Picture: T Maritz

AgulhasNPark eBulletin

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South African NATIONAL PARKS

The Southernmost Tip of Africa S34˚49'59" E20˚00'12"

In 1488 Bartolomeu Dias turned back after he failed to reach the East in search of a trading route. On his return journey he passed a certain flat piece of land on the 16 May. He named it after an Irish monk, St Brendan, whose festival day it was: *Ponte de Sao Brendao*. Cape Agulhas as a name, however, appeared since 1488 to 1643, 31 times on documents. The name *Cabo de Agulhas* (Cape of Needles) appeared for the first time on a map in 1502. The first map to depict the continent of Africa as a whole was drawn by a German cartographer, Martellus in 1489. The Overberg coast was surveyed for the first time properly in 1822 with a device that measured longitude. The actual southernmost tip is situated some 250 km further south at the edge of the continental shelf after it has wandered over the millennia because of plate tectonics.

Cape Agulhas the name

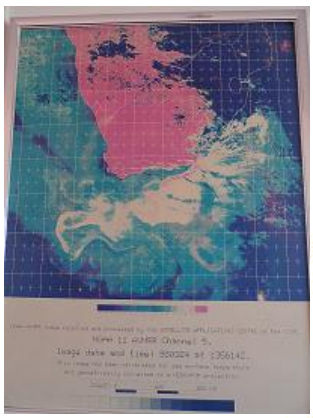
The name referred to the needle-like formation of the rocks along the coast, and also from the fact that the compass needle pointed north without any variation. The navigators of the 1400's to the 1700's who discovered the sea route around the southernmost tip, observed the sun at noon when it passed the meridian, and found, that the magnetic compass pointed to true north. Today it points some 24 degrees west of true north.

Where two oceans meet

The southernmost point is recognized by the International Hydro-graphic Organization as the ***geographic dividing line*** between the Indian and Atlantic oceans, following the meridian of 20˚ east. The Agulhas and Benguela currents that originate in these mighty oceans mingle some hundreds of kilometres south of here over an area of a few hundreds of kilometres that is not fixed in size or location.

The Agulhas and Benguela *Currents*

The hot Agulhas Current, flowing from north to south, is a very strong current, moving at a speed of 2 m/sec, following the east coast of Africa. The cold and weaker Benguella stream runs from west to east and then north up the west coast of Africa. To the south of Africa flows the east-west cold Antarctic Circumpolar current (West Wind Drift). From infrared satellite images it is clear that there occurs a mingling of water of especially the Agulhas and Benguella currents in the vicinity of the tip of Africa. This intermingling creates a swirling pattern stretching over hundreds of kilometers at times. These rotating bodies of warm water from the warm Agulhas current can sometimes stretch into the cold Atlantic Ocean. These patterns can be viewed at the website http//:www.rsmas.miami.edu/environment/imagery/imagery.pl?agulhasgac&0.



The Southernmost Tip as a heritage site

One of the key intentions of founding Agulhas National Park was to protect the geographic location of the Southernmost Tip of Africa which makes it an important and valuable national heritage site, if not an international site. The Southernmost Tip of Africa is spectacularly beautiful, dangerous, desolate, windswept and hard. It is characterized by its needle-like coastline (from whence it gets its name) which has resulted in countless shipwrecks over the years. Approaching it with the realization that the Indian Ocean lies to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the west, with only Antarctica lying to the south, is a quasi-spiritual one. The iconic dimension of it lies in the integrity of the landscape. A photographic interpretation of the Southern Tip clearly revealed the stark and wild beauty of the landscape.

