

HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THYSPUNT NPS SITE

Tim Hart

Archaeology Contracts Office

c/o Department of Archaeology

University of Cape Town



LEGISLATION

Section 38 of the ***National Heritage Resources Act*** of 1999 makes the identification of those “heritage resources” which are considered part of the “national estate” mandatory for developments that fulfill certain criteria as prescribed by the Act.

When Heritage Resources are identified as part of an EIA, responsibility for compliance reverts from SAHRA (South African Heritage Resources Agency). Dept of Environment Affairs and Planning. SAHRA remains a commenting authority only, however the requirements of the NHRA apply.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED

Heritage is defined in the Act as meaning “**any place or object of cultural significance**”

Cultural significance is defined as “**aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, linguistic or technological value or significance**”

The study involves assessing the impact of the proposed activity on the following.

Buildings and structures over 60 years old

Archaeological sites over 100 years old

Shipwrecks and aircraft wrecks over 60 years old in national waters (on water and in land)

Palaeontological sites and specimens

Meteorites

Special landscapes and streetscapes

Important natural areas and features

Any place where something important happened relevant to a community

Graves

HISTORY OF STUDIES FOR THE NUCLEAR SITE

1987: A survey of the study area was undertaken for Eskom by Johan Binneman. He mapped a very rich array of archaeological sites at Thyspunt. He concluded that the site was sensitive and that mitigation would be required. The site was acquired by Eskom.

In subsequent years Dr Binneman sampled a number of the sites, the findings were included within his Phd.

ACO was appointed by Arcus Gibb Pty Ltd in 2007 to become involved in the EIA for 5 proposed NPA sites. Based on the available desktop information, the ACO concluded from the heritage perspective, that the two NORTHERN CAPE sites were most SUITABLE, and of all 5 candidate sites, THYSPUNT was the LEAST SUITABLE.

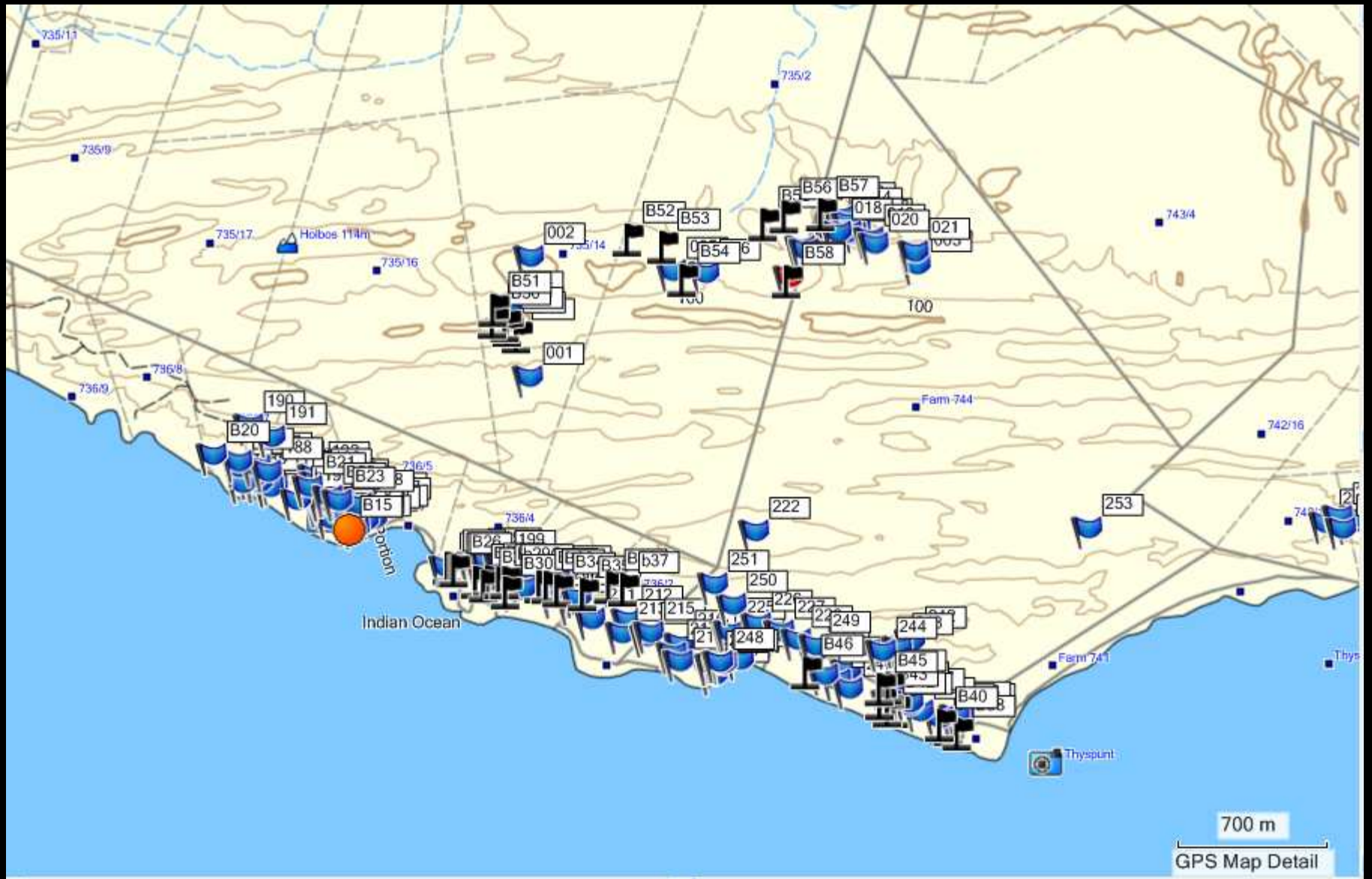
For economic and practical reasons the Northern Cape sites were “scoped out”.

