

1. INTRODUCTION

The Archaeology Contracts Office of the University of Cape Town was commissioned by Langebaan Waterfront (Pty) Ltd to undertake archaeological excavations at Leentjiesklip 2 just to the north of the town of Langebaan, Western Cape Province, South Africa (Figure 1). A preliminary survey of sites in the area (Parkington and Poggenpoel 1987) revealed that there were a number of occurrences of archaeological material on Leentjiesklip 2 which would potentially be impacted by development activities. As plans for the development of the area are soon to be implemented, the archaeological excavations were commenced at short notice to mitigate the potential damage to this material. The following pages describe the background to the work, the archaeological sites, method of excavation and findings.

2. BACKGROUND HISTORY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

A simplified summary of the main characteristics of the various historical periods of the region is presented below. These summaries will help to place the findings of the archaeological investigation in context.

2.1 The Early Stone Age (ESA)

In 1911, an amateur archaeologist discovered some ancient stone artefacts on the banks of the Eerste River in Stellenbosch (Peringuey 1911). Among these was an artefact type which he recognised as the handaxe and suggested that they were of extreme age. Modern research has shown that these artefacts were made by people who lived between 200 000 and 1 000 000 years ago. Sites containing these characteristic Early Stone Age artefacts have been found throughout Africa, parts of Europe and the Far East (Sampson 1974) and locally, sites of this period have been found throughout South Africa. The makers of Early Stone Age artefacts are believed to be the hominid type known as *Homo erectus*. Although the population of these hominids was probably relatively small, the sheer depth of time over which they roamed the landscape has resulted in large numbers of sites found in widely differing ecological zones from the coast to the mountainous regions and beyond. The raw material favoured for the production of Early Stone Age tools was quartzite. It is no coincidence therefore that ESA sites are often found next to river beds where large quantities of water worn quartzite cobbles can be found.

2.2 The Middle Stone Age (MSA)

Large cave sites discovered in the Kalk Bay mountains on the Cape Peninsula in the 1920s, contained deep deposits with large numbers of more refined stone artefacts in the lower parts of the sequences. These were recognisably different from ESA artefacts and had many similarities to artefacts found in the Palaeolithic sites of Europe. Similar kinds of artefacts have since been found on many open sites and on rare occasions, in the deposits of caves throughout South Africa. A larger selection of fine grained raw material was used for the manufacture of artefacts as new techniques of production, and secondary working into intricate tools, required more predictable flaking properties. Research has shown that these artefacts belong to a period known in South Africa as the Middle Stone Age and date to the period between 40 000 and 200 000 years. In some very rare instances where circumstances permit, fossil animal bone and marine

shells have been found in association with the artefacts giving some indication of the diet. MSA people are thought to have been an early form of modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) who were capable of hunting large animals. Current theory is that early *Homo sapiens* evolved in Africa and migrated to Europe and the Middle East some 40 000 years ago (Klein 1989). It is believed that these new migrants may have been responsible for the demise of the Neanderthal populations in Europe.

2.3 The Late Stone Age (LSA)

So far, all the archaeological sites that have been investigated by the Archaeology Contracts Office on the coast of the lagoon north of Langebaan fall into the period known as the Late Stone Age. Late Stone Age people lived in southern Africa from 40 000 years ago up to the arrival of European colonists at the Cape, and co-existed with them for some time. Late Stone Age people were the ancestors of the San (Bushmen) and Khoi Khoi (Hottentots) who were present throughout the south-western and northern Cape during the colonial period. Throughout most of the Holocene (last 10 000 years) southern Africa was inhabited by small groups of San hunter-foragers who were highly mobile. They hunted with bows and arrows, snared small animals and, where groups lived close to the shore, gathered shellfish and other marine resources, a habit which resulted in the use of the term "Strandlopers"¹. They used digging sticks, often weighted with bored stones, to find a variety of vegetable foods, particularly bulbs below the soil.

Not only did the San have a prodigious knowledge of the animals and plants around them, but they also had a complex belief system, aspects of which are represented in many of the rock painting and engraving sites of the northern and western Cape. It is now broadly accepted by archaeologists that shortly after 2000 years ago, a new economic system was introduced to southern Africa. Certain groups of people (the Khoi Khoi) who had adopted transhumant pastoralism (in this case with herds of fat-tailed sheep and later cattle) appeared in southern Africa (Smith 1987, Sealy and Yates 1994). While the San groups seem to have co-existed with the pastoralists, it has been suggested that hunter-foragers were marginalised moving into areas where the grazing opportunities were less attractive to pastoralists (Parkington et al 1986). The advent of pastoralism seems to have been accompanied by the technology of making clay pottery. The precise origin of early stock keeping and ceramic technology in southern Africa is still unclear but it is suggested that stock keeping was introduced from the north.

