# A Report on the excavation and reburial of some human remains from the Emjindini Tribal Authority Offices near Barberton, Mpumalanga.

Conducted by the

# Lydenburg Museum



Compiled By Mr JP Celliers May 20, 2015

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#### 1. Introduction

Lydenburg Museum was contacted by the Barberton Museum to conduct a site visit/ inspection where human remains were exposed during building activity in January 2014. A grave was exposed during building activity at the Emjindini Tribal Authority offices near Barberton. The matter was subsequently reported to the Barberton SAPS on 20 January 2014. CAS No 1358/01/2014. The Barberton Museum then contacted SAHRA about the matter and SAHRA recommended JP Celliers, Curator at Lydenburg Museum and a trained Archaeologist, to assist with the matter. Mr Celliers then visited the site on 3 April 2014 and identified human remains in the form of some teeth and what seems to be fragmented pieces of lower jaw bone together with some decorated pottery and grave dressing stones. After discussion with the Chief of the Emjindini Tribal Authority and his induna Mr Julius Matsebula, (employee at the Barberton Museum) it was agreed that the remains would have to be exhumed and re-buried at the Tribal graveyard. The exposed remains were kept at the Barberton Museum until the day of exhumation and re-burial. A permit application was made to SAHRA in this regard and the permit was issued on 27 September 2014, Permit ID 1922.

The Archaeologist is Mr JP Celliers, Curator at the Lydenburg Museum and the Principal Investigator is Mr Anton Pelser.

Logistical and other difficulties resulted in the exhumation and reburial process only taking place on 1 April 2015. In the meantime the site was filled with soil again but the spot where the remains were located was marked which made it easy to locate on the day of exhumation and re-burial.

#### 2. Description of site and area

The area falls within the Umjindi Local Municipality within Mpumalanga Province. The nearest town is Barberton. The site is located at the residence of the Tribal Chief and is

also the location of the Emjindini Tribal Authority offices which was built here. It is as a result of these building activities that the human remains were found.

According to the site foreman, Mr Simon Mlawuza, workers were busy collecting sandy soil adjacent to the new office building when they found pieces of pottery and some teeth and bone in association with a few stones suggesting that they have accidently discovered a grave. The pottery, stones and remains were located approximately a metre below the soil surface which explains why the grave was not detected before building activity commenced.

#### 3. Methodology and Social Consultation

The location of the remains and associated artefacts were pointed out by the site foreman and the chief of the Emjindini Tribal Authority. Teeth and bone fragments as well as pieces of decorated pottery which probably served as grave goods, were exposed. These were all photographed. The general location of the grave and remains were also photographed. The location of the site was recorded with a GPS for mapping purposes. All information relating to the discovery of the grave and related remains were gathered from the site foreman and Tribal Chief.

The process of exhumation and re-internment was explained to the chief and Tribal Authority.

The chief explained that they did not know about the existence of the grave as no dressings were visible on the soil surface, also, nobody knew about this particular grave. So identification and age estimate is almost impossible to determine without excavating the remains.

Fortunately the individuals who discovered the remains (Tribal Chief and the building foreman) acted in accordance with Section 36 (6) of the NHRA 25 of 1999 and the SAPS as well as the local Museum and SAHRA National Office were notified (See attached documentation, Appendix D).

Upon discovery of the remains the SAPS was notified and a case registered CAS No 1358/01/2014. According to the informant and the local SAPS, this particular case is not within their jurisdiction because the remains are not associated with a crime.

4. Location of the sites

The site was numbered EBG 1 which is an abbreviation for Emjindini Barberton Grave 1.

Below is a concise description and a 1:50 000 topographical map (2530 DD Nelshoogte,

1984) location as well as Google Earth aerial photo image of the site location.

The site where the remains were re-buried was also documented and was numbered EBG

2.

4.1. Site EBG 1

Description:

Human remains, grave dressing stones and decorated pottery were exposed during

construction activity at the Emjindini Tribal Authority offices.

GPS coördinates: S25°47.5313' E030°55.4670'

Photos: Appendix C (fig. 1-13).

4.2. Site EBG 2

Description:

The site at the Emjindini Tribal Authority graveyard where the remains were re-buried on

1 April 2015.

GPS coördinates:

Photos: Appendix C (fig. 14-18).

