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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF DOORNBOSCHFONTEIN 513 JQ, MAGALIESBURG

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PREFACE

The archaeological investigation at Spring Farm and Gloster Farm near Magaliesburg, was initiated by Mr Willem Prinsloo and commissioned on behalf of the owners. The work was financed by Anglo-American Corporation and the Standard Bank of South Africa. I am very grateful for the opportunity to do the survey and for permission to publish the final report.

The survey was aimed at an appropriate assessment of the sites. In this paper I describe the surface finds in general and compare the site complex with other known prehistoric archaeological occurrences from the area. I also examine the settlement pattern and in the discussion attempt to place the sites in an historical context and chronological order, and to identify the occupants. Finally, certain recommendations on the utilization and preservation of the sites are made.

Adverse circumstances, such as a shortage of time and the distance from Bloemfontein, hampered follow-up visits to the sites. The intention was not to do any excavations and the project was therefore limited to a description and discussion of the different stone-built structures and other visible features on the surface. Stone flakes from the Late Stone Age which occurred in several places, required expert knowledge and had to be omitted from the report. I realise that an assessment of the sites based only on a surface investigation of the settlement pattern without supporting evidence from the ceramic assemblage and other finds can not be final. This report is not intended to be so but will put the site on record and provide a basis for further investigation.

I owe gratitude to Willem and Bonnie Prinsloo for their friendliness and the supply of transport during the survey and to Rolf Oosthuizen who helped with the mapping of the site at Skeurkloof. My sincere thanks are due to Johan and Ida Potgieter of Koesterfontein for housing us in their usual hospitable manner. I am also indebted to Jaco and Gerhard for essential assistance during the field-work. Without their interest and devotion the survey would not have been possible. The illustrations were done by Sharon Holt, to whom many thanks are due. Sandra Bishop and Zoë Henderson are thanked for reading the script.

INTRODUCTION

Ruins in any environment are fascinating. The unknown past is usually veiled in an atmosphere of mystery and romance, and the basic promise of discovery inherent in the exploration of the history of anonymous peoples is exciting and often rewarding. The mere existence of stone walls on the Highveld proves that people lived there and utilised the material from their immediate surroundings to build shelters for themselves and protection for their stock. Wood and cow dung were used as fuel. The people tilled the land and planted crops to supplement natural food resources. They buried their dead, worshipped their gods and honoured their ancestors. Their lives were ordered by social relationships, economic organisation and political systems and their spatial expansions led to treaties, marriages and the catastrophes of war.

To reconstruct the past we have to examine the available literature, survey the sites, and formulate and test hypotheses. We describe and discuss finds, classify sites for comparison, and attempt to date the settlements, to identify the occupants and to reconstruct their ways of living.

SURVEY

My first visit to the farm was during a brief one day tour in December 1990. At the time I noticed the stone-walled circular enclosures which could represent a prehistoric occupation. At other sites there were rectangular foundations which are clearly remnants of more recent settlements.

During June 1992 eight days were spent on a survey of Doornboschfontein. Twenty five sites were identified, numbered and plotted (Fig.1). Due to a lack of time not all the sites could be described in full, but four units were selected arbitrarily to represent two different building phases. For further investigation to record the layout and determine the settlement pattern, these sites were mapped in detail by plane table. The study was limited to the farm, although another stone-walled ruin (No.26), located on neighbouring land, was included for comparison. The very promising settlement at site 13 (Fig.1), popularly known as "Martial Corner", was slightly damaged during the erection of the existing game fence and was omitted. The archaeological complex is named after the original farm Doornboschfontein 513 JQ.

