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TO: SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE RESOURCES AGENCY

PHASE I ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT AND ASSESSMENT OF THE  
AREA DESIGNATED AS THE MANDELA MUSEUM AT MVEZO IN THE EASTERN  
CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA (Site 3128DC1)

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The South African Heritage Resources Agency commissioned this Archaeological Impact Assessment in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act. This Act ensures the protection of heritage of all South Africa's people and attempts to take heritage conservation beyond the biased apartheid focus on colonial buildings.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS AND LEGISLATION**

### **The National Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 of 1999)**

In South Africa, all palaeotological and archaeological sites as well as places of cultural and historical significance are protected by the National Heritage Resources Act. In terms of the Act archaeological remains are material remains resulting from human activity that are in a state of disuse and are in or on land, which are older than 100 years, including artifacts, human and hominid remains and artificial features and structures. In terms of the Act no person may destroy, damage, deface, excavate, alter, remove from its original position, subdivide or change the planning status of any heritage site without a permit issued by the heritage resources authority responsible for the protection of such site.

Before any activities can take place on a site that might contain archaeological remains an archaeological impact assessment (AIA) has to be carried out. Normally these assessments consist of two phases. The first is a surface survey and attempts to establish whether archaeological remains are potentially present. If this possibility exist, Phase II investigations are carried out. Based on the results an archaeologist will issue recommendations regarding mitigation.

If an AIA has not been carried out and South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) has reasonable cause to believe that any activity or development that will destroy, damage or alter any archaeological or palaeotological site is under way, and where no application for a permit has been submitted and no heritage resources management procedure in terms of section 38 has been followed, it may serve on the owner or occupier of the site or on the person undertaking such development an order for the development to cease immediately for such period as is specified in the order. Once this has been done, it may carry out an investigation for obtaining information on whether or not an archaeological or palaeotological site exists and whether mitigation is necessary.

If the heritage resources authority deems mitigation to be necessary, it may assist the person on whom the order has been served to apply for a permit as required, and recover the costs of such investigation from the owner or occupier of the land on which it is believed an archaeological or palaeotological site is located or from the person proposing to undertake the development if they receive no application for a permit within two weeks of the order being served.

### **The Environmental Conservation Act (Act No 73 of 1989)**

In addition, the Environmental Conservation Act (Act No. 73 of 1989) makes provision for Environmental Impact Assessments, these reports concern the impact on the environment of activities identified and prohibited in terms of Sections 21 and 22 respectively. These reports must evaluate the impact the developments may have on the natural and human-made environment. This includes archaeological sites.

## DESKTOP INFORMATION

Archaeological impact assessments can be divided into two broad categories: Phase I and Phase II assessments. Phase I examinations are surface surveys attempting to assess the potential presence of archaeological material at sites. Archaeologists conduct these on foot, after they have consulted relevant written and oral records. These are not detailed studies. Phase II explorations are detailed assessments involving mapping and excavation of material or potential areas identified in a Phase I survey.

### **What research has been conducted in the area?**

Systematic archaeological research has been conducted in the Eastern Cape for a number of decades. However, most of this research focused on the western part of the Eastern Cape. The former Transkei has not been subjected to any systematic archaeological research. The most thorough archaeological study formed part of a geographical survey by Feely (1987). This survey consisted of stratified random sampling of representative transects in the north, centre and south of the former Transkei. This survey found many Early<sup>1</sup> and Late<sup>2</sup> Iron Age sites. Stone Age material has also been found in the area (cf. Opperman 1992). Stone Age research has been largely confined to rock shelters. Obviously there are numerous colonial/historical archaeological sites in the region.

### **What we know about settlements in the central Mbashe River valley area**

The earliest written record on the Thembu kingdom was made by the survivors of the Stavenisse (wrecked in 1554 on the Eastern Cape coast) who recorded that the Thembu and other Eastern Cape Xhosa speaking people occupied the region. The accounts of the survivors include information of the construction of Thembu homesteads at the time. Additionally the graves of Thembu kings are recorded in the 'Thembuland' area as far back as 1600 (Shaw and van Warmelo 1972). Within Thembu oral history the Mbashe river features very early in the Thembu occupation of the former Transkei. A key battle during the rule of Nxego (mid 1600s), between his sons Hlanga and Dlommu, is said to have taken place approximately 10 miles from the Mbashe bridge. Nxego's grave is located in this area (Soga 1930). The Thembu great place was also near the Mbashe river in the period 1820-1850 AD (Peires 1981).

The oral history information correlates with the archaeological material located in the area by Feely. He found evidence for Early and Late Iron Age archaeological settlements in the central Mbashe river area dating between 900 and 80 BP. The evidence included rim

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<sup>1</sup>The Early Iron Age (EIA) refers to the occupation of South Africa by agro-pastoralists who made ceramics and worked iron. In South Africa it dates from the beginning of the first millennium to the early second millennium AD. The Iron Age first appears in the Interlacustrine region in East Africa in the early part of the first millennium BC. (Sutton 1994-5), whereas the EIA first appears at about AD. 200 along the east coast of southern Africa (Huffman 1982). The southernmost Early Iron Age site found in South Africa is Kulubele in the Kei river valley which dates to the 8th and 9th century AD. (Binneman 1996).

<sup>2</sup>The Late Iron Age (LIA) refers to the occupation of southern Africa by the second expansion of metal and ceramic producing agro-pastoralists, as well as Northern Province developments out of the EIA (Huffman 1982). The expansion started in East Africa where the LIA dates to the beginning of the second millennium AD. (Phillipson 1985). The people of the LIA expansion are the direct material culture ancestors of Nguni and Sotho-Tswana speakers in South Africa, whereas the LIA development out of the EIA relates to the ancestors of Venda and Shona speakers. In South Africa the earliest LIA on the highveld dates to the fourteenth century (Evers 1982). By the end of the sixteenth century it had spread all the way along the East coast and lasted until the colonial/historic period (Hall and Maggs 1979, Maggs 1980).

notched ceramics and smelting slag. Earlier field work by Robey also found evidence for early second millennium Early Iron Age settlements (Feely 1987).

## **THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF THE MVEZO AREA**

### **The study area**

This phase I investigation focused on the area designated as the Mandela Museum at Mvezo in the Eastern Cape, South Africa (3128DC1). Construction has already taken place on the site, developers have fenced the core area, and developments have centred within the fenced in area. This portion, as well as surrounding areas, was surveyed carefully for the presence of any archaeological or historical remains that may occur on this site. The up-slope section of the fenced in area was not included, as the surface of this area (with the exception of the North-West corner) has been almost completely altered by construction. Any material or sites present there would have been destroyed.

### **Methods**

The survey was conducted on foot. It focused on the area within the fence (Fig. 1), which is at high risk of further destruction. Features in this area were mapped and photographed. Remains outside the fence were investigated, but not mapped or photographed as they are not under immediate threat by further developments.

## **SURVEY RESULTS**

### **HIGH RISK - AREAS WITHIN THE MUSEUM FENCE (Fig. 2)**

#### **Occupation Area A**

House remains A1 is the least visible in Occupation Area A. It consists of a low mound with no visible wall remains. Of note is that this area is associated with a low flat stone (Fig. 3). When the survey was undertaken there was an Upper Grindstone placed on it, however the smoothed areas do not resemble that of traditional grindstones (see Fig. 22), but is rather similar to stones found on Iron Age sites on which spears have been sharpened. This implies that the stone might have been part of the male assembly area, which suggests that the A1 remains predate the settlement at Occupation Area A, as a building would not have marked this area. A square shallow hole has recently been excavated into this mound.

House remains A2 has clearly visible individual clay box bricks from a collapsed wall. House remains A3 and A4 are also clearly visible (Fig. 4). The up slope side of A4 was excavated into the hill, with the down slope side raised. A3 consists of a raised mound. House A5 was built on a stone foundation that is visible at the base (Fig. 5). The stones in the foundation have been cut. Clay box brick walls were built on top of the stone layer. The individual clay box bricks are still visible.

The house platform at A6 was formed through excavation at the up slope side into the hill. The down slope side has been built up. The base for this consists of uncut stone (Fig. 6). The up slope areas of A7 and A8 were also cut into the hill. The mound at A9 is smaller than that of the house remains (Fig. 7). It consists of a raised mound ridge with a more shallow centre. A smaller mound is associated with it. The nature of this collapse and placement in the occupation area suggests that it was a granary.

Below Occupation Area A there are two parallel rows of large unworked stones. This seems to form a level section between the more sloping areas to either side (Fig. 8). Directly below the stone rows is a stone walled enclosure. The walls have been constructed in the traditional method, with larger stones on the outside and smaller stones filling the centre

(Fig. 9). The oral information suggests that this was the tobacco garden. If this is correct it implies that tobacco occupied a very important role in the homestead as this is the only visible stone wall on the site and would have required a large amount of energy to construct. It is more likely, however that this was the kraal. This is indicated by the time and energy spend in construction as well as by the location immediately down slope from the rondawels.

