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**LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION FOR THE EXEMPTION FROM A  
FIRST PHASE ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HERITAGE  
INVESTIGATION OF THE PROPOSED BORROW PIT  
DEVELOPMENTS AT LERATONG 835,  
THABA NCHU, FREE STATE**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Raubex Construction, Free State Region, is planning the development of new borrow pit sites at the farm Leratong 835 in the district of Thaba Nchu, Free State.

Several existing borrow pits, which have extensively been worked over time, are located on dolerite outcrops in the specific area along the N8 main road.

We are aware of Anglo-Boer War activities at Boesmanskop, Springhaansnek, the waterworks at the Modder River and several koppies along the N8 road to Thaba Nchu and Ladybrand. Two fired British, 303-inch calibre rifle cartridge cases dating from the Anglo-Boer War were found at a borrow pit near the road.

No archaeological, cultural or any other historical remains were found.

The new developments will have no impact on the cultural heritage and historical environment of the area.

I recommend that the proposed new developments be exempted from a full Phase I heritage report.

Further planning of the proposed project may continue, and no mitigation measures will be needed.

## **INTRODUCTION & DESCRIPTION**

Greenmined Environmental Consultants, Somerset West, on behalf of the applicant, Raubex Construction Free State, commissioned the archaeological and heritage assessment of the extension of the borrow pit sites at the farm Leratong 835, along the N8 main road in the district of Thaba Nchu, Free State.

### **Scope and Limitations**

The investigation provided the opportunity to examine several existing borrow pits on the farm Leratong 835, along the N8 main road to Thaba Nchu. The borrow pits are located on dolerite and shale outcrops. According to Dr J.C. Loock, geologist and Anglo-Boer War expert from Bloemfontein, the dolerite deposits in this area are mixed and complicated and therefore, very difficult to decipher in geological terms.

No limitations were experienced during site visit.

### **Methodology**

1. Standard archaeological survey and recording methods were applied.
2. A survey of the literature was done to obtain information about the history, archaeology and heritage back ground of the area.
3. The sites were inspected on foot.
4. The layout of the areas were plotted by GPS and transferred to Google Earth.
5. Surroundings and features were recorded on camera.

## **INVESTIGATION**

The development of several existing borrow pits is planned on the farm Leratong 835, along the N8 main road in the district of Thaba Nchu, Free State. No layout maps were provided by the consultants for the proposed borrow pits.

The study aims to locate and evaluate the significance of heritage sites, archaeological material, manmade structures older than 60 years, and sites associated with oral histories and graves that might be affected by the proposed developments. Planted and self-sown trees and other types of vegetation characterize a major part of the historical environment of human settlements in villages and towns, on farmyards or even deserted places in the open veld. These features should be recognised and taken into consideration during any cultural or historical investigation.

The sites were examined for possible archaeological and historical remains and it was intended to establish the potential impact on any cultural material that might be found. The Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is done in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), (25 of 1999) and under the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act. 108 of 1998).

Sonette Smit from Greenmined Environmental Consultants, Somerset West, gave directions to the site and the site visit was done on 24 November 2013.

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND**

The archaeological environment of the Free State Province is rich and diverse, representing a long time span during the human past. Certain Later Iron Age sites elsewhere on the southern high veld have produced important archaeological information (Maggs 1976, Mason 1962, 1986, Evers 1988). These Iron Age sites date between 1660 AD and 1810 AD. The Later Iron Age phase brought people who cultivated crops, kept livestock, produced an abundance of pottery in a variety of shapes and sizes and smelted metals. Extensive stone walled enclosures characterise their permanent settlements. These living places are known from the Batlokwa settlements at Nkwe near Verkykerskop north of Harrismith, the prominent Sotho/Tswana settlements in the Vredefort Dome, Doringberg (Maphororong) near Ventersburg, Viervoet (Tihela) at Clocolan, Biddulphsberg (Kurutlele) at Senekal and Marabeng near Ficksburg. A number of Taaibos Korana and other Griqua groups, remnants of the Later Stone Age peoples, managed to survive the assimilation by Sotho/Tswana tribes in the region.

Dramatic climate changes during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in a rapid population growth along the east coast of South Africa. Increased pressure on natural resources, together with the control of trade caused the emergence of dominant leaders in the area. Subsequent power struggles resulted in a period of instability in the central parts of Southern Africa. This period of strife or wars of devastation, known as “difaqane” (Sotho/Tswana) or “Mfecane” (Nguni), affected many of the Black tribes in the interior. Attacks from east of the escarpment initiated by the AmaZulu impis of Chaka in about 1822, were sustained by the AmaNdebele of Mzilikazi and the AmaNgwane of Matiwane into the Free State, thus uprooting among others, the Batlokwa of Sekonyela and Mantatise and various smaller Sotho/Tswana tribes. On their turn, the Batlokwa drove off the Bafokeng of Sebetoane from Kurutlele (Biddulphsberg) near Senekal, who, in their effort to escape the pursuit by Mzilikazi’s AmaNdebele forces, eventually landed up in the Caprivi (Smith 1956, Dreyer & Kilby 2003). This period of unrest directly affected the peoples of the Free State, Northern Cape, Northwest Province and the southern parts of the land across the Vaal River, resulting in the displacement of scores of tribesmen, women and children. The stronger tribal

groups, such as the AmaNdebele of Mzilikazi, assimilated many of these refugees.

