



Rose's

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ROUND-UP

A privately-published monthly newsletter covering snippets of mainly Karoo history * Copyright: Rose Willis
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TITUS OATES REMEMBERED IN ABERDEEN

The centenary of the death of Captain Lawrence “Titus” Oates was recently commemorated in the little Karoo village of Aberdeen. On March 16, 1912, Oates, a member of Captain Robert Falcon Scott’s ill-fated expedition to the South Pole, stepped out tent during a blizzard saying: “I’ll am going out. I will be some time.” He was suffering badly, and in severe pain. He never returned. Scott, and his companions, died waiting for his return. While Oates died on the ice, his death is linked to wounds received on the sun-scorched plains, outside Aberdeen in the Great Karoo. The full-day commemoration, during which tribute was paid to Oates as a man and a soldier, was arranged by Dallis Graham of the Aberdeen Heritage Society in collaboration with Dr Sydney Cullis, an expert on Antarctica. The guest of honour for the day was Oates’s great nephew, Laurie Oates, from Pretoria. Proceedings started with a memorial service, in the Aberdeen Methodist Church, led by Rev J L Jantjies, from Graaff-Reinet, who is superintendent of the Karoo East Circuit.. Appropriate messages and readings formed part of the service and moving renditions of well known hymns were given by the Thembalesizwe Choir. After the service a letter from Brigadier E J Torrens- Spence of the Royal Dragoon Guards in York, England, was read. This is the present day counterpart of the regiment to which Oates was attached. The regiment sent a memorial plaque to be placed in 16 Brand Street, where Oates was nursed after being wounded. The plaque was unveiled by Dr Cullis, who also loaned paintings and other material for display and who later gave a talk, on the history of Antarctica. The house today belongs to Albert and Magdeline Green. Aberdeen historian Wendy van Schalkwyk paid tribute to Oates and told the story of his life, wounds, recuperation and association with Scot, at the church service and at a later function. The film *90 Degrees South*, which contains footage of Scot’s expedition and Oates having a rather dramatic haircut, was also shown.

COLLECTABLE STAMP OF APPROVAL

Prince Albert Tourist Bureau has its own special postal stamp, but for this year only. The S A Post Office created this once-off postmark and date cancellation stamp to commemorate the village’s 250th anniversary. The stamp will be used only on mail posted at the bureau, however, so a new bright red post box for letters and cards has been installed there. As the date canceller will used for a relatively short period cancellations should become collectable. The Bureau thus hopes the box will be well used. General post in Prince Albert is taken to Beaufort West where stamps are cancelled.

COULDN'T FIND THE KEYHOLE

General Sir Redvers Buller, to whom the command of the British troops was first entrusted during the Anglo-Boer War, was a brave soldier, states J Purvis-Stewart in *Sands of Time*. “He led and fed his men with equal gusto. Sadly, however, his previously successful strategies were of little avail against the wily, determined, courageous opponents he faced in this country. A stereo-typical expression soon began to appear in all his despatches. He constantly he claimed that he “now held the key to the position.” Hearing this caused British Tommies to remark: “That may be so, but he constantly fails to find the key-hole.”

MIGHTY CLIMB, BUT NOT THE FIRST

In 1840, an Indian Army Officer left his mark at the top of Compassberg, a mountain on the outskirts of New Bethesda. Major Walter Stanhope Sherwill was on long leave from Bengal and decided to visit South Africa. He initially sailed to Cape Town, where he explored for a while and then continued on to Port Elizabeth. He then decided to explore the interior and so trekked to Cockscomb and on to Graaff Reinet. When he saw Compassberg he could not resist climbing the mountain. However, on reaching the summit he found someone had already planted flag pole there. “I wonder who planted that first flag pole?” asks Cape historic researcher Steve Craven. After exploring the Karoo, Walter trekked across country going as far as the Augrabies Falls. He returned to Port Elizabeth via George, the Cango Caves, and then visited Cape Town, again for a short while before rejoining his regiment in India.

DID GORDON PLANT THE FLAG?

The 2505m Compassberg was named by Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon, Commander of the Dutch Garrison at the Cape in 1778, when he travelled through the area with Governor Joachim von Plettenberg, states a Graaff Reinet Museum newsletter. “Gordon, explored the interior with restless zeal and on one journey of great magnitude discovered the Gariep River which he named to honour the Prince of Orange. He also visited the Sneeu Berg and because he was an experienced mountaineer, climbed and named Compassberg.” So perhaps he planted the first flag. John Barrow said Gordon gave the mountain this name because steams flowed from it in all directions, but Lichtenstein, said he named it Compassberg because being the highest point it offered fine all-round view from its summit. Research reveals that a large San population was also present in the Compassberg area when farmers began moving in in the 1700s. Prof Garth Sampson and others have explored over 5 000 m² at the foot of this mountain and excavated well over 16 000 surface sites. Many stone artifact have been discovered, yet archaeologists constantly visit the area. Today the Compassberg Hiking Trail is among the attractions that brings outdoor enthusiasts to the area. Mike Sporen of the S A Mountain Club once stated that there was still much to be discovered along this route. He noted some graffiti that dated back to the 1870s. The Afrikaans poet, G A Watermeyer, was born on a farm at the foot of Compassberg. It lies almost at the start of the present day hiking trail. It is said that this area was an inspiration for much of his work. Compassberg is composed of sediments of the Beaufort Series in the Karoo System, and extensively intruded by dolerite dikes and sills.