2.4 The colonial period

When the Dutch colonists arrived to set up a replenishment station at the Cape in 1652, they encountered several Khoi Khoi groups. Some of these lived on the Cape Peninsula while the larger groups grazed herds of sheep and cattle in the Tygerberg Hills and Cape Flats. First contact between Europeans and indigenous southern African pastoralist groups had occurred much earlier when Portuguese mariners sailing down the coast in the 15th and 16th centuries had bartered supplies of meat from the

¹ It has not been proven that there were indigenous groups who lived exclusively at the coast and entirely on marine foods, although hunter-foragers may have become more dependant on them when access to traditional food sources was limited by the influx of first Khoi pastoralists and later European settlers.

Khoi that they encountered at places such as Saldanha Bay (Smith 1985). With the increase of shipping rounding the Cape, it was inevitable that some would be wrecked. Encampments were set up by the survivors of such wrecks, and they often recount meeting and trading with the indigenous groups (Smith 1985, Raven-Hart 1967) so that by the time that Van Riebeck arrived, a history of contact had already been established. Although it is not entirely clear from the writings of the early settlers, it appears that some San groups still existed in the Cape. They still seemed to be pursuing a largely hunting and foraging lifestyle and were often encountered in the more mountainous regions where there was less possibility of conflict with either the Khoi or Dutch settlers (Parkington et al 1986).

At first the relationship between the Dutch and the Khoi Khoi was one of co-operation, with a great deal of bartering taking place primarily to get regular supplies of fresh meat. However, as the colony grew and free burghers were granted lands further away from Cape Town, grazing lands previously available to the Khoi Khoi were encroached upon. The conflict for land began a process of attrition which when accompanied by several deadly smallpox epidemics broke down the indigenous population and it's political structures. Those who survived were pressed into service as farm labour or settled around several large mission stations that had been established in the Cape. Namaqualand was one of the least desirable parts of South Africa for the colonists and meant that San and Khoi Khoi people were able to continue many aspects of their traditional ways of life in this area until they were displaced during the last century. The accounts of several early travelers who passed through Namaqualand, most notably that of Robert Jacob Gordon in 1779, clearly attest to the presence of indigenous hunter-forager and pastoralist groups in the area (Raper & Boucher, 1988). The Nama, originally one of the Khoi Khoi groups, still practice transhumant pastoralism in reservations in Namaqualand today.

2.5. Previous research in the Langebaan area

When Parkington and Poggenpoel (1987) conducted a general Phase 1 investigation of land destined to be developed by Club Mykonos, they located 40 archaeological sites. Some of these were considered to be important requiring excavation before development activities were to begin. Locations of excavated sites on the eastern shore of Langebaan Lagoon are presented in Figure 2.

The first major excavations that took place along the eastern shore of the Langebaan Lagoon were conducted in 1988 when the Archaeology Contracts Office was commissioned to sample archaeological material that was to be impacted by the development of the Club Mykonos resort. Four sites were excavated (Parkington, Poggenpoel and Hart 1988) providing enough information and radiocarbon dates to construct a preliminary local sequence of the Late Stone Age occupation of the area. The oldest site excavated was LP 16 situated on Leentjiesklip no 4. This small buried encampment demonstrated that occupation of the area dated back to over 3500 years ago (shell date 4150 ± 60 BP (Pta -5036)). Site LP 18 was rather more recent dating mainly to the pottery period of the Late Stone Age after 2000 years ago. The youngest layers of this particular site dated to within the last 200 years showing that agents of midden accumulation were active in this area until historic times.

In 1991 The Archaeology Contracts Office was once again commissioned to excavate archaeological material on Leentjiesklip 3 just south of the Club Mykonos development. Unfortunately work on an interesting site (LP 12) could not be completed as the client was declared insolvent. In general, the archaeology suggests that the pattern of occupation of the Langebaan area involves people locating themselves at the coast where they ate large quantities of marine food including seals and fish. Furthermore there is good evidence to suggest that they may have been scheduling their coastal visits to collect lower tidal zone shellfish such as limpets and perlemoen which were found on most sites. Unlike many coastal sites that have been studied in the western Cape, terrestrial foods were well represented with tortoises birds, and small antelope playing an important role in the diet.

