

**THE ORIGINS OF MAPUNGCUBWE PROJECT
PROGRESS REPORT
2005 & 2006**

Prepared for De Beers, the NRF, SAHRA and SANParks

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the project's inception in 1999, its principal focus has been the interlinked roles of agriculture and rainmaking in the rise of Mapungubwe. The project involves extensive surveys for Iron Age sites (T.N. Huffman), test excavations at Middle Iron Age sites (all personnel), the ethnoarchaeology of rainmaking (M. Murimbika) and the archaeology of rainmaking (M.H. Schoeman). The survey and excavations also form part of the field course for the Wits Honours class each year. Furthermore, the excavations have yielded data forming the core of various Masters projects.

II. SURVEY

In May and June of both 2005 & 2006, Honours students helped to survey the northern portion of Venetia Game Reserve, owned by De Beers. The team concentrated on the Kolope River drainage on the farms Hilda 23 MS, Anglican 24 MS, Blykclip 25 MS and Edmondsburg 32 MS. They recorded 107 Iron Age sites representing some 114 different occupations, most of which were previously unknown (Table 1). The list includes 16 Leokwe, 23 K2, 5 Transitional, 6 Mapungubwe, 23 Khami, 4 Icon, 8 Sotho-Tswana and 2 Venda occupations. In addition, various European homesteads appear on the 1980 editions of the 1: 50 000 maps 2229AC Evangelina (Figure 1) and 2229AD Coila (Figure 2).

A few sites are worthy of special mention. First, the team revisited Baobab (2229AD6) previously excavated by J. Calabrese as part of his Doctoral research. Since then, heavy rains have exposed more burnt grain bin foundations; as many, in fact, as the agriculturally orientated homesteads on Den Staat. Presumably, the Baobab villagers cultivated the small floodplain down below where the Kolope swings around the Edmondsburg range. Whatever the case, the Baobab grin bins show that rainfall had increased substantially by the beginning of the 11th century. So when K2 people arrived, the climate had already improved.

Secondly, a Leokwe site (2229AD144) in the northern portion of Edmondsburg yielded several glass beads, including a yellow garden roller. These people may have been

Table 1. Sites recorded during the 2005 and 2006 surveys.

Map No.	Site No.	Site Name	Farm name	Period	Industry/Culture	Site Type	Co-Ordinates	Donor	Exca.	Visual/Written Material	C14	Artefacts	Organic Remains	Samples	Rock Art
2229 AC 34		Hilda		H	Sotho		22 18 12 29 12 44							v dung 3 kraals	
2229 AD 004	Koape	Bykrip		LIA	Khamsi		22 18 20.4 29 16 14.5		GL					v dung 2 kraals pots, bones	
2229 AD 005	Map 1	Edmondsburg		MIA	Map		22 18 37 29 17 28		JC	JC thesis					
2229 AD 006	Beabab	Edmondsburg		MIA	ZL		22 18 33 29 17 12		JC	JC thesis		days gb			
2229 AD 007	TEB 4/2	Edmondsburg		19th C	Sotho	walls	22 18 34 29 17 02			EOMH					
2229 AD 008	Scorpion	Bykrip		19th C	Venda	kraal waling	22 18 28 29 16 41		JC						
2229 AD 009	Monkey	Bykrip		LIA	Khamsi ?		22 18 27.8 29 16 29.5		JC	JC thesis				v dung	
2229 AD 010	Hornbill	Bykrip		19th C	Venda	Musenda on hill	22 18 31 29 16 41			EOMH					
2229 AD 070		Bykrip		MIA	K2	now destroyed	22 16 17 29 15 39			H05					
2229 AD 071	TBK 1/2	Bykrip		LIA	Khamsi		22 16 47.7 29 15 37			EOMH				1 slg pot	
2229 AD 075	TBK 3/1	Bykrip		MIA	K2		22 18 08 29 15 45			TNH/ EOMH					
2229 AD 076		Bykrip		MIA	K2		22 18 13 29 15 54			TNH/ EOMH					
2229 AD 077	TBK 3/2	Bykrip		MIA	T		22 18 16 29 15 59			EOMH				v dung	
2229 AD 078	TBK 2/1	Bykrip		LIA	Khamsi		22 18 12 29 16 12			EOMH EE					
2229 AD 079	TBK 2/2	Bykrip		LIA	Khamsi		22 18 19.4 29 16 09.4			TNH/ EOMH					
2229 AD 080	TBK 2/7	Bykrip		LIA	Khamsi		22 18 24 29 16 22			EOMH				v dung	
2229 AD 081	TBK 2/6	Bykrip		MIA	Khamsi		22 18 24 29 16 25			EOMH				2 kraals v dung	

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	2229 AD 082	Marras homestead	Bykrip	+/-1952	European	farm	22 16 33-35 29 15 38-42	H05							
	2229 AD 083		Bykrip		Sotho	A tenants	22 16 33 29 15 49	H05							
	2229 AD 086		Bykrip		Sotho	A tenants	22 16 16-4 29 15 35	H05				cement floor			
	2229 AD 087		Bykrip		R	Sotho	22 16 19 29 15 36.5	H05							
	2229 AD 088	Anglican			Historic	E	22 18 04 29 15 19	TNH/ EOMH							
	2229 AD 097		Bykrip		MSA	hilltop	22 16 20-4 29 15 40-6	EOMH				garden roller			
	2229 AD 098		Bykrip		R	?	22 16 12-3 29 16 07-4	H05							
	2229 AD 099		Bykrip		MIA	Leckwe	22 16 04-7 29 16 42-2	H05							
	2229 AD 100	Edondburg			IA	?	22 16 13 29 17 18-5	H05							
	2229 AD 101	Edondburg			MIA	KZ?	22 16 09 29 17 22	H05							
	2229 AD 102	Edondburg			LAMIA	KLK	22 16 09 29 17 25	H05							
	2229 AD 103	Edondburg			MIA	Leckwe	22 16 11 29 17 22	H05							
	2229 AD 104		Bykrip		R	Sotho	22 16 33-5 29 15 45-5	H05							
	2229 AD 105		Bykrip		MIA	Leckwe	22 16 29 29 15 43	H05							
	2229 AD 106		Bykrip		MIA	Leckwe	22 16 31 29 15 39	H05							
	2229 AD 107		Bykrip		R/MIA	S/KZ	22 16 28 29 15 39	H05							
	2229 AD 108	VK 2	Bykrip		LAMIA	LVA/T	22 16 42 29 15 34	H05				dagga gb	skeleton	potls, bone, charcoal	
	2229 AD 109	VK	Bykrip		LIA	Khami	22 16 45 29 15 37	H05				glass beads			

Table 1. Sites recorded during the 2005 and 2006 surveys.

Map No.	Site No.	Site Name	Farm name	Period	Industry/Culture	Site Type	Co-Ordinates	Donor	Exca.	Visual/Written Material	C14	Artefacts	Organic Remains	Samples	Rock Art
	2229 AD 110	KK		Bykrip	LIA/MIA	Kraai/Lekwa	22 16 47 29 15 40	EOMH	H05				2 kraals	pot. bone	
	2229 AD 111			Bykrip	LIA	Kraai	22 16 47 29 15 35	H05							
	2229 AD 112			Bykrip	Historic	Sotho	22 16 47 29 15 32	EOMH		village walls					
	2229 AD 113			Bykrip	H/R	Sotho?	22 16 50 29 15 38	H05		stone lines					
	2229 AD 114			Anglican	IA	?	22 16 49 29 15 16	EMOH		buried					
	2229 AD 115			Anglican	LIA	Kraai	22 16 50 29 15 12	EOMH		palace		ruin		v dung	
	2229 AD 116			Bykrip	LIA	Kraai	22 16 52 29 15 29	EOMH		hilltop		low walling		4 kraals	
	2229 AD 117			Bykrip	MIA	K2	22 17 01 29 15 44	EOMH							
	2229 AD 118			Bykrip	MIA	K2	22 16 59 29 16 04	EOMH							
	2229 AD 119	Beacon		Bykrip	MIA	Map	22 17 04 29 16 07	EOMH							
	2229 AD 120			Bykrip	MIA	K2?	22 16 58 29 16 04.5	EOMH							
	2229 AD 121			Bykrip	R	ATL?	22 16 21 29 16 07	EOMH		benches					
	2229 AD 122			Bykrip	MIA	T	22 16 18 29 16 10	EOMH				2 cupules			
	2229 AD 123			Bykrip	R	Sotho	22 16 17 29 16 16	EOMH					2 kraals		
	2229 AD 124			Bykrip	R	?	22 16 21 29 16 16	EOMH				stone circle			
	2229 AD 125			Bykrip	R/MIA	S/K2	22 16 24 29 15 37	H05							
	2229 AD 126			Bykrip	R	Sotho	22 16 38 29 15 32								
	2229 AD 127			Bykrip	R	Sotho	22 16 28 29 16 09						2 kraals	fig	

Table 1. Sites recorded during the 2005 and 2006 surveys.

