



# NGSBA Excavation Reports

Volume 1 (2009)

## Salvage Excavation at Nahal Saif – 2004 Final Report

Excavation Permit: B - 293/2004  
Excavating Archaeologist: Yehuda Govrin  
Y. G. Contract Archaeology Ltd  
Academic Sponsor: Hebrew Union College

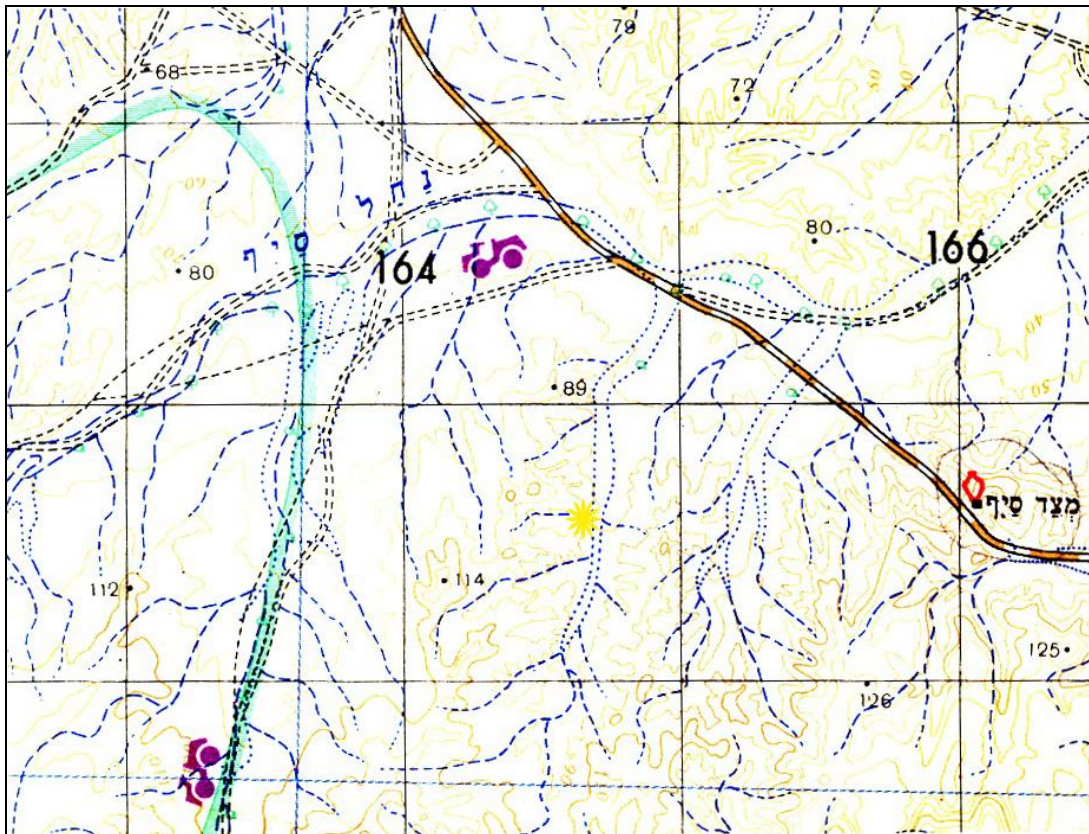


Figure 1: Site location map (30°51'24.08''N / 35°09'18.48''E).

## Introduction

In order to further their business model, Rotem Emprat Negev Corporation Ltd in 2004 commissioned an archaeological survey in the Sdeh Saif area of the southern Negev (plan no: 271/03/10 Sdeh Saif). This survey was conducted by Yeshayahu Lender, southern Negev regional archaeologist with the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). 5000 dunams were surveyed (1250 acres), and fifteen archaeological sites and find points were identified (IAA report: 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2004). The surveyor documented the location of the sites, their description, and any IAA action requirements. Y.G Archaeology was contracted to carry out the necessary heritage management work, which amounted to excavations at six of the surveyed sites (Sites 3, 4, 7, 8, 12 and 13). The extent of excavation required for each site was between 2 and 4m<sup>2</sup>.

In accordance with standard practice, before commencing excavation Y.G Archaeology head archaeologist and company executive Yehuda Govrin and IAA archaeologist Yeshayahu Lender conducted a tour in order to identify the sites and finalize the necessary extent of excavation for each, as well as clarifying any other important issues relating to the IAA action requirements.

