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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE PROPOSED  
RIVERSONDEREND BYPASS ROAD

Prepared for Kannenberg, Prinsloo, Underwood, Verheyen

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## INTRODUCTION

We have been asked to do the following:

1. provide a general description of the archaeological and historical significance of Riviersonderend;
2. ascertain whether or not there are any archaeological or historical sites along the proposed bypass route;
3. comment on the impact on the proposed bypass route of any sites.

## A BRIEF ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY

The southern Cape is a region rich in archaeological resources. Most of the research on the precolonial history in this region has taken place at the coast and near-coastal zones, where many rockshelters and shell middens (ancient rubbish dumps) are found. Unfortunately, little is known about the archaeological and historical significance of the inland region around Riviersonderend, as it lies outside the area of present archaeological research. There are, however, a number of sites close to Riviersonderend which show that the south-east Cape region has an archaeological record going back several hundred thousand years. These are mainly open sites of stone tool scatters and caves, and are to be found at Caledon, Riversdale and further afield, at Montagu and Mossel Bay. The implication is that there is a widespread distribution of very early material throughout the inland region of the south-east Cape. Based on this assessment, we are fairly confident that the region around Riviersonderend would yield considerable evidence of early human occupation in the form of open sites and caves/rockshelters. This has been borne out by our present survey.

## METHOD

The method which we have followed for previous proposed bypass roads surveys is a thorough foot-survey of the area. This is standard archaeological procedure and one which in our experience produces the best results.

## SURVEY

The area surveyed lies between two farms: Appelkraal on the eastern extent of the survey zone of Riviersonderend, and Proefplaas on the western extent of the survey zone. The proposed bypass road lies just outside the municipal boundary fence to the south of the town. It is envisaged by The Planning Partnership that the proposed bypass road will link up with the N2 national road adjacent to Appelkraal and Proefplaas farms. At present the surveyed area consists of ploughed and unploughed fields.

## RESULTS

Two clearly distinguishable archaeological occurrences were located during the foot-survey, while a very

dispersed scatter of few stone artefacts was found close to the eastern extent of the proposed bypass route (Figure 1).

RVS 1. is a fairly widespread scatter of Middle Stone Age (MSA) and Early Stone Age (ESA) stone artefacts. The site is located in a previously ploughed field (now overgrown with grasses), just outside the municipal boundary fence close to the eastern boundary of the town. The artefacts found include crudely manufactured choppers, complete and incomplete handaxes, flakes (occasionally with faceted platforms), and large chunks, an assortment of cores (including large irregular and disc cores). Other formally retouched artefacts include miscellaneous retouched pieces on large flakes and chunks. The raw materials are almost exclusively fine-grained quartzite with some silcrete occurring. These artefacts are classic ESA and MSA type tools, with the latter being in the majority. The site is probably older than 200 000 years. The location of the site (in a previously ploughed field) and the absence of any bone, suggest that the artefacts found have been disturbed and are thus in a secondary context.

RVS 2. is an extensive scatter of predominantly ESA artefacts, with occasional MSA artefacts occurring. The site is located on river gravels on the eastern most boundary of the proposed bypass road. It is littered with both large and small quartzite boulders and cobbles. There is evidence that the location of the site was a quarry or flaking site, where extensive stone artefact manufacturing took place. This is borne out by the fact the vast majority of artefactual remains are flaking debris including large irregular cores and the occasional MSA disc core, large flakes, some utilised, and chunks. Some of the flakes have faceted platforms. The occasional crude chopper, cleaver and miscellaneous retouched piece, was also found. The assemblage is exclusively made up of fine-grained quartzite, with some silcrete occurring. The site appears to be in primary and undisturbed context, although one cannot rule out disturbance due to the movement of grazing animals.

Our survey of the ploughed fields, located towards the western boundary of the proposed bypass road, identified a very dispersed scatter of stone artefacts of both ESA and MSA origin. This included a handful of both quartzite flakes and quartzite and silcrete cores. This scatter is very disturbed and we are reluctant to call it a site.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

We are of the opinion that RSV 1 and the very disturbed and ephemeral scatter of stone artefacts found in the ploughed fields, does not necessitate any further rescue attempt. RSV 2, on the other hand, is a site of considerable importance and we recommend that follow up work be carried out here in the form of a mapping and

sampling programme, subject to the bypass road being built. Such follow up work would contribute toward a greater understanding of early hominid behaviour in respect of stone artefact manufacturing technologies, functional differences between the assemblage, movement across landscapes and sourcing of suitable raw materials.

We also recommend that before any land clearing, road cutting, excavation or levelling takes place, an archaeologist from the Contracts Office be consulted by the road contractors on procedures to follow, in the event of the bypass road impacting on the archaeological sites.

Figure 1. Location of archaeological sites.

