

SALVAGE EXCAVATION FOR PLOT 91 IVY PARK SITE,
CAPRICORN DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE..

A PHASE 2 REPORT

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EXECUTIE BRIEF

Nzumbululo Heritage Solutions was commissioned by Plot 91 Ivy Park Developers to conduct a Heritage Phase 2 study at Ivy park development site. The rescue archaeological excavation was conducted from 17th November to 22 November 2004. A total of six test trenches were excavated. The site was mapped. The archaeological deposit on most of the site areas was not as deep as anticipated. The excavation yielded pottery and bone materials which are being processed and catalogued for submission to the Polokwane Museum. The detailed results of the material analysis would be published in the complete excavation report. However, it should be noted that the proposed developments will still be monitored by an archaeologist for sensitive chance archeological finds such as human burials.

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SALVAGE EXCAVATIONS AT Plot 91 Ivy Park

INTRODUCTION

During 2002, the Potter's House Church planned to construct a church building on Plot 91 Ivy Dale in Polokwane, Limpopo Province. The work was interrupted and suspended when archaeological materials were discovered. The assessments that were conducted made recommendations that the site should be cleared, mapped and test excavated before construction resumes. These mitigation measures were completed between 17 and 22 November 2004 under Permit No. 80/04/10/009/51 from the South African Heritage Resources Agency.

THE SITE

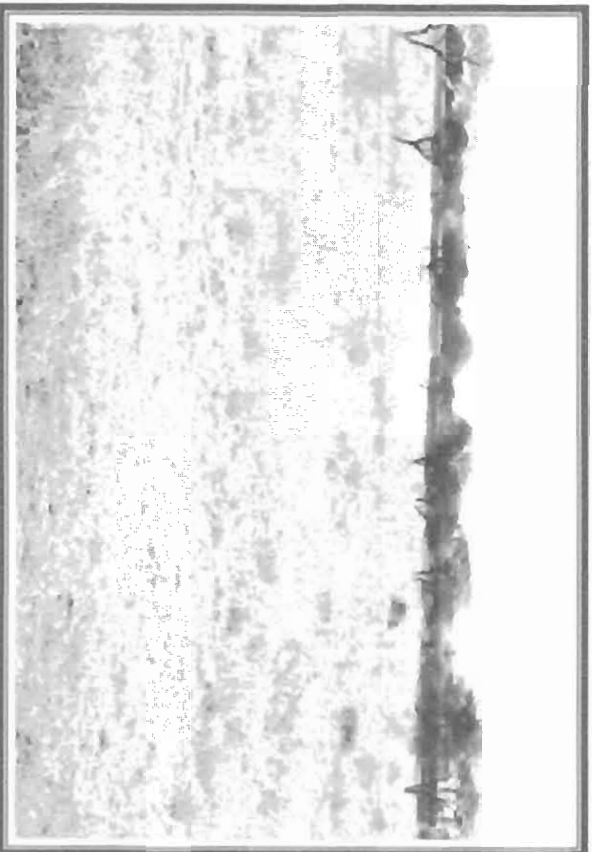


Plate 1: Plot 91 site facing the west boundary.

The site ($23^{\circ}55'27.5''$ S $29^{\circ}26'18.8''$ E) stands between developed plots on the southern Ivy Dale area of Polokwane. Survey of the area show that the site originally extended into neighbouring properties. However, sections outside Plot 91 have since been destroyed by development. Most of the Plot 91 site has been disturbed by earthmoving and earlier construction work on site (Murimbika 2004). Nonetheless, several stonewall foundations are still visible on the surface as well as ash midden mounds. The surviving features and structures cover an area of approximately 350m x 110m (Plate 1).

A workforce supplied by the Potter's House church first cleared the site of grass. A

fortuitous veld fire helped to clear parts of the site further. Mapping and excavations then began with the aid of church workers.

THE PLAN

The site condition survey conducted earlier indicates that the stonewalling on site had all been reduced to the ground surface leaving only outlines of foundations visible on the surface. Some walls were damaged completely. Evidently, a bulldozer had pushed through the front area on the north section of the site and piled up rubble on the east and west boundaries of the property. Some pits dug earlier are still visible in the central area. Rubble and rubbish dumping has occurred on site over the years (see Site Condition Report, Murimbika 2004). There is a vehicle path that runs along the western boundary of the site. The central and the southern areas of the site appear to have been damaged the least.

