

AgulhasNPark eBulletin

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Intriguing history of Ratelrivier

Ratelrivier, situated in the western section of Agulhas National Park, is one of the most iconic heritage sites in the park. It has a rich and colourful history which stretches as far back as the Late Stone age with evidence of middens along the river beds and potshards in the cemetery, into the early 21st century. Matthys Johannes Rostock Lourens was the first trek farmer who settled on Ratelrivier when it was registered in his name as a loan farm in 1745, at the time called *Buffeljagtsrivier aan de Ratelrivier*. In 1831 Hans Jacob Swart bought 1 875 hectares (2 343 morgen). He passed away in 1835 and his wife, Catharina, was an active farmer for the next 25 years. In the late 1860s Dirk Gysbert Van Reenen Van Breda, second son of Michiel Van Breda of Zoetendals Valleij, bought Ratelrivier. He sent his son, Dirk Gysbert, and family to live on Ratelrivier. Dirk Gysbert was known for his violent and unruly personality and actions. In 1871 he shot his wife, Alida, fatally. He only went on trial a few years later and was found guilty of murdering his wife. The farm stayed Van Breda property until it was sold to William Fletcher in 1898. The Fletchers were a respected and affluent family and continued their luxurious Cape lifestyle at Ratelrivier. (To be continued)



Harry Bolus and Ratelrivier

South Africa has been the destination of botanical explorers from about 1592 and established, unbeknown to them, the beginning of a significant **bio-cultural heritage** for South Africa. Plant populations found and identified from those days are recognised as historical scientific artefacts, but the link between the first collections made by early botanists and the scientific heritage value of these collections has not been made in the South African context yet. Currently Carly Cowell of the Cape Research Centre is busy with a study which aims to establish the scientific heritage of type plant collections in the Agulhas National Park before 1914. Three farmsteads, today part of the Agulhas National Park, were visited by botanical explorers in the 1800s, namely Ratelrivier, Rietfontein and Rhenosterkop. These botanists made the Elim Missionary station their base from where they conducted exploration and collection trips to the neighbouring farms. From the type specimens it can be seen that there were two major collection times when travel to the Agulhas Plain was suitable, namely April before the heavy winter rains and December, once the wetlands had dried out sufficiently for travellers to pass through. In September 1894 Harry Bolus left the Cape for Elim. On October 4 he drove over to Ratelrivier where he met up with Mr and Mrs Hughes, who at the time managed the farm for the Ratel River Estate Consortium. He proceeded to do botanical work along the roads and fields near the farmstead. During his visits to the farm he was told that Mrs Hughes liked wild flowers and kept what remained around the homestead intact.

(SOURCE: COWELL, C. 2014. *Critical moments for botany on the Agulhas Plain*. Unpublished).



Harry Bolus, 1834 - 1911



After the first winter rains in early June



L Du Toit

Pelicans and Flamingos flock together at the Saltpans



M Raselabe

Flooded service roads and veld



L Lewis, A Appel

The veld rejuvenated

Agulhas Working for Water plans for 2015-16

In 2014-15 a total of 18 864 ha was cleared of which 352 ha can be classified as “initial areas”, meaning the first clearing of alien growth in an area. The plan is to do follow up clearing of 5898.80 ha across the park in 2015-16, and 583.07 ha of initial alien clearing. The project now concentrates on initial areas in the Rietfontein and Rhenosterkop sections. Large areas of the park are scheduled into a two to three year cycle due to the lower densities of alien infestation in these areas. This will explain the fact that the total hectares cleared is so much lower than the previous year. The dominant species are Red Eye, Rooikrans, *Acacia Cyclops*, Spidergum, Spinnepokblom, *Eucalyptus lehmannii* and the Australian myrtle, Australiese mirteboom, *Leptospermum laevigatum*, especially in the Ratelrivier area. The new threat and challenge for the Working for Water teams after this initial clearing is Pampas grass, Pampasgras, *Cortaderia selloana*, Milkweed, Balbos (Cotton tree, Spasballas), *Asclepias physocarpa*, Common Lantana, Gewone Lantana, *Lantana camara* and Stinkbean, Stinkboon, *Paraserianthes sp.* Now that the dominant alien species are disappearing and the natural landscapes appear these “new” alien species can be seen, especially at former rubbish dumps and where farm animals were kept or where there was a stock post, especially Kikuyu grass.



Stinkbean



Lantana



L Lewis

Research projects in Agulhas National Park

Currently there are 29 active research projects in ANP managed by the Cape Research Centre. All the registered research projects are evaluated and rated according to essential, important, useful and inventory. These ratings speak to the park management plan. Three projects that speak to alien vegetation are

Adaptive Research and Management: Emerging Invasive Alien Plants, SANParks Cape Cluster: Evaluating the effectiveness of alien control measures: mapping of invasive aliens as a tool for evaluating and improving the efficacy of control measures in parks (SANParks Cape Cluster Parks: Table Mountain, Agulhas, West Coast, and Bontebok) and An assessment of the challenges to effective management of invasive alien plants in fynbos protected areas. Read more about the other research projects in future eBulletins.

Adaptive Research and Management: Emerging Invasive Alien Plants, a short summary

SANBI's Invasive Species Programme collaborates with various partners to assess and report on species of concern in the Western Cape. Each species (and sometime genus, e.g. the Acacias) is treated as a project. Some species like *Billardiera heterophylla* is listed, but is reported on separately, as requested, because it constitutes a new project. For each project, the objective is to co-ordinate the adaptive management, i.e. eradication (where possible) or containment of an invasive alien plant species. Project-specific objectives will be crafted per project and in collaboration with the relevant SANParks staff.

