

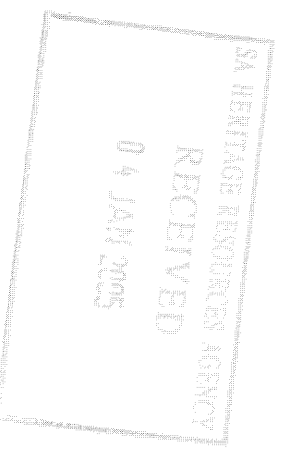
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE EZEMVELOO  
NATURE RESERVE**

A Phase I report prepared for E. Oppenheimer & Son (Pty) Ltd

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December 2004



# ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE EZEMVELO NATURE RESERVE

## INTRODUCTION

The Ezemvelo Nature Reserve lies about 20 km northeast of Bronkhorstspuit in the Bankenveld. The Wilge River has cut through an outcrop of Waterberg sandstone, creating shallow rock shelters, and at least one contains rock paintings. The Trustees commissioned A.C. Steyn to develop this site for tourism as part of a broader intention to make the Reserve accessible to more people. Later, the scope widened to include other heritage resources.

As a result of the enlarged project, Ms Steyn contracted Archaeological Resources Management (ARM). It was ARM's task to first establish the range of archaeological sites in the Reserve and then to assess the potential of individual sites for tourism.

## METHOD

One ARM staff, in the company of Ms Steyn, visited the Reserve on 18 April 2003 and then again on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> November 2004. The distribution of Historic kraals had already been recorded (Cater 2002); and so the team concentrated on outcrops that could provide suitable raw material for Stone Age artefacts as well as prominent landmarks that could have served as lookout points. In addition, the team examined virtually every road within the Reserve.

Normally, the heritage significance of archaeological sites is based on standard criteria, such as site integrity (i.e. primary vs. secondary context), number and variety of features, uniqueness and the potential to help answer present research questions. The value of a site for tourism purposes, however, should first take into account visibility, and then its entertainment/educational potential. Management plans must consider a site's vulnerability to visitor impact relative to its heritage significance.

## RESULTS

The sequence of archaeological sites within the Reserve ranges from the Middle Stone Age through the Late Iron Age to the Historic Period (Figure 1). We begin with the earliest.

### *Middle Stone Age*

Dating from about 250 000 to 25 000 years ago, the Middle Stone Age marks the transition from specialized scavengers to fully modern human behaviour. During this time, our ancestors became hunters, utilizing spears with stone points, as well as stone knives and scrapers. They chose hard rocks with suitable flaking properties, such as quartzite, for these artefacts.

Some of the conglomerates in the Waterberg sandstones contain quartzite and other suitable pebbles. The low but prominent hill on the western boundary fence is one such outcrop. There, Middle Stone Age flakes and cores stretch across the flat top (**Site 1**) from 25 41 35S 28 56 09E to 25 41 42S 28 56 12E.

- **Site 1** has little deposit and therefore low heritage significance. To the ordinary visitor, there is little to see, although the geology and view are interesting; and so this site also has low tourist potential.

A few Middle Stone Age artefacts lie scattered across the prominent hill around trig beacon 274. These few artefacts have neither heritage significance nor tourist potential.

A concentration of Middle Stone Age artefacts (**Site 2**) occurs along the cliff edge overlooking the confluence of the Wilge and Saalboomspruit on the east side (25 43 58.3S 28 59 24E). This site also overlooks one of the routes to the painted rock shelter.

- **Site 2** has low heritage significance, but because of its location along the route, it has some tourist potential.

