

REPORT FOR THE

**SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE RESOURCES AGENCY
ON THE EXCAVATION 28 JUNE TO 1 JULY 2000**

AT

MELKBOSSTRAND (ERF 609)

SITE CBD 14 (2)

BY

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**REPORT ON FIELDWORK AT MELKBOSSTRAND, SITE 14 (erf 609)
ON 28 JUNE 2000 TO 1 JULY 2000.**

BACKGROUND

Mrs. Jean M Gray carried out an excavation at the site of the new Melkbos Shopping Centre from the 28 June 2000 to 1 July 2000 at the request of Mrs. Mary Leslie of SAHRA (South African Heritage Resources Agency) on Permit No. 80/00/06/110/51. This was done in order to add to the work that had been carried out as a Rescue Excavation by Mr. Jonathan Kaplan of the Agency for Cultural Resource Management (ACRM), between September 20 and October 06 1999. A baseline archaeological impact assessment was originally carried out of the area of the proposed Melkbosstrand CBD in June 1998 by ACRM, during which Site 14 was identified, and was given a high significance rating (Kaplan 1998a). A rescue excavation was recommended, and subsequently carried out in September 1999 so that a representative sample of the archaeological material at the site CBD 14 would be preserved before development of the site took place (Kaplan 2000).

In June 2000 before the development continued, Mrs. Mary Leslie, Prof. Tim Maggs, and Mr. John Gribble, in consultation with the client RMS Colliers International Property Consultants, and with Mr. Jonathan Kaplan, felt that as more material was obviously still in situ, and in light of the human skeleton which had been excavated by Kaplan (Kaplan 2000), that it would be a worthwhile exercise to take out an extra sample of the archaeological material from what had once been an extensive shell midden. The other mitigating factor was the site's relative proximity to the site called Atlantic Beach, and which has yielded herder evidence, such as pottery (Kaplan 1998). The site at CBD 14 had not yielded evidence of herder activity, but had revealed some worked shell, and since so much evidence has already been lost at other sites that have been developed in the Melkbosstrand vicinity, this was an opportunity to gauge the possible differences between the sites.

STUDY AREA

The vegetated sand dune in which the shell midden is situated is on the north-east corner of Otto du Plessis Drive and the new Atlantic Beach Golf Resort Road, on a portion of Erf 609, which has been designated for the new Melkbos Shopping Centre. See Kaplan's Report of May 2000, for the relevant Figure 1, of the location of the recorded archaeological sites, and the orientation of Erf 609. The original shell midden once extended across the area of what is now Otto du Plessis Dr. and is still visible but disturbed, on the embankment on the far west side of the road. The lens of shellfish is visible along the cut, west side of the dune from a footpath running along the side of the dune from north to south.

FIELDWORK AND EXCAVATION

The excavation took place over four days, from June 28 to July 1, 2000, and was carried out by ten volunteers from the Western Cape Branch of the South African Archaeology Society who attended on different days. As the excavation was required to take place urgently, there was not time to excavate an extensive area, or to gather a workforce together which would have made it possible to excavate larger, or different areas.

In addition it would appear from the work and analysis carried out by ACRM, as reported in Kaplan 2000, that a fairly comprehensive record of the archaeological value had been taken, and any real added value from extra excavation and analysis, would have needed a longer and more committed time period in order to plan one's objectives. This is not to say that this would not have been valuable in the light of the possibilities of different aspects of the archaeological record in the Melkbosstrand area, but that it was now too late to do this adequately.

The excavation by Kaplan was situated towards the top of the dune, in an area of some 4x4 metres, which had been marked into metre squares, and cleared of dense dune vegetation. It was decided to excavate just to the south and slightly above this, closer to the old water reservoir, as a good deposit of shellfish in situ could be seen from the path on the west. The height from the road to the top of the vegetated dune was 5.5 metres, and the lens of shell showed up clearly at 4-4.5 metres, and was 40-50 cms thick. (Photo 1).