Early European missionaries and travellers ventured into the interior of the country during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Dreyer 2001). The Rev James Archbell established the missionary at Thaba Nchu by 1834, while several of the marauding hordes affected the lives of the Batswana people living at Dithakong near the mission station of Robert and Mary Moffat near Kuruman.

Ancient Batswana tribes take their 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century roots back to the Setlagole area and in the Delareyville, Schweizer Reneke and Mafikeng districts of the North West Province (Bergh & Bergh 1984).

Despite the placing of Thaba Nchu within this potentially rich cultural region, Maggs' (1976) archaeological survey is limited to the north of the 30°S line, excluding the Bloemfontein, Thaba Nchu and Ladybrand areas. Heritage Impact Assessments (HIA) near Thaba Nchu and Thaba Nchu Mountain (Dreyer 2006), produced a variety of material of cultural and historical significance. In the immediate surroundings of Thaba Nchu, the research shows a lack of Later Iron Age sites (Dreyer 2005, 2008, 2009).

## **THE BAROLONG OF THABA NCHU**

Barolong is a tribal name for a particular group of Batswana people from the North West Province of South Africa. They live mainly in Mafikeng, Lotlhakane and in Thaba Nchu. The reason for this group of Batswana people at Thaba Nchu in the centre of a predominantly Basotho area lies in the troubled history of the Batswana during and after the turmoil of the difaqane wars of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Different Tswana groups share the same origins and have strong cultural and linguistic similarities. Indications are that the Batswana peoples moved into their present territories by the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Extensive stone ruins on the southern Highveld dating from mid 17<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century are connected to these Sotho/Tswana migrants.

According to lore, Chief Morolong is accepted as the founder of the Barolong tribe. He was born near Zeerust on the Botswana border in about the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century. Sotho/Tswana lineages honour certain totems i.e. *tshipi* (iron) and *noto* (hammer), which imply that they were ironworkers and blacksmiths in bygone days.

Before 1760, the Rolong people formed a political unit under their great chief Tau. At his death, the tribe split into four main groups under the sons of Tau. Today the largest group is those of Ratshidi living at Mafikeng. People of Ratlou based mainly south west of Mafikeng, are still considered as the senior group.

The Rapulana live mainly south east of Mafikeng, while the Seleka or Moroka group is stationed at Thaba Nchu in the Free State.

Moroka II, chief of the Boo-Seleka (Thaba Nchu) section of the Barolong tribe, migrated here in 1833. The Wesleyan Missionary, Samuel Broadbent, first mentioned the Seleka Rolong in 1823. They lived at Thabeng under their Chief Sefunelo. Here they were dislodged by the Baphuting and moved to Makwassie, where the missionaries joined them. The following year the Bataung of Moletsane drove them out, and they joined the Tshidi and Ratlou sections of Barolong at Phitshane. At some stage, they returned to Makwassie, but left again before Mzilikazi in 1827, to settle at Platberg-on-Vaal near Warrenton, where Moroka succeeded his father Sefunelo. On their turn, the Tshidi and Ratlou sections, fleeing from Mzilikazi's AmaNdebele hordes, joined Moroka at Platberg. The ensuing shortage of water and grazing forced Moroka to reposition again. In May 1833, an exploration party, consisting of the missionaries and representatives of the different Rolong chiefs and of the Griqua and the Kora, investigated the area around the Modder, Caledon and Riet Rivers. Moshoeshe of the Basotho and Sekonyela of the Batlokwa allowed the Barolong to settle at Thaba Nchu, while the Coloured communities obtained permission to occupy the area further east at Thaba Patchoa and at Platberg mission station (*Makudukameng*) in the Ladybrand district. The Seleka Rolong of Moroka settled at Thaba Nchu in December 1833. The Tshidi Rolong under Tawana and the Boo-Ratlou under Gontse accompanied the Seleka of Moroka to Thaba Nchu. Shortly after this, the Barapulana under Matlaba joined them, followed by the Griqua of Barend Barends, Kora of Jan Kaptein and the "Newlanders" of Piet Baadjies, who settled to the east of Thaba Nchu.

The Ratshidi, Ratlou and Rapulana Rolong groups, did not stay long at Thaba Nchu. Soon after Mzilikazi and his AmaNdebele was driven north by the Voortrekkers in 1841, the Barolong started to move back to the old country north of the Vaal River. Later the Griqua moved away to Kokstad, while the "Newlanders" remained at Thaba Patchoa, where their descendants still live today. Disputes over succession had split the main tribe, but the different Barolong groups still recognised their relationship with each other and sought protection in times of trouble.

