



# **AFRICAN HERITAGE CONSULTANTS CC**

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## **CULTURAL HERITAGE RESOURCES IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE BLOEMHOF NATURE RESERVE BLOEMHOF NORTH WEST PROVINCE**

### **1. DEFINITION**

The broad generic term *Cultural Heritage Resources* refers to any physical and spiritual property associated with past and present human use or occupation of the environment, cultural activities and history. The term includes sites, structures, places, natural features and material of palaeontological, archaeological, historical, aesthetic, scientific, architectural, religious, symbolic or traditional importance to specific individuals or groups, traditional systems of cultural practice, belief or social interaction.

### **2. PROTECTED SITES IN TERMS OF THE NATIONAL HERITAGE RESOURCES ACT, ACT NO. 25 OF 1999**

The following are the most important sites and objects protected by the National Heritage Act:

- 2.1 Structures or parts of structures older than 60 years.
- 2.2 Archaeological sites and objects.
- 2.3 Palaeontological sites.
- 2.4 Meteorites.
- 2.5 Ship wrecks.
- 2.6 Burial grounds.
- 2.7 Graves of victims of conflict.
- 2.8 Public monuments and memorials.

- 2.9 Structures, places and objects protected through the publication of notices in the Gazette and Provincial Gazette.
- 2.10 Any other places or object, which are considered to be of interest or of historical or cultural significance.
- 2.11 Geological sites of scientific or cultural importance.
- 2.12 Sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa.
- 2.13 Objects to which oral traditions are attached.
- 2.14 Sites of cultural significance or other value to a community or pattern of South African history.

### **3, METHODOLOGY**

The site was visited and inspected on foot. All appropriate documents on the area were studied.

### **4. RESULTS**

The area of the Bloemhof Nature Reserve is flat grassland with a number of dry pans. It is an arid region with low rainfall. The dam was constructed in the Vaal River.

#### **4.1 Stone Age Artefacts**

The Vaal River is well known for its alluvial diamond deposits. Some of the earliest stone tools (Oldowan) have been reported from the Vaal river gravels. Diamond diggers have also found large numbers of Acheulian artefacts in the gravels. The diamond diggers who worked along the Vaal River called these bifaces “amandelklippe” (Almond shaped stones). Not a single Acheulian artefact could be found as the river gravels are now covered by the water of the dam (Deacon H.J. & Janette 1999 pp 77 – 83)

At the water edge of the dam small numbers of Middle and Late Stone Age artefacts occur, which have been exposed by wave action. These artefacts are also found in small numbers where grading for roads has taken place as well as all along the rims of the dry pans (see photograph 1 & 2). No important Stone Age deposit could be found.

#### **4.2 Cemeteries**

Two cemeteries were found in the nature reserve. At S27° 35' 17.7" and E25° 44' 48.7" (cemetery 1 on map) a large farm workers cemetery was found. The cemetery is overgrown and it is difficult to distinguish specific graves. Some twenty graves or more may be present (see photograph 3). Another small cemetery with only three graves was found at S27° 37' 34.5 and E25° 37' 35.0" (cemetery 2 on map). Only one grave has a tombstone dating to 1935. This cemetery is also overgrown and neglected (see photograph 4).

### **4.3 Remains of the old farm settlements**

At least ten old farm settlements were originally present on the area now covered by the Nature Reserve. Unfortunately most of them were demolished and all that remains are blue gum (eucalyptus) and pepper trees. One of these old settlements is now used as a hunting lodge (S27° 35' 01.5" and E25° 41' 29.5"). A number of new stone and thatched bungalows were built. What remains of the old farm settlement are the exotic trees. A hedge of pomegranates has survived (see photographs 5 & 6).

The only farm settlement which has survived is found at S27° 36' 04.8" and E25° 40' 52.4". The original granite stone house was most probably built at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though neglected over many years the house is in a relative good condition of preservation. The northern wall has two large cracks, which can be repaired (see photograph 7 & 8). The reservoir and some of the original outbuildings have also survived (see photographs 9 & 10).

