4. *Archaeological Impact Assessment by the Agency for Cultural Resource Management (ACRM) (February 2010)*
01 February, 2010

Att: Mr Nik Wulirschleger
Boland Environmental Consultants
PO Box 250
Worcester
6849

Dear Mr Wulirschleger,

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF PORTION 22 OF FARM 386 WYSERSDRIFT RAWSONVILLE WESTERN CAPE: SECTION 24G APPLICATION

1. Introduction and brief

Boland Environmental Consultants, on behalf of the Symington Trust requested that the Agency for Cultural Resource Management undertake an archaeological assessment of Portion 22 of Farm 386 Wyssersdrift near Rawsonville in the Western Cape.

The 159 ha farm was purchased in 2002 and a number of new vineyards were subsequently developed, in addition to the excavation of a deep irrigation pit. These activities were carried out without the relevant authorisation from the commenting authorities, including the provincial heritage authority Heritage Western Cape. Acknowledging this, the new owner of the farm applied to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEADP) for amnesty in 2005 and was requested to complete a Section 24G application. Boland Environmental Consultants was requested by the Symington Trust to assist in fulfilling the requirements for submission of the 24G application. Heritage Western Cape subsequently asked that an Archaeological Impact Assessment must be done\(^1\). The area cleared for agriculture is quite substantial. When the Section 24G application was initiated, an area of about 90ha (or 56% of the total area of the farm) had either been cleared or was already under cultivation. The cultivation of cash crops was subsequently suspended and currently around 50 ha (or 31%) of the farm are under vines.

2. Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference for the archaeological assessment are to:

- Inspect 'new' areas cleared for agriculture between 2003 and 2006 for archaeological occurrences;

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\(^1\) HWC letter dated 29 October, 2009 (ROD 678)
• Inspect the new irrigation pit and surrounding area for archaeological occurrences;

• Inspect the site for a proposed new house for the owner, for archaeological occurrences, and

• Inspect the water diversion channel around the farm for archaeological occurrences

3. The site

A locality map is illustrated in Figure 1.

An aerial photograph of the study site is illustrated in Figure 2.

Wysersdrift (Farm 386/22) is located in the upper Breede River Valley near the town of Rawsonville, about 90 kms from Cape Town. Access to site is via the N1 and the Goudini Road. The farm lies adjacent to the Breede River and the Breede River floodplain. The farm also borders the Badgerberg Conservancy. Much of the floodplain in the vicinity of Wysersdrift has been heavily impacted by agriculture, particularly vineyard production. Around 50 ha of the farm are currently under vines. The farm also contains about 30 ha of seasonal wetlands. These wetlands follow old water courses of the Breede River. Large areas of the farm were also previously planted with peas, onions and cereal crops (for animal feed) and farmed under central pivots. The remainder of the farm (including the previously ploughed lands) consist of grassland vegetation, which will not be further developed, or farmed, but allowed to return to a 'natural' state.

The irrigation pit, measuring about 150 m x 30 m, acts as a sump draining the wetland areas in order to facilitate cultivation. The pit is surrounded by a 30-40 m wide strip of old agricultural lands, some natural veld and extensive vineyards to the west and east.

The site for the proposed new house for the new owner of the farm comprises old agricultural lands, which have lain fallow for several years. An 'avenue' of trees about 200 m long has been planted from the Goudini Road, till the proposed site of the new house.

The water diversion channel around the farm was excavated in order to divert wetland water away from the farm and drains into the Platdrif River, a confluence of the Breede River.

4. Approach to the study

The affected landholdings were not searched in detail, as much of the area has already been planted with vineyards. These landholdings comprise the bulk of the 'new' areas that were cleared for agriculture between 2003 and 2006. Also, the surrounding soils comprise wind blown sands with virtually no surface stone visible.

The irrigation pit and the immediate surrounding area were searched in detail (Figures 3-8).

The surrounding grasslands/old agricultural lands, which were farmed under central pivot for many years by the previous owner's father, were only partially searched. Here the soils comprise deep wind blow sands with no surface stone visible, indicating that few
archaeological occurrences would be visible here. Some of these lands also include wetlands with obvious wetland vegetation. In winter, according to the farm manager, these lands are heavily waterlogged, with much of the area being inaccessible.

The site for the proposed new house for the owner, including the long avenue of trees in the eastern portion of the affected landholdings and surrounding area was searched for archaeological occurrences (Figure 9-12).

The water diversion channel around the farm was only partially searched.

A GPS track path of the archaeological survey was created. This track path has been saved to a CD and submitted with a digital copy of the report. All archaeological occurrences were plotted (and photographed) in situ, using a Gamin Oregon 300 GPS unit, set on map datum wgs 84. A spreadsheet of the waypoints and a description of each of the artefacts are illustrated in Table 1.

The site visit and assessment took place on the 28th January, 2010

5. Results of the study

5.1 Irrigation Pit

Nine archaeological occurrences (SYM1-9) were documented during the inspection of the irrigation pit and surrounding area. Five tools (SYM1-5) were found on the elevated cobble and gravel road that runs alongside the Goudini Road above the irrigation pit. The pit was excavated to a depth of about 4 metres and much of the excavated material and river stone was used for construction of the gravel road and the remainder spread evenly over the surrounding area. The tools comprise Early Stone Age tools and one Middle Stone Age flake, including one broken ESA handaxe (SYM3) found half embedded in the gravel road.

