

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE PROPOSED  
ITSHELEJUBA VODACOM TOWER, PONGOLA,  
KWAZULU-NATAL**

**FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING SERVICES**

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## INTRODUCTION

Umlando cc was contracted by Environmental Planning Services to undertake a heritage impact assessment of the proposed Itshelejuba Vodacom Tower. Environmental Planning Services first notified Umlando when they had noticed a stone feature on the site during an initial site visit.

The site is located ~800m southeast of Itshelejuba Hospital, on a small hill overlooking the southerly valleys (figures 1 – 2). The graves are on the top, or crest, of the hill, a few meters west of the (damaged) trigonometric beacon.

The site consists of three human graves probably dating within the last 60 years. While there was probably a household, the structures are no longer visible. The human graves are 'red flags' and the tower should not impact the graves in any manner.

The proposed impacts on the area will be:

- Vodacom tower base
- Access roads
- Electrical cabling
- Related infrastructures

## METHOD

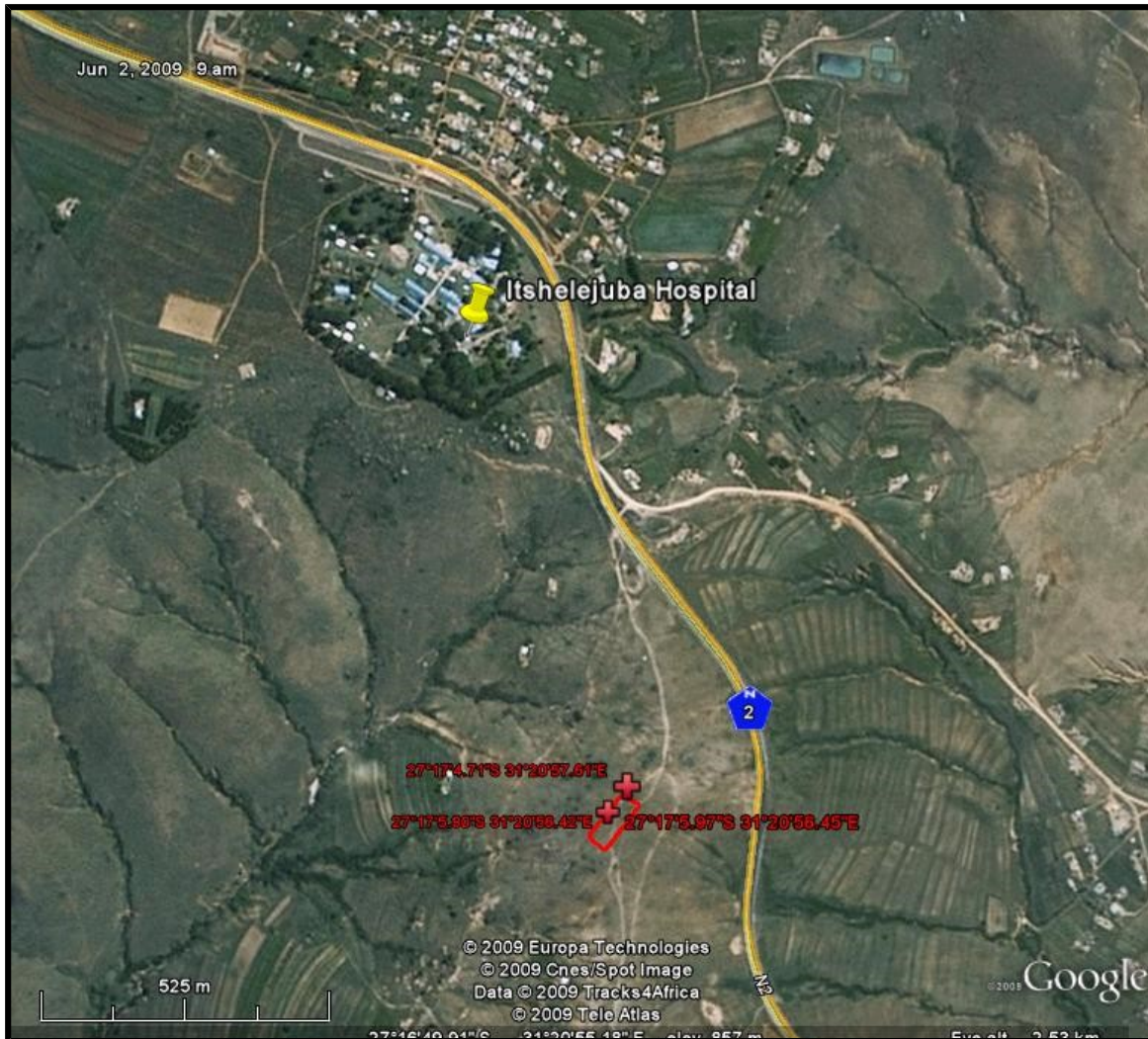
The method for Heritage assessment consists of several steps.