Moroka and the Barolong at Thaba Nchu accepted the Voortrekkers (early European migrants) as their allies. The first Voortrekkers to stay here on their northward journeys were Louis Triegardt and Lang Hans van Rensburg. Thaba Nchu subsequently became a safe assembly place for other Voortrekker leaders such as Hendrik Potgieter, Piet Uys and Gerrit Maritz. After the Potgieter trek was attacked and plundered at Vegkop by the AmaNdebele of Mzilikazi, Moroka assisted them with draught oxen and a generous provision of supplies. The Boer party was also assisted in returning to a refugee camp at Thaba Nchu, named "Moroka's Hoek". The Boer leaders held a war council with the Barolong chiefs, Moroka and Tauana, where a Boer-Barolong-Griqua allegiance was formed to

drive out Mzilikazi and his AmaNdebele (Stalz 1971, Cope 1977, Inskeep 1978, Lye & Murray 1980, Bishop 1989, Murray 1992, Kinsman 1995).

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **ANGLO-BOER WAR (1899-1902)**

The incident at Sannaspos took place on 31 March 1900. The Anglo-Boer War saw five months into action and the battles of Magersfontein and Paardeberg were history. Bloemfontein was occupied on 13 March 1900, leaving the way open for Lord Roberts to prepare for the onslaught on Pretoria. The Boer forces were already war-weary after the fall of Bloemfontein and the burghers were allowed leave of commando duties until 25 March 1900.

Between 15 to 28 March 1900, nearly 40 000 British troops gathered around Bloemfontein, a situation which placed a further impact on the already overloaded infrastructure in the town. A young British officer with about 30 men was deployed to protect and guard the water pump station on the Modder River 34km east of Bloemfontein along the road to Thaba Nchu (Figs.13-17). At Boesmanskop, about 14km west of the pump station, a lookout post and heliograph station manned by a strong British force occupied the summit.

On 25 March 1900, Gen Christiaan de Wet led his newly assembled commando to Brandfort. As a first mission, he decided to attack and occupy the pump station on the Modder River to disrupt the water supply to Bloemfontein. On the evening of 28 March 1900, Gen De Wet left Brandfort and despite all the precautionary measures by the British military forces, De Wet and his men made straight for the waterworks on the Modder River. While riding by night and lying up by day, his scouts watched every movement of the British columns. On the evening of 30 March 1900, De Wet and his commando bivouacked some distance north of the waterworks. He ordered the burghers into positions north east and east of the Modder River, ready for an attack at dawn. By 04:00, De Wet crossed the Modder River with 400 men and occupied the drift in the natural ditch of the Koornspruit. The drift on the old wavy road at the base of the wide plain was out of sight from any of the lookout posts set up by the British forces.

### **THE BATTLE OF SANNASPOS**

Waiting at the Koornspruit drift, Gen De Wet gave orders that gunfire should wait until he fired the first shot. This was not to be. At about 05:00, Maj. Gen H.E. Colville was preparing to move his troops from a camp near Bloemfontein towards Boesmanskop.

At about the same time, east of the waterworks, Gen Broadwood was planning his march to Bloemfontein. Suddenly the peace in camp was disturbed by exploding shells from Piet de Wet's guns at their artillery position at Likatlong. This and rapidly increasing fire from the east, forced Broadwood to advance to Klipkraal opposite the Koornspruit. Broadwood's baggage wagon train retained some order and moved off with two gun batteries as their escort, with the main force following suit. Soon after 07:00, the baggage wagons reached Koornspruit. De Wet and his men were ready for the ambush. As each wagon entered the drift, an armed Burgher jumped up next to the driver. Recognising the muzzle of the loaded Boer Mauzer rifle, the bewildered driver politely drove on as if nothing had happened. A congestion of wagons soon developed at the drift and soldiers sent forward to sort out the hold-up, were instantly "hands-upped" and disarmed. In this confusion, one British trooper was able to withdraw unnoticed and to raise the alarm. Broadwood reacted swiftly, but fearing that the Boers also took Boesmanskop, he ordered a general retreat to Bloemfontein.

By 11:00, De Wet and his force was rapidly evacuating the Koornspruit drift, taking with them booty of seven guns, 96 wagons with rations and ammunition and a column of about 480 prisoners (Breytenbach 1987, Loock 1996, Pakenham 1997, Wessels 2002).

### **SPRINGHAANSNEK**

Springhaansnek is a pass about 20km south east of Thaba Nchu on the road to Ladybrand. In an effort to prevent Gen De Wet and his commando from breaking north, a line of British fortifications extended westwards from Thaba Patchoa to beyond Springhaansnek. On 14 December 1900, Commandant A.M. Prinsloo with the Bethlehem commando crossed the blockhouse line near Thaba Patchoa. In their attempt to pass through, heavy fire drove De Wet's advance guard back. The column had to redirect and in a clever manoeuvre, the commando, consisting of about 3000 burghers, raced through Springhaansnek, with the British forces too late to intervene (Jones & Jones 1999).

