Contextual Guide

Vink&Vink Inc

Tour of South Africa 2014

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PROVINCES AND RIVERS OF SOUTH AFRICA

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SOUTH AFRICA TOUR

Oct–Nov 2014

INTRODUCTION

Unlike "rough guides" prepared for previous tours, this one I have called a "contextual guide." In other words, it's not intended as a guide to destinations along the tour route, but as a background to the historical and political significance of large sections of the country that we will transit.

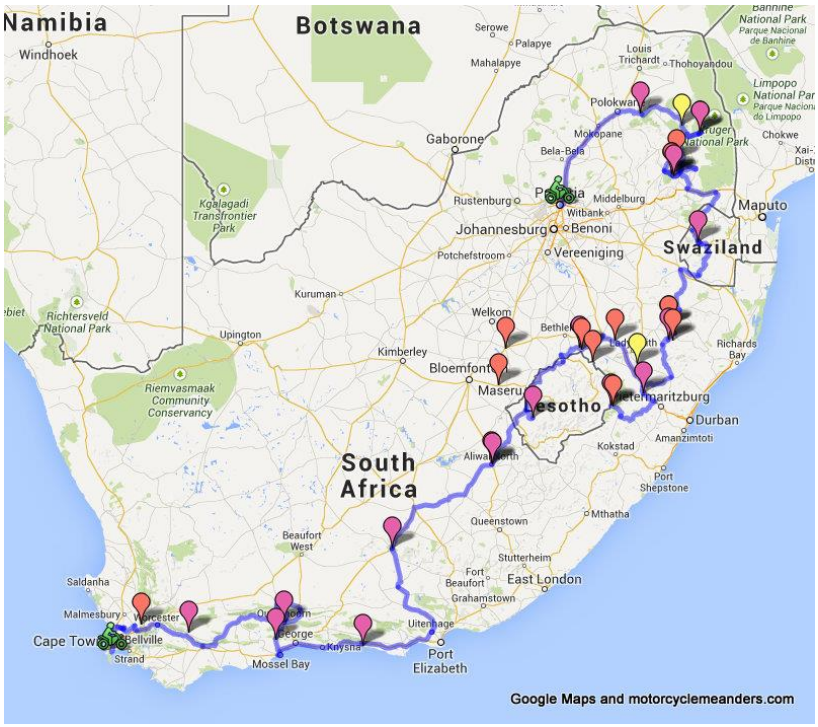
There were two reasons for doing it this way. First, Vink&Vink Inc has produced an impressive day to day guide with maps. Secondly, it seemed to me that many of the events in South Africa's history are tied so closely to the geography and racial mix of the country that appreciating those connections will enhance our enjoyment of the tour.

Having said that, I need to put in a disclaimer, if somewhat inconsistent with protestations on page 2. The more I got into the "contextual" issues, the more I became intrigued but, at the same time, overwhelmed by their complexity. The evolution of southern Africa from the early centuries of so-called Bantu[1] migration from central Africa, the interaction of these migrating groups with one another, the spread of the European migrants and their geographic and political paths as well as their interaction with the already settled occupants of the land, and the complexity and conflicts both within and between the various ethnic groups whether black or white were all very challenging to understand let alone capture with any confidence of insight or accuracy. So I accept responsibility if I've got anything wrong.

PRELUDE

This tour will be special. And unique.

It may not have the antiquity of the basilicas and castles of Turkey; or the seductive lure of the kasbahs of Morocco; or the grandeur of the Rajput and Mughal palaces, forts and mausoleums of India; or the majesty and challenge of the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau.



But each of those traits were peculiar to the relevant tour. And South Africa will definitely have unique traits peculiar to it.

The South Africa tour will offer an exclusively characteristic insight into a distinctive mix

[1] See chapter on Races and Relations for an attempt to explain terminology.

and clash of historic forces vying for superiority, ethnic groups replete with complexity and competitiveness, cultures and traditions of extreme polarities, a potpourri of *dramatis personae* that defies fiction; and that's in addition to the Machiavellian politics, obsessive personal ambitions, armed raids and vicious battles, deceptive agreements and treaties – all transcending races, ethnic groupings, cultures and political powers.

What more could you ask for?

Ah, of course. I almost forgot to mention there is more: amazing topography and geography covering mountains, plateaus and coasts; wildlife unique to Africa; and towns and cities that combine history with cultural quaintness.

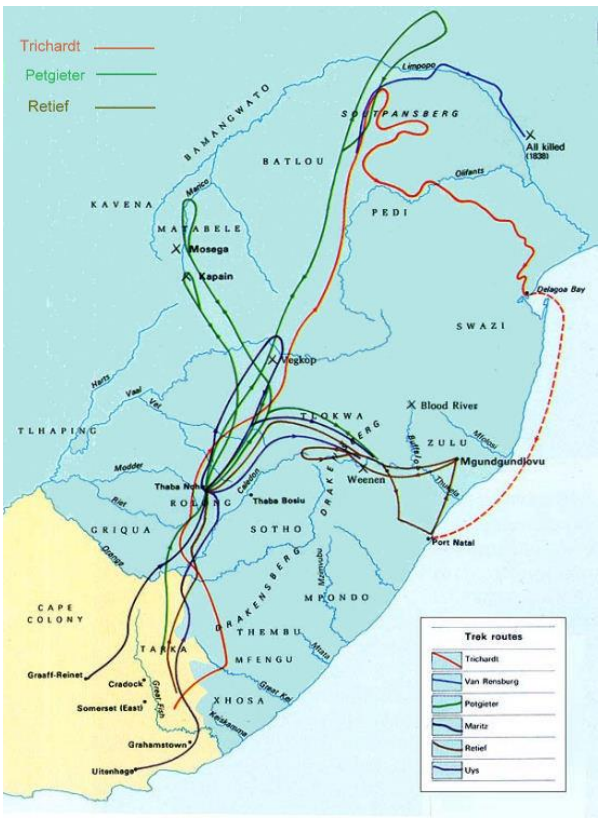
And, not least of all, the riding: trekking with the Voortrekkers up and down Drakensberg passes, venturing into the battles of Boers, English and Zulus, winding along coastal roads, tackling a plethora of passes in various mountain ranges and venturing to the tip of the cape of Good Hope.

START OF THE TOUR AND ITS SETTING

We start our tour in the centre of the Transvaal (as we classicists prefer to say, utilising our hard-learnt Latin): the heart of the independent Boer Republic of South Africa (ZAR – from its name in Dutch and Afrikaans) and the epitome of the Highveld[2] for which the Voortrekkers trekked, worked and fought.

The Voortrekkers were immigrants, mostly of Dutch descent, who left the Cape Colony during the late 1830s and 1840s moving into the interior. There were several mass movements under different leaders. Taken together they constituted *The Great Trek*.

Most headed out from the eastern part of the Cape Colony, skirted round the southern end of the Drakensberg Escarpment and headed north across the Orange River onto the Highveld. Crossing the Vaal River and trekking further north were additional attempts by the more determined and less compromising of the Boer pioneers to stay beyond the reach of the British colonisers based in Cape Town and consistently expanding their tentacles in all directions. The British had fairly quickly established control or, at least, nominal sovereignty over the areas emanating from Cape Colony north to the Orange River; but had initially been reluctant to chase down the Voortrekkers who pushed beyond the Orange River and further north beyond the Vaal.



That was to change, but for now Pretoria north of the Vaal River is our starting point for the tour.

Pretoria was founded as the ZAR's capital in 1855 by Marthinus Pretorius, a leader of the

[2] The Highveld refers to the high plateau mostly above 1500m that starts from the top of the Drakensberg Escarpment sloping gradually downwards to the west and south west, as well as to the north towards the Limpopo River. These higher, cooler areas are characterised by flat or gently undulating terrain and vast grasslands.

Voortrekkers, who named it after his father Andries Pretorius[3]. Marthinus Pretorius became the first president of the new republic, which was independent from 1856 to 1877, then again from the end of the First Boer War in 1881, in which the Boers regained their independence from the British Empire, until 1900. In 1900 the ZAR was annexed by the United Kingdom during the Second Boer War although the official surrender of the territory took place at the end of the war on 31 May 1902.

Our ride north from Pretoria takes us through the heart of the northern Highveld – the far outer reaches of voortrekking, which eventually became the northern perimeter of the ZAR and ultimately, on reaching the Limpopo River, the northern border of today's South Africa. The settlement movements of the Great Trek would come to an end here.

The Voortrekkers didn't confine themselves to the Highveld. A small "commissioned" exploratory trek had earlier made its way along the low-lying coastal areas from the eastern part of Cape Colony north to Port Natal (today's Durban); and judged the area stretching west to the Drakensberg as ideal for settling. The Voortrekkers heading north across the Highveld knew this and a branch of them found its way across the Drakensberg to the Natal hinterland.

By the end of our first day's ride, we'll have experienced the Highveld through which lines of wagons and their voortrekking occupants had pushed their way across the Vaal River to set up the independent Boer ZAR; over which the widely scattered farms of the Voortrekkers spread as far as the eye can see; and interspersed with the Voortrekker farms, the kraals, animals and daily life of the native African people who partially shared the grazing and farming lands and partially worked in loosely defined levels of servitude. This was also terrain that was not only disputed and fought over between White Afrikaner and Black African but brought to a head the ever-festering animosity between the Boer state and the British Empire. Take it in!

LET'S TAKE A STEP BACK

Before we think that the Voortrekkers were the original European pioneers or that escape from British administration was the sole motive for trekking, we need to meet the Trekboers. They were the forerunners of the Voortrekkers; and, to a large extent, their forebears. The Trekboers preceded the Voortrekkers by a couple of generations and were a mix of ethnic groups of roughly equal proportions: Dutch colonists, French Huguenots and German Protestants. They were nomadic pastoralists who began migrating north and east from the areas round Cape Town in the late 17th and 18th centuries to find better pastures and to escape the autocratic rule of the Dutch East India Company.

[3] The elder Pretorius had become a national hero of the Voortrekkers after his victory over the Zulus in the Battle of Blood River. Andries Pretorius also negotiated the Sand River Convention (1852), in which Britain acknowledged the independence of the Transvaal.

In reality, even the Trekboers had forerunners in a few hardy frontiersmen who before them had ventured north and east; sometimes escaping the law more than the administration.

While the Dutch East India Company did not want to have the colony extended, it was powerless to stop the Trekboers' migrations, which continued throughout the 1700s. By the 1740s the Trekboers had reached the Little Karoo and by the 1760s had reached the Great Karoo[4]. From the Great Karoo, some ventured across the Orange River. Those heading east (probably the majority) carried the extremities of the Cape Colony with them until the Dutch authorities by 1780 declared the Great Fish River would be the eastern-most border of the colony. By then there were some isolated farms in the area. (Remember the map on page 2!)

In both cases, the Trekboer numbers were not huge compared to the later Voortrekkers. Those heading north tended to be more nomadic than permanently settled; but they made their mark albeit sporadically across the Highveld, with a few even crossing the Vaal River. Those heading east kept up a nomadic life style until they reached the declared border where they became more permanently settled and from where their successors would become the bulk of the Voortrekkers.

Both the Trekboers and Voortrekkers came to be called Boers (farmers). Together with their compatriots who stayed farming in the Western Cape area, they came to be called collectively Afrikaans.

The movements of the Trekboers, taken with the settlements in the Western Cape, constituted the extent of settlement in the Cape Colony during the Dutch administration.

WE MIGHT AS WELL GO A BIT FURTHER BACK

Our starting point for this chapter is 1652. That's when the Dutch hit upon having a "way point" on the Cape of Good Hope (so named already by the Portuguese) for their ships plying between Holland and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia).

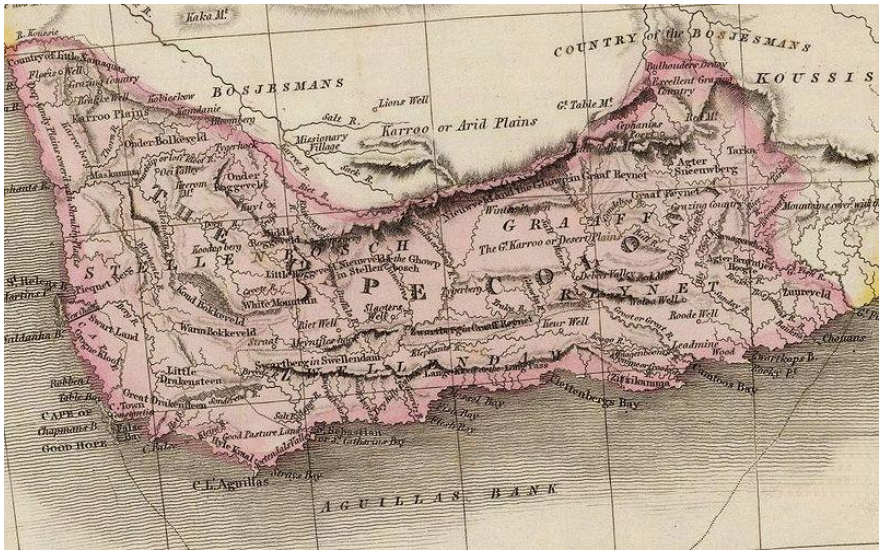
Their toehold on the African continent started as a small settlement of about 90 Dutch and German settlers established by the Dutch East India Company in Table Bay to re-supply their trading ships with fresh food and water. This would become Cape Town. Over the next four decades, the settlement expanded with arrivals of more Dutch and German settlers, a significant number of French Huguenots and also slaves from the East Indies.

