

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENTS
IN THE MAPUNGUBWE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE**

A Phase-1 Report prepared for SANParks, SAHRA and VUKA

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June 2003

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INTRODUCTION

SANParks intends to establish new facilities on Greefswald as part of its tourism development within the Vhembe/Dongola National Park. The development includes a main camp and new access road, a wilderness camp, an entrance gate and interpretive centre, and new sections of road to Mapungubwe and the confluence.

An initial impact assessment of parts of this development revealed several archaeological sites. To assess their significance, complete the survey and recommend appropriate mitigation, SANParks contracted Archaeological Resources Management (ARM). If possible, the routes and facilities would be relocated to avoid important archaeological sites..

METHOD

One ARM staff examined the different areas on the 5th and 6th June 2003, in the company of SANParks personnel (B van Linte, J Verhoef and Q Neethling) and members of the original survey team (M Hutton and J van der Walt). Much of the new routes were traversed on foot and some by vehicle. Archaeological sites were first recorded with a hand-held GPS instrument, and then transferred to the 1:50 000 map 2229 AB Mapungubwe.

The significance of archaeological sites and occurrences was based on five main criteria: site integrity (*in situ* vs. derived), amount of deposit, variety of deposit (pits, middens, hut debris, etc), uniqueness and potential to answer present research questions. Sites with no significance (such as an isolated stone flake) require no mitigation. Sites with low or medium significance may require mitigation, while sites with high significance must be mitigated and exceptional sites (such as K2 and Mapungubwe) should not be negatively impacted at all.

RESULTS

Main Camp and New Access Road

The first section of the proposed access route crossed over two Iron Ages sites (1) 22 12 38.15S 29 21 14.7E; (2) 22 12 35.35S 29 21 17.3E), both dating to the Khami-period (Figure 1). SANParks personnel realigned the route, and it now connects to an old road, completely avoiding the two Khami-period sites.

