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ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURE HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS AT VERKYKERSKOP, NEAR HARRISMITH, FREE STATE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a growing interest in the proposal to extend the residential area of the village at Verkykerskop, situated about fifty kilometres north of Harrismith, along the R722 road to Memel and Vrede, Free State.

The town consists of a number of residences, a general dealers' store, farmers' coop, stock auction facilities and a police station.

There is a grave yard which contains the graves of two English gentlemen who found their last stand at Verkykerskop. Several clusters of graves were pointed out in the vicinity of the town. One specific group is located near an old European farm house and others appear in groups in the veld.

Another group of four individual graves is demarcated by concrete kerb stones and is covered in paving blocks. The structures have a very artificial appearance and could be a mere commemorative feature.

No archaeological or other cultural material was found on the soil surface.

Historical buildings such as the old mill, school house, the post office, several residences and the general dealers' store are in a varying degree of decay or maintenance. Some of these buildings have been put to alternative uses and others could be restored and preserved.

I conclude that the planned developments will have no serious effect on the cultural and historical heritage of the area. The development could actually imply the rehabilitation and preservation of most of the structures.

I recommend that further planning of the residential project may continue.

INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION

Scope and Limitations

The investigation provided the opportunity to visit Verkykerskop on at least three occasions. Various places were examined and recorded on camera and plotted by GPS.

No serious limitations have been encountered during the investigations. A constraint, if any, could have been the thick stands of grass cover on the surface.

Methodology

1. Site visit and investigation of the town on foot.
2. Study of the literature.
3. Recording on camera.
4. Plotting by GPS.

INVESTIGATION

The village of Verkykerskop was visited on 17 March 2006, 15 January 2007 and on 28 February 2007. Dr Johan du Preez from MDA Environmental Consultants, Bloemfontein, and other experts on building and town-planning accompanied us to the site.

The area was examined for possible archaeological and historical remains 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 village of Verkykerskop is situated about fifty kilometres north of Harrismith, along the R722 road to Memel and Vrede, Free State (Map 1).

There is a growing interest in the plans to extend the residential area of the village of Verkykerskop (Map 2).

The topography of the region is characterised by flowing grass covered waves with several landmarks in the form of protruding hills (Fig.1) with kloofs flowing down the escarpment towards the east (Fig.2).

There is a certain amount of confusion about the hill called Verkykerskop from which the name of the town is derived. It is generally accepted by uninformed people that the prominent hill to the south west of the village is the actual Verkykerskop. This hill which is called *Sefate* in Sesotho played a prominent role in the early prehistory of the Batlokwa tribe of the area. In actual fact this hill is officially called Tafelkop (Map 3) and a small hill east of Tafelkop is presented as the authentic Verkykerskop (Fig.1).

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

Farmers' Union Hall	27°55'14"S 029°16'46"E Altitude 1908m (Fig.18).
Graves (2)	27°55'22"S 029°16'47"E Altitude 1916m (Fig.2).
Sand Stone House	27°55'23"S 029°16'44"E Altitude 1914m (Fig.12).
Δ DE-EK 144	27°55'52"S 029°16'44"E Altitude 1960m.
Annasdal	27°55'19"S 029°17'22"E Altitude 1848m (Fig.26).
Graves (4 paved)	27°55'32"S 029°17'03"E Altitude 1915m (Fig.28).
Hill (North of town)	27°54'37"S 029°16'55"E Altitude 1955m.
Dam on Hill	27°54'43"S 029°17'01"E Altitude 1964m.
Graves (Afsluit)	27°54'57"S 029°17'22"E Altitude 1930m (Figs.30&31).
Graves (3)	27°54'52"S 029°17'19"E Altitude 1934m (Fig.27).

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 laymen and experts.

Comprehensive archaeological 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 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 other materials in various styles (Dreyer 1996).

