

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE PROPOSED ROUTE FOR THE
PONGOLA-VERGENOEG TRANSMISSION LINE**

For Eskom, New Germany

By

By Gavin Anderson

**Institute for Cultural Resource Management, Natal Museum, Private Bag 9070,
Pietermaritzburg, 3200**

9 July 1998



INTRODUCTION

ESKOM is currently surveying a proposed route for the Pongola-Vergenoeg transmission line. The Institute for Cultural Resource Management was approached to undertake the archaeological survey of the proposed route in order to locate archaeological sites, assess their significance and suggest mitigatory procedures for these sites.

Prior to the survey I consulted the archaeological data base at the Natal Museum in order to determine whether any known sites existed in the area. The desktop analyses indicated that there has been no prior systematic archaeological survey in this area. I consulted Acock's (1975) vegetation map and the Geological Survey map to assess the probability of agricultural sites occurring in the area. The combination of the geology, soils and hydrology initially indicated that certain areas may be archaeologically sensitive, although there would be a low probability of finding archaeological sites of high significance.

The first survey was conducted in 1996. A second survey was undertaken in 1998, since part of the transmission line route had not been previously assessed, and some sites required further inspection. In addition, one site was mapped in accordance with archaeological standards.

LEGISLATION PERTAINING TO CULTURAL RESOURCES

All archaeological and historical sites are protected by the National Monuments Act of 1969 which makes it an offence to alter in any way such sites without a permit from the National Monuments Council (NMC). As from 1 April 1998, the KwaZulu-Natal Heritage Act of 1997 will replace the current heritage legislation in KwaZulu-Natal. The new heritage compliance agency, Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali, may require an assessment of the impact of any development on heritage resources, where such an assessment is not required by other legislation. The NMC and its successor in KwaZulu-Natal (Amafa) may hold developers responsible for any damage accrued to a site in cases where they have deviated from the permit requirements. It is the responsibility of the developers to apply for a permit should development have a negative impact on archaeological or historical sites.

DESCRIPTION AND ASSESSMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN THE STUDY AREA

A total of four archaeological and/or cultural sites were located during the survey. These sites may belong to the Late Iron Age or Historical period in southern Africa.

Site 1:

This site can be divided into two main parts: possible graves and byres. The possible graves are located at the top of a quartzite *koppie* in the dense bracken. They are 2m apart from each other and are made from stone cairns. Both graves are 2m long and 1m wide. There may be another grave 5m to the south. There are no headstones for these graves, possibly indicating a pre-European influence.

On the other side of the *koppie* are two stone dry stone wall structures. The smaller structure is located halfway down the *koppie* and is probably a sheep pen. It is 2m x 2m wide. The larger structure is a dry stone walled cattle byre. The byre is rectangular in shape (26m x 15m), and the walls are 1m wide.

The stone walled structures are of low significance, while the graves are of high significance. The transmission line will not impact this site.

Site 2:

This site consists of two main sites.

The first site is a large homestead with a surrounding wall. There are six structures and several graves within this wall.

From east to west these features are as follows:

1. The smallest structure abuts the outer wall and is 4m x 4m in size. It is made out of dry stone walling.
2. This structure is the main cattle byre. It is rectangular in shape and its dimensions are 18m x 6m. The entrance to this byre faces downhill, or south-west. There are two collapsed semi-circular secondary walls at either side of the entrance.
3. A square feature, 5m x 5m, while the walls are approximately 2m high. The feature is made from dry stone walling and probably represents a house. There is potential archaeological deposit in this feature.
4. This square feature is 5m x 5m x 2m. It differs to other features in that the stone walling has been covered with a mud plaster. The entrance faces north. There is potential archaeological deposit in this feature.
5. This circular feature is 5m in diameter. It is made with locally available stone and mud plaster. There is a potential archaeological deposit within this residential feature.
6. To the north of the previous feature is a 4m x 4m dry stone wall.
7. Besides the previous features is a circular stone feature 3m in diameter. It may be grain storage facility.
8. There is a group of five graves in the north-eastern part of the homestead. All graves are stone cairns and do not have headstone. This suggests a pre-European influence and date for the site.
9. Outside of the homestead wall are two features. One is a 10m x 2m rectangular dry stone wall feature, and the other is a 2m (in diameter) circular dry stone wall feature.