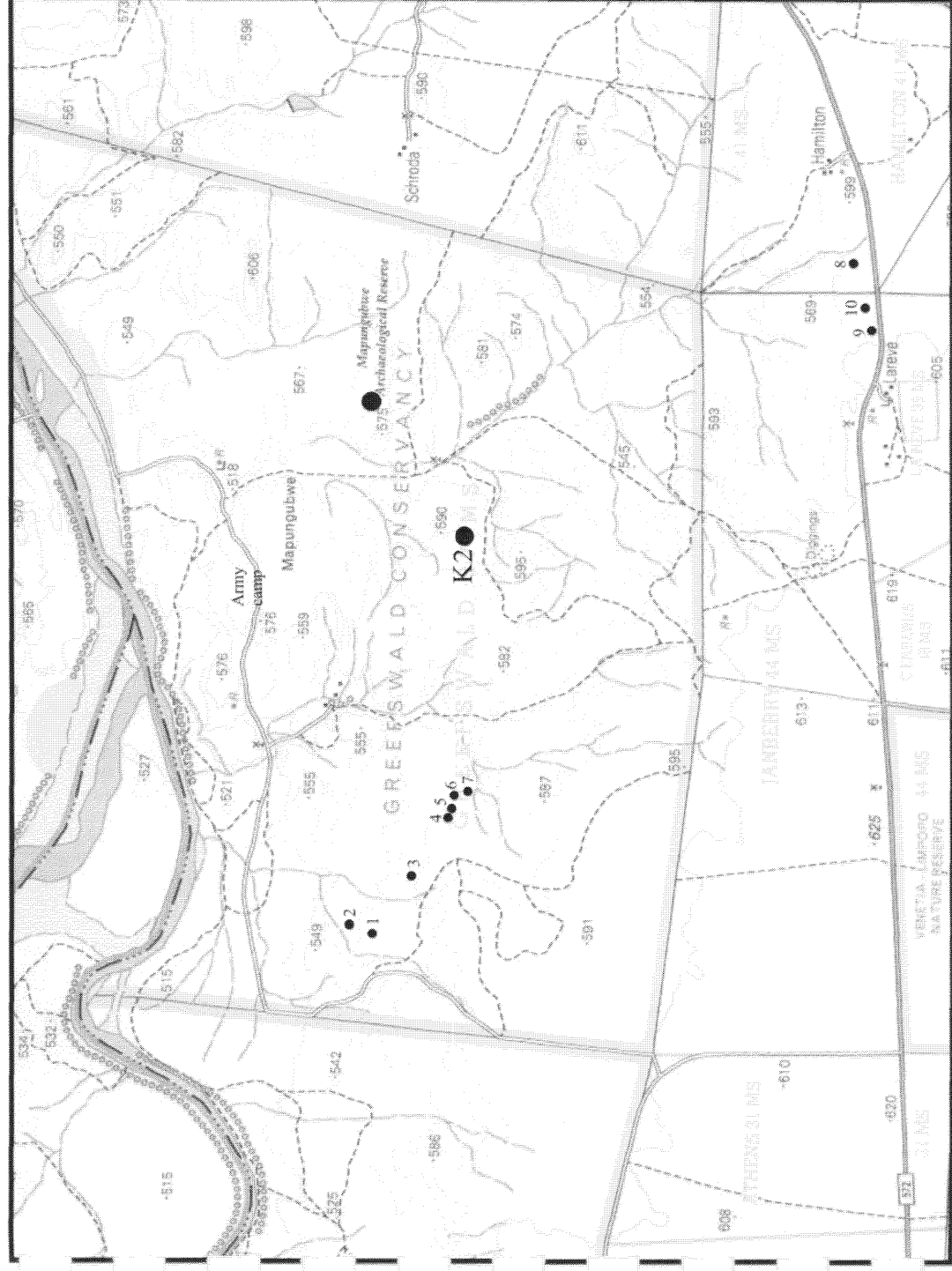


Figure 1. Archaeological sites noted during the survey.

The second section winds through the box canyon south of the Army camp. This section traverses Site 3 (22 12 48.8S 29 21 27.9E) dating to the K2 period. It is already on record (2229 AB 226) and has low significance.

The proposed route skirts the edge of Site 4: 2229 AB 222 (22 12 52.9S 29 21 37.0E). missing the central kraal by some 50m.

Rains and elephant activity have exposed another cattle kraal and associated deposit (Figure 2) in Site 5: 2229 AB 223 (22 12 53.3S 29 21 44.5E). Pottery from a nearby midden belongs to the Leokwe facies (Figure 3). This site has high significance, and so the route was realigned at least 50m east of the cattle kraal.



Figure 2. Site 5 in Centre.

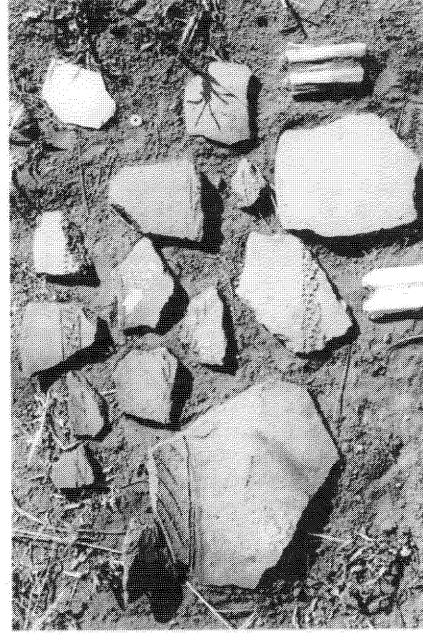


Figure 3. Leokwe pottery at site 5.

More Leokwe deposit lies around a small sandstone hill forming Site 6 (22 12 55.4S 29 21 48.3E). Various cattle kraals surround the hill (Figure 4), and the pottery belongs to the Leokwe facies (Figure 5). Because this new site also has high significance, the route was shifted as far east as possible.