Despite the damage, the overall plan of the site could be recognised as an example, most of Central Cattle Pattern settlement, most probably of the Late Iron Age Northern Sotho-Tswana Group II walling (see Huffman 2001, 2002). The portion of the site that survived on Plot 91 was part of a larger settlement situated in the open veld area. The perimeter wall remains indicate that the site was made up of more than one large homesteads built next to each other. It is probable that these are remains of an aggregated village that once stood in this veld.

The central zones would have contained one or more cattle kraals. Small stock enclosures, on the other hand, were incorporated in the outer perimeter wall, near embayments marking the back courtyards of individual households. There are number of stone foundations and mud soil mounds that mark remains of circular houses. These occupy the courtyards between the central byre and the outer perimeter walls. Some of the circular features are linked to each other by short stonewall foundations. These were most probably internal courtyard divisions.

EXCAVATIONS

Because the central area of the site was better preserved, we test excavated inside three embayments searching for hut remains. One trench was opened on a midden mound and the other two were placed within the open zones within the wall enclosures. The trenches were excavated to the sterile quartz gravel and the bedrock in 10 cm levels. Although there were relatively lots of plain potsherds scattered across the surface of the site, the

archaeological material was not very deep except on middens.



Plate 2: Workers who assisted with the excavations working in Trench I.

Trench I

Reddish-brown soil 15-25 cm deep lay on top of compact quartz gravel (Plate 3a & b). The trench was located just outside a perimeter wall. There were a scatter of pottery on the surface along the stonewall foundations. The excavation exposed three almost complete small constricted bowls that were left set against the stonewall. There were some bored soapstones associated with these vessels (see Plate 7).



Plate 3 a & b: Almost complete pottery vessels that were found in Trench 1 set against stonewall.

Trench II

The trench was located within a small stone enclosure which appeared to be a house foundation. The excavation exposed a cow dung layer and a pit 80 cm deep filled with ash. Limited pottery and bone material were recovered. The stonewall was most probably part of a larger cattle kraal that had a small stock enclosure on the side (Plates 4 a & b). A grinding stone lay on the surface in the middle of the trench. The size of the grinding stone is characteristic of the maize grinding stones. No other evidence for a house was obvious, but the grinding stone suggests a house had previously stood nearby there.

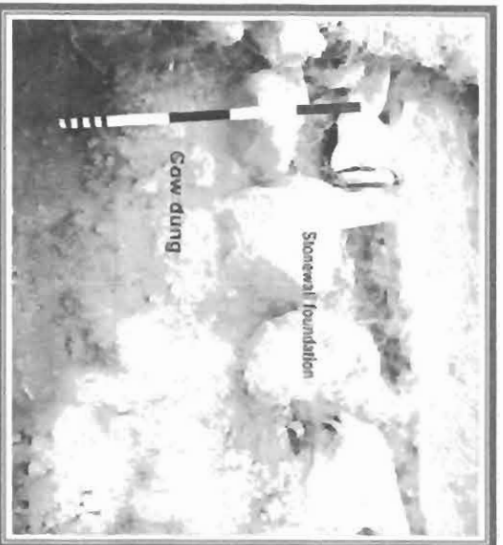


Plate 4a: Cow dung layer in Trench II associated with stonewall that marks the edge of a central cattle kraal. **4b)** The Stone wall outline of central kraal was not visible from the surface.

Trench III

This trench contained the shallowest deposit (Plate 5). It measured 2m x 2m in dimensions. Some 2-4 cm of humus overlay 8-12 cm of red brown soil on top of the compact gravel. Apart from few potsherds recovered from the top layer, no other materials were recovered from this trench.

