

REPORT ON THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE UMHLANGA/LA LUCIA BUSINESS ESTATE DEVELOPMENT SITE

by

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Summary

During an archaeological survey of the Umhlanga/La Lucia Business Estate site, seven archaeological sites were found. Indications are that these sites date to the 11th century AD, a period about which little is known in Natal. I therefore recommend that further mitigation work is carried out, taking the form of excavations and mapping. Additional funds will be required to carry out this work.

Introduction

The Natal Museum's Institute for Cultural Resource Management was contracted in December 1992 by Rob Kirby Associates to undertake an archaeological survey of the Umhlanga/La Lucia Business Estate development site. This site lies a little inland of Umhlanga Rocks, east of the N2's Umhlanga/Mt Edgecombe interchange between the Natal Sharks Board offices and the N2. It is currently planted with sugar cane but would originally have been covered with Coastal Forest.

Geologically, the development site is situated on the Quaternary dunes of the Berea Red Formation. There is a small outcrop of the Vryheid Formation to the north of the site while inland are extensive outcrops of the Pietermaritzburg Shale Formation. Both the Vryheid and Pietermaritzburg Shale Formations are potential sources of iron ore which elsewhere were exploited by precolonial agriculturists.

The archaeological survey was carried out on the 5th and 6th of January 1993.

Methodology

A ground survey was required because any archaeological sites on the development site would not have been detectable through remote sensing techniques such as aerial photography. Almost the entire development site was covered during the survey. Some areas had restricted archaeological visibility because of dense sugar cane growth. However, most of these areas are fairly steep and are unlikely locations for archaeological sites.

The archaeological sites were plotted on a copy of the 1:5000 contour map supplied by Rob Kirby Associates and recorded on the standard site report forms used by the Natal Museum Archaeology Department. Interim site reports are included in this report.

Results and Recommendations

Seven archaeological sites were found during the survey (Fig.1). They are all Late Iron Age (LIA) sites, dating to within the last 900 years. All are situated on the tops or upper slopes of hills. The sites, which are the remains of villages of Bantu speaking agriculturists, consist of scatters of potsherds, grindstones and rubbish dumps or middens containing fragmentary shell. Interestingly, the most common identifiable shell in the middens is that of the oyster. Evidence from elsewhere indicates that the brown mussel was the shellfish most commonly exploited as a food source by precolonial agriculturists. The apparent prevalence of oyster on these sites may be a reflection of the toughness of oyster shell in comparison to mussel shell.

Without radiocarbon dates it is not possible to make an accurate statement about the age of the sites. However, the presence of grindstones typical of those used to process pre-maize staples such as sorghum and millet suggests that the sites are of some antiquity. Supporting an early date are potsherds decorated with rim notching. This decoration occurs on pots dating to the 11th century AD, suggesting that the sites may be as much as 800--900 years old. Iron ore occurs on three sites which, if it is not related to recent road construction, also suggests a precolonial date as indigenous iron production ended with the influx into Natal of mass-produced European metal goods after 1824.

Excavations have been undertaken on only two LIA sites on the Natal coast, both of which date to around 900 years ago. These are situated near Scottburgh (Robey 1980) and north of the Umhlanga Lagoon (Davies 1971). However, little is known about this period and I therefore recommend that, before the development proceeds, further limited mitigation work is carried out on selected archaeological sites on the Umhlanga/La Lucia Business Estate site. This work should take the form of limited test excavations and mapping. Personnel from the Institute for Cultural Resource Management are able to undertake this work at short notice and with a minimum of disruption to the construction schedule. However, the work cannot be accomplished within the current budget and I request that further funds be made available at the appropriate time.

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References

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