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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE HERITAGE POTENSIAL FOR A PROPOSED NEW ROUTE FOR A 132kV POWER LINE BETWEEN THE MERENSKY SUBSTATION AND THE PROPOSED NEW BURGERSFORT SUBSTATION IN THE MPUMALANGA AND LIMPOPO PROVINCES OF SOUTH AFRICA

PREPARED BY:

Dr Julius CC Pistorius

Archaeologist and Cultural Heritage Management Consultant

352 Rosemary Street

LYNNWOOD 0081

Pretoria

Tel and fax (012) 348 5668

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report discusses the results of an assessment of the heritage potential of a proposed new power line to be established between the Merensky Substation near Steelpoort and a proposed new substation in Burgersfort in the Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces of South Africa.

Both the Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces have been explored for heritage remains in the past. These explorations have shown that both provinces have a rich heritage comprised of remains dating from the prehistoric and the historical past. Prehistoric and historical remains in these provinces reflect the heritage of most groups living in South Africa today. Many of the types and ranges of heritage resources ('the national estate') as listed in the National Heritage Resources Act (No 25 of 1999), occur in this province (see Box 1).

2 AIMS OF THIS REPORT

Eskom intends to establish a new 132kV power line between the existing Merensky Substation near Steelpoort and a proposed new substation to be established in Burgersfort. The proposed new power line will be approximately 30km long. Several routes (options) were considered for the proposed new power line. A Phase I HIA study for these various options have been conducted during an earlier investigation of the proposed new power line corridor (Pistorius 2004).

This report discuses the heritage potential of a deviation that has been proposed for Options B, C1 and F that have been put forward for the new power line between Steelpoort and Burgersfort.

In order to comply with legislation Eskom requires knowledge of the presence and of the significance of any heritage resources that may occur in the proposed new deviation that has been put forward for the new power line corridor. Eskom needs this knowledge in order to take pro-active measures with regard to any significant heritage resources that may be affected, damaged or destroyed when the proposed new power is build. Consequently, the author of this report was commissioned by BPA International and Eskom to assess the heritage potential of the proposed deviation that has been put forward for Options B, C1 and F.

4 THE PROJECT AREA

4.1 Location

Eskom's project area is situated to the north-west of Steelpoort in the Steelpoort River Valley and covers parts of the farms Doornbosch 294KT, Apiesboomen 295KT and Derde Gelid 278KT. The proposed new power line will run from Steelpoort (in the south-west) to Burgersfort (in the north-east) (Steelpoort 2430CA; 1: 50 000 topographic map) (Figure 1).

The Steelpoort Valley's name is derived from the Steelpoort (Tubatse) River, one of the main geographical features in this valley. The Steelpoort River is a southern tributary of the Olifants River. It flows from an altitude higher than 1 800m on the Highveld near Wonderfontein in the Belfast district northwards and then north-eastwards to join the Olifants River before the latter cuts through the Drakensberg to enter the Lowveld. Other prominent beacons in the wider study area include the Chromite Hills to the north-east of the study area and the imposing Leolo Mountain range to the west of the study area. The Leolo Mountain range is known as a beacon in the origin history of the Pedi.

Formal and informal villages are scattered throughout the Steelpoort Valley. It would appear as if these communities, some of which are still practising mixed subsistence farming, have occupied the Steelpoort Valley without interruption for decades and perhaps even for centuries.

4.2 Historical beacons near the project area

Several important historical beacons are located in the Leolo Mountain range, in the peripheral area outside the project area, namely:

- The mountain Thaba Mosego is part of the Leolo Mountain range. It was here that the British and their allies subjugated the Pedi of Sekhukhune in 1879 during the Battle of Sekhukhune. The Sekhukhune Wars of 1876 and 1879 were both fought near/on this mountain (and in the Leolo

Figure 1. The Eskom project area between the Merensky Substation and the Burgersfort Substation. Several options have been proposed for a new 132kV power line to be established between the Merensky Substation and the Burgersfort Substation in the Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces of South Africa.

This study focuses on a heritage assessment for a deviation that has been put forward for Options B, C1 and F for the proposed new power line between Steelpoort and Burgersfort.

5.1.2 The 2nd stretch

The 2nd stretch runs more or less parallel with the existing Foskor-Merensky 275kV power line but to the west of the Steelpoort/Burgersfort road. It eventually joins the Foskor-Merensky power line which crosses the Steelpoort-Burgersfort road as well as the Steelpoort River. These two power lines will then run together in order to cross the Polokwane/Burgersfort national road.

5.1.3 The 3rd stretch

From the Polokwane-Burgersfort national road the proposed new power line will run northwards along a dirt road until it reaches the Spekboom River in the north.

5.1.4 The 4th stretch

This stretch will turn towards the south-east in order to run along the banks of the Spekboom River to the proposed new Burgersfort Substation.

5.2 Heritage resources observed during earlier Phase I HIA studies

Various types and ranges of heritage resources were found in or near the various options for the proposed new power line corridor to be established between the Merensky Substation and the proposed new Burgersfort Substation during an earlier Phase I HIA study (Pistorius 2004), namely:

- Informal graveyards in close proximity to informal settlements scattered along the northern foot of the Morore mountain range.
- A number of stone tools, mostly dating from the Middle Stone Age (200 000 to 22 000 years ago), that were exposed in the extensive system of dongas and erosion channels that occur along the northern foot of the Morare range of mountains.

However, when the power line enters the flat area to the north of the Morore mountain range, it is possible to expect Early Iron Age sites, stone tools and informal graveyards in this area.

5.3.3 The 3rd stretch

Rudimentary stone walls were observed along this stretch of the power line. These walls occur in close proximity of the dirt road and may date from the historical period or from the more recent past. It is also possible that informal graveyards may be associated with this stretch of the proposed new deviation for the new power line.

5.3.4 The 4th stretch

This stretch of the power line may be disturbed by agricultural fields so that any heritage resources which may have existed along this stretch may have been destroyed. However, this stretch was not visited or surveyed.

5.4 Possible impact of the proposed new power line on heritage resources

Eskom's proposed new power line corridor has not been surveyed thoroughly. It is therefore possible that any of the types and ranges of heritage resources that have been identified during earlier HIA studies may occur along the proposed new deviation. These heritage resources include stone tools dating from all the periods of the Stone Age; settlements dating from the Early Iron Age and informal graveyards.

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