

9/2/2009/10/10/10  
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**A REPORT ON THE RECOVERY OF LATE IRON AGE  
HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS FROM WILLOW ACRES,  
STAND 57, GUINEA FOWL STREET  
SILVER LAKES ESTATE,  
PRETORIA EAST, GAUTENG PROVINCE**

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**FIELDWORK: November 2003**

**REPORT: December 2003**

Pelser.

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## SUMMARY

A private home developer at Stand 57, Willow Acres (Silver Lakes Estate) requested the NCHM to recover human skeletal remains from foundation trenches dug here for his house. The remains of at least 3 individuals, all dating to the Late Iron Age (LIA), were recovered. These burials are associated with an ash midden that is related to a large LIA stone walled settlement in the area. Further development is threatening the preservation of this and other sites in the area, and recommendations to remedy this are put forward at the end of the report.

## INTRODUCTION

During October 2003, a private homebuilder at the Willow Acres Extension of the Silver Lakes Estate requested the Archaeology Section of the National Cultural History Museum, to investigate human skeletal remains exposed in the foundations of his house. We subsequently phoned SAHRA Gauteng to investigate the site with us. The Gauteng office complied and we carried out the site visit together with the homeowner. During the site visit we recommended that the skeletal remains be removed, and a permit (PERMIT NO: **80/03/11/007/51**) for the work be issued by SAHRA. The SAHRA Gauteng office also recommended that no further development take place until a decision is reached regarding further archaeological investigations in the area. A major Late Iron Age (LIA) stone walled settlement is situated here, and any housing development will destroy and disturb the site.

It is the second time this year that the NCHM was called in for such rescue archaeology operations at Silver Lakes. During May, SAHRA Gauteng was informed by a private developer at Stand 1610, of a burial exposed in foundations being dug for his house. SAHRA Gauteng called in the NCHM's archaeology section, which exhumed and removed the skeletal remains. A report on this has already been lodged at SAHRA.

## LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

Aspects concerning the conservation of cultural resources are mainly dealt with in two acts. These are the South African Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999) and the Environmental Conservation Act (Act 73 of 1989).

### **South African Heritage Resources Act**

#### **Archaeology, palaeontology and meteorites**

Section 35(4) of this act states that no person may, without a permit issued by the responsible heritage resources authority:

- (a) destroy, damage, excavate, alter, deface or otherwise disturb any archaeological or palaeontological site or any meteorite;

- (b) destroy, damage, excavate, remove from its original position, collect or own any archaeological or palaeontological material or object or any meteorite;
- (c) trade in, sell for private gain, export or attempt to export from the Republic any category of archaeological or palaeontological material or object, or any meteorite; or
- (d) bring onto or use at an archaeological or palaeontological site any excavation equipment or any equipment that assists in the detection or recovery of metals or archaeological and palaeontological material or objects, or use such equipment for the recovery of meteorites.
- (e) alter or demolish any structure or part of a structure which is older than 60 years as protected.

The above mentioned may only be disturbed or moved by an archaeologist, after receiving a permit from the South African Heritage Resources Agency.

**Human remains:**

In terms of Section 36(3) of the National Heritage Resources Act, no person may, without a permit issued by the relevant heritage resources authority:

- (a) destroy, damage, alter, exhume or remove from its original position of otherwise disturb the grave of a victim of conflict, or any burial ground or part thereof which contains such graves;
- (b) destroy, damage, alter, exhume or remove from its original position or otherwise disturb any grave or burial ground older than 60 years which is situated outside a formal cemetery administered by a local authority; or
- (c) bring onto or use at a burial ground or grave referred to in paragraph (a) or (b) any excavation, or any equipment which assists in the detection or recovery of metals.

Human remains that are less than 60 years old are subject to provisions of the Human Tissue Act (Act 65 of 1983) and to local regulations.

Exhumation of graves must conform to the standards set out in the **Ordinance on Excavations (Ordinance no. 12 of 1980)** (replacing the old Transvaal Ordinance no. 7 of 1925). Permission must also be gained from the descendants (where known), the National Department of Health, Provincial Department of Health, Premier of the Province and local police. Furthermore, permission must also be gained from the various landowners (i.e. where the graves are located and where they are to be relocated) before exhumation can take place.

Human remains can only be handled by a registered undertaker or an institution declared under the **Human Tissues Act (Act 65 of 1983 as amended)**.

