

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE RHINO  
ANDALUSITE MINE, THABAZIMBI**

**THIRD REPORT**

A Phase I report with Appendix prepared for Rhino Minerals

Professor T.N. Huffman

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

March 2009

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE RHINO ANDALUSITE MINE, THABAZIMBI

## THIRD REPORT

### Executive Summary

*No archaeological sites were found within the project area. A few isolated pieces of pottery and iron slag, however, suggest a Late Iron Age settlement may be buried in the vicinity. The area needs to be re-examined once the bush has been cleared.*

### INTRODUCTION

Rhino Minerals intends to build a plant for its Andalusite Mine on the Farm Buffelsfontein 353 KQ southwest of Thabazimbi. The project area covers about 10 ha to the west of Pit 9. In accordance with their Environmental Management Plan, Mine personnel commissioned Archaeological Resources Management (ARM) to examine the project area before bush clearance began.

### BACKGROUND

Previous investigations at the Rhino Mine (Huffman 2004, 2006a) documented Early Iron Age villages and Late Iron Age homesteads. One early village, 2427CB18, has been radiocarbon dated to AD 400±80 (Pta 9546). Excavations at the Late Iron Age cluster 2427CB14 date these homesteads to AD 1550±10 (Pta 9543) and 1630±40 (Pta 9547). Both settlements contained burnt structures. Subsequent research in the Limpopo Valley suggests that people intentionally burnt some of their grain bins and houses as a ritual of cleansing during severe droughts (Huffman 2008). Correlations with other data suggest the burning at CB18 occurred between AD 675 and 700, while the specific drought for the later period occurred at about AD 1650. Excavations at CB14 show that this later drought coincided with the introduction of maize from Maputo (Huffman 2006b). The Rhino Mine is thus of particular interest to Iron Age archaeology.

The area for the new plant had been examined before, and no sites were noted. ARM staff was nevertheless interested to re-examine the project area because new strips had been cleared of bush.

**METHOD**

One ARM staff examined the Project area on 24 January 2009. Personnel from the Mine showed the limits of the designated zone. The area was then traversed on foot, following each cleared strip. A hand-held GPS instrument calibrated to WGS 84 was available for site recording. The entire area lay on the 1: 50 000 map 2427CA Kaaldraai (Figure 1).

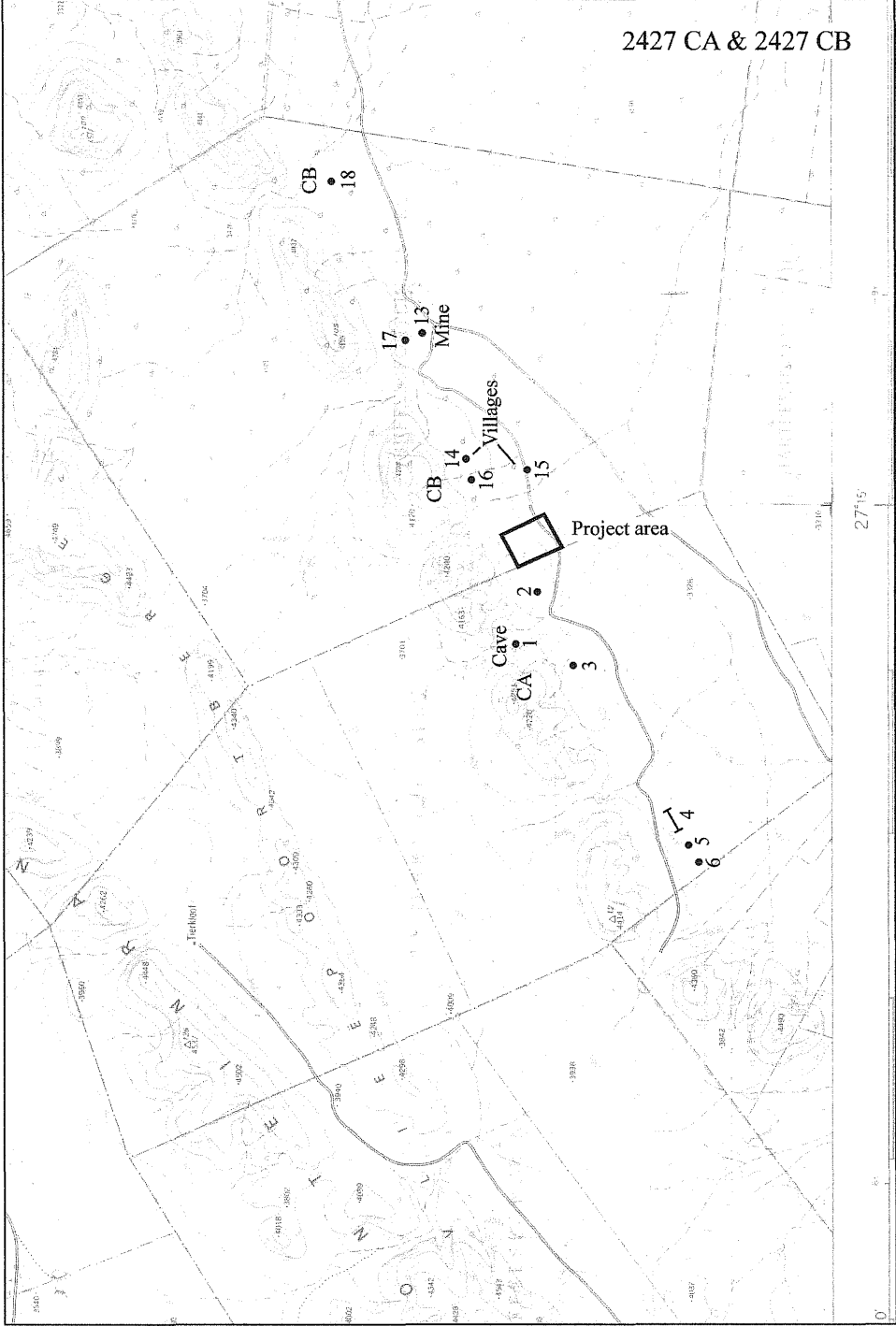


Figure 1. Location of project area and sites previously recorded.

