

PHASE 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF LAND AT THE MOUTH OF THE GOURITZ RIVER.

Prepared for

The Grootrug Partnership

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Prepared by

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1. INTRODUCTION

The ACO was asked to survey a small portion of land on the north bank of the mouth of the Gouritz River on the farm Misgunst. The location of the surveyed area is shown on Figure 1. In addition to housing plots, the locations of proposed access roads, an airstrip and walkpaths were also examined for archaeological sites which could be impacted by such developments. This report details the findings of the survey and makes recommendations about ways of minimising impacts on cultural resources.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Southern Africa is the repository of a wealth of archaeological material spanning thousands of years. The Early Stone Age (ESA) describes the earliest types of recognisable stone artefacts and are associated with the early hominid inhabitants of southern Africa. The age of these materials can be in excess of 500 000 years at which time climate and local geography could have looked very different to today.

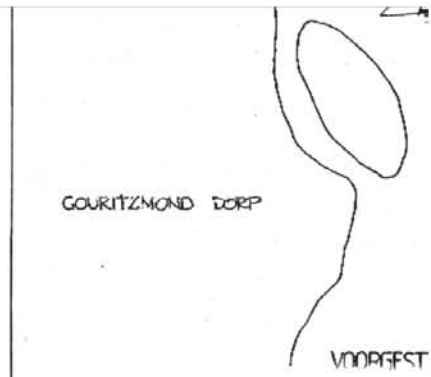
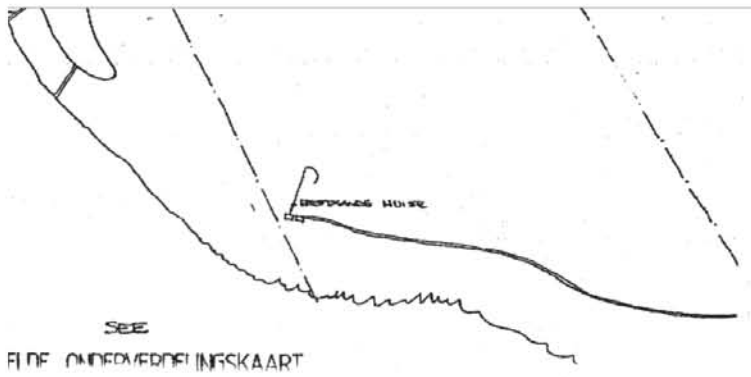
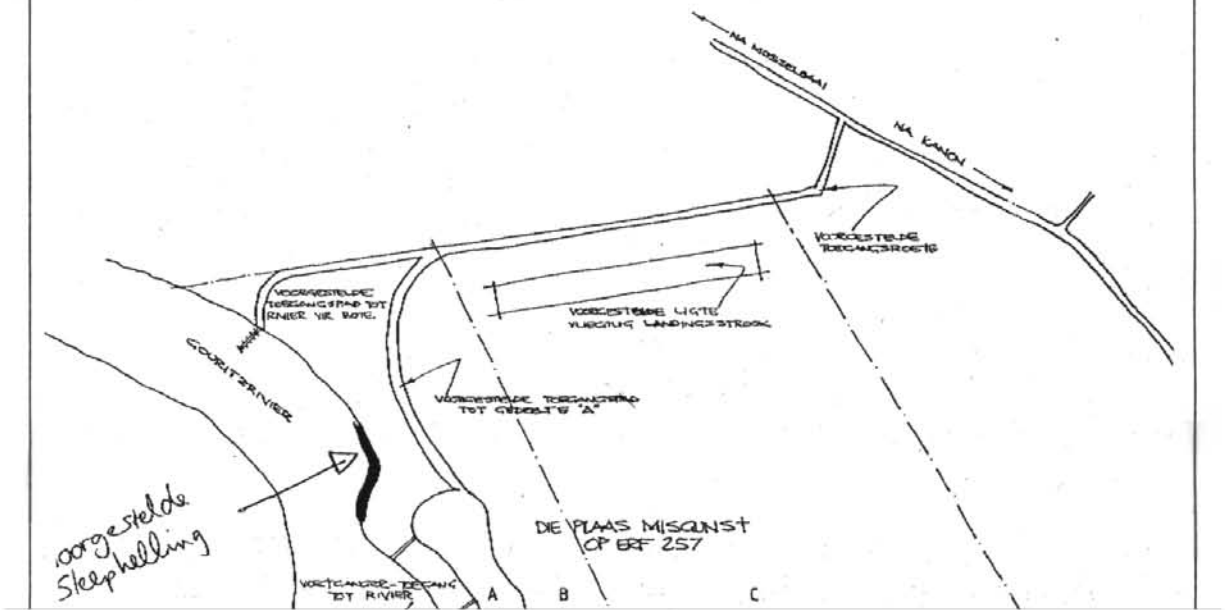
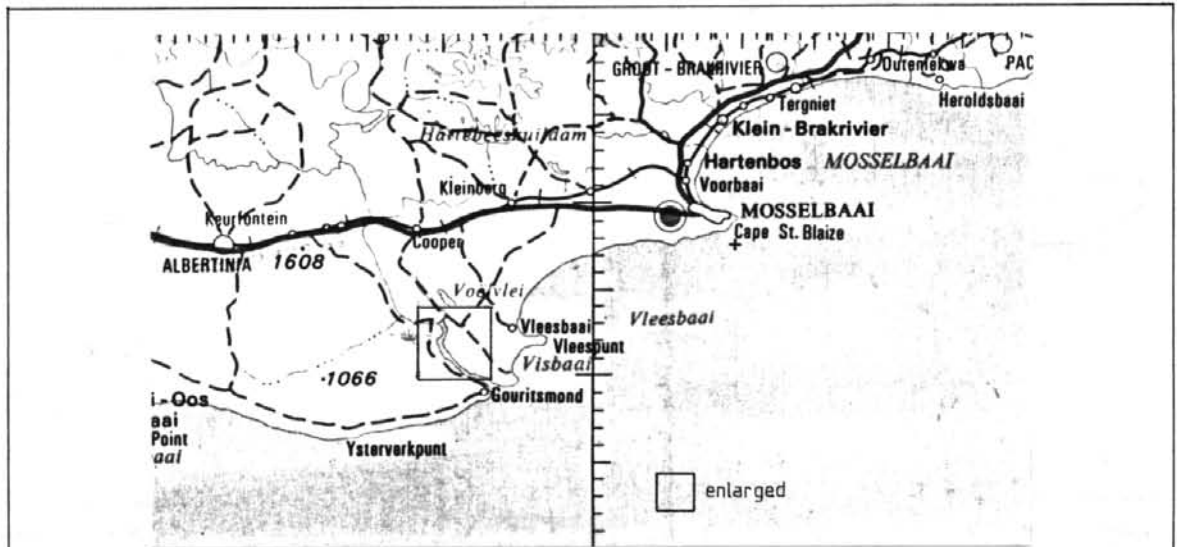
The simple stone artefact forms which characterise the ESA continue until they are replaced by more sophisticated forms in the Middle Stone Age (MSA). It is presumed that the technological development accompanied evolutionary changes in humans. This period persisted to sometime between 40 000 and 20 000 years ago after which is replaced by forms described as microlithic. This technology persisted for most of the period known as the Late Stone Age (LSA) and is accompanied in the last 2000 years by the introduction of pottery.