5. Exhumation and re-burial

On April 1, 2015 the site where the remains were found was excavated in an effort to

locate record and remove any human remains and relocate them to the Emjindini Tribal

Authority graveyard.

An effort was also made to locate other cultural material or remains in the vicinity of the

original site. Nothing was found.

Careful excavation of the area where the remains were found in 2014 revealed only a few

5

more pottery shards and a few bone fragments, one of which possibly belongs to a small rodent. The other pieces are unidentifiable fragments. It was then decided to excavate further in an effort to locate more remains which was possibly deeper under the soil surface. This too delivered no results and it was decided to re-bury the bone fragments along with the bone fragments and teeth which were originally found and the associated pottery sherds. Although no family or relatives of the deceased was present, traditional burial practices accompanied the exhumation and re-burial activities.

#### Excavation:

As stated earlier, the site had been filled again after the initial visit by Mr Celliers on 3 April 2014. Fortunately the exact spot where the remains were located was marked (See photo in Appendix C) and excavation with the assistance of a TLB could be done to reach the approximate depth of the remains. Thus at a depth of approximately 95 cm the excavator was stopped and the excavation continued by hand.

Shortly afterwards during further excavation the soil colour changed from a sandy straw (yellow) colour to a darker more moist sandy layer.



**Fig. 5.1.** At a depth below 95 cm from the soil surface the soil colour started changing from a straw (yellow) colour to a darker hue. The soil is very grainy (sandy) throughout. Green pen points north and scale is 50cm.

At a depth of approximately 110cm the dark soil colour intensified and some pottery shards were found at this level. This confirmed that we were at the right spot and we proceeded more carefully. The soil was still darker than the surrounding soil and it formed a roughly cylindrical shape which was some 84cm in diameter.

At a depth of 120cm after sieving the excavated soil, a small collection of bone fragments and more pottery was found.



**Fig. 5.2**. At a level of approximately 110cm the soil colour continued to darken and pieces of pottery was found which confirmed that we were on the right spot.



**Fig. 5.3.** A small number of bone fragments and more pottery were retrieved from a level approximately 120cm deep.



Fig. 5.4. Bone fragments found at a level of approximately 120cm.



Fig. 5.5. At a level of approximately 130cm the original soil colour (yellowish) returns and no more finds.

At a depth of around 130cm the soil colour changes suddenly to the original straw (yellow) colour and no more bone or pottery fragments were present. A small section of darker soil remained to the eastern section of the excavation.

It was decided to dig a bit deeper on the eastern side of the excavation and *at a depth of approximately 145cm* the soil colour was completely straw coloured or yellow and the texture also dry and very grainy similar to the original upper layers. A small step some 15cm deep was made and the light-coloured sandy soil continued. The excavation was halted here as it was evident that the dark-coloured soil which contained the bone and pottery fragments was not present anymore.



**Fig. 5.6.** At a depth of approximately 145cm no more dark soil was present and stepping further down some 15cm to the east (arrows) proved that the dark soil layer was not present any longer.



Fig. 5.7. A view from the soil surface down into the excavated section.

#### Interpretation:

Results were inconclusive. Although initial finds suggested that substantially more human remains may be present beneath the soil surface, there were not. It is highly probable that the original context was disturbed and jumbled to such an extent that the individual's remains were scattered already and that the remains which was originally found was a chance discovery. The circumstances under which the remains were found is one where the original context has already been altered (agricultural activity, earth moving activity) which leaves many possibilities for the nature and original position of the remains.

### 6. Sources

1. National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999.

#### Maps

1. SA 1:50 000 2531 CC Barberton (1998); 2530 DD Nelshoogte (1984).

## Appendix A

#### **Terminology**

"Alter" means any action affecting the structure, appearance or physical properties of a place or object, whether by way of structural or other works, by painting, plastering or other decoration or any other means.

