

Progress Report - Historical Research on Wolwekloof

Summary of findings

The name of Wolwekloof was given to two sites in the Wellington-Ceres area, one just over Bain's Kloof Pass and other to a farm with a ravine just outside modern day Mitchell's pass, probably because the Wolwekloof River flows through these sites.

In historical accounts, Wolwekloof is mentioned as a ravine on the farm of Jan Mostert who built Mostertshoek Pass built in 1765 and thereafter charged a toll fee to travelers to use the pass.

Mitchell's Pass was rebuilt to replace Mostert's Hoek Pass in 1846 -1848 with Grey Bridge as an entry to the pass.

Grey Bridge was washed away in 1921 as rebuilt as White Bridge

Mitchell's Pass was newly concreted in 1946.

The Wolwekloof Site, on the top of Bainskloof Pass, is recorded as a site for the Breede River Convict Station during 1849 – 1851 and is later called Tweede Tol as the second tollhouse for Bainskloof pass was built there. It is associated with Borcherd's Bridge.

Methodology

Research has primarily been conducted in libraries and archives in Cape Town and Wellington. The following sources have been researched:

- South African Library
- National Archives, Cape Town
- Wellington Museum
- Wellington library
- Cape Town municipal library
- UCT libraries
- Witzenberg Municipality

Discussion

1. Wolwekloof on Bain's Kloof Pass:

Very little information exists about the site in pre-colonial times.

Wolwekloof has also been referred to as Wolwenhoek – in association with a farm of that name on which the gorge is situated. English people have referred to it as Wolf's Gorge. The Breederiver Convict Station existed at Wolwekloof in the mid-1800s. In the 1850s, when the Bain's Kloof pass was built a tollhouse was established at Wolwekloof, and it was then called Tweede Tol. While the first tollhouse had

previously been the main tollhouse on the pass, from 1888 onwards, Tweede Tol became the main tollgate.

The earliest records of Wolwekloof refer to Wolwenhoek farm, which was established in 1784; (Various writers refer to Wolwekloof by the name Wolwenhoek in their writings (See Borchers, Mackenzie,). Governor van de Graaf granted 1 morgen of land to Pieter Celliers in 1784 – he named it Wolwenhoek. His nephew Petrus Jacobus Malherbe inherited this land and sold it in 1801 to Gabriel Gideon Rossouw. In 1817 he sold it to his brother-in-law Petrus Johan Celliers. He passed it on to Willem Jacobus van der Merwe in 1825, who later sold it in 1839 to Johannes Retief. Pieter Jacobus le Roux inherited the land and it stayed in his ownership until 1879.

Convict system:

Wolwekloof was a subsidiary convict station from 1849 and became the main station in 1851. Thoman Bain, Andrew Geddes Bain's son was the Superintendent of the Breede River Convict Station . There were about 100 men under his control. Up to 450 convicts were employed on the pass at any one time and more than a thousand convicts employed during the construction period of 4 years from 1849 – 1853.

The convict system was reformed by Montagu, the Colonial Secretary in 1844 with the Ordinance 7 for the Discipline and Safe Custody of

Convicts Employed on the Public Roads. Human treatment and strict discipline was to be enforced. Monetary rewards could be gained for good behaviour and hard labour – the emphasis was placed on rehabilitation.

After a successful implementation of the convict system on Michell's Pass in 1846, many of the convicts who had worked on Michell's pass moved to the construction of Bain's Kloof.

The names of some convicts:

Gert Hollander

Cupid Samson

Ian Zeeland

Plaatje Snyman

Charles King

Maronge

Official records note the racial classifications as: "Hottentot, Bushman, English, Irish, French, Dutch, Malay, Half-caste, American, Kafir, ex-slave, coloured".

Convicts had committed such crimes as: "arson, robbery, rape, theft, man-slaughter, and other serious crimes deserving on long sentences".

Mackenzie notes that a large percentage of convicts were Khoi men

whod had been recruited as armed levies and then deserted or mutinied during the Colony's Wars against the Nguni people. Details of food, education and living conditions of the convicts are available.

One convict, of whom many stories were written, was "Scotty" or "Kwaai" Smith, No 1080, who given the length of his sentence, most likely did stay at the Wolwekloof Breede River Convict Station. He was a burglar. He made several escape attempts. He was recaptured each times and put in chains. He was chained to a securing ring, one of which still existed at Tweede Tol. (photograph enclosed). One story was forced to roll a huge boulder back and forth for hours on end.

