

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR THE THABA YA BOTSWANA
PROJECT**

A Phase-I report prepared for Bohlweki Environmental

Professor T.N. Huffman

**Archaeological Resources Management
Department of Archaeology
University of the Witwatersrand**

May 1999

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY FOR THE THABA YA BOTSWANA PROJECT

Introduction

Mr. H. Louw intends to develop portions of the Farm Rietvllei 1011R southern Johannesburg for the Thaba Ya Botswana project. Among other aspects this development could include a hotel and conference centre as well as the reconstruction of a Late Iron Age stone-walled settlement. Bohlweki Environmental consultants have undertaken various technical and environmental studies and in the process commissioned Archaeological Resources Management (ARM) to survey the development area for archaeological sites.

Methods

Two ARM staff examined the area on May 16, 1999, traversing about one-third on foot. In accordance with the relevant environmental and heritage legislation, the ARM team searched for the remains of settlements 50 years or older. One ARM staff returned on May 19th in the company of Mr. Louw, and examined all areas designated for development.

Results

Grass was high and therefore visibility was low. Nevertheless some stone-walled sites were noted.

Site 1 (26.18.12S 28.01.33E) was a complex of stone walling on the level plateau originally designated as a driving range. Without clearing the vegetation, it is not possible to know the precise layout. At present some walls appear to be circular cattle kraals surrounded by outer walls containing small stock enclosures. This overall layout has been disturbed by a more recent occupation, for there is an ash heap with coal cinder next to a rectangular enclosure. Another unit extends further south along the hillside. Some of these walls have been realigned to make houses for farm labourers. Metal items and middens of coal cinder date to this recent

occupation.

A stone-lined road and parallel lines of gum trees at the south end of the property were also part of the previous farmstead. There may have been another stone-walled site at the east end of the trees, but the area was disturbed many years ago and the vegetation is now dense.

Site 2 (26.18.25S 28.01.47E) is located just south of the gum trees, slightly beyond the boundary of the property. At least three circular stone-walled units stand at the base of the exposed rock. In plan they resemble Site 1 before it was disturbed: the outer walls consist of a series of arcs, defining the residential zones, separated by the occasional small stock kraal. In addition, the orthophoto 1:10 000 map (2628AC 6) shows older walling, characterised by a smooth outer wall.

Site 3 (26.18.09S 28.01.53E) lies on the level spur south of the beacon on Tussenkoppies, inside the area originally proposed for residential development. The arrangement consists of a smooth outer circle of low walling surrounding a larger central kraal. There may be two such units.

Site 4 (26.18.01S 28.01.48E) west of the beacon is located on the edge of the proposed hotel complex. The type of ruin is similar to Site 3.

Site 5 (26.17.58S 28.01.53E) is a complex of at least three individual ruins, each with high outer walls forming a series of large arcs around central cattle kraals. The complex is located north of the beacon, behind the proposed hotel and conference centre. Mr. Louw intends to have the easternmost unit reconstructed.

Site 6 (26.18.02S 28.01.55E) about 250m east of the beacon is visible on the 1:10 000 orthophoto (2628AC 6) on a level spur in what is now dense bush. Its arrangement is similar to Site 5.

Discussion

Three types of stone-walled sites have been recorded in the southern section of Gauteng

(Mason 1986, Taylor 1979). Most sites on Rietvei belong to what is called Group III, or the Klipriviersberg type (Sites 1, 2 and 5). They date from about AD 1750 to 1823, when Mzilikazi settled near Heidelberg (Rasmussen 1975). Sites 3 and 4, however, belong to Group I which dates to the 16th century. Site 2 incorporates both types of walling.

Group I and III settlements were built by Sotho-Tswana people who had moved north from the Free State in the 16th century. In general historical terms, these people would have been Bafokeng (Rasmussen 1975).

Under present climatic conditions, the Klipriviersberg is not suitable for subsistence agriculture, and it would have been warmer and wetter when these settlements were occupied (Huffman 1996). Some of the hillside meadows would have been cultivated, but the main fields would have been located along the river valley west of the development area and of course along the Kliprivier further south. This proximity of good agricultural land is the reason why these settlements are located here.

Recommendations

In discussions with the developer, the driving range, residences and hotel locations can be shifted to avoid disturbing any of the ruins. If a site will be damaged because of a change in plans, however, it should be cleared, mapped and test excavated. Archaeologically, the Group I settlements are of particular importance because of various unanswered research questions.

For tourism, Group III sites have the greater potential. The reconstruction of one unit in Site 5 should follow certain stages. The residential zone should be excavated to establish the location of houses. Some kitchens should be excavated to clarify their construction. The small stock and central kraals should be test excavated to recover dung samples for environmental data. And finally, middens need to be sampled for a representative artefact assemblage. These excavations will help to establish the most appropriate reconstruction.

References

- Huffman, T.N. 1996. Archaeological evidence for climatic change during the last 2000 years in Southern Africa. *Quaternary International* 33: 55-60.

Mason, R.J. 1986. Origins of Black People of Johannesburg and the Southern Western Central Transvaal, AD 350 to 1880. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Archaeological Research Unit.

Rasmussen, R.K. 1975. Ndebele Wars and Migrations. PhD Dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of California at Los Angeles.

Taylor, M.O.V. 1979. Late Iron Age Settlements on the Northern Edge of the Vredefort Dome. MA Dissertation, Department of Archaeology, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.