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**REPORT ON A WATCHING BRIEF DURING THE DEMOLITION OF AN ANGLO-
BOER WAR (1899-1902) BLOCHOUSE AT PAMPOENNEK, NORTHWEST PROVINCE**

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1. Background to the project

In June 2008, Dr JCC Pistorius discovered some military structures while doing a Phase I Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) survey for a proposed new route, called the PWV 3 road (see Pistorius 2008: 26-28). The road is to run over Pampoennek in the Magaliesberg Mountain, to the west of the Hartebeestpoort Dam, and it is here where the military structures were found.

It was recommended that the site and its features may be demolished, but only after it has been investigated, documented and researched by archaeological means. This was to be done by an archaeologist accredited by the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists (ASAPA). The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) agreed and the client appointed Archaeos to do the work. The necessary permit was obtained from SAHRA (permit no. 80/08/09/002/51), but due to many administrative matters relating to the process of development, the excavations was only done in October 2011 (the permit was renewed in the meantime).

By doing these excavations, the site was mitigated and reported on (see Van Vollenhoven & Pelsers 2011). It was recommended that the blockhouse may now be demolished, since mitigation was done.

Although this report was approved by SAHRA, the project developed as such that it only became necessary to demolish the structure in 2017. Resultantly a new permit was needed. This was applied for and issued by SAHRA (PermitID: 2495; CaseID: 10693). The permit explicitly stated that the demolition activities should be monitored by an archaeologist. Such an activity is called watching brief. During September 2017 the structure was demolished in accordance with the permit. This report deals with the results of the latter.

2. Aims

The aims with the project were:

- To monitor the demolition of the Pampoennek blockhouse
- To collect any archaeological material that may be unearthed during the watching brief
- To analyse any finds found
- To report on the entire matter.

It needs to be indicated that some information from the Phase II report (Van Vollenhoven & Pelsers 2011) will be repeated in order to provide a comprehensive context.

3. Location

The Pampoennek blockhouse (also called blockhouse no. 2) is situated to the west of the Hartebeespoort Dam on the farm De Rust 478 JQ. A mule path leads from the blockhouse to another one higher up the Magaliesberg Mountain. The other blockhouse (or blockhouse no. 1) is on the farm Zandfontein 447 JQ. The first blockhouse is in a saddle formed here,

called Pampoennek (Figure 1). The GPS co-ordinates to the site are 25°44.121'S and 27°47.683'E.

The PWV corridor runs between the N4 road and Road 123-1. This goes across both farms indicated above (Figure 2). The area where the road is planned can be found on map 2527DB of the South African 1:50 000 topographic series.

