

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL BASELINE STUDY OF SOETWATER

Prepared for
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on behalf of
South Peninsula Municipality

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Soetwater study area lies between the Slangkop lighthouse in the north and the southernmost part of Witsands beach as shown in Figure 1.

The area has been used for formal and informal camping, and infrastructure was put in place many years ago by the Cape Town City Council to facilitate such use. While the area is managed by South Peninsula Municipality no access control is maintained, and buildings and facilities have been heavily vandalised. There seems to be no system of rubbish removal and as a result the area is heavily polluted by litter. In addition to recreational use, a crayfish factory exists at Witsands and recently a proposal for the erection of a mariculture facility to the north of the factory has been made. A boat slipway lies to the south of the factory but here too the facilities have been vandalized. Some years ago a municipal rubbish dump was located in the dunes at Witsand.

The South Peninsula Structure Plan identified this area as a node for potential upgrading of the existing recreational and tourist facilities.

1.2 Brief

- Survey the study areas for archaeological sites and mark them on A3 overlay transparencies to the provided aerial photographs;
- Assess the significance of the identified sites within the regional context (Cape Peninsula);
- Identify, with reasons, zones or areas of varying archaeological sensitivity to development e.g. high (no go), moderate, and low, within the study areas and mark these onto the overlay transparencies. Criteria for identifying these categories of sensitivity should be explained;
- Suggest ways in which identified archaeological sites could be integrated into further development of the sites;
- Recommend mitigation measures that should be applied in the event that development of the Soetwater site was to proceed and areas where further investigation is required.

