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PRELIMINARY
PHASE 2 REPORT
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION

MAKAPAN VALLEY – ROAD UPGRADING
LIMPOPO PROVINCE

FOR: SAHRA
Polokwane City

Hester Roodt
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Tel: (015) 225 7075
Cell: 073 222 4867
E-mail: hr19@pixie.co.za



PO Box 1600
POLOKWANE CITY
0 7 0 0

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1. INTRODUCTION

R&R Cultural Resource Consultants were contracted by Ron Viney, SAHRA, Polokwane City, to undertake a Phase 2 archaeological excavation of the site, after workers had noticed some ashy deposits in the dirt road leading to the declared heritage site, namely the Makapan Caves and the Lime Works. This road is presently being upgraded (tarred) in order to improve access and to promote tourism.

A permit for excavation was issued by SAHRA (Permit No. 80/03/04/003/51). This report provides an overview of the archaeological features that were detected on the site.

As this is only a preliminary report, and the excavations are not complete nor are all the material processed yet, only the finds from Block 1, TT 1 will be presented. Similar finds were recovered from the other excavation units. Other important finds include bone/OES beads and fragments of a freshwater mussel. Faunal remains still need to be analysed.

2. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The main source of information was a report from the monitors employed by SAHRA. A surface survey of the road area indicated the presence of middens, indicated by ash and pottery sherds.

Patrick Moore excavated the Ficus Iron Age Site for his M.A degree in 1981. This site is located in the saddle between the cliff forming the Ficus Cave ridge and a small isolated hillock directly opposite the cave entrance. The Iron Age presence extends southwards as far as the Mwaridzi stream. According to Moore, "*the earliest occupation dates from \pm 550 AD (Early Iron Age, Lydenburg Phase), and the second to about 870 AD - Eiland Phase. The third occupation represents an ambiguous 15th – 16th century entity at around 1560 AD. Finally, there are superficial relics pertaining to Late Iron Age and late 19th and early 20th century occupation of the site*" (Cave Klapwijk & Assoc & J.M Maquire). Ashy patches in the present dirt-road were interpreted as representing the remains of burnt dung accumulations, marking the former location of Iron Age cattle byres.

3. METHODOLOGY

The road area had been swept by the workers, the sand heaps remaining on the side of the road. It was decided to excavate three of the more prominent features. The location of each excavation unit was recorded by means of a GPS (Garmin 12). The excavations and excavated material were photographed with a Canon digital camera.

The workspace (one half of the road) had been fenced off by using road workers' tape and heavy sandbags. The excavation units were pegged out, and a team assigned to each unit whose responsibility it was to excavate, sieve, sort and pack. The units were excavated in 10 cm arbitrary layers. Artefacts were cleaned and labelled off site. Every afternoon all

excavated units were covered with plastic bags, filled with sieved sand to prevent cattle trampling the excavations.

Limitations

- **Time and funding** are the most limiting factors, as work has already started on the road. Initial funding allowed only for two days' work, which under the circumstances, are insufficient, as more features had been recovered during the last day's work. The archaeologist, together with an assistant, however, continued to work for two more days on site. Additional funding was procured for three more days' excavation.
- Not enough workers could be employed to efficiently complete the task within the limited time. Although the workers worked hard, it was a learning experience to them, and thus work continued very slowly under constant supervision.
- The heavy construction vehicles literally travel through the site on a regular basis, which is hazardous to some of the archaeological features. Although the area had been demarcated and the road temporarily diverted, the heavy vehicles still need to travel through one particular site, which is located in the centre of the road and extends well off the shoulder of the road.
- Although the excavation was executed as thorough as possible, circumstances allowing, it is certain that some important archaeological features had remained undetected.

4. LOCATION

Refer to map, South Africa (1:50 000 2439 AA). The site is located on the farm Makapansgat 39KS, and in the road next to the Peppercorn and Ficus caves.



Fig 1. Map of Makapansgat 39KS. The dirt road is ochre coloured, while the archaeological site is coloured in red.

5. EXCAVATIONS & ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

On arrival at the site, a sieving team was assigned to the surface layer that had been swept and shovelled the previous day. This mainly resulted in recovery of very small bone, pottery and wood material, but simultaneously acted to sensitise the workers to the type of material expected to be found in the excavations. Not much progress was made with the recovery of this material, for as soon as the first excavated material arrived at the sieves, the teams had to start working on it.

