

McGregor Museum
Department of Archaeology



Archaeological Specialist Input
with respect to upgrading
railway infrastructure on the Sishen-
Saldanha Ore Line in the vicinity of new
Loop 7a near Loeriesfontein.

David Morris
January 2007

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Introduction

This report describes observations made in the vicinity of a new Loop 7a along the Ore Line in the Loeriesfontein area.

While archaeological material was found along the route of the upgrade at Loop 7a, no significant impact arising from the construction of this loop is anticipated.

Background

The archaeology of the Northern Cape is rich and varied, covering long spans of human history. The Karoo is particularly bountiful. Concerning Stone Age sites here, C.G. Sampson has observed: "It is a great and spectacular history when compared to any other place in the world" (Sampson 1985). Some areas are richer than others, and not all sites are equally significant. Heritage impact assessments are a means to facilitate development while ensuring that what should be conserved is saved from destruction, or adequately mitigated and/or managed.

Terms of reference

This report highlights issues and impacts in relation to potential loss of cultural/heritage resources along the route of the proposed ore line upgrade, principally in the vicinity of Loop 7a. En route, a grave-like feature was investigated at Loop 15.

Potential impacts are described and assessed.

Legislation

The National Heritage Resources Act (No 25 of 1999) (NHRA) provides protection for archaeological resources.

It is an offence to destroy, damage, excavate, alter, or remove from its original position, or collect, any archaeological material or object (defined in the Act), without a permit issued by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

Section 35 of the Act protects all archaeological and palaeontological sites and requires that anyone wishing to disturb a site must have a permit from the relevant heritage resources authority. Section 36 protects human remains

older than 60 years. In order for the authority to assess whether approval may be given for any form of disturbance, a specialist report is required. No mining, prospecting or development may take place without heritage assessment and approval.

The Provincial Heritage Resources Agency (PHRA) in the Northern Cape has, for the time being, requested SAHRA at national level to act on an agency basis where archaeological sites are concerned. Permit applications must be made to the SAHRA office in Cape Town.

Methods and limitations

A background literature/museum database search provides indications of what might be expected in the region.

Limitations include the possibility that sites occur subsurface. During fieldwork dongas and animal burrows were carefully examined in areas of potentially higher sensitivity to ascertain the chances of such sites existing. In the event that any major feature is encountered during construction, for example a burial or a cache of ostrich eggshell flasks, then work should be halted and a professional archaeologist consulted.

subsurface

Archaeological resources in the Karoo

The significance of sites encountered in the study area may be assessed against previous research in the region and subcontinent. Humphreys' evaluation remains true, that "the amount of archaeological research that has been undertaken in the Karoo is in no way proportional to its importance in terms of area in South Africa" (1987:117). The region's remoteness from research institutions accounts for this.

The area has probably been relatively marginal to human settlement for most of its history, yet it is in fact exceptionally rich in terms of Stone Age sites and rock art, as a relatively few but important studies have shown. Pre-eminent amongst these are the projects undertaken by C.G. Sampson and his colleagues in the Seekoei Valley (Sampson 1985). McGregor Museum archaeologists have focused attention on the Upper Karoo and the northern periphery of the Karoo (Humphreys 1987; Beaumont & Morris 1990; Beaumont & Vogel 1984; Morris 1988; 1994; 1996; 2000a; 2000b; 2001; Morris & Beaumont 1991; 1994; 2004).

Sparse as previous studies have been, the information to hand (in this case from the Seekoei Valley specifically) enabled Sampson (1985:107) to declare that:

"The South African central plateau is unique in the world...in that it supported large numbers of non-farming people who were also prolific makers of stone tools until very recent times. A brief comparison of surveys conducted elsewhere in the world reveals promptly and unambiguously that South Africa is richer in Stone Age remains than any other place on earth."

Against this background, any and every conservation effort is significant.

Observations made

Loop 7a km 317-323

This consists of a stretch of line descending between hills at the north eastern margin of the Knersvlakte, in the valley of the Krom Rivier and on the farms Brakfontein and Ibequas Rivier.

In the vicinity of km 316-7 the maintenance road runs on the west side of the line within the portion of the railway reserve where Loop 7a is to be built. Much of the reserve is hence already disturbed. The strips of about 4 m between the road and the railway and 1 m between the road and the fence were investigated at 30°42.978' S 19°13.799' E. No artefacts were noted here. Further up the line at 30°42.625' S 19°13.891' E a rocky knoll was inspected. It was anticipated that shelter afforded by the small hill might have made this a focus of past human activity. A small number of Middle Stone Age artefacts, on quartz and quartzite, were indeed noted on its lower slopes, mainly on the south side. Their density was below 1 artefact/ 10m² so that the occurrence is of low significance. The rock surfaces were too coarse to have supported rock art, either as engravings or paintings.

Near km 318 a hill feature, at 30°41.962' S 19°14.327' E, was inspected. Again, a low density of MSA artefacts similar to those mentioned above were noted on the north eastern slope. Flat areas on top of the low hill were bereft of artefacts. Another sand-covered prominence further on near km 320 was without any traces of an archaeological nature.

The existing borrow pit at km 322, adjacent to the Brakfontein road bridge, was inspected. Dongas here, at 30°40.013' S 19°15.062' E, gave an opportunity to assess subsurface occurrences. A very sparse surface scatter of stone artefacts including Middle Stone Age was noted. No stone tools were noted in any of the exposed sections at the edges of the quarry. These observations confirmed the impression of low archaeological visibility in the vicinity.

Finally, the area near km 325, at 30°38.465' S 19°15.211' E, was examined. No artefacts at all were noted at this vicinity.

Recommendations

Only very sporadic and distinctly low density occurrences of artefacts were noted along the stretch of railway that was inspected. These were mainly of a Middle Stone Age character.

No other heritage / cultural traces were noted.

From a heritage perspective, the proposed upgrading of the Ore Line and construction of Loop 7a is expected to have a minimal impact.

In the (unlikely) event that any subsurface feature such as an unmarked grave is encountered during construction, then work should be halted and a professional archaeologist consulted.

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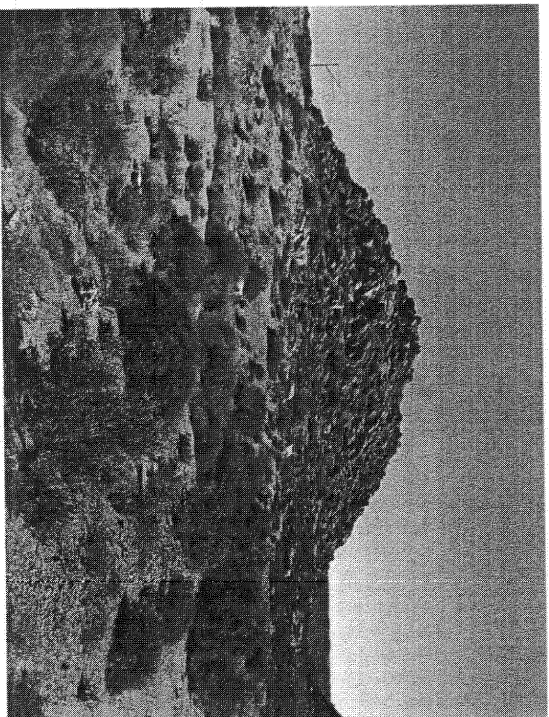
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PHOTOFILE



Lower slope of small hill (above) with low density occurrence of Middle Stone Age artefacts (below)

