

Metal thieves damage KZN monument

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Witness Reporter



Scrap metal thieves have struck again. This time they have once again vandalised the memorial to fallen Zulu warriors at Isandlwana, the most visited battlefield in KwaZulu-Natal.

Amafa, the provincial heritage body and the site's custodian, has appealed to scrap metal dealers to look out for the two distinctive thorns from the isiQu (bravery necklace), which were removed from the memorial in northern KZN near Nqutu.

Amafa has also offered a reward for information leading to the whereabouts of the thieves.

James van Vuuren, deputy director of Amafa, said he believes that increased prices for scrap metal were the motive for the vandalism.

"We will obviously have to restore it, but it is a tragedy that a memorial of such significance to the Zulu people and the country has been vandalised. We are now worried about other memorials.

Apart from their heritage value, these are important components of the provincial tourism offering."

The Battle of Isandlwana was fought on January 22, 1879, between the Zulu army and the British forces.

"It was a decisive Zulu victory, which reverberated around the world. Today the battlefield and its memorials draw thousands of local and international visitors," Van Vuuren said.

He said that until 1994 there was no adequate memorial to the Zulus who had died, though there

were many to the opposing forces. Amafa duly commissioned Pietermaritzburg sculptor Gert Swart to design a memorial, which was unveiled by King Goodwill Zwelithini on the 120th anniversary of the battle. Many amakhosi and their constituencies helped to pay for it with cash or cattle.

"It (memorial) consists of a circular concrete platform symbolising the traditional Zulu homestead. Four bronze headrests reinforce the idea of final rest, while the bronze necklace of thorns echoes the bravery necklace given by the king," said Van Vuuren.

"It also suggests izimpondo zenkomo (the horns of the bull), the encircling tactics perfected by King Shaka and used with such skill and precision at Isandlwana.

"The battlefield has a cattle fence, but no security barrier, as we didn't expect this to happen. We will have to look at more protective measures," Van Vuuren said.

Swart said that this is not the first time the memorial has been damaged. He said he notified Amafa in 2003 when it had suffered similar damages. He said thieves levered the thorns up and snapped them off.

He complained that there is insufficient information about the memorial for visitors to Isandlwana.