

**REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES
BETWEEN MAURITZBAAI AND JACOBSBAAI,
VREDENBURG-SALDANHA**

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE JACOBSBAAI
AND MAURITZBAAI AREA WEST OF
VREDENBURG/SALDANHA

INTRODUCTION

The development of the land around Jacobsbaai and Mauritzbaai for housing will have a lasting impact on the local landscape. Levelling, excavation and building will effectively remodel the coastline and adjacent interior with dramatic impact on any archaeological, palaeontological or historical sites in the area. More than that, the introduction of more permanent occupants and more visitors will inevitably lead to casual and thoughtless destruction of even those sites not directly destroyed by earthmoving and housing and road construction. For this reason we have been asked to prepare a report on the archaeological sites affected by the proposed developments and to suggest ways of minimising long term loss of information by their destruction. We should first point out that people have been making use of the shoreline and its resources in southern Africa for over 100,000 years, giving the region one of the longest records of marine exploitation anywhere in the world. Unfortunately one of the negative effects of our ongoing wish to live by the sea is that new settlement is often located directly on top of older settlement, damaging or destroying it in the process. Thus archaeological sites that have remained more or less intact for thousands of years are destroyed in a few weeks of modern earthmoving and large scale trenching. A brief trip up our West

Coast from say Ysterfontein to Elandsbaai will convince the traveller that the scale of such destruction is vast and that in a few decades very little will survive.

Most of these coastal sites are shell middens - places where prehistoric strandlopers camped, lit their fires and discarded shells, bones, other food debris and such artefacts as they no longer needed. For archaeologists this is an invaluable source of information from which alone we can try to reconstruct the ancient and unwritten history of southern Africa. All of the shell middens are protected by law in recognition of their great value as cultural resources. Unlike the natural resources that we treasure, such as animals and plant communities, cultural resources are finite - they cannot breed and reproduce. Thus if we destroy archaeological sites, they are gone forever and with them the information they contain.

Our experience in two decades of excavation at Elandsbaai and along the Verlorenvlei has convinced us that the prehistory of an area is written only after considerable effort, lots of analyses and years of work on as many sites as possible. Unfortunately we know as yet almost nothing of the prehistory of the Saldanha/Vredenburg area - despite some excavations in rock shelters and shell middens. We know that Van Riebeeck referred to some regular visitors to the site of his fort as 'Saldanbars' or 'Saldanhamen' because he believed they lived near that bay for most of the year. These people were Khoi herders - known in Van Riebeeck's time as 'Hottentots' - who moved seasonally about the sandveld and coastal foreland in search of good pasture for their cattle and sheep. But how did they plan their moves, what were their relationships with local hunters - San people we call them - and how did they cope with the penetration of Europeans? Going further back in time we would like to know whether the earliest

Khoi to arrive, perhaps 2 000 years ago, looked and behaved like those seen by Van Riebeeck. And how did the hunters who had lived there previously take to the appearance of herding newcomers? Did hunters live there continuously for tens of thousands of years or were there times when the region was too dry, too hot or otherwise unattractive?

The list of questions for which we as yet have no reliable answers, could be extended almost indefinitely. Some of the answers lie buried in the shell middens and rock shelters of the western Cape. But like a complex jigsaw puzzle, if we lose a few pieces of the answer, we may never recognise the picture. Archaeologists are not naive enough to want to prevent the development that destroys the sites, they merely seek the opportunity to rescue the information before the bulldozers move in.

This report reflects a thorough survey of the development area in December 1987 and replaces earlier less detailed site maps. Our descriptions of the sites are first approximations of the locations, sizes, contents and significance of the shell middens and set the scene for more exhaustive investigation. We use the label BCSE to distinguish our sites from the few numbered in previous surveys. We conclude by recommending a course of action that will minimise the loss of archaeological information during building operations around Jacobsbaai and Mauritzbaai.

SITE SURVEY

BCSE 1 - is a small and still largely buried shell midden about 250m from the rocky shore, about 100m west of the western fence of the landing strip and about 500m south of

are visible in mole heaps over an area of 50 - 100m² and seem to come from a brown gritty soil with lots of calcrete nodules and small granite cobbles. We found some stone artefacts in association but little bone. Although an interesting site it is relatively distant from likely large scale earthmoving.

