

**ASSESSMENT OF THE
SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE
ROAD RESERVE SITUATED ADJACENT
TO
ERVEN 163, 168 and 169
NORTH ROAD & BEAUFORT AVENUE
CRAIGHALL PARK**

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REPORT COMMISSIONED BY the CRAIGPARK RESIDENTS' ASSOCIAYION

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The compilation of the statement of significance of the road reserve adjacent to erven 163, 168 and 169 situated between North Road, Dunkeld West and Beaufort Avenue, Craighall Park was commissioned by the Craighall Residents' Association (CRA). The scope and purpose of the assessment is to determine the historical and other significance of the property.

The study does not focus on any specific period and is a record of what could be found about the site during the investigation. The scope of the report does not include an investigation of the archaeological record of the site. The area around the road reserve has been substantially altered with the building of private houses and office blocks. The historical record of the site has therefore been largely destroyed or impacted on and little is left of the integrity of the ridge.

The location of the ridge could have led to its occupation many thousand years ago by the early inhabitants of the area because of the relatively close proximity of the ridge to water and the uninterrupted views of the surrounding areas. Again, there is a possibility that a blockhouse was built somewhere on the ridge because of the commanding views and the ridge's proximity to Jan Smuts Avenue, an important route between Johannesburg and Pretoria during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. However, due to the almost complete development of the area, finding evidence of either of the above 'occupations' of the ridge is remote.

The significance of an open, undeveloped area in the middle of the city of Johannesburg should not be underestimated and as one open area after another succumbs to large-scale development, the call for the preservation of this small section of ridge with its strikingly tall blue gum trees is justifiable. The road reserve allows access to and from Jan Smuts Avenue and this highlights its social importance to a wide cross section of the public.

The eucalyptus or gum trees in Johannesburg are recognised as a living heritage that were a product of attempts by the early inhabitants of Johannesburg to improve their surrounding landscape that was largely treeless and windswept. In addition, the gum trees are closely associated with the mining industry that could not survive without the timber provided by the trees.

For these reasons it is the opinion of the writer that the Road Reserve is of **some historical, social and natural significance**.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE

2.1. PRE-HISTORY OF THE TRANSVAAL AND JOHANNESBURG:

Records relating specifically to the prehistory of Craighall Park area are scant. There is, however, some information regarding the prehistory of the area previously known as the

Transvaal and to a lesser extent of Johannesburg before the first white settlers arrived in the early nineteenth century.

“In the Transvaal we live in a province rich in memories of ancient human life.... we have seen the social scale expand from the Stone Age family ... to the larger but politically unstable Iron Age community and, today, to a Transvaal society numbered in millions”.¹ This quotation sums up the existence of rich diversity of communities that lived in the Transvaal.

Revel Mason, previously of the Archaeological Research Unit of the University of the Witwatersrand, has described the existence of the prehistoric communities accordingly: “Achuel people lived in the Transvaal till the end of the Earlier Stone Age...over fifty thousand years ago. [They] died before the first Middle Stone Age Pietersburg people...crossed the Vaal and found that they liked the bushveld and its north-flowing streams. The last Stone Age People in the Transvaal ... came from the Free State ...[and were displaced]... by Iron Age people. The invaders brought mining, farming and housebuilding to the Transvaal. This is the vague shape of what happened in the Transvaal before John Campbell brought written history to the country in 1820”.²

Ms Amanda Esterhuysen, Archaeologist at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), undertook a search of the Wits archaeological archive and found only one reference to an *in situ* Early Stone Age site in Craighall Park which was found in a donga. Unfortunately, no information is provided as to where the donga was and what the co-ordinates of the site are. The archaeology archive was opened in the 1930s as part of the Government Bureau of Archaeology, and includes data from the Bureau’s successors, viz., the Archaeological Survey, the Archaeology Department and the Archaeological Research Unit of the University of the Witwatersrand.³

To date, no physical evidence has been found of pre-historic communities residing in the Craighall Park area apart from the find mentioned above. However, the find suggests the possibility that early inhabitants of the Transvaal may have lived on or near the ridge because of its then 360 degree views across the veld and beyond. What more could a community want than a site with water relatively close by (the Braamfontein Spruit) to water the community and animals and unrestricted views of their surroundings?

