

# **The archaeological excavations of the AMS9 skeleton**

**For Richards Bay Minerals**

**Date: 12 February 2006**

**By Gavin and Louise Anderson**

**Umlando: Archaeological Tourism and Resource  
Management**

**PO Box 102532, Meerensee, 3901**



RBM Rehab. Department informed us about a skeleton that was exposed during the dry mining operations at AMS (north) on Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> February. We assessed the skeletal remains on the Saturday.

The site is referred to as AMS9. It consists of a high density of artefacts and human remains. Most of the site had been disturbed by the bush clearance phase.

The pottery is mostly undecorated. A few lip incisions were observed and one sherd had small horizontal incisions on the body. The faunal remains consisted mainly of large and small bovid. We observed one shell midden that consisted mainly of brown mussel and some oyster and limpet. The remains of a daga floor were noted near the shell midden. One fragment of daga had mat impressions on the one side. The stone artefacts included upper and lower grinding stones, stone flakes, hammer stones and a pestle.

These artefacts are very similar to those recorded at AMS7. AMS7 is approx. 40m northeast from this site.

Most of the skeletal remains had slumped down the dune. We recovered several limb bone fragments and phalanges on the slope of the dune. The right leg, both feet and a fragment of the left pelvis were *in situ* and visible in the dune cutting. These were removed. The cranium is mostly missing and only the maxillae and mandible were recovered (at the base of the dune). Both femora and tibia were recovered, as well as the patellae, ~25% ribs, pelvis, sacrum, and ~8 vertebrae. The rest of the remains had either disintegrated since internment, or lost when the skeleton slumped. We estimate that we recovered ~60% of the skeletal remains.

The person was buried in a sitting position facing the interior (i.e. west). The hands were not underneath the feet, and thus were possibly flexed against the chest.

The age and sex of the skeleton can only be estimated at this point. The wisdom teeth had erupted and the molars were very worn. The epiphysis on the few long bones had fused. The pelvis was too fragmented to assess for biological sex. The mandible had a pronounced jaw. These suggest that the person was an adult male of at least 30+ years.

The decorated pottery and degree of preservation of the faunal remains suggest that site (and thus skeleton) are more than 200 years old, possible more than 400 years. We will continue to monitor this area so that we can obtain a larger sample of pottery and thus possibly narrow the age of the skeleton.

The site is also rare in that it has the daga floor. I have observed very few of these in the dunes.