#### **Occupation Area B**

The preservation of house structures in Occupation Area B is the best of the occupation areas within the fence. The north eastern wall of house B1 is still in tact (Fig. 10). The area where the plaster has peeled off clearly shows the building technique of overlaid clay box bricks. A small window is present near the top of the wall.

The B2 remains are less well preserved. They consist of a mound with a hollow in the middle. This is similar to the remains at A9, suggesting that this could have been a granary. Clay box bricks are still visible in the remains of B3 (Fig. 11). Wall remains are also visible at B4, where a three brick high section of the wall is still standing. A broken lower grindstone is located to the east of this house (Fig. 12).

A cluster of large uncut stones is associated with this occupation area. (Fig. 13).

#### **Occupation Area C**

Occupation Area C is located the furthest down slope of all the areas within the fence. It is separated from the other occupation areas by a slope, which seems to be a combination of natural gradient and terrace cutting. There are a number of house platforms located in this area as well as a number of obvious stone clusters. The lack of a regular layout in this area suggests that either not all the house remains are visible or this area was subject to multiple occupations over time, which blurred the pattern.

House platform C1 (Fig. 14) consists of a flat topped circular mound with some visible dakha walling on the outside. However, no stone foundation is evident. A ring of unworked stone surrounds the mound, set approximately 1 metre from it on the inside (Fig. 15).

House platform C2 is located furthest up slope in the occupation area. It is a well-defined mound (Fig. 16)

The lower sections of the walling at C3 and C4 houses are in tact. The remaining walling consists of clay box bricks (Fig. 16). Part of the C4 wall has intact wall plaster. The doors to these houses seem to have faced in a northerly direction (Fig. 17).

Courtyards C5 and C6 on which houses would have been located, were formed by cutting into the hill (Fig. 18) and building up the platform down slope. This resulted in two artificial terraces (Fig. 19). There seem to have been no support constructed for the up slope cuttings which are now eroding away.

#### **Occupation Area D**

Occupation Area D is located directly above the slope that separates the lower part of the site (Occupation Area C) from the rest of the site. The remains of only one house were found in this area. These remains are not easily visible, forming a very low flat mound (Fig. 20). There are no visible wall remains associated. The remains of a broken lower grindstone in area D further strengthen the possibility that the area was in fact an occupation area.

### **General**

Very little material culture remains were found on the surface. The only visible remains were lower and upper grindstones, remains of cast-iron pots, miscellaneous metal and porcelain. No middens could be identified.

### **LOWER RISK - AREAS OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM FENCE**

There are three occupation areas close to the fenced area. These were not subjected to a detailed examination as they are not under immediate threat (except one house platform). The first area is located to the north east of the fenced area. It consists of the remains of a number of houses. The remains are similar to those found within the fence. One floor from this occupation area is located within the fence, near the area where construction is currently taking place. The second occupation area is similar to the first. However, it is associated with a series of large holes and what might be a grave. The possible grave has a red painted stone standing upright and the area around it is marked with rows of stones. The third house ruin cluster is located to the east of the fenced area. These remains are again similar to those already discussed.

### **DISCUSSION**

The surface material culture artifacts, at the site, suggest that the visible surface occupation areas date to the colonial/historical period. No traditional ceramics, which would have implied an earlier Iron Age date, were found on the surface. However, this does not mean that no Iron Age material is present at the site, as it is possible that the later occupations 'over wrote' earlier occupations. This can only be established through excavation. The low density and nature of artifacts on the surface make it very difficult to date the surface material at site to any specific date within the colonial period. An accurate chronology can only be constructed through the combination of archaeological excavation and oral history research. Such multi disciplinary research will not only help construct a site sequence, but will assist in the understanding of regional changes in house form.

There are correlations between the house remains found on the site and ethnographic information of Thembu settlement and houses. I discuss this below.

### **Standard spatial model of a Thembu homestead**

The typical Thembu settlements are homesteads (*imiziz*). For Thembu people the favourite sites on which to build homesteads are on the slope or top of a rise, on sloping ground above a river or along the ridges between valleys. Thembu homesteads follow the standard layout of southern African Nguni and Sotho speaking people's homesteads, generally known as the central cattle pattern (cf. Huffman 1986, Kuper 1980). The classical arrangement is a circle or semicircle around the kraal.

The main wife's house was in the highest position above the kraal and her store-hut and the houses and store-huts of the other wives were arranged on either side. The kraal would be found in the conceptual centre of the homestead. Between the kraal and the houses there would be an area (*inkundla*) where guests are received, where functions and *imbizo* are held and at the places of *inkosi* court-cases are heard. On the other side in the area between the kraal and houses there would be a granary (*udlala*). The domestic garden would be located down slope from the homestead (Shaw and van Warmelo 1972) (Fig. 23).



### **Traditional house construction**

Shaw and van Warmelo (1972) recorded a number of changes in the house form of Eastern Cape people. Originally these houses were 'beehive' shaped, built with a wooden pole framework and thatched with grass. This shape and construction method was common to all Nguni speaking people of southern Africa. In the Eastern Cape these houses were called *oongquphantsi*.

In the 1800s traditional Eastern Cape house form started to change, this first manifested in a shift away from the beehive shaped *oongquphantsi* to straight walled houses called *izithembiso*. When constructing *izithembiso*, poles (about 1.2 to 2.4 m high) were planted in a circle and side poles interlaced, chequer woven, to make a strong frame. Once the framework had been completed the walls were plastered thickly inside and out. It was not long before a wall built up of sods or turf (*isisinde*) or of sun-dried clay box bricks ('Kimberley bricks') replaced the wattle frame. The walls were plastered as before, both inside and out. Initially these new style houses had domed thatch roofs, later these roofs were replaced by conical thatch roofs (Shaw and van Warmelo 1972).

A change in the style of thatching defines this most recent traditional Xhosa house form, as these *oorontawuli* are also cone-on-cylinder shaped with plastered walls and a thatch roof. When women thatched the *izithembiso* the whole grass was used and tied on in bundles, whereas when thatching the *oorontawuli* roofs the grass stems are separated from the leaves and the stems are then sewn on with the use of a needle and twined or plaited cord. Only stronger walls can bear the weight of this type of roof and, therefore, the walls of *oorontawuli* are generally constructed from sun dried "Kimberley" bricks (ibid).

### **Correlation between ethnographic information and the remains at Mvezo**

The remains within the fence at Mvezo indicate multiple occupations over time, suggesting that people saw the site location as favourable. This correlates with site preferences recorded in the ethnographies.

The remains at Occupation Area A (Fig. 2) clearly conform to the ethnographic homestead settlement pattern. The layout of this area suggests that the kraal and assembly areas would have been located in the area below the houses. This is the area where house platform A1 and the large flat stone were found. If the area immediately below the houses was the assembly area, it suggests that this platform might date to an earlier occupation. The pattern at the other occupation areas are not as clear. This might be the result of preservation in these areas, or damage done by more recent occupations.

The difference in preservation of the house remains might be indicative of different forms of house construction. The best preserved remains are clearly that of clay box brick or 'Kimberley' brick walls. The less well preserved ruins might be that of houses constructed in wattle and daub fashion. This suggests that there were three or four distinct site re-occupations. The earliest occupations produced house remains A1 as well as remains in Occupation Area D. The remains here might be that of *izithembiso* constructed with wattle and daub walls. The distance between the two areas suggest that these were two distinct occupations. These were followed by the *oorontawuli* houses with clay box brick walls identified by oral testimony as the Mandela family occupation at Occupation Area D, dating to early 1900s. The house remains at Occupation Areas B and C are similar to that at D, with the remains at B being the most recent, as the wall of B1 is the best preserved on the site. Further exploring wall construction methods might assist in refining an occupation sequence.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **House remains**

The site at Mvezo is clearly rich in material from past Thembu occupations. The most abundant remains are of rondawel houses. These need to be stabilised and protected from further damage and erosion. Ways to support and prevent the collapse of the intact wall at Occupation Area B need to be found. This must include the stabilisation of the wall plaster.

The site was clearly occupied a number of times, Phase II excavations focusing on the house remains might be able to establish a sequence of occupation. However, such excavations would be destructive and the potential results need to be measured against the negative impact on the remains themselves.

### **Material Culture**

Few material culture items were visible on the surface. To preserve these, it is recommended that all the visible material is collected by an archaeologist and their locations mapped. If this is not done the material, such as metal, will decay further. Furthermore, tourists might pick up smaller items such as porcelain fragments as souvenirs. Lower and upper grindstones should be included in this surface collection. The surface collection needs to include the sieving of all the soil from holes already excavated and the rescue of material culture items contained therein. While these have little archaeological value as they are no longer within context, they could later be used in museum displays.