Of the rest of the old farm settlement only the trees have survived and some indications of the foundations of the old structures. Two examples are given at S27° 35' 53.8" and S25° 41' 19.6" (ruin one on map) as well as at S27° 35' 09.5" and E25° 43' 02.0" (ruin 2 on map) (see photograph 11 & 12).

### **4.4 Oral history**

Unfortunately no oral history on the old farm settlements or cemeteries could be recorded as the original inhabitants of the farms were removed more than thirty years ago.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Though there might be important Early Stone Age sites present at the Bleomhof Nature Reserve these are now covered by water. Middle and Late Stone Age artefacts occur in small numbers throughout the reserve. Unfortunately nearly all the old farm settlements were demolished before the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25 of 1999 came into being. The one settlement with its granite stone house is worth preserving and restoration. The two cemeteries are neglected and need protection and maintenance.

## **6. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that:

- If the dam's water level drops substantially during winter the Early Stone Age bearing gravels will be exposed. A representative collection of the artefacts should be made for scientific and educational purposes.

- When new development like overnight facilities, infrastructure etc. take place a detailed survey of the areas be done to collect Middle and Late Stone Age material for scientific and educational purposes
- The cemeteries on the nature reserve be properly recorded, cleaned, fenced and maintained.
- The granite stone house farm settlement be properly recorded, restored and maintained and utilized.
- New developments for overnight accommodation or recreation be done at the sites of the old farm settlements as these areas are already damaged. This will prevent unnecessary new developments in sensitive areas.
- If an environmental education facility is established attention be given also to cultural heritage resources and their importance in conservation of the environment
- A Heritage management plan be compiled for the Bloemhof Nature Reserve.

## 7. REFERENCES

1/50 000 Maps 2725DA & DB

Deacon H.J. & Janette 1999. Human Beginnings in South Africa

Mason R.J. 1967. The archaeology of the earliest surficial deposits in the Lower Vaal Basin near Holpan

Van Riet Lowe C 1937. The archeaology of the Vaal River basin. In Söhnge P.S., Visser D.J.L. & Van Riet Lowe C. The geology and archaeology of the Vaal River basin. Geological Survey Memeirs 35: 61 – 164 Pretoria

## 8. PROJECT DATA

<p>Owners contact details:</p> <p><b>North West Parks &amp; Tourism Board</b></p>
<p>Developers contact details:</p> <p><b>North West Parks &amp; Tourism Board</b></p>
<p>Consultants contact details:</p> <p><b>African Heritage Consultants</b></p>
<p>Type of development (e.g. low cost housing project, mining etc.)</p> <p><b>Tourism</b></p>
<p>Whether rezoning and/or subdivision of land is involved:</p> <p><b>No</b></p>

Full location of Province, Magisterial District/Local Authority, property (e.g. farm, erf name and number):

**North West Province, Bophirima and Southern District Municipalities, Makwasssi Hills and Lekwa-Teemane Local Municipalities, Bloemhof Dam Nature Reserve**

Location map must have the polygon of the area to be surveyed on it and full geographical coordinates for all relevant points and where applicable indication of the area to be developed (footprint):

If possible an aerial photograph of the specific area showing the location of all site.