[4] The Karoo is a semi-desert area distinguished by its common natural features of geography, geology, and climate; and noted for its low rainfall, arid air, cloudless skies, and extremes of heat and cold. It formed an almost impenetrable barrier to the interior from Cape Town. The early adventurers, explorers, hunters and travellers on the way to the Highveld unanimously denounced it as a frightening place of great heat, great frosts, great floods and great droughts.

From 1679-1688, satellite settlements were set up at Stellenbosch, Paarl and Franschoek. By then there were about 1000 Europeans and 400 slaves.

While things might have started well enough for the commander (Jan van Riebeeck) and his complement of sailors and settlers in 1652, by the last decade of the 1600s, a lot of the settlers had had enough of the autocratic Dutch East India Company and its restrictions on their freedom of trading and movement. Thus began the excursions of Trekboers further north and east, starting mainly from the satellite settlements. As noted in the previous chapter, these migrations and consequent settlements continued throughout the 1700s and, in effect, defined the *de facto* borders of the Cape Colony.

As if the spontaneous expansion of the colony wasn't problem enough for the Dutch East India Company, worse was to come in the guise of the French Revolution.



The French Revolution kicked off in 1789 and the following ten years were marked by internal turmoil and the subjugation of several European countries. Revolutionary France launched wars against several European nations because of their antagonism to the revolution or perceived support for counter revolutionaries. Having declared war on the Netherlands in 1792, France occupied them in 1795 and the French-controlled Batavian Republic was proclaimed. Britain, already at war with France since France's declaration in 1792, reacted to its actions in the Netherlands by occupying Cape Colony by military force ostensibly to keep it safe for the exiled Dutch Prince William V but just as much to ensure revolutionary France didn't get control of such a strategic location.

By 1799, the Dutch East India Company had duly fallen on its sword, formally transferred its possessions to the Batavian Republic and wrote itself out of the play. Probably all a bit academic in the circumstances since Britain was, in effect, calling the shots.

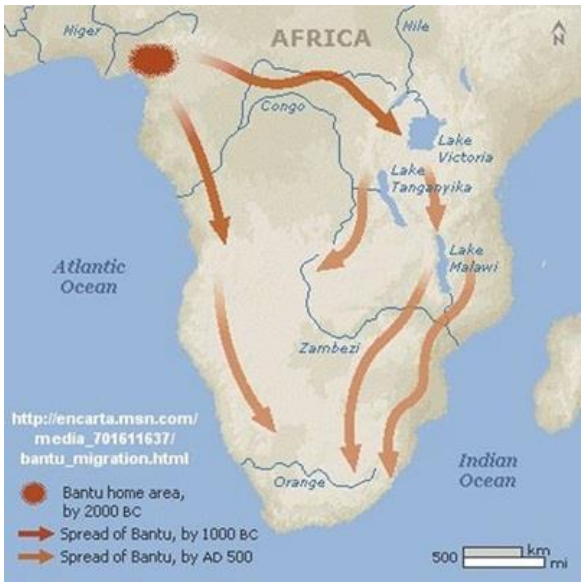
Not to miss an opportunity, Trekboers, obviously sensing an impending power vacuum with the plight of the Netherlands, set up independent states at Graaf-Reinet and Swellendam in 1795. The British wasted no time in disabusing the Trekboers of their ambitions.

Britain's state of war with France continued until the treaty of Amiens in 1802, which is seen my many as the transition point between the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars. The treaty must have brought some solace to Britain because in 1803 it handed back Cape Colony to the Dutch in the form of the Batavian Republic. The peace lasted only a year before France and Britain were at war again as part of the Napoleonic Wars waged against European nations from 1803 until Napoleon met his Waterloo in 1815. By 1806, Britain, no doubt suspicious about Batavian Republic allegiances and also concerned at news of troopships sent by Napoleon to fortify the Cape Colony garrison, sent its own fleet to occupy the colony, which was successfully completed at the Battle of Blaauwberg.

The British occupied the Cape until it was formally ceded to it by the Netherlands in 1814. It then became a British colony. And the start of a new era.

RACES AND RELATIONS

It's important to note that none of the events or developments outlined in the preceding sections took place in a vacuum. From the time van Riebeeck first set foot on the shores of Table Bay, there were permanent and devastating social and economic impacts on the people who already inhabited southern Africa. Southern Africa was no *terra nullius* nor claimed to be such.



This is the most complex set of issues to write about; and needs an even stronger disclaimer than contained in the Introduction. There will inevitably be a wider set of divergent views and perceptions on this set of issues than on any other. Then there are the pitfalls of terminology. Some terms once commonly used have come to be considered offensive. Others, while less offensive, are less preferred. If I have used any terms in their historical context, this should not be taken as a view that they acceptable for general use.

At ill-defined times several centuries back, there were migrations of people from central Africa that arrived by various paths and in different time waves. Anthropologists and linguistic experts grouped these waves of migrations as *Bantu* reflecting the fact that they shared commonalities in their languages that were also common to many groups remaining in central and northern Africa. The languages were categorised as Bantu languages.

If I have understood correctly, all the languages – and consequently all the various groups of people in southern Africa by the 17th century – were classified as Bantu…except for two groups in the south west, namely the Khoikhoi and San or Bushmen, who were related and often get grouped together as Khoisan. While the term 'Bantu' became tainted because of its use in the apartheid days, it remains relevant to understanding migrations and shared characteristics of ethnic groups.

Principal Languages of South Africa (2011 census)

Language Group	Language	Percentage Spoken
Nguni	Zulu	23%
	Xhosa	16%
	Swati	2.5%
	Ndebele	2%
Sotho	Northern Sotho	9%
	Setswana	8%
	Sotho	7.6%
West Germanic	Afrikaans	13.5%
	English	9.6%

There are far too many clans, tribes or peoples to cover here; and, in any event, it gets far too complicated. I have tried to confine this section to the peoples whose history we encounter on our tour.

Khoikhoi

The Khoikhoi had migrated in centuries past from Botswana and inhabited the Western Cape including the areas around Capetown. Various subgroups of Khoikhoi inhabited northeast and east of the Cape. The Khoikhoi were the first to encounter the landing of European settlers. They were called Hottentot by the Dutch settlers because calls they made during ceremonies sounded to the Dutch like the sound of Hottentot! The Khoikhoi were pastoralists with large herds of Nguni cattle (a breed well suited to the conditions and brought down from northern Africa with early migrations of a subgroup of the Bantu people called Nguni). Initially there was trading between the first European settlers and the Khoikhoi, but as settler farms extended further into their traditional pastoral grazing land, the Khoikhoi were displaced; and pushed further into drier country. Eventually, their social and economic structures broke down. Many ended up as bonded farm labourers or members of military units of the colonial government. Their plight was further exacerbated as the Trekboers headed north, northeast and east through their territory.

San

The San or Bushmen were hunter gatherers and more nomadic than their Khoikhoi cousins. Some sources suggest the Khoikhoi, with easier access to resources in their cattle, displaced the San and pushed them into more arid areas. Others suggest there was movement between the two groups depending on whether you own cattle or not!

Griqua

Mixed-race "Afrikander" trek-boer nomads in the Cape Colony, ancestral people to the great Griqua migration.

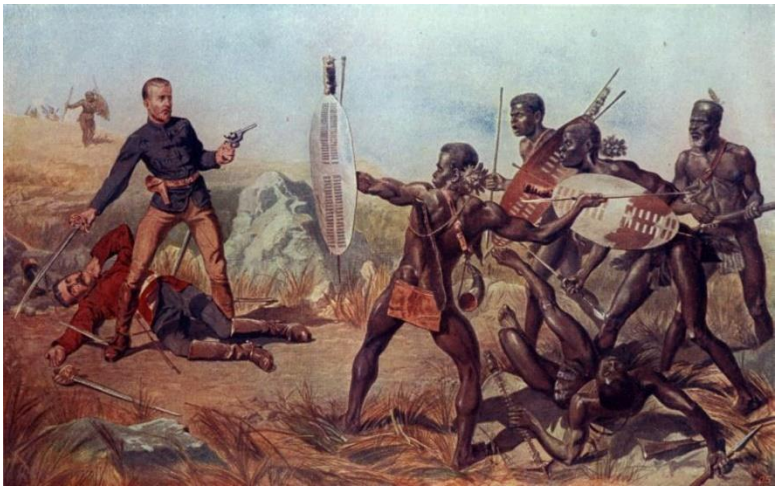
The Griqua deserve a mention. They were not a Bantu people or even a homogeneous ethnic clan. In the quaint language of Donald R Morris (*Washing of the Spears*) they "evolved from miscegenation between the early Cape settlers and the Hottentots." In other words, they originated from relationships between the early Dutch settlers and the Khoikhoi as the former pushed to the edges of the Cape Colony.

They were called by several names. Baastards (or Basters) was one they seemed to like. But Griqua (derived from the name of one of the Khoikhoi clans) became the one authorities preferred to use. They generally spoke Afrikaans and were Christians. They evolved to form, in effect, their own way of life in their own territory. Their main settlement was west of the Orange Free State including the Kimberley region, so came to increased notice with the discovery of diamonds. So much so that West Griqualand, as it was called, was immediately gobbled up by the then British colonial power. A break-away group that had moved east and established East Griqualand had a much shorter life-span before being absorbed into the Cape Colony.

Xhosa

Early frontiersmen, later the Trekboers and subsequent settlers who headed east from Cape Town were to encounter a much more aggressive opposition to their incursions and settling adjacent to traditional lands. The Xhosa were part of the Nguni migration that also include Zulu, Swazi and Ndebele people.

By the 17th century, the Xhosa occupied territory from just south of today's Durban to the Great Fish River. The Xhosa were cattle herders who were always on the move for better pastures. The first encounters between them and encroaching settlers was as early as 1779 in the area along the Little Fish River. The Xhosa were not ones to back down easily and this encounter sparked skirmishes that lasted two years. This encounter was later to be known as the First Frontier War or First Xhosa War. As more settlers arrived and competition for land intensified, there were nine so-named wars[5] over the next ten years with increasing degrees of intensity as firearms became widespread. The Xhosa had the added misfortune of being caught between two advancing forces: the colonists to their south and marauding bands, mainly Zulus, to their north. The upshot was that the Xhosa were pushed back well north of where they had long settled to areas closer to the Kei River. The Kei River became something of a focal point later in the apartheid era with the establishment of Xhosa 'homelands' of Ciskei and Transkei.



Ndebele (aka Matabele)

There would come a time when a Matabele Kingdom would occupy much of south western Zimbabwe having created Bulawayo as its capital. But a lot happened before that, including being a *force majeure* in the Highveld of the Transvaal contemporaneously with the Voortrekkers. However, long before that, there were two groups of Ndebele in the Highveld: Northern and Southern Ndebele. Enter the later-to-become great Ndebele/Matebele[6] King, Mzilikazi. He didn't seem to have any real Ndebele blood, but, at least he was from another Nguni clan, so had some ethnic and linguistic commonalities with the Ndebele. Mzilikazi had become chief of the Khumalo clan in the Natal area which was under the suzerainty of Shaka Zulu. Mzilikazi became Shaka's most senior military lieutenant before he fell out with him and took a large contingent of his Khumalo ultimately onto the Highveld of the lower Transvaal. Mzilikazi brooked no opposition and embarked on a devastating and murderous campaign conquering and killing or absorbing all who stood in his way. Both groups of the Ndebele, who were also Nguni

Mzilikazi issues an order to bowl underarm in a match against Shaka

[5] Many, mainly early, sources refer to them as the Kaffir Wars. While the term 'kaffir' has become unacceptable, its origin was an Arab word meaning non-believer which was used by early Arab traders. The term also spawned official terminology applied to Xhosa lands such as Kaffraria and British Kaffraria, which was a British colony in its own right before becoming part of Cape Colony.

[6] Matabele was a British invention brought about by their difficulty in pronouncing Ndebele with its inevitable prefixes.

people, met this fate, except that Mzilikazi took on their name; and hence the rise of the Matabele Kingdom.

Mzilikazi's indiscriminate 'scorched earth' campaign made it relatively easy for the Voortrekkers initially – there were few local inhabitants left to hinder their progress. However, they were to find Mzilikazi's army a formidable opponent and were engaged with it for some two years before Mzilikazi was forced to retreat beyond the Limpopo River to the north. It's a lot more complicated than that; but this suffices for superficial awareness for the purposes of our tour.

