

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT FOR MIDDLEWIT STENE,  
MPUMALANGA**

A Phase 1 Report prepared for Hennox Management Solutions

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Middelwit Stene (Pty) Ltd. has applied for authorization to mine clay for brick making on the farms Mooifontein 285 JS (Portion 17, Remaining Portion of Portion 7), Rietfontein 286 JS (Portions 6 & 8) and Elandspruit 291 JS (Remaining Portion of Portion 31) in the Middleburg Magisterial District. In keeping with various Mining, Environmental and Heritage legislation, the environmental coordinators for the project, Hennox Management Solutions, commissioned Archaeological Resources Management (ARM) to examine the area for sites of archaeological interest. Graveyards area already known and on record.

## **METHOD**

One ARM staff visited the project area on 20 February 2005, in the company of Mr. D. Niehaus, Manager of Middelwit Stene. The team examined all of the proposed mining areas and other spots such as sandstone outcrops. Sites were recorded with a hand-held GPS instrument and then transferred to the 1 : 50 000 map 2529 CD Middelburg (Figure 1).

For this project, five criteria determine site significance: integrity of deposit (primary versus secondary context), depth of deposit, number and variety of features, uniqueness and potential to answer present research questions. Following these criteria, sites with no significance do not require further consideration, low significance may require mitigation, sites with medium significance will require mitigation while sites with high significance should not be disturbed at all.



Figure 1. Archaeological sites recorded during the assessment for Middlewit Stone.

## RESULTS

Generally, the shales that produce the high quality clay are devoid of archaeological sites. The only areas of interest are the sandstone outcrops.

Middle Stone Age artefacts (Dating to between 250 000 and 25 000 years ago) lie scattered around two groups of rocks (**Site 1: 25 47 36.8S 29 23 14.9E** and **Site 2: 25 47 40S 29 23 37.5E**) on the edge of a natural pan on Elandspruit. Presumably, MSA people frequented the area because of game around the pan.

- *These two sites have low significance.*

**Site 2** includes a known graveyard with two headstones.

- *The graveyard has medium significance.*

The most important site is located on the Antblom portion of Rietfontein. Here (**Site 3: 25 45 28-30S 29 21 59-22 00E**) stone kraals and the rectangular foundations of houses and courtyard walls mark the location of Ndebele people who were probably workers on the farm many years ago.

- *Site 3 has medium significance.*

Another rectangular kraal (**Site 4: 25 45 27.8S 29 22 12.3E**) straddles the road leading to the east end of the ridge. No other structures could be located. Somewhat surprisingly, however, the team found a piece of decorated pottery that probably dates to about AD 1000. **Site 4** overlooks a natural sponge in the vlei below, and perhaps rainmaking rituals took place here.

- *Site 4 has medium significance.*

Remains of other farm compounds are marked on the 1: 50 000 map. One not recorded is located on the rocky edge of the spur near Beacon 222. Here (**Site 5: 25 45 34.4S 29 20 58E**) the remains include a rectangular stonewalled kraal and the foundations of a few houses.

- *Site 5 has no significance.*

Finally, the stone remains of a two-roomed house (25 45 19S 29 22 25E) stand at the east end of the spur beyond Site 4. This house was most likely occupied by servants for the people living in the European house on Draaihoek, north of the game fence.

- *It has no archaeological significance.*

### **RECOMMENDATION**

At present the Ndebele homesteads are not in any impact zone. To guarantee a better measure of protection, however, **Site 3**, the best example, should be fenced. Similarly, the graveyards may need further protection while the mines are in operation.

With this proviso, there is no archaeological reason why the mining development should not proceed.