

SCHOEMANSDAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT PLAN



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2001/077745/23

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March 2005

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SCHOEMANSDAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and description of site

The Schoemansdal archaeological site is situated 17 km. west of Makhado on the road to Vivo (S23° 03' 08" & E29° 46' 25"). The site borders on the western and southern side on the farm Ashfield 246 LS. on the eastern side on the farm Lincoln 247 LS and on the northern side on the farm York 251 LS (map Louis Trichardt 2329 BB). The site lies south of the Soutpansberg, and is 552m above sea level. The total area controlled by the Schoemansdal Museum is some 600 ha.(see map 1).

In 1848 a group of Voortrekkers, under the leadership of field-cornet Jan Valentyn Botha, arrived at the site, which was later named Schoemansdal after Commandant-General Stephanus Schoeman. This first group consisted of some 48 families. On their arrival they immediately constructed an earthen redoubt. The original settlement was known as Zoutpansbergdorp. Later a new town was laid out north of the original town and became known as Schoemansdal after 1855. The prosperity of the town was largely due to ivory hunting. The town was evacuated in 1867 after the Venda people started to threaten the inhabitants. The land was subsequently used for agricultural purposes until the Transvaal Provincial Museum Service began excavations in 1985.

1.2 Ownership and responsibility for the site

The Schoemansdal archaeological site forms part of the Schoemansdal Museum, which is owned by the Government. The site is managed by the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture of the Limpopo Government, and is under the curatorship of the Schoemansdal Museum.

1.3 Statement of site significance

Schoemansdal archaeological site is the best preserved and most complete remains of a typical Voortrekker town of the nineteenth century. Most other towns of that period developed into modern towns and cities, destroying the original streets and layout.

1.3.1 The layout of Schoemansdal

The layout of the new town was typical of a Transvaal pioneer settlement. The town is situated near the Dorps River, which was flowing at the time. The rectangular erven were all the same size. The Soutpansberg provided the town with drinking and irrigation water. A furrow brought water to the town from a fountain, probably situated on the farm Sarum. A second furrow, eight kilometres long, brought water from several streams and fountains. The intersections were laid out with stones. Irrigation ditches took water from the main furrows to the erven (see Site plan 1).

1.3.2 Architecture

According to the Portuguese traveller, Deocleciano Das Neves, who visited Schoemansdal in 1855, the settlement never consisted of more than seventy houses. Archaeological excavations suggested however, that this number might have been greater. The market place, parsonage, church and redoubt were situated in the centre of the town. The construction of the second redoubt was started even before attempts were made to develop a new town. It was built of raw and burnt clay bricks, with cannons on two bastions and loopholes in the walls. Though never used in a war situation, the redoubt provided protection against possible attacks since 1866. The Dutch Reformed church was the first of its kind built in the Soutpansberg area. The building also served as a school for several years. The house originally built for Commandant-General Stephanus Schoeman later became the parsonage of the Reverend Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo. The house was of superior quality compared to other houses of the time (see photograph 1).

Reed houses such as those in the first settlement were once again constructed in the new town. Kitchens situated outside the houses were common. However, structures built from raw and burnt clay bricks indicated that the town's inhabitants were determined to settle there permanently.

1.3.4 Economy

Agricultural products such as coffee, peaches, oranges, rice and wheat were cultivated on a large scale. Ostrich feathers and skins were extensively used for trading. Schoemansdal was known for exporting massive quantities of ivory annually. Wood used in trading and general construction work included yellow wood, Cape teak, tamboti and South African beech wood. The export trade led to economic prosperity.

1.3.4 The community

Due to the favourable economic and trading potential of Schoemansdal, numerous travellers of different nationalities visited the town. These include Joao Albasini, Augusto Carvalho, Cassimiro Simmoens and Dietlof Mare, who owned shops in the town. Visiting ministers catered for the community's spiritual needs. These included the Reverends Andrew Murray, J.H. Neethling, Piet Huet and Dirk van der Hoff. In 1856 the town's first full time clergyman, Nicolaas Jacobus van Warmelo, and his wife Josine, settled here. The couple immediately became involved in education. Van Warmelo also appointed Schoemansdal's first teacher, Cornelia van Boeschoten. As no professional medical services were available, home remedies were used. A large number of residents died from malaria.