RIVERS WITHOUT WATER, BIRDS WITHOUT SONG

During the Anglo-Boer War Dr J Purvis-Stewart, called the Karoo a “place to see”. He was one of the doctors sent to South Africa in 1901 with the Imperial Yeomanry Bearer Company – the first company of its kind raised ever established by private funding. In his biography, *Sands of Time*, he wrote: “After three weeks’ tedious delay in Cape Town our hospital at last entrained and made its way towards Bloemfontein through the Karoo. This is a high table-land surrounded by koppies, flat-topped mountains of varying heights, peppered with short scrubby bushes and small stones, but without grass. This is a place to see – rivers without water, flowers without scent, birds without song. The railway tracks were bordered with empty bully-beef tins and beer bottles. Here and there was a tin-roofed shack inhabited by a couple, often with about 15 children. At Deelfontein, we visited the already established Imperial Yeomanry base-hospital, staffed by eminent civilian physicians and surgeons and lavishly equipped to the last detail. All their glass and crockery, from champagne goblets down to the most menial sanitary vessels, were emblazoned with the Imperial Yeomanry badge, the Prince of Wales’s feathers. Shortly after we left there our train passed through a storm of locusts. They reminded us a pantomime snow storm, except, as one Tommy said, that the flakes were khaki coloured “to match the troops.” At Norval’s Pont our train crossed the Orange River on a temporary bridge of tressels and pontoons. It replaced the bridge recently blown up by the Boers.

KAROO AIR CREATES A BAPTIST MINISTER

A sickly youth, who came to the Karoo hoping for better health, rose to become a highly respected Baptist minister. Joseph John Doke, who came from a line of zealous, religious missionaries, was born in Chudleigh, Devonshire, England, on November 5, 1861. He was a bright, but frail boy. He suffered from a bad chest and nagging cough which meant he was not able to regularly attend school. However, in the hopes of curing this respiratory condition his family sent him to the Karoo as a missionary. He loved the area, settled in Graaff-Reinet, and started a Baptist church in 1882. The fresh, clean air eventually revitalized him to such a degree that he was able to travel to India to further his studies. But, he'd left his heart in the Karoo, he had fallen in love with Agnes Hanna Biggs, the granddaughter of 1820 settler, David Hobson. Joseph returned in 1886 to marry her. She was an energetic lass and totally devoted to him. She supported everything he did throughout his ministries in South Africa, England and New Zealand.

OFF TO NEW ZEALAND IN A 'STORM OF SORROW'

In time Joseph returned to England to succeed his father as pastor of Chudleigh Church. He later accepted a calling to a larger parish but in "a perfect storm of sorrow" for the sake of his son, Clement's health, had to go to New Zealand. The family spent seven happy years in Christchurch, where Joseph, a talented artist with irrepressible sense of humour, produced a highly acclaimed series of cartoons for a local newspaper. In 1903 he returned to South Africa and settled in Grahamstown. Shortly after this he was elected president of the Baptist Union. Greatly loved, highly respected, a man with a generous nature, he again threw himself into service. He was a spirited and gifted orator, so his sermons were sympathetic and heart-searching. Many attribute the fact that the Baptist church of South Africa was saved from financial ruin to Joseph's hard and diligently work. When the church's property was in danger of being seized in a foreclosure by the mortgage bondholder, Joseph went to America and England to raise funds.