### **LOCALITY**

Thaba Nchu is located about 64km east of Bloemfontein and used to be part of a rural settlement for the Setswana-speaking peoples of the area.

In the present investigation the farm Liefdefontein 320 along the N8, Bloemfontein to Thaba Nchu road has now become known as Leratong 835.

The following GPS co-ordinates were taken (Cape scale) (2926BA) (Surveyor-General 1973): (Map 5).

<b>A</b>	29°10'47"S. 026°37'40"E. Altitude 1387m (Figs.1-3).
<b>B</b>	29°10'27"S. 026°36'58"E. Altitude 1379m (Figs.4&5).
<b>C</b>	29°10'22"S. 026°36'49"E. Altitude 1475m (Fig.6).
<b>D</b>	29°10'15"S. 026°36'27"E. Altitude 1368m (Fig.7&8).
<b>E</b>	29°10'30"S. 026°36'32"E. Altitude 1369m (Figs.10-12).

## RESULTS

### FINDS

The borrow pits indicate that extensive and almost careless mining operations took place along the N8 in former years. The pits are crudely excavated and poorly rehabilitated. The whole area to the west of Thaba Nchu seems to be part of a rapidly deteriorating zone. Most of the farms are left unoccupied. Labourers manage the farms and tend to the livestock, while maintaining small vegetable gardens. Farmhouses and outbuildings show evidence of neglect and poor maintenance. At the farm Vadersgift for instance, the owners used to run a renowned and flourishing abattoir and butchery, from where they supplied fresh meat to consumers in Bloemfontein and Ladybrand environs. This enterprise is no longer functioning anymore and the buildings are deserted.

Two fired British ,303-inch calibre magazine rifle cartridge cases were found on the outskirts of the borrow pit at Point D (Map 5). One cartridge case is damaged at the rim, but the head stamp of the second specimen indicates an Anglo-Boer War origin (Fig.9):

**R**↗**L** = Factory code, Royal Laboratories, Woolwich, UK,  
**C** = Cordite,  
 Mark II. (Loock 2003).

No indication of archaeological or any other historical material was found at the sites.

### IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The potential impact by new borrow pit mining developments on the heritage resources of the sites are of minor significance and no mitigation measures will be needed.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Several existing borrow pits are located in the specific area along the N8 main road. All these borrow pits are placed on dolerite outcrops and have extensively been worked over time. I therefore see no justification for the opening of a new borrow pit. I recommend that the material should be taken from another existing borrow pit along the N8, which is in any case closer to the road.

If this proposal is acceptable to the developers, there is no further reason to delay the planning of the developments at the borrow pit sites along the N8.

I recommend that the proposed extensions to the existing borrow pits should be exempted from a full Phase I report and that the planning of the proposed developments may proceed.

## **MITIGATION**

No mitigation measures will be required.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Sonette Smit from Greenmined Environmental Consultants, Somerset West, gave directions to the sites. Dr J.C. Loock (HC), geologist and Anglo-Boer War expert from Bloemfontein, commented on the geology of the area and on the origin of the cartridge cases.