Another interesting note describes a group of convicts, 47 in total who came from the Kat river settlement in the Eastern Cape. "When the Eighth Frontier War broke out in 1850, large numbers of me from the Kat River settlement refused to heed the call to arms to defend the Colony....simmering discontent spilled over into open rebellion, and many of the men went over to join the Xhosa. The revolt was crushed... (the men)'s sentences were commuted to life imprisonment...and the 46 were sent to work on building a road through Bain's Kloof."

Tweede Tol was established in Wolwekloof in an old convict station building. "Wolwekloof was an ideal outspan site with the river easily

accessible and its broad valley providing adequate grazing." The road to Wolwekloof was completed by the end of 1850

Borcherd's Bridge is also situated near Tweede Tol. Borcherd opened the Pass in 1853 and was the Chairman of the Central Road Board. Borcherds called Wolwekloof the terminus of the pass – at the time it was considered the end of the Pass

2. Wolwekloof, near Mostershoek Pass

"South Africa has many kloofs but few more beautiful than Mostert's Hoek, where the Breede River breaks through the Skurweberg range, connecting the Warm Bokkeveld with the Tulbagh Valley. The entrance to the kloof is guarded by the mountain giant, the Mostert's Hoek Twins, its summit cloud-wreathed in summer, and mantled by snow in winter. Beside the mouth of the pass is a ravine known as Woweekloof. According to report, this was once the farm of Jan Mostert after whom the kloof is named." (Burman 1963: 132) Jan Mostert, after having built the Pass charged a toll fee to all travelers passing through the pass to the Warm Bokkeveld.

Smuts also mentions that Jan Mostert, who she postulates, "in all probability a descendant of Wouter Cornelisz Mostert who accompanied Gabbema in 1657 and who led a commando to punish the cattle-lifting Gonnema at the Bushman's Rock – had lived at

Wolwenkloof, that pleasant old farmhouse beneath lofty oaks and beside a water-wheel near Grey's Bridge at the foot of Michell's Pass. Farmers were compelled to take their wagons to pieces and load wheels and body as well as their goods upon oxen, which slowly made the ascent." (Smuts 1988: 20) It was also Wouter Cornelisz Mostert who in 1657 became one of the first progenitors of a military presence in South Africa, as a free burgher who was appointed as a corporal by Governor of the Cape at the time, Jan van Riebeeck.

Wolwekloof, as part of Mostertshoek is mentioned first in the writings of early travel writer to the Cape and botanist, Karl Peter Thunberg in his Travels at the Cape of Good Hope 1772 -1775, "...at the other end it is open , with a range of mountains projecting into it, & forming an angle, called Mostershoek, and grows wider and wider the nearer it approaches to the south." (Forbes: 1986: p62). Thunberg had been forced to travel through Mostertshoek though the road was stony and the mountain steep : "every farmer traveling from Roggeveld to the Cape through Mostertshoek pays annually a certain sum towards repairing the roads. We fell in there with another commando that had been the in the pursuit of the Boshiesmen quite up into the Roggeveld". (Forbes 1986: 302). Because Wolwekloof was a ravine on a farm on the outskirts of what was then the Cape at the time – Ceres only developed there in 1849 after the building of Michell's Pass – it was a site where the Cape burghers were in conflict and in pursuit of Khoisan,

with whom they were at the time still in constant struggle over cattle and land.

Swellengrebel, another traveler not long after Thunberg, merely mentions that he had to travel through Mostertshoek (1986: 62)

Wolwekloof, as part of Mostershoek, is mentioned again by Henry Lichtenstein, another traveler in the Cape and doctor in his writings, Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806,

“We ourselves departed from Tulbagh on the seventh of May. In three hours and a half we reached the place of the Field-Cornet Muller, at the foot of the Mostershoek, where a number of horses for the whole party were waiting. After partaking of a good breakfast, we mounted them, and proceeded on our way. Mostertshoek, properly so called, is the southern end of the ssteep wall of mountains which bear the name of Witsemberg.....Mostertshoek is only separated from the Black Mountains by a deep chasm, through which this river rises in the Bokkeveld.....A road made forty years ago, by a certain John Mostert goes sometimes on one sideof the river, sometimes on the other, according to the ground's most favourable fork.” (1930: 201)

Governor Michell in the 1830s also noted the steepness of the pass, “...of an nature so rugged and precipitous that it is necessary to take a

wagon to pieces, carry it and its cargo piecemeal through, and then undergo all the trouble of putting together and reloading. Eight thousand pounds would enable an excellent pass to be built here."

