



COBUS DREYER

Pr.Archaeologist/Heritage Specialist

**P.O. Box 12910
Brandhof
9324
dreyerc.HUM@mail.uovs.ac.za**

**Tel: 051 - 444 1187
Fax: 051 - 401 2363
Cell: 083 - 357 7982**

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED TOURIST ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES ON THE FARM BUFFELSKLOOF 511 IQ IN THE VREDEFORT DOME CONSERVANCY

INVESTIGATION

The proposed tourist accommodation sites are located on the farm Buffelskloof 511 IQ in the district of Parys. The area was visited and inspected on 7 July 2004 in the company of Me Elbie Erasmus from Enviro Works, Environmental Consultants, Bloemfontein and Mr Todi Netshitangane from the Department of Environmental Affairs, North West Province.

The proposed sites for the future developments of tourist accommodation were examined for the possible presence of archaeological and historical material and also to establish the potential impact on any cultural material.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is done in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), (25 of 1999) and under the Environmental Conservation Act, (73 of 1989).

The different sites were selected and identified by the landowner.

LOCALITY

The farm Buffelskloof 511IQ is located on the north side of the Vaal River (26°51'S. 27°17'E. 2627CD) near Venterskroon, between Parys and Potchefstroom. As a tourist recreation centre, the farm offers accommodation in several mountain chalets and other renovated old farm buildings. Recreational facilities include hiking and biking trails, a swimming pool, a conference room, a game camp and old mine shafts, dating from the 1880s.

The proposed tourist accommodation facilities will be located in the kloof along the slope of the mountain. The following sites were visited and observations were made. The GPS co-ordinates were taken in Cape scale.

1. PROPOSED SITE ONE

The site is located high up in the kloof (26°51'17"S. 027°17'04"E. Altitude 1383m). The immediate area is covered by indigenous vegetation on the edge of a natural perennial watercourse (Fig.1).

2. PROPOSED SITE TWO

The proposed site is located on the eastern side of the watercourse and near the entrance of the kloof against a natural rock outcrop amongst indigenous trees (26°51'27"S. 027°17'15"E. Altitude 1375m) (Fig.). A vehicle parking area for visitors will be placed below the chalet (26°51'27"S. 027°17'15"E. Altitude 1375m) (Fig.).

3. PROPOSED SITE THREE

The site is also located on the eastern side of the kloof along the lower part of the slope of the mountain above the stream (26°51'27"S. 027°17'18"E. Altitude 1368m). (Fig.). The soil surface is covered by grass and stone.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

None of the inspected sites produced any archaeological material. During prehistoric times indigenous people used to settle on level ground or on selected spots on a plateau along mountain slopes. In the case of Buffelspoort 551, Later Iron Age sites are indeed found higher up in the kloof on a plateau above the present proposed area of development.

A Late Iron Age living site of possible archaeological significance produced the remnants of a smelting furnace (Fig.) with associated scattered slag were pointed out by the landowner (26°50'55"S. 027°16'51"E. Alt. 1453m). Part of a lower grinding stone was also found (Fig.).

The cultural material and settlement layout at Buffelspoort dating from the Late Iron Age will most likely coincide with the archaeological occurrences at Askoppies (Fig.). Anton Pelsler of the Cultural History Museum, Pretoria, has recently done extensive archaeological research at Askoppies (2000). Taylor (1979) and Loubser (1985) had previously done more archaeological research in the Buffelshoek area on the northern edge of the Vredefort Dome. Maggs (1976)

also gave attention to this particular region, although it did not fall into the main focus area of his research.

No stone tools or ceramics were recovered, neither were traces of rock art or graffiti of historical significance found at any of the sites.

CULTURAL REMAINS

In the same area, but closer to the mountain (26°50'59"S. 027°16'2E. Alt. 1471m) the remains of two rectangular single room houses, possibly dating from the times of the gold rush (c.1889) are found, in relation with the mining activities (Figs.10&11). One of the buildings was constructed of natural sand stone blocks with clay mortar (Fig.12). The walls of a second structure were built of raw clay blocks with clay mortar (Fig.13), When the age is considered both these structures are still in a fairly good condition.

It could not be ascertained if the structures in the second case, have previously been described and documented. The building method is quite unique and represents an excellent example of this kind of wall construction by early European colonists.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

After examination by the environmental consultants and the archaeologist, it has been agreed that no obvious reasons could be found to restrict any of the existing tourism developments inspected in the Vredefort Dome, or to delay the commencement of further planning in future.

Every archaeological and historical site is unique and should be treated as a non-renewable commodity. All efforts should be made to avoid any unnecessary disturbance or destruction. It is stressed that in case of the discovery of any archaeological or historical material during the course of any further work, all activities should temporarily be stopped in the specific area for inspection by the archaeologist or other specialists.

DISCUSSION

The disturbances by roads and agricultural developments made it unlikely that any remains of early human occupation could have survived. The locality is likewise not close enough to the higher ground to be the obvious living site for people during prehistoric times.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No obvious reasons could be found to delay the commencement of further planning and development of the site. It is recommended that the proposed developments may proceed.