17DC

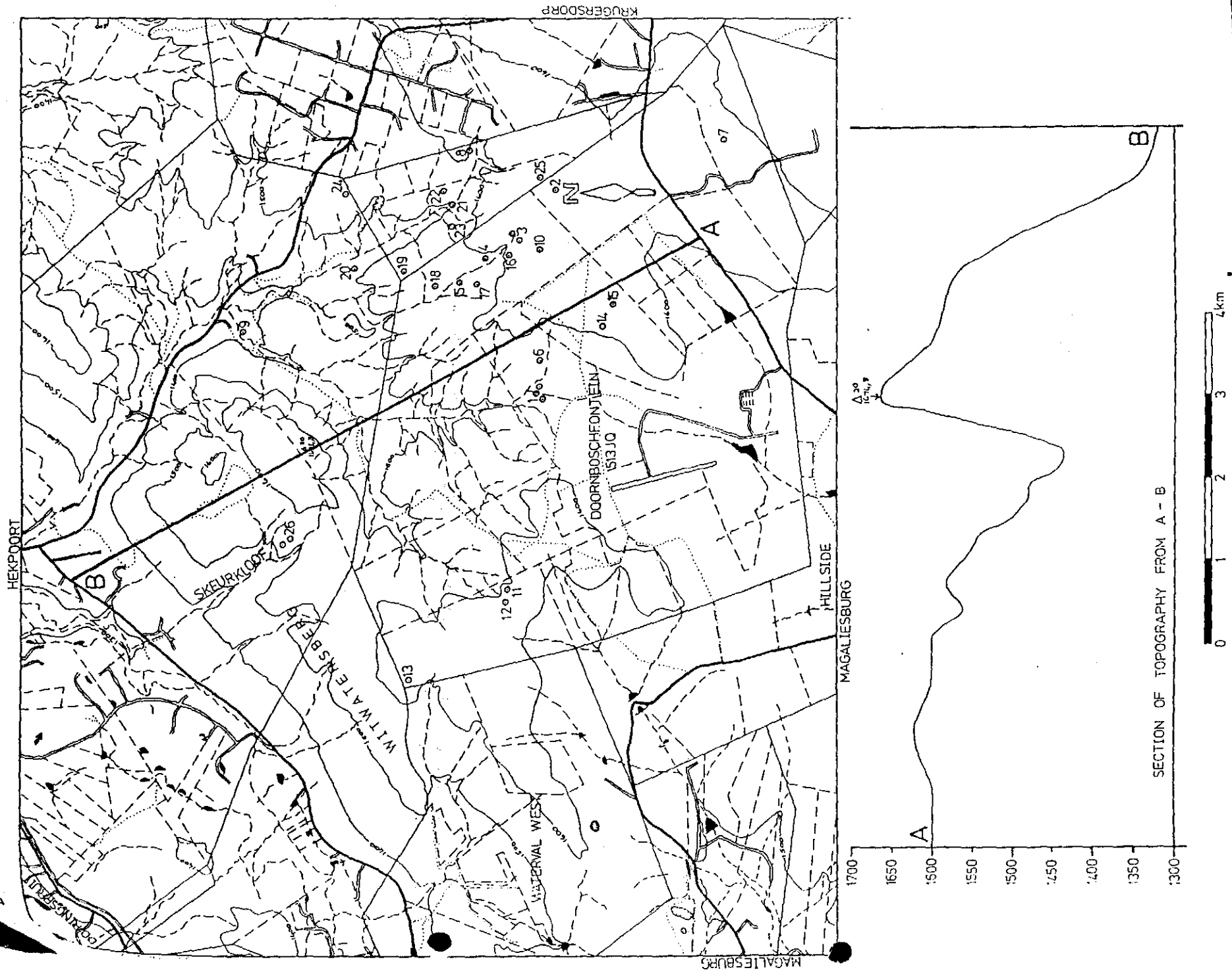


Fig.1 Doornboschfontein 513 JQ:

Locality, topography and distribution of sites.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Stone-walled sites are widely distributed over the Transvaal and Orange Free State and are linked to Sotho/Tswana occupation during the Iron Age. The important historical role of the Magaliesberg region in Sotho/Tswana traditions was already recognised several decades ago. The special importance of the area in the history of the Kwenā peoples is found in the honouring of their great chief Kgaswane (Cashane) by using his name for the Magaliesberg during the 18th century, and in more recent times the name of the ancestor Mogale.

Other tribes, such as the Bafokeng, are also believed to have come from the Magaliesberg where they bore the brunt of an attack by the Bapedi in 1823-24. Indications are that the Magaliesberg and surroundings did not escape the onslaught of the Amandebele of Mzilikazi. During the years 1825-26 their reign of terror destroyed the settlements in the entire area to the north. The devastation and desolation was witnessed by Moffat on his journey to Mzilikazi in 1829. A certain degree of peace came to the Magaliesberg region after 1832 when the Amandebele were driven towards the far western Transvaal.

Aspects of the prehistory of the region have previously been investigated and the description of a stone walled site at the farm Doringspruit, about 8km from Doornboschfontein, represents the first archaeological work in this region.

An assessment of the sites in the area indicates different categories of settlement patterns during the Later Iron Age. Those at Doringspruit (Fig.2 A&B) and certain sites at Olifantspoort are characterised by an open central court. Circular huts with smeared clay floors are located inside oval courtyards on the periphery against the uneven outer walls. Threshing floors are found in the central open area and grain bin stands occur in the rear courtyards behind the huts. In some cases associated large single byres display several smaller enclosures inside and a single hut for herdboys near the entrance (Fig.2C). Middens containing pottery, bone and clay-covered human burials occur on the outside

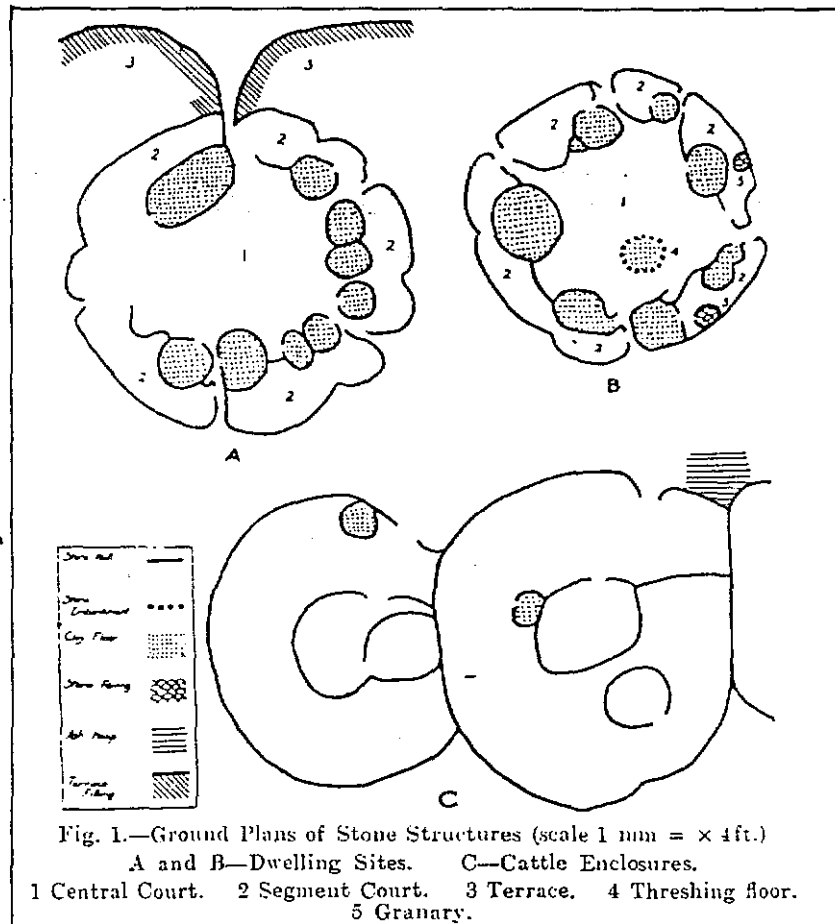


Fig.2 Settlement Layout: Doringspruit (Jones 1935).

against the wall. It appears that sites of this settlement type usually have very thin layers of ash, and lack associated surface pottery. This could indicate a later occupation.