### **The Landscape**

This survey focused on the structures and material culture under threat, however traditional settlements were not isolated from the broader surrounds. Interaction with the landscape was an integral part of a more traditional way of life. Further developments at the site, both inside and outside of the fenced area, thus need to, not only be sensitive to the built environment, but also take cognisance of the social significance of seemingly 'empty' spaces.

### **Further development**

It is strongly recommended that no further construction take place within the Occupation Areas. As this site is associated with the legacy of Nelson Mandela it is of national significance. Recent development excavations have already damaged house platform A1 in Occupation Area A. A row of holes have also been excavated through the space between the kraal and the houses. This space is significant and imbued with cultural meaning.

Non-intrusive methods need to be explored to protect the remains from possible damage by visitors. These could include marked pathways using natural materials, constructing low walls out of clay brick or stone around structures that need protection. If the clay brick option is chosen, participatory annual plastering could form a tourist attraction. It is essential that the method chosen does not involve any further excavation. However, if SAHRA grants permission for further construction the affected areas need to be subjected to a Phase II impact assessment before any further building and excavation is conducted on the site.

It is recommended that, whichever option is chosen, that it be combined with a community guide system as used in rural Zimbabwe. There access to archaeological sites are controlled by members of the local community, who not only act as guides, but control the movement of visitors at sites. The guides are paid by the tourists for their services. Adoption of this system will ensure direct financial benefits from heritage conservation for local residents.

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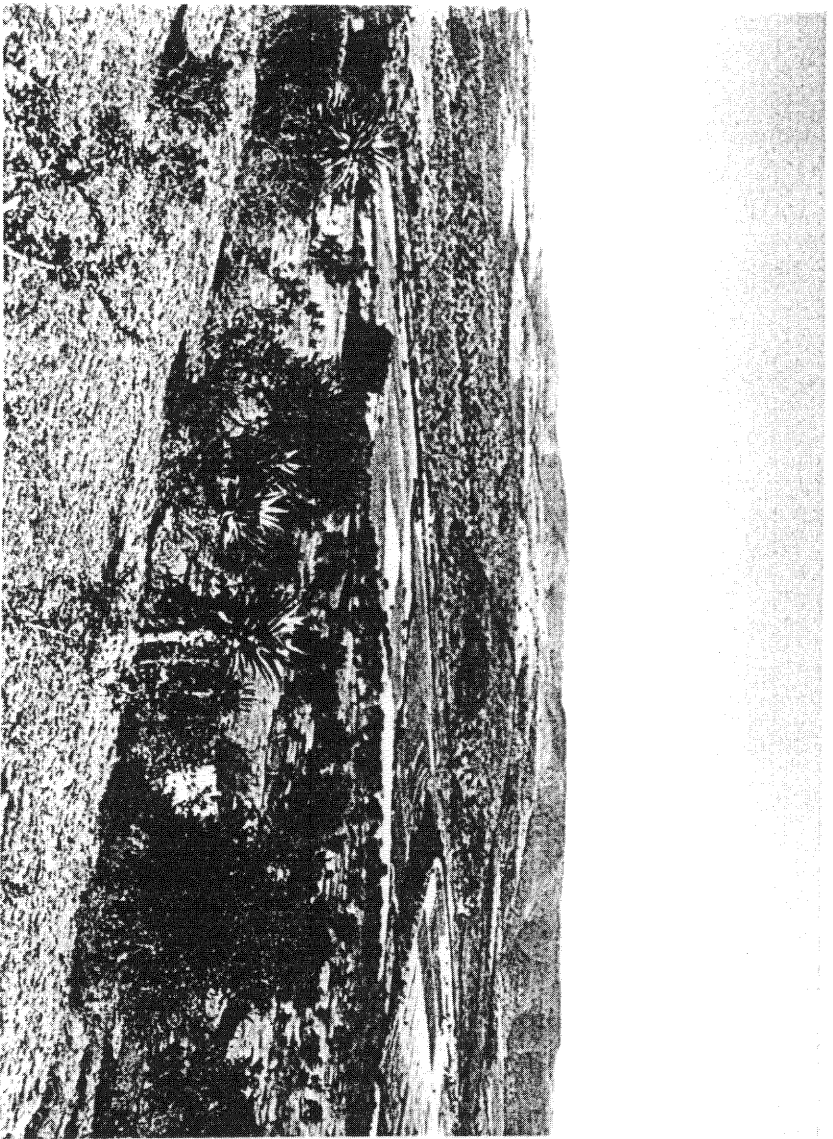
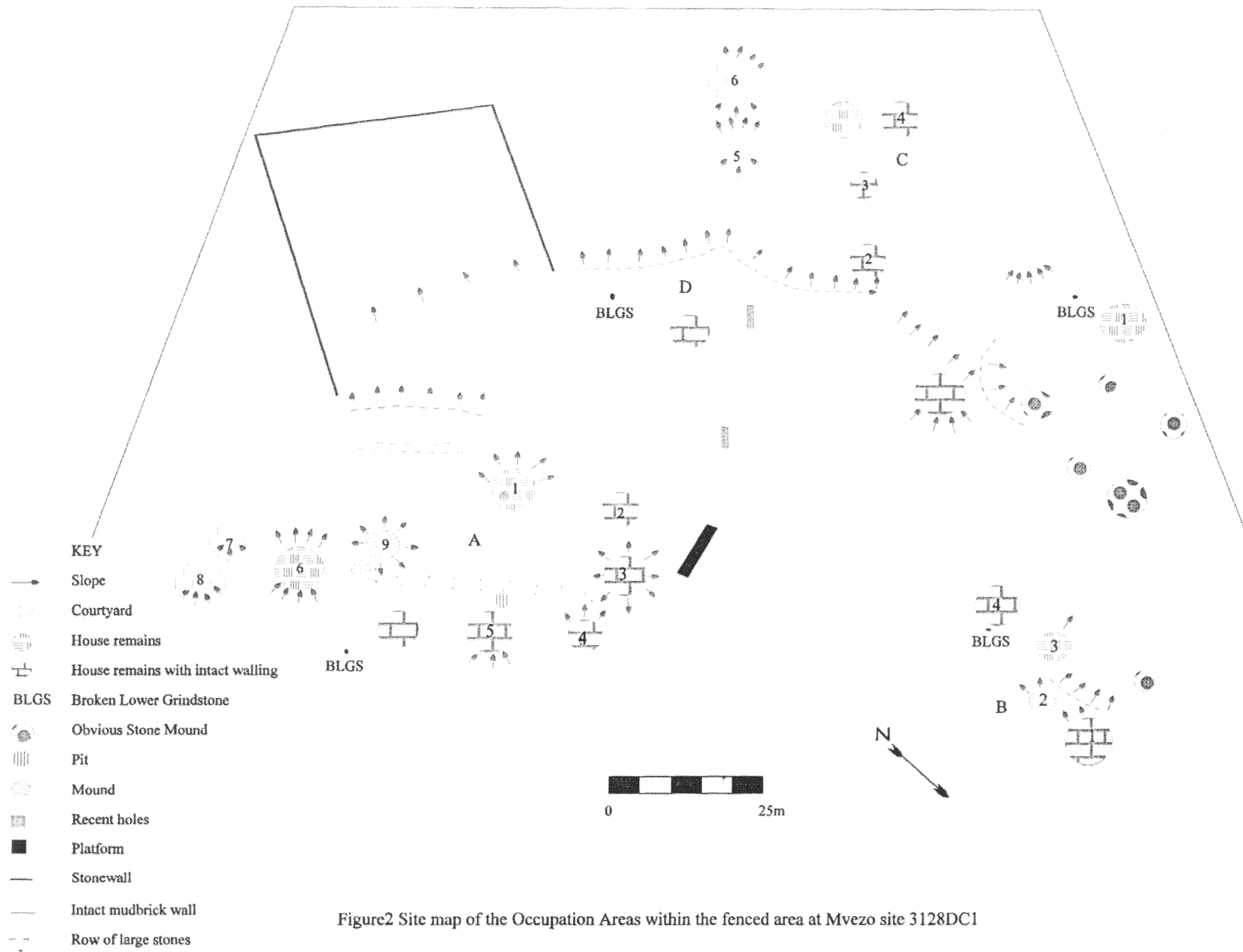


Figure 1 Photograph showing view of Occupation Areas within the fenced area at Mvezo.