MITIGATION

Concerning the area for the proposed development, no mitigation measures are needed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Elbie Erasmus of Enviroworks Environmental Consultants, Bloemfontein, took me to the site and also supplied information on this investigation. I have benefited from discussions with Dr Johan du Preez, Botanist and Ecologist from Cebo environmental Consultants, Bloemfontein.

MITIGATION

Concerning the areas of the existing developments, mitigation measures are not needed in any of the investigated cases.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Elbie Erasmus of Enviro Works Environmental Consultants, Bloemfontein, arranged the visit to the sites and supplied information on this investigation.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:



Fig.1 Chacma is built on a high protruding rock.

Fig.2 Amanzi is located next to the streambed.

Fig.3 Dassie is built on the slope-edge next to the road and overlooking the stream.

Fig.4 Plumbago towers high on the outcrop next to the road.

Fig.5 Eagle's Nest – hidden behind vegetation along the steep slope above the stream.



Fig.6 General view to the east along the Vaal River.



Fig.7 Remains of a Later Iron Age smelting oven. Length of pocket knife is 8cm



Fig.8 Later Iron Age lower grinding stone. Length of pocket-knife is 8cm



Fig.9 A view of Askoppies looking east.

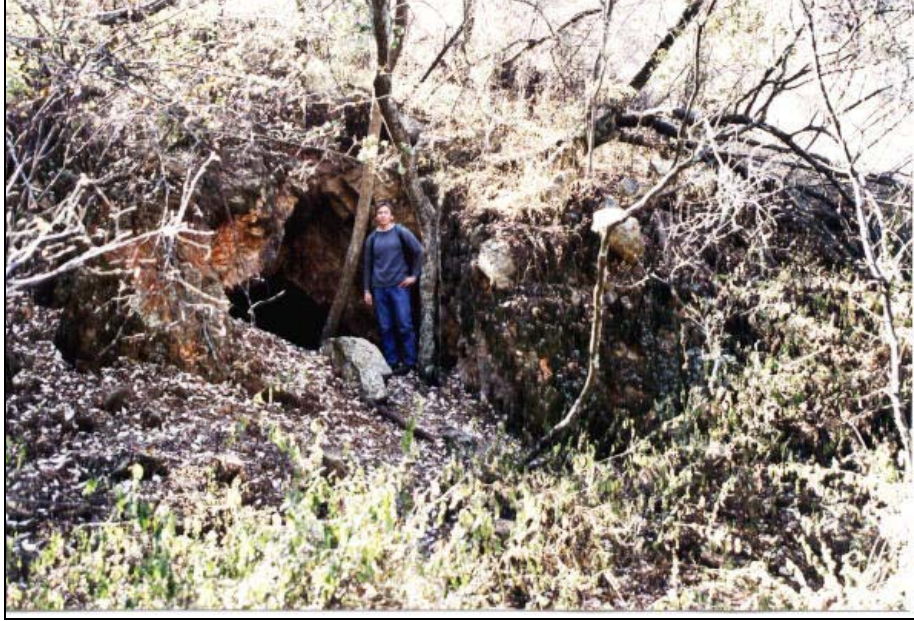


Fig.10 Several old mine shafts are evident of the gold mining activities of the 1880s.

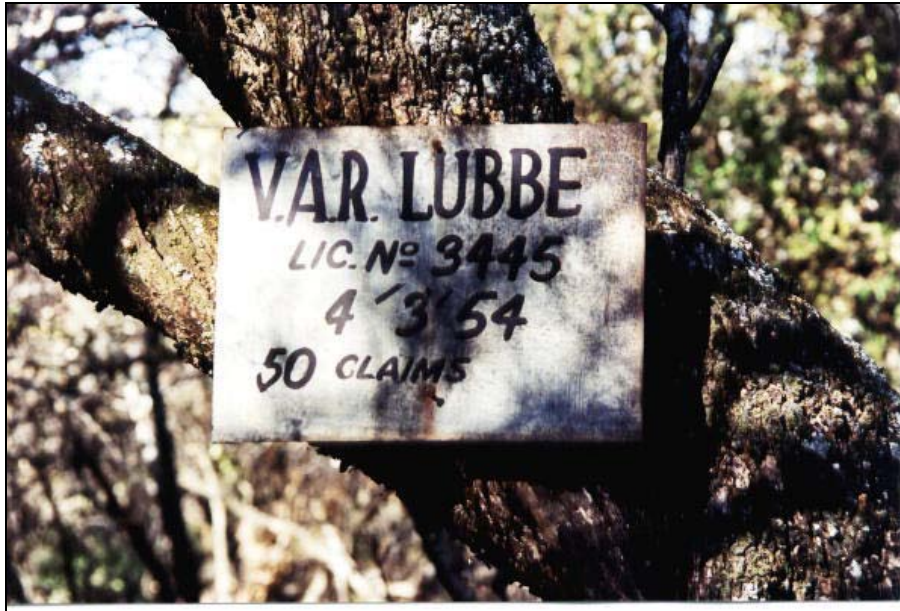


Fig.11 A plate announcing the name of the owner of the claims.



Fig.12 A stone and mortar built remnant of a little house dating from the 1800s.



Fig.13 The wall of a little mining house dating from the 1800s, built of raw clay blocks.