

The Forgotten Highway Guide Book,
1st edition



THE FORGOTTEN HIGHWAY

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR TRAVELLERS

Tulbagh to Griquatown

October 2022

First edition

Karoo Development Foundation

With special thanks to Claus Riding, land surveyor in Ceres,
for the maps illustrating Burchell's routes

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THE FORGOTTEN HIGHWAY ROUTE

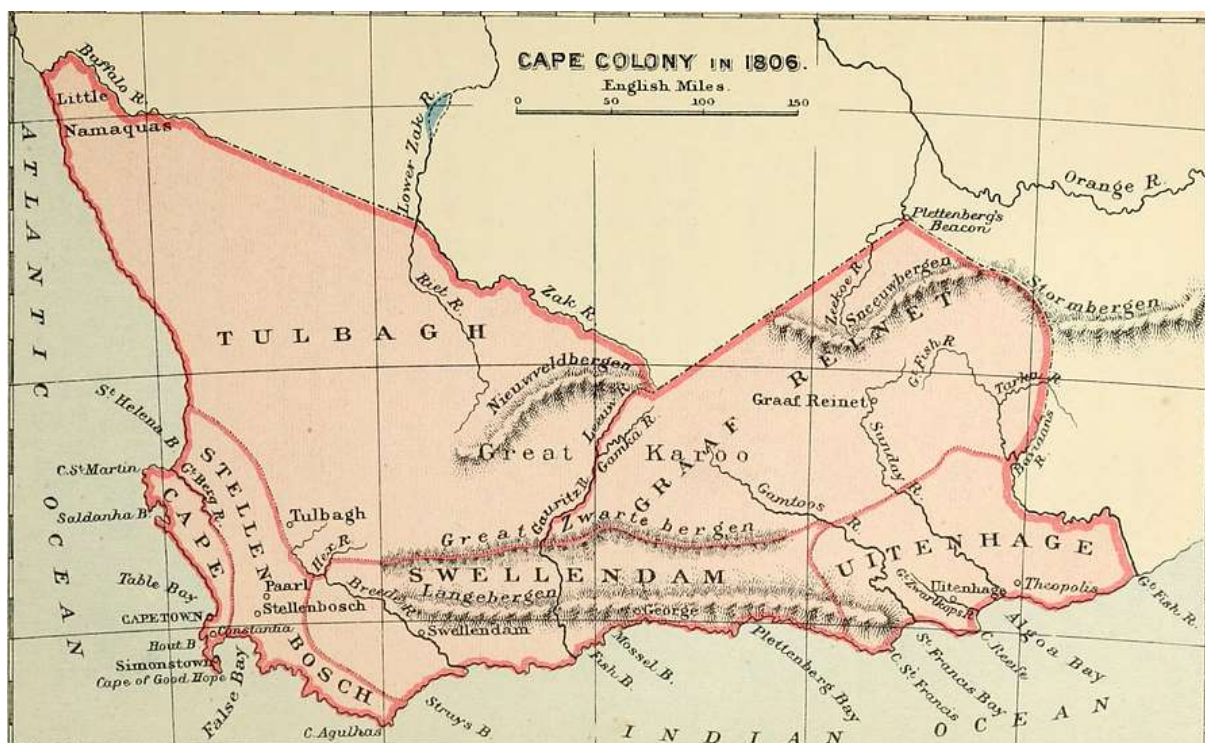
The 1 000 km Heritage Route stretches from Tulbagh and Ceres in the south to Kuruman in the north. It is the route that was used by the !Xam (San), KhoeKhoe (Khoi), Tswana, missionaries and explorers. From there, travellers would venture into central Africa.

This Traveler's Guide will pinpoint historic sites along the 1 000 km of the Route.

Many of these sites are now just names on a map, but the Guide will recall the experiences of other travellers who have made the same journey as you are doing now.

The focus of the route is the period 1780-1860 – roughly eighty years. During this period, the northern boundary of the Colony expanded from roughly where Ceres is now to where Prieska is now.

The main reason for the expansion is that white *trekboers* kept moving north and establishing farms, churches and villages, and to keep order on the chaotic boundary, the Colony expanded its jurisdiction.



The Cape Colony in 1806 – after the Somerville-Truter expedition of 1801, and before the Burchell expedition of 1811

From 1823, the Moffat Mission in Kuruman was the last stop from the Cape into the deeper African interior. It was also Africa's link to the Cape.

Parts of the Route were based on pathways well-trodden by |Xam (San) and other hunter-gatherer groups, later by Khoekhoe herders with sheep and cattle, Tswana farmers at the northern end, and Xhosa who entered the Karoo, taking up residence there and along the Gariep from the late eighteenth century.

From the late 1700s, a trickle of white and 'baster' (coloured) frontiersmen, farmers, hunters and fugitives, traders, explorers and missionaries were followed by a steadier spread of Trekboer farmers. The San, Korana, Xhosa (at Prieska and Canarvon), the Griqua at Griquatown, and the Tlhaping near Kuruman, met the in-comers in widely varying types of encounter – trade, state-building, military power, conflict, and religious competition.



The Forgotten Highway Route links Tulbagh in the south with Kuruman in the north, traversing several Karoo regions –Ceres Karoo, Roggeveld, Nuweveld, Bo-Karoo, Griqualand West, onto the Ghaap, and into the Kalahari.

The CORE towns along the route include Tulbagh, Ceres, Sutherland, Fraserburg, Williston, Loxton, Carnarvon, Vanwyksvlei, Prieska, Niekerkshoop, Griquatown, Danielskuil, Postmasburg, Campbell and Kuruman.

There are also “cultural off-shoots”, into the southern Free State (such as Philippolis, also a Griqua state); Witsand Nature Reserve in the Langeberg; and Olifantshoek, Kathu and Deben in the Kalahari. Other important towns on the edge of the route are Matjiesfontein, Victoria West, Vosburg, and Vanwyksvlei.

The main theme of the Route is “Encounters” – of people often out of their comfort zones and meeting others of different cultural background. Very often, the result was an intercultural mosaic of mutual influences.

Several museums already offer engaging displays – Tulbagh, Ceres, and Griquatown. More museums are being refurbished along the Route. Wonderwerk Cave, north of Danielskuil, and Wildebeestkuil, west of Kimberley, are important heritage sites and fascinating to visit.

The purpose of the Route is to awaken the historical awareness of local people along the Route, so that they realise how special their environment is. Also, other South Africans will explore where their ancestors travelled, and foreign visitors will help us celebrate the historical significance of these remarkable events.

This brief Route Guide focuses on the travels of the Somerville/Truter expedition (1801), the William Burchell expedition (1811), and the path-breaking book by E.E. Mossop (1827).

WHAT SHOULD YOU PACK IN YOUR WAGON?

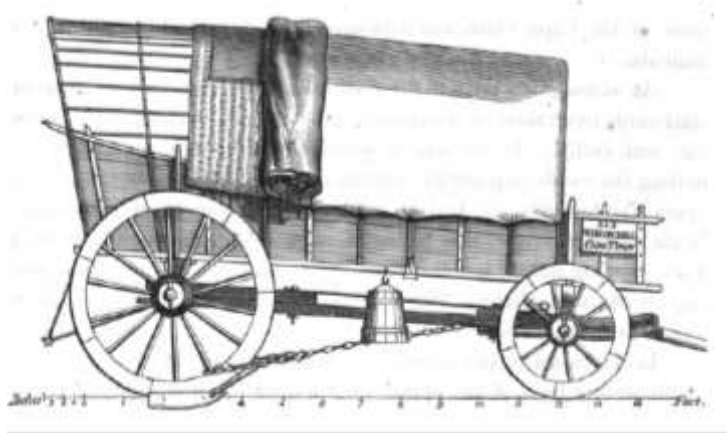
In 1811, William Burchell’s wagon, with all the other required travelling articles, amounted to 585 rix-dollars, i.e. about 88 pounds (page 38). In addition, he had to add chests and “various conveniences” which were very expensive. In the end, the whole outfit cost him 600 pounds sterling.

This included 20 oxen, and a team of ten men to pull the wagon. He had six Khoi assistants, of whom Philip drove the Wagon and Speelman was a good hunter.

The wagon was 15 feet in length, and 2 feet 9 inches wide. The framework of the “tilt” was made of bamboo cane covered over with Hottentot mats, above which there was a painted canvas. Over that, there was a covering of sailcloth, with a flap to close up the ends. That made the wagon rain-proof.

In the wagon, “not an inch of space was left unfilled”, which was used for valuable and useful goods, and to keep them from moving about with the jolting of the vehicle.

Under the tilt (tent) were bags filled with useful things, as well as bottles, muskets, pistols, powder-horns, the cutlas. The five large chests left just room for one person to sit.



Burchell's ox-wagon

The front part of the wagon was separated from the other part by a canvas partition, to form a sleeping-place. The bedding lay along the tops of the chests. In the rest of the space, there were reams of paper, a press, the smaller chests, a large tin collection box, the brandy barrel, and the water casks. In the bed, were the fragile instruments, such as the sextant. The driver sat on a chest which contained tools and implements for repairing the wagon.

On the outside of the waggon, the spare yokes, lever, tar-bucket, skid, spades, pick-axe, hatchets, and whip-stocks, were fastened. On the trap (or step-frame) were the cooking utensils, besides the karosses (cloaks) and bedding of the Khoi helpers.

When travelling in a convoy of several ox wagons, each wagon took a turn each day in leading the column, so that every driver would share in the care and attention required in driving the foremost team. All the other teams could then following the footsteps of the front team.

Burchell also described how the Khoi broke in the oxen for riding. At a year old, they pierced the ox's nose for a bridle – they throw the ox on its back, and make a slit through the cartilage between the nostrils. They push a strong stick; at each end is a thong of hide, long enough to reach around the neck and form the reins. They use a sheep-skin, with the wool on, for a saddle. Stirrups are made from thongs with a loop at each end. It takes about two weeks to train an ox to become an obedient animal – it can be made to walk, trot or gallop. They could walk three or four miles in an hour, or trot at five miles an hour.

Burchell later figured out that, if he moved his one chest further backwards in the wagon, he created a “very commodious sitting-room, well enclosed and barricaded by the after-chest”.

The travellers had an interesting way of measuring distance travelled. Burchell had figured out the exact length of ground over which the greater wheel passed in a single revolution. Now they had to calculate the number of revolutions: This was done by a leather thong that always remained tied around one of the spokes.

TULBAGH TO SUTHERLAND

The Oudekloof Pass (entering Tulbagh Valley)

Our Route starts with two passes, leading from the Wellington area, past Gouda, to Tulbagh. The oldest dates from as early as 1658, just six years after the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape.

But why was there such an urge by Van Riebeeck to find a way to the north? It was partly to barter cattle from the Khoi, and partly to find out the truth about the mythical places, such as Rio do Infanta and the great city of Monomotapa, which he had read about.¹

But to move northwards from the Cape, one had to cross a formidable mountain barrier – whether in the east, north-east or north. In March 1658, Van Riebeeck sent Sergeant Jan van Harwarden to find a pass across “the mountain range of Africa”, as Van Riebeeck called these formidable peaks.

Van Harwarden’s party travelled from Cape Town, via Tygerberg, then past Koeberg on the west coast, past Riebeeck Kasteel, and came to the Great Berg River. They spent a few days wandering about the Wagenmakers Valley, where Wellington is now.

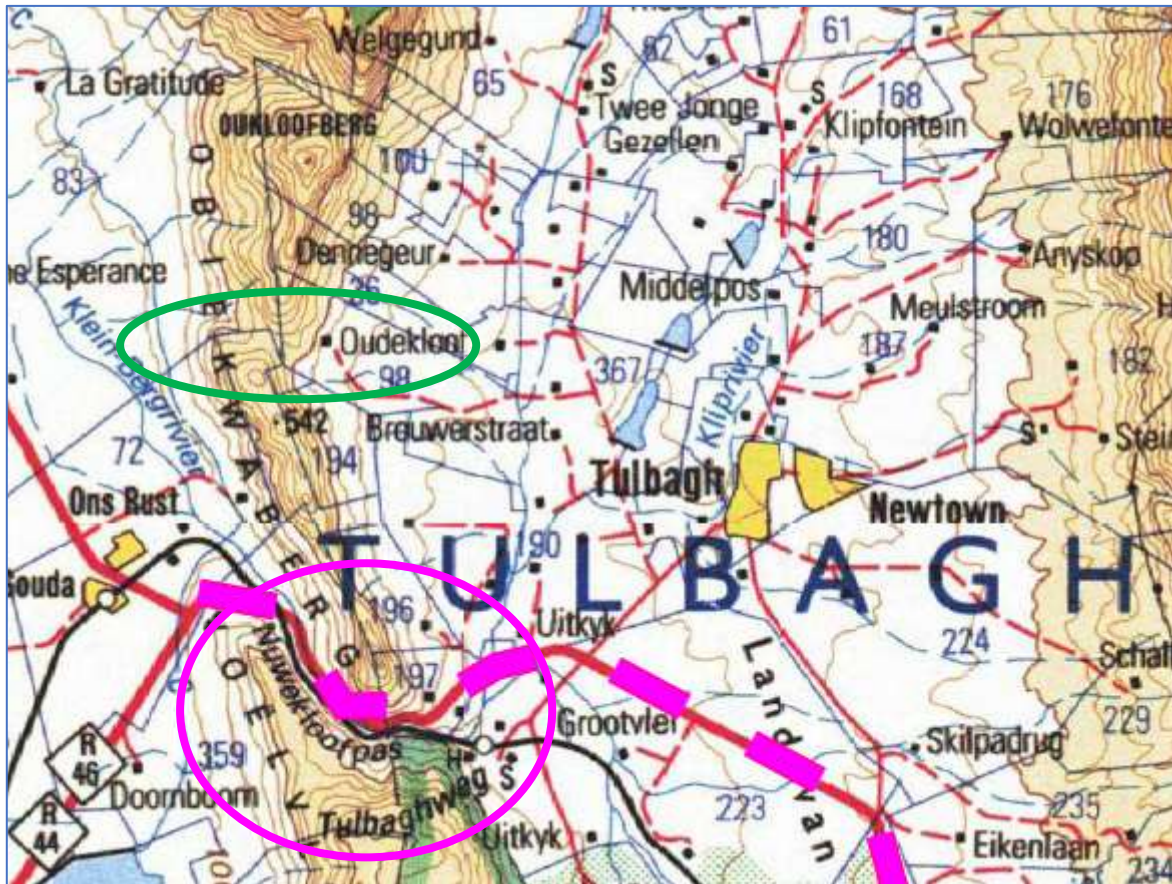
Here several men suffered a bout of dysentery, and so Van Harwarden sent the Surveyor, Pieter Potter, ahead to find a passage across the Oubiqua Mountains. On about 5 March 1658, Pieter Potter found a pass – and became the first white person to look upon the Tulbagh Basin. This was called *Oudekloof Pass*. In those days, the Tulbagh Valley was called *Roodezand (red sand) Valley*, or *The Land of Waveren*.