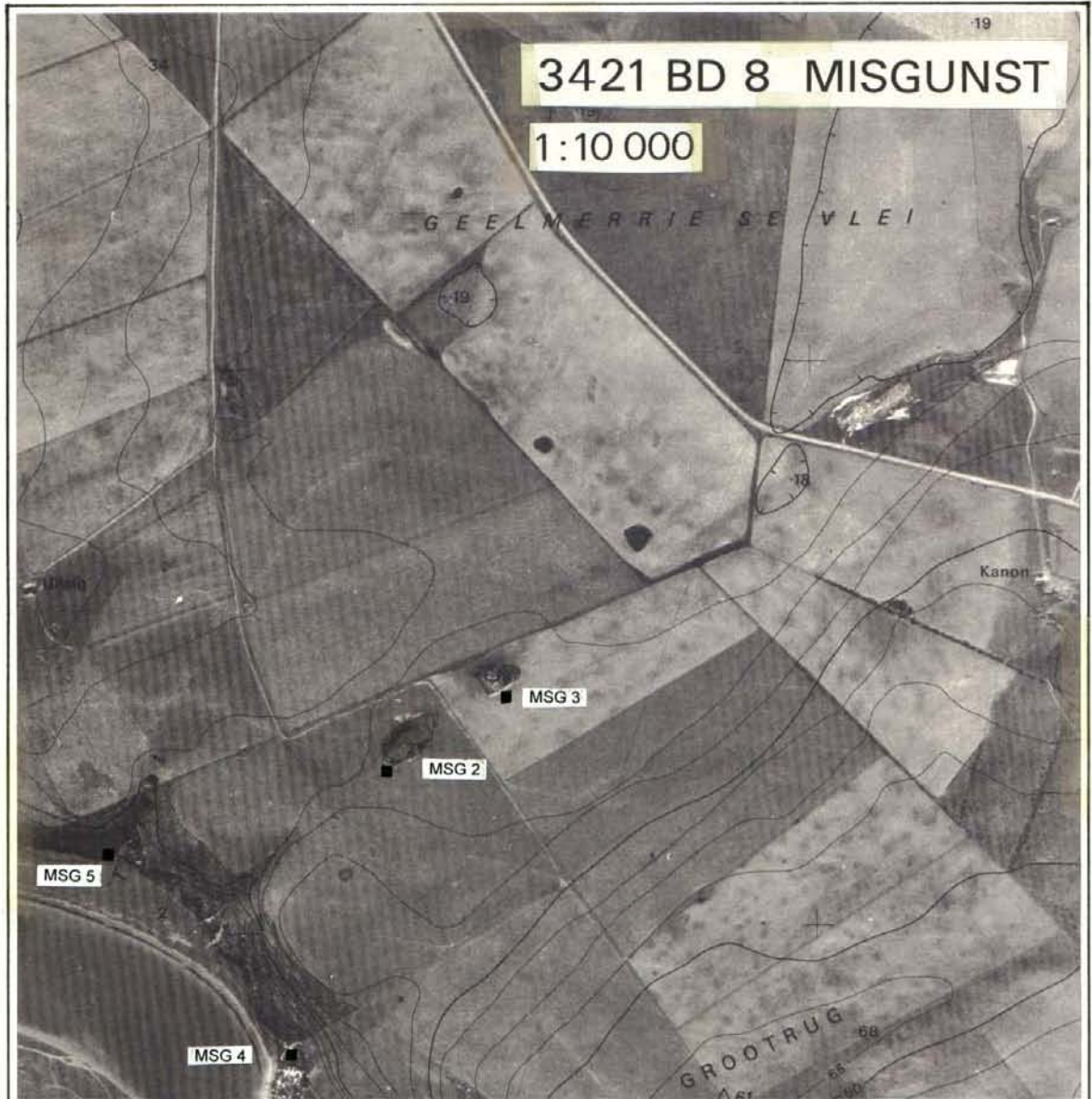
After about 20 000 years ago large parts of southern Africa were inhabited by fully modern humans ancestral to the San hunter/gatherers. They persisted until sometime around 2000 years ago when herding people with sheep arrive at the Cape presumably from the north. Physically they resembled the San but probably had a very different lifestyle. It is speculated that hunter gatherers may have been displaced in some areas by these new arrivals who were politically more organised and lived in much larger groups in semi-sedentary encampments moving about the landscape in search of grazing and water. Pottery technology seems to have accompanied this influx. Cattle arrived later. Hunters and herders alike were eventually displaced by colonial expansion and were decimated by disease and warfare.

