The role of Impact Assessments in protecting and enhancing heritage - a case study from AlUla County, Saudi Arabia

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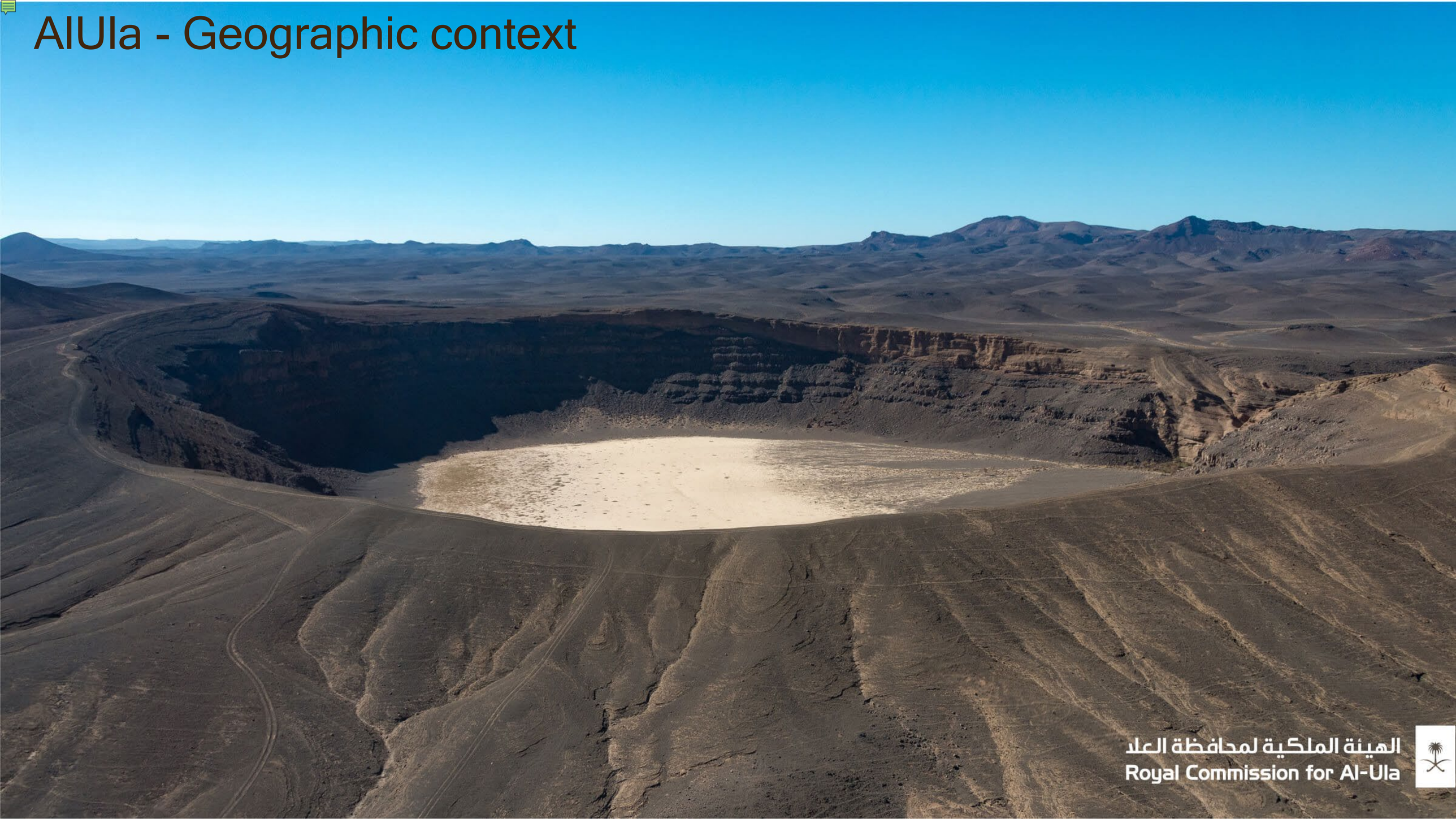