BCSB 2 - is probably the most significant site at Mauritzbaai, being a very extensive and still largely undisturbed shell midden south of the deepest penetration of the bay. The shell is very dense and outcrops over an area of more than 100m by about 20m in a wide arc some 80m from the sandy beach. Depth of midden is difficult to gauge but may be up to a metre, and the content is very definitely limpet-dominated with few whelks or mussels. There are granite cobbles, probably used as artefacts, animal bones and a few stone tools in association, but no potsherds that we could see. Although the surface is very fragmented there are signs of a well preserved midden of large limpets below the surface.

BCSB 3 - may be merely the western extension of BCSB 2 in that it is separated from it only by an extensively trashed area close to some caravans, tents and a small shack. Were all the broken glass and other midden rubbish removed we might conclude that the sites were really one. BCSB 3 differs from BCSB 2 in that it lies up and in the surface of a very prominent cobble cordon which backs the very rocky point and bay south of Mauritzbaai. The shells are patchily distributed all along this cordon, in places achieving some depth, in places replaced by pavements of fist sized

granite cobbles. The crest of this cordon, obviously a marine feature, is some 5 or 6m above present mean sea level and thus the feature must reflect an ancient shoreline when the sea stood a few metres higher relative to the land. Again unlike BCSB2, BCSB3 has very prominent concentrations of the perlemoen - Haliotis - in and among the limpets. Mussels are likewise rare. Obviously because of the cobble substrate these patches are totally undisturbed by mole activity. Equivalent to MB1 of a previous survey.

BCSB 4 - could again be viewed as merely the extreme western portion of BCSB3 but is spatially discrete and some 300m from the location of BCSB2 - justifying in our view its separate status. It is in effect a large, 40m x 15m, level scatter of limpet and perlemoen shell situated on top of and extending landward of the cobble cordon at the southern end of the very rocky bay southwest of Mauritzbaai. This is an interesting shell midden with potsherds, occasional bone fragments but no stone tools that we noticed. We should note that along BCSB3 and 4 as others described later, but not at BCSB2, there were heaps of what appeared to be recent shells from animals collected either as food or bait. Although we recognise a problem of distinguishing old from recent shell midden there is no question whatever of the antiquity of the bulk of BCSB2, 3 and 4.

BCSB 5 - is a very low density shell scatter appearing in dune mole rat heaps about 100m south of BCSB4. Most shells are limpets and lie in an area of about 20m by 15m, some 60m from the shore and immediately east of a sandy turning circle.

BCSB 6 - is a very large but very diffuse scatter of shells below and on top of what might be the same slope break formed by or accentuated by BCSB2. It is due east of Mauritzbaai, roughly circular with a diameter of about 50m and perhaps 100m from BCSB2. Shell is highly fragmented and may have no real depth. In terms of geoarchaeology the most interesting feature may be its association with the slope break, above which the terrain is a sand, below this the ground is a fine granite gravel such as is found on the beach.

BCSB 7 - is another low density but quite extensive (\pm 40m diameter) surface shell scatter a few metres north of BCSB6. What distinguishes BCSB2, 6 and 7 from BCSB3 and 4 is their location vis-a-vis the cobble cordon, the latter being on it, the former behind it.

BCSB 8 - is an enormous semi-continuous scatter of shell around the long point that lies north of Mauritzbaai. It could easily be regarded as several discrete sites in that like BCSB3 it is in effect a set of scatters lying on top of or just down behind the cobble cordon that is continuous around this part of the coast. As at BCSB3 the shell matrix is limpet but there are noticeable patches of perlemoen from place to place - not all of them recent! This site is thus extraordinarily long - perhaps 300 metres - but narrow, about 15m or so. The main problem here will be to distinguish between shell banks associated with an old beach feature and shell middens that are contemporary but humanly derived. There is a particularly interesting patch underneath the tower that lies at the tip of this point. Equivalent to the MB2 of a previous survey.