Four more tools (SYM6-9) were found on the cobble and gravel fill surrounding the irrigation pit. These include an ESA core (SYM7) and a MSA blade (SYM8). Many similar types of tools have been documented in the Breede River valley and are not uncommon in the disturbed farmlands. All the above tools (SYM1-9) are isolated finds and occur in a disturbed context and have been rated as having low local significance.

A collection of some of the tools is illustrated in Figures 13-17, while Figure 18 illustrates the context in which SYM1-5 were found.

5.2 Site for proposed new house for owner

No archaeological remains were found during an inspection of the site for the proposed new house for the owner. The receiving environment comprises old agricultural lands now covered in thick, dry grasses, resulting in low archaeological visibility. The surface deposits comprise loose wind blown sands and there is no surface stone visible over the entire site and surrounding area. According to the farm manager, Mr J.D. van Zyl (pers comm.) who is also the previous owner of the farm, the surface sand body is up to 3 m deep while the older river stone terrace lies below this sand body.
It was therefore very interesting to document the remains of a dispersed scatter of stone tools (SYM10) below this deep sand body adjacent the avenue of trees alongside the Goudini Road (Figure 19). More than 30 tools, comprising mostly stone flakes, chunks and chips occur on a compact, gritty sandy surface, alongside a large pile of sand that is now fairly well vegetated (Figure 20). The site measures about 15 x 20 m in extent. Some of the tools occur under a thin veneer of wind blown sands. It is unclear why the sand was removed from this particular area (probably when the avenue was cleared prior to planting), but it has conveniently exposed the tools on the old surface. More than 90% of the stone flakes are in quartzite (mainly cobble-flakes), while quartz is the next most dominant raw material type. Interestingly, a few flakes in silcrete were also found. Silcrete is not a locally available rock type and must have been introduced on the site from elsewhere. No formal tools were found and neither was any pottery, bone, or ostrich eggshell noted.

At least another twelve Early Stone Age and Later Stone Age tools, were also found on a similarly compact sandy surface about 25 m north of SYM10. The surface sand deposits have also been scraped from the ‘site’ (called SYM11), but much of the natural veld has since recovered in the area (Figure 21). The tools comprise several large flakes, a large edge retouched (ESA) flake, chunks and at least one (ESA) core. Two small quartz chunks were also found on the site, as well as a few quartzite flakes. It is unclear whether SYM10 and SYM11 is one site, but for the purpose of this report has been described separately.

5.3 Water diversion channel

No archaeological remains were located during the inspection of the water diversion channel. A section of the channel from the entrance to the farm, till the intersection of the Goudini Road was searched. It is estimated that the water diversion channel is about 1.0 m deep and less than 1 m wide. The area on either side of the channel comprises sandy soils that are heavily overgrown with weeds and grasses, resulting in low archaeological visibility. Some river stone was noted, but no tools were found. The channel obviously constitutes a disturbed landscape.

6. Discussion

By far the most interesting archaeological observation is the scatter of LSA tools (SYM10) that occurs at the top of the tree-lined ‘avenue’ alongside the Goudini Road. These tools occur on a compact sandy surface, about 2-3 meters below the sandy overburden. All the tools are waste flakes, chips and chunks and no formal tools were found, despite a careful search of the surrounding area. Had pottery or sheep bone or even vitrified dung been present on the archaeological site, it may have been compelling evidence for the presence of a Khoekhoen herder encampment. The ‘sites’ proximity to the Breede River and (historically) good grazing lands, suggests that the location of the site was carefully chosen, as a range of subsistence resources would have been available at that time. Interestingly, herder groups have historically been documented in the study area. According to Ron Martin\(^2\), Hassequ (Khoekhoen) herders are reported to have seasonally occupied the Worcester area during the late 17th Century.

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It is also interesting to note, that while most of the archaeological occurrences documented to date in the Breede River valley comprise isolated finds of Early Stone Age and Middle Stone Age tools in disturbed farmlands, the discovery of a Later Stone Age (LSA), possibly herder, site in a riverine context is quite rare and therefore significant. LSA sites and rock art in caves and shelters are known to occur in the surrounding mountains, near Slanghoek (pers. observation) and at the Goudini Spa³, but not usually in the floodplain as they have mostly already been destroyed by intensive farming and related activities. Recent research and a few CRM studies have, however, indicated that such possible Khoekhoe encampments are still archaeologically ‘visible’ in these highly transformed landscapes⁴.

7. Recommendations

While SYM10 is considered to be an important archaeological observation, and has been documented and described, the context in which the tools occur has been compromised. Also, apart from the stone flakes, no pottery, bone, or other cultural or behavioural remains were found, thus minimising the importance and value of the site.

Archaeological mitigation is therefore not required.

However, any future planned earthworks such as removal of top soils (for construction of the new owner’s house, for example) and excavations for services (such as water pipelines) must be monitored by a professional archaeologist.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Kaplan

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Figure 1. Locality Map

Study site
Figure 2. Aerial photograph of Wysersdrift Farm 386 indicating the approximate boundary of the affected landholdings

Figure 3. Grasslands and vines west of the irrigation pit. View facing north

Figure 4. Grasslands west of the irrigation pit. View facing north
Figure 19. SYM10. View facing north

Figure 20. SYM10 tools. Scale is in cm

Figure 21. SYM11 tools

Figure 22. SYM11. View facing north

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Table 1. Spreadsheet of site observations