AlUla - Geographic context

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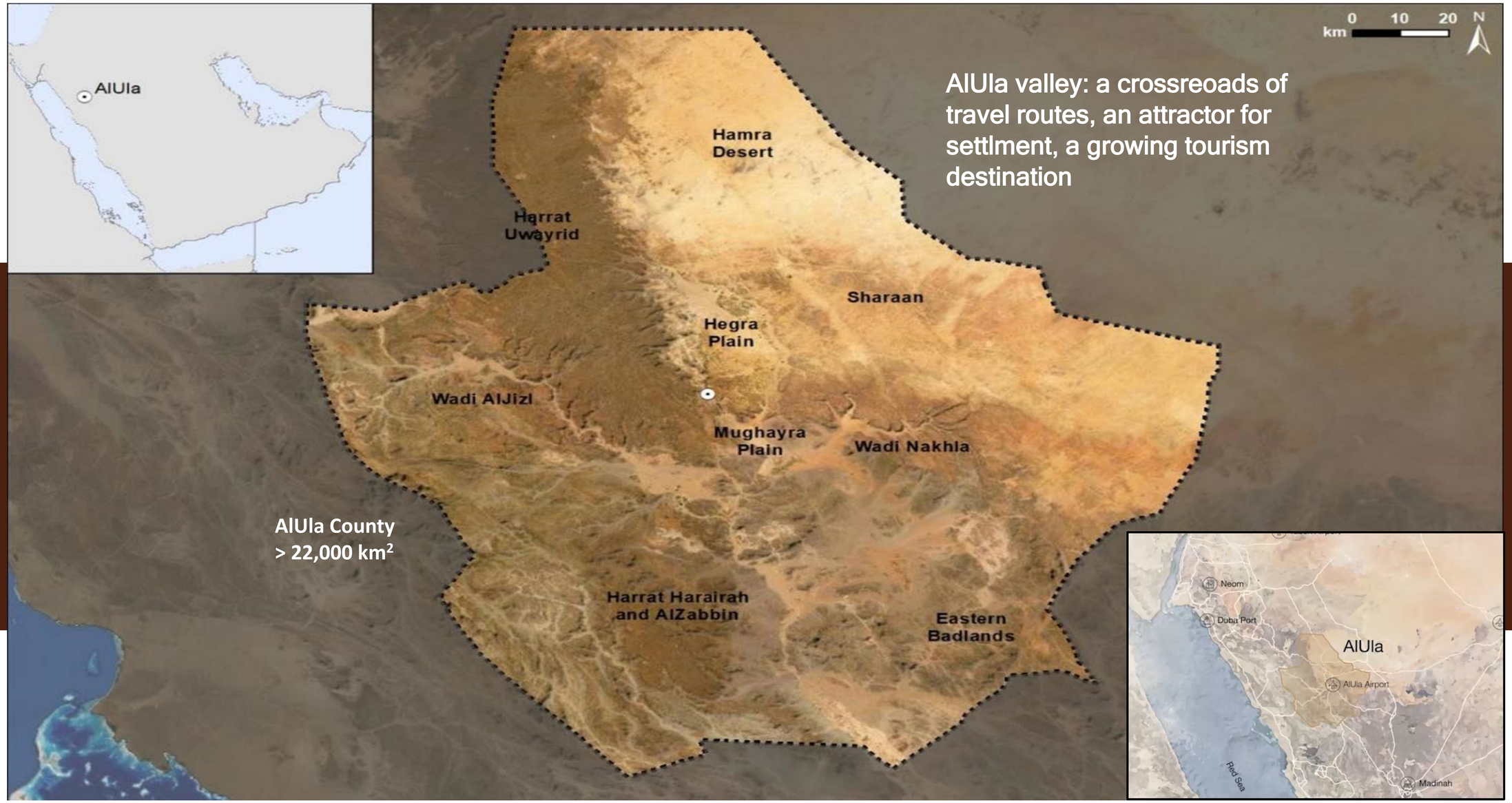
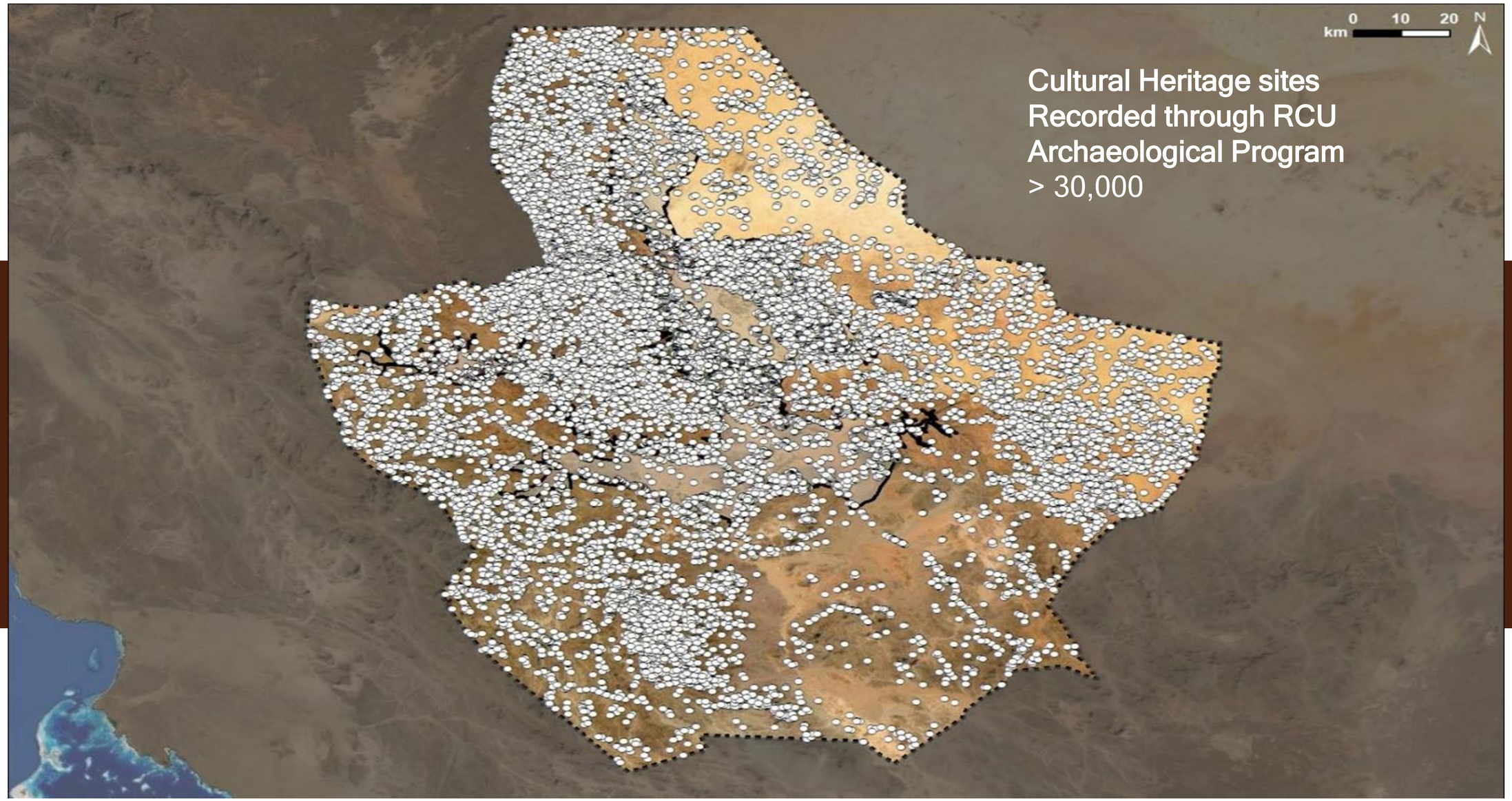


