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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF SLAAIHOEK  
BARBERTON**

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Johannesburg**

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# ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF SLAAIHOEK, BARBERTON

## SYNOPSIS

Five sites were located within the project area, ranging from Iron Age stone-walled kraals and engravings to historic farm remains and a farm cemetery. The farm cemetery needs to be avoided, as well as one stone-walled cluster. The Iron Age rock engravings require special attention.

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# ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF SLAAIHOEK, BARBERTON

## INTRODUCTION

ANGLOVAAL has recently begun the NICO Project, a new mining venture on Slaaihoek in the Barberton District of the Transvaal. To comply with Mining, Environmental and Monuments legislation, ANGLOVAAL contracted Steffen, Robertson and Kirsten (SRK) to compile the Environmental Management Proposal Report. SRK in turn commissioned Archaeological Resources Management (ARM) to conduct an archaeological survey.

ARM staff attended the project initiation meeting at SRK on March 8th, and then visited the project area on April 8th. Mr C Knoetze, the mine manager, showed us the endangered areas. All sites were first marked on the 1:17 000 aerial photographs supplied by SRK and then transferred to a 1:2 500 map also supplied and returned to SRK. At the end of the day, we showed Mr Knoetze the important places.

## SURVEY RESULTS

**Stone Age.** The local surface rock was a shale largely unsuitable for making stone tools. We only found two stone cores, both in secondary contexts next to the main road. They probably date to the Oakhurst phase ( $\pm$  12 000 to 7 000 years ago) of the Later Stone Age.

**Iron Age.** The Late Iron Age was better represented. Two stone-walled kraals (Site 1) were found together at the upper end of the project area, near the

proposed slimes dam. They were both about 25m in diameter with entrances facing uphill. Presumably, huts were built some 15 to 20m away on the slopes overlooking the kraals, but afforestation had obscured any evidence there may have been.

Upslope from the kraals, near the peg marked 5200N/4750E, stood a cluster of dolerite boulders, three with Iron Age engravings (Site 1B). The engravings were mostly irregular circles representing cattle kraals. In one case double lines, representing cattle tracks, crisscrossed the boulder and connected the circles (Fig. 1).

Another set of stone-walled kraals (Site 2) occurred against the ridge next to the Gladdespruit, just south of the proposed plant. Apparently, there were three kraals here, but some of the walling was damaged by afforestation. At least one circle, however, was still in good condition.

Both stone-walled clusters can be identified as Swazi homesteads, and they probably date to between AD 1750 and 1850.

**Historic.** Some time more recently, European prospectors dug into the saddle of the ridge (Site 3) about 100m east of Site 2. They left a tall pile of cobbles inside a semicircular excavation.

Another 300m further east along the ridge stood the remains of a kraal about 25m in diameter. One portion was still about 1.5m high and associated with prickly pear plants. Elsewhere portions of the wall bore fence posts, and the kraal probably dates to when Slaaihoek was a working farm.

**Cemetery.** About 100m west of the recent kraal, against the ridge, was a farm cemetery (Site 5). About 15 graves were marked by stone piles and a few headstones. One headstone bore the name Mr Msiti, Badklang, Nkabinde and the



Figure 1. Iron Age rock engravings at Site 1B.

date 1.4.1932. Six children had been buried a short distance away from the main cemetery, bringing the total to about 21.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the development plan, the cemetery is not in any present danger. Mine personnel should nevertheless note its location and avoid any disturbance. The Stone Age material and historic sites are of no consequence.

Some of the Iron Age remains, on the other hand, require mitigation. The walls at Site 1 will probably be destroyed by the slimes dam. They have already been partially damaged by afforestation and other activity, and they are of less value than Site 2. Consequently, Site 2 should be protected from any future development but not Site 1.

The Iron Age engravings at Site 1B are not as common as the kraals, and are definitely worthy of mitigation. The mine manager agreed to protect them. At present these engravings lie outside the area designated for the slimes dam. If, however, they become endangered, they should be traced, and the extensively engraved boulder should be removed and put in an appropriate institution.

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