Oral traditions and several radio-carbon dates are available for the prehistoric occupation of the Late Iron Age at sites near the Magaliesberg. The area between Rustenburg and Swartruggens was occupied between 1660 and 1770, and settlement in the Olifantspoort area dates to after 1600 AD. Other Late Iron Age occupations in the region are chronologically placed between 1500-1800 AD and corresponding stone-walled sites from the Orange Free State also date from the 16th to 19th century AD.

It is possible that pioneer hunters have visited Mzilikazi during 1830, but the first contact between the inhabitants of the Magaliesberg and the Voortrekkers occurred when Andries Hendrik Potgieter came into the area in about 1841. There is a rich historical heritage depicting the period before, during and after the Anglo-Boer War.

LOCALITY AND ENVIRONMENT

The farm Doornboschfontein is situated in the district of Krugersdorp, about 8km east of the town of Magaliesburg. It lies on the southern slopes of the Witwatersberg at an altitude varying from 1591m to 1674m above sea level. The land borders on the main road from Heckpoort to Krugersdorp (Fig.1), not far from the well-known Sterkfontein Caves.

The topography of the region is determined by the geology and is dominated by the parallel-running Witwatersberg and Magaliesberg ranges (Fig.1). The area is characterised by a wavy appearance of ridges and valleys flowing down from the hills.

The False Grassveld vegetation is part of the central variant of the Bankenveld type. Along the hills and ridges the sour mixed bushveld vegetation consists mainly of *Protea*, *Acacia* and *Celtis* species. It is notable that the hillslope environment was able to support the large settlements of the western Transvaal around the 17th century. The particularly sour grass cover of the low lying parts of open

savannah was probably the result of the cultivation of crops by the Amandebele of Mzilikazi during prehistoric times.

THE SITE COMPLEX

The site complex is characterised by stone structures of at least two different phases of occupation with distinct layout patterns. The stone walls of one group of settlements depict a complexity of round or oval enclosures featuring prominent scalloped and circular outer walls, resembling the arrangement of structures representative of the Late Iron Age of the region. The walls were built in the traditional manner of two faces of stacked stones with a rubble infill.

The layout of structures on the other sites are predominantly rectangular with double rows of angular foundation stones intact. Middens are found near these latter settlements.

FEATURES

2527DC 4

The site forms part of an arrangement of similar habitations on the lower-lying parts of the landscape near a seasonal stream (Fig.1). It is characterised by double rows of stones on the ground (Fig.3) representing the remains of the foundations of angular buildings with straight walls. The largest of these measure about 15x6m with smaller examples of about 3x4m. At this particular site not all the corners formed by the foundations are square and some of the corresponding parallel wall-bases are not of the same length, resulting in a somewhat distorted ground plan (Fig.4). This confusing arrangement could possibly be the result of different stages in the building process and thus hampered the explanation of the function of the buildings from the plan layout.

Nearby, indications of baked clay occur on top of a stone paving of about 1m diameter (Fig.5). The function of this feature is unknown. At a large associated midden a rusted pair of scissors, the mouth-piece of a baby's feeding bottle, a few undecorated potsherds, pieces of glass, and porcelain fragments and a fired Martini Henry cartridge shell were collected on the surface.



Fig.3 2527DC 4: Foundation stones.



Fig.5 2527DC 4: Baked clay on stone paving.