AlUla- Heritage overview



AlUla- Heritage overview

Nabataean
2,100 years

North Arabian Kingdoms
7,000 years

Early Islamic
800 years

HEGRA
HISTORICAL
CITY

NABATAEAN
DISTRICT

JABAL
IKMAH
DISTRICT

DADAN
DISTRICT

ALULA OLD TOWN
DISTRICT

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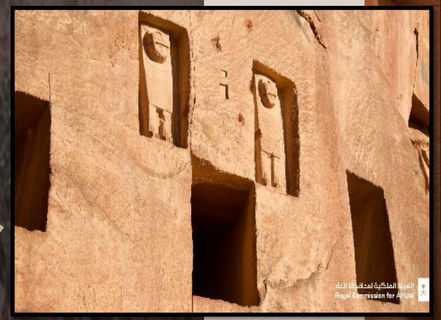


Mission and Vision

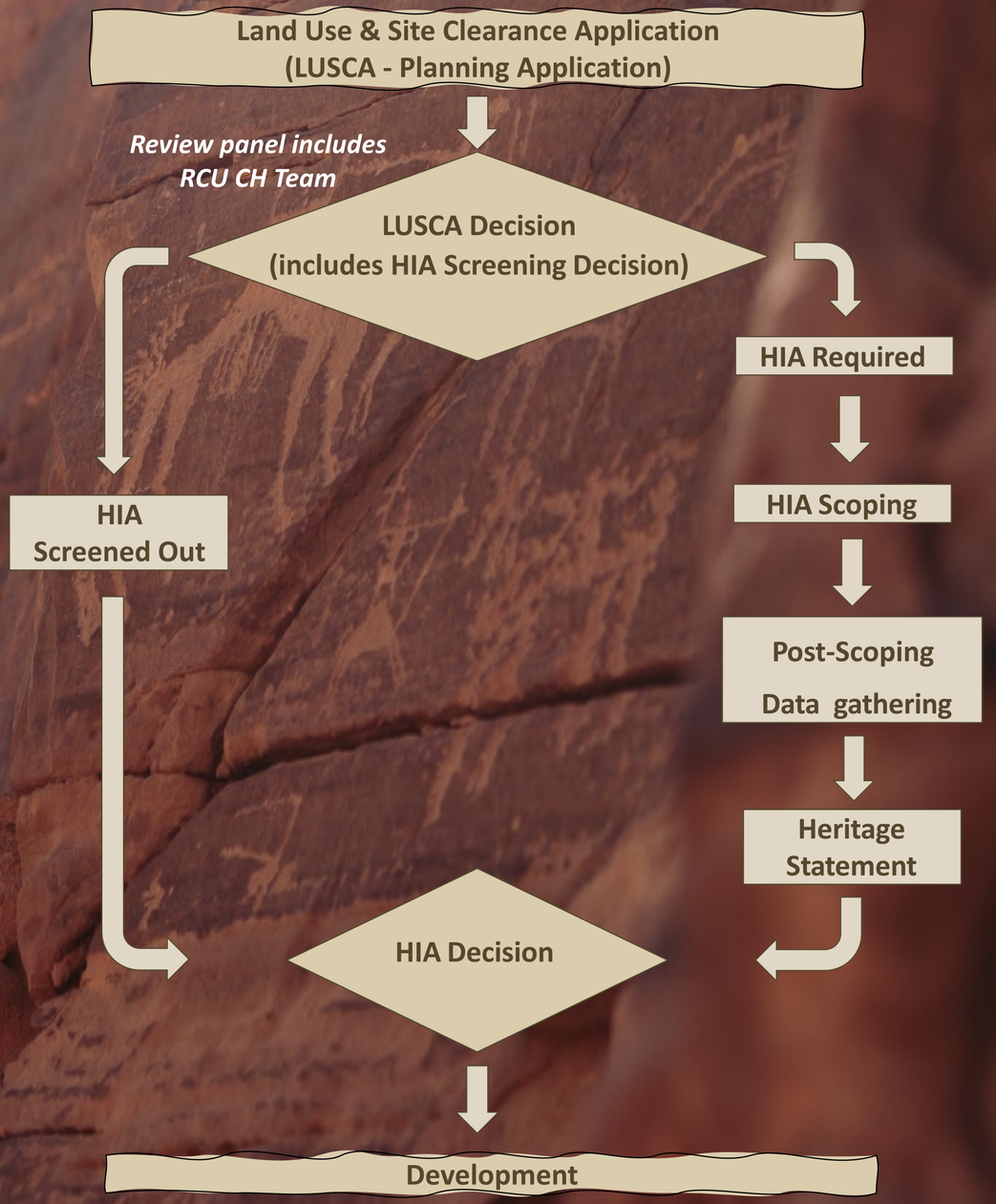
At Royal Commission of AlUla, our vision is to elevate AlUla into a premier global destination renowned for its rich historical, cultural, and natural treasures within the framework of Saudi Vision 2030. We will cultivate AlUla as a vibrant living museum, where every corner tells a story of ancient civilizations, artistic expression, geological wonders, and ecological diversity, Wildlife. This priority is balanced against the extremely rapid large-scale development needed to support the anticipated visitor numbers (between 1.6m - 2m) by 2030.

HIA as a Requirement

Why do we require HIA to give work approval, and what is its role in protecting and enhancing heritage?

Our role as Cultural Heritage Department is twofold- to safeguard the heritage resource of AlUla and also to support development in line with the AlUla vision and Saudi Vision 2030- this means we're presently working to support upwards of 400 current and future development projects. Encompassing everything from hotels and resorts, and housing, to major infrastructure to preserve the authenticity and heritage of AlUla while fostering sustainable development. And we has included Heritage Impact Assessments as a mandatory step in the planning process, with developing tighter controls on compliance and mitigation.