THE EASTERN FREE STATE

The type site of the settlements in this region is named after Ntsuanatsatsi (Type N), or Tafelkop, a solitary hill at the junction of the N3 main road and 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 allegedly buried, was erected by the late Chief Wessels Mota of Qwaqwa at the farm Sunrise (Morgenlicht 869) in 1962. According to the landowner, black people still visit the site occasionally to pray and to pay homage to their ancestors through sacrifice.

Some of the more important Batlokwa sites, such as Nkwe (Sunrise) and Sefate (Verkykerskop) are known, but other historical sites in the region have

not yet been identified. Tlokweg, where Motonosi supposedly 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 Bamokgalong (Tsotetsi) 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 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 Schaaprand on the farm Helena (Ntsuanatsatsi) and at 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 these localities, settlement layouts resembling sites which generally occur in the central and Western Free State (Type Z) are found (Dreyer 1999). The houses associated with Type N settlements were made of reed 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 15th century to early 17th century.

An investigation into 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 way of living, 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 diverse 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 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 live stock regularly on a seasonal basis to winter pastures below the escarpment in Natal and even to Swaziland. These treks were usually under the supervision of European stock farmers assisted by black herders. According to lore this stock movement 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 a major feature in a system of stock migration during colonial times.

FINDS

The town of Verkykerskop consists of a number of residences (Figs.12-16), a general dealers’ store (Figs.10&11), farmers’ coop (Fig.17), stock auction facilities (Fig.24), an Agricultural Union hall (Fig.18) and a police station (Fig.19).

Historical buildings such as the old school house (Figs.22&23), the old post office (Fig.25) and the general dealers’ building (Figs.10&11) and old mill (Figs.6-9) have been put to alternative uses. Others are in a varying degree of decay and should be restored and preserved.

A corrugated iron shed of substantial measurements appeared to be neglected (Fig.20) and has been demolished since our first visit (Fig.21).

There is a grave yard which contains the graves of two English gentlemen of unknown backgrounds who found their last stand at Verkykerskop (Fig.2). According to the inscriptions the first grave contains the remains of Charles Robert Spencer, a stone mason who died on 14 September 1909 at the age 28 years (Fig.3). The second grave belongs to Joe T. Lee, born 20 November 1900. It is related that he fell from his horse at Verkykerskop and died on 30 July 1936 (Fig.4).

Several other grave clusters were pointed out in the vicinity of the town. One specific group of about three graves is located at Annasdal near the farm house (Fig.27) and others are found in groups in the veld at Afsluit (Figs.30&31).

A cluster of four “graves” are placed close together and are neatly aligned (Fig.28). The following names appear on the respective head blocks: Matabane Mofokeng, Matshane Mofokeng, Matahleho Mofokeng and Moloi Hlopeho. Individual graves are demarcated by concrete kerb stones and are partly covered in paving blocks (Fig.29). The structures appear to be quite recent and there is no clear indication of soil disturbance visible on the surface (Fig.28). The total display appears very artificial and portrays the impression

of a commemorative feature to honour certain people rather than to represent real graves.

At least two other graves in the same area are stone and grass covered and look very old (Figs.30&31).

No archaeological or other cultural material was found on the soil surface.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

The clusters of graves outside of town fall beyond the proposed area of residential development and will not be affected.

Historical buildings such as the old mill, school house, the post office, several residences and the general dealers' store are in a varying degree of decay or well maintained and preserved. Some of these buildings have been put to alternative use and others could be restored and preserved.

I conclude that the planned developments will have no serious effect on the cultural and historical heritage of the area. The proposed residential developments at Verkykerskop demand the sensitive management of the project and could actually imply the rehabilitation and preservation of most of the built structures.

The proposed improvements of Verkykerskop will have no major effect on the cultural and historical heritage of the area.

The development is planned to be ecologically friendly with a low density and a minimum impact on the environment.

Old buildings should be restored and preserved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The residential developments at Verkykerskop will have an insignificant impact on the archaeological and cultural heritage of the village and surrounding area.

Depending on the finds by other specialists, and based on the practical feasibility of the project, I recommend that the preferred residential developments at Verkykerskop could resume.

