

# **Archaeological Survey for the Umtshezi Repeater Station Powerline**

**For Eskom**

**By**

**By Gavin Anderson**

**Institute for Cultural Resource Management, Natal Museum, Private Bag 9070,  
Pietermaritzburg, 3200**

**26 September 2001**



The Institute for Cultural Resource Management was approached by ESKOM to undertake an archaeological survey for the proposed powerline to the Umtshezi Council Repeater Site, near Estcourt. The powerline is a 22kV line, approximately 5 km long and follows partly along an existing road and/or old powerline route.

Nine archaeological sites were recorded along the corridor of the route. These sites date to the Late Iron Age and would require mitigation if they are affected by the powerline and/or access route. These sites may be avoided, and thus should not require mitigation, if there is consultation between the surveyor and the archaeologist.

The powerline is of a wooden pole construction and thus no serious impact is likely to occur. However, the location of the servitude/access road may affect some of the sites. My suggested management plan for this line is to have minimal impact on archaeological sites, and thus limit the need for mitigation. This can be achieved by On-site discussions with the surveyor prior to the surveying of the powerline.

All archaeological sites are protected by the KwaZulu-Natal Heritage Act of 1997. The Client, i.e. ESKOM will require a permit from KwaZulu-Natal Heritage if any of the sites are to be damaged. The onus is on Eskom to obtain such permits.

## **Methodology**

The locations of the recorded archaeological sites were recorded on the map provided by Eskom Engineering Line Designer. The reference numbers are the Line Route Points and are shown in Fig. 1. The Line Route Points have latitude and longitude allocations and these are housed with Eskom.

All sites have been grouped according to low, medium and high significance for the purpose of this report. Sites of low significance have no diagnostic artefacts, especially pottery. Sites of medium significance have diagnostic artefacts and these are sampled. Sampling includes the collection of artefacts for future analysis. All diagnostic pottery, such as rims, lips and decorated sherds are sampled, while bone, stone and shell are mostly noted. Sampling usually occurs on most sites. Sites of high significance are excavated or extensively sampled. The sites that are extensively sampled have high research potential, yet poor preservation of features. I attempt to recover as many artefacts from these sites by means of systematic sampling, as opposed to sampling diagnostic artefacts only.

Significance is generally determined by several factors. However, in this survey, a wider definition of significance is adopted since the aim of the survey is to gather as much

information as possible from every site. This strategy allows for an analysis of every site in some detail, without resorting to excavation.

### **Defining significance**

Archaeological sites vary according to significance and several different criteria relate to each type of site. However, there are several criteria that allow for a general significance rating of archaeological sites.

These criteria are:

**1. State of preservation of:**

- 1.1. Organic remains:
  - 1.1.1. Faunal
  - 1.1.2. Botanical
- 1.2. Rock art
- 1.3. Walling
- 1.4. Presence of a cultural deposit
- 1.5. Features:
  - 1.5.1. Ash Features
  - 1.5.2. Graves
  - 1.5.3. Middens
  - 1.5.4. Cattle byres
  - 1.5.5. Bedding and ash complexes

**2. Spatial arrangements:**

- 2.1. Internal housing arrangements
- 2.2. Intra-site settlement patterns
- 2.3. Inter-site settlement patterns

**3. Features of the site:**

- 3.1. Are there any unusual, unique or rare artefacts or images at the site?
- 3.2. Is it a type site?
- 3.3. Does the site have a very good example of a specific time period, feature, or artefact?

**4. Research:**

- 4.1. Providing information on current research projects
- 4.2. Salvaging information for potential future research projects

**5. Inter- and intra-site variability**

- 5.1. Can this particular site yield information regarding intra-site variability, i.e. spatial relationships between various features and artefacts?

5.2. Can this particular site yield information about a community's social relationships within itself, or between other communities.

**6. Archaeological Experience:**

6.1. The personal experience and expertise of the CRM practitioner should not be ignored. Experience can indicate sites that have potentially significant aspects, but need to be tested prior to any conclusions.

**7. Educational:**

7.1. Does the site have the potential to be used as an educational instrument?

7.2. Does the site have the potential to become a tourist attraction?

7.3. The educational value of a site can only be fully determined after initial test-pit excavations and/or full excavations.

The more a site can fulfill the above criteria, the more significant it becomes. Test-pit excavations are used to test the full potential of an archaeological deposit. These test-pit excavations may require further excavations if the site is of significance. Sites may also be mapped and/or have artefacts sampled as a form of mitigation. Sampling normally occurs when the artefacts may be good examples of their type, but are not in a primary archaeological context. Mapping records the spatial relationship between features and artefacts.

### **Archaeological Sites**

#### **SLY1**

This site is located above the old road (or railroad track?) along the Alternative Route 1A, and is between points 1 and 2 on the provided map. The site consists of various stone terraces and walling along the slopes of the hill. No artefacts were observed.

Significance: The site is of medium archaeological significance. A spatial pattern exists between the various features and some stone walling is well preserved.

Mitigation: Further mitigation should occur if the powerline is to affect this site. However, if the powerline follows the edges of the site it **may** only affect a small fraction of the site. The location of the wooden poles should be carefully placed so as not to disturb stone walling and or terraces.

#### **SLY2**

This site is located on the top of the hill alongside the road, and is between points 2 and 3 (closer to 3) on the provided map. The site consists of a stone-walled circle ±4 m in diameter. A pottery sherd was observed on the southern side of the road.

Significance: The majority of the site is of low archaeological significance, while the stone-walling is of medium significance.

Mitigation: The location of the wooden poles and access road should not affect the stone walling.

