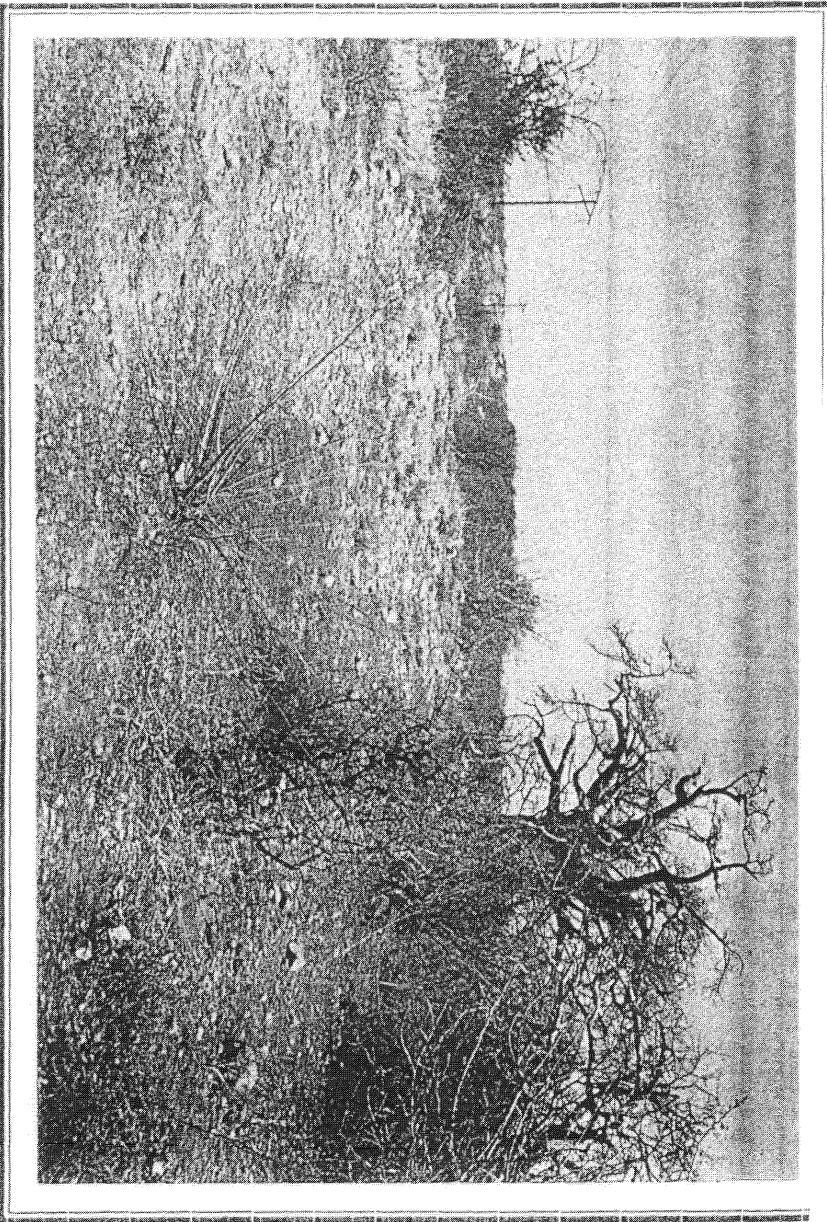


Photo 3. Area disturbed by Eskom service road (W)