Four units were excavated due to their visual prominence on the road surface. These are numbered Block 1 (Test Trench 1), and Blocks 2 and 3. The fourth site, an iron smelting site, is referred to as the “Metal Site”. Eight workers were assigned by Ron Viney to assist in the excavation process.

Block 1, Test Trench 1

S 24°08'53.3" E 29°10'13.4"



Fig 2. Block 1, Surface.



Fig 3. Block 1, TT1, Surface.

This site was selected for excavation due to its extended, light grey ashy deposit. Block 1 was measured out 262cm x 432cm, with the test trench (TT1) 100cm x 432cm, on the side and parallel with the road.

Block 1 was swept to reveal the road surface, where surface finds included pottery sherds. As can be seen from the photograph, the soil is hard and compacted.

The surface of Test Trench 1 (TT1) shows characteristic ash deposits, the typical coloration of either a cattle byre or a midden.

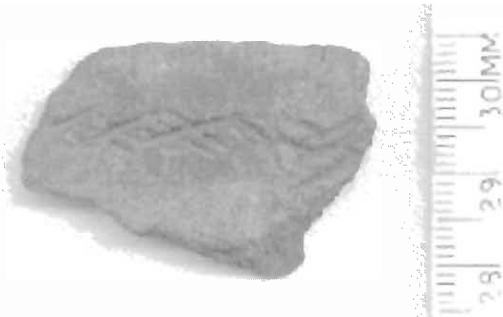


Fig. 4. Pottery from BL1 TT1, Layer 1



Fig. 5. Pottery from BL1 TT1, Layer 3

Fig. 6. Pottery from BL1 TT1, Layer 4



Figs 7 & 8. TT1, Layer 5. "Dog" burial.

At a depth of approximately 120cm below surface an animal skull, presumably that of a dog, was recovered. As more bones were revealed within the southern wall, it was decided to extend the excavation into that part in order to recover the complete animal. Some pottery sherds were recovered from below the body, while more were found on top. Stones covered the body, which relates it to a burial.

This burial is located within an ashy deposit immediately next to, or within the walls of a homestead. Further excavation into the rest of Block 1 could possibly clear this up.



Fig. 9. Pottery from BLI TT1, Layer 6

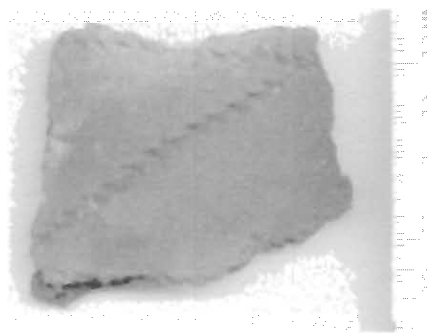


Fig. 10. Pottery from BLI TT1, Layer 7

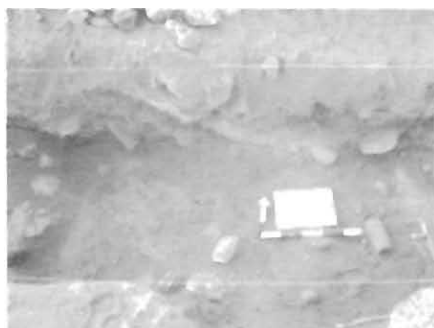


Fig 11. TT1, Layer 8.

This layer is 140 cm below surface. The two ash lenses are clearly seen in the northern wall.

Fig 12. Pottery from TT1, Layer 9.

Layer 9 is approximately 145 cm below surface.

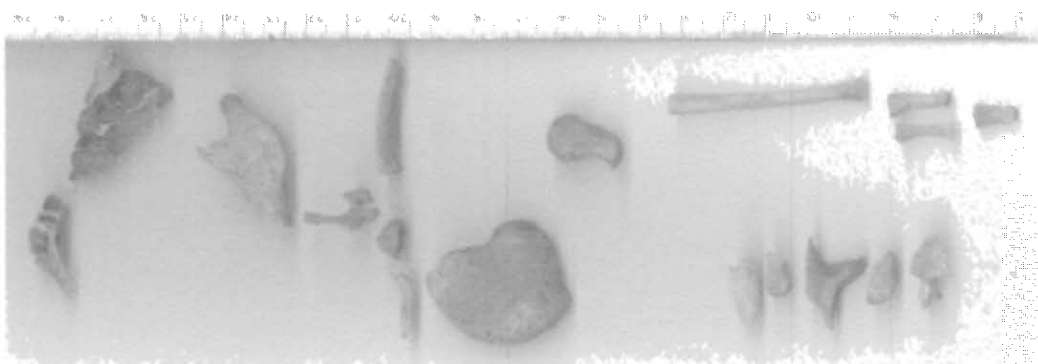


Fig 13. TT1, Layer 10.

