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**ASSESSMENT OF THE ALBASINI ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE AND MUSEUM,
KRUGER NATIONAL PARK**

by

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1. Introduction

The Albasini ruins is a well known historical site in the Kruger National Park. The site consist of the ruins of Joao Albasini's house and shop and some other cultural remains. The late dr JB de Vaal did a study on the history of Albasini and included a detailed study of the ruins. This included doing archaeological excavations on the site and rebuilding the walls of the building. A site museum was also build in which the history of Albasini is summarised and artifacts from this site and an associated site were displayed.

2. Location

The site is located in the southwestern part of the Kruger National Park, approximately 24 kilometres north of the Pretoriuskop Rest Camp. A GPS measurement of the ruins was taken. This is 25° 01' 29"S and 31° 14' 40"E.

3. Aim

Archaelmos CC was requested by the Kruger National Park to do an assessment on the site in order to determine what needs to be done to return it to being one of the important historical site museums in the park. Since De Vaal's work in 1978/9 the site gradually deteriorated and today it can not be seen as an asset to the park.

As a new gate, the Albasini gate, will also be opened close to the site, it is foreseen that the site will increasingly be visited by tourists. Therefore it needs to be upgraded. Thirdly, a historical site such as this, should be maintained in an acceptable manner, according to the National Heritage Act (No 25 of 1999).

4. Site description

The most important feature on the site is the ruins of the house, which apparently was also used by Albasini as a shop. Remains of other structures are not visible because of the long grass and other vegetation growing up to between 5-10 metres from the ruins. The ruins is fenced in by a pole fence of about 0,5 m high.

The ruins is of a rectangular structure. It is not easy to define the original building material from what was reconstructed by De Vaal. Apparently he used bricks that were scattered around the site and that was baked (sundried?) by himself. The building had four rooms. A full description of the ruins will not be given at this stage, but only should archaeological excavation commence. A detailed photographic documentation of the site was however made.

Building rubble are lying around over a vast area around the ruins. These might be part of the structure, but could also be associated with the structures and activity areas on the site around the ruins. This can however only be determined with a further investigation, after the site has been cleared.

No remains of a refuse midden was seen, but as the vegetation shows signs of being disturbed, this might be discovered at a later stage. To the south of the ruins, two graves and other cultural features, possibly living floors, can be seen. The graves are those of members of the Mavundla family. He was a former employee of the Kruger National Park and his family apparently had a long association with Albasini.

The site museum is also situated south of the ruins in a circular thatched roofed structure. The displays are in a bad state, with some artifacts and parts of the letterwork from the text not even in place.

To the northeast of the site the household of the Mavundla family can be found. Because of the family's association with the ruins and the uniqueness of the site (being a small anthropological site), it also is of a cultural historical importance. Parts of the structures has collapsed, but others are still in tact. This will probably also be documented at a later stage.

The GPS measurement of the site is 25° 01' 15"S and 31° 14' 53"E. This is right on the southern bank of the PhabeniSpruit, close to the confluence with the Sabie river.

5. Historical context

As this document only reports on the assessment of the site, the historical context will only be dealt with briefly. A more detailed historical background will be given with an archaeological report.

The site is associated with Joao Albasini, who was a well known pioneer trader in the Lowveld during the 19th century. He traded the farm from a local chief, Magashula, in 1845 and subsequently called it Maghashulaskraal. Here he established a trading post on the route to Delagoa bay. A shop was erected here during 1846 from which he traded and where he stored a large amount of elephant ivory, resulting from his hunting activities (De Vaal 1990: 116, 122-123).

He had good relations with the black communities and even had his own black followers. He mainly traded between the white pioneers (Voorrekkers) and the Portuguese at Delagoa bay. He left the site at the end of 1848 to establish a more permanent shop in Ohrigstad. It is unknown if Magashulaskraal was still used as a trading post after 1848 (De Vaal 1990: 123-125).

By 1870 the house already was in ruins. It remained that way until the Kruger National Park decided to research and reconstruct the building. This was done during 1978 and 1979 (De Vaal 1990: 116-117).

(For a more extensive history of Albasini and the Albasini ruins, see the chapter written by DeVaal, cited in the bibliography.)

6. Recommendations

The recommendations in this report is based only on the site assessment. It has been assumed that the site is of a historical importance, in accordance with article 3 of the National Heritage Resources Act (No 25 of 1999). Therefore no discussion in this regard was deemed necessary at this stage.

The following are recommended:

a. As it is difficult to interpret the ruins without proper documentation thereof, archaeological excavations are proposed. This is the only way of determining the exact function of the different rooms in the house, as well as other structures associated with it. This includes excavation of associated features if needed. In this way it would not only be possible to study the original way of construction of the building, but also the reconstruction thereof.

Last mentioned is very important as no documentation of the excavations done by De Vaal or the reconstruction could be found. Neither the South African National Parks, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (formerly the National Monuments Council) and the University of Pretoria, all parties involved in the previous work on the site, had any documentation of exactly what was done and how and why it was done in a certain way. Although information written by De Vaal was obtained, this was limited as it for instance did not include site or excavations maps and photographs.

Excavation of the site will also provide updated information for use in a new site museum. Artifacts unearthed during excavations will also provide material to be displayed, as those in the existing display is not a fair reflection of the site. In some cases it also is in a very bad state. Archaeological research will also lead to the writing of a complete history of the site.

b. Documentation of the other features on the site is also recommended. This includes graves, living floors, the household of Mavundla and remains of any other structures that might be found. By doing this the Albasini ruins will be placed in context, but the associated features will be contextualised itself. This will also lead to the correct interpretation of the site as a whole.

The information gathered in this way will provide the site with a full history, all of which can be displayed in the site museum. It will also address aspects of the history that has been overseen in the past, especially that of the local black people. This will increase the cultural historical and archaeological importance of the site.

It should also be mentioned that some of these features might prove important enough to also be researched further. This may also include archaeological excavation, but can only be determined after the vegetation has been cleared from the site.

c. Before any documentation or excavation can begin, an area of 200 metres on all four sides of the ruins should be cleared from vegetation (grass). This may be done in any way the Kruger National Park deems necessary. This will help the archaeologists to determine the association between different cultural historical features on the site in order to illuminate the site history.

d. Lastly it is proposed that the existing site museum is upgraded. Archaeos has no regulations concerning the layout and size of the museum building, but as this is not a prehistorical site, a rectangular building is suggested, perhaps simulating the plan form of the ruins. It should however be built with contemporary (modern) building material in order to clearly distinguish it from the historical structure.

The position of the museum should only be determined after the research on the site has been completed, in order not to build it on a historically sensitive area (which might have been the case with the existing site museum). It should however be noted that the size and content of the final display will be influenced by the size and shape of the building.

Archaeos can only provide a lay-out of the museum once the building has been completed. It is however proposed that the exhibition consist of display cases and information panels. In the cases artifacts from the site will be displayed. Proper captions will also be provided in order to explain the artifacts to visitors. The panels will contain information on the history of the site and the importance thereof as a cultural historical and archaeological resource.

7. Sources

- De Vaal, J.B. 1990. Jaoa Albasini (1813-1888). U.de.V. Pienaar, **Neem uit die verlede.** (Nasionale Parkeraad, Pretoria).
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