Photo 4. Undecorated potsherds and microlithic stone tools



Photo 5. OES head grinding stone

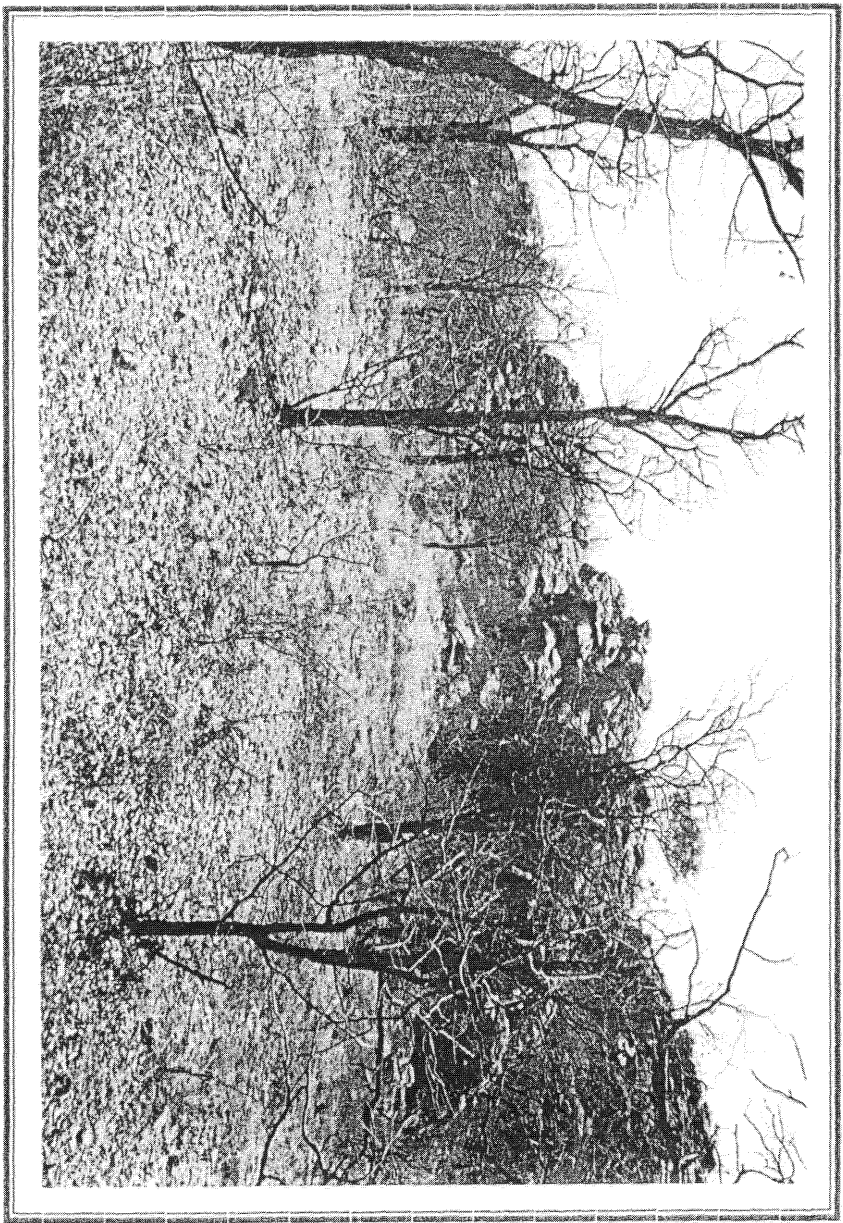


Photo 6. Site for Wilderness camp (S)