Iron Age furnaces have been found at various sites scattered across Johannesburg. The best known is the furnace on Melville Koppies. It was carbon-dated to around 1600AD and three other furnaces have been found on the Melville ridge. Further afield, 13 furnaces have been found at Honeydew, three at Lonehill and further east near Bruma Lake another furnace was found.⁴ These furnaces point to the existence of prehistoric communities in the greater Johannesburg area.

¹ Prehistory of the Transvaal, Mason, R., p 440

² Mason, R, p 4

³ Telephonic conversation with Ms Esterhuysen on 30 July 2005 and e-mail dd 1 August 2005

⁴ www.joburg.org.za/feb-2002/melville.stm, p 3-4

It is believed that the Iron Age people who moved into a Stone Age southern Transvaal expanded peacefully across the near empty grasslands. Their stable existence led to an expansion in the population. It is estimated that before 1822, the indigenous population of the former southern Transvaal numbered some 150 000, many of whom lived in large settlements of up to 7 000 people.⁵

However, the ravages of the *Mfecane* led to the break-up of these settlements and saw many people flee the area as Shaka's former ally, Mzilikazi and his followers, fled present day KwaZulu Natal to the south-eastern Transvaal. A dispute over missing cattle with Shaka led to Mzilikazi fleeing north. The political weakness of the local Iron Age communities meant that they were unable to withstand the invading force and either fled the area or succumbed to Mzilikazi's rule.

The invasion of the area by land-hungry Dutch farmers in 1836 also forced indigenous groups to flee the Witwatersrand until the imposition of the hut tax and the lure of gold brought many people back to Johannesburg.

2.2. HISTORY OF CRAIGHALL:

The first white settlers in the area that now constitutes Randburg were Boers who came to the area as a result of the Great Trek. J.L. Pretorius was the original owner of a farm called Driefontein, which extended from present day Bryanston to present day Braamfontein. In 1886, when Pretorius died, the farm was subdivided amongst his nine sons, a lot of whom sold their farms to outsiders.⁶

One of the farms was called Boskop and was owned by J. Labuschagne in 1860. An area of Boskop was demarcated and named Klipfontein, No. 479 district of Pretoria on 6 June 1865. The farm was then transferred to the district of Johannesburg [either in 1906 or 1908] and registered as Klipfontein No. 4.⁷

Johannesburg was established in 1886 and soon after that William Gray Rattray purchased a section of Klipfontein in 1891. He named his portion Craighall after his birthplace in Scotland.⁸ The portion must have been large because it apparently consisted of what is now known as Craighall, Craighall Park and Blairgowrie.⁹

Residents have referred to the existence of a blockhouse on the ridge where the road reserve is located. Attempts to find records to verify this proved unsuccessful. The Royal Engineers Museum in the United Kingdom was contacted in the hope that the Museum would hold records concerning the location of blockhouses in Johannesburg. The regiment was responsible for building and locating the blockhouses in South Africa.

⁵ www.sahistory.org.za/pages/town&c/villages/gauteng/johannesburg, p 1

⁶ www.icon.co.za/~antondekker/html/body_randburg.html, p 1

⁷ National Archives Depot, source CDB, vol. 2429, reference 4/2/2/290

⁸ www.icon.co.za/~antondekker/, p 1

⁹ www.craighall.gp.school.za/craighallhistory.htm, p 2

In response, Beverly Williams, the Assistant Curator of the museum indicated that there were no records that referred specifically to the location of blockhouses in Johannesburg. She makes mention of a sketch map that shows blockhouse lines and posts at the end of March 1902 which does not show the presence of blockhouses in Johannesburg. The map shows blockhouses to the west of Johannesburg, viz., Maraisburg and Roodepoort and to the east of Johannesburg, viz. Elsburg, Boksburg, Brakpan and Springs.¹⁰

A copy of a sketch map was found in the South African Military History Museum by the writer that maps the location of several blockhouses between Johannesburg and Pretoria. The location of the blockhouses, however, appears to be outside Johannesburg, as we know it today.¹¹

The remains of a blockhouse in Parktown, the so-called Stonehouse Blockhouse, were found on Parktown ridge and this indicates that blockhouses were built in and around Johannesburg. On the same property where this blockhouse was situated, Sir Herbert Baker built the dwelling aptly named Stonehouse in 1902. The house is a declared local heritage site. He describes the property when he purchased it accordingly “there was nothing on it but a blockhouse and barbed wire. It overlooked a young plantation of fir and gum trees; and ... to the distant faint blue Magaliesberg Mountains, ‘ramparts of slaughter and peril’ where the war still raged.”¹²