The first step forms part of the desktop assessment. Here we consulted the databases from both Umlando and the Natal Museum. These databases contain most of the known heritage sites in KwaZulu-Natal. This database does; however, tend to be restricted to archaeological and palaeontological sites.

The initial archaeological survey (i.e. fieldwork) consists of a foot survey where the selected area was covered. The survey results will define the significance of each recorded site, as well as a management plan. The main problem with the survey was the poor archaeological visibility.

FIG. 1: GENERAL LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT



FIG. 2: DETAILED LOCATION OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT<sup>1</sup>

## RESULTS AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

One site has been previously recorded in the general study area: 2731AB 003 (Natal Museum site record).

### 2731AB 003

The site consists of three human graves. The upper grave (27°17'4.71"S 31°20'57.61"E) is near the crest of the hill (figure 3), and just southwest of the

<sup>1</sup> Affected area and graves in red

trigonometric beacon (that no longer exists). This grave is the largest of the three graves. The other two graves occur ~46m southwest of the upper grave (27°17'5.97"S 31°20'56.45"E, and 27°17'5.90"S 31°20'56.42"E). These two graves are of an adult and juvenile, with the juvenile occurring further down slope (figure 4). One of the graves has several 5 cents coins placed in a niche amongst the gravestones. The coins date from 1986 to the more recent 5-cent coin. These coins have been placed as part of an offering to the ancestral spirit. This also indicates that the graves are still revered and that living descendants exist. Figure 5 indicates the location of these graves and suggests a minimum “no-go area”.

**FIG. 3: UPPERMOST SINGLE HUMAN GRAVE**



**FIG. 4: LOWER SOUTHWEST GRAVES<sup>2</sup>**



Significance: The site is of high significance. I suggest that the graves should not be affected by the proposed tower.

Mitigation: The human graves are probably younger than 60 years in age, and the KZN Heritage Act of 1997 has no jurisdiction over these graves. Municipal by-laws and the Human Tissues Act thus govern the graves. There are two options for Vodacom regarding the graves.

The first option would be to have minimal impact on the graves and relocate the tower further northwest along the ridge. I would suggest at least 50m away from the graves. An alternative hill exists to the south of this hill, however there is a human grave in this area as well – 2731AB 004. Figure 6 indicates these sites and the possible alternative area. If this option is chosen, I would suggest that

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<sup>2</sup> Arrow indicates approx. location of other grave

the living descendents are contacted and informed of the decision to place a tower near their ancestral remains. The descendents should also agree to this tower. In this way, Vodacom could not be blamed for insensitivity towards ancestral graves and beliefs. The grave area should also be fenced off prior to tower construction.

