

N7C 40 File (closed)

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(part II)

July 86 - April 90

Good desc. of catchways of Ndingi  
in 20 maps of NPL.

PLAN OF DINGAAN'S HUT GROUP

and

RECONSTRUCTION OF DINGAAN'S HUT,

DINGAAN'S KRAAL, ZULULAND.

Surveyed 7th March, 1959.

NOTES ON THE HUTS AT DINGAAN'S KRAAL, ZULULAND.  
(To accompany the plan and hut reconstruction )

General.

The hut floors, baked hard when the whole kraal was fired by Dingaan as he abandoned the settlement in 1838, are frequently very clearly defined and, from these, accurate reconstruction is possible. The following points apply generally and must be borne in mind in drawing up a plan of the kraal or in attempting any reconstruction of the kraal :-

1. The hearth is always placed towards the entrance and not in a central position. This still applies in modern Zulu huts.
2. The umsamo, the place where the pots were stored, is always at the back of the hut. It is marked off by a curved moulded ridge.
3. From a consideration of these factors the entrance can be determined and it is evident that the huts faced down the slope. The huts of Dingaan's wives and umDlunkulu were sited at the head of the kraal and thus faced down into the central open space. Those of the warriors and of Dingaan himself on the eastern slope faced in a north-easterly or easterly direction and those of the warriors on the western slope faced in a westerly or north-westerly direction.
4. The extent of the hut floor can be determined by an irregular rim of carbon fused into the edge of the clay floor and resulting from the mass of burning thatch and wattle which slid down to the base.

Reconstruction of Hut A.

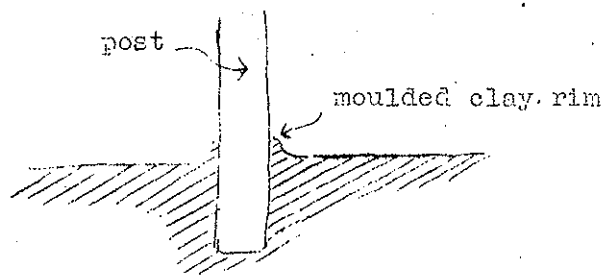
Dingaan's own personal group consisted of five huts, the floors of three of them having been completely cleared. Hut D is revealed by its hearth and hut E by its umsamo but the limits of the floors of these huts have not been determined.

Hut A, which is regarded as Dingaan's Council Hut, is the same size as many others in the kraal, namely 21 feet in diameter. This agrees with the measurement given by Cloete, who stated that "it is twenty feet wide" (quoted in Holden, William C.; History of the Colony of Natal, 1855, p. 87), and with the description given by Piet Retief who also estimated the diameter as about 20 feet (quoted in The Monuments of South Africa, 2nd Edition, 1949, p. 96). The statements by some writers (e.g. Champion) that Dingaan's hut was exceptionally large is not supported by a survey of the hut nor by the descriptions of early visitors.

The height of the hut is more difficult to determine as figures vary from 8 to 20 feet. Cloete, whose description of other details which can be confirmed is usually correct, gave the height as 8 feet and this figure has been used in the reconstruction. This

results in a rather flattened appearance but Gardiner states that the hut "was of sufficient height to stand erect with a hat in almost every part" (Journey to the Zoola Country). This confirms a flattened outline and also supports the figure of 8 feet given by Cloete. Champion stated that the hut was about twenty feet high (in Bird's Annals of Natal, p. 204) but this must be rejected in view of the size of the floor area and the figures given by Cloete and Gardiner.

The one feature in which the floor of hut A differs from that of other huts is the presence of a number of post holes, about 6 inches in diameter. These are recognisable by the fact that the clay floor was moulded up around the base of the post and in two instances charred remains of the posts were found in the holes.



POST HOLE

Gardiner states that "the framework was supported by three parallel rows of posts, four in the middle and three on each side" and he gives a sketch showing the arrangement. Eight post holes can definitely be determined; namely the two outer rows of three and the two post holes on each side of the hearth which supported the izinsika, the posts usually found in a Zulu hut today. The other two post holes of the middle row have been considerably broken by plant action.

It is interesting to note the varying estimates of the number of posts given by different writers. Retief stated that there were twenty-two pillars (op. cit.). Champion gives the number as nine and huts with nine posts, arranged in three rows, are still in use (Bryant: Zulu-English Dictionary). Gardiner seems the more reliable and agrees with the existing remains if the two damaged post holes are accepted.

The posts of Dingaans' hut were of a special kind of mimosa (umNgandane) (Colenso: Zulu Dictionary) and were completely covered with beads (Retief). A blue bead was found in one of the post holes.

The hut covering probably had a similar timber framework to that still in use and impressions of timbers, about an inch in diameter, were found in masses of baked clay. This framework was covered with grass over which a number of mats, isiHlandla,  
about/ 3. ....

about three feet wide, were arranged in overlapping rows to throw off the rain (Cloete: op. cit.). The finial which crowned the thatch was, according to Cloete, called the tsikongo, 'pinnacle of the house or temple'. This was constructed from a "very long piece of matting rolled into the form required".

The hut floor was of ant-heap and clay, beaten and polished with a stone. A remarkably smooth surface was produced and this was darkened with fat and ox blood and polished until it shone like a mirror (Retief). When the hut was burned down the floor was baked hard, producing a structure almost identical to that of the hut floors at Zimbabwe and other Southern Rhodesian and Northern Transvaal ruins. Around the edge the floor curved upwards like the rim of a saucer.

At the back of the hut is the umsamo, marked off by a curved moulded clay ridge. Pots and other household possessions were kept in the umsamo where they were assured of protection by the medicines placed there by the medicine-man when the hut was erected. Masses of broken pots were recovered from the umsamo. The umsamo is the most sacred part of an Zulu hut but in Dingaan's hut this was particularly so for the guardian spirits of the tribe occupied his umsamo and offerings were made to them there.

The hearth, iziko, is situated near the front of the hut and about 5 feet from the entrance, as is still the custom. It is a circular depression, 6 inches deep and 3 feet in diameter, surrounded by a neatly-fashioned moulded clay rim. This is confirmed by Gardiner who states that "the fireplace, as is usual in all their houses, is situated about one-third of the whole diameter from the door, to which it is exactly opposite and exhibits, for a Zoola device, a considerable degree of taste, the raised sides being waved in the form shown in the plate at the end, instead of the general pattern - an exact circle". Gardiner shows a wavy outline in his sketch. The outer edge of this hearth is considerably broken but one part of the crenellated edge is preserved (see photograph).

There is nothing to indicate the position of the entrance but it is invariably opposite the umsamo and in front of the entrance and it has been shown in that position on the plan. This is confirmed by Gardiner's description and sketch.

The remains of the floor of Hut A conform so exactly to Gardiner's description as to leave little doubt that this was actually Dingaan's hut.

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10th MARCH, 1959.