

INTRODUCTION

Tongaat-Hulett Properties is currently developing several parcels of land in the greater Durban area for residential and industrial use (fig. 1). The parcels, namely Office, Sunningdale Extension, La Lucia Ridge A, Mount Edgecombe, Lower Westridge, Effingham and Peace Cottage, all lie between the Mngeni and Mdloti rivers. With the exception of Peace Cottage and parts of Mount Edgecombe, this land was until recently devoted to agriculture. Following an assessment of the archaeological resources in these areas, Whitelaw (1994) recommended that six Iron Age archaeological sites were sufficiently significant to warrant further investigation prior to development. In this report we describe the results of these investigations. To avoid confusion we refer to the sites by the numbers provided in the 1994 report, although each site has since been allocated a national site number in accordance with national archaeological site recording requirements. The sites and their corresponding national site numbers are listed at the end of the report.

The sites fall into two groups. The first comprises three Late Iron Age (LIA) sites (33, 36 and 37) probably dating to within the last 200 or 300 years. They were the principal focus of our investigation. All are situated in the Effingham area and yielded iron-smelting debris. Though they were too badly damaged to merit extensive excavations, it seemed worth collecting surface artefacts. The second group consists of Sites 14 and 15 in Sunningdale Extension and 29 in Mount Edgecombe, all dating to the Early Iron Age (EIA).

THE LATE IRON AGE SITES

Sites 33, 36 and 37 are marked by a few sherds and concentrations of iron-smelting debris, including slag, furnace and tuyere fragments and iron ore. All three are small sites and unlikely to have preserved features of any significance. Nevertheless, Whitelaw (1994) recommended that surface artefacts be collected prior to any further development of the sites.

Site 37 proved to be too badly damaged to warrant any further attention. We have, however, collected artefacts from Sites 33 and 36. We shall continue to monitor the sites in order to recover as large a sample of pottery as possible. The samples are stored at Natal Museum and will be available to future researchers for scientific analysis.

THE EARLY IRON AGE SITES

Sites 14, 15 and 29 belong to the earliest expression of the Iron Age in Natal. This expression is characterised by a ceramic style conventionally referred to as Matola after a site in southern Mozambique. Matola or Matola-like ceramics also occur in Northern Province (South Africa), Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and as far north as east Africa. This widespread occurrence of similar pottery is regarded as evidence of an early southward spread of Bantu-speaking agriculturists into the savannah and coastal regions of sub-Saharan Africa. The Matola phase in Natal has been dated to AD 400—600 (calibrated) at two sites, Enkwazini in the St Lucia area and Mzonjani in Durban (Hall 1980, Maggs 1980). Mzonjani was first recorded during the construction of National Road N2 near what is now Sunningdale Extension and excavated in the 1970s by a Natal Museum team.

The significance of Matola sites lies in the fact that they are evidence of the advent of the agricultural way of life in South Africa. Limited research has been carried out on sites of this important period. Most of this has been in the form of small-scale excavations that have yielded ceramics and radiocarbon dates, but little else. It was therefore imperative that archaeological material was rescued from sites 14, 15 and 29 before they were destroyed by development. We hoped that our excavations would uncover features such as hut floors, livestock pens, grain-storage facilities and ironworking areas, that would provide more detailed information on the layout of Matola settlements.

Excavation and features at sites 14 & 15

Sites 14 and 15 are situated 2.5 km inland of the coast on a long high hill with a flattish crown. The position commands a good all-round view of the area. The sea is visible from site 15, while

much of the hilly terrain inland of the sites has a lesser elevation. The sandy soil is typical of the Berea-type red sands that occur along much of the Natal coast. Primary vegetation in the area would have been Coast Forest and Palm Veld (Moll 1976), although it is likely to have become a mosaic of grassveld, forest and thornbush as agriculturists settled and cleared vegetation for village sites and fields. Several currently seasonal streams flow on the east, south and west slopes of the hill.

These sites are separated by two parallel cane tracks running either side of a line of trees and bush. It is possible that the sites are the remains of a single settlement, although there is the possibility that they represent two or more contemporaneous settlements or alternatively, two or more settlements occupied at slightly different times.

The sparse artefact scatters that mark the sites provide no indication of what lies beneath the surface. We therefore placed five 10 x 10 m grids on site 15 and excavated several 2 x 2 m squares within each grid in an attempt to discover hidden features. This strategy became less practical as the sugar cane on the site grew during the course of the excavation. We then chose to excavate a line of five 3 x 3 m squares across the site. For the same reason we employed this latter excavation strategy on site 14 (fig. 2).