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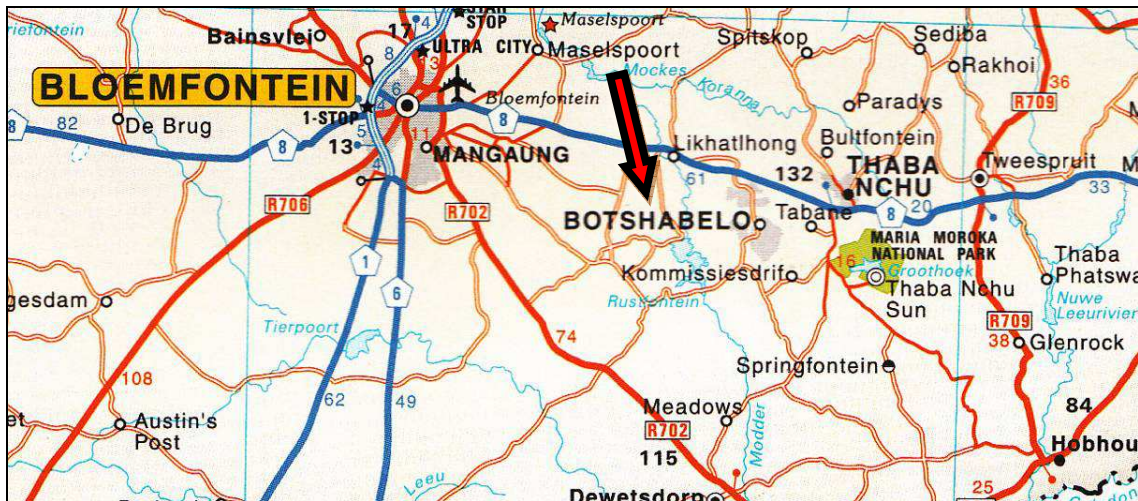
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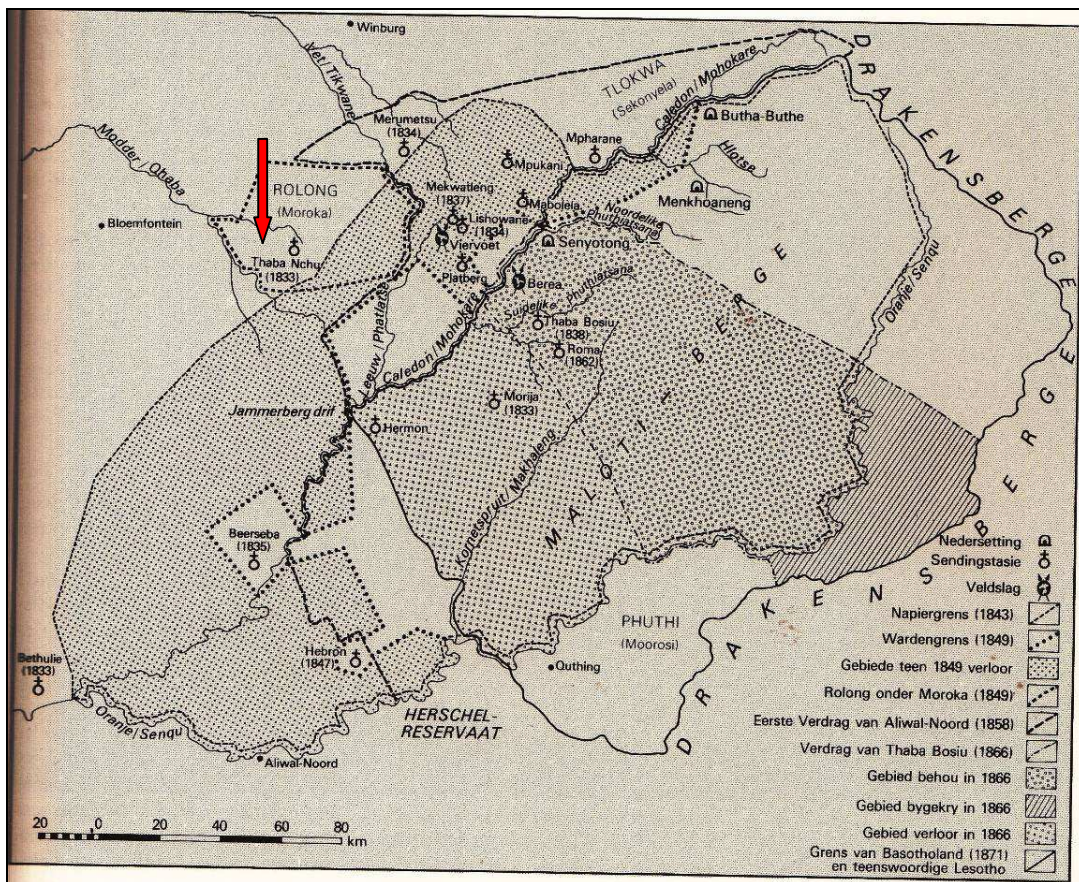
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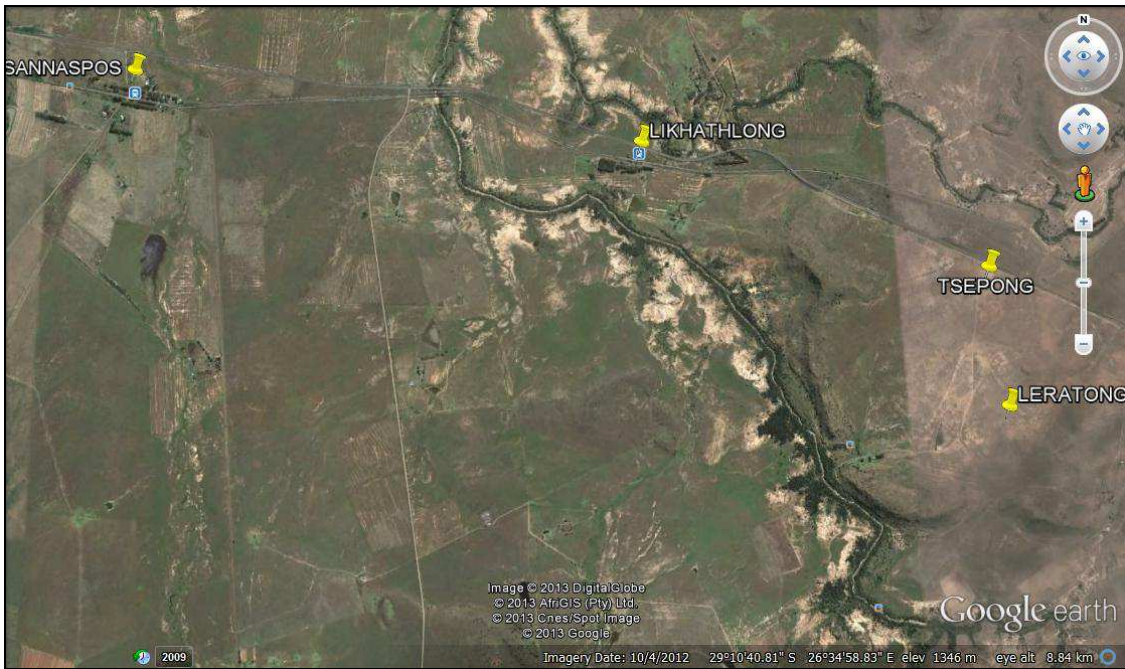
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