BCSB 9 - perhaps a continuation of BCSB8 around the very rocky beach which lies between Mauritzbaai and the small bay with the factory built out from it. In character it is very much like BCSB8, placed in exactly the same relationship to the cobble cordon and again dominated by limpets with some perlemoen. The patches of this site should be very interesting as we found potsherds in places, a depth of at least 0.25m and very good preservation of both shell and bone. Equivalent to the MB-JB1 of a previous survey.

BCSB 10 - is a highly fragmented scatter of limpet shell west of an outcrop of granite boulders south of BCSB9 and east of BCSB9.

BCSB 11 - slightly separated from BCSB9, is located next to a group of large granite boulders at a rocky point just south of the factory. As in previous sites, it lies on top of the cobble cordon, is limpet dominated with occasional perlemoen shells and is fragmented at the surface. It probably has some depth.

BCSB 12 - is a very small patch, about 15m by 6m, of shell very similar to BCSB11 in front of a small set of granite boulders a few metres south of BCSB11. The recurrent association with granite boulders may be of interest.

BCSB 13 - is a scatter of shell in a hollow among granite boulders, just landward of the cobble cordon and about 30m north of BCSB11. It lies at the southern end of the small granite point that runs into the sea immediately south of the bay with the factory. This point was presumably

BCSB 17 - is a 30m by 8m scatter of shell on top of the cobble cordon about 100m north of the factory along the very rocky shore. We saw mostly limpets with some perlemoen. The scatter extends toward a set of granite boulders about 2m high.

BCSB 18 - is a long, narrow scatter of limpet with some perlemoen on top of the cobble cordon on the south shore of Jacobsbaai. The site is about 80m by 10m and probably does have some stone tools - though few - as we found a couple of silcrete flakes. This site seems to be the MB-JB3 of a previous survey.

BCSB 19 - is about 60m north of BCSB18, also along the southern shore of Jacobsbaai and amongst a set of low granite boulders. This is probably an unnamed dot marked on the 1:50 000 map by a previous survey and immediately south of the first - most southerly - Jacobsbaai structure.

BCSB 20 - is a very ephemeral scatter in the veld about 100m south east of the Jacobsbaai farm buildings. Visible over an area of some 30m diameter, it may have little or no depth.

BCSB 21 - is a small ephemeral scatter of shell south west of the Jacobsbaai farm and immediately inland of the track leading south to Mauritzbaai. It is about 100m from the farm. We saw a few limpets thrown up in mole heaps in the veld.

DISCUSSION

The coastline of the Vredenburg/Saldanha Peninsula is almost continuously rocky from south of Mauritzbaai to the northern shore of Jacobsbaai. Prehistoric shellfish gatherers attracted to the rich limpet and perlemoen populations in the intertidal zone of this stretch of coast, have left a semi-continuous strip of shell midden refuse parallelling the shore a few tens of metres inland. Although we have recognised individual patches of midden and given them separate numbers, it would be just as accurate to speak of a single site broken here and there by areas where shellfish were scarce or the local terrain unattractive. In the sites we have recorded the shellfish composition appears to be relatively monotonous with a clear preference for limpets with occasional concentrations of perlemoen. It is tempting to think of the perlemoen patches as low spring tide episodes when strandlopers could get lower down the shore to the perlemoen beds at the infratidal fringe.

There does appear to be some bone in the middens - though not very much - and here and there we found a small number of stone tool flakes of silcrete. Although all of the midden is in the open, some of it is quite definitely banked up against or distributed in and amongst large granite boulders which would have afforded some shade and shelter. Our guess, but this needs some substantiation, is that almost all of the shellfish deposit represents very short visits to the shore by sets of family groups intent on shellfish gathering and little else. Pottery at two of the sites implies some occupation after about 1800 years ago, when herders brought pottery into the western Cape, but whether the sites with no pottery predate that time is a question in need of research.

