

Dingaan's kraal rises again . . .

...out of
the ashes
of 145
years ago

By Owen Coetzer

FOR the first time in 145 years, huts are again rising on the ashes of Umgungundlovu — once the immense kraal of Zulu despot Dingaan.

The huts are authentic and traditional — replicas of the very same huts set on fire by Dingaan in the face of an avenging Boer commando (led by Andries Pretorius), after Dingaan's murder of Piet Retief on February 6, 1837, and the Blaauwkrantz, Moordspruit and other massacres on February 17.

Now, in the shadow of Kwa Matiwane — where Retief's heart and liver were torn from his body — and under the immense cross of the Dingaanstat DRC Mission, voices of Zulu men and women are lifted in traditional working song as they plait grass and bend saplings for the huts.

This time the huts will be permanent, thanks to Johannesburg film-maker Elmo de Witt, under whose auspices the huts are being constructed. They will form the authentic background to parts of a TV series — Shaka Zulu — he will be working on soon for TV1 and TV2.

Immense as it is, the film set will only be built on about one third of Dingaan's kraal, which, when he occupied it with some 20 000 people in about 1829, stretched some 2,5 km in diameter.

Part of the film set huts stand on excavated floors of the *isigodlo* (or the woman's quarters of the royal enclosure). The excavations were done jointly by the University of Cape Town and the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, some years ago under Dr Martin Hall, of the Pietermaritzburg Museum.

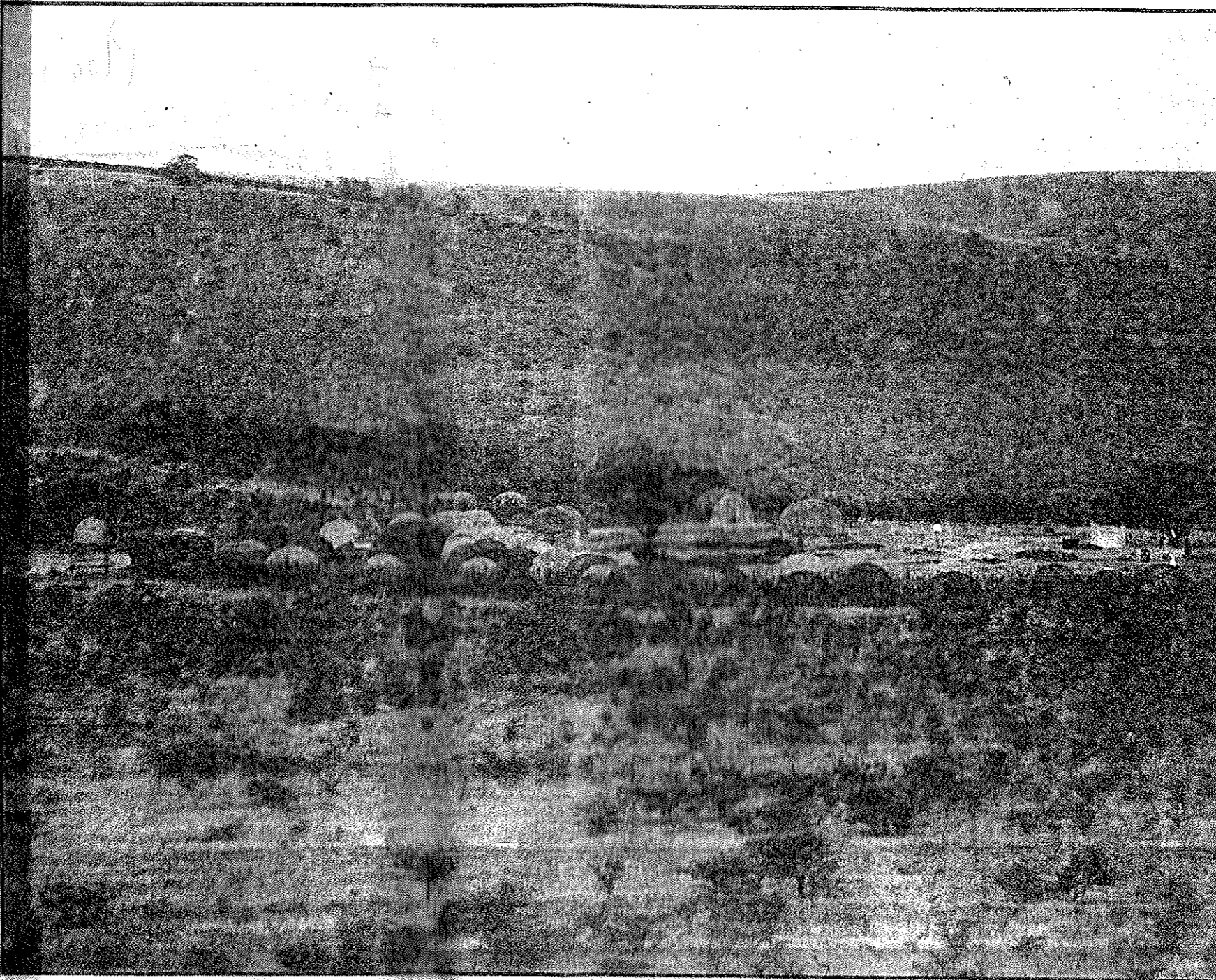
The site, which belongs to the National Monuments Council, has now been accepted by the Natal Provincial Museum Services as a provincial museum and is being developed jointly by the two bodies.