Surface artefacts on both sites include EIA and LIA sherds, the latter being more abundant towards the southern edge of the cane field. The LIA sherds are probably derived from Site 16, a LIA smelting site situated south of Site 15. Site 16 has now been destroyed by residential and road development in Sunningdale. Our investigation focused on the northern part of the cane field where EIA sherds were common.

Site 14

We excavated a total of 11 squares at site 14 comprising 89 m². Two squares were 2 x 2m, while the remaining were 3 x 3 m squares. Squares were excavated stratigraphically in units and 10 cm

spits. Spits were used to counter any possible lack of stratigraphy within each cultural horizon, since the soil colour changes were slight. The LIA horizon occurs approximately 20 cm below the surface and is 20 - 25 cm deep (ie 20 - 45 cm below the surface). There is a 10 - 15 cm deep hiatus below which is followed by a 20 cm deep EIA horizon (ie 55 - 75 cm below the surface). This stratigraphic sequence occurred in all squares. The colour of the soil was reddish-brown on the top, interspersed with calcium carbonate and coal. From about 50 cm downwards, the soil became lighter in colour and consisted partly of aeolian beach sand.

Five of the eleven squares contained features. These features include a highly fragmented shell midden and several pottery clusters. Of these features only the shell midden was not associated with the EIA, since it occurred between the LIA and EIA cultural horizons. The shell midden in Square 3 comprised mostly of oyster (*Striostrea margaritacea*, cf. Lamarck 1989). It was 42 cm below topsoil in the east and southeast parts of the square. The midden was 4 cm to 5 cm thick and approximately 3 m in diameter (fig. 3). No artefacts occurred within the midden.

Several concentrations of pottery were located. In the west corner of square 7, we found a cluster of sherds in the EIA cultural horizon. Initially we thought it to be a pit, since it had grindstone, pottery and charcoal fragments clustered together (fig. 4). Although this feature occurred 35 cm below the surface, it was below the LIA horizon in this square. It was 90 cm in diameter and 17 cm deep. A dark patch of soil, about 10cm in diameter, was found in the eastern part of this feature. Soil samples were taken at various levels within this feature. Sterile sand occurred beneath this feature.

Several scatters of sherds were found in the Matola horizon of squares 8 and 9. The main scatter of sherds in square 8 was located on the western side of the square occurring 49 cm below the surface (fig. 5). The feature was 67 cm wide and 22 cm deep and extended towards square nine. Within this feature there was an area of yellow cream coloured deposit that was 19 cm wide and 10 cm deep. The material remains from this feature included iron-ore, shale, charcoal and pottery. The remains of a single bowl was situated near this concentration of sherds. A similar feature was found in square nine. This feature was 40cm in diameter, 10 cm deep and 50 cm

below the surface. The feature contained pieces of charcoal, slag and several sherds. The concentration of sherds contained the only artefacts in the square. We believe both features to be the remains of middens. Sterile sand occurred below both features.

In square 11 a fragmented pot, charcoal, and a piece of slag were found in the Matola horizon (fig. 6). The cluster was 40-50 cm below the surface, 40 cm in diameter, and 10 cm deep. This cluster contained the only artefacts found in this square.

Site 15

The soil on site 15 is generally reddish, but varies from brown to buff-brown in a few excavation units. The natural stratigraphy at site 14 is characterised by a poor distinction in colour and texture between the A and B horizons, though the A horizon is generally about 20 cm deep and slightly darker in colour, presumably because of a mix of organic material. Cultural material, consisting largely of Matola phase EIA sherds, occurs mainly in the first 30 cm. LIA sherds were recovered from Squares 1, 3, 4 and 5.

Excavation showed a positive correlation between surface scatters and the presence of deposits, or at least artefact occurrences, beneath the surface, at both sites. Site 15 Grid 3 for example, where few surface artefacts occurred, yielded the least cultural material. Squares 4 and 5 also had low yields. There was a good surface scatter of sherds and other material in the vicinity of Grid 5, on the other hand, and this excavation unit yielded, by a considerable amount, the greatest quantity of material. The concentration in Grid 5 suggested that this material was most probably part of a midden deposit. Other than Grid 5, sherd yields were highest in Grid 4 and Square 3 (Table 1).

Square 4 was the only excavation unit in which LIA and EIA material occurred in stratigraphic succession. All diagnostic LIA sherds came from the 0—20 cm level and all diagnostic EIA sherds but one from the 20—40 cm level. The Matola horizon in Square 4 was marked by several sherds lying flat at a depth of 35 cm. There was no evidence of a floor at the sherd level within

the excavation or in the section, indicating either that the sherds were lying on an unplastered floor or the floor had not been preserved through burning or that the sherds had been deposited on the surface outside a built structure.