1.3.5 Evacuation

The natural resources of the Schoemansdal area were being depleted by the pioneers through intensive hunting and by exhausting the wood supply. Conflict between the Venda and some ivory hunters caused tension in the area. Eventually the town's inhabitants had to seek refuge in the redoubt and circumstances became unbearable. The assistance of Commandant-General Paul Kruger was invoked to defuse the problem. A commando consisting of 400 men undertook a punitive expedition

against the Venda. The expedition was, however, unsuccessful. Kruger then ordered the evacuation of the settlement, during which the residents caused extensive destruction by removing building materials. The former Schoemansdal population settled in Marabastad, near Pietersburg. From here they later dispersed to all parts of the Transvaal. Schoemansdal was never rebuilt. Since 1985 archaeologists had been excavating the town's remains.

The Schoemansdal site offers a unique opportunity for the study of early colonial settlement patterns, architecture, daily life, military strategy and economy. Though some archaeological work has been undertaken, the major part of the site is still intact for future archaeological and historical research. The town's archaeological significance is vital on provincial and national level, as it is the only town of its kind, which is still intact as an archaeological site. It represents an era of colonial history and will increase in significance as time goes by.

1.4 Objectives for opening this site to the public

- 1.4.1 To make the site accessible to all people
- 1.4.2 to interpret the site to visitors
- 1.4.3 to enrich visitors' knowledge through well-informed and objective educational and recreational programmes
- 1.4.4 to contribute to the history of South Africa and nation building.

1.5 Objectives of management plan

- 1.5.1 To manage the site in a sustainable way
- 1.5.2 to develop the site in a sustainable way
- 1.5.3 to make the site accessible and safe for visitors
- 1.5.4 to implement an ongoing maintenance plan for the site.

1.6 Revision of plan

The management plan should be revised every five years or whenever unforeseen problems of sustainability occur

1.7 Potential impact of opening the site to the public on archaeological resources

- 1.7.1 Access to the site should be strictly controlled and should only take place under the supervision of a trained guide
- 1.7.2 Visitors should only be allowed to visit the site on routes clearly demarcated for this purpose
- 1.7.3 Incessant visits to the site could lead to erosion, but fortunately the site lies on flat ground, where the possibility of erosion is minimal. Notwithstanding this, possible erosion should be counteracted immediately.

2. RECORDING AND RESEARCH

2.1 Objectives of recording and research

- 2.1.1 To determine the exact boundaries of the historical site and settlements
- 2.1.2 to retrieve as much scientific data as possible from the excavated site
- 2.1.3 to make all data available to the public through exhibitions, publications and the media
- 2.1.4 to give recommendations for the management of specific sites and aid interpretation and visitor experience.

2.2 Research into archaeology of sites

Archaeological research on the site has taken place from 1985. The research has to a large extent focused on the mapping of the site and the excavations of the most important structures. These included the following:

- Church
- Hendrik Potgieters workshop
- “Onderste skans” – Redoubt
- Structure E6/R1 – Lower redoubt/Lower fortification
- Structure R2 – Possible small two roomed house
- Parsonage
- New Redoubt
- Water furrow System
- Ammunition store

(See photograph 2).

3. SITE MANAGEMENT

Introduction

The archaeological site at Schoemansdal forms part of the Schoemansdal Museum. The Museum consists of a total area of 600 hectares. A security fence has been erected around the area. An entrance gate, which is not in operation at present controls access. Visitors report at the exhibition centre. The exhibition deals with the history of Schoemansdal and that of the Venda people. From here visitors are taken on a guided tour through a reconstructed pioneer settlement just south of the archaeological site (see photograph 3).