What became clear very quickly during our survey is the close relationship between shell midden refuse and a prominent cobble cordon which runs almost continuously through the area we searched. This cordon crests at about 5m above modern mean sea level, and the lichen covering on much of the upper part of the ridge illustrates beyond doubt that this is an ancient feature not related to modern tide levels. Our experience elsewhere encourages us to suggest that this cobble beach cordon was thrown up and maintained by a sea level 3m or so above that of today, from which the sea has now regressed. We have good reason to suppose that sea levels were at about +3m some 5000 to 8000 years ago and we see no reason to doubt that the Mauritzbaai/Jacobsbaai cobble cordon dates from such a time. A high priority of future work in this area would be to investigate the stratigraphic relationship between the shell midden and the ancient shoreline. There is no reason, of course, why the middens must also be 5000 years old - indeed those with pottery can hardly be that old. What we need to do is date both shell midden and beach shells by C^{14} dating.

Inland of the Vredenburg/Saldanha shoreline archaeological debris tends to be very notably concentrated amongst large granite boulders at sites on, for example, Kasteelberg, Heuningklip and Witklip. Some of these sites may have been occupied by Khoi pastoral groups of the kind termed 'Saldanhar's' by Van Riebeeck, but others could have been used as camps by surviving groups of San - Van Riebeeck would have termed them Soaqua or later 'Bosjesmen'. As yet we do not know how the coastal middens of places such as Jacobsbaai relate to the inland sites, which also have substantial shell deposits. Nor do we know whether all of the sites we found are contemporary with one another, whether

they were all left behind by the same people, or whether they were used seasonally or situationally. In short we know where the sites are and we know roughly how big they are; but we don't know how old they are, how deep they are, how much information they hold nor how they relate to one another and to other known sites.

One final point: the South African Museum and UCT Anatomy Department collections are rich in human skeletons recovered at various times and in various ways from prehistoric sites in the Saldanha region. Although we did not notice any signs of human remains eroding out of the shell middens, we believe it almost certain that the very considerable volume of Jacobsbaai and Mauritzbaai deposit houses a large number of burials, large scale earthmoving will reveal and disturb these inhumations and we must plan for the orderly and respectful attention to this probability.

RECOMMENDATION

We have no doubt that the proposed development along the shores of Mauritzbaai and Jacobsbaai will destroy large quantities of prehistoric shell midden - perhaps as much as 2000m³ of as yet unresearched information on the prehistory of the area. On the other hand we have no doubt that new areas need to be developed, that housing along attractive coastlines will continue to be in demand and that some accommodation between cultural resources and future space requirements needs to be reached. The shell middens endangered are not only substantial in size, they contain irreplaceable information protected by law and rightly considered part of our national common heritage. Sites ECSB 2, 4, 8, 9, 13 and 16 are important archaeological sites in the context of

southern African prehistory. There should be no further
destruction of these until excavations by professional
archaeologists have extracted the information they contain.

We therefore recommend most strongly that the opportunity be
afforded to archaeologists to carry out investigations into the
sites before any earthmoving or landscaping begins. Such
investigation should include the following:

i) a dating programme should be initiated, preferably in
association with Dr J C Vogel of the radiocarbon dating
laboratory of the CSIR in Pretoria, so as to establish the age of
all sites.

ii) an excavation programme is needed so as to generate
samples of shellfish, faunal remains, stone artefacts, charcoals
and sediments for analysis and interpretation. There is no doubt
that this would allow us to reconstruct the subsistence patterns,
social organisation and technology of the hunter gatherers and
pastoralists who lived in the Saldanha area before the arrival of
European colonists.

iii) a geo-archaeological programme should be initiated so as
to investigate the relationship between geomorphological features
- particularly old marine features - and archaeological remains.
In our view this will shed valuable light on the question of past
climates and now altered landscapes of the region - effectively
the environmental framework in which prehistoric people operated.

iv) a 'hot-line' should be established as a matter of
urgency so that building contractors can call upon the services
of an archaeologist at a moment's notice if they encounter
unanticipated sites or burials.

v) finally some thought should be given to the publicisation of the sensitivity of archaeological sites to damage by even small scale digging or levelling. There is no doubt that most people in South Africa are not particularly aware of the fragility of our cultural resources or of the alarming rate at which they are being destroyed. The establishment of a site museum at Jacobsbaai and the provision of educational information would help to protect sites generally in the region.