Sotho-Tswana

King Moshoeshoe and his ministers

The Sotho-Tswana are part of the Bantu people who migrated from the north. Within that grouping, however, there are three fairly distinct subgroups often referred to as the Western Sotho (the Batswana or Tswana) centred in today's Botswana; Northern Sotho (associated with the Pedi – some disagreements over to what degree) centred in the northern Transvaal; and Southern Sotho. The terminology seems to get a bit loose. For our purposes it might suffice to be aware the Sotho-Tswana group includes the Basotho of Lesotho and the [Orange] Free State, to whom the term 'Sotho' has come to be more specifically and almost exclusively applied. This group is the one referred to as the 'Southern Sotho'.

There's a fair bit of uncertainty and speculation mixed in with oral traditions about the history of the Sotho people who occupied the area on the Drakensberg and into the western plains (areas that would later become Lesotho and the Orange Free State). It seems they might have started off as a homogeneous clan of sorts but very early in the piece fractured into several clans adopting the names of their dissenting chiefs. It sounds a bit like the Boers, whom they would later encounter, where every would-be or wanna-be chief takes his followers off on their own.

It wasn't until a few historical developments coalesced in the 1800s that a more or less unified group emerged and developed into a nation. These developments were: the pressures from the north and east of the Mfecane (called the Difaqane by the Sotho people – see next chapter), the pressures from the south and west of the encroaching Voortrekkers and the rise of a leader with skills and vision in King Moshoeshoe.[7] We'll pick this up later in the chapter on *Lesotho*.

Mthethwa

The Mthethwa people were part of the original Nguni group of tribes dating from the early migrations. They settled around modern-day Swaziland, mainly on the Lubombo Mountains, before leaving in the 17th century to settle in modern-day KwaZulu-Natal.

The Mthethwa evolved into what's frequently called the Mthethwa Confederacy or Paramountcy. It was a confederation of tribes that retained their individual identities and chieftains but came under the suzerainty of the Mthethwa chief of the day.

The Mthethwa Paramountcy was consolidated and extended under the rule of Dingiswayo to include almost all the tribes surrounding it. It was during the reign of Dingiswayo that the relatively non-descript Zulu clan was brought into the confederacy. The Mthethwa Paramountacy came to an end

[7] Pronounced something like mow-shway-shway (mow as in mow the lawn)

– sort of – when Dingiswayo was killed by his arch rival Zwide from the neighbouring Ndwandwe tribe.

Ndwandwe

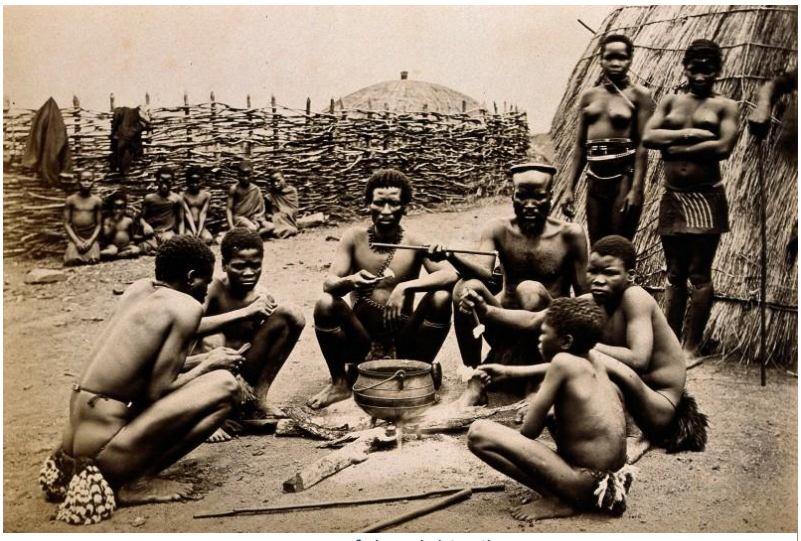
The Ndwandwe clan are also a subgroup of the Nguni people.

The Ndwandwe, with the Mthethwa, were a significant power in present-day Zululand at the turn of the nineteenth century. Under the leadership of King Zwide, the Ndwandwe nation all but destroyed the Mthethwa under their king Dingiswayo. Zwide eventually came to grief in one of his battles with Shaka of the Zulus who had picked up where Dingiswayo had left off. (See under *Zulu* below.).

The Ndwande then split up, with pockets under different generals settling in other parts of southern Africa.

Hlubi

I'd have to say that it was a lot easier to find stories about and images and more images of Hlubi Mboya than on anything else under "Hlubi". (You can look that up yourself.)



Men of the Hlubi Tribe

Pockets of Hlubi people can be found in several places in South Africa and neighbouring countries. A substantial group had settled in the Lubombo Mountains in the east of Swaziland. Some of these seemed to have fled in the face of slavers torching surrounding lands and made their way to an area somewhere close to the Drakensberg which we will traverse as we head North West into the Drakensberg after our overnight stop at the top of Sani pass. From there the Hlubi became quite a force to be reckoned with: one so significant that Shaka kept a peace treaty with them. Their chieftain at the relevant time for our interests was Mtimkulu.

Ngwane

The Ngwane don't feature largely in our tour; but we come across them in much the same area as we do the Hlubi. In fact, it's a bit confusing because it seems that a group called the Ngwane were amongst the early settlers of Swaziland – in fact possibly the main group. There are references to the Swazi being, in reality, Ngwane; and adopted the name Swazi only after a split in the group.

In the early years of the 1800s, as the Ndwandwe (under Zwide) and the Mthethwa (under Dingiswayo) were facing off for power and resources, the Ngwane (presumably a group that had already split with their Swaziland kin) under the leadership of Matiwane headed west and settled somewhere not far from the Hlubi – according to sources near today's Bergville which we would pass through if we take Oliviershoek Pass rather than Van Reenen's Pass).

The relevance of this group of Ngwane to our tour is their location and relationships amongst them, the Hlubi and the Zulu.

Matiwane, their chieftain, was something else again. Morris describes him as "a short brawny man of great intelligence but with a ferocious temper" and, based on his role in the Mfecane (see next chapter) someone who "any...Bantu chieftain would have murdered…out of hand."

Zulu

"Well, about time we got to the Zulu!" I hear you subvocalise. It's hard to pinpoint where we first meet the Zulu. Some sources suggest it's when the Voortrekkers met Mzilikazi on the Highveld, but that's because they superficially regard him as an offshoot of the Zulu. He really wasn't. I suspect it's more likely when Piet Retief led his followers over the Drakensberg and negotiated with Shaka's successor, Dingane. A lot followed from that, as you will read in a later chapter on *The Zulu Kingdom*. We'll spend a few days meeting the Zulu and their historical highs and low as we pass through KwaZulu-Natal.

The Zulu started life as a small, non-descript clan, albeit part of the Nguni people so sharing some common ethnic and linguistic characteristics with many of their neighbours. Their chief in the latter part of the 18th century was Senzangakona. He would seem to have had a *dalliance* with a lass from a neighbouring tribe, who was later found to be pregnant, causing much scandal all round.

Senzangakona tried to pass off the alleged pregnancy as a case of *iShaka* – an intestinal beetle that affects menstruation. It didn't work and when a son was born, Senzangakona rather cruelly called him Shaka. Shaka and his mum had a pretty rough time being shunted here and there before being befriended by another tribe that, like all the others, were loosely part of the Mthethwa-controlled network – a sort of confederacy under which tribes or clans had their own chieftains and way of life but were subject of the suzerainty of the Mthethwa whose chieftain at the time was Dingiswayo.

In due course, Shaka got called up for military service in the Mthethwa army and did so well he ended up being a key lieutenant of Dingiswayo. On Senzangakona's death, Dingiswayo installed Shaka as head of the Zulu. On Dingiswayo's death at the hands of Zwide, chieftain of the inimical Ndwandwe, Shaka took over the Mthethwa confederacy, tracked down Zwide and defeated him; and brought the Ndwandwe under his suzerainty.

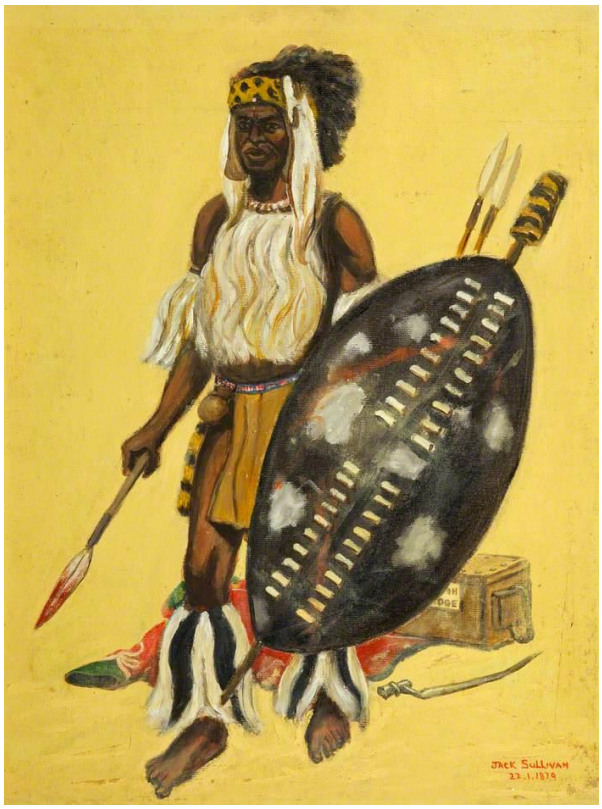
So by now the once discarded boy called after an intestinal beetle – and mocked and teased as a boy because of his tiny dik dik – was in command of a huge empire, having taken control of the expansive Mthethwa and Ndwandwe, both of which, in turn, had already taken control of numerous other clans.

Shaka did something unusual and probably unprecedented in the traditions of the Nguni peoples or, indeed, of the Bantu peoples of which the Nguni were part. Instead of the traditional decentralised system whereby tribes, clans or groups retained their individual identities and chieftains, Shaka instituted a highly centralised and integrated society whereby all the component groups lost their individual identities and became absorbed into his (re-named) *Zulu Kingdom*. A new military structure, centred on age groups across all the component parts (rather than tribal identity), reinforced the integrated nature of the new kingdom.

Shaka was no benevolent dictator. He was a ruthless tyrant with scant regard for the lives of others, randomly and unpredictably executing people often just for the hell of it. The Zulu no longer waged battles simply to settle disputes or steal some cattle, as had mostly been the case in squabbles

between clans. Under Shaka, the Zulu became synonymous with savage, bloody conquests that ripped into the heart and soul of the surrounding land and its people.

Shaka's rule was contemporaneous with the first British pioneers who set up camp at Port Natal and who engaged with him. The earliest oral and written stories about Shaka come from them. Their encounters were not always benign. As far as Shaka was concerned it was all his land and he not infrequently drove home the point with raids on the fledging settlement.



Shaka eventually met an untimely demise at the hands of his half-brother, Dingane, who took up the Zulu mantle.

While there were several instances of amicable and mutually agreeable – even trusted – relations between the Zulu kings and the white settlers both British and Boer, the overall relationship was never without its doubts and wariness. Lack of agreement at times, misunderstandings about agreements, and the inevitable tensions of border pressures and disputes all contributed to violent encounters. In addition to that, there were the Zulu raids on settler farms and the stealing of cattle as well as the management of thousands of refugees running from Zulu persecution and looking for protection from the colonial authorities.

There was little by way of consensus amongst the British, who eventually established themselves unequivocally as the colonial power, about how to handle the Zulu issues. Bartle Frere, an otherwise respected governor of Cape Colony, was committed to the view that only the complete subjugation of the Zulu Empire would guarantee lasting peace and stability. His view was to prevail. (For more detail on the Zulus, see chapter below on *The Zulu Kingdom*.

Swazi

We get to meet the Swazi early in the ride once we cross into Mpumalanga after a day in the game reserve. 27% of the Mpumalanga population are Swazi (or siSwati) speaking. We then cross into Swaziland itself. The Swazi are part of the Nguni group of the Bantu people who migrated into southern Africa. They settled in the lands that currently constitute Mozambique, Swaziland and South African territory west and south of Swaziland. Those who settled along the Pongola River came into conflict with the Ndwandwe people, whom we met in a preceding section. Following a few battles, the Swazi retreated north into the central area of today's Swaziland where they consolidated with fellow Swazis and continued the process of expansion by conquering numerous small Sotho and Nguni speaking tribes. Under Sobhuza I, the Nguni and Sotho peoples were integrated into the Swazi nation.

MFECANE

This seems an appropriate place to deal with a significant and somewhat controversial episode in southern African history. It's significant because it deeply affected pretty much all the peoples you have just read about who inhabited the expanses we will traverse. It's controversial because there seem to be differing views about how or who started it; and about the extent of its reach. And, inevitably, there are the 'Mfecane deniers.'

So what is the Mfecane?

First, the word itself. It is said to mean "the crushing" or "the scattering" or derived from Xhosa words meaning "become thin from hunger" and "starving intruders".

Essentially the Mfecane was a period of tremendous upheaval during the 1820s and 1830s among many southern African tribes during which tribes migrated from their traditional lands driven by a combination of withering drought, a search for food, escaping persecution and war; but then driving other tribes from their lands as the incoming tribe ravished people and land in desperate struggles for survival. It became a continuous chain reaction as tribe confronted tribe and fought, with each displaced one displacing another. The most affected places were the Orange Free State, parts of Lesotho and the area between the Drakensberg and the Natal coast.

