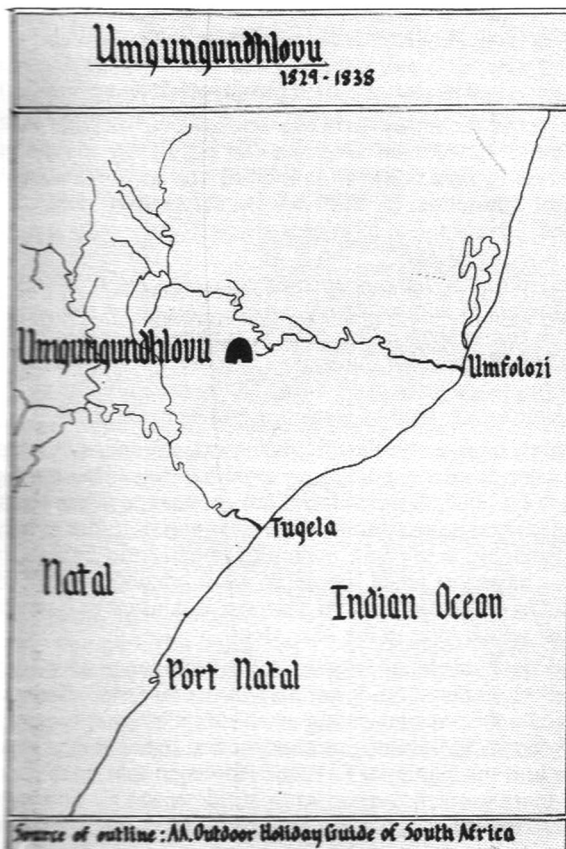


A PHYSICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF MGUNGUNDHLOVU—DINGANE'S KRAAL—CIRCA 1837 BASED ON EYE WITNESS ACCOUNTS AND SUPPORTED BY AUTHORITATIVE STUDIES

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Introduction

After assassinating his half-brother Shaka, who was the Zulu king, and his other brother Mlangane, in 1828, Dingane determined to erect a new capital for Zululand in the Emakhoseni valley. He selected the site on which to build an impressive new military kraal in the mid-winter of 1829¹, in the Zulu heartland away from the foreign influences of the whites at Port Natal. It was from this new kraal that he wished to inaugurate his reign. The Emakhoseni valley, otherwise known as the "cradle of the Zulu clan, and the birthplace of the Zulu Nation" is particularly relevant and significant to Zulu History due to the fact that it constituted the entire area of the original Zulu tribe from which Shaka built the great and dreaded Zulu Nation which induced the Difaquane. The graves of Nkosinkulu, Phunga, Mageba, Ndaba, Jama, Senzangkhona and Dinuzulu (who were all Zulu kings prior to Shaka) may be found in the valley. Thus the Emakhoseni valley, "the valley of the kings" or "Burial Place of kings"² was hallowed ground and reserved for royal kraals only.

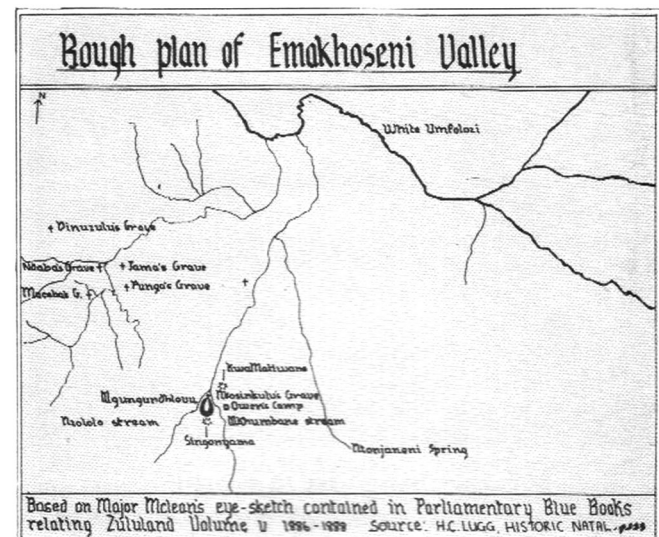


Name of the Kraal

Dingane's impressive new Royal kraal was given the name Mgungundhlovu. Of the variety of definitions of Mgungundhlovu offered, two distinct groups of variations can be distinguished: those dealing with Dingane's plot to assassinate Shaka; "The Secret Condave of the king"³ and "The secret meeting of the king"⁴. The second group deals with the place where the Elephant (Dingane) resides; "The Place surrounded by the Elephants"⁵, "The Place of the large Elephant"⁶, "The rumbling noise of the Elephant"⁷, "The Place where the Elephant lives and his its being"⁸ and "The enclosure of the Royal Elephant"⁹. An encompassing definition could therefore be the place where the Royal Elephant lives and from where he rules his nation.