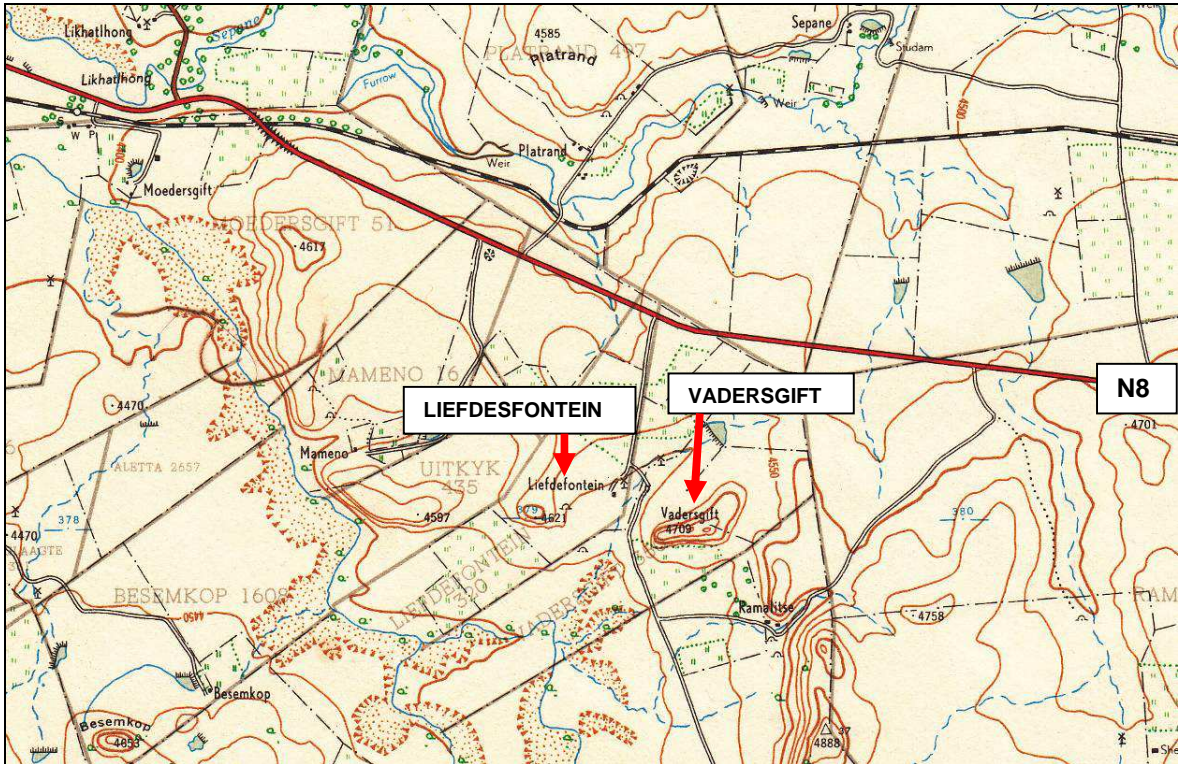
Map 1 Locality of Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu, Free State.