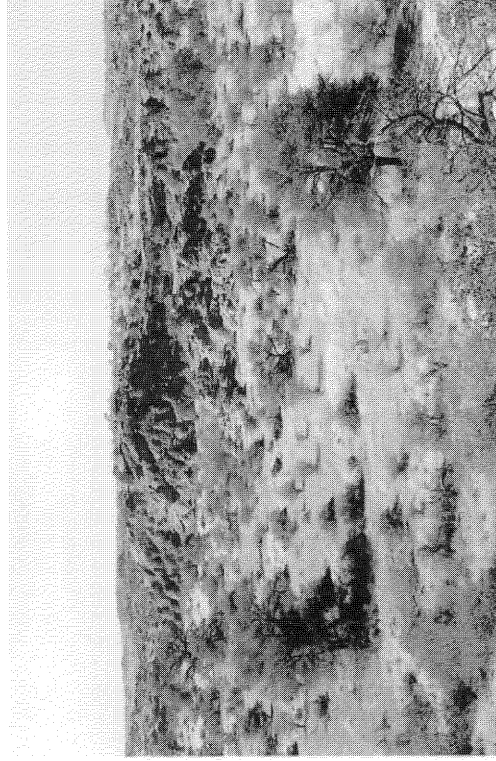


Figure 4. Site 6 at small kopje in center right.

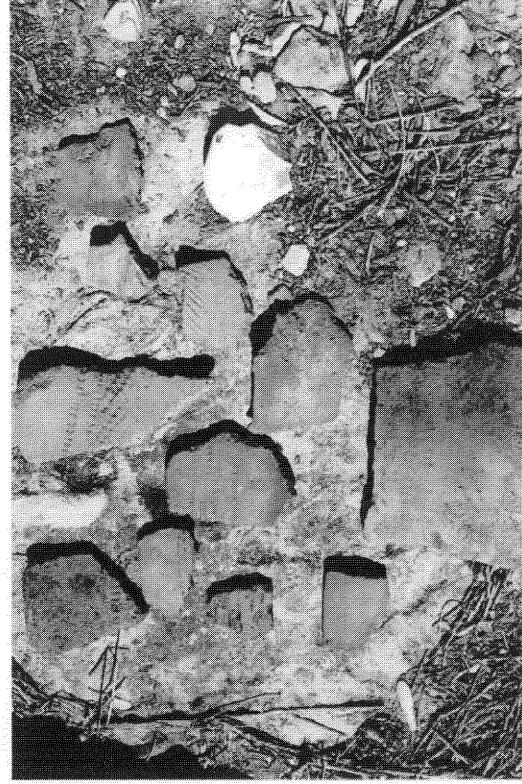


Figure 5. Leokwe pottery at site 6.

As the route swings southwest to enter the rest camp, it crosses some minor areas of pottery and gray soil (A 22 12 55.7S 29 21 51.6E; B 22 12 59.3S 29 21 51E). These areas have low significance and do not require mitigation.

The Main Camp itself in on top of Site 7: 2229 AB 225 (22 13 01.2S 29 21 49.3E), a previously recorded Leokwe site. Site 4 to 7 probably formed a Leokwe community contemporaneous with K2, and they should be considered as a unit rather than separately. For the most part, the access route has now been realigned to avoid negatively impacting this archaeological complex.

Wilderness Camp

The camp lies on a small shelf (22 11 33.6S 29 24 29.2E) above another box canyon that becomes a bog during the rainy season. The previous assessment noted a few potsherds and small midden deposit on the shelf. Presumably, the shelf was used as a hunting camp or for guarding cattle. Whatever the case, it has low significance and does not require mitigation.

