

Heritage Impact Assessment of the resources at the old beachfront facility, Umgababa, KwaZulu-Natal South Coast

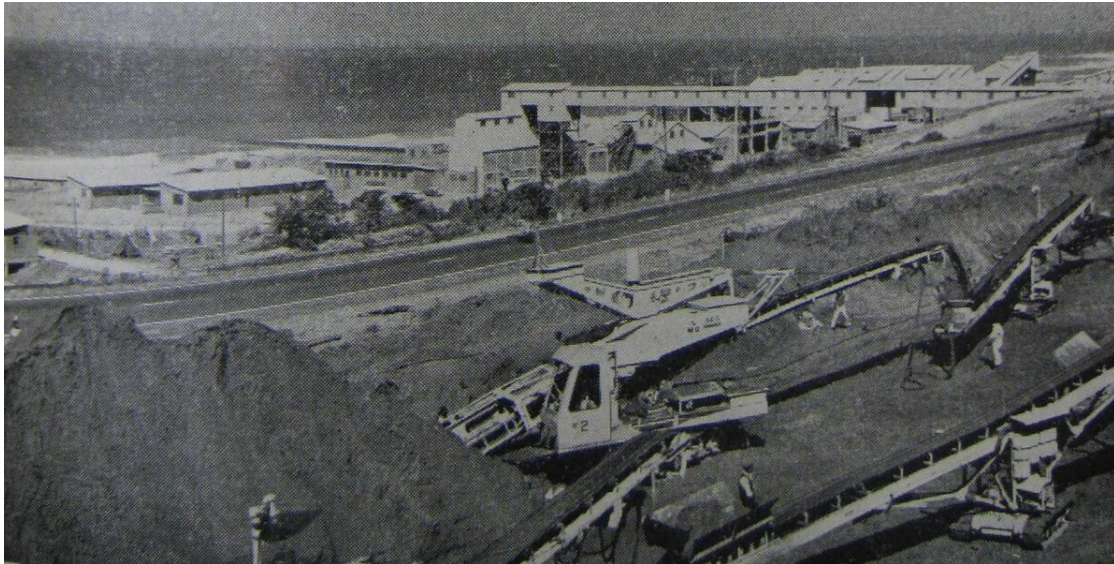


Figure showing commencement of mining operations (Cairns & Langton 1959: 163)

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December 2013



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All buildings / structures over the age of 60 years are automatically protected by legislation. In terms of the National Heritage Act no 25 of 1999, provision for the automatic protection of buildings over the age of 60 years is made in clause 34.1 which stipulates that *'No person may alter or demolish any structure or part of a structure which is older than 60 years without a permit issued by the relevant provincial heritage resources authority.'* Application for demolition or alteration of these structures would have to be directed to the Provincial Heritage Resources Agency for KwaZulu – Natal, *Amafa aKwaZulu-Natali* in Pietermaritzburg.

Please note also that whilst this heritage report has certain recommendations, they may or may not be upheld by the adjudicators in the appropriate Heritage Authority, when it comes to assessment. This is part of the process, and once that first level of adjudication has been completed, then the appropriate steps for a second phase can be assessed. Much can be achieved / mitigated in the design process, given correct briefing by the client and sufficient dexterity by the architects involved.



Fig 1: Showing extent of developments at Umgababa Beach

1. Introduction

Debbie Whelan of Archaic Consulting was requested by Ms. Lekha Mistri of L & R Architects to carry out a site inspection and prepare a report to establish the heritage significance of the old Beachfront facilities at uMgababa, on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast.¹ This was with the aim of redevelopment of the site by eThekweni Metropolitan Council and the construction of new beachfront facilities, including a swimming pool, for the local community at uMgababa.

Currently, the site consists of a well - constructed and extensive access road with a large level open plain on the edge of the dune. The beach is immediately to the east, and the railway line to the west. The only substantial structure of any significance is the old beachfront recreation complex, which consisted of change rooms, elevated terrace and a cafeteria. This building consists of two circular structures, with an access ramp to the upper level leading from the road / parking areas to the west.