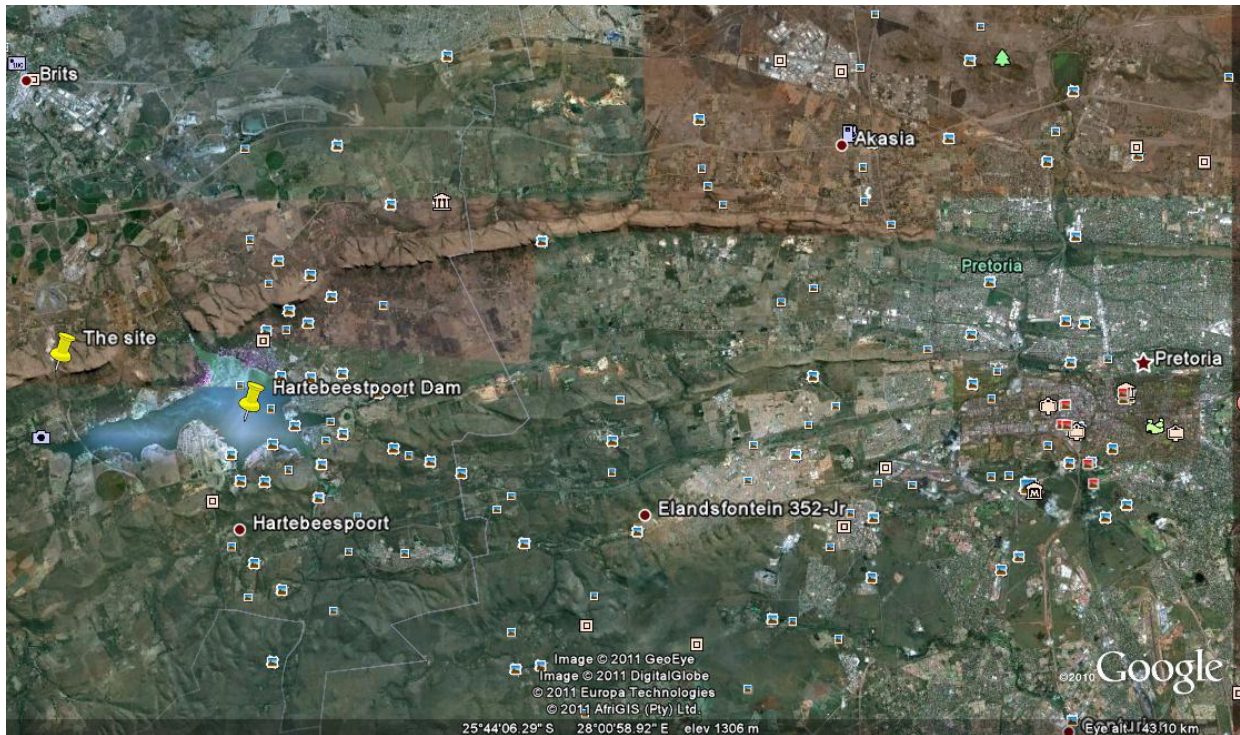


Figure 1: Location of the site to the west of the Hartebeestpoort Dam.

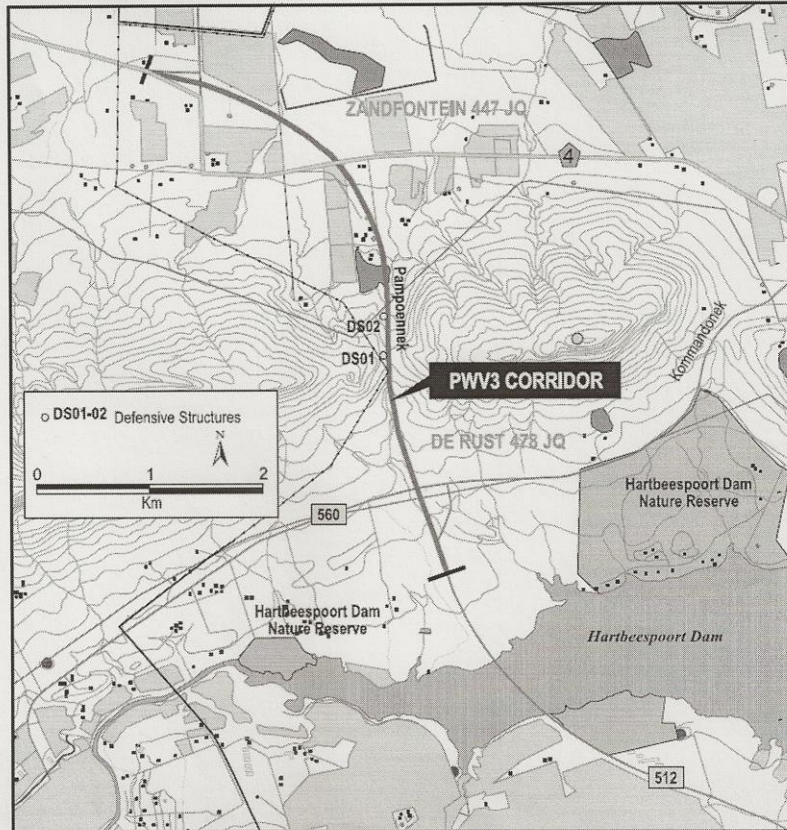


Figure 2: Map indicating the location of the site.

4. Site description

The natural environment here is called the Bankenveld. It is a small stretch of natural vegetation forming the zone between the Highveld and the Bushveld. The Magaliesberg Mountain range falls within it. Pamponnek is one of many corridors (called 'poorte' or 'nekke') within the mountain forming natural areas as gateways for animals and people.

The Pamponnek site consists of two blockhouses and other contemporary military structures. Only the lower blockhouse will be demolished by the proposed development. This blockhouse (no. 2) is situated in the saddle (or nek). The GPS coordinates thereof is 25°44.113'S and 27°47.681'E. It is linked to another one (blockhouse no. 1) by a mule path, built from the same stones as the blockhouses. Blockhouse no. 1 is right on top of the hill, but to the west of the one that was documented (Figure 3). Its GPS coordinates is 25°44.200'S and 27°47.508'E.

The blockhouse that was excavated and now demolished (no. 2) most likely used to be a circular Rice pattern (corrugated iron) blockhouse. Very little remains of the corrugated iron, but the circular form of the defensive wall around it, still are well defined (Figure 4-5). The diameter of the blockhouse is 10 m and the mule path is about a further 10 m away.

The structure was placed to the west of the current pathway through the nek on an area that was prepared to make it level for this purpose. The path is nothing more than a two track road and might well be the remains of the original wagon road. It is here where the new road is currently being laid out.

On the south-western side of the blockhouse and right against what probably was the original wall, a hollow area with soft soil was identified. This may have been used for refuse. Apart from the few pieces of corrugated iron at the site, remains of tins (e.g. bully beef), roof screws (typical to those used in corrugated iron structures during the late 19th and early 20th century and a few pieces of broken glass from that time period were also found.