2. METHOD

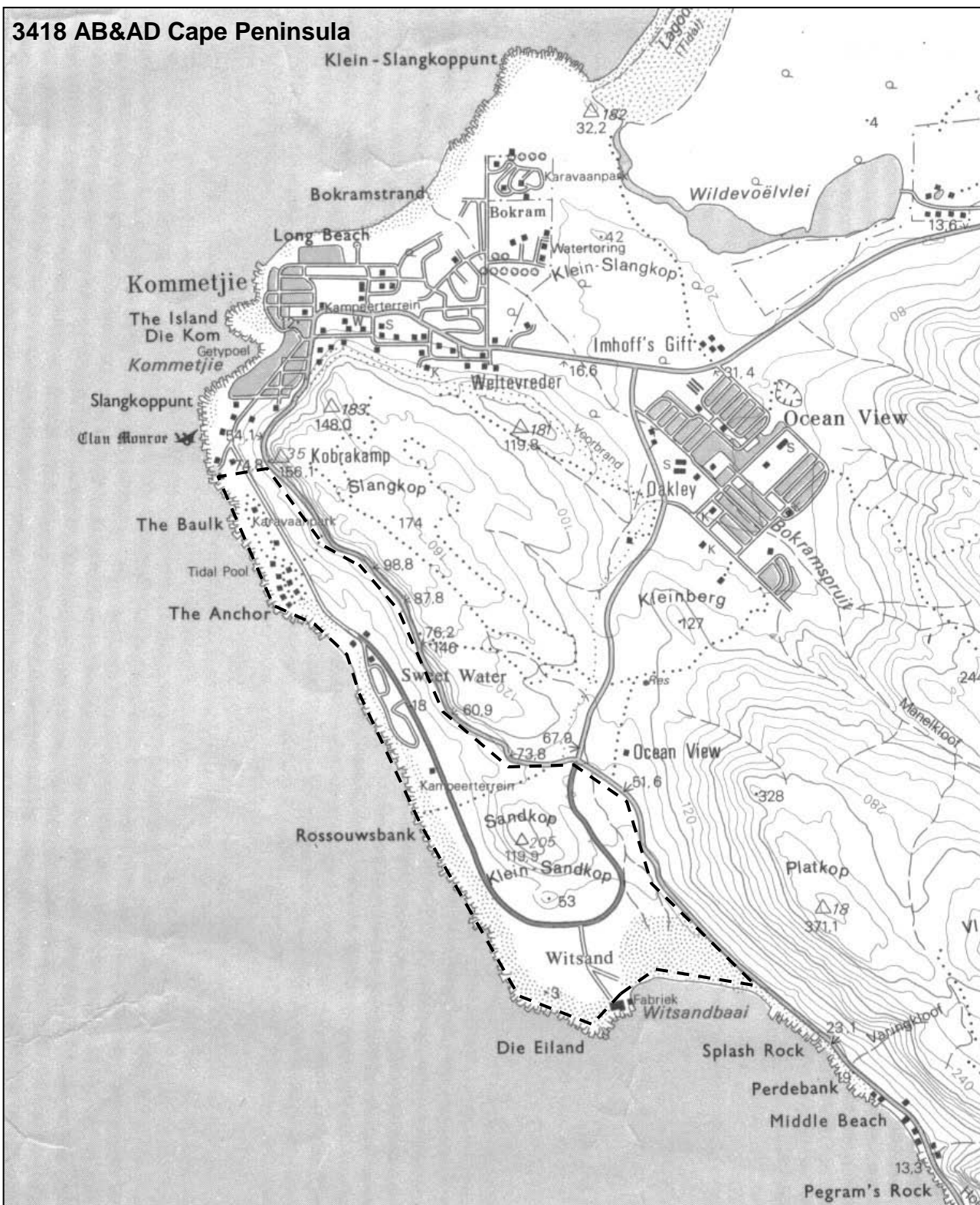
2.1 Approach

Three archaeological/historical surveys have previously looked at portions of the area (Olivier 1978, Raimondo & Grindley 1996, Halkett 1999). These reports were consulted and aspects were verified by way of fieldwork. The results from the Phase 1 study of the mariculture facility were used without further verification.

2.2 Limitations

Portions of the Soetwater site are covered by dense stands of Port Jackson wattle and are largely inaccessible apart from sections where pathways cut through it. Despite this limitation we have looked at enough of the area to believe that this does not pose a problem.

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Location of the study area



3. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Eleven sites of archaeological/historical interest have been located. The locations are shown on Figure 2 as well as on the overlay transparencies.

3.1 Pre-colonial sites

3.1.1 Fish traps

These features are constructed by removing loose cobbles from areas of the shoreline and building informal retaining walls to form pools which during receding tides are able to trap fish.

Three fairly intact traps are found on the rocky shoreline of the intertidal zone (FT1-3). An example (FT2) is shown in Plate 1. These were located during the study for the mariculture facility. In addition, I have been informed that one of the tidal pools at Soetwater was constructed on a fish trap, although no signs could be detected to confirm or deny this. One other probable fish trap is located on a small promontory to the south of the lighthouse (FT4).

3.1.1.1 Significance

The construction of these features requires the right geomorphology, such as is found at Soetwater. They provide direct evidence for early methods of exploiting the marine resources of the peninsula. Few fish traps survive on the peninsula today as many were modified for use as tidal pools while others were modified for use as slipways.

3.1.2 Shell middens

These features are accumulations of shellfish, bone and stone artefacts which mark places where humans either stayed or prepared food.

Five shell middens have been located (SM1-5). Two of these (SM2,3) contain *in situ* deposits. SM2 is of particular importance as multiple stratified shell lenses are noticed, and bone and stone artefacts are also present. The main shell lens can be seen in Plate 2. SM1 and SM4 are ephemeral surface traces of shell mostly brought up in molehills. These scatters may indicate the presence of buried shell but probing has not detected any close to the surface, so if present they lie more deeply buried. SM5 is a surface exposure of shell in an area that has been leveled within the camping area. All context of this material has been destroyed.

3.1.2.1 Significance

Only two of the middens (SM2,3) should be considered significant in both the local and peninsula contexts. These have potential research value in that they may relate to the exploitation of the tidal fish traps, and appear to be the only sites with potential in the study area.



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3.2 Historical sites

3.2.1 Grave

In the proposed Slangkop Reserve Management Plan (Raimondo & Grindley 1996), mention is made of the grave of a crew member of the Clan Monroe. No location is indicated but a description suggests that it lay just inland of Slangkoppunt, which lies outside the study area. A stone feature, greatly resembling a crude headstone, was located within the study area. This consisted of a slab of local sandstone which appeared to have been shaped and firmly planted upright in the sand on top of a dune (G1). Without excavating it is impossible to confirm if our interpretation is accurate or not. The feature is shown in Plate 3.

3.2.1.1 Significance

Unknown at this stage.