HIA as requirement



All permit applications for developmental, commercial, recreational, and other activities involve our participation in heritage administration, as one of stakeholders in developmental projects within the administrative boundaries of AlUla through the LUSCA portal. LUSCA serves as a platform through which project owners submit requests, and conditional approval is granted based on mandatory planning and implementation guidelines and requirements tailored to the intended use of the development site.

Examples:

- If a project is within an area where an HIA has been previously conducted, helping us make a clear decision, an HIA may not be required.

- If the project scope is extensive and is located in areas where we lack sufficient data to grant approval, requiring an HIA becomes necessary. Approval is granted after reviewing the HIA report to ensure heritage protection alongside project continuity.

Therefore:
It's important to emphasize the necessity of an HIA in cases where it's needed to ensure proper heritage protection and enhance.

How HIA helped in protecting and enhancing?

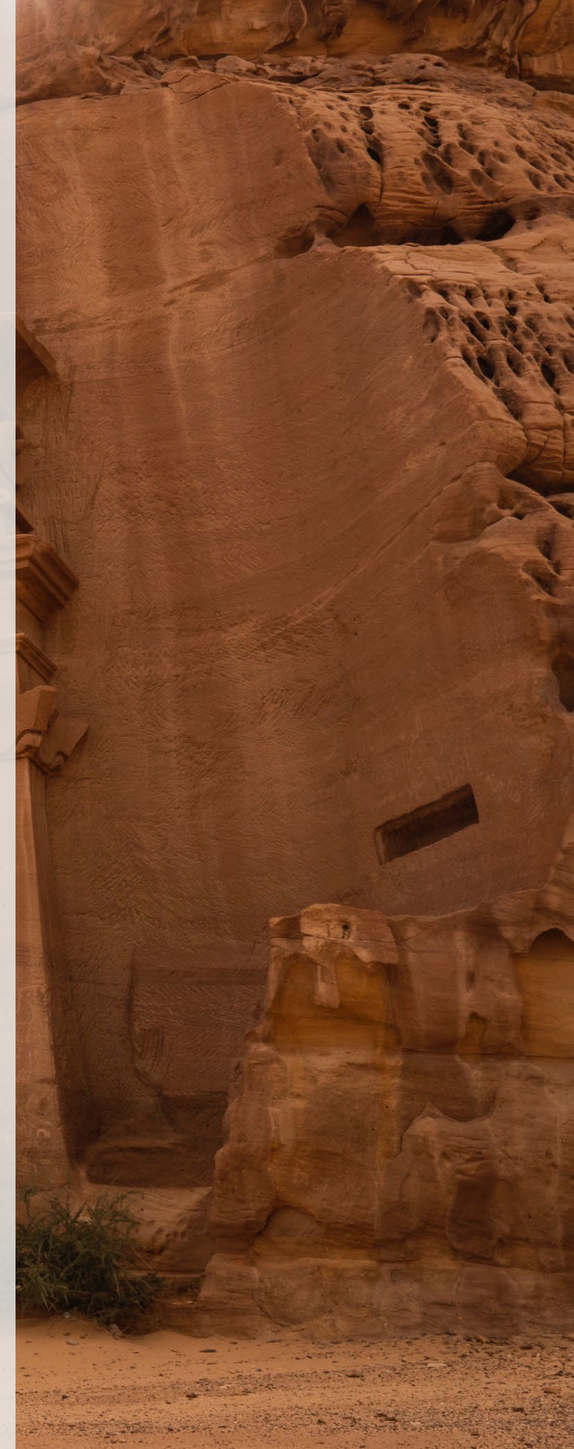
1 HIA expedites decision-making. by assessing potential site damage, recommending avoidance or mitigation measures outlined in the report.

2 HIA reports facilitate data collection for each site through the information provided within the report. making them akin to a cataloging process for heritage information at each site developed after HIA requirements. This occurs automatically and sustainably.