The Y.G Archaeology excavations at Nahal Saif were carried out in early December 2004.

### Site 3: Stone Concentration

Location: 161995 – 029511

Description: A small mound of stones, diameter ca.1.5m, found in an area of level ground between two wadis. The western and eastern stones in the pile were found standing upright. Fifteen and thirty meters west were two additional stone concentrations.

Excavation: A 4m<sup>2</sup> square was excavated to a depth of 0.15m. No finds were recovered and the soil was sterile throughout the entire excavation depth.

Conclusion: There is no certainty that this small mound of stones was man-made; it may have been a limestone chunk which fragmented naturally to form this pile.

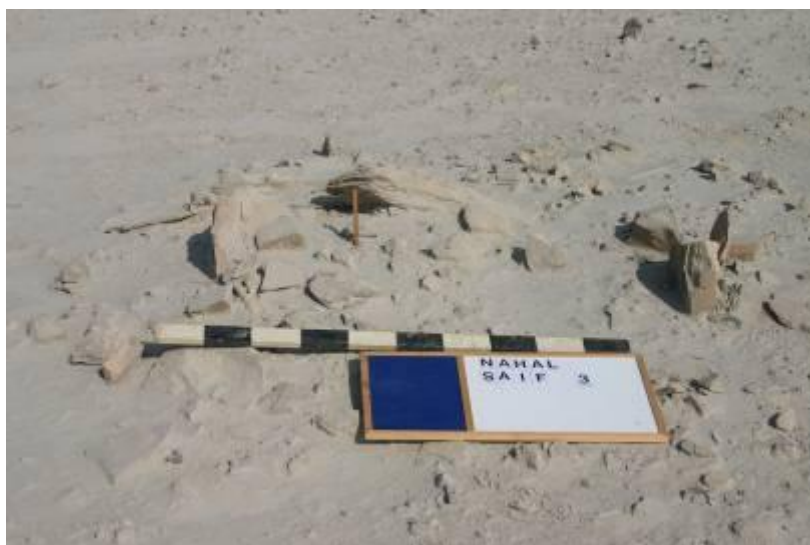


Figure 2: Site 3 before excavation.

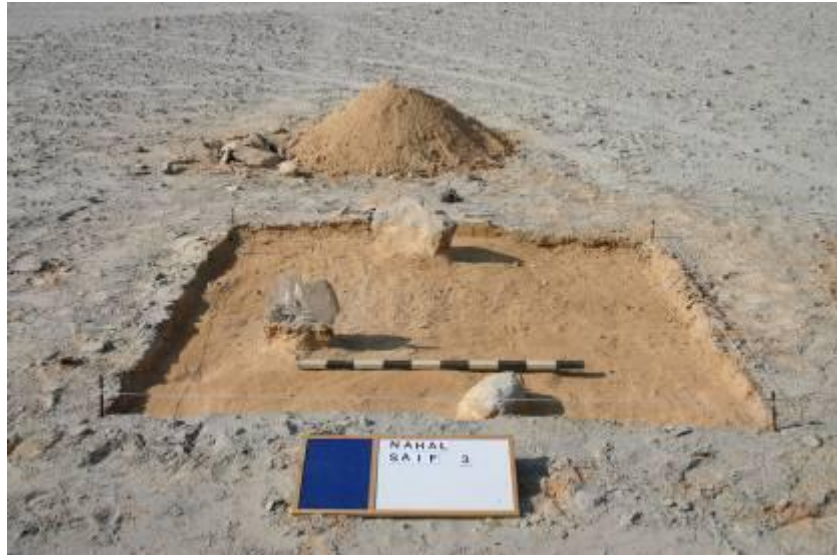


Figure 3: Site 3 after excavation.

**Site 4: Stone Concentration**

Location: 163622 – 030940

Description: Twelve small piles of stones within a circular area of ca.30m diameter. The piles consisted of small flat limestone rocks, and as a group they formed an uneven ovoid shape in plan.

Excavation: A 4m<sup>2</sup> square was excavated to a depth of 0.15m at the center of the stone concentration. No finds were retrieved and the soil was sterile throughout the entire excavation depth.

Conclusion: There is no certainty that these piles of stones were man-made. It may well be that they were the result of natural fragmentation of larger limestone rocks.