The mule path starts to the east of the blockhouse from where it criss-crosses up the hill to end at blockhouse no. 1. A heap of stones are found at the start of the mule path and may be some kind of a platform used as a loading bay (Figure 6). Mule paths were used to carry equipment and supplies, either on mule back or by carts pulled by mules. A similar heap is found further to the north, but this one is too far from the mule path to have been used for this purpose.

The mule path is more or less 1,5 m wide and built with stones (Figure 7-11). Where it turns, it is wider and even built in a square shape in order to create space for the carts to turn. Where necessary it was built up with a wall on one side to create a level surface. Close to the top a ramp is found. This is probably the area where the carts were stored and the ramp was used to give access to the path. This area also leads to a structure believed to have been an enclosure to keep the mules.

Another mule path, running to a third blockhouse further to the west of blockhouse no. 1, can also be seen in a distance (Figure 12). On the eastern side a similar mule path, most likely running to a blockhouse on that side is also visible (Figure 13).

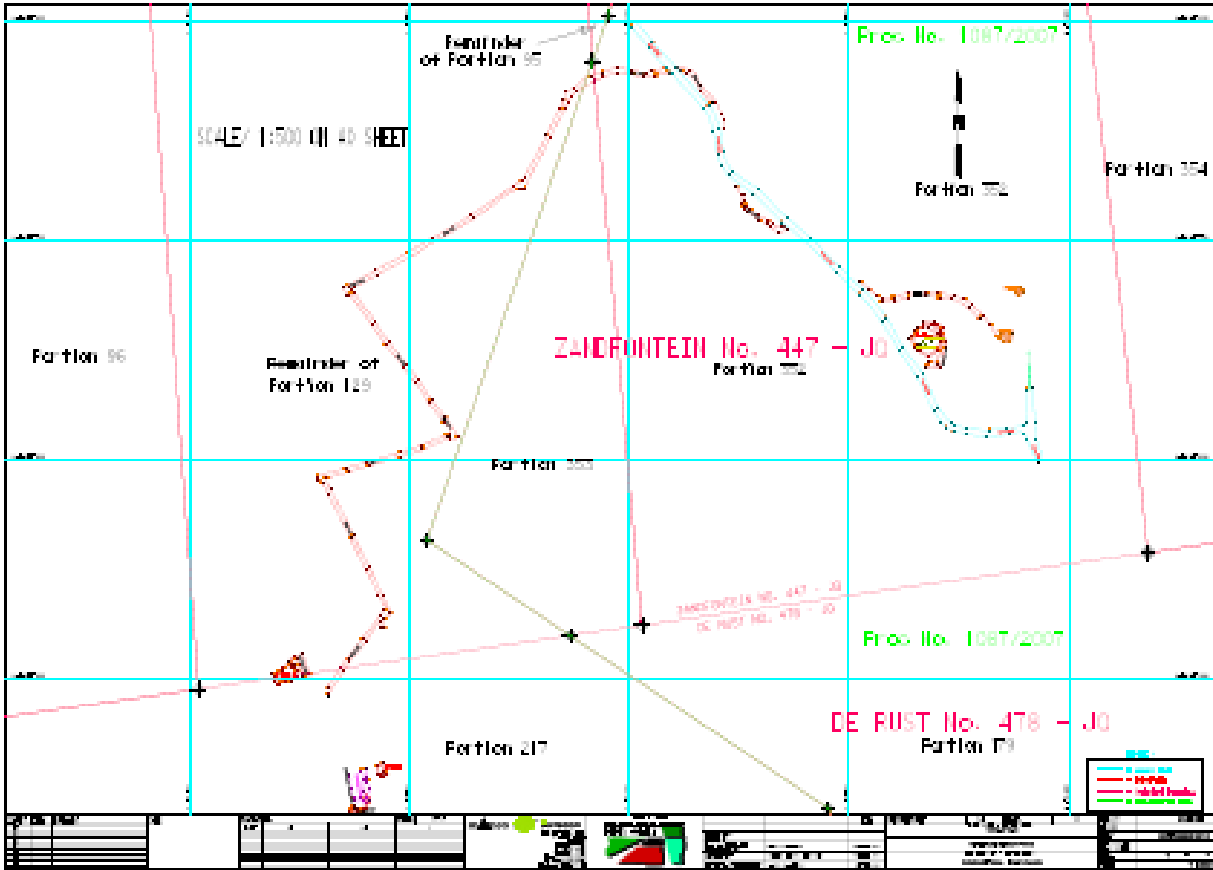


Figure 3: Map indicating both blockhouses and the remains of a mule path between them (scale indicated for A3 size).



Figure 4: View of the remains of blockhouse no. 2.



Figure 5: Collapsed defensive wall around blockhouse no. 2.



