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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE ONVERWACHT
TAILINGS DAM, BADPLAAS**

A Phase-1 report submitted to SRK Consulting

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INTRODUCTION

The Nkomati Mine intends to establish a tailings dam on the farm Onverwacht 611JT a few kilometres south of the mine. Mine personnel noted the remains of stone walling in the proposed dam area. As a result, SRK Consulting, the environmental coordinators for the project, commissioned Archaeological Resources Management (ARM) to assess the value of the remains.

METHOD

One ARM staff visited the project area on 13 June 2001, in the company of the mine surveyor and geologist. The team traversed a portion of the dam area on foot, examining four sets of walling. The sites were recorded with a GPS instrument, located on an orthophoto supplied by the mine, and then transferred to the 1:50 000 map 2530DC Badplaas.

ARM determines the historical significance of sites on the basis of four criteria: the integrity of deposit (that is to say, primary or secondary context); amount of deposit; range of features; and potential to answer present research questions. Sites with no significance do not require mitigation; low to medium significance requires mitigation; while sites with high significance should not be disturbed at all.

RESULTS

All four sites examined are the remains of relatively recent African homesteads (Figures 1 & 2). Typically, a low circular outer wall encompasses a rectangular cattle kraal in the centre, while rectangular house platforms (now marked by stone foundations and soil heaps) form a residential zone between the kraal and outer wall.

Site 1 (25.50.01S 30.38.56.9E) includes the remains of several houses, a large lower grindstone for maize and parts of an iron plough (Figure 3).

Site 2 (25.49.51S 30.38.55.8E) includes a stone pile up-slope of the central kraal that might be a grave.

Site 3 (25.49.41S 30.38.36E) comprises two homesteads with the high walls of the central kraals still intact. Two graves stand next to the kraal wall of one unit: they are formed by stone cairns about 2m long x 1m high and 1m wide.

Site 4 (25.49.46.7S 30.38.33.8E) includes a maize grindstone, rectangular stone walls of the cattle kraal and the stone walls of a house with what appears to be a front veranda.

Several more homesteads are visible on the orthophoto prepared by the mine. At least one other (Figure 2:5) contains a cemetery.

The rectangular walls and maize grindstones show that these homesteads date to the Historic Period and probably to the last 100 years. Some of them may have even been occupied in the 1960s when the 1:50 000 map was produced.

Significance

- The homesteads have low historic significance.
- The African graves have medium cultural significance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Because the homesteads have low significance, and there are several more standing outside of the project area, the remains do not require extensive mitigation. Nevertheless, a small sample should be mapped for record purposes, for example Sites 1 and 3. The mine surveyor has already produced a general plan of Site 1 (Figure 3), and he has agreed to produce more detailed plans of sites 1 and 3. These plans will be sufficient.

All the graves within the tailings dam are culturally significant and they need to be removed in accordance with existing legislation. Basically, trained personnel should advertise the planned removal in a local forum, identify the descendants, and rebury the remains in a recognised cemetery chosen by descendants.

With these stipulations, there is no archaeological reason why the project should not proceed.