Visitors were also taken to a viewpoint overlooking the archaeological site. This viewpoint consisted of a pole structure and viewing platform some five metres above ground level. Unfortunately this platform has deteriorated to such an extent that it had to be closed. Information panels explain the layout of the site to the visitor. The information panels have faded over the years and are illegible. The site itself is so overgrown by trees, shrubs and grass that nothing is visible except vegetation. The tall grass also prohibits tours (see photographs 4-6).

Visitors can also go to the graveyard. This area is also totally overgrown with grass, weeds and thorn trees so that the cemetery is inaccessible.

Once a year the site is cleaned by the Schoemansdal *Geloftefees komitee* who is responsible for the commemoration of the Day of the Covenant, now called Day of Reconciliation on 16 December each year (see photograph 7).

The Museum and archaeological site give the impression of total neglect. The curator blames a lack of finances for the present state of the site, but it is also due to a lack of proper management and supervision.

3.1 Objectives of site management plan

- 3.1.1 To preserve the archaeological site for future research and educational and recreational purposes
- 3.1.2 to manage the site in a sustainable way
- 3.1.3 to maximise the educational value of the site through exhibitions and interpretation panels and signage
- 3.1.4 to make the site accessible and safe to visitors

3.2 Site vegetation and firebreaks

At present the site is overgrown by dense vegetation. The vegetation is typical thorn tree bushveld with *Acacia karroo*, *Acacia caffra*, *Dichrostachys cinerea*, *Peltophorum africanum* and *Ziziphus mucronata*. These trees grow all over the site and also on top of archaeological structures. As the trees grow larger, their roots break the archaeological deposit, especially old foundations of buildings. On the other hand grass does little or no damage and controls erosion. Fire is no real threat to the archaeological deposits as they are mostly covered by soil.

The proposed new signage and information panels could, however, be damaged by fire, that could also threaten visitors in case of a unexpected fire.

3.2.1 Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- All trees and shrubs on the archaeological site with the exception of a number of shade trees be cut and the trunks treated with a herbicide (weed killer) to prevent them growing again. Digging out the trunks could harm the archaeological deposit.
- A number of large shade trees must be selected for the visitors to rest. These should be selected from trees, which grow in or near the original streets and not on old foundations.
- The grass on all the original streets as well as on the outskirts of the site should be cut on a regular basis to keep it short. This would divide the site into street blocks, and could act as firebreaks. At the same time it would give the visitors demarcated walkways and a good impression of the town's layout.

- The grass on the site itself could be burnt annually as this would do no harm to the archaeological deposits. Should grass become too thick it might become a threat to visitors when burning.

3.3 Site infrastructure

3.3.1 Access arrangements

The present access arrangements do not function properly. The access gate needs to be activated and visitors should receive a leaflet in which it is explained what can be expected and what is prohibited. From here they move to the existing parking and picnic area, which has good ablution blocks and barbeque facilities.

3.3.2 Visitor control infrastructure

Visitors control infrastructure such as security, fencing, access gate, parking, picnic and barbeque facilities are sufficient and in good condition, but the gate is not operational. This portion of the site is neat and appealing.

From the parking area visitors go to the exhibition area. The building and exhibitions are in good condition. The floor needs repair. The information on the history of Schoemansdal and its surroundings is sufficient and well presented (see photograph 8).

The visitors then move to the reconstructed early settlement with a security officer (guide). The buildings in this section of the Museum need regular maintenance, as they are all pole and mud structures with thatched roofs. Maintenance of this section is an ongoing task and should be presented as part of the visitor's experience. Plants and vegetable gardens, which one would expect in such an early settlement, together with chickens, ducks, sheep and goats, are lacking. At present the site looks deserted and dead. In the past there were a number of activities like the baking of bread, tanning and other activities, which unfortunately have been stopped due to a lack of funds and staff. These activities should be reinstated.