3. STUDY AREA - LEENTJIESKLIP 2

Leentjiesklip 2 is one of 4 granite promontories on the eastern shore of the Langebaan Lagoon between the town of Langebaan and the Club Mykonos resort. The granite boulders on the shoreline currently support colonies of shellfish, the same species of which were exploited by prehistoric people in the past. Partially vegetated dunes have accumulated over the highest points of the promontory creating a mound. This raised area (which is the focus of a new housing development) is elevated above the surrounding land to the west and overlooks sandy beaches to the north and south. Parkington and Poggenpoel (1987) located 2 archaeological sites on Leentjiesklip 2 as well as a further three sites to the north. Sites LP 1 and LP 40 (Figure 2) lay within the development area and were likely to be heavily impacted by building operations and laying of services.

4. METHOD

A large surface scatter of shellfish dispersed over the raised area at Leentjiesklip 2 (site LP1) extending across to the coastal flatlands to the east (LP 40) was an indication that prehistoric people had been camping in this area. Plate 1 shows the view from site LP 2 looking northwards. At the time of the initial assessment, trial excavations were not undertaken which meant that both sites had to be subjected to test excavations to determine the best areas for archaeological sampling. Fourteen deep trial excavations were positioned on various parts of the vegetated dune and surrounding areas to establish the best areas for controlled archaeological sampling. Shell was found to be thinly dispersed throughout the dune body and surrounds with the result that the majority of the trial excavations did not locate significant archaeological material. However, test excavations 1, 2 and 10 produced evidence of buried deposits at depths of 90 and 120mm respectively.

As the development was to encroach directly on the vicinity of test excavations 1 and 2 on the dune top (LP 1), a formal archaeological excavation was conducted in this area. A standard 1m² grid was set up over an area of 12m², with excavations initially beginning in three squares. In time the excavation was extended over 11m² in response to the presence of lenses of material deeply buried below the surface. As much of upper dune body contained very little material, 10 cm spits were used as the basic unit of excavation. This changed to a combination of spit and stratigraphic excavation when visible lenses of material were encountered. All material was sieved through a 1.5 mm screen (when dry) and a 3 mm screen (when damp). Material was bulked on site and

curated at U.C.T. The excavation was terminated at a depth of 2.8 m. Figure 3 shows the main excavation at LP 1 along with some of the major identified stratigraphic units.

Test excavation 10 (Figure 2) revealed a deeply buried lens of shell, bone and pottery partially exposed in the bottom of a gully in the shoreline dune embankment. For reasons of ecological sensitivity of the dune embankment, this previously unrecorded site was not targeted for archaeological sampling.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Site LP 1

The first 70 cm of deposit that was excavated contained small quantities of shell and very little else. The presence of fragments of glass in spit 6 (60cm) suggests that some form of disturbance may have taken place in the upper layers, possibly as a result of dune mole activity. Spits 7 - 9 showed signs of increase in the general density of material. The first identifiable archaeological features were identified in spit 12 (120 cm) with the discovery of a shallow pit containing ash, shell, bird and seal bone (*E10 pit in spit 12*). A further shelly patch was located in spit 12 extending across several squares. A major lens (CSP#3) of shell and ash was found in spits 13 and 14 dipping to spit 20 then wedging upwards to spits 15, 16 and 17 on the eastern side of the excavation (Figure 3, Plate 2). A further shell lens was encountered in E13 spit 18 continuing to spit 19 and broadening further in spit 20. Like CSP#3 this depend in an easterly direction. The last stratigraphic unit excavated was a hearth in spits 25-27 (2.7m) in square D13.

The stratigraphy of site LP 1 implies that the dune body experienced several phases of occupation by prehistoric people. Each phase of occupation appears to have been fairly ephemeral involving people camping on the dune body for fairly short periods of time, then leaving it. During these intermittent periods wind-blown sand accumulated over the debris resulting in several distinct layers of material stratified within the dune body. Some of these are distinct layers of discarded shell and food debris, while others are small hearths and pits representing baking pits and cooking fires of individual groups of people. This programme of excavation located archaeological material at a depth of nearly 3 m below surface at which point, both time and safety considerations prevented further investigation. It is possible that layering of archaeological material may continue below 3 m into the dune body as it is evident that in the past there was a dynamic process of sand deposition.

