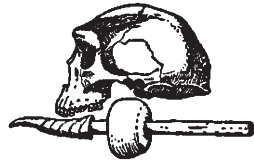


# South African Archaeological Bulletin



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## Editorial

### Mapungubwe Matters

Regular readers of the *Bulletin* editorial section will recall Amanda Esterhuysen's editorial entitled *Undermining Heritage*, which she concluded with the statement: "...we need to ... lobby, educate and hold various government departments/consultants/developers accountable for their actions (or inaction). Failing to do so may result in the complete devaluation of what we do" (Esterhuysen 2009: 3). In recent months this is exactly what both ASAPA (the Association of Southern African Professional Archaeologists) and the South African Archaeological Society have chosen to do. Both have joined with a broader coalition of public interest and environmental organizations to appeal the awarding of New Order Mining Rights and the approval of the Environmental Management Programme (EMP) for the Vele Colliery which is situated a scant seven kilometres from the eastern border of the Mapungubwe National Park (MNP) and Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site (MCL WHS).

The Vele Colliery, as outlined in the Environmental Management Programme (Jacana Environmentals 2009), will use underground as well as open-cast methods, with the open ground activities and related infrastructure affecting a large surface area. The mine will operate for a period of about 30 years, seven days a week, 24 hours a day. While Limpopo Coal Ltd, the owner of the colliery, claims that the impact of the coal mine on the area will be temporary, it should be stated that the impact on the archaeological sites and places of intangible significance in the path of the mine and related developments will be permanent and non-reversible. The auxiliary effects of the mining, such as the road network, increased traffic, dust and noise are likely to have far-reaching impacts on the broader surroundings, including the degradation of the 'sense-of-place' and the 'aesthetic values' of the area. This cannot help but impact on the attractiveness of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape as a tourism destination and thus it will have negative consequences for the existing, sustainable eco- and heritage tourism sector. This situation has also highlighted a number of further issues in relation to heritage practice in South Africa.

First, there is the need to take a holistic approach to heritage at the landscape level. South Africa has already partly accomplished this in view of the fact that the MCL WHS was established as a 'cultural landscape' rather than as encompassing merely the eponymous hilltop site. Such a landscape comprises a network of sites – in this case spanning from 500 000 years ago to the 19th century and marking the interaction of numerous groups of people (hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, agro-pastoralists and trekkers) in the Shashe-Limpopo Confluence Area (SLCA) at different times over the last 2000 years. As the archaeological impact assessment for the Vele Colliery shows, the eastern boundary of the MCL WHS is an arbitrary one. Farming Community homestead sites of the same age as

those within the MCL WHS extend eastwards and so do Stone Age occurrences. The significance and integrity of the landscape is therefore evident beyond the boundary of the MCL WHS. It should not be allowed to be permanently damaged by a short-term mining project that will destroy the integrity of the landscape forever.

This, however, does not seem to be a concern of those such as the Department of Mineral Resources, who are responsible for sanctioning industrial development in the area. At present, decisions about the Vele Colliery and associated developments such as an access road and above-ground fuel storage tanks, as well as the granting of prospecting permits to other mining companies and the planned Mulilo power station are being made on a piecemeal basis. Thus the relatively small number of sites affected by any one aspect of the larger process of industrialization tends to be presented as easily mitigated and understood. This contradicts an approach that sees the value of heritage resources as arising from the landscape in which they are situated, rather than only the nature and location of individual sites. In addition, it ignores the cumulative impact that many industrial ventures will have on our broader heritage landscape. Thus, ASAPA argued in their appeal against the awarding of mining rights that if the area is going to be subject to industrial development there should be an integrated Environmental and Heritage Impact Assessment (EIA and HIA) that looks at the area north of the Soutpansberg in its entirety, before any large-scale industrial activity in this area is approved. This approach would allow for the proper assessment of the probable impact of any development and facilitate future planning. Such economic, environmental and spatial planning should include heritage as "an integral component" (Winter & Baumann 2005: 3).

Second, the Vele situation has raised questions about the international aspects of heritage management in this area. The initial boundaries of the MCL WHS corresponded with those of the envisioned MNP. The true Mapungubwe cultural landscape, however, is not confined to these boundaries, and the Botswanan and Zimbabwean governments are investigating, as part of the Trans-Frontier Conservation Area process, the possibility of extending World Heritage Site status to include areas of the Mapungubwe cultural landscape that lie in their respective countries. Extension could also include areas in South Africa beyond the current boundaries of the MNP. The extent of the Mapungubwe cultural landscape within the SLCA represents a unique opportunity for the three countries to manage and conserve their heritage to the benefit of all three and bears testimony to the integration of these areas in pre-colonial times. Because it is a shared heritage, we feel that the South African government should not make unilateral decisions about the destruction of sites in the region.