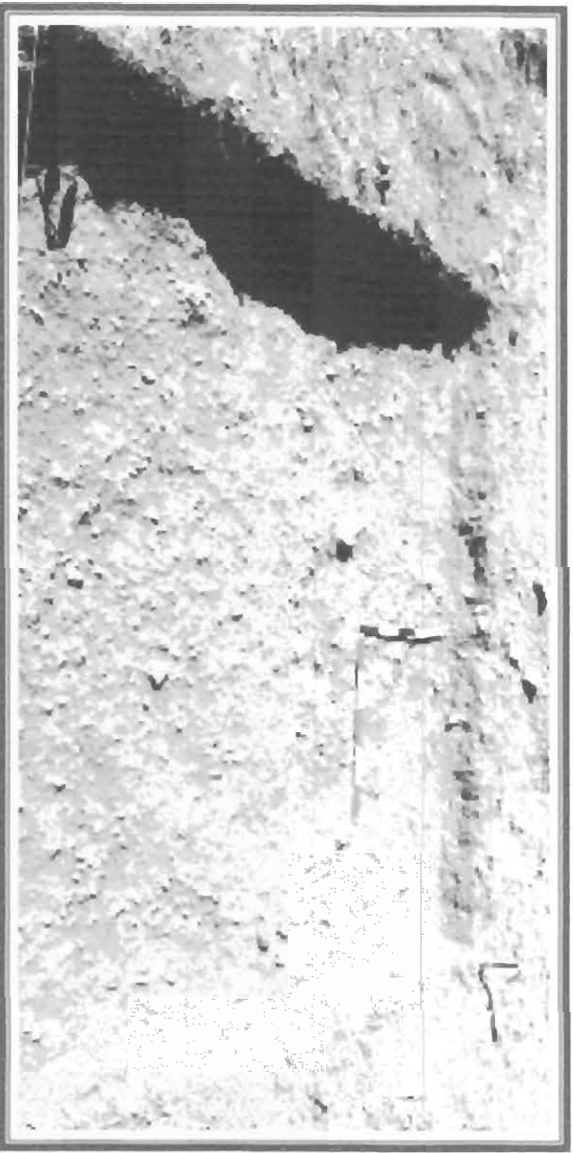


Plate 5: Trench III yielded pottery on the top 10cm and was only 15 cm deep. The bottom gravel was hard and compact. The cultural materials on this site are not deep suggesting probably the site was occupied for a limited time period.

Trench IV

The trench was located within a circular stone circle of 4m in diameter. Virtually no cultural materials were recovered from the 4m x 4m test square trench that went 50cm deep. The soil was red-brown mixed with gravel. However, the excavation exposed some sections of the stonewall foundation. This was probably a house foundation. There was a large maize grinding stone that was found on the edge of the trench (Plate 6).

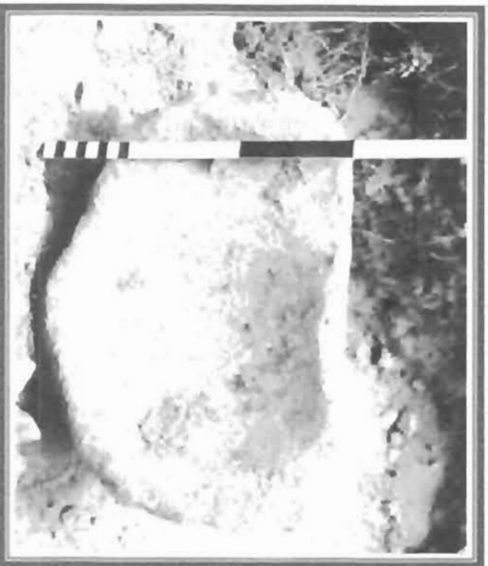


Plate 6 & 7: The several maize grinding stones on site indicate that the site dates relatively to the post-1700 period when the Portuguese sailors on the Indian Ocean first introduced maize in the region. There are several bored soapstones on site.

TRENCH V

This trench was located on the edge of the main midden on the central area of the site. The trench was 1m x 6m in dimension. It was designed to recover a sample of the cultural materials such as bone and pottery. The soil was sieved using screens. However, limited diagnostic pottery was recovered together with relatively a large sample of animal bones. Most of the bones seem belong to cattle and goat/sheep-sized animals.



Plate 8: Soil processing from Trench V. Although the midden was almost 1m deep, the archaeological materials were relatively limited.