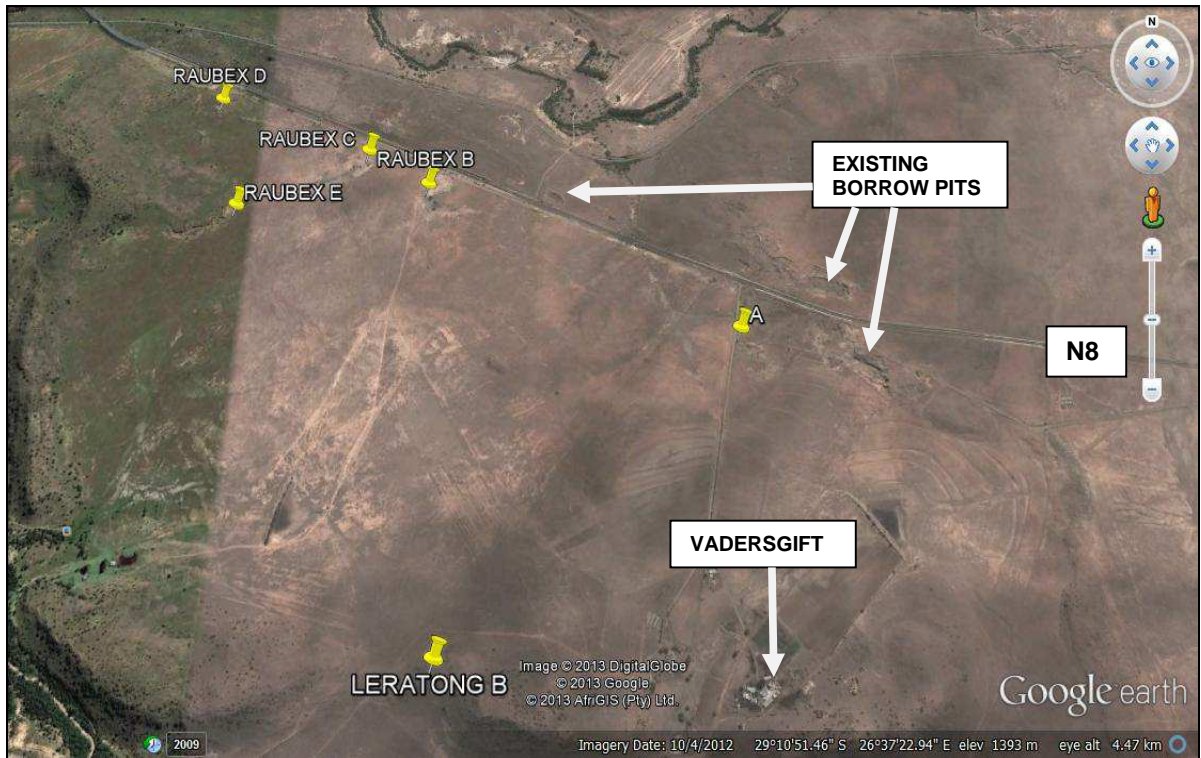
Map 2 Competition for land in the Eastern Free State between 1843 -1871.



Map 3 Tsepong & Leratong in relation to Sannaspos & Likhathlong.



Map 4 Locality of Liefdesfontein & Vadersgift, Thaba Nchu (2926BA 1964).



Map 5 Locality of borrow pits along the N8 main road to Thaba Nchu, showing coordinate points.



Fig.1 Point A at Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.



Fig.2 Point A at Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.



Fig.3 Point A at Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.





Fig.4 Point B at Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.



Fig.5 Point B at Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.



Fig.6 Borrow pit at Point C, Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.



Fig.7 Borrow pit at Point D, Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.



Fig.8 Borrow pit at Point D, Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.

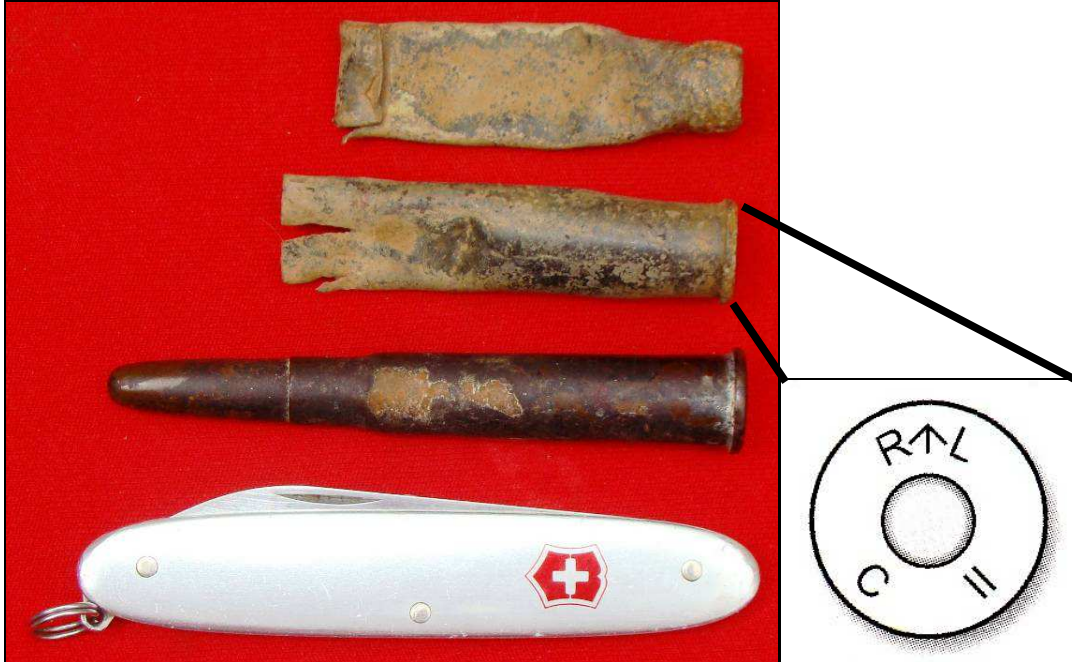


Fig.9 The fired British ,303 cartridge cases from Point D compared to an unfired ,303-calibre magazine rifle bullet dating from the Anglo-Boer War.  
 Head stamp: Factory code **R↑L** = Royal Laboratories, Woolwich, UK,  
 C = Cordite, Mark II (Pocket knife = 84mm).