The second part of the site is approximately 50m east of the first site. There is a large, 10m x 10m dry stone wall cattle byre nearby a tree. Approximately 20m west of the byre is a 16m² dry stone wall, with the entrance facing north. A circular secondary wall is attached to, and encloses part of, the northern and western walls. This secondary wall is 3m in diameter.

There may be other features near both sites, however, the tall grass made observations difficult. This site is of high significance. The transmission line will not impact this site.

Site 3:

Site 3 consists of several individual settlements occupied at different time periods. It initially appears that there is a chronological order, in terms of site occupation, along an east to west line. The site has been mapped (fig. 1).

Site 3 consists of several houses, cattle byres, and cemeteries. The standard feature for each individual settlement is as follows:

1. A large cattle byre, normally placed at the lowest position of the house and in front of the main house.

2. Several circular features, ± 5 m in diameter, that are probably the remains of a hut. These features often have the foundation stones indicating the architectural styles. Some of the circular features have double stone walls with a space between each wall. Archaeological deposits exist within these circular features. The range from one to four circular features per settlement.
3. Each settlement has one to three rectangular houses. Some of these have dividing walls. The rectangular houses vary from 15 m to 5 m in length or width.
4. Most settlements have an associated cemetery, or a few graves. It is, however, difficult to attribute specific graves with some settlements. Graves tend to be placed in specific locations, and several graves have been placed in the 'incorrect' location suggesting that the graves and the nearest settlement are not related.
5. Some settlements have been constructed in a slight depression, with a small wall surrounding the main structures. These tend to occur at the older settlements.

The site is of high archaeological significance. The impact of the transmission, line will be medium negative. The transmission line goes directly through some of the settlements. However, the poles tend to avoid the settlements.

Site 4:

Site 4 consists of two large dry stone wall cattle byres. Access to the site was not possible, since it was situated between two deep dongas. It is situated between Sites 3 and 5.

The site appears to be of low significance. The impact of the transmission line will be medium negative.

Site 5:

This is the largest site recorded in the study area and it is a multicomponent site (*i.e.* it has been used and re-used for several years/centuries).

The features are as follows, moving downhill:

1. Group of ± 18 graves. The graves are stone cairns, each with a small headstone. This cemetery is still in use.
2. Stone terrace, 6m x 6m. The terrace may have the remains of a house.
3. Dry stone wall, 8m long and 1m wide.
4. Circular dry stone wall 3m in diameter.
5. Group of five graves in the form of stone cairns. All of the graves have small headstones.
6. Circular dry stone wall 3m in diameter.
7. Rectangular dry stone wall cattle byre, 20m x 5m.
8. Indeterminate dry stone wall feature - possible byre.
9. Rectangular dry stone wall cattle byre, 20m x 20m.
10. Rectangular dry stone wall cattle byre, 20m x 10m.
11. Circular feature 4m in diameter.
- 1 Remains of dry stone wall, in a T-shape. There are three graves inside this feature.

This site is of high significance. The impact on this site will be high negative.

Site 6:

This site is located near tower #208. The site consists of stone-walled cattle byre and a few individual huts. The length of the grass made it difficult to assess the full extent of the site. The site is of low-medium significance, although its significance may change when it is resurveyed.

The transmission line will directly affect this site, especially the stone-wall cattle byre. The location of one of the supporting lines for this tower is within 25 cm of the wall. An excavation and/or hole next to the wall has the potential to damage archaeological deposit and the feature. First, the excavation may cause structural damage to the wall, since it may weaken the surrounding support. Second, archaeological deposits tend to occur near walls. The position of the hole would thus damage and destroy any potential archaeological deposit.

Site 7:

This site is located near tower #181. The site consists of:

1. a circular feature 3 m in diameter;
2. two rectangular stone-walled features 3 m x 4m , and 8 m x 6 m is size;
3. stone-walled cattle byre 3 m in diameter; and,
4. three stone features that may be graves.

Several upper and lower grindstones are scattered throughout the site. The circular feature is very well defined, however the two rectangular features beside it are not very visible. They are in close proximity to each other.

The position of the tower will not damage the site.

DISCUSSION AND MITIGATION

Four main archaeological sites were recorded during the survey and each requires some form of mitigation. I discuss the significance and required mitigation for each site.