(1836) Mostertshoek Pass then later became popularly known as Michell's Pass, built by convicts from 1846 – 1848, directed by the same Andrew Geddes Bain who later directed the building of Bain's Kloof pass from 1849 -1853. A similar convict station is positioned on Mostertshoek farm on maps relating to that period. Some of the convicts who built Michell's Pass, were later transferred to the Neck and Wolwekloof in Bain's Kloof pass.

It was after the opening of Michell's Pass that "1800 acres of unappropriated Crown Land at the eastern end of the pass were laid out in a village named Ceres" (Burman 1963: 135)

By 1871, maps indicate that Mostertshoek farm had been subdivided earlier in the century and was now owned by P.M Retief. In the twentieth century, after 1921 a section of Mostertshoek was now commonly known as White Bridge Farm. The farm, Wolwekloof, was developed into a resort by a Mr. Rynhardt and later sold to the Tulbagh municipality. (Pers comm. Mr Creamer 2006) The Divisional Council developed this resort as a resort for people classified "coloured" during the Apartheid era. The people who used this resort during this period were mainly from Cape Town and visited it as part of their annual

leisure activities during Easter and Christmas and New Year.

Wolwekloof, like other resorts Antoniesvlei, was also a site where union meetings were held during the Freedom Struggle period.

Contextual history of Wolwekloof, Michell's Pass

The historical significance of Wolwekloof, known as a resort by people today, needs to be understood in the broader context of Cape history.

The ravine is situated on a farm called Wolwekloof which was in the 18th century known as Mostertshoek. Mostertshoek was probably allocated to a free burgher in the early Cape period. Free burghers were previously officials of the Dutch East India Company who had been bound to the company, but were granted freedom so that they could develop farming lands and expand the boundaries of the settlement at the Cape. Free burghers lived on the outskirts of the settlement and probably went to Cape Town once a year. At this time the economy of the Cape was developed by slave labour, but slaves were mainly owned by urban-based farmers and people living in towns.

Free burghers mostly used indenture labour of the increasingly dispossessed Khoi herders, whose land was being disappropriated by the Cape colony. Constant skirmishes between the free burghers and the Cochoqua clans in the area and raids by the early European-inspired military regiments were common.

Because the site of Wolwekloof was on a farm on the outskirts of the Colony, it became part of the historical record only from the experience of European travelers who were literate and wrote accounts of their travels. It is probable that Jan Mostert mentioned was not literate and therefore did not record any history about the building of the pass in 1765. Again, in 1840s Wolwekloof as part of Mostertshoek, is only recorded in the context of the building of Michell's Pass and it is at this time that the land is subdivided into separate farms of Wolwekloof and Mostertshoek farm. At this time, slavery in the Cape had been abolished and the government at the time had to rely on convict labour to build road and passes. Early recordings of the convict system at the time describe the system at Bainskloof Pass, rather than Michell's Pass, but it can be assumed that conditions were the same. Because Wolwekloof Farm in the 19th century was not owned by a rich landowner who had access to government and international networks at the time, and because it was merely adjacent to the Pass and not directly on the route to Ceres, very little is recorded of life there during this time period. Ceres, itself only established as a village in 1849, with the opening of the pass, has historical records only from that period onward. It is likely that Wolwekloof's situation as subsidiary to farms directly on the routes between Tulbagh, Ceres and Worcester made it suitable for purchase as a resort for disadvantaged people in the 1960s.

Published References

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Lichtenstein, H. Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806. Volume III Reprint of translation from German by A. Plumtre Van Riebeeck Society 1930.

Forbes, V. 1986 Pioneer travelers of South Africa, 1750-1800. AA Balkema

Smuts, D. 1988. The Forgotten highway through Ceres and the Bokkeveld. Gallery Press

Illustrations and Photographs:

Picture of Tweede Tol, Wolwehoek and Borcherd's Pass ca 1880-90, Wellington Museum

Photo of Borcherd's Bridge

Map of area

Bain's hand-drawn map

Photos of White Bridge Farm

Maps of Mostershoek, showing Wolwekloof and Grey's Bridge

