

**McGregor Museum
Department of Archaeology**



**Report on a Phase 1
Archaeological Impact Assessment at
Biesjesbult West No 96, Portion 2
Aucamp's Hope near Plooyburg,
Herbert District, Northern Cape**

David Morris
April 2010

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Introduction

The author was contacted by Mr Joos Wessels on behalf of Wheatfield Investments No 168 (Pty) Ltd (Tel 053-8318736, Fax 8318737 VAT 4880206554 Reg No 2002/005487/07, P.O. Box 110447, Hadison Park 8306) to carry out a Phase 1 Archaeological Impact Assessment with respect to proposed mining at Estate Biesjesbult West 96 Portion 2 Aucamp's Hope, which is on the south of the Riet River upstream from the Driekops Eiland rock engraving site, near Plooyburg, Herbert District, Northern Cape. The farm was visited on 23 and 30 March 2010. Observations made and recommendations are given in this report. Fieldnotes and photographic coverage are archived at the McGregor Museum in Kimberley.

Legislation

The National Heritage Resources Act (No 25 of 1999) (NHRA) provides protection for archaeological resources.

It is an offence to destroy, damage, excavate, alter, or remove from its original position, or collect, any archaeological material or object (defined in the Act), without a permit issued by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

Section 35 of the Act protects all archaeological and palaeontological sites and requires that anyone wishing to disturb a site must have a permit from the relevant heritage resources authority. Section 36 protects human remains older than 60 years. In order for the authority to assess whether approval may be given for any form of disturbance, a specialist report is required. No mining, prospecting or development may take place without heritage assessment and approval.

SAHRA at national level acts on behalf of Ngwao Bošwa ya Kapa Bokone (the Provincial Heritage Resources Authority in the Northern Cape), where archaeological sites are concerned. Permit applications should be made to the SAHRA office in Cape Town.

Methods and limitations

A background literature/museum database search provides indications of what might be expected in the region. Of particular concern is the proximity of this area to the Driekops Eiland Rock Engraving Site which is currently being nominated for Grade 1 National Heritage Site Status.

During the site investigation, areas of proposed mining were inspected.

In this environment sediments of archaeological significance are frequently well below the surface. Old diggings or quarries sometimes provide sections that may be inspected, and dumps of gravel give an opportunity to assess the potential archaeological content of underlying sediment, but opportunities for this in this instance were rare.

Background: archaeological resources in the region

The Northern Cape has a wealth of archaeological sites (Beaumont & Morris 1990), with locales along and adjacent to the major river systems being of particular note (see also Burkitt 1928; Goodwin & van Riet Lowe 1929).

Stone Age material found in this area spans the Earlier, Middle and Later Stone Ages through Pleistocene and Holocene times. Of particular interest are Pleistocene sites along the Vaal River (e.g. Beaumont & Morris 1990; Beaumont & McNabb 2000), and similar material is known to occur along the Riet River. Late Holocene material with pottery is known to occur on the river banks, while rock engravings are richly distributed in the region, the site of Driekops Eiland being of particular renown (Wilman 1933; Morris 1988; Morris 2002).

