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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE OLIFANTS/SAND WATER
TRANSFER SCHEME - RURAL WATER SUPPLY

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SYNOPSIS

Nine Stone Age, Iron Age and Recent Sites were located along the proposed routes. Two Iron Age sites - Site 6 and Site 11 - require mitigation. Probable graves near Site 4 should be avoided. The section through the cemetery at Site C may have to be changed, and at least one grave may need to be moved. Site 10b should be avoided.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE OLIFANTS/SAND WATER TRANSFER SCHEME - RURAL WATER SUPPLY

INTRODUCTION

The Board of Northern Transvaal Water/Meetse/Mati/Madi commissioned the construction of a pipeline between Pietersburg and Lebowakgomo. The project engineers, Delport, Du Preez & Associates, appointed Cave, Klapwijk & Associates (CKA) to conduct an environmental impact assessment. As part of this assessment, CKA contracted Archaeological Resources Management (ARM) to examine the proposed pipeline route for sites of archaeological and historical interest.

The main route was examined in April and May 1995 (Huffman, et al. 1995). In February 1996 ARM was contracted to continue with the next section of the project, known as the Rural Water Supply. In essence, extensions from the main pipeline will take water to various residential communities.

ARM staff surveyed the proposed routes on March 2 and 3. Sites were first recorded on 1:2 500 maps provided by CKA and the locations were then transferred to the 1:50 000 map 2429BC Lebowakgomo (Figure 1). Site designations refer to this map, and the sequence of numbers continues from the initial report.

SURVEY AND RESULTS

Nine sites were located containing Stone Age, Iron Age and recent material (Figure 1).

SITE 4 (Map 5) 24°15'06"S;29°32'38"E

Broken pottery, maize grindstones and midden remains mark the location of a Late Iron Age site next to the Chunies River near HPI C1. The maize grindstones indicate that the site dates after AD1750. In addition to the Late Iron Age material there were a few Later Stone Age (\pm 20 000 - 2 000 years ago) artefacts including a concave scraper, bladelet core and large flake. These artefacts appear to be part of a gravel lens deposited by the river.

This site has been largely destroyed by the main pipeline, and is of no value.

Nearby, a cluster of aloes grows among a number of irregular stone cairns. Similar cairns were investigated along the main pipeline at Area PI 602-602. Those were the result of land clearance for farming (Huffman and Steel, 1995), and the majority of these newly recorded cairns were probably caused by the same activity.

There are two cairns, however, that could be graves. Nearby residents interviewed during the survey were unaware of any graves among the aloes, but they have not lived there for long.

These two cairns should be avoided.

SITE 5 (Map 6) 24°16'29"S;29°32'47"E

Late Iron Age Moloko pottery lay scattered along the proposed route east of the showgrounds. The pottery and other artefacts were part of Site 1 found during the earlier survey. A further concentration was found on the west side of the Chunies River at HPI 01, about 300m north-east of the new pump station. Besides pottery, the concentration included grindstones and a low heap of metal slag.

As with Site 1, ploughing has severely disturbed this site and it is of little value.

SITE 6 (Map 6) 24°16'13"S;29°32'56"E

Another Moloko site was found on the east side of the river opposite Site 5. Although affected by ploughing, one area appeared to have the remains of an intact midden near the stone foundations of some small structures. Several decorated vessels were found around the foundations and middens.

This intact part of the site is important.

SITE 7 (Map 6) 24°15'57"S;29°33'51"E

Middle Stone Age (\pm 200 000 - 20 000 years ago) material occurred on the low hill where reservoir No MP 4 is located. Exposed bedrock served as a prehistoric quarry.

A modern quarry has destroyed part of the hill, but otherwise the site is not in danger.

SITE 8 (Map 29) 24°21'56"S;29°35'35"E

Later Stone Age artefacts covered a flat area among basalt boulders next to reservoir SP 2. The artefacts included microliths made from a wide variety of material and probably date to the last 8 000 years. The remains of a few low stone circles stand about 160m from the reservoir, next to the old pipeline.

The stone walls are not important, and the Stone Age site is not in danger.

SITE 9 (Map 28) 24°22'07"S;29°33'36"E

A large concentration of Middle Stone Age artefacts lay on the flat plain at the western end of the basalt ridge 150m north of HPI A10. The concentration included flakes, cores and blades made from quartz, quartzite, hornfels and other fine-grained siliceous materials; some were heavily patinated.

This site contains a great amount of material, but it is not in situ and therefore of little value.

SITE C (Map 15) 24°21'26"S;29°37'25"E

The route between HPI Q6 and A1 goes through a modern African cemetery . One grave is on the south side of the proposed route and several others are to the north.

These graves will probably be damaged. Furthermore, a borehole lies directly on the route about 190m south-west of HPI Q6.

SITE 10a (Map 15) 24°21'23"S;29°36'58"E

The road up to reservoir MP18 has gone through a series of rectangular homesteads. Their shape suggests a date between AD1880 and 1920.

The remains are not important.

SITE 10b (Map 15)

The flat area below reservoir MP 18 contains a multi-component site. The earliest component includes a large midden area with Moloko pottery and a buried cattle kraal. The kraal has the 1991 grave of Mabutie Mphahlele in it. The upper component consists of recent houses.

This is an important site.

SITE 11 (Map 10 & 12) (24°20'42"S;29°43'05"E)

An Early Iron Age Eiland site (\pm AD900 - 1300) lies next to the Tudumo stream bed between HPI 10 and 03. The road next to the river has cut through the site, but part of a buried cattle kraal still remains.

This site is important.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Experience from the main pipeline shows that there is no value in using pipe trench excavations to record archaeological information (Huffman, 1996). The sites are too shallow, while the bulldozer and backhoe obliterate the surface. Any sites of interest must be excavated by archaeologists.

Two sites, Site 6 and Site 11, are of interest and in danger. Both represent archaeological cultures that are not well dated, and both contain intact deposits that could yield charcoal amenable to radiocarbon dating. Both should be test excavated: three days at Site 6 and four at Site 11 should be sufficient.

The possible graves next to Site 4 and the cemetery at Site C pose another problem. The graves at Site 4 can probably be avoided, but the section through Site C should probably be re-routed. Even so, at least one grave will probably have to be moved.

Site 10b downslope from reservoir MP 18 is not threatened by the pipe trench, but it could be used as a construction camp. If the area will be used for such a purpose, it should be test excavated beforehand.

REFERENCES

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