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## **FIRST PHASE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS AT THE FARM BUFFELSKLOOF 511 IQ, VREDEFORT DOME, POTCHEFSTROOM, NORTH-WEST PROVINCE**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A spa and leisure residential developments are planned on Portion 2 of the farm Buffelskloof 511 IQ, Vredefort Dome, Potchefstroom district, North West Province.

Archaeological and cultural material occurs in the form of Later Iron Age circular stone-walled sites, ash heaps and crude potsherds. The farm contains two clusters of Late Iron Age stone-walls, which are of special value to archaeologists and other students of history.

There is a wide distribution of these walls in the specific Vredefort Dome area. The impact on the cultural heritage of the proposed development site at Buffelskloof 511 IQ should be handled with caution.

I recommend that the proposed developments and planning of the site may proceed, provided that caution should be taken during the excavation and building phase. In the case of the discovery of any potsherds and ash heaps or iron tools, the work should immediately be stopped and reported to the archaeologist.

Care should also be taken to avoid damage to any of the walls or to destroy ash heaps during the installation of services and the building of roads. The removal of stones from the walls should be strictly prohibited.

I also recommend that provision should be made in the planning to include at least two monitoring visits by the archaeologist to the site during the construction phase.

Potential buyers of the properties should be informed about the significance of the stone-walled structures.

Basic rules recommended for the protection of archaeological sites, which have been approved by the South African Association of Professional Archaeologists are enclosed herewith and should be implemented as guide lines for the management of the site.

## **INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION**

### **ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

The Iron Age archaeology of the Free State and southern trans-Vaal is characterised by a wide distribution of stone-walled sites along the flat-topped ridges and hills. Studies have revealed detail and consistency in the arrangement and design of the structures. People's expression of culture has left its imprint on the material environment. Thus, recognised settlement patterns display human perceptions with regard to social clustering, economic system and political organisation. Patterns are indicated by the arrangement of huts, stock enclosures and ash heaps in a particular order and in relation to one another. Spatial organisation in general is characterised by the central position of stock byres and the placing of the main dwelling area on the perimeter of the settlement.

During the Later Iron Age, emphasis was not only on stone-building, for additional structures of perishable materials, supplementing living space, have also been revealed. The characteristics of individual settlement patterns allow the recognition of specific cultural groups of people populating the landscape.

A classification of settlement patterns produced a standardised archaeological framework for the ordering of structures and sites characterised by connecting walls, surrounding walls and huts with bilobial courtyards respectively. Furthermore, the research indicated that the division of sites based on layout is confirmed by associated pottery assemblages with different decoration styles. Different settlement patterns also produced huts of different materials in different styles.

The classification of sites is based on the assumption that settlement layout is bound and prescribed by cultural perceptions. The identification of different ethnic groups is thus possible from the way in which these traditional peoples have organised their different living places in terms of space and time. The final result was directed by cultural preference (choice) and function. The importance of livestock, personal status, kinship, social organisation and the diverse roles of men, women and offspring have always been important in the understanding of settlement patterns.

## **BUFFELSKLOOF SETTLEMENTS**

I anticipate that the Buffelskloof settlements will have a similar site arrangement as those found at the excavated site at Askoppies on the farm Tygerfontein 488 IQ (Pelser 2002). This type of settlement is widely scattered over an extensive part of the Vredefort Dome in particular and in the area north of the Vaal River. These sites are also found at Suikerbosrand, near Heidelberg.

The remains normally show up as a ring of scalloped stone walls surrounding several stock enclosures. From this, it is concluded that these dwellings consisted of a cone on cylinder hut with stone-walled courtyards at both front and rear, forming a bilobial layout, which is visible in the wall plan. The huts are arranged around a cluster of central cattle byres. Raw materials have been substituted at different localities, resulting in a variation in settlement pattern where clay walls replaced stone-walling of the front lobe at Bothaville and at Willem Pretorius Game Reserve on the Sand River, near Ventersburg (Dreyer 1997).

Pottery decorations associated with this settlement type are characterised by shallow line incisions in bands and triangles below the rim and on the shoulder, combined with straight or curved lines and areas of red ochre burnish on the body of clay vessels (Maggs 1976).

The occupation of the sites with bilobial dwellings is ascribed to Batswana (Thlaping and Rolong) groups. It is also possible to link Kubung people to every known site of this kind (Maggs 1976).