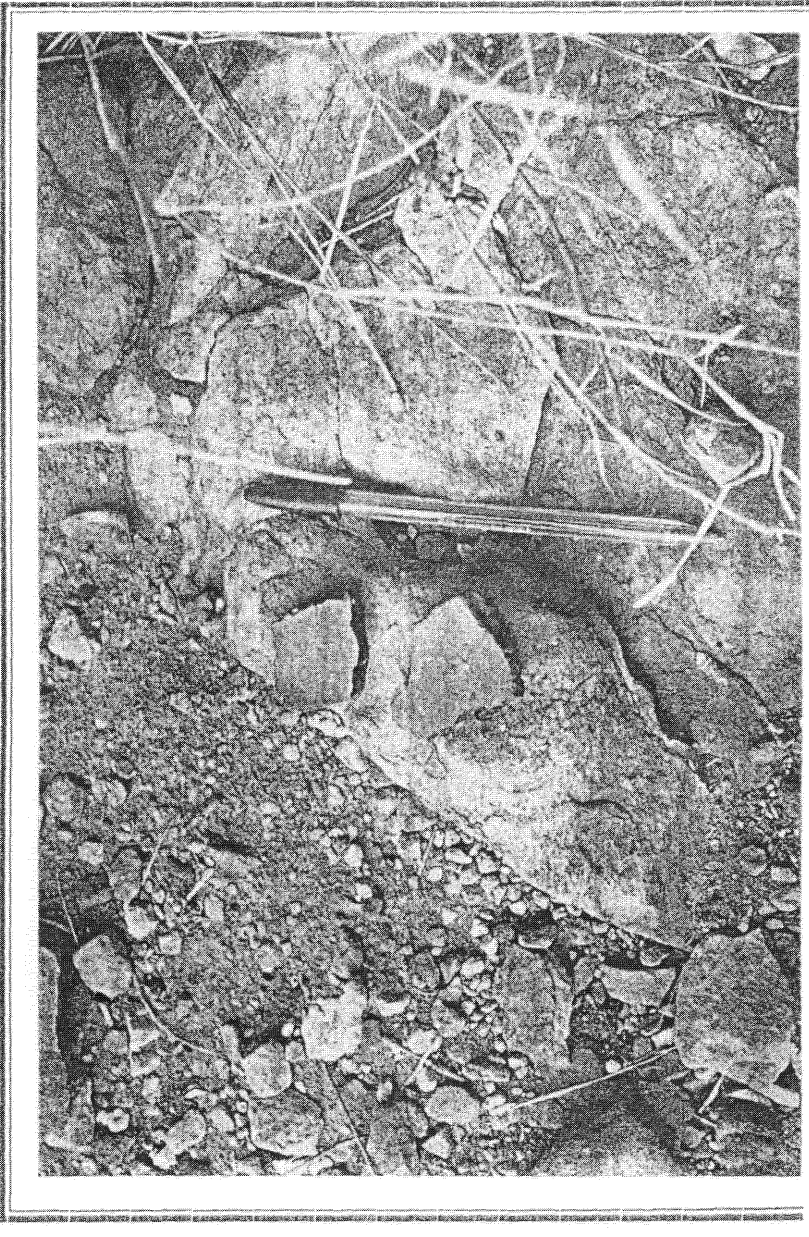


Photo 7. Two non-diagnostic potsherds from the Wilderness camp site

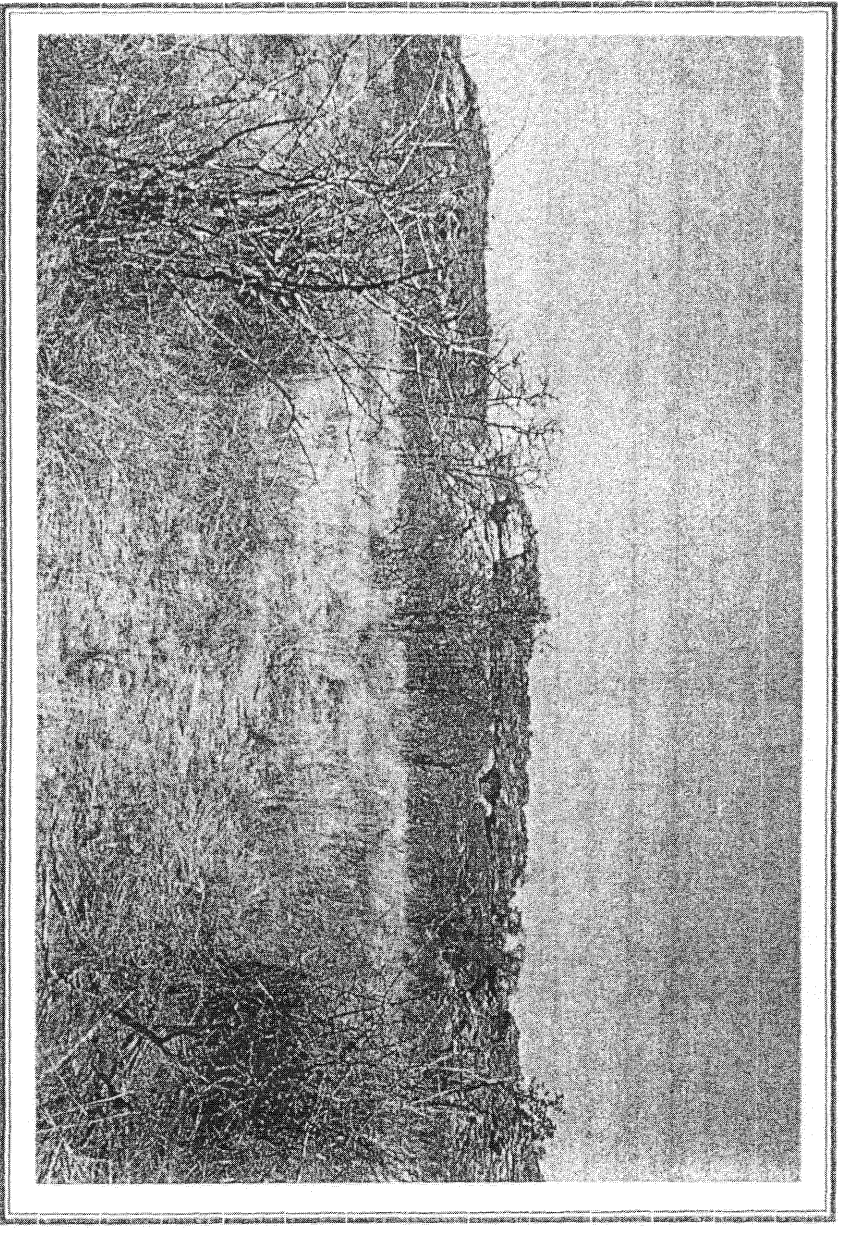


Photo 8. Site for the development of the Main rest camp (S)

