

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE INSPECTION REPORT

**GRAVES DISCOVERED DURING UPGRADING OF
THE R72 FROM PORT ELIZABETH TO
PORT ALFRED, EASTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA**

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INTRODUCTION

The Aurecon Group has been appointed by the proponent, SANRAL (the South African National Roads Agency), as engineering contractor for the upgrade of an approximate 20km line route along the R72 from Port Elizabeth to Port Alfred. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the project was done on behalf of SANRAL by CEN Integrated Environmental Management. Aurecon construction was initiated during 2009 and is expected to be completed during the course of the year (2010).

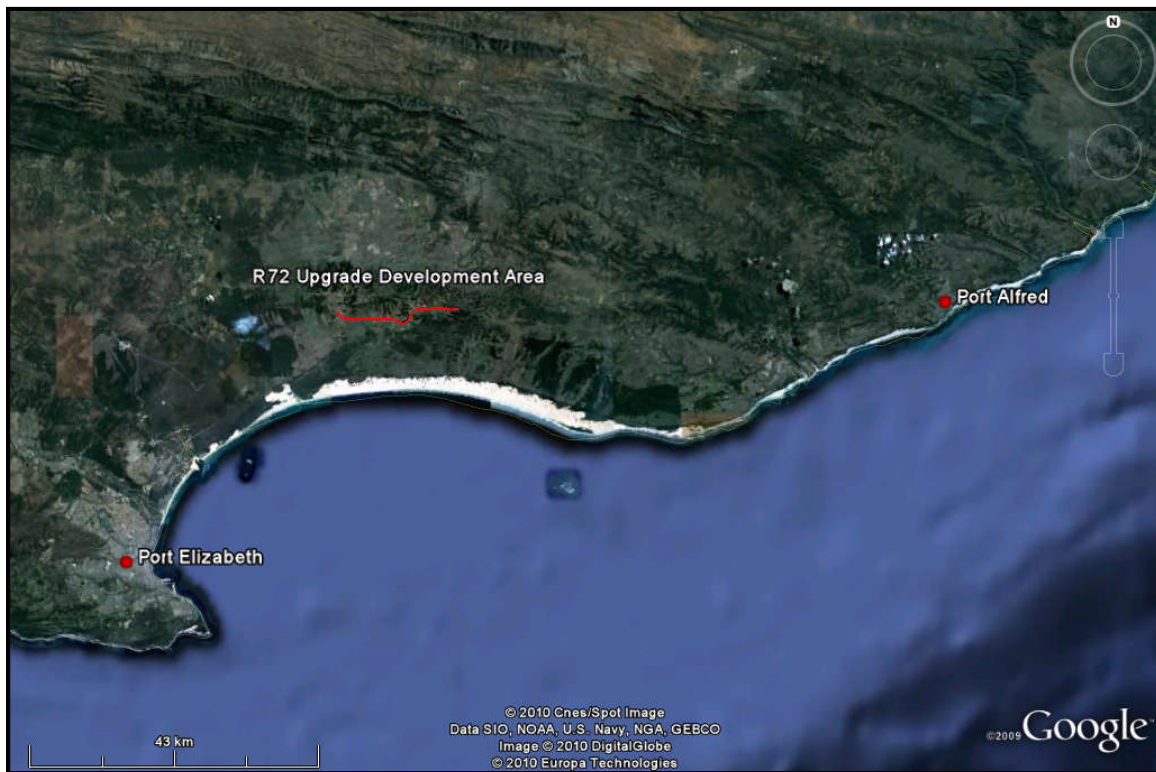


Figure 1: The R72 Upgrade Development area between Port Elizabeth and Port Alfred

On Thursday, 4th March 2010, the Aurecon construction team exposed what seemed to be 6/7 grave-like sockets within a scraped horizontal section. All work in the vicinity of the find was immediately ceased by Aurecon Project Engineer Athol Hodgkinson and the site reported to ArchaeoMaps by Ayanda Mbanga from the Aurecon Environmental Services Unit. A preliminary report on the discovery of graves was made by ArchaeoMaps to the SAHRA Eastern Cape office (Tanduxolo Lungile) on Sunday 7th March, and forwarded for the attention of the SAHRA APM Unit (Mary Leslie) and the SAHRA BGG Unit (Jennifer Kitto). Initial contact was made with Len van Schalkwyk (eThembeni Archaeological Consultants) as ASAPA accredited Principle Investigator on Grave Relocation. An archaeological site inspection was arranged and on Thursday, 11 March 2010, the site was visited in the company of Aurecon Project Engineer, Athol Hodgkinson and Aurecon Environmental Services personnel, Ayanda Mbanga and Jenny Youted.

The remainder of this report will be in 3 parts:

1. Brief comments on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the R72 Upgrade project;
2. Grave Site - Site Description; and
3. Recommended Heritage Management for the site.