3 HIA report will enable us to make decisions that ensure the protection, enhancement, or documentation of heritage.

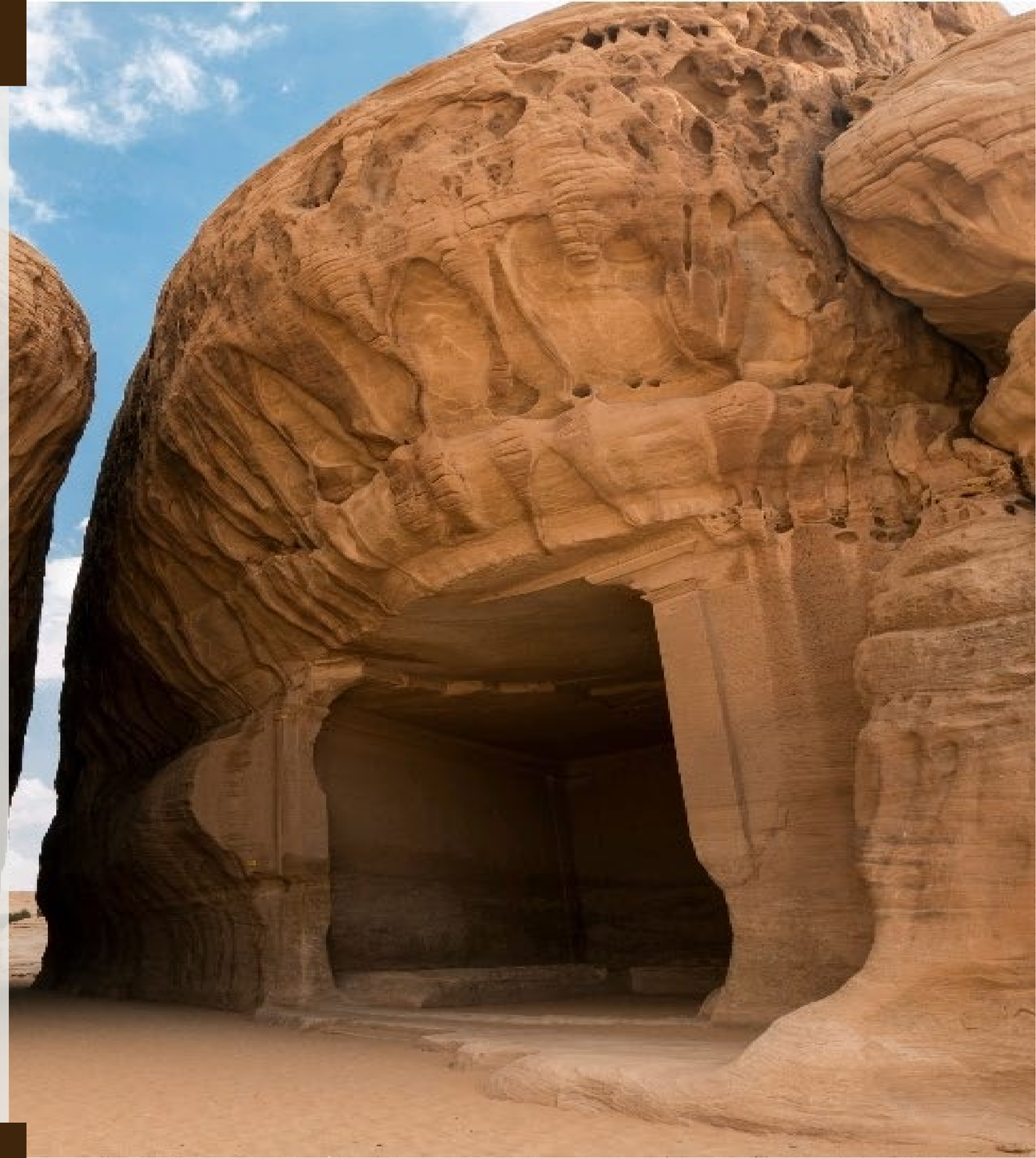
The upgrading of the security fences project

It is one of the projects broadest scope in AlUla Governorate, focusing on protecting heritage sites through the installation of new fencing, provision of cameras, and lighting for 39 sites across two phases. The project is currently ongoing in its second phase.



The upgrading of the security fences project

The role of HIA in the project



The role of HIA in the project

- HIA aided in documenting new features at each heritage site. resulting in the expansion of fencing at most locations to encompass surrounding features that were previously beyond the fenced perimeter.

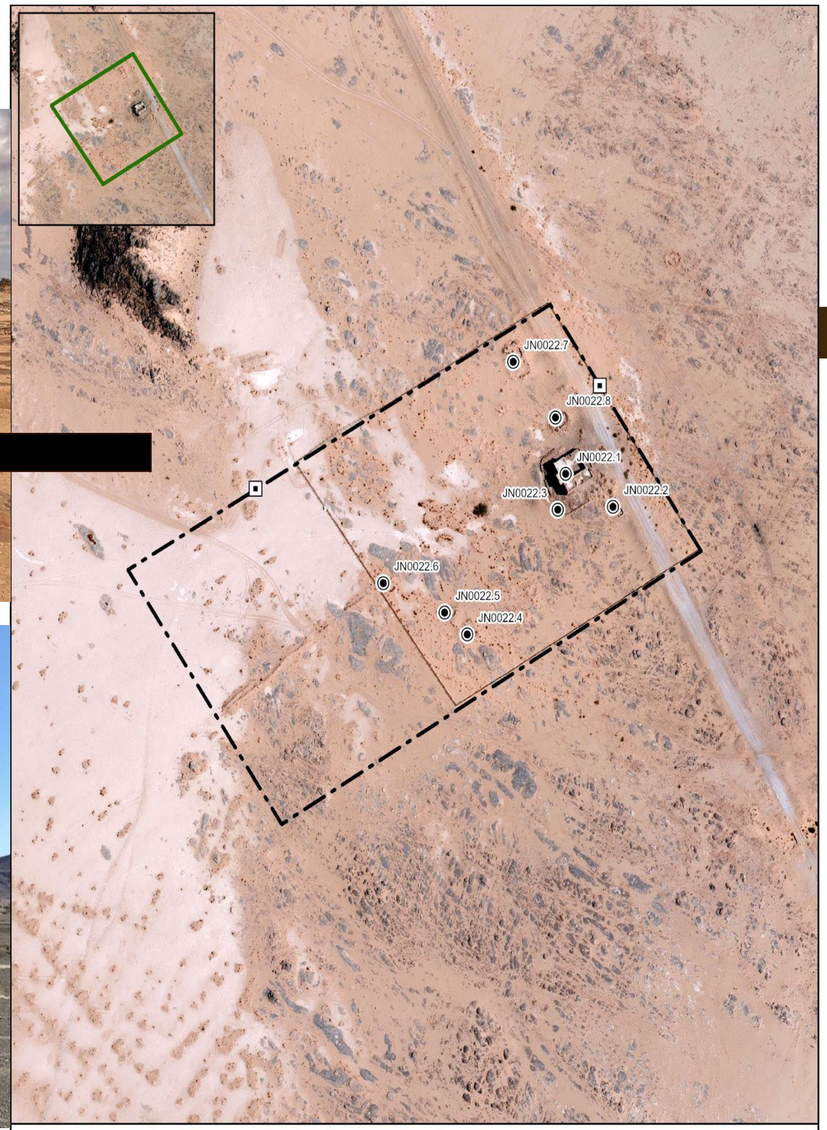
- We were able to choose the excavation method for each site. by identifying areas where manual excavation is required and areas where excavation using machinery is permissible. This approach safeguards the heritage from potential damage without causing delays in the project.

- Led to improved water management. within the modern fencing by identifying water flow areas and points that threaten the safety of the fence and the site.