Several sources, perhaps too simplistically, attribute the Mfecane to Shaka's militaristic expansionism, absorbing or destroying tribes, with the consequence of triggering huge waves of refugees that, in turn, came into conflict with other tribes.

Perhaps better informed analysis has pointed to developments such as: the increased density of populations along the Natal coast with no geographical options of expansion; a growing trend for tribes to become more settled rather than moving – partly because of competition for land and partly because the introduction of corn by the Portuguese in Mozambique had spread new farming opportunities into the Lowveld (corn was more productive); a crippling drought in the first decade of the 1800s that exacerbated the struggle for food; and the eruption of war between two significant kingdoms – the Ndwandwe under the leadership of Zwide and the Mthethwa under Dingiswayo – battling for control of resources in the expanse of land between the Pongola and Tugela rivers.

We learned from the previous chapter that the Ngwane and Hlubi had moved into areas near the foothills of the Drakensberg. Around 1817 as part of the Mthethwa expansion, Dingiswayo and Shaka decided that Matiwane's Ngwane tribe was getting too powerful and should be taken out. Matiwane got wind of this and asked his neighbour the Hlubi king, Mtimkulu, to look after his cattle until the fighting was over.

In fairly quick succession the following seemed to have happened: Matiwane made an early tactical surrender and (to Shaka's disgust) Dingiswayo let him be with his forces largely intact; Mtimkulu

refused to return Matiwane's cattle; Zwide with his Ndwandwe attacked Matiwane and forced the Ngwane out of their territory.

Instead of stealing some cattle or weakening the power of a defeated clan, Zwide had created a new phenomenon: he had deprived a large group of people of their livelihood.

Matiwane was left with only one practicable option: to attack the cattle and land of the Hlubi, which he did with desperate ferocity. The scattered Hlubi clans had nowhere to escape except up the Drakensberg where they encountered startled Sotho clans. Matiwane abandoned the Hlubi lands and returned to the foothills of the Drakensberg where the Ngwane settled peacefully for a few years. By then Shaka had established his Zulu Kingdom over all the land across the plains below the Drakensberg.

Matiwane was compelled to leave his kraals and cattle and take his Ngwane clan over the Drakensberg. There was no time to re-establish his kraal economy so pillage was the only means of survival. The Hlubi had been at it for the past few years and now the Ngwane were following in their footsteps until they came head on with the main body of the Hlubi whereupon a fierce battle raged for several days. The Hlubi were beaten. By this stage the Sotho people had also taken a bashing. It seems (and history is deficient on this) that Matiwane and his Ngwane continued on a pillaging campaign onto the plains to the west – so in effect the Orange Free State.

And thus the chain reaction continued until over hundreds of square miles there was hardly a permanent kraal remaining; and perhaps as many as two million people had died.

There's more. A large Sotho clan, the Tlokwa, was one of the first to be displaced by the Ngwane. That led to the Tlokwa setting out on a path of destruction. Under the leadership of Mantatisi – who sounds like a *femme fatale* like no other – this clan soon became a horde and scorched everything and everyone in its path as it drove south at great speed. Somewhat incongruously they were eventually stopped and turned back to the north by a ready-to-flee ineffective clan to whose aid a band of Griquas from the west under the leadership of two chieftains called – seriously – Waterboer and Kok.

The Griquas were not in a position to take on the Mantatee Horde (as history would come to call it), but succeeded in harassing the edges of this seething mass and eventually forcing it to turn back and retreat northwards. On its way back north, it attacked a small Sotho clan lead by a very young Moshoeshoe, who wanted nothing of pillaging and so took his clan and headed south into the western foothills of the Drakensberg. There he discovered a high plateau surrounded by steep

escarpments. It was called the Mountain of the Night – Thaba Bosiu. We'll pass close to it as we go through or skirt Maseru, capital of Lesotho. We may even get to hike up it. It's now a World Heritage Site.

But back to the story. Perched on this plateau, it has been said that "he formed the only island of sanity in a sea of madness."[8] It was from here that Moshoeshoe built his clan into the Basotho nation.

Meantime the Mantatee Horde continued to be a major nuisance to Moshoeshoe for some years before he was powerful enough to eliminate them.

Matiwane continued to harass clans in the area including Moshoeshoe until he was driven off to the south where he finally run out of puff. Having ended up in Zulu territory, Shaka's successor, Dingane, sent for him and, in the words of Morris, "pondered his future for a while and then gouged his eyes out and killed him by driving wooden pegs up his nostrils."

By this time the Mfecane had pretty much run its course.

Morris' final summing up is as follows: "while Shaka was certainly responsible for the havoc on the coastal strip, he had little enough to do with the destruction in the interior. The onus here falls on Zwide, Matiwane and Mtimkulu", i.e the Ndwandwe, the Ngwane and the Hlubi. He probably should have added Mantatisi and her Mantatee Horde.

Refugee groups escaping Shaka's anger, invaded the lands of present-day Botswana. Sobhuza of the Swazi moved his people north from the Pongola River to present-day Swaziland and conquered the peoples living there. The marauding Hlubi and Ngwane created chaos as they tramped westward. The Basotho were pushed into the mountains where they were harassed by cannibals. Setting towns on fire, the Ndebele swept ahead of the Zulu Impi to settle in present day Zimbabwe, where they absorbed others and became the Matabele. On their way, they encountered King Thulare's Pedi Empire, which was destroyed. They attacked the Mokololo to the northwest, who were Sotho-Tswana speakers from the south pushing north. Forced off their lands, many Nguni and Tswana peoples collided with the Voortrekkers moving from the south. The Xhosa expanded into Khoi-khoi lands. Some Khoi-khoi retreated into the Kalahari Desert. Others were killed or enslaved by the Voortrekkers. The Tlokoa marched from Natal leaving a path of destruction all the way to Botswana. They attacked the Fokeng forcing them west. The Fokeng marched north to the Zambezi River and beyond, where they raided destitute refugees. Vagrants from various Nguni and Sotho groups formed a new tribe, the Mfengu, which means 'beggar' in iziXhosa. By the time of Shaka's murder in 1828, no group of people were living on their original lands.

Gallery Ezakwantu:

THE DRAKENSBERG ESCARPMENT AND THE LOWVELD

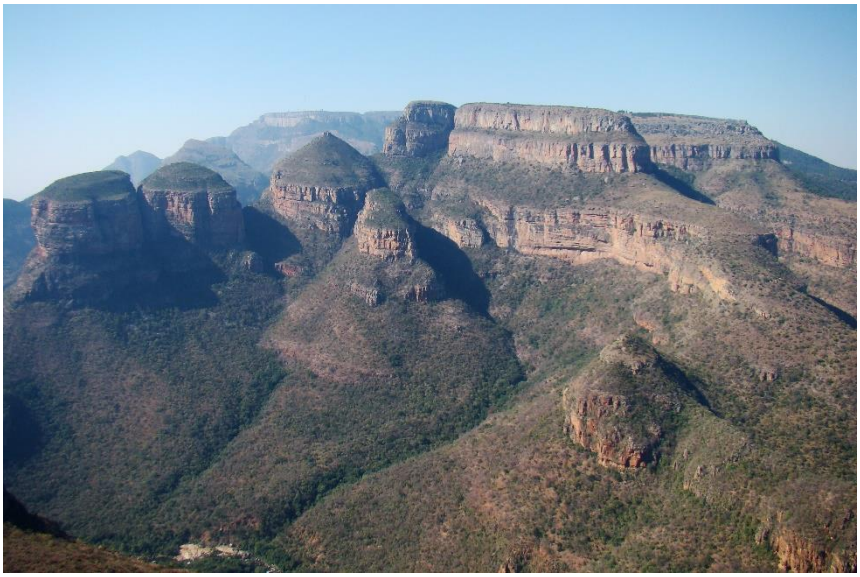
Our first night's sojourn on the ride will be both a culmination for the day's history and geography, with much to absorb and ponder, but also a prelude for further expanding the experience of the Voortrekkers and the wars they seemed to attract, if not sought.

Before getting too comfortable for the night, having shared a day with the Voortrekkers, spare another thought for a couple of their vanguard who had trekked ahead of the main waves. These were Louis Tregardt (also spelt Trichardt) and Hans van Rensburg. They continued north to the

[8] Morris, "Washing of the Spears"

Soutpansberg Mountains, where they made camp in the foothills. There, they split company and van Rensburg set out to reach the Portuguese port of Lourenço Marques (later to become Maputo) in search of ammunition (his ivory-motivated over-use of it had been the cause of the split). Neither he nor any of his party was ever seen again. You can see by the blue line in the top right hand corner of the map on page 6 where they came to grief at the hands of locals. Tregardt hung round the area for over a year waiting for the main wave of Voortrekkers led by Potgieter, who had been meeting more resistance than he had bargained for. Finally, Tregardt also struck out for Lourenço Marques in the hope of blazing a trail to the Lowveld and Delagoa Bay.

Tregardt decided to take a southerly route through some of the area we will have traversed near today's Polokwane. A bit southeast of there he picked up the Olifants River until awed by the sight of the Drakensberg ahead of him, just as we will be at the end of the first day's ride. Undeterred, he found a way across with his wagons and the families with him – probably a little further south than where we will cross but with much the same topography. He would have emerged onto the Lowveld in the same vicinity as we will except that what took Tregardt a few months to accomplish we will do in a couple of hours. He would seem to have followed and criss-crossed the Olifants River before heading through the countryside where we will spend a couple of days. Like a lost tribe of the Israelites, his party wandered for several more months across the Lowveld before emerging at Delagoa Bay and Lourenço Marques where they were greeted warmly but where many, including both Tregardt and his wife, died of malaria.



The village of Haenertsburg, where we spend the night, is nestled in the hills on the edge of the Drakensberg Escarpment at the start of the Magoebaskloop Pass, the steepest mountain pass in South Africa.

Over several days of riding from here we will get an immediate and tangible feel for the passes of the Drakensberg Escarpment that were explored and utilised by the Voortrekkers. At different times and from different starting points Voortrekker goals were to find passable ways to obtain access to the coast from the Highveld, particularly Lourenço Marques; to make their way down to the beckoning grazing and pastures of the Natal hinterland; and later back up the escarpment to escape British annexation of their fledging Boer Republic of Natalia.

The ride down the Magoebaskloop Pass takes us from the Highveld to the Lowveld[9] which embraces all the area of Kruger National Park and adjacent reserves, extending south along and into Swaziland. We'll stay on the Lowveld at first, but as we head south, we'll experience other Drakensberg Passes in Robbers Pass and Long Tom Pass. The Long Tom Pass was built between Lydenburg and Sabie as an alternative route for the wagoners of the 1800s to get through to Lourenço Marques for trade.

[9] The Lowveld refers to lower regions usually below about 500mm that run north of the Highveld where the Limpopo River has eroded a broad valley into South Africa's central plateau; and extending southwards along the border with Mozambique to the east of the Drakensberg Escarpment in Mpumalanga. This region is generally hotter and less intensely cultivated than the Highveld. The arid lower plateau regions to the west, south and southwest of the Highveld are not generally referred to as Lowveld.

At the top of pass is a very large silver cannon called The Long Tom. That was the British name for this Boer-operated field artillery that fired a 38kg shell for 10km and was the bane of British generals and their brigades. The Boers lugged this metal monster to the most amazing places, constantly surprising their enemy. The gun was used with great effectiveness in this area, and 50 years after the South African War, the pass was named in its honour. (I think it's only a replica.)

Later in the tour we will settle and linger at the foot of another set of Drakensberg passes of historical significance. These were relevant to the Voortrekkers who crossed the Drakensberg into the hinterland of Natal and into the midst of the Zulu kingdom.

The Barefoot Woman at top of Retief Pass

We'll meet these Voortrekkers in the chapter on *The Zulu Kingdom*.

Take this for now as a marker to remind you to ponder the passes when we get to them.

Over only a few kilometres along the Drakensberg at this point there are several passes, some of which are inviting only to the very hardy; but there are a few that had their origin with the Voortrekkers and are still in use as significant passes.

We are scheduled to cross the Drakensberg back onto the Highveld via Van Reenen's Pass. This post-dated the Voortrekkers and is historically associated with the second Anglo-Boer War. The siege of Ladysmith at the foot of the pass is described in one source as "the biggest battle fought by the British in Africa until World War 2."

An alternative pass is Oliviershoek Pass a little further to the south of Van Reenen's Pass. Oliviershoek Pass is reputed to be the route pioneered by Retief (I think Maritz was also with him at this stage but doesn't seem to feature in references to the passes) as he headed across the Drakensberg from the Highveld. As he pushed across the edge of the Drakensberg escarpment, he led his party on a route that is today called Retief's Pass or the Voortrekker Pass. It branches off the Oliviershoek Pass road adjacent to Driekloof Dam. Not far in along the start of Retief Pass are two monuments to the Voortrekkers.