According to Dennis Adams, Parktown historian, no evidence of the Stonehouse blockhouse still exists except for a plaque that marks the spot where the blockhouse was situated.¹³

Reference is made to the building of blockhouses to secure the old Pretoria road (now Jan Smuts Avenue) after the British occupied Johannesburg in 1900. According to a centenary history of Parktown, Lord Roberts marched into Johannesburg (on 31 May 1900) and declared martial law. Blockhouses were erected on the ridges to guard the old Pretoria Road (Jan Smuts Avenue).¹⁴

The location of the road reserve ridge so close to Jan Smuts Avenue may have resulted in the building of a blockhouse on the ridge but no recorded evidence could be found to verify this apart from a reference by Edgar F. Droste, a resident of North Road. In a note or letter, he states that “originally, in the near vicinity [of the road reserve], there was a block house [sic] from the Boer War”.¹⁵ In the same letter it is mentioned that remains of the blockhouse were still visible 45 years ago. However, in light of the fact that much of the ridge is developed, the likelihood of finding these remains are remote.

¹⁰ Email correspondence with Beverly Williams dd 12-08-2005

¹¹ Manuscript C248. *Blockhouse System in South Africa*. South African Military History Museum.

¹² *Introducing Sir Herbert Baker* by Cecil Graham & Flo Bird, SAHRA file 3/1/3/Joh/1/3

¹³ Conservation with Dennis Adams, 16 August 2005

¹⁴ Parktown Century Souvenir, 1892-1992. Parktown & Westcliff Heritage Trust, p 92.

¹⁵ Undated letter addressed to Dudley Aitken titled *The North Road Koppie*.

This is confirmed by van Vollenhoven and van der Bos in their research report where they state “in gebiede soos die Rand, wat grootliks stedelik van aard is en dus aan grootskaalse ontwikkeling blootgestel, is relatief min oorblyfsels van blokhuise opgespoor”.¹⁶ (Translation: *In areas like the Rand that are mainly urbanised and subject to large-scale development, very little evidence of blockhouses have been found*).

Records found in the National Archives Depot in Pretoria indicate that Rattray had two farms, namely Klipfontein 497 and an adjoining portion of the farm Driefontein, No. 64. In a letter penned to the Secretary of Native Affairs in 1910, Rattray complained about ‘hardship’ he was suffering regarding the movement of his Black employees between the two farms as Klipfontein, by special proclamation, was declared to be in the mining labour area. Driefontein was excluded from this proclamation.¹⁷

This meant that every time Rattray wanted to move his Black employees from Driefontein to Klipfontein he had to obtain a pass for that employee even if he required his services for only a few days or weeks. Rattray had been fined one pound for breaking the law and requested that Klipfontein be deproclaimed from the mining labour area. It could not be established whether Rattray was successful in his request.¹⁸

The above suggests that mining activities were impacting on areas like Craighall and Craighall Park hence the proclamation under which Klipfontein fell. It is possible that the proclamation may have covered a large part of Johannesburg as mining spread across the Witwatersrand.

Related to this are the large blue gum or eucalyptus trees found on the ridge. It is said that the trees are over 80 years old. It should be mentioned that the eucalyptus trees are recognised as a living heritage that bears witness both to the mining industry, which could not survive without timber and the efforts of residents to soften the undulating grasslands and harsh mining environment.¹⁹

Eucalyptus trees are well suited to the highveld as they grew fast and local plantations soon began to resemble forest. Eucalyptus trees are found everywhere on the Witwatersrand and especially on mining land. Today, the City of Johannesburg is said to be the largest man-made forest on earth because of the extensive planting of trees.²⁰

Not only did Rattray farm his land, but he also dammed the Braamfontein Spruit to make the Craighall Lake and in 1905 the first advertisement appeared for the Craighall Park Hotel that referred to the hotel as an ideal recreational spot for city dwellers. At that time Craighall was about an hour’s drive from the city centre.