Map No.	Site No.	Site Name	Farm name	Period	Industry/Culture	Site Type	Co-Ordinates	Donor	Exca.	Visual/Written Material	C14	Artefacts	Organic Remains	Samples	Rock Art
	2229 AD 146	Bykip		LIA/MIA	Khami/KZ		22 16 13 29 16 30 5	H05					2 kraals		
	2229 AD 147	Bykipo		IA	?		22 16 11 29 16 33	H05							
	2229 AD 148	Bykipo		MIA	KZ		22 17 21 3 29 15 49 2	H06							
	2229 AD 149	Bykipo		MIA	KZ		22 17 38 29 15 50	H06							
	2229 AD 150	Bykipo		MSA		lookout?	22 18 08 29 15 31	H06							
	2229 AD 151	Bykipo		MIA	LK		22 18 08 29 15 28	H06							
	2229 AD 152	Anglican		IA	?		22 18 03 29 15 15	H06							
	2229 AD 153	Bykipo		LIA	icon		22 18 45 29 16 14	EOMH							
	2229 AD 154	Bykipo		MIA	T		22 18 42 29 16 14	EOMH							
	2229 AD 155	Bykipo		MIA	KZ		22 18 46 29 16 15	EOMH				iron tang			
	2229 AD 156	Bykipo		LIA	icon		22 18 49 29 16 15	EOMH							
	2229 AD 157	Edondburg		MIA	KZ		22 18 38 29 17 26	EOMH							
	2229 AD 158	Bykipo		MIA	Lackwe		22 18 31 29 16 58	H06	2006					v dung	
	2229 AD 159	Bykipo		LIA/MIA	Khami/Lackwe		22 18 24 29 16 23	H06							
	2229 AD 160	Edondburg		LIA	icon		22 18 42 29 17 06	H06					2 v dung	v dung	
	2229 AD 161	Edondburg		LIA	icon		22 18 43 29 17 11	H06							
	2229 AD 162	Edondburg		MSA		workshop	22 18 45 29 17 16	EOMH		Hansh/Eastwood Report					
	2229 AD 163	Edondburg		MIA	Lackwe	midden	22 18 43 29 17 26	EOMH							

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Map No.	Site No.	Site Name	Farm name	Period	Industry/Culture	Site Type	Co-Ordinates	Donor	Exca.	Visual/Written Material	C14	Artefacts	Organic Remains	Samples	Rock Art
	2229 AD 164	Edmondsburg		IA	?	rock	22 16 40 29 15 57	EE				maraba only			
	2229 AD 165	Edmondsburg		MIA	Map		22 16 17 29 16 30	EE							
	2229 AD 166	Edmondsburg		LIA	Kharrt		22 16 13 29 16 50	EE							
	2229 AD 167	Bykip		MIA	K2M		22 16 43 29 16 14	EOMH							

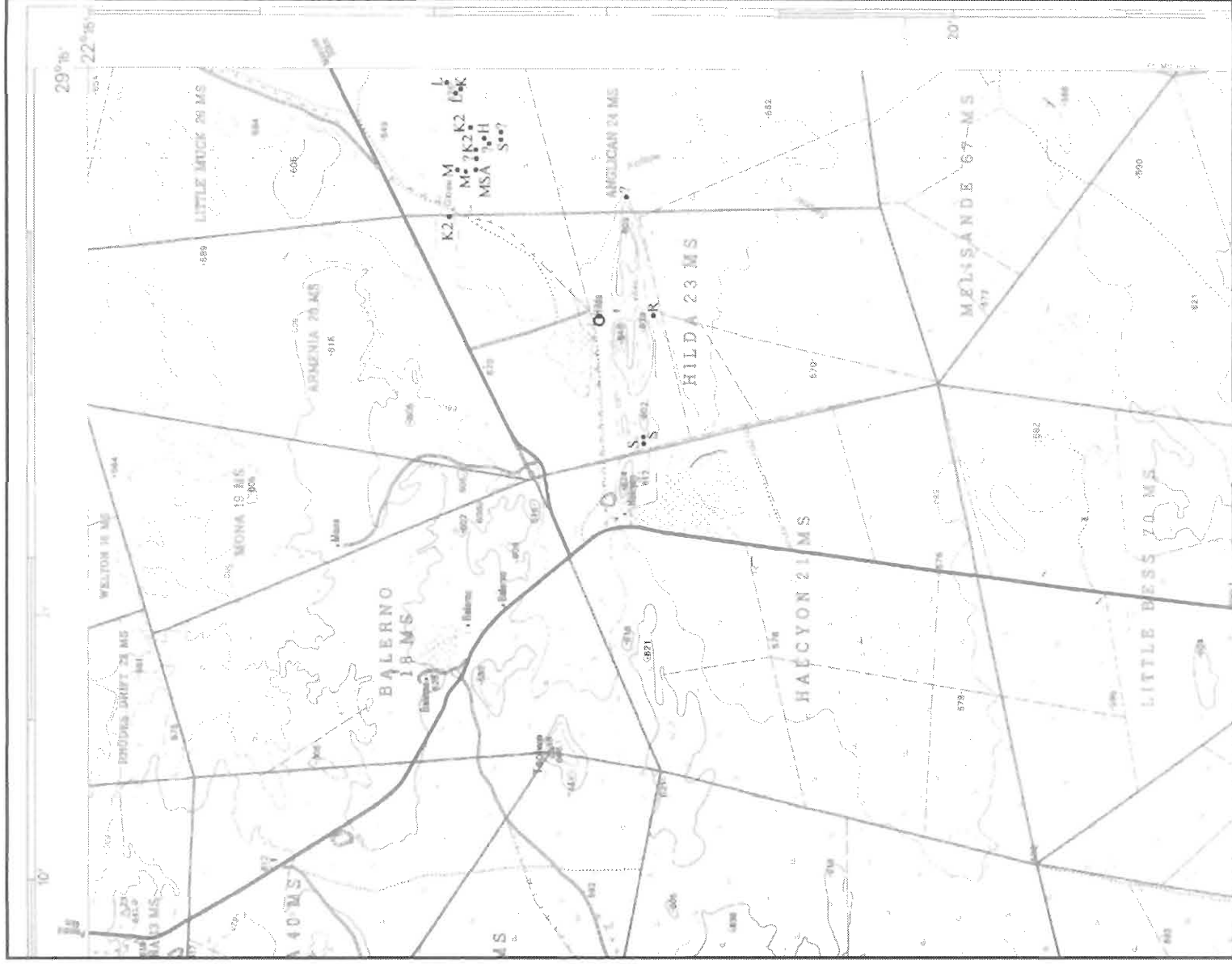


Figure 1. Location of sites on map 2229AC, examined during the 2005 and 2006 surveys.