Irrespectively of which pass or passes we use, we will ride close to one of the oldest Voortrekker monuments near the village of Chieveley. This is the site of the Bloukrans River massacre of Voortrekker families in the aftermath of Retief's murder at the hands of Dingane (more about this under *The Zulu Empire*).

BOER WARS

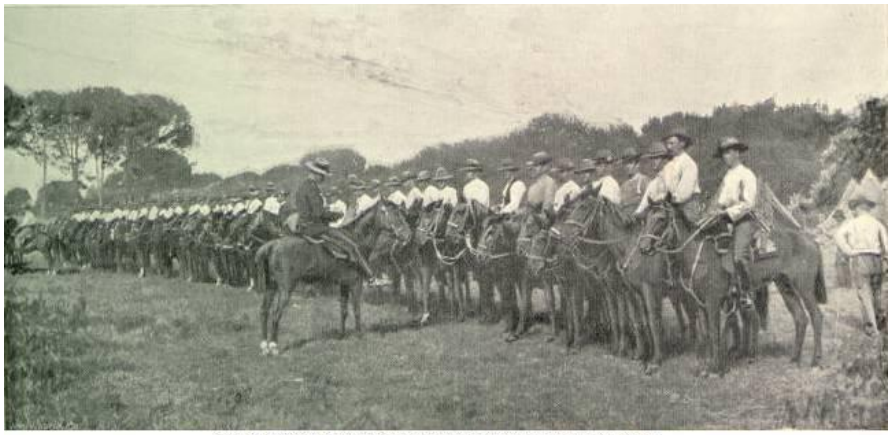
Here is as good a place as any to contemplate the origin, significance and outcomes of the Boer Wars[10], not least because their geographical and political focus was centred on Highveld territory of the Boer republics of Orange Free State and Transvaal.

Most history sources cite two Boer wars: the first from 1880 to 1881 (but fought only over three months) and the second from 1899 to 1902. We usually hear only about one such war: the one from

[10] The Boer Wars have several nomenclatures. We've mostly called them just that or, more commonly, "The Boer War" referring to the second war. In South Africa, they are called "The Anglo-Boer Wars" and divided into the first and second Anglo-Boer Wars. Boer patriots have referred to them as the wars of liberation or the freedom wars.

1899-1902. Australian Government sites consistently talk only of “The Boer War, 1899-1902”. That’s likely because it was only the second one (1899-1902) that had Australian participants.

Other reasons why the first of the Boer wars gets scant attention compared to the second might be because it was so relatively short; nor did it have anything like the loss of life, particularly civilian life, or the atrocities of the second war. The historical and political outcomes of the second were hugely more significant; and, not least of all, the British forces were routed in the first war, so the less said the better (as was the case after Isandlwana!).



The first Australian soldiers to see action preparing in 1899

Both Boer Wars have their roots deeply entrenched in social and political chasms that divided British and Boer perceptions, expectations and intentions. While British rule over the Cape Colony tolerated – and at times condoned – Boer expansion into and occupation of new territory, including their establishment of independent republics of sorts, the ultimate goal of British domination and control was never far from the surface. There was only so far the Boers could keep trekking and setting up their republics before the tolerance and patience of British imperialism would run dry setting up the inevitability of an epic clash between the two forces.

First Boer War

Added to the historical chasms referred to above were the discovery of diamonds in 1867 and more pertinently in 1871, which brought huge influxes of prospectors from outside the Boer republic and Cape Colony and economic wealth to the colony; and the ever hovering of other foreign powers following the smell of colonial wealth and power. Britain had a lot at stake in its view.

In the circumstances, it was inevitable that something would give: the British annexed the ZAR or Transvaal, as the British called it, in 1877, which engendered deep resentment. This came to a head with the annexed ZAR declaring its independence from Britain in 1880.

Although the Boers were largely uncoordinated militia groups fighting against a disciplined and experienced regular army on the British side, the British found early defeats sufficiently unpalatable that it called for a truce after three months of skirmishes. The truce and subsequent peace treaty provided for complete self-rule for the Transvaal, with British control over foreign relations, African affairs and native districts.

Second Boer War

The second Boer War was of a very different order. It was a full-scale war that descended into savage guerrilla warfare and became infamous for the inhumane treatment and killing of civilians.

Underpinning it were the same social and political chasms that had been always present between the British and the Boers; but by the outbreak of the second war they had further deepened though the defeat of the British in the first war and the explosive gold rush set off with the 1886 discovery of the Witwatersrand gold deposit on the outskirts of what would fast become the city of Johannesburg.

There had been previous finds of alluvial gold, but the Witwatersrand discovery was monumental. Wealth seekers flocked to the area from all over the world in far greater numbers than with the diamond finds, significantly increasing the non-Boer population of Transvaal. Within ten years the miners' camp had become the largest city in South Africa. The British-Boer dynamics had changed drastically.

While Transvaal had suddenly become potentially the richest state in southern Africa (with the political power that comes with that), it needed a lot of outside expertise and labour to harvest that wealth. It wasn't long before it was faced with huge numbers of outsiders demanding a say in how the state was run (i.e. voting rights) – lots them of British origin; and outsiders, not least Cape Colony powers, demanding a role in investment in and management of gold mining ventures. The British goal of incorporating the Boer republics into a British controlled federation was ever present. Throw in the more excessive British expansionist ambitions of the likes of Cecil Rhodes and the mix becomes toxic for the Boer governments of both Boer republics.

Negotiations on these issues were not productive and Paul Kruger, the President of the South African Republic, issued an ultimatum on 9 October 1899, giving the British government 48 hours to withdraw all their troops from the borders of both the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, failing which the Transvaal, allied to the Orange Free State, would declare war on the British government. The British government rejected the South African Republic's ultimatum, resulting in the South African Republic and Orange Free State declaring war on Britain.

Thus began the second Boer war or second Anglo-Boer War.

Historians divide the war into three phases:

In the first phase, the Boers mounted pre-emptive strikes into British-held territory in Natal and the Cape Colony, besieging the British garrisons of Ladysmith, Mafeking and Kimberley. The Boers then won a series of tactical victories at Colenso, Magersfontein and Spionkop against a failed British counteroffensive to relieve the sieges.

In the second phase, after the introduction of greatly increased British troop numbers under the command of Lord Roberts, the British launched another offensive in 1900 to relieve the sieges, this time achieving success. After Natal and the Cape Colony were secure, Roberts occupied Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, and on 28th May 1900 the province was annexed and renamed the Orange River Colony. On 31st May, British troops entered Johannesburg and, on 5th June, Pretoria was taken. The Transvaal was annexed on 1st September 1900. To many it seemed that the wars was over. At the end of November, Roberts made a triumphal return to England.

In the third and final phase, under the leadership of Louis Botha, Christiaan de Wet, Jan Smuts and de la Rey, the Boers launched a protracted hard-fought guerrilla war against the British forces, lasting a further two years, during which the Boers raided targets such as British troop columns, telegraph sites, railways and storage depots. In an effort to cut off supplies to the raiders, the British, now under the leadership of Lord Kitchener, responded with a scorched earth policy. Approximately 30,000 farms were burnt. In March 1901 the need to restrict the movement of the Boers brought the development of 8,000 blockhouses and 3,700 miles of wire fencing guarded by 50,000 troops. This was followed by a number of 'drives' which had the intention of cornering the Boers but the operations mainly produced large numbers of displaced Boer and African families. These refugees were sent to concentration camps around South Africa.

Australians in the Boer War

Around 16,000 Australians volunteered to fight for Britain in the Boer War. It remains Australia's third-worst conflict in terms of casualties. A total of 606 Australians died in the two-and-a-half years in South Africa; that is more than the number of casualties in Vietnam over 10 years.

When the war broke out in 1899, Australia was made up of six colonies that were on the verge of becoming a federation. The first Australian troops and their horses sailed in late 1899 and were involved in major action by January 1900. After Australian Federation in 1901, the new

Commonwealth Government sent a further eight battalions. In addition to the Australian troops, thousands more Australians, who were already there working in the gold and diamond mines, also signed up to fight.

Most Australians served in mounted units from the colonies and later from the Commonwealth, known variously as Bushmen, Mounted Rifles, Imperial Bushmen, The Australian Commonwealth Horse and the Light Horse.

Australians at home generally supported the war at the outset. However, public enthusiasm began to wane after 1900. As the war dragged on, Australians became disenchanted. The suffering of the Boer civilians and the court martial of Lieutenant 'Breaker' Morant and Lieutenant Handcock in 1902 made the war less popular.

Harry Morant and Peter Handcock were lieutenants in a unit of the Bushveldt Carbineers. They were convicted of murdering twelve Boer prisoners and were executed by a firing squad in Pretoria, on 27 February 1902.

Morant and Handcock admitted that they shot the Boers, but they maintained that they had been ordered by their British commanders to do so and not to take any prisoners alive during their campaign. Although there was no proof that the soldiers were ordered to shoot the Boer prisoners, the case remains infamous today, and is seen by some as a symbol of British military injustice.

ON SAFARI

"Safari?" you query. This is South Africa. *Safari* is Swahili. Well, at least, Swahili is a Bantu language with some commonalities to some the South African Bantu languages.

In preparation for spending a day on safari on the edges of the great Kruger Park, it might be useful to revise your ability to identify some of Africa's wild animals. Just a safety measure.

Please study carefully and submit your answers to your nearest Vink & Vink representative.

Please identify each of the above animals and write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.

SWAZILAND

We have already covered aspects of the Swazi people in the section of Races and Relations under the heading Swazi.

Apart from crossing an international border into another state altogether, we'll also experience another geographical change from the Lowveld into the mountain ranges bordering Swaziland before emerging to the south of the country into the lands that for many years were the stranglehold of southern Africa's might Zulu Kingdom. Soon after exiting Swaziland we're into the grazing and farm lands over which Shaka extended his kingdom and over which Voortrekkers argued, negotiated and fought with the Zulu kingdom.

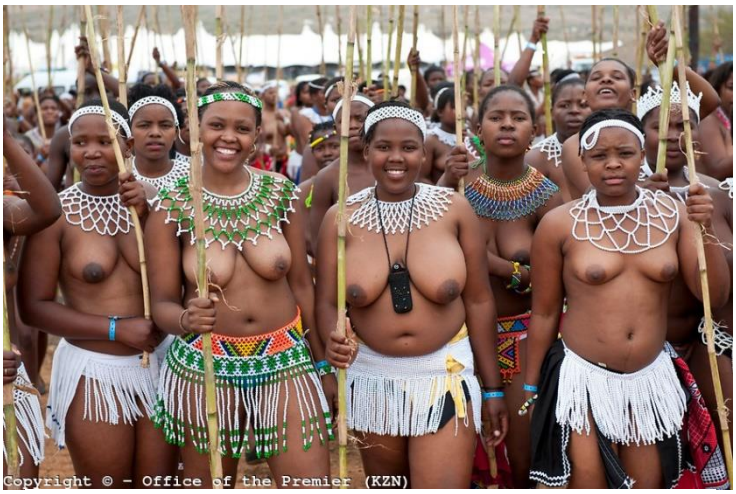
But before we do that we will experience life in the last of the world's absolute monarchies.

In 1899, Britain transformed Swaziland into a protectorate under its direct control. Subsequently, throughout the colonial period, Swaziland was governed by a resident administrator under the British High Commissioner for South Africa.

Britain expected that Swaziland would ultimately be incorporated into South Africa. However, South Africa's intensified racial discrimination post-World War II pushed the United Kingdom to arrange for the independence of Swaziland.

Swaziland gained its independence in 1968. In 1973, King Sobhuza replaced the constitution and dissolved the parliament, assuming all powers. Eventually a new parliament formed, one that was chosen in part by elections and direct appointment by the king.

The country's current head of state (King Mswati III) appoints the prime minister and a small number of representatives for both chambers of parliament. Elections are held every five years to determine the majority of the representatives.



Caption with this image on Internet: Police in Africa's last absolute monarchy Swaziland have banned women from wearing miniskirts and midriff-revealing tops saying they provoke rape,

Student and labor unrest during the 1990s pressured King Mswati III, the world's last absolute monarch, to allow political reform and greater democracy, although he has backslid on these promises in recent years.

The country has faced many criticisms over the past several years, including the purchase of a $50 million luxury jet for the king while hundreds of thousands of Swazis faced starvation due to drought and poor agricultural practices.

In 2004 another drought hit Swaziland. A year later the first constitution of the country was put into place, but it maintained the current ruling of no opposition parties and the king as the ultimate power.

Agriculture, manufacturing and the service industry are the dominant factors of the Swaziland economy, but any economic growth is highly impacted (negatively) by the HIV epidemic. Swaziland (in fact) has the highest HIV infection rate in the world (26% of all adults) and the lowest life expectancy at 32 years of age.

THE ZULU KINGDOM

A lot has been said about the beginnings of the Zulu Kingdom in the chapter on Races and Relations in the section headed *Zulu*. We met Shaka in that section and learned of his origins and the start of his rule.