FIG. 5: LOCATION OF THE THREE GRAVES

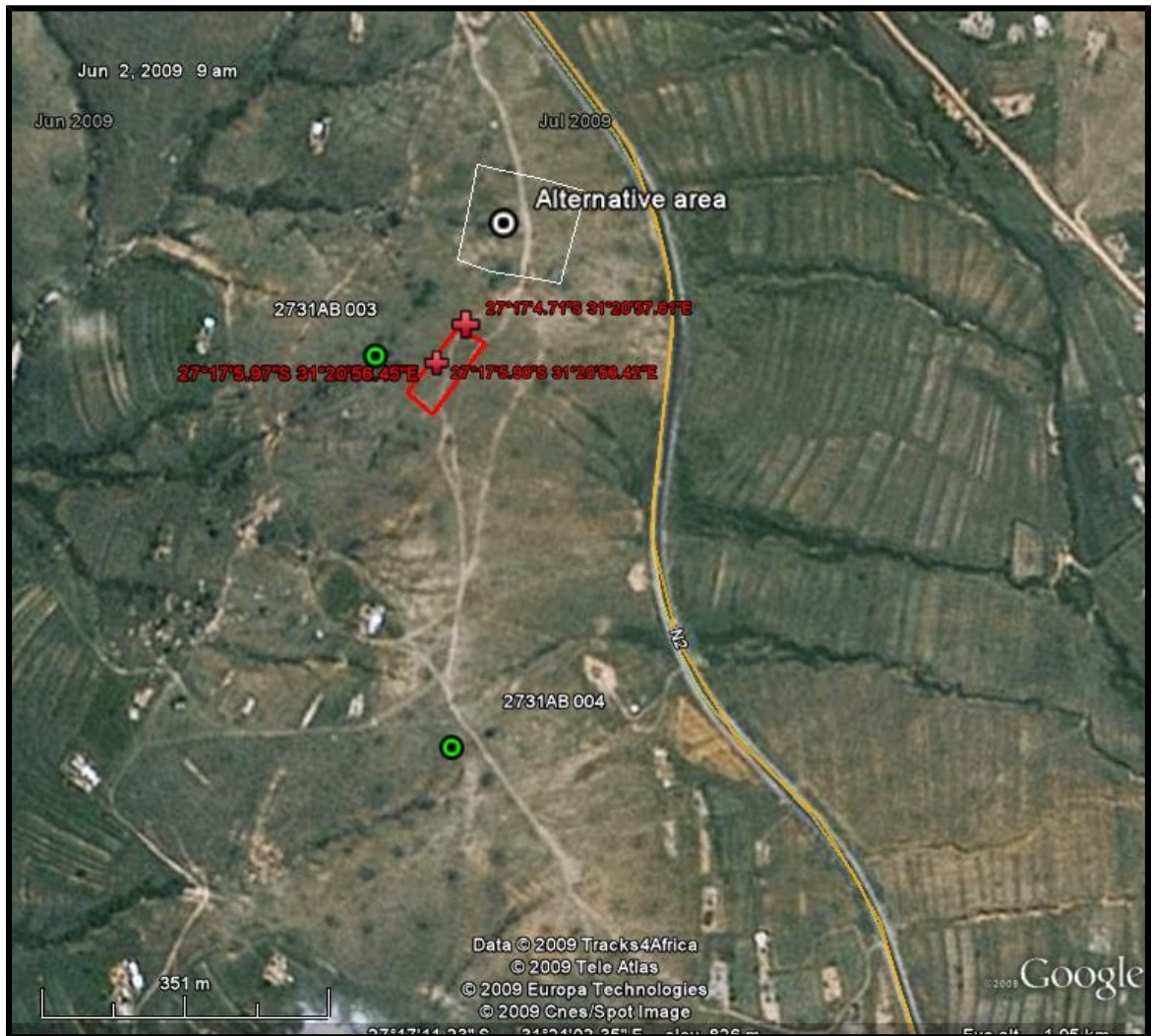


The second option will involve exhuming and relocating the human graves. This option will entail hiring a registered undertaker to conduct a social impact assessment regarding the graves, exhuming and then reburying the remains. The undertaker will need to find the living relatives/descendents and obtain their



permission to remove the human remains. Vodacom will need to pay for this process as well as for the new burial plots. I would strongly suggest that this option is not taken, as a cell phone tower should not be enough reason for human remains to be impacted from their ancestral grounds unless necessary.

**FIG. 6: LOCATION OF 2731AB 003 & 004 AND PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE TOWER LOCATION**



**CONCLUSION**

Umlando undertook a heritage survey of the proposed Itshelejuba Vodacom Tower located north of Pongola. One site has been previously recorded in this area, and the three human graves were noted. The graves are located between

the crest of the hill and the Eskom transmission line. These graves are probably younger than 60 years in age and are thus not protected by the KZN Heritage Act, but by municipal by-laws and the Human Tissues Act.

I would not support the removal of the human remains for the convenience of a cellular phone tower. I suggest that the tower position is relocated at least 50m away from the nearest grave, and that the descendents are contacted regarding the location of a Vodacom tower near their ancestral remains. The three graves should also be fenced off if the tower is located nearby.