Figure 2: General view of the R72 Aurecon upgrading project in progress



Figure 3: Upgrading of the R72 between Port Elizabeth and Port Alfred

1. BRIEF COMMENTS ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The Environmental Impact Assessment for the R72 Upgrade project was done by Mike Cohen from CEN Integrated Environmental Management on behalf of SANRAL. A Phase 1 Archaeological Impact Assessment (AIA) was not included as specialist sub-component to the EIA (Pers comm.: Jenny Youthed).

In line with current legislation, heritage requirements may either be addressed as an integrated part of the EIA or independently thereof by the proponent / developer. However, not being the first time that the author of this report has been requested to do 'emergency' archaeological management on a CEN project where heritage / archaeology was excluded from the EIA specifically for SANRAL in the Eastern Cape, it is recommended that SAHRA, as heritage compliance agency, address the issue of minimum compliance in accordance with requirements of the National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999 (NHRA 1999) with both the EIA consultant and the proponent, SANRAL Southern Region. [Please also see: van Ryneveld, K. & Koortzen, C. 2006/08. *Archaeological Site Inspection – Borrow Pit 76.0 quarry impact on archaeological 'Michausdal' deposits, Cradock District, Eastern Cape, South Africa* (SNA/HHO/ICE Joint Venture for SANRAL)].

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2. GRAVE SITE – SITE DESCRIPTION (S33°35'57.4"; E26°02'31.1")

Earth moving activities along the R72 by the Aurecon construction team exposed 6/7 grave-like sockets along an approximate 20m road cutting from S33°35'57.4"; E26°02'31.1" in the west to S33°35'57.3"; E26°02'31.8" in the east. Operation in the vicinity of the find was immediately ceased and a low impact temporary fence, constructed with pole and red and white danger tape, erected to demarcate the area as a 'no-go' zone. Construction impacted on the grave-like socket features only to a level of exposing feature outlines, with only very limited bone exposed from Grave 7. By implication all features and their contents are at present still in-tact.

The grave-like socket features are most reminiscent of Iron Age burial practices, perhaps along a midden, pre-dating Christian burial influence, preliminary thus assigning a date of between 400-200 years BP. Alternatively the site may represent a later Iron Age related informal cemetery, allowing for a much later date.

With development having only impacted on the very outline of the features, no human remains were exposed. Bones were found having been washed from the Grave 7 feature and identified on site as:

- 1) A chicken (*Gallus Gallus / Gallus domesticus*) scapula; and
- 2) A small tibia (probably also chicken).

In addition, originally thought to have been a human metatarsal with a related tarsal bone, turned out to be, after slight clearing of loose soil, nothing more than a small *in situ* distal femur and tibia. The bones may also be chicken.

The lack of identified human remains in the grave-like sockets does not negate the original interpretation of the site as an informal cemetery and identified faunal remains may be interpreted as 'grave-goods'.

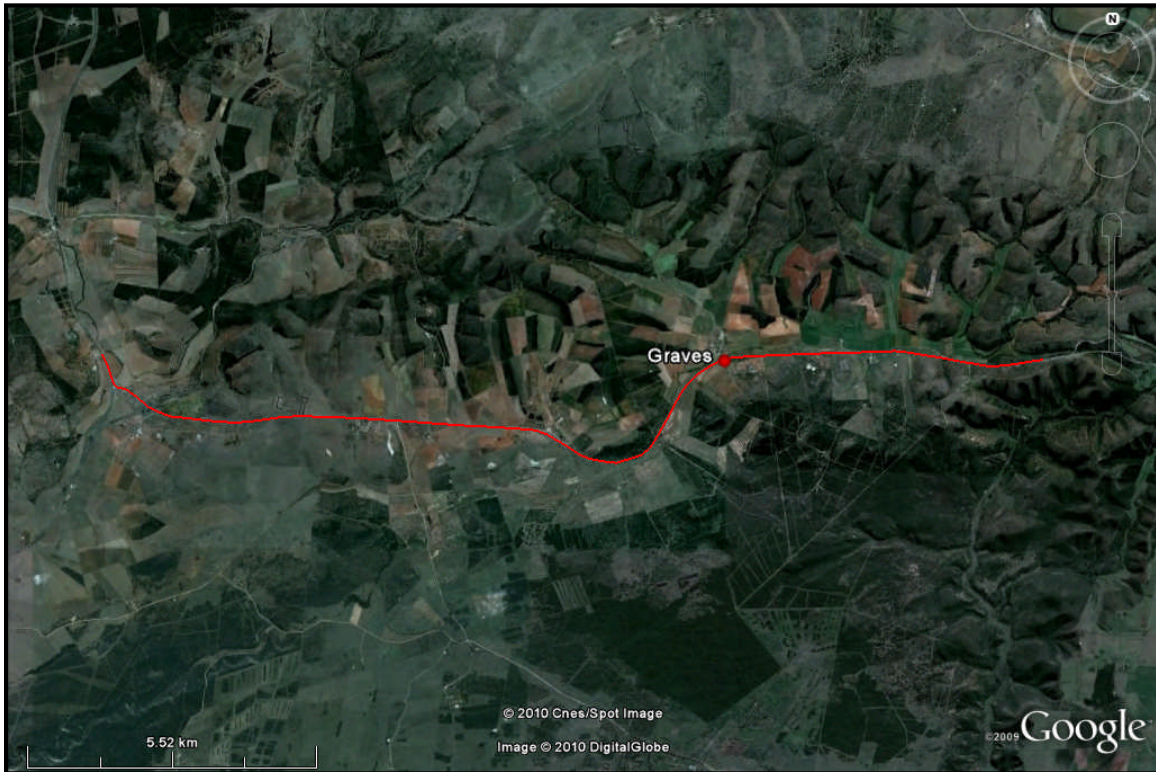


Figure 4: The Aurecon R72 Upgrade development area in relation to the locality of the grave site



