



COBUS DREYER

Pr. Archaeologist/Heritage Specialist

**P.O. Box 12910
BRANDHOF 9324
Bloemfontein
dreyerj@telkomsa.net**

**Tel: 051-444 1187
Fax: 051-444 4395
Cell: 083 357 7982**

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FIRST PHASE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HERITAGE ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS ON THE REMAINDER OF THE FARM WESSELHEIM 1793, BETHELEHEM

INVESTIGATION

The proposed residential development is located on the Remainder of the farm Wesselheim 1793, Bethlehem, Free State (Surveyor-General O.F.S. 1973). The site was visited and inspected on 7 June 2005 in the company of Cedric Nelson from Bokamoso Environmental Consultants, Bloemfontein.

The area was examined for possible archaeological and historical material to establish the potential impact on any cultural material that might be present. The Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is done in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), (25 of 1999) and under the Environmental Conservation Act, (73 of 1989).

LOCALITY

The site for the proposed residential development is located on the Remainder of the farm Wesselsheim 1793, Bethlehem. The property lies to the south of the town with a fair view on Loch Athlone. The entrance to the land is through the suburb of Jordania from Baartman Street and Kwagga Road (28°15'02"S. 028°19'18"E. Altitude 1665m).

The proposed development covers about 45 hectares and is planned for 200 house erven to accommodate 100 town houses. Most of the area identified for development borders on the existing residential area.

The land contains a thick cover of cultivated established pastures (Figs.1-3,14). On the southern portion there is a stand of Eucalyptus and Pine trees (Fig.8).

Two boreholes with windmills occur on the site. Borehole and windmill 1 is located beyond the Eucalyptus trees (28°15'17"S. 028°19'28"E. Altitude 1662m) with the second installation near the soil walled dam (28°15'20"S. 028°19'13"E. Altitude 1650m) (Figs.9&12).

There is a fresh water spring in the little stream bed near the dam (28°15'23"S. 028°19'15"E. Altitude 1652m) (Fig.15).

The soil dam wall indicate previous farming activities (28°15'20"S. 028°19'08"E. Altitude 1650m) (Fig.13).

FINDS

Several graves are located in the eastern corner of the farm. The scatter of graves could contain about six visible graves, but there could be more (28°15'21"S. 028°19'31"E. Altitude 1665m) (Figs.16-17).

No indication of archaeological or historical material was found in the inspected area and neither were any stone tools or ceramic ware found.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the graves should be avoided during the present developments. It could be included in the planning to leave this particular area out of the process.

No obvious reasons could be found to delay the commencement of further planning and development of the site.

After examination by the archaeologist, it is recommended that the proposed developments may proceed.

MITIGATION

Concerning the area for the proposed development, no mitigation measures are needed.

In the case of the graves, no development should take place in this particular area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Cedric Nelson from Bokamoso Environmental Consultants, Bloemfontein, for taking me to the site.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:

Fig.1 The northern corner of the site.



Fig.2. View from the northern corner facing east along the fence.



Fig.3 From the northern corner facing south along the fence. Wolhuterskop in the far right



Fig.4 The area contains a thick cover of cultivated established pasture.



Fig.5 Another part of the land facing east.



Fig.6 Facing south.



Fig.7 Facing west.



Fig.8 The stand of Eucalyptus and Pine trees in the south.



Fig.9 Windmill and borehole 1 beyond the trees.



Fig.10 Labourer's houses along the eastern boundary.



Fig.11 View along the eastern boundary.



Fig.12 Windmill and borehole 2 facing west.



Fig.13 The dam and windmill 2. The picture was taken facing east.



Fig.14 View from below facing north.



Fig.15 Fresh water spring.



Fig.16 Grave in the eastern corner of the site.



Fig.17 Another gravestone in the burial area.

LETTER TO MARY LESLIE SAHRA CAPE TOWN

Dear Mary

I have done this investigation at Wesselheim, Bethlehem, in June 2005. There were about six well kept graves to the one side along the border fence. I have recommended in my report that they should avoid the graves and plan their development elsewhere.

It seems now that they are planning to move the graves because I have been approached to attend the exhumation of one grave which is older than 75 years, as they put it. The exhumation and reburial will be done by AVBOB in Bethlehem. They were very clear that I should only quote for attending the exhumation of one grave and then be off again.

Now to be quite honest I am not really sure how to handle this case. What will my presence do to the removal of the one grave older than 75 years? To witness the work on behalf of SAHRA and then submit a report to say what I have seen makes sense. But just to be there only to legalise the exercise sounds ridiculous.

I remember that Johan Loock took me along once when Prof Petrus Nienaber took out the remains of two Voortrekkers at Vegkop near Heilbron. The poor blokes were killed during the famous battle Vegkop in 1836. The work had been

done by a local undertaker and it turned out to be the most horrific experience to witness how, in the most undignified way, they crushed every fragment of bone to pieces with their picks and shovels. (Eventually the total exercise turned out to be a fiasco, because on 10 October 1984 during the sacred reburial ceremony the heavens opened up and the rain poured down in torrents). Luckily I was not invited to attend this circus.

Could you please throw some light on this exhumation matter? I expect to get my call-up very soon now. They are probably only waiting for the consent of the Free State Premier.

As a matter of fact I was hoping for a case like this to do a proper controlled archaeological excavation, something like Maryna Steyn and Coen Nienaber did on the eastern Transvaal Highveld some time ago. I don't think that this is the exact case I was hoping for.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Cobus Dreyer

Vincent

I spoke to you about this case of the removal of graves at Bethlehem a short while ago.

I have tried to get guidance from Mary by sending her the email below, but without any response.

In the mean time I was summoned to Bethlehem on 31 July 2007 to attend the exhumation of the graves. At my arrival the site was covered by a dense stand of grass, which made it very difficult (actually impossible) to ascertain the number of graves, to plot their separate positions and to take photographs of the individual graves. I was not comfortable with the whole situation for the fact that I could not identify the graves properly. AVBOB head office in Pretoria claimed to have a letter of consent from the Free State Premier, but this could not be shown at the site.

The member of the SAPD who was also ordered to attend the diggings was very uneasy with the situation and advised the representative of AVBOB rather not to disturb anything before the site had been cleared and the necessary paperwork had been put into place. I fully agreed with that.

My advise to the lawyer in Bethlehem was to arrange his papers according to the act even if would mean to obtain a court order. He was convinced that such an act was totally unnecessary and that the paper work was sufficient.

On my return I had a talk to the manger of AVBOB in Bloem about the exhumation of graves and reburials. He spoke about the letter of consent by the Premier and also mentioned that he is going to do 22 reburials within the near future.

I realise that I am a small fish in a big bowl, but it is unacceptable to me that this whole happening, which could become a very emotional issue, lies in the hands of a political figure who has the power to decide on the permanent destruction of the graves of our beloved ones. We should pay more respect for the commemoration of our own ancestors and to the ancestors of other people. This is not a price we should be forced to pay only for the sake of development.

I don't have answers to all these matters, but I am looking for direction as to the way we should proceed.

I am trying hard to be the eyes and ears of SAHRA, but if we cannot come to an acceptable conclusion with which I can also feel comfortable, I am not going to participate in these matters any more.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

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