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

MITIGATION

Mitigation measures will only be required in the case of the restoration of the old buildings.

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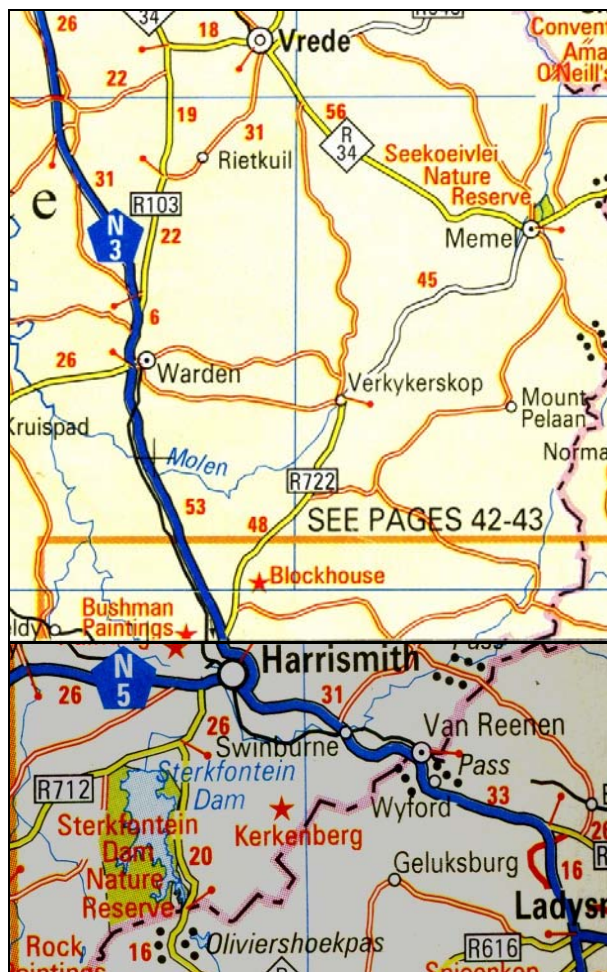
