

Archaeological Survey of the Ariadne Venus Line

The Institute for Cultural Resource Management was contracted by Eskom to undertake an archaeological survey of the Ariadne-Venus transmission line. Several archaeological sites are already known to occur along the transmission line path and those of its servitudes. Eskom had been informed of these sites during the initial scoping exercise. The archaeological survey was undertaken during the last stages of the project, and in some cases after servitudes and pylons had been constructed.

The survey was undertaken along the affected corridors in areas where archaeological sites could potentially occur. Areas with archaeological potential, but not yet accessible, were noted and will be surveyed once the access roads for the transmission line route has been finalised. The archaeological survey located two main areas of archaeological sites, some of which will require a conservation management plan or mitigation.

All archaeological sites are protected by the National Monuments Act of 1969 which makes it an offence to damage archaeological sites without a permit from the National Monuments Council. As from April 1998 the KwaZulu-Natal Heritage Act will replace the national legislation. Engineering activities are not exempt from either Act and the NMC may hold contractors responsible for any damage accrued to a site where they have deviated from the permit requirements. It is up to the developers to apply for a permit if they intend to damage, alter or remove any aspects of a site. Site inspections may occur during and after the construction of the transmission line, at the expense of Eskom.

This report is a brief summary of the initial archaeological results and serves as a motivation for mitigation. A full and final report will be submitted once the mitigation for all sites is completed.

Description and mitigation of archaeological sites

Since the survey was undertaken with time restrictions, sites were briefly noted in the field. Those sites requiring further mitigation will be given a more detailed analyses on the second inspection. Following is a brief description of each group of sites and the management plan required for the sites.

VEN1

VEN1 is a group of four archaeological sites on various plateaus along a hill near the pylon numbers 131 to 135. One site has already been damaged by the current pylon. The sites are low stone-walled settlements and are in a relatively good state of preservation. Each settlement consists of a few circular stone-walled features and a slightly larger circular enclosure nearby. The former may be the remains of houses and the latter a cattle byre. Some of the cattle byres have smaller enclosures within the main byre. At least two of these sites have archaeological deposit, and fragments of ceramic vessels were observed. Human graves may occur at this site. Three of the sites may date between AD 1250 and AD 1440. The lowest site is probably not older than 100 years.

Three of these sites may be directly affected by the construction of powerlines and thus require some form of mitigation. The last site would require mitigation if it is effected by the construction of an access road. These sites are of low (the most recent site) to medium-high significance and any impact will be negative.

There is a strong likelihood that these sites will be damaged when the pylons are constructed, as has already happened with the current pylon. Furthermore, the access road will in all probability be in the vicinity of these sites and thus may negatively affect the sites. I recommend the following mitigation:

- If at all possible, the pylons and access roads should avoid all stone-walled structures.
- The upper three settlements need to be accurately mapped by an archaeologist.
- If the pylons are to be placed on a site the location of each pylon leg would be examined through archaeological excavation.

VEN2

VEN2 consists of two stone-walled archaeological sites on the same ridge of a hill. The first site is near the location of pylon number 240. This site is a low stone-walled structure. The walling is not well preserved, but there appears to be an archaeological deposit associated with the walling. This site may date to between AD 1250 and AD 1440. This site is of medium archaeological significance and any impact will be negative.

The second site in this group is near pylon number 242. The site extends from the existing transmission line to the Ariadne-Venus line path. The site has already been negatively affected by the current pylon. The site consists of three to four circular stone-walled structures that may be the remains of houses and a cattle byre. There is a potential archaeological deposit at this site. This site is of medium archaeological significance and any impact will be negative.

While the pylon does not directly affect either site, they may be affected by the construction of servitudes such as access roads. I recommend the following mitigation:

- The access road should avoid this site
- Contractors should not use the stones from this site, as with any other site, in the construction of the pylons.
- Both sites need to be accurately mapped by an archaeologist.
- Test pit excavations may be required if the pylons directly affect either site, or if the access road intends to cause any damage. These test pit excavations will occur in the areas where the pylon legs are to be inserted into the ground, or where the access road may pass through the site.

Discussion & Conclusion

Several archaeological sites were located during the archaeological survey of the Ariadne-Venus line. These sites date to the Late Iron Age and to this century. The Late Iron Age has not yet been fully researched in KwaZulu-Natal, and consequently some of these sites have significant research potential. In addition, some of the sites have archaeological deposit that may yield a variety of artefacts and/or features.

Some of these sites require further mitigation in terms of either mapping or test pit excavations. No further construction may occur in the vicinity of these sites until the mitigation for these sites is complete. A full excavation strategy can only be finalised once the position of the servitudes and locations of pylons have been finalised. For the time being, I suggest that the sites be mapped.

Once the mitigation is complete, the contractors must avoid damaging the stone walling of the sites and disturbing the soil unnecessarily. Under no circumstances are the stones from any archaeological site to be used for the construction of pylons. A permit will be required if any of the archaeological sites are to be damaged, altered or destroyed. I can demarcate these areas with red danger tape if it is necessary. The onus is on Eskom to inform the contractors regarding the contents of this report.

Finally, I wish to express some concern regarding the process of the archaeological assessment and mitigation on this project. Despite assurances to the contrary during the Ariadne-Venus scoping exercise, I was given the go-ahead to conduct an archaeological impact assessment along the transmission line route at a very late stage in the project. In fact, construction and erection of the pylons had already begun, to the extent that much of the work on about half the line is complete. The ICRM was first approached in late November 1997 to undertake the archaeological assessment. By then the several of the access roads and pylons had already been constructed, or in the final process of construction. This had occurred in the corridor south of the N3 crossing to the Ariadne substation. Clearly, this is unsatisfactory. The environmental reports of March 1995 clearly indicated that archaeological sites exist in the affected area, that a transmission line would affect these sites, and that an assessment and some form of mitigation would be required.

These circumstances surrounding the archaeological assessment are extremely disturbing since Eskom has a policy, at least in KwaZulu-Natal, of protecting archaeological sites and conducting archaeological surveys prior to the construction of transmission lines. I hope that this will not reoccur and that the project leaders comply with the archaeological requirements for this project.