#### "Archaeological" means -

- Material remains resulting from human activity which are in a state of disuse and are in or on land and which are older than 100 years, including artifacts, human and hominid remains and artificial features or structures;
- Rock Art, being any form of painting, engraving or other graphic representation
  on a fixed rock surface or loose rock or stone, which was executed by human
  agency and which is older than 100 years, including any area within 10m of such
  representation;
- Wrecks, being any vessel or aircraft, or any part thereof, which was wrecked in South Africa, whether on land, in the internal waters, the territorial waters or in the maritime culture zone of the Republic, as defined respectively in sections 3, 4 and 6 of the Maritime Zones Act, 1994 (Act No. 15 of 1994), and any cargo, debris or artifacts found or associated therewith, which is older than 60 years or which SAHRA considers to be worthy of conservation; and
- Features, structures and artefacts associated with military history which are older than 75 years and the sites on which they are found;

"Conservation", in relation to heritage resources, includes protection, maintenance, preservation and sustainable use of places or objects so as to safeguard their cultural significance;

"Cultural significance" means aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, linguistic or technological value or significance;

- "Development" means any physical intervention, excavation, or action, other than those caused by natural forces, which may in the opinion of a heritage authority in any way result in a change to the nature, appearance or physical nature of a place, or influence its stability and future well-being, including
  - construction, alteration, demolition, removal or change of use of a place or a structure at a place;
  - carrying out any works on or over or under a place;
  - subdivision or consolidation of land comprising, a place, including the structures or airspace of a place;
  - constructing or putting up for display signs or hoardings;
  - any change to the natural or existing condition or topography of land; and
  - any removal or destruction of trees, or removal of vegetation or topsoil;

"Expropriate" means the process as determined by the terms of and according to procedures described in the Expropriation Act, 1975 (Act No. 63 of 1975);

"Foreign cultural property", in relation to a reciprocating state, means any object that is specifically designated by that state as being of importance for archaeology, history, literature, art or science;

"Grave" means a place of internment and includes the contents, headstone or other marker of such a place, and any other structure on or associated with such place;

"Heritage resource" means any place or object of cultural significance;

"Heritage register" means a list of heritage resources in a province;

"Heritage resources authority" means the South African Heritage Resources Agency, established in terms of section 11, or, insofar as this Act (25 of 1999) is applicable in or in respect of a province, a provincial heritage resources authority (PHRA);

"Heritage site" means a place declared to be a national heritage site by SAHRA or a

place declared to be a provincial heritage site by a provincial heritage resources authority;

"Improvement", in relation to heritage resources, includes the repair, restoration and rehabilitation of a place protected in terms of this Act (25 of 1999);

"Land" includes land covered by water and the air space above the land;

"Living heritage" means the intangible aspects of inherited culture, and may include –

- cultural tradition;
- oral history;
- performance;
- ritual;
- popular memory;
- skills and techniques;
- indigenous knowledge systems; and
- the holistic approach to nature, society and social relationships;

"Management" in relation to heritage resources, includes the conservation, presentation and improvement of a place protected in terms of the Act;

"Object" means any moveable property of cultural significance which may be protected in terms of any provisions of the Act, including –

- any archaeological artifact;
- palaeontological and rare geological specimens;
- meteorites;
- other objects referred to in section 3 of the Act;

"Owner" includes the owner's authorized agent and any person with a real interest in the property and —

- in the case of a place owned by the State or State-aided institutions, the Minister
  or any other person or body of persons responsible for the care, management or
  control of that place;
- in the case of tribal trust land, the recognized traditional authority;