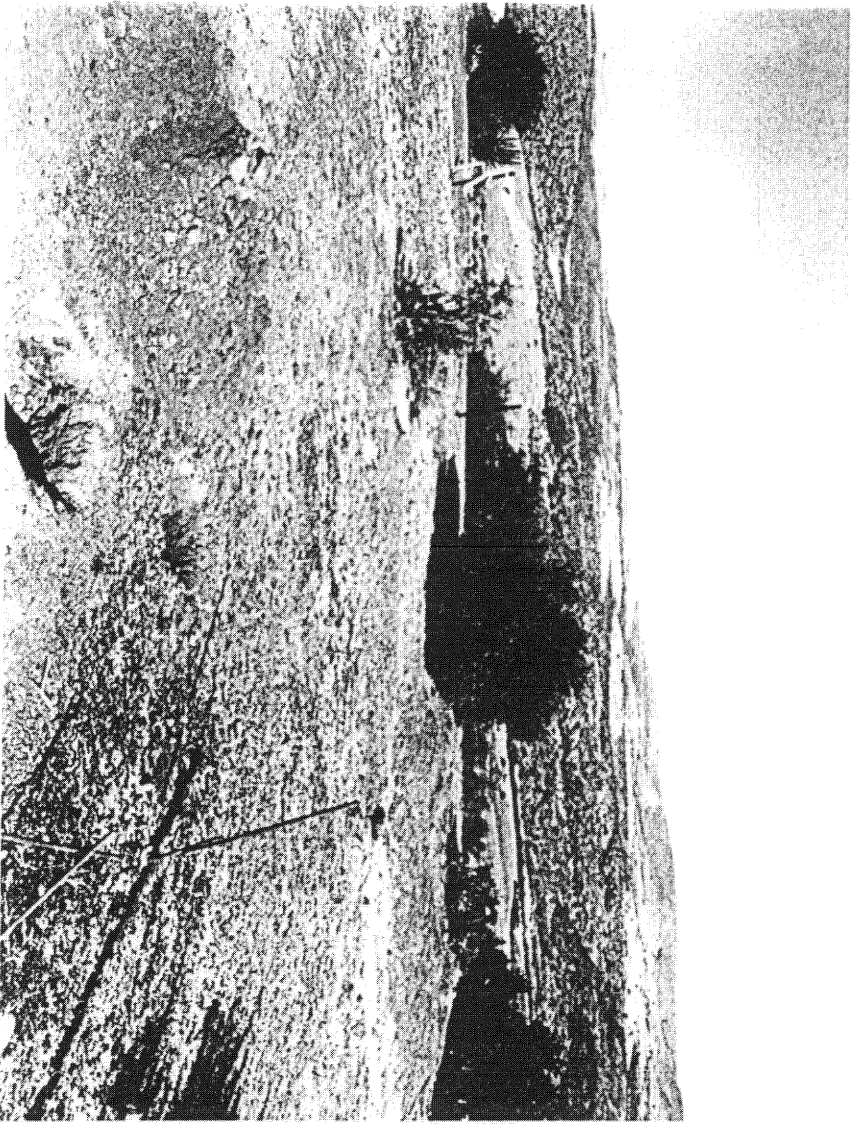


Figure 3 Photograph of house remains A1 associated with a large flat stone.

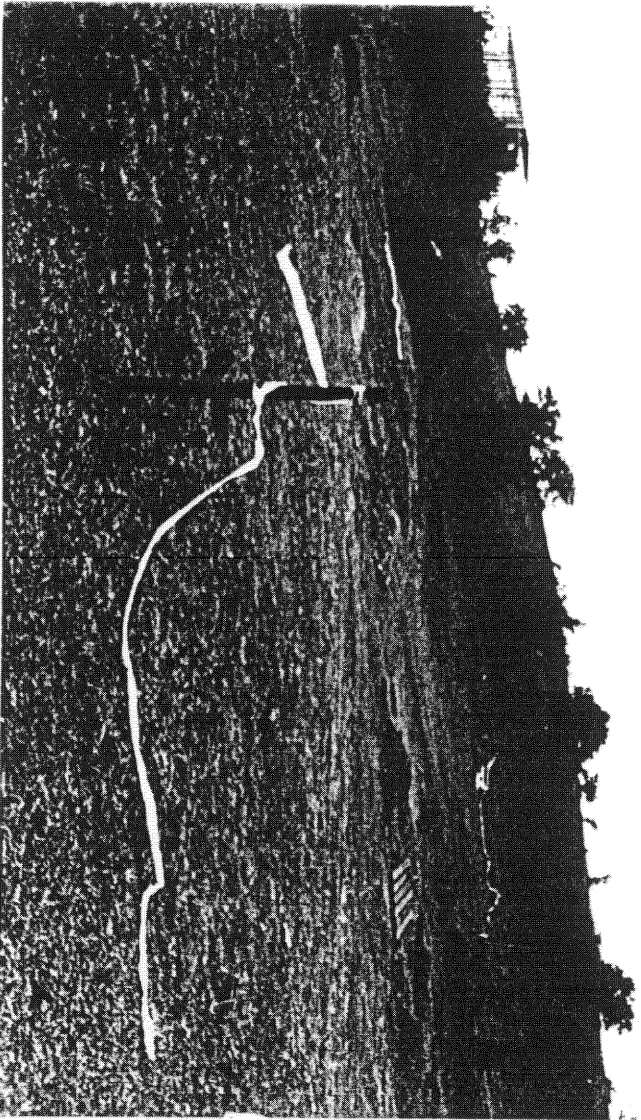


Figure 4 Photograph of house remains A3 and A4.



Figure 5 Photograph of stone foundation and wall remains at A5.

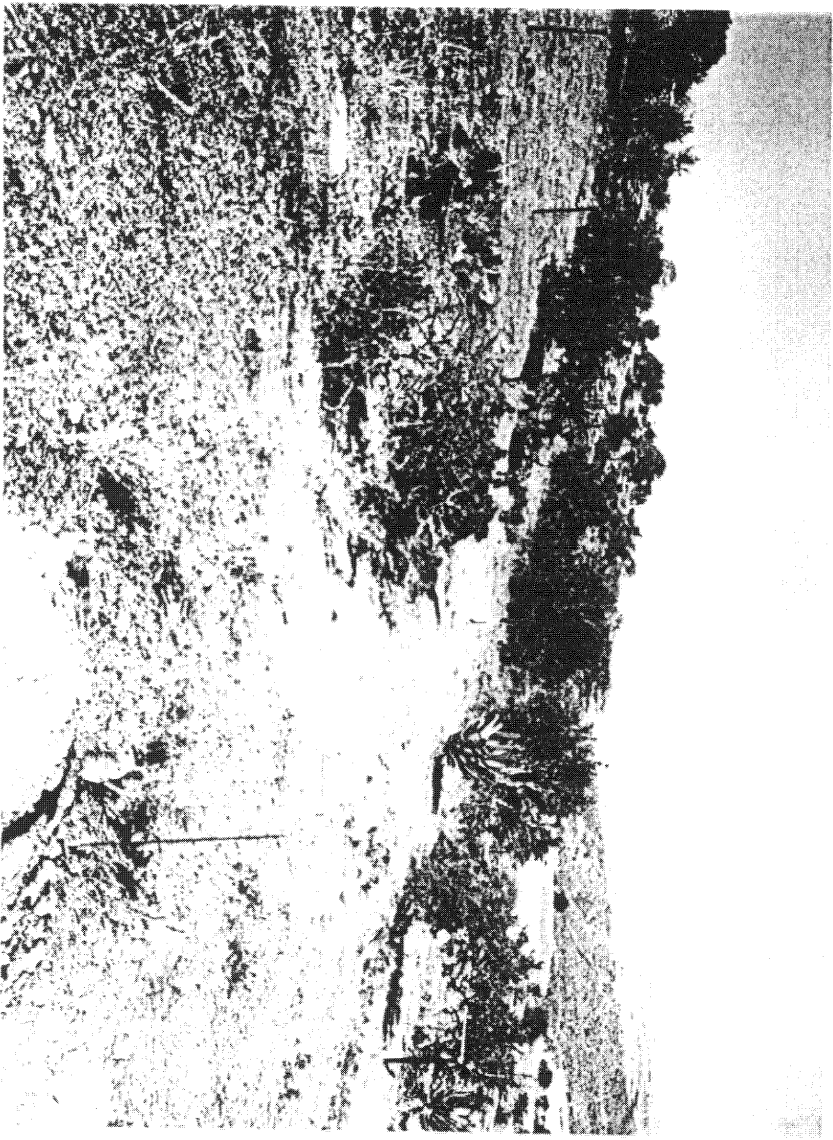


Figure 6 Photograph of house platform A6.