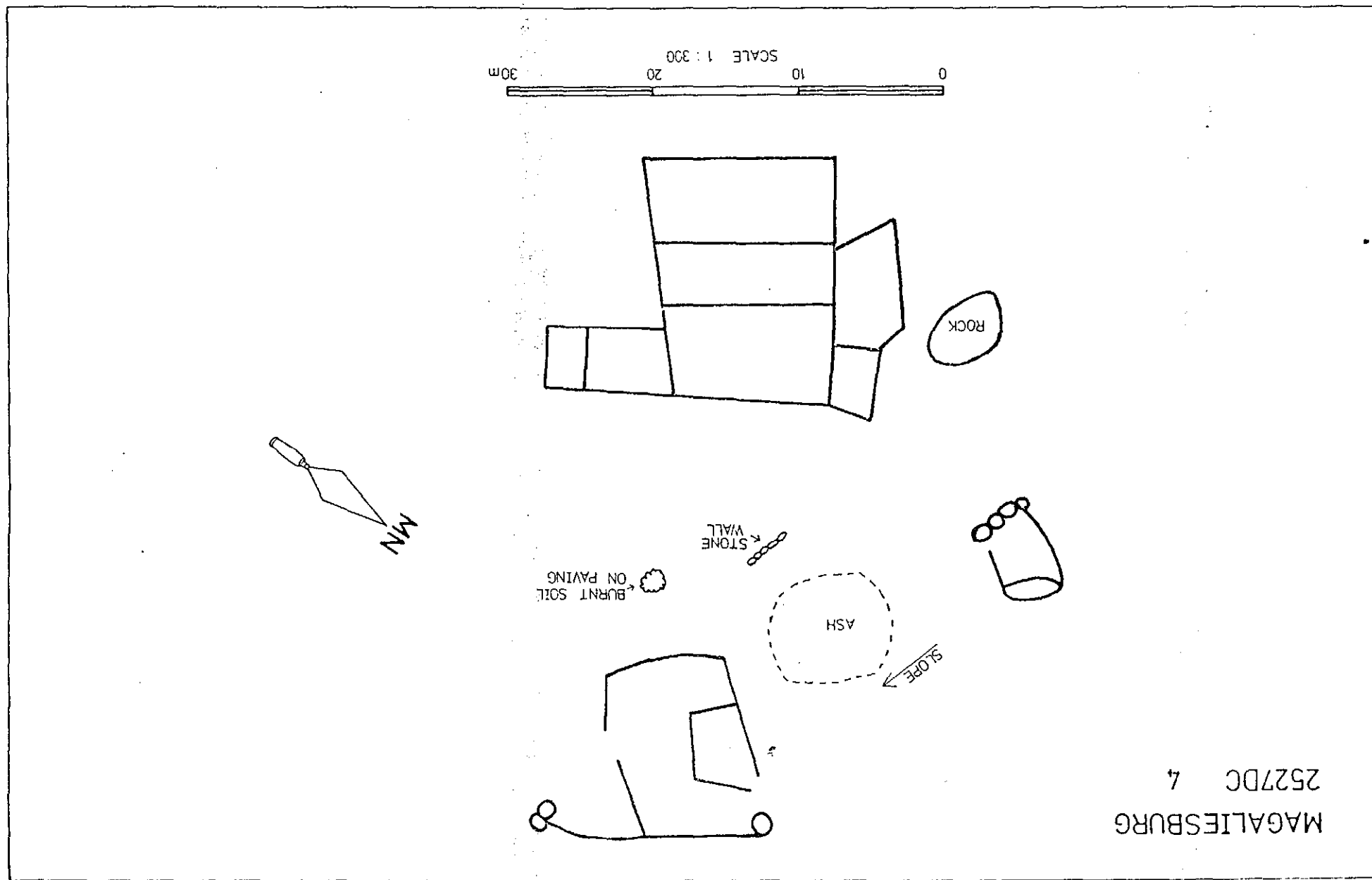


Fig.4 2527DC 4: Site plan.

Crude stone-walled enclosures on a lower level probably represent cattle byres (Fig.4).

2527DC 8

The site is located near the eastern border of the farm (Fig.1). It consists of a single cluster of stone-walled enclosures about 60m in diameter. The settlement consists of a spacious central open area surrounded by a series of linked stone enclosures with an oval or scalloped stone wall on the perimeter (Fig.6). Several entrances give access to the inner area (Fig.7).

The well-preserved walls (Fig.8) have a height of about 0,50m and were built in the traditional method (Fig.9). No potsherds, middens or hut remains were visible on the surface.

2527DC 12 (not captured not prehistoric)

Two neighbouring sets of rectangular foundations of about 3x6m and 3x9m respectively were found near the western boundary of the farm (Fig.1). The foundations consist of parallel rows of angular stones laid down on the ground (Fig.10) in a rectangular plan form (Fig.11). Both structures had entrances (Fig.12) in the two long walls and the larger building has the remains of a stoep about 1,5m wide (Fig.13) on the side facing east. The buildings are placed at a 90° angle with an inexplicable stone mound in between (Fig.11).

A single circular byre is located about 144m to the east but the relationship between this structure and the rectangular buildings is not clear.

2527DC 26

The site complex lies to the north of Doornboschfontein above the Skeurkloof (Fig.1). It consists of four separate clusters of stone-walled enclosures ranging between 43m and 58m in diameter (Fig.14). The ground surface slopes down towards the north and the different clusters are spread out over a total distance of about 220m along the incline. The stone walls were built in the traditional manner (Fig.15) and seem to be well preserved (Fig.16).