### **SLY3**

This site is located further northeast of SLY2, and is between points 3 and 4 on the provided map (just below 4). The site consists a series of stone-walled features and probably an archaeological deposit along the eastern side of the road. The stone-walled features are still well preserved and a spatial pattern may exist at the site.

Significance: The site is of medium archaeological significance.

Mitigation: The powerline is unlikely to affect the stone walling of the site as it is on the opposite side of the road.

### **SLY4**

The site is near point 5 on the provided map, and is located on the western side of the road near the top of the hill. The site consists of stone walling and a possible archaeological deposit.

Significance: The site is of low archaeological significance.

Mitigation: The powerline may run near the site, especially the stone walling. The powerline, or specifically the wooden poles, can bypass the stone walling and thus have little impact on the main part of the site.

### **SLY5**

This site is a large stone-walled settlement on both sides of the road, and is between points 7 and 8 on the provided map. At least ten stone-walled features were observed on the site. Other artefacts include a potential engraving and a stone pestle. The site will probably have an archaeological deposit.

Significance: The site is of medium archaeological significance due to its spatial component and archaeological deposit.

Mitigation: The wooden poles are unlikely to affect the site if they are carefully placed besides the road. On-site discussions should occur with the surveyor regarding the location of the powerline and servitudes.

#### **SLY6**

This site is located on both sides of the road on a relatively flat area near the base of the hill, and is between points 9 and 10 on the provided map. The site consists of a series of large stone-walled features, a possible grave and stone terracing. One of the stone-walled circles has secondary walling inside of the main wall. The site probably has an archaeological deposit.

Significance: The site is of medium archaeological significance due to its spatial component. The site can also be compared with SLY5 and thus provide information for inter-site comparisons.

Mitigation: The wooden poles are unlikely to affect the site if they are carefully placed besides the road, or at selected places at the site. The access road will also need to be carefully located. On-site discussions should occur with the surveyor regarding the location of the powerline and servitudes.

#### **SLY7**

This site is located east of SLY6 along a flat area near the base of the hill, and is between points 10 and 11 on the provided map. The site consists of approximately six stone-walled features on both sides of the road. The site probably has an archaeological deposit.

The construction and/or upgrading of the road has passed between the two stone walled features and may have damaged some of the site. This road construction is not related to Eskom activities.

Significance: The site is of medium archaeological significance due to its spatial component and potential for comparisons with other sites in the area.

Mitigation: The wooden poles are unlikely to affect the site if they are carefully placed besides the road. On-site discussions should occur with the surveyor regarding the location of the powerline and servitudes.

#### **SLY8**

This site is east of SLY7, at the base of the hill, and is located just west of point 11 on the provided map and may be related to SLY7. The site consists of stone-walled features to the northwest of the current road.

The general pattern of stone-walled features in the area is that of a group of these features in close proximity to each other. The current upgrading of the road may very well have removed parts of this site's deposit or stone-walling. Since the upgrading of the road is relatively wide and deep it is not possible to determine what remains have been damaged. A reinspection of older aerial photographs would indicate the potential stone walling in more detail.

The upgrading of the road is not associated with Eskom activity.

Significance: The site is of low archaeological significance.

Mitigation: The powerline may cross over the remains of the site. On-site discussions should occur with the surveyor regarding the location of the powerline and servitudes.

#### **SLY9**

This site is located at the top of the hill where the Umtshezi repeater station is located. Stone terracing and possible hut floors were observed just below the repeater station. Many pottery sherds were observed in the vicinity of the repeater station.

The top of the hill and higher slopes has been severely impacted by bulldozer activity. No stone walling is now visible on the top of the hill. If the site follows the pattern of other sites in the Estcourt area, then stone walling may have occurred on the top of the hill. This is even more likely since there is terracing just below the bulldozed area. The site also has a high concentration of pottery sherds that have clearly been washed down from the top of the hill. An examination of older aerial photographs would indicate the full extent of the site.

Significance: It is not possible to judge the significance of the site due to the intensive damage to the area.

Mitigation: The powerline should not affect the site if it follows the road. On-site discussions should occur with the surveyor regarding the location of the powerline and servitudes.

### **Discussion and Future Management**

Nine archaeological sites were located during the course of this brief survey. All of these sites consist of at least stone walling and probably an archaeological deposit. These stone-walled features occur frequently in the Estcourt area, and they still have archaeological significance. While little is known of these sites, they probably date to the Late Iron Age and

are associated with the formative Nguni people. The origins of these people is debated in the literature and thus all of the sites have some relevance.

The sites also have important inter- and intra-site components. The intra-site component is important in that information regarding how people organize their personal space can be obtained. This space tends to be culturally specified and thus reflected in the material remains. The comparisons between sites of similar and different ages would yield information about (non-)changes in a society through time and across space.

It is for this reason that I argue that it would be better to have no impact on the stone-walled features. This can be achieved by the surveyor avoiding the stone-walled features, and having a general 10 m “barrier” (or no-go area) from each stone-walled feature. This will have the added advantage of not affecting important archaeological deposit. Most of the areas outside of this “barrier” are unlikely to have important archaeological material and thus the wooden poles will do minimal, if any, damage to the archaeological deposit. Furthermore, the wooden poles are  $\pm 20$  cm – 30 cm in size and are unlikely to have a major impact on other aspects of the sites, except stone walling.

An option is for an archaeologist to have on-site discussions with the surveyor regarding the positions of wooden poles and access roads before the surveying begins. The archaeologist would walk the line with the surveyor and point out the sensitive areas. This will allow for minimal impact on sites.