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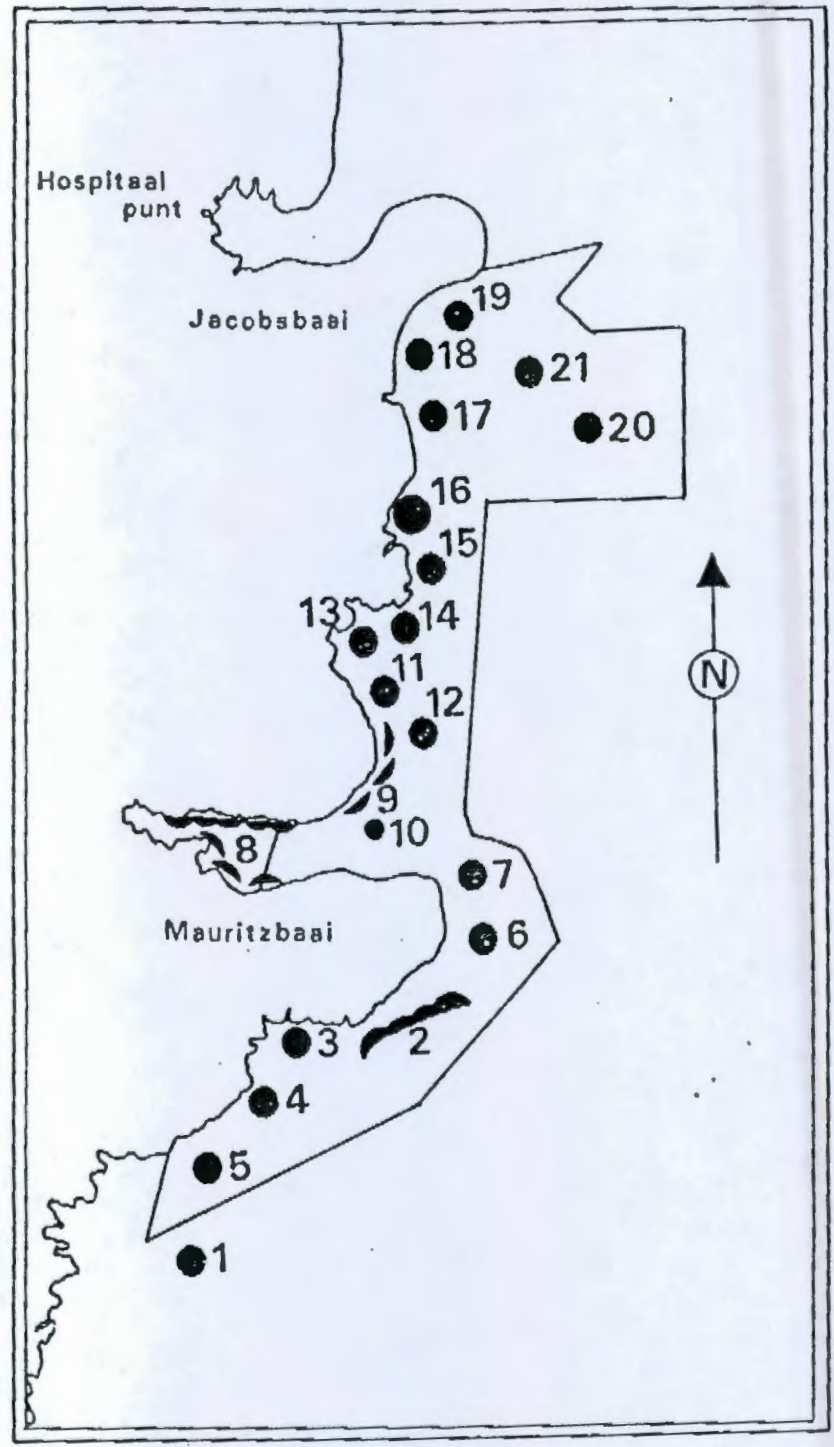


Fig. 1. Location of archaeological sites in the Jacobsbaai and Maritzbaai area.