New staff appointments



Sonwabo Mbanyana
Tourism Intern
Studied Tourism at
Walter Sisulu University



Denzil Swartbooi

Field Ranger, Agulhas East

Denzil is one of the first appointed Environmental Monitors to become a field ranger. He is a born Bredasdorp and after school completed a two-year Agriculture Plant production certificate course with the local Department of Agriculture



The taking of the slaver *Meermin* 1766



Dan Sleight & Piet Westra

Die aanslag op die Slaweskip Meermin now available in English

Dan Sleight & Piet Westra: *The taking of the slave ship Meermin, 1766*. In February 1766 while the slave ship *Meermin* was returning to Cape Town from Madagascar with 140 slaves, some male slaves got hold of a number of their native spears, killed most of the officers and crew on deck and trapped the remainder, some of them badly wounded, in a cabin in the stern of the ship. The fight raged for days, while the ship was carried helplessly along by wind, current and tide, until it ran aground near Cape Agulhas. This first complete account of the violent uprising on the hooker *Meermin*, based entirely on archival records, describes a desperate struggle on the open sea for freedom and survival. The dramatic tale of courage, bloodshed, endurance, death, deceit and betrayal, also sheds light on the economic and social conditions at the Cape at the time. Details are given about the origins of Cape slaves, why and under what circumstances they became slaves, with what they were bought, how they were transported, treated and employed by the Cape government, and how they were punished when they transgressed its laws. Africana Publishers, 2013, ISBN-9780-620-58141-7.

The old Bontebok fence

Along the road between Bredasdorp and Waenhuiskrans the last remains of the Bontebok camp from the 19th century can still be seen, thanks to the Albertyn family of the farm Nachtwacht. In 1837 only a few Bontebok survived hunting on the Agulhas Plain. Alexander Van der Byl, owner of the farm Nachtwacht at the time, fenced in a herd of 26 Bontebok for protection. It is a section of this fence that still can be seen next to the road between Bredasdorp and Waenhuiskrans, as well as a memorial plaque. The herd increased but the numbers stayed low. In 1931 the Government bought the farm *Quarriebos* south of Bredasdorp and near De Mond to establish the Bontebok National Park. At the time, a mere 17 Bontebok *Damaliscus pygargus dorcas* remained from a known population of 20 animals in the area. Initially the Bontebok thrived under this protection, but later inadequate grazing, parasite infestations, trace element deficiencies and the wet marshy conditions in the area again threatened the survival of this species. In 1960, 61 members of the surviving population were relocated to its current location in the Swellendam District, and on March 24, 1961, the new park was formally proclaimed. Today Bontebok NP is home to about 200 Bontebok, the maximum this park can support taking into consideration biodiversity as a whole.



A Appel

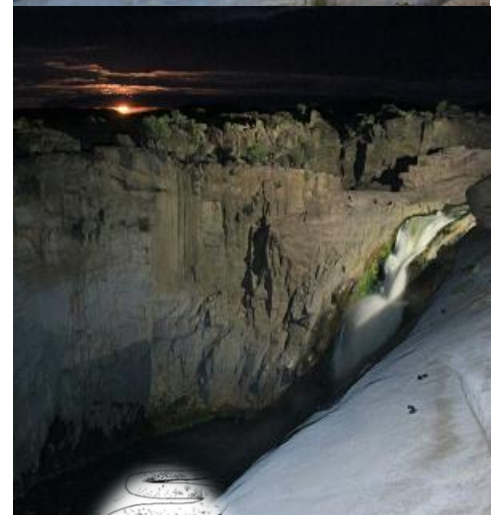
M Visser

Augrabies Falls

South African National Parks are established not only to conserve specific biodiversity or habitats, but also places or sites of cultural and geological significance. Augrabies Falls in the Augrabies Falls National Park is a good example of a culturally and geological significant site, not only for the local people but all South Africans. It is said that the name *Augrabies* is derived from the Nama word *!oukurubes*, meaning “noise making place” or “place of great noise”. The first documented visit to the falls was made by Swedish deserter, Hendrik Jacob Wikar in 1778. His visit was followed shortly afterward by that of Robert Jacob Gordon in 1779. The published travel journals of these visitors provide valuable information on the inhabitants of the areas surrounding the falls in the late 18th century, their culture and heritage. Both journals indicate that at the time of their visits the area was extensively populated by both herder and forager groups. While the herders seemed to have inhabited the islands above the falls, the foragers lived in the direct vicinity of the falls. Wikar called these foragers *Klaare Kraal* people and mentions that they sustained themselves by catching fish in the river and eating the fruit of the raisin-bush *Rhus pendulina* still found in the vicinity of the falls. Gordon also describes a group of hunter-gatherers in the direct vicinity of the falls, which he calls the *Anoeis* or *Heldere (Kraal)* people, and mentions that they caught fish but also hunted hippopotamus and rhinoceros with the use of game trapping pits which Wikar found above the falls. Local legend has it that the falls is the dwelling place of a mythical creature known as the Water Snake. This snake, *!ariep Siren*, which has a diamond on its forehead, is believed to live underwater in a dry cave and only comes out at night to graze on land. (SOURCE: *Cultural map for Augrabies Falls National Park*, 2001; Richtersveld NP documents.)



N Du Plessis



L Lewis, A Appel