The Geographical aspect of Mgungundhlovu

The Emakhoseni valley covers approximately 25 000 hectares of land which features the occasional stony hill. There were few trees in the valley, the larger vegetation consisting mainly of aloes, mimosa and euphorbia; the latter had a cauliflower shape and often grew to 21m high¹⁰. Mgungundhlovu was built and completed in 1829¹¹ on a spur of the Ntonjaneni Mountain which formed the eastern boundary¹² of the valley. From the top of this spur of Singonyama or Lion Mountain a view of the entire Emakhoseni Valley is offered. The capital of Zululand was built on this broad and gently sloping ground and was strategically well placed. It was also hygienically well chosen as the excess water from a down-pour was able to move down the slope making drainage efficient.



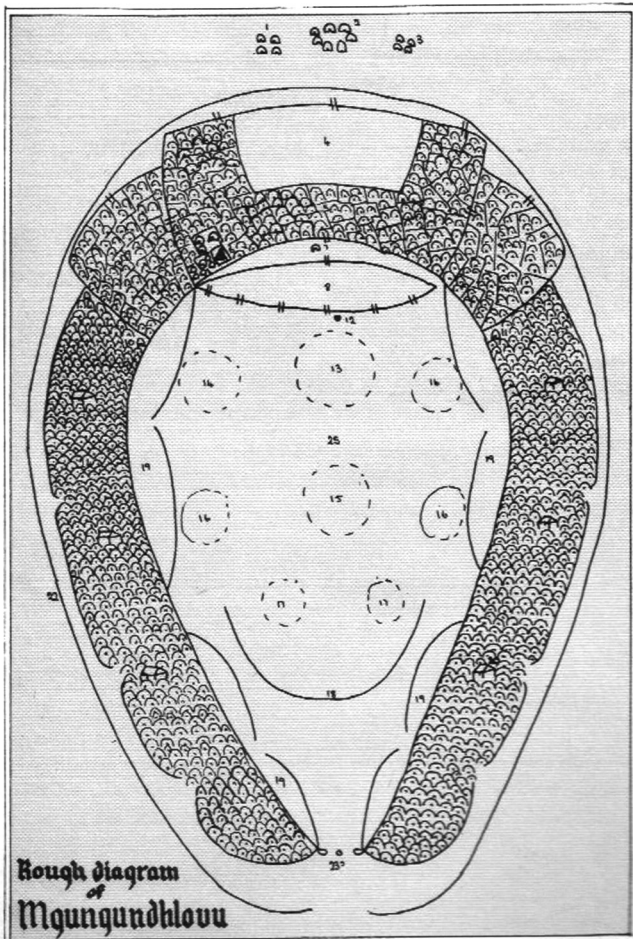
spur and the Nzololo spruit flowed down the western slope¹³. They joined directly below the main gate of the kraal which faced north and the stream continued, as the Mkhumbane stream, to flow into the Umfolozi River. The Ntonjaneni spring was approximately 5 kms¹⁴ away from Mgungundhlovu in a south-easterly direction. It was from here that unpolluted water for the kings use was drawn daily¹⁵. The Ntonjaneni Spring flowed into the Mkhumbane stream after the latter had joined the Nzololo spruit and before it joined the Umfolozi River¹⁶.

Across the Mkhumbane stream is a hill known as Hloma Amabuto (Arm the Soldiers Hill)¹⁷. This hill ends in the north in a promontory known as kwa Matiwane (Hill of execution). This hill was very stony and had only a few stunted bushes as vegetation.

South of the confluence of the Mkhumbane and Nzololo streams, on the ground just below the main entrance of the kraal was a very large and old tree trunk which no one was permitted to touch¹⁸ as Dingane's grandfather Nkosinkulu¹⁹, the founder of the Zulu dynasty was buried there. There were two other trees nearby which were also sacred²⁰. They were milk trees²¹ which consisted of leafless shoots and branches which were brittle and covered with prickles²². Milk trees may be known as Euphorbia trees.