The early pre-colonial history of southern Africa is preserved not in writing but in the artefacts which were left scattered about the landscape. It is important that we recognise places which contain archaeological material and ensure that they are conserved if they are important. If not we may be losing valuable clues to our early history.

3. METHOD

The area was searched on foot. Attention was paid not just to the proposed physical development area but also to areas close by which could be affected by secondary impacts associated with development such as increased human use. No sites were located which required shovel testing. Sites have been plotted on a 1:10 000 orthophoto. We were unable to take GPS readings on the sites but given that the sites are easily located on the orthophoto this is perhaps not too serious.





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4. RESULTS

No sites have been identified which are directly threatened by development. Sites have however been identified in close proximity and some will need to be taken into account in the ongoing planning process. These sites and their locations are plotted on Figure 2 and are discussed below. The nomenclature “MSG” is an abbreviation of the map and farm name Misgunst and is used for identification.

4.1 MSG 1

This consists of a surface scatter containing artefacts which in form appear to date to the Early Stone Age (ESA), Middle Stone Age (MSA) and some smaller pieces to the Later Stone Age (LSA). There are a lot of cores and other waste pieces over a wide area. These are made predominantly on quartzite although finer grained materials such as silcrete are noted. The site lies partially within the area of the proposed housing development. The scatter is situated on a steep slope and in addition to movement through slopewash, ploughing has also disturbed the scatter.

Importance: Low. The artefacts are not *in situ*. No finished artefacts have been observed.

Impact: Some disturbance will occur.

Mitigation: No mitigation required.

It must be noted that artefactual material of ESA and/or MSA origin are to found in virtually all the areas that we have examined. In some instances such as MSG1, MSG2 and MSG3, the density of material increases slightly to suggest some focus for the scatters.

