



# **COBUS DREYER**

**Pr. Archaeologist/Heritage Specialist**

**P.O. Box 12910  
BRANDHOF 9324  
Bloemfontein  
dreyerj@telkomsa.net**

**Tel: 051-444 1187  
Fax: 051-444 4395  
Cell: 083 357 7982**

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## **FIRST PHASE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE INVESTIGATION OF THE PROPOSED LEISURE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT AT MOLENRIVIERSDRAAI 173, HARRISMITH, FREE STATE**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A leisure residential development is planned on the farm Molenriviersdraai 173, near Verkykerskop in the district of Harrismith, Free State.

The area consists of a sandy soil deposit with a short grass cover.

Old rundown farm buildings are still found at the site. No graves or other historical or cultural remains were found.

Several clusters of rock paintings are present on the cliffs along the slope below the area of development. The finds fall outside the proposed area of development, but I recommend that access to the paintings should be strictly controlled. I also include recommendations for the protection of archaeological finds, which should be implemented.

I recommend that the planning and development of the proposed leisure residential settlement may proceed.

### **INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION**

#### **INVESTIGATION**

The site for a cluster of twelve leisure residential units at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173 near Verkykerskop in the district of Harrismith, Free State, was visited on 15 September 2007.

The area was investigated on foot, GPS coordinates were taken on the peripheral points, and the features were recorded on camera.

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 leisure residential developments are planned at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173 (Map 2) near Verkykerskop in the district of Harrismith, Free State (Map 1). The development will include 12 leisure residential units. The proposed developments are located above the flow of the Mill River. There is a steep slope down from the proposed land down to the flood level.

The following GPS coordinates (Cape scale) were taken (2729CD):

MRA                      27°59'42"S 029°16'35"E Altitude 1736m (Figs.1&2).

HIGHEST POINT      27°59'50"S 029°16'32"E Altitude 1738m (Fig.4).

CONTOUR                27°59'49"S 029°16'31"E Altitude 1740m (Fig.5).

FARMHOUSE            27°59'37"S 029°16'34"E Altitude 1745m (Figs.3&6).

PAINTINGS (1)        27°59'50"S 029°16'38"E Altitude 1682m (Figs.7-11).

PAINTINGS (2)        27°59'51"S 029°16'37"E Altitude 1678m (Figs.12-15).

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE VERKYKERSKOP AREA**

#### **GENERAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION**

The archaeological landscape of the Free State is characterised by a wide distribution of stone-walled sites. These prehistoric structures on the ridges have generated interest over the years and the dome-shaped stone huts in particular, have captured the imagination of the people.

Studies on the history and ways of living of the early inhabitants of the region have revealed detail and consistency in the arrangement and design of the structures (Maggs 1976). The expression of culture in the recognised settlement patterns has left its imprint on the environment, illustrating people's perceptions about social clustering, economic systems and political organisation. These

patterns are indicated by the arrangement of huts, stock kraals and ash heaps in a particular order and in relation to one another.

Spatial organisation in general is characterised by the central position of the stock kraals and the placing of the main dwelling area on the perimeter of the settlement. From the archaeological investigation it becomes clear that during the actual occupation of these sites the emphasis was not only on stone-building, for additional structures of perishable materials supplemented living space.

Stone-walls were built in a customary manner of two faces of stacked stones with a rubble infill. All the stone structures from the prehistoric era are either circular or oval in plan. Rectangular buildings and kraals are normally either associated with missionary influences or could represent European preference during early colonial times.

The study of these stone-walls is based on the classification of settlement patterns, according to a standardised archaeological framework (Maggs 1976). This arrangement of structures and sites is characterised by connecting walls (Type V), surrounding walls (Type N) and huts with bilobial courtyards (Type Z) respectively. The clustering of sites based on settlement layout is confirmed by associated pottery assemblages with different decoration styles (Maggs 1976:290). Different settlement patterns also produced huts of different materials in different styles.

## **THE EASTERN FREE STATE**

The type site of the settlements in this region is named as Type N, after Ntsuanatsatsi (Tafelkop), a solitary hill along the R34 road between Frankfort and Vrede. Great symbolic value is attached to the name and some Sotho peoples still believe in an almost creational legend which proclaims that man (*motho*) originated from a reed bed at Ntsuanatsatsi.