According to radiocarbon dating and oral history, these sites were occupied from the 16th and 17th to early 19th century at Ventersburg, and 18th to early 19th century at Bothaville. A single bone sample from Jansfontein in the Doringberg, Ventersburg, produced a calibrated date of 1670, which is slightly later than the Ventersburg date (Dreyer 1992). Taylor (1979), Pelsner (2002)

## **INVESTIGATION**

From previous archaeological investigations in the Vredefort Dome and surrounding areas experts are aware that archaeological remains occur in the form of Later Iron Age stone-walled settlements (Maggs 1976, Taylor 1979, Loubser 1985, Pelsner 2005, Dreyer 2005a, Dreyer 2005b, Dreyer 2006).

The distribution of these artefacts seems to be fairly general and widespread and the proposed developments at Buffelskloof 511 IQ should be handled with caution to reduce the impact on the cultural heritage.

The sites for the proposed residential developments on the farm Buffelskloof 511 IQ, Potchefstroom were visited on 8 August 2008.

The site was examined for any possible traces of cultural and historical remains to establish the potential impact of the developments on any archaeological and cultural historical material. The Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is done in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), (25 of 1999) and under the Environmental Conservation Act, (73 of 1989).

## LOCALITY

The farm Buffelskloof 511 IQ is located on the northern bank of the Vaal River on the road to Venterskroon (Map 1) (Surveyor-General O.F.S. 1973).

The farm is reached from the R53 Parys - Potchefstroom road and by travelling west on the S646 gravel road to Venterskroon along the Vaal River.

The area is characterised by Bushveld vegetation. The soil surface is very stony with a dense bush and tree and grass cover.

The area was investigated on foot and all finds and features were plotted by GPS and recorded on camera.

The following GPS co-ordinates (Cape scale) were taken (2627CD). Coordinate points were taken at random (Map 2). The proposed areas of development are indicated on Map 3.

A	26°50'41"S 027°16'51"E Altitude 1440m (Figs.1-5).
B	26°50'18"S 027°18'36"E Altitude 1542m (Figs.6&7).
C	26°50'26"S 027°18'06"E Altitude 1518m (Fig.8).
CC	26°50'26"S 027°17'52"E Altitude 1533m (Fig.9).
Deck (Spa)	26°50'48"S 027°17'56"E Altitude 1529m (Figs.10&11,29).
E	26°50'23"S 027°18'37"E Altitude 1536m (Figs.12&13).
F	26°49'50"S 027°18'33"E Altitude 1527m (Figs.14-16).
Grave	26°50'42"S 027°17'52"E Altitude 1525m (Fig.17).

H	26°50'07"S 027°18'12"E Altitude 1510m (Figs.18&19).
J	26°50'12"S 027°18'11"E Altitude 1499m (Figs.20&21).
K	26°50'24"S 027°17'52"E Altitude 1464m (Fig.22).
L	26°50'45"S 027°17'08"E Altitude 1399m (Fig.23).
M	26°51'01"S 027°17'24"E Altitude 1440m (Figs.24&25).
MM	26°51'05"S 027°17'46"E Altitude 1374m (Figs.26&27).
Bore Hole	26°50'34"S 027°17'14"E Altitude 1432m (Fig.28).

## **RESULTS**

### **FINDS**

#### **STONE-WALLING**

The area for the proposed developments at Buffelskloof 511 IQ, Potchefstroom, contains an elaborate number of Later Iron Age stone-walls (Fig.16). The walls are mostly in a poor and rundown state of preservation (Figs.14,25), while others show evidence of heavy wall-robbing (Fig.24). Despite this occurrence, however, the settlement pattern is still recognisable.

There is a thick grass stand all over the site (Fig.) and only a few crude and undecorated potsherds were found on the surface at Point M.

### **DISCUSSION**

The total area covered by the Vredefort Dome Conservancy is very rich in Later Iron Age (LIA) stone walled settlement sites. According to radio-carbon dating and cultural remains the Late Iron Age occupation of the Vredefort Dome area dates between mid-seventeenth century to about mid-nineteenth century (Pelser 2005). The survey by Bakker et al. (2005) does not include detailed descriptions of all the sites and many individual stone enclosures and clusters representing prehistoric living areas will most certainly be discovered as the developments continue.

It is therefore, important to keep in mind that 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 of the features or the environment.

## **ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT**

The proposed residential developments will have a serious impact on the archaeological and cultural remains at Buffelskloof 511 IQ, Potchefstroom. To reduce the impact on the cultural heritage remains, the proposed residential developments at the farm will have to be moved away from the areas of stone-walling.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

No obvious reasons could be found to delay further planning and development of the site. I recommend that the proposed developments at the selected sites may proceed, taking the stone-walled settlements into consideration.

It is stressed that in case of the discovery of any archaeological remains in the form of stone tools, stone-walling, pottery and other archaeological material of significance during the course of the work, all activities should temporarily be stopped for inspection by the archaeologist and other specialists from the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.

