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01 June 2005

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REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECONNAISSANCE OF GORASSIS (NRNR)
AND ADJACENT PARTS OF THE NAMIB NAUKLUFT PARK (QRS Survey 42)

During the above field reconnaissance carried out from 27th May to 5th June 2003, we documented a total of twenty archaeological sites. GPS waypoints for the sites are attached. The fieldwork was carried out with the permission of NRNR and under permits issued by the National Monuments Council and Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

The purpose of the reconnaissance was to locate and assess the archaeological potential of the area for an investigation of the relationship between the remains of stone hunting blinds and related sites, and the seasonal movement of oryx between the southern Namib and the escarpment. Our previous investigations in this area included detailed mapping of one site on Gorassis and a brief inspection of a site known as Hard Rock Café. The results of this fieldwork have been previously reported to NRNR.

During the present reconnaissance we revisited the Gorassis hunting blinds and established that more detailed mapping of the terrain would be necessary for the research to proceed. We subsequently acquired the necessary equipment to perform this survey, namely an Ashtech Promark differential GPS two-receiver kit. This will be used during the July 2005 fieldwork. We also revisited the Hard Rock Café site and established that it would be suitable for test-pitting. NRNR management has agreed in principle on the scheduling of the excavation.

On the basis of our field inspection we believe that the most promising area of excavation

would be the shelter now used as a dining area. Our approach would be to make a 1m sq test pit to bedrock, probably at about 1.5m in this case. The purpose of the excavation would be to recover dateable material on which to base an archaeological sequence for the area. Since this would be based on stone tool assemblages correlated with radiocarbon dates we would only proceed to depth if the test pit showed promising traces. The pit would be closed and the surface rehabilitated before leaving the site.

Our field reconnaissance in May 2003 also looked at a number of sites in the adjacent part of the Namib Naukluft Park. Two of the sites showed some potential for excavation and we would probably test one of these sites during the envisaged fieldwork. The sites concerned are in the vicinity of the Awasib spring and both had very dense surface scatters of Holocene age stone artefacts. Similar scatters were seen at the Hard Rock Café site in the past but these have been disturbed by the use of the site as a picnic spot. The surface has been trampled and much of the artefact scatter has been disturbed, possibly by sweeping. There has probably been a fair amount of illicit artefact collecting.

If the Hard Rock and the Awasib sites both contain stratified deposits we will excavate test pits in both. This would help to resolve the local archaeological sequence and provide a better chance of reliably dating the hunting blinds. The two rock shelter sites are at the eastern and western extremes of a highly interesting distribution of hunting blinds. Our field reconnaissance confirmed that this distribution straddles the Namib Naukluft Park boundary and it appears that the system of hunting blinds was built around an established route of oryx migration.

To further explore the association between the rock shelter deposits and the hunting blinds we will carry out some detailed surveys, beginning with the Gorassis site. The field reconnaissance showed that the positioning and layout of the hunting blinds is very finely tuned to the local topography. For this reason we will carry out detailed surveys on at least three of the sites. In all cases seen so far, the blinds occur as fairly extensive complexes situated in hill saddles or on spurs. Our initial measurements at the Gorassis site and on Stellerine suggested that layout was influenced by small differences in gradient in the order of 5%. The July fieldwork will examine this more closely.

The field reconnaissance suggests that the area encompassed by the distribution of the

hunting blinds has been artificially disrupted by the alignment of the Namib Naukluft Park boundary. Data from MET surveys of oryx mortalities shows a very high correlation with this section of the boundary, further suggesting that the hunting blinds were built upon a well established, even ancient, route of animal migration. This we would like to evaluate more fully.

At present, the archaeological significance of the area is mainly limited to the presence of the hunting blinds, which are a very unusual feature indeed. The research value of these sites would be greatly enhanced if they were properly surveyed and dated. It may not be possible to resolve the dating question in only one short field investigation. However, if the sites are dateable, and if the distribution of hunting blinds can be shown to form part of an integrated hunting strategy this would have some conservation implications for NRNR.

The conservation implications are twofold: archaeological and environmental.

Archaeologically, a well dated and surveyed group of sites comprises a major research asset and a potential focus for future work in the area. This would necessitate some evaluation of the present role of the sites as tourism attractions. Uncontrolled tourist access has a very negative impact on the sites, and this is already evident at the Hard Rock Café. It is important that the NRNR management approach seriously consider first the responsibility of archaeological stewardship, and second, the tourism benefits of archaeological attractions.

Environmentally, the implications of an integrated distribution of hunting blinds on a migration route have some value as the basis of a proposal to reopen the park boundary. Few, if any, animal migration routes in Namibia are still functioning, and in most cases these cannot be restored. It appears that in this particular case the route of movement is relatively short and topographically constrained. Furthermore, there is evidence that oryx still attempt to follow the route. Re-opening an ancient migration route with spectacular archaeological evidence of its antiquity would be a major asset to environmental conservation.

Signed

Grid Lat/Lon hddd.ddddd°

Datum Schwarzeck

QRS 42 recce: AWASIB FOUNTAIN, May 2003

Name	Position
038	S25.45909 E15.70580
039	S25.41199 E15.67244
040	S25.37764 E15.70339
42-1	S25.38010 E15.70310
42-10	S25.39181 E15.62019
42-11	S25.39054 E15.62097
42-12	S25.38891 E15.63755
42-13	S25.39024 E15.63640
42-14	S25.38873 E15.63813
42-15	S25.39393 E15.62441
42-16	S25.42651 E15.59519
42-17	S25.42511 E15.56517
42-18	S25.44755 E15.58931
42-19	S25.40033 E15.68267
42-2	S25.37060 E15.64311
42-20	S25.33144 E15.79310
42-3	S25.36604 E15.64275
42-4	S25.31550 E15.65620
42-5	S25.30925 E15.66140
42-7	S25.38269 E15.59638
42-8	S25.38854 E15.61631
42-9	S25.39020 E15.61888
AWASIB	S25.38639 E15.64385