

REPORT ON A FURTHER VISIT TO PRE-COLONIAL SITES ON LOURENSFORD, SOMERSET WEST

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Introduction

After visiting Lourensford on 11 January 2015 to see the rock paintings of finger dots on the bank of the Sneekop River, we returned for a second visit with members of the South African Archaeological Society on 14 November 2015. The purpose was to see the stone-walled structure at Diepgat that was photographed by Johan West and was included in my report of 11 January. Two members of the Archaeological Society, Dr Tim Maggs and Nigel Amschwand, who have experience in dry stone-walled structures elsewhere in South Africa, were present, in addition to Sally Reece, **Mike**, Mary Leslie, Janette Deacon, Helen van Rensburg, Lyne MacLennan and Steuart MacLennan.

This report records the important finding at both Sneekop and Diepgat of fragments of earthenware pottery typical of the kind made in pre-colonial times by Khoekhoe herders (formerly referred to as Hottentots) in the Western Cape. This is the first time that Khoekhoe pottery has been recorded in the Hottentots Holland mountains, although it has been found in shell middens along the west and south coasts and in other inland mountains such as the Cederberg. Early colonial documents, such as Van Riebeeck's diary, record the presence of Khoekhoe herders on the mainland adjacent to the Cape Peninsula, hence their naming of the mountains as the Hottentots Holland. Archaeological evidence for their presence in these mountains, however, has not been reported before.

Additional comments on rock paintings on the bank of the Sneekop River

Further to the description of the site in the January 2015 report, Mary Leslie found a sizeable piece of earthenware Khoekhoe pottery on the slope, about 6 m below the rock shelter with red painted finger-dots. A concentrated search located two smaller fragments (Figs 1 and 2) which provide evidence for the assumed relationship between the paintings and Khoekhoe herders. The potsherds were left in place and should not be removed without a permit from Heritage Western Cape.

The secluded location, paintings, pottery, and arrangement of stones around the front of the painted rock are all evidence for the presence of people there in pre-colonial times and support the interpretation made in the January 2015 report that the site was used by Khoekhoe, possibly for girls' initiation.

We speculated that the herders who used the site might have camped and kept their livestock on the mountain slopes above the wooded Sneekop River kloof rather than on the land below.



Fig. 1. One large and two smaller fragments of Khoe pottery at Sneekop shelter.



Fig. 2. Location of fragments of Khoe pottery on the slope below the shelter.

Stone walling at Diepgat

Situated at 34.02.981 S, 18.55.493 E, the site is on the west bank of the Lourens River, upstream from a drift for vehicle traffic and on the slope above a bridge of wooden poles constructed for mountain bikers. Vehicles were parked at 34.03.29 S, 18.54.12 E and we walked upstream to a short ladder, along the pole path and then left up the river bank to a relatively flat area measuring about 10 x 15 m that has been partially cleared of vegetation. It lies below a massive tumble of quartzite blocks, with more large rocks down the slope below. The flat platform is anomalous as it is set in an otherwise steeply sloping landscape. Probably for this reason it has been used as a camping place over a long period.

The walling which seems to be the oldest feature (see Fig. 3) is about 3 m long and 1 m at maximum height, tapering down on either side. It might have been a circle or semi-circle at one time, but no longer forms more than a quarter of a circle that might at one time have had a radius of about 2 m. There is a deliberately made opening with a lintel on top near the base of the wall. The style of walling was not distinctive enough to allow an estimate to be made of its age or purpose, nor to identify who might have constructed it. Its location in relation to another circular structure at Diepgat photographed by Johan West (Fig. 4) was unknown at the time of writing this report.

Ten potsherds, small and weathered but unmistakably in the Khoe tradition, were found on the surface within and outside the original circle together with one piece of ochre, and eleven untrimmed stone flakes in quartz, silcrete and chert (Fig. 5). They were left at the site, and may not be removed without a permit from Heritage Western Cape. The pottery is a clear indication that Khoekhoe herders inhabited this place at some time during the last 2000 years and probably prior to about 1680 AD, by which time Dutch colonists were settled in the vicinity.

In addition to the main piece of walling with the lintelled opening there are several other short pieces of low stone walling as well as four fireplaces and a stone table. A circular fireplace about 1.5 m in diameter is shown in Fig. 6. Pieces of recent glass and metal, probably from tin cans, were seen on the ground. Some of these features are clearly quite recent and the remains of a bridge (rotting poles and rusty nails) at the minor stream next to the site show that the site has been in regular use during the recent history of the farm.

Summary and Recommendation

The sites at Sneekop and Diepgat are an important part of the cultural heritage of Lourensford and the Hottentots Holland mountains in particular. They provide incontrovertible evidence of the presence in the area of Khoekhoe herders who are known to have been in the south-western Cape from about 2000 years ago, and who interacted with the early European colonists after 1652 AD.

It is recommended that the sites should not be publicised because this could lead to the loss of already scarce and rare artefacts. Should any development or change be made in the vicinity of either of the sites reported here, an archaeological impact assessment will be mandatory before permission can be given by Heritage Western Cape.

Information on site location and significance will be placed on the SAHRIS database that is managed by the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

Acknowledgements

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Fig. 3. Remnant of a circular dry stone wall at Diepgat. Note the gap which seems to have been deliberately constructed between the stones.



Fig. 4. Stone structure at Diepgat photographed by Johan West. We did not see this structure during our visit and were unable to ascertain where it is in relation to the site we saw.



Fig. 5. Potsherds, ochre and stone artefacts found at Diepgat.



Fig. 6. A fireplace, possibly constructed from stone that originally formed the circular wall, is seen on the left with stumps of trees perhaps used for seating arranged on the right.



Fig. 7. Members of the team at Sneekop shelter, from left to right, back row: Helen van Rensburg, Nigel Amschwand, Sally Reece, Steuart MacLennan. Middle row: Lyne MacLennan. Front row: Tim Maggs, Janette Deacon, Mary Leslie.