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FIRST PHASE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE INVESTIGATION OF THE PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS ON THE FARM VAALKOP 1024, VREDEFORT, FREE STATE

INVESTIGATION

The site for the proposed residential developments on the farm Vaalkop 1024, Vredefort was visited on 13 October 2005. Elbi Bredenkamp and Christine Fouché from Enviroworks Environmental Consultants, Bloemfontein, took me to the farm. At the farm we were accompanied to the sites by the owner Mr Hannes de Klerk. Wilhelm Rost (Planner) and Kobus Steyn and Bert Hattingh (Developers) were present.

The site was examined for any possible traces of cultural and historical remains to establish the potential impact of the developments on any archaeological and cultural historical material. 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 farm Vaalkop 1024 is located on the southern bank of the Vaal River about 10km from Skandinavia Drift in the district of Vredefort (Maps 1&2) (Surveyor-General O.F.S. 1973).

The farm is reached from the R501 road from Potchefstroom to Viljoenskroon by travelling east on the S646 gravel road along the Vaal River (2627CC 1997).

The planned residential settlements will cover about 45 hectares.

The area is very stony with a dense bush and tree cover (Fig.2).

The vegetation was almost totally destroyed by a severe veld fire over the whole area shortly before our visit (Fig.8).

The area was inspected on foot and all finds and features were plotted by GPS and recorded on camera.

The following GPS co-ordinates (Cape scale) were taken:

Proposed site west of Vaalkop 26°57'37"S 027°05'29"E Altitude 1388m
(Figs.1&2).

LIA stone walls 26°57'19"S 027°08'20"E Altitude 1353m (Figs.3-5).

Stone walls east of Vaalkop 26°57'30"S 027°09'14"E Altitude 1420m
(Fig.2).

Walls on plateau behind Vaalkop 26°57'19"S 027°08'20"E Altitude 1353m
(Figs.6-8).

Graves along the S646 road 26°56'41"S 027°08'40"E Altitude 1319m
(Figs.10-11).

FINDS

A graveyard which contains about 10 graves, lies along the S646 road between Skandinawia Drift and Schoemans Drift (26°56'41"S 027°08'40"E Altitude 1319m) (Figs.10-11). According to the inscriptions, these are mostly graves of black people, presumably farm labourers. The surname of Dlamini could for instance be deciphered. It is further alleged that one of the graves was that of a little Voortrekker girl who had been buried there during the 1830s. Because of the fact that a former landowner has removed the gravestone for safekeeping to the Potchefstroom Museum the specific grave can no longer be identified.

Stone walls which clearly date from a Late Iron Age occupation (1650-1810), were found in several places. A cluster lies at the foot of the slope to the west of Vaalkop (Figs.), while another group is found on a higher level to the east of Vaalkop (Figs.).

During the investigation, no remains of archaeological and other material of cultural historical importance could be found on the lower part of the farm near the river.

DISCUSSION

It is unlikely that any prehistoric human occupation would have settled on the riverbank and floodplain and it is most probable that the agricultural and building activities near the river have destroyed any possible remains of human cultural activities and early human occupation in this area.

The total area covered by the Vredefort Dome Conservancy is very rich in Later Iron Age (LIA) remains in the form of stone walls dating from the 17th century to early 19th century. The survey by Bakker et al. (2004) does not include detailed descriptions of all the sites and many individual stone enclosures and clusters representing prehistoric living areas will most certainly be discovered as the research continues.

It is therefore, important to keep in mind that every archaeological and historical site is unique and should be treated as a non-renewable commodity. All efforts should be made to avoid any unnecessary disturbance or destruction of the features or the environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No obvious reasons could be found to delay further planning and development of the site. It is recommended that the proposed developments at the preferred site may proceed, taking the graves and the stone-walled sites into consideration.

It is stressed that in case of the discovery of any archaeological remains in the form of stone tools, stone-walling, pottery and other archaeological material of significance during the course of the work, all activities should temporarily be stopped for inspection by the present archaeologist and other specialists from the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.

MITIGATION

Concerning the area for the proposed development, mitigation measures are needed to protect the graves. I also recommend that the areas of stone-walling should be avoided in the planning of the residential developments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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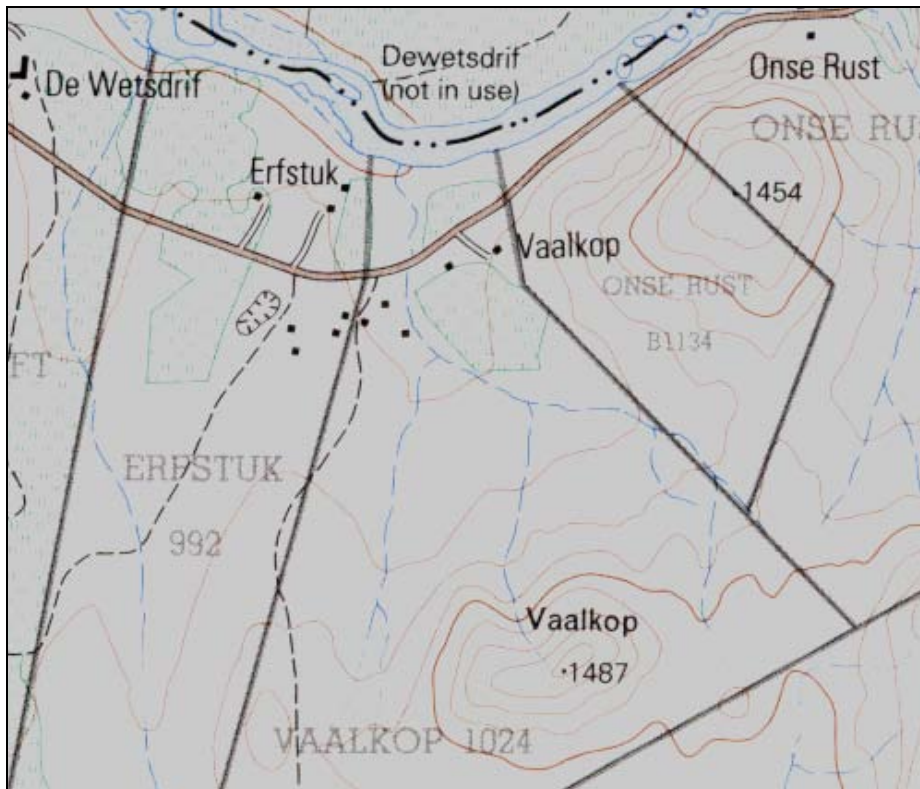
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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:



Map 1 Locality of the Vredefort Dome in relation to Potchefstroom, Parys, Venterskroon and Vredefort.



Map 2 Locality of the farm Vaalkop 1024 on the Vaal River (2627CC 1997).



Fig.1 The name of the farm is derived from Vaalkop near the Vaal River.



Fig.2 View across the site facing towards the Vaal River in the centre.



Fig.3 LIA stone-wall on the lower part of the site.



Fig.4 Remains of a LIA stone-wall on the farm Vaalkop 1024, Vredefort.



Fig.5 Remains of a circular stone structure on the lower part of the site.



Fig.6 LIA stone-wall on the eastern side of Vaalkop.



Fig.7 Circular stone structure in the area east of Vaalkop.



Fig.8 According to the walls this must have been an elaborate LIA living site.



Fig.9 The stone-walled site to the south of Vaalkop.



Fig.10 A cluster of graves near the S646 road between Skandinawia Drift and Schoemans Drift.



Fig.11 Grave stone dating from 1954. The surname of Dlamini is inscribed on the stone.