

A comparison between the artefacts found at one of the Anglo-Zulu War battlefields and the Mthonjaneni Zulu historical Museum in KwaZulu-Natal.

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Abstract

The Anglo-Zulu War is one of the well-known conflicts that took place in South Africa. It is regarded by many scholars as one of the few wars between the British and an African group whereby the Africans fought to keep their land. The Anglo-Zulu War took place over a period of six months (1879) in a series of eight battles across Zululand, which is modern day KwaZulu-Natal. One of the series of battles is the battle of Ntombe, a small battle that took place on the river bordering Zululand and the Transvaal, which is modern day Mpumalanga (the Ntombe River). The Ntombe battlefield has historical and archaeological significance to the people in the area; it has also become an attraction for tourists, especially those of British origin. The remains from the Anglo-Zulu War have often sparked debates. Materials were found on the battlefield during a pedestrian tactic survey that was believed to have a link with the battle of Ntombe. Coincidentally, there were also some materials from the Ntombe battlefield at the Mthonjaneni Zulu Historical Museum (MZHM), which is believed to house the largest collections from the Anglo-Zulu War battlefields. This article compared and analysed the material found at the Ntombe battlefield landscape and those housed at MZHM in order to find a pattern also the differences and similarities that could reveal more on the historic and archaeological narratives of this landscape. The study revealed that there are no similarities between the materials from the battlefield and the museum. Therefore, more extensive research still needs to be done in order to find more materials which can help us to conclude on these findings.

Introduction

Although the Anglo-Zulu War and some of its series of battles are well-known and much literature has been written about them, the battle of Ntombe is rarely written about. This is because the battlefields of the Anglo-Zulu War are prioritised according to their popularity. This means other battlefields such as the Ntombe battlefield are given less attention. The battle took place on the 12th of March 1879. Most literature records the events of the battle of Ntombe as follows: After the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift (also part of the Anglo-Zulu War), the British forces were running out of weapons and saw amaZulu with their strong force and spears as a bigger threat (Zulu 2015). They needed to transport more weaponry into former Zululand after some of their weapons had failed (Zulu 2015). At the beginning of March 1879, a few days prior to the battle of Ntombe taking place, the 80th Regiment led by Captain W.T. Anderson had been ordered to travel to Derby in the Transvaal to fetch and escort a convoy of 18 wagons (Smythe & Whittall 1996; Knight & Castle 2000). These had been forwarded from their former base situated in Lydenburg into Luneburg, a small farming community in Zululand (Zulu 2015).

While travelling, the British regiment used the most direct route to Luneburg (see figure 1), this route went via the disputed territory under the Swazi Chief, Mbilini ka Mswati,¹ (Greaves 2003) in former Zululand (Laband & Thompson 1990; Zulu 2015). Chief Mbilini's "stronghold directly overlooked the Ntombe River above the ford² at Meyer's Drift, which marked the border of Natal" (Best 1999:4).

