

## Introduction

The February archaeological survey occurred earlier than normal due to the occurrence of two skeletons that were located in the new mining lease. The new mining lease is referred to as Town Board, and is known as AMS South. Archaeological sites related to this area are prefixed with the letters TB, so as not to confuse them with sites at AMS North. The latter sites are prefixed with the letters AMS.

We were requested to assess the human remains in terms of the RBM procedures regarding human remains. In addition to the above, we also surveyed the RBM area for new sites.

### Human Remains at Town Board Mining Lease

We were informed on 14 February 2005 that two skeletons had been located in the new mining lease. We arrived on site on the 17 February and noted that the main skeleton (SK2) had been heavily disturbed, and partially removed. SK1 was located ~4m uphill and the surface remains consisted of small rib bones. A third skeleton was noted at TB3 and is discussed later.

#### **SK1**

We demarcated the area around SK1 into a small square. The surface remains were those of the ribs of a juvenile child. We estimate the child to be between 1 – 2 years old<sup>1</sup>. A few isolated vertebrae were noted scattered downhill from these remains. We excavated the rib bones, and the area surrounding the bones to determine the full extent of the burial. Only the surface rib bones were found.

The occurrence of only juvenile rib bones is enigmatic. Under normal circumstances, the ribs, of adults, tend to be poorly preserved<sup>2</sup>, and if they do

<sup>1</sup> Using a modern sample of child size-age ratios

<sup>2</sup> In the acidic soils of the coastal dune forest only shell middens preserve bones very well, and this may have been the case in this instance.

exist, they are very fragile, in relation to the other bones, especially the long bones. Juveniles bones tend to be cartilaginous, as they have not yet ossified. They thus tend to preserve less well than adult remains. The rib bones from SK1 tend to be well preserved. However, they also appear to be in a secondary context. It would be very rare to find only juvenile ribs and not the rest of the skeleton. It is for this reason that we believe SK1 has been previously removed and placed in its current location. Since it is disturbed, we cannot determine when this occurred.

## **SK2**

SK2 had been previously disturbed by the bulldozer and had been partially excavated. Some of these remains had been stored in the Rehab. Dept. offices and we excavated the remaining parts of the skeleton.

The remaining parts of the skeleton consisted of both feet, the left humerus, radius, ulna, some hand bones, and the right radius. The humerus had a much rusted iron ring around it. This iron ring may be an armband. It appears as if the skeleton was originally in a sitting position, with the feet facing northeast to east. The mandible appears to be that of a male in his late 20's – early 30's: the wisdom teeth have erupted (and impacted) and the mandible is male-like. Two possible *Ranella olearium* (Linnaeus 1758) shells were found besides the skeleton.

It is difficult to assess the archaeological age of the skeletons as both are out of context. Even SK2 is out of context as most of it was removed. The best we can do is to presume that the decorated pottery is in association with the skeletons. The decorated pottery belongs to Group 7 pottery. This pottery is characterised by thin-walled pottery with a dark red burnish, and shell-impressed decorations. It has been previously dated to AD1200 – AD 1500.

## **Archaeological Survey**

Several archaeological sites were recorded during this survey. The new mining lease has opened a new area to be surveyed and this has the potential to yield information regarding the human habitation along the more southern dune system. The southern dunes are smaller and narrower than those dunes north of the Nhlabane River and thus may have different settlement patterns.

### **TB1**

TB1 is located at the top of the small dunes. Two trigonometric beacons have been placed in this area. The site is relatively flat and consists of three small dunes with a small deflation between them. The human remains (SK1 and SK2) are located along the western side of the site. Artefacts occur on the southern and western dunes, while the north(-eastern) dune is relatively sterile).

The artefacts consist of grindingstones, pottery, animal bones, shell, and worked bone.

The grinding stones are both lower grinding stones (made on white beach sandstone, and other sandstone), and upper grindingstones (from beach pebbles). These occur in various sizes. The pottery belongs to various vessels and some are decorated. The decorations are shell impressed decorations forming triangular-like patterns. Other decorations consisted of lip notching. The animal bones consist mainly of cow and fish bones. The marine shell consists mostly of brown mussel, oyster and limpet. One piece of worked bone (a spatula) was recovered in association with SK1. The spatula is made from the metapodial of a small bovid, possibly a goat.