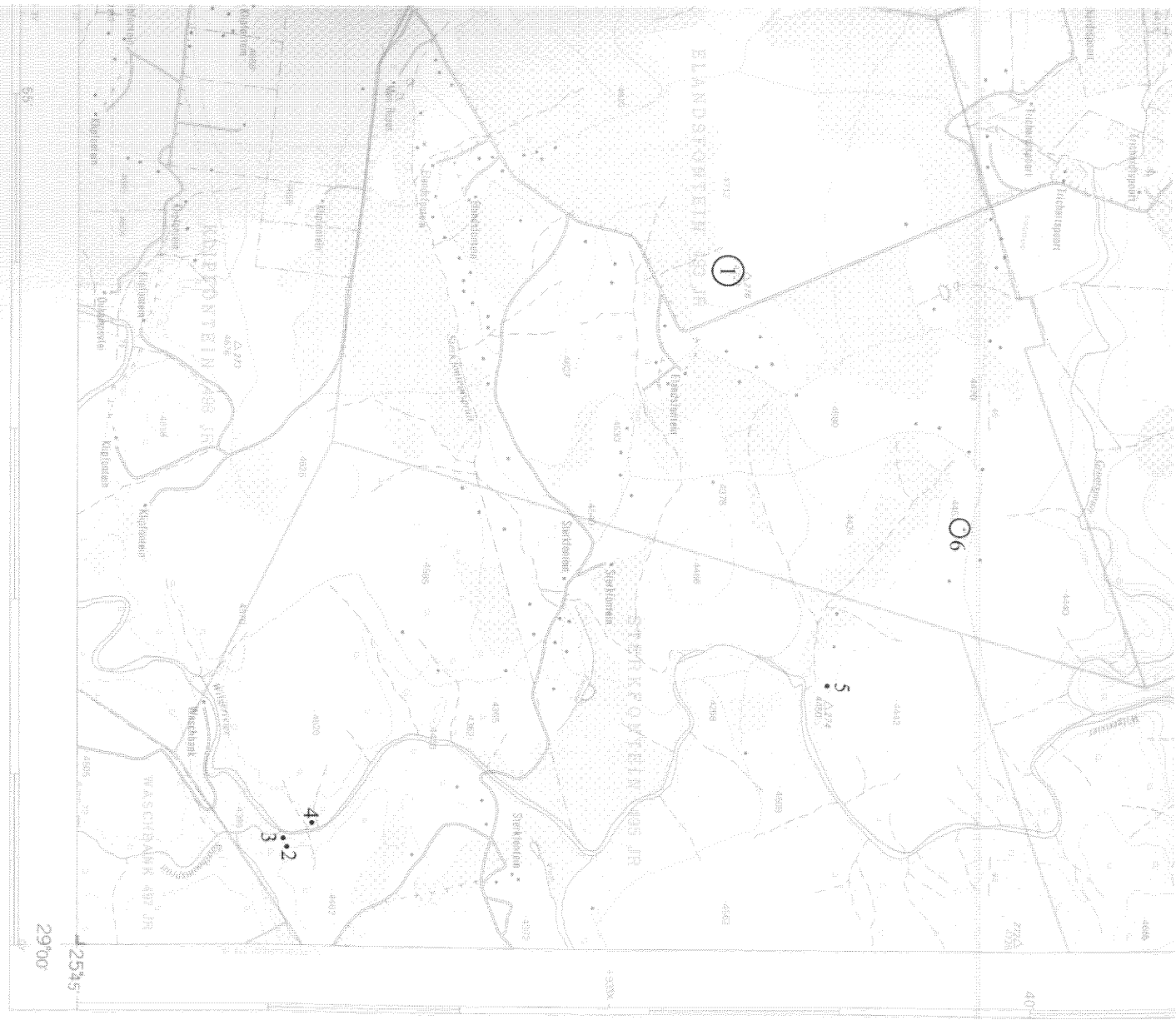


Figure 1. Sites recorded in the archaeological survey on the 1:50 000 map 2528 DB.

### *Rock Paintings*

In southern Africa, rock art begins in the Later Stone Age, and its over-all theme is predominately religious. San (or Bushman) art, the best known, depicts the religious experiences of shamans and various aspects of life involving the supernatural. Khoe, or herder, art typically depicts geometric images and skin aprons representing girls' initiation. Farmer art, on the other hand, usually concerns male initiation through the use of roughly made human and animal figures, often in white.