MAGALIESBURG

2527DC 8

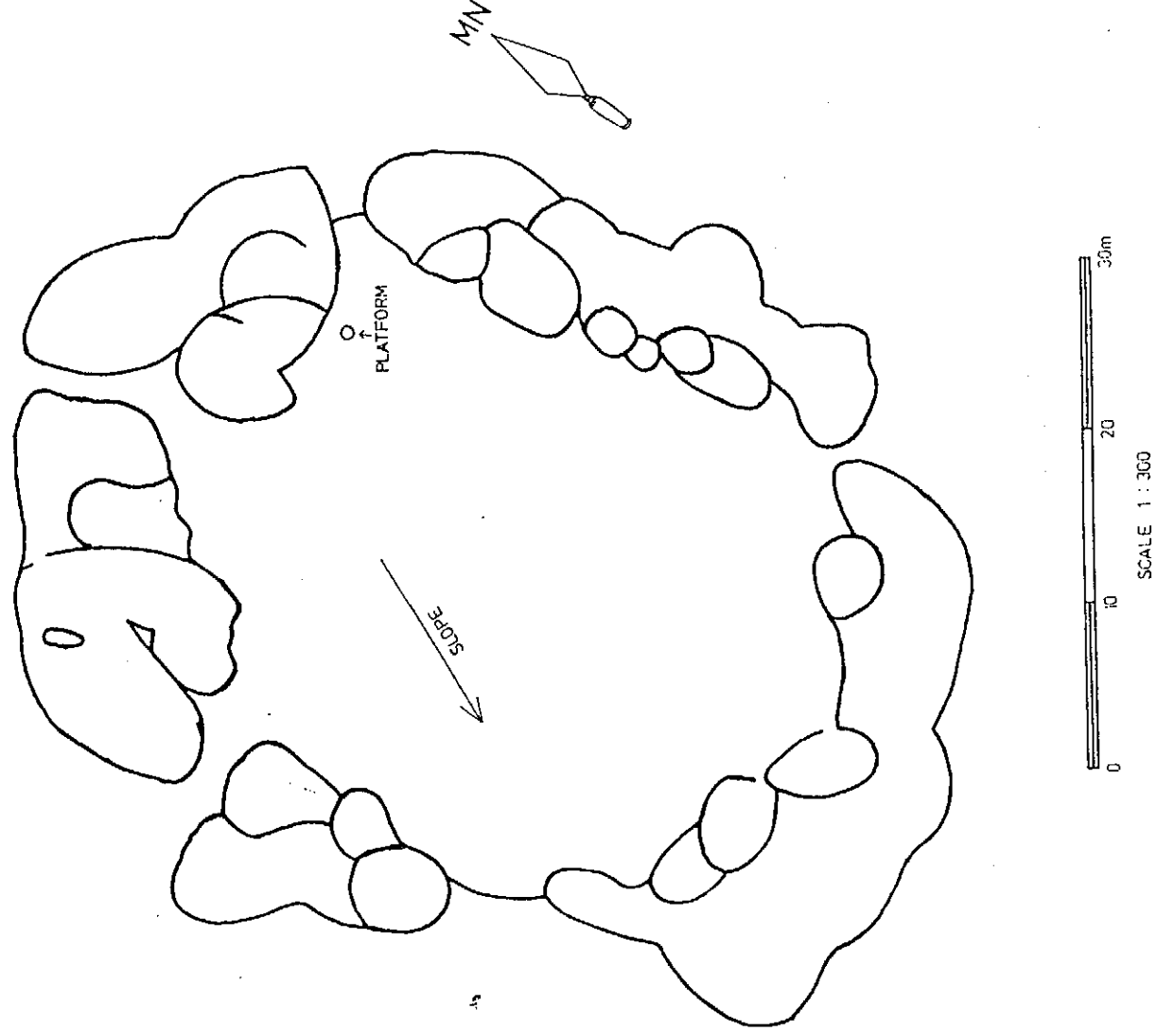


Fig.6 2527DC 8: Site plan.

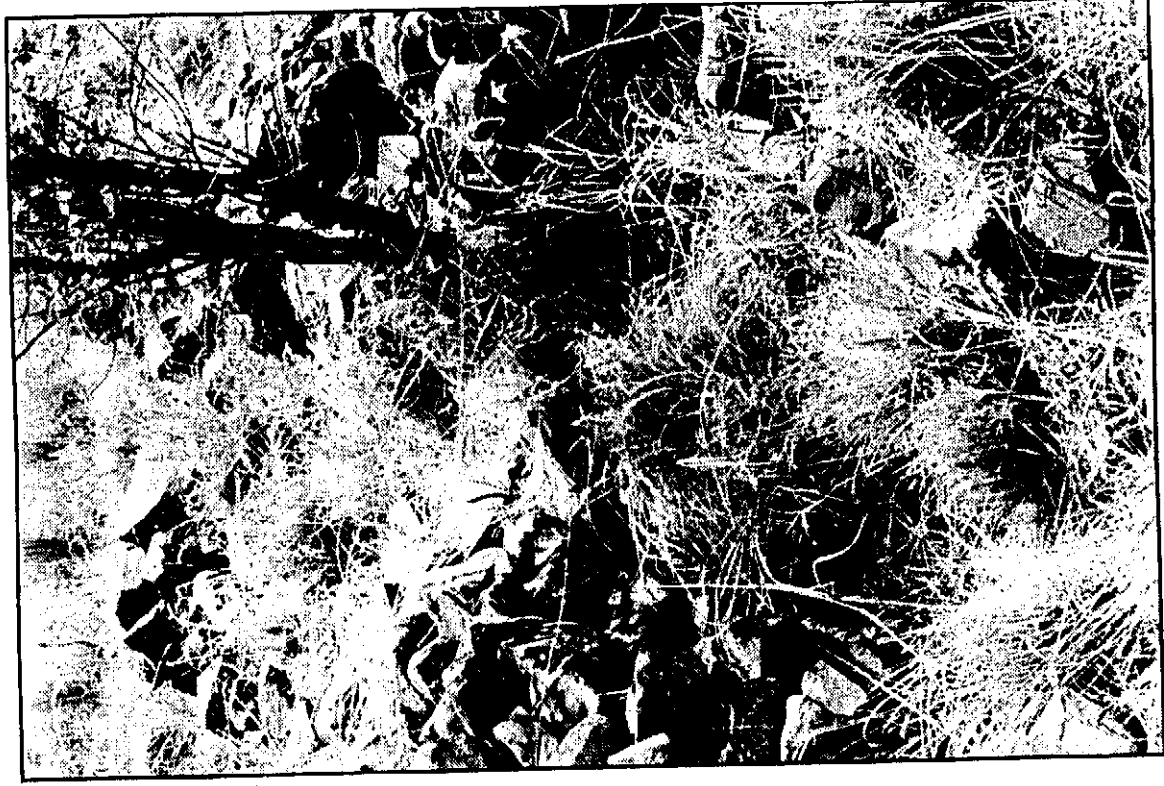


Fig.7 2527DC 8: Entrance to the central area.

