

Report on the engraving RDR8, Panorama shopping mall development, Lydenburg, Mpumalanga

Jeremy C Hollmann
7 March 2014

Background

I was engaged by the developers, Thornby Mellows One, who had been requested by SAHRA to employ a rock art specialist to investigate the situation and to advise on the options available with regards to the engraved stone (RDR 8) and the development of the Panorama shopping mall.



VIEW OF THE ENGRAVING FROM THE FUTURE FRONT ENTRANCE OF THE PANORAMA MALL. THE ENGRAVING IS FENCED OFF (CENTRE). THE SURROUNDING LAND WILL BE A PARKING LOT AND IS TO BE RAISED BY 4 M ABOVE ITS CURRENT LEVEL. THIS WILL MEAN THAT THE ENGRAVING WILL BE AT THE BOTTOM OF A 4 M DEEP PIT.

The crisis of the engraving

On 7 March, 2014, I met on site with the developer-appointed archaeologist Ms Christine Rowe, Mr Alfie De La Hunt, the developer's representative, and Mr Robbie Rudman, to discuss the situation. I asked Mr De La Hunt why, if the company had initially made a commitment to preserve the engraving and its immediate context, it was now requesting permission from SAHRA to have the engraving moved. The reasons they provide in their motivation — the 4 m level change, and the drainage problems — indicate that the developer did not make any plans to accommodate the engraving in its original location. Otherwise, these factors would have been foreseen long ago, at the planning stage, when something could have been done to expedite the situation.

As it is, and as a direct result of the developer's flagrant disregard of SAHRA's recommendation of 23 October 2007 that the engraving must be preserved *in situ*, a "crisis" has been created in which the engraving is no longer secure in its original location.

Solutions to the crisis

Ideally, the engraving should stay in its current location as originally agreed to between SAHRA and the developer. However, the archaeologist appointed by the developer has pointed out that the engraving would be difficult to view and to access if it sunken in a 4 m deep pit. The change in microclimate, from a sunny and windy situation, to a humid environment might be detrimental to the engraving. I agree that this could be a problem and that it will now be difficult to keep the engraving in its original location.

That leaves the option of removal. I have inspected the engraving and its surroundings and I conclude that it is possible to move the engraving with very little risk of damage, if this is done carefully with suitable equipment and under the supervision of a suitable archaeologist like Ms Rowe.

Recommendation

Lack of planning by Thornby Mellows One has placed the engraving in a vulnerable situation. I must therefore recommend that the engraving should be removed, either to a suitably protected area in or around the mall, or to the Lydenburg Museum.