It was a tough journey from Cape Town. At least two of the party had died – one from illness, and one had been mauled by a lion. Fifty years later, Governor van der Stel used the same pass to travel to Tulbagh.

For history on the Oudekloof and Nuwekloof Passes, please visit www.mountainpassessouthafrica.co.za. It makes history come alive.

It offers maps, videos and driving hints. There is a small joining fee.

¹ This early history is described in Dr E.E. Mossop’s classic book, *Old Cape Highways*.



Entering the Tulbagh Valley: The Green circle denotes the Oudekloof Pass, while the pink circle indicates the Nuwekloof Pass. {The pink dotted line indicates William Burchell's route in 1811}.

Today, the Oudekloof Pass cannot be used for vehicles. It is a lovely walk across the Obiqua Mountain; to experience this, contact the Oudekloof Wine Estates.² The name "Obiqua" is an important reminder that this area had been inhabited by Khoi people.

For about 100 years, i.e. to the mid-1700s, the Oudekloof Pass was the main entry point to the Tulbagh Valley.

The Nuwekloof Pass (entering Tulbagh valley)

But there was a second pass – the entrance to which Pieter Potter had also discovered. It was at first a mere cattle track along the Little Berg River – and this would become the Nuwekloof

² www.oudekloofwineestate.co.za

Pass. By 1810, this was the “new way for carriages. It crossed and re-crossed the riverbed.³ Pieter Potter never made it through the Nuwekloof Pass; he came half-way, and then turned back because the pass seemed too narrow to traverse.



One of the earliest travellers was the botanist, Carl Peter Thunberg, in 1772.⁴ This is Thunberg’s description of the Nuwekloof Pass: “In some places, it was so narrow that two wagons could not pass each other. At such narrow passes, it is usual for the drivers to give several terribly loud smacks with their long whip, which are heard at a distance of several miles, so that the wagon that arrives first may get through unimpeded before another enters it”.

Carl Peter Thunberg

In 1811, William Burchell passed through the Nuwekloof Pass. There was a toll, which travellers paid to help cover the costs of maintaining the pass. He describes the Nuwekloof as “a narrow winding defile of about three miles in length, just enough to allow a passage for the Little Berg river, on each side of which the mountains rise up abrupt and lofty”. Along the steep and winding sides a road had been cut out, about a hundred feet above the river, but at one point the road had to go through the river itself.



Burchell’s dramatic drawing, in 1811, capturing the great difficulties of the Nuwekloof Pass

³ See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuwekloof_Pass_\(Western_Cape\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuwekloof_Pass_(Western_Cape)).

⁴ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Peter_Thunberg.

Years later, in the 1860s, the pass was rebuilt by Thomas Bain, and it was tarred in the 1930s. In 1874, Bain also built the railway pass which runs along the roadway.

On the western side of the Pass is Bushman's Rock – another glimpse into a historical era when the San used to roam freely in these mountain crevices. In the words of EE Mossop, "Flat-topped and crenellated, it stands like some mediaeval castle guarding the entrance to the pass", where the San could keep a look-out.

On the eastern side of the Nuwekloof Pass is the Oude Tol Farm⁵, which offers pleasant rural accommodation. This old toll has been in existence since the early 1800s, to help defray the expenses of maintaining the old road. *It is not clear where the old toll actually is.*

TULBAGH TO CERES

Many early travellers crossed the Oudekloof or Nieuwekloof Passes to visit the Tulbagh or Roodezand Valley, then called *The Land of Waveren*. The town of *Roodezand* was renamed as "Tulbagh" in 1805. Almost all the early travellers passed by Tulbagh.

The Somerville-Truter party, 1801

In 1801, the "Truter-Somerville Expedition" crossed the "Roodezand Kloof", presumably the Oudekloof. The "Expedition to the Beriqua [Thlaping]", arrived at the south bank of the Orange River near present Prieska, on 1 November 1801. They proceeded as far north as Dithakong (Lattakoo), north of the Kuruman River, becoming the first Europeans to meet and describe the southern Tswana. This was a very important expedition as it yielded much information and understanding about the interior.⁶

Dr William Somerville, a physician, who recorded much cultural, botanical and zoological information on his travels.

Image courtesy of the National Picture Gallery, London



The co-leader of the expedition was **Petrus Johannes Truter (1749 – 1825)**, a senior judge at the Cape, and he compiled the final report to the Governor.

⁵ See

⁶ George McCall theal, *Records of the Cape Colony, May 1801-February 1803*, vol. IV. Printed for the Government of the Cape Colony, 1899. Report to Lieut-Gen Francis Dundas, Acting Governor.

Also on the expedition was **Samuel Daniell**, a highly regarded British artist, who worked on the Expedition as Somerville's assistant.



Samuel Daniell, who created numerous excellent paintings and sketches of the people and animals of the interior

The fourth key member of the Expedition was **Petrus Borchers (1786 – 1871)**. He was very young at the time – only fifteen years old.

Also on the Somerville Expedition were JC Schultze, Overseer of the Waggon; three government slaves (Jan, Willem and Anthony); a Khoi wagon driver, Hendrik Booy; and a "Bastard"⁷ called Hannes. They travelled in six wagons.

At Roodezand Pass (Oudekloof), Truter recalled how fresh oxen carried the wagons over the mountains.

William Burchell, 1811

Burchell travelled without other white companions, because he feared tensions with companions. Although, he said, "I must confess there were often moments during my subsequent travels in which I severely felt the want of some companion, whose assistance and advice might have relieved my daily fatigues and the anxieties of my mind".⁸

However, for a while, he travelled in contact with the missionary William Anderson's party, because he had heard of reports of large bands of raiders moving across the colony. Anderson was accompanied by his wife, and later joined by another missionary, Mr Kramer. The two parties did not travel together all the time, but kept in touch with one another.

Burchell had engaged six Khoi men, of whom Philip drove the wagon and Speelman was useful in hunting. The party also included Jan Kok.

⁷ Dutch-speaking coloured person from the Cape; they were later called "Griqua".

⁸ William Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of South Africa*. His travels took place in 1811, but he only published his journals in 1822.

Burchell was astonished to find that the Khoi men memorised each ox's name and place in the team. In contrast, Burchell could not even distinguish his own team from those of other wagons.

Mostertshoek

The pass to Ceres was always called *Mostert's Hoek*, but it is now known as the *Michell's Pass*.⁹ In the late 1700s, Jan Mostert lived at Wolven Kloof, at the foot of Michell's Pass. In those days, travellers had to take their wagons to pieces and load the wheels and the body of the wagons, as well as the goods, upon oxen, which slowly crossed the pass. In about 1765, Jan Mostert built a road at his own expense. Today, parts of it can still be seen up the kloof as a cutting along the riverbanks.¹⁰

This road crossed and re-crossed the river bed of the river, and so it was not always passable. Near the top of the pass, the river flows between two high cliffs, and there Mostert made his road to run along a rocky terrace high on the mountain side.

The use of Mostert's Hoek route was challenging. Lichtenstein's party had to face raging torrents in the riverbed, and their horses crossed with great difficulty.

The modern road also runs along this terrace. It was built in 1846 by Andrew Geddes Bain, after which it changed its name to *Michell's Pass*, named after Charles Michell, an engineer who became the Surveyor-General of the Cape Colony.

Some travellers, like Lichtenstein, sent their baggage wagons via the **Hex River Pass**, which exists the Tulbagh Valley further south than the Michell's Pass. The Hex was passable for wagons all year round.

When Lichtenstein passed through the Ceres valley in 1805, he visited the Justice of the Peace, Francis van der Merwe, on whose farm the town of Ceres now stands. They saw many fruit trees – vineyards, orange trees and fig trees.

Remember to subscribe to Mountain Passes SA for a full description and video of the Michell's Pass and Swaarmoed Pass. Ideally, watch the videos in 720 bps.

www.mountainpassessouthafrica.co.za

. There is a small joining fee.

⁹ Note that "Michell" is spelled without a "t".

¹⁰ EE Mossop, *Old Cape Highways*.

In 1805, Lakenvally was owned by Peter van der Merwe, commonly called Peter Laekenvally. His family provided a sumptuous dinner to the Lichtenstein travelling party, as his youngest daughter, a girl of seventeen, was to set off the next morning accompanied by her brothers and bridegroom, to travel to Tulbagh for her marriage formalities.¹²

The Swaarmoed¹³ Pass road leaves the R46 about 10 km north-east of Ceres, and rejoins it about 40km further, after the beautiful Theronsberg Pass, at Hottentotskloof. This is another subtle reminder of the Khoi who originally lived in the area. At this point, you depart the fertile Ceres valley, and enter the drier Warm Bokkeveld region.

Just after the Theronsbergpass you will find the *Forgotten Highway Guest Farm*, which celebrates its pride of place on this historical route.¹⁴

The old road itself is no longer used. It runs somewhat parallel to the R46, on the southern side. Traces can still be seen on Google Maps:

The old road also passed by Uitkomst Farm, which in Lichtenstein's day (1805) belonged to Veld Cornet Bruyere.

The next important stop is Karooport Pass – or “Bokkeveld's Poort”, as Lichtenstein called it.

KAROOPOORT: THE GATE TO THE DESERT

The history of the Ceres Karoo region goes back thousands of years. These hills The Ceres Karroo and surrounding hills were first occupied by Early Stone Age and Middle Stone Age communities as early as one million years ago. Prehistoric sites in the area contain surface and sub-surface stone artefact scatters, with blades, scrapers, ostrich eggshell, and indigenous pottery.

Several rock art sites have been recorded in the local vicinity of Karooport Farm, depicting colonial people, wagons and horses (Yates et al 1993; Hall and Mazel 2006). There is also an ancient rock shelter near the homestead.

This thoroughfare would have been used in prehistoric times much the same way it was in historic times, as a means to travel between these two biomes in order to benefit from the seasonally available game and plant food – whether for hunting or for farming. The early

¹² EE Mossop, *Old Cape Highways*.

¹³ The translation of “Swaarmoed” is not entirely obvious. In Afrikaans, “swaarmoedig” means “dejected”, “melancholic” or “pensive”.

¹⁴ <https://www.forgottenhighway.co.za/>

farmers of the Ceres Karoo would lead their herds through the pass to escape the worst of the Koue Bokkeveld winters.

For early travellers, this was the only access point to the Karoo. It was also memorable, because for many travellers, it was their first encounter with the Karoo veld and landscape. They were often astonished by the dryness of this region, particularly in contrast to the well-watered Tulbagh and Ceres valleys.

The pass follows the bed of the Doring (or Doorn) River – usually just a trickle, but it can swell significantly in case of a rare thunderstorm. The river flows from south to north, towards the Karoo, and it finds its source in the highlands of the Hottentotskloof.

Remember to subscribe to Mountain Passes SA for a full description and video of the Karoopoort Pass. Ideally, watch the videos in 720 bps.

www.mountainpassessouthafrica.co.za.

The Kwarrieberg (which is the eastern end of the Baviaansberg range) is situated on the west of the pass (on the left, as you go north). The Saalberg is in the east.

Burchell wrote: “The strata of the mountains here, on each side, are inclined in opposite positions and curiously curved in undulating lines”.

As you travel north, you enter the southern Karoo, also known as “Ceres Karoo” or “Bokkeveld Karoo”.

Karoopoort was visited by all the important explorers of the late 17th and early 19th centuries – Thunberg, Le Vaillant, the Somerville-Truter Expedition, Lichtenstein, De Mist, Burchell and Barrow. Thunberg, accompanied by Francis Masson, a Scottish horticulturist from Kew Gardens, passed through the Poort on 9 December 1774.

Somerville and his colleagues passed through the Karoopoort on 8 October 1801, where they “unyoked the oxen and dined”.

For Lichtenstein, on his first journey from the north, in 1803, the early morning light in the Poort was delightful: “The return of the morning light threw magic shadows upon the naked rugged rocks and on the green bushes that bordered the deep torrent ... as if by enchantment, we found ourselves in the mild twilight of this contracted valley, the living vegetation of which formed so fine a contrast with the with the dry, barren, and almost boundless plain which we had quitted”.

William Burchell travelled here six years later, in 1811. His companions were Khoi, notably Phillip Willems (the wagon driver) and Stoffel Speelman, ex-soldiers of the “Hottentot Battalion” from Wynberg. They relaxed under the trees alongside the river.

The young William Burchell



On 13 July 1811, Burchell noted in his travel journal: “We arrived at the southern entrance of Karoo Poort, where we unyoked the oxen and took up our station under the shelter of two large bushy trees of Karree Hout near a small stream of water. On the banks of this rivulet (Doorn) grow some large trees of the same kind, forming, by the peculiar softness of their foliage, very picturesque ornaments to the landscape. The soil was clothed with low bushes of *Atriplex albicans*¹⁵ and *Galinia Africana*. The latter produces a remarkable effect on the legs of the cattle that graze amongst it by staining them a green colour. All our oxen, but more particularly the white ones, exhibited this singular appearance”.

He remarked that the flora north of the Karooport Pass was radically different, and almost all the typical Cape plants completely disappear. This was of course the transition to the Karoo veld.

Neither Lichtenstein (1805) nor William Burchell (1811) mentioned a farmstead in the Karooport. In 1805, it was occupied by Bruyere, the owner of the farm Uitkomst further south. At the time, there was a fine orchard, cornfield, and a little spiney of oaks and poplars beside the river; but probably no homestead. The farm has always been a Government Farm, leased to local farmers. It is not clear when the first homestead was actually built.

Burchell’s drawing of Karooport



Burchell noted the importance of the land just north of the Karooport (the Roggeveld Karoo), for the farmers of the region. In the winter, the farmers leave the high Roggeveld plateau and come down to the Roggeveld Karoo, to their “leg-plaatsen” (livestock stations), and they return back to the mountains at the end of October. (This system of seasonal movement is called “transhumance”).

¹⁵ Also called *Manochlamys albicans*, or “Spanspekbos”.

The traffic to the north increased significantly after the opening of the Michell's Pass in 1848. The village of Ceres was established in 1849, and a road was then constructed between Ceres, Theronberg, Karooport and Sutherland. This reduced the travel time for an ox-wagon from Cape Town to Beaufort West from 20 to 12 days. Ceres was now on the highway to the north.

Karooport served as a travellers' inn for over fifty years. The first building was erected in about 1850.