Figure 4: Site 4 before excavation.



Figure 5: Site 4 after excavation.

**Site 7: Stone Circle**

Location: 163668 – 031504

Description: Remains of a truncated circle of small stones, with an estimated original diameter of ca.2.5m. Found on a moderate slope close to the bank of a stream.

Excavation: A 4m<sup>2</sup> square was excavated to a depth of 0.15m. No archaeological finds were recovered and the soil was sterile throughout the entire excavation depth.

Conclusion: It is likely that this arrangement of stones was man-made. However, its purpose is not clear since there were recovered no indicative or datable artifacts or vestiges of activity.

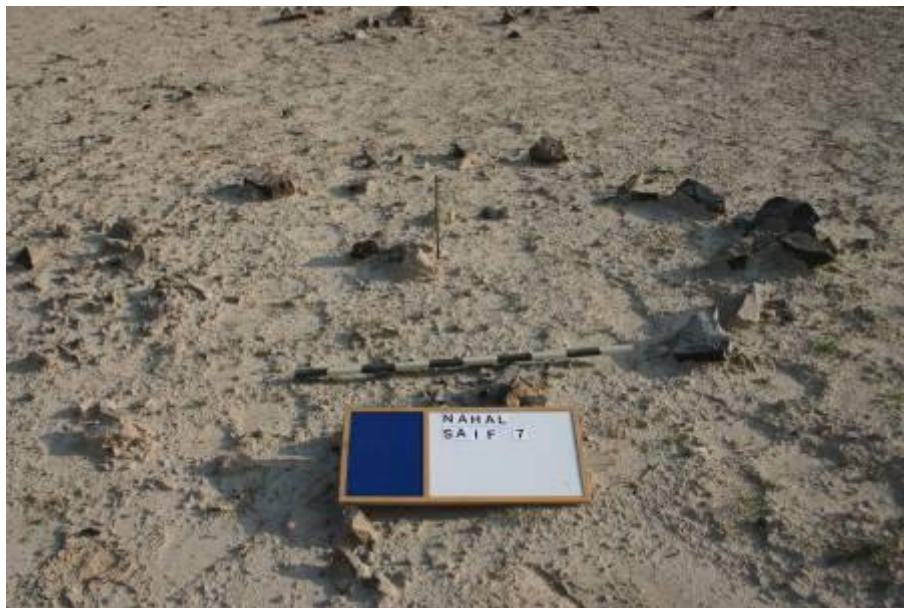


Figure 6: Site 7 before excavation.

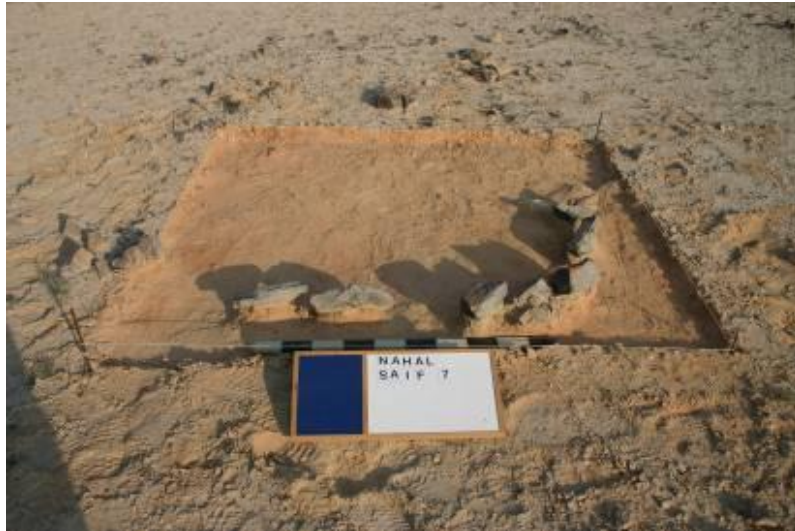


Figure 7: Site 7 after excavation.

### **Site 8: Stone Circle**

Location: 164043 – 031158

Description: A circle of flat stones at the centre of a rock surface, as well as nearby concentrations of stones, very close to the bank of a shallow stream. A small stone lying on its narrow side was seen ca.10m from the site during the IAA survey (Fig.10).