Type N settlements are located in the north-eastern Free State, in the region around the towns of Warden, Frankfort, Vrede, Harrismith and Verkykerskop. This area has always been accepted as the traditional living place of the Batlokwa and Basia peoples, (different tribes within the Sotho/Tswana cluster) before the Difaqane. Informed people have been aware of the historical significance of the region and others are becoming increasingly interested in the actual history of these ancestral sites. A memorial stone to commemorate the Batlokwa heritage and to designate the area in which at least eight generations of their chiefs were buried, was erected by the late chief Wessels Mota of Qwaqwa at the farm Morgenlicht 869 (Sunrise) in 1962. According to Mr Wally Sharratt, the landowner, people still visit the site regularly to pray and to pay homage through sacrifice.

Some of the more important sites, such as Nkwe (Sunrise) and Sefate (Verkykerskop) are known, but other Tlokwa historical sites in the region have not yet been identified. Tlokweng, where Motonosi allegedly gathered his people is indicated somewhere near the town of Vrede and the Vaal River. There is also reference to Lejwe Motho, located between Ntsuanatsatsi (Tafelkop) and Vrede, where Lebaka of the Bamogkalong (Tsoetsi) group settled for some time. This reference brings us to Leeukop (Peme), south of Ntsuanatsatsi (Maggs 1976:142), with a different settlement layout. The Malakeng, an independent Batlokwa group, was also living at Seropong, a locality which is still unknown.

Basia people were also living in this particular region, somewhat further up along the Wilge River, always in close relation with the Tlokwa. To complicate matters further, it is known that shortly before the outbreak of the Difaqane, a group of Hlubi under their chief Motsholi came from east of the Drakensberg to settle in the Tlokwa area. The localities of their settlements are still unidentified.

Archaeological excavations have been done by Maggs (1976) at the farms Helena (Ntsuanatsatsi) and Zoetbron 151, in the lower Klip River valley. The settlement pattern shows a central complex of stock pens surrounded by a ring of domed grass huts, which are in their turn enclosed by boundary walls, with ash heaps scattered on the outside. At some of the sites settlement layouts resembling sites which generally occur in the central Free State, are found. The houses associated with Type N settlements were made of reeds and grass plastered with clay and contained dung floors smeared over stone paving. The pottery of the region are characterised by finger-pinched and comb-stamped ware combined with ochre burnish. The occupation of Type N settlements is linked to the early Fokeng, Koena and Kgatla lineages. Based on radiocarbon dating and lore, Type N sites were occupied during the 15<sup>th</sup> century to early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

An investigation on the historical settlements of this area (Dreyer 1999), identified several unrecorded stone-walled living sites of two obviously different periods of occupation. These features clearly represent a Later Iron Age pastoral occupation, dating from pre-difaqane (wars of devastation 1822-1830) times. It is generally accepted that the occupants of these stone-walled sites were the ancestors of the present day Sotho peoples.

Sites containing remains of rectangular stock kraals and other buildings most likely date from a more recent period of occupation by European farmers. These structures have never been documented or investigated and differ drastically from our previous knowledge. The layout seems to indicate that different influences and priorities were important in this area during their occupation.

The origin and purpose of these structures could not be ascertained. Wall construction consisting of two faces of stacked stones with a rubble infill seems

to indicate black expertise, while the rectangular form on the other hand, tends to imply European influence.

A possible explanation may be found in the size, layout and distribution of the units. It has been narrated by the old people that in bygone days, migratory stock farmers ("trekboere") from the area and from other districts such as Standerton and Volksrust further north and east across the Vaal River, used to move their cattle regularly on a seasonal basis to winter pastures in Natal and even to Swaziland. These treks were usually under the supervision of young European boys assisted by black herders. According to lore this movement of stock took place from long before the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and continued until the 1930s and 1940s.

Bearing this in mind, it can be concluded that these kraal sites could have been an aspect of a system of stock migration during colonial times.

## **RESULTS**

The investigation at Molenriviersdraai 173, near Verkykerskop, Harrismith, did not produce any archaeological material in the form of stone tools, ceramic ware or stone-walls.

Several panels with paintings occur on the rock faces along the escarpment (Figs.7-15).

No graves or any other cultural or historical remains occurred on the surface.

## **IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

The development of a residential area above the Mill River on the farm Molenriviersdraai 173 near Verkykerskop, Harrismith, will have no impact on any cultural, archaeological or historical remains.

The rock paintings fall outside the area of proposed development and will be protected and preserved by the developers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There are no obvious reasons to delay the commencement of further planning and development of the residential developments and I recommend that the work may proceed.

## **MITIGATION**

Concerning the areas for the proposed residential developments, no mitigation measures will be required.

Regarding the rock paintings, I recommend that the developer should take drastic steps protect and preserve the paintings and will allow access only in guided tour groups. The Sharratt-family is well aware of the value of these relics from the past. They have been actively involved with the preservation and protection of Iron Age remains on their farm Sunrise (Morgenlicht 869) near Verkykerskop, for several generations. The present owner's mother compiled a paper on the history of the Batlokoa people in their area (Sharratt 1968).