A lease was granted by 1864 to David Anderson. By the 1860s accommodation for travellers and stables had been built on the land at the lessee's expense; the land was retained by the government and the lease stipulated that the lessee provide accommodation for paying overnight travellers.¹⁶ In the 1870s, the Poort became a very important overnight stop on the way to the diamond fields. By the 1870s, however, the railway line via Worcester and Matjiesfontein reduced the use of Karooport dramatically.

Today, Karooport Pass is on the R355 road to Sutherland. This is a ... km stretch of gravel road – except for one kilometer of tarred road, in the pass itself. Many years ago, the road was tarred to protect the orchards from dust.

Today, there are still tenants living in Karooport. The site is in need of upgrading, maintenance, and a plan for tourism and local livelihoods.

CERES TO KAROOPOORT, VIA TOUWSRIVER

For travellers of old, there was a longer way to Karooport. It had the advantage of *not* going through Mostertshoek (which later became Michell's Pass). Once the pass was properly constructed in 1848, Michell's Pass became the favoured option, but before that, it was very risky. The old track through Mostertshoek crossed and re-crossed the river bed, and it was difficult to traverse if the river was swollen. Often it required travellers to take their wagons to pieces, and load all the wagon parts, and the goods, onto oxen, in order to scramble through the pass.

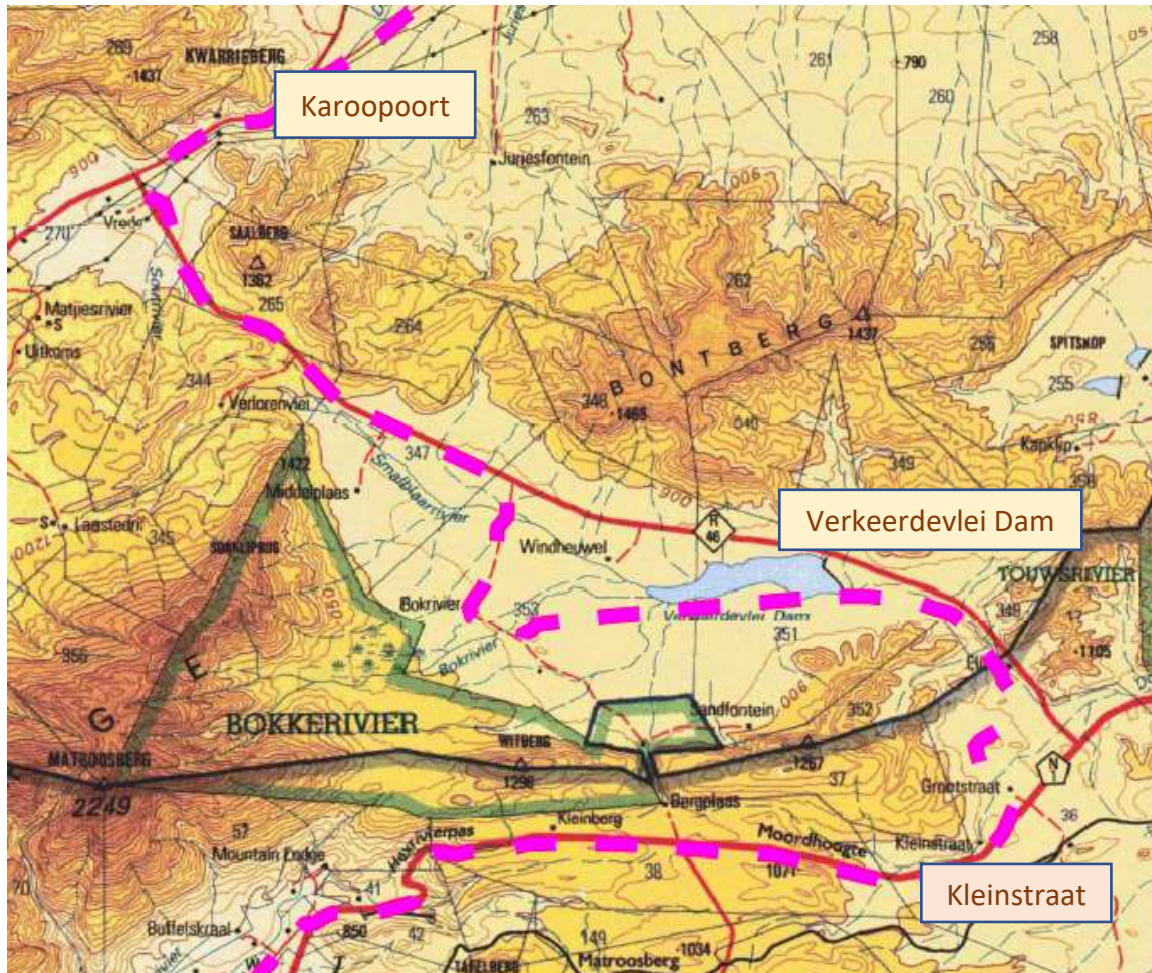
William Burchell, for example, sent his wagons through Mostertshoek, and he went on the gentler journey, via the modern towns of Wolseley, Worcester and De Doorns (in the Hex River Valley). The modern N1 highway travels along the Worcester-De Doorns valley. So Burchell traveled northwards, until he passed the picturesque poort called Klein Straat (almost reaching the modern town of Touws River).

¹⁶

<https://sahris.sahra.org.za/sites/default/files/heritagereports/Smuts%20Pinto%20Karooport%20survey.pdf>

Kleinstraat

At Kleinstraat, now a railway siding, Burchell turned west towards Karoopoort.



*Burchell's detour, in pink: Along today's N1 highway, almost up to Touwsrivier.
At Kleinstraat, Burchell turned west, as the pink line indicates.
Then past Verkeerdevelei to Karoopoort.*

As Buchell turned westward at Kleinstraat (and the nearby Grootstraat farm), he described the narrow poort which takes the traveller into the now Elim Nature Reserve¹⁷: “By moonlight we passed through ha singular defile in a ridge of rocky hills. It was very narrow and stony, and the perpendicular wall-like sides which enclosed the road on either hand, favoured by the uncertain light of the moon, gave to the place a considerable degree of resemblance to a *large street*; and the sound of the wheels rattling over the rocky ground, as on a pavement,

¹⁷ I.e. off the modern N1 route.

and reverberated from these walls, still further assisted the imagination. It is, therefore, not surprising that this defile should have obtained the name of *De Straat*".

After Burchell's westward turn, along what is now R46, he passed through a gentle valley between the Hexrivier Mountains on the left (south), and the Bonteberg on the right (north). This is where the modern game lodge, Aquila Safaris, is located.¹⁸

Verkeerdevlei lake, along the N46 road

The first mention of Verkeerdevlei was made by the Somerville-Truter expedition. As they passed the lake, they arrived late in the evening "at the house of the shoemaker Mulder, who lives near the Verkeerde Vlei in a hut, where we, through the dark, rain, cold and intenseness of the weather, were obliged to take shelter for that night". The Somerville party paid Mulder 3 Rixdollars for provisions.

Burchell also passed the Verkeerdevlei lake ("Contrary Lake"). This was, said Burchell, "an extensive sheet of water said to owe its name to the circumstances of the rivulet, which issues from it, running in a direction *contrary to the other streams of that part of the country*". The Bokberg River runs in a north-easterly direction, from the Matroosberg peak due west of Verkeerdevlei. In Burchell's time, the lake was full of ducks, geese and other waterfowl.

KAROOPORT TO SUTHERLAND: THE OLD HIGHWAY (GRAVEL ROAD)

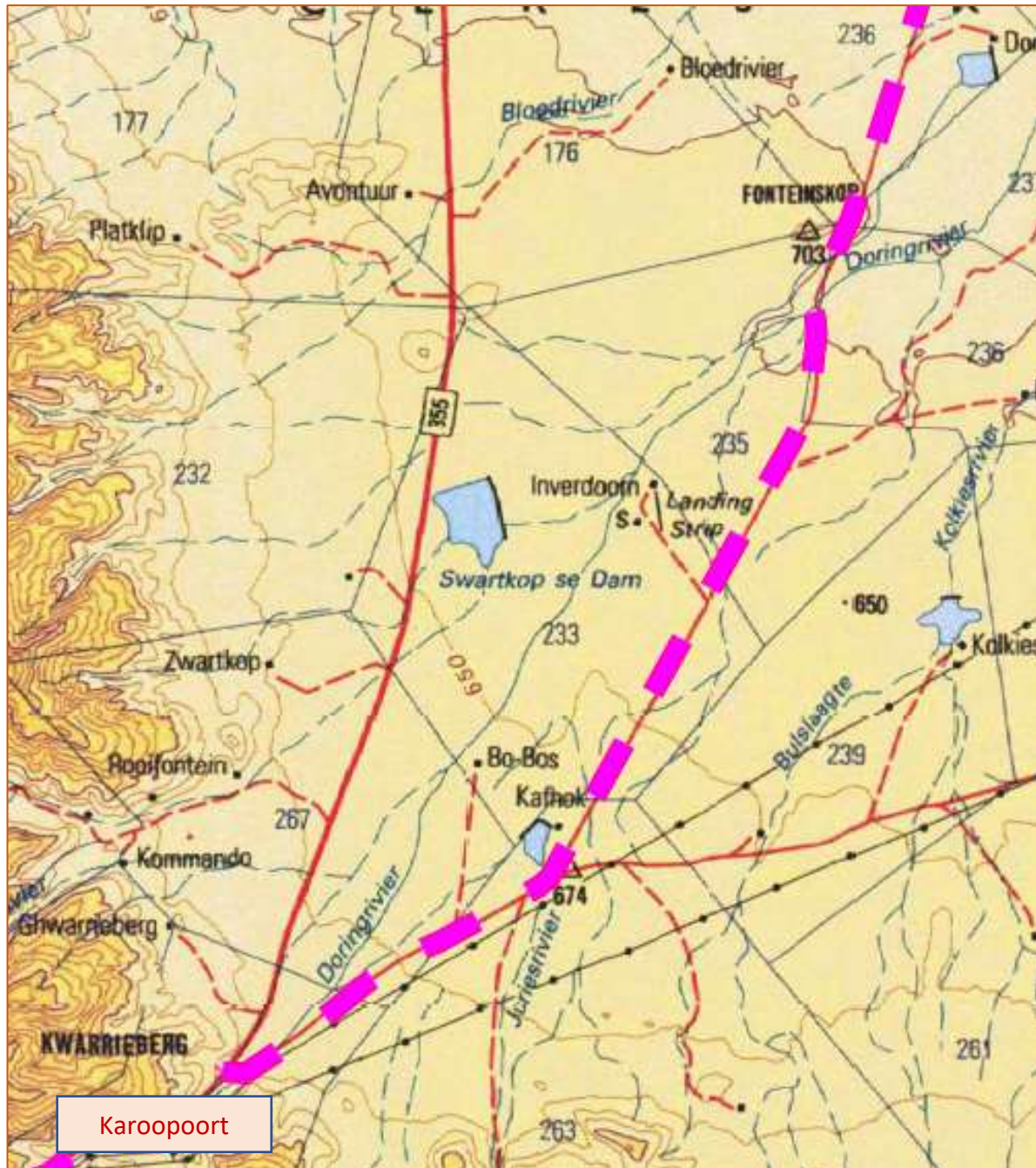
This long stretch of dirt road is one of the major historical segments of "The Highway to the North" – or more accurately, to the north-east.

It continues the route from Tulbagh and Ceres basin, through Karooport, across the Bokkeveld Karoo, to the escarpment (called the Roggeveld – where Sutherland is now). Between 1750 and 1800, trekboers were establishing temporary grazing farms ("legplaatsse") or even permanent farms along the foot of the Roggeveld mountain range.

The way up the escarpment was via the Verlatenkloof, which is today on the excellent tar road between Matjiesfontein and Sutherland. This was the main route to the Orange River, to Griquatown (the Klaarwater mission after 1804), to Kuruman (the Moffat Mission after 1823), and to Dithakong (or Lattakoo, as the Europeans called it).

¹⁸ See <https://www.aquilasafari.com/>

“Some fifty miles of lonely veld separates Karooport from Verlatenkloof”, as EE Mossop wrote. It is indeed about 110 km of dirt road (the R346) to reach the tar road (the R354), just at the bottom end of Verlatenkloof.



*From Karooport to the north: Inverdoorn, Doornfontein and Fonteinskop
The pink line indicates William Burchell's route*

In 1811, Burchell's party travelled in the night, "but the dry atmosphere of the karro was so exceedingly clear ... that an infinite multitude of sparkling stars enabled us easily to see our way, till we reached the Kleine Doorn (Little Thorn) river, where we halted for the night. Several graziers [farmers] were at this time stationed here, with their wagons, cattle and families".

Remarkably, Burchell found the road to be in good condition: "A clayey soil, washed level and smooth by frequent thunder-showers, and afterwards hardened and afterwards hardened and baked by the heat of the sun, forms a strong floor, on which the wheels of a wagon leave little or no impression; and on which eight oxen are found to be a sufficient teams. These African roads are, however, nothing more than the space cleared from shrubs and plants, by the passing and repassing of wagons". He also commented on the wide variety of succulent plants that could be seen.

Despite the emptiness of the Bokkeveld Karoo, there are several landmarks – if you know where to look! The forgotten highway runs from Karoopoort to Spes Bona beneath the Paardeberg, and then on to the Hangklip, where the foothills of the Roggeveld Mountains begin.

Inverdoorn Game Reserve

Today, the Inverdoorn¹⁹ Game Reserve offers a Big Five experience, along with many other large African species. It also includes a cheetah rescue and rehabilitation centre, and a guest lodge.²⁰ In 1927, EE Mossop referred to "the ten-mile orchard of vines and figs of the Inverdoorn Estate (Spes Bona), fed by the melted snows of Matroosberg, some twenty miles away". Lichtenstein also mentioned Spes Bona.

Paardekop, Paardeberg or Fonteinkop, and the Doorn/Doring River

Mossop also referred to Paardekop (or Fonteinkop), an outcrop of rock which forms a miniature Lion's Head and Signal hill, about 100 metres above the flat Karoo.

