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9 November 2005

**FIRST PHASE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE  
ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL  
DEVELOPMENTS AT THE FARMS GROOTKRANS 238, KASTEEL  
106 & BERGPLAATS 120, KESTEL, FREE STATE**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The area selected for residential developments at Grootkrans 238, Kasteel 105 and Bergplaats 120 in the district of Clarens, was visited and inspected for the remains of any cultural and historical material.

The only occurrence that could be of importance in this regard seems to be the rock paintings in one cave.

The option to handle this matter is to avoid any developments in the cave and to prohibit any uncontrolled visiting of the cave. As part of the developments, serious consideration should be given to the instalment of stone paving on the floor to prevent any dust to be stirred up and could settle on the paintings.

It is recommended that the developers should contact other landowners with similar cultural features on their farms to gain information on the benefits of the installation and methods of installation of a stone floor in the cave.

Concerning the graves, I recommend that the place should be fenced and left as they are. It is also important that as much as possible information should be collected from the family during their next visit. It could be a good idea to take photographs of the family members to be kept on the farm as an historical record.

This act could please the family and bring about some friendships, which will convince them of the goodwill of the present landowner.

## INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION

### INVESTIGATION

The site for the proposed residential developments at the farm Grootkrans 238, Kestell, was visited on 1 November 2005. At the farm Mrs. Joan van den Berg, one of the landowners, accompanied me.

The area was examined for possible archaeological and historical material and to establish the potential impact on any cultural material that might be found. 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 proposed residential developments are planned on the farms Grootkrans 238, Kasteel 106 and Bergplaats 120 near Kestell in the district of Bethlehem. (Surveyor-General 1973) (Map 2). The land is part of the Bothasberg and lies to the east of the town of Kestell (Map 1). The farm is reached by a turnoff on to the S1107 secondary road from the N5 between Bethlehem and Harrismith.

The following GPS (Cape scale) coordinates were taken (2828BC):

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Graves                                       | 28°20'49"S 028°37'34"E Altitude 1861m (Fig.1).      |
| Rock with stonewalling                       | 28°20'48"S 028°37'33"E Altitude 1870m (Fig.2).      |
| Cave with paintings                          | 28°20'36"S 028°37'54"E Altitude 1932m (Figs.3-11).  |
| Cave (with strong perennial flow) Bergplaats | 28°21'42"S 028°38'00"E Altitude 1950m (Figs.12-14). |
| Cave (Grootkrans)                            | 28°21'28"S 028°37'37"E Altitude 1952m (Figs.15-17). |
| Chalets site                                 | 28°21'00"S 028°37'41"E Altitude 1854m (Figs.19&20). |

## RESULTS

The areas earmarked for developments at Grootkrans, Kestell, is limited to the old farm worker's house site and inside the two caves on Grootkrans, facing the farmhouse (Fig.15&18).

One cave at Grootkrans (Fig.15) contains a thin deposit of dung and produced a collection of Later Stone Age flakes and potsherds of unknown origin and dating, of which some have red ochre burnish (Fig.17). No other remains of prehistoric human occupation or cultural material could be found in the other shelters. No indication of any archaeological or historical material was found or any stone tools or ceramic ware found.

## FINDS

### 1. GRAVEYARD

A graveyard (28°20'49"S 028°37'34"E Altitude 1861m) which contains 3 stone covered graves (Fig.1), is located along the east facing slope to the west of the farm house. The cemetery has never been fenced, but the graves seem to be in a well-kept condition.

Scattered stones outside the vicinity may indicate more graves, but due to a heavy grass-cover, this could not be verified.

### 2. ROCK PAINTINGS IN CAVE

An elaborate number of paintings and remnants of paintings are visible in one cave. No evidence of graffiti or vandalism of any paintings was obvious. The sandstone back wall of the cave seems to be brittle and sandy, which could be the reason for the obvious deterioration of the pictures (Figs.6-11).

## ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

The impact on the cultural heritage remains of the proposed developments at Grootkrans 238, Kasteel 106 and Bergplaats 120 will be of minor significance. In the case of the rock paintings, the impact of hikers could likewise be reduced through strict control of the behaviour and movement of visitors.

The fact that the paintings are already in a deteriorated condition, could be a motivation to withdraw access to the cave. There is in any case no compensation for the irreplaceable loss of these cultural relics.

The two caves in the opposite cliff facing the farmhouse (Fig.18) contain no cultural remains. The developers anticipate the possibility of placing tents on wooden pallets inside these caves. This form of accommodation will not have any direct effect on either the environment or the physical condition of the rock shelter.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The grave yard should be protected and maintained and should not be included into the lay-out of hiking trails and any other recreational activities on the farm.

While it is still possible that a serious effort should be made to record the oral history of the family of farm labourers who have lived on the farm.

It could be possible that some of the family members will request to be buried on the farm. This could be accommodated and provision for a number of graves could be made in the planning. This decision is the prerogative of the farm owner and should be negotiated only in case of a request from the people.

It is further recommended that a visit should be paid to the rock art site at Tandjiesberg near Modderpoort to observe what has been done to limit the trampling of dust inside the cave. An arrangement for the visit should be made with Mr. Ligouri at Tripolitania (Tel. 051-924 2036). (See also Loubser 1993).