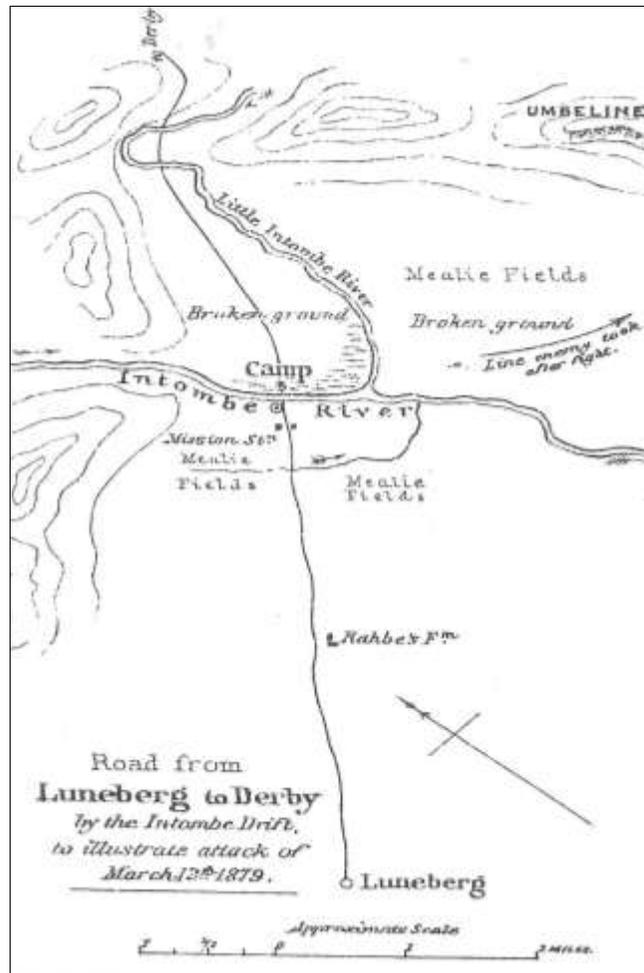


Figure 1: Illustration of the road from Derby to Luneburg (Diver 2010: ix).

Their journey was undertaken during a heavily rainy season. The roads were muddy and the rivers were flooding (Knight & Castle 2000). Captain Anderson and his men struggled to get all the wagons across the Ntombe River and some got stuck miles back at the Little Ntombe Rivulet³. Only two out of the eighteen provision wagons were able to cross the River into Luneburg (Laband & Thompson 1983; 2000, Smythe & Whittall 1996). Some of the men who could not cross over with their wagons pitched camp and

¹ Chief Mbilini ka Mswati was a rebel Swazi Prince who owed allegiance to the Zulu King, King Cetshwayo (Laband 1985: 24).

² A ford is a shallow place in the river, which can allow for crossing (www.oxforddictionaries.com, accessed: 14 October 2016).

³ . Ntombe is a tributary to Phongola, and Little Ntombe rivulet is a tributary to the tributary Ntombe.

formed V shaped laagers⁴ with their wagons as a protective tactic. The river was flooded and Chief Mbilini, who decided to concentrate his men on Tafelberg (a flat topped mountain in the area) known to the community as Mount Thalaku (Zulu 2015), saw the flooding of the camp as an opportunity to attack the British regiment. With the area and road being under the watchful eye of Chief Manyonyoba⁵ (of amaZulu) and Chief Mbilini (of amaSwati), the two Chiefs wasted no time in assembling their men in preparation to attack the British at their vulnerable time (Knight & Castle 2000). The rising ground at the camping area limited the line of sight from the British to about 45m (Knight & Castle 2000), therefore they could not see when the amaZulu and amaSwati warriors were approaching the camp. The two Chiefs led their men against the British sleeping camp and fired several volleys⁶ which landed on one of the British leaders, Capt. Moriarty (Greaves 2003). He had pitched his tent outside the protective laagers (Smythe & Whittall 1996). It was at that moment when the British forces were ambushed and attacked by amaZulu and amaSwati warriors before they could prepare to fight back (Laband & Thompson 1983, 2000).

Literature available on the Ntombe battlefield records that this battle took place over a short space of time. After the battle, the surviving amaZulu and amaSwati warriors rushed back to their caves. The surviving British regiment were ordered to Luneburg and those that lay dead were buried in a mass grave at the battlefield, except for Captain Moriarty and Doctor Cobbin, whose bodies were also taken to Luneburg for burial (Hope 1997:62). The search to retrieve bodies and some of the materials left behind after the battle was successful as some of the soldiers were found as the days went by (Hope 1997:74). Hope (1997:62) records that, “the remainder of the day was spent collecting and burying the dead, the majority to remain forever where they had fallen on the banks of the Ntombe River”. This means that some of the people and the materials of war from both opposing groups were left behind on the battlefield.

Purpose of research

The main purpose of this article is to present and compare the artefacts found on the Ntombe battlefield and those found at the Mthonjaneni Zulu Historical Museum. This is to find out whether the material from the museum has any similarities to those found at the battlefield currently. The debate raised here is whether these materials tell the same or different stories about what remains of the battle of Ntombe. The material found is also significant in revealing a pattern of site occupation and conflict on the landscape. Meaning, the material can reveal if the area was used only for the purpose of the battle or it was occupied prior to the battle. The research seeks to not only compare the materials against each other, but to also link these materials at both the battlefield and the museum

⁴ Laager is a word derived from Dutch. It is also known as a wagon fort meaning a mobile fortification made of wagons arranged into any shape and joining each other (www.oxforddictionaries.com, Accessed: 16 June 2014).

⁵ Chief Manyonyoba ka Khubeka was the Chief of the section of the Khubeka people living at Ntombe from the 18th century (Greaves & Knight 2007: 156).