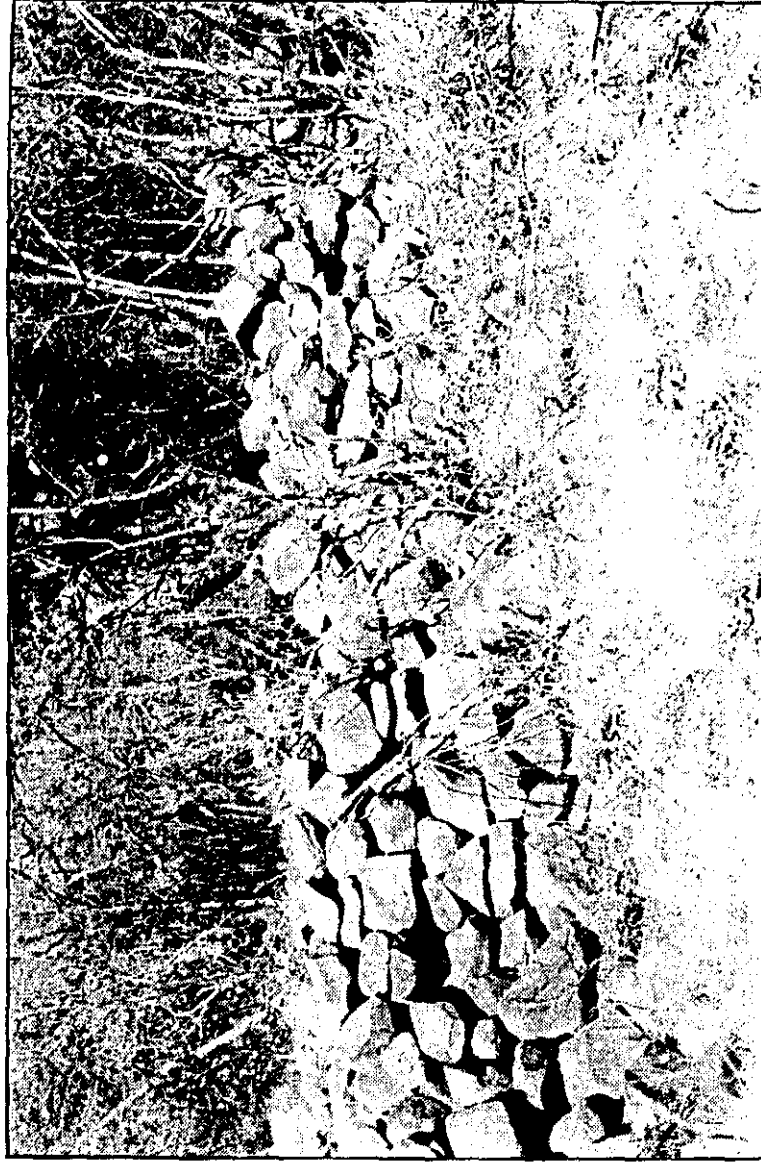


Fig. 8 2527DC 8: Stone walls.



Fig. 9 2527DC 8: Construction of stone wall.



Fig.10 2527DC 12: Double row of foundation stones.



Fig.12 2527DC 12: Door space in foundation.

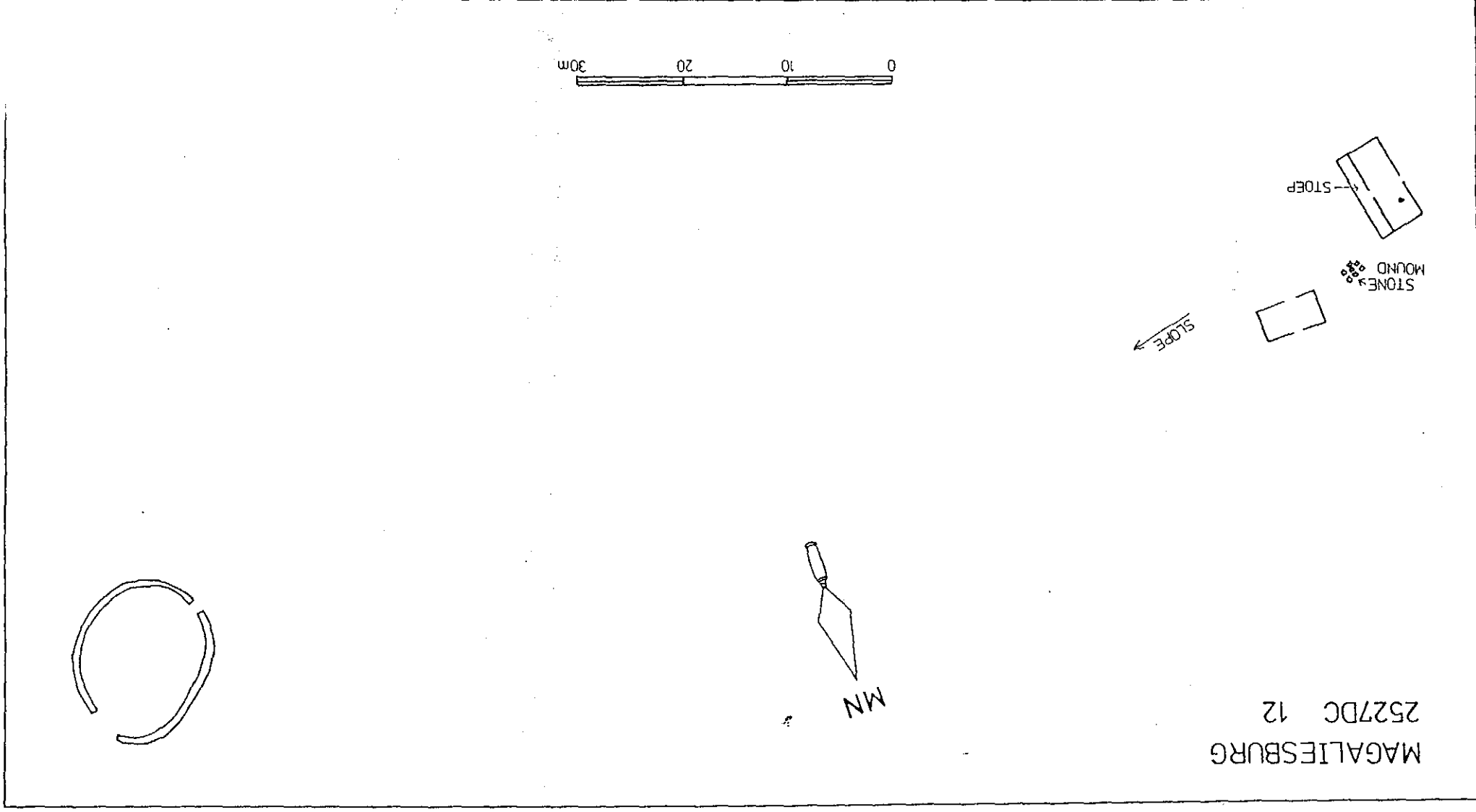


Fig.11 2527DC 12: Site plan.



Fig.13 2527DC 12: Stoep.