Fig.10 Borrow pit at Point E, Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.



Fig.11 Borrow pit at Point E, Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.



Fig.12 Borrow pit at Point E, Leratong & Tsepong near Thaba Nchu.

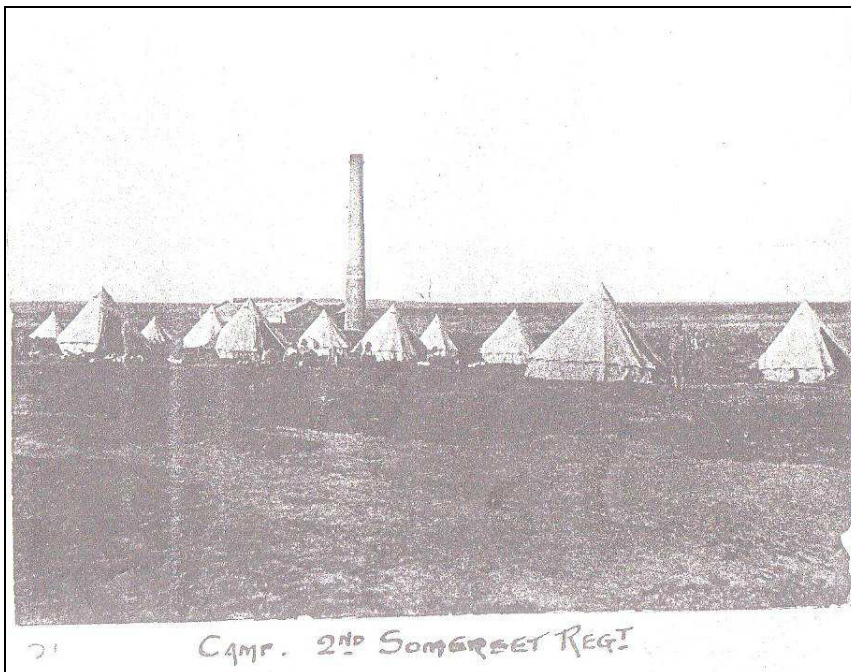


Fig.13 2<sup>nd</sup> Somerset Regt. British Military camp at Modder River pump station.  
(Photo: Unknown British soldier, Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902).

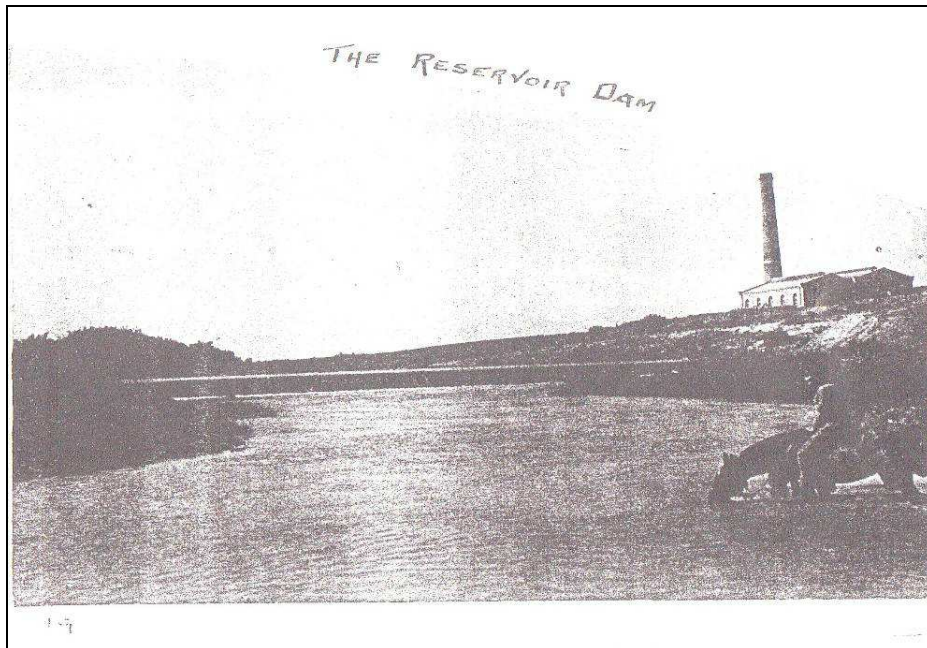


Fig.14 Engine house with chimneystack at the Modder River pump station.  
(Photo: Unknown British soldier, Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902).



Fig.15 Fixtures for the steam engines in what used to be the pump house at Modder River.



Fig.16 Sturdy old building at the Modder River pump station.



Fig.17 Old water reservoir dams at the Modder River pump station.