

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

INTRODUCTION:

As combined works of nature and humankind, cultural landscapes express a long and intimate relationship between people and their natural environment¹ and reveal people's relationship with the land over time and form part of the national heritage of a country and people's lives. Certain sites reflect specific techniques of land use whilst others are associated with powerful beliefs and artistic and traditional customs.²

Cultural landscapes can range from sacred places and cemeteries to industrial areas, public gardens and farmlands.

According to section 3(2)(c) of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25 of 1999, the national estate may include landscapes and natural features of cultural significance. Cultural significance is defined by the above Act as any place or object that has aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, linguistic or technological value or significance.

For example, the Mapungubwe cultural site that is situated against the northern border of South Africa where it abuts the borders of Zimbabwe and Botswana in the Limpopo province is a declared World Heritage Site and is known as the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape. It was so declared as it represents an unrivalled and visible picture of the development of social and political structures and human interaction over some 400 years between AD 900 and 1300.³

MATIMBA-MARANG-DINALEDI STUDY AREA:

The majority of the land in the study area is privately owned and many of these properties feature game farms, with the remainder comprising agricultural land. The rest of the study area features community settlements, nature reserves and mining activities. The towns of Thabazimbi, Northam, Rustenburg and Brits fall within the study area.

To the north of the Magaliesberg and the west of the Great Escarpment, stretches a vast savanna region that is popularly known as the 'bushveld' and forms the dominant ecology of the study area.

Stone walled sites are abundant in and near the study area that date from the Late Iron Age. The study area is also characterised by areas that were previously part of the so-called Black homeland, Bophuthatswana and large sections have been and are being intensively mined.

The social impact specialist for the project undertook a socio-economic survey of the study area and it was established that there was a strong cultural attachment to the study area from both landowners and those living on communal land. Certain communities have lived in the study

¹ <http://whc.unesco.org/exhibits/cultland/landscape.htm>, p.1

² *ibid*, p.1

³ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1099>, p.1

area since the eighteenth century so it can be safely assumed that place attachment is strong amongst these communities.

When asked if the 3 x 400kV lines should be placed together in one corridor or next to existing lines or spread out, many landowners indicated that they lines should be placed together so that the impact of the lines is limited to one area or corridor. The impact of a single corridor of power lines as opposed to 3 separate lines on the cultural landscape is difficult to assess as it could be determined that a single corridor of power lines would have less of an overall impact.

However, specific landscapes such as areas of stone walled sites may be more heavily impacted on by a single corridor as the sense of place or historical value could be seen to be lessened by the presence of the proposed power lines. However, whether it is three lines or one line crossing the landscape some may say that the landscape will be negatively impacted on unless the landscape is an industrial landscape where the power lines may positively impact on the overall industrial feel of the area.

Much of what cultural landscapes are is also about the choices people have made with regard to their interaction with the natural environment. What is emerging from the public participation process for the project is that people are choosing to oppose the building of power lines in their areas. They are increasingly doing this not on an individual basis but from a group point of view where groups are arguing that their area is either pristine and should not be impacted on or that their area has already been impacted on by existing infrastructure developments and they want no more. They want to preserve what they have.

Whether this argument comes from game farmers/eco-tourism operators in live in pristine bushveld areas or the Bafokeng whose land is severely impacted on by mining and electrical infrastructure, they believe that their area or landscape is worth preserving and power lines will negatively impact on this. Humankind often believes that they “cannot survive and fulfil themselves unless there is a landscape to hold them together in a group”.⁴

MATIMBA-MARANG CORRIDOR

Along the proposed corridor for this line, stone walled settlements occur on most of the isolated, scattered norite hills close to the Marang substation, at the eastern end of the Makgope Mountain, along the western edge of the Thaba-ea-Napa mountain range and on koppies to the north and south of Marang substation. These stone walled sites are evidence of early historical settlements and political/social systems and form a distinctive trace of past communities.

The impact of the proposed power line is seen to be limited as the heritage specialist sees the avoidance of the stone walled sites as sufficient mitigation.⁵ The impact on the cultural landscape of the single 400kV line is not seen to be severe, although place attachment appears to be strong, even though the study area is already impacted on by existing power lines, road and rail infrastructure and extensive mining development especially east and south east of the Pilanesberg.

⁴ <http://www.icls.harvard.edu/language/hist1.html>, p.5

⁵ Executive Summary of Heritage Impact Report compiled by Dr. J. Pistorius, February 2007

Although landowners have stated that the power line will impact on sites of significance on the individual properties, these appear to be site specific and cultural landscapes are seldom site specific.

MATIMBA-DINALEDI CORRIDOR

Until Spitskop, the proposed Marang and Dinaledi power lines run parallel to one another. From Spitskop, the 2 x 400kV Dinaledi lines turn to run in a southeasterly direction towards Brits. The area from Spitskop is characterised by intensive mining, communal land and formal and informal settlements interspersed with a few game farms and subsistence farming.

The heritage specialist has stated that there are no known stone walled sites in the above area, hence the impact of the proposed 2 x 400kV lines is expected to be minimal.

When asked if the 2 x 400kV lines should be placed together in one corridor or next to existing lines or spread out, many landowners indicated that they lines should be placed together so that the impact of the lines is limited to one area or corridor. The impact of a single corridor of power lines as opposed to 2 separate lines on the cultural landscape is difficult to assess as it could be stated that by limiting the lines to a single corridor the overall impact will be lessened.

However, specific landscapes such as areas of stone walled sites may be more heavily impacted on by a single corridor as the sense of place or historical value could be seen to be lessened by the presence of the power lines. However, whether it is 2 lines or 1 line crossing the landscape some may say that the mere presence of the landscape will be negatively impacted on unless the landscape that is being crossed is an industrial landscape where the power lines may positively impact on the overall landscape.

Much of what cultural landscapes are is also about the choices people have made with regard to their interaction with the natural environment. What is emerging from the public participation process for the project is that people are choosing to oppose the building of power lines in their areas. They are increasingly doing this not from an individual point of view but are arguing that their area is either pristine and should not be impacted on as there are very few pristine areas left or they are arguing that their area has been impacted on enough by infrastructure developments and they want no more. They want to preserve what they have.

The cultural landscape potential of areas that have been and are in the process of been intensively mined and populated and criss-crossed with a variety of infrastructure is often seen to be low. The cultural landscape of the area could be determined however as being that of an industrial landscape that although not attractive to look at, it is still a recognisable landscape.

CONCLUSION:

The impact of the proposed 400kV power lines on cultural landscapes in the study area is expected to be low. There are no extensive landscapes in the study area apart from the Pilanesberg and several stonewalled sites that can and must be avoided during the construction of the power lines. The Pilanesberg is avoided by the power lines hence the impact on this site is negligible.