

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF STEELPOORT PUMPED
STORAGE SCHEME, UPPER AND LOWER RESERVOIR AREAS**

A Phase-1 Report Prepared for L&W Environmental

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INTRODUCTION

ESKOM is currently undertaking feasibility studies in the Steelport River Valley for a pumped storage scheme. The proposed scheme spreads over the farms Keerom 151 JS, Steynsdrift 145 JS, Luijpershoek 149 JS. The pumped storage scheme will involve the construction of two dam reservoirs, access roads, an underground surge chamber and associated access tunnel, headrace intake works, a blindbore or raised shaft and a tailrace works. L&W Environmental, the environmental consultants for the feasibility study, commissioned Archaeological Resources Management (ARM) to survey the area of the two potential reservoirs for archaeological sites as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment process.

METHOD

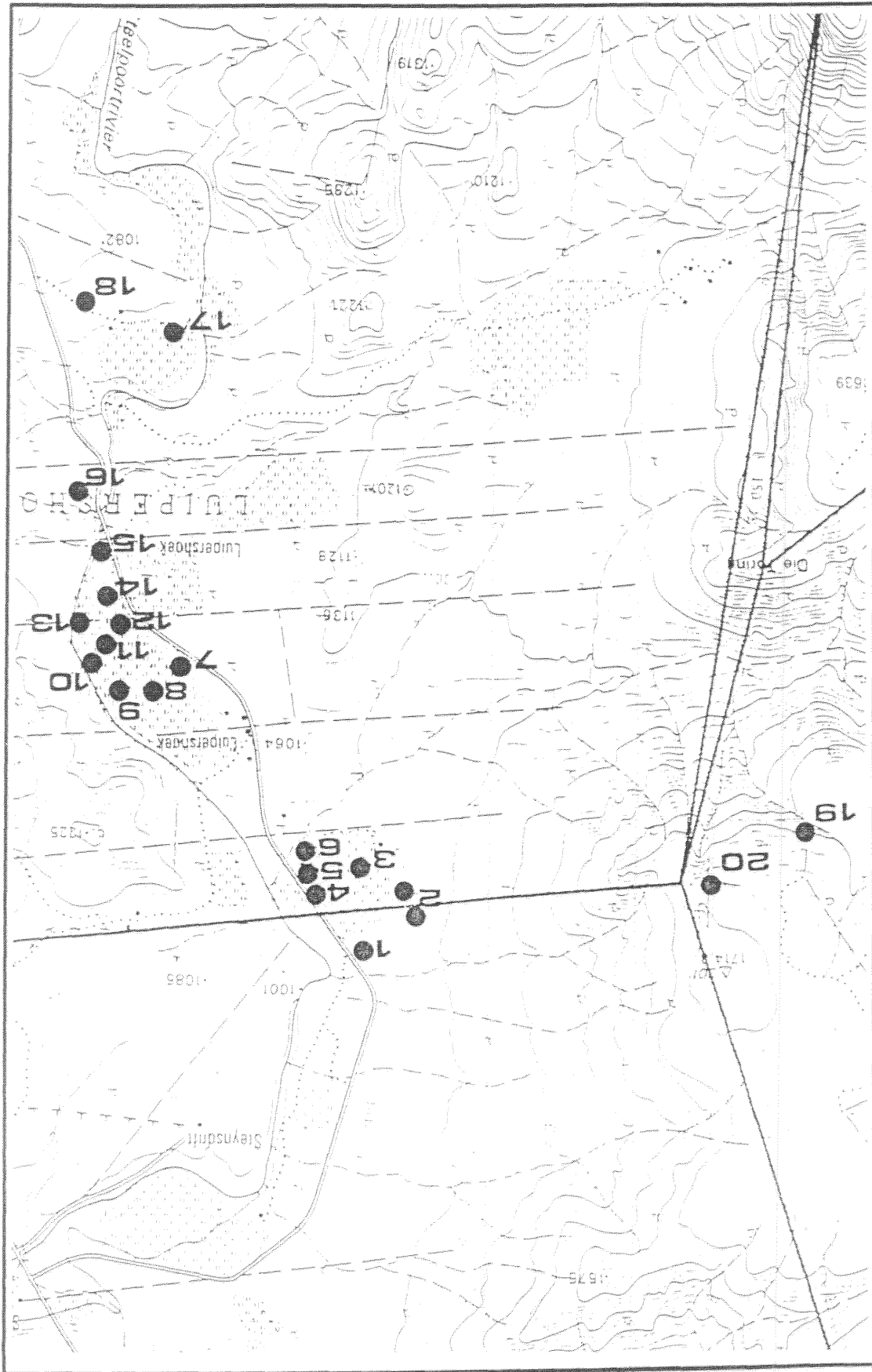
Two ARM staff visited the proposed project area on 27, 28 and 29 November 1998. They surveyed on foot the two reservoir areas as defined by 1:10000 and 1:50000 maps supplied by L&W. Site locations were recorded on the 1:50000 map 2529 BB Roosenekal.

At the time of the survey, the proposed project area was thickly covered in vegetation, making surface visibility difficult outside of cleared agricultural fields. Also, the Steelport River was high and strongly flowing, making it possible only to survey those areas between the river and the road in the lower reservoir. Nevertheless, the greater part of the proposed reservoir areas was examined.