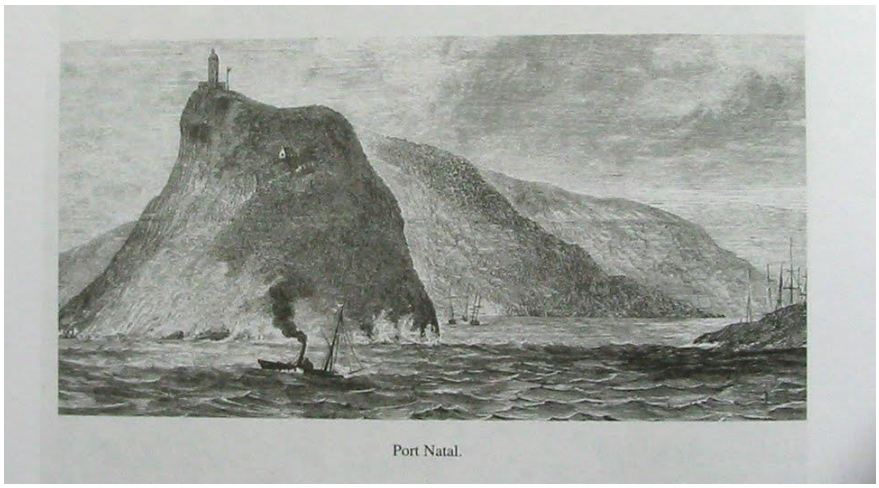
Shaka Zulu 1825 Drawn by Lt James King

However, I think the *Rise and Fall of the Zulu Empire* had such impact on southern African history that it's worth a little more attention. Apart from its historical significance, it's also an intriguing story.

Port Natal: From Settlement to Threat

Let's make Port Natal out starting point. That's today's Durban. The first Cape Colony denizens who set foot there came ashore in 1823. A couple of ex Royal navy officers from the Napoleonic wars were now civilians trading between the Cape and Delagoa Bay. They were Francis George Farewell and James Saunders. On one of their trips round the coast they took refuge in the Bay of Natal. The name Natal must have appeared on maps or in diaries from Vasco de Gama's recording of the name he gave the area in 1497. A year later Farewell with a trading company he was involved in decided to establish a trading post there. Another trader and adventurer, Henry Francis Fynn, was also involved in this venture. In 1824 Fynn and Farewell arrived by separate ships bringing with them some 26 possible settlers, of which only 18 stayed at first, later dropping to 6, who might be considered the founding members of Port Natal as a British possession. Two more arrived in 1825 with crew: Lt. James King and Nathaniel Isaacs.

At this stage Shaka was in full swing and had expanded his empire so that it covered all the territory from the Pongola River in the north to somewhere not far short of the Great Kei River in the south (pushing against the Xhosa people) and inland to the Drakensberg. (That's why I included a map of rivers on page 3, some of which I had to draw in myself!)


Port Natal.

Trying to establish a settlement at Port Natal necessitated dealing with the Zulu. Farewell and Fynn made contact with Shaka, whose royal kraal was not too far north across the Tugela River. Initial contacts proved productive and Shaka ceded them a tract of land many kilometres long and a hundred deep that encompassed Port Natal. As with subsequent such concessions, it was all a bit loose and vague; and uncertain as to whether the Zulu understood the implications. They were certainly always ready to ignore them with equanimity.

So the tentative start of a British settlement had begun; not that the British Cape Colony authorities knew much of what was happening.

Over the next few years, small ships came either to check on the welfare of the settlers or to embark on trading. Some didn't quite make it to land succumbing to the treacherous bar that hindered easy access. Some left never to be seen again. But the settlement continued with numbers of white settlers not changing much, although numbers of black refugees escaping from Zulu rule or displaced by the Mfecane grew steadily. Relations with the Zulu, however, continued amicably enough. This was despite a couple of glitches.

Visits by the settlers to Port Elizabeth with emissaries first of Shaka and then of Dingane in pursuit of expanded trading relations didn't go well. They were given unfriendly receptions and the scruffiness of the town much dampened the Zulus' expectations about British life and power. That was 1828.

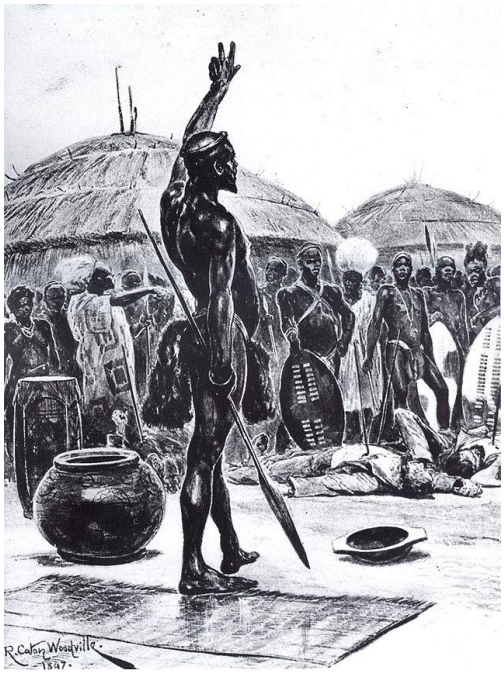
By the early 1830s clouds were slowing forming on the horizon. Word was reaching Dingane about British incursions into Zulu land north of the Kei River. Then in 1832 a British officer travelled the land doing an assessment of its military capabilities. He reported back on the fertility of the land which was largely unpopulated. That prompted a group of merchants in 1834 to petition the British Government to annex the area. In the same year a party of pre-Voortrekkers led by Petrus Lafras Uys, visited Natal and its hinterland to evaluate its potential for farming; and reported favourably. Meanwhile missionaries, who were not always understanding of the Zulu, started to become active.

Dingane found these events highly disturbing and relations between Zulu and British became increasingly strained. It was obvious to all concerned that the colonial invaders from the south were now beginning to cast their eyes northwards towards the Zulu kingdom.

The British declined all pleas from the settlers for annexation of Natal. Not even the proactive naval officer turned missionary, Gardiner, despite his direct appeals in person to London, could persuade the Crown. One of Gardiner's legacies was presiding over a meeting of 15 residents in 1835 where it was decided to create a town at Natal and call it D'Urban after the then Governor of the Cape (he no doubt thought a little sucking up wouldn't go astray).

Arrival of the Voortrekkers: a Lethal Mix to the Cocktail

In the chapter on *Start of the Tour and its Setting*, I alluded to a group of the Voortrekkers breaking company with the others and heading across the Drakensberg to the hinterland of Natal. Their leader was Piet Retief, who always had in mind the favourable reports that had been brought back by the party of Petrus Lafras Uys. He was also sufficiently aware from the Uys party of the political situation in Natal. Retief, with a small band, found a way down the Drakensberg in October of 1837 and visited the royal kraal of Dingane and negotiated some sort of interim agreement for access to Zulu land. The following month, over 1,000 Voortrekker wagons made their way over the Drakensberg. Before an agreement could be signed, Retief was requested to retrieve some stolen cattle for Dingane, which he succeed in bringing back on 3 February 1838.



Dingane orders the killing of Piet Retief's party of Voortrekkers (portraying their deaths in the kraal; in fact they were killed on the execution hill)

The next day, a treaty was signed, wherein Dingane ceded all the land south of the Tugela River to the Mzimvubu River to the Voortrekkers. At the end of celebrations, Retief's party were invited to a dance, and asked to leave their weapons behind. At the peak of the dance, Dingane leapt to his feet and yelled "Bambani abathakathi!" ("Seize the wizards"). Retief and his men were summarily and savagely executed. Dingane's army then attacked and massacred a group of 250 Voortrekker men, women and children laagered along the Bloukrans River and in the area between today's Escourt and Colenso. When a Boer village grew up in the area, it was called Weenen (meaning 'weeping').

History hasn't recorded what precisely motivated Dingane. However, it's not unreasonable to assume that Dingane was feeling somewhat hemmed in. He had already displayed misgivings about British intentions at Natal and expressed the view that the British settlement was starting to look like a kingdom in its own right. Retief wasn't to know this; and his display to Dingane of Boer military might (he boasted of Boer victories over Mzilikazi in the Highveld and provided a demonstration of the fighting abilities of his own men) would not have done anything to assuage Dingane's deeply rooted concerns.

These events could well have been a turning point in South Africa's history. It's likely Retief, in effect, signed his own death warrant by his injudicious actions towards Dingane; and Dingane similarly likely signed the death warrant of the Zulu Kingdom by his intemperate responses. The massacres left a lasting scar on the Boer psyche relating to the Zulu and galvanised the views of many British that there could never be a lasting peace without the complete subjugation of the Zulu.

Voortrekkers Retaliate

The surviving Voortrekkers from the Dingane attack, now under the leadership of Gerrit Maritz, appealed to other treks, particularly those of Piet Uys and Hendrik Potgieter in the Orange Free State, for help. Both treks sent out commandos[11] to help.

The two groups met on the banks of the Bloukrans River, where a council of war was held. Maritz was too ill to take a leading roll over the commandos, so Uys was designated leader. In typical Boer manner, Potgieter refused to comply and the two commandos (347 men) set out, in two separate columns, on 5 and 6 April 1838. It would seem that they might have been led into a trap by misinformation obtained by captives they took along the way. Whether or not that was the case, the commandos soon found themselves faced with a narrow gorge through the hills with impis[12] on both sides and in the valley – about 8,000 warriors.

Potgieter chose to attack the one in the valley, while Uys decided to attack the hill towards his right.

Uys routed the impi on the right side ridge. Potgieter made what was reported as a "half-hearted" attack on the impi in the valley and then retired. Some of his commando also attacked the Zulus at the base of the hill on the left. They didn't do so well and they were pushed back to the main commando, whereupon, Potgieter led his commando off the battlefield.

The remaining Zulu impis were now free to attack Uys' commando from the rear. Uys saw the Zulu force advancing and sent word to Potgieter requesting him cover his rear. However, Potgieter ignored this request and continued retreating.

As Uys and fifteen of his commando sought to rescue a couple of members who had been trapped by Zulus, half of them including Uys and his 15 year old son Dirkie were killed. The bulk of the commando became surrounded and had to fight their way out.

Due to the outcome of the battle, the Voortrekker forces involved in the fighting subsequently became known as the *Vlugkommando* (Flight Commando).

Battle at Blood River

This section might also be called "Voortrekkers Retaliate Part 2".

In the aftermath of the failed *Vlugkommando*, the Voortrekkers of the Bloukrans River district were leaderless and demoralised: Maritz was very ill (he died in September 1838); Uys was dead; Potgieter had been branded a traitor and had taken his followers back up the Drakensberg. Dingane, however, remained a constant reminder to them of his treachery and their vulnerability.

Enter Andries Pretorius (we met him on page 7). He was barely into trekking when he was summonsed to take over the leadership and do something about Dingane.

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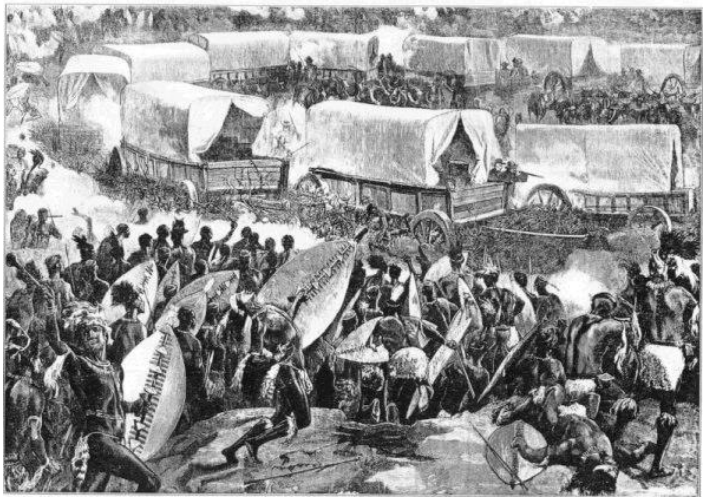
[11] The word commando stems from the Afrikaans word *kommando*, which translates roughly to "mobile (originally by horse) infantry regiment" (in other words, a mounted infantry regiment).

[12] Impi is a Zulu word for any armed body of men. However, in English it is often used to refer to a Zulu regiment.

Pretorius arrived at the desperate Trekkers' main camp on 22 November 1838. Pretorius' diligence and thorough action immediately instilled confidence and he was appointed chief commander of a punitive commando against Dingane. In early December 1838, Pretorius led 470 men with 64 wagons into Dingane's territory.



Foremost on Pretorius' mind no doubt was a realisation that it would be disastrous to head straight for Dingane's capital and get trapped in the same way the Uys and Potgieter commandos had been; and that the already tried and proven tactics were chose your own ground and defend there in laager style.

Despite some enthusiasm amongst his commando for attacking The Zulu impis that had been observed after crossing the Buffalo River, Pretorius had his own plan. As the site for the overnight wagon camp, Pretorius chose a defensible area next to a hippo pool in the Ncome River that provided excellent rear protection. The open area to the front provided no cover for an attacking force, and a deep dry river bed protected one of the wagon laager flanks. Here he organised the ox wagons in typical Voortrekker laager formation. Movable wooden barriers that could be opened quickly were fastened between each wagon to prevent intruders, and two cannon were positioned.

