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RE: LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION  
Shell midden at Kidd's Beach Golfing Estate, Kidd's Beach, East London, Eastern Cape

o INTRODUCTION

The Phase 1 Archaeological Impact Assessment (AIA) for the Kidd's Beach Golfing Estate (Portions of Farms 1075, 1076, 1077, 1078, 1079 & 1086), Kidd's Beach, East London, Eastern Cape, prepared by ArchaeoMaps Archaeological Consultancy (dated 2008-12-03) was submitted to SAHRA. The report included heritage related information as defined and protected by the National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999 (NHRA 1999), relating to graves probably pre-dating and post-dating 60 years of age, directly associated with the contemporary farm workers residential area / village.

Subsequent to submission of the Phase 1 AIA palaeontologist Rob Guess reported on a shell midden located during fieldwork for the development in his Palaeontological Impact Assessment (PIA) report entitled 'Palaeontological Impact Assessment for Kidd's Beach Golfing Estate & Portions of Farms 1078 & 1079, Kidd's Beach'. He briefly described the site as 'About 200m north of the minor road, in the westerly bank of the river, a midden was found cut through by the river bank. It contained similar portions of *Achatina* land snails and marine shells (including large periwinkles, limpets, mussels and whelks), as well as a charcoal layer, embedded in river sand, approximately 2m below the current river terrace surface.'

In response to the described locality of the midden in the PIA report SAHRA [E-mail comm.: A. Jerardino (SAHRA) & C. v/d Riet (BESC)] suggested that due to the locality of the midden, remains may be related to the farm workers village implying a Contemporary origin and not necessarily a Pre-colonial or 'Strandloper' association as suggested by Guess. However, SAHRA requested that the midden be assessed by an archaeologist. The site inspection was done on 2009-04-17. Subsequent to the assessment SAHRA [Telephonic comm.: A Jerardino (SAHRA) & K. van Ryneveld (ArchaeoMaps)] indicated that the site report should:

1. Place the site in context with other identified midden material in the greater East London area by means of consultation with the archaeology database of the Albany Museum, Grahamstown;
2. Include information on the formal identification of shells; and
3. Describe heritage management options including conservation and mitigation in line with the proposed development.

o THE SITE INSPECTION

The site inspection was conducted on 2009-04-17 by C. v/d Riet (BESC) and K. van Ryneveld (ArchaeoMaps). The site is located at S33°08'56.8"; E27°40'30.1" and situated approximately 2m below the Mlele riverbank within the western section of the river at a bend in the river and an intersection with the drainage line bypassing the present day workers village. The site measures approximately 0.9m (90cm) in horizontal *in situ* section with a maximum vertical depth not exceeding 0.25m (25cm) and radically declining towards the edges of the exposed section.

The deposit comprises primarily of broken shells; no associated Contemporary or Pre-colonial artefacts were found in association with the shells. The absence of artefacts in the exposed horizontal section is not interpreted as definite evidence of their *in situ* absence. The exposed horizontal section yielded a well defined anthropic member comprising of medium to high quantities of broken shells. *In situ* width of the deposit is unknown, but not expected to be great; should the anthropic member constitute a long narrow site, width is not expected to be double that of the exposed horizontal section in other words not exceeding 1.8m (180cm), inferred to be a highly unlikely site size estimate based on the rapid decline of the anthropic member towards its edges in the exposed horizontal section. Rather the site can be expected to not exceed in width the dimension of the exposed horizontal section, thus  $\leq 0.9 \times 0.9\text{m}$  (smaller or equal to 90x90cm).

Charcoal is present, in scattered quantities across the midden layer (and in the non anthropic deposit overlying the midden material). Charcoal was not found in lensed form or associated with ash layers. Dense vegetation on the riverbank resulted in a green root system penetrating into the shell midden. The green root system overlies a burnt root layer indicative of periodic burning that may explain the scattered presence of charcoal within the anthropic layer albeit not excluding the possibility that some charcoal may be directly associated with the cultural member. It however emphasises the fact that charcoal data will be mixed / disturbed for purposes of site dating.