RESULTS

Twenty archaeological sites were recorded in the proposed reservoir areas (Figure 1). Two were located in the upper reservoir, while eighteen were located in the lower reservoir. Sites ranged in age from the Early Stone Age to the Middle Stone Age, Early Iron Age and

Figure 1. Location of Archaeological Sites.



Late Iron Age.

Lower Reservoir (Sites 1 to 18)

Site 1

Site 1 (S25.06.59.6 E29.49.35.0) is a stone-walled Late Iron Age settlement located on the southern edge of Steynsdrift farm, directly adjacent to the existing gravel road. Numerous circular and rectangular stone-walled structures were located, suggesting that the site may be associated with the historically known Bapedi (i.e., Northern Sotho) occupation of the region.

Site 2

Site 2, shown as two circles on Figure 1, is a very large (ca. 250 x 250 m) stone-walled Bapedi settlement (S25.07.11.5 E29.49.27.7) located just within the proposed reservoir area and includes land both on Steynsdrift and Luipershoek. The site consists of numerous circular and rectangular stone-walled structures. Four graves were located on the far northern end of the site, directly adjacent to the edge of fallen rectangular structure, at S25.07.11.5 E29.49.31.0. Each grave had a name etched into the base of the headstone.

These names are as follows:

Kgapiane Mamehlaba

Nkegethe Malebana

Rapoto Nandiar Mmago

Mmago Kiriti Nkgadima

According to a local informant, Mr. Piet Mashilangwko, the graves are those of a chief and his family. Mr. Mashilangwko, born in 1927, said that these graves were present when he was a small child. The site may well therefore date to the late 19th or early 20th century.

Sites 3, 5 and 6

These sites represent areas of heavy concentrations of a Middle Stone Age open air deposits located in a ploughed field and around a small tenant farmhouse (ca. S25.07.21.7 E 29.49.47.0). Cultural material observed included lithic tools and flakes representing the entire reduction process. The material was remarkably unweathered and uneroded,

indicating that has only been disturbed by recent ploughing. The densest concentration of material was found in the area marked as Site 5 on Figure 1. It is uncertain if intact deposits of cultural material are present below the ploughzone.

Site 4

Early and Late Iron Age pottery was found on the far northern edge of Mr. Piet Mashilangwko's ploughed field (S25.07.09.5 E29.49.45.4). The pottery dated to the Eiland (ca. AD 900 to 1300) and early Moloko (i.e., Sotho-Tswana) (ca. AD 1350 to 1650) ceramic traditions. It is uncertain if intact cultural deposits are present below the ploughzone.

Sites 7 to 15

These sites all represent a relatively continuous scatter of Early and Middle Stone Age material. Concentrations of material are marked by circles on Figure 1. The approximate midpoint of the scatter is at S25.07.53.7 E29.50.29.7. The material is badly weathered and rolled, indicating that it has eroded out of primary context.

Site 16

A small stone-walled settlement incorporated both circular and rectangular structures, indicating that it probably dates to the historical Bapedi occupation of the area. The site is located at S25.08.28.0 E29.50.37.2.

Sites 17 and 18

The area between these points on Figure contains a continuous scatter of Middle Stone Age material exposed in a ploughed field. The densest concentration was found at S25.09.02.0 E 29.50.18.2. Like Sites 7 through 15, however, this material is also highly weathered and rolled, indicating that it has eroded out of its original context.

Upper Reservoir

Both sites found in the vicinity of the upper reservoir are located outside of the proposed impact zone. They are included here, however, to provide information on the types of sites

which may be impacted by the project.

Site 19 is a small (ca. 30 x 15 metre) stone-walled area of uncertain cultural affiliation and function, east of the proposed upper reservoir. The site is located on a narrow flat ledge directly overlooking a currently dry drainage. The walling does not appear to be residential and is more reminiscent of cannon or large gun emplacements. Also, no water sources are nearby. The site may thus date to the Anglo-Boer War, or perhaps to Mapoch's late 19th century conflict with the ZAR.

Site 20 is a 40 x 40 m stone-walled settlement incorporating between five and seven circular stone structures. The site is located on high escarpment overlooking the river valley below. Again, like Site 19, no water is readily available, suggesting that the site was situated more for defensive purposes than convenience. It may therefore date to the ditragane.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sites 1, 2, and 16 were in good condition and may yield important data on subsistence, trade and settlement patterns during the BaPedi occupation of the area. Prior to any construction activities, these sites will therefore require some mitigation. The stone-walling needs to be mapped, and test excavations should be conducted to determine their research potential.

Sites 4 and 5, the Elland/early Moloko site and the open air MSA scatter, need to be test-excavated to retrieve representative samples of cultural material.

The remainder of the archaeological sites are either outside of the project area or are in clearly eroded contexts. They therefore do not require further archaeological work.

Finally, if the Steelport River Valley is chosen as the location of the pumped storage

scheme, all access road alignments, tail- and headrace works, tunnels and additional work and construction staging areas will need to be surveyed. This work should take place in the winter when surface visibility is optimal for archaeological reconnaissance.