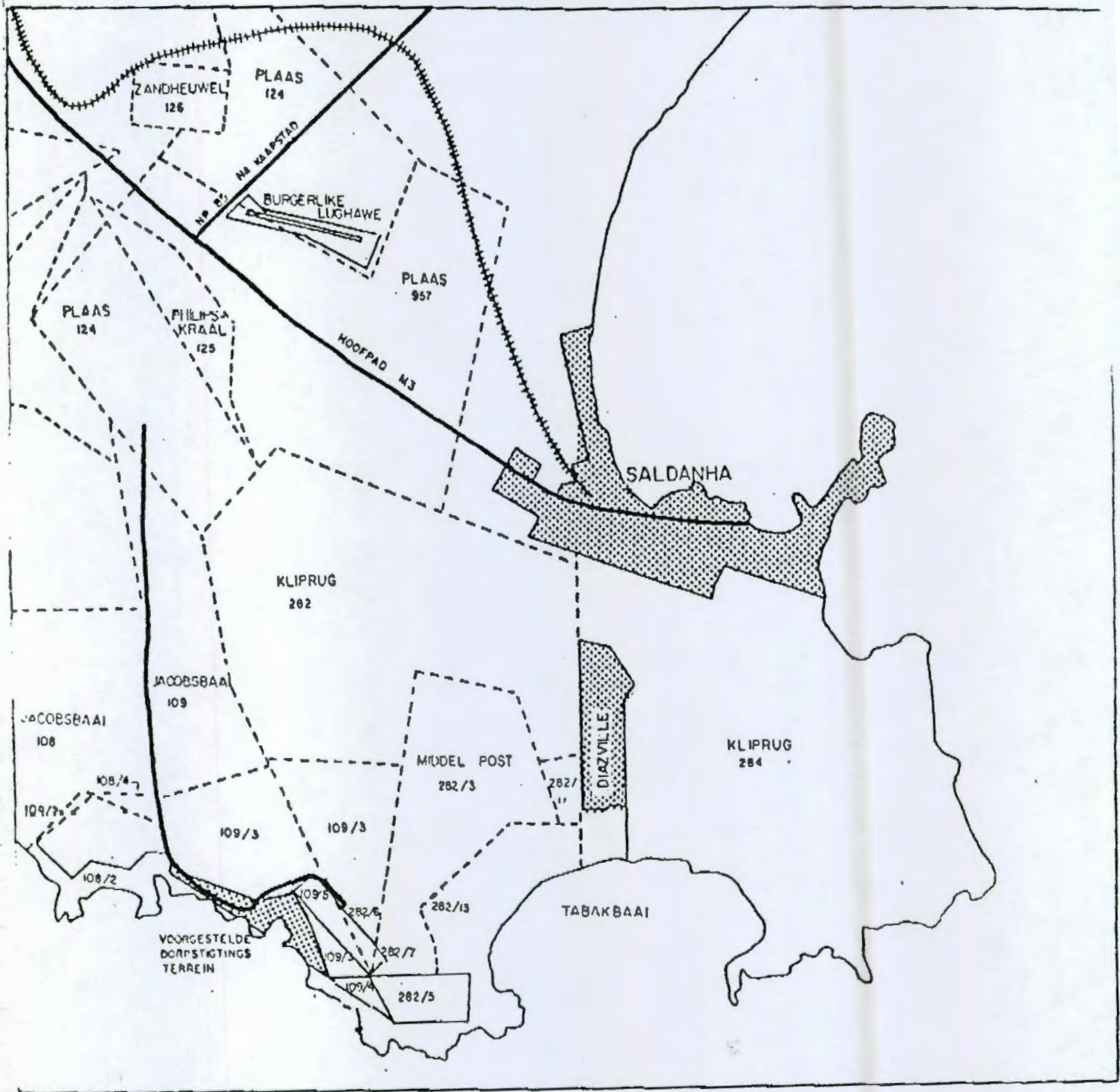


Fig. 2. Location of proposed development in the Jacobsbaai and Maritzbaai area.