HERITAGE STATEMENT FOR THE PROPOSED EXPANSION OF THE NAMAKWA SANDS MSP LANDFILL NEAR KOEKENAAP, VREDENDAL MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT, WESTERN CAPE

(Assessment conducted under Section 38 (8) of the
National Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 of 1999) as part of a Basic Assessment)

Prepared for

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UCT Archaeology Contracts Office was requested by Savannah Environmental (Pty) Ltd to assess the potential impacts to heritage associated with the proposed expansion of the Namakwa Sands MSP landfill site, just north of Koekenaap in the Vredendal Magisterial District (Figures 1 & 2). The expansion will be approximately 90 m by 150 m giving a total area of 1.33 ha and is located on Portion 629 of Olifants River Settlement.

The site is gently sloping and partly disturbed through previous activities there. Undisturbed areas have very low, sparse vegetation and eroding patches of ground are present with hard substrate exposed.

The only heritage resources encountered were scatters of Early and Middle Stone Age artefacts similar to those found over much of southern Namaqualand. These have low local significance and are not worthy of any further attention. Visual impacts are insignificant given the large scale of impacts already present in the immediate vicinity.

Subject to the approval of Heritage Western Cape, the proposed project should be allowed to proceed with no further heritage work required. However, if any human remains are found during excavation then the find should be reported to Heritage Western Cape (telephone: 021 483 9685) and an archaeologist will need to be contracted to excavate as required.

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

The UCT Archaeology Contracts Office was requested by Savannah Environmental (Pty) Ltd to assess the potential impacts to heritage associated with the proposed expansion of the Namakwa Sands Mineral Separation Plant landfill site, just north of Koekenaap in the Vredendal Magisterial District (Figures 1 & 2). The expansion will be approximately 90 m by 150 m giving a total area of 1.33 ha and is located on Portion 629 of Olifants River Settlement. The site lies 7 km north of Koekenaap and is 600 m northeast of the R363 that links Koekenaap and Nuwerus.