As the site is developed, more archaeological excavations will be undertaken and huts transferred to, or built on, the original floors to enter in

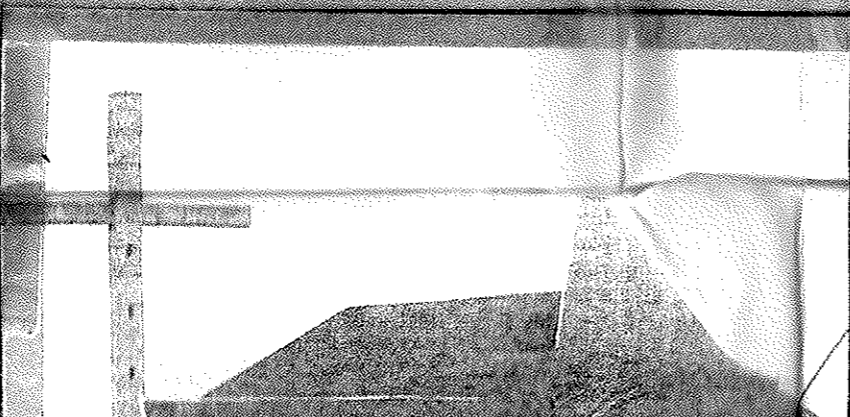
Secret meeting

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Huts rise again on Umgungundlovu, where once Dingaan's kraal took up the whole of this hillside.



The bones
of the old
Zulu kings
rest here
in the valley

DINGAAN'S KRAAL is set in the Zulu "Valley of the Kings" — Emakhosini, burial place of the Zulu dynasty, and fountainhead of the nation. It is one of the most sacred places in Zululand.

In the valley lie the graves of Senzangakhona (c. 1757-1816) — father of Shaka, Dingaan, and Mpande, and grandfather of Cetshwayo — Phunga, Jama (father of Senzangakhona), Ndaba (father of Jama), Dinizulu, son of Cetshwayo, and others.

During the mid-winter of 1829, Dingaan chose the site for his royal kraal — after he murdered Shaka at Dukuza (where the sugar village of Stanger lies today). His retinue moved from the old kraal, Nohamba, to the Valley of the Kings. The land was fertile with abundant water from numerous streams — and the land was rich for grazing.

By the end of 1829, 20 000 people lived in the massive Umgungundlovu kraal, oval in shape with the main entrance to the lower end. The circle was formed by two concentric hedges of mimosa stumps within which the huts were located.

Almost 100 metres from the top of the hill stood three small kraals outside the enclosure of the main kraal. They were commonly known as the *Ebhhe* — the central kraal had eight huts and the other two, four each. Only members of the royal family lived here.

The upper part of the royal kraal, separated from the rest by a high palisade, constituted the royal quarters or *isigodlo*. It had its own carefully guarded entrances and was made up of two divisions — the black and the white. The black, on the right side, was the personal quarters of Dingaan with a complex of very large huts. Dingaan had two *ibhwe*, or sleeping and eating hut, which rested on only one central pole, and his big hut or hall of audience.