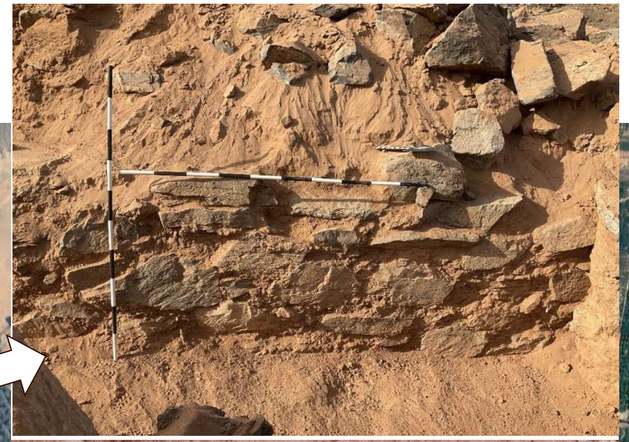
- The HIA report recommended to canceling the decision to fence two sites and installing another security solution for independent cameras because the potential damage from the project on the site would be greater.

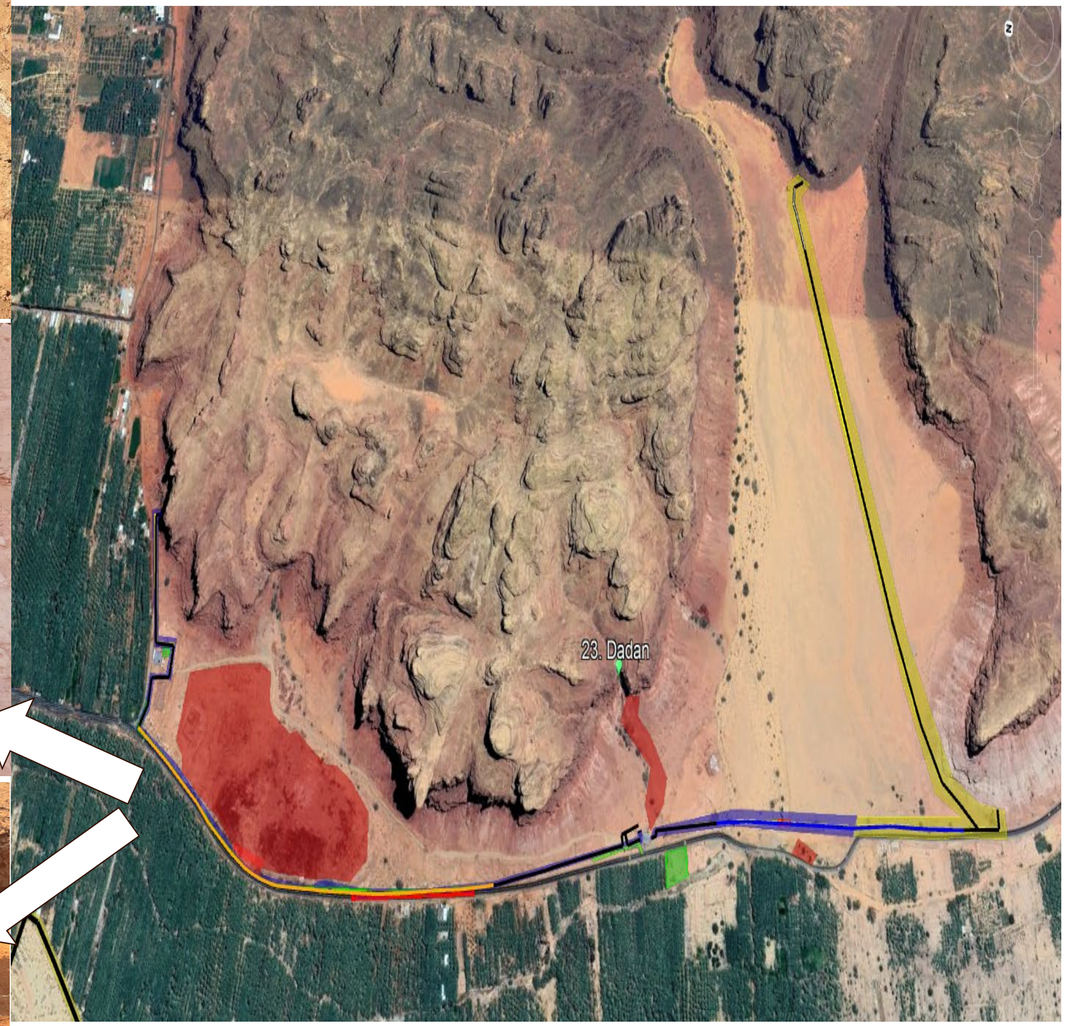
- the satisfactory results that ensure the site's and heritage's sustainable safety and security. and collaboration between security, safety, and heritage experts during the report discussions.