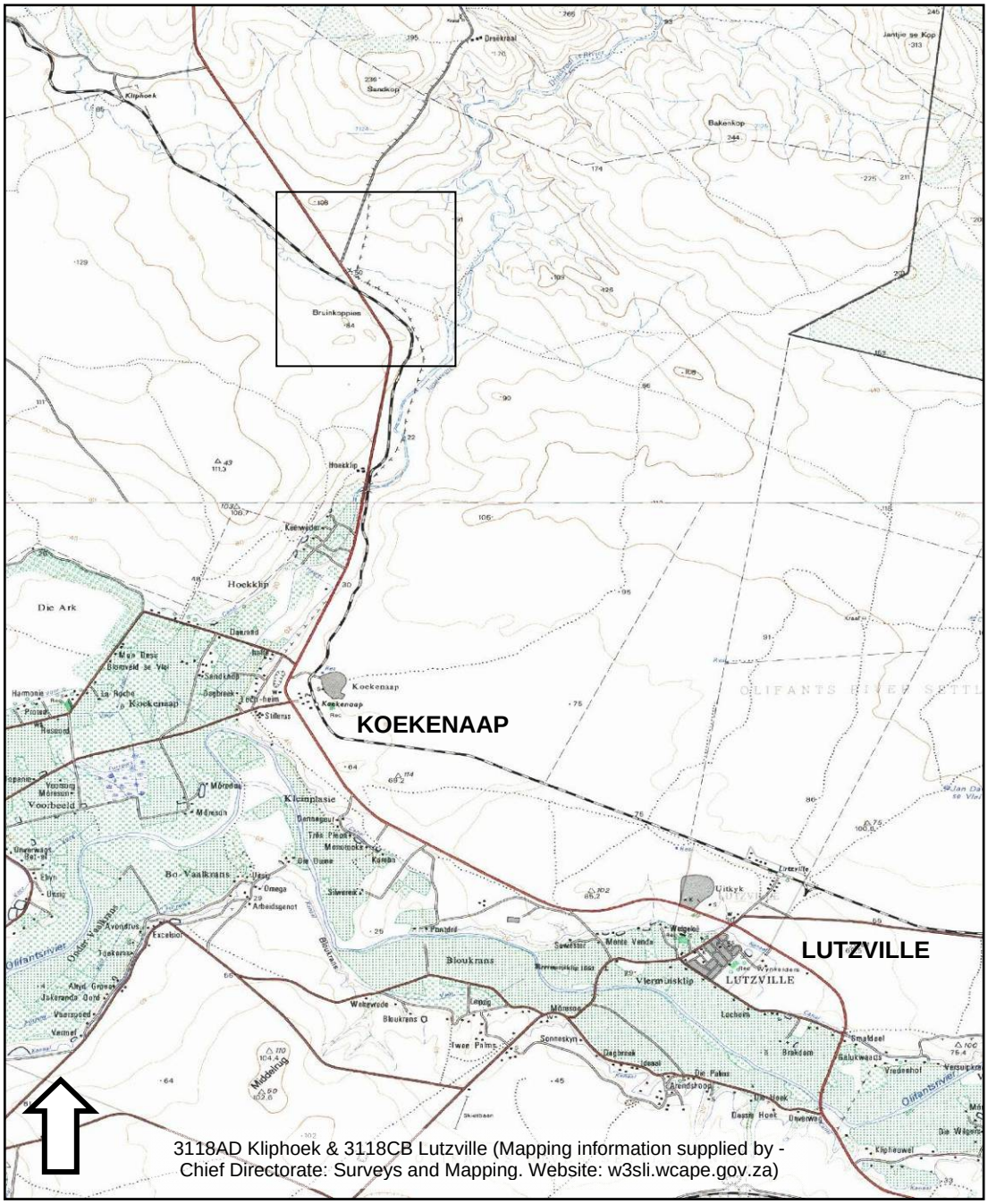

Figure 1: Location of the study area relative to Koekenaap and Lutzville. The area in the box is enlarged in Figure 2.

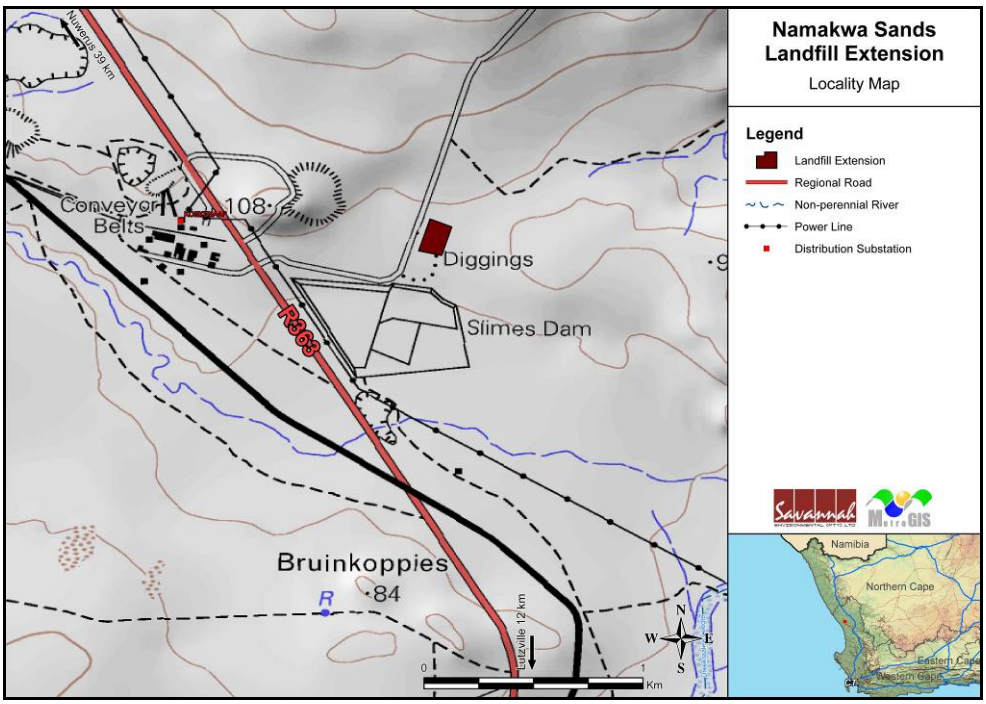

Figure 2: Location of the proposed landfill expansion (maroon polygon) within the study area (Map supplied by Savannah Environmental).

The nature of the development and receiving environment dictate that this assessment is largely archaeological, but with a small visual component being included as well. As such, the majority of this report deals with archaeological resources.

2. HERITAGE LEGISLATION

The National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) No. 25 of 1999 protects a variety of heritage resources including palaeontological, prehistoric and historical material (including ruins) more than 100 years old (Section 35), human remains (Section 36) and non-ruined structures older than 60 years (Section 34). Landscapes with cultural significance are also protected under the definition of the National Estate (Section 3 (3.2d)).

Since the project is subject to a Basic Assessment, Heritage Western Cape (HWC) is required to provide comment on the proposed project in order to facilitate final decision making by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP).

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The site is gently sloping to the south and characterised by very low vegetation and open, eroded patches of hard substrate. A large part of the area has already had its surface extensively disturbed through use of the area for stockpiling earth. A few tracks cross the area and these tend to be slightly more eroded than other parts. Figures 3 to 5 show views of the study area and the Mineral Separation Plant is visible in the background.

Figure 3: View of the study area. The disturbed area is obvious on the right.