Entrance Gate and Interpretive Centre

The area around the new Entrance Gate on Hamilton has already been disturbed by the construction of the main Pont Drift-Mussina Road. Erosion has exposed a few Stone Age artefacts, but they are probably not *in situ* and therefore of low significance.

Site 8, a concentration of Middle Stone Age artefacts (2229 AB 108), lies on top of the basalt dyke (22 14 30.7S 29 24 07.2E) overlooking the small dam on Hamilton. The new road will run across the dam wall to the Interpretive Centre and will not impact this site at all.

The proposed location for the new Interpretive Centre appears to be devoid of any archaeological remains.

New Road to Mapungubwe and Confluence

Near the basalt dyke, the proposed route branches westerly away from the Interpretive Centre towards Greefswald. The first section skirts a vlei and crosses over the former living area of

farm labourers (Site 9: 22 14 34.1S 29 23 49.9E). Scattered bits of metal, glass and porcelain mark this old compound. The remains of Site 9 have low significance.

A few Earlier Stone Age artefacts lie scattered in the same area, and the road was shifted to avoid a small concentration (Site 10: 22 14 33.4S 29 23 54.4E). More EIA material lies on the low ridge above the vlei. Site 10 has medium significance, and is worth further examination. It is well away from the road, however, and does not require mitigation.

This first section near the basalt dyke crosses the rocky escarpment at the head of the Mapungubwe valley. Widely scattered stone artefacts lie on the surface all along the escarpment. Some may have moved down slope from the kopje next to the Lemmer homestead. These isolated artefacts have no significance. For the record, an isolated hand axe was noted at 22 14 30.8S 29 22 54.4E.

The next section of the road meanders across the mopane plateau. This section is largely covered in thick red sand, and no archaeological remains are visible. Occasionally, a stone artefact lies on a rocky outcrop, such as calcrete or basalt. In the context of the road project, these occurrences have low significance and do not require mitigation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As agreed on site, all new roads will be raised above ground level. Other than an initial scrape to remove vegetation, construction materials (stone, wire, cement etc) will lie on the surface. Thus, the impact on archaeological sites will be minimal. Secondly, an archaeologist will monitor the construction of the Main Camp and new access road.

Following best practice, it was agreed that ARM would mitigate Site 5 rather than Site 3. Although the road will impact Site 3 to a greater degree, Site 5 is more significant: it has more deposit, more varied remains and a greater potential to answer present research questions. J. Calebrese (2000) recently demonstrated that the Leokwe facies represents Zhizo people who remained behind (or returned) after K2 took over the basin. They maintained their own cultural identity and thus exemplify what anthropologists mean by ethnicity: a dominant/subordinate

relationship between two separate identity groups in the same area. In this case Leokwe, the subordinate group, may have been ritual specialists (Huffman 2000). The extensive kraals in the Site 4 – 6 complex suggest that they may have also looked after K2 cattle. This possibility represents a new research question that informs mitigation.

The mitigation will last six days, the amount of time appropriate for Site 3, and will concentrate on the cattle kraal and deposit exposed in the gully. This area requires rehabilitation in any case. We are able to complete the work in August.

In conclusion, the proposed steps are reasonable. The realignments of the access road to the Main Camp avoid disturbing most deposits visible on the surface. Secondly, the monitoring of road and camp constructions continues the archaeological assessment into another phase. And finally, the test excavation of Site 5 satisfies the requirements for salvaging archaeological deposits under threat. With these provisions, there is no archaeological reason why developments for tourism in the Vhembe/Dongola Park should not proceed.

REFERENCE

- Calebrese, J.A. 2000. Interregional interaction in southern Africa: Zhizo and Leopard's Kopje relations in northern South Africa, southwestern Zimbabwe and eastern Botswana, AD 1000 to 1200. *African Archaeological Review* 17(4): 183-210.
- Huffman, T.N. 2000. Mapungubwe and the origins of the Zimbabwe culture. *South African Archaeological Society Goodwin Series* 8: 14-29.