There is some video material of the site before excavation, taken on the 25th July. This gives a good idea of the natural vegetation and the state of the dune prior to excavation, and to its destruction for the development. There was a good sample of west coast fynbos, and bird and animal life, and it seems firstly that it would have been advisable to have incorporated some of this remaining high-vegetated dune into the development as a reserve, of both the natural environment, and for retaining the archaeological record for the future. Secondly, I understood that J. Kaplan of ACRM had recommended this in the May 2000 report. Input from local inhabitants indicated that they had understood from meetings in the area, that a portion of the dune was to have been preserved. I would certainly have recommended this action.

i. Method

With the co-operation of the contractor, and labour from helpers, an area of about 4x5 metres was cleared of very dense dune vegetation. A 3x3 square metre grid was laid out, with the intention to excavate an L-shaped trench of five one metre squares from south to north, and west to east, (Fig. 1.) The datum point was located in the north-west upper corner of square A1, at the highest point of the natural contour of the trench. Five one metre squares were marked out, running A1, A2, A3 on the west-east axis, and A1, B1, C1 on the north-south axis. The overburden was removed, and one shovel test was taken in A1, in order to gauge the depth at which the midden deposit could be judged to occur. This was measured at 180mm to the first shell level.

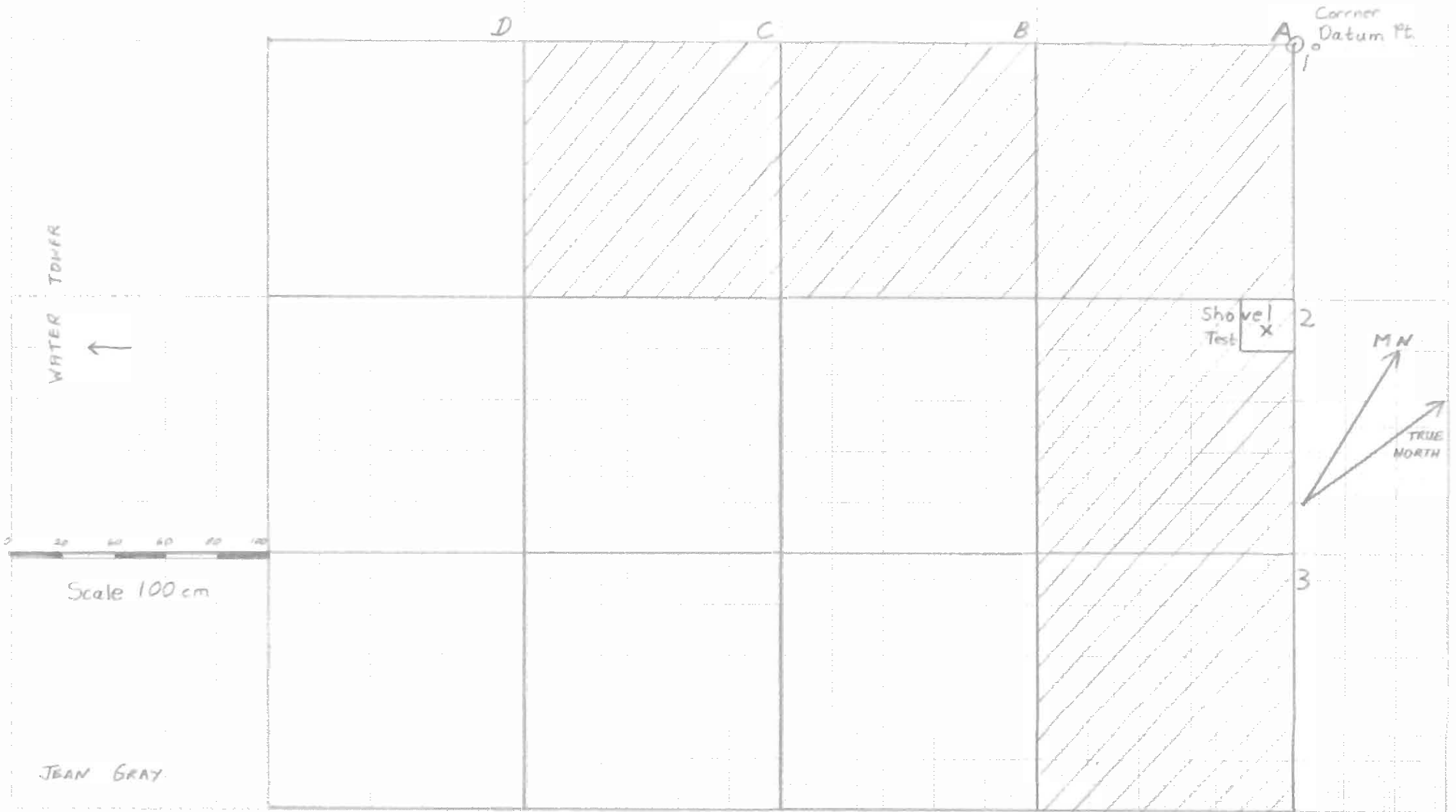
28 JUNE TO 1 JULY 2000

OTTO DU FLESSIS DRIVE

FIG. I

PLAN OF EXCAVATION AT CBD 14(2) MELKBOS SHOPPING CENTRE

x Shovel test
= 180 mm to
shell level



Corner Datum Pt.

WATER TOWER
←

Shovel Test x

MN
TRUE NORTH

Scale 100 cm

JEAN GRAY

CBD 14 (2) MELKBO'S SHOPPING CENTRE

Fig 2 Diagram of Surface and Surface Overburden level East to West Orientation.

