

Malangeni excavations

DA Thomas approached the ICRM to undertake salvage excavations of three sites on behalf of the Malangeni Housing Support Committee. These sites are to be affected by development housing and were recorded in a prior survey (Anderson 2002). This survey recorded six archaeological sites, of which three were regarded as having significance.

Malangeni is situated approximately 5km inland from Sizela. All the sites are on hills and have been disturbed by agricultural activities. However, there appears to be a deep archaeological deposit at all sites.

The archaeological sites were regarded as being significant for several reasons:

- The Late Iron Age of southern KwaZulu-Natal has had few research projects in the past – only one site has been excavated (Robey 1980). Thus any archaeological site in the area has the potential to increase our knowledge of the history of the area
- Decorated sherds were observed at the significant sites. These sherds have meaning in terms of language and social identity.
- There is a high density of sherds and an archaeological deposit at the sites. This suggests that subsurface features may occur.

THE SITES

MAL 5

This site is located along the eastern areas of the development and has been used for sugar cane farming in the past. The site extends for approximately 200 m x 100 m along the gentle slope of a hill. The lower parts of the hill were marked for excavation as this area had the higher density of pottery sherds (fig. 1).

The soil of the site is a uniform dark brown-black colour and is almost clay-like in texture. This profile extends for more than a meter, however there is a layer of quartz stones at approximately 30 cm below the surface. This fragmented quartz layer demarcated the end of the archaeological deposit.

Eleven 2 m x 2 m squares were excavated at MAL 5 in 10 cm spits (fig. 1). The excavations varied between a depth of 10 cm to 35 cm. No subsurface features were excavated, and each spit varied in the density of artefacts.

Artefacts

Pottery: The pottery from the site was mostly thin-walled, suggesting a Late Iron Age or Historical Period occupation for the site. The pottery varied in colour and included sherds with a black, brown or red burnish. If no burnish was present, then the sherds were in an orange-brown colour. The rims were straight and had flat lips. One sherd had an *isumpa* (wart).

Stone: Two types of stone occurred at the site – grinding stones and stone tools. The grinding stones are fragmented and used as upper grinding stones.

The stone tools are Middle Stone Age tools and are mostly located in the lower parts of the deposit.

Discussion

An adequate sample of pottery was recovered from the excavation. The sample indicates that the site dates to the earlier part of the Late Iron Age, i.e. AD 1200 – AD 1500.

The site was excavated in terms of test-pit excavations. No spatial information was available from the limited test-pits, nor was there an increase in decorated pottery. I concluded the excavations on the basis that it was unlikely to yield further information regarding the Late Iron Age.

MAL 3

MAL3 is located at the highest hill in the study area. The hill is almost keyhole in shape and the archaeological deposit is located along the northeastern part of the hill. This site was regarded as being of medium significance due to its archaeological deposit, possible metallurgy and decorated sherds.

A total of six 2 m x 2 m squares were placed in areas of high artefact densities. These squares were excavated in 10-cm spits (fig. 2).

Artefacts

Pottery: The pottery was mostly undecorated and undiagnostic. A few rims and one decorated sherd were recovered. The decorations consisted of circular impressions.

Stone: Two types of stone occurred at the site – grinding stones and stone tools. The grinding stones are fragmented and used as upper grinding stones. The stone tools are Middle Stone Age tools and are mostly located in the lower parts of the deposit.

Metallurgy: Various fragments of iron ore and a small tuyère fragment were recovered from the surface collection.

Discussion

The excavations were in a very hard clay-like soil. Most of the artefacts were located in the upper 5 cm of the deposit. This indicated that the first 10 cm would have had most, if not all, of the artefacts relating to the Iron Age occupation. It was not worthwhile excavating further into the soil, and thus the excavations were concluded.

An adequate sample size was recovered from the test-pit excavations.

MAL 4

The site was initially marked for test-pit excavations. However, since it was similar in soil types to the previous excavations, I decided that a surface collection would suffice.

The surface collection recovered only pottery sherds; however, MSA flakes were also noted. The pottery sherds varied in size and colour, but were mostly an orange-brown, dark brown or black colour. The decorated sherds had a circular impression motif or *isumpa* on the body.

Discussion

The excavations for the Malangeni Housing Support Committee have been completed. The excavations recovered sufficient material from the test-pit excavations and no further mitigation is required.

References

Anderson, G. 2002. Archaeological survey at Malangeni and Nzimakwe. ICRM report for DA Thomas Development and Construction.

Robey, T. 1980. Mpambanyoni: a Late Iron Age site on the Natal south coast. *Annals of the Natal Museum* **24(1)**: 147-164.