4.2 MSG 2

The site consists of a mixed scatter of stone and shell at the south-western corner of a small natural pan. The area has been subjected to ploughing and material has been moved around as a result. The stone artefacts are suggestive of ESA and MSA but some LSA may be present as well. It is not possible to say how old the shell scatter is but given that there is some LSA, it is likely to be associated with this. Material can be found all around the pan but again the density is greatest in the area that has been described. The artefactual material consists mostly of cores and flakes on quartzite with some fine grained materials also present. No bone was observed with the shell.

Importance: Low. The artefacts are not *in situ*. No finished artefacts have been observed.

Impact: Some disturbance may occur during building of the airstrip.

Mitigation: No mitigation required.

4.3 MSG 3

The site consists of a scatter of artefacts on the south eastern side of a second small natural pan. Unworked cobbles are found eroding out of the bank of the pan and amongst these can be found flakes and cores of MSA and ESA origin. It would appear that the well rounded cobbles are part of an early river terrace of the Gouritz River that was exposed by incision of a river channel that is evident on the aerial photograph. Two small pans are all that remains of the old channel. The gravels have been exploited for the excellent quartzite raw material that is represented. One bifacially retouched flake was observed but most material represents waste from manufacture.

Importance: Low. The artefacts are generally not *in situ*. Few finished artefacts have been observed.

Impact: Some disturbance may occur during building of the airstrip.

Mitigation: No mitigation required.

4.4 MSG 4

The site consists of a single lens of *in situ* shell midden (mound or layer of shellfish remains) visible in the side of an erosion gully. This midden along with several other patches of deflated shell are to be found in the belt of vegetated dunes between the area proposed for houses and the river. This area contains endemic vegetation, amongst which are milkwoods, and will be preserved. Access to the river will be via wooden walkways located in some existing natural clearings. It is likely that the natural shelter that was provided by milkwood canopies could have been used for shelter and that midden patches may relate to such usage. The midden material is almost certainly of LSA origin. While some stone has been observed it is fairly limited and consists of cores and flakes. No formal tools or pottery were observed at any of the sites.

Importance: Medium. This is the only lens of *in situ* shell that has been observed although others may be buried at other sites.

Impact: Some secondary disturbance may occur if informal pathways go through this area.

Mitigation: If walkways to the river or the proposed boat mooring are developed they should avoid this site. Areas which are not served by walkways should be fenced or some other action should be taken to prevent people and animals creating informal pathways and so furthering erosion and destruction of sites and vegetation. Signboards which will presumably be erected requesting people to stay on wooden walkways should also mention that archaeological sites are present and should not be tampered with.

4.5 MSG 5

This is a small shelter, known as Tiergat, located at the interface between the rocky embankment and the flood plain of the river. Some shell was noted outside of the shelter on the small talus fan but a shallow scrape of the upper deposit in the shelter revealed a thick humic layer. This layer appeared recent and contained no archaeological debris. It seems unlikely that anything but an extreme flood would have affected the shelter. It is proposed to put a jetty in the river close to this point served by a road running down the gully close to Tiergat. The shelter is at present hidden by thick vegetation and is thus naturally protected. ESA/MSA artefacts are present in both the erosion gullies between Tiergat and the location of the houses. These are however not *in situ* and the road is unlikely to have significant negative effects as a result.

Importance: Medium. Although no artefactual material was seen in the scrape it is likely that material could exist at a deeper level.

Impact: Some secondary disturbance may result, particularly if curious members of the public decide to dig holes in the shelter.

Mitigation: Do not disturb vegetation in front of the shelter.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The wealth of archeological material from a range of time periods suggests that the area has always been important possibly because of the abundance of fresh water. More recently marine resources, particularly shellfish, were also exploited and the remains are found in the dunes along the river bank. As most of the archaeological resources have been disturbed by agricultural activity no mitigation has been suggested where direct impacts are concerned. Two sites should be protected from secondary impacts in the form of human activity.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

i) The shell midden MSG 4 should be protected through preventing informal pathways accessing the area. Wooden walkways should also avoid this area. If for any reason these suggestions cannot be implemented, the midden should be sampled.

ii) The small shelter known as Tiergat will become vulnerable as a result of the proximity of human activity. Some archaeological deposit may be present at depth below the surface but at present is naturally protected by vegetation and it is not felt that mitigation is warranted.

iii) A signboard should be erected near the wooden walkways informing people that archaeological sites are present and that these should not be disturbed. All shell middens are protected by the National Monuments Act of 1969 (as amended).

7. PROFESSIONAL TEAM

Fieldwork & Report

Dave Halkett
Tim Hart