

ZIMBABWE

**Nyanga Archaeology:
Mapping the Past and Plans
for the Future**

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gullies associated with Nyanga’s distinctive hill slope terracing, “are indeed hushing channels”, a possibility I had introduced in my paper published in the proceedings of the International Mining History Congress, RSA, April 2012: [http://www.imhc.co.za/assets/pdf/papers/Kritzinger%20IMHC%20paper%20\[final%20with%20pics\].pdf](http://www.imhc.co.za/assets/pdf/papers/Kritzinger%20IMHC%20paper%20[final%20with%20pics].pdf).

Dr Strassburger concluded that ‘pit structures’ sited among remains of ore-washing and ore-dressing floors were purpose-built plants for the gravity concentration of gold. All taken together, these features “form a carefully engineered system for mining and processing eluvial gold. It is unique, and therefore of value to study not only for Zimbabwe” (personal communication 2014).

Strassburger will be returning to the precolonial mining sites of Nyanga next year when mapping of the features will be his first priority. Depending on adequate funding, all activities will be connected to educational programs for Zimbabwe’s universities and schools, with consciousness developed for the country’s history and heritage as well as environment.

Introduction

Throughout 2014 my research in the Nyanga Mountains of Zimbabwe’s Eastern Highlands -aspects of which have been published in *Nyame Akuma* Nos. 73, 77, and 78 - gained international interest. The highlight was ten days in the field with German mining archaeologist Dr. Martin Strassburger in September.

Confirmation From Germany

Based on his wide experience of the typology of early-mining landscapes in Europe, it was to Strassburger “directly apparent that the terraces and so called ‘pit structures’ have absolutely nothing to do with agriculture” (personal communication 2014). Sketching schematics on the spot, he identified heavy-metal exploitation in all surface modifications of the nine unpopulated sites we visited across a straight-line distance of 40km. He verified that



Figure 1: Detail of a Nyanga mountain with ‘ancient terracing’ marked on hillslopes. Many of the rivers, with their source in the mountains such as the one on the right of the map, are illegally panned for gold. Copyright: Surveyor-General, Harare.

Pointer From New Zealand

Mapping provides the answer to an astute observation by Dr Rosanne Hawarden, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand: “If the terraces are equally on the southern and northern slopes of the Nyanga hills, this will be a big factor in your favour” (personal communication 2014) in the debate Mining vs Farming. In fact the terraces face all points of the compass, as can be seen immediately by checking the contour lines on the Surveyor-General’s 1:50000 topographical maps for Nyanga district.

Compiled by stereoplotted from areal photography of the 1970s, the more extensive flights of artificial terraces are marked ‘ancient terracing’. Figure 1 reveals that their orientation faces all points of the compass. Figure 2 is a close-up of a valley too small in extent for terracing to register from the air. In September 2008 three members of the Geological Society of Zimbabwe sampled mineralized vein-quartz on the ground, and found that quartz chippings from the walls of gullies contained residues of gold. The assay results are recorded in Figure 2 with those from tunnels and drains of stone-built structures similar to the example shown in plan and section in Figure 3.

Plans From Zimbabwe

An archaeological team from National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) brought topographical mapping into the research in December 2013. Their survey of a ‘pit structure’ at Nyanga’s Claremont Golf Course (Figure 3) reveals that the standardized design is a tank built into a freestanding platform. Their professionally mapped section of the structure, a detail not published in previous research, reveals that it is unsuitable as a pen for stallfeeding ‘dwarf’ cattle, the theory widely published as the function of these features. As Strassburger found inside the tunnels of the 29 tanks he examined in September, only his human ability to twist at the waist allowed him to negotiate their