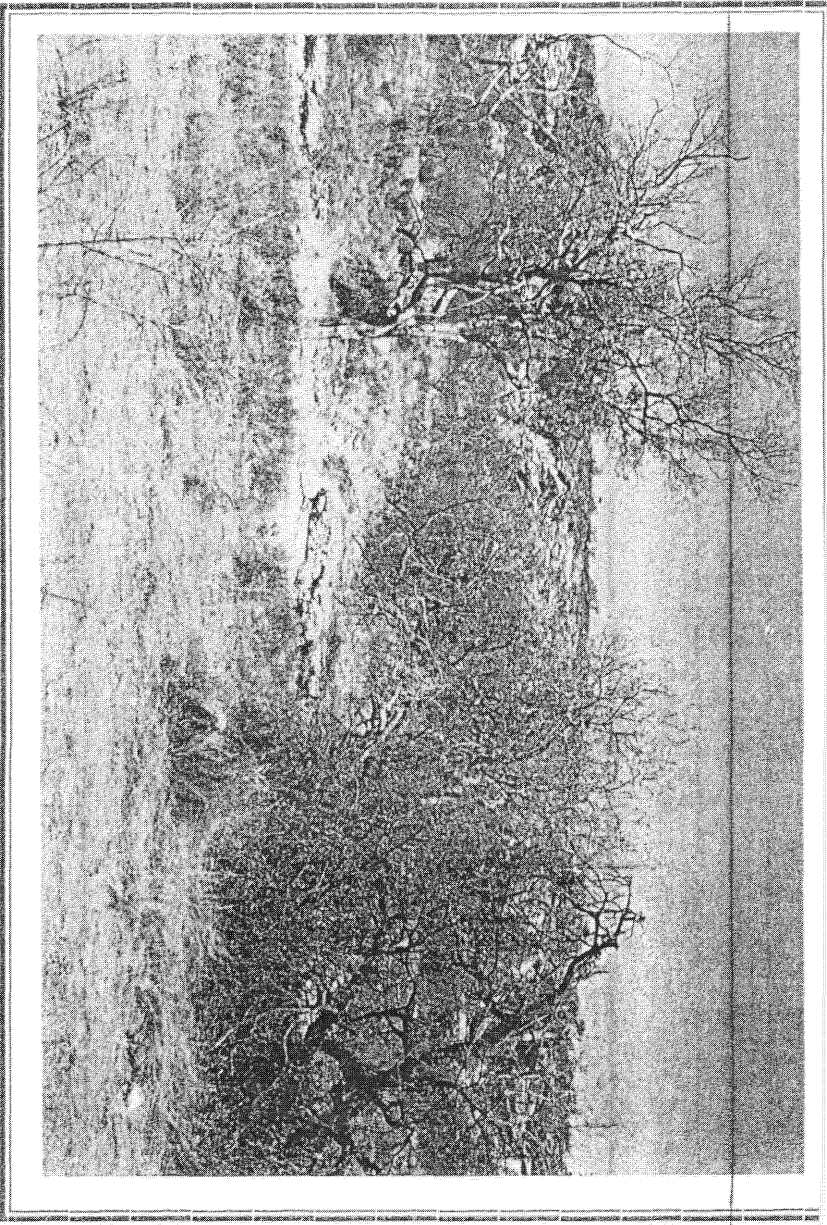


Photo 9. Site for the development of the Main rest camp (SW)