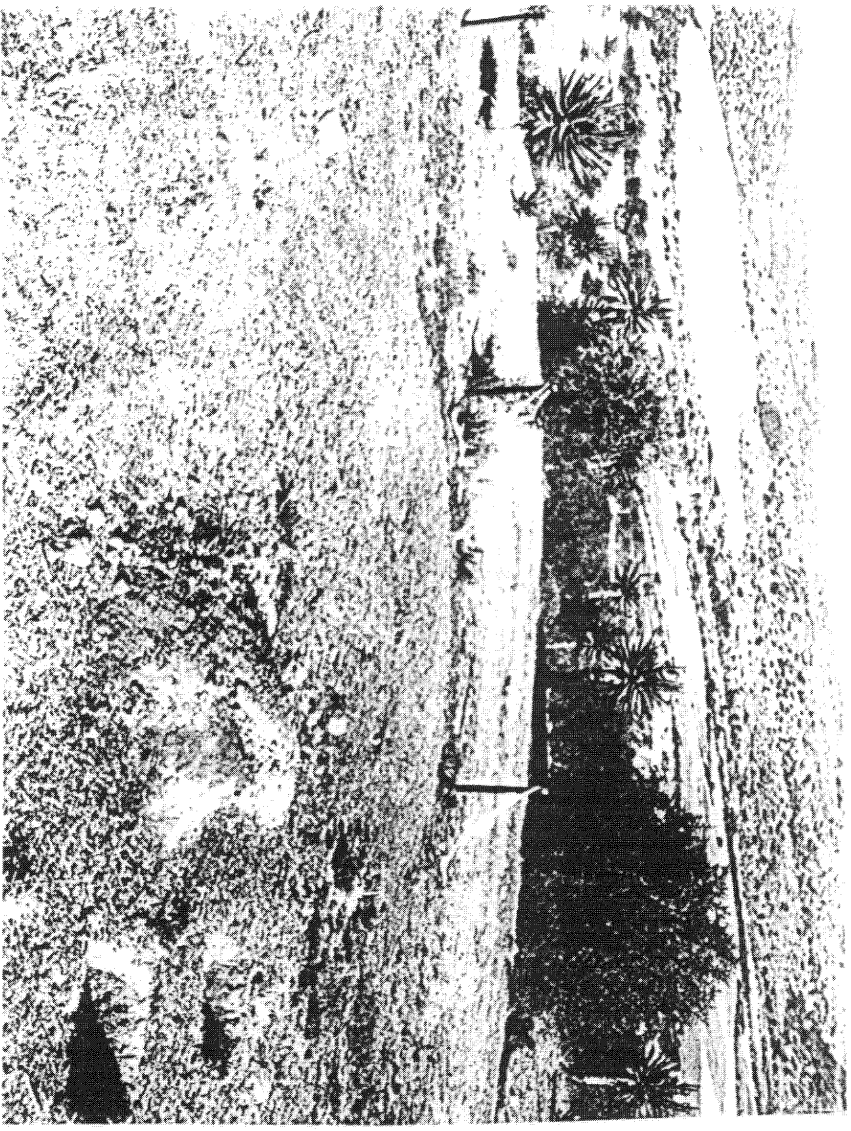


Figure 7 Photograph of the A9 granary mound.

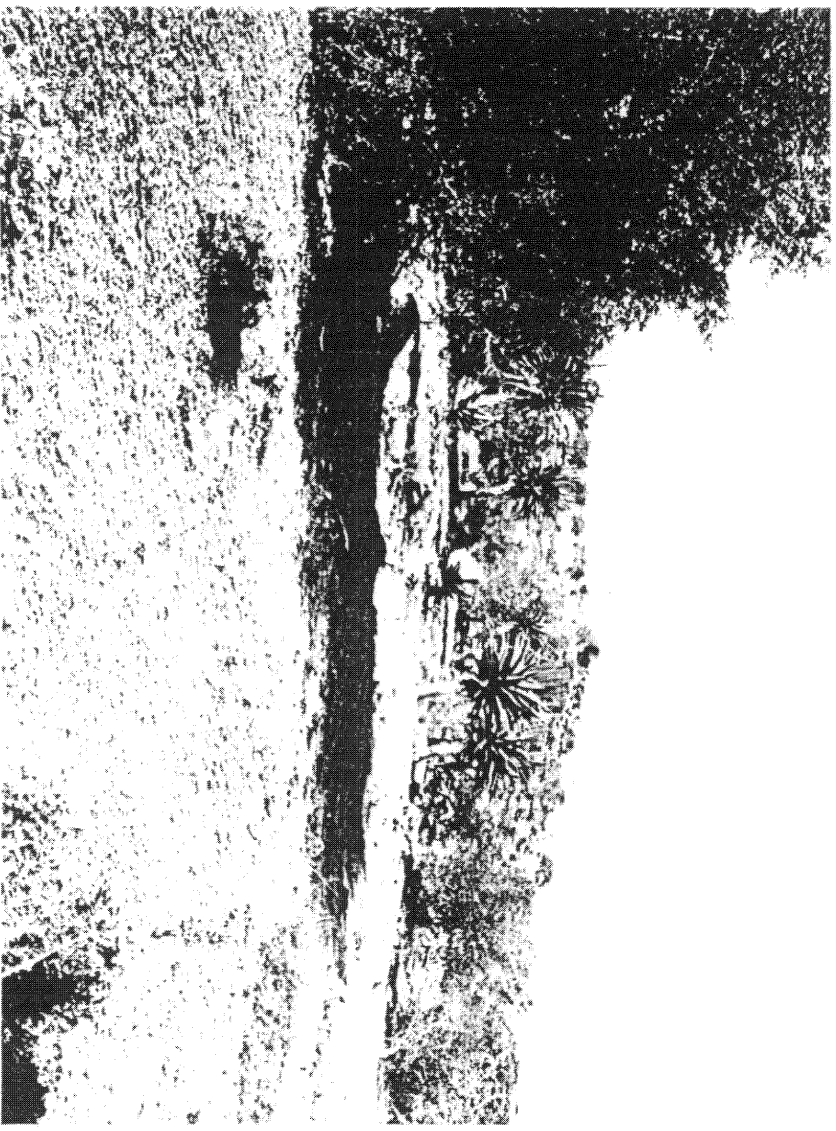


Figure 8 Photograph of parallel rows of stone in Occupation Area A.





Figure 9 Photograph of stone enclosure wall.



Figure 10 Photograph of intact walling of house B1.



Figure 11 Photograph of B3 house remains.

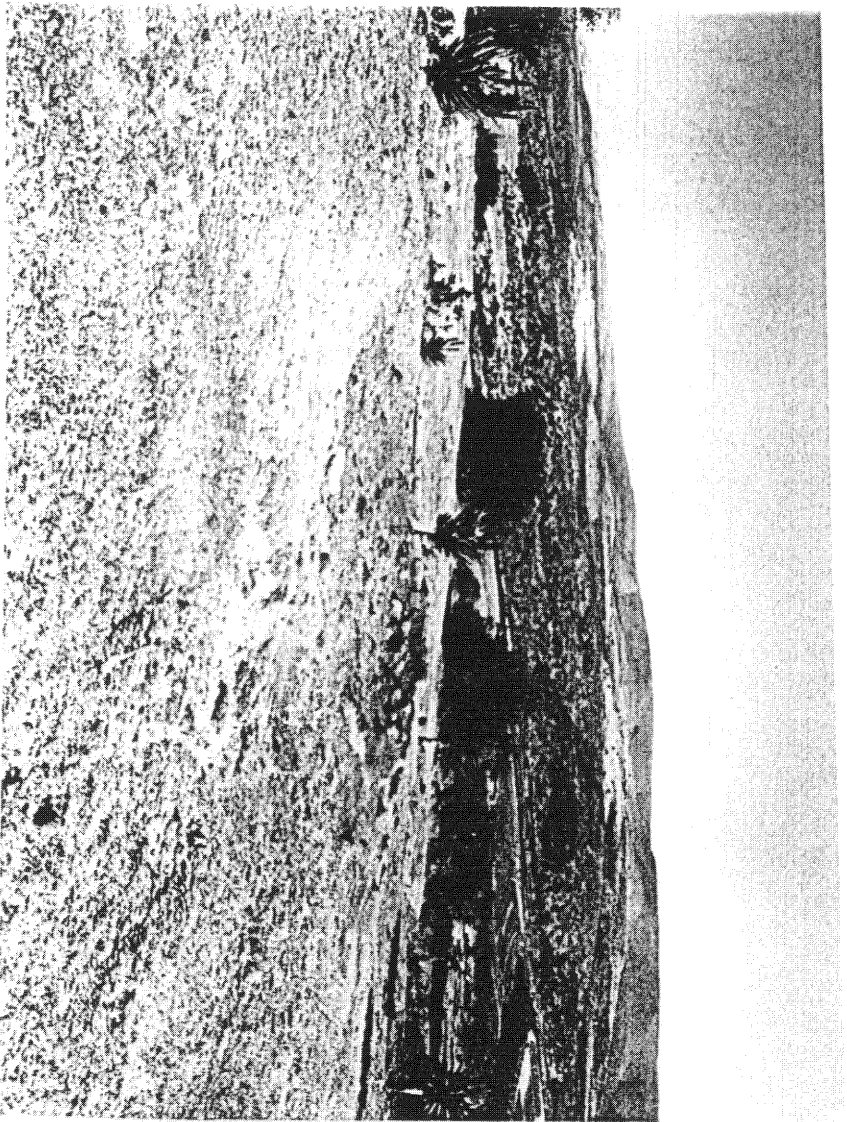


Figure 12 Photograph of B4 house remains with a broken lower grindstone.