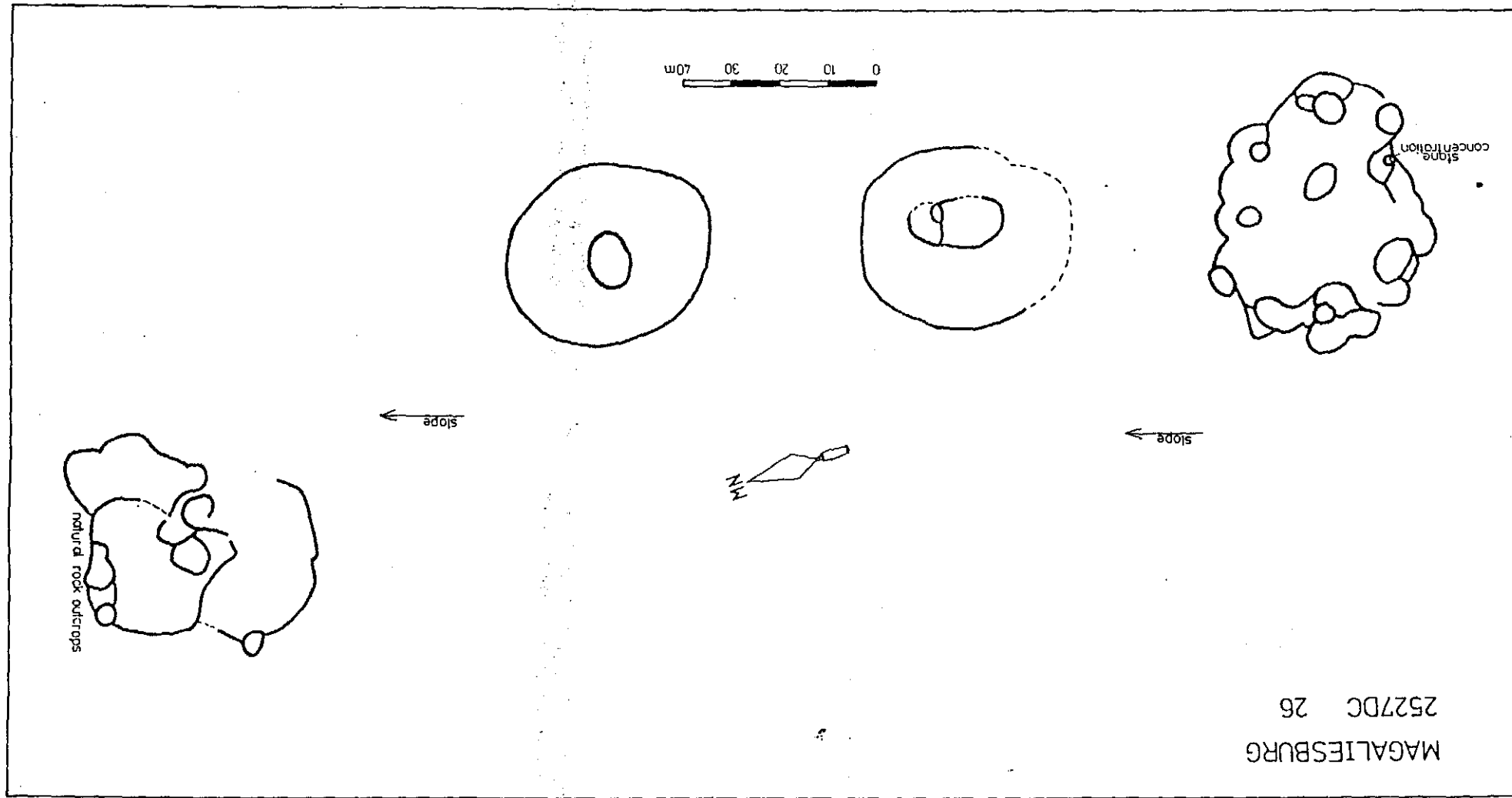


Fig.14 2527DC 26: Site plan.



Fig.15 2527DC 26: Construction of stone wall.