The intention of this report is to evaluate the structures on the site in terms of the provisions of the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Heritage Act no 4 of 2008. This automatically protects buildings and structures over the age of 60 years. It also has an interest in struggle history within the last 60 years.

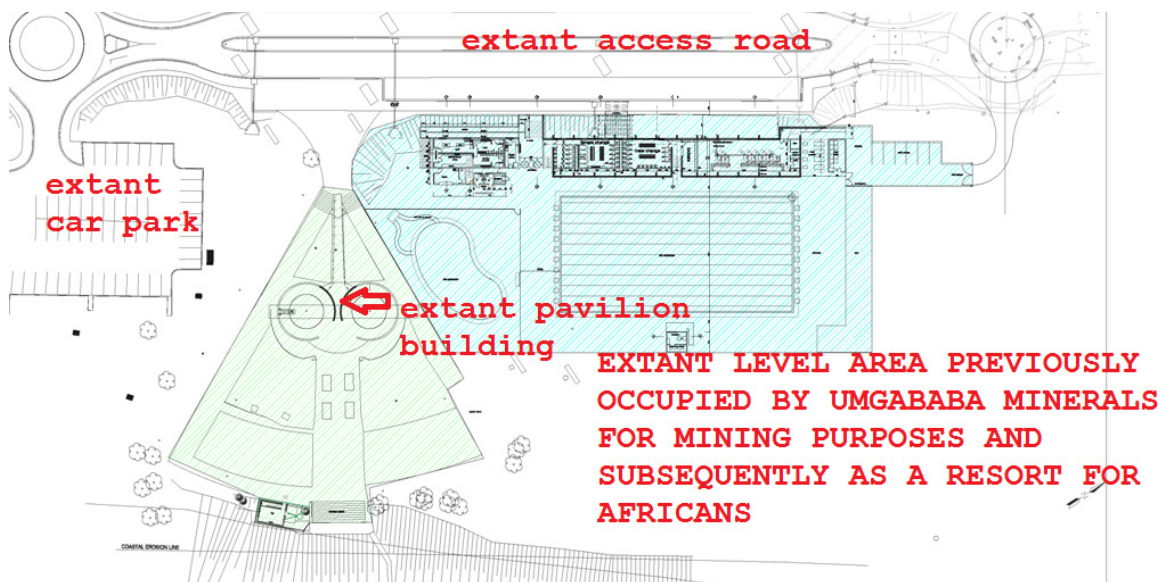


Fig 2: Intended development of the site as a beach resort for the uMnini community

¹ The site is located between the railway line and the beach, at co-ordinates - 30.129730, 30.851471

2. Methodology

The site was inspected with Ms. Mistri on 7 November 2013, the potential heritage resources inspected, and photographs taken. Some conversation was carried out with people on site, to establish the value of the structures on site. It emerged that most of the workers were not from the area, and thus not familiar with the history of the site.² Ms Mistri pointed out a tunnel that was of particular interest, leading north from the basement old changing room / beachfront facility which had been exposed during excavations for the new swimming pool. She noted that she had heard rumours about mining at this site. Aerial photographs were then consulted, particularly those from the late 1950s and early 1960s which revealed developments on the site. Unfortunately few in the early 1970s reveal anything of any value.

This information led to online and archival searches, although the majority of the documents remain unverified, lodged as they are in the State Archives in Pretoria and beyond the ambit of this brief. There is very little information in the public domain regarding the site, as noted by Oliver Davies in 1982 that 'There are no records by the last mining company, the Anglo American Corporation; nor is there any trace of the artefacts collected during mining' (Davies 1982: 42)

3. History of site

uMgababa was historically located within the Umnini Reserve. This meant that any applications for sites had to be directed to the person in charge of Native Affairs at the time. Not much interest is seen prior to the turn of the 20th century, but a number of applications to erect beach shelters or collect oysters were received in the first couple of decades of the 20th century.

