

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry contracted the Institute for Cultural Resource Management to undertake mitigation for two sites that will be affected by the raising of the Mearns Weir. These sites were identified in a previous survey (Anderson 2000).

The new water levels have the potential for a negative impact on the organic material remains at the archaeological sites due to an increase in humidity and water seepage through the soil and rock outcrop. However, the material is not of such significance that it should impede the project.

The mitigation for each site differed, but the aim was to salvage information in case the sites were inadvertently affected by the raised water levels. The mitigation at the first site (M6) consisted the tracing and photographing of the rock art. The mitigation at the second site (M7) consisted of archaeological test-pit excavations and the photographing the rock art at the site.

The sites overlook the Mearns River, near Nottingham Road and Connington, KwaZulu-Natal.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

M6

This site consists of various rock art images. These images occur in various styles, colours, and states of preservation on various parts of the boulder (fig's. 1 and 2). The images were divided into nine panels and traced accordingly.

The rock art images can be described as follows¹.

Panel 1: Parts of the panel have been chipped in a presumed attempt to remove the art. There are charcoal graffiti markings on this panel. The art consists of a faded white antelope facing right.

Panel 2: This panel consists of eleven white antelope of which most face to the right. The antelope are in varied positions and superimpositionings. One antelope is drawn with a posterior view, and another is in a lying posture with its head facing backwards. On the bottom left is an animal in white leaping to the left. One animal is a bichromatic eland that is superimposed by the other white antelope. On the upper right corner of this panel are faint

¹ All images are in red unless specified

white lines and graffiti. Below these white animals is a small group of red images. These appear to be of two very faded animals and possibly three humans. The one human has potential head adornments.

Panel 3: This panel consists of faded red paint and graffiti. Some of the area has been chipped away in an attempt to damage or remove the art.

Panel 4: This area is on a smooth part of the wall and consists of graffiti and faded red images. In the upper parts of this panel is a faded elongated animal, with a small head.

Panel 5: This panel consists of \pm six faded white images and several red images. Four of these are antelope. The upper two antelope have semi-well preserved heads, and well defined ears. Below these animals are several areas of red paint that are smeared or faded. One of these is a human with a white outline along its shoulders and head, and two white lines above its head. Below this image is a group of about eight humans. These humans face a central figure. The humans near the central figure appear to be holding its arms.

Panel 6: The legs of five humans are visible near the top of the panel, while a complete human occurs just above these legs. A water stain has damaged this area. Below these humans are a few white lines and a faded red and white antelope. Below these images are very faded areas of white paint. Below these areas, is a long thin line in a vertical and horizontal position. Along this line are groups of three smaller lines that appear similar to tassels seen on images of bags. There is an incomplete row of dark red lines below the white line. These latter lines continue to the base of the shelter.

Panel 7: This panel consists of several images in various states of preservation. One eland in white and orange occurs on the left-hand side of the panel. Water seepage has eroded part of this eland. Above this eland is a faded scene of very faded red images (possibly human). Flecks of white paint and another human occur to the right, and a white human is located above. Above these images are two very faded large bichromatic eland. These eland are in orange-red and white paint. Above these eland are faint traces of white paint. To the right of these eland are two bichromatic antelope in red and white. The lower antelope is standing on natural cracks on the rock face. Parts of this panel have been chipped. To the left of the latter antelope are white and red lines.

Panel 8: This panel consists mainly of faded red and white images. On the far left is the hind quarters of a red antelope. To the right are several areas of water staining, and faded

white images. To the right is a small white antelope and areas of the surface that have been chipped. On the far right are areas of very faded white paint and a faded animal torso.

Panel 9: This panel consists of a single faded white animal.

Mitigation

The rock art at this site was traced according to standard archaeological practices. Each panel was photographed and then detailed photographs of specific images were taken. The tracings are not reproduced in this report as it would be too time consuming and expensive to redraw and ink in the various panels. The tracings are currently curated at the Natal Museum and forms part of its rock art database.

M7

The site is a small overhang \pm 10 m wide and a maximum of 3 m in depth. There appears to be a shallow deposit that is been relatively sheltered from water, apart from one small area of water seepage (fig. 3). Two 1 m x 1 m squares were placed on either side of the overhang and excavated to bedrock.

This site consists of rock art and an archaeological deposit. The reason for the mitigation was that an increase in the water levels, and thus water seepage, had the potential to affect potential archaeological deposits in the site. The mitigation was to excavate parts of the site to test if an archaeological deposit exists, to determine the degree of preservation of organic materials, and make further recommendations regarding the site.

