

# Archaeological Survey for the Xolobeni Area

For Martinick McNulty

By

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Martinick McNulty contracted the Institute for Cultural Resource Management (ICRM) to undertake an archaeological survey of an area that is being prospected for possible future mining. The affected area is located south of Port Edward, along the Wild Coast, between the Sikombe and Kwanyana Rivers. The prospecting area is located on the second dune cordon from the sea, and consists of probable Pleistocene Dunes. Several of the areas in the dunes have eroded, resulting in open deflation hollows. The survey was a cursory survey to locate potential areas of archaeological sensitivity, and to have a general understanding of the archaeology of the area. If mining is to proceed, a more in-depth survey will be required.

### **Archaeological sites**

I noted many artefacts during the survey. There is a small scatter of pottery concentrated mostly on the northern parts of the affected area. These sherds were in secondary context, however, more may occur in the vegetated areas. One sherd had the characteristic lip impressions associated with the Late Iron Age.

A shell midden was observed at the interface between the first and second dune cordon. This midden has been partially damaged by the existing road to the beach. The shell midden extends on either side of the road. I observed one thin-walled sherd on the surface of the midden. This indicates that the site dates to the Late Iron Age or Historical Period.

The main artefact concentration is an extensive and apparent continuous scatter of stone tools that occur throughout the affected area. The stone tools include hand-axes, cleavers, and various types of cores, flakes, points, and blades. The hand-axes and cleavers date to the Early Stone Age and occur infrequently. The rest of the stone tools are associated with the Middle Stone Age, and they are representative of at least two Phases within the Middle Stone Age (MSA). The more definitive tools are associated with the Howiesion's Poort Industry. These have prepared, or faceted platforms, and/or evidence of the Levallois technique. This latter technique has a characteristic wide scar on the dorsal surface, I also observed several points and one unifacial point – these are associated with spear points. In addition to the above tools, a very high concentration of beach pebbles, quartz, and shale have been used for making these tools.

The MSA aspect of the survey is interesting, as there are two possible interpretations to the function of the site. Either the site is a “quarry” area where the people came to these dunes/deflations to utilise the existing beach pebbles that had eroded. Alternatively, the people had brought in the beach pebbles from nearby sources and knapped the stone tools within the dunes, and the deflation hollows. The interpretation of occurrence of beach pebbles in the dune system is dependent on the geological interpretation of the site. Either there was an existing ancient beach horizon that has eroded through time (thus favouring the “quarry” interpretation), or the beach pebbles are a result of past human activity.

### **Significance**

The archaeological sites that I observed of low-medium archaeological significance. The pottery sherds are too infrequent to suggest a major occupation in the areas where they were observed.

The MSA component is also of low archaeological significance. First, the assemblages are in a lag deposit. This means that many millennia have been deflated onto the same horizon, hence the ESA and two MSA assemblages. I did not observe any significant, or unique, tools in the deflations, nor any stratified archaeological deposits. The ESA and MSA occur throughout southern Africa, and it is only when they are in a primary context that they can have any significant meaning.

### **Current and Future Management**

The archaeological survey should have been undertaken before any prospecting in order to have determined the archaeological significance of the area. Having said this, the current prospecting has not damaged archaeological sites. The Stone Age sites are already in a secondary context, and thus any movement of artefacts would not change the general interpretation of the site. It is unlikely that the auger will have an impact on the sites as well - the diameter of the auger is too small.

A full archaeological survey will need to be undertaken if mining occurs in the future. Mitigation for the ESA and MSA assemblages would also be required. These sample areas should be mapped and quantified.