**Not available yet**

## PHOTOGRAPHS



**No 1. Middle Stone Age cores and flakes**



**No 2. Late Stone Age cores and flakes**



**No 3. Remains of large cemetery**



**No 4. Single gravestone in small cemetery**



**No 5. Hunting camp**



**No 6. Remains of pomegranate hedge**



**No 7. The stone house**





**No 8. Cracks in the northern wall of the house**



**No 9. Remains of reservoir**



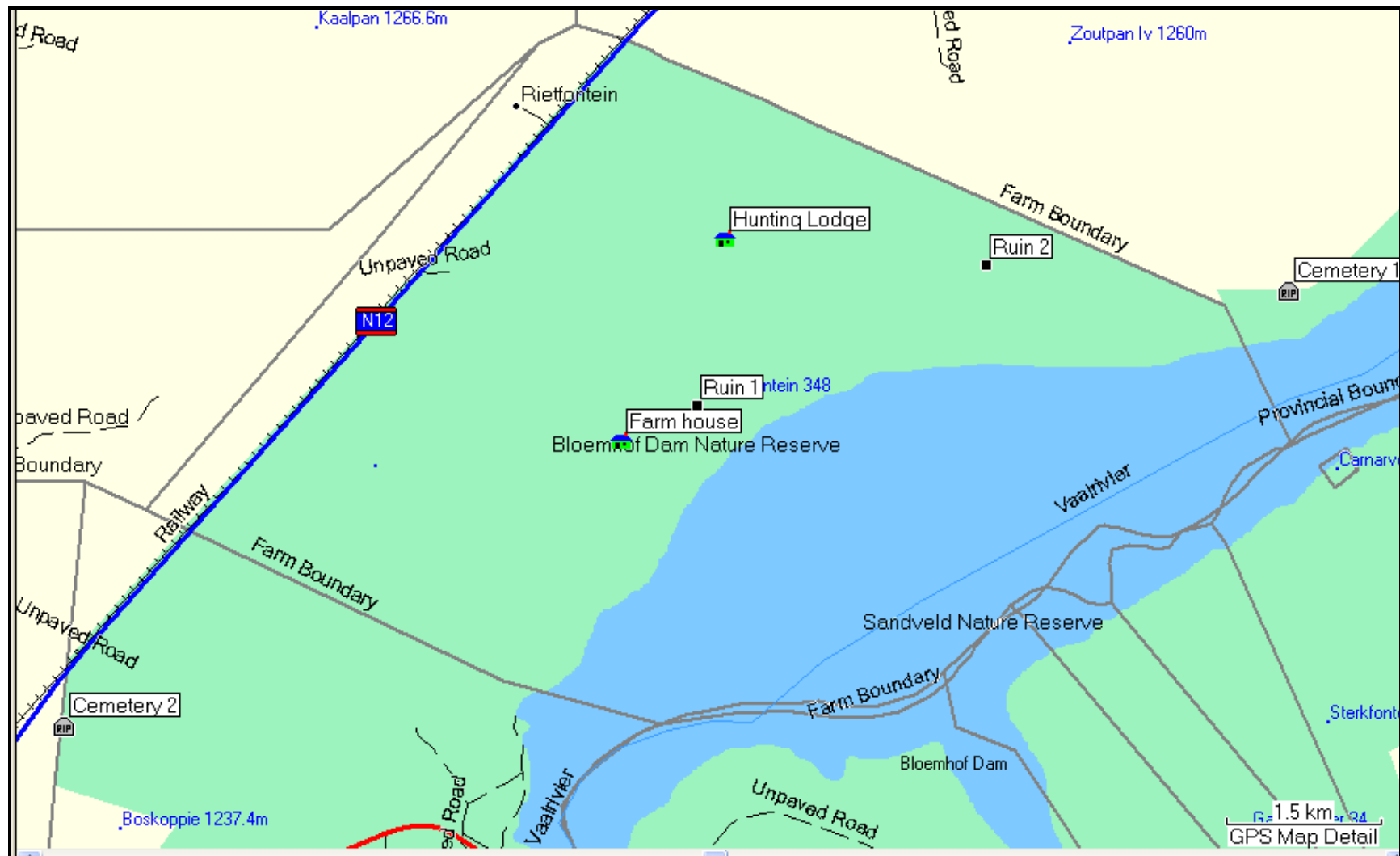
**No 10. One of the outbuildings**



**No 11. Eucalyptus and pepper trees is all that remains of one of the old farm settlements**



**No 12. Eucalyptus trees is all that remains of this farm settlement**



Map