The visitors then move on to the view platform, which at present is falling apart and needs urgent repair. Though this platform gives the visitor an elevated view of what is supposed to be the archaeological site, the only thing visible is bushveld - trees, shrubs and grass. By taking out most trees and shrubs and cutting short the grass in the original streets, the visitors will get a good view of the layout of the town. The present information panels on the viewing platform should be placed so that visitors can identify important structures and their own location on site. An additional panel should depict what the town would have looked like in the past.

From here the visitor should be taken on a guided tour through the town. Street names should be marked on the ground on cement or concrete slabs so that visitors know where they are. In a similar way the owners of the various stands should also be named (see Site plan 2 with names of individual owners). In the case of important structures like the church, the fortification and other buildings of which drawings exist, these should be sandblasted or etched onto granite slabs. Granite lasts a very long time and is not popular with thieves, as is the case with bronze plaques. It is also

much cheaper. These granite panels could be fixed flat on the ground so that they have little visual impact on the site (for an example of a granite panel, see photograph 9).

A visit to the site will end at the graveyard. This whole area should be cleared of all vegetation and be treated on a regular basis with a herbicide. A granite plaque should also be placed here with particulars on the graveyard.

In future important archaeological sites in the town could be treated with herbicides to expose the site. Photographs and information on the archaeological excavations should be exhibited on granite panels. These panels could stimulate visitors to experience the past, and to familiarise them with archaeology and the reconstruction of histories of the past.

At this stage there is no need for a broad walk as long as guides and visitors stay on the old streets. If in the future specific buildings are exposed for visits, this might be necessary. Visitor numbers per guided group should be kept smaller than fifteen at a time. A guide cannot control more than fifteen people at one time.

3.3.3. Education Infrastructure

The present exhibition centre is a fine education facility. What is lacking is information plaques on the site and the viewing platform. Streets and individual stands should be named, as already mentioned. Information in the form of sketches and diagrams should be placed on granite slabs at important structures. The majority of educational work will have to be done through guides. These guides will have a security guard function in addition to their educational task.

At this stage the guides are poorly informed and do not know enough to undertake a guided tour. A proper training course will have to be introduced by the curator, or through an outside firm.

A printed information booklet with a site map and illustrations is also needed and should be compiled by the curator and staff. At present a visitor book has to be completed. The book is held in the exhibition centre.

3.3.4 Maintenance of site infrastructure

At present the parking and picnic area is well maintained. The reconstructed village site needs two or three staff members to maintain buildings on an ongoing basis. The archaeological site needs proper development, as recommended. Signage on cement or concrete blocks and on granite slabs is maintenance free. Once these are in place they should last for a very long time.

The viewing platform should be properly repaired and made safe for visitors. Once this has been done the wood should be treated annually to prevent it from decaying. Minor repairs might be necessary from time to time. The present bad state of the structure is largely due to the lack of maintenance.

As far as the site itself is concerned the recommendations on the vegetation should be implemented as soon as possible. The cutting of grass will be the most extensive maintenance task. A small tractor with a slasher can do most of the work. All the streets will have to be slashed at least every three weeks during the growing season. In winter the site has to be burnt, which will also prevent the growing of new trees and shrubs. Sites like the graveyard and some important structures where no vegetation is wanted should be sprayed regularly with herbicide during the growing season.

3.3.5 Permit requirements

Any development on an archaeological site needs permission from the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) or the Provincial Heritage Authority. Once a decision on recommendations to be implemented has been taken an application for a permit has to be made together with plans and specifications.

3.4 Training of staff

Staff training should take place even before the completion of the site. At present the staff lacks proper training. It is recommended that the curator should develop a comprehensive training programme for the site and its associated information.

Guides tend to get bored by doing the same thing every day and tell less and less to the visitors. Training is therefore an ongoing task. Continued evaluation of guides and further training on a regular basis should take place. This should include proper testing in writing and orally. At the same time these guides should also be made aware of site maintenance as they visit the site on a daily basis. When no visitors are present they can supervise site maintenance and also identify problems, and create new opportunities.