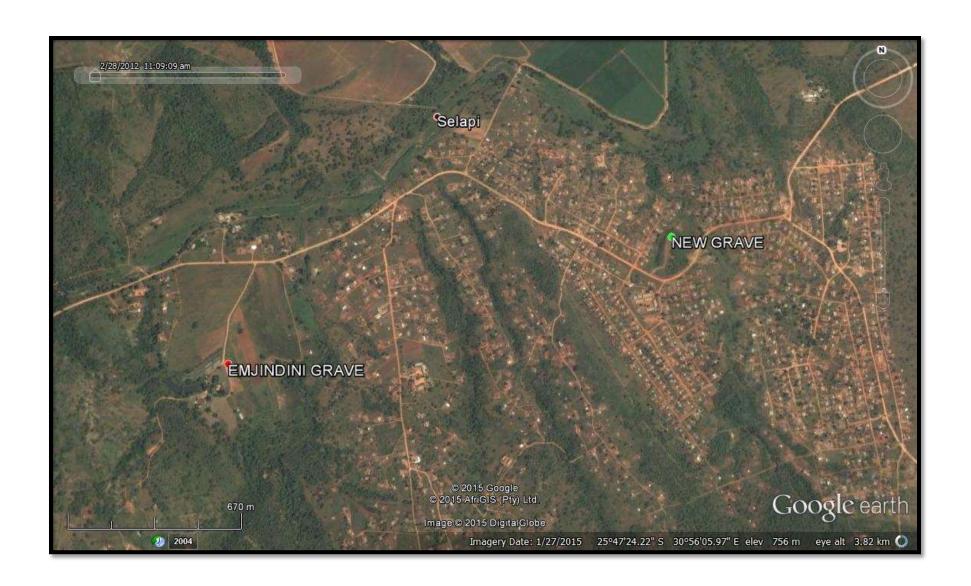
#### "Place" includes -

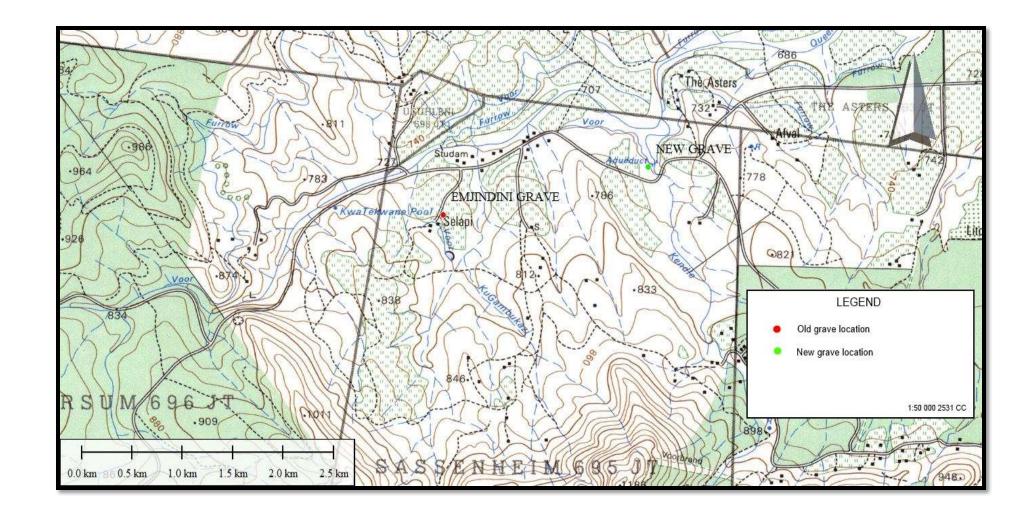
- a site, area or region;
- a building or other structure which may include equipment, furniture, fittings and articles associated with or connected with such building or other structure;
- a group of buildings or other structures which may include equipment, furniture, fittings and articles associated with or connected with such group of buildings or other structures;
- an open space, including a public square, street or park; and
- in relation to the management of a place, includes the immediate surroundings of a place;

"Site" means any area of land, including land covered by water, and including any structures or objects thereon;

"Structure" means any building, works, device or other facility made by people and which is fixed to land, and includes any fixtures, fittings and equipment associated therewith.

# Appendix B – Maps





# $\label{eq:Appendix-C} Appendix - C$ Photos of the site during the initial visit



**Figure 1.** Barberton Museum employee, Mr Julius Matsebula, points to where the human remains were found during excavation activities.



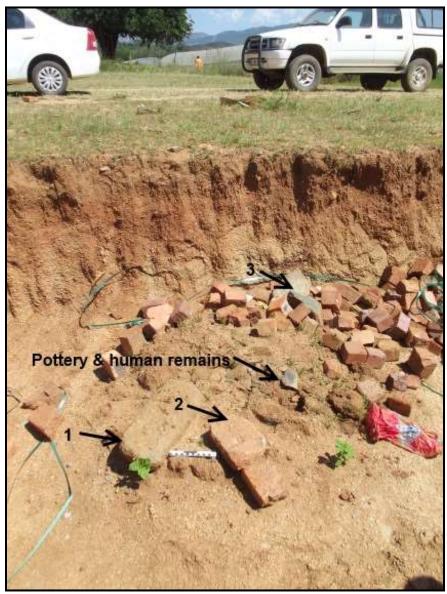
**Figure 2.** Nine teeth, some bone fragments believed to be that of the lower jawbone and pieces of decorated pottery were exposed during excavation activity during the construction of offices for the Emjindini Tribal Authority.



