

## THE NAMAQUALAND PIONEERS

Little is known about the first pioneers residing in Namaqualand. Due to the political circumstances at the Cape as well as their individualistic nature, a lot of farmers decided to leave the restrictive boundaries of the Colony. According to a document dated 27 August 1845 the very first quitrent farms were already leased as early as 1766. These were Silverfontein to Johannes Augustus v.d. Hever on 24 March 1766 and Rietfontein to Gerrit Beukes on 17 October 1776. Both these farms were in the vicinity of what is today known as Kameelboom. Some of the descendants of the early pioneers are still living in Namaqualand. During 1809 some of the following families were already occupying farms in this area: G. Niewoudt on Matjiesfontein; J.A. Engelbrecht on Brakkefontein; Gerrit Cloete on Grootriet; Gert Andries Aggenbach on Canariesfontein; A.P. van Neukerk (Justice of the Peace) on Grootevallei and Eenriet; Johannes Engelbrecht on Klipkuyl; Gerrit Cloete Jr on Modderfontein; Johannes Kotzé on Eenkokerboom and Johannes Hendrik Aggenbach on Soebatsfontein. Although some of these farms are in the vicinity no reference is made of Hondeklip Bay at all. A mention however is made of a small harbour next to the Zwartlyntjies River in a book written by George Thomson about his "Travels and Adventures in South Africa" during 1823 and 1824.

Characteristic to the nineteenth century the Missionaries also made an appearance in Namaqualand as early as 1808. First of these was the Reverend Johannes Seidenfaden of the London Missionary Society who was active in the Kamiesberg. In 1816 the Rev. Barnabas Shaw founded a station at Leliefontein and in 1818 Johan Heinrich Schmelen stations in Steinkopf and in Kommaggas (1829).

In 1838 Sir James Alexander, the renowned explorer cum missionary, visited the farm, Keerom, in Namaqualand. He meets with two farmers and a ship's captain called Anderson. They inform him about the possibility of a harbour nearby the mouth of the Spoeg River. After inspection he reports as follows:

"...For some time there had been a rumour that there was a bay on the west

coast of the colony, near to the frontier, which might be turned to account, but no one from the Cape had proceeded to examine into the truth or falsehood of this, when I found that Mr. Anderson had come up privately, in the employ of two or three Cape Traders, to search for this bay, and he had discovered it, though, until I made it known at the Cape, it was kept secret.

Rooé Wall Bay derives its name from lofty cliffs of red sandstone, which face the sea at its eastern extremity. It is an indentation in the coastline of less than a mile in length and breadth; the entrance is broad, and across it blows the two dangerous winds at the Cape, the N.W. and S.E., so that it is sheltered, except from the western swell of the South Atlantic. Precipitous cliffs are on the two sides of the Bay, and two sandy beaches at the bottom of it, separated by a mass of rocks. These sandy beaches are favourable for hauling the seine, and abundance of excellent fish are to be procured here; such as the delicious Roman Fish, Hottentot, Jacob Fever, mullet, stump nose, and klip fish.

There is one danger on entering the bay; viz., a rock on which are only two fathoms of water, and twelve fathoms all round it: - a buoy will easily point out this danger. At the entrance of the bay the depth is twelve fathoms, which decreases to six, four, and three and a half. In five and a half fathoms there is good anchorage in the middle of the bay, with sand and shells. All about the bay, the land is covered with shrubby plants, and there is grazing for cattle: the soil is sandy, and drinking water is to be procured by digging on the beach. There are plenty of shells for lime on the coast, and abundance of driftwood about the mouth of the Orange River. Rooé Wall, therefore, affords every possible facility for shipping produce, and also for salting provisions and establishing a fishery; and it is earnestly to be hoped that it may be the means of "opening up" the "section" of country in which it is situated. ..."

In this same correspondence Alexander also mentions the fact that on the whole coastline he only found three locations inhabited by indigenous people. These are at the mouth of the Tousie River (Buffels River), the mouth of the Great River (Orange River) and Robbe Bay (Port Nolloth).

According to the above document it seems that the need for shipping copper ore was not yet of extreme importance. Apparently the authorities in the

Cape does not deem Alexander's discovery so consequential as no further development takes place.

It is alleged that Sir James Alexander returned to London in order to establish a mining company but it cannot be determined without doubt, if he ever returned to the Namaqualand Copperfields.

Postscript:

It is commonly assumed that Alexander Bay was named after Sir James Alexander but some evidence suggest that it was possibly associated with a trader also named Alexander. This Alexander was the person who in 1852, attempted to transport copper ore along the Orange river to the mouth (Alexander Bay) by barge.

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