Interest in the site was piqued in 1944³ when initial investigations revealed the existence of titanium rich soils on the coastal dunes, classified by Hugo (1993:46) as Umgababa aeolian (red dunes) Pleistocene to Holocene 44Mt ilmenite, rutile, zircon' (Hugo 1993: 52).⁴ The presence of ilmenite - bearing sand was identified by Theo Perlman in 1946, and by 1949 The Titanium Corporation of South Africa was formed. Cairns and Langton note that modest operations carried on for a time under the banner of the Titanium Corporation, until 1956 when the Anglo American Corporation of South Africa expressed interest, purchasing the company and forming Umgababa Minerals Ltd. in the same year⁵. Development and exploitation of the sands occurred quickly.



Fig 3: Mining the ilmenite hill, March 1956 (Cairns and Langton 1959: 145)

² It is to be noted that Debbie Whelan inspected the site in 2005. At the time there were many more structures than extant today. Most have subsequently been demolished.

³ NTS 6896 277/319

⁴ Access to these references was problematic, since they are old texts.

⁵ Cairns and Langton 1959: 139



Fig 4: Titanium Corporation Plant, March 1956 (Cairns and Langton 1959: 145)

The site was cleared in July 1957, with the completion of the wet and dry concentration plants in the middle of 1958. There were hold ups in the development of the site as a result of the negotiation of leasehold land from the uMnini Trust (Cairns & Langton 1959: 162).

In order to provide fresh water for the mining operations, a dam (see Fig 6) was constructed on the Umgababa River (Cairns & Langton 1959: 152). The mining itself required ten million gallons of water per day, and efforts were made to acquire this water from the sea. This led to the construction of the sea water pump (see Fig 7 below)

Since this was the first plant of its kind in South Africa, and one of the largest operations in the world, cutting - edge technology was introduced derived from extensive international research and consultation. Ironically, at the same time that this was implemented, topography and situation meant that much of the work was also carried out manually, using local labour from the location (See Fig 4 below).



Fig 5: African labour bearing titanium rich ore (Cairns & Langton 1959: 146)