Figure 13 Photograph of large uncut stone cluster at Occupation Area B.

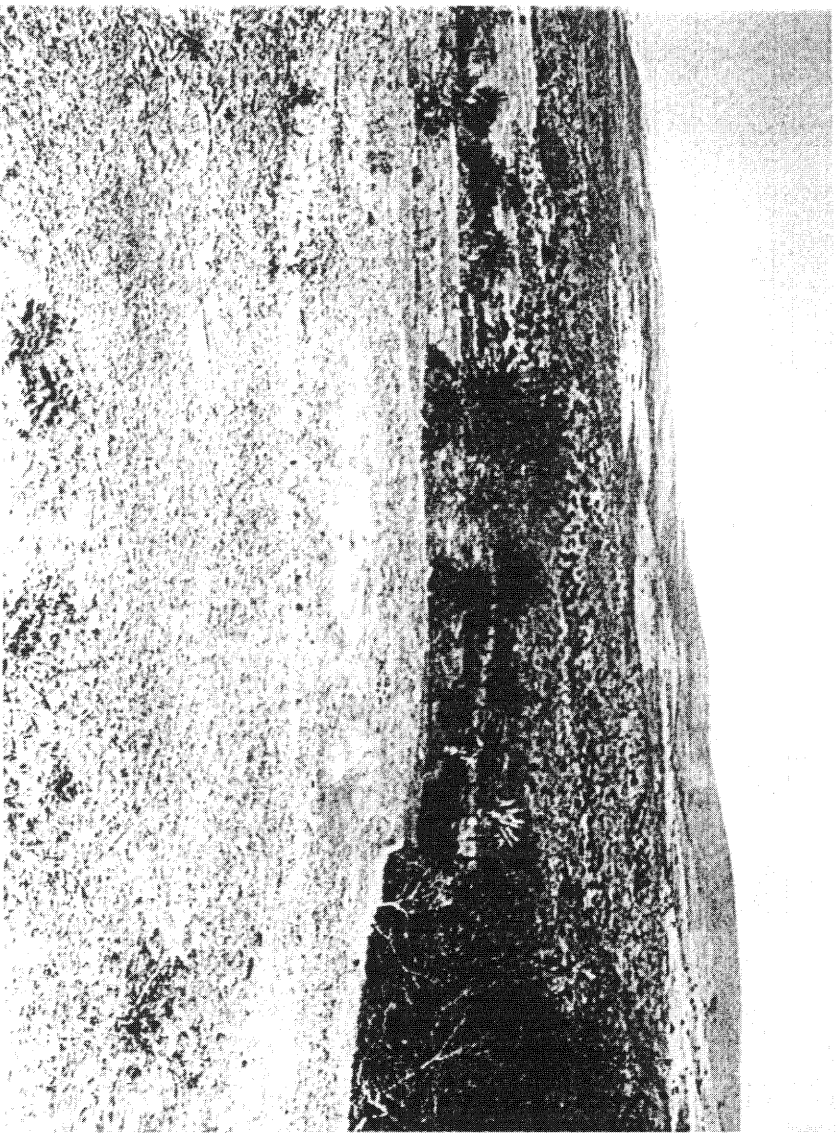


Figure 14 Photograph of house platform C1.

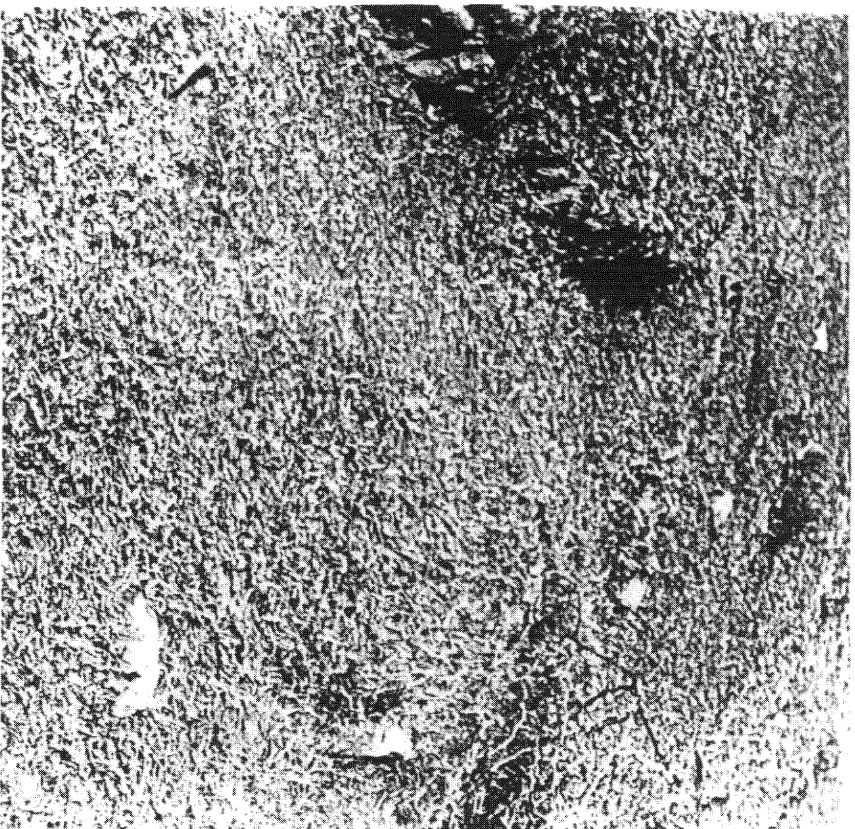


Figure 15 Photograph of platform and stone ring associated with C1.