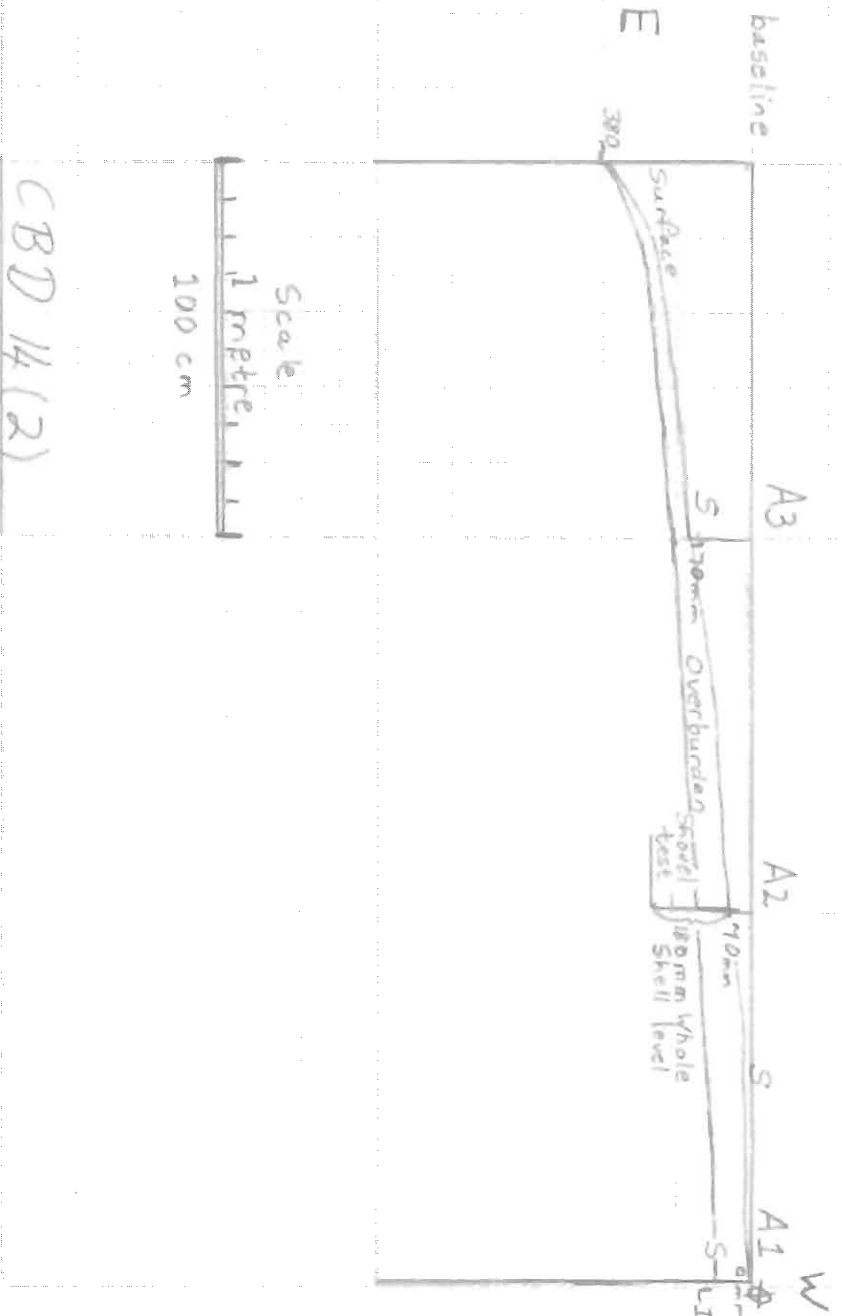
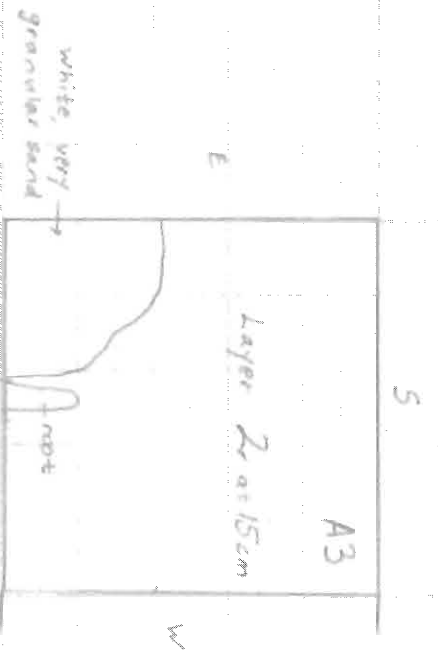