⁶ Volley is a number of bullets or arrows released at one time (www.Merriam-webster.com).

with historical records. This will show whether the events recorded from the historical accounts did take place; the materials found can serve as proof of that.

Methods

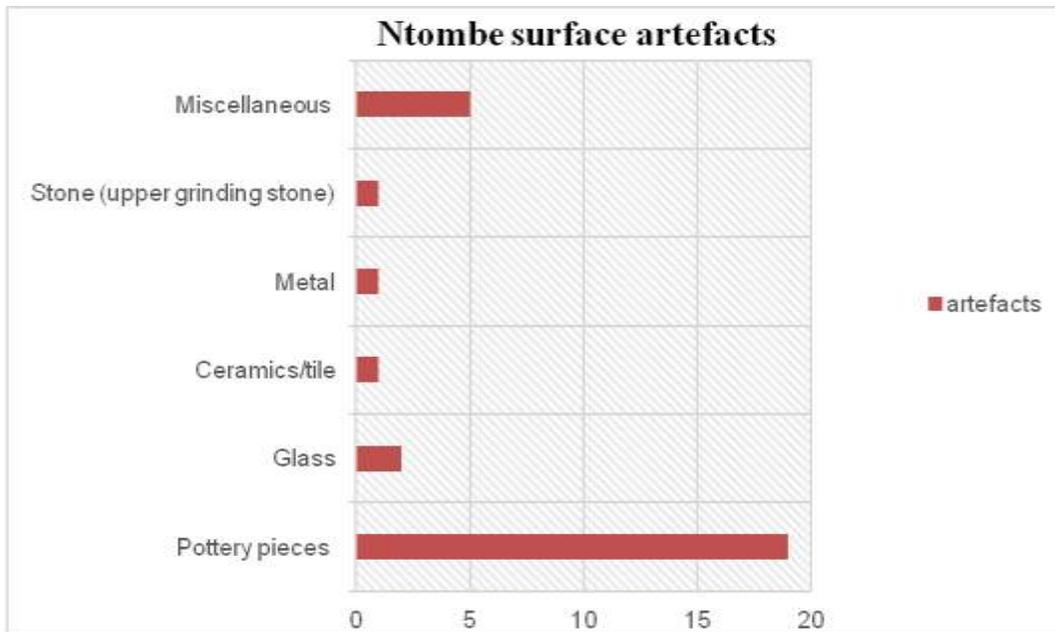
The Ntombe battlefield is one of the sites of conflict that reflects how different groups with opposing ideas confronted each other in acts of aggression, leaving physical traces on the landscape (Shackel 2003:4) and/or beneath the ground. Archaeologists have always had an interest in the material of conflict. Scott and McFeaters (2010:103), attests that it is only recently that archaeologists have come up with methodologies and theoretical approaches to study the materials and landscapes of conflicts.

In this research, a number of methods were used in order to find a pattern, differences and similarities. Firstly a desktop study was undertaken in order to find out more about the background of the Ntombe landscape as well as information about the Mthonjaneni Zulu Historical Museum. Secondly, a pedestrian tactic survey was conducted at the Ntombe battlefield. Five field assistants walked systematically across the battlefield looking for any material on the surface. No metal detector was used in the survey. Thirdly, the materials found scattered on the battlefield were documented *in situ*⁷ using a GPS to record the coordinates and pictures were taken. All the recorded materials were then documented using a documentation form. The materials at the museum were recorded from their glass cabinets using a camera and a documentation form. The museum collection already had accession numbers to indicate that they were already registered. Most of the materials could not be hand-handled because they are very fragile and some of them are rusted, so they also had to be documented *in situ*.

Results

The results from the pedestrian tactic survey and documentation and analysis revealed more archaeological material that can be linked to the period prior to the battle of Ntombe, and not exactly to the period or rather events of the battle itself. The results from the pedestrian tactic survey have been summarised on the map below (see Figure 2).

⁷ *In situ* means in place or in its original place.



The number of the material found on the battlefield is subject to change with time. This is because there were no excavations undertaken to reveal more material. The available material on the surface could be the results of multiple activities on the battlefield, such as farming and animal burrows. Some might have been unearthed from the ground during these activities.