Care should also be taken to avoid damage to any of the walls or to destroy ash heaps during the installation of services and the building of roads.

The removal of stones from the walls should be strictly prohibited.

All developments should be planned and executed in close consultation with the archaeologist. I also recommend that the planning should include at least two monitoring visits by the archaeologist to the site during the construction phase.

It will be essential to inform potential buyers about the significance of the structures. Certain rules, which are recommended by the archaeologists for the protection of cultural heritage sites should apply to the site at Buffelskloof 511 IQ, during the construction phase and afterwards.

## **MITIGATION**

Care should be taken not to damage any of the walls or destroy ash heaps during the installation of services and roads. The removal of stones from the walls should be strictly prohibited.

The archaeologist must be consulted before and during the planning and building stages of the development.

Basic rules recommended for the protection of archaeological sites, which have been approved by the South African Association of Professional Archaeologists are enclosed herewith and should be implemented as guide lines for the management of the site.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

The recommendations and guidelines for the utilization and preservation of the site are made in the knowledge that **all archaeological, historical and palaeontological finds are protected in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), (25 of 1999).**

The following minimum standards are approved by archaeologist and are prescribed for site museums or other places of interest open to the public. The guidelines are therefore strongly recommended as the basic rules at any archaeological site, and are applicable in the case of Buffelskloof, Potchefstroom.

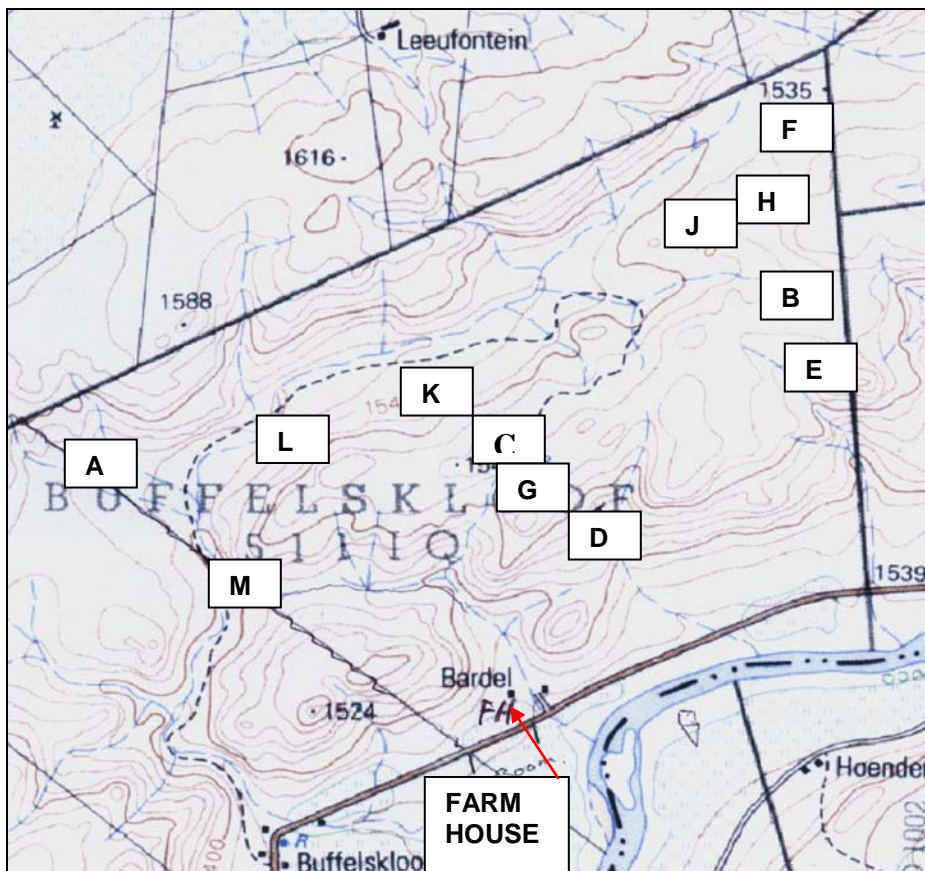
- Do not allow unauthorised visitors to the ruins;
- Always have a knowledgeable guide available to accompany visitors to the site;
- Allow visits to certain selected sites only;
- Educate the regular visitor about preserving the site;
- Prepare an explanatory brochure for the farm;
- Have a single access road to the site;
- Provide a clearly marked parking area at the site;
- Plan hiking routes where the site can not be damaged;
- Prevent people from climbing on to the walls;
- Control vegetation growth at the site;
- Consider a notice board explaining the sites;
- Do not **restore** the walls, leave them as they are;
- Do not remove any finds (e.g. stone tools, beads or potsherds);
- Provide a litter bin at the parking area or along the hiking trail;
- Visit sites regularly to check on litter, damage, vegetation etc;
- Use a qualified archaeologist when planning any developments;