A full description of the paintings (25 43 58S 28 59 23E) and shelter at **Site 3** (Figure 2) appears in Steyn's report. It is sufficient to note here that the paintings appear to include typical San figures, as well as Khoe herder and black farmer art (Figure 3).

- **Site 3** has medium heritage significance, but high tourist potential.

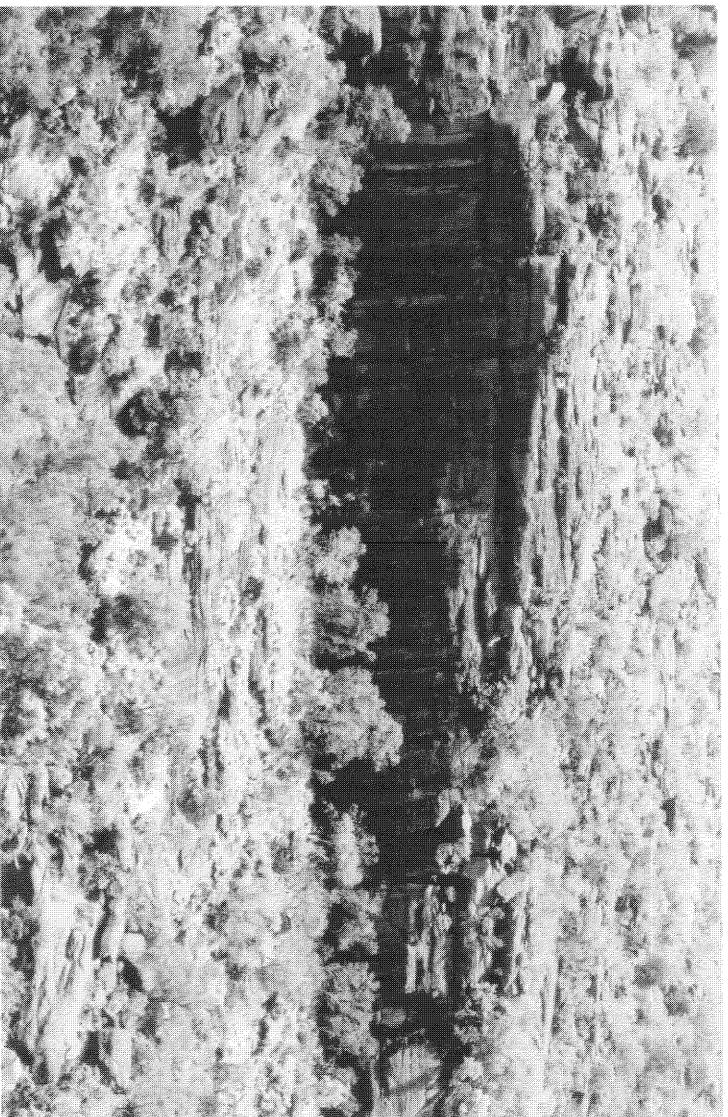


Figure 2. View of Site 3 from west.



Figure 3. Rock paintings at Site 3.

Another painted shelter (**Site 4**) was recently located on the west side of the confluence at about 25 44 46S 28 59 17E. Its significance and full potential has not yet been completely assessed, but it does not appear to be as important as Site 3.

#### *Late Iron Age*

The Iron Age begins roughly 2000 years ago and encompasses the time when Bantu-speaking farmers dominate the landscape. The Late Iron Age, from AD 1300 to 1840, marks when Nguni and Sotho-Tswana created the early history of South Africa.

Throughout the entire period, people cultivated sorghum and millets, beans and peas, and herded cattle, sheep and goats. They were also proficient metal workers, mining, smelting and forging iron and copper and sometimes gold and tin.

The survey did not reveal any normal Iron Age sites; and so it was a surprise to find an iron-smelting site near trig beacon 274 (Figure 4). **Site 5** (25 41 06.5S 28 58 29.9E) is marked by an arc of stone walling (about 13 x 20 m) on the cliff edge overlooking a large pool in the Wilge River. The furnaces probably stood inside this enclosure because at least two slag heaps with broken clay blowpipes have accumulated in front, on the cliff edge (Figure 5). A few smaller (about 3 x 4 m) stone arcs may have served as temporary shelters for the metal workers. The remains of Historic Ndebele homesteads stand to the north of the trig beacon, but we doubt they were associated.