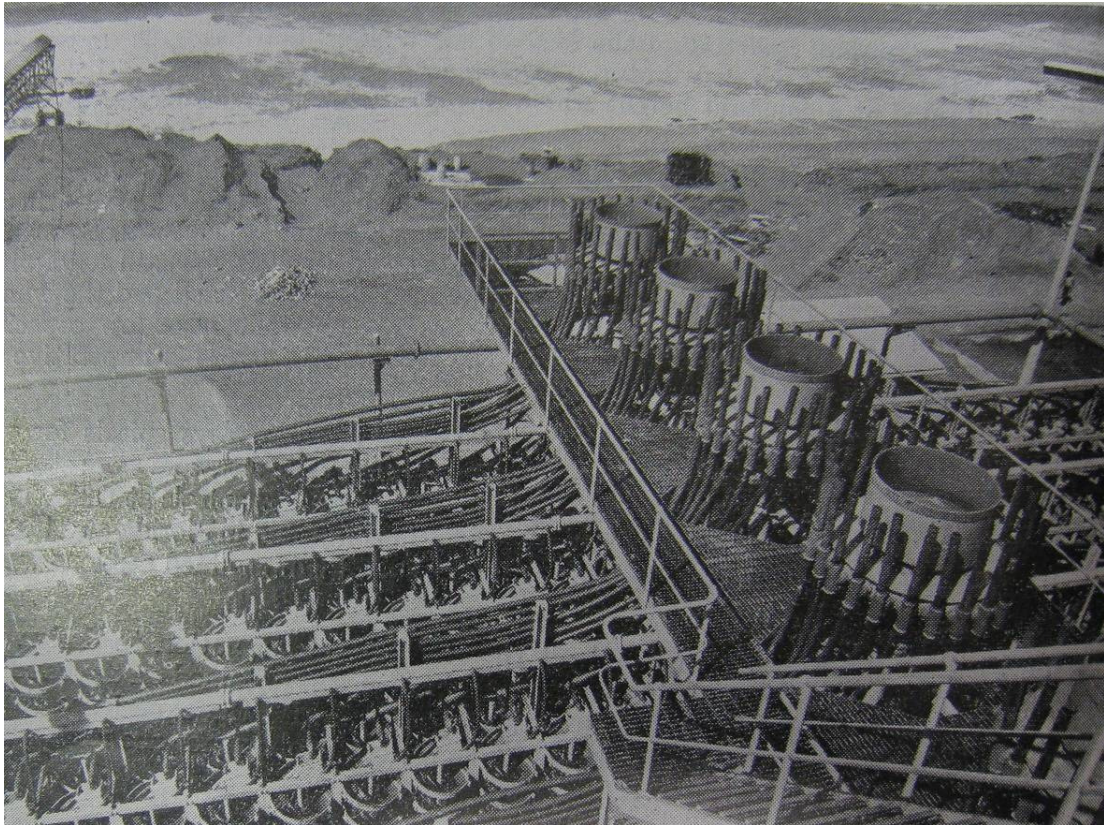


Fig 6: Pulp distribution using a Hunphrey's Spiral (Cairns & Langton 1959 :152)



Fig 7: Umgababa Dam under construction (Cairns & Langton 1959:

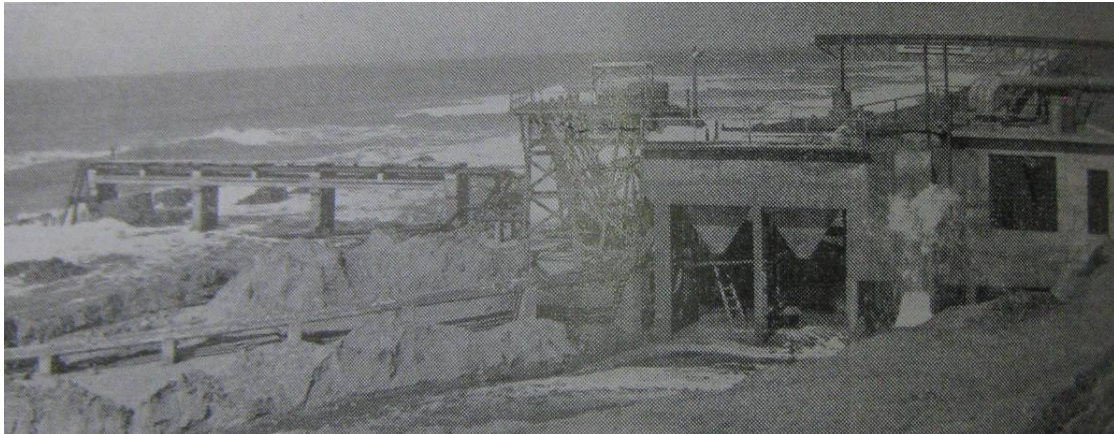


Fig 8: Sea water pump installation (Cairns & Langton 1959:154)