During the night some six Zulu impis – some 6000 men – crossed the river, although the elite forces of senior general Ndlela did not cross the river. Ndlela thereby split Dingane's army in two. Those that crossed, with their short stabbing assegais, were no match for the fire power of the Boers and the protection the laager gave them. After two hours and four waves of attack, with the intermittent lulls providing crucial reloading and resting opportunities for the Trekkers, Pretorius ordered a group of horsemen to leave the encampment and engage the Zulu in order to disintegrate their formations. The Zulu withstood the charge for some time, but rapid losses led them to scatter. The Trekkers pursued their fleeing enemies and hunted them down for three hours. Some 3000 Zulu were killed; and the remainder retreated to Dingane's capital.

The river acquired its name of Blood River because of the slaughter of so many Zulu whose blood coloured the river. Afterwards the clash was commemorated as having occurred at Blood River (*Bloedrivier*). 16 December is a public holiday. Before 1994 it was known as “the Day of the Vow” and "the Day of the Covenant" on the basis of the vow/covenant made by the Boers to build a church if God delivered a victory. Since the end of apartheid, it has been "the Day of Reconciliation".

In the picture above, you can see the Voortrekker monument on the west side of the Blood River and the Ncome Museum, featuring Zulu culture and traditions, on the east side.

From Dingane to Cetshwayo

Four days after the Battle of Blood River, the Trekker commando arrived at King Dingane's capital only to find it deserted and ablaze. The bones of Retief and his men were found and buried where a memorial stands today.

Two would-be successors of Dingane were killed at Blood River, leaving Mpande, a half-brother of both Shaka and Dingane as the most likely successor. Mpande was also General Ndlela’s favoured choice. Ndlela had previously resisted Dingane’s attempts to assassinate Mpande.

Now, with Dingane's military might weakened due to the disastrous Battle of Blood River, Prince Mpande openly joined into the military alliance with Pretorius, promising the Boers many cattle and access to land if they assisted him to defeat Dingane. The Zulu civil war erupted into the open.

The armies of Dingane and Mpande eventually squared off at what would become known as the Battle of Maqongqo. Mpande did not wait for Pretorius' cavalry to arrive, and attacked the remaining regiments of Dingane, who were again under the command of general Ndlela, as at the previous Battle of Blood River. Again Dingane's general Ndlela strayed from normal fighting tactics against Mpande, sending in his regiments to fight one at a time, instead of together in ox horn formation.

After Maqongqo, Dingane had to flee Natal completely, but before he did so, he had general Ndlela slowly strangled by cow hide for high treason, on the grounds that he had fought for, instead of against Mpande, with the same disastrous result for Dingane as at Blood River

Afterwards Pretorius approved and attended the crowning of Mpande as Zulu king in Pietermaritzburg. They agreed on the Tugela River as the border between Zululand and the newly formed Boer Republic of Natalia. Mpande and Pretorius maintained peaceful relations. However, in 1842, war broke out between the British and the Boers, resulting in the British annexation of Natalia. Mpande shifted his allegiance to the British, and remained on good terms with them.

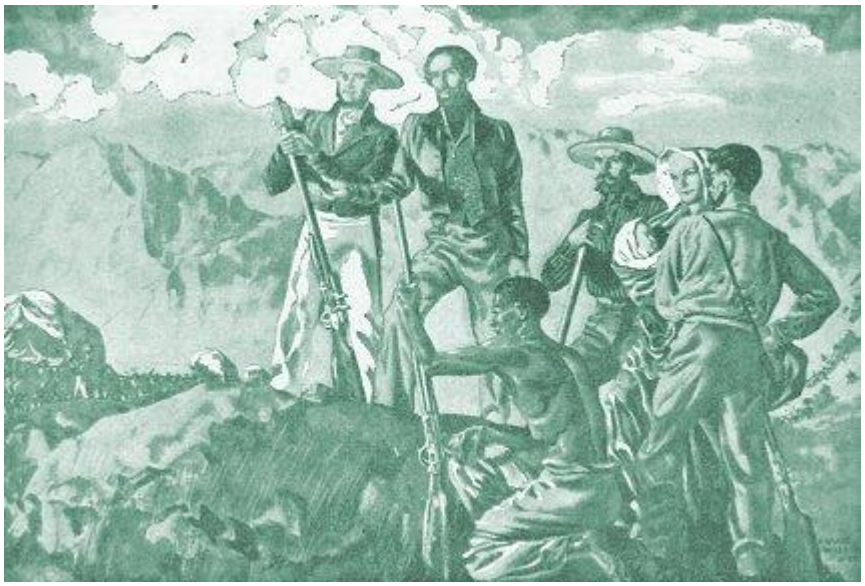
As Mpande's son Cetshwayo grew – he was 13 when Mpande became king – he gained popularity. So much so that Mpande became worried for his own kingship (and life). Over the years, Mpande's kingship was questioned more and more, especially after drought and famine hit the Zulu nation in the early 1850s.

Although Mpande tried to sideline Cetshwayo by favouring his half-brother Mbuyazi, when push came to shove, Cetshwayo defeated Mbuyazi's forces. In 1857 Cetshwayo was given effective control of the Zulu nation, whilst Mpande remained as titular king with 'ultimate' authority. In truth, his kingship was severely reduced. Over the next 15 years, Cetshwayo cemented his position, and when Mpande died on 18 October 1872, Cetshwayo was crowned king of the Zulu.

Anglo-Zulu War

Now we're getting to the heart of the demolition of the Zulu Kingdom. I'll leave you to ponder how much it was an essential security issue or a devised mechanism to achieve British imperial goals. Irrespective, it didn't happen exactly according to the British plan.

The seeds for an eventual war between the British and the Zulu were sown very early in the life of a colonial presence at Port Natal (later to become D'Urban and Durban). We began to see that in the first section of this chapter where we covered the earliest of settlements from 1823 to 1835.



Andries Pretorius

Despite attempts over the years by settlers to get the British to annex Port Natal and bring in within the colony, the colonial administrators were never interested. That is until the Voortrekkers turned up in significant numbers and started to take over. That all came about with the arrival of Retief and his party followed by all the accompanying events that we saw in the previous sections of this chapter.

On hearing of the massacre of Retief's Voortrekkers along the Bloukrans River, Port Natal settlers got emboldened and, with bands of African levies (in effect conscripts from local tribes) made raids on Zulu families across the Tugela enriching themselves with stolen cattle. The Natal settlement by this time didn't have much going for it by way of leadership. All the leaders of the first settlers had either died or returned to the Cape. A second incursion by a ragtag of settlers and African levies into Zulu territory was a disaster, having been repelled and all but annihilated by seven Zulu regiments under the command of Mpande (remember, he was Dingane's half-brother and would become his successor). Subsequently, a defenceless Port Natal was attacked by Dingane's army, with the few British inhabitants saving themselves by boarding an anchored ship or taking refuhe on an island. The Black inhabitants were left to fend for themselves as Dingane's army rampaged and burned for nine days.

The later success of the Voortrekkers against Dingane at Blood River, the alliance between Pretorius and Mpande, and the declaration of the Boer Republic of Natalia soon aroused keener British interest in the Natal settlement. Many of the subsequent events were more to do with British-Boer politics that British-Zulu relations, although there was one aspect relating to the latter. With a sort of peace established under the Mpande-Pretorius alliance, many previously displaced Zulus and other tribes started to return to their ancestral homelands thus spreading themselves across what had become Boer farms. The attempted exclusions of the Zulus and others from these areas was one factor in motivating the British to annex Natal and ultimately pronounce it as a colony in its own right.

Cetshwayo

With the British now firmly in control of Natal, more British settlers arrived but several Boer families remained even though most packed up and retreated to "Boer lands" over the Drakensberg.

As the years rolled on Mpande was succeeded by Cetshwayo (see previous section); and the British, as self-appointed guardian of the overall peace, got drawn into border disputes between Cetshwayo and Boers relating to the western boundaries of their claimed territories. Although a British border commission ruled in favour of the Zulus, the Cape High Commissioner Sir Henry Bartle Frere decided to use this opportunity as an excuse to reduce the perceived Zulu military threat. He said that the disputed land would only be returned if the Zulu army was disbanded. This was too harsh a term for the proudly militaristic Zulu and they ignored the provocative ultimatum.

Cetshwayo returned no answer to the demands of Bartle Frere. In January 1879 a British force invaded Zululand, seemingly without authorization by the British Government.

Lord Chelmsford, the Commander-in-Chief of British forces during the war, initially planned a five-pronged invasion of Zululand composed of over 15,000 troops in five columns and designed to encircle the Zulu army and force it to fight. In the event, Chelmsford settled on three invading columns. The three columns were to invade Zululand, from the Lower Tugela, Rorke's Drift, and Utrecht, their objective being Ulundi, the royal capital.

The initial entry of all three columns was unopposed. On 22 January the centre column, which had advanced from Rorke's Drift, was encamped near Isandlwana; on the morning of that day Lord Chelmsford split his forces and moved out to support a reconnoitring party, leaving the camp in charge of Colonel Pulleine. The British were outmanoeuvred by the main Zulu army nearly 20,000 strong. Chelmsford was lured eastward with much of his centre column by a Zulu diversionary force while the main impi attacked his camp. The ensuing Battle of Isandlwana was the greatest victory that the Zulu kingdom would enjoy during the war. The British centre column was wrecked and its camp annihilated with heavy casualties as well as the loss of all its supplies, ammunition and transport. The defeat left Chelmsford no choice but to hastily retreat out of Zululand.

In the battle's aftermath, a party of some 4,000 Zulu reserves mounted an unauthorised raid on the nearby British army border post of Rorke's Drift and were driven off after 10 hours of ferocious fighting. Just over 150 British and colonial troops successfully defended the garrison. The massive, but piecemeal, Zulu attacks on Rorke's Drift came very close to defeating the tiny garrison but were ultimately repelled. Eleven Victoria Crosses were awarded to the defenders, along with a number of other decorations and honours.

At the same time as Isandlwana was happening, the right flank column on the coast, under Colonel Charles Pearson, crossed the Tugela River, skirmished with a Zulu impi that was attempting to

set up an ambush at the Inyezane River, and advanced as far as the deserted missionary station of Eshowe, which he set about fortifying. On learning of the disaster at Isandlwana, Pearson made plans to withdraw back beyond the Tugela River. However, the Zulu army managed to cut off his supply lines, and the Siege of Eshowe had begun.

The left flank column at Utrecht, under Colonel Evelyn Wood, had originally been charged with occupying the Zulu tribes of north-west Zululand and preventing them from interfering with the British central column's advance on Ulundi. To this end Wood set up camp at Tinta's Kraal, just 10 miles south of Hlobane Mountain, where a force of 4,000 Zulus had been spotted. He planned to attack them on 24 January, but on learning of the disaster at Isandlwana, he decided to withdraw back to the Kraal.

Thus one month after the British invasion, only their left flank column remained militarily effective, and it was too weak to conduct a campaign alone. The first invasion of Zululand had been a failure.

It had never been Cetshwayo's intention to invade Natal, but to simply fight within the boundaries of the Zulu kingdom. Chelmsford used the next two months to regroup and build a fresh invading force with the initial intention of relieving Pearson at Eshowe. The British government rushed seven

On the 29 March a column, under Lord Chelmsford, consisting of 3,400 British and 2,300 African soldiers, marched to the relief of Eshowe, entrenched camps being formed each night.

Chelmsford ordered Sir Evelyn Wood's troops to attack the Zulu stronghold in Hlobane. However, as the Zulu main army of 20,000 men approached to help their besieged tribesmen, the British force began a retreat which turned into a rout and were pursued by 1,000 Zulus who inflicted some 225 casualties on the British force.

Lord Chelmsford

The next day 20,000 Zulu warriors attacked Wood's 2,068 men in a well-fortified camp at Kambula, apparently without Cetshwayo's permission. The British held them off in the Battle of Kambula and after five hours of heavy attacks the Zulus withdrew with heavy losses but were pursued by British mounted troops, who killed many more fleeing and wounded warriors. British losses amounted to 83 (28 killed and 55 wounded), while the Zulus lost up to 2,000 killed. The effect of the battle of Kambula on the Zulu army was severe. Their commander Mnyamana tried to get the regiments to return to Ulundi but many demoralised warriors simply went home.

Chelmsford's second invasion of Zululand, with a significantly reinforced army, was undertaken with extreme caution building fortified camps all along the way to prevent any repeat of Isandlwana.

Cetshwayo, knowing that the newly reinforced British would be a formidable opponent, attempted to negotiate a peace treaty. Chelmsford was not open to negotiations, as he wished to restore his reputation before he was soon to be relieved by Sir Garnet Wolseley[13] relieved him of command, and he proceeded to the royal kraal of Ulundi, intending to defeat the main Zulu army. On 4 July the armies clashed at the Battle of Ulundi, and Cetshwayo's forces were decisively defeated.

