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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY
VERSVELD PARK, PIKETBERG**

Prepared for

ENVIROAFRICA

By

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

rock art sites were located during a baseline archaeological study of Versveld at a proposed resort development above Versveld Pass near the town of Piketberg in the south western Cape.

The first site comprises a north-facing sandstone overhang partially obscured by wild fig trees, on top of the Stawelklip, immediately to the south of the old agricultural fields. Measuring about 25 metres across, and about two-three meters deep, the paintings on the shelter wall comprise at least three indeterminate human figures, a fish-tail-like painting with a fishtail, and other indistinguishable images and smudges of paint.

Two indeterminate antelope, two or three indeterminate human figures and some faint lines and indeterminate images occur on the ceiling of a darkened shallow overhang to the right of the main panel. Salts percolating from the ceiling have damaged some of the paintings.

The paintings in the shelter are reasonably well preserved, but some are also very faded. Some of the paintings on the main panel have been vandalised by charcoal writing.

Two pieces of pottery and three stone flakes were found on the floor of the shelter, and stone flakes, a core, and one piece of pottery were found behind the shelter in a rain wash.

Although the site will not be directly impacted by implementation of the planned project, secondary impacts such as increased visitation to the resort, may impact negatively on the archaeological deposit and the paintings.

Some indistinguishable paintings were also located in a small south-facing sandstone shelter amongst a rocky outcrop, about midway down Stawelklip, but these are very faded. As a result no archaeological mitigation is required at this site.

In addition, a handful of Middle Stone Age tools were located in the fruit orchard, as well in the gravel road on top of the Stawelklip. The material, however, was found in a severely disturbed context. No archaeological mitigation is required.

No archaeological remains were located in the old fields immediately west of the orchard on top of the Stawelklip.

The probability of locating significant surface archaeological sites during implementation of the proposed development is considered to be low to negligible.

Following archaeological recommendations are proposed.

A Rock Art Management Plan should be implemented at the site on top of Stawelklip.

The site should be documented in detail.

The graffiti should be removed by a trained rock art removal specialist.

A representative sample of archaeological material should be excavated from the site.

An archaeological display of excavated material could be mounted in the proposed conference centre.

In the interim, the paintings may be viewed, but should not be touched, or wet with any liquid. The deposit in the shelter should not be disturbed. The site should not be publicised until implementation of the management plan.

Proposed archaeological mitigation is seen as a positive impact of the planned Versveld Park resort development.