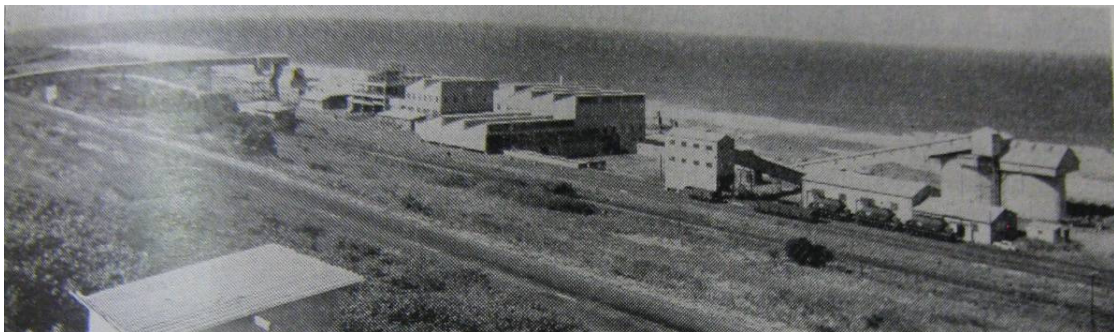


Fig 9: Panoramic view of complete plant: circular structures to the right are suspected as being the core of the contemporary beach pavilion (Cairns & Langton 1959: 163)

The mine was closed in 1963, ostensibly due to environmental hazards for the local uMnini community.

An important part of this aspect of the site history was the levelling off of the site and the provisions of the basic infrastructure, such as roads, which remain extant today. Scrutiny of the aerial photograph dated 1969, as well as Fig 9 above shows that there is a possibility that the twinned circular buildings which remain on site and are being reworked as a recreational facility, may, in fact, date to this era, industrial structures having been reworked into a more lighthearted function. This would suggest that the associated subterranean tunnel would also date to this period, having formed part of the industrial workings of the mine.

In July 1969 the site was revived, this time in the guise of a holiday resort aimed at Africans. *'uMgababa Holiday Resort was built in July, 1969 on the KwaZulu-Natal coast. The resort was meant to play an extremely significant role for the black population within the framework of separate development as the sole coastal beach resort for blacks to holiday at. The site was previously used by Anglo American Corporation as a mineral titanium plant which closed down in 1963.'*⁶ However, unrest in uMgababa in the early 1990s⁷ resulted in the facilities being laid to waste.

⁶ See Online Reference #1

⁷ http://sabctr.org.za/glossary/umgababa_attacks.htm



Fig 10: 1959 aerial photo

Note in the photograph above that the road infrastructure is much the same as extant today. Note also the extent of the large structures required for the mining process.



Fig 11: 1967 aerial photograph showing extent of development on site

4. Assessment of structures on site

It is to be noted that the extant structures on site are of recent construction, the oldest dating it is suspected, to the period of Umgababa Minerals.



Fig 12: Recreation pavilion – western (inland) view

The beach recreation pavilion is presently being renovated in order to provide amenity for the people of the uMnini area. This consists of two circular structures placed close together. The rear of these structures facing inland, is accessed by a ramp which leads to the viewing deck (Fig 12). On each side of the viewing deck is an elegant concrete umbrella (Figs 14 and 15).



Fig 13: View from south west



Fig 14: View from north east

The structure is deliberately post - modern in style, though, as noted, it is suspected that the circular structures forming the frame of the structure date back to the period of Umgababa Minerals. This building is currently being refurbished in order that it can function as a community recreation space.



Fig 15: Viewing deck with concrete umbrella

Below the building is a basement, accessed from a door to the west of the building.



Fig 16: Door to basement



Fig 17: (right) steps down to basement

This basement runs along the western edge of the building. At the end is a bricked up wall (see Fig 18) which was accidentally discovered as being hollow. This cavity corresponds on the outside of the building with a concrete encased tunnel (see Fig 19) which in turn had a concrete slab placed upon it. The extent of this tunnel cannot be established at this point.



Fig 18: Opening in wall at end of basement leading to cavity



Fig 20: Reinforced concrete deck on edge of site



Fig 21: Extent of concrete on site



Fig 22: The site as it stands today

5. Note on archaeology

This site is essentially a brownfield site, having been heavily excavated in the process of ilmenite mining in the early 1960s in which the primary dune was essentially flattened, as well as extensive construction of buildings and infrastructure on the site (See Fig 9 of this report). It has also been used heavily as a beach resort in the intervening years by members of the uMnini Community.