Third, there does not appear to have been adequate consultation with regard to aspects of intangible heritage and community interests. It is likely that many of the Farming Community sites that will be destroyed by mining activity will contain burials. There appears to have been a lack of consultation on this issue with local communities and more generally with local communities about aspects of intangible heritage in the area in which the Vele mine will be located. This lack of consultation with all local communities is of particular concern since the 2007 DEAT-led reburial of the human remains from the Mapungubwe area highlighted how deeply the archaeological past resonates with contemporary communities. The human remains previously excavated by archaeologists were not seen as just bones, but rather as ancestors who were displeased about being moved from their resting places. It is probable that the communities will view the mining-related exhumation of graves and bulldozing of burial places in the same way.

These kinds of problems are by no means limited to the Vele colliery. Going forward therefore there is, in our view, a need to highlight the important role that CRM archaeologists play in the heritage management system. Much of South Africa's coastline and interior is becoming increasingly subject to large-scale development projects, whether for industrial purposes, housing, or the extension of basic services including electricity, water and schools. These are a necessary part of the development of South Africa's economy and society. The legal restrictions and requirements are, however, there for a reason – to ensure that such development is carried out in an environmentally- and people-friendly way and to ensure that our environmental, cultural and social rights are not trampled on during development. Archaeologists have their part to play in this process through their role in HIAs, but we have to ensure that such assessments are carried out in a thorough manner.

South Africa has progressive environmental and heritage legislation but it is only as good as the political will to implement it. As shown by the recent admission in Parliament by the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Buyelwa Sonjica, that there are currently 124 mines operating in South Africa without valid water licenses, we cannot rely on companies who are looking after their bottom line to adhere strictly and ethically to guidelines by themselves (Morgan 2010). It is therefore our responsibility as heritage and environmental practitioners to do good work. Heritage resources are inextricably bound up in environmental resources. Often, when the environmental management assessment process is badly managed, the heritage impact process also is flawed. A number of elements in the Vele Colliery EMP, for example, have been questioned by specialists (for example, Walmer 2010) and in our opinion the Vele colliery has failed to produce a full-fledged HIA, despite calls to do so during the EIA process. Despite this lack, the EMP was approved by government. As a result, official consideration of the heritage values of the area (in close proximity to a World Heritage Site) rests on little more than very basic palaeontological and archaeological reports and a pedestrian survey. Despite the complex and fragile nature of the archaeological landscape in the entire SLCA (encompassing Stone Age, rock art, pastoralist, Iron Age and colonial-era sites) and the accompanying intangible heritage values, the environmental consultant failed to ensure that a range of experts suitable for the various archaeological and social historical aspects were called in to fully evaluate the area.

There are many good CRM archaeologists who act as the first line of defence against the unconsidered destruction of archaeological resources in this country. They are intimately familiar with what kinds of developments are taking place and

where. Through their reports they inform the heritage agencies of the potential significance of sites – which should be mitigated and destroyed and which should be preserved. Yet, as professional archaeologists they need to do more than simply plot the path of least destruction and mitigate at those sites that lie in the path of development. They need to ensure that they have the relevant expertise to handle all archaeological aspects of their projects, and if not, to introduce such expertise. As outlined in ASAPA's Code of Ethics for Archaeological Impact Assessors they are also expected to "reflect any community or stakeholder issues that have been identified and indicate how each has been considered/resolved" as well as to protect the "interests of the public in respect of the national estate." Occasionally this may entail telling employers something that they do not want to hear. But if this baseline work is done well and thoroughly, we would meet with far fewer problems at the level at which government gives approval.

If this first line of defence fails, and government agencies and/or departments allow developments without following proper procedures or giving due consideration to all the facts, it is surely our role as citizens to speak up. In this case, the appellants in the Vele matter believe that the government erred in issuing the approvals for the Vele mine to go ahead. In view of the importance of the area in southern Africa's history – as containing the first evidence of state-level organization in southern Africa – adequate planning needs to be implemented to ensure the best environmental and social outcome for all.

We are increasingly being told in South Africa that we need to balance development needs against those of heritage preservation. But perhaps this is looking at heritage the wrong way? Too often, these statements stem from the view that heritage (either tangible or intangible – the latter a much ignored aspect in many HIA reports) is an obstacle. How different things would be if we viewed it as an asset! Heritage resources are assets – they are cultural, educational, intellectual, community, regional and national assets inherited from our ancestors. Mapungubwe as a place of archaeological and historical significance derives its value not only from the physical site but also from its position in the surrounding landscape. In addition, it operates as a national symbol in the South African imagination. Its future as a successful World Heritage Site within an industrial landscape is questionable. By allowing mining to go ahead the government, in our opinion, is trading away one of South Africa's most precious assets in return for the small proceeds that will be derived from the short-term mining of an anti-environmental, unsustainable, hopefully soon-to-be defunct energy source.

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**Natalie Swanepoel<sup>1</sup> & M.H. Schoeman<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, Unisa  
E-mail: swanenj@unisa.ac.za

<sup>2</sup>Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Pretoria  
E-mail: a.schoeman502@gmail.com