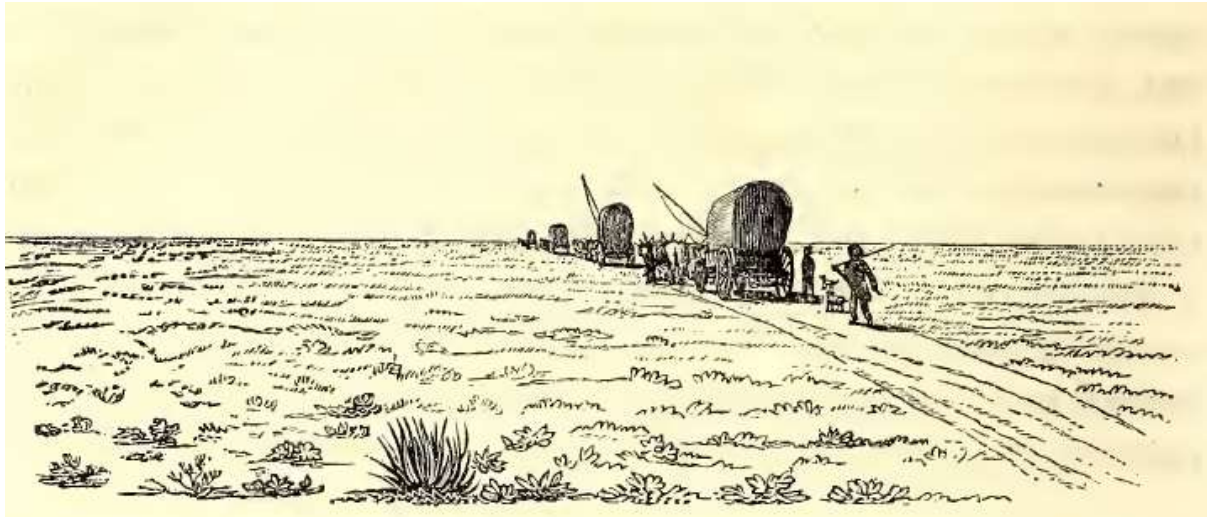
The Somerville party camped at the Doornrivier on 8 October 1801. Here they got fresh oxen from Veldcornet SW Pienaar and his brother, Barend Pienaar.

William Burchell's party reached the Doornrivier on 16 July 1811, and he described it as an oasis in a sandy desert.

¹⁹ Interestingly, "inver" is a Scottish word meaning "confluence" of two rivers, or the river and the sea. So the name "Inverdoorn" must have referred to the confluence of the Doornrivier with another rivulet.

²⁰ <https://inverdoorn.com/>

He sat for a long time on the bank, listening to the soothing cooing of turtle—doves. He commented on the wide variety of birdlife, including sparrows (muisvoels), finches, and the cotton-bird (capoc-vogel), so named because it built bottle-shaped nests, using cotton-like plants.

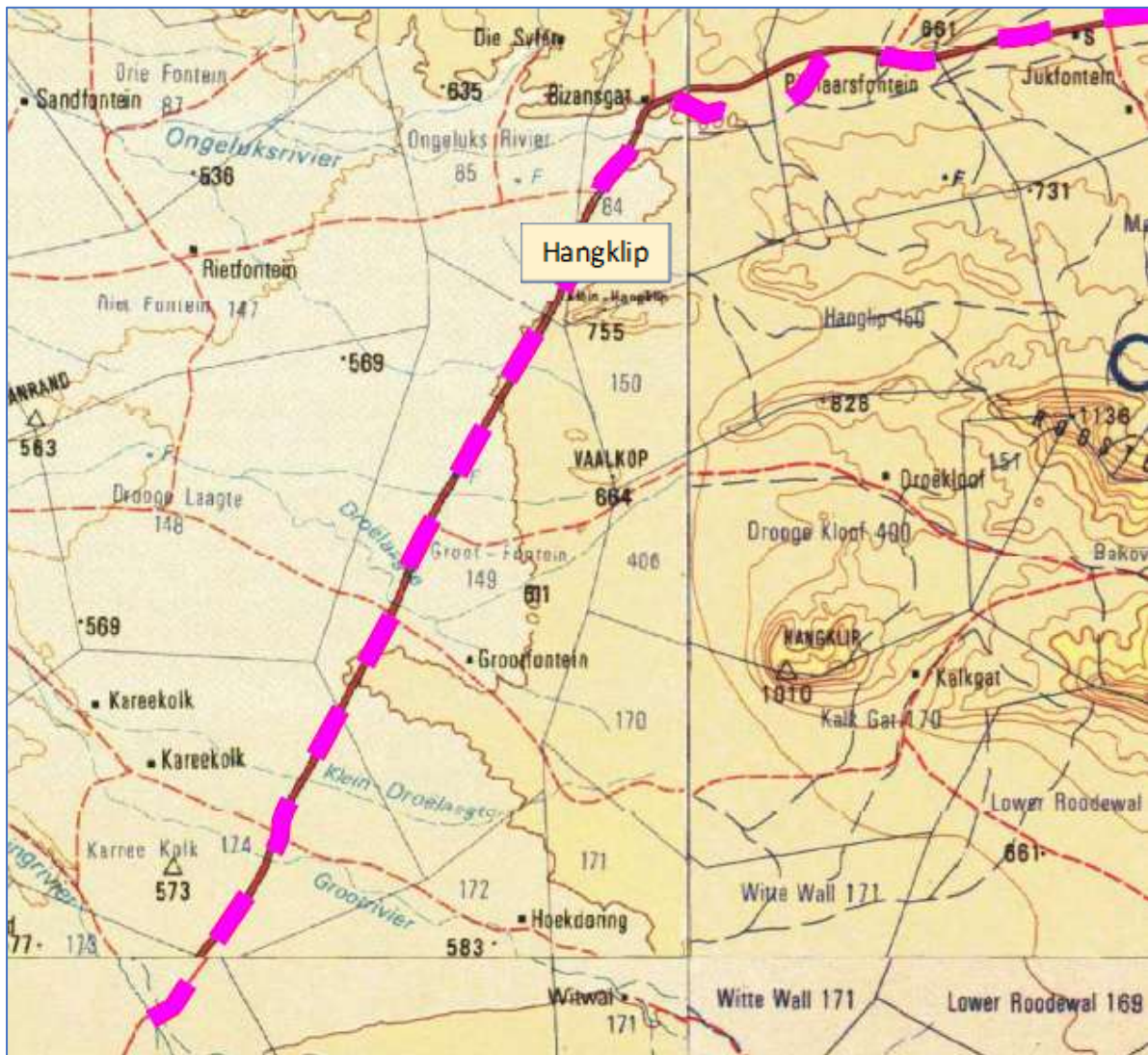


Burchell's famous drawing of the crossing of the Bokkeveld Karoo (1811)

During Burchell's visit, one of the missionaries' oxen died from fatigue and sickness, and it was left for the vultures. The Khoi took off the hide, to make *velskoens*. This is used for the soles, while the skin of goats is used for the upper-leathers. They are sewed together with thread made of the sinews, taken from the backbones of sheep or goats. They then set off, and travelled for another six hours.

The road then crosses the Groote-rivier, which, according to Burchell, the farmers considered as the line of demarcation between the Bokkeveld Karoo and the Roggeveld Karoo.

In 1805, Lichtenstein mentioned camping beneath the Paardeberg, as well as the spring at Pretorius Kraal, "a lonely stone-built hovel", used as a seasonal grazing farm or "legplaats". Even before Lichteinstein, the botanist Thunberg referred to Paardeberg in 1774, as "small and solitary".



*Grootrivier, Hangklip, Ongeluksrivier, Bizansgat and Jukfontein
The purple line indicates the route travelled by William Burchell*

At the roadside, Mossop found an old grave in 1927, made from unchiselled sandstone: “Magdalena maria jooste, Housewife of J. Jooste, in the year of Christ 1792”. “It seems fitting that this forgotten headstone should lie beside a highway now forgotten too”.

Hangklip

One of them is Hangklip (sometimes called Hanglip), about 45 km north of Karooport. EE Mossop described this as a “fingerlike projection of the Koedoesberg which ends in a small

mountain that overhangs", and it was also described by Lichtenstein in 1805. Burchell described the Hangklip in 1811, "when we released our oxen and were ourselves glad to rest for the night". This was always an important landmark; "towards it longing eyes had gazed and tired oxen strained; to the farmer of the Roggeveld, it meant that he had reached the foothills of the range, and the hot and waterless Karoo was passed" (Mossop, 1927).

On 16 July 1811, Burchell's party reached Hangklip ("Hanging Rock"). As always, the Khoi immediately unyoked the oxen and set off looking for firewood. Making a fire was always a major priority for the Khoi travellers. Then they would cook their own steak on the fire. "These fire-light scenes have always a picturesque appearance", said Burchell, "and the oxen, lying by the wagons, increased the social character of the assembly; while the watchful dogs, continually moving about, gave us a security and confidence that no danger would approach us in the night, without being observed in time". Burchell had his own faithful little terrier.

Burchell described Hangklip: "By its projecting and overhanging crag, the Hangklip naturally gave a name to a spot where nothing else presents itself. In these solitary wilds, no moving being was to be seen, no sound to be heard".

Ongeluksrivier

This river ("River of Misfortune") emerges from the Roggekloof mountains, near the Koedoesberg peaks to the east. Typically, it has no water in it, but when there is a trickle, it flows east-west, and disappears into the vast arid Tankwa plain south of Calvinia.

Here the Somerville party visited the farm of Veldcornet Gerrit Snyman, who provided fresh oxen.

Burchell's party also spent time at the Ongeluksrivier in 1811, "where the land begins to be hilly". He noted that the name came from "the circumstance of a Boer having been torn to pieces by a lion". One of Burchell's compasses had also been broken due to the jolting of the wagon – which he thought was also quite a misfortune. The long drought had now caused a problem of a lack of water for the oxen. By now, the oxen looked "lean and weary". The party had to wait several days at Ongeluksrivier. During the day, Burchell collected botanical samples; and in the evenings, the missionaries would lead the whole group in hymn-singing and prayer.

Before they left Ongeluksrivier, they met a group of Khoisan. One of the group was a Kapteyn, with a staff of office, which he had received from Governor Caledon. This usually meant that they were treated with some courtesy by the landdrosts and field-cornets.

Due to the lack of water, they then had to press on to the Juksrivier.



Burchell's drawing of the Khoisan leaders at Ongeluksrivier, riding their oxen

Bizansgat

In 1811, Burchell was at Bizansgat (or Bisan's Gat); he looked around and saw absolutely no movement and heard no sound. He described his wagon party: "It was a busy scene, a little society within itself", surrounded by an expanse of nothingness.

The Juksrivier and Juksfontein

In Afrikaans and Dutch, "juk" means a "yoke", as used for oxen – a piece of wood fastened over the necks of the draught animals.

The Somerville party pitched their tents at the Juk River, in October 1801.²¹ They paid 5 Rixdollars for their provisions, and set off to the Gousbloem Kloof.

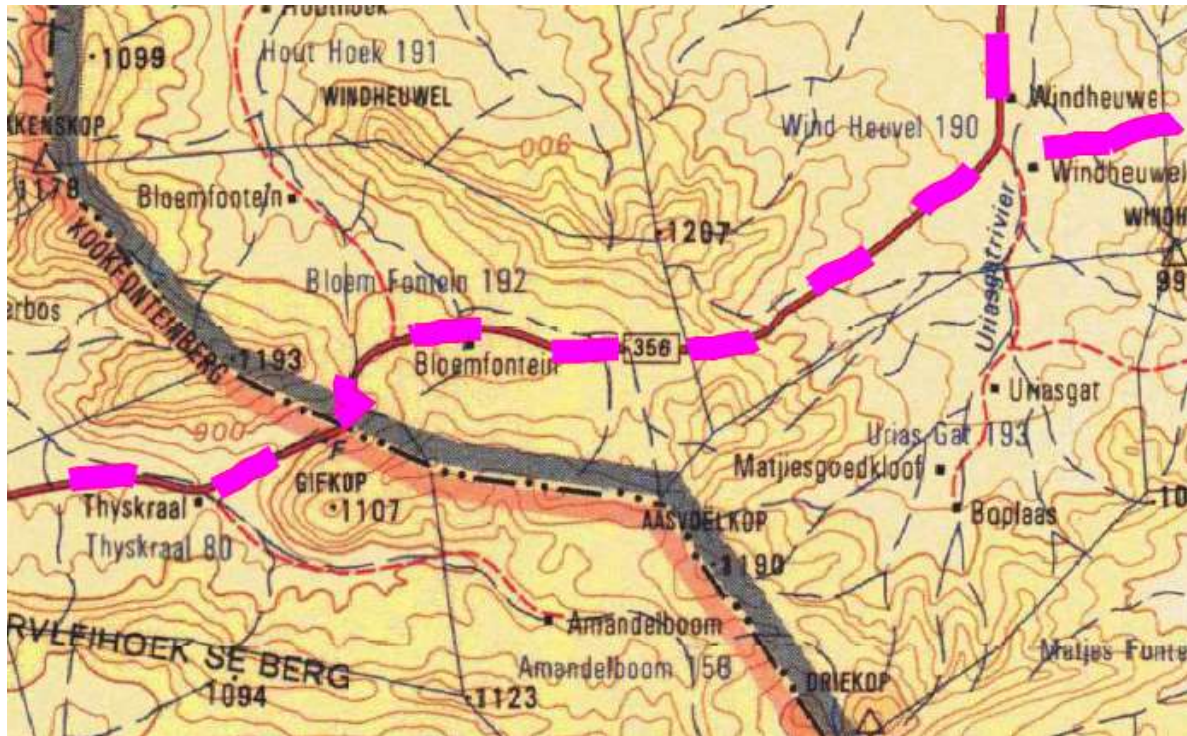
Mossop described the dry and tree-lined Juksrivier, in 1927: "On the slant of the farther bank is a solitary stone hut backed by a rising slope up which the Forgotten highway disappears amongst the farther hills ... heat waves dance over the dry river bed ... only the baying of a watchful dog breaks the silence of that hot solitude". This little hut was another ancient "uitspan-plaats", or overnight stop for travellers.

Burchell described Juksrivier Hoogte in 1811 as "a considerable eminence", and they had some difficulty to manage the wagons.

²¹ The original text refers to the "Ink River", which must have been a typo, based on a misreading of the original handwritten text.

Thyskraal and Gousbloem's Hoogte (Marigold Heights)

In 1927, EE Mossop described the “inhabitant of Thyskraal (or Thuyskraal) as being busy branding the skin of a goat. It was clearly a Khoi person, Jan Johnson. This was the same as Burchell’s “Tys Kraal”, at the foot of the Gousbloem (Marigold) Hoogte.



*Thyskraal, Bloemfontein (Gousblomhoogte), and Windheuwel
Burchell's route is shown in pink*

Slightly north-east of Thyskraal is a little rise, a western spur of the Koedoesberg mountain range. The early travellers called it Gousbloemhoogte. Today, there is a farm called “Bloemfontein” at the top of the rise, which probably drawn from the original name. “Gousblomme” (Arctotis or Marigold) are African Daisies, similar to Gazanias. “Gousblom” means “golden flower” in Dutch or Afrikaans.

On 10 October 1801, the Somerville party passed the “Gousblooms kloof”, and soon after stayed at a farm of one Esterhuizen. There they outspanned, and received fresh oxen.