**Figure 3.** Numbers 1, 2 are stones associated with the original grave dressing. The remaining arrow points towards the location of the human remains and pottery.



**Figure 4.** A close-up photo of the pottery shards.



**Figure 5.** Numbers 1& 2 are original grave dressing stones and the remaining arrow points to the remains. Note the depth of the deposit, the reason why the grave dressing was not visible.



**Figure 6.** The position of the grave is indicated by the black arrow.

#### Additional Photos during the exhumation and reburial



Figure 7. The site on 1 April 2015. Notte that the excavation had been filled again.



Figure 8. Showing the site as it appeared on 1 April 2015. The arrow shows where the spot had been marked with a piece of timber right where the remains were located the previous year.



Figure 9. Trenches were opened around the peg which marked the spot where the remains were found (see arrow).



Figure 10. The depth at which excavation started was approximately 95cm. Green pen points north.



Figure 11. At approximately 110cm the soil colour started to darken & pottery fragments were found.



Figure 12. Pottery shards found during the excavation.



Figure 12. The pottery and bone fragments were put in the coffin together with the original remains found at the site.



Figure 13. Mr Julius Matsebula of Barberton Museum places some soil from where the remains were discovered along with the bone and pottery fragments in the coffin to be re-buried.



Figure 13. The coffin is ready to be re-buried at the Emjindini Tribal Authority graveyard.



Figure 14. The Emjindini Tribal Authority graveyard.



Figure 15. A new grave is dug.



Figure 16. The coffin is brought to the new grave.



Figure 17. A ritual is being performed before the coffin is buried again.



Figure 18. The coffin is laid to rest.

# $\begin{array}{c} Appendix-D\\ Letters\ and\ supporting\ documents \end{array}$

PO BOX 3047 BARBERTON 1300



CELL: 079 843 1610 CELL: 082 857 9010

6 March 2014

Dear Mr J Cellers

Subject; REQUEST TO EXAMINE UNDERGROUND ARTEFACTS

My name is Julius Matsebula, working in Barberton Museum; I'm also a Chief headman at Mjindini Royal Kraal, 15km from Barberton town. I have given by SAHRA your name from Cape Town. Unfortunately your land line phone sound as it engaged when I phone.

At Mjindini rural near the Chief's homestead / Kraal there is a contractor busy with constructing the Office of this Kraal. While they dug the ground not far from the building, the contractor met with strange artefacts pieces of clay pot, teeth objects, the soil on the spot looks dark brown and few portable stones come out from ground. This matter was reported to Police in Barberton, they came to see the place, but there told the contractor and tribal authorities that they cannot do anything about this, since it looks as if is not crime, base on artefacts which were found, and it's very old. This matter is outside in their working scope.

The tribal Authorities and the relevant people met on the 30 January 2014 and they concluded that the construction of the building must continue, but the site where there uncover the objects must not disturbed, until we get people who can examine these artefacts.

I spoke to SAHRA officials Collette and Jenna Levin, both gave me your name, you are the one who can assist us in this Province. Jenna will take from your report.

Note; The Tribal Authority does not have fund for studies of the objects, but will provide you with petroi from Mashishini to Mjindini Royal Residence, Aprox. 10 to 15 KM from Barberton town, take the Prison farm road will lead you to Mjindini Royal Residence.

For More information please contact Julius Matsebula to 0828579010 work; 0137124208

Kindly regards

Julius Matsebula

8/03/2014 PP Malalah PO BOX 3047 BARBERTON 1300



CELL: 079 843 1610 CELL: 082 857 9010

Enquiry; JSZ Matsebula Cell No; 0828579010

Date; 23 April 2014.

