

Introduction

The Institute for Cultural Resource Management (ICRM) was contacted by Environmental Planning and Design to undertake excavations of an archaeological site located near Sheffield Beach. The site was initially surveyed in early 2001 and regarded as having medium archaeological significance (Anderson 2001). The survey located several pottery sherds, marine shell and grinding stones.

It appears that most of the site dates to the Historical Period (AD 1830 onwards), however there may be an earlier cultural horizon possibly dating between AD 1000 and AD 1830. Both of these periods have several socioeconomic changes for agriculturists in KwaZulu-Natal and are considered to be significant periods along the KwaZulu-Natal coastal. (see Anderson 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2000; 2001; Davies 1971; Robey 1980).

Methodology

A total of 24 squares were excavated along the hill (fig. 1). Squares were initially placed on either edge and in the centre of the hill so as to locate potential settlement patterns and information. Each square was excavated in 10 cm spits and by stratigraphic lenses. The squares varied between 2 m x 2 m and 3 m x 3 m in size,

Stratigraphy

Five main stratigraphic layers were visible during the course of the excavations. These are from the surface to the base: Top Sand, Brown Sand, Red-Brown Sand, White-Brown Sand and Berea Red. The Red-Brown Sand did not occur in all squares. White-Brown Sand tended to be the archaeologically sterile horizon, although a few artefacts were located within this layer. Most of the artefacts came from the Brown Sand horizon. The shell lenses were more stratified and are discussed below.

Features

Very few features were located at this site. These features include a possible fire place, stone circle and a large shell midden.

The possible fire place consisted of soft black sand with charcoal surrounded by gritty black sand in Square C2. The gritty black sand had some pottery and a broken vessel in the southeastern corner. The feature is ± 10 cm – 15 cm deep and occurred in at least half of the square. No burnt material came from this feature, besides the charcoal fragments.

A semi-circle of stones was located in Square A6. This semi-circle was located in the White-Brown Sand some 70 cm – 80 cm below the surface. Three small clay circles (grey in colour) were recorded within this semi-circle. A square adjacent to the semi-circle was excavated, however the rest of this feature was not located.

The main shell midden extended over two 2 m x 2 m squares. The shell midden consisted of five different, and overlapping, lenses (fig's 2 – 3). The lenses generally consisted of a fragmentary upper layer with a more compacted lens below. Lenses 1 and 2 were surrounded in blackish sand, while Lenses 3 and 4 were in brown-black sand. Lens 5 appears to be located beneath Lenses 1 and 2. Lens 5 is more compacted than the other lenses and is the basal lens.

Lenses 3 and 4 were the largest lenses (Table 1) and extend westward outside of the excavated squares. These lenses were systematically sampled. The lenses varied in size but tend to be ± 1.5 m in diameter and they form a basin-shaped feature.

Table 1: Volume of shell excavated per shell lens

Square	Lens	Volume (litres)¹
C7	1	25
C7	2	34.1
C7/ C7.1	3	237.9
C7.1	4	154.8
C7.1	5	50

The shell remains consist mainly of brown mussels, oyster and some limpets. Other shell remains did occur, but are probably a result of occurring naturally on the more edible shellfish. Some of the shellfish were burnt.

Artefacts

The artefacts consisted of ceramic vessels, grinding stones, shell, glass beads and metal working debris.

Glass

A few fragments of glass bottles came from Lens 1 and Lens 3. These fragments are dark green in colour and some of the bottles have a rectangular base. Several sherds have bubbles in the glass suggesting that they were hand-made, as opposed to automated factory bottles.

Glass Bead

A small pink glass bead was recorded on the surface of square B6. It probably dates to the 19th century.

Metal Working

A small piece of slag occurred along the northern part of the site.

Ceramics

The site had a very low density of ceramics in comparison to other sites in the area. Most of these sherds were undecorated and brown in colour. A few sherds have a black burnish. One sherd has five rows of horizontal grooves, while one sherd has possible lip-notching.

Shell

Most of the shellfish remains consisted of brown mussel (*Perna perna*), oyster (*Ostridaea spp.*) and limpets (*Patella spp.*). These are consistent with the shellfish remains from other excavated sites.

Worked Stone

Several upper and lower grinding stones were recorded. The lower grinding stones tend to be flat and smooth, and not the normal “bird bath” variety. Other fragments of worked stone were also recorded.

Bone

A few bone fragments were recovered from the shell midden. Some of these included fish bone.

Discussion

The excavations at SBD1 did not yield many significant finds or features. The site itself has a low density of occupation, alternatively, the higher density of occupation occurs more to the north of the hill in the current sugar cane. The latter is probably more the case as the northern squares have higher volumes of artefactual material than did the more southern squares. The impact of the housing development will thus be minimal provided it does not extend beyond the current boundaries.

¹ I use an approximation of 10 litres per bucket of excavated material

The excavations of the site had two main aims. Record the culture-history of the site, and attempt to reconstruct the spatial aspect. The site appears to be a Late Iron Age site probably dating to the 19th century (as seen with the glass bead and old glass bottles), however there may also be an older component to the site. Too few decorated ceramics were located to place this site in any firm chronology. The thin-walled sherds with the black burnish suggest a more recent date to the site.

The spatial component of the site suggests that the more southeastern part of the hill is less densely occupied than the north/northwestern part of the hill². It appears that the more densely occupied part of the site is still under sugarcane and will not be affected by the housing development. No distinctive features such as cattle byres or hut floors were recorded and only the one main shell midden was excavated. Thus no specific settlement pattern could be discerned.

² The southeastern part of the site needed to be excavated to ensure that no significant archaeological material existed.

References

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