Mossop noted that one can climb the hill behind Thyskraal, to reach Gousblomhoogte. There was a dry river-course at Thyskraal, and the party kindled a large fire as the night was very cold. They brewed coffee and the Khoi cooks broiled the mutton *karbonaatjies* (chops). While everyone slept, Burchell recorded the observations of the day and managed his botanical collections, which kept him busy till midnight.

The Burchell party also passed here in July 1811.

At Thyskraal, Burchell was very happy to meet Berends, a Khoi Kapteyn from Klaarwater (the mission station at Griquatown), along with his father, “a little old man possessing quite as much liveliness and vigor as his son”. They were all riding oxen, and were very friendly, with “lively manners and shrewd understandings”. They were dressed partly in colonial clothes, and partly in their own cultural clothing.

Burchell’s group were alarmed at an impending rainstorm and freezing cold, but they found a deserted hut. The walls and roof were weather-tight, and it had a door. It was a single room, and the whole party could sleep in it, while the San went off to their own fire between the bushes. It was Sunday (21 July 1811), so everyone gathered in the hut to sing psalms and one of the missionaries gave a sermon.

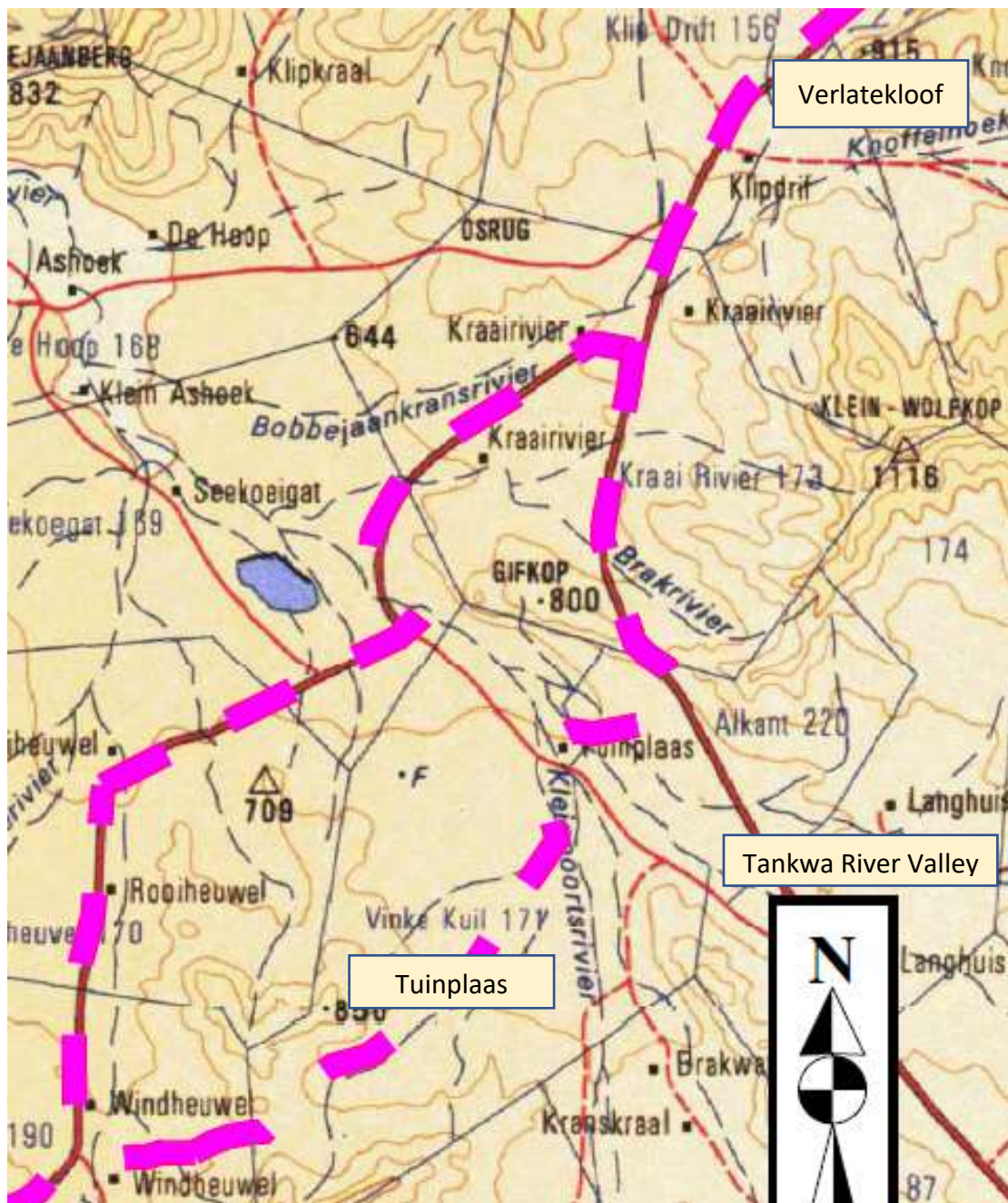
Windheuvel

In October 1801, the Somerville-Truter party passed by Windheuvel. Both Burchell and Lichtenstein climbed the Marigold Heights to Windheuvel.

In 1927, EE Mossop followed the road along this route. Lichtenstein mentioned Urias Gat in a report on “A Visit to the Roggeveld” to General Janssens.

For the design of the Windheuvel Pass, please visit www.mountainpassessouthafrica.co.za. It makes history come alive.

It offers maps, videos and driving hints. There is a small joining fee.



*Windheuwel, the Tankwa Valley, Tuinplaas, and then the start of the Verlatekloof ascent
The pink route indicates William Burchell's journey*

Burchell described the Windheuwel as “a mountain much more difficult to climb”, and it required all the strength of our oxen, and the great care of the drivers, to bring the wagons over it in safety”. The road was rocky and irregular. At the top, they met up with more Khoi from Klaarwater. From here, there was a fine view of the hilly Roggeveld Karoo, and here they could clearly see the mighty Roggeveld Mountains.

At Windheuvel, more Khoi, as well as some shepherds, joined the party. Most were old friends, and had a merry time around the fire – smoking, laughing and talking, and enjoying extra rations of tobacco, flour, potatoes, wine and brandy.

On the next day, Burchell sent one of his Khoi helpers to the farm of Jasper Cloete, to purchase a sheep. He returned with it, and the farmer's "complements to the Englishman". Burchell was often delighted by such generosity.

As there were rumours of raiding African bands in the interior, Captain Berends and his party agreed to remain with the Burchell party until they reached Klaarwater (Griquatown).

One of the most detailed descriptions of a farmer's residence was provided by Burchell in on 24 July 1811. This was the home of Veldcornet Gerrit Snyman. It was a "small oblong low hut built of rough bits of rock, rudely thatched with reed and sedge; having no window, excepting one small opening covered with white linen, instead of glass; and the doorway but half closed with a clumsy panel of reeds". There were two rooms – the sitting room, and the bedroom which was also the storeroom. The only furniture were a table and three stools. The hut was warmed in the evening by a large iron pot, full of wood embers, which was placed in the middle of the room.

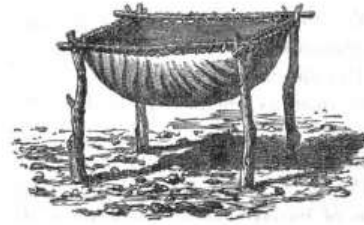
Near the hut were two out-buildings – a storehouse and a kitchen. In the kitchen, the fire was made in the middle, on the ground, and the smoke left at the door or through the ill-thatched roof. The whole hut was a glossy jet-black, due to the wood smoke. On the *werf* (yard), there was a large sheep-fold, hedged round with branches of Karoo thorn. A nearby rivulet provided excellent water. The family had three meals of mutton every day, and they had some potatoes. Snyman owned about 2 500 sheep, which was not considered a large holding on the Roggeveld.



At Windheuuvel farm: Khoi shepherds and flocks leaving for the fields in the morning; the shepherds are always armed

At this farm, Burchell's Khoi helper Speelman brought him his first sample of Ghaap, a plant now called Hoodia. It had a cool and watery taste, and was used by the Khoi for quenching thirst in very dry areas. Speelman often brought Burchell samples of plants and birds.

Burchell also saw a tanning-vat, made by four stakes on a frame, on which a zebra skin was stretched, making a basin. In it, Karoo-thorn bark was steeped in water, and sheepskins were placed in it as part of the tanning process. Such sheep-leather was used for clothing by Boers as well as Khoi. Even women's gowns and petticoats were made of it.



Tankwa Valley

The Somerville party reached the Tankwa River on 10 October 1801. They were visited by Mr Willem Wium, to inform them that all the necessary relay teams and provisions for the Roggeveld portion of their trip had been arranged. Several other local farmers would assist with this: Jacob Kruger (Veldcoronet of Klein Roggeveld), Martinus Bouwer, Marthinus Snyder, Andries Esterhuizen, Pieter van der Westhuizen, Abraham Lotriet, Jan Schnyder, and Jacobus Nel (Veldcoronet of Lower Roggeveld). Provisions were planned for Kuilenburg and Gannakraal (mentioned below).

Vinkekuil (Tuinplaats)

At Vinkekuil, Mossop found a thatched white-walled homestead blistering in the sun. The homestead was surrounded by an oasis of pleasant orchards, which were already 150 years old in 1927. It was known locally as "Tuinplaats".

In Burchell's day, it was farmed by Field Cornet Visser, who provided extra oxen to Burchell for his transport up the Verlatenkloof. It was a permanent residence, and therefore much better built, with an excellent garden containing fruit trees and vegetables.

VERLATEKLOOF

Mossop described this dramatic feature as "a great gash in the abrupt wall of the Roggeveld Range". He roughly translated the name "Verlatenkloof" as "Deserted Cleft". The rivulets which drain the Kloof eventually become the Tankwa River, which flows in a south-easterly direction from the escarpment.

Klipfontein

In the evening of 11 October 1801, the Somerville party arrived at Klipfontein and pitched their camp. At this point, they heard that their expected oxen relays would not be available at Gannakraal after all for several days, and therefore they proceeded on their way on half-day journeys, much to their annoyance. They were, however, glad that the helpful Mr William Wium left them with a bag of salt, which was a very important item. It was extremely scarce in the Roggeveld.

Today there is a farm called Klipdrif, and another, slightly north, called Klipbanksrivier. These may refer to the "Klipfontein" which Somerville and Truter encountered.

At the bottom of this defile, William Burchell's party waited for the cold rain to clear, as it would be impossible to ascend the escarpment in the slippery mud. It was now 5 August, 1811. They stayed over on the farm of Jan van der Westhuizen, which may have been this farm.

The ascent of the pass

The Somerville-Truter party ascended this kloof on 11 October 1801, assisted by Nicolaas van der Westhuizen with an additional wagon. The Veldcornet Gerrit Maritz provided fresh oxen. Somerville described the ascent as "very steep and difficult".

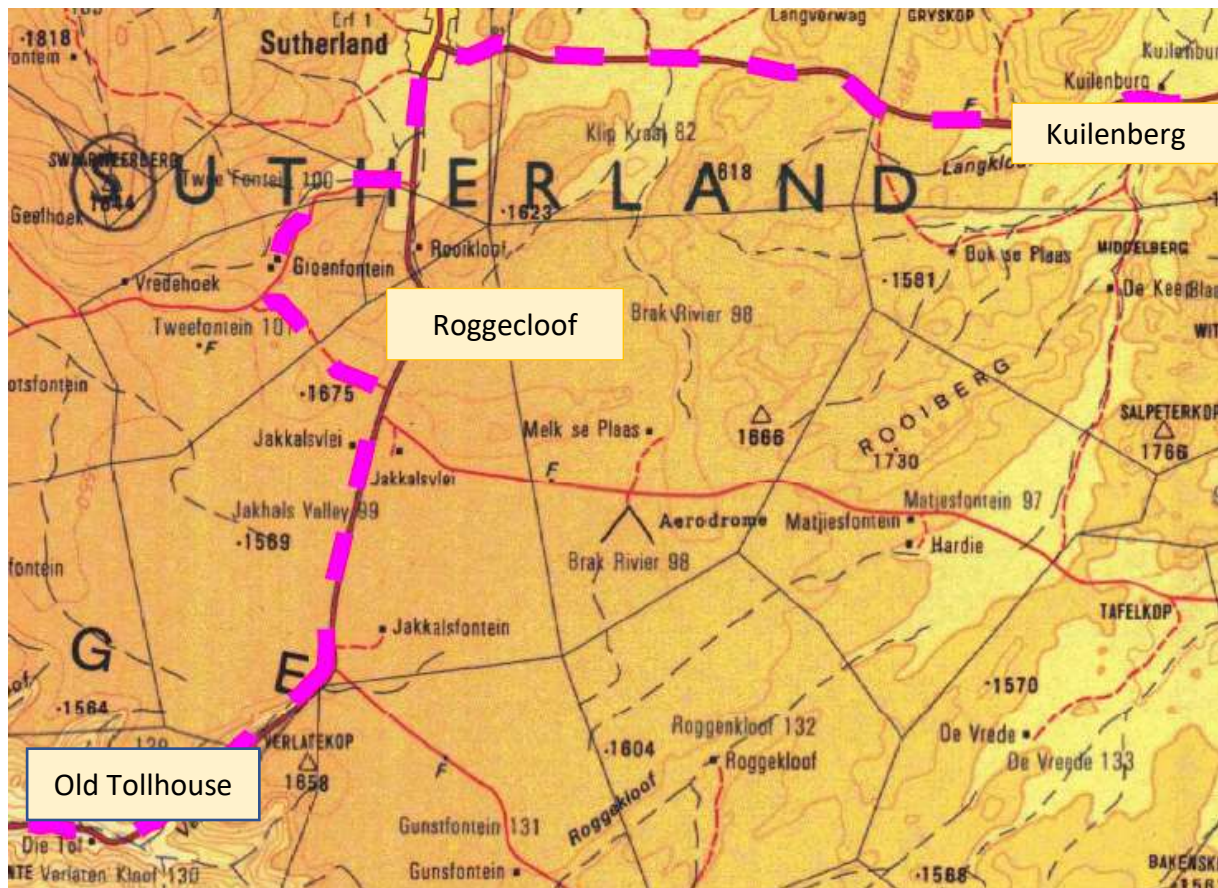
Burchell's ascent, on 6 August 1811, was a harrowing experience. After the rain, the pass was slippery. At one steep spot, the oxen slid from side to side, unable to keep on their feet. The great weight of the wagon began to drag them backwards, in spite of their utmost exertions. Burchell himself was below the wagon, and scrambled away, expecting the whole wagon and team to tumble down the slope. Luckily, the wheel came to rest against a large rock, and this gave the oxen time to recover their feet. From here, two Khoi helpers placed rocks behind each wheel the moment the wagon began falling backwards. "By a smart application of the whip, and loud whooping, the oxen made an extraordinary exertion", and reached the summit.