## **Environmental Conservation Act**

This act states that a survey and an evaluation of cultural resources should be undertaken in areas where development, which will change the face of the environment, is to be made. The impact of the development on the cultural resources should also be determined and proposals to mitigate this impact are to be formulated.

## **AIMS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK**

The aims of the archaeological work were the following:

- (a) to remove the exposed skeletal remains from their respective locations at the site
- (b) to record the position of each individual in terms of associated features and objects, if any
- (c) to try and locate any in situ remains not exposed by the construction work

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND AREA**

The Willow Acres Extension of the Silver Lakes Estate lies to the east of Pretoria (See Appendix A). Stand 57 is located in the middle of a large stone walled LIA settlement that covers an extensive area next to and along the foot of a prominent outcrop. The foundations for the house were dug on a large ash midden. The ashy deposit of the midden is clearly visible in the walls of the trenches, and over and above the human skeletal remains pieces of pottery, faunal skeletal remains and some upper grinding stones were also identified. Sections of stonewalling also seem to have been disturbed by the development. The GPS location of the site is 25 45'53.1" S and 28 22'28.6" E.

All the human skeletal remains have been completely disturbed and are out of context, which made interpretations in terms of burial type and position extremely difficult. The features and grave goods that might have been associated were also not identified. Besides Stand 57, a number of adjacent stands are located on top of stone walled features such as cattle enclosures, huts and granary platforms. At the time of this rescue operation development on these stands have not yet commenced, although they were clearly demarcated with danger tape. No development should be allowed here until further archaeological investigations have been undertaken.

## **RECOVERING THE HUMAN REMAINS**

With the skeletal remains out of context and completely exposed, proper archaeological methodology was not utilized. In total of three and maybe even four individuals are represented by the skeletal remains. The remains were mainly found on top of discarded heaps of soil that came from the foundation trenches, and were sometimes scattered over a fairly extensive area. Only one of the individuals was found in close proximity to what can be described as a formal burial pit.

Photographs were taken of the remains in their positions before they were removed (See Appendix B). Care was also taken to search a wide area around the exposed skeletal parts in order to recover all possible remains.

## **RESULTS**

The remains of at least three, and maybe four, individuals were recovered from the foundation trenches at Stand 57. The remains were nearly completely removed from their original locations (presumably burial pits) in an ash midden associated with a large LIA stone walled settlement in the area. The LIA in South Africa dates to between the late 1600's and mid 1800's AD. The site here probably dates to before, and just after, the arrival of the first Europeans to the area. The human skeletal remains were scattered over a fairly wide area, and this made any substantial interpretations regarding burial types nearly impossible. Only one of the skeletons was found in close proximity to its original location, a feature that seems to have been a burial pit. Part of this skeleton was found in a posture that indicates an upright sitting position in a pit dug in the midden. The other individuals were more than likely also buried in this manner.

No detailed analysis of the remains has been undertaken yet, and all information provided here is based on superficial observations made during the recovery process. All three identified individuals were adult in age. Determining the sex of these individuals was difficult, but at least one, if not all three, seems to be female (based on pelvis size and shape). No distinct pathological indications have been noted, although extra bone growth (calcification) was noted on the vertebrae of one skeleton. This is normally associated with things such as arthritis and strenuous labour during the persons' life.

The University of Pretoria Anatomy Department will undertake detailed analysis of the skeletal remains at a later stage.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The burials recovered from Stand 57 in the Willow Acres extension of the larger Silver Lakes Estate have a LIA origin, and are associated with a LIA stone walled settlement in the area. The settlement comprises features typical of this time-period, and includes cattle enclosures, huts, granary platforms and ash middens. These are not the first burials recovered from the area in recent times due to residential development, and the impact on the LIA sites are not to be underestimated. If proper archaeological investigations are not carried out the information contained by these sites will be lost forever. With the above mentioned in mind the following is recommended:

- (a) that the owner of Stand 57 be allowed to continue with his work. The archaeological deposit here has been completely destroyed and no in situ material remains
- (b) that further housing development on stands adjacent to Stand 57 be halted until further notice

- (c) that a detailed cultural resources survey be carried out in the area, in order to locate, identify and document all sites of cultural importance
- (d) that the impact of further development on these sites be assessed and determined, if any
- (e) that mitigation on sites and features that will be impacted upon is undertaken. Mitigation will include the detailed mapping and drawing of the LIA stone walled sites, as well as excavations at selected areas. Funds for this work must be made available by the developer.