The shape of Mgungundhlovu

When studying the various definitions of Mgungundhlovu, one word is noticeably constant: Elephant. It has been said that the shape of the kraal resembled the shape formed when two elephant tusks are placed on the ground²³ with their bases together and the tips slightly apart. For these two reasons the view cannot be cast aside.



Mgungundhlovu—key to diagram

1. uMvazana
2. uBeje

5. White Isigodhlo
6. Dingane's hut
7. Sentry hut
8. Cattle Kraal where Dingane bathed
9. Black Isigodhlo
10. Ndhlelah's hut
11. Nzobo's hut
12. Dingane's seat
13. Royal cattle
14. Isigodhlo cattle
15. Prince's cattle
16. impakata cattle
17. impakata cattle
18. line where men danced
19. kraal for community cattle
20. uMyango
21. small fences
22. Outer fence: battis
23. Main entrance
24. 'horns' where the warriors had their huts
25. Parade ground

Unless viewed from the air or from a high distant mountain I imagine that it would have been difficult to conceive the exact shape of Mgungundhlovu due to its vast size and position on a spur. It would have appeared from the inside to be circular²⁴ but this was possibly due to the strategical position of the Isigodhlo and Dingane's chair at the top of the parade ground in the kraal. It would not have been possible to walk around the outer perimeter of the kraal to determine the shape as it would have involved walking past the rear entrance of the Isigodhlo and thus instant death for the walker.

Although it has been said that the kraal was circular in shape²⁵, more evidence is given towards the shape being oval⁽²⁶⁾. We are warned that in the drawing of Mgungundhlovu it was simply easier, for reasons of space, to draw a circular form than to draw the actual oval shape and that the kraal was not circular but elliptical²⁷. This oval shape, or more precisely, elliptical shape is more comparable to the elephant tusk theory than that of the circular shape.

The fences of Mgungundhlovu

In diagrams and drawings of Mgungundhlovu the outer fence and other fences are depicted as consisting of straight branches²⁸. This however cannot be true as there were no straight branches in the vicinity. Therefore mimosa²⁹ stumps, intertwined to form an x-shape³⁰ were used to make high hedges of about 1.8m³¹ all around Mgungundhlovu. There were often various species of snakes, especially Boa-Constrictors of approximately 3-4.5m, draped on the fences to warn the snakes in the field to stay away for fear of the same fate³². However the snakes draping themselves on the Isigodhlo fence were quite alive. These green mambas and speckled brown snakes were apparently quite tame³³.

The high hedges had many exits and entrances³⁴ which were often used for toilet requirements. The main entrance was Intuba nkulu³⁵ which faced the confluence of the Nzololo and Mkhumbane streams. This entrance was shut at night by positioning long poles, isipandu, which stood against the central gate-post while the cattle were grazing without the kraal. On either side of this gatepost was another gatepost against which long poles also stood.

Within the outer fence was the cattle kraal fence which was 1.5m³⁶ high, only 0.3m lower than the outer fence. Between these two fences were many smaller fences on the outside of the barracks leaving an open space between the outer fence and the barracks³⁷. Within the Isigodhlo were many high fences which formed an intricate maze³⁸. The main purposes of the fences were to control cattle which were the most valuable asset of the Zulus and defence from attack.

The Isigodhlo

The Isigodhlo was situated at the upper end of Mgungundhlovu, directly opposite the main entrance. It covered an area of approximately 2 acres³⁹. It was in the Isigodhlo that Dingane and his women or umdhlunkulu⁴⁰ lived. It was separated from the rest of the town by a cattle kraal which stretched across the upper end of the kraal with a narrow gate at one end which gave entrance to an area between the white Isigodhlo and the cattle kraal⁴¹. This gate was strictly guarded by a sentry so that no one, apart from those whom the king wished to see, might enter within the space between the cattle kraal and the Isigodhlo, directly opposite the main entrance of the kraal, was a sentry hut for the guards of the seraglio which guarded the inner entrance gate⁴².

Any illegal entrance into the Isigodhlo meant an instant and horrifying death for unforgivable offenders. The gate leading into the Isigodhlo and many within were arched⁴³. This was effected by placing sticks over the gateway parallel to each other and continuing down to the ground on either side⁴⁴. This formed a semi-circle on the top of the gate and gave it an arched appearance.