Concubines' huts

Retief wrote that it had a diameter of six metres. In the open space adjoining these huts was a mound of earth which can still be seen, from which Dingaan could overlook the whole kraal.

The white *isigodlo* stretched for nearly 100 metres. Here under the supervision of the Nko-gika-si (headwoman) lived the king's 300 or more concubines. Their huts were usually built on a raised platform.

Part of the film set huts stand on the floors of the *isigodlo* (or the woman's quarters of the royal enclosure). The excavations were done jointly by the University of Cape Town and the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, some years ago under Dr Martin Hall, of the Pietermaritzburg Museum.

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Dingaan gave his kraal the name Mgungundhlovu. Opinions differ as to the meaning of the name, but according to historian H.C. Lugg it is derived from ungunawendhlovu, which means the secret meeting of the king, and refers to Dingaan's successful plot to murder Shaka.

James Stuart, on the other hand, expresses the view based on Zulu tradition, that the kraal was formed ungunghlovu because it had the shape of two elephant tusks placed on the ground. Therefore, the name meant The Place of the Large Elephant. By transference, it was applied to

As it was a hill, the two horns running down to the kraal, the two horns of the Zulu warriors' kraal were the quarters of the kraal, altogether, nine impi included there. There were, therefore, the famous "White Shields." Each of the two horns housed four impi and each impi occupied its own head within the horn. Commanding each impi was an induna and over each horn was a chief induna.

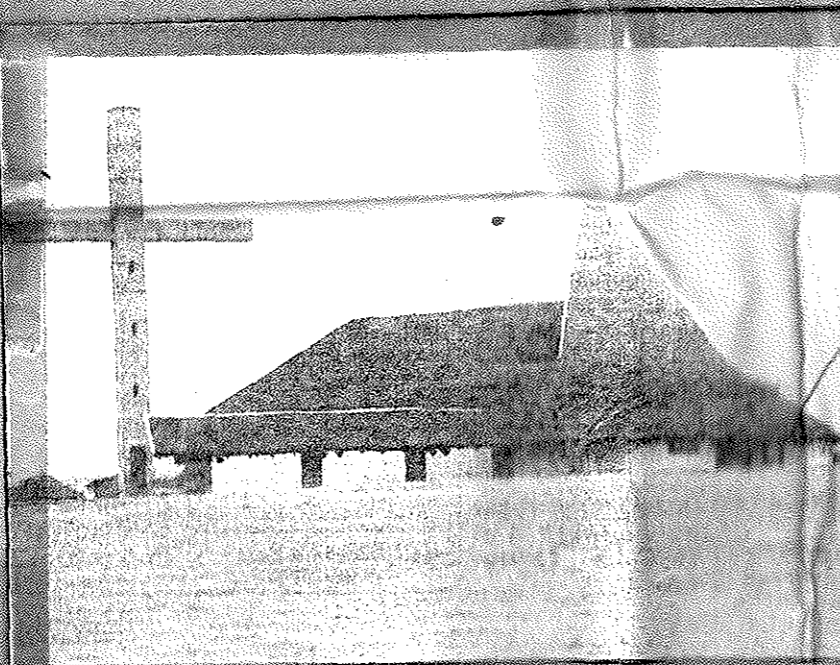
• E.M. Ritter's *Shaka Zulu* is being made into 13 one-hour segments for TV2 and a four-hour mini-series for TV1. Joshua Sinclair, who is writing both series, is a qualified medical doctor who has worked with Sister Theresa in India and in Vietnam and is the son of a former editor of the *New York Times*. He has been involved in the *Shaka* project for 10 months.

• Kwa Matiwane (Hill of Execution) was named after Chief Matiwane who, in 1822, having been warned of the approach of Shaka's army, fled with his clan, the Amangwane. In 1829, after hearing of Shaka's death, he returned and pledged loyalty to Dingaan — but Dingaan killed all the tribe and then executed Matiwane himself on the stony ridge which was named after him.