## **MITIGATION**

Concerning the area for the proposed development, mitigation measures will be required in the case of the graves and the cave with rock paintings. It could be worthwhile to invite rock art specialists from the National Museum, Bloemfontein, to visit the site to make an official recording.

No obvious reasons could be found to delay the commencement of further planning and development of the site.

After examination by the archaeologist, it is recommended that the proposed developments may proceed.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I thank the Mrs Joan van den Bergh for taking me to the different sites on the farm.

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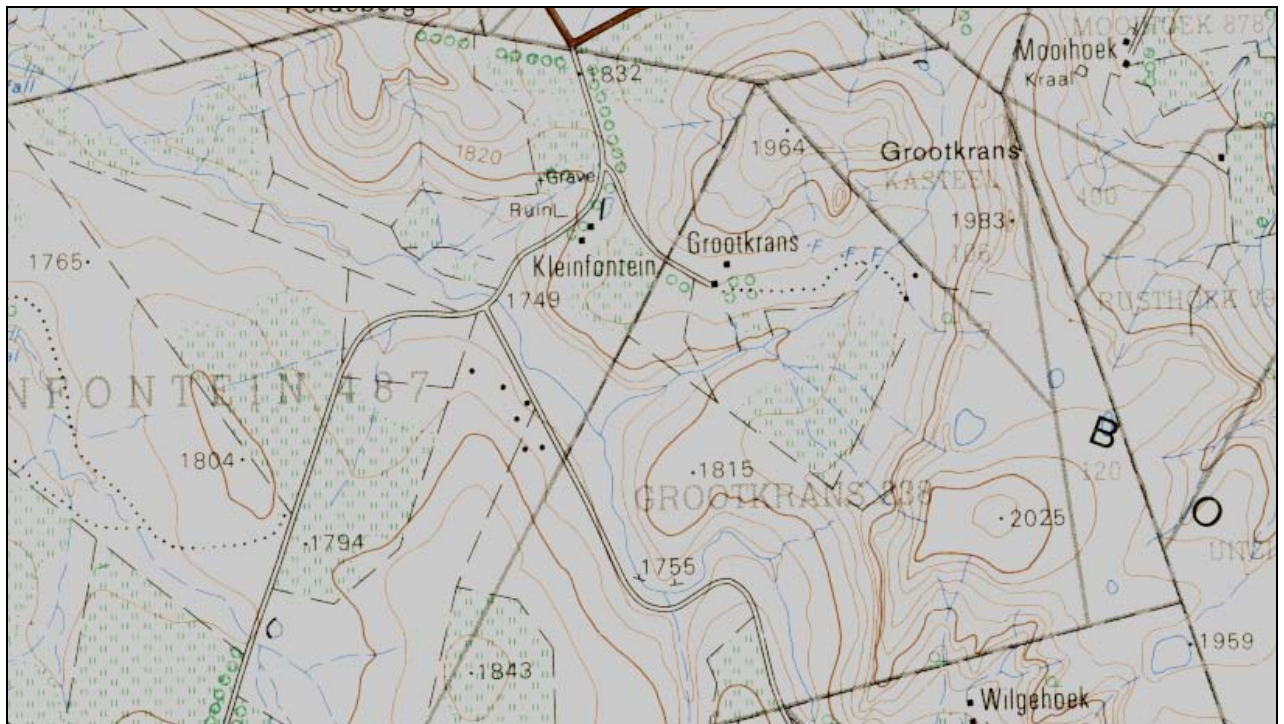
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## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



Map 1 Locality of Kestel in relation to Bethlehem and Harrismith.



Map 2 Locality of the farm Grootkrans 238 near Kestel in the district of Bethlehem (2828BC).





Fig.1 One of three graves at Grootkrans 238, Kestel.



Fig.2 Hollow underneath a big rock with stone-walling on the edge.



Fig.3 Small rock shelter with prominent stone-wall in front.



Fig.4 View of the stone-wall in front of the cave.





Fig.5 View towards the entrance of the cave.



Fig.6 A familiar picture of a running figure.



Fig.7 Another running figure.



Fig.8 Dark red ochre figures against the back wall of the cave.



Fig.9 Human figures with sticks.



Fig.10 Painting of a jumping catlike animal.





Fig.11 Female figures against the back wall.



Fig.12 The flood water from above removed the soil deposit from this cave.





Fig.13 This cave is bare of any occupational deposit.



Fig.14 The remains of a small stone structure on the floor of the cave.



Fig.15 The name of the farm is derived from this big rock shelter (Grootkrans=big rock or cliff). The dimensions of the overhang is indicated by the vehicle.



Fig.16 The constant trickle of water from the roof, causing the growth of grass on the cave floor.





Fig.17 A collection of stone flakes and pottery from the floor of the cave.  
Note the red ochre burnish on potsherd.



Fig.18 Another cliff overhang facing the farmhouse.



Fig.19 The old farm labourer's living site is selected for the proposed chalets.



Fig.20 Mrs. Van den Berg on the old farm labourer's living site now proposed for the erection of chalets.