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PROVISIONAL REPORT: FINAL SEASON OF CONTRACT WORK AT DOORSPRING, LAMBERTS BAY

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INTRODUCTION

The third and final season of contract work at Doorspring was carried out between 8 and 14 August 1994.

The aim of this final season was to remove a further seven square metres of deposit from the midden site, Doorspring 16 (DSP 16). The previous excavation of a single square at this site revealed that it was quite different from the 17 other sites sampled at Doorspring. These other sites were all fairly homogeneous, mussel dominated middens with very low artefact counts. They also tended to show a homogeneity of occupation within their individual as well as collective sequences. DSP 16, in contrast, showed stratified evidence of two distinctly different types of deposit and material cultural remains within a single site. The qualitative and quantitative differences too, not only between the upper and lower sections of the sequence of DSP 16 itself, but also between the lower SSWS levels of DSP 16 and the other 17 sites sampled, suggested not only clear differences in occupation and resource exploitation strategies, but also the likelihood that the SSWS layers represent a far earlier occupation that found at any of the other sites sampled.

THE EXCAVATION

The area sampled during this season was adjacent to the square excavated during the previous season, and forms a L-shaped trench running roughly east/west for 5 metres, with a further 2 metres orientated north/south removed at the eastern end of the long trench.

What the excavation revealed was that the deposit of DSP 16 is fairly homogeneous spatially, with virtually the same stratigraphic sequence being encountered across all the squares sampled. As far as this sequence is concerned, the site can be divided into two major stratigraphic units, with a further division discernable within the lower of these:

* Fragmented Shell Layer - a dense, black mussel dominated midden layer.

* Soft Sand With Shell - a soft sandy deposit containing isolated pockets of mainly limpet shell.

The Fragmented Shell Layer (FSL), can conceivably be seen to comprise the three surface layers of the site, although it is in reality the lowest of the three. The Surface of the site is a thin (± 3-5cm) layer of soft white beach sand, which is in turn underlain by a soft, dark brown layer named Humus With Rodent Faeces (HRF). Both of the layers were virtually devoid of artefacts, and in their marine shell composition were dominated by crushed black mussel shell. Those two features of the upper two layers make it seem likely that they are therefore surface manifestations of the main shell midden of the site - FSL.

FSL itself, is a dense layer of black mussel shell, which may be part of the same period of human occupation of this stretch of coastline, as is represented at a number of the other sites sampled during the work at Doorspring. It is even conceivable that many of these similar mussel dominated middens sampled at Doorspring may be part of a single midden that is spread along much of the crest of the coastal dune cordon. FSL slopes down gently across the site from west to east, and was found to be thickest (± 12cm) in the easternmost squares of the site - I6 and I7. In this area HRF and Surface are also at their most substantial, and together these upper three layers are 28cm thick. These surface levels gradually thin out as one moves westward, until in the extreme west of the excavation - N8 - they are only 10cm thick, and FSL lenses out midway across this square.

Like the two layers above it, FSL was virtually devoid of any artefactual or cultural material. Small quantities of bone, and some quartz pieces were recovered, but by and large these layers are artefactually sterile.

This is in sharp contrast to the Soft Sand With Shell (SSWS) which underlies FSL. These layers consist of a soft sandy matrix, very much like beach or dune sand, and have very low shell densities, containing only discreet pockets of mainly limpet shell. The nature of the deposit in these levels doesn't change dramatically through their ± 80cm depth, except for becoming gradually more sandy, and shading from a dark brown colour nearer the surface, to the orange of the local dune sand near the bottom.

As with the previous excavation at DSP 16, the amount of artefactual, and culturally derived material recovered from the SSWS levels was of a different order of magnitude to that recovered from the FSL layers. Due to its homogeneous nature, SSWS was once again removed in 10cm spits, of which there were eight in sequence.

Once again the stone recovered from SSWS was very interesting. As with the previous excavation, it was clear that there is a division within the SSWS layers, probably between SSWS3 and SSWS4. At this level, the colour of the deposit can clearly be seen to change from brown to yellow/orange, and there is a marked change in the stone raw material frequency too. In the lower parts of FSL isolated pieces of quartz were found, along with some more coarse-grained raw materials, as encountered previously. In SSWS - SSWS3, the dominant stone raw material is quartz, with fairly substantial quantities being found. SSWS3, however begins to show evidence of the use of silcrete as a raw material, and from SSWS4 down, silcrete becomes increasingly dominant, until near the bottom of the sequence the stone is almost exclusively silcrete. Besides the greater density of stone from the SSWS layers, as compared to FSL, the qualitative difference is also striking. The lower levels of SSWS - from SSWS4 down - produced a number of cores, as well as a number of very nicely finished formal tools, including at least two scrapers, some MRP's and backed pieces including a segment and a backed bladelet.

The other culturally derived material from SSWS was just as interesting, and included a good sample of bone. The bone tended to drop off in frequency in the lower units of SSWS, but this is probably a feature of preservation rather than human behaviour.

An extremely interesting aspect of this excavation was that the last square to be dug N8 in the extreme west - seemed to be yielding far greater densities of bone in the SSWS levels than were recovered from the same units in the other squares, It was in N8 too, that FSL lensed out, and a layer not obviously present in the other squares was found below FSL. Although it had been clear from the start of the excavation that the base of FSL was associated with the appearance of whole patella shell in contrast to the mussel shell that formed its bulk, only in N8 was there a clearly defined Patella Layer (PL) that could be removed as separate unit from between FSL/HRP and SSWS. The SSWS levels of N8 also tended to be softer and were brown to a greater depth than in the other squares. It is likely therefore, that in N8 we may have evidence of the presence of something different to the sequence found in the rest of the site.

The only other difference from the norm in the stratigraphy of the site was the discovery of a small feature within SSWS6 and SSWS7 on the north side of the squares M8 and L8. The feature appears to have been a small circular hollow, ± 70cm across, and ± 15-20cmm deep. Located within the yellow/orange sand of SSWS6 and 7, it was clearly visible as a dark patch, and was also packed with patella shells. The material from this feature - Dark Patch in SSWS6/7 - was removed separately, and beside some stone and bone, at least two ostrich eggshell (OES) beads were recovered.

An element of material culture found in some levels of the initial excavation of DSP 16 - viz. OES - was not found in any quantity during this season. What was found however, in contrast to the previous season when none were found, was a number of OES bead and a few examples of unfinished beads. The beads appear to fall within the 3mm range, and together with the formal tools recovered would tend to suggest and early date for the SSWS levels of the site.

To check that the artefacts were in fact no longer present below the base of SSWS7, it was decided to remove a 10cm spit of Moist Orange Sand With Shell (MOSS) from J8 and L8. Although some shell was still present in MOSS in these squares, and a few bone fragments and stone chips were found, the extremely low densities of these finds would tend to suggest that they have perhaps filtered down into MOSS from the SSWS levels above.

DISCUSSION

The conditions for the granting of a permit for the destruction of the remaining shell middens at Doorspring have been met.

1. The excavation has been extended to cover a total area of 8 m2.
2. bulk samples (all the contents of one bucket of deposit from each stratigraphic unit in each square) have been kept.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The permit, approved in principle, to destroy the remaining shell middens at Doorspring, should be issued without further delay to the developers, Le Cap Projects