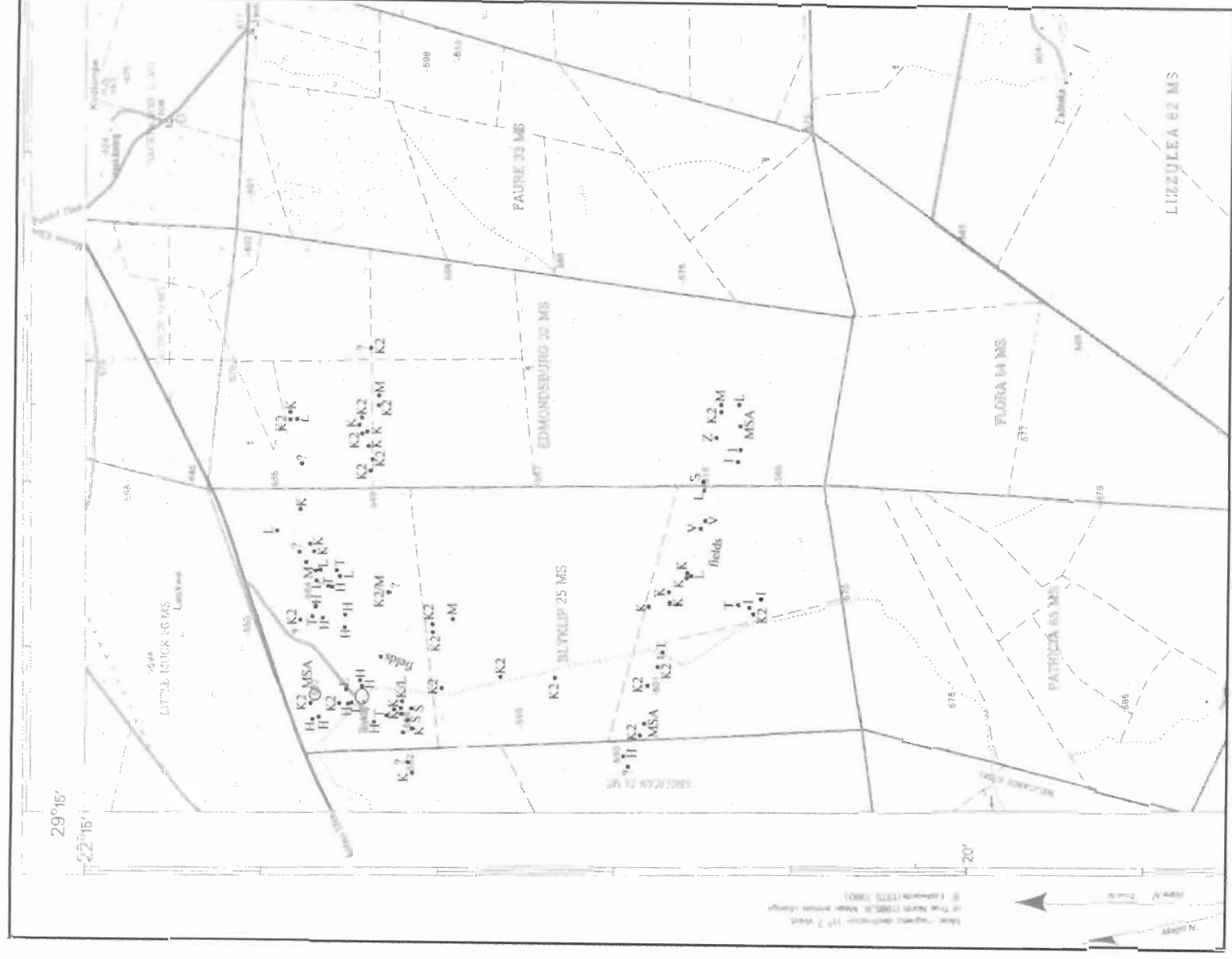


Figure 2. Location of sites on map 2229AD, examined during the 2005 and 2006 surveys.

manufacturing them. As with other Leokwe settlements, at least one cattle kraal was placed against a sandstone ridge, and the kraal probably stood outside the associated village. This site is worth further investigation.

Thirdly, a Mapungubwe-period settlement (2229AC17) on Anglican included a small stone arc marking the men's court. Another court wall occurs on Weipe 506. Sites such as these two help to establish regional political boundaries.

III. EXCAVATIONS

A. Weipe (2229AB508)

The 2004 Honours team located Weipe 508 (22 10 32S 29 29 07E) next to the Limpopo flood plain (Figure 3) on the Roos Trust portion of the farm Weipe 47 MS. The 2005 class test excavated it to document a commoner homestead dating to the Mapungubwe period. Typically, the homestead was organized according to the principles of the Central Cattle Pattern (Figure 4) with a central kraal surrounded by numerous grain bins (Figure 5). Excavations revealed two occupation horizons; pottery representing a short transitional phase between K2 and Mapungubwe lay underneath the main Mapungubwe horizon. Charcoal from a midden dates the Mapungubwe horizon to 630 ± 70 BP (Pta 9549), calibrating to between AD 1290 and 1405. Both horizons contained the remains of a red-grit plaster that had been smeared around the grain bins and houses. This point is relevant to current debates about rainmaking hills.



Figure 3. Weipe 508. Note cultivated floodplains in background.

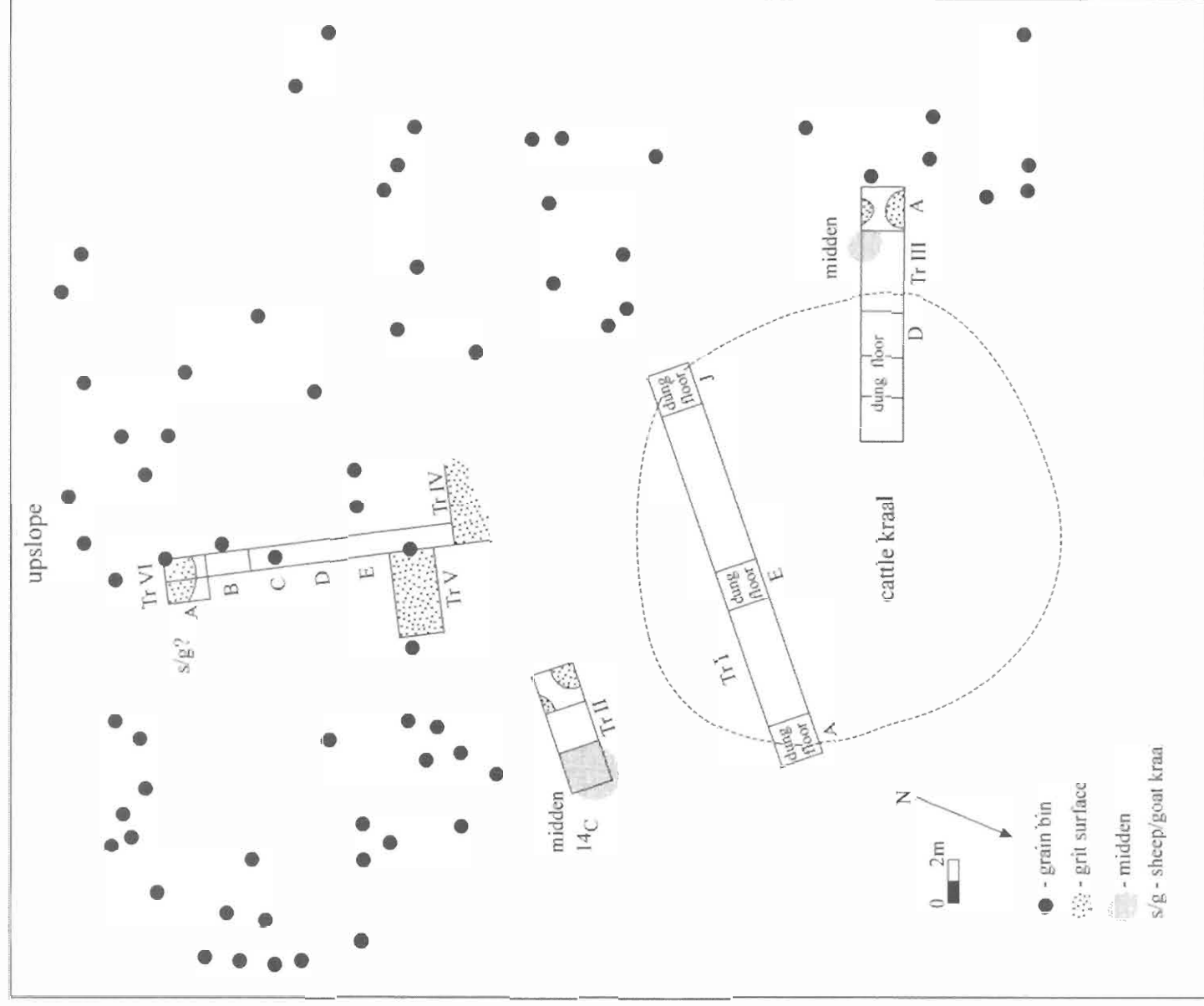


Figure 4. Weipe 508: plan showing location of trenches



Figure 5. Weipe 508: (above) students on the central kraal; (below) grain bin stand at the end of Trench III.