Amongst all the artefacts that were found on the landscape (this is including the battle site and the Khubeka Mountain overlooking the battle site); broken pottery pieces were the most found. Generally in archaeology, pottery is used to reveal some information about cultures and use. This is done by studying the decorations and design of the pottery. At Ntombe, it was difficult to link the pottery found on the landscape to any culture or tradition since the pottery pieces did not comprise any decorations (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Undecorated Ntombe pottery piece. Photograph by Mpho Maripane 2015



Commonly, amaZulu/abeNguni groups, like most African groups used vessels for storage, preparations of food and traditional beer. Most of these pottery pieces found at the Ntombe comprised of very large pieces of pottery. According to oral history, most of the larger pots which they called *Imbiza* in Zulu were mainly used for brewing traditional beer made of sorghum, while others which they called *Ukhamba* pots were used for serving.

Further analysis and study will have to be done to find out more about these pottery pieces. More detailed ethnographical study is also essential; an understanding for an understanding of the different uses of the pottery at Ntombe or the Phongolo region during the 19th century.

Table 2 below, summarises the materials found and documented from the Mthonjaneni Zulu Historical Museum. These materials already have accession/ registration numbers; this indicates that they are already in the records of Amafa along with their description and approximate location in which they were found. These materials are registered under Amafa and are known as the Thembani collection.

Table 2: Collection from Ntombe battlefield at Mthonjaneni Zulu Historical Museum (Maripane 2016).

DATE	OBJECTS	DESCRIPTION	INSCRIPTION/MARKINGS	REF. NO.	CONDITION	PHOTO NO.	ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
24/06/2015	Male shoes	2 rusted male shoes	none	201/005-AB	poor		314) found where Capt. Moriarty's wagons stood
24/06/2015	Cavalry boot/spur	cavalry boot (rusted part of spur)	none	201/003	poor		315) part of spur found on battlesite
24/06/2015	Metal buckles	various unknown types of metal buckles	none	201/004-A-H	fair		316) found where Capt. Moriarty's tent stood
24/06/2015	Military tunic buttons	General service buttons	not clear	201/006-A-J	fair		318) found on battlesite
24/06/2015	Military tent eyes	canvas bras rope eyes	none	201/013 A-C	good		319) found at Capt. Moriarty's campsite
24/06/2015	Padlock	rusted part of padlock	"patent"	201/004	poor		322) found on battlesite
24/06/2015	Sfripups	2 horse rusted saddlery sfripups	none	201/002	poor & fair	323-324	found at Capt. Moriarty's lager site
24/06/2015	Horse shoe	rusted horse shoe	none	201/014	poor	325-326	found where Howards provision wagon stood
24/06/2015	Scissors	rusted medical scissors	none	201/008	poor		327) found in ploughed maize field where Moriarty's stand
24/06/2015	Cavalry boot/spur chain	rusted boot spur chain	none	201/007	poor		328) found 100 yards west of Moriarty's lager site
24/06/2015	Clothing buttons	9 various types of buttons	none	201/007 A-H	fair		329) found on battlesite
24/06/2015	Spoon	spoon with some rusted parts	none	201/006	fair		330) found where Howards detachment stood
24/06/2015	Waist belt/guide	small part of military waist belt	none	201/001	fair		331) found on campsite
24/06/2015	Tobacco pipes	pieces of clay tobacco pipes	none	201/008 A-G	fair		332) found on battlesite at the lager site
24/06/2015	Bullet mould	rusted part of bullet mould	none	201/007	poor		333) found on Capt. Moriarty's campsite
24/06/2015	Male collar hooks	military male tunic collar hooks	none	201/004 A-D	fair		334) found on lager site near the Ntombe River
24/06/2015	Horse shoe nails	7 pieces of horse shoe nails	none	201/005 A-G	poor		335) found where Howards provision wagon stood
24/06/2015	Male canvas hooks	3 canvas hooks	none	201/002 A-B	fair/poor		336) found at Moriarty's campsite
24/06/2015	Tinder box	part of tinder box	includes some decorations	201/003	fair		338) found in ploughed field east of Moriarty's campsite
24/06/2015	Musical instrument	inferior part of mouth instrument	none	201/009	poor		339) found at Moriarty's lager site
24/06/2015	Head gear	part of the metal helmet hide cover	none	201/009	poor		340) found on battlesite
24/06/2015	Meat hook	rusted steel meat hook	none	201/000	poor		341) found at Moriarty's lager site
24/06/2015	cartridge cases	7 Martini Henry ammo rusted cartridge cases	none	201/009	poor		342) found on battlesite east of lager site
24/06/2015	Bullets	15 Martini Henry ammo rusted bullets	none	201/011 A-N	poor		343) found east of wagon lager site in marsh field
24/06/2015	Teaspoon	approx. 12cm rusted teaspoon	none	201/001	poor		344) found east of Moriarty's lager site in marsh field
24/06/2015	Haversack buckles	2 valise equipment haversack buckles	none	201/005 A-B	fair		345) found on Moriarty's campsite
24/06/2015	Military buttons	5 military tunic general services buttons	visible but not clear	201/002 A-F	poor		346) found 30 yards from Moriarty's stand in marsh field
24/06/2015	Infantry boot plate	rusted leather boot infantry boot plate	none	201/003	poor		347) found at provision wagon site
24/06/2015	Glass bottle	broken pieces of glass bottles	"Simon Rybernde & Conen Schiedam"	201/008 A-E	fair		348) found in ploughed field next to Moriarty's wagon site

