

**PRELIMINARY CULTURAL RESOURCE ASSESSMENT FOR
THE PROPOSED NEWCASTLE CASINO SITE**

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Environmental Design Partnership contracted the Institute for Cultural Resource Management (ICRM) to conduct a data-base search to identify archaeological and historical resources that may exist on a proposed casino site, being part of Newcastle Townlands 4702. The affected area currently belongs to Newcastle TLC.

Our terms of reference required us to provide a preliminary assessment of any archaeological and historical resources and to recommend mitigatory measures for these.

All archaeological and historical sites are protected by the National Monuments Act of 1969 which makes it an offence to alter in any way such sites without a permit from the National Monuments Council (NMC). As from 1 April 1998, the KwaZulu-Natal Heritage Act of 1997 will replace the current heritage legislation in KwaZulu-Natal. The new heritage compliance agency, Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali, may require an assessment of the impact of any development on heritage resources, where such an assessment is not required by other legislation. The NMC and its successor in KwaZulu-Natal (Amafa) may hold developers responsible for any damage accrued to a site in cases where they have deviated from the permit requirements. It is the responsibility of the developers to apply for a permit should development have a negative impact on archaeological or historical sites.

The site

The proposed casino site is a gently-sloping piece of land situated west and southwest of Arbor Park, a suburb of Newcastle. From a geological point of view, it occurs in the Vryheid Formation of the Ecca Group, which in places has extensive intrusions of dolerite. These were important in the past because:

1. dolerite provided building material,
2. dolerite soils are relatively fertile and
3. contact between dolerite and strata of the Ecca Group in places yielded occurrences of hard, metamorphosed rock which hunter-gatherers targeted for stone-tool production.

The 1:250 000 geological map shows that dolerite outcrops occur north of the proposed casino site, but not on the site itself.

The natural vegetation on the site is Acocks' Natal Sour Sandveld, though patches of Southern Tall Grassveld occur in the vicinity. Vegetation maps suggest that these patches are concurrent with the dolerite intrusions.

Archaeological data base search

The Natal Museum is the Regional Recording Centre for archaeological site data in KwaZulu-Natal. Recorded archaeological sites are mapped on a 1:50 000 map sheet and allocated a National Site Number. Each archaeological site has a site record form that lists the details of the site. From this database, and personal experience, an archaeologist can undertake a preliminary desktop assessment of an area. Few areas in KwaZulu-Natal have been systematically surveyed, while those sites on record were frequently recorded for specific research purposes.

No known archaeological sites occur in the affected area. Sites dating to the Early Stone Age, Middle Stone Age, Late Stone Age and the Historical Period do, however, occur in the vicinity of Newcastle. These sites relate to the last 1.5 million years of hominoid history in southern Africa.

The Stone Age sites are scatters of stone tools and are most likely in a secondary context, i.e. they have been disturbed through natural processes and/or agricultural activity. These sites are probably of low archaeological significance.

Stone-walled sites dating to the Late Iron Age may occur in the Newcastle area, though the wide distribution of sour veld grasses suggests that such settlement would not have been especially intensive. Such settlement, if it occurred at all, is likely to have focused on the Southern Tall Grassveld, especially where this veld type was concurrent with dolerite outcrops.

Historical sites in the Newcastle area include the remains of settlements built by Zulu-speaking people, stone-walling, houses and other structures of white people, as well as battlefields. One such historical site immediately south of the proposed casino site is a national monument. This is Hilldrop House situated on the property Sub 36 (a sub of 1) of the farm Boschhoek No. 3345. Hilldrop House is owned by the Roux family. It consists of a workshop, which has now been developed as a residential building, and the house itself, which is currently a hotel and conference centre. Hilldrop House was erected by Sir Melmoth Osbourne. Sir Rider Haggard apparently occupied the house in January 1881, while the Royal Commission, which drew up the terms of the Pretoria Convention, met there.

Although the entire property was originally declared a national monument, the declared area was recently restricted to Portion 51 of sub 36, which abuts against the higher ground to the south and southwest of the proposed casino site. The owners sold the remainder of the property to the Hentrix Trust.

No structures of historical significance are known to occur on the proposed casino site.

Assessment of aerial photographs

Both the 1:50 000 aerial photograph and the 1995 1:10 000 orthophotos of the affected area were examined. Buildings, stone-walling, and even certain subsurface features

may be identified by such an examination. The study revealed that the ground surface of the proposed casino site had suffered considerable disturbance. Past disturbance has included the excavation of quarry pits, construction or establishment of dirt roads and tracks, and the erection and removal of a powerline. Such disturbance is likely to have had a negative impact on any archaeological sites that may occur in the area.

No stone-walled Late Iron Age sites, or any other significant structure, was visible on the aerial photographs.

Conclusion and recommendations

No known archaeological or historical sites occur on the proposed casino site. No significant archaeological or historical sites were visible on the aerial photographs. This is not unexpected, given the topography of the site and its natural vegetation. Moreover, an archaeologist colleague of ours who recently visited the site for another purpose observed nothing of archaeological or historical interest.

While Stone Age archaeological sites *may* be found on the proposed casino site, these are likely to be of limited significance and would not require time consuming or expensive mitigation.

Issues which require consideration are:

- the visual impact of any casino development on Hilldrop House and
- the possibility of graves associated with the 'location' on the northern boundary of the site.

Given the limited archaeological and historical potential of the proposed casino site, we suggest that a site visit at this stage of the project would be an unnecessary expense. Should the Newcastle casino proposal be given the go-ahead, we recommend an archaeological assessment during the winter months when the vegetation cover is reduced.