Figure 6: Heap of stones that may have been used as a loading bay.



Figure 7: Remains of the mule path close to the ‘nek’.



Figure 8: View of the mule path against the slope of the mountain.



Figure 9: Well-defined side wall of the mule path.



Figure 10: Mule path at the top of the mountain. Note the ramp on the side, where the people are standing.



Figure 11: The mule path almost halfway up the mountain.



Figure 12: Another mule path running to another blockhouse further to the west.



Figure 13: Mule path against the eastern slope.

The other blockhouse, called blockhouse no. 1, is situated on top of the hill and the mule path goes up to right next to it. The remains consist of a heap of stones which formed the platform on which the corrugated iron Rice pattern blockhouse was placed (Figure 14). The platform has two areas where the stones were removed, but it is not certain whether this was deliberately done during the building thereof or whether it was a recent occurrence. It also has a defensive wall on its north-eastern side.

The blockhouse had a rectangular room added to its western side with an entrance to the south (Figure 15). This may have been a room that was either for the comfort of the officer in command or for the storing of provisions.

Barbed wire was sometimes used to make it difficult for the Boers to move in between the blockhouses. A piece of such wire was found tightened to a rock (Figure 16). Other cultural material, including a piece of corrugated iron (Figure 17) was also identified on site.

To the south-west and about 40 m further other structures built from stone were also identified (Figure 18). The first looks like it could have been an enclosure for keeping the mules (Figure 19-20). The entrance of this kraal, is to the north and directly opposite the ramp where the mules and carts had access to the mule path.

Next and to the south of the kraal a small rectangular structure was identified. Access is gained via the kraal. This may have been a store room, perhaps for the mule food, or a place where the mule herders slept.

To the east of the kraal another rectangular structure was identified. This one is built much better and has its entrance to the south (Figure 21-22). This most likely was a guard house.



Figure 14: Blockhouse no. 1.

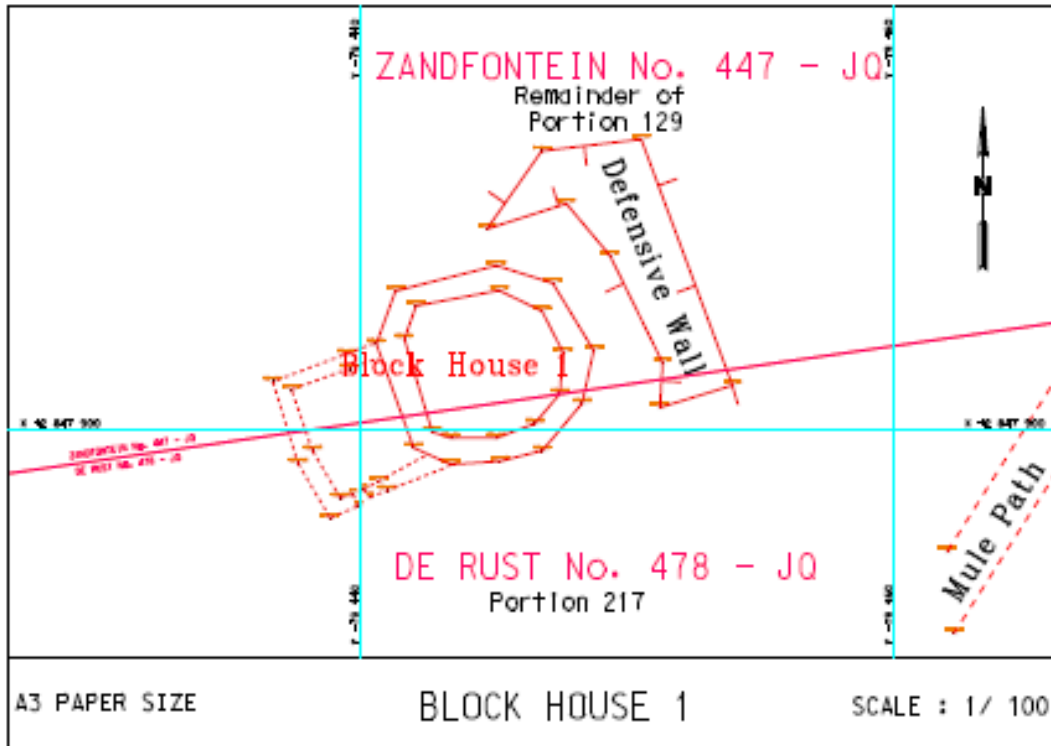


Figure 15: Detailed map of blockhouse no. 1 which was not excavated. Note the rectangular addition and the defensive wall (scale indicated for A3 size).



Figure 16: Piece of barbed wire fixed to a rock.



Figure 17: Corrugated iron found close to blockhouse no. 1.