Figure 4: View of the study area. The Mineral Separation Plant and associated spoil heap are visible in the centre and right hand side respectively.

Figure 5: View of the study area. The disturbed area and plant are evident.

4. HERITAGE CONTEXT

Little is known of local palaeontology in southern Namaqualand, although fossils have been recovered from the gypsum mine near Vanrhynsdorp. A recent assessment of three sites in the Vredendal to Vanrhynsdorp area contained no palaeontological input as this was not deemed necessary for that area (Almond 2010). Towards the granite hills fossils are very unlikely due to the lack of sedimentary rocks. More recent fossils, such as snails and small animals, may occur in the sandy fills of valleys but these are unlikely to be of much significance.

Although archaeological research in southern Namaqualand is relatively youthful, several recent commercial and research projects have improved our knowledge. Stone artefacts pertaining to the Early (ESA), Middle (MSA) and Later (LSA) Stone Ages are regularly encountered on the surface in areas where erosion and deflation dominate over deposition. Surveys in the Knersvlakte to the southeast of the current study area have demonstrated this particularly well (Kaplan 2010; Mackay et al. 2010; Orton 2010a, own data). One survey has been carried out in the vicinity of the current study area and located a scatter of ESA or MSA artefacts close to the Mineral Separation Plant (Parkington & Hart 1993). Several surveys have been conducted towards the coast. These have revealed LSA shell middens and scatters in the sandy areas and artefacts of all ages in eroding areas, particularly along rivers (Hart 2007; Hart & Orton 2005; Orton 2010a, 2010b; Parkington & Poggenpoel 1991).

Rock art is rare but known to occur in various parts of Namaqualand. The nearest to the study area is on the north bank of the Oliphants River, southwest of Koekenaap. Two painted sites exist there, with the larger one once having contained an extremely significant archaeological deposit that has now been all but completely destroyed.

Colonial period heritage resources are very rare in the Namaqualand Sandveld, since the dry climate discouraged settlement prior to the advent of wind pumps for the abstraction of ground water. Older mud-brick ruins do occur in places though.

Also of concern in the area are the character of the natural environment and the feelings of remoteness that this invokes in one. This sense of place can be easily destroyed through insensitive development.

Little archaeological research or mitigation has ever been conducted in the southern Namaqualand region and it is thus of importance that archaeological and other heritage sites are recorded and sampled prior to their destruction.

5. METHODS

The proposed landfill area was surveyed on 10th December 2010. The area was examined on foot and walk paths were recorded on a hand-held GPS receiver set to the WGS84 datum. Finds and features were recorded photographically and positions were recorded by GPS.

5.1. Limitations

No limitations were experienced, although the majority of the site was previously disturbed by stockpiling activities and consequently was not searched. To overcome this limitation the search proceeded over the surrounding area (Figure 6) in order to gain an understanding of what might have been present on the site.

6. FINDINGS

6.1. Palaeontology

No palaeontological resources were noted during the survey and none are expected to be encountered (Almond & Pether 2008). A very small chance of encountering buried fossil material does exist but this is insignificant.