(SA3 Newsletter 37, 1992)

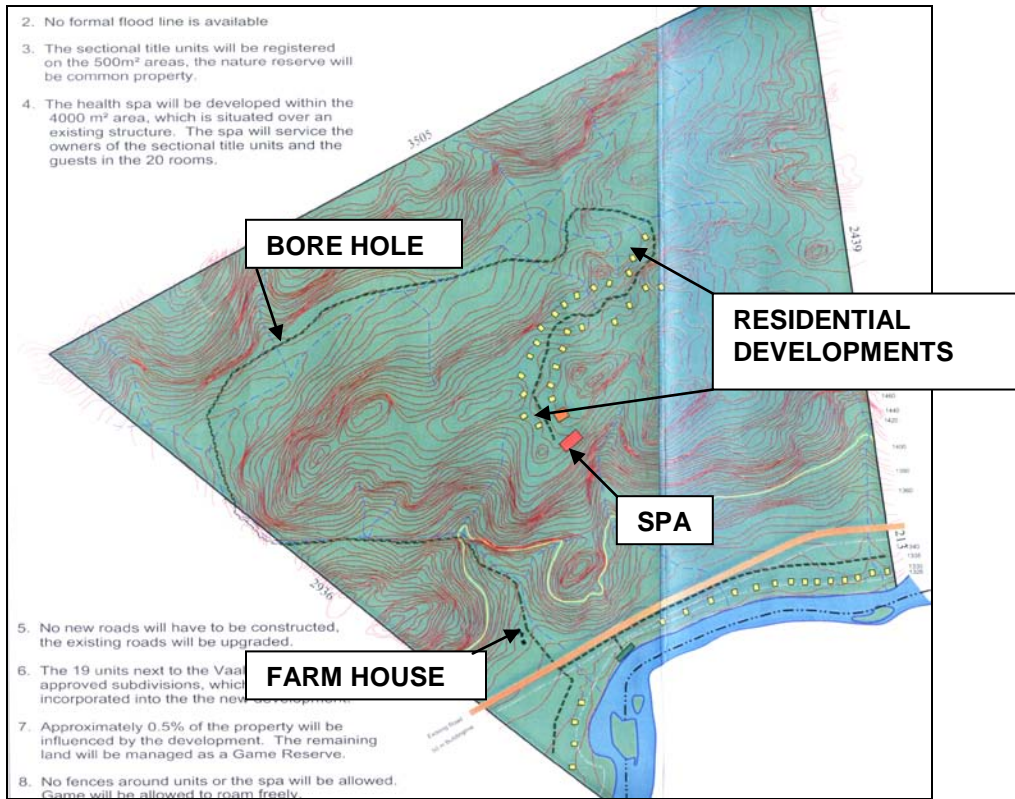
## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:



Map 1 Locality of the Vrederskroon in relation to Potchefstroom, Parys, Vrederskroon & Reitzburg.



Map 2 The farm Buffelskloof 511 IQ on the Vaal River near Parys (2627CD). Coordinate points were allocated at random.



Map 3 Proposed areas of development at Buffelskloof 511 IQ, Potchefstroom.



Fig.1 Point A.



Fig.2 Vague remains of a stone wall at Point A.



Fig.3 Stone wall remains at Point A.



Fig.4 Donga at Point A.



Fig.5 Old plough lands at Point A.



Fig.6 Point B.



Fig.7 Point B.





Fig.8 Point C in the area intended for leisure residential .developments



Fig.9 Point CC indicating the limit of the residential developments.



Fig.10 Point D at the deck earmarked for the development of the spa.



Fig.11 Point D at the site intended for the development of the spa.



Fig.12 Point E.



Fig.13 Point E.



Fig.14 Remains of a stone wall at Point F.



Fig.15 Point F.



Fig.16 Stone walls at Point F.



Fig.17 A single stone covered grave at Point G.



Fig.18 Point H.



Fig.19 Dense vegetation at Point H.



Fig.20 Point J.



Fig.21 .Point J.



Fig.22 Point K.



Fig.23 Point L.





Fig.24 Stone walls at Point M.



Fig.25 Stone walls at Point M.



Fig.26 Point MM.



Fig.27 Point MM.



Fig.28 View at the borehole near Point L.



Fig.29 View from Point D (proposed Spa) towards the Vaal River.