The role of HIA in documenting new features

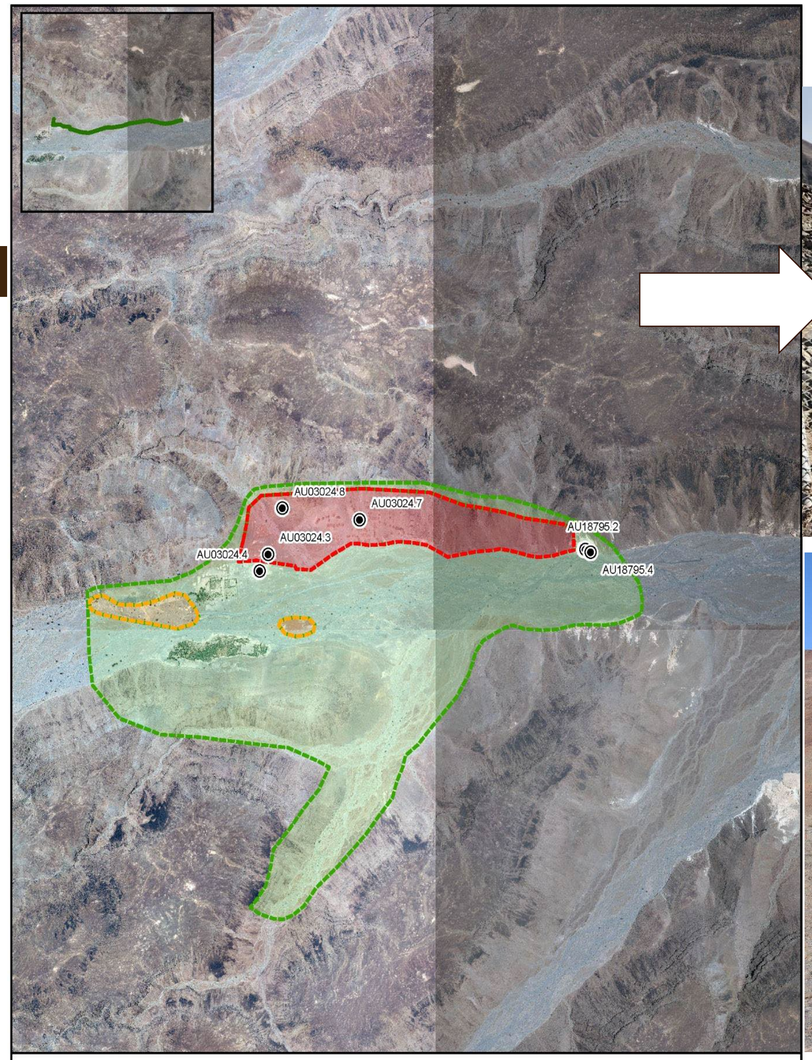


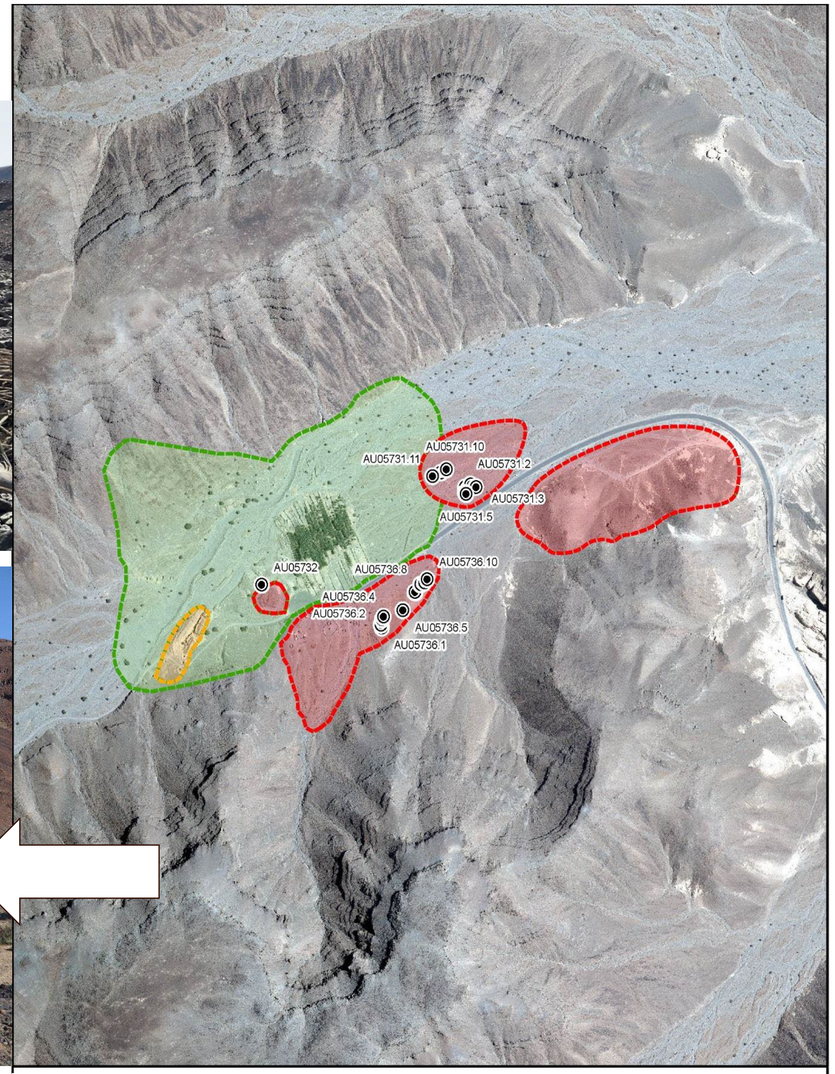
The role of HIA in the excavation method for each site