Among other finds, this skeleton (*Fig 13*) from an infant (+ 10 months, ? female) was found in this layer. The skeletal parts retrieved are very fragmentary, but include a fragmented maxilla, partial left mandible, partial cervical vertebra and a vertebral body, two fragmented ribs, a right ilium, left ischium, partial fibula, two metatarsal or –carpal bones and one phalanx. Other fragmented and unidentified bones, probably belonging to the remains, are included in the photograph.

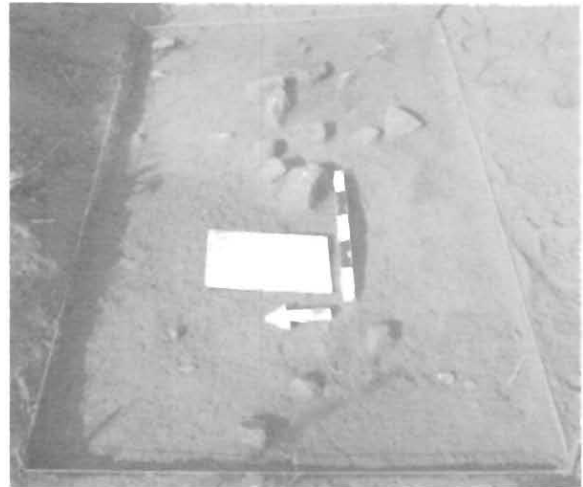
The exact location within the excavation unit is uncertain, but it is possible that it could be linked to the above-mentioned dog burial.

Block 2

S 24°08'53.2" E 29°10'14.5"

Block 2 measured 103cm x 187cm. It is located on the shoulder of the road, and approximately 30m from Block 1. It was characterised by an ashy deposit. Layer 1 revealed an upper grinder, some decorated pot sherds and bone material.

Fig. 14. Block 2, Layer 1



Block 3

S 24°08'53.5" E 29°10'13.5"

Block 3 was measured out to 100cm x 100cm. Surface evidence indicated a pit. Although the extent of its size was not known, it was decided to limit the excavation size to 1m as it is located on the side of the road yet in the part accessible to traffic, the opposite side being partitioned off.

In this layer the boundary between the ash deposit and the surrounding earth is even more enhanced, with bone and pottery being recovered from the ash, whilst the surrounding area is sterile.

Layer 4 is 23 cm below road surface. Ash deposits are present in both the southern and western walls, with a large concentration towards the centre of the block. No ash deposits occur in either the northern or eastern walls. The remainder of the pit thus occurs more to the southwestern side of the excavation unit.

Fig 15. Block 3, Layer 2.

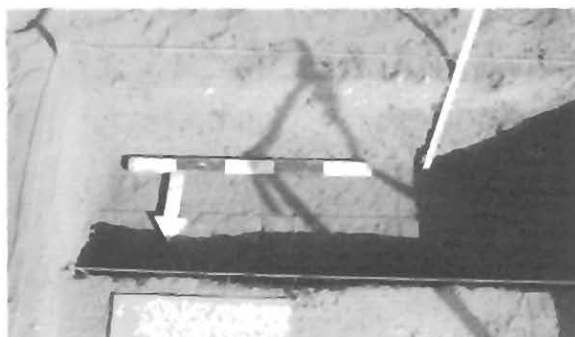
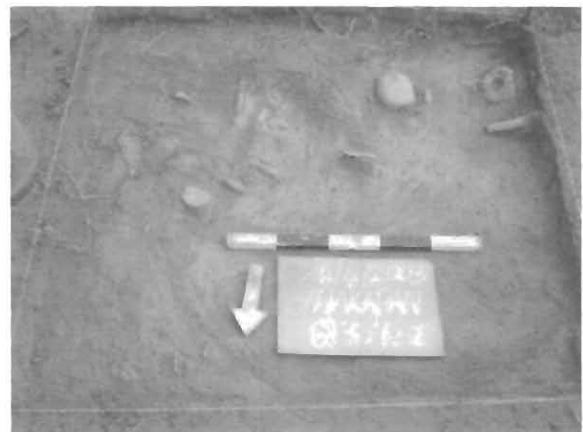


Fig 16. Block 3, TT, Layer 5.