General rules recommended for the protection of archaeological sites are included herewith and should be applied to ensure the preservation of the rock art sites on the farm.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I thank Dr Johan du Preez of MDA Environmental Consultants, for taking me to the site. We were also accompanied by Jako Viviers and Jaco Petzer from LMV Environmental Specialists, Kroonstad. At the farm we were shown around by the Sharratt-family.

I have benefited from previous investigations in the Verkykerskop and Harrismith area over more than two decades. I also pay homage to the memory of the late Ntate Mosebi Damane of Lesotho. He accompanied me on several trips to this country which he so dearly loved.

Finally, sincere thanks are due to Mohlalefe Seleke for his constant support in completing the earlier research project in this area.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

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).**

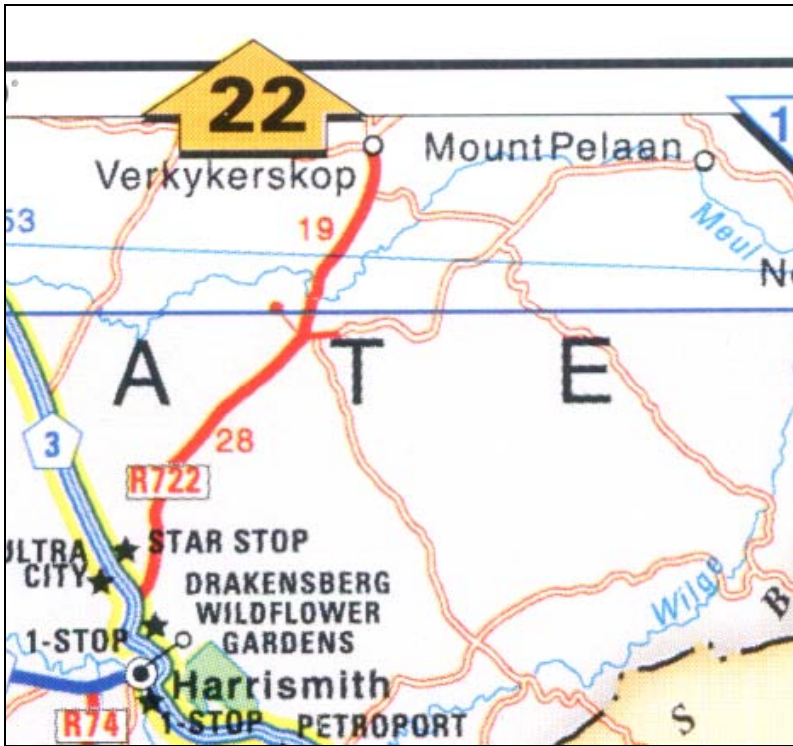
The following minimum standards are approved by archaeologist and are prescribed for site museums or other places of interest open to the public. The guidelines are, therefore, strongly recommended as the basic rules at any archaeological site, and are applicable in the case of Molenriviersdraai, Harrismith.

- Do not allow unauthorised visitors to the paintings;
- 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/development;
- Have a single access road to the site;
- Provide a clearly marked parking area at the site;
- Plan hiking routes where the paintings can not be damaged;
- Prevent people from spraying liquid on the paintings;
- Control vegetation growth at the site;
- Prepare a notice board explaining the sites;
- Do not **restore** the paintings, 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 Verkykerskop in relation to the N3, Harrismith and the Meul and Wilge Rivers.



Map 2 Locality of the proposed developments indicated by red arrow (2729CD).



Fig.1 View of the area of development at Molenriviersdraai facing north.



Fig.2 The area of development at Molenriviersdraai facing north.



Fig.3 The old farmhouse at Molenriviersdraai 173, Harrismith.



Fig.4 Highest point of the area of development at Molenriviersdraai.



Fig.5 Facing down the slope towards the Mill River below.



Fig.6 Old fence poles at the site near the house.



Fig.7 Rock art at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173, Verkykerskop.



Fig.8 Rock art at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173, Verkykerskop.



Fig.9 Rock art at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173, Verkykerskop.



Fig.10 Rock art at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173, Verkykerskop, Harrismith.



Fig.11 Rock art at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173, Verkykerskop.



Fig.12 Rock art at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173, Verkykerskop.



Fig.13 Rock art at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173, Verkykerskop.



Fig.14 Rock art at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173, Verkykerskop.





Fig.15 Rock art at the farm Molenriviersdraai 173, Verkykerskop.