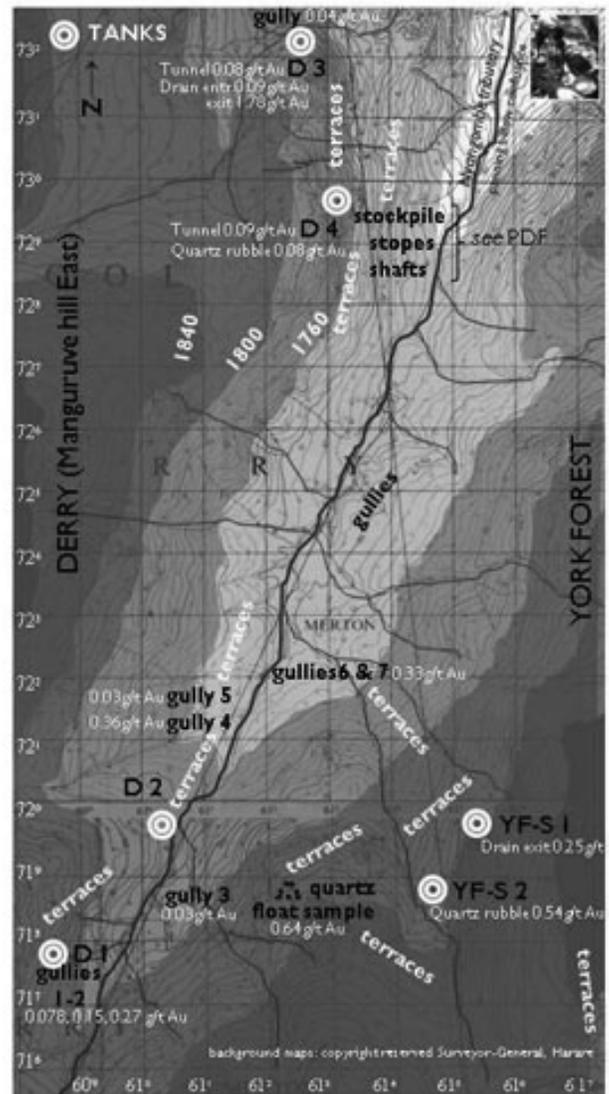


Figure 2: Close-up of a valley in Nyanga south, with a record of assays of gold in samples taken from the archaeology. These ore- and residue-type results are significantly higher than background trace values at less than 0.005g per tonne Au. The stream running the length of the valley joins the Nyangombe river 600m north of the map. At the confluence (image inset top right) Kudzai Musiwa, University of Zimbabwe’s senior lecturer in Mining and Metallurgy, witnessed colors of gold in every panful at an exhibition of American equipment donated to the university by Rege Podraza in May 2009. One of Nyanga’s main rivers, the lower course of the Nyangombe is the Ruenya. Tributary of the Zambesi, it was known for alluvial gold by the Portuguese in the early 1500s. Background map, copyright: Surveyor-General, Harare.