The summit had taken them two hours. When they reached the top, they found that the temperature had fallen almost by ten degrees, and it was almost 3 degrees below freezing. There was not a single tree to be seen. They were now in the "Middel Roggeveld". By nightfall it was six degrees below freezing, and Burchell's party found the ruins of a hut – they used the walls to from the freezing wind. Because his fingers were too cold to hold a pen, Burchell could not write in his journal.

Today, the pass has a well-built tarred road.

The old Toll

Today, along the Verlatenkloof pass, you will find the Verlatenkloof Padstal, offering beautiful handcrafted products and pleasant accommodation. A little further on, you will reach “Tjol te Tol”, situated in the old Toll building in the pass. Tjol offers drinks in his pub (“Tjol se Gat”), as well as accommodation.



*Verlatekloof, the Old Toll, Jakhalsfontein, Sutherland town, and Kuilenburg
The pink line indicates William Burchell's route*

Jakhalsfontein

The Somerville party spent the night of 12 October 1801 at Jakhalsfontein, the farm of Wietze van der Westhuizen. He also provided them with flour, biscuit, three saddle horses, an ox-wagon, and mats – to the tune of 10 Rixdollars. They also received another 75 sheep, which would be their most important meat supply “on the hoof”.

They were joined by five inhabitants of these districts: Frans Kruger, Johannes Hendrik Cloete, Johannes Stephanus Maritz (all under Veldcornet Gerrit Maritz), and Caspar Snyder, and Pieter Jacobs (under Veldcornet Gerrit Snyman). These men served as an escort for the Somerville commission. From here, they headed directly to Kuilenberg, a farm just east of the modern town of Sutherland. The town, of course, did not exist in 1801 – it was only established in 1855.

Burchell's party also stayed over at Jakhalsfontein. The farm Jakhalsfontein is now part of the Roggecloof Nature Reserve.

Karopoort to Sutherland: The modern Tar Road option

Today, many travellers would like to drive on a tar road. If so, drive from Tulbagh to Ceres, via the beautiful Mitchell's Pass; then along the R46 northwards, turn left, still following the R46, and you will reach Touwsrivier, along the N1 highway.

Then drive northwards along the N1, until you reach the delightful village of Matjiesfontein.

At Matjiesfontein, there are many things to see and do: Join Johnny for the tour around the village in an old London bus; visit the transport museum, rejoice in the old railway coaches, and explore the vintage car collection; visit the Matjiesfontein museum; and walk along the Fish Eagle Walking Path.

From Matjiesfontein, travel along the R354. This will take you along the historic Verlatenkloof Pass to Sutherland.

SUTHERLAND TO FRASERBURG

In 1927, Dr EE Mossop described Sutherland as "a pleasant little town of the Roggeveld several thousand feet above sea level. Its wide streets are lined with pepper trees, and each of its iron-roofed houses is surrounded by a pleasant garden fed by water drawn from windmills of galvanized iron". It is likely that the early travellers passed through the site which would eventually become the town of Sutherland. From that point, they would head due east, to the farm Kuilenburg.

Kuilenburg Farm

The Somerville-Truter party stayed over at Kuilenburg (also "Kuilenberg") Farm on the night of 13 October 1801. Although the expected fresh oxen did not arrive, they pushed on, past De Beer's Poort, on the 14th October.

Willem Burchell arrived here on 7 August 1811. He translated “Kuilenberg” as “Pit Mountain”, possibly due to nearby water holes. They found a house which had been abandoned during the winter (migrant farmers), with many sparrows in the roof.

They did not stay over here, but headed north, and so no people or animals of any description. His Khoi helper, Speelman, was now wearing a military full-dress cocked hat, which his friends in Cape Town had given him. In addition, he wore a short blue jacket and sheepskin trousers, carrying a gun and powder-horn.

Groot Riet River

The Somerville party arrived at the Groot Riet River, and had a very cold and rainy night. The travellers caught a lot of fish in the river, which were delicious, “but full of bones”, and they saw the fresh footprints of a lion. They stayed here until the 16th of October.

William Burchell’s party also stayed here, on 8 August 1811. It was nothing more than a line of ponds, but in the rainy season, could become a considerable river. It was full of reeds and rushes, along the ponds. “No trace of man or his works disturbed the more pleasing harmony of nature”. At the river, Burchell painted a picture of the beautiful colours of the veld, the rushes, and the hills.

The water was clear and fresh. These ponds were called zeekoeigatten” or “sea cow holes”, but there were no hippos any more. The Khoi picked the reeds to make their mats and huts. It was called “Hard Matjies-goederen”, as it was more durable than other kinds of reeds, which they called “Sagt Matjies—goederen”.

For the first time, Burchell saw a dassie and a Namaqua partridge.

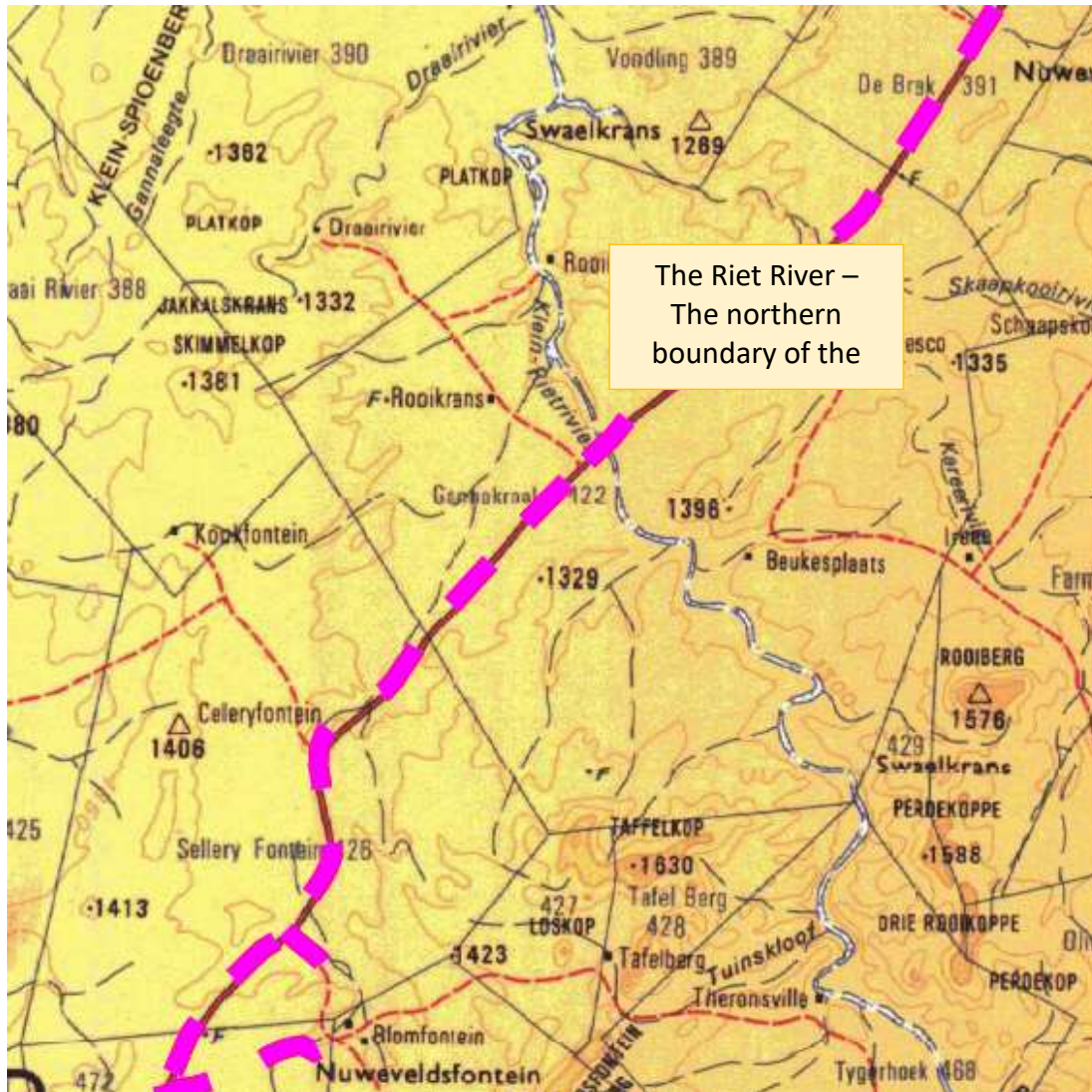
Burchell noted that, in a distance from the Roggeveld to the Orange River, only three rivers were in any way worthy of note – the Rietrivier, the Zak River (Sack River or Sakrivier), further north, and the Brakrivier, north of the Zak – in a distance of 358 miles. Even these rivers cease to flow for at least six months a year. Burchell was also amazed at the temperate range, from zero degrees at 9 am, to 22 degrees at three in the afternoon.

Here Burchell slept in his wagon as usual, and was awakened in the night by some strangers trying to get in. They seemed “surprised and disappointed” to find the wagon was inhabited. Burchell reached for his pistol, but did not pull the trigger, and the aspirant robbers managed to escape. “I heard them at a distance, talking to the rest of their gang, explaining, most probably, the little chance there was of their expected booty, and rejoining at their own escape”.

To the east was Bonteberg (“Spotted hill”) remarkable for several large red spots on its side.

Selderysfontein

On 16 October 1801, the Somerville party passed by this farm (“Celery Fountain”). Burchell also spent a night here, on 15 August 1811, and noted the abundant and thorny bushes in this vicinity, which were very troublesome.



Selderysfontein, the Little Riet River, and Brakfontein
The pink line indicates William Burchell's route
The modern farm, Beukesplaas, is to the east of Burchell's route

Gannakraal on the banks of the Little Riet River

The Somerville party spent the night at Gannakraal, “one of the uninhabited places of Frans Maritz”, on the northern bank of the Klein Riet River.

Once again, the party was frustrated because the promised relay oxen were nowhere to be found. They spent the next day here, enjoying more fish from the river.

Burchell also stayed over here, noting that “Ganna” was a shrub which grew locally. Here they met up with Barend Barends, who were on their home to Klaarwater. The entire group now included 97 people, including women and children. There were eight wagons, and many oxen, sheep and horses. The Khoi people preferred their karosses, even though they also used cotton shirts and western hats. Some of the women wore gowns and aprons of printed calico or leather, “neatly made up in the Dutch manner”. All had their heads closely bound up with coloured cotton handkerchiefs. Almost all could speak Dutch.

There were also five black men, and their wives. Burchell noted how tall they were (at least six feet, “strong and finely proportioned”). Except for their leather kaross, they wore no covering whatsoever. Their bodies and cloaks were reddened all over with ochre mixed with grease. “They accosted us in an easy manly tone, and with manners perfectly free from servile timidity”. Two of the men could speak Dutch fairly well.

At Gannakraal, Burchell encountered a *fisant*, as well as a bird called *schaapwagttertjie*. Apparently that bird is so called because it would freely approach the Khoi shepherds while tending their sheep.

The party all received information that Jager Afrikaner, a noted Khoi brigand, and raided some missionaries in Namaqualand, who had to flee back to the Colony. In fact, Burchell noted, Jager was by now old and feeble, and living peacefully, but his son, Jonker Afrikaner, had taken over his role as brigand. They heard that he had actually attacked the Klaarwater mission. Burchell was also getting anxious about the condition of his oxen, and sent four horsemen to Klaarwater, to fetch fresh oxen.

Karee River and Brakfontein (De Brak)

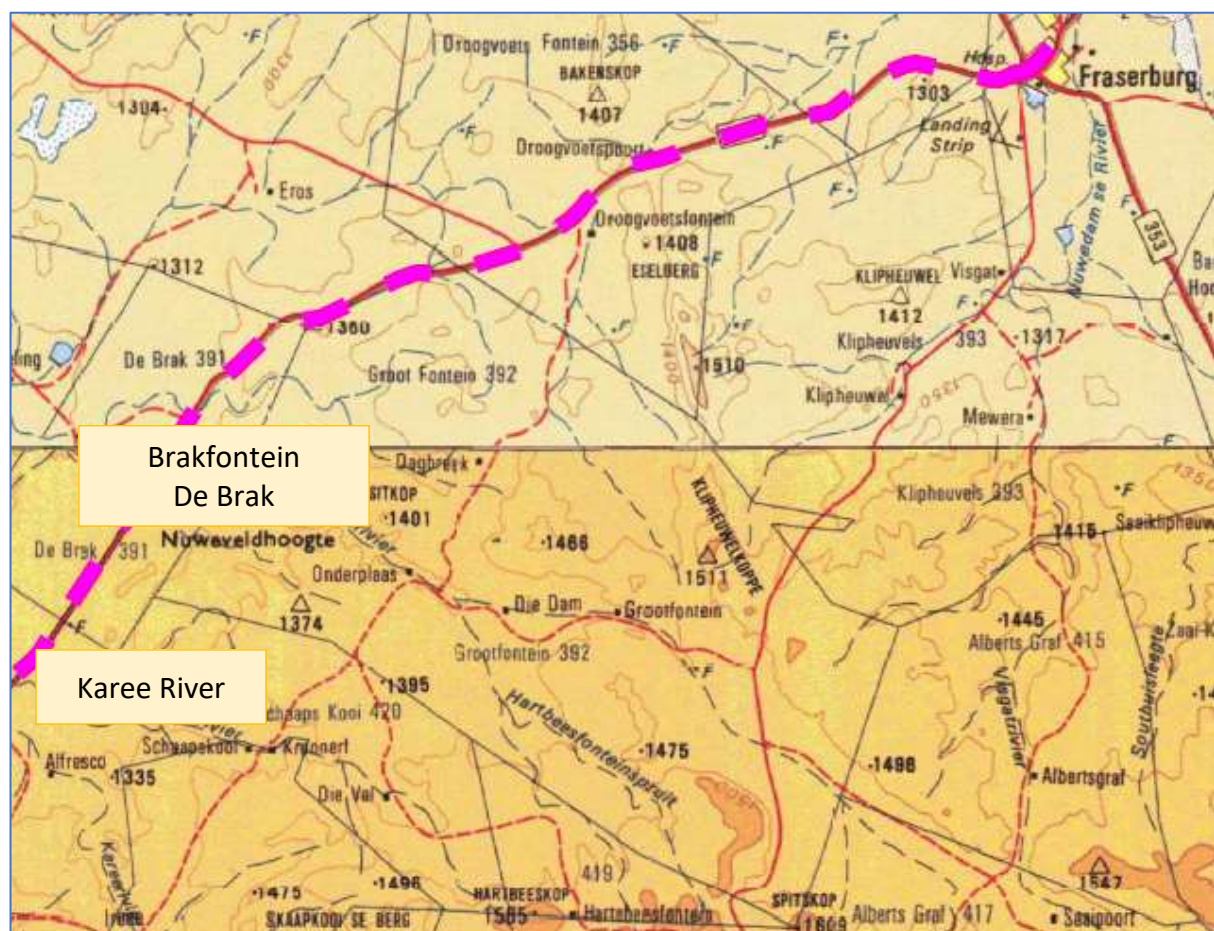
On 19 October, the Somerville party crossed the Karree River. **Crucially, this was the northern boundary of the Cape Colony in 1801.** The local veldcornet, Jacobus Nel, brought them 30 oxen. To their annoyance, these oxen were very young and untrained, so they could barely muster one team.²² Nevertheless, “notwithstanding all the disappointments, we thought ourselves able, under the blessing of God, to perform our undertaking, and left the Brakfontein”. (“Brak” refers to brackish, or salty, water).