Fig. 3 Diagram of Sq. A3, A2, patch of white sand



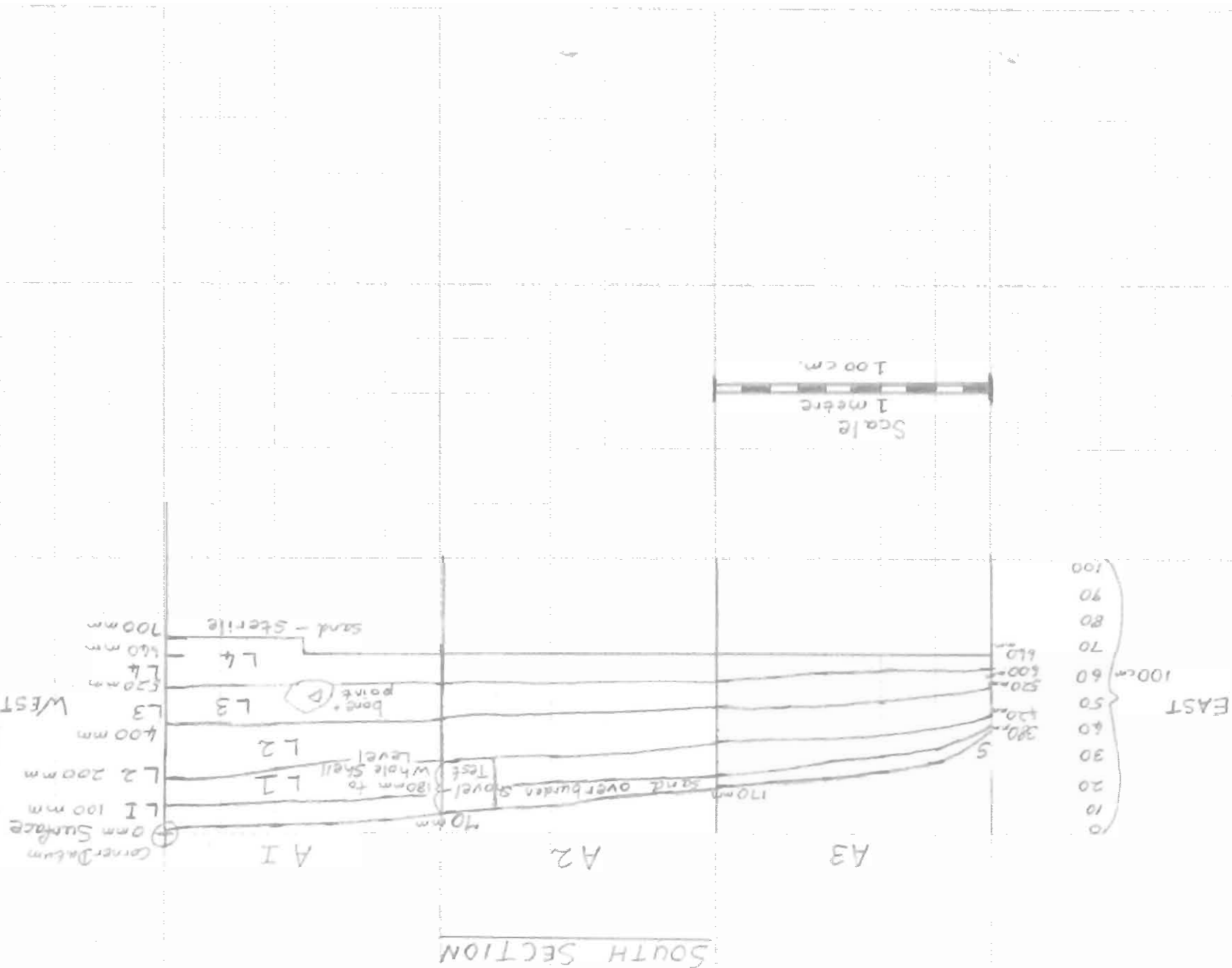
Taken off as a separate bucket, Area visible down to layer 3.

Photo 1. Vegetated dune above west side of Otto du Plessis Drive.
Shell midden is situated in open area to centre left.



Photo 2. Trench on east/west axis, showing A1, A2, A3 top to bottom.
At Layer 2-3 levels.