3.5 Consultation with Neighbours

Consultation with neighbours and interested parties has taken place with the establishment of the Museum. Members of the Schoemansdal *Geloftefees-komitee* were interviewed. They are not satisfied with the present state of affairs.

3.6 Conservation requirements/intervention

At this stage an abundance of trees are most probably the biggest threat to the site. The site lies in a flat area and maintenance and monitoring should pose no problem. As recommended most trees and shrubs should be cut down and treated with herbicide to prevent them from coppicing. Grass in the streets should be cut on a regular basis. This is recommended instead of cleaning the streets of all vegetation as the grass roots prevent soil erosion.

To implement the management plan a proper survey of staff requirements and equipment is needed. This can only be done once a final decision has been taken as to what recommendations will be implemented and when.

4. MONITORING

4.1 Objectives of monitoring

- 4.1.1 To make sure that the site management plan is implemented according to the specifications.
- 4.1.2 to do regular inspections of the site in order to identify problems betimes so that maintenance work can take place..
- 4.1.3 to ensure the sustainability of the site and its facilities.
- 4.1.4 to make the necessary changes to the management plan as new problems and needs arise.

4.2 Monitoring site maintenance

The ultimate responsibility for the monitoring of the site maintenance is vested in the curator of the Schoemansdal Museum. A fixed page book should be kept in which inspections are recorded on a weekly, monthly and annual basis. The book should contain a list of all the infrastructure and facilities, which needs to be inspected. This should include the security fence, entrance gate, parking area, ablution facilities, exhibitions, reconstructed early settlement, the viewing platform, the archaeological site, including vegetation control, grass cutting, signage information panels, guided tours and the graveyard.

All problems identified should be listed and instructions issued to solve those problems. At the next inspection special attention should be given to the listed problems and progress, should be reported.

This inspection book should form a complete record of the work to be done on the site. The book should be inspected quarterly by supervisors from the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture head office and should also be available for inspection by the Limpopo Resources Authority (LIRA).

4.3 Monitoring visitor experience

Any museum/site has to be visitor ready on an ongoing basis. This is also a prerequisite for marketing.

The Schoemansdal Museum was not in top condition during the consultant's visit. The curator of the museum is responsible for prime conditions for visitors at the Museum. It can only be achieved through regular inspections, training and motivation of staff, good supervision and maintenance.

The regular inspections of visitor facilities should form part of the proposed weekly, monthly and annual inspections. Visitor experience starts at the gate and ends at the gate. To achieve an outstanding experience the facilities, signage and information panels are important, but the most important aspect is the personal contact with the staff, especially the guides.

Though the key to good guiding is training, other factors such as an outgoing personality, knowledge, communication skills, enthusiasm and humaneness are important too. It is imperative to choose the right persons to be trained as guides.

4.4 Monitoring impact of visitors on archaeological site

If the proposed development of the site is followed and facilities well maintained visitors should have little impact on the site. Visitors will be compelled to use the old streets of the town and will not be tempted to go on to the old buildings. The monitoring of the impact of visitors to the site should form part of the weekly, monthly and annual inspection of the site.

Proper visitor statistics, other information and suggestions should be collected from visitors for marketing purposes and service improvement.

This information and the inspection reports should be sent to the head office of the Department of Sports Arts and Culture and the Provincial Resources Authority on a quarterly basis. A joint inspection by senior staff of both organisations should take place at least once a year.

5. VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Objectives for visitor experience and interpretation

- 5.1.1 To give the visitor an insight into pioneer life with its joys, hardships, challenges and dangers.
- 5.1.2 to make visitors aware of the early history of South Africa and its influence on later developments.
- 5.1.3 to acquaint visitors with the relevance of archaeological sites and the data they can yield.
- 5.1.4 to make visitors aware of our rich and diverse heritage and its management.

5.2 Viewing opportunities

The Schoemansdal site museum will offer visitors a formal exhibition, a reconstructed pioneer settlement and an archaeological site. Well-trained guides, who should also be able to supply additional information the visitors might require, will highlight these facilities. This experience will take place in an enchanting natural area with the Soutpansberg in the background. In future the experience can be extended to include particulars on the natural environment, i.e. trees, plants, insects, birds and reptiles.