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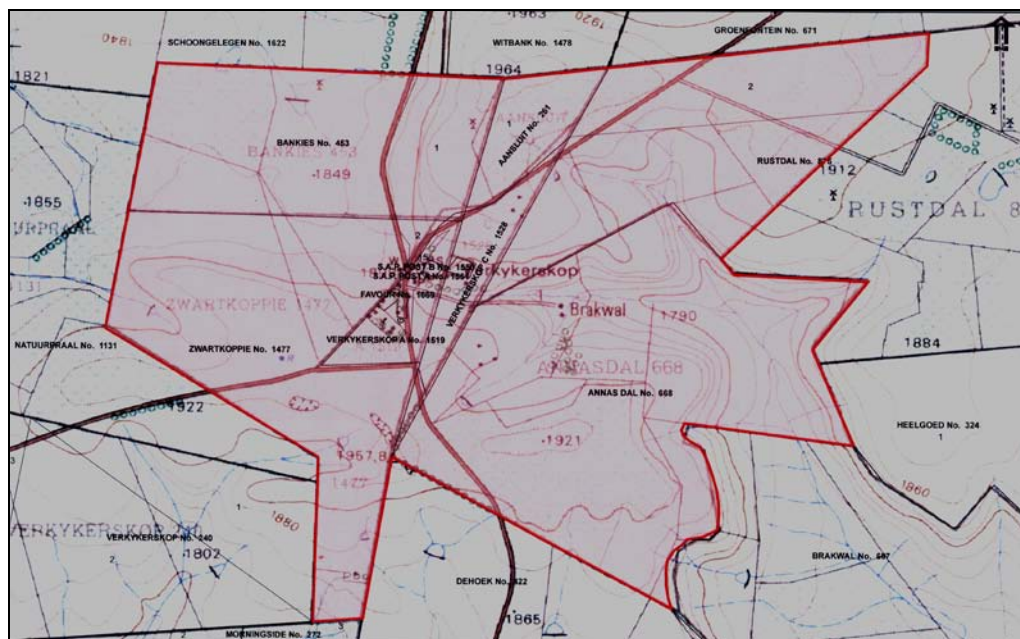
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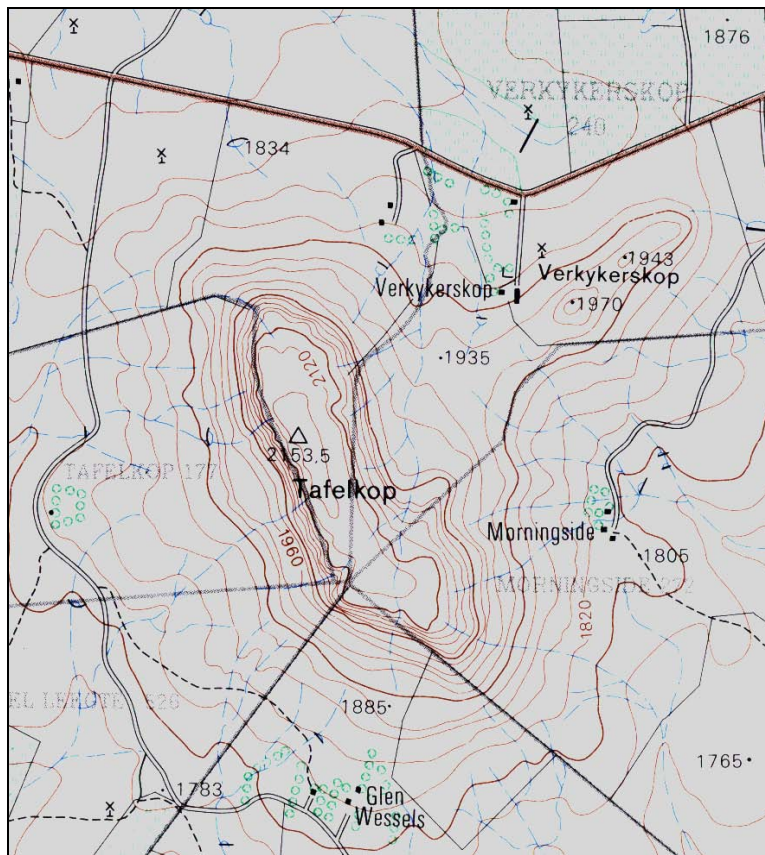
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:



