

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE MAGUGA ROAD
DEVELOPMENT SITES

Professor T N Huffman
Mr R H Steel

Archaeological Resources Management
Archaeology Department
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg

August, 1995

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE MAGUGA ROAD DEVELOPMENT SITES

SYNOPSIS

No Archaeological sites of importance were found in the open grassland on the north and south sides of the dam. Archaeological sites were restricted to the bushveld in the dam basin, and most were clustered around the dam wall. One Middle Stone Age site was found near the wall on the south side, while Middle Stone Age, Rock paintings and Later Stone Age village and smelting sites were to the north. Some Swazi graves were noted, and there will be several more associated with old and modern homesteads.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

OBSERVATIONS

South Side

North Side

MR-1 Bridge

RECOMMENDATIONS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE MAGUGA ROAD DEVELOPMENT SITES

INTRODUCTION

The Joint Water Commission of Swaziland and South Africa has authorized the construction of the Maguga Dam on the Komati River about 12km south of Pigg's Peak. The Komati Basin Water Authority (KOBWA) manages the project.

As part of this project, KOBWA plans to have permanent access roads to the dam site leading from the MR-1 both north and south of the Komati River. Further, the dam will inundate the MR-1 bridge over the Komati, and the bridge must be moved.

To proceed, this road development must have an Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) in terms of the Swazi National Regulations for Environmental Audit, Assessment and Review of Projects.

Steffen, Robertson and Kirsten (SRK), consulting engineers on the road development, commissioned Archaeological Resources Management (ARM) to survey the proposed routes for sites of archaeological and historical interest as part of the environmental impact assessment for the ECC.

Two ARM staff meet Mr C Layman of ZMCK, the Chief Resident Engineer and Deputy Project Manager, on Sunday July 23rd in Mbabane. The various alternative routes were examined on the 24th and 25th, and then ARM staff meet Mr Layman on site on the 26th and gave him a verbal report of their

findings. A further verbal report was given to Ms J Joughin of SRK on the 28th. All sites were recorded on aerial photographs (about 1:15 000) supplied by Mr Layman.

OBSERVATIONS

South Side

Numerous Swazi homesteads were scattered along the southern alternatives between the MR-1 and dam basin. Older homesteads were marked by pottery, grindstones and hut circles. None of them probably date before 1930. Residents interviewed near the Van Damme house and at the junction of the S1 and S2 knew the location of several graveyards associated with both the older and present-day homesteads. As a rule, the graves will be marked by carefully packed stones forming an oval about 1m high and 2m long.

Generally, the open grasslands between the MR-1 and the dam basin were devoid of archaeological sites. The exception was a cave (**Site 5**) in the hill behind the new Van Damme house above the S1. This cave, formed by granite boulders, contained a few Late Iron Age potsherds. It may have been used as a refuse or for storing rainmaking medicine. At present the cave is protected by the landowner. The remaining archaeological sites were in the bushveld of the dam basin.

Site 1 consisted of low stone walling on the side of the boot-shaped hill north of the school along the S2b. Walling was exposed in the road made by the drillers to gain access to the dam site. This site may have been a 19th century Sotho or Swazi cattle post.

Site 2 was a stone age camp site on the low rises at the junction of the S1, S2 and dam wall. Stone artefacts included bifacial points, unifacial points, blades,

flakes and cores that date the material to the Middle Stone Age (from about 200 000 to 30 000 years ago). An old Swazi homestead had been built on top, and both had later been disturbed by ploughing. Stone piles here were the result of land clearance for cultivation: none appeared to be graves.

North Side

Raw material for stone tools was available in the river gravels, and another Middle Stone Age site (**Site 3**) was located on the north side on a small rise next to the river immediately upstream of the dam wall. Site 3 also contained a Late Iron Age (LIA) occupation that may date to between AD 1000 and 1300. An old abandoned Swazi homestead on top of the LIA occupation formed a third component.

Site 4 on the plateau at the dam wall was a large iron smelting site marked by broken clay pipes, iron ore, slag and LIA pottery. This material went down at least 25cm. Presumably, the smelters lived at site 3, a short distance to the northwest. As with site 3, there had also been a Swazi homestead here.

About 100m upslope of the edge of the gorge, in the line of the proposed dam wall, was a rock outcrop containing some San (i.e. 'Bushmen') rock paintings. The small cluster of paintings included red human figures and some buck.

Three old Swazi homesteads were noted along the N1 on the upper plateau above the dam wall. One included a grave. Another grave stood next to the present road just south of the store where the N1 turns south towards the dam site.

MR-1 Bridge

The new bridge location was highly disturbed by the original bridge construction, and no archaeological sites were noted.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the open grasslands the important cultural sites are associated with recent Swazi homesteads. Consequently, when the final access roads have been chosen, the surveyors must check with local residents for the location of graves. Furthermore, local residents must be given sufficient notice in order to shift the fences around their fields.

The most important archaeological sites are near the dam wall. Sites 2, 3, and 4 are worthy of mitigation. The rock paintings are not so important that they should be moved (in any case, removal might not be possible). They will be destroyed, however, so they should be traced.

The iron smelting and Late Iron Age village sites will also be destroyed. Their positions in the local Iron Age sequence are unclear. Both should be test excavated so that sufficient material is available for future study.

The Middle Stone Age sites are less important, but nevertheless, a representative sample should be collected. All three mitigation measures can be accomplished during a three week field trip.

If the S2b route is chosen, then the stone walls of site 1 must be recorded. Site 5 is not endangered.