BEFRIENDED GAHNDI

While in Johannesburg Joseph met Mahatma Gandhi. Sympathetic to the desire of the Indians for improved civil rights, he attended a rally where Gandhi was attacked and left for dead. Joseph brought him home and Agnes nursed him. Gandhi said if all Christians were like the Doke family, he might have become a committed Christian. Following the success of his first novel, Joseph edited Gandhi's Journal, *Indian Opinion* and also wrote the highly acclaimed *M K Gandhi – An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, the first biography on this great man. . It was originally published as a series of articles in 1909 in the London-based publication, *The London Indian Chronicle*. In 1913 Joseph immortalized the Karoo in an adventure novel entitled *The Secret City – A Tale of the Karoo*. It was so popular that he wrote a sequel, *The Queen of the Secret City*, in 1916. This was published posthumously as Joseph died of enteric fever on his way home from Lambaland on August 15, 1913. He was 52. He had visited to discuss setting up a chain of mission stations to link South Africa to the Congo. Anna was beside herself with grief. She and Joseph had three sons, Willy, Clement Martyn, and Comber, all of whom were missionaries, and a daughter, Cline. Willy later studied medicine and became a doctor, while Clement Martyn is said to have been one of the greatest scholars of the twentieth-century

DOCS DELIGHT THE READERS

Readers loved the stories of Karoo doctors in the April issue. Many wrote to say so. Most enjoyed learning more about the medical men of Beaufort West. Joan Pienaar says "Some were at school with my husband, Alwyn. D P de Villiers was my cousin. My grandfather, Ryk Daantjie de Villiers was married twice. His first wife was a daughter of magistrate Jacobus Johannes Meintjies, but, my father was a son from his second marriage." Noel de Villiers, chief executive of Open Africa wrote: "D P de Villiers was my dad's brother. I was born in his nursing home and remember him and his charming wife Leone very well."

THE SEARCH IS ON FOR A RABBIT LOGO ...

The Riverine Rabbit Programme has just announced a competition. It is looking for a logo for its *Rabbit Runner* newsletter. "Any one can enter," says Christy Bragg. "We'd like a clear and simple drawing of a Riverine Rabbit that can be easily reproduced. It can be a caricature, cartoon, abstract or as realistic the artist desires, but people must be able to recognize the riverine rabbit." Once finished e.mail your artwork to christyb@ewt.org.za or posted it to: Rabbit Runner Logo Competition, Riverine Rabbit Programme, P.O. Box 172, Loxton, 6985. The main prize will be a hamper of Lindt chocolates, There will be runner-up prizes for toddlers up to 4; youngsters from 5 to 12 and teenagers from 13 to 19 years old. Closing date is November, 30, 2012."

... AND FOR FUNDING FOR CAMERAS

The EWT Riviering Rabbit Programme recently ran a most successful one-week "camera trap trial". For this Jeremy Bolton loaned 15 remote digital camers to the organization and 17 images were captured over four nights. "This is most encouraging because it allows us to view the rabbits in their habitat, see what they eat, what eats them, their social interaction and what they do as they move around.," says Christy Bragg. "The cameras also show the time of the night the rabbits are active. Interestingly, 90% of the pictures were taken after 07h30. So it seems the bunnies like the early warm rays of the Karoo sun! We learnt a lot in this mini-trial, but it proved that we need our own camera traps. Anyone interested in donating towards this project should contact cristy@ewt.org.za.

FAINT HEART DID NOT WIN A FAIR LADY

When the French Missionary Francois Coillard reached Leribe, in the then Basutoland in 1859, he was clean-shaven and unmarried. The Basutos were perplexed by this beardless, wifeless boy. Was he a missionary? Could he teach? Would anyone listen? Aware that he needed a wife, Francois kput the matter in the hands of God, and He put Christina Macintosh, into Francois's life. He met her just before he left, and while for him it was a case of love at first sight, he lacked the courage to propose. He wrote to her from Africa and she answered saying while she badly wanted to be a missionary, but she did not know him well enough to travel to Africa to join him. Her family and friends were delighted. Africa was too dangerous, they said, and anyway, she was more at home in the classroom than the kitchen. Two years passed before Francois gathered courage to propose again. This time she accepted. She arrived at the end of December, 1860. He rushed to Algoa Bay to meet her only to learn she was due to arrive in Cape Town. Beside himself with anguish he sped across the country, despite all warnings of the dangers of along this inland route across part of the arid Karoo. It was an arduous and hazardous journey, but he made it. He was later severely rebuked by the directors of the Paris Missionary Society for being irresponsible.

TURNED AN OX WAGON INTO A HOME

Christina was overjoyed to see him. They were married in Cape Town on February 28, 1861, and set off immediately by ox wagon across the arid Karoo for Basutoland. Totally secure in her husband's love Christina set about making the wagon "as pretty as possible and homelike". She wrote to her sister: "Everyone who has seen our wagon is astounded. They admiring the way I have decorated it with pretty curtains, skins and plants. The whole is so magnificent one would think it was the eighth wonder of the world." Christina was very happy. For her entire life she remained devoted to her husband. She reveled in being his constant support and companion. At one time when fretting for her family threw mementos and reminders of them into the fire. Each alone would have been an excellent missionary, together their work was great beyond measure, said Belle M Brain in *Love Stories Of The Missionaries*.

What we call the beginning is often the end and to make an end is to make a beginning.

So, to paraphrase T S Eliot, the end is often a good place to start.