

THE VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA
DIE VOLKSBOUKUNDIGE VEREENIGING VAN SUID AFRIKA

DURBANVILLE DAY OUTING : SATURDAY, 21ST AUGUST 1976

TYGERBERG HISTORIC SKETCH

The long low range of Tygerberg hills has been a landmark since earliest days of settlement at the Cape.

In 1657 Jan van Riebeeck mentions the 'Luipaertsbergen' in his diary, and on a map of the same year they are marked as "gevlechte luiPERTSgebergte". The name stemmed not from an abundance of leopards, but from the mottled appearance of the vegetation on the hill slopes. Simon van der Stel comments on this in his account of his journey to Namaqualand in 1685, and, to this day, depending on the season and the light, the spotted appearance is very obvious in the bushy areas. The Luipertsberge soon became known as Tygerberge, since the early Dutch did not differentiate between "luiPERT" and "tier".

Two of the oldest routes to the North crossed the Tygerberge: One led past Rietvlei (which van Riebeeck called Zoutpan) towards present Blaauwberg Strand and Vissershok, then up the valley of the Diep River. In 1655 Jan Wintervogel, with a party of seven soldiers, set out on foot with provisions for three weeks, together with tobacco, copper bars and beads for barter; they reached the area where Malmesbury now stands, meeting for the first time with a group of Bushmen.

The second route led over the flats to cross the 'tail' of the Tygerberge, roughly where Bellville and Stikland now lie, then on to de Kuylen (Kuils River) and Clampusbergh (Klappmuts). ("over Zoute en Verse Rivier dwars oor die vlakte tot de staart van de Luipaertsberge" - Gabbemas diary Oct. 1657).

Between what is now Paarden Eiland and Blaauwberg, were several salt pans, salt being a precious commodity for preserving meat and fish.

Various small Hottentot tribes lived and grazed their cattle nearby; huge herds could sometimes be seen, but they were reluctant to barter more than a few head at a time. Some of the earliest cattle posts were established here: One of these was Welbeloond, mentioned first in 1677 as Bommelshoek after Jan van Bommel. Vissershok (1683) began as a cattle post. A few soldiers were stationed there, with slaves, to graze cattle, raise poultry and grow wheat.

On the seaward slopes of the Tygerberg, with a grand view over the bay, lie the farms Plattekloof, de Grendel and Bosmansdam. The road to Durbanville climbs to a neck passing between the farms Klein and Groot Roosboom, the latter once a large farm complex, is now derelict.

Some of the largest quarries in the Peninsula are situated in these hills, producing rock used for fill in harbour extensions, and crushed stone for the network of Cape highways.

The road now enters the Tygerberg valley, an area of mixed wine, grain and dairy farms, with fertile soil especially suitable for red wine production. There are numerous strong springs - the well-known Riebeeck water is tapped from a spring on Kanonkop farm.

The source of the Elsies River lies in the hills above Maastricht, the highest farm in the valley, known first as Elsie's Kraal. Extensive conservation work in the form of contouring and dam building was carried out in the 1940's to regulate the flooding of the Elsie's River, which periodically causes such damage in the low-lying areas of the Cape Flats.

Three high hills in the neighbourhood (one now crowned with a microwave tower, another with aviation warning lights) are all called Kanonkop, since all had cannons on their summits. This was part of the early communications system and the cannons were fired as a warning in emergencies, and to signal the arrival of ships in the bay during peacetime, calling to stock up on meat and vegetables. One of the main problems for the farmer lay in negotiating the sandy waste area of the flats with wagon or coach, and this led to the introduction, in 1845, of Port Jackson, Australian Myrtle and Hakea, in order to stabilise this difficult terrain - a project only too successful!

The Tygerberg farms form some of the earliest land grants: Mosselbank, Diemersdal, Klein Olifantskop, Phesantekraal, Altydgedacht (originally Tygerberg) and Doordekraal all date from 1698, while another large group of farms has title deeds granted in the early eighteenth century.

The village of Durbanville, until fairly recently a quiet farming centre with typical village general stores, a blacksmith's shop and a wagon-making business, has changed its character completely and is now a thronging town of about eleven thousand people, surrounded by vast residential townships, two shopping centres and five traffic officers! Originally known as Pampoenkraal, the village was a popular outspan for coaches and wagons. Good water was available, and it was a convenient distance from Cape Town.

In 1826 a group of Tygerberg farmers requested permission from Governor Lord Charles Somerset to build their own church. This was completed in the same year, and the congregation has just celebrated its 150th anniversary.

In 1836 the name of the village was changed to D'Urban in honour of Sir Benjamin. Later, in 1886, because of confusion with the rapidly growing D'Urban in Natal, the ending 'ville' was added to give the name its present form.

ITINERARY

- 9.45 - 11.00 : WELBELOOND - Mrs. Mellish
Early Company cattle post "Bommelshoek". Extensive grand formal layout of homestead and outbuildings overlooking the Dieprivier. Simple but effective 19th century detail overlaid in general on the earlier fabric. U-shaped basic home plan - compare with Phesantekraal.
- 11.15 - 12.15 : VISSERSHOK - Mr. Melck
Well-known landmark, also early cattle post. T-shaped homestead set within a very generous walled werf.
- 12.30 - 12.45 : short stop to see only parts of
CONTERMANSKLOOF - Mr. Lennie Starke
- 12.45 : roadside view over GROOT ROOSBOOM
well-known early property, 19th century overlay, detail, now facing dilapidation.
- 1.00 - 2.00 : picnic lunch at ALTYDGEDACHT (originally TYGERBERG).
Jean Parker to tell of the property's history.
- 2.15 - 2.45 : DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH
150th anniversary year of its founding in 1826.
- 2.45 - 3.15 : ALL SAINTS CHURCH
1860. Suspected "Sophie Gray" design.
- 3.30 : drive through OXFORD STREET
Numbers 18, 20 and 22 - typical early Durbanville dwelling-houses.
- 4.00 - 5.00 : PHESANTEKRAAL - Mr. and Mrs. Rennie Brink
U-shaped homestead containing a most valuable illustrative range of early, mid and late 19th century details overlapping and happily co-existing with early surviving woodwork. Extensive outbuildings.

Historical sketch and itinerary by Jean Parker, assisted by John Rennie.