

Report on Archaeological Survey of the farm Klipbank 26 JS, Groblersdal,
compiled by

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1. Introduction

The National Heritage Resources Act (Act no. 25 of 1999) requires of individuals (engineers, farmers, mines and industry) to have impact assessment studies undertaken whenever any development activities are planned.

This includes guidelines for impact assessment studies to be done whenever cultural resources may be destroyed by development activities.

Against this background a preliminary Archaeological or Cultural Resources Management (CRM) survey was carried out during July 2005 on the farm Klipbank 26 JS in Groblersdal.

Van Vollenhoven (1995:3) describes cultural resources as all unique and non-renewable physical phenomena (of natural occurrence or made by humans) that can be associated with human (cultural) activities.

These would be any man-made structure, tool, art object or waste that was left behind on or beneath the soil surface by historic or pre-historic communities.

These remains, when studied in their original context by archaeologists, are interpreted in an attempt to understand, identify and reconstruct the activities and lifestyles of past communities. When these items are disturbed from their original context, any meaningful information they possessed is lost, therefore it is important to locate and identify such remains before construction or development activities commence.

A CRM survey consists of three phases, this document deals with the first phase. This (phase 1) investigation is aimed at getting an overview of cultural resources in a given area, thereby assessing the possible impact a proposed development may have on these resources.

When the archaeologist encounters a situation where the planned project will lead to the destruction or alteration of an archaeological site, a second phase in the survey is normally recommended.

During a phase 2 investigation the impact assessment of development activities on identified cultural resources is intensified and detailed investigation into the nature and origin of the cultural material is undertaken. Normally at this stage, archaeological excavation is carried out in order to document and preserve the cultural heritage.

Phase three consists of the compiling of a management plan for the safeguarding, conservation, interpretation and utilization of cultural resources (Van Vollenhoven, 2002).

Continuous communication between the developer and surveyor after the initial report has been compiled may result in the modification of a planned route or development to incorporate or protect existing archaeological sites.

2. Description of surveyed area

The survey was carried out in Groblersdal on a portion of the farm Klipbank 26 JS. The portion of land is located on the northern side of Groblersdal and bordered by residential areas to the south. Groblersdal is a farming town situated approximately 30 km north of Loskop dam in Mpumalanga Province.

Crops cultivated here include tobacco, citrus, table grapes, maize, wheat, vegetables, peaches and more.

The surveyed area is covered in indigenous Bushveld vegetation and the greater part of the land was

visibly utilized for agricultural purposes that involved irrigation.

In the eastern corner of the property, a number of ruins are visible (See figure 3, Appendix C).

The ruins together with a large amount of building rubble were probably deposited here when the structures were demolished. It is believed that these structures served as living quarters for farm laborers or storage dwellings.

There are also some intact buildings on the property, a storage shed and also a residence.

3. Aim and method of survey

The aim of this survey is to establish the whereabouts and nature of cultural heritage sites should they occur in the area.

This includes settlements, structures and artifacts, which have value for an individual or group of people in terms of historical, archaeological, architectural and human (cultural) development.

It is the aim of this study to locate and identify such objects or places in order to assess whether they are of significance and warrant further investigation and/ or protection.

The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) formulated guidelines for the conservation of all cultural resources and therefore also divided such sites into three main categories. These categories might be seen as guidelines that suggest the extent of protection a given site might receive. They include sites or features of local (Grade 3) provincial (Grade 2) and national (Grade 1) significance.

For practical purposes the surveyor uses his own classification for sites or features and divides them into three groups, those of low or no significance, those of medium significance, those of high significance.

Sites of low significance:

These are sites or features that indicate some form of human activity in the form of a structure, shelter, materials used by historic settlers but which are in such a weathered state that it will provide very little information that warrants further investigation. Features or structures that are not considered as national treasures also fall within this category.

Sites of Medium significance:

A good number of sites fall into this category. These include sites which are moderately to well-preserved and may be of such a nature that they may be utilized for future research. Sites of this nature also fall into an archaeologically well-known category which means that in most instances they will provide little new or significant information during further investigation.

Sites of High significance:

There exist archaeological sites that contain invaluable data which will significantly enhance the knowledge that archaeologists currently have about our cultural heritage. These sites are rare and normally of more ancient origin (Stone Age shelters and Early Iron Age settlements are among the more common ones). In most instances these sites should be preserved and not damaged during

construction activities.

When development activities do however jeopardize the future of such a site, a second and third phase in the Cultural Resource Management (CRM) process is normally advised.

Graves are considered very sensitive sites and should never under any circumstances be jeopardized by development activities. In all instances where graves are found by the surveyor the recommendation would be to steer clear of these areas. If this cannot be done or if construction activities have for some reason damaged graves, specialized consultants are normally contacted after development activities have been brought to a halt.