This layer is 33 cm below road surface. This last layer of Block 3 became sterile. It was decided to continue with a test trench in the southern side of the unit, which was 33 cm wide.

As neither the test trench nor the rest of Block 3 exhibited any more features and the reddish brown soil (the natural colour of the surrounding area) seemed to be sterile, it was decided to stop excavation in this unit.

The reasons for this are that the other units also contained ash middens where large amounts of material were procured. It would probably be a replication of what the others had to deliver if one had to continue excavating this unit (*F Roodt – pers comm*).

Metal Site

S 24°08'53.4" E 29°10'15.0"

The characteristic surface is hard, compacted and orange in parts, indicative of heat. Slag, iron droplets and tuyère fragments were imbedded in the layer and present in the immediate covering layer, which consists of a very fine, compacted earth, probably representative of a flood some time in the past. Some parts (*Fig 18 below*) exhibit black, vitrified remains of clay structures, which were probably furnace walls. Samples had been taken.

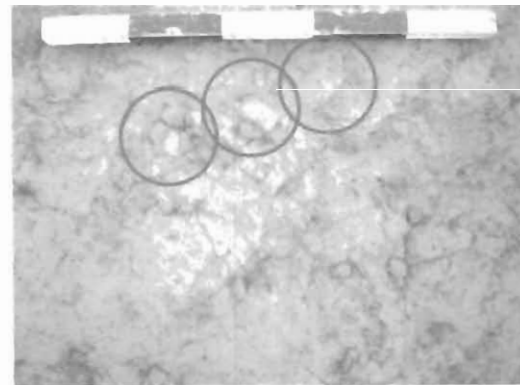


Fig 18.

Fig 19. From this photograph it is clear that the metal site extends well beyond the road.



Fig 17. The surface of the road had been swept after the initial discovery of the metal site. The dark area is where the furnace remains are located. The encircled area shows the location of the first set of tuyère fragments.



Figs 20 & 21. Both photographs show embedded tuyère fragments in the burnt clay/soil. These are encircled in red.

6. EVALUATION

The characteristic Eiland decorations on the pottery seems to derive from the early Eiland phase, and in this regard this archaeological site could confirm Moore's (1981) early dates for Eiland. The Eiland date he acquired for his excavations at Ficus is about 100 years earlier and contemporaneous with Klingbeil ceramics, the second phase in the Lydenburg area. He reasoned that, *"if the radiocarbon samples from Ficus (the second component) and Klingbeil are truly associated with the ceramics that they are purported to date, and are equally accurate, then Eiland could not have developed out of Klingbeil: there must be at least one other regional facies of the Western Stream during the second phase"* (Moore, 1981). According to Huffman (pers. comm) Eiland originated from Diamant, a regional facies of the Western Stream, and contemporary with Doornkop and Klingbeil. Bearing in mind that the Diamant find site is in the Waterberg area, the early Eiland dates of Moore at Makapan may prove accurate, should Eiland have derived from Diamant.

The area is thus sensitive and may contain important undetected archaeological remains that could be unearthed during development.

7. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

As Moore has correctly concluded, there are still some culture history questions left unanswered. The composition of the ceramic phase between Ficus (A) and Eiland is still not well understood. It is important to know whether the Eiland material is like Klingbeil – in the Lydenburg area – or a member of another (possibly Diamant) but related facies. Also, origin dates for Eiland has not yet been established. Moore's early dates from Ficus need to be verified.

It is indicated that these archaeological remains will be affected by the proposed development and the report recommends mitigation measures that should be implemented to minimise the adverse effect of the proposed development on this site. The mitigation measures also apply to archaeological remains not detected during the limited excavations, but which could still be uncovered.

In view of the possible early dates expected from the site, as well as the possibility of finding an Eiland homestead, it is recommended that in depth research should be conducted. In view of the above it is recommended that the previously undetected archaeological remains require further mitigation measures.

Additionally, funding would be required for radiocarbon dating of material, flora and faunal analysis.

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- Hester Roodt** (Nat Dip Fine Arts, Nat Higher Dip (Post School Education), BA (Hons) Archaeology, UP)
For: R & R Cultural Resource Management