¹⁶ Manuscript C248. ‘n Eerste Fase Ondersoek na Britse Blokhuis-stelsel van die Anglo-Boereoorlog (1899-1902) in the Transavaal, p 104

¹⁷ National Archives Depot, SNA, No. 468, ref. 1906

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ *One History: Auckland Park Kingsway Campust*, University of Johannesburg pamphlet

²⁰ Ibid.

It should be remembered that Johannesburg at the time was ugly, treeless and dusty and several 'country hotels', including the Craighall Park Hotel, offered city dwellers a temporary escape from these conditions.

In 1902, eleven years after Rattray bought Craighall, he advertised that he was selling 229 plots of land and described Craighall township as splendidly watered, having a stream running through it ... bounded by the Jokeskei [sic] River, besides which there are innumerable fountains on the ground.²¹

The sale of plots in Craighall Park was again advertised in 1911. It is unknown how successful the sale of the plots in 1902 and those in 1911 was. It appears however that the suburbs of Craighall and Craighall Park only developed in the 1930s. The suburbs were incorporated into the municipal area of Johannesburg in 1938 and improvements such as the tarring of roads and installation of street lights occurred after the Second World War.²²

According to several sources, the property where the Backpackers Ritz now stands was home to two lions, the pets of the then landowner. Thereafter the building was used as the Dunkeld Preparatory School and at the end of the Second World War, Baron von Oetzen, owner of Volkswagen in South Africa, bought the property. After his death, his widow sold the property and in 1989 the Backpackers Ritz of Johannesburg was opened and is still operating today.²³

3. ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

It is the opinion of the writer that the Road Reserve is of **some historical significance** for the following reasons:

3.1. Topographical Significance:

Many thousands of years ago the Transvaal was settled by communities who lived in small groups scattered across the grasslands. The Craighall ridge may have been a sought after location because of the view of the surrounding areas as the ridge commands expansive views of Johannesburg and environs. Unfortunately, due to the large-scale development of the ridge, any evidence of pre-historic communities has long disappeared.

In addition, the topography of the site may have been useful in defending and securing territory and this appears to be the source of speculation regarding the existence of a blockhouse somewhere on the ridge during the Anglo-Boer South African War of 1899-1902.

²¹ <http://www.craighall.gp.school.za/craighallhistory.htm>, p 3

²² <http://www.craighall.gp.school.za/craighallhistory.htm>, p 1

²³ Copy of an article in The Gardner, Journal of T.H.S, Spring 2004

3.2. Social Significance:

Craighall, in the early years of the twentieth century, proved to be an attractive getaway for many city dwellers who wanted trees, water and the peace of the countryside on their days off as Johannesburg town was dusty, treeless and noisy. The Craighall Park Hotel offered citizens shaded picnic areas and refreshing recreational activities on or near the Craighall Lake.

The gum trees found in Johannesburg, as previously stated, are recognised as a living heritage as they are closely associated with the mining industry and attempts by those living in Johannesburg to alleviate the harsh and treeless landscape that existed. If one drives around Craighall and Craighall Park, there a number of large eucalyptus trees in the suburb that bear testimony to the 'forest' of trees that once existed in the area.

In addition, the road reserve is well used by pedestrians, residents and workers to access shops and transport in Jan Smuts Avenue. A site visit on the 10th of June 2005 confirmed this as many people from all walks of life were seen using the access. If the road reserve is developed, this main access artery may eventually be closed off and countless people will have to make a considerable detour to get to and from the suburbs.

3.3. Natural Significance:

It has been mentioned that the road reserve forms part of a unique granite ridge and is the only one of two sections of the ridge that have not been developed. In addition, the ridge forms a natural buffer zone between the office parks in Dunkeld West and the residential suburb of Craighall Park.²⁴

4. CONCLUSION

Although no specific detail could be found that established the presence of pre-historic communities on the ridge or the existence of a blockhouse, the site is of social importance to the surrounding community and those working in the suburbs. The residents appreciate and manage this undeveloped section of the site and the development of the site appears to be unnecessary and unwarranted.

Whether the site has enough significance to be declared a local heritage site should be established with the Gauteng Provincial Heritage Resources Agency.

²⁴ Discussion with Wendy McAllister of the CRA, 10 June 2005

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Mrs Rowena Wilkinson of the South African Military History Museum, Johannesburg.
Staff of the Parktown & Westcliff Heritage Trust

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