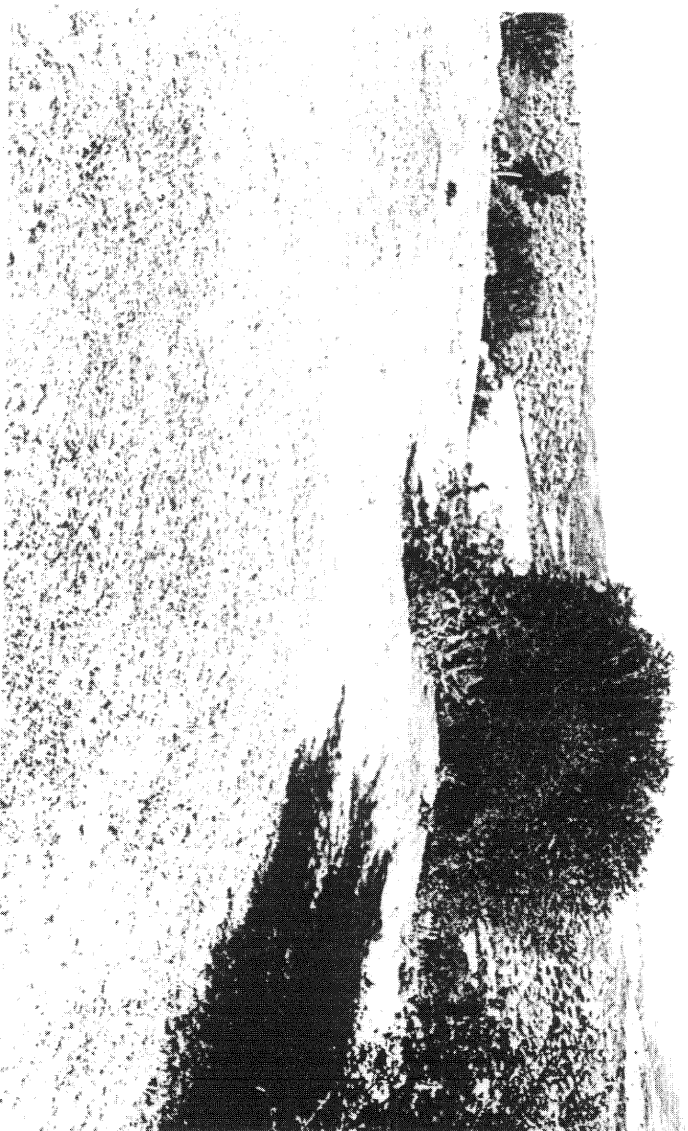


Figure 16 Photograph of C2 house remains

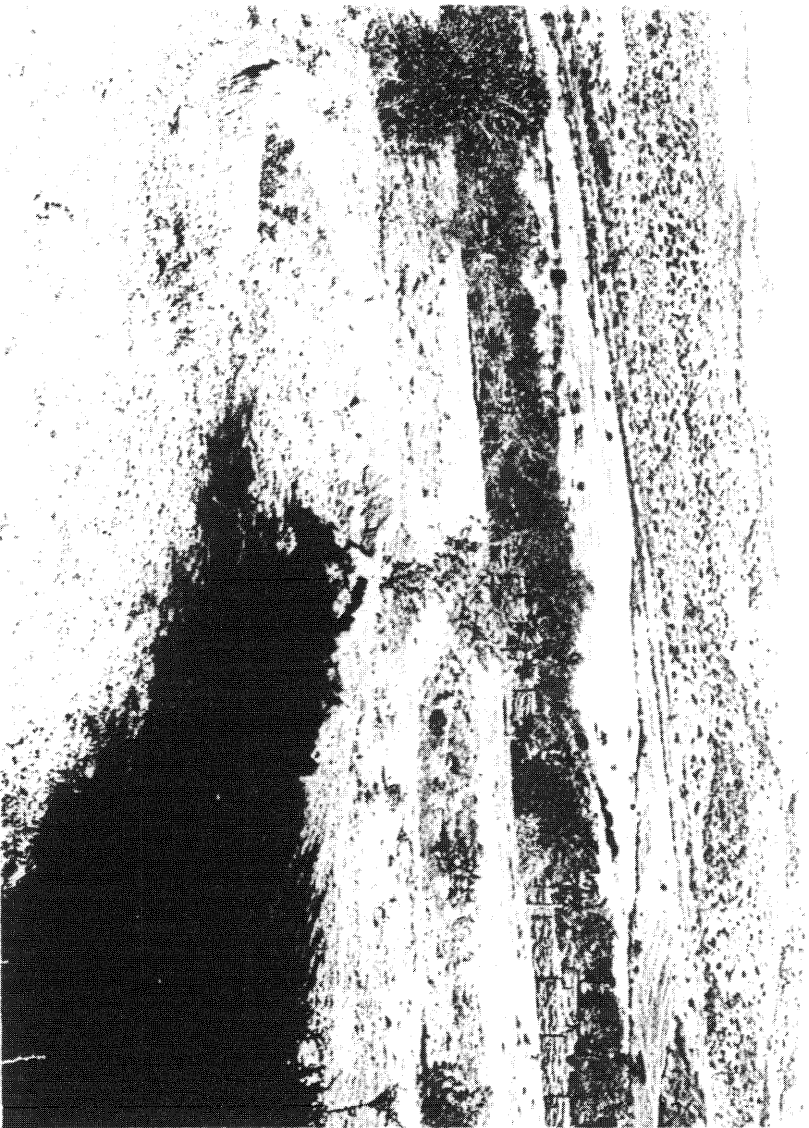


Figure 17 Photograph of house remains C3 and C4.



Figure 18 Photograph of C4 house remains showing wall plaster.

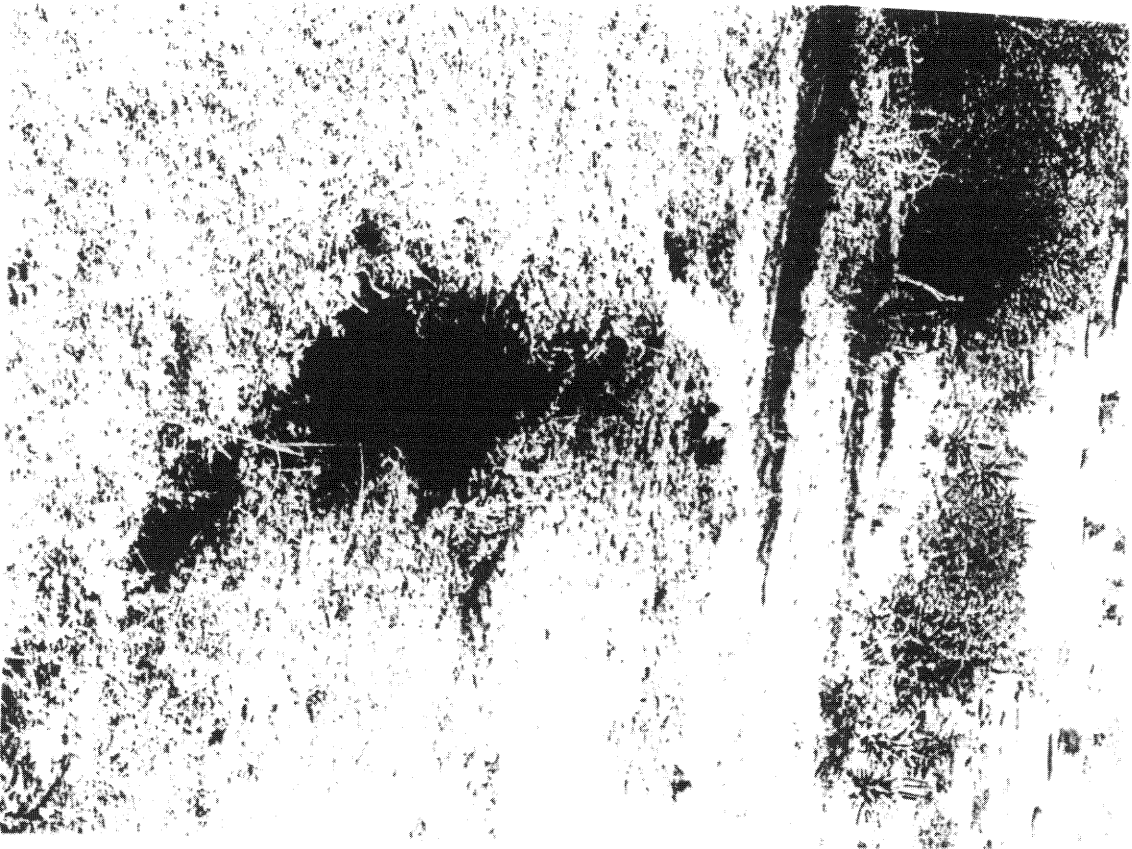


Figure 19 Photograph showing terrace cutting detail.

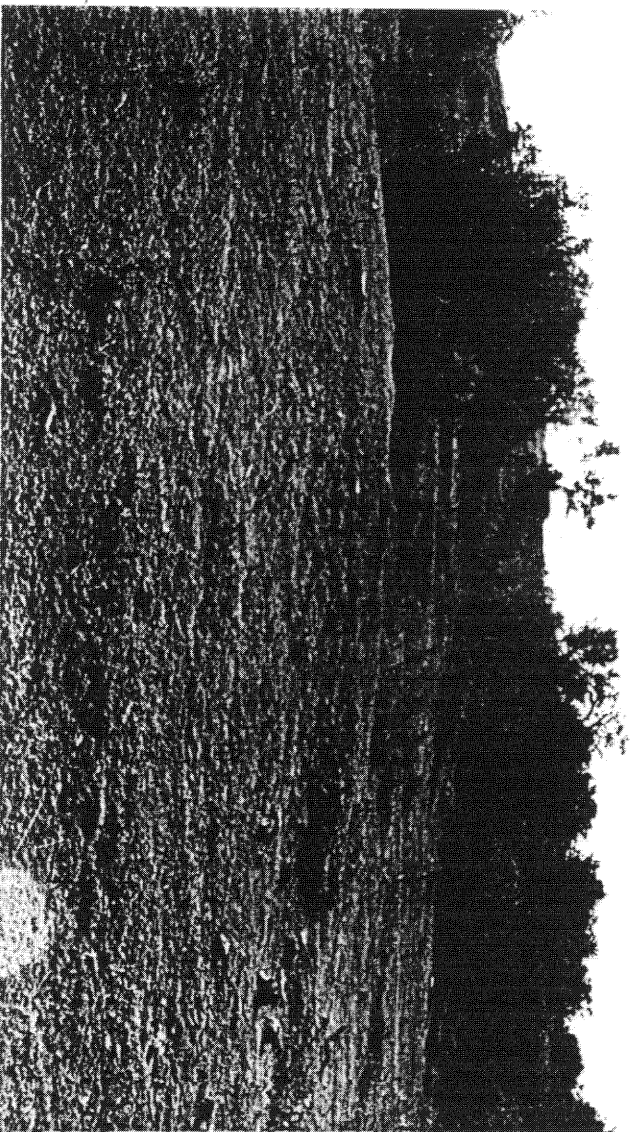


Figure 20 Photograph of terrace detail at Occupation Area C viewed from down slope