#### Dear J.P Cellers

The Chief and his Tribal councils of Mjindini Royal Kraal are very much concern about the archaeological objects discovered on their site of development. The tribal authority took a decision to give permission to Mr JP cellers, who is an archaeologist based at Lydenburg Museum to continue with all the processes are needed to remove these archaeologist objects. The tribal has the grave site where could transfer these bones to.

This matter was reported to the Police in Barberton, they have done preliminary investigation, found out that the grave is too old and is out of working their scope. We also tried to report this matter to Health department in Barberton, there did not assist us.

JP Cellers visited the site on the 27 March 2014 after we requested him to do the preliminary study of the objects. The Tribal authority will keep the file of this grave, if, its primary information required to being preserve, there is a Museum in Barberton where we can preserve the information or the archaeologist may take advice the Tribal authority, where could be preserve the historical background of this grave.

The Tribal authority is concern about these human beings artefacts; there is an urgent need to relocate them to Mjindini public graves with the permit of the tribal authority.

As Tribal authority, we hope that the research about these bones may result to understand better the community lived on this area on previous centuries.

Regards,

Mjindini Royal Kraal – Headman

Jsz Matsebula.

Julius Sikelela Zwangendaba Matsebula

# modies form BURIAL RELOCATION FORM

1).	BURIAL RELOCATION FOR	RM .
FARM: Sassenheim 695 JT OLD BURIAL NO:	PROVINCE: MP. NEW CEMETERY.	Emyindini Tribal Authority ( SITORY: N/A
BURIAL POSITION  Horizontal Upright Tightly flexed	BURIAL DIMENSIONS  Max length E-W/N-S  Max width E-W/N-S  Depth	UE (D
SEX Male Juvenile Female Young adult Unknown   Middle/Old Age	- NE	RE RACIAL AFFINITY
PRESERVATION Poor _ Fair _ Good	CAUSE OF DEATH	
INVENTORY OF GRAVE GOO	DDS/CULTURAL MATERIAL	
	DOS/CULTURAL MATERIAL	h is had to ID.
Phalanges (28) L R Fibula (2) L R Metatarsals (10) L R Atlas Axis Thoracic vertebrae (12)	s (2) L R Radius (2) L (16) L R Metacarpals (10), Femur (2) L R Patella Tibia (2) L R Tarsals Phalanges (28) L R Cervical vertebrae (7) Lumbar vertebrae (5)	R Ulna (2) L R L R (2) L R (14) L R Scapula (2) L R
Jpper 4 <sup>th</sup> premolar L_R_ Lower 3 <sup>rd</sup> premolar L_R_	Lower 4th premolar LR	Upper 2 <sup>nd</sup> molar L R Lower 1 <sup>st</sup> molar L R Upper 3 <sup>rd</sup> premolar L R Lower canine L R Upper central incisor L R
PHOTO NUMBERS:	REPORT	

Sassenheim 695 J	BURIAL RELOCATION FORM
FARM: Modies Fam OLD BURIAL NO: _N/A NEW GRAVE NO: _N/A	NEW CEMETERY:
BURIAL POSITION  Horizontal Upright Tightly flexed	BURIAL DIMENSIONS           Max length         E-W/N-S         HEAD:           Max width         E-W/N-S         SIDE:           Depth         ORIENTATION:
SEX AGE  Male Juvenile Young adul  Unknown Middle/Old	ESTIMATED STATURE RACIAL AFFINITY  It
PRESERVATION Poor Fair Good	CAUSE OF DEATH
AT 100-011 NO AND THE TOTAL OF	Inscription
Grave Dressing/Headstone/	
Grave Dressing/Headstone/	(Inscription   N/A/
Grave Dressing/Headstone/ INVENTORY OF GRAVE  SEE EFFORT  NAME OF DECEASED	(Inscription   N/A/

### Barberton Grave relocation attendance 1 April 2015

DATE	NAME & SURNAME	AFFILIATION/INSTITUTION	SIGNATURE
01/04/15	Richard NKUSI	Lowveld Media	Of Big
01/04/5	July Mutschila	Mindre Royal frau	Motertale
X/04/15	Il cellis	Lydenbuy Museum	Ste
1/04/5	K-M. NUCOOT	Engendini TIC	Afren
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