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INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Cultural Resource Management was contracted by Mark Wood Consultants to conduct an archaeological survey of the proposed Richards Bay-Empangeni pipeline route. The survey was to determine the location, extent and characteristics of each site, and the importance of these sites with respect to their conservation.

The area of the proposed pipeline mainly follows the existing railway line from Empangeni to Richards Bay. The alternative route leaves the pump station at Empangeni and follows the existing electrical power transmission servitude until it meets with the John Ross Highway. From there it runs along the highway for 3.5km, then follows the railway line.

The proposed route thus crosses various areas; namely blue gum forests, sugarcane fields, the Lake Nsezi area, and some industrial areas.

METHODOLOGY

A ground survey was undertaken, since sites and/or artefacts would be more visible, as opposes to a remote sensing survey. The area within a 50m radius of the proposed pipeline route was surveyed. Archaeological visibility was at its best in disturbed areas and areas with a low vegetation density. Sites were recorded using the standard Natal Museum site record form and then plotted on the 1:50 000 map that are housed in the Natal Museum.

RESULTS

Two archaeological sites were found in the proposed area. These sites can be grouped into either the Stone Age or Late Iron Age.

Site 1:

This site consisted of several scattered pot sherds. Sherds suggest occupation of the site in the Late Iron Age (1500 AD to recent times) - possible even early this century. Other artefacts included a quartzite upper grindstone. A few pieces of vitrified metal were found, but these are due to modern industrial action.

Site 2:

Evidence for both the Stone and Late Iron Ages were found at this site. Half of this site has been lost due to quarry activity.

All the evidence for the Late Stone Age in this area is in the form of lithic material. Most of the lithics were found on the right hand side of the site. Raw materials included quartz (and quartz crystals) and cryptocrystalline silicates, such as chalcedony. No formally retouched pieces were found, but several utilised flakes were seen. These microlithics indicate a Late Stone Age occupation of two main time periods: about 20 000 - 17 000 years ago and 6 000 - 2 000 years ago.

Scattered amongst the lithic materials were several pot sherds. Other sherds were still in situ and are presently about 1.5m below the surface. Several undecorated rim sherds were found indicating a Late Iron Age occupation, probably within the last 200 years. One sherd was decorated with an applied boss (Zulu: insumpa), thus reinforcing this late date. The relevance of izisumpa are as yet unknown.

Iron working debris on the site suggests that the site dates to around the beginning of the nineteenth century or earlier.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While none of these sites are of great importance, I recommend that minimal intrusion occurs at Site 2. Furthermore, huts are historically documented in the vicinity of this site and can be seen on the 1964 3129DD Felixton 1:50 000 map. Construction work should thus be careful of damaging any graves that may occur below the surface of this area. The B.K.S. and Gaskor pipeline may thus continue with their project.

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