

Skeleton eroding from the bank of the Ongers River, Elandsfontein (Annasdal), south of Britstown, Northern Cape: first report.

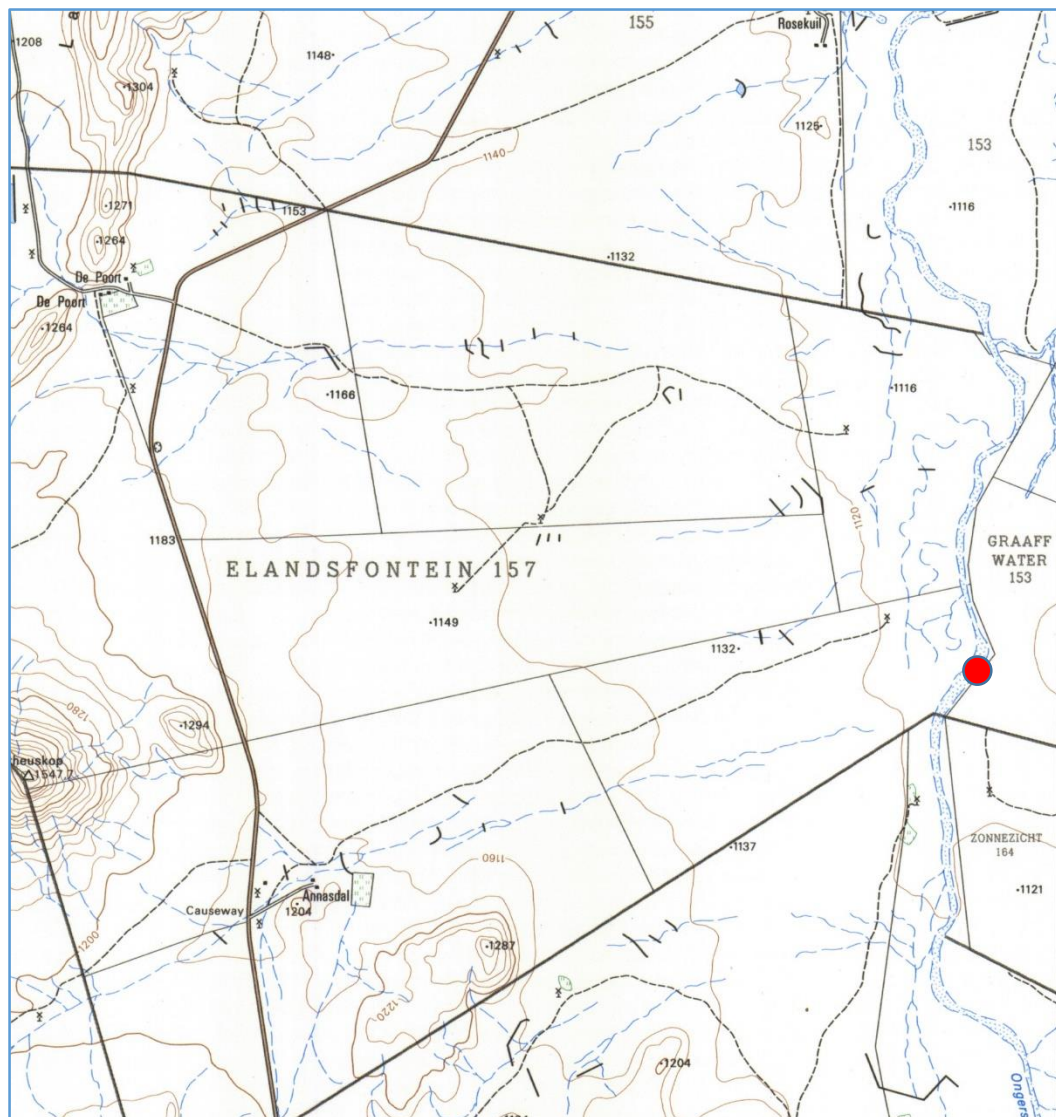
David Morris
McGregor Museum
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Introduction

On 11 July 2015 word was received of a human skeleton that had been found on a farm near Britstown. Contact was made with land owner, Mr Diederik Badenhorst, on Monday 13 July and a site visit was scheduled for Wednesday 15 July.

Observations at the site of discovery

The skeleton, situated at 30°51'12.8" S 23°14'35.6" E had been found by a worker on the farm Elandsfontein, known locally as Annasdal, on 9 July. It is located in the east bank of the Ongers River, virtually at the boundary of the farm Graaff Water.



Extract from 1:50 000 sheet 3023CC.

Initial speculation by the farm owner, Mr Badenhorst, had suggested that the remains were of a person washed up in a flood, perhaps in the 1800s.

Inspection of the site revealed a cranium and parts of the right side of a skeleton embedded in the silt bank of the Ongers River, about 1 m from the present surface. Some skeletal parts had slumped downwards and some were probably missing. It appeared that the bleached skeletal parts had been exposed for some time already.



The skeleton had been in a flexed semi-seated position, facing north. A flat slab of shale, exotic to the immediate silt context, rested above the cranium. Ostrich eggshell pieces were found a metre or so away but no cultural objects were visible in direct proximity with the skeleton. The situation was consistent with this having been a Later Stone Age burial. The teeth were highly worn, typical for an adult hunter-gatherer.

The grave is situated surprisingly deep beneath the present surface: it is possible that river-side silt had accumulated locally through time. It is estimated that the grave could be at least a few hundred years old.

There were no indications of further graves in the vicinity. Virtually all pre-colonial human remains known from this part of the country have come from isolated, chance finds in situations such as this (e.g. Morris 2006).



Recommendations

It is recommended that the remains of the skeleton should be salvaged.

Preparatory to a permit application there should be a form of community consultation. It is not likely that direct links could be established with people living in the area today.

Acknowledgements

I thank Mr Diederick Badenhorst for information provided and for guiding us to the site. We are grateful to the farm worker who reported it in the first instance. Our attention was drawn to this by Mr Murray Swart of the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*. Mr Koot Msawula (McGregor Museum) accompanied the author to the site.

Reference

Morris, A.G. 2006. Later Stone Age burials from the Western Cape Province, South Africa Part 2: Leeufontein. *Southern African Field Archaeology* 15&16:35-41.