



## Past Projects

# Noetzie

The Archaeology Contracts Office was asked by Pezula Private Estate (Pty) Ltd to assess the site of a proposed swimming pool in front of one of the famous Noetzie “castles” along the Western Cape coast near Knysna. A short way to the east, the Noetzie River enters the sea via an estuary and rocky shoreline is found at either end of the sandy beach providing optimal foraging opportunities for shellfish. The ACO conducted test excavations to determine the significance of scattered marine shells scattered throughout the gardens, found that the pool would be situated in a large Late Stone Age shell midden. Full mitigation of the area of the swimming pool was requested by HWC and as a result, two excavation seasons were undertaken in late 2006 and early 2007. In total 27 square meters were excavated. Two burials were recovered.



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Our reconstruction of events suggested that the site experienced natural sand accumulation for several millennia, probably beginning immediately after the maximum high stand of the mid-Holocene sea level, resulting in a prominent sand dune forming at the base of the forested hillside. This dune was attractive for human settlement and about 6000 years ago people began exploiting the marine shellfish that must have been abundant on the nearby rocks at either end of the beach, depositing the marine and other terrestrial food residues as a midden on the dune. Through the years many layers built up with some being sandier when people were less active, and others having very dense shell reflecting intensive use of the site. Radiocarbon dates for the site range from the oldest 5800±40 (4147 (4077) 4024 BC) to 2240±30 (258 (292) 343 AD). Large samples of stone artefacts, shellfish, bone, pottery and ostrich eggshell was recovered and analysed.

Noetzie Midden provided an excellent opportunity to obtain a large sample of Holocene archaeological material from an open midden on the Cape south coast, to date, the only systematically excavated open midden from the broader area. Whereas archaeological observations from cave sites are relatively common, only limited work has been done on open sites. The very deep sequence probably spans some 5000 years and provides good comparative material for other south coast sites. Burials are common in south coast caves and the pattern seems to be true on deep open middens as well. (Adapted from an unpublished report).



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