- In its present condition, **Site 5** has medium heritage significance and medium tourist potential. If the site is studied further, it could have high tourist potential.

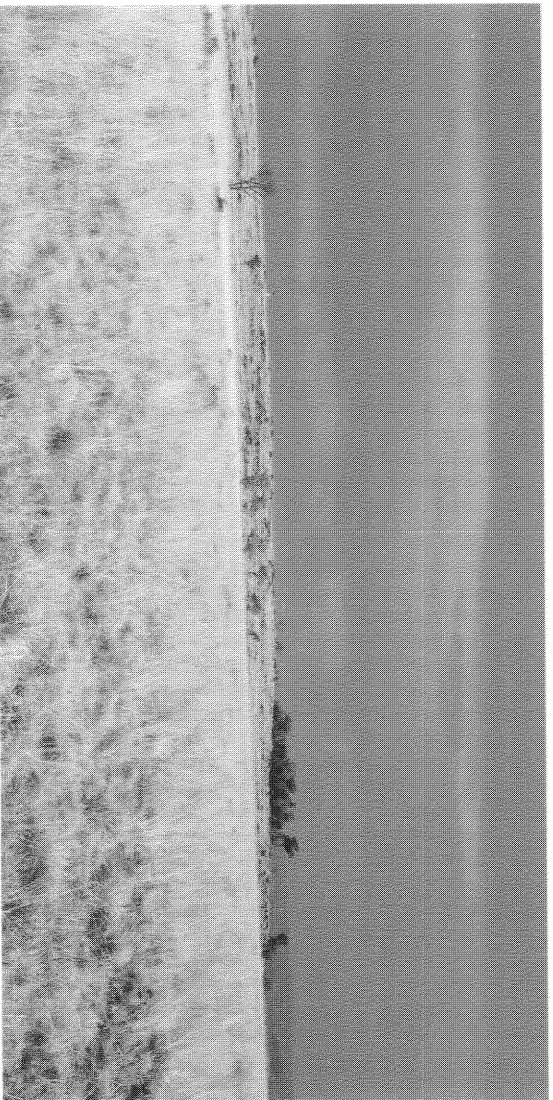


Figure 4. Site 5 in clumps of trees to right; trig beacon 274 to left.





Figure 5. Slag heap at Site 5. Trowel and pencil mark clay blowpipes.

#### *Historic Period*

The historical sequence in the Ezemvelo area has not yet been fully established.

According to oral traditions (e.g. Van Warmelo 1930; see also Huffman 2004), Southern (Transvaal) Ndebele moved into Gauteng from KwaZulu-Natal at about AD 1700. The Manala division stayed in the Pretoria area, while the Ndzundza moved east to the Steelport Valley. During the *mfecane* in the 1820s, Ndzundza lived in defensive locations for protection against other Nguni, such as Mzilikazi, Zwide and the Swazi (Schoeman 1998). Later in the 1880s, the Boers defeated them in the well-known MaPoch war. After their defeat, many Southern Ndebele were dispersed onto Boer farms as indentured servants, while others lived among the Pedi and only became farm labourers after the Anglo Boer War.

Thus, some time towards the beginning of the last century, Southern Ndebele moved into the area. The remains of numerous Ndebele homesteads dot the landscape inside the Reserve. One good example (**Site 6**) stands at 25 40 24S 28 57 33E near the Road 15 sign. This site includes at least two rectangular cattle kraals (about 11 x 14 m), several



earth mounds marking old house sites and a large ashy midden (Figure 6). Presumably, the complex once resembled Figure 7.

- In its present condition **Site 6** has low to medium tourist potential.