B. Site VK (2229AD109)

Found during the 2005 survey, this site (Figure 6) was part of a complex of settlements located around an outcrop of sandstone hills near a cultivatable portion of the middle Kolope. The 2006 team showed that VK was a Khami-period homestead with a Kalanga version of the Central Cattle Pattern. Instead of the down slope orientation typical of many commoner settlements, a west/east axis defined the front and back (Figure 7). Here, white grit formed the plastered surface in the residential zone (Figure 8).

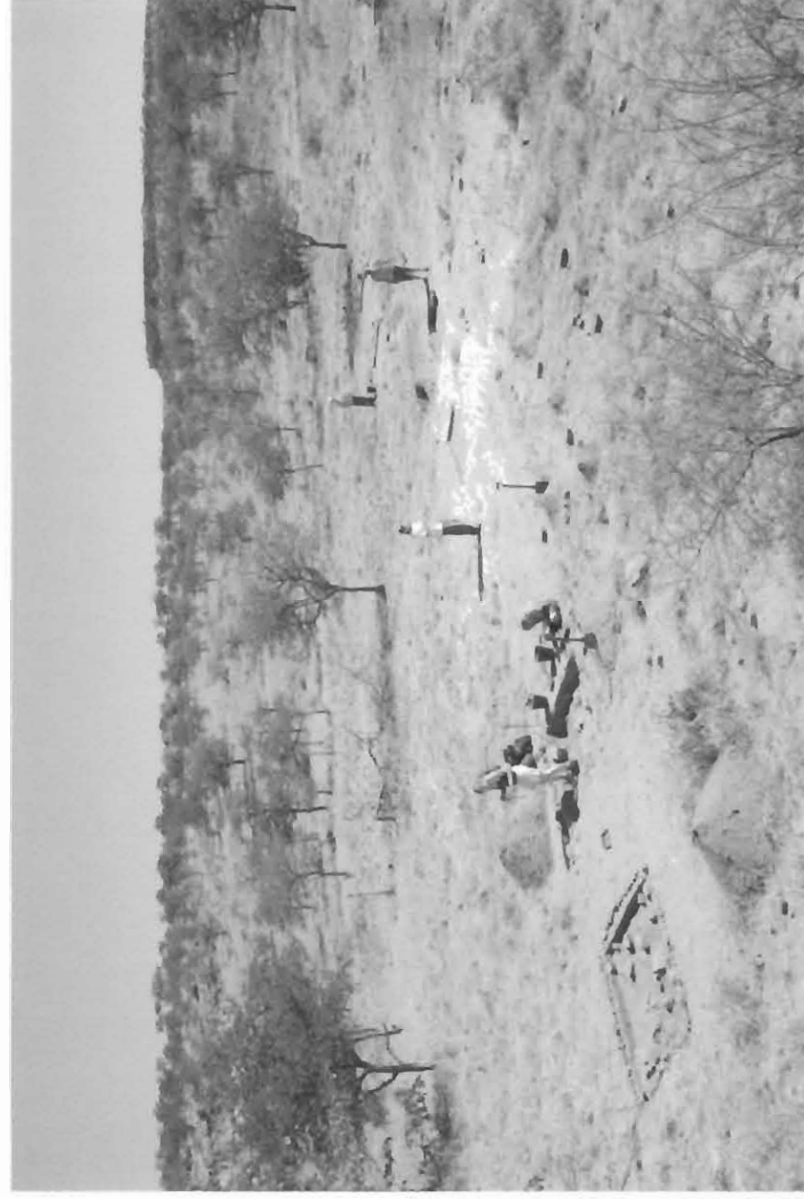


Figure 6. VK from the south.

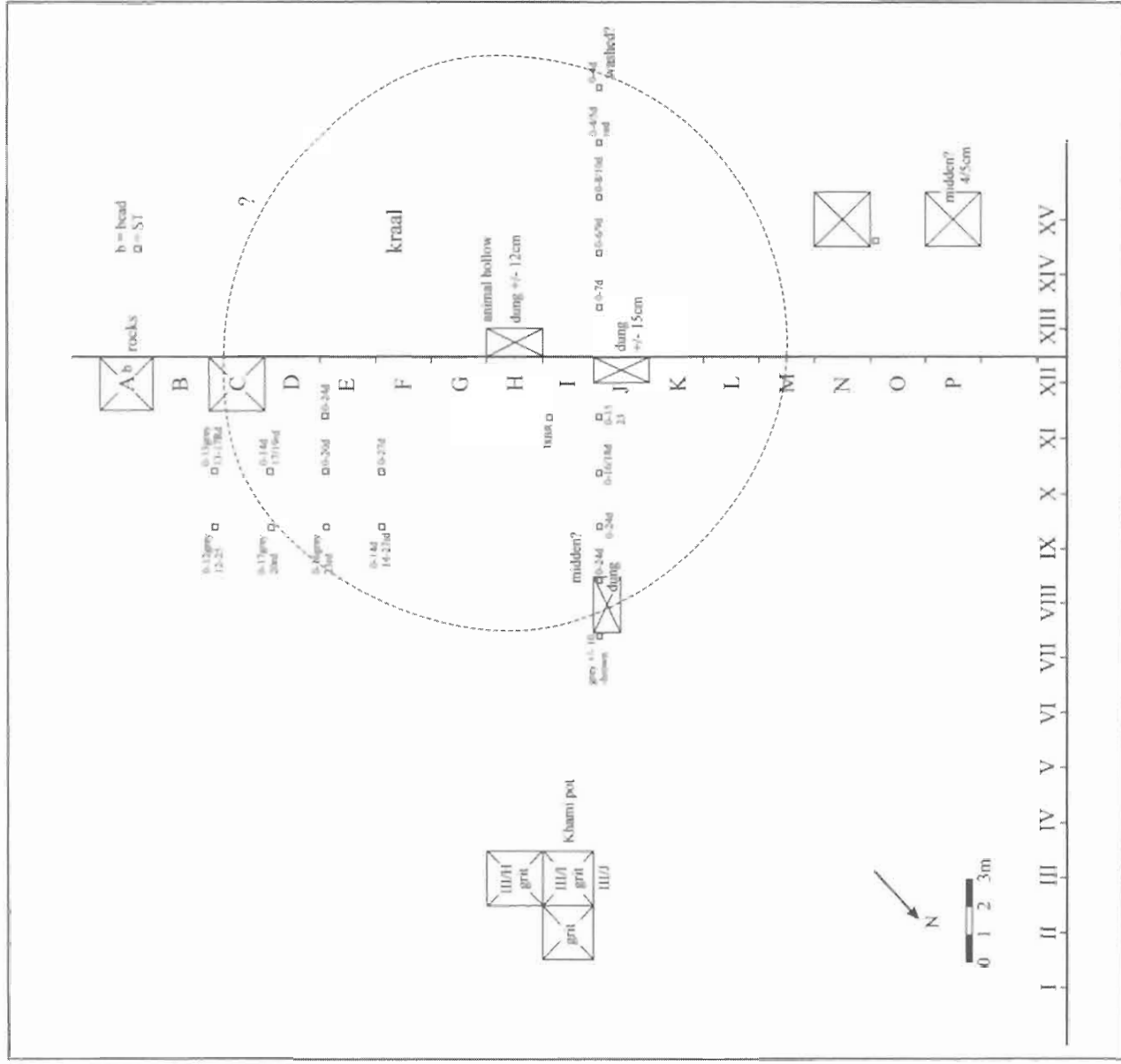


Figure 7. VK: plan showing location of trenches.



