

# Report on Archaeological Survey on the farm Vergesig 566 KT

compiled by

## Kudzala Antiquity



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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 January 2005 on the farm Vergesig 566 KT.

Van Vollenhoven (1995:3) describe 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, object of art 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 preliminary 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 on an area extending over approximately five hectares on the farm Vergesig 566 KT. The site is located at high altitude, approximately 1477 metres above sea level and on the edge of the escarpment.

The Graskop-Hazyview road also known as the Kowyns Pass passes by the property on the southern and south-eastern side. An ancient irrigation ditch and what may be an historic road or trade route also passes through the property on the southern side and close to the south-eastern boundary. This route descends along the steep escarpment towards the lower-lying Lowveld further east.

## 3. Aim and method of survey

An archaeological survey aims to establish the whereabouts and nature of cultural heritage sites should they occur in the area. This includes settlements, structures and artefacts which have value

for an individual or group of people in terms of historical, archaeological, architectural and human (cultural) development.

The purpose of this study was 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.

The survey was carried out on foot and with a motor vehicle in an effort to locate any cultural remains in the area where the proposed development will take place. No cultural remains were found during the survey, although it should be noted that most archaeological remains are found beneath the soil surface and may still be revealed during excavation and/or land moving activities.

The transport route descending the escarpment on the southern side of the property may be of historical value, but sources do not indicate whether this specific route was extensively used as a wagon or transport route during historic times. It is a well-known fact however that at least one trade route connecting the interior with Lourenzo Marques (Maputo) passed by Graskop. The remains of the route were photographed and plotted. (Appendix B, photos).

#### 4. History of the area

The first reference to Graskop (grassy peak) dates back to around 1840 when the Voortrekker Hendrik Potgieter, Casper Kruger (Father of President Paul Kruger), Jacobus Hamman, J.G. Bronkhorst among others set out with their families to find a road or trade route to the coast. At this stage Natal was annexed by the British and the Boers had no access to port facilities so they were determined to find a route to the coast of Lourenzo Marques (Maputo).

They travelled across the highveld without hindrance until they reached the edge of the escarpment and its abrupt descent into the bushveld or Lowveld. They explored the escarpment in search of a place suited for safe descent until Casper Kruger found a route, known as Caspersnek which eventually was well-used as a road between Ohrigstad and the bushveld (Lowveld). The party travelled through this gap until they reached *Graskop* a grassy plateau situated on the edge of the escarpment cliffs towering over the Lowveld (Bulpin, 1989).

“At this place Potgieter left the women with a small escort and rode off down Kowyn’s Pass and through the bush to Lourenzo Marques. Behind him the waiting party changed their camp occasionally and at last grew so anxious as time went along that they became certain some disaster had occurred. They named the stream by whose banks they were camped the *Treur* (river of sadness) and set out to return home. Hardly were they on their way, however, but the patrol came safely back and the place of reunion has ever since been called the Blyde (joyful) River” (Bulpin, 1989).

According to Bornman 1995, Graskop as a farm belonged to a N. Steenkamp in 1864 who sold it to the renowned Abel Erasmus also known to the indigenous population as “Dubula Duzi” meaning “He who shoots close-by”. Erasmus sold the farm to the late Z.A.R. President, S.W. Burgers for a £1000. Burgers wanted Graskop to be the centre of the goldfields but his dream was never realized and the town ended up as a railway stop from Nelspruit in 1911 (Bornman, 1995; Pienaar, 1990).

Now during the time when Abel Erasmus stayed on this farm, he acted as a sort of Native Commissioner of the Eastern Transvaal. According to historic sources, from Erasmus' house a pathway dropped down to the bushveld (Lowveld) "with nerve-racking gradients, passing the kraal of the Kwena chief Kowyn, whose name still lingers on over this sensational trail of scenic dramatics" (Bulpin, 1989).

A number of trade routes criss-crossed the Lowveld, all connecting to the coast and one of these as described by Dr J.B. de Vaal, passed close-by Graskop. This route led northwards from Delagoa Bay past rest camps like Compos Corvo, Progresso de Guedes and Castilhopolis, Furley's Drift at the Nkomati River onwards to Tengamanzi next to the Crocodile River then to Joubertshoop, Pretoriuskop, Burgershall, Sabie, Klipkraal, Pilgrim's Rest ending at Rustplaats (Pienaar, 1990). Also it is described that many transport riders during the 1880's chose to take the longer route via Pilgrim's Rest, Caspers Nek and Krugespos to Lydenburg. On top of the plateau they would then "outspan" close to Graskop at the so-called "Paradise Camp" to rest their weary animals.

## 5. Description and evaluation of sites

It would seem that the route described and photographed during the survey may conform to the historic route used by Potgieter and Erasmus and may even have been part of the transport routes used during the 1880's. This statement needs to be verified however and there is no more evidence archaeologically, to substantiate this.

Since the current Kowyn's Pass passes by the property on the southern and south-eastern side, it may be linked to the reference of Erasmus' descending trail to the Lowveld and past the chief Kowyn. This suggests that Erasmus' dwelling may have been situated in the vicinity of the proposed development. No evidence of such ruins could be located, however, this may be due to the fact that the construction of current dwellings and land use served to eradicate such remains. It is, naturally, possible that the site of Erasmus' dwelling is located on a totally different place; there is too little evidence to make a positive conclusion.

## 6. Findings and recommendations

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.

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.

## 7. Bibliography

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## Appendix A

### List of site locations

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

The initials GV followed by a number marks the identity of the site. The “G” stands for Graskop and “V” for the farm Vergesig.

1. Site name: GV1 (Site 1)

Date of compilation: 23/01/2005

GPS reading: Longitude, 30° 51, 307' E

Latitude, 24° 57, 720' S

Altitude: 1 477 m

Photo: 1, 2, 3.

## Appendix B



## Appendix C