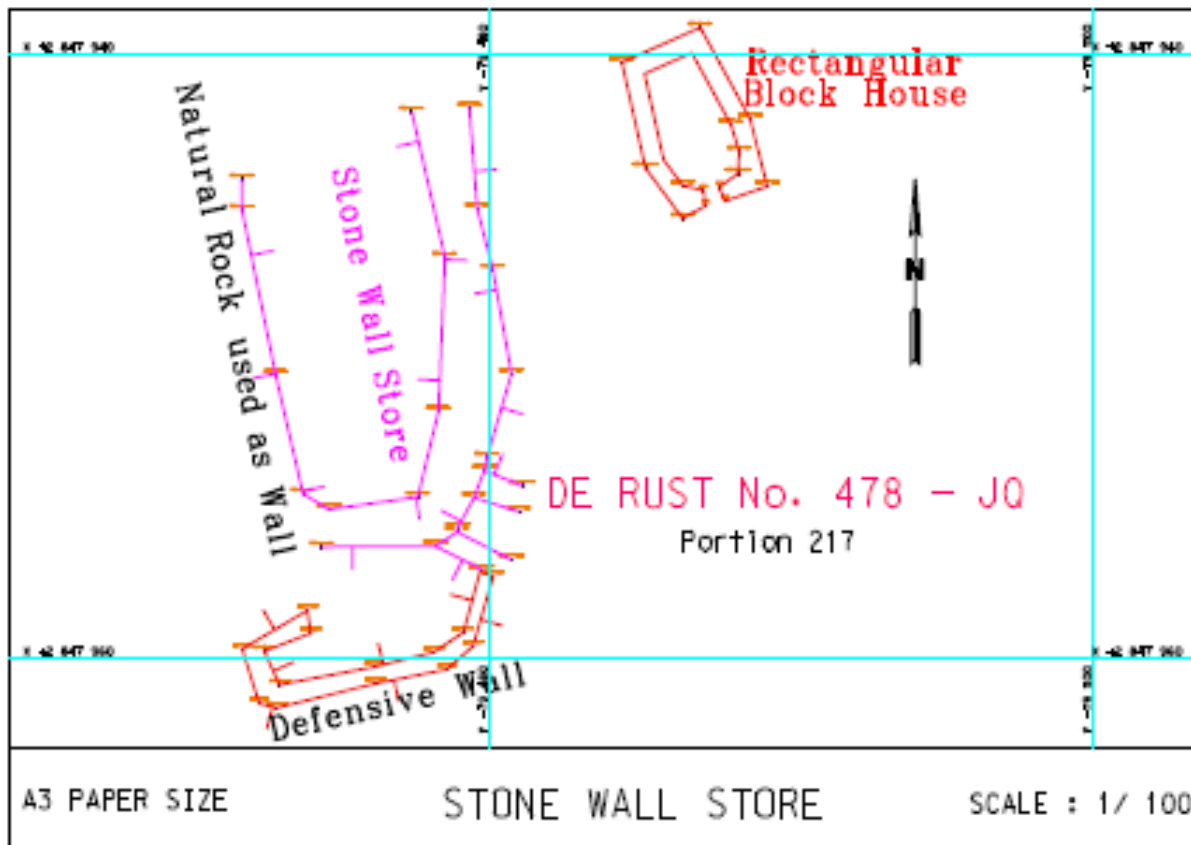


Figure 18: Detailed map of other military structures close to blockhouse no. 1 (scale indicated for A3 size). What is called a store most likely was an enclosure for keeping mules and what is called a rectangular blockhouse most likely a guard house.



Figure 19: The enclosure where mules were most likely kept.



Figure 20: Eastern wall of the mule enclosure. Natural rock was used for the western wall.



Figure 21: Possible guard house.



Figure 22: Entrance to the guard house.

5. Historical context

Blockhouses such as this one were built by the British during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). The Anglo Boer War took place between 1899 and 1902 in South Africa, and was fought between Great Britain and the two Boer republics, Transvaal (Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek) and the Orange Free State (Pretorius 1999: 247).

After the British forces captured Pretoria on 5 June 1900 fortified posts were established at strategic positions all over South Africa. The purpose thereof was to protect routes such as railway lines and roads (Van Vollenhoven 1999: 80). The importance of the railway line is emphasized by the fact that the Boers also implemented protective measures at the time they were still in control thereof (NAD, SS0, R 8496/00).

The system of blockhouses was erected since the railway links was to a large extent being left defenceless. As this was an important communication system, the British decided to have it protected. The first of these fortified posts were erected in July 1900. Most of these blockhouses were double storied and took about three months to build (Van Vollenhoven 1999: 80-81).