A patch of darker soil, sherds and small slag fragments suggested the presence of a pit in Square 3. However, this appeared on excavation to be a hole associated with an old termite nest. It contained small pieces of slag and a mix of Matola and LIA sherds.

TABLE 1: Excavation units & details of sherd numbers and mass.

G = Grid, S = Square. Sherd mass in grams

excavation unit	area excavated	sherd yield	sherd mass per m²	sherd yield per m²
G1	20 m ²	185	173	9
G2	24 m ²	210	135	9
G3	16 m ²	64	63	4
G4	28 m ²	330	366	12
G5	16 m ²	1068	1341	67
S1	9 m ²	92	100	10
S2	9 m ²	74	161	8
S3	9 m ²	94	233	10
S4*	9 m ²	63	133	7
S5	9 m ²	15	139	2

*Figures for Matola level only

Site 29

Initial archaeological surveys of Site 29 indicated a Matola occupation and that iron working may have occurred at the site. An area with a concentration of sherds was initially marked for excavation. The area marked for excavation was subsequently significantly disturbed and we decided to excavate as close to the first area as possible. Five squares were cleared for excavation: four were 3 x 3 m squares, and one was 9 x 9 m (fig. 7). Squares were excavated in 10 cm spits, since there was hardly any change in the colours of the soil. The Matola horizon

begins about 30 cm below topsoil in all of the excavated square, with a 20 cm test pit below this horizon. No features were found in the Matola horizon and very few artefacts were recovered.

THE FINDS

Ceramics

Site 29 yielded ceramics associated with the historical period. These included porcelain and stoneware. The latter was made on a potter's wheel.

The LIA ceramics from Site 15 comprise thin rim sherds with slightly everted lips. Several are decorated with notches on the lip. The pottery at site 15 had no decorations. Several of the LIA pottery fragments had rims, The pottery rims were flat and not everted as were the Matola rims. The lack of decorations suggest the sherds are of a recent age.

The decorated pottery from sites 14 and 15 conforms to the above styles, which are similar to those described and illustrated by Maggs (1980), some different styles were observed at site 14 (fig. 8). Pots from the Matola phase in KwaZulu-Natal tend to have fairly straight everted rims with an abrupt neck/shoulder junction. Most are decorated, usually with a band of hatching, a groove or row of impression on the rim. Decoration on the shoulder usually consists of a variety of discontinuous quadrilateral or curvilinear motifs, while pendent triangles may also occur. Decoration motifs may be continuous or discontinuous. Continuous motifs consist of horizontal grooves, bands of oblique hatching, band of interlocking and hatched triangles, bands of interlocking rectangles that are hatched alternately vertically and horizontally, bands of alternate rectangles, with vertical and horizontal cross-hatching, bands of interlocking parallelograms, hatched, bands of alternating triangles, circular impressions, and hatched parallelograms suspended from the body rim. The last two decorations only occurred at site 15. Discontinuous decorative motifs consist of oblique hatched quadrilaterals, short, vertical row or rows of impressions, usually along a groove, short rows of impressions, and single V's. Discontinuous

decorative motifs consist of oblique hatched quadrilaterals, short, vertical row or rows of impressions, usually along a groove, short rows of impressions, and single V's.

Bowls are simple and open. Many are thickened below the lip to form a subcarination, below which some are decorated with a groove or rows of impressions.

Ironworking debris

Samples of slag, iron ore and tuyere fragments were collected from the surface at the LIA sites 33 and 36. These will be stored at the Natal Museum for future analysis if required.

The quantity of ironworking debris recovered from the EIA sites was small. The slag recorded at Site 14 was located underneath a cluster of EIA sherds, indicating a direct association with the EIA cultural horizon. This suggests that iron working also occurred in the earliest occupation of this site. Slag occurred in Grids 4 and 5 and in Squares 3 on Site 15. Iron ore occurred in Grids 1 and 2. Tuyere fragments were recovered from Grids 1 and 4. Given that the slag was most abundant in Square 3 where LIA sherds occurred, we need to consider that all ironworking debris on Site 15 may be associated with the nearby LIA smelting site (Site 16).

Worked stone

Most of the worked stone from site 14 came from the LIA horizon. These artefacts included upper and lower grindstones, and several manuports.

Several excavation units at Site 15 yielded fragments of broken upper and lower grindstones and burnishing stones. A complete lower grindstone with a short, narrow groove came from Square 5. This type of groove is typical of EIA grindstones. Late Stone Age-like flakes in quartzite and hornfels also occur.

DISCUSSION

In the original motivation for this investigation, Whitelaw (1994) felt that Sites 14 and 15 could contribute significantly to our understanding of the earliest farming communities in South Africa. The results of the investigation are unfortunately disappointing in the light of this hope. We identified only five features on Site 14 and a single feature on Site 15 and thus could not develop a clear understanding of the organisation of individual settlements. Nevertheless, some points arose from the investigation that are worth pursuing.

