U. SHORES

Field Note U12a9. Archaeology - Fish traps – Breede River Mouth

The west wall of the Breede River Mouth fish trap.
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There are twenty-eight sites of intertidal fish trap clusters along the Cape South Coast, eight of which are along the shores of the Study Area. They are (from southwest to northeast): Suiderstrand, Rasperpunt, Cape Agulhas, Struis Bay, Struis Point, Ryspunt, Skipskop and Breede River, containing in total >100 traps of all shapes and sizes (Figure 1). This Field Note is about the trap at the Breede River Mouth.

Figure 1. Satellite image (rotated) showing the locations of fish trap clusters in the Study Area. Arrow points to the Breede River Mouth.
The fish trap on the southern side of the Breede River mouth is located some 600m west of Kabaljoubank (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Topography map (top) and satellite image (bottom) of the Breede River Mouth, showing the location of the fish trap (arrow).
This fish trap was noted by other researchers, and described by Lucy Valeska Kemp, in her unpublished MSc Thesis ‘Ancient stonewall fish traps on the south coast of South Africa – documentation, current use, ecological effects and management implications’, 2006. She shows an old aerial photograph (no date given) with the tracing of this trap (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Aerial photograph of the fishtrap on the south bank of the Breede River Mouth.  

The fish trap is the smallest and least impressive of all the fish traps, which are described in this chapter. It has a trapeze shape, with the north wall about 100 m long, and the side walls about 15 m long each (it is, therefore, much smaller than that, which was presented in the above photograph: the perimeter is only about 130 m, and the area is less than 2000 m²).

This fish trap is the only one of the traps described in this chapter, which is located in a river mouth. It is, thus, subject not only to the waves and tides, but also to the river level fluctuations and relatively strong currents in the flood channel (up to 3 knots, or 1.5 m/sec) (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Map of the Breede River Mouth. Arrow points to the location of the trap.  
The traps walls are quite low (or they have been partly destroyed by waves and currents), and hardly protrude the water. In most satellite images the trap is submerged (Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5. Satellite images of the fish trap on the south bank of the Breede River Mouth (top - 2011, bottom – 2012).
Figure 6. Satellite images of the fish trap on the south shore of the Breede River Mouth (top - 2014, probably taken at very low tide and low river level; bottom – 2016).
The trap is located on the bank of a flood channel, where currents could have damaged the trap walls (Figure 7).

Figure 7. The trap, two hours before low tide (and in the middle of rainy winter, which resulted in higher river water levels). Top – view to the north; bottom – view to the northeast. White arrow points to the partly submerged west wall. Yellow arrow points to the totally submerged north wall. (To see the fully exposed trap, a time of very low tide should be selected).