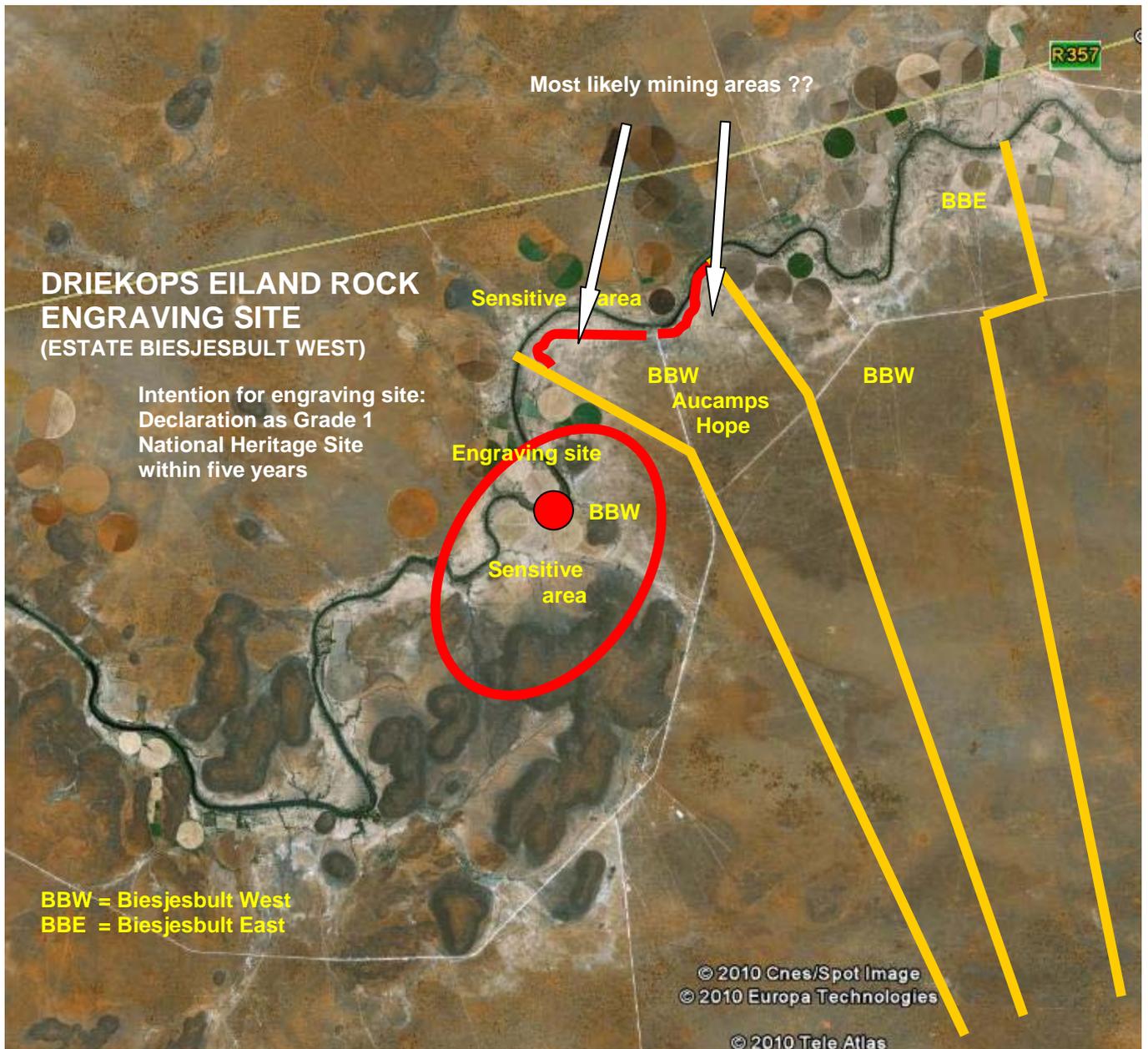
Terraces along the rivers have long been known for their association with archaeological and Plio-Pleistocene fossil material (e.g. Helgren 1979).

Undisturbed river banks are becoming increasingly scarce.

Observations

The area examined consisted of silt deposits adjacent to the river which Helgren (1979) characterises as being a Riverton Silt equivalent along the Riet River; and a higher terrace set back from the river possibly an equivalent of the Rietputs, which seemingly lies against a calcrete-capped shale plain, in turn mantled by Hutton Sands. All of this overlies andesite bedrock. Some kilometres away from the river within the narrow portion of land represented by Portion 2 of Biesjesbult West, the andesite outcrops as a low ridge which was included in this survey.

Observations are given according to zone: *Riverton Silt, Terrace; Upland including calcrete/Hutton Sands; and Andesite ridge.*



Map 1. Map based on Google Earth showing known sensitive areas on the farm Biesjesbult West including the Driekops Eiland Engraving Site and a buffer zone where threats need to be minimised. This map should not be regarded as reflecting all the sensitive areas that might exist on these properties – only those sensitive areas already identified. Only Aucamp’s Hope (Portion 2) has been assessed systematically. See Figure 2 near the end of this report.

Riverton Silt

It seemed most likely, according to Mr Wessels, that prospecting would be focused on this portion of the farm. It is the part closest to the river and likely to be the most sensitive in terms of archaeological traces.

There is an extensive flat area composed of silt, the surface of which over an extensive area appears to be virtually entirely bereft of artefacts. It remains a possibility that artefacts occur below its surface.

Closer to the river, near to where erosion features are found, a variety of Later Stone Age archaeological traces of late Holocene age were found in variable but sometimes quite high densities. These included a lower grind stone (28°57'33.3" S 24°13'18.8" E), upper grind stone (28°57'53.2" S 24°12'59" E), so-called 'pillar stone' with ground surface at one end (28°57'35.0" S 24°13'17.7" E), a grooved stone used in ostrich eggshell bead production (28°57'34.3" S 24°13'19.8" E), as well as large numbers of mainly hornfels flakes, cores, and formal tools, particularly scrapers (e.g. at 28°57'35.3" S 24°13'17.8" E & 28°57'40.8" S 24°13'06.09 E), and ostrich eggshell pieces (a possible broken egg or even a cache at 28°57'52" S 24°12'59.3" E) There is one possible Later Stone Age grave at 28°57'35.3" S 24°13'17.8" E.



Some of the artefacts found: upper grind stone, scraper, grooved stone.