²² At this point, the company consisted of twelve white men (the original party of five, as well as 7 locals), and 24 “Hottentots and Bastards”. Their names were recorded, and give some inkling of family names which are sometimes still found in in modern South Africa: Wildeman, Kiviet, Booy, Steven, Willem, Polak, Andries, Piet Liebergeld (who absconded near Carnarvon), Dikkop, Viool, Booy Hartog, Vigilant, Fredrik Kaffer, Africaander Kaffer, Fortuin, Geswind Gerrit, Hendrik Zwart, Roelof, Stoffel, Cupido, and Mulder Hartebeest. The party now had 120 draught oxen, 13 horses, and 20 guns.

When they passed the Karee River, Burchell noted how cold it was, and it even snowed, which held up their travels. The maximum temperature was 7 degrees.

Near here, Burchell almost lost an eye in an accident. He was observing his assistant, Speelman, busy with the lock of the great rifle-gun, and found that he had put the hair-trigger out of order. Burchell took the gun, rectified it, and fixed it on again, not supposing the piece loaded, he snapped the cock. The gun went off, and the ball fortunately went between two people. But the flash scorched his eye, and he was blind for the rest of the day. By the evening, he found that his sight was uninjured, but grains of gunpowder had to be picked out of his face the next name.

Fraserburg to Loxton and Carnarvon



now setting off on their own. They bred their own horses. They had five Khoi shepherds who worked for them.

Today, this road leads directly to Fraserburg, which of course did not exist in during the time of the early travellers. It was only established in 1851.

The original Forgotten Highway did not go via Loxton, which was only established in 1900. The direct route went from Fraserburg to Carnarvon, which was established in 1853 (when it was called Harmsfontein).

The Rhenish mission, Schietfontein, was established in 1840 – also long after the travels by Somerville, Truter, Lichtenstein and Burchell.

In fact, in the early 1800s, there were no towns north of Tulbagh. It was a long, lonely and dangerous road. Loxton is therefore not directly on the Forgotten Highway road, but about 70 km to the east.

Qwaggafontein and Blij Vooruitzicht

This was the Somerville campsite on 21 October 1801, and Burchell also passed by here in late August 1811.

Burchell recalls coming across a party of white farmers, whose daughter was in the last stages of leprosy. Realising that she would not recover, and that death was near, the missionaries prayed with her, but the family and their daughter could not be comforted.

Somerville passed “the not unpleasant place” Blij Vooruitzicht (Kruidfontein), where the missionaries Kicherer and Edwards had spent about a year establishing the first church beyond the boundaries of the Cape Colony, between 1798 and 1800. “We found there yet in good repair a long oblong building or hut, which probably had served both for a church and lodging, together with several smaller huts, and the remains of a kitchen garden”. They pushed on, and arrived at Kicherer’s second mission site, which is today called Kerkplaats. It is situated along the Sak River. Again, there were buildings and huts.



Bly Vooruitzicht, the first mission station, and Zakrivier, the second mission, both north of Fraserburg

The pink line denotes Burchell's route

Zakrivier

At Zak River, the Somerville party met some San, who could speak Dutch. The travellers heard that the missionaries had already moved northwards to the Orange River.

The Burchell group also stayed over here in late August 1811. There was a trickle in the river, and it was full of rushes. They fished in the river, and caught numerous yellow fish which were delicious. Burchell also found his first specimens of limestone (dolomite), which shows the transition to the dolomite structures of the Ghaap to the north.

The Zak River was now recognized as the northern boundary of the colony – in contrast with Somerville's journey of 1801, when the boundary was located further south, near the Riet River.

Burchell's party still expected possible raids by brigand bands, and kept their guns and powder at the ready. By now, the group had grown to eighteen wagons, and it looked like a village which had sprung up in the desert. Each wagon had its own fire; the livestock grazing nearby; the women going to the river or returning with their calabashes with water; the children playing near the wagons; the men returning from hunting or carrying loads of firewood; and horses and dogs moving in all directions. Barends' wife gave birth to a child. Burchell, of course, was the only white man in the party.



A section of Burchell's painting of the scene, somewhat south of the Kareeberge

By now the wood of the wagons started to shrink and crack. The metal rims expanded by the heat, while the wood shrank, and so these growing gaps had to be stopped up with wedges of wood, to save the wheels from dropping to pieces. This problem increased inexorably as they went northwards, and with the arrival of spring.

Patrysfontein and Krugerskolk

Somerville's group then moved on to a deserted farm which had been occupied by Hendrik Korf. There is still a farm called "Korfplaats", which may be this farm. They then moved northwards to Patrysfontein.

Burchell's party also stayed over here, and to their delight, found a Khoi party bringing almost 100 fresh oxen from Klaarwater.

On their way, they passed by Krugerskolk, named after Ernst Kruger, the youngest son of Jacob Kruger.²³ This was a well-known family of Korana brothers who travelled far and wide in the interior.

Brakfontein

At this rivulet, Burchell's party found plenty of water, with a good taste, but yellow and muddy. They were now pursued frequently by lions.

Leeufontein

Somerville's party continued north to Leeufontein, which is now on the main Williston-Carnarvon road (R63), about 30 km west of Carnarvon. William Somerville and their companion, David Kruger, shot a male quagga, "one of the largest and strongest we ever saw". Samuel Daniell sketched the animal. There was a strong fountain with a lot of reeds which served as pasturage for the cattle.

²³ According to Mr Denzil Kruger, a descendant of the Kora Krugers.

The Quagga, by Samuel Daniell – it was probably sketched on this occasion, possibly with the Kareeberge in the background

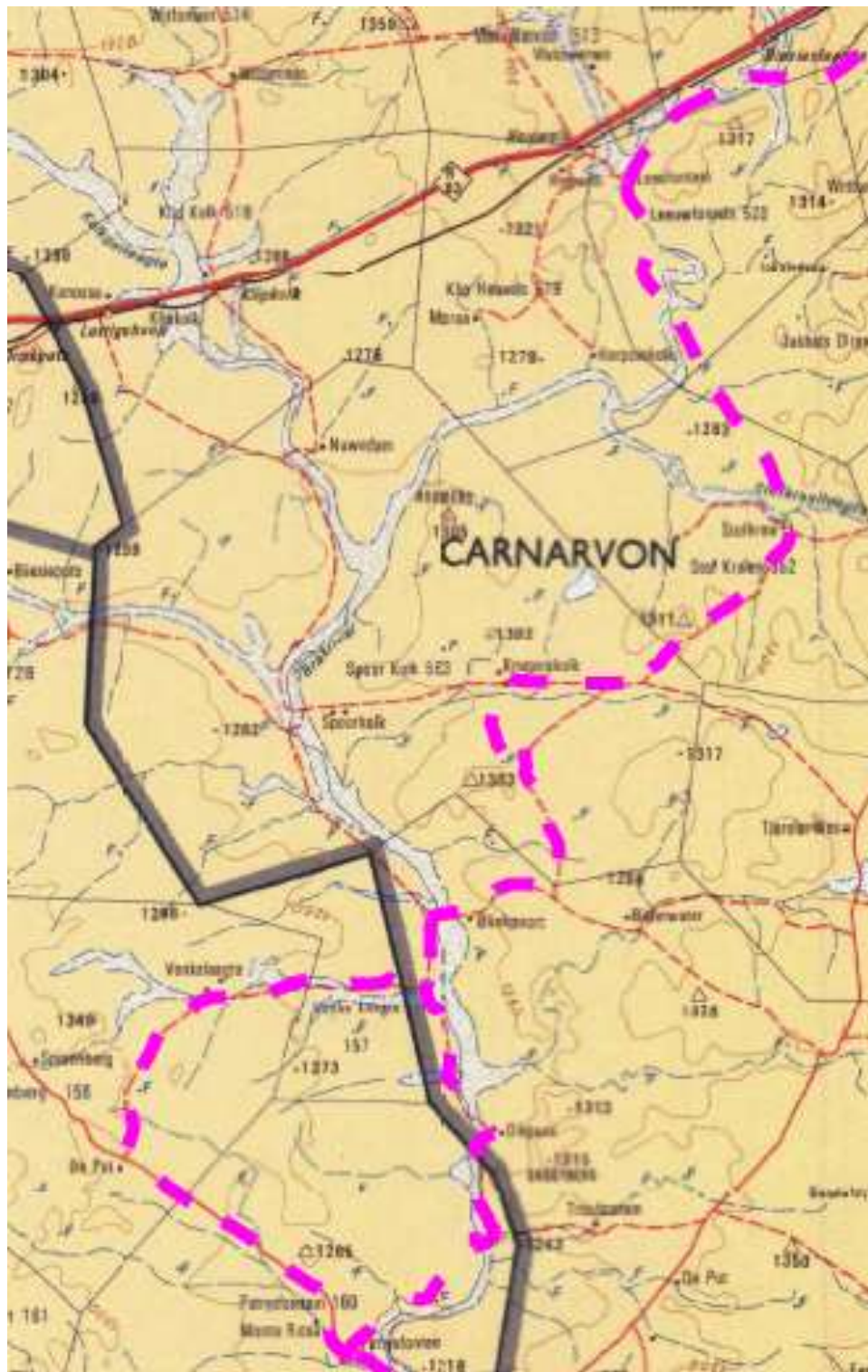


In 1811, Burchell's party was anxious about the drought, particularly north of Schietfontein (on the road to Prieska). On the other hand, it would mean that the Orange River would be more easily fordable – if they could reach it. They also heard the glad tidings that the rumours of marauding African bands had been disproven, and a group of Xhosa people were living peacefully near the Orange River.

Burchell's party of almost 20 wagons formed a long line, proceeding towards where Carnarvon is now. "Wagon behind wagon, slowly rose to view, and oft at intervals, the loud clapping of the whip, or the jolting of the wheel, disturbed the silence of the atmosphere, rolling its sound in a half echo along the surface of the sun-baked earth. Not a green herb enticed the eye; not a bird winged through the air: The creation here was nought but earth and sky".

They also encountered a group of San, who were curious about these travellers. In the beginning, they showed mistrust and fear, but after receiving gifts of tobacco and beads, they were very friendly. There were three young San women, whose hair was ornamented with small cowry shells (which must have come from further north in Africa), each wearing a high cap of leather. When Burchell's party departed from Leeufontein, three San men remained with them, to help them to find water sources.

On 26 October, Somerville's party left Leeufontein, and in the evening arrived at Klipfontein, on the south side of the Karree Mountains. He reported that the missionary Kicherer was now based two days' travel north of the Orange River.

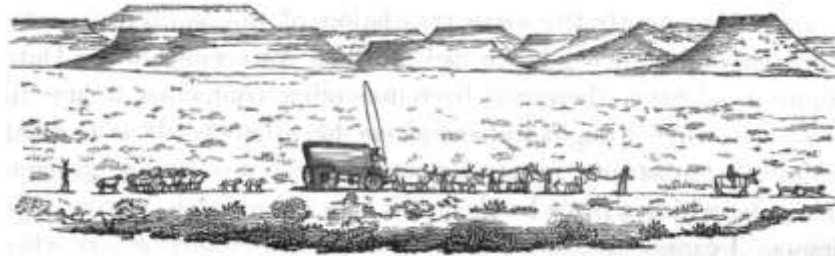


Patrysfontein, Krugerskolk and Leefontein, north of Fraserburg

Burchell's route, in pink, meets up with the modern R63 road

CARNARVON TO PRIESKA

The travellers were now near the Kareeberge. Burchell was astonished to see the flat, broad tops of the mountains, like a group of Table Mountains.



Burchell's sketch of the ox-wagon crossing the plain, north of the Kareeberge

Schietfontein

On 27 October 1801, Somerville's party passed Schietfontein, which is now on the western outskirts of the town of Carnarvon. The party passed by Schietfontein again on the return journey, on 4 April 1802. On the way back, they purchased a large bag of honey from some nearby San people, and paid for it in terms of goats, knives and tobacco.

Burchell passed here on 9 September 1811. The place got its name ("skirmish fountain") because the Boers had attacked the bushmen here. There was a lot of good water, from a spring in a thicket of reeds. They were visited by six Bushmen, one of whom was well known to the missionaries and Khoi; he was called Goedhart. His brother had been shot by the Boers, and had developed a great hatred of the Boers. Of all the white people, he only trusted the missionaries.

Burchell described the remarkable pass in the Kareeberg because of the large horizontal strata of harder rock, looking like bands of masonry. This was banded ironstone.

Elandsvalley

Burchell's party stayed over here – a mere puddle of muddy water in the open plain. It did not soak into the earth because of the clay soil. To everyone's annoyance, The Khoi Moses let his oxen drink from the pond long before the people arrived, so the pond was all trampled and the water was unusable.

Karelsgraf

After a brisk pace, Burchell's party arrived here on 11 September 1811. There was no water! The cattle were very thirsty, and Burchell listened to their mournful lowing during the night. From here, there would be no water within 35 miles, and even that may be an underestimation. They now had to travel day and night till they reached a spring. The drivers clapped their whips, and called "Loop!", and the whole caravan set off again.

Burchell noted the story of Carel Krieger (Kruger). He was an excellent Korana marksman, and pursued an elephant which he had wounded. The irritated animal suddenly turned around, seized him with his trunk, and dashed him to the ground. The rest of the group fled, and when they returned the next day, they only found a few bones, and buried them near the spring.

The party kept going through the night, with the stars behind clouds, and there was distant lightning. No-one was sure of the correct way. Burchell helped by taking out his compass, and by torchlight, they could see which way to go. The Khoi were not very impressed by the compass, until it turned out that it had indeed steered them in the right direction. The missionary Anderson helped to persuade the group to trust the compass. They eventually camped at five am, without any rest or eating, for 52 miles. They had arrived at Buffelsbout spring.

Buffelsbout (Bierfontein)

Having left Schietfontein, the Somerville party headed for Buffelsbout, on the direct route between Carnarvon and Prieska. For one whole night, they had to keep moving to find water.