Figure 8. VK: white grit plaster in Trench III.

C. Site VK2 (2229AD108)

The collapsed remains of burnt grain bins marked the residential zone of VK2 (Figures 9&10) 150 metres north of VK. As at Weipe 508, red grit formed the plastered surface around the grain bins and houses (Figure 11). Broken pots under these granaries represent the transitional style between K2 and Mapungubwe (Figure 12), and therefore this occupation probably dates between AD 1200 and 1250. Somewhat surprisingly, later Khami-period structures had been built on top of the two grain bins. These later structures were probably contemporaneous with a Khami-period burial located in the vicinity (Figure 13). After recording, we left the burial *in situ*.

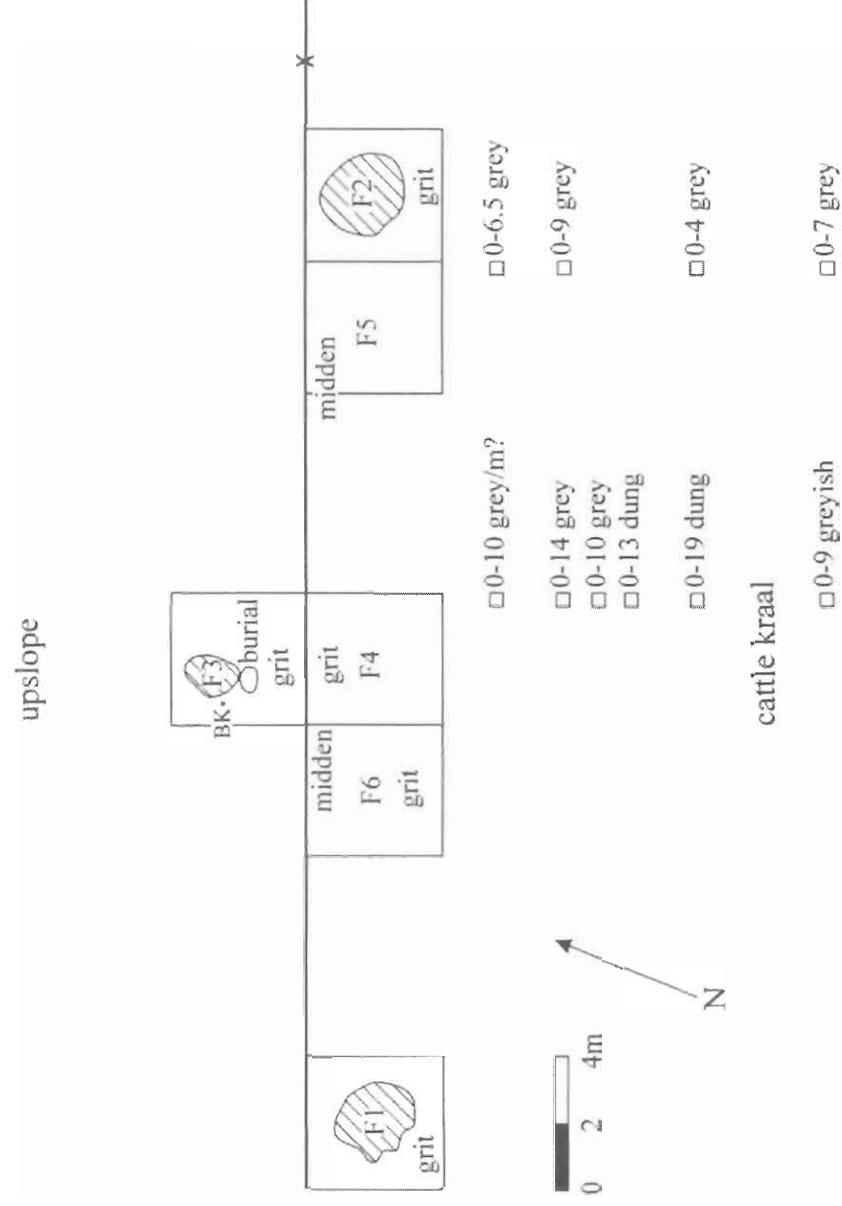


Figure 9. VK2: plan showing location of trenches and grain bin remains.

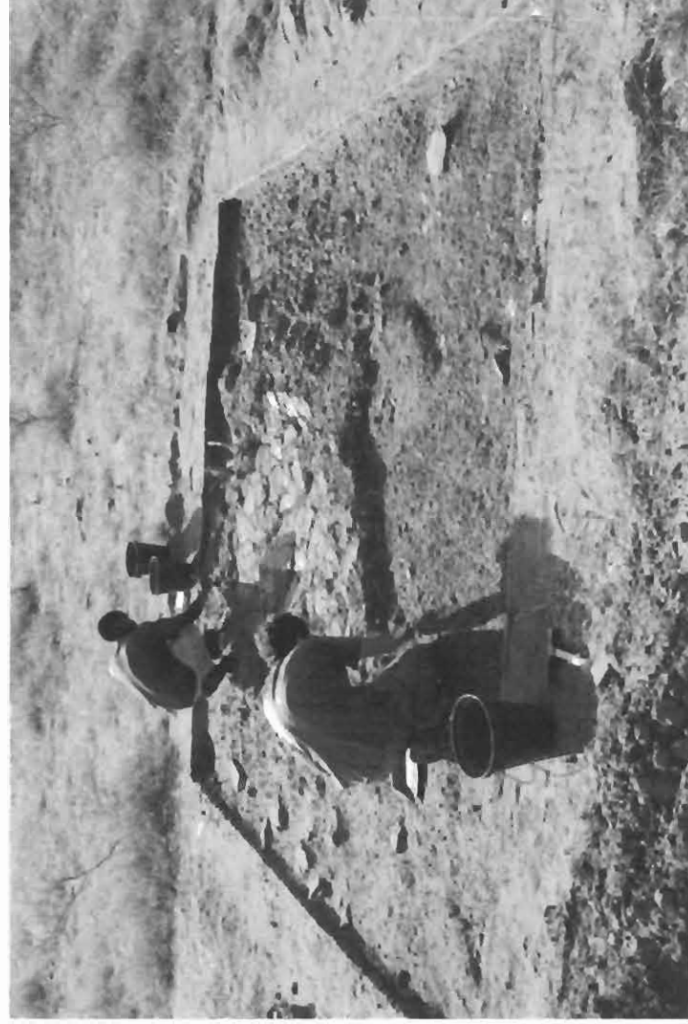


Figure 10. VK2: remains of grain bin in F2.