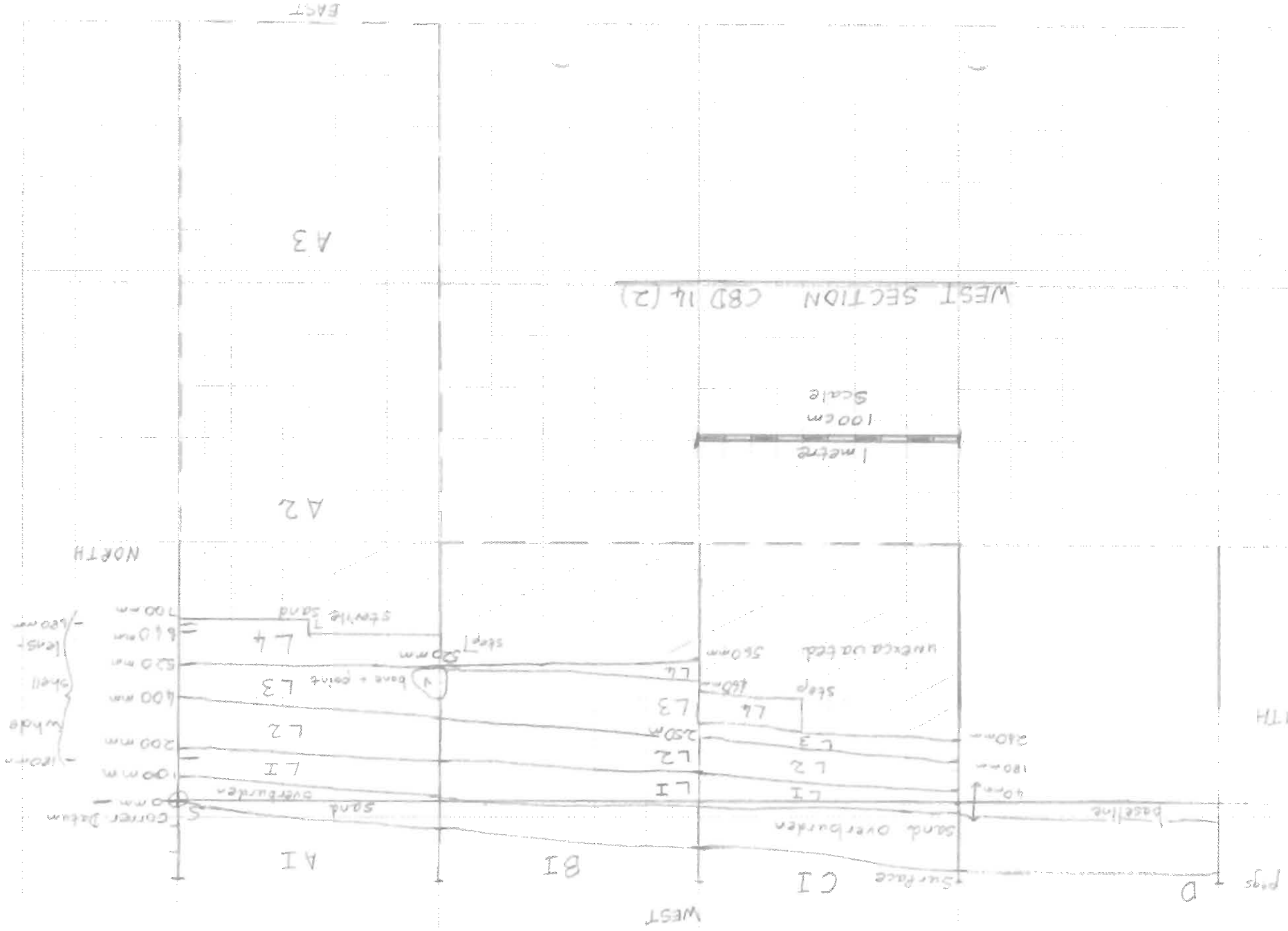




ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION
 CBD 14 (2) MELKBOS SHOPPING CENTRE
 SOUTH SECTION
 FIG. 4

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS: HEARBOS SHOPPING CENTRE - CBD 14 (2)

FIG:5



All material from the excavation was sieved with the 0.5 mm sieve. Some buckets were additionally sieved through a 0.3 mm sieve, but this was too time consuming as the soil was damp, and there were time and labour constraints.

The excavated material was sieved, preliminarily sorted, and bagged. Bulk bagging of the full contents of all buckets was done on the last day, both in order to save time, and to save the full sieved samples. This sample was taken from all layers, as the different squares were at different levels, simply by virtue of the workforce being of less or more on different days.

Field notes were taken on a daily basis, with a section drawing of the stratigraphy and levels, and a photographic record was taken of certain aspects.

ii. Stratigraphy

As far as possible, the stratigraphy as distinguished by Kaplan was followed. The eleven stratigraphic units of Kaplan, where they could be identified, were divided into a similar four stratigraphic layers. (Figs. 4 and 5).