5.1.1 Shellfish

Shellfish were analysed from five of the major stratigraphic units from spit 13 to spit 26. The results are presented in Appendix A. Relative frequencies of shellfish species are consistent not only across squares but also in each of the five units. *Choromytilus meridionalis* (black mussel) made up between 50% and 65% of the assemblage.

Burnupena sp. (whelks) were the next most frequent making up between 17% and 29%. Limpets made up a minor part of the overall diet. Of these *Patella granatina* and *Patella granularis* were numerically dominant. Other species were present in minimal quantities. Worthy of mention are the presence of some warmer water species such as *Haliothis midae* and *Patella tabularis* which reflect the comparatively warmer waters of

the lagoon compared with the open shorelines of the West Coast. In general, the consistency of the shellfish assemblage over time probably reflects the edible species of shellfish that were available on the restricted section of rocky shoreline at Leentjiesklip 2.

5.1.2 Animal bone

Most of the animal bone from this site was found associated with shell lenses from spit 7 downwards. Like the shell assemblage, the faunal remains are not only similar from unit to unit but also compare with other excavated sites in the area. Bone preservation on the site was good and a significant amount of material was recovered. This has been identified to species in selected squares, lists of which are presented in Appendix B. A general observation about the bone sample from all the excavated units is that it reflects a more terrestrial than marine foraging pattern. Tortoise bones (*Chersina angulata*) dominated the sample in every instance. Bones of reptiles such as snakes and lizards were also very common. The presence of bones of antelope ranging from small steenbok (*Raphiserus* sp) to larger springbok sized species, shows that hunting or snaring of these animals took place fairly regularly. Marine mammals such as seal, which are normally common on coastal sites such as this were scarce within the assemblage, although washed up seal carcasses have been noted on the beach at the present time. The bone assemblage contains remains of both marine and estuarine bird species (flamingo, cormorant, penguin and Cape gannet) which were also an important component of the prehistoric diet. Fish also played a notable role with bones of the common estuarine fish, white stimpnose (*Rhabdosargus globiceps*) occurring in virtually every unit. Lobsters (indicated by preservation of the mandibles), which are often a common feature of coastal sites, were very scarce at LP 1.

People who were living at Leentjiesklip were exploiting both the marine and terrestrial environment around them with the result that they were experiencing a diversity of different foods. The major protein source came from shellfish collected from the rocky shoreline. In terms of other animals, terrestrial foods gathered off the coastal plains east of the shoreline played an important role. Plant foods would also have been collected by these people, but in this instance the remains of these have not been preserved in the dune environment. As this site is probably older than 2000 years, bones of domestic animals such as sheep and cattle did not occur in the assemblage.

5.1.3 Artefacts

Details of frequencies of artefactual material are presented in Appendix C.

Stone tools: Only 39 stone artefacts were found in the entire site. Apart from a single scraper and an adze, all of these were waste fragments dominated by use of quartz as a raw material. This sample is far too small to accurately characterise the site in terms of the stone artefact technology used. Research has shown that coastal middens frequently contain very few artefacts as the bulk of the food collection (gathering shellfish) did not require the use of very much technology.

Bone tools: Two sharp polished bone points were found in spits 17 and 24. These were probably used as needles or awls rather than hunting points as they are very thin.

Ostrich eggshell: Several ostrich eggshells beads were found. This small sample (Appendix C) has an average external diameter of 3.92 mm. Small bead sizes such as these are characteristic of Late Stone Age period predating the advent of ceramics in South Africa 2000 years ago. In addition there are incomplete and perforated fragments in the major units indicating that working of ostrich eggshell was taking place on the site.

Pottery: No pottery was found in the main excavation at LP 1 indicating that that this part of the site predates the ceramic period. Test excavation 10 produced fragments of a Cape Coastal type ceramic vessel found within a partially buried lens of shell. This lens represents part of a deeply buried ceramic period site under the immediate coastal dune cordon just to the north of Leentjiesklip 2. Although very close to site LP 1, this is probably a different occupation relating to a different time period.

5.2 Site LP 40

This site consisted of a thin scatter of shellfish among some low bushes on the flatlands east of Leentjiesklip 2. Four test excavations were positioned on areas where the material was visible. Each of the 10cm spits in each excavation was sieved and the resulting material examined on site. Small amounts of material were present in all excavations with two whole *Haliotis midae* shells and some barnacles being present at 65cm depth in two of the excavations. In general terms, the archaeological material was dispersed and ephemeral leading us to believe that the site was not worth further excavation. Inspection of service trenches on a follow up visit did not produce any evidence of more archaeological material.

