

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MITIGATION FOR THE WESTERN LIMB
TAILINGS PROJECT, RUSTENBURG**

A Phase-2 Report prepared for Anglo Platinum

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INTRODUCTION

The Archaeological survey for the Western Limb Tailings Retreatment Project recorded several prehistoric sites, and a few were worthy of mitigation (Huffman & Schoeman 2002). These included the rock engravings at Site 23 and stonewalling at Sites 28, 37 and 47. A recent fire, however, exposed Site 51, a better stonewalled settlement under the power line, and it was recorded in place of Site 37. Finally, we assessed the state of a cemetery under the power line at the eastern end of the project area.

METHOD

Mitigation began in January 2003, and continued irregularly for three months. Staff from the Rock Art Research Institute helped to trace the engravings, while various postgraduate students participated in the other mitigation.

RESULTS

Sites 23 & 28

Originally, we wondered if the engravings were linked to Site 28 because they resemble settlement plans superficially similar to the walling. Although simple circles similar to the oldest walling (Figure 1), the engravings appear to be recent: the lines are shallow and lack a patina characteristic of older work.



Figure 2. Rock engravings at site 23

In the case of the walling, we first thought that it might be an example of the oldest type in the area. But, unfortunately, much appears missing, and so little remains that a pattern is not evident (Figure 2). Some stone paving may have served as house floors, and the long wall may have been an outer boundary. Whatever the pattern, the two sites are most probably not connected.



Figure 2. Plan of site 28.

Site 47

The team mapped the walling in the area around the designated location of a pylon for the rerouted power line (Figure 3). The pattern for this area was clear. Stonewalls formed a long cattle lane from the south to a residential unit now overgrown by trees and bushes. The unit comprises a series of stone arcs around central enclosures. The arcs mark the back walls of the households of individual married women, while cattle stayed in the central enclosures. The whole settlement consists of several such units.

To recover a sample of the material culture associated with the mapped unit, the team excavated a small square (3 x 3 m, reduced to 2 x 3) in a midden outside the back wall (Figure 4). The midden was about 40cm thick and consisted of a series of alternating lenses of ash and soil underneath a dark brown surface horizon. Evidently, the original villagers shifted at least one stonewall because a later arc crossed over the midden.

Broken pottery (Figure 5) was the most common artefact in the midden (Table 1). Decoration included red ochre burnish (67), small stamping (7) and deep incision (1). The abraded edges of a few broken sherds show that they had been used for scraping.

The style of pottery (Huffman 2002) and the type of settlement organization (Mason 1986; Pistorius 1992) identify the original inhabitants as Western Sotho-Tswana (such as Kwena, Kgatla and Hurutshe), and dates the settlement to the 18th and 19th centuries.

Table 1. Artefacts in Test Trench at Site 47.

| | Plain | Pottery Decorated | Rims | Stone | Beads | Bone |
|---------|-------|----------------------|------|----------|-------|------|
| Surface | 17 | 2 | | | 1 ocs | 2 |
| Level 1 | 141 | 10 | 11 | | | |
| Level 2 | 177 | 11 | 15 | | | |
| Level 3 | 296 | 52 | 36 | 5 Flakes | | 55 |
| Total | 631 | 75 | 62 | 5 | 1 | 57 |

