

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF A DAM SITE IN THE FRANSCHHOEK AREA

Prepared for

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May 1996



Prepared by

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town was commissioned by Ninham Shand Consulting Engineers to conduct a Phase 1 archaeological assessment of the proposed Skuifraam dam site near Franschhoek. Archaeological materials in this area occur at a very low density and only one site, the Skuifraam ruin, has potential significance. Suitable mitigatory measures relating to this structure are suggested in this report.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO) at the University of Cape Town was commissioned by Ninham Shand (consulting engineers) to conduct a phase 1 archaeological survey as part of the assessment of the proposed Skuifraam dam site. The terms of reference required that the study be undertaken to "identify the position of any (archaeological) features and comment on their significance and importance". The site of the proposed dam is for the most part comprised of the La Motte Plantation presently owned by the South African Forestry Company Limited (SAFCOL). Orthophotos were supplied by the client.

3. INTRODUCTION

Dam building necessarily involves a variety of large scale earthmoving and construction both of which will have serious effect on archaeological sites in the vicinity. The subsequent flooding of the dam dramatically extends the potential of damage. Both these impacts have been borne in mind when assessing the impact of the proposed Skuifraam dam.

The proposed area of the dam has, where possible, been searched on foot for archaeological materials, with particular attention to rock outcrops as well as existing buildings and ruins. Sites identified in this manner have been located with a Global Positioning System (GPS) and plotted on a map of the locality (Figure 1).

4. RESULTS

The area of the proposed Skuifraam dam consists of the flanking slopes and rocks of the river valley and the more gentle relief of the river banks and valley bottom. The entire area has been subject to either intensive forestry activities or farming. Fields in the vicinity of Dew Dale and Robertsvlei are presently under abandoned vineyards or lush pasturage. Equally, the areas of plantation are all thickly covered with secondary vegetation (where recently logged) or stands of trees with a substantial blanket of pine needles below. Elsewhere, unused plantation land is choked with a combination of pine, bluegum and wattle. Plantation land thus poses the particular difficulty of very limited horizontal visibility. These features of the proposed Skuifraam dam site severely compromise archaeological survey, as rock outcrops can only be located somewhat haphazardly and ground scatters of artefacts are effectively invisible. Nevertheless, rock outcrops such as could be found were examined as were the margins and cuttings of the forestry roads which criss-cross the area.

4.1 SKR1

This site was the only one found during the survey and consists of the remains of a substantial building (Fig. 1). The structure is identified on the 1:50 000 scale map (presently out of print) as Skuifraam and lies at 33° 54.4183'S; 19° 03.5646'E in virtually impenetrable bush. Owing to the vegetation very little can be said about this building besides that it is rectangular and subdivided into at least three rooms. It comprises a foundation of lightly dressed stone which is elevated downslope so as to achieve a level building platform. The



walls appear to have been of mud or very lightly fired brick. A cursory study in the archives did not find any information on the building as the property is listed as state land. More work with the records and older generation maps would be required to furnish further information (A. Malan pers comm.). A few sherds of ceramics seen on site were of nineteenth to early twentieth century vintage (J. Klose pers comm.). SKR1 could be either a place of residence or a utility building.

Importance: PROVISIONALLY MEDIUM (until more detailed information is available). Although the building is entirely ruined, it still constitutes an archaeological site. Due to the extremely dense vegetation covering the remaining structures, it is difficult to make an accurate assessment of the ruin. It seems probable that encroaching vegetation, previous forestry operations and the passage of time have substantially damaged the remains of the building and any midden deposits that may have existed.

Further archival/historical research will be required to establish the precise chronology of the Skuifraam building. If the settlement is shown to date to the 18th or early 19th century the site would have archaeological value and would then warrant further attention.

Potential Impact: HIGH

This building appears to be north of the dam wall but within the construction zone. Damage or destruction is therefore likely.

Suggested mitigation:

If the proposed Skuifraam dam is commissioned it will be necessary to undertake archival/historical research to establish the identity and significance of the Skuifraam structure. It is particularly important to determine the chronology and the area covered by the settlement. If significant features are shown to exist and will be affected by the dam, mitigation in the form of a detailed recording will be necessary.

4.2 General

Only two other occurrences of archaeological materials can be reported here.

Stone artefacts of Early or Middle Stone Age character were noted in the walls of a series of geological exploratory pits at the location of the proposed northern Skuifraam dam wall (33° 54.4183'S; 19° 03.5646'E). These were extremely thinly distributed in the upper meter of the section in weathered clast supported rubble. Stone artefacts of this age (1.5 million to 30 000 years before present) can be expected to occur generally in the area as is shown by odd examples next to roads. Research worthy concentrations cannot be easily predicted and, although they may exist, none were seen on the occasion of the present survey.

The final observation comprises two river cobbles located in front of a low rock outcrop near the western side of the proposed northern dam wall. One of these cobbles may have been lightly ground but, as the locality is well clear of the river gravels, both can be considered as humanly transported objects. No other materials were noted despite the removal of the pine needles covering the soil surface. The finds here are not considered sufficient to warrant identification as a site.

Importance: LOW. The stone artefacts are likely to occur more extensively than the proposed area of the dam. Even a moderate concentration of such materials would be of little value. Any richer occurrences would be of interest but they are not practically identifiable. The river cobble locality has no potential for yielding information.

Impact: Destruction and inundation.

Suggested mitigation: None.

5. CONCLUSION

The survey of the proposed Skuifraam dam site shows that this river valley has been occupied over a very long period of time. However, every available indication suggests that this use was somewhat limited; considerably greater densities of artefacts of all periods have been found in other valleys of the wider region. The recommendations made below are subject to the approval of the Archaeological Planning Committee of the National Monuments Council.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Only one site, SKRI, warrants any further attention. This should take the form of an archival study to determine the precise history of the site and if it would be necessary to conduct any physical excavations prior to the commencing of construction.

7. PROJECT TEAM

Field work:	Royden Yates, John Lanham and Anthony Manhire.
Report preparation:	Royden Yates