By January 1901 the large scale erection of blockhouses along railway lines was at the order of the day. These were corrugated iron structures, called Rice-pattern blockhouses (Figure 23). These had different shapes and were much smaller than those built from stone and could therefore be build much quicker. From March 1901 these blockhouses were also erected at other strategic positions such as roads. It was used to prevent the Boers from moving around freely. By January 1902 the blockhouse lines were completed. Blockhouses were placed more or less three quarters to one and a half mile apart (1,20 - 2,40km). As much as 8 000 blockhouses were eventually build over a distance of 6 000 kilometres (Van Vollenhoven 1999: 81). These were manned by about 50 000 troops and 16 000 black scouts and guards (Pakenham 1986: 215).



Figure 23: Example of a Rice pattern blockhouse in Pretoria (Van Vollenhoven 1992: 206).

For the British it was of particular importance to protect Pretoria after they had occupied it. Therefore they built additional fortifications here (Van Vollenhoven 1992: 180). Pretoria already had four forts - Fort Klapperkop, Fort Schanskop, Fort Wonderboompoort and Fort Daspoortrand – which were erected by the Boers prior to the War (Van Vollenhoven 1995: 54-61). In order to turn the town into a complete fortified town the British added to this. As far as what could be determined, 36 stone-and-masonry blockhouses and 25 corrugated iron ones were erected in Pretoria, a total of 61. Most of these did not survive (Van Vollenhoven 1992: 180-181).

A list of blockhouses dated 1 June 1902 indicates that 85 blockhouses were built in and around Pretoria (War Museum of the Boer Republics, CRE 5659, List of Blockhouses in the Pretoria District and on the Northern line, 1902-05-16). Information about these is limited as it was mostly destroyed since the War.

The following fortifications were identified in the Pretoria area, but outside of the municipal boundary:

- 3 at Bronberge/Swawelpoort, to the south-east
- 3 at Kalkheuwel, to the south of Broederstroom
- 1 at Pampoennek, to the west of Kommandonek
- 4 at Nooitgedacht between Hekpoort and Buffelspoort
- 3 at Breedtsnek, to the north of Maanhaarrand
- 1 at Hekpoort (the well-known Barton's Folley)
- 1 at Broederstroom
- 1 at Warmbaths (Bela-Bela)
- 1 at Ifafi (called the Rietfontein fort) (Tomlinson 1994: 11-29)
- 21 fortifications at Pienaarspoort (Panagos & Faber 1988: 208-212).
- 1 at Irene (Fort Cornwall) (Minnaar 1993: 5; Tomlinson 1994: 14).
- 1 at Onderstepoort
- 7 between Pretoria en Bronkhorstspruit (Spies 1955a: 106; Spies 1955b: 79).
- 6 at Kommandonek (Emms 1979: 48; Tomlinson 1994: 16-17)
- 5 at Hornsnek (Van Schalkwyk e.a. 1994: 10-11; Emms 1979: 48; Tomlinson 1994: 15).
- 3 at Bapsfontein
- 2 at Silkaatsnek
- 2 at Tygerpoort (Van Vollenhoven & Van den Bos 1997: 113-134).

The one listed at Pampoennek is blockhouse number 1 from this report. The second, which was excavated, therefore was only identified by Dr Pistorius during his survey of the area.

Blockhouse lines have been classified and divided into two types. The first is railway lines, which followed the railway tracks and the second is called field lines, which followed other routes or protected strategic positions. The Pampoennek blockhouses formed part of a field line between Pretoria and Rustenburg. Apparently 5 Blockhouse were erected at Pampoennek, wrongly called Pampoenkraal in historical documents (Van Vollenhoven & Van den Bos 1997: 113, 122-123).

6. The excavations of 2011

In summary (details to be found in Van Vollenhoven & Pelsler 2011) two excavations were done. The first was on an area next to the outer wall of the structure in an area believed to be

a refuse midden (Figure 24-26). Excavation 2 was measured out inside of the blockhouse (Figure 27-29).

The defensive wall around the blockhouse was also investigated by unpacking some of the loose stones (Figure 30). This was also done to learn more about the construction and building materials used.



Figure 24: Excavation 1 before excavation.



Figure 25: Unearthing artefacts at Excavation 1.



Figure 26: The completed Excavation 1. The test trench in the centre was done to test the depth of the deposit.



Figure 27: Excavation 2 before excavation.



Figure 28: The completed Excavation 2.



Figure 29: Detail of corrugated iron in Excavation 2.



Figure 30: The defensive wall around the blockhouse.

7. The watching brief during demolition

The methodology consisted of documenting as much as possible of the site before and during demolition. Before the demolition of the structure started, a few site photographs were taken (Figure 31-32). These indicate the site before destruction.

The destruction was done by using a 40 ton excavator (Figure 33). The bucket of the excavator is 1,25 m wide. Each bucket load were carefully monitored for artefacts, as was the area after each scrape of the bucket. Lastly the heaps of soil from the site were also checked for possible artefacts.

