

INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Cultural Resource Management was approached to undertake archaeological salvage excavations near the Ashburton horse training center. The archaeological site is situated at the top of a hill overlooking the Msunduzi and Mkhondeni Rivers, with Bushveld vegetation surrounding it. Petronet intends to construct a new oil pipeline adjacent to their existing pipeline and this would impact on part of the existing archaeological site. This site was recorded several years ago and regarded as having at least medium archaeological significance.

The Terms of Reference for this contract are:

1. To undertake archaeological salvage excavations in the area to be affected by the new pipeline;
2. Write a report regarding these excavations with a management plan for the site.

METHODOLOGY & STRATIGRAPHY

The new pipeline is to be placed 2 m away from the existing pipeline. The trench for the pipeline would not extend beyond 1 m. Thus a series of 1.5 m x 1.5 m excavation holes were placed along the length of the site with the center new pipeline placed in the center of the excavation squares (fig. 1).

Each square was excavated in 10 cm spits until the basal, i.e. archaeologically sterile layer, was reached. The stratigraphy of the site consisted of topsoil and rootlets above a hard black clay-like soil. Below this latter layer was either a brown clay-like soil and/or the basal layer. The main cultural horizon is located in the black soil and it varies between 10 cm to 30 cm in depth. This black sand was the thickest in the center excavations of the site (fig. 2), between Squares 5 to 9. The brown soil tends to be located along the eastern squares, and consists of few artefacts. This brown soil is often harder than the black soil and very deep in some places.

FEATURES

Two main features were located at this site. Both of these were pits with various types of artefacts located inside of them.

Pit 1

The first pit consisted of a complete decorated pot in Square 5. The pot was located ± 25 cm below the surface and went down ± 35 cm into the basal layer. The pot was in an upright position with decorated everted rims. These rims appear to have been purposefully broken as they lined the inner base of the pot. Above these rims were several broken lower grindstones, rocks and fragments of iron-ore. Beneath the pot was a ± 50 cm wide and ± 40 cm deep hole filled with charcoal and ash.

Pit 2

Pit 2 is located in the black soil ± 15 cm below the surface. The pit can be divided into three stratigraphic layers. The upper layer consists of 55 stones (of which eight were lower grinding stones). These stones formed the outline of the pit to a depth of ± 50 cm. Sand and several Msuluzi sherds were observed in this level of the pit. The second layer was below the stones and consisted of decorated pottery, bone, charcoal, ash and sand. At least our different pots were observed at this level. The lower level consisted of decorated pottery, bone, charcoal, ash and sand. The decorated pottery includes motifs from the Msuluzi Phase and possibly the Ndondondwane Phase (applied banded motifs). Charcoal samples were taken from all three levels for possible radio-carbon dating. The pit was ± 1 m deep and ± 80 cm in diameter (fig. 3).

ARTEFACTS

Pottery

Several decorated sherds were recovered from the excavations. Most of these sherds belong to the Msuluzi Phase of the Early Iron Age, while a few may belong to the Ndongondwane Phase. These specific Ndongondwane motifs do, however occur in the Msuluzi Phase (Maggs 1980, 1984), and thus the sherds may still be part of the same occupation at the site.

The decorations consist of bands on the rim and/or neck, and applied bands on the rim-neck interface.

Worked Stone

Several pieces of worked stone were recorded. These included upper and lower grinding stones, smoothed stones, and fragments of iron ore.

Metallurgy

Several fragments of slag and iron-ore were recorded at this site. Two large pieces of slag weighed over 2kg and were located along the eastern part of the site. The iron-ore tended to be large fragments while a few pieces had been crushed.

Faunal Remains

Most of the faunal remains came from Pit 2. These remains include bird bone and cow-sized animals. The faunal remains tended to be well preserved, but fragile. Cow-sized teeth were observed in other squares.

Daga

Two types of daga were recovered: granary and hut floor. The granary daga was concentrated along the western side of the excavations. The granary daga tended to be in various positions suggesting that it had been dumped, and was thus not *in situ*. Several fragments had pole

impressions suggesting that the granary area may have been raised from the ground. The hut floor daga was located ± 5 m from Pit 2. The daga had been smoothed on one side (the top) and was concentrated in one area, suggesting the location of a hut floor. The old pipeline has probably damaged the rest of the hut floor.

DISCUSSION

The excavations at this site were limited to the area affected by the construction of the pipeline. This has limited the ability to interpret the spatial and cultural history of the site. The site itself dates between AD 600 and AD 800. The ceramic typologies indicate that there is probably only one occupation phase at this site.

The spatial component of the site is difficult to assess. Those areas that were excavated suggest that the pits are located near houses. This pattern is similar to other excavated Early Iron Age villages in KwaZulu-Natal.

CONCLUSION & MANAGEMENT PLAN

The site has yielded valuable information regarding Early Iron Age settlement patterns. Sufficient information has been excavated to make this site useful for future researchers.

The site still has valuable material outside the area of the two pipelines. Any further excavations or other forms of earthworks in this area would effect the settlement pattern of the site. Thus the site still has valuable *in situ* research material. If any further construction work, or development, is to take place in the vicinity of the site, then it would need to be assessed in terms of its archaeological impact. KwaZulu-Natal Heritage should be notified of any further developments on the site.

REFERENCES

Maggs, T. 1980. Msuluzi Confluence: a seventh century Early Iron Age Site on the Tugela River. *Annals of the Natal Museum* **24(1)**: 111 – 146.

Maggs, T. 1984. NdongondwaneL a preliminary report on an Early Iron Age site on the lower Tugela River. *Annals of the Natal Museum* **26(1)**: 71 – 94.