3.2.2 Buildings

Two “buildings” have been located. The Slangkop lighthouse (B1) is one of these and the other is the remains of a shack at Witsand (B2), one of a number that were apparently inhabited by fishermen and their families from about 1906. Aeolian sand has virtually covered this structure.

3.2.2.1 Significance

The lighthouse has obvious significance and is any event unlikely to be affected by development. The shacks, or the area where the old fishing settlement was located, may still be preserved in some form beneath the dunes. Apart from the significance these structures may have for residents who could have been resettled at Ocean View, the dumps of this settlement could provide information on the material culture and diet of such communities.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In his survey of the archaeological sites of the Cape Peninsula in 1978, Olivier had only noted one site in the Witsand/Soetwater area. This site was relocated by us and designated SM2. As he generally looked for the more substantial sites, the results of his, the mariculture survey and this survey suggest that indeed there is only one substantial midden accumulation in the area. The substantial landscaping that was undertaken by the council when preparing the camping and picnicking facilities, may have destroyed other sites that could have been located adjacent to the shoreline. The shell scatter at SM5 would have been such a site.

Two middens, SM2 and SM3, and the tidal fish traps are worthy of protection and suggested procedures are laid out in Section 5.

In general, the remaining archaeological/historical sites do not pose any major constraints on upgrading of the recreational facilities.



5. MANAGEMENT AND MITIGATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

At present, most classes of archaeological sites, grave markers and buildings older than 50 years are protected under the National Monuments Act of 1969 (as amended). This act will shortly be replaced by new heritage legislation and will be known as the National Heritage Resources Act of 1999. This will substantially reinforce the protections of heritage material.

Sites which require management or mitigation are presented below.

5.1 Shell middens

5.1.1 SM2

SM2 has been identified as a site with research potential. By virtue of its context, (soft dune sand), we see no way to incorporate this feature into the development unless one is prepared to spend a large sum of money to erect a building over the site. Leaving the site exposed will lead to further damage by both natural and human agencies. Drawing attention to the site in its current state will undoubtedly lead to accelerated damage through vandalism.

Two options are available in dealing with the site;

1. Archaeological excavation - this would remove the midden in a systematic way so that no information is lost. This would remove any further need for management and if necessary the area could then be utilised for recreation. Informative signage could be erected at the site on which the findings of the excavation could be displayed.
2. Landscaping - bring in additional sand and increase the soil cover over the whole mound. Following this plant indigenous dune vegetation to prevent wind erosion and ensure that access to dunes is controlled.

Our preferred method of dealing with the site would be option 1.

5.1.2 Other shell middens

SM1 is an ephemeral surface exposure. No further action is necessary on this site.

SM3 is sufficiently far removed from the recreational areas not to be directly threatened by human agencies. If the site is directly threatened by mitigation, it will have to be excavated.

SM4 is possibly buried in a dune. Once alien vegetation is removed indigenous species should be cultivated to stabilise the sand. If the dune is to be developed, a program of test excavations will have to be undertaken to determine the nature of the archaeology.

SM5 has been heavily impacted and no further action is necessary on this site.

5.2 Fish traps

All identified traps must be protected. No damage should occur through construction of slipways or tidal pools. The features themselves are fairly robust and could easily be highlighted for the interest of the general public. Perhaps the best place to erect signage in

this regard is at viewing sites on the upper Kommetjie road, from where viewers could identify the traps at low tide when they are visible.

5.3 Grave

While we cannot state unequivocally that G1 is a grave, it should be treated as such until information to the contrary is obtained and not disturbed in any way. At present there is no reason why this site should be integrated into the development. In the future, if information suggests that it is warranted, this could change.

5.4 Buildings

5.4.1 Fishermen's shacks – Witsands

The remains of a shack, B1, close to the derelict boat sheds at the slipway at Witsands could mark the location of the settlement noted in the Raimondo report (1996). A more detailed study of the site should be undertaken before any development of the site commences. Such a study may require identification of surviving inhabitants to get further information, and a program of archaeological test excavations may also have to be undertaken.

5.5 Zones of sensitivity

These are marked on the transparent overlays. Sites of high archaeological sensitivity (no-go areas) are colored green. Moderately sensitive archaeological sites are marked blue. As far as limitations on development by the archaeology are concerned, these are relatively minor. The area surrounded in red shows areas which could be developed without any impact on archaeological sites.

6. REFERENCES

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