Map 1 Locality of Verkykerskop in relation to Harrismith and other town in the area.



Map 2 Extent of the proposed area of development at Verkykerskop (2729CD).



Map 3 Locality of Verkykerskop in relation Tafelkop.

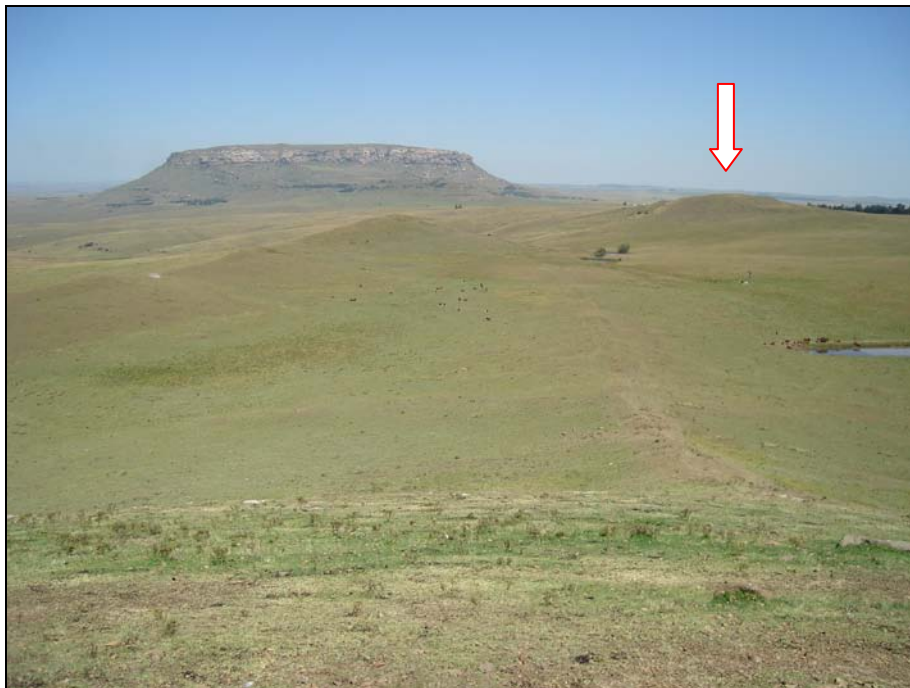


Fig.1 Locality of Tafelkop at the back and Verkykerskop indicated by arrow.



Fig.2 The landscape flows down in kloofs towards the escarpment.



Fig.3 Two graves of English gentlemen of unknown occupation found their last resting place in the village of Verkykerskop.



Fig. 4 Grave of Charles Robert Spencer. † 14 September 1909 aged 28 years.



Fig.5 Grave of Joe T. Lee *20.11.1900 †30.7.1936.



Fig.6 Façade of the old mill building.



Fig.7 Front view of the old mill building.



Fig.8 Rear view of the old mill building.



Fig.9 Some of the milling equipment which are still in place.



Fig.10 View of the old mill adjacent to the general dealers' store.



Fig.11 View of the general dealers' store.



Fig.12 Sandstone house is presently being used as visitors' accommodation.



Fig.13 House adjacent to the general dealers' store.



Fig.14 One of several old houses at Verkykerskop.



Fig.15 Another residential house at Verkykerskop.



Fig.16 Painted sandstone house at Verkykerskop.



Fig.17 Farmers' Coop at Verkykerskop.



Fig.18 Farmers' Union Hall.



Fig.19 New SAPD buildings under construction.



Fig.20 The old in a bad state of deteriorated.



Fig.21 The foundation and floor of the old shed after demolition.

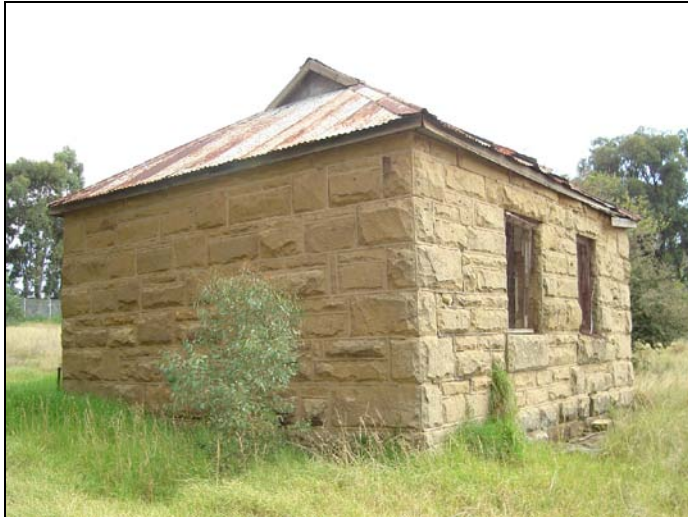


Fig.22 Old school house.



Fig.23 Old school house.



Fig.24 Stock auction kraals.



Fig.25 The old post office building is now part of the stock auction kraals.



Fig.26 Sandstone farms house at Annasdal.



Fig.27 Stone covered graves near the farm house at Annasdal.



Fig.28 Paving cover on four graves has a very artificial appearance. The head blocks bear the names of Matabane Mofokeng, Matshane Mofokeng, Matahleho Mofokeng and Moloi Hlopeho.



Fig.29 The grave of Matahleko Mofokeng.



Fig.30 A stone covered grave has a more authentic appearance.



Fig.31 Another stone covered grave in the same area.



Fig.32 Pension day fair at Verkykerskop.