Notwithstanding, Oliver Davies commented on excavations on the site in a paper titled 'The Palaeolithic sequence at Umgababa Ilmenite Diggings' (Davies 1982), in which it was established that *'About one metre below the interface of the lower red sand and calcarenite were pieces of very late Acheulian with picks which indicate a transition to the Tugela Industry. The interface had been a surface on which were many terrestrial molluscs, traces of bushes and a few pieces of the Tugela Industry. Within the upper red sand was a layer of nodules with artefacts of the Pietersburg Industry. In a valley which had been eroded and apparently refilled by slumping was a collection of Late Stone Age artefacts, and another collection, probably not in situ but dumped by the miners, seemed to belong to a different Late Stone Age industry. On the surface of the dune were middens with Iron Age pottery'* (Davies 1982:41).

It is the opinion of the author that an archaeological impact assessment of this site would be superfluous, given the nature of the disturbance of the site prior and subsequent to Davies report, in which he notes the ilmenite workings reached a depth of some 35m. It appears that he was working on a stratigraphed sequence excavated as a result of the ilmenite workings, which revealed the documented examples of the ESA and LSA type industries. These were closely documented and analysed. He noted issues with provenance of certain artefacts, suspecting that they had been relocated by miners.

6. Built environment conclusions

Umgababa resort	local	regional	national	international
architectural	low	low	low	low
historical	high	medium	low	low
technical	high	medium	low	low
scientific	low	low	low	low
social	high	medium	low	low

Statement of significance:

It is suspected that the core of this structure of the Recreation pavilion, together with the concrete encased tunnel, formed part of the Umgababa Minerals operation, which was the first and largest of its kind in South Africa, and one of the largest operations in the world at the time. The site was revived in 1969 to become a recreation beach for Africans, although the infrastructure created in this period was demolished by conflict and neglect. This adds another unique layer to the significance of the site, existing, as it did, as material evidence of apartheid legislation.

Whilst the structures themselves are not over the age of 60 years, they do form an important, yet silent part of the mining history of South Africa, and the subsequent legislations of separation.

Recommendations:

It is understood that the beach pavilion is to be refurbished. If it indeed started off life as a mining structure, it has been much altered in the past, and the core of the building remains extant. For the subterranean tunnel, should it have formed part of the Umgababa Ilmenite mine, it has not seen the light of day in nearly 60 years. In the opinion of the author, should its destruction be required, its lack of real function and reuse in any future operations renders it superfluous and thus impractical for recycling or interpretation.

The gravity of the association of the site with the mine and apartheid, suggests that this intangible heritage be reinterpreted in the new structure in some form. This would entail scrutiny of the records in the State Archives in Pretoria, in order to find details of the land use and developments, and plans for the beach resort in 1969. This would also interpret the apartheid construct of separate facilities and separate development.

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Wipplinger, P.E. (1985). Extract from report: An outline of the economic potential of titanium in South Africa. In *S. A. Geol. Surv. Report*.

Provincial Archives Repository – unverified records

Chief Native Commissioner:

CNC 165 1914/464 Application to lease about 600 - 800 acres of Trust Land at Umgababa, South Coast

Surveyor General's Office:

SGO III/1/215 SG4546/1906 CP Harvey, Smith Street, Durban: On behalf of Mr. James P Lansdell, applies for permission to erect a moveable cottage on the Admiralty Reserve near the mouth of the Umgababa river.

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SES 0 F1140/61 Other Minerals Umgababa Minerals Ltd. (1962-1965)

URU 3699 1868 Huurooreenkoms tussen die Umninitrus en die "Umgababa Minerals Ltd". (1957)

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BAO 9721 C29/3/1273 Werkgewerswerflisensies. Employers Recruiting Licences. Umgababa Minerals Limited. (1962)

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HEN 4654 NFM3/1/1597 Umgababa Minerals Ltd. 44 Main Street Johannesburg. 19560000 - 19570000

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- 2) <http://mineral-resources.findthedata.org/l/304514/Umgababa-Deposit>