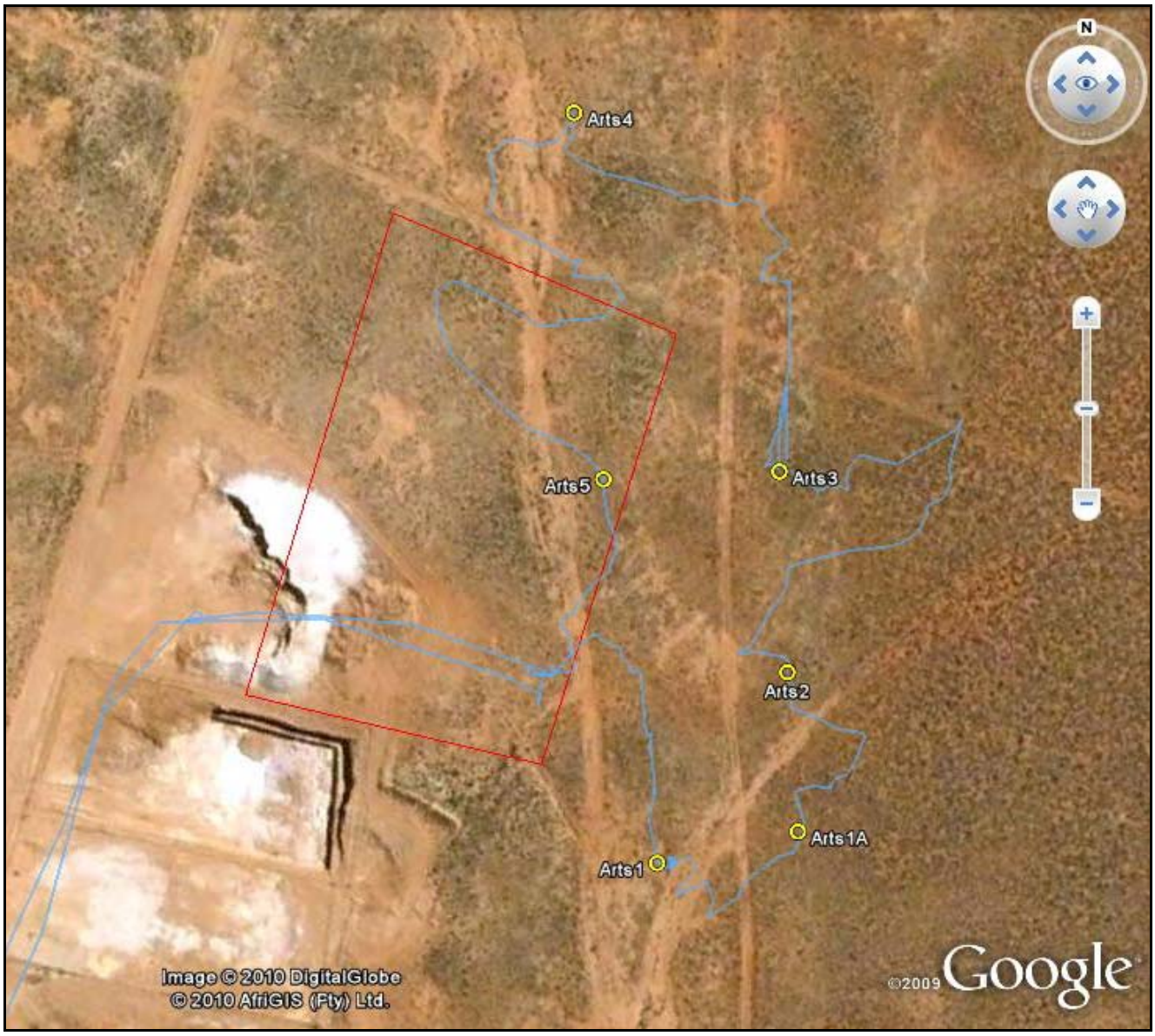

Figure 6: Aerial view of the site (red polygon) from Google Earth showing the walk paths (blue lines) and positions of stone artefact scatters recorded during the survey. Note that almost all of the site was heavily disturbed and thus was not searched.

6.2. Archaeology

Stone artefacts were noted in a few locations, all of them deflated or eroded. These consisted of scatters of artefacts that probably all pertain to the MSA and maybe ESA (Figure 7 & 8). These sorts of finds are commonly made throughout southern Namaqualand where they tend to be insignificant. Although no diagnostic ESA artefacts were noted, the fact that Parkington and Hart (1993) found ESA hand-axes in a similar context nearby suggests that ESA material is likely present here as well. One artefact, a large radial core, seemed very likely to be MSA (Figure 9).

Figure 7: Artefacts lying on the exposed hard substrate. Note the radial core at lower centre.

Figure 8: Selection of flakes.

6.3. Cultural landscapes and sense of place

No historic cultural landscape features are present. The overriding character of the region is a sense of remoteness upon which any development would have a negative effect. The character of the site is very visually degraded due to the presence on the landscape of the Mineral Separation Plant, spoil heaps and slimes dams on either side of the R363 just west of the site. As such, the proposed landfill will only have a very minor effect on what is now more of an industrial landscape. On Figure 10 the existing landfill (at the southwest corner of the red polygon) makes little visual impression.

Figure 9: Two sides and an edge view of a Middle Stone Age radial core.

Figure 10: Aerial view of the area showing the existing mining facilities, spoil heaps, slimes dams and the landfill site.

6.4. Visual impacts

Given the landscape issues discussed above, the proposed landfill expansion will result in very minor and insignificant visual impacts.

7. ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS

7.1. Palaeontology

No impacts to fossil heritage are expected.

7.2. Archaeology

The archaeological material present on the site is similar to that which is commonly encountered throughout much of southern Namaqualand. It is in secondary context and of little research value. It is considered to be of low local significance.

7.3. Cultural landscapes and sense of place

As a result of the existing infrastructure in the area, the impacts to the cultural landscape and sense of place are considered to be negligible.

7.4. Visual impacts

As a result of the existing infrastructure in the area, the visual impacts are considered to be negligible.

8. CONCLUSIONS

No significant impacts to heritage resources will occur as a result of the proposed landfill expansion.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Subject to the approval of Heritage Western Cape, the proposed development should be allowed to proceed with no further heritage work required. However, if any human remains or archaeological material over and above scattered stone artefacts are found during excavation of the landfill then the find should be reported to Heritage Western Cape (telephone: 021 483 9685) and an archaeologist will need to be contracted to excavate as required.

10. REFERENCES

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