Rock Art at M7

Several rock art images were located against the wall of the shelter (fig. 4). These images are generally not well preserved and are very faded. The images can be grouped into two main categories: San and Nguni art, and are thus of two very different artistic traditions. The former tends to be associated with the more commonly known rock art images of the Drakensberg, while the latter consists of fingersmears.

The art was divided into a series of panels, and is described as follows (from left to right, and top to bottom):

Panel 1: Exfoliation and black lichen has damaged the panel.

- Are of indeterminate red paint.
- One orange antelope facing left, with the neck and hindquarters absent.

- Three antelope facing right. The upper antelope is very faded. The tip of the middle antelope's tail is in black, while the lower foreleg is in white. The hind legs and head are absent, but were probably in white. Below this antelope is a group of seven black lines extending onto the lower antelope. The middle antelope is superimposed on the lower antelope. The lower antelope is very faded.

Panel 2: Three areas of red paint, that are faded and damaged by lichen and a drip line.

Panel 3: Area of red paint damaged by exfoliation, lichen and a drip line. To the right are three orange fingersmears. These are 12 cm, 10 cm and 12cm long, respectively, and taper from the top to the bottom (1 cm to 3 cm).

Panel 4: Very faded paint under lichen and graffiti. Under the some of graffiti is an orange fingersmear 10 cm long.

Panel 5: Very faded animal torso and indeterminate red paint. These have been affected by lichen.

Panel 6: One possible fingersmear 6 cm long.

Panel 7: One orange fingersmear 12 cm long. It tapers from 1 cm – 3 cm.

Panel 8: One orange fingersmear 9 cm long, and faded at its base. Very faded red paint to the right, and graffiti above it. Possible red paint to the right. This panel has been painted on the shale part of the shelter.

Panel 9: This panel consists of five very faded orange-red fingersmears under a small overhang.

Panel 10: A row of eight orange-red fingersmears, of which some superimpose each other. There is an area of indeterminate red paint to the right. The area has been affected by black lichen.

Panel 11: Area of indeterminate red paint covered by black and green lichen.

Panel 12: One orange fingersmear on an exfoliated area. It is 7 cm long and 2 cm wide.

Panel 13: Large area covered by black lichen

- Area of indeterminate paint covered by black lichen.
- Row of ten fingersmears extending to the edge of the ledge.
- Row of four fingersmears. The last three continue over and underneath the ledge. The last three are orange in colour.
- Possible paint to the right.

Panel 14: Faded orange antelope.

- Row of six orange-red fingersmears between 6 cm – 10 cm in length.

Panel 15: Area of thick red paint covered by lichen.

Panel 16: One large antelope 49 cm in length. The main body is in orange-red, while the tail, hind legs, forelegs, neck and head are in black. The horns, forehead and nose are in white paint.

- Very faded image surrounded by lichen.

Panel 17: This panel is situated underneath a ledge and all are orange-red in colour.

- One group of five fingersmears, damaged by exfoliation and lichen.

- One group of six fingersmears at various angles, damaged by lichen and exfoliation.
- One group of four fingersmears (two vertical and two horizontal) damaged by lichen and exfoliation.
- At the back of this panel is a possible handprint and four fingersmears.

The rock art was extensively photographed and mapped. No rock art tracings were undertaken, as the images did not warrant further mitigation, unlike those at M6.

Stratigraphy

The stratigraphy of the deposit is uncomplicated. The upper layer consists mostly of recent debris. Below this is a shallow deposit varying between 5 cm and 30 cm in depth.

Square 1

Square 1 consisted of six main layers and two features (fig. 5). The differences in some of the stratigraphic layers may be more a result of moisture in the deposit, rather than a real difference. That is, the moisture (from the drip line) has changed the texture and colour of the soil, giving it an appearance of being different to the same stratigraphic horizon alongside it.

The main layer is Upper Crust (UC) that is adjacent to Upper Rocks (UR). This layer is a hard compact light brown sand that covers most of the square. Underneath the UC layer is a thin layer of Soft Brown Sand (SBS) that does not extend over the whole square. Underneath the UC and SBS layers are another three thin layers. These are Powdery Brown Sand (PBS), Hard Brown-Black Sand (HBBS) and Fine Grained Black Sand (FGBS). FGBS is probably related to HBBS as it is in the wetter part of the square. HBBS lies on bedrock in most places. PBS is mostly below UC and lies directly on Bedrock. PBS appears to be a mixture of soft UC and decomposed bedrock. There are two small ashy features on bedrock (FP1 and FP2). These are the remains of hearths.

Square 2:

The stratigraphy of Square 2 consists of an upper hard layer of Consolidated Grey Sand (CGS) and a loose Brown Sand with Roots (BSR) (fig. 6). The former formed the upper layer of the main ash feature, while the latter consisted of sand that is more recent with organic remains. Underneath these two layers were two small, but deep, ash features called CGS2 and Dark Ashy Sand (DAS). These two features abutted each other and only the colour differences distinguished the two.