It is felt that mining here should encroach no closer to the river than about 28°57'36" S 24°13'17" E.

Near the western edge of Portion 2, an erosion feature has exposed a Middle Stone Age 'hot spot' at 28°58'01.4" S 24°13'12.0" E, with flakes and points with faceted platforms on hornfels and quartzite. To the east of the road from the bridge to Plooyburg similar material occurs in a large eroded area but in much lower density.



MSA artefacts

A farm workers' burial area was pointed out to us by Mr Joseph Mahalak at $28^{\circ}57'42.4''$ S $24^{\circ}14'40.2''$ E. Seven grave cairns were counted, only one of which has a concrete headstone, with details: Isak Riet 5-10-1914, d 17 Nov 1981.



Isak Riet grave.

Three further graves were found on a high spur of silt running parallel with and close to the river: an isolated oval-shaped packed-stone cairn on the river bank at $28^{\circ}57'26''$ S $24^{\circ}14'43.7''$ E, and another two low rectangular cairns side by side further along this spur at $28^{\circ}57'30.6''$ S $24^{\circ}14'39.9''$ E.



Oval-shaped grave

Terrace

The terrace above the Riverton Silts appears to contain gravel as well as a richness of artefacts, principally on weathered hornfels. The integrity of this material is uncertain and no organic material was found with it.

Part of the old homestead complex is situated on this terrace, partly on its slope. The Du Plessis family graveyard is also on the terrace nearby at $28^{\circ}57'48.6''$ S $24^{\circ}14'09.7''$ E. There are eight graves, seven of them with well-kept cairns and inscribed grave stones.



Grave stones indicate:
Hercules Gerhardus du Plessis, 28 May 1845 – 4 May 1929

Maria Magdalena du Plessis, nee Aucamp, 6 Oct 1883 – 6 Feb 1952
Barend Johannes du Plessis, 22 May 1887 – 9 Dec 1970
Anna Johanna F. du Plessis, nee Van Niekerk, 24 Jul 1890 – 18 Oct 1916
Anna Catharina du Plessis, nee Wandrag, 21 Apr 1908 – 15 Jul 1999
Arrie Gerhardus Niekerk du Plessis, 5 Oct 1916 – 26 May 1965
Maria Magdalena Punt, nee du Plessis, 18 May 1920 – 16 Mar 1991
Leendert Boudewyn Punt, 2 Feb 1912, oorlede.

Nearby there is a quarry, now used as a rubbish tip, but evidently once a prospecting pit, at 28°57'51.5" S 24°14'03.6" E. Sundry items of broken machinery, agricultural equipment and building materials have been discarded here.



Pit/quarry now used as rubbish pit

Upland with calcrete surface and mantling of Hutton Sands

Almost all of this area where calcrete is exposed has a low density sprinkling of artefacts, mainly Middle Stone Age or Fauresmith in character. These are masked where Hutton Sands occur but can often be observed at localised places where the underlying calcrete is visible.



A view southwards – the Mokala National Park at the horizon to the left, the andesite ridge defining the horizon to the right.



Artefacts typical of those occurring on the 'Upland' area

Andesite ridge

It was anticipated that rock engravings might occur here given the proximity of this ridge to an engraving site on a similar andesite outcrop at the nearby Mokala Park boundary – but none was found.



The andesite ridge

A large Acheulean core and a rock on the side of the hill from which flakes had been struck in Earlier Stone Age times was found at 29°02'14.4" S 24°16'45.5" E



Acheulean core

A packed stone feature was observed at 29°02'11.0" S 24°16'50.4" E, but no clues in the way of artefacts were found to explain what this might have been. It is surmised that it might relate to the Anglo-Boer War as a defensive or scouting position since it is at a point with a good view down towards the river crossing.



Packed stone feature.

Recommendations

It is clear from the above that while artefacts occur over most of the Aucamps Hope property, the more sensitive part is within a belt running parallel with the river (as indicated in Map 1 above, Maps 2 & 3, below).