Layer 1 – Crushed Shell and Sand

A surface level consisting of soft, loose sand was excavated, with twigs, roots, rootlets, sand, and very crushed shell, which was mostly black mussel. Little stone material was noted. This material was sieved, using a 0.5 mm sieve, and discarded after examination. (Fig. 2). Once whole shell began appearing, the material was bagged, and designated as Layer 1.

Layer 1 followed the surface, as more countable whole shell began to appear. This stratigraphic unit consisted of sandy grey deposit with some loamy appearance.

There were quite high densities of crushed shell, mostly mussel with some countable fragments, and some whole *Patellas*, mussels and whelks. One or two quartz flakes in A1, L1 at 80–100mm, and a smooth stone flake. One or two fragments of tortoise carapace in A3, and B1. A 1976 20c coin in A3. One musket ball in A2. Quartz flake in B1.

Layer 2 – Whiter Sand and Shell

The greyer sand with roots and rootlets changed to a whiter, drier layer of sand and shells. This was reached first in A3 at 180mm from datum line. Still some roots, but the larger, deeper ones. In A3, a section of whiter, very granular sand was noted in the northeast corner, and was plotted, and taken off as a separate bucket. (Fig. 3).

This area was still visible in the next bucket. In A3 a small fragment of ochre was found at 150mm below surface level. Quartz flakes were recovered in A1, A2 and B1. In A2 a shale flake was found. Section tortoise carapace found in A2.

Overnight there was much dew precipitation, which tended to change soil colour, until dried off. Working in A1, A2 and A3, the colouring of the soil began to change from darker to lighter, and more loose and granular, particularly in aforementioned corner of A3. (Photo 2). The greyish white loose soil contained *patellae*, mussels (*perna perna*), and whelks (*oxystelae*). Sections of *perlemoen* were also recovered, some of which could have been worked.

Layer 3 – Granular Sand and Shell

Layer 3 was reached in A1 at 320mm from datum point on northwest corner of grid. Much whole black mussel shell was recovered with some large specimens, which became less as Layer 3 was excavated. There were also more whole patellae, (granularis, granatina, tabularis), whelks and perlemoen. The white, grainy sand continued in NE corner of A3, but did not appear to have any cultural significance. Large roots were excavated around, in order to prevent cave-ins of the dry sand. In Square A1 at the junction of B1 on south side, and at a depth of 400mm from datum, a section of a largish bone was uncovered. This was very crumbly. As the bone became more exposed it could be seen to be some sort of pelvic bone. As L3 changed to L4 at 520mm on south side, 120mm of bone had been exposed, but it could not be recovered until B1 was at the same level. Encased in the sand around and with the bone was a very good example of an MSA point, 30-40mm in length, and made of siltcrete. This was wrapped and bagged together. (Photo 3.) At the A3 east end, layer 3 was only 100mm in depth, in contrast to 200mm in A1.

Layer 4 – Browner sand and less shell

Layer 4 was begun at 600mm depth at northwest corner from the datum point. This consisted of grey-brown sand containing somewhat less whole patella than in Layer 3. Roots still present. In A1, by 640mm it appeared that the shell lens was beginning to come to an end. On the fourth and last day bulk samples of pre-sieved material were kept from all buckets, as preliminary sorting became too time consuming. In order to obtain a representative sample, steps were excavated in C1, of Layers 2-4, and in B1, of Layers 3-4, in order to arrive at a sterile level comparable with the bottom of L4 in A1. (Photo 4). The shell lens dipped from west to east along the NE axis, and rose slightly in a southern direction along the SW axis.

In square A1, a 50cm square was dug in the NW corner in order to ascertain whether the end of the shell lens had indeed been reached. In the first bucket of this subsection there were a few shells, but none in the second bucket at 700mm. Sterile soil of a yellow/whiter type had been reached, and the shell lens passed.

