

Archaeological assessment  
*of*  
an alternative site for a proposed development at  
Groß Spitzkuppe, Usakos District



J. Kinahan  
Quaternary Research Services  
P.O. Box 22407, Windhoek, Namibia

Commissioned by Eco.plan (Pty) Ltd (Namibia)

Submitted 21 November 2003

QRS Job 50

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An archaeological assessment of a proposed alternative site for a tourist lodge at Groß Spitzkuppe near Usakos, identified six archaeological sites within the envisaged project boundaries. The sites are considered to be valuable components of the cultural heritage of Namibia. It is recommended that the lodge should not encroach upon the sites and that special care should be taken to avoid damage to the sites, especially during the construction phase of the project.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	Page 4
ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT	Page 4
RECOMMENDATIONS	Page 8
SITE PHOTOGRAPHS	Page 9

## INTRODUCTION

Plans to establish a tourist lodge at the base of the Groß Spitzkuppe were halted by the National Monuments Council of Namibia when an archaeological assessment of the site reported the presence of five archaeological sites that might be affected by the proposed development. The sites include well-preserved rock paintings and stratified archaeological deposits. The assessment report<sup>a</sup> recommended that an alternative site should be selected, taking into account the archaeological sensitivity of the Groß Spitzkuppe inselberg complex.

After extensive discussions with the developer and other interested and affected parties a detailed site inspection was carried out and a possible alternative site selected for the tourist lodge. Quaternary Research Services was commissioned to carry out an archaeological assessment of the site, and to prepare a baseline topographic survey to assist the lodge design process. Fieldwork at the alternative site was carried out between 16 and 19 November, and topographic survey data were submitted to the developer on 20 November 2003.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

The proposed alternative lodge site lies on the northern side of a granite ridge, separated from the Groß Spitzkuppe by a narrow gap forming the course of an ephemeral stream. The ridge presents a complex of short defiles issuing into a northward flowing drainage system of braided streambeds. These streambeds converge to form a small number of well-developed ephemeral watercourses close to the northern boundary fence of the Groß Spitzkuppe farm. There are also several minor outcrops of granite and gneiss between the main granite ridge and the boundary fence. The area examined here includes the lower slopes of

---

<sup>a</sup> *Archaeological assessment of a proposed development site at Groß Spitzkuppe, Usakos District. Quaternary Research Services Job No. 43, submitted 30 June 2003.*

the granite ridge, the gap between the ridge and the Groß Spitzkuppe massif, and the ground lying between these features and the boundary fence.

Weathered calcrete soils with sparse scrub, annual grasses and herbs predominate in the area, except at the foot of the granite outcrops, where sheltered conditions and the superior soil water characteristics of the decomposed granite support a variety of tree species and occasional dense thickets of scrub. The visibility of the ground surface is generally good, and archaeological materials are easily observed. It is clearly apparent that the whole of the drainage area on the calcrete soils is covered by a scatter of stone artefacts, with few dense concentrations of material. The artefact scatter evidently represents a lag deposit resulting from the gradual lowering of the ground surface by sheet erosion, accompanied by re-deposition of the archaeological material.

The six archaeological sites found in the course of the field survey are as follows:

#### QRS 50/1

Posn. 21° 48' 32.08" S 15° 10' 15.16" E

A discrete surface scatter of late Pleistocene age stone artefacts and reduction debris, associated with a small group of gneiss boulders. The scatter extends over an area of 10m x 10m, with an object density of  $<5/m^2$ . Artefact material includes core reduction debris, mainly in hydrothermal vein quartz, and a range of prepared-platform flakes and blade flakes in basalt and hornfels. The scatter appears to be in primary context. However, the site is not significant, and is unlikely to be affected by the proposed development.

#### QRS 50/2

Posn. 21° 48' 33.28" S 15° 10' 24.28" E

The site is located on the margin of a small granite outcrop isolated from the main rocky ridge, and is formed by a north-facing, near-vertical granite surface, with a frieze of paintings extending over about 12m. The paintings, all in

shades of monochrome reddish brown, include at least 15 human figures, approximately five birds, a serpent, and a large antelope torso. The rock surface is extensively spalled and the paintings are generally rather indistinct, although details of accoutrement are visible on some of the human figures. The floor area below the paintings is approximately 4m x 3m, and while there is a slight concentration of stone artefact material on the surface it does not appear that the site would contain any stratified deposit. The artefact scatter, consisting mainly of waste flakes in hydrothermal vein quartz and hornfels, extends for more than 50m to the north. In terms of its number of paintings the site is a significant addition to the documented rock art of the Spitzkuppe<sup>β</sup> and is therefore worthy of protection. It does not appear that the site would be directly affected by the proposed lodge development, although this will have to be confirmed by the final layout of the amenities.