Artefacts found were collected and analysed (see section 8). It will be curated by the Fort Klapperkop Heritage site, as was the case with the artefacts from the excavations on site.

The site was made level with the ground (Figure 34). The stones and soil were removed and dumped with other material from the broader site, in order to prepare it for road construction.



Figure 31: View of remains of the blockhouse, photographed from the east.



Figure 32: View of the blockhouse, photographed from the south.



Figure 33: The excavator that was used in the demolition of the site.



Figure 34: The site after the demolition of the blockhouse.

8. Cultural material

Twelve artefacts were found during the demolition of the site. Approximately 50 artefacts (the fragmented nature of some metal makes an accurate count difficult) were identified during the excavation of the site. This brings the total artefact count up to approximately 62.

Most of the material excavated seem to post-date the blockhouse (see Van Vollenhoven & Pelsler 2011) and it seems as if it is the same with the artefacts collected during the watching brief. Six items are likely from another time period. The following artefacts were identified:

- 1 x fragment from a glass bottle (Figure 35). It is the shoulder, neck and mouth part of a clear bottle with screw top. Although screw-top bottles were known since 1885 (Lastovica & Lastovica 1990: 41), this one is very delicate and therefore likely post-dates the blockhouse. It likely was a medicine bottle.
- 1 x washer, likely from typical screws used in corrugated iron (Figure 36). Such examples were found at various other fortification sites from this time period (see for instance Van Vollenhoven 2017: 69) and it therefore can be regarded as being contemporary with the blockhouse.
- 3 x pieces of corrugated iron (Figure 37-38). All of these likely are contemporary with the fort. One of the pieces have wire attached thereto. This may indicate that it was used in the defensive system around the blockhouse as wire was frequently used for this purpose (Van Vollenhoven 2017:69).
- 1 x metal rod with nuts and washer on both sides (Figure 39). It is similar to ones that were found during the excavations on site and may therefore not be contemporary with the site (see Van Vollenhoven & Pelsler 2011).
- 1 x heel iron from a military boot (Figure 40). This indeed is contemporary to the blockhouse and belonged to a soldier's boot. Similar items are found frequently on other fortification sites (see for instance Van Vollenhoven 2010: 126).
- 1 x hammer stone (Figure 41). This is just a rock with markings indicating that it was used as a hammer. Such hammer stones were used frequently during the Iron Age, but since this one is similar to the stones used in the construction of the blockhouse, it is believed to be contemporary therewith.
- 4 x clay bricks (Figure 42). The brick seems to be hand-made, but it was done by a skilled craftsman. They are not formed perfectly with the sides being somewhat skew. The clay was well-prepared and the bricks baked at a low temperature (personal communication: M Naudé). These bricks are too few to have been used in the construction of the blockhouse and there also is no evidence of such bricks ever been used for this purpose. It therefore probably is an intrusion – the bricks were likely left there during the dumping of building material on site. In fact, one of the contractors indicated that they had removed much dumped material from the broader site during construction of the new road.



Figure 35: Medicine bottle fragment.



Figure 36: Washer from the site.



Figure 37: Two pieces of corrugated iron from the site.



Figure 38: Piece of corrugated iron with wire attached thereto.



Figure 39: Metal rod from the site.



Figure 40: Heel iron from a military boot.



Figure 41: Hammer stone from the site. Note the hammering marks.



Figure 42: Handmade clay bricks found at the site.

9. Conclusion

The large number of blockhouse built during the Anglo-Boer War indicates the importance thereof as a military strategy aimed at restricting the Boers. Pretoria and surroundings became the most fortified town in Southern Africa, further enhancing the importance of the town and the blockhouse system. Although it is difficult to determine exact numbers, it seems as if at least 75 blockhouses were built around the town and at least 89 within its municipal boundary. Unfortunately not many of these survived and therefore it is important to preserve these as far as possible or at least the information as in this case.

The detailed phase II investigation and documentation of the blockhouse was done during 2011 in accordance with the issued SAHRA permit. Detailed site maps (see earlier) and a map of the demolished blockhouse were also done (Figure 43). The documentation on site was completed and no further work is necessary. The relation between the two blockhouses and the mule path is clearly indicated on a Google image of the site (Figure 44).

The cultural material found can be broadly categorized in two categories. The first is fairly recent material which has no historical connection with the blockhouse and which was left here much later. Those excavated in 2011 are discussed in the excavation report (Van Vollenhoven & Pelsers 2011). The ones identified during the watching brief is discussed in this report, but it has no direct historical significance in relation to the blockhouses.