The survey was carried out on foot in an effort to locate any cultural remains in the area where the proposed development will take place.

Three locations were documented of which only one is of medium importance. This site, numbered GK 2, consists of a number of scattered broken pottery pieces and a lower grinding stone. These are clearly indications of previous Bantu activity and were possibly used by the Bakopa.

4. History of the area

Some 1500 years ago Bantu tribes appeared in the Eastern Transvaal; they left behind a history of iron and copper production, farming with cattle and sheep and also planted crops. These tribes migrated from the north and brought with them unique skills such as the making of beautifully decorated pottery. This period is known as the Early Iron Age (EIA) of Southern Africa and extends over the period 200AD – 1000 AD (approx.).

The Later Iron Age period (1000AD – early 1800's) especially the historic era (from the late 1700's) is well documented. The whereabouts and actions of various indigenous tribes in the South African interior were documented by travelers, historians, missionaries and government officials.

An isolated group known as the Bakopa (Kôpa) was known to have settled in the vicinity of Groblersdal around the period 1859-1860. Intensive interaction between the Kôpa and Europeans took place in terms of landownership, provision of labour and employment, the possession of horses and firearms and more.

During July 1860 the Berlin Missionary Society established a Mission known as Gerlachshoop near the modern Groblersdal, in an effort to spread the gospel among the Bakopa (Bergh, 1990).

During the year 1864 the Swazi attacked the Bakopa and they (Bakopa) fled to Botshabelo as a result of this attack.

Years after this in 1890 the Bakopa under Ramapudu, requested Government to have his people return to their original residence on the farm Rietkloof where the mission of Gerlachshoop was located. Ramapudu was the son of Boleu, the initial chief of the Bakopa when they settled in this area for the first time (Bergh, 1990).

Groblersdal was laid out on the farm Klipbank and proclaimed in 1938. The town is named after the original owner, a Mr W.J. Grobler. According to Bergh (1990) documentation dating from 1859 state that the Bakopa occupied the farm of W.J. Grobler and that this farm, named Rietspruit, together with that of a Mr A.N. Steenkamp (Weltevreden) would be purchased by government so that chief Boleu and his followers could reside there.

5. Findings and recommendations

An isolated lower grinding stone was found on location GK 1. This location can be described as a findspot and not a proper site. This grinder was probably moved to this location by someone as no related features were located in the vicinity. I am however, of the opinion that the grinder may have been moved to this location from Site GK 2 which is located some 300 metres south-east of GK 1. At Site GK 2, a single lower grinding stone was found together with numerous scattered broken pottery shards.

The total area of scattered shards covers an area of about 5m². No decorated pottery shards could be located. The site is considered to be of potential Bakopa nature dating to around 1860 and thus of medium significance.

It is recommended that an archaeologist sample the grinding stones and insure that they be kept at a research institution such as a Museum. This will ensure that these grinding stones will not be lost or removed out of context during development activities.

It is important to note that the bulk of archaeological remains are normally located beneath the soil surface. It is therefore possible that some significant cultural material or remains were not located during this survey and will only be revealed when the soil is disturbed.

Therefore it is recommended that the owner of the land or developers take this into consideration when such activities are planned and executed at this location.

Should excavation or large scale earth moving activities reveal any human skeletal remains, broken pieces of ceramic pottery, large quantities of sub-surface charcoal or any material that can be associated with previous occupation, a qualified archaeologist should be notified immediately.

This will also temporarily halt such activities until an archaeologist have assessed the situation. It must also be noted that if such a situation occurs, it will probably have further financial implications for the developers.

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7. Appendix A



Figure 1. Some of the building rubble and ruins visible at Site GK 3.

Appendix B

8. List of Site Locations

During the survey, the locations of the sites were plotted with aid of a GPS (Global Positioning System). The sites were also numbered in the following fashion:

The initials GK followed by a number marks the identity of the site. The “G” stands for Groblersdal and “K” for Klipbank.

1. Site name: GK1 (location 1)
Date of compilation: 16/07/2005
GPS reading: Longitude, 29° 23, 367' E
Latitude, 25° 09, 502' S
Altitude: 927 m
Photo: Figure 1
2. Site name: GK 2 (Site 2)
Date of compilation: 16/07/2005
GPS reading: Longitude, 29° 23, 420' E
Latitude, 25° 09, 485' S
Altitude: 935 m
Photo: Figure 2
3. Site name: GK 3 (location 3)
Date of compilation: 16/07/2005
GPS reading: Longitude, 29° 23, 540' E
Latitude, 25° 09, 490' S
Altitude: 927 m
Photo: Figure 3

9. Appendix C



Figure 2. A single lower grinding stone found at location GK 1.



Figure 3. A lower grinding stone and some broken pottery found at Site GK 2.