Most of the artefacts came from CGS2, DAS, HBBS and FGBS.

Artefacts

Stone

The raw materials used for stone tools consisted of dolerite, hornfels, cryptocrystalline silicates (CCS) and a small frequency from quartz. These materials were used to produce a variety of stone implements.

The majority of the stone artefacts consisted of debitage (or waste material), a few cores, utilised flakes (flakes that were used for general purposes), and several formal tools. The formal tools consisted of mostly scrapers, and a few adzes, MRP's², and bladelets³.

The stone tool assemblage indicates that stone tool making occurred on site, as opposed to people bring in already made tools. This indicates that there was some form of human occupation at the site.

Faunal

There is a variety of faunal remains from the site and these are well preserved. The CGS, CGS2 and DAS layers have the most faunal remains.

These include:

- Warthog
- Canid
- Small bovid (duiker to sheep size)
- Medium bovid (wildebeest sized)
- Microfauna (mouse, rat, lizard and snake)

Worked bone

One piece of worked bone was excavated. This is a bone link-shaft used to link the arrowhead to the arrow shaft.

Beads

Two ostrich eggshell beads were recovered from CGS2.

Painted stones

Several fragments of stone with remnants of paint were recovered in the deposit. These probably originate from the rock paintings of the site.

² Miscellaneous Retouched Pieces, i.e. it shows signs of being intentionally reshaped, however not into a specific tool.

Ochre

A small quantity of red ochre (hematite) was excavated from both squares.

Pottery

Several pottery sherds were excavated from both squares and in all stratigraphic layers. None of the pottery was decorated. Two sherds had rims and lips that are indicative of the Late Iron Age or Historical Periods⁴.

Charcoal

Both CGS, CGS2 and DAS have high concentrations of charcoal. The charcoal is important for identifying tree species and radiocarbon dating.

DISCUSSION

The archaeological sites date to the Later Stone Age (LSA) and Historical Period (HP). M6, the rock art site, consists only of rock art images that were painted by San hunter-gathers. The imagery is the standard LSA imagery associated with the Drakensberg art. While the art is stylistically similar in content, it does differ in how the paintings were painted. Several images probably date to different times. According to Vinnicombe (1976), bichromatic images, especially of eland, occur near the bottom of the stylistic sequence. Several bichromatic eland were observed at M6, and these were painted below white images – were they co-occurred. The next type of painting is what has been referred to as “Late Whites” (Ward 1997). These occur much later on the sequence of rock paintings.

The paintings did not have enough material to use for a radiocarbon date, nor was it viable to sample the paint for a pigment analyses.

The rock art at M7 has two different styles of paintings. The first is the standard LSA art as observed at M6. The second style has been equated with a Nguni artistic tradition. Only a few LSA images occur at this site. The better example of this is a polychromatic antelope in red, black and white. This type of imagery occurs after the bichromatic paintings as seen at M6. The Nguni art occurs much later in the rock art sequence and may be the result of Nguni *izisangoma* using the cave for ritual purposes. Little is known about this aspect of rock art.

³ Bladelets are twice as long as wide, and shorter than 15mm.

⁴ Without decorations it is not possible to precisely date the sherds

The excavated sequence indicates a LSA occupation of the shelter during the last 1000 years. The formal tools (i.e. scrapers and adzes) are classic examples of a LSA stone tool assemblage dating back to the last 4000 years. However, the thin-walled pottery in the basal strata indicates an occupation of the last 1000 years. This type of pottery did not occur prior to c. AD 1200.

In summary, M6 appears to be an exclusive LSA site due to the paintings. M7 appears to have two main occupations. The earliest appears to be that of LSA people within the last 1000 years. The later occupation, in the form of Nguni art, probably occurred in the more recent past after the LSA people had left the area.

CONCLUSION

Archaeological mitigation occurred at two sites along the Mearns River. The Mearns Weir will be raised, and thus the new water levels have the potential to damage the sites. This indirect damage may be in the form of an increase in water seepage from the river. This in turn may affect the rock art and archaeological deposit. The mitigation proposed was thus for a cautionary approach to the sites, in case of long term damage.

The site M6 consisted only of rock art. These images were traced and photographed according to archaeological methods. The site M7 had rock art and an archaeological deposit. The rock art was photographed and two 1 m X 1m squares were excavated at either end of the cave. I believe that enough mitigation has occurred at both sites and an adequate sample size has been retrieved.

The next phase of the mitigation for this site is to set up a monitoring program for the rock art and archaeological deposit. This will be undertaken under the auspices of KwaZulu-Natal Heritage.

References

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