As articulated previously that the materials have been documented and registered, most of them have not been studied or analysed to acquire more information on them. This is except the well-known Martini-Henry rifle illustrated below (see figure 4). Fragments of this rifle were found at the museum as well as complete ones.



Figure 4: *Martini-Henry rifle (Manning 2013:15).*

The Martini- Henry was a single-shot lever-actuated breech-loading rifle used by the British armies since 1871 (Manning 2013:15). The rifle was a combination of two rifles; the Swiss-Hungarian Friedrich von Martini and the Scot Alexander Henry (Manning 2013:8). These were chosen after multiple tests were done on a number of rifles to find the best one.

From the survey and documentation, it was found that there is only one item that was found at the battlefield and matched an item found at the museum. This was the spear or assegai used by amaZulu during conflicts. The piece of a broken spear (see figure 5) was found on the battlefield surface.



Figure 5: *Broken piece of metal believed to be a spear (Maripane 2015).*

It was later found that such spears were common weapons used by amaZulu and amaSwazi during the Anglo-Zulu War and other conflicts. Maggs (1991), studied these weapons found across KwaZulu-Natal and found out that they had different shapes and sizes (see figure 6 below).

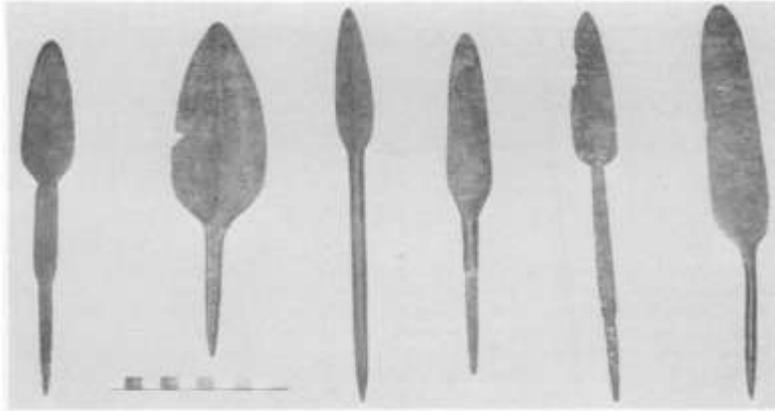


Figure 6: A number of spears from KwaZulu-Natal (Maggs 1991:132).

The circled spear shows similarities to the metal piece found on the Ntombe battlefield. This shows evidence that there was conflict in the area. A number of large engraved rocks were also found on the battlefield. The engravings reflected images of spears and mountains. It is no surprise that the materials of war that information is available on includes the weapons (Martini-Henry rifle and the Zulu spear). Generally, there is the assumption that weapons indicate the imagery of power and are associated with adult males (Gilchrist 2013:5).

The overall results of this research revealed that the materials found at the Ntombe battlefield and those found at the museum do not share similarities. There is no evidence of the British on the landscape except the memorial and mass grave embedded on the battlefield. The materials from the museum reflect a much more military story, while the material from the battlefield reflects a story of earlier human occupation on the landscape.

Discussion

The artefacts found on the landscape of the Ntombe battlefield can be attributed to the people who settled in this area prior to the battle. According to Zulu (2002), the Khubeka people under Chief Manyonyoba settled in this area in the 18th century. Materials found on the landscape such as pottery, are evidence of site occupation. All the pottery pieces found on the battlefield were not decorated. Oral history records that before the Anglo-Zulu War, Zulu pottery was not decorated. Decorations only came after the period of the war; this shows that the site had been occupied prior to the war.