Site significance is based on five main criteria: (1) primary versus secondary context; (2) amount of deposit; (3) number and variety of features; (4) uniqueness; and (5), potential to answer present research questions. Sites with no significance do not require further work, low to medium sites may require limited mitigation while high significance requires extensive mitigation; outstanding sites should not be disturbed at all. Recognizable graves have high social value regardless of their archaeological significance.

## RESULTS

A few isolated pot sherds and iron slag occurred in the roads and strips at 24 43 23-24.5S 27 14 49-51E and 24 43 15-16S 27 14 45-46E. On the basis of previous work, the pottery probably dates to the Late Iron Age. The site (or sites) that ultimately generated these surface finds could not be located and may well be buried.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Thick bush makes any archaeological reconnaissance difficult. Because of the archaeological importance of the Mine area, the plant area should be re-examined once the bush has been cleared.

## REFERENCES

- Huffman, T.N. 2004. *Archaeological Assessment for the Rhino Andalusite Mine. Second Report*. A final Phase 1 report prepared for Rhino Minerals. Johannesburg: Archaeological Resources Management.
- Huffman, T.N. 2006a. *Archaeological Mitigation for the Rhino Andalusite Mine, Thabazimbi*. A Phase II Report prepared for Rhino Minerals. Johannesburg: Archaeological Resources Management.
- Huffman, T.N. 2006b. Maize grindstones, *Madikwe* pottery and ochre mining in precolonial South Africa. *Southern African Humanities* 18:51-70.
- Huffman, T.N. 2009. A cultural proxy for drought: ritual burning in the Iron Age of southern Africa. *Journal of Archaeological Science* 36: 991-1005.

## APPENDIX

Two ARM staff returned on 30 March 2009 to re-examine the section cleared for the proposed plant. The cleared section is located at the western end of the project area (Figure 2). The team traversed this section on foot, paying special attention to the four soil pits.



Figure 2a. Cleared section above road in background.

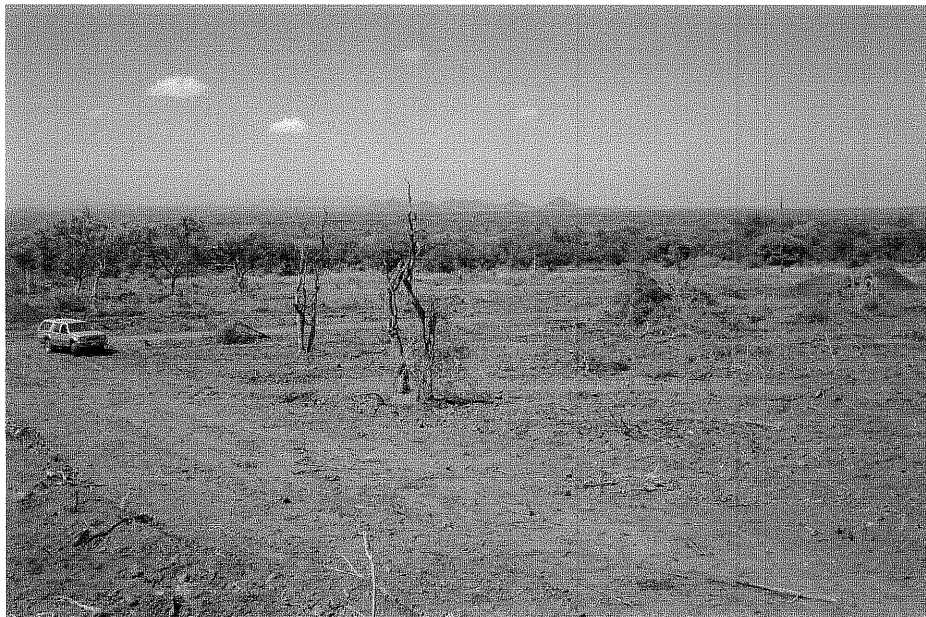


Figure 2b. Homestead area below road.

Clearing activities removed vegetation and soil down to the rocky surface. There are no artefacts, neither stone tools nor pottery, in the section above the road.

Below the road, a small scatter of pottery and a few pieces of smithing slag lay over some 50m of the scraped soil (from 24 43 30.3S 27 14 46.2E to 24 43 28.6S 27 14 45.7E). The pottery belongs to the *Madikwe* facies of **Moloko**, associated with Western Sotho-Tswana. The soil here is suitable for agricultural and the artefacts probably mark a small Late Iron Age homestead. This homestead either lies under the scraped zone or it did not burn down. In either case, research potential is low, especially in comparison to the Madikwe complex nearby (Huffman 2006a and b) that has already been excavated.

Unless something important is uncovered by future building activities, the project area does not require further investigation.