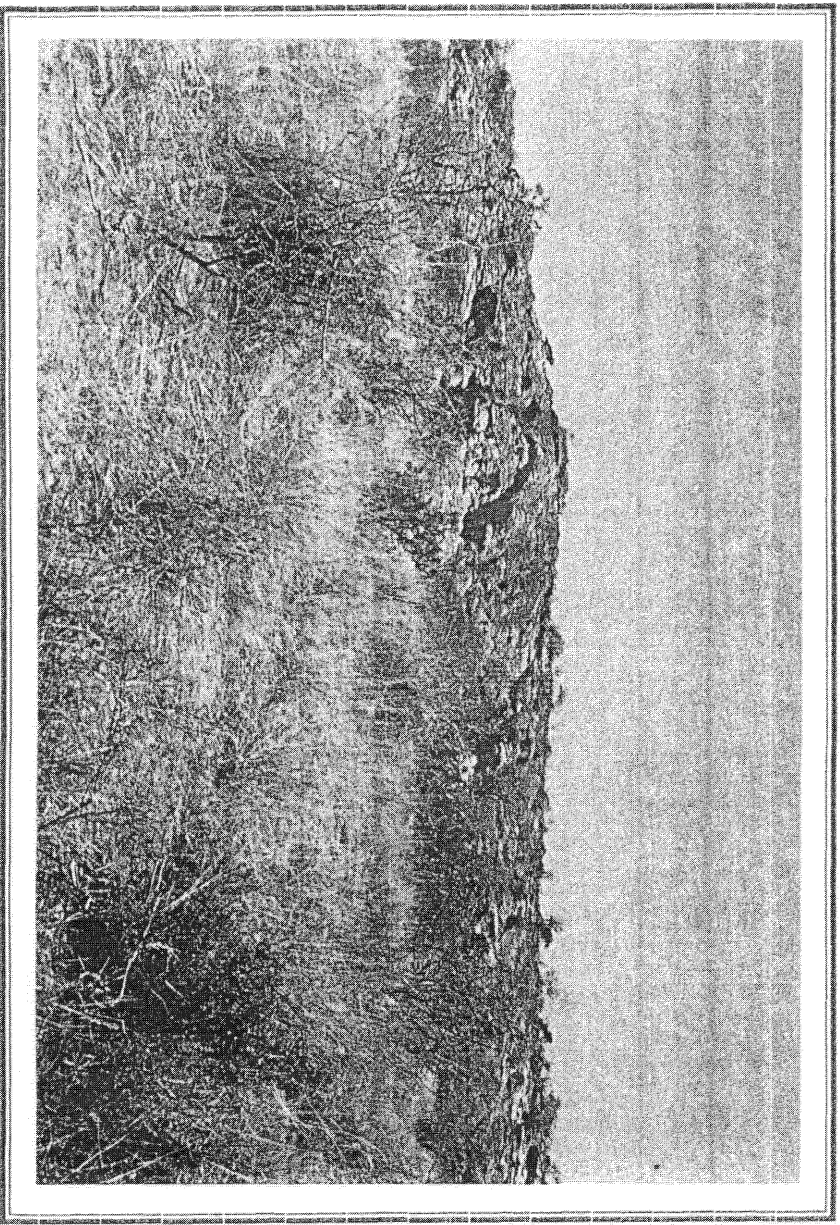


Photo 10. Kalahari-type sand deposit at the Main rest camp site

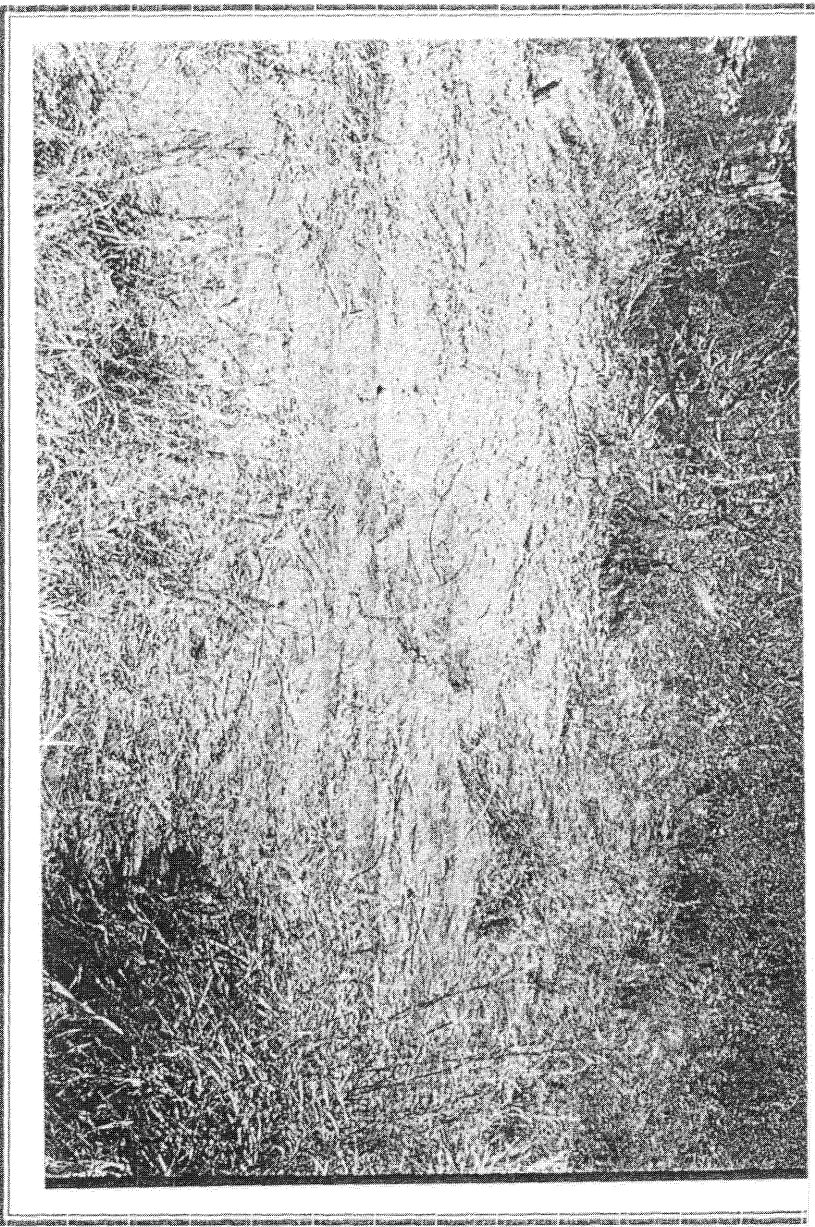


Photo 11. Ash-grey deposit found at site for Main rest camp