The second is the historical artifacts linked to the blockhouse. From the excavations, these include typical objects from the time period such as the ceramic gin bottle fragment, fragments of rum bottles from the time, barbed wire, corrugated iron, roof screws used in the construction of the blockhouse, bully beef and other contemporary tins, a spent cartridge, nails, and a Worcestershire sauce bottle stopper. Those identified during the watching brief include a washer, wire and corrugated iron used in the construction of the blockhouse, the heel iron from a British military boot and possibly also a hammer stone used on site.

The mitigation of the site, including the excavation thereof and the watching brief during demolition, was completed successfully. This report serves as final documentation of the site. In accordance with the permit requirements the excavated material will be curated by the Museums Service of the City of Tshwane. It will be included with the collection of the Fort Klapperkop Heritage Site.

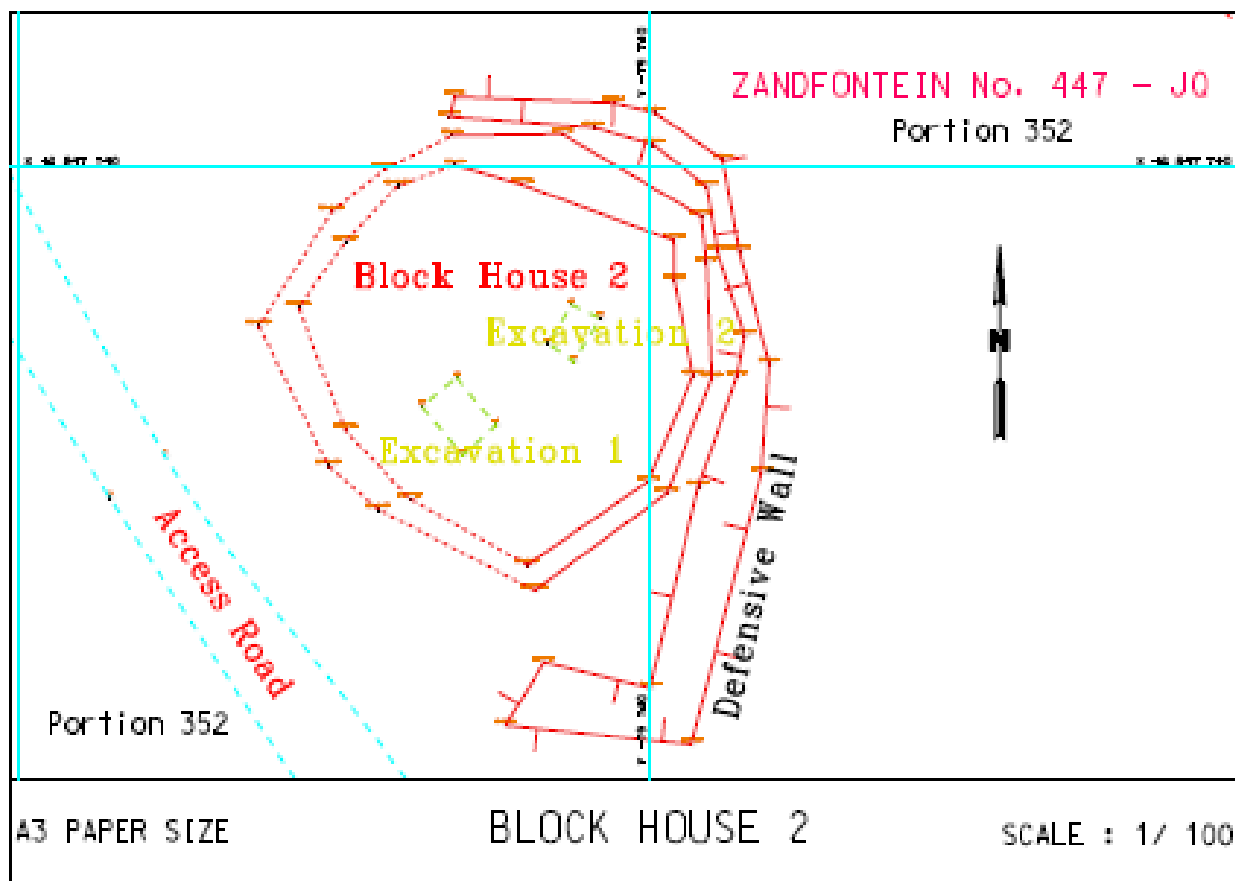


Figure 43: Detailed map of the excavated blockhouse (no. 2) which has now been demolished (scale indicated for A3 size).



Figure 44: Google image indicating the two blockhouses. Note the mule path close to the upper one.

10. Recommendations

10.1 It is of the utmost importance that the remains of the other blockhouse (no. 1) and mule path higher up the mountain and to the west of the site should be left intact. Although the blockhouse was documented, it needs to be emphasised that blockhouse no 1 may not be damaged or demolished as it is a much better example of such a structure of which very few were preserved.

10.2 The mule path should also remain intact, apart from the lower part which will be demolished by the development.

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