The Isigodhlo was divided into two sections: the black seraglio and the white seraglio. The white seraglio was in the centre and the black seraglio on either side of it. These were separated from each other by a high fence with an interleading gate⁴⁵. Dingane had his huts in the white seraglio on the side nearest the Mkhumbane stream⁴⁶. Dingane had two huts: his *llawu* or sleeping and eating hut and his hall of audience⁴⁷. These huts were on an eminence and overlooked the whole kraal⁴⁸. Dingane's hut was the largest hut and in a compartment by itself⁴⁹. It was in a triangular shape instead of the common dome shape and was supported by sticks in a curved form⁵⁰. It was supported by 21 pillars which were straight and perpendicular to the ground. They were all covered with patterns of beads⁵¹. The roof inside was wattled or woven and looked like a well braided basket⁵². It was very large and had a remarkable diameter of 7.5-9m⁵³ and a height of 6m⁵⁴. The fireplace in the centre of the floor consisted of a circular raised rim of clay⁵⁵. Within his hut was Dingane's chair⁽⁵⁶⁾ which had been carved with an assegai out of a single block of wood and which was similar in shape to those used by Europeans⁽⁵⁷⁾. The floor of the hut was smooth and highly polished with fat. Surrounding this hut was an open court which could hold up to 80 women on mats⁽⁵⁸⁾. The fence around this court was 2.1-2.4m high and had 3 or 4 gates in it. It was made of wattle branches which were woven together. In this open space was a mound of clay⁽⁵⁹⁾ which was about the size of an ant hill. Dingane would stand on this mound and was able to overlook the entire kraal⁽⁶⁰⁾ from this central position.

Dingane's *llawu* was not as lofty and as spacious as his hall of audience but was nevertheless still important. It was only about 2.4m high and about 6m wide⁶¹. The rods supporting the hut were not horizontal as in the common huts but perpendicular and straight. They were arranged in three parallel lines: four posts in the middle and three on either side. Approximately 3.8m from the door was the fireplace which had walled, raised sides instead of the common circular rim⁶². The floor was rubbed with grease and had a polished appearance. As the ventilation was poor the huts interiors were blackened with smoke⁶³.

It is not clear whether the Matron, Dingane's favourite concubines and personal servants responsible for his food were to be found in the black seraglio or white seraglio but as they lived in the same seraglio as him, they must have lived in the white seraglio. The first Matron was Langazana (daughter of Gubashe) but when she was transferred, Mjanisi, Lenzangakhova's wife became the Matron. A boy who had not yet reached puberty could enter as a servant⁶⁴. The food and beer was not kept in the Matron's hut but in the concubine's huts. Corn was kept in baskets made of reeds or mats in the shape of an inverted cone⁶⁵. Dingane had two huts in the black seraglio in which he stored ivory to trade with the white hunters⁶⁶.

The rest of Dingane's 'umdhlunkulu' lived in the black seraglio which was on either side of the white seraglio. There were approximately 1500 girls and women living there, who were given as tribute to Dingane⁶⁷. The huts were usually grouped in three compartments⁶⁸ or kraals within kraals. The entire Isigodhlo had been divided up by high fences with narrow entrances⁶⁹. This gave rise to an intricate maze⁷⁰ or labyrinth, generally known to the Zulus as Tsikohlo. If a stranger were to find his way into the labyrinth, he would be hopelessly lost⁷¹.

The huts in the Isigodhlo did not have their thatch held together with string but by thin sticks which were done right around the hut, in rows, at intervals⁷². All of the huts had low fences in front of the entrances to prevent wind from blowing into them. The only air and light entering the hut was through the low door and the smoke had to percolate through the thatch.

The huts were constructed by placing three poles in a line and over them a central ridge pole. This would be crossed at right angles, almost in contact with each other and giving the hut great strength. The outside would be thatched and the inside not plastered but black with smoke. The fireplace was usually a circular, elevated rim of clay a little way inside the entrance⁷³.

At the top of the Isigodhlo were numerous gates for the undhlunkulu to move through. Outside the fence was a midden which has erroneously thought to have been Dingane's bathing place⁷⁴. The stench in that area was overpowering due to umdhlunkulu relieving themselves there⁷⁵. Near the Isigodhlo was the Smith's shop where brass work was done. Dried aloe leaves were used for the fire⁷⁶.

Within the kraal, in the Isigodhlo between the black isigodhlo and above the white isigodhlo was the Dancing Square⁷⁷. It was here that the umdhlunkulu danced and entertained Dingane. No warriors were permitted in this area.