Sir Garnet Wolseley (aka Modern Major General)

After the battle of Ulundi the Zulu army dispersed, most of the leading chiefs tendered their submission, and Cetshwayo became a fugitive. Wolseley, having relieved Chelmsford after Ulundi, took over the final operations. On 28 August the king was captured and sent to Cape. His deposition was formally announced to the Zulu.

Following the conclusion of the Anglo-Zulu War, Bishop Colenso (he was quite an active player) interceded on behalf of Cetshwayo with the British government and succeeded in getting him released from Robben Island and returned to Zululand in 1883.

LESOTHO[14]

At some stage during the early Bantu migrations, the area that today is Lesotho as well as surrounding pasture lands to its west was settled by people who spoke a Bantu language called Sotho and called themselves Basotho. It wasn't until sometime either side of 1820 that a 'nation' became identifiable as Basutoland, later to be called Lesotho. The first ruler of this new entity was King Moshoeshoe I who in the preceding years had set up his own clan and formed allegiances with neighbouring clans to deal with what the Sotho called the Lifaqane.[15]

As part of the retreat of the Tlokwa under the Mantatisi, she attacked what was then a small Sotho clan led by Moshoeshoe. He took his clan west to the western foothills of the Drakensberg and came

[13] It was he who inspired W S Gilbert to create his 'modern major general!'

[14] (*li-**SOO**-too*)

[15] Known elsewhere mostly as the Mfecane

across a mountain called Thaba Bosiu – the 'Mountain of the Night'. It was a flat-topped hill with good pastures and steep scarps that could be securely guarded. Morris put is this way: "Perched on this stronghold, [Moshoeshoe] formed the only island of sanity in a sea of madness and over the years was able to build his clan into the Basuto nation."

PASSES AND MORE PASSES

When will it stop?

I'm guessing only when we've pass'd out! Hopefully short of being pass'd away

In the footsteps or the wagon wheel tracks of the Voortrekkers and, in places, in the hoof prints of the horses of participants in the Anglo-Boer Wars, we will have traversed four passes across the Drakensberg. Then we add another two for good measure[16]:

Magoebaskloof Pass

This is one of the great classic passes of Limpopo province. It only has nine passes in total, but amongst those 9 are some of the finest scenic passes in the land. This pass climbs 446 vertical metres to the summit at 1400m.

Robbers Pass

This long tarred pass offers diverse scenery through an area steeped in history and, of course, stories of robbers of those who found gold in the area. There is the famous Robbers Grave which can be visited near the pass at Pilgrims Rest - a village inextricably linked to the pioneering days of the discovery of gold. Once a flourishing town, it is today a small village offering tourists a glimpse into a bygone era. Pilgrims Rest and the aptly named Robbers Pass are historically bound like a set of twins.

Long Tom Pass

This is undoubtedly the most famous pass in Mpumalanga - and with good reason too. It is 22.2 km long (and even longer depending on where one starts measuring), plus it loses 682 vertical metres of altitude through a complex network of curves as it descends down the Drakensberg escarpment between Lydenburg in the west and Sabie in the east. The pass is part of the Mpumalanga Panoramic Route and carries appropriately heavy traffic both tourist and commercial. It is prone to heavy mist and can be dangerous in low visibility conditions. It is named after the famous Long Tom cannon.

Kowyns Pass

This is another of the Top 5 Mpumalanga passes with stunning views and an altitude drop of 512m through the Drakensberg escarpment, over 7.81 km producing an average gradient of 1:15. This is a steep pass in places with gradients in excess of 1:4. It was completed in October 1959 and named after a local Sotho chief, Koveni who controlled the land along the track. The name, Koveni, became

[16] All these titbits are from mountainpassessouth.co.za

Anglicized to Kowyn. The area around the pass is truly 'out of this world' with a wide range of attractions for the traveller.

Sani Pass

Then for good measure we tackle in both directions the famed Sani Pass.

Sani Pass is the mother of all South African mountain passes. Statistically and in every sense, it out distances, out climbs, and out performs all its competitors with consummate ease to have become the most iconic gravel pass in SA.

The Sani Pass starts at 1544m and rises 1332 vertical metres to its summit at 2876m. This altitude gain is almost 300 mettres more than its nearest competitor - the Naude's Nek Pass in the Eastern Cape. The Sani's average gradient is only 1:20, thanks to the long easy gradient section in the foothills of the Drakensberg, but certain sections are as steep as 1:4 and it is here that most drivers come unstuck when the going gets slippery. The large number of car wrecks down the ravines bear mute testimony to the dangers.

Van Reenen's Pass

Named after the little town of Van Reenen, which seems to stand guard in the middle of this majestic pass which winds its way through the Drakensberg Mountains between Ladysmith and Harrismith, along the N3 between Durban and Johannesburg. Unfortunately the only record that the pass can lay claim to is that of the most dangerous pass in South Africa. Despite this, the fairly long pass provides beautiful scenery as it descends down to the Natal Midlands. It is a 2-lane, freeway pass which rises from 1105m to 1768m at the summit over a distance of 36.3km, producing a climb of 663 vertical metres. It nonetheless results in a moderate gradient of 1/54 with the steepest sections around 1:20.

Oliviershoek Pass (possible alternative to Van Reenen's Pass)

This tarred (if you can call it that!) 6.6km pass sweeps up through the Northern Drakensberg from the farming areas North of Estcourt as well as Ladysmith in KZN. The road often provides a suitable alternative to Van Reenen's Pass, which is subject to road closures due to trucking accidents and snow. Over the past decade the road has become potholed and deteriorated

to such a point that the maximum speed over some sections is 20kph! The altitude gain is only 115 metres to its summit at 1740m. This produces a mild average gradient of just 1:57. The steepest section near the summit is 1:18.

Retief Pass (no way! Just for curiosity): no help from mountainpassessouthafrica.co.za on this one.

This is a pretty rough track but a target for 4x4 enthusiasts and determined motorcyclists. It's not easy to locate all of it. The mountainpasses source seems to equate it with Sandspuit Pass, so that wasn't helpful. A few sources identify the upper part, but that's still on the edge of the escarpment. The descent is all in KZN (the border is the dotted white line). The short bit of orange road leads into one of the two monuments at the top of the pass (Retiefklip). The barefoot woman is somewhere on the green line – presumably.

Lootsberg Pass

This lovely pass with its sweeping curves around the buttresses of the Lootsberg, lies in the heart of the Great Karoo some 70km North of Graaff Reinet on the tarred N9. It is the highest pass in the Karoo and was named after Hendrik Loots who died on the old pass, after his carriage overturned. It is the first of a string of poorts[17] and passes starting from the North East near Middelburg, with the final one being the Potjiesberg Pass to the South of Uniondale taking travellers from the high grounds of the Great Karoo down to the Little Karoo towards Oudtshoorn and George.

Naudeberg Pass

The Naudeberg Pass should not be confused with its like-named, but much more famous Naudes Nek Pass, which is also in the Eastern Cape. The Naudeberg Pass lies 40km North of Graaff Reinet on the tarred N9 connecting with the karoo town of Middelburg some 70km further North. The pass rises 221 metres over 5.93km resulting in an average gradient of 1:26.

Soutpansnek

Soutpansnek translates from Afrikaans as 'Salt Pan Neck'. This 7km tarred pass is located on the R75, 15km North of the small Karoo town of Jansenville. The pass has a stiff gradient on its Northern side of 1:14, but other than the one sharp bend at the summit, which is well marked, should present no real dangers. At the summit (710m) you will have a good view to the NNE of the 1000 metre high Buffelshoek Kop and the endless plains of the Great Karoo.

Bloukrans Pass

On the map it looks like we traverse the Bloukrans Pass. But we don't. In fact you can't. The mountainpasses site laments: It is a sad indictment that this road has been allowed to degenerate into such a state of disrepair that it is now been declared closed to traffic. We use bridges to cross the Bloukrans River. The river namers either love that name of ran out of alternatives. There are at least three of them. We met one where Retief's laager was parked when Dingane moved on them.

[17] I had to look this up. It's a narrow chasm or gorge such as a river (with accompanying rail and/or road) might flow between its high walls.

But be consoled, there might be time to try bungee jumping. The Bloukrans Bridge is home to the world's highest commercial bungee jump.

Grootrivier Pass

The Grootrivier Pass - (on route R102) played a significant role in the economic development of the Cape Colony and was originally built by Thomas Bain between 1822 and 1823 (he seems to have built most of the passes in this part of the country). Together with its sister pass, the Bloukrans Pass, they presented some highly technical problems to Bain, who had to contend with rockslides, mud, high rainfall, shale, unstable slopes and the omnipresent baboons.

Robinson Pass

The Robinson Pass is a modern classic of the Southern Cape with beautiful sweeping curves and superb views around every corner. It connects the coastal port of Mossel Bay with Oudtshoorn. The pass has been rebuilt several times over the past 140 years.

Schoemanspoort

Schoemans Poort connects Oudtshoorn with the Cango Caves. It also doubles as the feeder route to the village of Prince Albert via the fabulous Swartberg Pass. This is the lesser of the three major poorts through this mountainous region. The others are Meirings Poort and the Seweweeks Poort.

Swartberg Pass

The Swartberg Pass is for many South Africans, the rubicon of gravel road passes. There is an allure and a mystique around this old pass, coupled with its status as a national monument, which elevates this pass to the very top of the list. It was Thomas Bain's final and best piece of road building. Most of the historical points of interest are signposted along the pass. There are names like *Die Stalletjie* (Small Stall), *Witdraai* (White Corner), *Fonteintjie* (Small Fountain), *Skelmdraai* (Devious Corner), and of course *Die Top*, the last sign is almost completely obliterated by graffiti by some folk who might feel they have just crested Everest and have this burning desire to paint their name on the well-known sign.

Meiringspoort

Meiringspoort is a Top 10 destination. The poort bears a tough history of floods and landslides amongst incredible hardships, yet engineers and road builders mastered the art of building a magnificent road through this awe-inspiring poort.

Huisrivier Pass

The 13.4km long Huisrivier pass lies on the R62 between two valleys in the Little Karoo between the towns of Ladismith in the west and Calitzdorp in the east. This pass is unique in that its geology is unusually unstable and several pioneering engineering techniques had to be applied to successfully build a safe all-weather pass.

Tradouw Pass

The Tradouw Pass (which means Women's Path in the old Khoi language) is a 17 kilometre drive through an altitude range of 219 metres through some of the most beautiful and rugged mountain scenery on offer in the Langeberg.

Cogmanskloof Pass

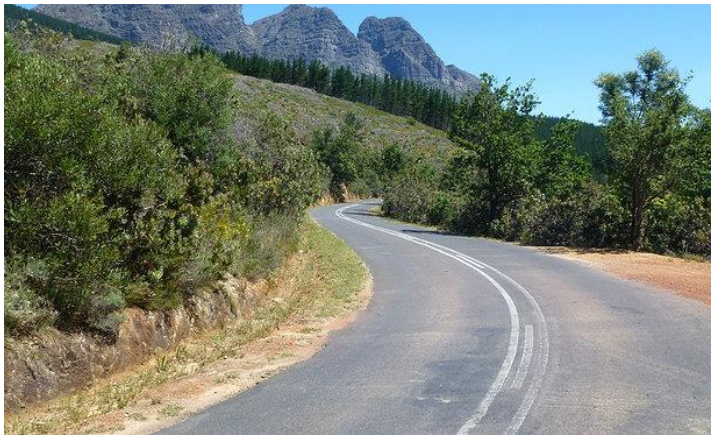
The Cogmanskloof Pass connects the towns of Ashton and Montagu. Its entire 6.5km stretch through a majestic landscape of towering rock formations and a colourful pastoral patchwork delights the eye and invigorates the heart! Renamed after Cape Colony secretary, John Montagu, the town's original name of Cogmanskloof is where this pass took its name from.

Du Toitskloof Pass

The old Du Toits Kloof Pass (officially designated as the R101) is 11km longer than the newer N1 route, and is certainly worth choosing over the new route! Its grand, dramatic mountain views and elegantly constructed, curved tunnel whisks one back in time to an older, almost forgotten era -- when World War 2 impactfully changed the world with its bombs, genocide and bittersweet victories.[18]

The first labourers to work on the pass, Italian POWs, were released from their years of toil in 1945. Three years later, the road was completed by fairly employed and paid local labour. Take the time to drive this pass, so rich in history and rugged beauty!

Bainskloof Pass



The Bain's Kloof Pass {R301} provided a more direct route from the town of Wellington to the more northern towns of Ceres and Worcester, in the Western Cape. It is 27.3km in length from the bridge over the Breede River to the outskirts of Wellington. Built circa 1849 by Andrew Geddes Bain, this pass was a tough nut to crack, working with convicts and raw, rough materials and methods. As always seemed to be the case with Bain, he oversaw a marvellous job of the pass which, having stood the test of time, is now a national monument. The more dramatic, northern section of the pass roughly follows the course of the Witte River, a raging torrent during the wet winter season.

EPILOGUE

Enough! Enough!

If I don't stop now, this might go on forever. There's a lot of things of interest that I haven't covered but there's also a lot more than I intended to cover. Hope it's interesting and useful.

[18] Whatever that means!