5.3 Interpretation and archaeological assessment

A portion of the site has been excavated and interpreted by archaeologists after 1985. The archaeological reports are housed at the museum offices in Makado. The exhibitions in the exhibition centre are based on this data. In future it might be necessary to extend the archaeological work to retrieve even more information. For

the time being however there is enough information for interpretation and exhibition needs.

5.4 Education and awareness – interpretive material

Sufficient educational material is available. Nonetheless material should be selected for specific audiences, like primary or high school learners, which can supplement their learning experience. Special programmes should be developed in cooperation with the local schools and offered on request.

5.5 Guides

No visitor should be allowed on the site without supervision of a guide. The guides should act as both security officers and guides. The quality of the presentation of the guides will to a large extent determine the quality of the visitor experience. For this reason it is essential to select the right persons to be trained as guides.

Guide training is offered by a number of institutions. The guides will specifically need extensive training in the history and archaeology of Schoemansdal and in site monitoring.

A continuous programme of further training, evaluation and monitoring should support initial training. Updated particulars on Schoemansdal itself should be imparted to guides on a regular basis. Additional information, supplied by visitors, should be recorded by the guides for future use.

5.6 Visitor Statistics

This once popular Museum has lost its appeal.

There had been some 15 000 visitors to the Museum per annum in the beginning. The number of visitors declined drastically (see below) to only 801 in 2004.

2001	3595
2002	2112
2003	2852
2004	801

This is really shocking! It is difficult to explain the decline in visitors, but some of the following factors may have had an effect on the numbers: their figures have declined drastically as can be seen in the following statistics.

- Lack of guidance since the Transvaal Provincial Museum Services was closed down.
- Lack of funding
- No proper maintenance of site
- Inexperienced staff
- Lack of staff and infrastructure

- Lack of training
- Lack of marketing

To reverse this situation will be a major task. This can be achieved if the Museum and its staff are sufficiently supported, motivated and trained. A proper development strategy should be developed to which every staff member is committed. Though funding is a major problem, the biggest problem most probably is the lack of a corporate vision, training and marketing. With the right support, proper training and the implementation of the proposed management plan, together with marketing, this Museum should at least have between 15 000 and 20 000 visitors annually.

6 Maintenance and monitoring budget

At this stage a budget cannot be proposed. The Schoemansdal Museum and the Provincial Department of Sports, Arts and Culture and the Provincial Heritage Resources Authority will have to decide which recommendations will be approved of, what funding is available and when. Only then can an annual budget be compiled.

7 Re launching the Schoemansdal Museum

To re-launch the Schoemansdal Museum the following steps have to be taken:

- approval of the site management plan
- budgeting to implement the plan
- detail planning of all information panels, plaques, pamphlets and leaflets
- implementing of all approved recommendations
- training of all staff
- implementing of inspection proposal
- launching of project to the public
- ongoing marketing and publicity campaign
- training and monitoring on an ongoing basis.