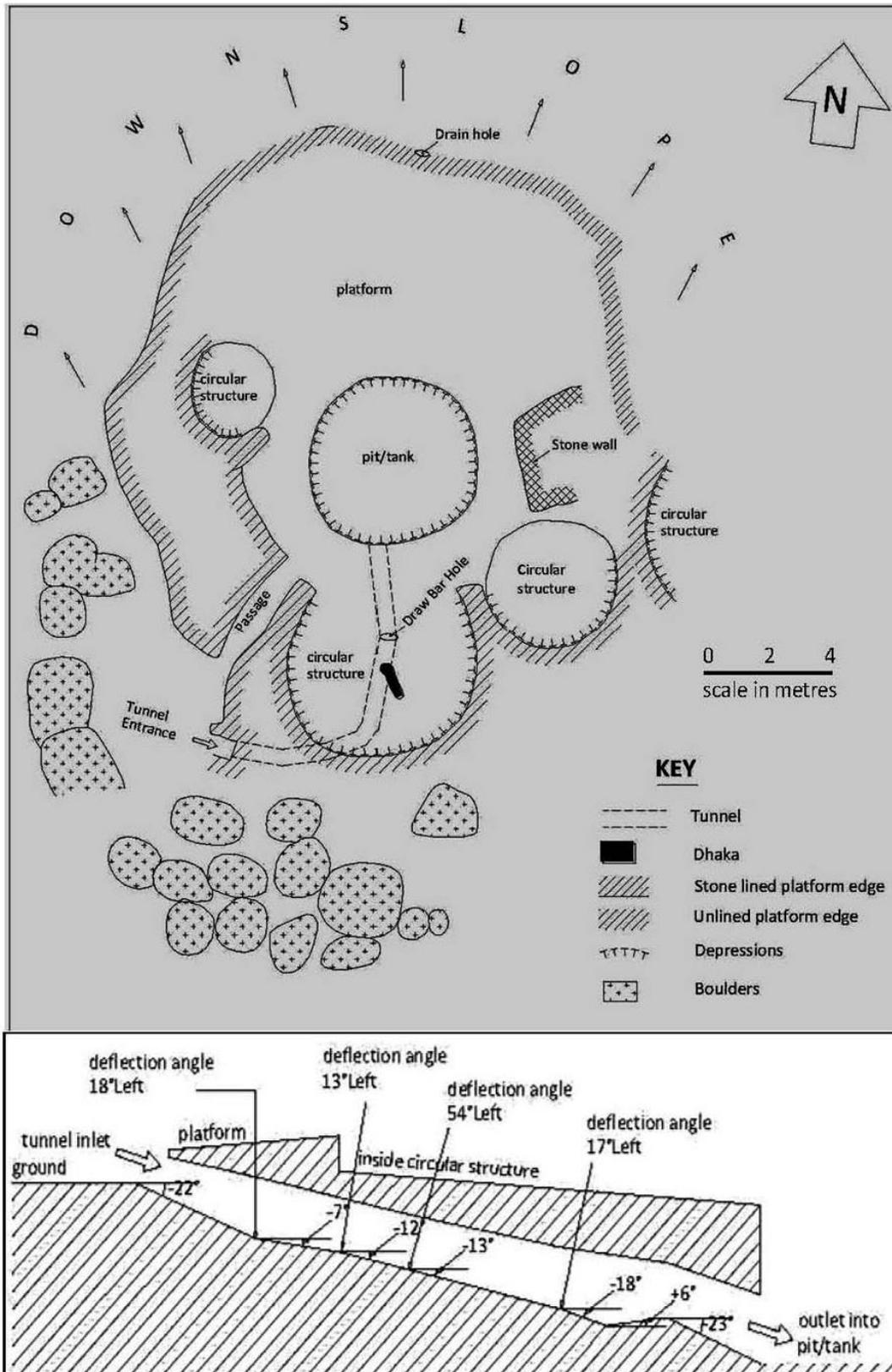


Figure 3: Topographical mapping undertaken by chief archaeologist Kundishora Chipunza and surveyor Justin Magadzike of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe at Green 3, Claremont Golf Course, Nyanga.

standardized curve, an impossible feat for bovine conformation. Figure 3 shows a 54-degree deflection and also the restricted dimensions of the uphill entrance to the surveyed tank.

A 200m water channel feeding the surveyed tank has been traced in the golf course rough. An uphill entrance for cattle entering a *danga* (pole-built corral) is contra to traditional practice: the gate is always built downhill to prevent inflow of water. The agricultural theory needs cattle stallfed in ‘pits’ to provide the manure postulated as essential for raising the fertility of the antiprogenic soils of the terraces for cultivation. But English loan words used for this imported farming practice are diagnostic: *manyowa* and *fetiraiza* – with *hei* for stallfeeding in contrast to the many traditional Shona names for plants and grasses grazed by cattle out to pasture.

The four features captioned ‘circular structures’ on the platform of the surveyed tank are due for archaeological excavation. The blueprint for these features is a ring of stones without postholes. Indicating open work bays, it questions the validity of the thatched huts built with wattle poles and mud-plastered walls at the Pit Dwelling Restoration open to visitors to Nyanga National Park. Wattle is as late an introduction to Zimbabwe as the words manure, fertilizer and hay.