5.3 Burial

Members of the Archaeology Contracts Office were recalled by the developer's contractors to inspect the site of a human burial which had been exposed during construction activities. The remains had been collected by the contractor and handed to Ms S. Winter of the National Monuments Council. Inspection of the site as well as communication with workers present at the time revealed that the burial had been exposed during excavation of a 2m deep service trench which ran at right-angles from the coast about 20m to the north of the Leentjiesklip mound. Workers on site informed members of the ACO that the burial had "fallen out of the side of the trench". It appears that the body was exposed after a portion of the side of the trench had collapsed and fallen along with human bones into the bottom. Informants pointed out the area of collapse which involved the first meter of sand indicating that the body was buried in a shallow grave. Exploratory excavations were conducted on the find site to ensure that there was no more material in the bottom of the trench or the section. The context of the burial indicates that it was in all likelihood, prehistoric.

6. CONCLUSION

Prehistoric use of the eastern edge of Langebaan is manifested in a number of LSA sites associated with the Lynch Point and Leentjiesklip rocky shorelines. These rocky areas exerted a strong attraction over prehistoric people who exploited the colonies of shellfish which grow on the rocks of the intertidal zone. The 11 sites that have now been excavated along the eastern Lagoon shore show that occupation dated from the Late mid-Holocene through to the ceramic period. Mid-Holocene high sea levels (about 4000 years ago (Deacon & Lancaster 1988)) which were 2.5m higher than that of today, would have probably had a fairly dramatic effect on the shoreline of Langebaan lagoon with the effect that the present littoral dune system probably post-dates this event. This is demonstrated by the fact that fairly recent archaeological sites such as LP 12 (Hart in prep) and LP 43 have been inundated by considerable depths of dune sand showing that a dynamic process of dune formation has been progress within the last 3000 years.

Site LP 1 shows patterns that appear to be characteristic of sites in the area that have been demonstrated to be older than 2000 years. The shellfish sample is dominated by black mussels, whereas ceramic period sites in a similar ecological context at Lynch Point are dominated by limpets. Jerardino (in press) has also demonstrated this phenomenon on open shell middens in the Elands Bay area. Site LP 20 (Parkington, Poggenpoel and Hart 1988) shows a marked changeover from mussel to limpet domination at the advent of the ceramic period. The reason for this change in shellfish exploitation patterns is unknown but it may be hypothesised that changes in the size of groups of people after the advent of the herding economy may have heavily impacted favoured shellfish populations (black mussel), forcing people to collect less palatable species (limpets). This phenomenon would have been especially marked in this area because of the limited areas of rocky shoreline that support shellfish on Langebaan lagoon.

A characteristic of these pre-ceramic lagoon-side sites is that prehistoric people were making use of a wide range of food sources ranging from shellfish, marine mammals, fish and birds, tortoises, antelopes and reptiles which were hunted and gathered on the inland coastal plain. Ceramic period sites excavated at Lynch Point show a much lower diversity of animal in terms of both quantity and species (Parkington, Poggenpoel and Hart 1988). This may be because after 2000 years ago people were able to rely on products of domestic animals and were not quite as dependent on hunting.

Without submission of material for radiocarbon dates it is difficult to establish the precise age of LP 1. The fact that neither domestic animals or pottery are present in the sample implies that the site is over 2000 years old. Unfortunately the stone artefact sample is too small and nondescript to be used as a dating marker. The material from site LP 1 now represents a valuable collection of rescued information that is available for further study and hopefully radio carbon dating in the future. Each excavated archaeological site represents a part of a region-wide system of human habitation and the environment in which people lived. However, our ability to gain a complete understanding of the history of South Africa is going to depend to a large extent on ensuring a continued policy of conservation and rescue of archaeological material, especially in the context of accelerating development.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is possible that there is still buried material within the sand body at Leentjiesklip 2. As it much of this material is deeply buried and very difficult to excavate, it is suggested that development of the site be permitted in the hopes that archaeological material will be preserved in posterity under the development.
2. It is possible that human skeletal material will be encountered during excavation of foundation or service trenches. In the event of this happening, the finds should not be touched or moved as interfering with a burial without the necessary authority is an offense. An archaeologist or the National Monuments Council should be contacted immediately with a view to systematically removing the material for storage in a licensed institution.

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9. PROFESSIONAL TEAM

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Report

Tim Hart