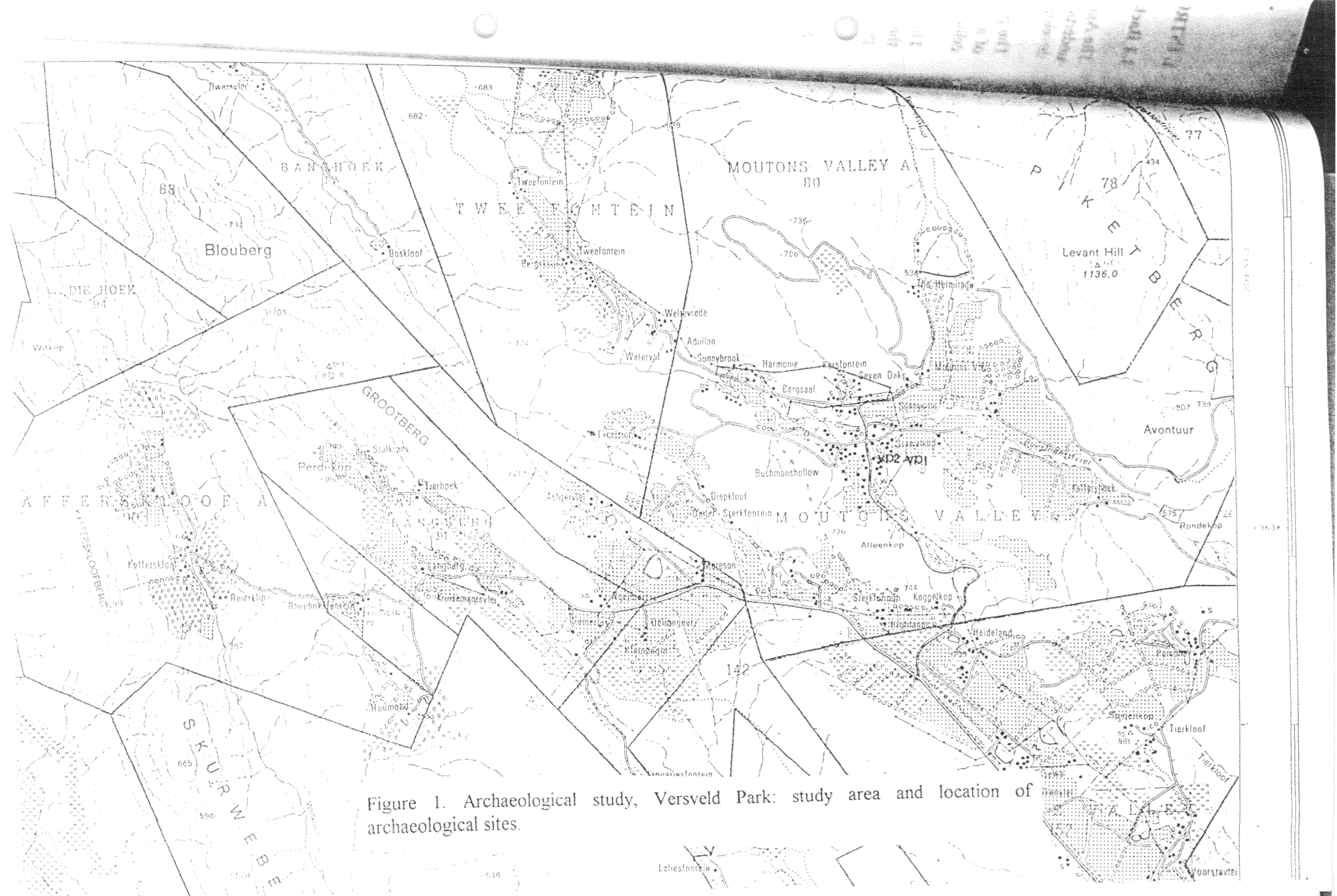


Figure 1. Archaeological study, Versveld Park: study area and location of archaeological sites.

STUDY APPROACH AND DOCUMENTATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

1.1 Method of survey.

The approach followed in the archaeological study entailed a detailed foot survey of the proposed site.

According to the records of the South African Museum Archaeological Data Recording Centre, one rock art site comprising a single faded handprint was recorded on Stawelklip in the early 1940s. We were not able to relocate this site, and it is possible that it occurs outside of the study area.

Seven more rock art sites occur on farms close to Stawelklip; two at Bushmans Hollow on the Farm Akerdraai, two at Rheeboksfontein, one at Tweefontien and three at Langberg. Rock art sites also occur at Noupoort Guest Farm above the Versveld Pass. The rocky and broken terrain of the area lends itself to the formation of overhangs and the probability of rock art sites being located. The Bushmans River and Bushmans Hollow, place names close to Stawelklip, suggests that San hunter-gatherers were recorded in the area during historic times. According to Dr Graham Avery of the South African Museum (pers. comm.), San hunter-gatherers were recorded at the bottom of the Piekernerskloof in the mid 1700s, not far from the town of Pikerberg.

Bushman rock paintings are found throughout southern African, and are a threatened non-renewable cultural and historical resource. The art is closely associated with the religious activities performed by Bushman shamans or medicine people, and records in a unique manner the history of southern Africa's indigenous people over at least the last 25 000 years. More recent interpretations link the paintings with Bushman mythology and to beliefs about the spirits of the dead. The art was still practised as recently as a century ago in the Natal Drakensberg. These traditions were lost in the process of colonialism.