#### QRS 50/3

Posn. 21° 48' 35.5" S 15° 10' 29.69" E

The site is located on a low-lying granite outcrop adjacent to the main ridge, and consists of at least 30 irregular-shaped patches showing artificial abrasion and polishing of the rock surface. The patches are associated with a number of natural hollows that hold water after rain. Although the purpose of the patches is not known, examples occur elsewhere in the Namib where they form part of communal hunting sites. From these it appears that the patches resulted from the working of hides on the rock surface. The site lies within the core development area of the proposed lodge but it is unlikely to be affected.

#### QRS 50/4

Posn. 21° 48' 35.7" S 15° 10' 29.72" E

The site is located within a deep crevice, approximately 6m wide, between steep flanks of the granite ridge. The crevice is a cul-de-sac, and offers no overhead shelter. A small group of indistinct monochrome reddish brown paintings is

---

<sup>β</sup> Kinahan, J. 1990. Four thousand years at the Spitzkoppe: changes in settlement and landuse on the edge of the Namib Desert. *Cimbebasia* 12: 1-14.

visible on the eastern wall of the crevice. The site is unlikely to be affected by the development of the proposed lodge.

### QRS 50/5

Posn. 21° 48' 35.6" S 15° 10' 30.12" E

The site is located among large boulders on the northern edge of the granite ridge. The boulder has two monochrome reddish brown paintings apparently representing rhino, although in both cases only the rear half of the subject is clearly visible. A boulder approximately 6m high forms a south-west-facing shelter in front of a smaller enclosed shelter formed by a second boulder. The enclosed area provides direct access to QRS 50/6, below. A dense scatter of stone artefacts and artefact debris covers the talus slope on the western and north western side of the shelter, with an object density of  $>10/m^2$ , consisting mainly of hornfels, hydrothermal vein quartz and basalt fragments. The site may contain some stratified deposit, but this would probably have been infiltrated by rootlets of trees and bushes growing on the talus slope.

### QRS 50/6

Posn. 21° 48' 35.9" S 15° 10' 30.14" E

The site is located among inward leaning boulders which form a closed passage 16m in length and 6m wide at its northern end. A concavity in the rock surface to the right of the entrance bears an indistinct monochrome painting of a hartebeest, while a similar shaped cavity within the shelter has two human figures in black. The floor surface close to the entrance has a light scatter of stone artefact debris. Deposit, most likely well stratified, is indicated by the firm horizontal nature of the surface and the inward dip of exposed bedrock immediately beyond the dripline of the shelter. The deposit covers approximately 4m x 5m and has an estimated depth of 1.2m. In view of the archaeological potential of the site it is considered significant and worthy of protection. Fortunately, however, the site is located some 30m among large boulders and occupies a position that is unlikely to be affected by the development of the proposed lodge.

With the exception of QRS 50/1 and the extensive lag deposit of mainly late Pleistocene material on the weathered calcrete soils close to the boundary fence, all of the archaeological sites located in the project area are of Holocene age, and represent hunter-gatherer occupation typical of the last 5 000 years in the Groß Spitzkuppe area (see footnote  $\beta$ ), above. No archaeological sites have been previously recorded in the project area, and the sites described here are a useful addition to archaeological knowledge of the Groß Spitzkuppe complex. At least two of the Holocene sites have excavation potential, namely QRS 50/5 and QRS 50/6, whereas QRS 50/2 contains well preserved rock paintings that merit detailed recording. As in the case of the archaeological sites recorded in the first proposed lodge development area (see footnote  $\alpha$ , above), the sites described here form a coherent group within the larger Groß Spitzkuppe site distribution, and an integral part of the archaeological landscape.

As far as I have been given to understand by the developer, the proposed lodge will occupy a relatively small area to the west of the archaeological sites, in and around the gap between the Groß Spitzkuppe massif and the granite ridge considered here. The area so indicated lies between two local groups of archaeological sites, one in the area covered by the first proposed lodge development, and the other represented by the sites described here. The area selected to form the core of the alternative lodge development contains no archaeological sites.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the observations presented here it is recommended that the proposed lodge development should be approved for the alternative site, *provided that:*

- Plans for the development are submitted showing that construction will not impact on the sites or encroach within 100m of the sites.
- In the case of QRS 50/3 (polished rock surfaces) development could be carried out to within 50m of the site, provided that the site is clearly flagged during construction.



- All sites must be clearly flagged (eg with “danger tape”) during construction to prevent inadvertent disturbance.
- If future expansion of the lodge facilities encroaches on the sites appropriate mitigation should be carried out.
- Warning notices should be placed at the sites to inform lodge guests concerning the vulnerability of the rock art in particular.
- A small information board/ display should be erected in the lodge reception explaining how the development has been sited with respect to the archaeological remains.