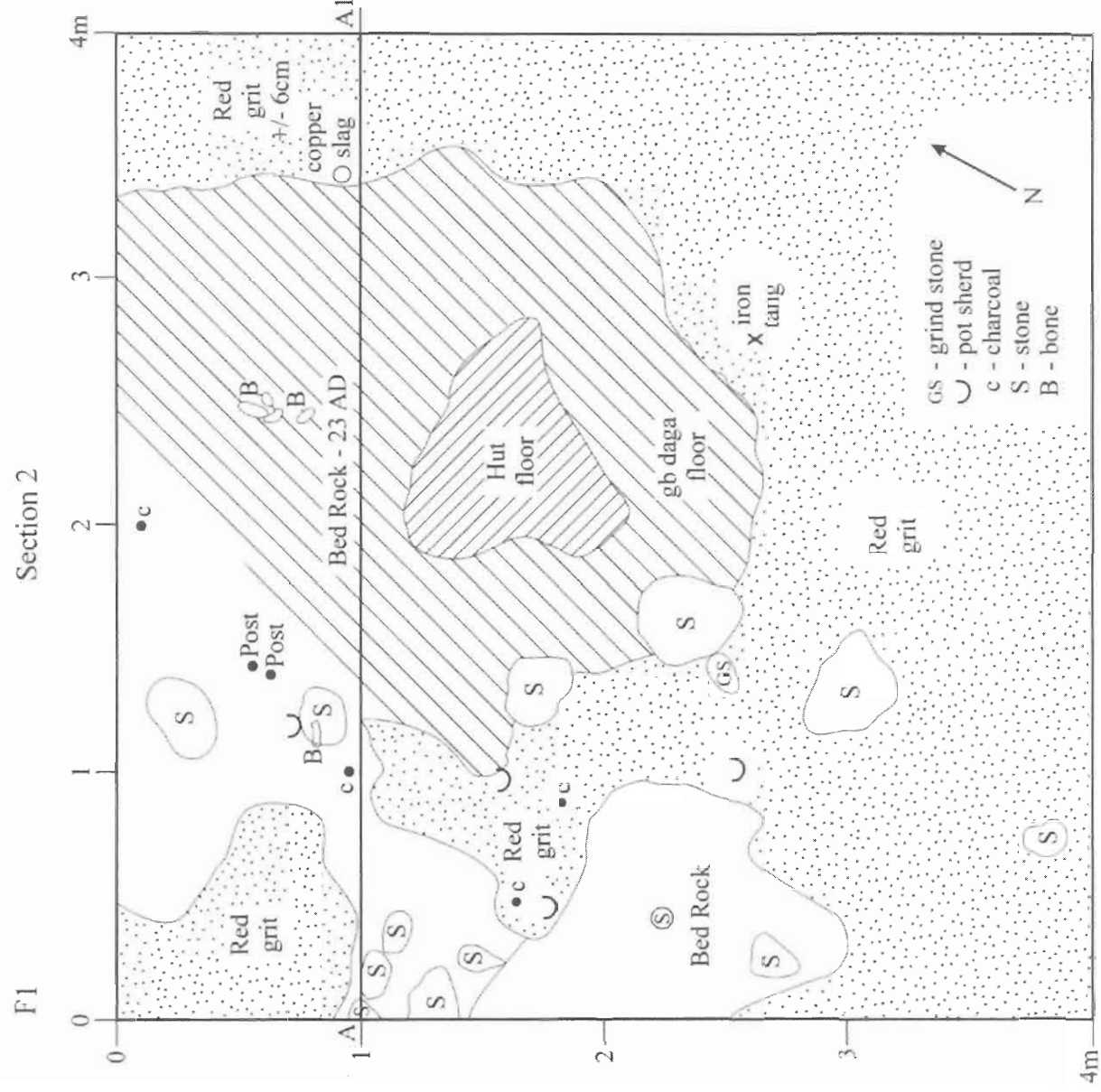
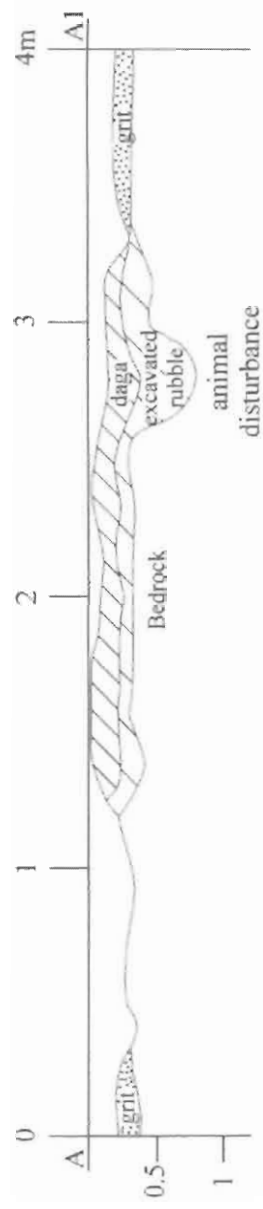


Figure 11. VK2: plan of F1 showing red grit plaster and later hut floor on top of grain bin.

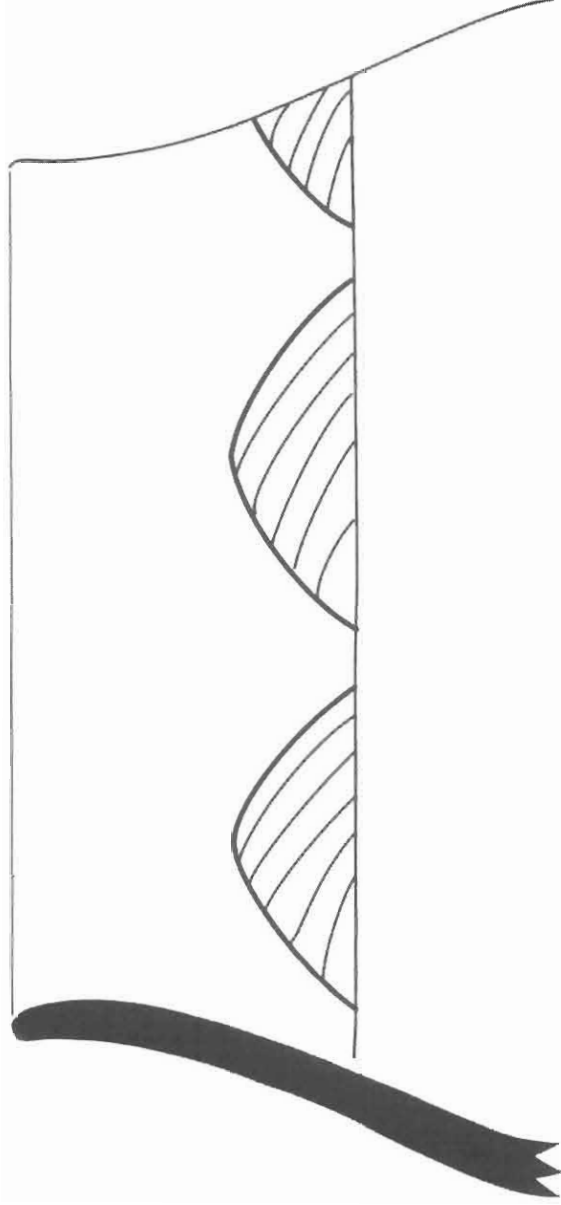


Figure 12. VK2: Transitional pot in association with F2.



Figure 13. VK2: Khami-period burial.

D. Site KK (2229AD110)

The third site tested in 2006 lay on the south side of the VK hill (Figure 14). The team uncovered two large cattle kraals dating to the Khami period (Figure 15). The two dung horizons overlapped in Trench I/J/4 (Figure 16). Presumably, these two marked separate homesteads dating a few years apart. Underneath both lay a Leokwe horizon at least 200 years older (Figure 17). The organisation of this older occupation is as yet unknown, but the excavations yielded a useful ceramic sample.



Figure 14. KK from the north. Note cultivatable land in background.