In 2008 ACO conducted heritage assessment of the remaining 3 sites, again concluding that of the three potential sites (Bantamsklip, Schulpfontein and Thyspunt), Thyspunt was least suitable.

Heritage is one discipline among many that makes up an integrated EIA. Although it was found that in heritage terms that Thyspunt was the least suitable of the sites, the overall findings of the EIA determined that Thyspunt was the preferred site.

Our assessment of the sensitivity of Thyspunt....

- The site survey revealed that Later Stone Age middens are *very* common in within 200m of the shoreline, and common within 400m. After 400m the frequency drops off. **These sites represent the heritage of a great many South Africans who have Khoi Khoi and/or San lineage.**
- There are well preserved archaeological sites in the dune field representing many ages of African pre-history spanning the Early, Middle and Late Stone Ages. Many of the later sites contain ceramics and features such as stone piles and hearths.
- The densely vegetated areas behind the coastal fore-dune were very difficult to search as the ground surface was only visible in cleared areas and along the roads. We don't know how frequent archaeological sites are in these areas, however the lack of sites along the existing east-west access road may be an indicator that sites are less common. We will only be able to assess this area if/when the vegetation is cleared.
- **It was concluded that Thyspunt contains a rich variety of pre-colonial heritage sites. The fact that we could only search a relatively small area due to thick vegetation cover means that there remains much to be learned about the way these sites are distributed on the landscape.**





Mitigation and Conservation

Mitigation 1. At Thyspunt, the degree of potential destruction of archaeological material depends on where the NPS is to be built. Close to the sea means a severe impact, the more inland it can be built, the less the impact (every meter away from the shore counts). Eskom is therefore encouraged to move the facility as far inland as they can. A zone of least sensitivity between the dunes and the shore has been identified.

Mitigation 2: We cannot gauge the true impact in the least sensitive zone until trial excavations are undertaken. It is suggested that such excavations are mechanically done in the project target area and along proposed access roads. It may be possible to slightly alter road alignments to avoid or minimize impacts.

Mitigation 3: The final resort. *The best way to conserve a heritage site is to protect it from people and leave it alone* however if this is not possible in the face of massive development projects such as this proposal, the only mitigation we can apply is to “rescue” the heritage resource.



This 1800 year old archaeological site is being systematically removed from the site of a future mining operation.

....No matter how hard we try to do the work as accurately as we can, once the archeological site is moved, it is gone forever.

Heritage resources are generally non-renewable.



CONCLUSION

The Thyspunt site is highly archaeologically sensitive. In terms of heritage it is the least preferred of the three possible sites we have assessed.

The amount of damage that will occur to archaeological sites is dependent on exactly where infrastructure is to be located. Specialists have indentified a “least sensitive” zone which may cause the least impact in heritage terms, however the exact space needs of the NPS are not known as yet.

The least sensitive zone lies in areas that are not well archaeologically understood due to dense vegetation, similarly the proposed access roads. These areas need to be pre-tested to determine how much “rescue work” will be necessary.

Eskom is aware of the implications of archaeological work needed – high quality scientific excavation, adequate storage and logistical support, and of course the funds to achieve this.