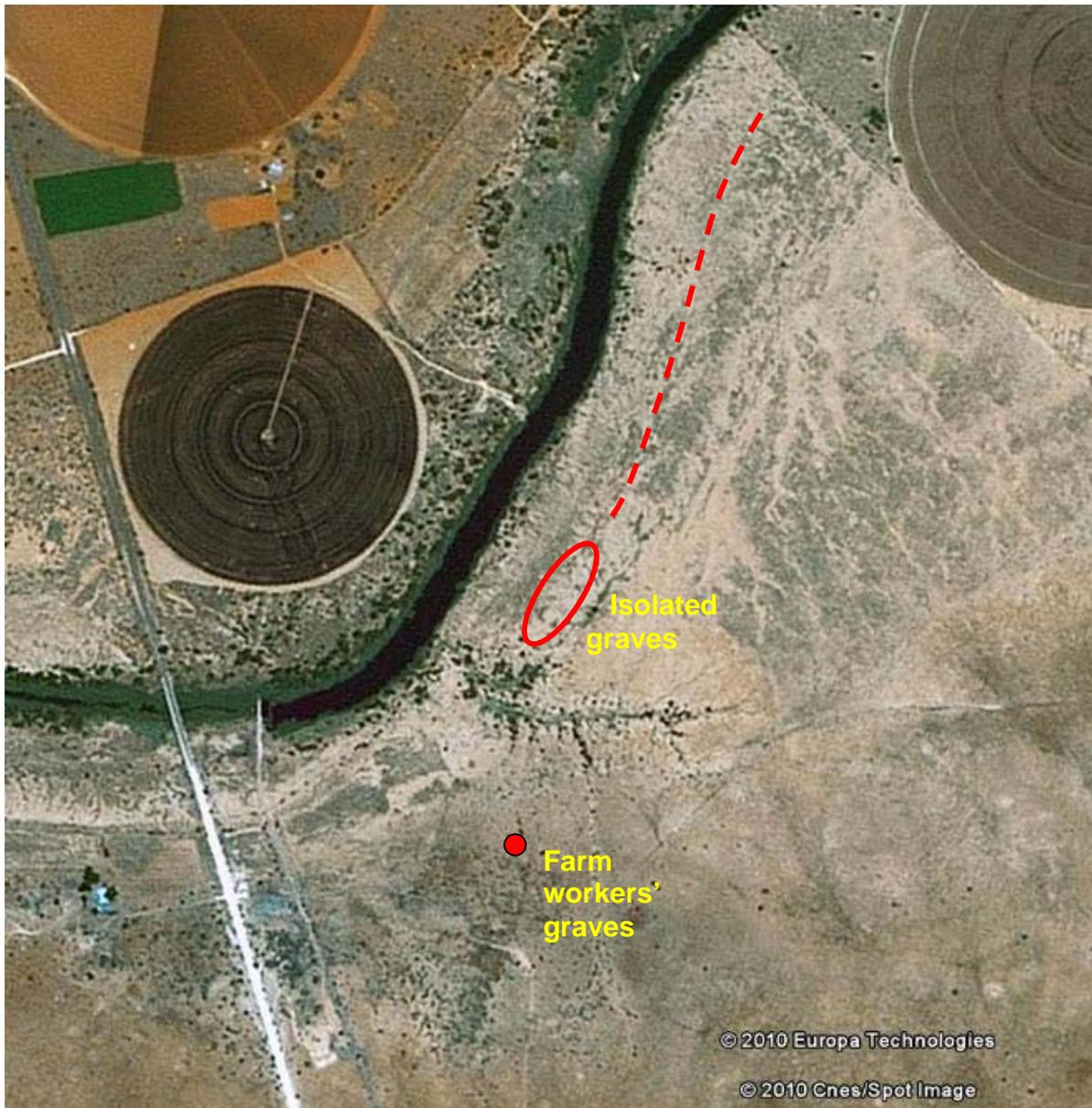
It is understood that the permit being applied for is to undertake prospecting. This report recommends that prospecting be permitted to take place in areas other than those indicated as sensitive in the Maps 1 - 3. No prospecting or mining should be allowed closer to the river than a line running parallel with the Riet River and passing through the point $28^{\circ}57'36''$ S $24^{\circ}13'17''$ E.

Even outside of this exclusion zone it is possible that sites and burials could occur below the surface. These could include Later Stone Age burials, such as have been found at Weltevrede and Driekopseiland, nearby. In the event of a burial being found during prospecting/mining, the SAHRA APM Unit should be consulted immediately (Ms M. Galimberti at 021-4624502).

Any gravels that are located below the Riverton Silt may contain localised accumulations of Earlier Stone Age artefacts (again, as at Driekopseiland). In the



Map 2. Approximate indication of the extent of the archaeologically sensitive Zone (between river and red line)



Map 3. The most sensitive sites east of the Plooyburg road are the farm workers' grave yard and isolated graves overlooking the river. It is recommended that mining should not take place close to the river.

event of such materials/features being found during prospecting/mining, the SAHRA APM Unit should be consulted immediately (contact details above).

Archaeologists of the McGregor Museum or otherwise authorised should be allowed to carry out visual inspections of sections opened up by mining in order to assess the

nature of sedimentation and possible cultural stratigraphies if such become available for study.

Acknowledgements

I thank Mr Joos Wessels who guided us to the farm and to Mr Joseph Mahalak, farm-worker, who indicated the location of some of the graves on the farm and assisted with opening of gates, permission having been given to Mr Wessels by farm owner Mr Kosie van der Merwe. Mr Koot Msawula assisted with fieldwork.

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