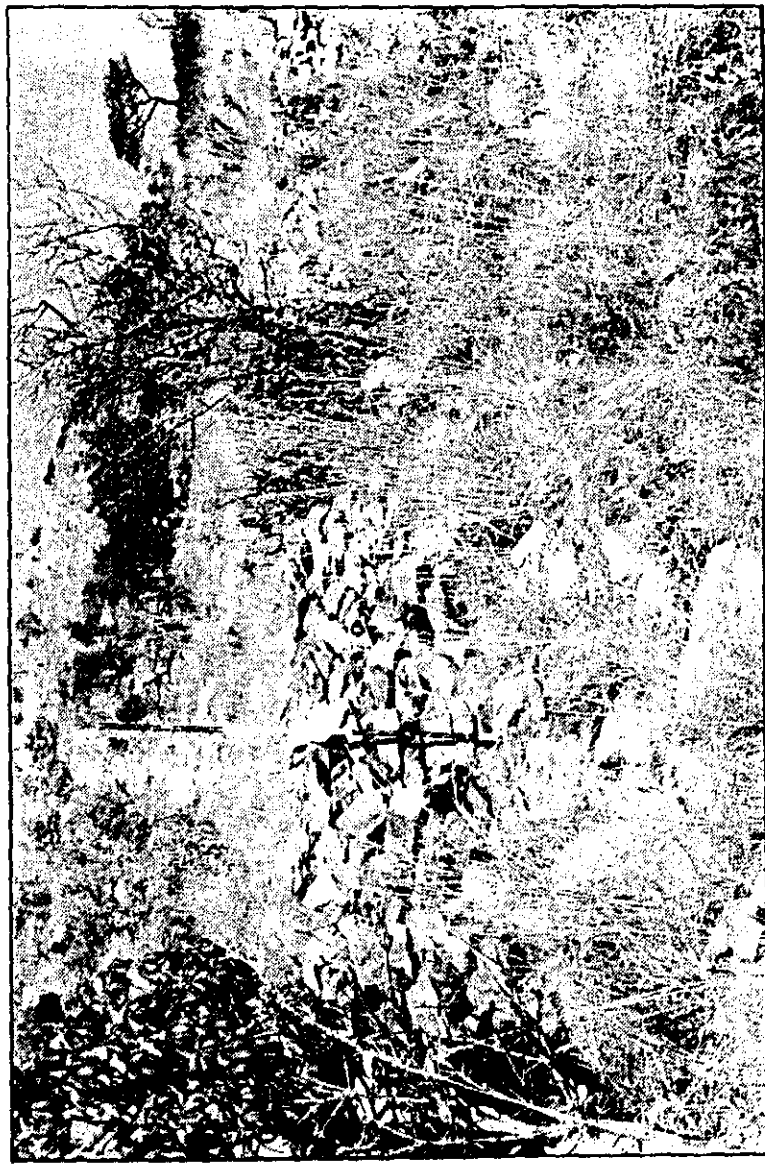


Fig.16 2527DC 26: Stone wall at 26B.

The most prominent group of stone walls (A) lies at the highest point of the ridge, just below the 1573m contour, giving a view to the north and south. The layout of this unit consists of a central open area containing a single oval stone enclosure. This is surrounded by clusters of enclosures which form part of an uneven surrounding wall. At least two openings in the outer walls gave access to the central area. Another group (D), which resembles A, is located down-slope, almost hidden from sight behind a ridge above the Skeurkloof. Enclosures B and C in the complex have a very simple layout, consisting only of one or more circular or oval enclosures in the centre, surrounded by a single stone-built wall (Fig.14).

No hut remains, middens or other surface finds could be located at the site.

DISCUSSION

The dating of the different occupations can only be based on settlement layouts, various construction methods and finds on the surface. From this it is clear that there were at least two phases of occupation in the past.

The more recent group of settlements is characterised by small isolated units of rectangular structures, glass and porcelain fragments and factory-made metal objects. Little is known about the early European occupation of the area. It is also not certain what role the region played during the Anglo-Boer War, although the battle of Dwarsvlei allegedly took place nearby.

During this later phase the house plan, comprising of two or more adjacent rooms, is consistent with existing records of early European buildings. This early type of house might even have had a single room which was screened off by curtains creating two or three separate rooms. No mention is made, however, of the placing of two almost identical I-plan or long houses in a row next to one another or at a 90° angle.

A single entrance was generally placed in the middle of the facade with a small window on either side. Entrances in both long walls could probably have been the European concept of a front and back door

but no reference could be found to account for the placing of a second door directly opposite the front entrance.

It is difficult to ascribe this occupation to a specific time and to identify the occupants. Black farm labourers were evidently living in rectangular houses at some of the sites until quite recently making it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish whether they are pioneer European settlements. I would speculate that the sites could represent remnants of the earliest European settlements from before or after the Anglo-Boer War, together with farm labourer housing until quite recently. However, these questions can only be answered by archaeological excavations.

Based on settlement pattern, the Iron Age occupation of Doornboschfontein fits in with other sites in the area and can be placed during the period from the 17th to the 19th century.

Prehistoric settlement patterns reflect not only people's perceptions about their specific ways of living, but also indicate the social clustering, economic system and political organisation at the time. There is diversity in the layout of the sites and in this case it is notable how the site above the Skeurkloof, reflects in its visible extension the dynamics expressed in the development of the site. The central position of the byres displays the prominent role of domestic stock in the daily life of the people. From the ethnographic records we know that the central area was also used as the gathering place for men.

The settlement layout at Doornboschfontein (sites 8&26) resembles Doringspruit and compares with other sites at Olifantspoort. In contrast, at Selonskraal and Boschoek the cattle byres seem to have been placed in the centre of the settlement. The settlements at Selonskraal, like Kaditshwene and Olifantspoort, represent the remains of sites with large populations where the limited space was defined by stone walls. Opposed to this, Doornspruit and related sites at Olifantspoort and the present Doornboschfontein probably represent smaller communities, allowing more personal space.

The use of clay pottery and the position of live stock within the settlement layout reflects that the life-style of the people was based on a stock and cereal economy. It is also clear that the settlement layout

at sites in the Magaliesberg was part of the Central Cattle Pattern, an ethnographic model used to explain the settlement pattern at living sites during the Iron Age where cattle were a focus point for the people.

The settlements as found at Doringboschfontein represent a single settlement type which should not be considered in isolation. Sites from the same chronological era with slightly different layouts are found in the immediate vicinity but also further away in the Suikerbosrand and between Swartruggens and Rustenburg. These relate to sites occupied by Sotho/Tswana peoples in the western Transvaal and could also be associated with the stone-walled sites in the Orange Free State.

The huts at these sites were probably typically Tswana and the life-style is characteristic of agro-pastoralists. With our present state of knowledge it is not possible to explain all the settlements, but it is hoped that further work will expand the knowledge of the early history of the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations and guidelines for the utilization and preservation of the sites are made in the knowledge that all archaeological, historical and palaeontological finds are protected by the National Monuments Act (No. 28 of 1969).

The following minimum standards are approved by archaeologists and are prescribed for site museums or other places of interest open to the public. They are therefore strongly recommended as the basic rules in the case of Gloster Farm and Spring Farm.

- Do not allow unauthorised visitors to the ruins;
- Have someone to guide people to the sites;
- Allow visits to certain selected sites only;
- Educate the regular visitors about preservation;
- Prepare an explanatory brochure for the farm;
- Have a single path to the site;
- Provide a clearly marked parking area at each site;
- Put the entrance where the site can not be damaged;
- Prevent people from climbing on to the walls;
- Control dangerous plants at the site;
- Consider a notice board explaining the sites;
- Do not restore the walls, leave them as they are;
- Do not remove any finds (e.g. stones or potsherds);
- Provide a litter bin at the parking area;
- Visit sites regularly to check on litter, damage, etc.
- Use a qualified person when planning any developments

(SAAA Newsletter 37, 1992)

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