

Archaeological Excavations for the Cornubia Switching Station

For Durban Metro Electricity and Environmental Planning and Design

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Environmental Planning and Design Approached the Institute for Cultural Resource Management to undertake salvage excavations at the proposed Cornubia substation. The excavations were undertaken in December 2002 over a period of seven days. The excavations appear to have located a multi-occupational site dating to both the earlier Early Iron Age, and the late Iron Age. The excavations are completed and no further mitigation is required. Permits for the destruction of these sites have been issued to Durban Metro Electricity.

The site is situated ± 1 km north of the Gateway shopping Centre at La Lucia Ridge. The hill where the site is located is currently under sugar cane farming.

METHOD

A total of nineteen 2 m X 2 m squares were excavated to a depth of ± 80 -100 cm below the surface (fig. 1). The squares were initially located in areas of surface artefact concentrations. Those squares with dense artefactual material were extended. All squares were excavated in 10 cm spits, unless a visible stratigraphy was present. Features were mapped according to archaeological methods.

The site was excavated to determine a stratigraphic sequence of occupation and to determine if any spatial patterns would occur on this part of the site.

STRATIGRAPHY

The site was excavated mostly down to Spit 8, although Square 10 was excavated to Spit 10. The stratigraphy of the site is as follows:

- Top Soil (Spits 1 -2)
- Red Brown Sand (Spits 2-3)
- Brown Sand (Spits 3-4)
- Red Sand/Mottled Brown Red Sand (Spits 4-7)
 - Light Brown-Yellow Sand (Spits 7-10)

The main cultural horizons were at Spits 3 - 4 (for the Late Iron Age) and Spits 7 - 9 for the Early Iron Age). Spits 5 - 6 were mostly sterile in a red clay-like soil. Fig's 2-11 illustrate the stratigraphy of the site.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Only two types of features were excavated: Shell Patches and Charcoal Pits.

Shell Patches

Two Shell Patches were excavated. Shell Patch 1 is located at Square 14 at top half of in Spit 5. It is a thin layer of shell (± 1 cm thick) ± 30 cm in diameter. The shell consists of oyster fragments.

Shell Patch 2 is located in Square 8, Spit 4. It is a thin layer of *Perna perna*. 0.5 cm thick and ± 15 cm in diameter. No other artefacts were associated with the Shell Patch.

Charcoal Pits

A few small pits with charcoal remains were recovered. Most of these came from Square 4. Square, Spit 8, had five Charcoal Pits. The upper layer of Spit 8 had a concentration of charcoal across half of the square, however the pits were situated separately underneath this layer. These pits were surrounded by the Mottled Brown Red Sand. All the charcoal pits have decorated Mzonjani pottery. The pits vary between 15 - 37 cm in depth and are 20 cm - 30 cm in diameter.

General Pits

Pit 1 was located in Square 6, Spit 4. The pit was in a dark brown sand, and had a few fragments of bone and pottery with lip notching. The pit is 17 cm - 21 cm deep and ± 40 cm in diameter.

Pottery

Two types of pottery styles occur on the site: Early Iron Age, and Late Iron Age. The Late Iron Age pottery is mostly undecorated. The decorated pieces include lip notching, and *isumpa*. The sherds are mostly a red-brown colour and some have a black burnish.

The Early Iron Age pottery includes pots and bowls. The decorated piece includes the single horizontal groove below the rim. These sherds are found in Spits 5 to 8.

Stone

Upper grinding stones on beach quartz pebbles were observed, as well as (lower) grinding stones on white beach sandstone.

Marine Shell

The marine shell consisted of brown mussels (*Perna perna*) and oyster fragments.

Bone

Very few pieces of bone were excavated. Those few that were retrieved appear to belong to small bovids (sheep/goat sized animals).

Iron ore

A few fragments of shale and iron ore were recovered. These were probably used in iron smelting or smithing activities.

Daga

One fragment of daga was located in spit 5. It appears to be the remains of a granary floor.

Conclusion

The Institute for Cultural Resource Management was contracted to undertake salvage excavations at the proposed Cornubia switching station. The excavations uncovered a site that has a multiple occupation. These occupations date to the Early Iron Age (specifically the Mzonjani period, 1500 to 1700 years ago), and a possible early Late Iron Age period ($\pm 600 - 400$ years ago). The excavations, and proposed switching site, appear to be on the outskirts of the main site. Thus any planned development further uphill from the site would require further investigation.

The excavations have been completed for this specific area, and no further mitigation needs to be undertaken. The Durban Metro Electricity is required to apply for a permit to damage this site. This permit is available from KwaZulu-Natal Heritage.