Significance: TB1 was of high significance as it consisted of two human burials (ignoring the fact that they have been disturbed). It is very rare to find a juvenile burial, and two skeletons beside each other (ignoring the fact that the juvenile is in a secondary context)<sup>3</sup>. The skeletons have the potential for

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<sup>3</sup> We assume that the two are in association with the rest of the site. Radiocarbon dates would solve this issue.

DNA sampling, as they may be blood-related. Only one other site, near MPA, has had more than one skeleton.

Mitigation: We will monitor this site in forthcoming surveys.

## **TB2**

TB2 is located south of TB1 and consists of a scatter of shell, pottery and some bone. The pottery is undecorated, and one complete (but fragmented) pot was removed.

Significance: The site is of low significance

Mitigation: The site will be monitored in forthcoming surveys.

## **TB3**

TB3 is located directly west of TB1 on a flat area of the dune. TB3 has been recently cleared of vegetation, and several artefacts are present on the surface. These artefacts include bone, shell, pottery, possible ivory and human remains.

The human remains consist of skeletal remains that have been pushed over by the bulldozer. Most of the bones had been scattered, although they all were in a line as if the skeleton had toppled backwards. The feet faced northeast to east, i.e. sunrise. Less than half of the skeleton was recovered.

The other artefacts consist of undecorated pottery, domesticated bovid bones, a possible ivory bangle, and large oyster fragments.

Significance: The site is of medium to high significance

Mitigation: The site will be monitored in forthcoming surveys.

### **MPA34**

This site is located just north of MPA33, and along the same dune cordon. The site consists of a scatter of shell and pottery over a 30 m x 10 m area. The shell is mostly brown mussel and limpets (*Patella concolor*). The pottery is undecorated.

Significance: The site is of low significance

Mitigation: The site will be monitored in forthcoming surveys.

### **MPC83**

The site is located on the second dune cordon from the side of Lake Nhlabane. The site consists of four small shell middens, each with an approximate radius of 1 m. The shell middens consist mainly of brown mussel, however one midden consists mostly of limpets (*Patella concolor*).

Significance: The site is of medium significance

Mitigation: The site will be monitored in forthcoming surveys and/or sampled by means of test-pits.

### **MPD74**

MPD74 is located along the new electricity transmission line, and at the wooden poles labelled MPD44. The site consists of an ephemeral scatter of brown mussel and undecorated pottery.

Significance: The site is of low significance

Mitigation: No further mitigation will be required.

### **MPD75**

MPD75 is located along the new electricity transmission line, and at the wooden poles labelled MPD42. The site consists of an ephemeral scatter of brown mussel, limpets and undecorated pottery.

Significance: The site is of low significance

Mitigation: No further mitigation will be required.

### **MPD76**

MPD76 is located along the new electricity transmission line, and at the wooden poles labelled MPD41. The site consists of a large scatter of brown mussels, and some oyster and limpets. Some undecorated pottery and a lower grinding stone also occur at the site.

Significance: The site is of low significance

Mitigation: No further mitigation will be required.

### **MPD77**

MPD77 is located along the new electricity transmission line and at the wooden poles labelled MPD38). The site consists of an ephemeral scatter of brown mussels, of which some are burnt.

Significance: The site is of low significance

Mitigation: No further mitigation will be required.

## **Conclusion**

The February survey and excavations yielded significant finds. These include a juvenile burial that may be in association with an adult burial and a third burial downslope from these two. Unfortunately the two skeletons were in secondary contexts and one had been partially removed. We have set a procedures program for human remains at RBM, and are trying to enforce this procedure. The local community structures should be informed of this

procedure as they have their own sub-group who deal with human remains irrespective of their age.

Several sites were recorded near MPD, and other sites have been noted for future sampling. We also demarcated part of a site near AMS North (site name of AMS3) which we will be excavating in the near future (possible in early March).

We also held a site meeting to sensitise AMS South personnel regarding archaeological sites and the procedures relating to archaeological material. One complete large and decorated pot had been located at AMS South conveyor belt.