The Versveld Park (VP) sites have been recorded using accepted archaeological recording techniques. These include a scientific description of the sites, mapping, Global Positioning System (GPS) co-ordinates, and photography where appropriate.

5. RESULTS OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

VP 1. GPS reading S 26° 06.334 E 31° 24.349

VP 1 is a sandstone overhang, partially obscured by large wild olive tress, located on top of the Stawelklip, immediately to the south of the old fields (Figure 1, Figure 2 & Figure 3). Facing north, and measuring about 25 metres across and about two-three metres deep, the paintings on the shelter wall comprise at least three indeterminate human figures, a snake/eel-like painting with a fishtail, and various indistinguishable images and smudges of paint (Figure 4). The paintings are in red ochre and are reasonably well preserved.

A number of other images in yellow/orange ochre to the right of Figure 4 on the shelter wall are also visible, but these are extremely faint and faded. Some of the paintings have been vandalised by charcoal lines. The words 'Jon was here', and an indeterminate date have been scrawled across some of the more faded images.

At least two indeterminate antelope/animals and two or three indeterminate human figures and some indeterminate images in red ochre occur on the ceiling of a darkened shallow overhang to the right of the main panel shelter. The images are relatively well preserved (Figure 5). Some salts percolating from the ceiling have damaged some of the paintings.

Two pieces of fine black burnished pottery and three quartz stone flakes were found on the floor of the overhang in what appears to be relatively shallow but extensive deposit. The area space of the site is quite large, but is not protected by the overhang. Stone flakes, a core, and one piece of pottery were found behind the shelter in a rain wash.

Significance of site: **high**

Suggested mitigation: **Secondary impacts such as increased visitation to the resort may impact negatively on the archaeological deposit and the paintings. The site should therefore be documented in detail and a representative sample of archaeological deposit should be excavated. The graffiti should be removed by a trained rock art removal specialist**

VP 2 No GPS reading taken

Some indistinguishable paintings were located in a south-facing shelter amongst a rocky outcrop about midway down the Staweklip (Figure 1), but these are very faded.

Significance of site: **low**

Suggested mitigation: **none required**

In addition, a handful of Middle Stone Age¹ tools were located in the fruit orchard, as well in the gravel road on top of the Staweklip. The material, however, was found in a severely disturbed context. As a result, no archaeological mitigation is required.

¹ a term referring to the period between 200 000 and 20 000 years ago.

IMPACT STATEMENT

proposed Versveld Park site comprises old agricultural fields, a fruit orchid and trees, and is already severely disturbed and altered. A gravel road has recently been cut through the southern portion of the site, below a prominent rocky ridge.

The impact of the proposed development on surface archaeological sites in the study area is considered to be low to negligible.

Although VP 1 will not be directly impacted by the proposed development, secondary impacts such as increased visitation to the area, may well impact negatively on the archaeological deposit and the paintings.

7 LEGISLATION

Rock art sites are protected by the National Monuments Act (Act No. 28 of 1969 as amended). It is an offence to disturb, remove or destroy from its original site, or excavate any such site without a permit from the National Monuments Council.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

With regard to the proposed Versveld Park resort development, the following archaeological recommendations are made.

- A Rock Art Management Plan should be implemented at VP 1.
- VP 1 should be documented. The paintings should be photographed and traced in detail.
- The graffiti should be removed by a trained rock art removal specialist.
- A representative sample of archaeological material should be excavated from the site.
- Excavated archaeological material could be used in a display in the proposed conference centre.

The recommendations should be seen as a positive impact which will 'add value' to the proposed development.

- In the interim, the paintings may be viewed, but should not be touched, or wet with any liquid. The deposit in the shelter should not be disturbed. The site should not be publicised until implementation of the management plan.

The above recommendations are subject to the approval of the National Monuments Plan Committee.