By daylight on 30 October 1801r, they arrived at the Biesiesfontein near Buffelsbout, and unyoked the oxen. A group of San, in full armour, and very frightened, approached them. The travellers went to them, unarmed, to show their good intentions, and gave them some gifts – 12 brass medallions, two gilt rings, bread, tobacco, and a sheep. Somerville and his party visited Buffelsbout again on their return journey. They arrived on 31 March 1802, and once again found the same San people, and distributed meat and tobacco. There were still frequent thunderstorms.

When Burchell arrived ten years later, this spring was situated in the middle of a wide open country. It was named after a Khoi who had been wounded in the thigh by a buffalo. The water was very limited – scarcely more than sufficient for the humans. The oxen and sheep, crowding in, trampled the remainder into a thick mud. Because they could not drink, they stood around, making a "mournful piteous noise". The travellers also found that eight oxen were missing – either because they had fallen into the hands of the San, or that they may have been startled by the lightning, and fallen a prey to the lions.

Soon they set off again, traveling through the night, although one of the Khoi women gave birth just at this time.

Jonkerwater

At noon, the Somerville party left Buffelsbout, and crossed a large plain, covered in high but dry grass (possibly a pan), and arrived at Jonkersfontein (or Jonkerwater), where they stayed the night. On the next day, they passed a very large vlei (swampland), which was very salty – probably the salt pan situated about 40 km south of Prieska. By now, Somerville calculated, the travellers had consumed 61 head of sheep on their journey thus far. (That was the 19th century equivalent of “take aways”).

Burchell also passed Jonkerwater, on 12 September 1811. However, the party did not stop, as they were pressing on to get to water. The advance wagon had to wait a while, to give a large lion some time to move away without molesting them. Burchell now began to observe quartz rocks.

Modderfontein

When Burchell reached Modder-gat (Modderfontein), there was again only enough water for the humans, and the first of the draft oxen. Those coming later in the convoy just found trampled mud. Modderfontein is a periodic lake, and when wet, one sinks into the mud. The oxen had great difficulty dragging the wagons through the muddy plain.

The party pushed on, desperately seeking water. In the darkness, the party got into confusion and separated. Burchell kept with two of the Khoi wagons, but got into massive thorny bush thickets of haakdoorn. After several hours of getting scratched, they found a large pond in which there was an abundance of clear and excellent hunters. An hour later, the other wagons and the loose cattle arrived. “All fears for want of water were now at an end... Nothing remained of our troubles, but great exhaustion from continued traveling day and night, under such distressing circumstances”. He noted that the place was called Zandvley.

While collecting specimens of the haakdoorn, Burchell discovered how dangerous it was. One twig caught hold of one of his sleeves; while he was trying to disengage it, both arms were caught by the “rapacious thorns”, and he became ever more entangled, till the tree seized his hat also. He called for help, and two of his men released him by cutting off all the branches which were clinging to his clothes.

They stayed here for several days, hunting eland and making biltong. He noted that the eland was being hunted to extinction in the area, because of its delicious meat, and had fat from which candles could be made.

When they moved on, Burchell experienced his first Karoo thunderstorm. The parched earth became covered with ponds in five minutes.

Prieskapoort

By 1 November 1801, the Somerville party reached the Prieskapoort. By lunchtime, they arrived at the Orange River.

The Prieskapoort is well described on the Mountain Passes SA website:
www.mountainpassesa.co.za.

PRIESKA

Somerville described the Gariep River (or Great River or Orange River), as bordered by willows, mimosas, and other trees. Here they met the missionary Edwards and his family, as well as Jacob Kruger, the Korana. They had been travelling together.

They investigated the drift (passage) across the river – a formidable stream with rapid currents, although an island in the middle made it more manageable. They also watched Jacob Kruger transporting his sheep across the river: One of the Khoi would lie on a branch of a large tree, and at one end, a large wooden pin was fixed in the log. He held the pin with one arm, keeping the head of the sheep above water, while he swam, with his other hand and his feet. He crossed the river at a 45 degree angle. This was not always successful, and apparently 31 of Kruger's sheep had drowned. On the next day, the travellers loaded their wagons onto large logs, to raise them somewhat so that the contents would not get wet.

Somerville's party crossed the Prieska drift on 3 November 1801. One of the three wagons got into trouble, and was dragged by the current into deep water. The San and Korana who lived nearby came to assist, as they were extremely good swimmers. They cut the yoks of the oxen, and as a result only one ox drowned. The wagon was only retrieved the next day, but they discovered that the medicine box had suffered a lot of damage. The travellers paid the Korana and San with brass medallions and plats, rings, tobacco, and sheep.

Burchell first saw the Orange River on 15 September 1811. It was a majestic river, almost a smooth translucent lake, while the drooping willows leaned over the water. The group settled down and built their matted huts. Many of the Khoi went for a swim, while others rested under the trees.



Burchell's idyllic painting of the Orange River

To cross the river, Burchell's party had to build a road to the water, through the trees. Led by several horsemen, to show the way, the wagons followed through the river. The greatest depth was less than three feet, but the current was rapid and strong. The low river indicated the severe drought which was still prevailing. Each wagon took about fifteen minutes to pass through.

PRIESKA TO GRIQUATOWN

Just north of the Orange River, Burchell encountered his first genuine Khoi settlement. He found it very picturesque. It consisted of matted huts, which were so useful to dismantle, transport and re-erect. The party was also visited by a group of ten San men. They had waded through the Orange River to come and visit. Burchell found them fascinating. He also continued collecting plant and bird specimens. He also encountered crickets, and for the first time heard the noise of these insects.

Modderfontein (Niekerkshoop)

By 7 November 1801, Somerville's party was at Modderfontein, which is situated just west of the town of Niekerkshoop. In fact, the town was established on the eastern part of Modderfontein. The congregation itself was established in 1878.

Here Somerville's met Slaparm, the captain of the Kora, with his some of his own group. They also met Caricacoup, a San captain. Once again, the travellers donated brass items and tobacco to these leaders.

On Somerville's return journey, they took a large detour to the Upington area, where Captain Adam Kok was encamped. Then they returned to roughly near Prieska. Slaparm met them near the Orange River, and assisted them as far as Jonkerwater. The return journey was difficult due to heavy rains, causing the wagons to sink into the mud.

Burchell also travelled through the Asbestos Mountains, and found a Khoi village at The Kloof (now called Hardcastle). Here the missionaries of his party re-united with many of their congregants who had lived at Klaarwater before. It was a joyful reunion. By evening, the missionaries set off to Klaarwater, while Burchell, Barends, and some of the others remained.

The most industrious man of the village was a "bastard" (mixed race) man, Willem Fortuin. He had learnt the skills of wagon-maker; he lived in a better house; and he had a vegetable garden.

It was very hot weather, but Burchell went on an excursion, and the Khoi showed him where to find blue asbestos (which was also called *Doeksteen*, or cloth-stone). There were several violent thunderstorms. They set off again on 29 September.

T'Karaap

In 1801, the Somerville party also met Jan Kok and his family, as well as several "bastard" Khoi, living in "a long passage in the T'karaap".

In the evening, Jan Kok gave a sermon on the Gospel form John Chapter 3, about the "regeneration of men", a simple prayer was said, and a hymn was sung. The travellers were astonished at his good understanding of the Christian message.

Rietfontein

On Sunday 8 November 1801, the Somerville party arrived at Rietfontein, where Rev Kicherer ran his mission. The buildings were quite new. The meeting hall was about 16m x 20m x 7m, with doors and windows, well covered with long reeds, plastered with clay. Further away there was a kitchen, "built in a circle", and a school building in progress. There were also numerous Koranna portable mat huts. The women and children fled in fear as soon as they saw the travellers.

Kicherer met them with great friendliness. There were also other missionaries: William Anderson, Cornelius Kramer, Jacobus Scholtz and Christiaan Botman. They all worked as teachers, mainly in literacy teaching. In the evening they attended a sermon.

They also recruited Kees Maklanga and his friend, Ruiter Makauta, two Tswanas, to serve as interpreter in Dutch and seTswana. They then purchased 46 sheep from Jacob Kruger, @ 2 Rixdollars each, and departed Rietfontein on 12 November. They also borrowed 48 oxen from the “bastard”, Jan Olivier.

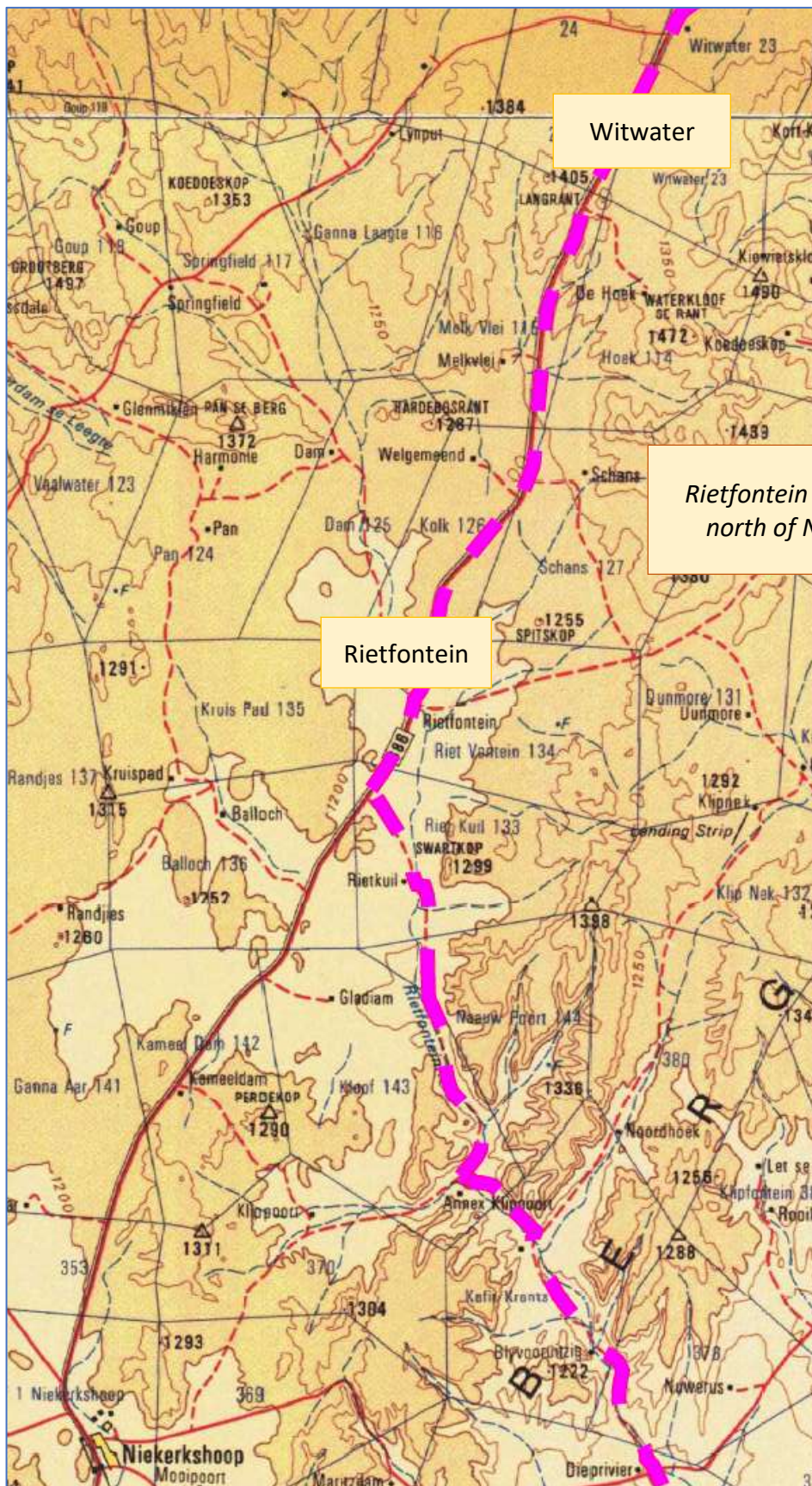
At Rietfontein, they were once again met with gladness by the missionaries. They heard that the “Bastard Khoi” Klaas Africaander (or Afrikaner), who had murdered his master, Pienaar, lived with his band of renegades a few days’ journey from here. Afrikaner was already known for his raids and murders, so that the Rietfontein community lived in some anxiety.

The travellers got their own oxen back, in good condition, and rewarded Jan Olivier’s herdsman for the good care they had taken. They distributed tinder boxes and tobacco. Maklanga, the interpreter, received for his services tinder boxes, knives, mirrors, beads, handkerchiefs, hats, rings, and tobacco.

Ten years later, Burchell also made a quick stop at Rietfontein, but only found the stone foundations of a small hut.

Witwater / Gattikamma

The Somerville party overnighted at Witwater, where they had to replace the axle of one of the wagons. They had brought this wood from the Orange River. On 14 November, they travelled via Buffelfontein (t’kambisiegalië) and Dwaalfontein (t’Jocka t’gonie), and found very little water. From here, the Somerville/Truter party went off to Bechuanaland, and returned along the same route, from Rietfontein southwards.



Ten years later, Burchell also overnighted here. They found a village of Kora (or Korana) living here. They were very curious to see a strange white man, and came to visit. The women could not resist coming to see the inside of his wagon, and were very excited to discover a mirror. They were particularly intrigued that Burchell was neither a missionary nor a colonist, but travelling only for the purpose of seeing their country. When Burchell's party left, the friendly Korana wished them a pleasant journey.

KLAARWATER / GRIQUATOWN

On 30 September 1811, Burchell eventually reached Klaarwater, at 1 am in the morning. In the middle of the night, Mr Anderson came to welcome him; then everyone settled down to sleep.



Burchell's drawing of Griquatown (1811)

At Klaarwater, Burchell met the missionaries Mr Jansz and Kramer, both from the Netherlands. He also met Mrs Anderson and Mrs Kramer, with whom he had travelled for much of the way from Cape Town. He then visited Captain Adam Kok ("Kapteyn Dam"), who was in authority over one half of the "bastard" community, while Kapteyn Berends was commander of the other half. He found Dam Kok to be a man of quiet disposition. Everyone had dinner together in the school-room.

There were about 25 Khoi houses immediately round the church, but many more scattered further away. The total number of residents was about 780 people.

Burchell remained here for several months, before setting off to the north.

TOWARDS THE SECOND EDITION OF THE GUIDE

A significant distance still remains to be described of the route – from Griquatown to Kuruman. In fact, there are two routes northwards to Kuruman – one via Danielskuil, and one via Postmasburg. There is a great deal of material to be considered for this very historic section, which culminated in the establishment of the Moffat Mission in 1823.