The metal spear and engraved rocks show that there had been conflict in the area; either the spear was used during the Anglo-Zulu War or prior to that. Historical literature (Visagie 2014:117), records that conflicts were inevitable. The occupants of this landscape also took part in conflicts with other tribes or African groups, especially in this area where the Ntombe battlefield is located. Thus the area came to be known as the “disputed territory” (Laband & Thompson 1990: 183; Greaves 1997:2; Laband 2009:69). Conflicts were usually over land or for one chief to overthrow another. Therefore the Ntombe landscape did not coincidentally become a battlefield during the night when the British were attacked. Although there is no physical material that can prove these events yet.

The Mthonjaneni Zulu Historical Museum is a privately-owned museum and comprises some of the largest collections of artefacts from the Anglo-Zulu War in South Africa. The material at this museum were supposedly collected by local farmers over the years and donated to the museum. It would seem that the majority of these materials were collected at this battlefield prior to the year 1997, when there was no law prohibiting the collection of material with national or historical significance. Currently, it is considered by law that collection of archaeological or historical material for personal purposes is prohibited. Before the year 1997 it was not considered illegal to collect artefacts from battlefields. When these battlefields were regarded as part of heritage, legislation was then introduced, prohibiting any artefact removal. The National Monuments Act, KwaZulu Monuments Act and KZN Heritage Act (Act 10 of 1997) states that “all battlefields are protected. It is also illegal to remove any artefact from a battlefield, or to make use of equipment such as a metal detector to find such artefacts, unless with the authority of a permit”. Individuals who had collected and were in possession of material from these sites were offered the chance to register them with Amafa⁸ (see accession numbers in table 2).

During an interview with the owner and manager of the museum, he mentioned that most of the material at the museum was collected by local farmers around the 1930s. This means that these materials were collected approximately 51 years after the battle of Ntombe took place. It can be debated that some of these material had not been lying around the surface of the landscape for 51 years. The argument is that the materials might have been buried under the surface and washed out or brought to surface by land erosion caused by rain, floods or farming activities.

While the museum has a good reference of the materials from the battlefield, there are not enough details regarding some of the material found in the glass cabinets of the museum, except the short description and explanation note close to each material. The descriptions on the labels next to the material in the glass cabinets explain specifically where the materials were picked up. For example some of the description explains that the particular material was picked up near Capt. Moriarty’s tent etc. The accuracy of these notes can be questioned. Since the materials were picked up by the local farmers, did they have knowledge about the battlefield or perhaps maps to use as reference to the exact location of the materials they collected?

As already mentioned, there are no similarities between the material from the battlefield and the museum, with some exceptions. Although we cannot see many similarities between the materials found on the battlefield and those found at the museum, it is difficult to draw conclusions that the materials do not relate or that the military materials are not from Ntombe. Oral history records support that the material of conflict was collected from the Ntombe battlefield. It does make sense that the local farmers would collect military materials and leave behind the pottery pieces that look like rocks to most people.

Conclusion

Since no excavations have been done at the Ntombe battlefield, the project relied on the survey and already available materials from the battlefield to establish a correlation of the

⁸ Amafa is the provincial heritage conservation agency for KwaZulu-Natal.

available artefacts from our survey and the museum. The materials showed no similarities except in the case of the metal spear found on the battlefield. Even so, the archaeological materials found at both the battlefield and the museum gave a broader perspective on the battle of Ntombe and the landscape in which this battle was fought (Maripane 2017:112).

What the materials revealed is that the landscape of the battle of Ntombe had multiple use (i) it was a settlement and farming area for the Khubeka people who stayed there some years before the Anglo-Zulu War took place. The material such as the pottery pieces do not show any cultural transition, so this means the same group occupied this area over a longer period of time. If, by any chance, other groups were conquered and joined the Khubeka people, then they may have also adopted their pottery tradition, (ii) although there have always been minor battles in the area, it became part of a larger war and was turned into a battlefield, (iii) it now serves as part of a national heritage, with its graves and memorial and is still used for farming activities.

At the moment it is very early to conclude on this study. More conclusions can be drawn after another systematic survey and an excavation take place in the battlefield. All the materials from the battlefield, museum and those that will be found during an excavation will need to be compared and analysed in order to see a pattern or link between these materials.

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