Excavation: A 4m<sup>2</sup> square was excavated down to bedrock (ca. 0.20m below surface). No archaeological finds were recovered and the soil was sterile throughout the entire excavation depth.

Conclusions: This site was defined by the IAA surveyor as a ‘camp site’ and the stone concentrations ‘fire places’. Excavation indicated that the site was not man-made, and that the flat stones of the circular feature in fact detached naturally from the nearby exposed rock by the stream bank. The small stone lying on its narrow side was alien to the site and therefore possibly intentionally placed there in such an unnatural position – although it is not clear by whom, when and for what purpose. The IAA surveyor defined this stone as a ‘stela’.



Figure 8: Site 8 before excavation.

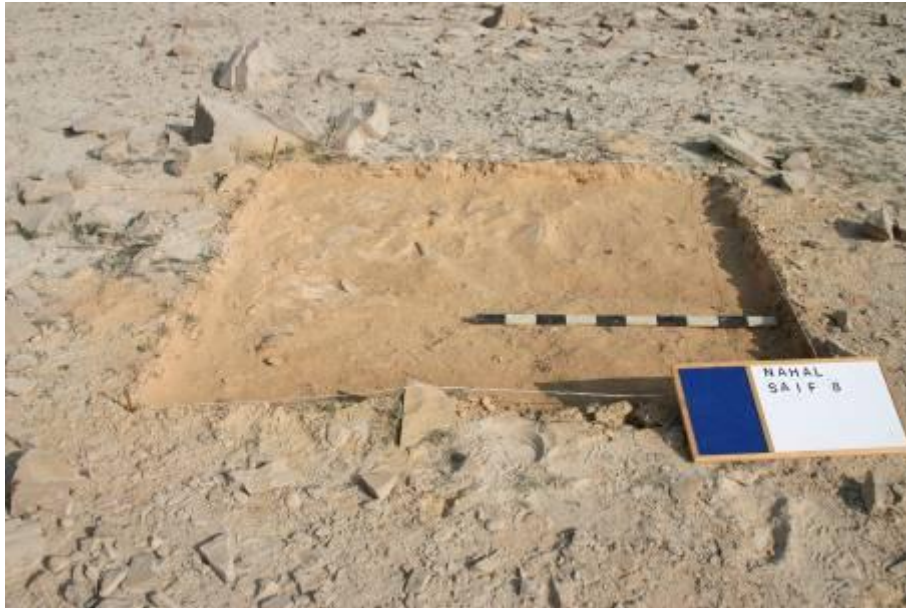


Figure 9: Site 8 after excavation.



Figure 10: The Site 8 'stela'.

### **Site 12: Stone Concentrations**

Location: 162342 – 030956

Description: Three flat stone piles spaced 15-20m apart on the east bank of a stream, each pile being comprised of one course of flat limestone rocks measuring ca.2.5 x 1.5m.

Excavation: A 4m<sup>2</sup> area was excavated to a depth of 0.15m beneath the limestone piles. No artifacts were retrieved and the soil was sterile throughout the entire excavation depth.

Conclusions: It appears that these piles of stones are natural limestone bulbs that fragmented without human agency.



Figure 11: Site 12 before excavation.



Figure 12: Site 12 after excavation.

### **Site 13: Stone Circles**

Location: 161520 – 030285

Description: Two stone circles found on a deep stream's bank 20m apart. These features were arranged using unworked stones, to form ca.2.5 x 1.5m elliptical shapes.

Excavation: A 4m<sup>2</sup> square was excavated to a depth of 0.20m. No artifacts were retrieved and the soil was sterile throughout the entire excavation depth.

Conclusions: It appears that these stone concentrations were natural, the rocks having become detached from large limestone bulbs which are found close to the stream's bank.



Figure 13: Site 13 before excavation.



Figure 14: Site 13 after excavation.

## Summary

From our excavations it appears that most of these Nahal Saif sites were natural, results of large limestone bulb or rock exposures erosion which caused stone concentrations that stood out against the light-colored sandy soil of the area. Furthermore, no archeological finds or signs of activity were recovered at these sites.

However, despite this dearth of finds, the remains of the stone circle at Site 7 and the stone standing on its narrow side at Site 8 could have been man-made.

In light of the paucity of archaeological activity evidenced here at Nahal Saif, the area was released for development.



## Further Reading

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