ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE FOR PROJECT LION

A phase-1 report prepared for Metago Environmental Engineers

Professor T.N. Huffman
M.H. Schoeman

Archaeological Resources Management
School of Geography, Archaeology & Environmental Studies
University of the Witwatersrand
Johannesburg

February 2004

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE FOR PROJECT LION

INTRODUCTION

Xstrata South Africa and Xstrata Alloys intend to develop a portion of the farm Spitskop 333KT adjacent to their Vantech Mine near Steelport. The Vantech complex includes a magnetite plant, and mine, while the new development (Project Lion) will include a smelter, slimes dam, power line and associated roads network.

The environmental coordinators for Project Lion, Metago Environmental Engineers, commissioned Archaeological Resources Management (ARM) to examine the proposed area for places of archaeological and historical interest, and for recent graves.

METHOD

Two ARM staff visited the project area on 26 and 27 February 2004. They traversed the various designated portions on foot and by vehicle. Site locations were recorded with a hand-held GPS instrument and then transferred to the 1:50 000 map 2430CC Kennedy's Vale.

RESULTS

A large portion of the project area was severely eroded and other areas had been cultivated, scraped with earth moving machinery or otherwise disturbed. In addition, rainy weather and thick vegetation restricted ground visibility. Nevertheless, the team recorded a representative sample (Figure 1) of the local prehistoric sequence. We begin with the oldest.

Earlier Stone Age (ESA)

A few stone hand-axes and other bifaces lay scattered over the eroded gully area in the northwest portion. Although old, dating from about 1 million to 250 000 years ago, these artefacts were not *in situ* and therefore of no scientific value.

Middle Stone Age (MSA)

The MSA was better represented. Triangular points, flakes, cores and scrapers, dating from about 250 000 to 25 000 years ago, lay scattered throughout the project area. Erosion had exposed this material in virtually every gully and bare surface. Once again, however, these artefacts were not *in situ* and of no scientific value.

Early Iron Age

The southerly portion, up slope from the R555, contained Iron Age settlements marked by the remains of pole-impressed daga (a mixture of mud and dung) structures and pottery with multiple bands on the neck of upright jars (Figure 2). This pottery, known as Doornkop, dates to between AD 600 and 900 and characterizes settled communities of mixed farmers who spoke one of the Eastern Bantu languages.

Site 1 (24 49 20.5S 30 07 06.8E) stretched across some 400 metres from the boundary fence with the Vantech mine east to a small tributary. Daga patches and pottery clusters probably marked collapsed grainbins and refuse dumps of more than one homestead. This site complex is important.

Site 2 (24 49 20S 30 07 35E), **Site 3** (24 48 40.1S 30 07 46.6E) **Site 4** (24 49 00.3S 30 07 35.9) and **Site 5** (24 48 55S 30 07 49) were marked by only a few pot shards, and most of the village remains probably lie under the present surface.

Late Iron Age

The portion north of the R555 yielded several homesteads with Icon pottery (Figure3). This ceramic facies dates to between AD 1300 and 1500, and represents the first Sotho-Tswana people in South Africa. The old cultivated lands yielded a wide scatter of this pottery (**Site 6**: 24 48 44S 30 07 07.5E); another occurred between erosion gullies (**Site7**: 24 48 39S 30 07 01E), a third lay exposed in another gully (**Site 8**: 24 48 41S 30 07 00.4E) and a fourth (**Site 9**: 24 48 43 S 30 06 53.7E) was washing out of the last terrace above the river. All these homesteads were probably sited to take advantage of cultivatable land next to the river.

An iron smelting area with the same pottery lay above Site 9. At least three slag heaps marked **Site 10** (24 48 45.3S 30 06 59.3E), but the smelter itself was not visible. Considering the amount of iron ore on the surface everywhere, we expected more smelting sites. This one is therefore important.

Historic Period

The remains of four recent Pedi homesteads stood inside the project zone. Two north of the main road appear on the 1965 edition of the 1: 50 000 map. The first (**Site 11**: 24 48 45S 30 07 00.3) included a large sisal patch, along with broken porcelain, Pedi pottery, cast iron and large maize grindstones. This material overlapped Site 10. We did not find a graveyard, but one could exist in the dense bush.

The second recent homestead north of the road (**Site 12**: 24 48 22S 30 07 16.7E) also included sisal, Pedi pottery and grindstones, but it did not lie on top of an earlier Icon horizon.

Two other similar recent Pedi homesteads occurred south of the R555, but they do not appear on the 1: 50 000 map. **Site 13** (24 49 28.1S 30 07 15.4E) was inside the southwest portion, below the old Spitskop farmhouse**,** and **Site 14** (24 49 20.5S 30 07 06.8E) straddled the boundary fence under the proposed power line. A graveyard was not noted, but the thick bush could conceal one.

RECCOMMENDATIONS

A social team needs to interview people living on the north side of the Steelport River to ascertain the location of graves associated with the recent Pedi homesteads. Graves may have been relocated or lie some distance from the sites.

The two important Iron Age sites, **Site 1** and **Site 10**, require mitigation.

Doornkop settlements elsewhere have yielded famous ceramic sculptures known as the 'Lydenburg Heads'. Several of these internationally celebrated objects are now on display in the South African Museum, Cape Town. Many aspects of village life at that time are unknown; and so **Site 1** is important to current research. Some daga clusters should be excavated to determine their shape and function and to retrieve a charcoal sample for radiocarbon dating. At the same time, a large sample should be collected of the surface pottery.

Because the Icon facies represents the first Sotho-Tswana, it is important to early Pedi history. The pottery from **Sites 6 – 10** suggests that Icon may have incorporated the earlier Eiland group. Consequently, a large pottery sample should be collected from the area. Furthermore, the iron-smelting site should be excavated to search for the furnace and to retrieve a radiocarbon sample.