Site 1:

If these are human graves, then the local community should be involved. The owner of the farm may be able to identify who used to live in this area and/or who owned the byre at the base of the hill. If the community does not acknowledge these graves, and if the electricity pylon affects these possible graves, then an archaeological excavation would be required. The excavation would determine if these are indeed human graves, or if they are another archaeological feature.

No further mitigation for the byres is required since it is not affected.

Site 2:

The main site, *i.e.* the one inside the stone wall, is a rare find in terms of its preservation. There is good preservation of the stone walling, plaster and archaeological deposit. The site has potential for future archaeological research, in terms of settlement layout and material culture. The stone walling features to the south of the main site are not as significant as the main site.

I would prefer that this site is not affected in any manner. It would be preferable for the transmission line to bypass the main site and impact on the sites to the south. No further mitigation for the byres is required since it is not affected.

Site 3:

This site has an exceptionally well preserved daga floor in one of the house remains. The cultural deposit at the second house is equally well good preservation. Several *in situ* artefacts were observed in the vicinity of the houses. The cattle byre may have some archaeological deposit. These factors make this site significant in terms of future archaeological research.

If the transmission line affects this site, then the site will need to be accurately mapped and photographed. In addition to this, a grid will need to be placed over the site and certain areas will need to be excavated. These area would include both of the houses and areas between the houses and byre. This would enable a thorough excavation of the layout of the settlement. The byre would require a test pit excavation to determine the extent of archaeological deposit. It will be necessary to consult with the community regarding the cemetery, since they are currently using it. The alternative is for the transmission line to be moved to the left/right of the site and cemetery, or that the location of pylons do not affect the site or any features. The site and/or features should be marked before any construction occurs.

The site has been mapped and the transmission line does not affect the very significant aspects of the site in general. The transmission line goes directly through some of the settlements. However, the poles tend to avoid the settlements. The construction crew should be made aware of the location of each settlement and avoid driving over these features. One of the tracks used by the surveyors currently goes over three features.

Site 4:

These byres are not significant. However, they would need to be accurately mapped and photographed. The site and/or features should be marked before any construction occurs. The mapping can be done by means of aerial photographs, since the features are large.

Site 5:

The site is significant because of the human graves and the large extent of this site. The site thus has research potential. The mapping can be done by means of aerial photographs, since the features are large.

Site 6:

There are two options for tower 208. First, the tower can moved at least 2 m downhill (or south-east) of the stone-walled cattle byre. This would alleviate any potential damage to features and deposit. Second, an archaeological excavation is undertaken to salvage any potential deposit, and the whole settlement is mapped. I favour the first option since it would cause the least negative impact on the site.

Site 7:

The location of pylon 181 near the site is unlikely to negatively affect the site. However, the access road not be placed further downhill from the tower. In this way the access road will avoid the important aspects of the site. The access road should be placed besides the fence and then turn at the location of tower 181. No further mitigation is required.

CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological survey for the Pongola-Vergenoeg transmission line recorded six previously unrecorded archaeological and cultural sites. All of these sites will require some form of mitigation. This may range from mapping and photographing features to full excavations. The sites should, however, not necessarily be affected if site management takes into account the location of the archaeological sites. In this way minimal impact may occur, especially regarding the location of electricity pylons. A further necessity is for archaeological sites to be marked so that construction of the pylons and servitudes do not unwittingly impact on the site.

A permit from the National Monuments Council will be required if any of these sites are affected. Furthermore, negotiations with the local community will be required if the graves are to be affected.

REFERENCES

Acocks, J. 1975. Veld types of South Africa, 2nd ed. *Botanical Survey of South Africa Memoir* **40**: 1 - 128.

APPENDIX A

GPS LOCATIONS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Site 1: S27⁰ 19' 05"; E31⁰ 10' 55.5"

Site 2: S27⁰ 19' 43.5"; E31⁰ 12' 03"

Site 3: S27⁰ 18' 10"; E31⁰ 13' 13"

Site 5: S27⁰ 17' 41.5"; E31⁰ 13' 36"

Site 6: tower number 208

Site 7: tower number 181 (S27⁰ 15' 52"; E31⁰ 15' 17")

These co-ordinates are to be treated with confidentiality. The readings for Sites 1 and 2, may be slightly out, since the GPS had trouble reading the satellites at those sites.