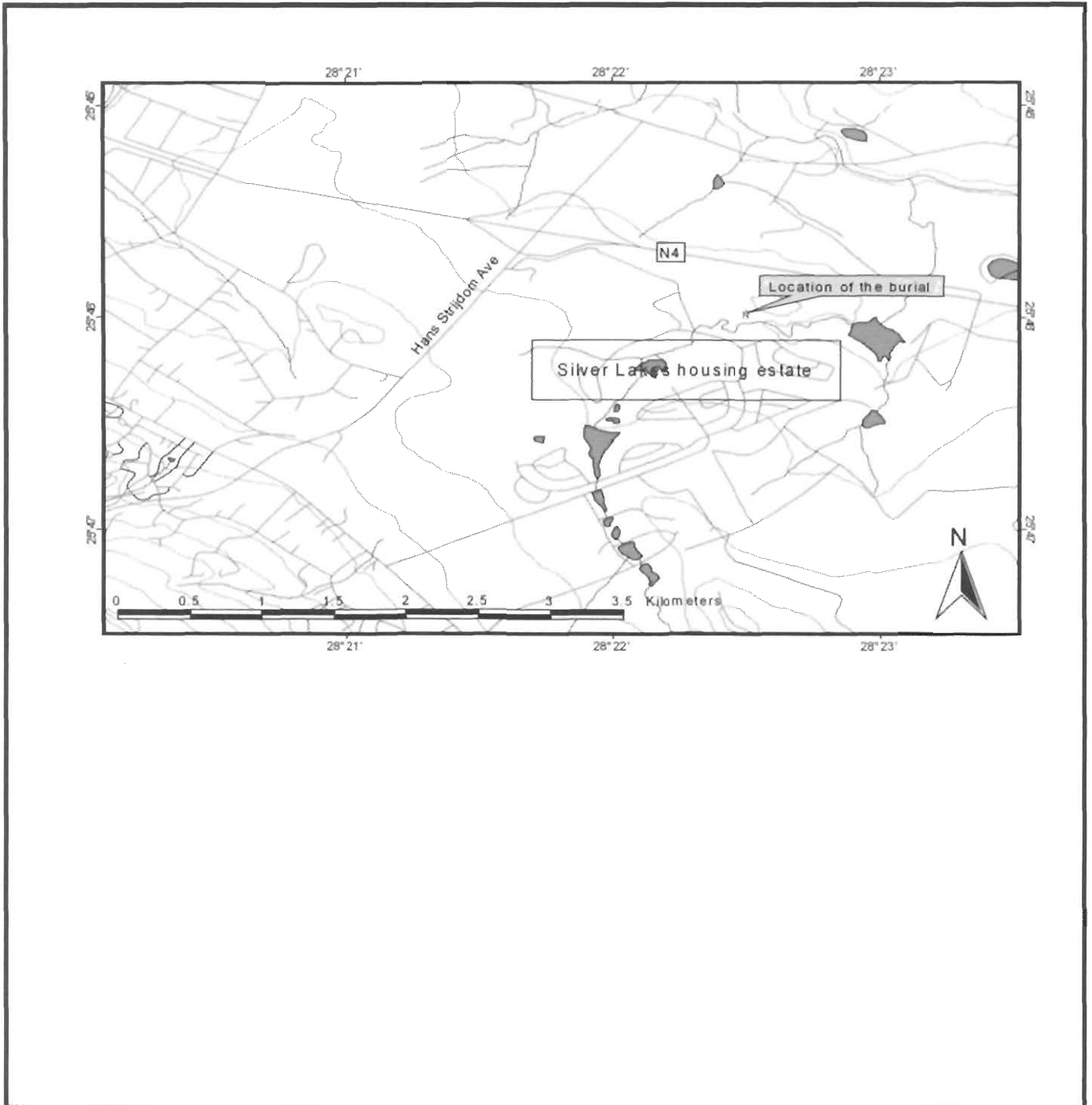
The work needs to be conducted as soon as possible, in order to not only preserve the area's cultural heritage, but also to allow development to continue without too much time and financial losses. In this instance, development and cultural heritage needs to work hand in hand.

### **PROJECT TEAM**

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APPENDIX A – 1:50 000 MAP INDICATING SITE LOCATION





**APPENDIX B – FIGURES**



**These figure show human skeletal remains exposed by the foundation diggings at Stand 57.**



**General view of the site, showing the foundations at Stand 57 and stone walling on adjacent stands.**



**Picture showing ashy deposit in the walls of the foundation trenches at Stand 57. This was clearly an ash midden, containing burials and other Iron Age material**