

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE MOUNT SAVANNAH GAME RESERVE

INTRODUCTION

Mr W Joubert of West Lake Country and Safari Estates intends to develop portions of the farms Danielsrust 518 JQ and Weltevreden 517 JQ in the new Sterkfontein World Heritage area. A lodge on approximately 77 hectare and a retreat on 40 hectare will provide accommodation for tourists to the area, while game will provide an added attraction.

Mr Joubert appointed Environmental Outsource to coordinate the necessary environmental impact assessments. Environmental Outsource in turn commissioned Archaeological Resources Management to conduct a preliminary archaeological survey.

METHOD

One ARM staff met Dr B Tibbles of Environmental Outsource and other members of the impact team on site on October 1, 1999. Mr Joubert introduced the team to the project area and outlined his development plans. ARM staff returned on October 8 to complete the survey.

The survey concentrated on the designated area for the lodge and its surrounds, Spioenkop in the northern corner of the property and likely areas on Danielsrust. All sites were recorded on the 1:50 000 Map 2527DC Hekpoort. We used four categories to help assess significance - none, low, medium and high.

RESULTS

A few sites were recorded, ranging in date from the Stone Age to the Historic Period. We report them here in terms of chronology.

Stone Age

The saddle of Spioenkop (25.57.53 S 29.43.13 E), west of the beacon, was extensively quarried for a fine-grained diabase rock suitable for stone artefacts. Some of the debris is typical of the Middle Stone Age (250 000 to 25 000 years ago), but most are typical of the Oakhurst, a technological industry of the Later Stone Age dating to 12 000 to 8 000 years ago. The characteristic artefacts include 'duckbilled' scrapers, irregular scrapers and side-struck flakes with wide platforms. The debris extends down the northern slope of the hill, and its density is high. The significance of the quarry is medium.

A few Middle Stone Age and Oakhurst artefacts lie scattered around the beacon, and the western spur also bears Oakhurst artefacts. There are a few small shelters formed by overhanging boulders on the spur that may have been focal points. Some Late Iron Age (the last 600 years) pot sherds are associated with one. The spur also contains small exposures of a ferruginous rock that oxidized to red and yellow pigments. These haematite and limonite pigments may have also been exploited during the Stone Age.

A few isolated Stone Age artefacts occurred on the property, for example on the gentle slope southwest of the proposed lodge area. These isolated occurrences have no significance.

Historic period

The name Spioenkop refers to the hill's alleged use during the Anglo Boer War. A small arc of low stone walling (about 5m long and 2m deep) stands in a ruined state next to the beacon, and the wall probably dates to this period. The arc faces northwest, and from that direction appears to be a natural feature. Another low stone arc (about 9m long) stands on the lower slope below the spur (25.57.51 S 27.43.09 E). It stands among natural rock outcrops, facing westerly. It too may date to the Anglo Boer War. Both these walls have a low significance.

Excavations resulting from historic prospecting and mining literally pockmark the area. These excavations appear to date to three different episodes associated with three different ores and minerals.

Gold

Gold exploration in the area dates to at least the 1880s, and in 1881 a sizeable deposit was found in quartzites on the nearby farm Kromdraai . On Danielsrust, excavations into alluvial deposits in the river bed (25.59.27 S 27.43.09 E) south of the proposed lodge were probably the result of gold exploration at about the same time.

Lime

Dolomite north of the quartzites was exploited for lime deposits. The most famous in the area are of course Sterkfontein, Swartkrans and Kromdraai, the primary inspirations for the recent World Heritage proposal.

Lime was mined on Danielsrust just east of the proposed lodge area. The present road to the lodge passes through the mine. The mine itself is marked by adits, ramps, tailings dumps and house foundations. The stone foundations of one rectangular longhouse (25.59.14 S 27.43.25 E) stands next to a large olive tree near the road, while the stone foundations of at least three other rectangular structures lie in a natural dip next to rocks upslope of the longhouse. Little artefactual debris lies on the ground, but the mining probably dates to the turn-of-the-century, between about 1890 and 1930s.

There are few lime mines in the area as well preserved, and the Danielsrust mine is a good example of how Sterkfontein and Swartkrans looked when they were first abandoned. In the context of the World Heritage area, therefore, the significance of this complex is high.

Manganese

Some other excavations on the lime mine date to a later period because at least one trench goes through the foundations of a rectangular structure. The dumps associated with these other excavations contain rejected pieces of manganocrete. This material is a common feature of the dolomites in the area (Brink 1979: 203-205), and it was sought after in the decades immediately after WWII.

Besides the lime mine area, excavations for manganese occur in the flat land north of Spioenkop, below the present reservoir on Danielsrust and probably in the gum tree plantation 1.5km west of the lodge area. High grade pyrolusite was apparently recovered on both Danielsrust and Weltevreden (Hammerbeck & Taljaardt 1976:171). The manganese excavations have a low significance.

Other building sites

The foundations of other historic structures stand in this plantation (25.59.10 S 27.42.21 E). At least one was a longhouse and the other was probably a kraal. This historic site probably predates the manganese mining. Another site with rectangular foundations is located on the southwest base of Spioenkop (25.57.58 S 27.43.09 E). This site too probably predates manganese mining, for some excavations are too close to the structures to have been socially acceptable. The significance of both these building localities is low.

An important historic building, however, is still used by the present farm manager. This was the original Maryvale homestead, and its construction probably dates to the first few decades of the 20th century. A few of the original sash windows remain, as well as all the press-metal ceilings, Oregon pine floor and doors. In the context of the proposed resort, the significance of this building is high.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Maryvale homestead is protected by the National Monuments Act (Act 28 of 1969 as amended), and a permit is necessary before the building can be demolished. In any case, the old house has good potential as 'historic accommodation' in the retreat complex.

The other historic structures are also protected by the National Monuments Act. Because of their low significance, however, these sites would only need to be mapped if they were ever endangered by development.

The Danielsrust lime mine has a high significance because of its state of preservation and its examples of housing as well as lime and manganese mining. It should therefore not be

disturbed any further.

Spioenkop is not under threat by the present development. If the hill becomes seriously threatened, then the Stone Age quarry will require mitigation.

At present, then, there are no sites of archaeological or historical interest in the proposed lodge and retreat areas whose significance would prevent development.

REFERENCES

- Brink, A.B.A. 1979. Engineering Geology of Southern Africa. Silvertown: Building Publications.
- Hammerbeck, E.C.I. & J.J. Talardt, 1976. Manganese. In C.B. Coetzee (ed) Mineral Resources of the Republic of South Africa. Fifth ed. Handbook 7. Pretoria: Government Printer.