8 References

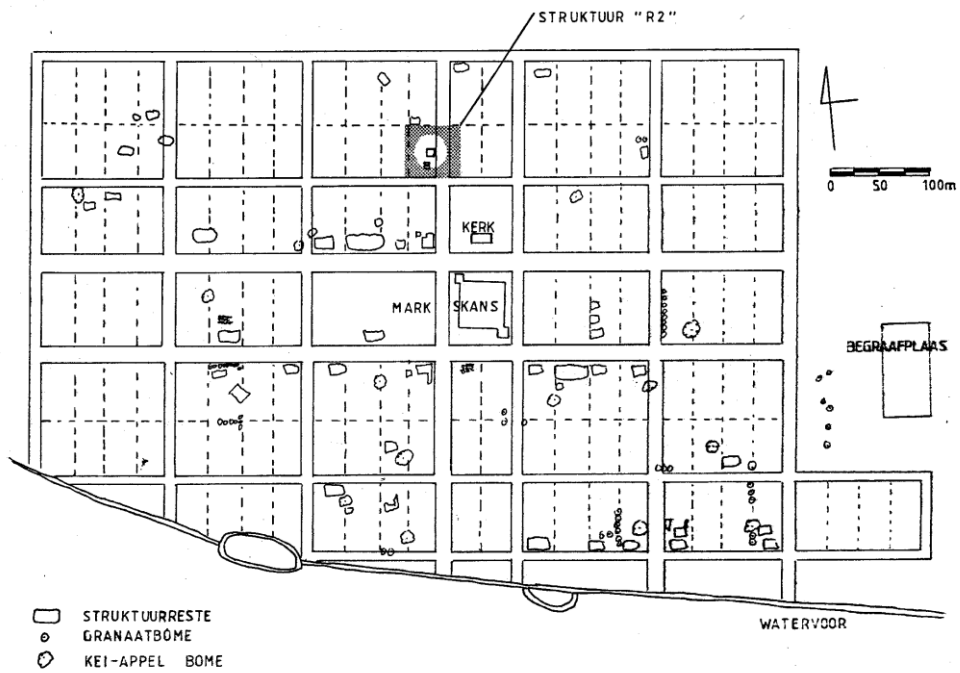
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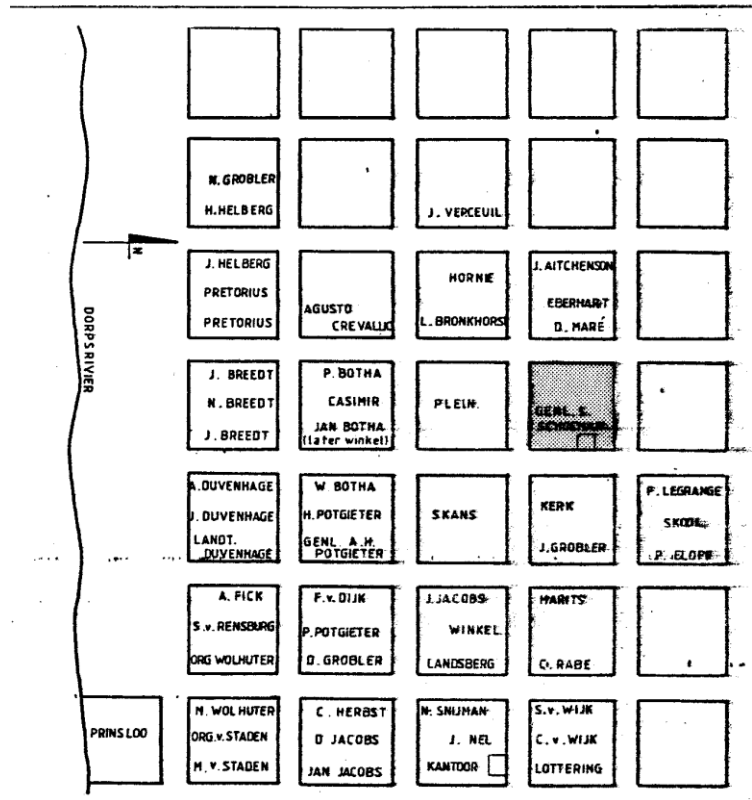
MAP 1



SITE PLAN 1



SITE PLAN 2



PHOTOGRAPHS



No.1 The house of reverent Van Warmelo



No. 2 Archaeological excavations of a structure



No. 3 Reconstructed structures in the first settlement



No. 4 Viewing platform



No. 5 Rotten floorboards of the viewing platform



No. 6 View over the archaeological site as seen from the viewing platform with the Soutpansberg in the background



No.7 Graves in the graveyard are hardly visible because of uncontrolled vegetation



No. 8 Detail of one of the panels in the exhibition area showing the redoubt in the foreground with the church behind it



No. 9 Example of a granite information panel