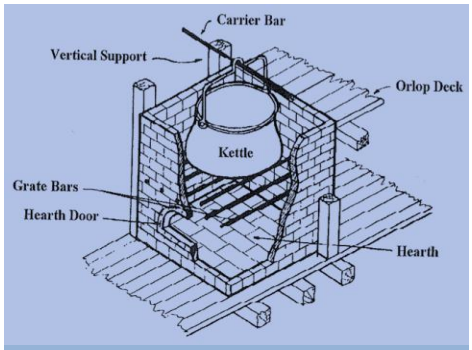




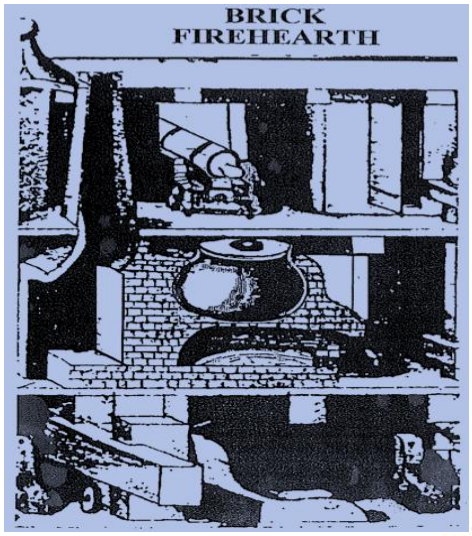

Bricks found on shipwrecks – Jimmy Herbert

It is known that bricks were brought to the Cape by the outward and homeward bound ships of the Dutch East India Company. In many cases they were carried as ballast and sold because of their value and to take in a heavy, more valuable cargo and replaced with stone ballast. As a cargo or ballast they would be expected to be found along the length of the hold. When a diver finds bricks on a wreck site it generally denoted the position of the galley floor or in Dutch ships, the vertical structure surrounding the area used as a galley. Between 1650 and 1850, the overall construction of galley fire hearths altered considerably. The major factor that influenced the design was the fire risk that was forever present on wooden vessels. Over the years the construction changed from brick-built hearths to a self-contained iron stove. During the first half of the seventeenth century, it appears that the fire hearth was situated low down in the vessel's hold. This type of hearth consisted of an enclosed fireplace in the form of a pit over which cauldrons were suspended or set on an iron grill. By 1670 the galley was relocated under the forecastle or at the fore-end of the middle gun deck on ships with three decks. The galley (kitchen/kombuis) was located in the middle of the ship up to at least the mid 18th Century. Up to 1850 a brick floor of English, French and Scandinavian vessels would generally be found in the fore castle area.

Schoonenberg 1722

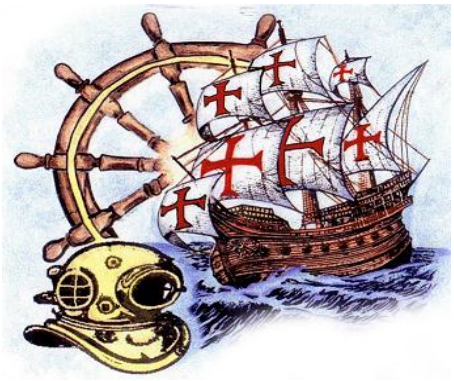


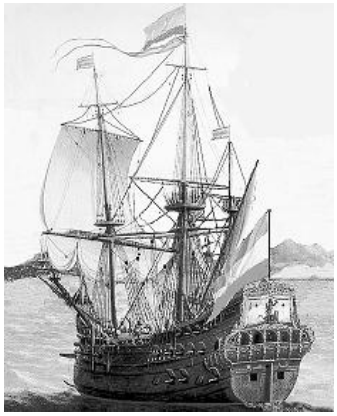
Fire hearth, c 1650



Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum displays in the Lighthouse

The Bredasdorp Shipwreck Museum will be displaying in the Lighthouse from 1 May until the 31 May as part of the Southern Tip day programme. On display will be a chart showing the results of a longitudinal *Cultural History and Archaeology Resource Study* covering the area of the Cape Agulhas light and involves more than 120 shipwrecks, showing more than one shipwreck per kilometre. The area around Cape Agulhas can truly be called Africa's most southern "maritime cemetery". A number of interesting artefacts from some of these Overberg shipwrecks will be on display of which one will be that of a signal gun presumed to be from the *Schoonenberg* that was lost in 1722.





The *Schoonenberg* shipwreck from 1722

The annual Southern Tip day Talk and Meal will be held on 16 May, the exact day Bartolomeu Dias sailed round the southern tip. The event is held at the *Suiderlig Dienssentrum* in Struisbaai and starts at 19:00. The talk is about the *Schoonenberg* shipwreck from 1722 by Dr Jan Malan from Bredasdorp. He did extensive research on the *Schoonenberg* which was published in two articles in the *South African Journal of Cultural History* of June and November 2013. Dr Malan will focus on the captain of the *Schoonenberg*, Skipper Van Soest and some other interesting findings about the Strandveld at the time. The title of the talk in Afrikaans is *Skipper van Soest, die Schoonenberg en die Strandveld: 'n storie uit 1722.* The *Schoonenberg* was a VOC ship which ran aground near Cape Agulhas on 20 November 1722.