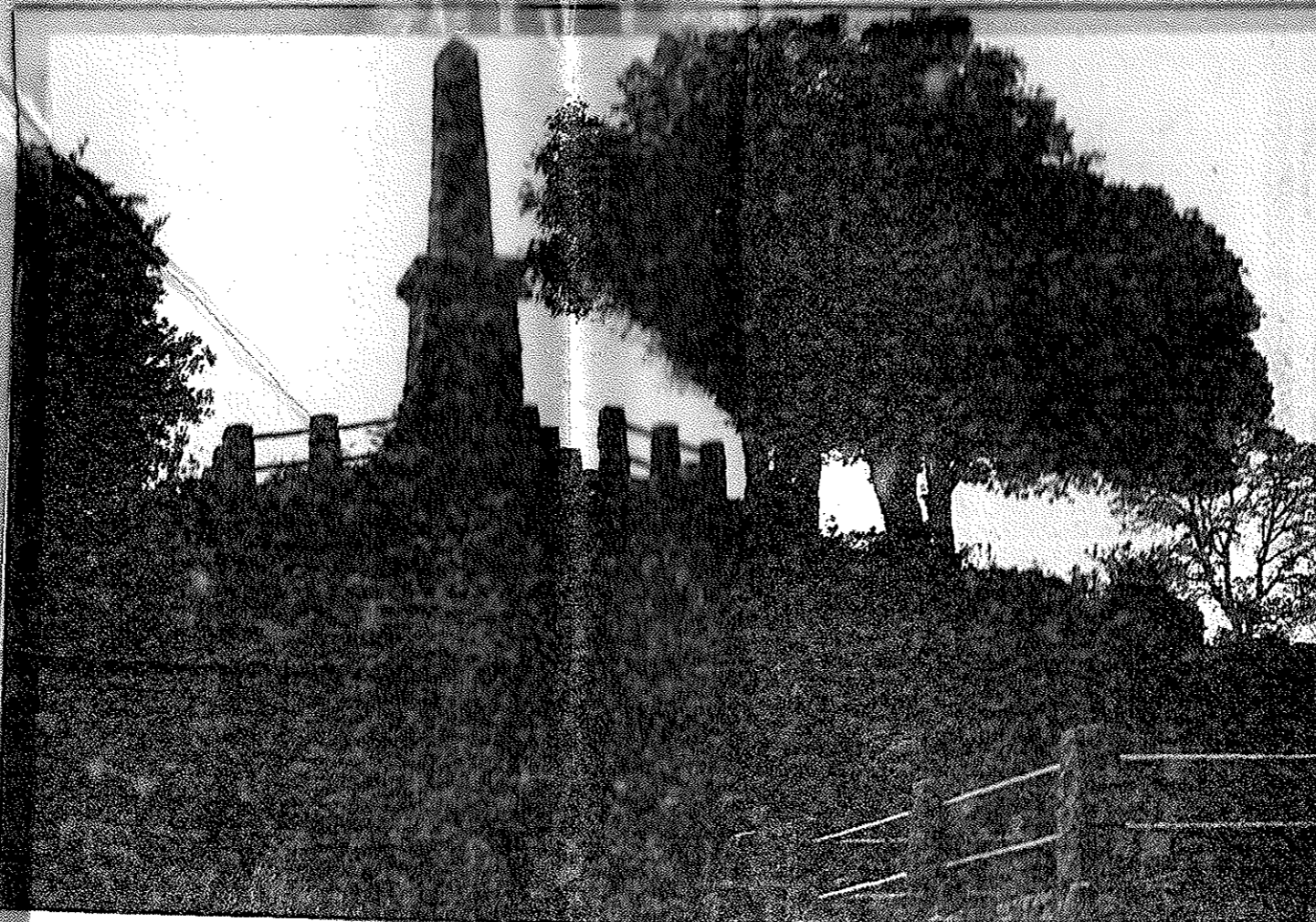


The grave of the founder of the Zulu nation, Zulu (Nkosinkulu) lies just outside the original entrance to Dingaan's kraal. Zulu (c 1597-1691) was the king whose name was adopted by the tribe and who is regarded as the founder of the Zulu royal dynasty.