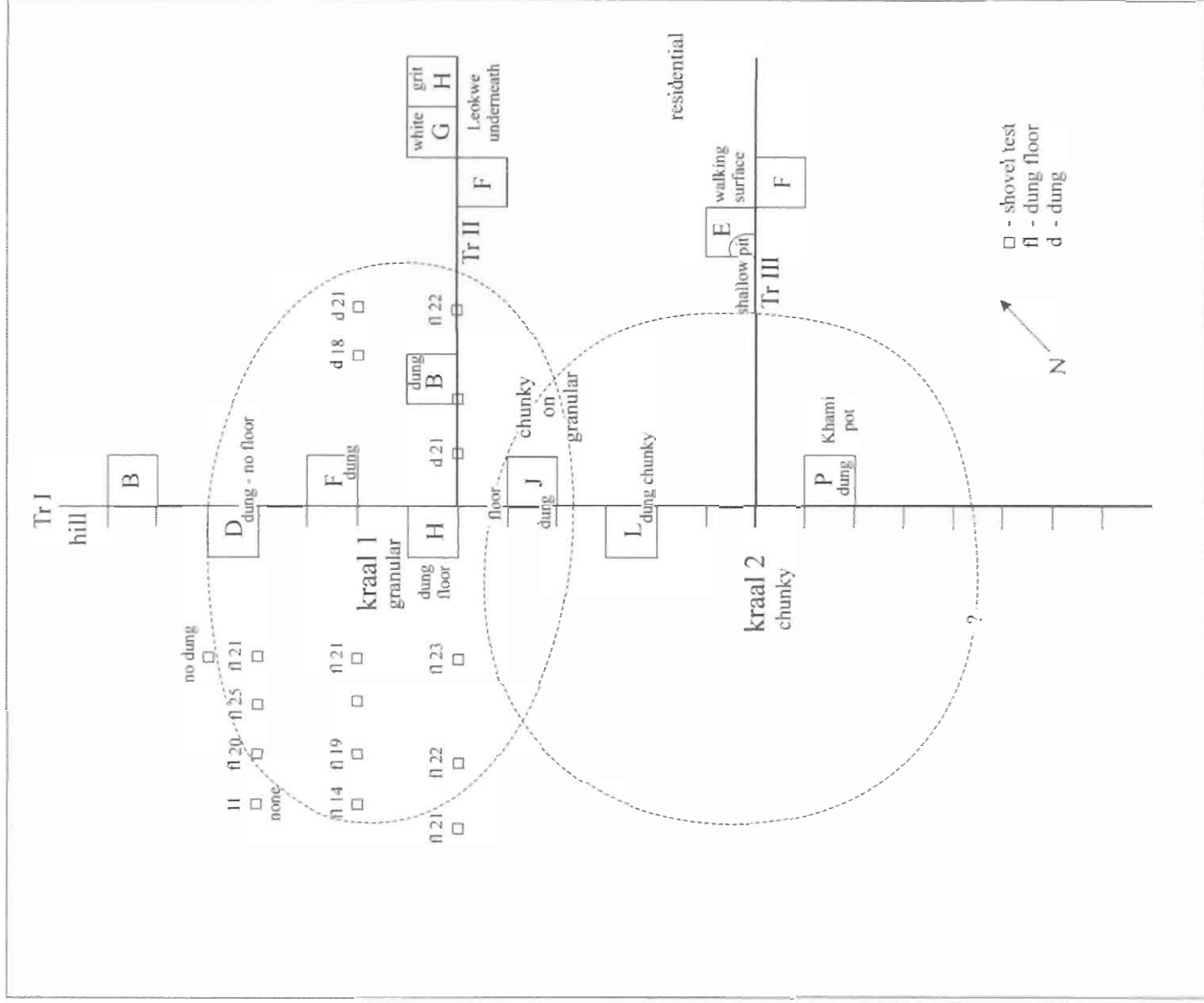


Figure 15. KK: plan showing location of trenches and kraals.

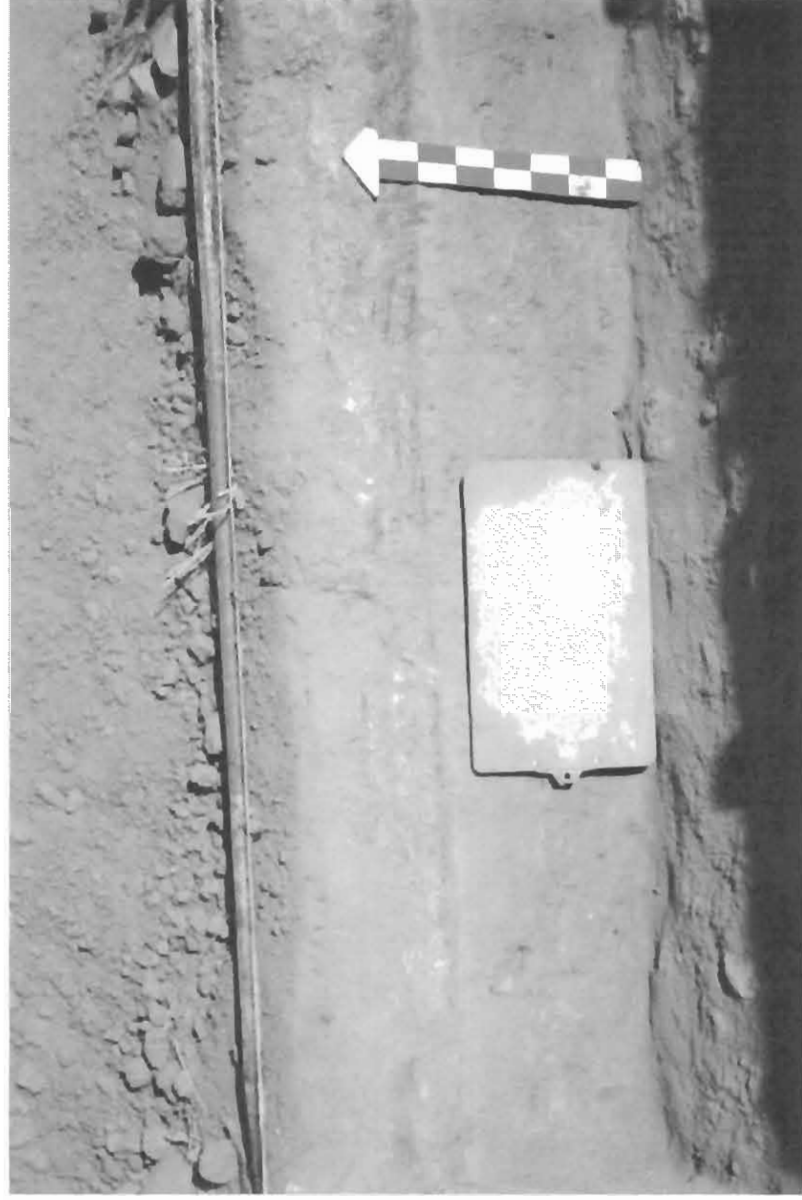


Figure 16. KK: chunky on top of granular dung in I/J/4 representing superimposed cattle kraals.

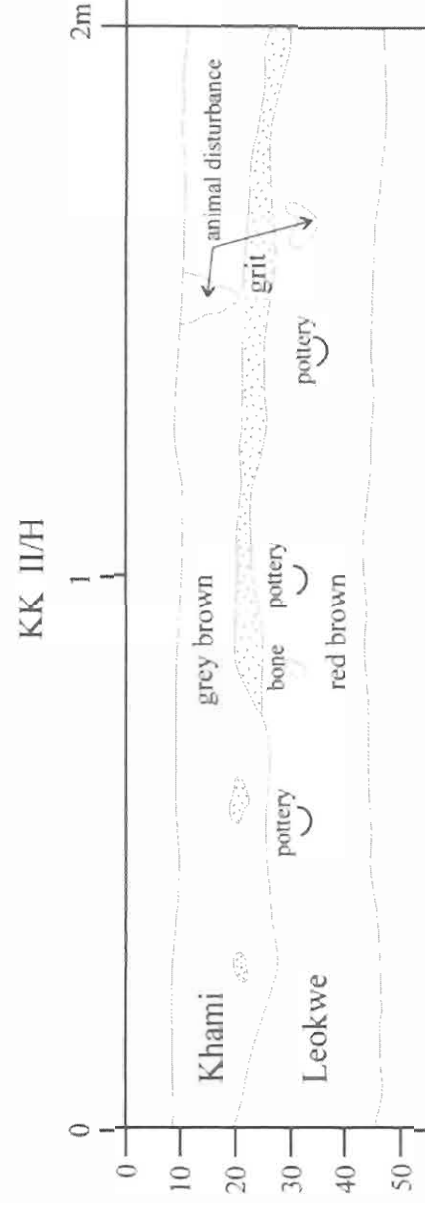


Figure 17. KK: section from Trench II/H showing Leokwe horizon under white grit dating to the Khami period.