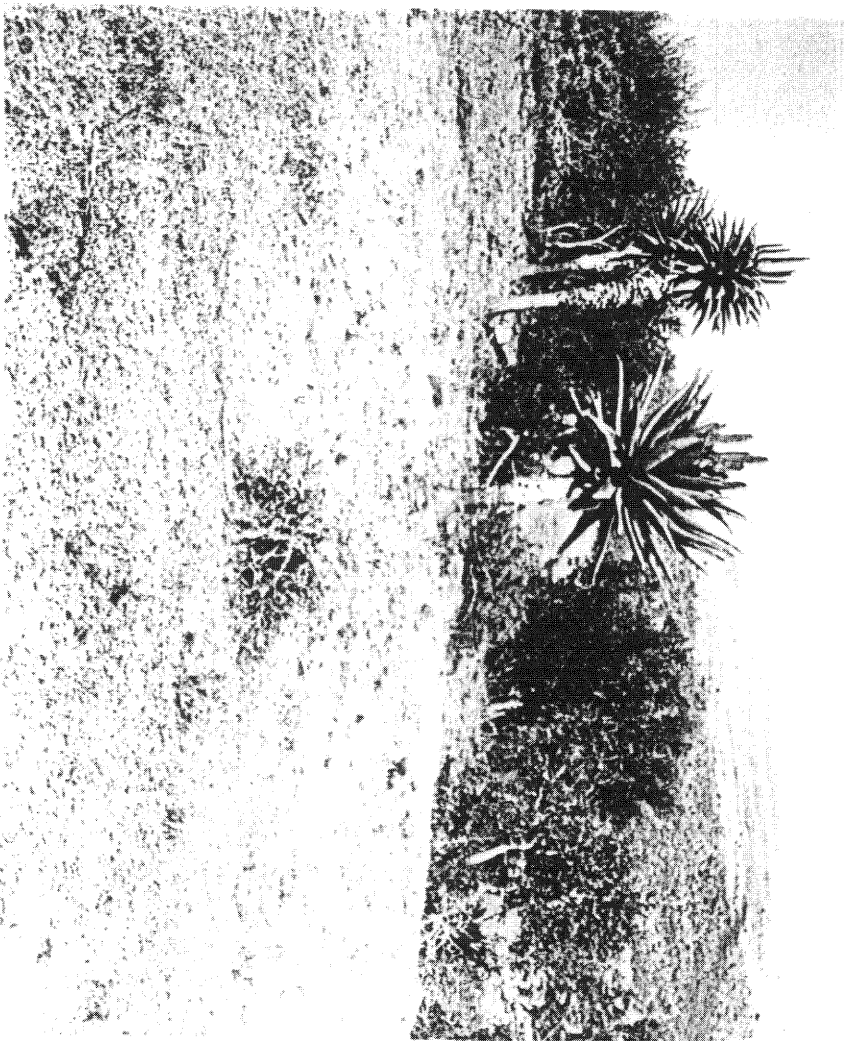


Figure 21 Photograph of low flat mound in Occupation Area D.

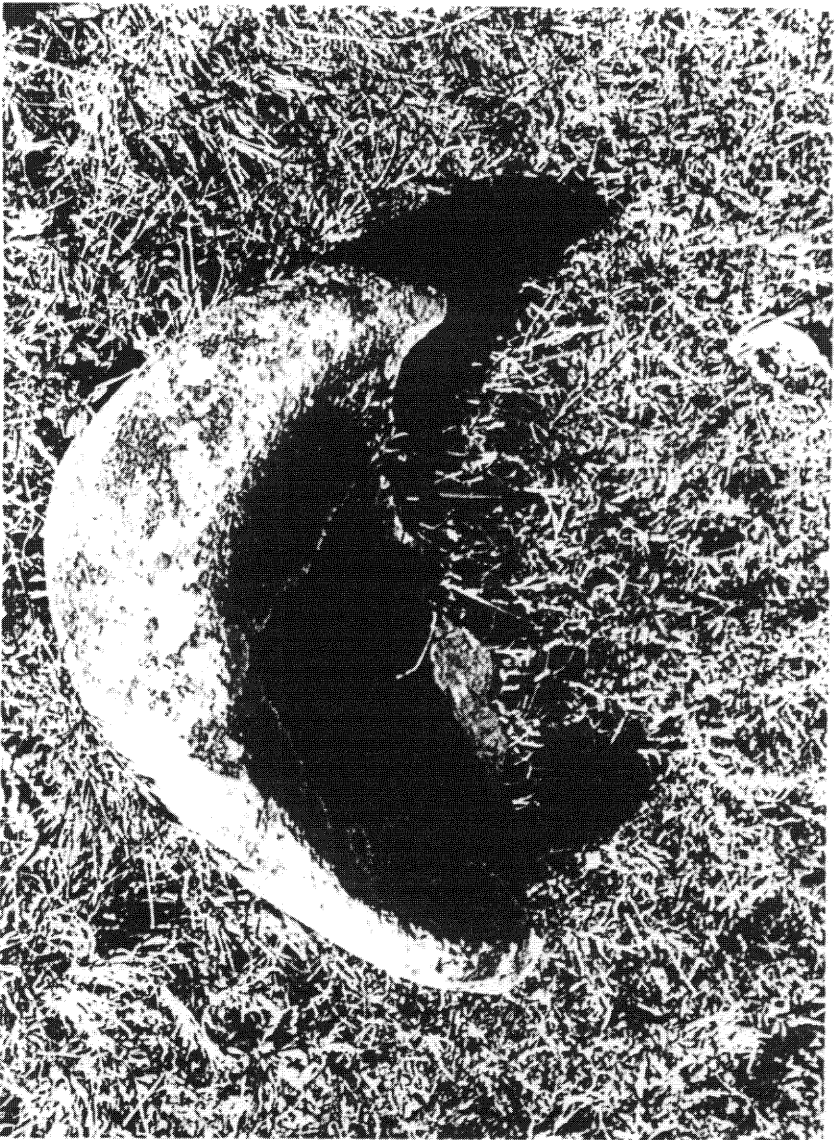


Figure 22 Photograph of broken lower grindstone from Occupation Area D.

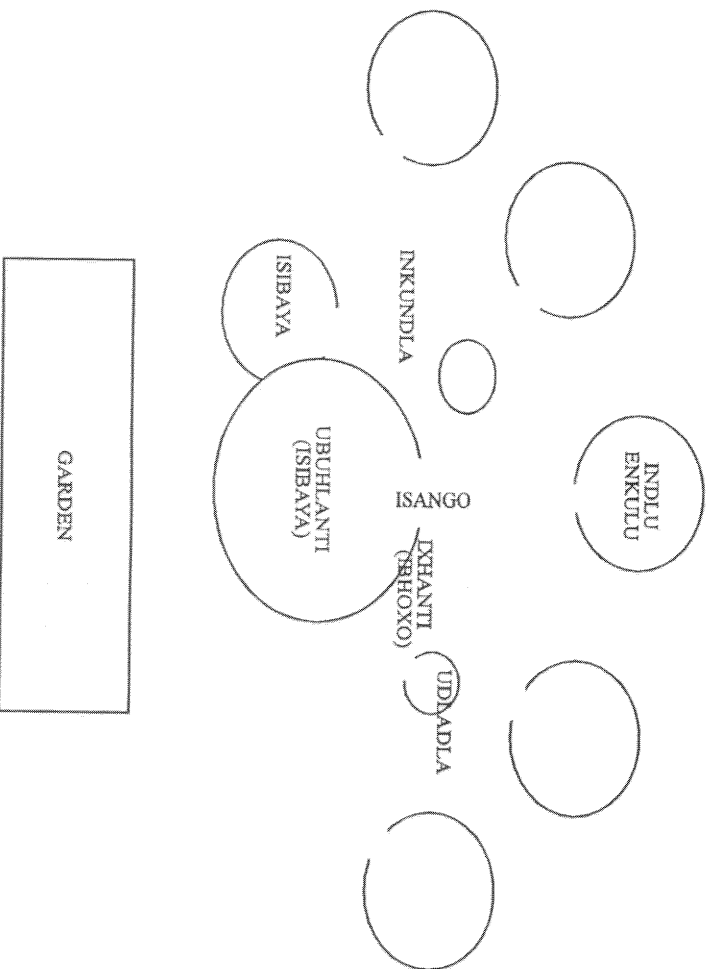


Figure 23 Drawing of the spatial layout of a Thembu homestead redrawn from Shaw and Van Warmelo (1972).