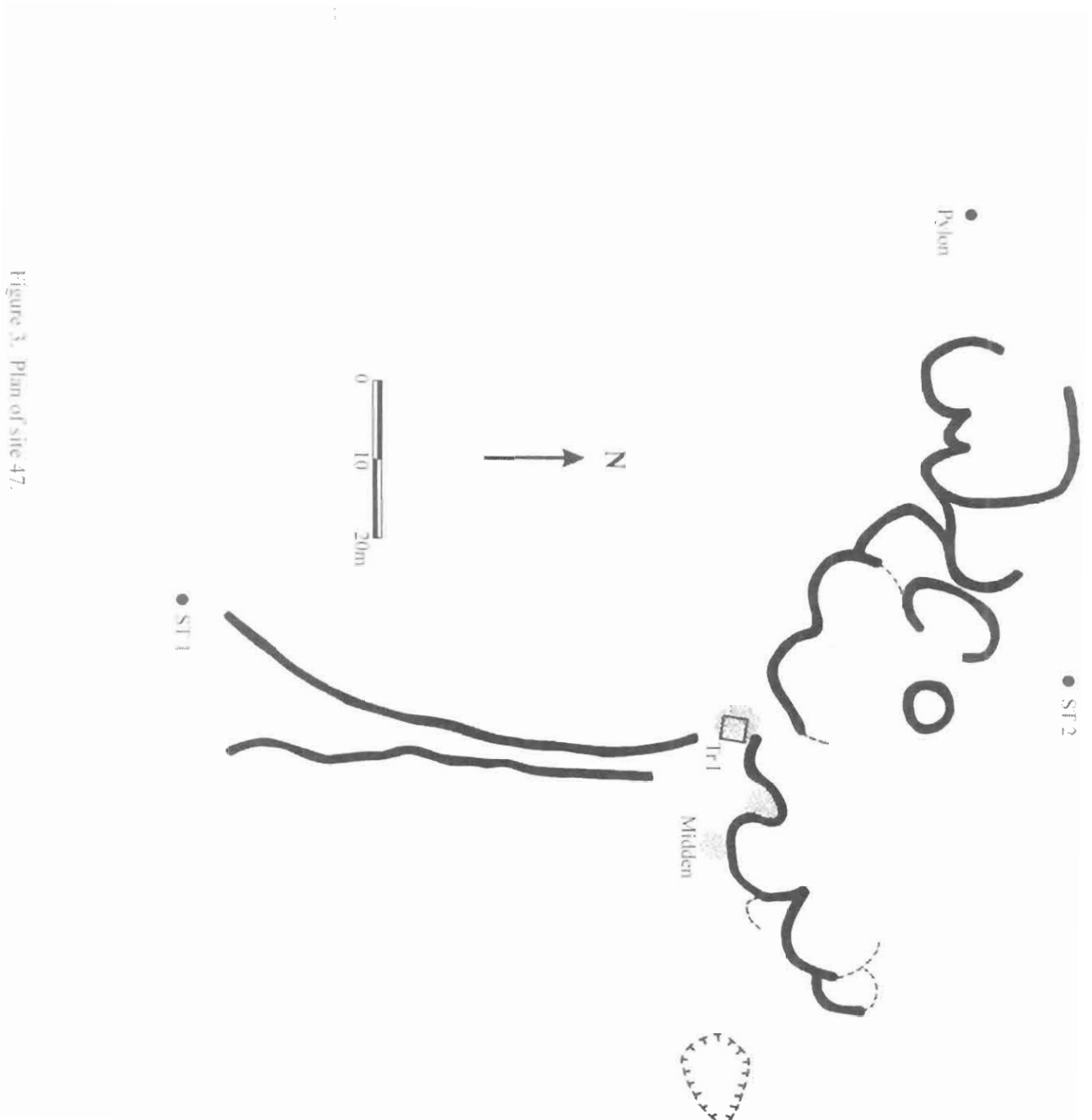


Figure 3. Plan of site 47.

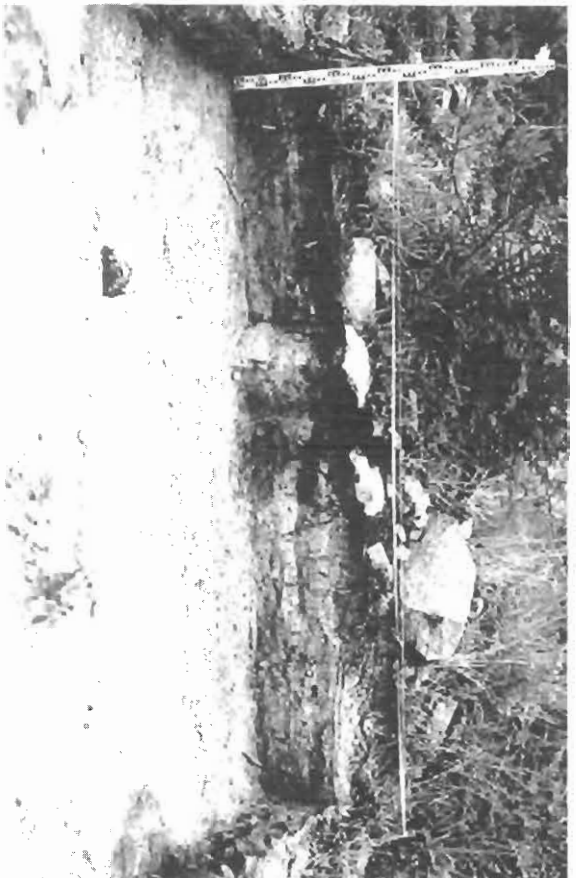


Figure 4. Test Trench in midden at site 47. Note stonewalling on top of midden.



Figure 5. Pottery from Test Trench, site 47.

Site 51

A veld fire exposed another stonewalled complex (25 40 47.3S 27 23 22E) under the power line not noted in the original survey. Although damaged, this complex is still better preserved than most others in the area. Among other features, daga (mud and dung) rubble marks the locations of burnt sleeping huts (Figure 6).

As Figure 7 shows, a cattle lane leads into the large unit at the core of the settlement. In the centre, various sized enclosures form a circle around a central open space.

Traditionally, villagers would have milked cows in this open space and separated the herd into the kraals of their owners: adults in the large enclosures and calves in the small ones next door. The men's court would have been located somewhere in the vicinity of the cattle kraals. The daga piles and stone arcs, on the other hand, mark the female residential zone. As the population expanded, some of the back arcs were straightened to allow room for more houses. Villagers also added two more residential zones, one to the northwest and the other to the southeast, while a complete, but small unit stood to the west.

The spatial organization here is the same in principle as Site 47, and the surface pottery is the same. Western Sotho-Tswana therefore inhabited both settlements.



Figure 6. Daga rubble in site 51.

Figure 7. Plan of site 51.



Mokgethi Cemetery

The final mitigation concerned an African graveyard underneath the power line at the southeast corner of the project area. Some 20 graves, three with headstones (Figure 8), lie about 100m from the remains of an historic house. The power line has not damaged the graves, and the cemetery remains accessible for visitation. The situation is thus compatible with the normal wishes of descendent communities.



Figure 8. Mokgethi Cemetery.

CONCLUSIONS

Although strategies changed as mitigation proceeded, the overall programme satisfied the initial goals. Within the tailings dam, the team recorded the engravings at Site 23, as well as the stonewalls at Site 28. Under the power line, the team surveyed part of Site 47 and recovered a ceramic sample from a small excavation. Site 51 took more effort, but it provided a fairly complete example of Sotho-Tswana settlement 200 years ago.

Finally, the steps taken to avoid the Mokgethi Cemetery and leave it accessible were successful and appropriate.

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