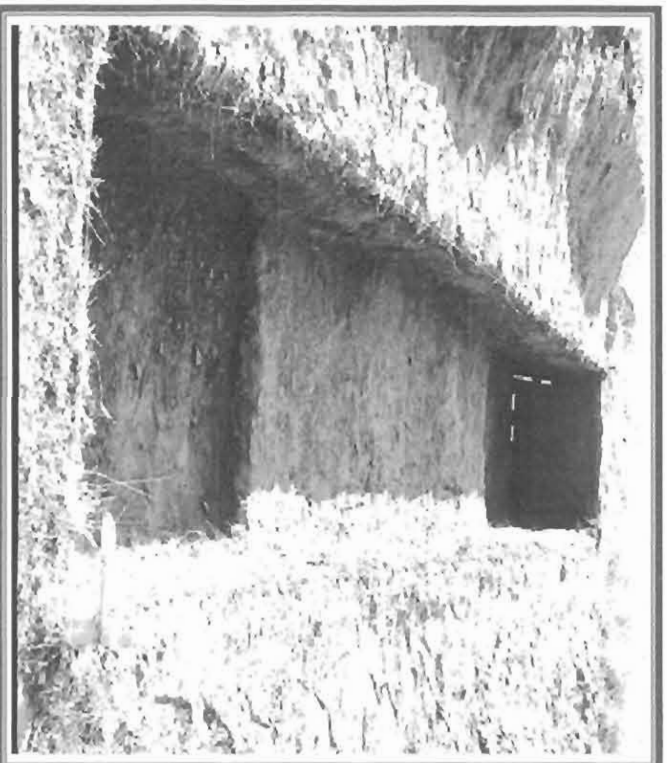


Plate 9: The long test trench was placed on a midden mound to recover a good sample of archaeological material from the site.

TRENCH VI

About a third of the site's surface area has been disturbed by earth moving activities. The impact assessment study noted that these activities only removed the top soil. *In situ* archaeological deposits were thought to be still in tact below. The last test trench was placed over the cleared area. The trench hit an ash midden that went down to 50cm in depth. It is not clear how high the original midden could have been before it was cleared.

Shovel tests over the disturbed area indicated that the most of the deposit had indeed been removed and the bottom gravel was generally laying less than 30cm below. This means most of the archaeological materials were removed by the earth-moving machine.

These limited excavations show that the settlement was not burnt down and no clear house mud rubble was recovered. Furthermore, the dearth of artifacts shows that, when abandoned, the people most probably took their possessions with them leaving very little for archaeologists today to recover. However, there are chances that some sensitive archaeological material such as burials may be uncovered in the course of the proposed construction work.

DISCUSSION

Plot 91 Ivy Park site is one of many Late Iron Age settlements in the Polokwane area. Most probably it is contemporary to what archaeologists call Group II stone wall sites (see Huffman 2002). These date to the 18th and 19th centuries, and were occupied by the Sotho-Tswana people. The ancestors of the present Northern Sotho-Tswana groups such as the Bakoni of Matlala occupied the Polokwane area during Late Iron Age (Mönnig 1967). To put these remarks into context, it is necessary to consider some points about climate, material culture and historical events.

Climatically, the Polokwane region is an acceptable terrain for traditional subsistence farmers. The area today is hot and dry and is favourable to grow sorghum and millet - the common crops (see Huffman 1996). From time to time, however, shifts in climate (Tyson & Lindsay 1992) had direct impact on the development of human culture in this region, just like in southern Africa in general. It was possible to cultivate domestic crops during parts of the Early (about AD 200 - 900) and Middle Iron Ages (ca AD 900-1300). From the 15th to the 17th centuries, the area witnessed arrivals of different Late Iron Age farming communities,

the ancestors of the Northern Sotho-Tswana who occupy the region today (also see Taylor 1984, Manson 1986, Pistorius 1992).

Like other Late Iron Age Sotho-Tswana settlement sites, the remaining layout of stone walling is a variation of the Central Cattle Pattern. The centre is the domain of men and contains the men's court and the cattle kraal. An outer ring of houses forms the residential zone and the domain of women. This pattern is generally associated with Bantu-speaking people, such as Sotho/Tswana, who were patrilineal (tracing their blood from their fathers), had male hereditary leadership, believed that male ancestors played a role in daily life and practised *lobola* (bridewealth in cattle) (Huffman, 1996).

Most Sotho-Tswana settlements were built at the base of hills, where stone was available, and near cultivatable soils. This proximity to cultivatable land was true for most Iron Age people: even though cattle were immensely important, settlements were located in terms of agricultural priorities. Plot 91 site is situated in an open veld away from the hills but close to cultivation land. This seems to be in contrast to most of the similar sites. For example, other studies in the interior to the south in areas such as the Suikerbosrand and Klipriviersberg, Late Iron Age Sotho-Tswana settlements were larger, and some were built on hilltops in defensive positions (Legassik, 1969; Maggs, 1976; Pistorius, 1992; Huffman 2001, 2002). The larger settlement size and hilltop location were defensive reactions to the troubled time known as the *difagane/mfecane* in the mid 19th century (Hamilton, 1995).

CONCLUSION

Plot 91 site belongs to a cluster of the Late Iron Age northern Sotho-Tswana settlements. Although limited archaeological materials were found, the limited excavations will add to the broader picture as research advances. The recovered data is valuable in answering current debate questions about the recent peopling of the area. However, the site will continue to be monitored by an archaeologist during the proposed development. The monitoring program would handle the chance archaeological finds including possible human remains that may accidentally be exposed.

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