

Report on Archaeological Survey on Portion 1 of Portion 3 of the
farm Beryl 313 JT, Nelspruit

compiled by

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Description of surveyed area
3. Aim and method of survey
4. History of the area
5. Findings and recommendations
6. Bibliography
7. Appendix A – Map
8. Appendix B – List of site locations
9. Appendix C – Photos

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 May 2005 on the farm Beryl 313 JT at Nelspruit, Sonheuwel Extension 2.

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 a 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 Nelspruit, Sonheuwel Extension 2 on the farm Beryl 313 JT. The portion is located to the south-eastern side of Nelspruit and bordered by residential areas on the northern, western and southern sides. Still visible today is evidence of quarry activities. This was confirmed by previous land owner, Mr Tjaart van der Walt who stated that granite boulders were recovered here and transported to Pretoria via railway.

The surveyed area comprises a kopje on top of which a water reservoir is situated, some parts of the kopje are very difficult to access due to steep angles and dense vegetation. Typical Lowveld vegetation was found on the surveyed area along with alien invasive plants such as *Lantana camara* and others.

3.Aim and method of survey

The aim of the survey is to establish the whereabouts and nature of cultural heritage sites should they occur in the area. This includes settlements and/ or 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 and/ or material used by historic settlers but which is 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.

This survey was carried out on foot in an effort to locate any cultural remains in the area where the proposed development will take place. No significant cultural remains could be located during the survey. It must be noted however that some of the terrain located in the proposed area proved inaccessible, due to both steep contours and impenetrable vegetation.

An interesting building was documented although it is considered to be of low importance. This is a dwelling that was allegedly erected during 1955 and used as a shop. This is according to informant Mr. Tjaart van der Walt, original owner of the property. It has clearly been altered since then (See photo Appendix C). According to Bornman (1979), the Sonheuwel Extension, where the surveyed property is located, was proclaimed in 1958 (Bornman, 1979:76) after which the town of Nelspruit started growing rapidly. This would suggest that the time of erection of the Beryl shop as indicated by Mr van der Walt, would be more or less accurate. The house where van der Walt currently resides was built in the 1960's according to himself. Both these buildings are considered as features of low significance. Should development activities require the destruction of them, it is believed that this would be warranted.

4. History of the area

During the surveying of the Nelspruit Railway station in 1889 the town area was also surveyed and it covered an area of some 38 hectares. The Anglo Boer War (1899-1902) put a halt to further surveying activities and only in 1904 surveyor Mr Servaas de Kock, completed the town plan, which included 120 stands, recreation areas and streets. The town plans were registered on May 18, 1904 and Nelspruit was proclaimed on January 27, 1905 (Bornman, 1979).

Scientists are of the opinion that the first residents of the Nelspruit area roamed this part of the Lowveld much longer ago than mentioned above. A hominid of the Australopithecine species is believed to have been the first to stake a claim as first inhabitant. Succeeded by more modern physical types such as *Homo erectus*, evidence of both these pre-historic predecessors of modern man was discovered on the location of the Lowveld National Botanical Gardens in Nelspruit. This evidence is in the shape of formal stone tools belonging to the Early- (Approx. 1,5 – 3 million AD) and Middle Stone Age (Approx. 200 000 – 30 000 AD) periods. (Milne in Bornman, 1979).

Some 1500 years ago Negroid tribes appeared in the Eastern Transvaal, leaving behind them a history of iron and copper production, farming with cattle and sheep and also planting crops. These tribes migrated from the north and brought with them unique skills such as the making of beautifully decorated pottery. At least three Early Iron Age pottery sites have been recorded in Nelspruit, there are also sites at Friedenheim, Plaston and Hazyview.

Other finds of Archaeological and cultural significance have also been documented in this area. These are rock-art sites or better known as Bushman paintings. A survey conducted about three years ago at the nearby Bongani Mountain Lodge and surrounding area, revealed some 100 sites of San Rock Art (Hampson et. al. 2002). Although no similar sites could be located during the survey, it is believed that some may be found in the near vicinity.

Before Europeans settled the area in large numbers, native bantu-speaking tribes occupied the land. The first of these groups were encountered by the odd traveller who documented their existence in diaries. This area was notorious for the abundance of Tsetse flies that made cattle herding impossible. Subsequently the groups that settled here were few and consisted of small family units (Barnard, 1975; Bornman, 1995).

In later years, when pioneers such as Hugh Lanion (H.L.) Hall established commercial farming in this area (since 1890) more of the land surrounding Nelspruit and White River was utilized for this purpose. This provided the opportunity for people to be employed as farm labourers and this state of affairs has been the norm ever since.

5. Findings and recommendations

As mentioned above, no sites or features that are archaeologically significant could be located during the survey. It is possible though, that some remains were not located because of the inaccessibility of certain areas. The features that were documented are considered to be of low cultural importance and do not require protection.

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 has assessed the situation. It must also be noted that if such a situation occurs, it will probably have further financial implications for the developers.

6. Bibliography

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7. Appendix A

8. Appendix B

List of Site Locations

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

The initials BN followed by a number marks the identity of the site. The “B” stands for Beryl and “N” for Nelspruit.

1. Site name: BN 1 (Site 1)

Date of compilation: 14/05/2005

GPS reading: Longitude, 30° 57, 483' E

Latitude, 25° 29, 889' S

Altitude: 808 m

Photo: Figure 1, 2

2. Site name: BN 2 (Site 2)

Date of compilation: 14/05/2005

GPS reading: Longitude, 30° 57, 437' E

Latitude, 25° 29, 818' S

Altitude: 763 m

Photo: Figure 3

9. Appendix C