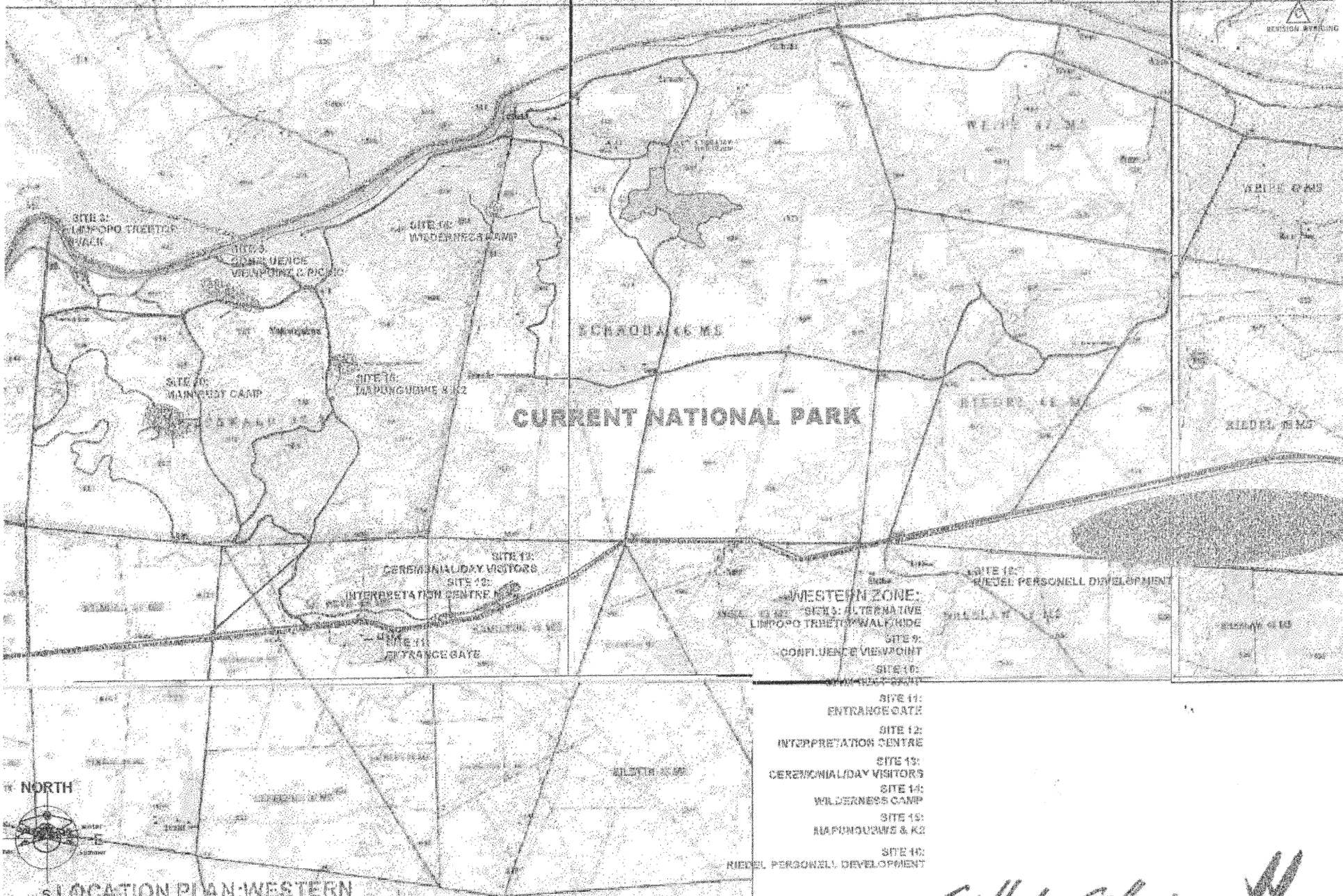
ADDENDUM B

Location Map

2 NATIONAL BUILDING REGULATIONS MUST BE COMPLIED WITH ALL DIMENSIONS TO BE CHECKED ON SITE DRAWING TO BE USED ONLY ON ORIGINAL DESIGNATED SITE UNLESS OTHERWISE AGREED BY ARCHITECT

Drawing Title: **VEMBE DONGOLA RESERVE**

Drawing No: 2100
 Date: 05/12
 Scale: 1:1000
 Project: VEMBE DONGOLA
 Client: SA
 Drawing: PLAN



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