ARTEFACT TYPES

The material from this excavation at CBD 14(2) has been curated along with the material from Kaplan's excavation of CBD 14, at the South African Museum, according to requirements of the Department of Archaeology (Human Sciences), and is available for research purposes at the Museum.

The suggestion for this material from CBD 14(2), is that it will be analysed as a project by the Western Cape Branch of the Archaeological Society of South Africa, under supervision of a person qualified in Stone Age material

Since only preliminary sorting was done on site of the material after sieving, it is not possible to provide a full outline of the numbers or categories of artefacts. As has been reported in the separate Layer notes, the finds consisted of stone flakes, made on quartz, larger flakes of shale or siltcrete, quartz nodules, ochre fragments, fragments of



Photo 3. Pelvic bone and associated stone artefact.



Photo 4. View of trench on west side. Measuring levels in B1.

terroise carapace, bone material, including the pelvic bone (species unknown), perlmoen with possible worked pieces, one small shell bead, and mussel, whelk, limpet and periwinkle shells. Also there was one musket ball, in Layer 1.

No pottery was recovered, and no hearth, ash or charcoal remains.

DISCUSSION

This material apparently represents a Late Stone Age occupation, though there appears to be what could be one or two MSA stone artefacts. Without further examination and analysis it is difficult to reach more comprehensive conclusions. There is nothing to suggest that any new material or conclusions from CBD 14 (2) can be drawn, and the finds from these 5 square metres, will add to the archaeological assemblage, dug by Kaplan in October 1999. The analyses of the original CBD 14 material is contained in a report (Kaplan 2000) which can be accessed at the SAHRA offices in Cape Town. It would appear from work carried out in Melkbosstrand at Atlantic Beach, Cape Atlantic, the CBD sites, and work done on other sites at Birkenhead Drive and Milkwood Place (see Kaplan 2000), that these sites together offer a valuable opportunity for a comprehensive understanding of particularly the Later Stone Age of the late Holocene in this area. The Atlantic Beach sites appear to have a herding component, while this is absent at the CBD sites. There has also been human skeletal material excavated from CBD 14, and in the past human skeletal material has been reported on to Museum personnel, from building operations in Melkbosstrand. This would also therefore seem valuable for analysis and understanding of life ways at this time.

The original coastal road of Otto du Plessis Drive cut through the major part of this high vegetated dune which further disturbed by house building on the west side, and now the remaining eastern portion has unfortunately been lost to future generations, either for research work, or for the preservation of the natural dune fynbos and fauna. Despite being in a built up environment, we saw bokkie hoof prints in the sand, and there were many varieties of birds. It is understood from local input that Milkwood trees had been bulldozed to make way for the building site for the new shopping centre. (Photo 5 – To the top, right hand side of this photo.) It is unfortunate that earlier intervention could not have taken place. Environmental legislation now calls for an Integrated Environmental Management Plan, and an Environmental Impact Assessment to be carried out with participation of Interested and Affected Parties prior to development. While this may have been carried out here, it appears that there have been developments in this area where development has gone ahead without prior consultation as is evident in the lost archaeological record at the Milkwood Place development (Kaplan 2000).

However a reasonably comprehensive sample of the archaeological record has been excavated and recorded for the understanding of human life in Melkbosstrand in the last few thousand years. It is hoped that this is carried forward as a comprehensive project integrating the various facets of the archaeology of the area. Also the recommendation in Kaplan's report (Kaplan 2000) that a selection of artefacts, drawings and photographs be displayed permanently in the planned shopping centre is reinforced here. An informative display of the Melkbosstrand prehistory could be incorporated in a display at either the Town Centre, or near the Beach Front.

REFERENCES

- Kaplan, J. 1998. Archaeological study, Melkbosstrand CBD. Report prepared for BVD Town and Regional Planners and Architects. Agency for Cultural Resource Management
- Kaplan, J. 2000. Archaeological Excavations. Melkbos Shopping Centre, Melkbosstrand. Agency for Cultural Resource Management. Riebeeck West.