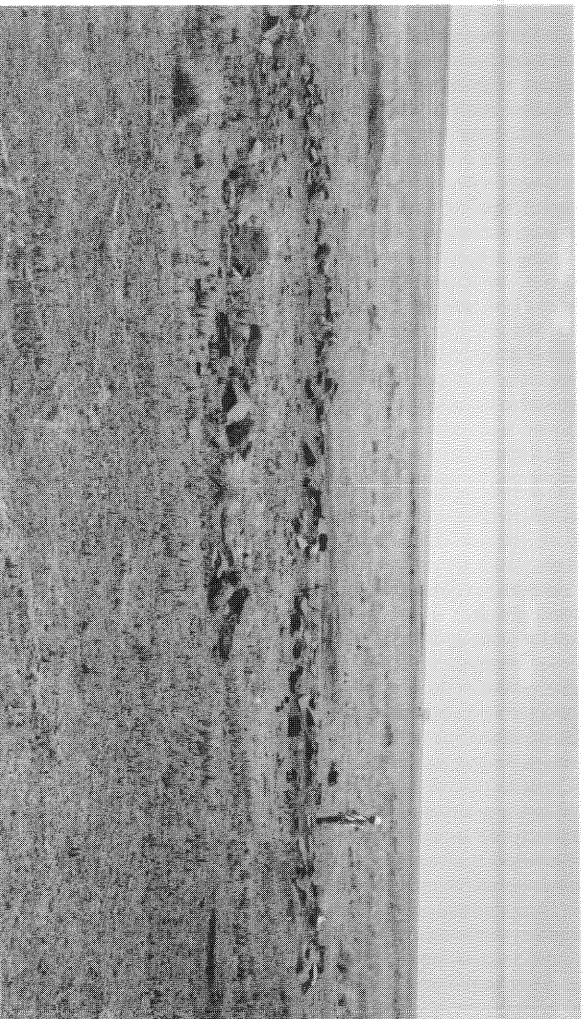


Figure 6. Stone kraal at Site 6.



Figure 7. Southern Ndebele settlement. Courtesy National Culture History Museum.

Ezemvelo incorporates portions of two farms established in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century: Elandsfontein 493 JR and Sterkfontein 495 JR. An early house on Sterkfontein is supposed to have predated the Anglo Boer War. It was rebuilt after the War, and is now known as the 'Red Roof Cottage'. This house would have been associated with some of the Ndebele homesteads. Indeed, the early farms would not have been viable without African labour.

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Reserve maintains the Red Roof Cottage. Because it was paired with some of the Ndebele homesteads, it is appropriate to use one homestead to represent the African component of the partnership. **Site 6** is suitable for this purpose.

In addition, the full historical sequence for the Reserve needs to be recorded. This sequence should include the family names of each homestead and associated graves, the European owners of the farms, the relationships between the two, as well as African and European traditions about the area.

Hopefully, the history project will also help to establish who smelted the iron at **Site 5**, and when. At present, two time periods seem most likely: the early 19<sup>th</sup> century because of the *mfeceme*, and the late 19<sup>th</sup> century because of the clash with the Boers.

**Site 5** is also worthy of an archaeological investigation. This investigation should include mapping the walls and associated house circles, as well as the excavation of the furnace area and slag heaps. Furthermore, ore sources needs to be located, and both ore and slag analysed. This information will enhance the tourist potential of the site.

The Reserve should note that the smelting site is vulnerable to tourist damage in that some visitors will remove artefacts despite the normal safeguards. Consequently, archaeologists should finish their investigation before the site is open to the public. For similar reasons of vulnerability, it would be unwise to advertise the Stone Age sites.

Our survey shows that there are few Stone Age sites of any period in the Reserve. People must have therefore made special trips to use **Sites 3** and **4**, the painted rock shelters. Their isolated locations, along with the river below, may well have enhanced their ritual significance. The paintings are also vulnerable to negative visitor impact, in this case by graffiti, while visitations could damage the deposit. Consequently, the management plan needs to restrict the number and frequency of visits along with other aspects of protection.

## REFERENCES

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