At site 14 cultural material appears to be concentrated near squares 4, 6, 7 and 8. At site 15 the cultural material was concentrated in Grid 5 particularly and, to a lesser extent, in the vicinity of Grid 4 and Square 3. From the Grid 4 vicinity, artefact yields decrease towards Square 5, Grid 3 and Square 2, but increase towards Grid 5. Grid 5's high artefact yield suggests that it was probably excavated into a midden. The low artefact yields of the outermost excavation units suggests two possibilities. First, low artefact yields could be related to activity areas in the settlement that the Matola community kept free of waste and debris. Secondly, the low artefact yields in the outermost excavation units may mark the edges of the settlement.

Consideration of the settlement layout of EIA sites post-dating AD 650 may provide some insight into the artefact-distribution pattern at Sites 14 and 15. Post-AD 650 sites had livestock pens that were closely associated with the site of the chief's or headman's court and an activity area where ironworking took place. The residential area with huts and grain-storage facilities was arranged around this central zone, which tends to have the greatest concentration of artefacts on the site. In particular, large middens frequently occur in the vicinity of the activity area and court.

If the low artefact densities in Grid 3 and Squares 1 and 5 for Site 15 do mark the edge of the Matola settlement, then the intermediate densities around Grid 4 could possibly be associated with the central activity area. The presence of slag (indicating ironworking) in Grid 4 and Square 3 would support this interpretation. The Grid 5 midden may then be associated with the central activity area and court. Similarly at Site 14 squares 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10 and 11, have low intensities

of debris, and these 'surround' squares 4, 6, 7, and 8. The two sites have thus similar spatial layout.

This interpretation of Site 15 suggests that the original settlement was approximately 1.5 hectares in area with the residential area sited to the north, west and south of Grid 4. The abrupt increase in slope to the east of Grid 5 suggests that there would have been a limited number of structures, if any, in this direction. A similar layout may occur for site 14, where squares 6, 8 and 9 are on the higher parts of the hill and have relatively high incidence of artefacts.

This interpretation also suggests that Sites 14 and 15 represent separate settlements. We should point out, however, that this interpretation is extremely tentative and rests upon a pattern of sherd density that may be an artefact of our excavation strategy, and upon acceptance of the slag in the vicinity of Grid 4 being associated with the Matola rather than the LIA occupation.

The Matola cultural horizon at both sites was only between 10 cm and 25 cm thick, suggesting a short term occupation at each site. The horizon is consistent throughout all the squares, unlike the LIA horizons which were unevenly distributed. The Matola horizons are mainly shallow features of sherds and one midden. The poor preservation of organic materials does not allow for any bones and seeds to remain - indicating the more recent age for the shell midden. The occurrence of a few pieces of slag is an indication of iron working on the site. The occurrence of slag in this deposit is important, since unlike at Site 15, the few pieces of slag here, are in direct association with the Matola pottery - some within the pottery clusters.

Mzonjani (Maggs 1980), and sites 14 and 15 have similar pottery motifs. These sites are in close proximity of each other and may represent parts of the same village settlement, or similar settlements through time.

Site 29

There was a very low density of artefacts from this site. The pottery decoration style is that of the Matola tradition. In terms of sherd style and morphology, they are very similar to those Matola sherds from sites 14 and 15. The three sites may thus be temporarily related. The thin cultural horizon at Site 29, would suggest a short period of occupation - similar to sites 14 and 15.

CONCLUSION

Tongaat-Hulett Properties is in the process of developing land for residential and industrial use. This development had the potential to damage important archaeological sites in the Umhlanga-La Lucia and Mt Edgecombe areas. The Institute for Cultural Resource Management was contracted to salvage these archaeological sites before the development began. About 50m² of the site was excavated to a depth ranging from 20cm to 80cm.

Excavations at Mzonjani and Mt Edgecombe indicated two periods of occupation. The first occupation occurred about 1700 years ago, and the second in the mid- to late nineteenth century. The excavations at Mzonjani indicated a large village settlement with middens and iron working. Organic material was not well preserved at the site, however, we know from other Matola sites, that maize was consumed, and cattle and sheep or goats were herded. The second occupation was not as extensive as the first, however, archaeological surveys have indicated several LIA sites in the vicinity. These sites may be temporally related. The differences are informative about changing settlement patterns through time.

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APPENDIX A:**SITES AND THEIR NATIONAL SITE NUMBERS**

<u>Site</u>	<u>National Site Number</u>
14	2931CA 122
15	2931CA 123
29	2931CA 150
33	2931CC 45
36	2930DD 128
37	2930DD 128