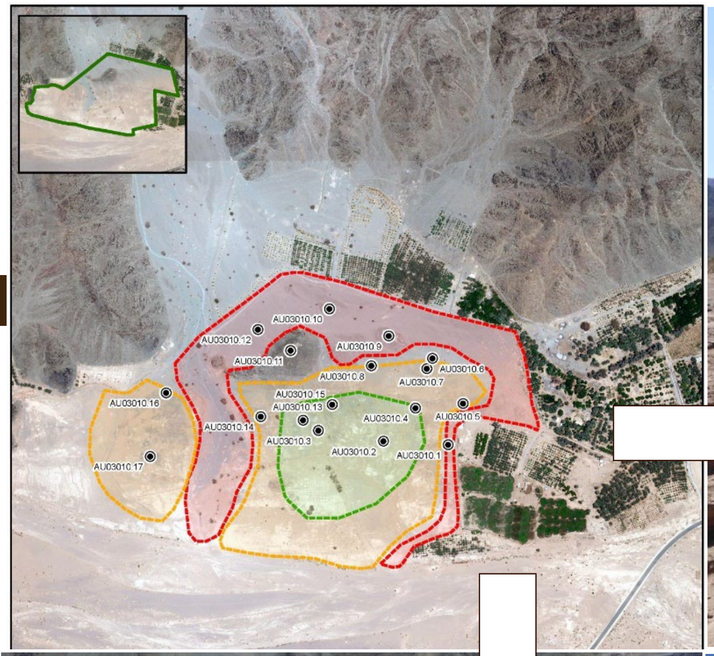


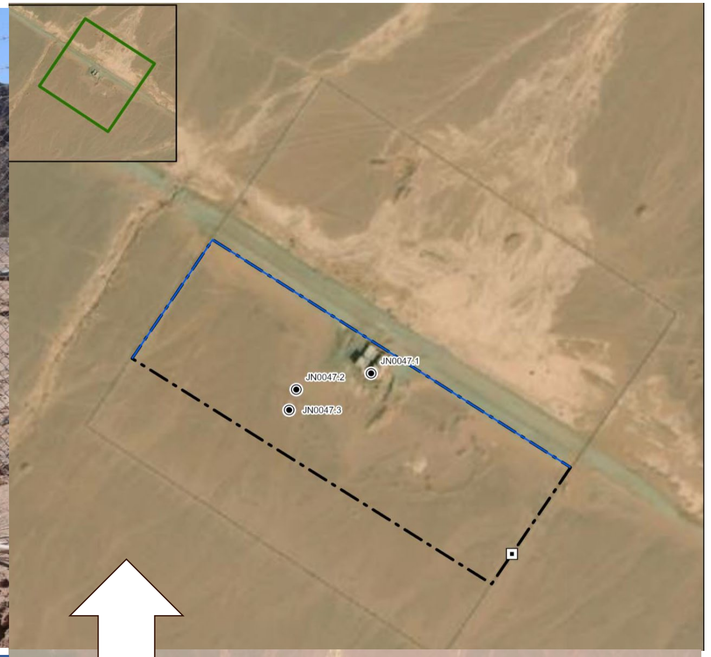
The role of HIA in canceling the fence for two sites

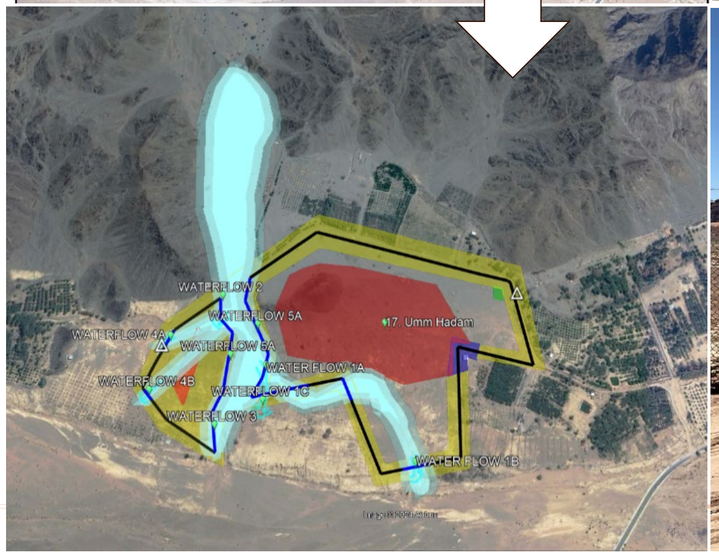


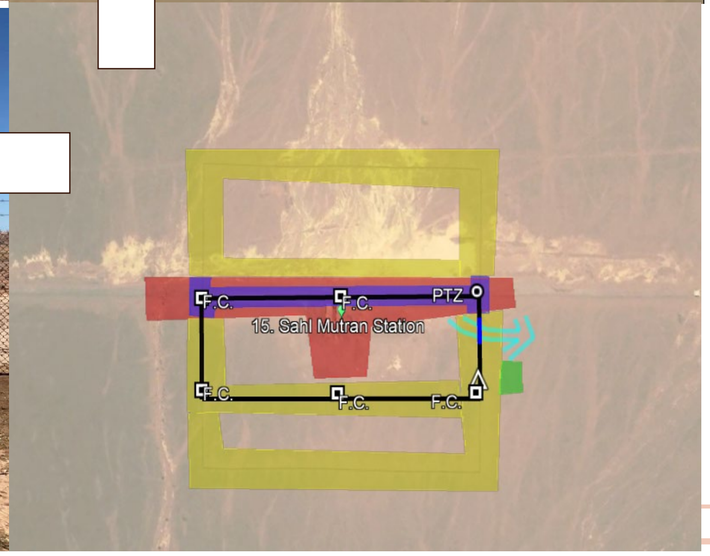


The role of HIA in the water management









An example of artifacts and finds

Pottery finds at the Kharit Yanbu site.

A Bullets field documented discovered during excavation at Bi’r al Jadid station.

Middle Paleolithic Hand axe recovered at al Dar al Hamra Station

Ceramic finds at Zumurud castle

The fence before and after

Summary & Conclusion

Heritage impact assessment is a proactive step to serve the development of heritage sites in the best possible way. Project managers often view it as a methodology that complicates and delays the project. However, in reality, it helps expedite work safely, ensuring the protection and enhancement of the heritage site and documenting it.

Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) helped provide satisfactory solutions for the Security and safety department and us as a Heritage administration department. It acted as a reference point for making most project decisions. Initially, we planned to fence off all the phase 1 sites within the project scope, totaling 24 sites, except for some stations along the Hijaz Railway. However, HIA report considered the damages that would arise from fence installation, digging, truck routes, etc.

The project work at all sites (except for some Hijaz Railway stations) was supposed to be manual excavation without machinery. But after assessing the heritage impact, the excavation methodology for almost all sites became a mix of manual and mechanized digging. This determination is made after reviewing the heritage impact assessment report for the site and conducting field visits. This illustrates how the report will expedite project execution and heritage protection.

VISION رؤيـــة
2030
المملكة العربية السعودية
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA
الهيئة الملكية لمحافظة العلا
Royal Commission for AlUla
Thank you

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