**Figure 1:** Locality of the shell midden at the proposed Kidd's Beach Golfing Estate, Kidd's Beach, East London

Due to the absence of associated artefacts neither a Contemporary nor Pre-historic association can at present be ascribed to the site:

1. The possibility of a Contemporary association exists, based on proximity to the workers village and associated with debris deposits along the drainage line. The contemporary association is challenged by the short timeframe that would have allowed the approximate 2m soil deposit overlying the midden to accumulate.
2. A Pre-colonial association cannot be excluded; not all shell middens contain (high quantities of related) artefactual material. The presence thereof within a shell midden may more than often be ascribed to specialist activity areas. Considering the depth of the deposit below the surface a Pre-colonial association may be more applicable.
3. In addition the possibility of a natural origin of the deposit associated with higher sea levels or periodic storms having resulted in a 'quasi estuary' situation along the drainage line cannot be excluded.



**Figure 2:** General view of the shell midden [courtesy BESC]



**Figure 3:** Close-up of the deposit (note the green root system overlying a burn root system) [courtesy BESC]



**Figure 4:** Close up of the relatively well defined shell midden member [courtesy BESC]



**Figure 5:** Shell samples from the midden [courtesy BESC]

Consultation with Dr. Johan Binneman (Head of Department: Archaeology, Albany Museum, Grahamstown) to access the Albany Museum's database in order to spatially position the site alongside other known cultural heritage resources in the greater East London area unfortunately proved problematic. Dr. Binneman confirmed that time and staff constraints would not allow assistance with a database search due to museum obligations, deadlines and scheduled fieldwork of his Department. He however stated that the museum database does have sites located in the greater East London area but could not confirm them as shell middens. In his opinion shell middens could well be expected along the beach, in riverbed deposits (such as the Kidd's Beach midden) and along smaller drainage lines.

Photographic documentation of shells from the midden was submitted to Dr. Dai Herbert (Chief Director of the Mollusca Section, Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg). Identification results have not as yet been received but will be forwarded to SAHRA in due time.

- o SAHRA SITE SIGNIFICANCE ASSESSMENT

The probable absence of related artefactual material, expected small site size and inferred problems with dating of the site are all aspects that would reduce the site's significance. Despite the fact that the site could not be spatially plotted in context with other midden and related cultural sites the expected low density of midden deposits in the greater East London area in turn serve to increase the significance of the find. The **Kidd's Beach Midden** is assigned a SAHRA **Low Significance** and **Generally Protected C** Field Rating, implying that the site be either conserved or mitigated.

- o RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with the SAHRA recommendation to submit heritage management options concerning the site the 2 options of conservation and mitigation are briefly discussed:

1. Conservation:

**The Kidd's Beach Midden will be conserved by the proposed Kidd's Beach Golfing Estate.** Conservation is in accordance both with the:

- o Current spatial development layout of the proposed development; and
- o Environmental requirements relating to floodline restrictions in accordance with which the Mlele River will form an approximate 80-100m conservation corridor throughout the development.

With regards to Conservation as preferred heritage management option it is recommended that the site be conserved *in situ*, without a formal fence demarcating the site. The site is located within the Mlele River; fencing would be both impractical and intrusive on the natural environment.

*In situ* conservation may have a negative impact on the site: Natural agents (particularly water erosion) are at present the most threatening aspect to site and may, in time, result in total site destruction.

2. Mitigation:

Should mitigation be the SAHRA preferred heritage management option for the Kidd's Beach Midden the following aspects in terms of Phase 2 rescue excavations are highlighted:

- o The probable absence of related artefactual material and expected small site size may not result in an excavated sample sizeable enough to clearly identify the site.
- o The known burnt root system identified at the site will affect dating samples; dating of the deposit is not an expected possibility.
- o Excavation will necessitate cutting back of the section which will impact on settled vegetation (large indigenous trees) on the banks of the river (on top of the approximate 2m deposit overlying the site): Total site excavation may not be possible.
- o The site is located at a bend in the river and an intersection with a drainage line; excavation and backfilling can be expected to result in increased erosion.

A Phase 2 Archaeological Mitigation (AM) project can either include total excavation (the site being mitigated in its entirety) or sample excavation (mitigation of a sample of the site with the remainder either being destroyed under a SAHRA Site Destruction Permit *in lieu* of the development or conserved for purposes of future research).

Total excavation of the site may not be possible for reasons as explained above. In addition conservation of a portion of the site / section for future sampling may be advantageous, particularly considering that the site is not directly threatened by the development, however taken cognisance of natural destructive agents. On the other hand

considering sample excavation versus the expected small site size; a too small recovered assemblage may well yield too little material for site identification and interpretation.

I trust SAHRA will consider the above heritage management options and expected related issues thereto. It is recommended that the developer adheres to the preferred SAHRA heritage management option related to the Kidd's Beach Midden.

Yours sincerely,

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