Ebheje

Outside of the Isigodhlo, 100 yards from the top of Singonyama⁷⁸ stood three small separate kraals. The central kraal, u Beje or the little outside centre kraal had eight huts⁷⁹. It served as a seraglio for Dingane's chief wives⁸⁰. Dingane was the only male permitted to enter this kraal. Looking up from the kraal's main entrance towards the top of Singonyama, the kraal on the left, uMvazana—the little outside left kraal⁸¹, was used as a slaughter house where beasts for the Royal 'table' were slaughtered⁸². The kraal on the right, kwaMbeceni — the little outside right kraal⁸³, was used as a provision kraal where grain was stored⁸⁴. uMvazana and kwaMbeceni both only had four huts each⁸⁵. These three huts were collectively known as the Ebheje group.

Approximately 800 yards South-west of the Ebheje group was the Spirit kraal which Dingane had built as a repository for Shaka's spirit⁸⁶. The Ebheje and Spirit kraal must not be confused.

Barracks

The main reason why Mgungundhlovu was built was not simply to be yet another Royal kraal, but to be a major military kraal in which the king lived with his warriors. Mgungundhlovu was obviously built with Royal proportions to accommodate the thousands of Zulu warriors. The Regiments had their place of abode in the horns of the kraal stretching from the Isigodhlo round to the tips at the main gate. The warriors were divided up into impi of which there were four in each horn. In charge of each impi was an induna, and in charge of each horn was a chief-induna⁸⁷. The ninth impi was the renowned "White Shields" impi.

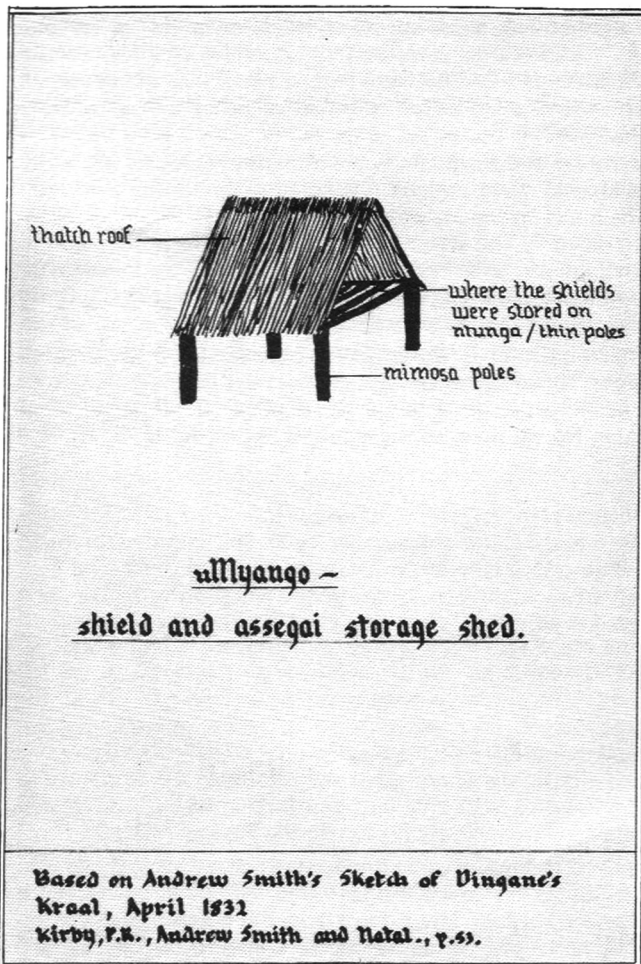
On the right hand side of the principal entrance Nzobo was in command. In this western horn from the Isigodhlo to the main entrance were the Nqobolondo, Mankamane (imikhulutshane), zibolela, Fasimba and Tshoyisa⁸⁹ regiments.

Ndlelah had his huts in the foremost corner of the horn nearest the Mkhumbane stream, next to the black isigodhlo⁹⁰. He had two hundred and fifty wives⁹¹. Nzobo had three huts: one for himself and the others for his wives⁹², in the foremost

corner of the horn next to the Nzololo spruit, next to the black Isigodhlo⁽⁹³⁾ the indunas of the eight impis had one hut and two wives and servants each⁽⁹⁴⁾.

The huts in the horns were six to eight deep in parts⁹⁵. Their construction was similar to those in the Isigodhlo: they were low and sometimes supported with only one pole⁹⁶. Most of the huts were 4,2m wide and 1,5m high. They were thatched and the entrances were low so that one had to crawl in and out; they were the only source of air and light⁹⁷. Up to twenty warriors used to live in one hut.