Figure 5: Close-up of the locality of the graves in relation to the R72



Figure 6: View of the grave site discovered along the R72

The site is not visible from the surface, with the immediately adjacent surface area being an agricultural field. The features were found in horizontal context between 1m below the present day surface and on average above 1.5m from the scraped Aurecon road construction level. The site may thus well extent further underneath the agricultural field or the current exposure may be representative of total site extent.



Figure 7: The Grave 1 feature



Figure 8: The Grave 2 feature



Figure 9: The small Grave 3 feature, underneath Grave 4 (interpreted as one locality) and the Grave 5 feature to the left



Figure 10: The Grave 6 feature



Figure 11: The Grave 7 feature



Figure 12: *In situ* bones (femur and tibia) from the Grave 7 feature

Landowner Willem van Niekerk reported to Aurecon that he has never discovered related archaeological artefacts, including ceramic, metal or *daga* in the field and was not aware of the presence of a heritage site in the vicinity. Farmworkers, of whom the oldest have been working on the property for 55 years, were also not aware of the presence of an archaeological site. Despite 55 years being quite a short time depth related to oral history, the lack of contemporary awareness regarding the presence of the site may support an older date for the remains.

Without skeletal evidence that the features are in fact human graves, reasonable inference validates the site as an informal Iron Age cemetery and with the potential for *in situ* conservation no attempt was made excavate, or to further expose any bones from the features.

3. RECOMMENDED HERITAGE MANAGEMENT FOR THE GRAVE SITE

At present 2 Heritage Management options for the grave site may be considered by Aurecon / SANRAL:

1. **Site Conservation**, the recommended heritage management option; or
2. **Phase 2 Grave Relocation**.

SITE CONSERVATION:

Site conservation is motivated by the fact that further development towards the south, the impacted slope with grave-like socket remains, won't be necessary and upgrading development can be focused to the north of the find. The existing Aurecon construction road level would need to be raised by 60cm, which will not affect the site. In addition current development impact only affected the infill feature outlines and not to an extent that the integrity of the graves were affected.

- **Temporary conservation requirements would include:**

1. That the erected temporary conservation zone be expanded to clearly demarcate the area along the top, slopes and between 60-100cm above the current Aurecon construction road level. A temporary fence of pole and red and white danger tape would suffice.

- **Permanent conservation requirements would include:**

1. Dual site conservation / slope rehabilitation would entail the approximate 20m in length site area to be covered with a geo-textile type of fabric after which the area can be covered with topsoil and vegetation.
2. The standard SAHRA cemetery conservation measures, where the conservation area is fenced allowing for at least one access gate is not recommended (based primarily on site slope and safety i.e. immediate proximity to a major road).
3. Based on exposure of the site and recorded increasing vandalism at cemeteries and trade in human remains it is recommended that the site don't be permanently fenced, but simply vegetated in order to let it blend with the surroundings.
4. No request for access to the site has been recorded to date; future requests are thus unlikely.
5. It is not recommended that a plaque or any signage be attached or erected at the site. Instead the developer may consider planting a *Euphoria*, some species of which are indigenous to the Eastern Cape, known to have been planted traditionally to demarcate grave sites.

- **Further development impact in the vicinity of the site:**

No further development impact in the vicinity of the site is necessary aside from the raising of the current Aurecon construction road level with approximately 60cm, which will not impact on the site.

1. It is recommended that Aurecon at all times ensure that the above temporary conservation measures are in place while working in the area.
2. It is recommended that Aurecon submits a short report including photographic evidence to SAHRA, documenting work in the vicinity of the site and of the final rehabilitated conservation area upon completion of the project.

- **Site management and monitoring:**

1. The site should be recorded in the SAHRA database for future reference and heritage site distribution and management purposes.

2. The landowner is reminded that should any archaeological finds, including skeletal remains, be discovered, particularly in the vicinity of the grave site, these should immediately be reported to SAHRA.

PHASE 2 GRAVE RELOCATION:

A Phase 2 Grave Relocation project is at present not recommended, but can be considered should SAHRA / the developer prefer grave relocation as Heritage Management option above conservation.

1. Exhumation of visible graves may result in only a portion of the site being relocated; the site may extent undisturbed sub-surfacely under the agricultural field.
2. With the integrity of the graves not having been affected by development impact there is no reason at present to exhume the remains.