The Southern Tip & Lighthouse Walk

As part of the Southern Tip Day programme the public is invited to take part in the Southern Tip & Lighthouse Walk on 17 and 18 May 2014 to commemorate Bartolomeu Dias sailing round the southern tip and all the shipwreck victims that lost their lives along the Cape Agulhas coastline. The walk will start at the Lighthouse and pass interesting sites along the way to the Southern Tip and back to the Lighthouse. These sites include the old Agulhas camping site from the 1920s, middens, fish traps, historical southern tip, beacons and the actual Southern Tip. On the way back the coastal fynbos will be interpreted culturally. The Lighthouse Precinct also has interesting sites which can keep one busy a whole morning. These sites are a grave, a well, the quarry from which the building blocks for the Lighthouse were mined and a small cave. The Egyptian Revivalism building style of the lighthouse in itself is an interesting story. The planned time for the walk is one and a half hours.

Arniston 1815

On 30 May 1815, 200 years ago the *Arniston*, an East Indiaman of 1 498 tons, met its fate near the Arniston coastal village of today. Under command of Captain George Simpson she succumbed to a storm off Waenhuiskrans while on a voyage from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to England. She was a troop transport ship and 14 women and 25 children were aboard ship as well. Only six men out of more than three hundred persons aboard survived the disaster. Visit the Shipwreck Museum exhibition in the Cape Agulhas Lighthouse to read more about this disaster. (SOURCE: WALKER, M. 2007. *Forgotten shipwrecks of the Western Cape.* Michael Walker) In 2015 an event is planned to commemorate the tragic wrecking of the *Arniston.*

Seconds before disaster (1815)

SOUTHERN TIP DAY
CAPE AGULHAS

International Day for Biological Diversity - 22 May

The United Nations has proclaimed May 22 the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. When first created by the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly in late 1993, 29 December (the date of entry into force of the Convention of Biological Diversity), was designated *The International Day for Biological Diversity*. In December 2000, the UN General Assembly adopted 22 May as IDB, to commemorate the adoption of the text of the Convention on 22 May 1992 by the Nairobi Final Act of the Conference for the Adoption of the Agreed Text of the Convention on Biological Diversity. This was partly done because it was difficult for many countries to plan and carry out suitable celebrations for the date of 29 December, given the number of holidays that coincide around that time of year. The theme for 2014 is Island Biodiversity. (SOURCE: http://www.cbd.int/idb/.)

Erica diversity in Agulhas National Park

Rehabilitating Agulhas Fynbos diversity through Working for Water

The Agulhas Plain forms part of the Cape Floral Kingdom. This area is characterised by an abundance of fynbos. Sadly, alien invasive plants have invaded the fynbos over the years. Some of the aliens (such as Rooikrans, Spider Gum, Manatoka, Blue Gum and Pine) were brought into the area to stabilise the sand dunes, and to use as firewood. These same species now pose a threat to our water security and Fynbos diversity. The Agulhas Working for Water Project has been running for 16 years to help rid the Agulhas Plain of these Alien Invasive Plants. The extent of Alien Plant Infestation within the Project boundary according to the current 2013 data is as follows: Alien plant infestations range from very dense stands, dense, medium, scattered to very scattered (100% - 1%). Approximately 3 300ha will be put in an initial clearing plan, 17 700ha are under a follow up programme and the rest are nearing a completion and maintenance phase (2 500ha - Soetanysberg and Sandberg). Over the last few years a total of 17 700 ha of initial clearing took place. These areas are often in fire and erosion-sensitive areas. Some of these areas are old quarries or agriculture lands. The other areas of initial work are areas that are very difficult to access (such as the wetlands in winter rainfall months). There is still an area of 3 300 ha that needs initial clearing. The densities of follow-up sites vary from full coverage of seedlings, to less than 5% coverage of all aliens on the site. There are a few areas that are extremely dense despite being cleared a few times. These are Rietfontein, Hangnes and Bergplaas and the high densities are caused by the effects of wildfires and the fact that the area is fertile (sandbanks). Of the 17 700 ha of follow up clearing done, 15 200ha is between 25 and 50% dense and 2 500ha is nearing the maintenance phase. (SOURCE: *Agulhas National Park Lower Level Alien Clearing Plan,* Draft 1, 2013).

New staff appointments

Thabelo Masemola
Section Ranger East
Previously WfW Project Manager
Marakele NP

Lana Du Toit
WfWetlands Project Manager
Previously Agulhas & TMNP WfW