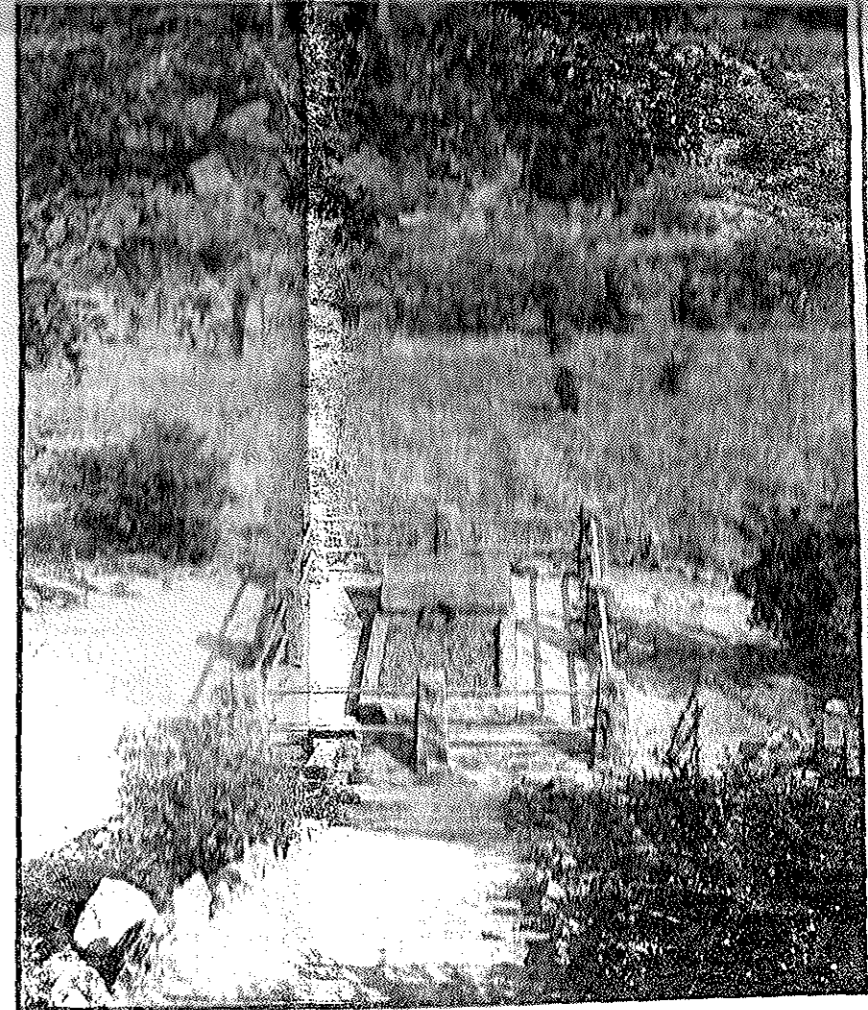
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LEFT: The Dingaanstat mission church, with its massive cross that overlooks the entire Umgungundlovu site. **RIGHT:** Under the brooding cross of the mission church, a worker plants grass in the traditional ancient Zulu manner on the site once occupied by Dingaan's kraal. To the right of the cross, the missionary Francis Owen had his camp, and heard the fearful rumpus as the Boers were murdered. There was little Owen could do, and he thought he and his family would be next. But Dingaan was fearful of this man's God, and instead the party was allowed to leave for Port Natal four days later, but were forbidden to go anywhere near Kwa Matiwane.



The brooding Kwa Matiwane hillock where Piet Retief was dragged and clubbed to death. His heart and liver were cut out and buried on the royal road to Thekwini (Port Natal). The monument is to him — and his party of 97 men and four youths, who were murdered at the site on February 6, 1838, and buried in a mass grave at the foot of the hillock.



The mass grave where Retief and his men were buried by Andries Pretorius, whose avenging commando reached the kraal after their victory at the Battle of Blood River. Pretorius found the kraal deserted and burning. At Kwa Matiwane he found the remains of Retief and his party, including the pouch with the treaty.

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Dingaan had a number of military kraals spread over Zululand, but Umgungundlovu was his capital. From here he dominated the Zulu empire built by Shaka.

However, he was regularly visited by English traders from Port Natal — men like Henry Fynn, Dick King and Nathaniel Isaacs, Allen Gardiner and Francis Owen.

After the Battle of Blood River, Andries Pretorius marched on Umgungundlovu. Dingaan was warned and fled the kraal. From a distance he sent word to Velenjani Mawonga, his personal servant, to light it alight — and watched it burn from a hillside called Isidhala, far to the north.

When Pretorius arrived at the kraal he found it in flames and deserted. On Kwa Matiwane, he found the remains of Retief and his men and the leather pouch containing the treaty.