Overall, these excavations help to establish the regional sequence. In terms of ceramics, Weipe 508 and VK2 clarify the stylistic change from K2 to Mapungubwe. This transitional step correlates with the first occupation on top of Mapungubwe Hill. At the same time as the transition, villagers started plastering the ground around their grain bins and houses. This feature also appears simultaneously in the rain making sequence at Machete and on Leokwe Hill; and so residential and ritual sites developed in parallel.

One other finding is worth special comment. The use of K2-period grain bins as foundations for Khami houses has not been previously noted. A few pieces of Khami pottery and the burial were the only other indication that another occupation had been present. Thus, erosion had removed most of the later deposit.

IV. CONFERENCES

Various team members presented their results at four conferences during the review period. First, the Director co-chaired a session on the 'Archaeology of the Shashi-Limpopo & Adjacent Areas' and read a paper at the international Pan African Congress of Archaeology and Related Studies, held during July 2005 in Gaborone, Botswana. Alex Schoeman and Marilee Wood also read papers about their research. Other members (L. Barrie, M. Kloppers, A. Raath, J. van der Walt) and Honours students (K. Fatherley & J. du Piesanie) attended the conference as observers.

The Biennial Meeting of the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists provided a second forum. Held at the National Culture History Museum in Pretoria during April 2006, the Director as well as John Calabrese (from the US), Edwin Hanisch, Anne Raath and Alex Schoeman presented papers. Two Masters students (K. Fatherley & J. du Piesanie) attended as observers.

Thirdly, the Director also attended the 18th Biennial Conference of the Society for Africanist Archaeologists held during June 2006 in Calgary, Canada. Marilee Wood presented a paper on her latest glass bead research. A former member of the project team, Dr Jeannette Smith, presented a paper based on her earlier Limpopo research.

And fourthly, A. Raath attended the 10th International Conference for the International Council for Archaeozoology held in Mexico City in August 2006. She presented a paper on her current Masters work.

V. GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

As conference attendances show, the project supports several graduate students. Five were registered for doctoral degrees and three have finished.

- **John Calabrese** (registered 1996) discovered the existence of the Leokwe group. His thesis (*Ethnicity, class and polity: the emergence of social and political complexity in the Shashi-Limpopo Valley of southern Africa, AD 900 to 1300*) was passed by the Faculty of Humanities in 2005.
- **McEdward Murimbika's** (2000) thesis (*Sacred powers and rituals of transformation: a study of the ethnoarchaeology of rainmaking rituals and agricultural practices in the development of the Mapungubwe state, AD 1000 to AD 1300*) was passed by the Faculty of Humanities in 2006.
- **Alex Schoeman's** (2002) thesis (*Clouding power? rainmaking, space landscapes and ideology in Shashe-Limpopo state formation*) was passed by the Faculty of Humanities in 2006.
- **Edwin Hanisch** (2003) is working on the changing strategies of animal husbandry during the Zhizo, K2 and Mapungubwe periods. His own herd of indigenous fat-tailed sheep has given him insights into such factors as growth rates and disease. He is registered in the Faculty of Science.
- **Peter Venter** (2006) is developing a computer programme to re-create life at Mapungubwe. The final product will be an important educational tool. He is registered in the Faculty of Science.

Seven other graduate students were registered for Masters degrees, and one has finished.

- **Marilee Wood** (2000) established the glass bead sequence for the valley and connected it to the Indian and Indonesian trade systems. Her thesis (*Glass beads and pre-European trade in the Shashe-Limpopo region*) was passed by the Faculty of Humanities in 2005.

- **Marietta Kloppers** (2003) is analysing faunal samples from K2, the Leokwe box canyon site and three of Alex Schoeman's rainmaking sites. So far, there are clear differences between the three data sets. She is registered in the Faculty of Science.
- **Laura Barrie** (2004) is working on the pottery excavated from two K2 sites on Den Staat. Her proposal (*A morphological analysis of the K2 Sites 2229 AA 14B and 14C, Limpopo Valley, South Africa*) was finalized in April 2005 for the Faculty of Science. She has completed the initial cataloguing and sorting, but has taken time out to have a baby.
- **Jaco van der Walt** (2004 - part time) is examining the pottery recovered from the rehabilitation exercise at Mapungubwe. He is concentrating on the transition between K2 and Mapungubwe.
- **Anne Raath** (2005) is investigating human diet during the Middle Iron Age. The work involves the isotopic analysis of faunal remains and human skeletons from Schroda (SAHRA Permit No. 80/06/01/007/51). She is registered in the Faculty of Science.
- **Kerry Fatherley** (2006) will study the distribution of cattle body parts to investigate the social relationship between Leokwe and K2 people. She is registered in the Faculty of Science.
- **Justin du Piesanie** (2006) will investigate the social relationship between K2 and Leokwe through a GIS approach to settlement distribution and other factors. He is registered in the Faculty of Science.

We congratulate **John Calabrese, McEdward Murimbika, Alex Schoeman and Marilee Wood** for completing their degrees.

VI. MAPUNGUBWE GUIDEBOOK

The Director incorporated the most recent project results in a guidebook on the Mapungubwe landscape. Wits Press published the guide in June 2005, and held a book launch with the Archaeological Society in the Everard-Reed Gallery, Johannesburg. The Director sent complimentary copies to all sponsors, as well as landowners in the project area.

VII. PAPERS AND PUBLICATIONS

- Calabrese, J.** 2006. Ethnic identity, class, and socio-political complexity in the Shashi-Limpopo: a new perspective on the rise of complex society in southern Africa. Read at the Biennial Meeting of the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists, Pretoria.
- Huffman, T.N.** 2004/5. Archaeological mitigation for Project Lion. *Southern African Field Archaeology* **13 & 14**:42-48.
- Huffman, T.N.** 2005. The Mapungubwe cultural landscape. Paper read at the 12th Congress of the Pan African Archaeological Association for Prehistory & Related Studies, Gaborone, Botswana.
- Huffman, T.N.** 2005. *Mapungubwe: Ancient African Civilisation on the Limpopo*. Wits University Press, 62 pp.
- Huffman, T.N.** 2005. The stylistic origins of Bambata and the spread of mixed farming in southern Africa. *Southern African Humanities* **17**: 57-79. Also read at the Biennial Meeting of the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists, Pretoria.
- Raath, A.** 2006A. Re-investigating diet from the Shashe-Limpopo basin during the Middle Iron Age. Paper read at the Biennial Meeting of the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists, Pretoria.
- Raath, A.** 2006B. Re-quantifying the faunal collection from Schroda, Shashe-Limpopo Valley, South Africa. Paper read at the 10th International Conference for the International Council for Archaeozoology, Mexico City.
- Schoeman, M.H.** 2005. Clouding power? Rainmaking, space, landscapes and ideology in Shashe-Limpopo state formation. Paper read at the 12th Congress of the Pan African Archaeological Association for Prehistory & Related Studies, Gaborone, Botswana.
- Schoeman, M.H.** 2006. The Shashe-Limpopo confluence area: a place where rivers and people met. Paper read at the Biennial Meeting of the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists, Pretoria.
- Smith, J.M.** 2006. Ethnographic and historical analogies for ancient dryland farming in southern Africa. Paper read at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Society for Africanist Archaeologists, Calgary, Canada.
- Wood, M.** 2006. The development of a glass bead sequence for southern Africa in the Islamic Period. Paper read at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Society for Africanist Archaeologists, Calgary, Canada.
- Robertshaw, P.T., **M. Wood**, R.S. Popelka-Filcoff & M.D. Glascock, 2006. Glass beads of

southern Africa and Indian Ocean trading networks. Paper read at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Society for Africanist Archaeologists, Calgary, Canada.

Robertshaw, P.T., B. Rasoarifetra, **M. Wood**, E. Melchiorre, R.S. Popelka-Filcoff & M.D.

Glacock, 2006. Chemical analysis of glass beads from Madagascar. *Journal of*

African Archaeology 4(1): 91-109.

VIII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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