At fixed distances among the barracks were uMyango or shield huts, in which the shields and possibly the assegais of the warriors were stored. There were six of these rectangular sheds which stood on a basement level with the other huts and were supported on poles. These sheds have thatched roofs⁹⁸. The shields (which belonged to the king and not the warriors)⁹⁹ were stored in these raised structures to keep ants, rats, worms and other pests away.



Around the outside of the regimental huts in both horns were fences. These fences were not continuous but had many gaps¹⁰⁰ so that warriors could move towards the outer fence and out of the main gate easily. This allowed for swift mobilisation and evacuation.

Cattle Kraals and the Parade Ground

As the isigodhlo was without the circle and the shape of Mgungundhlovu was that of two elephant tusks placed on the ground, a vast open space between the two horns, the main entrance and the Isigodhlo would have been left open. It was in this area that the cattle kraals and the parade ground were to be found.

Within the cattle kraal that stretched at the top of Mgungundhlovu, from one side of the kraal to the other, directly below the Isigodhlo, were the cattle which were used for slaughter. It was within this kraal that Dingane washed¹⁰¹. This cattle kraal had one entrance facing the main gate. Just outside this entrance to the west was Dingane's chair where he some-

times sat to watch dancing and parades of his warriors. On the other side of this kraal was another gate¹⁰² through which Dingane could pass to reach the Isigodhlo.

The fence within the barracks was continuous¹⁰³ and thus an enormous cattle kraal was formed in the centre. There were four¹⁰⁴ large cattle kraals which held cattle for the community¹⁰⁵. The two largest ones were at the bottom of the kraal, on either side of the main gate. They were oval in shape with a large indentation in the middle, in which there was a gate through which the cattle could pass. In the cattle kraal on the right of the main entrance were the cattle for the amawombe regiment¹⁰⁶.

Most of the cattle kept at Mgungundhlovu were oxen although there were some milking cows to supply the kraal with milk. The cattle moved out of the kraal each day and returned at night. Each herd had its own special spot within the great enclosure where it was watched by a herdsboy. The whole enclosure was covered with grass except for the places where the herds stood.

In the centre of the kraal, directly below the Isigodhlo and the cattle kraal where the king bathed was the place where a large herd of about three hundred to four hundred cattle. Many of these cattle were white. On either side of this herd were the places where the Isigodhlo cattle stood as no cattle were enclosed in the Isigodhlo. Below these herds, near the fence on either side of the kraal were the places where the impakata cattle stood. Below the large herd with white cattle in it was the place where the prince's cattle stood. We are not sure why they are called prince's cattle but it may be because they belong to the chief induna. Below this herd are two other herds of impakata cattle¹⁰⁷.

At the base of the kraal was the place where the warriors danced. They lined up in a u-shape before the milking began and danced and sang. The Parade ground and cattle kraals covered such a large area that one person shouting on one side could not be heard on the other. There were no trees in the parade ground neither were there any antbear holes¹⁰⁸.

KwaMatiwane and Hloma Amabuto

KwaMatiwane and Hloma Amabuto have often been confused. On the side of the Mkhumbane stream, opposite Mgungundhlovu is a low-lying hill known as Hloma Amabuto or 'Soldier's' Ridge; this was the hill where the Zulu impis were traditionally mobilised¹⁰⁹. This hill or ridge ends in the north in a prominent stone knoll known as Kwa Matiwane¹¹⁰ or the Hill of Execution. It was here, at the Golgotha of Mgungundhlovu that myriads of dead bodies were left on the bare ground to decay and be devoured by vultures. It was this legendary hill which inspired fear throughout Zululand.

There were several footpaths across this hill and it was the custom of everyone to throw a stone onto the ground when they came to a crossing. As a result many piles of stones or isivane's were formed¹¹¹. The Reverend Francis Owen's camp was erected on 'Soldier's Ridge'¹¹² and was opposite the Hill of Slaughter. From his camp Owen had a good view of Mgungundhlovu. The doors of the huts which Dingane had ordered be constructed for them were high enough for a man to walk through having only to bend his back. The huts were high enough to stand upright in and were 6m in diameter¹¹³. These huts were close to Mgungundhlovu⁽¹¹⁴⁾.

Conclusion

For approximately ten years Mgungundhlovu was the political hub of South Eastern Africa. Its hegemony was only challenged by the encroaching Voortrekkers. Mgungundhlovu was razed to the ground by Dingane at the time of the Battle of Blood River in December 1838¹¹⁵.

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