



CITY OF CAPE TOWN
ISIXEKO SASEKAPA
STAD KAAPSTAD

Stories of the South Peninsula

Historical research, stories and heritage tourism opportunities in
the South Peninsula



SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM

The peninsula from Cape Point Nature Reserve

*Prepared for the City of Cape Town by C. Postlethwayt, M. Attwell & K. Dugmore Ström
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Background

The primary objective of this project was to prepare a series of 'story packages' providing the content for historical interpretive stories of the 'far' South Peninsula. Stories cover the geographical area of Chapman's Peak southwards to include Imhoff, Ocean View, Masiphumelele, Kommetjie, Witsand, Misty Cliffs and Scarborough, Plateau Road, Cape Point, Smitswinkel Bay to Miller's Point, Boulders, Simon's Town, Red Hill, Glencairn and Fish Hoek to Muizenberg.

The purposes for which these stories are to be told are threefold, namely to support tourism development; to stimulate local interest; and to promote appropriate and sustainable protection of heritage resources through education, stimulation of interest and appropriate knowledge.

To this end, the linking of historical stories and tourism development requires an approach to story-telling that goes beyond the mere recording of historic events. The use of accessible language has been a focus. Moreover, it requires an approach that both recognises the iconic, picture-postcard image of parts of Cape Town (to which tourists are drawn initially), but extends it further to address the particular genius loci that is Cape Town's 'Deep South', in all its complexity and coloured by memory, ambivalences and contradictory experiences. We believe there is a need to balance the more conventional approach, which selects people or events deemed worthy of commemoration (for example, the Battle of Muizenberg) to tell the story of places, by interweaving popular memory and culture into these recordings (for example, the rich Muslim culture that existed in Simon's Town before the removal under the Group Areas Act).

Thus, these are stories, familiar and unfamiliar, that link intangible heritage with (largely) material forms and are about real-life characters and events that have shaped our past. The tone of these stories is conversational in order to engage local residents and tourists alike, and can be utilised in story-telling mode (by tour guides for example) or to fulfil on-site interpretive requirements.

Stories have been selected to balance historical themes from prehistory, through pre-colonial to colonial settlement, apartheid and democratic South Africa. The history of Cape Town's South Peninsula has been very ably and comprehensively recorded by many of its residents, and we wish to acknowledge and give thanks to all those cited as references.

Referencing

The stories are intended for popular consumption. Therefore, the traditionally detailed referencing that would be expected of historical research was not regarded as appropriate in this instance, although full accuracy in terms of content and referencing has been sought. All references utilised have been listed. In respect of images, reference sources have been provided, which are open-source as far as possible.

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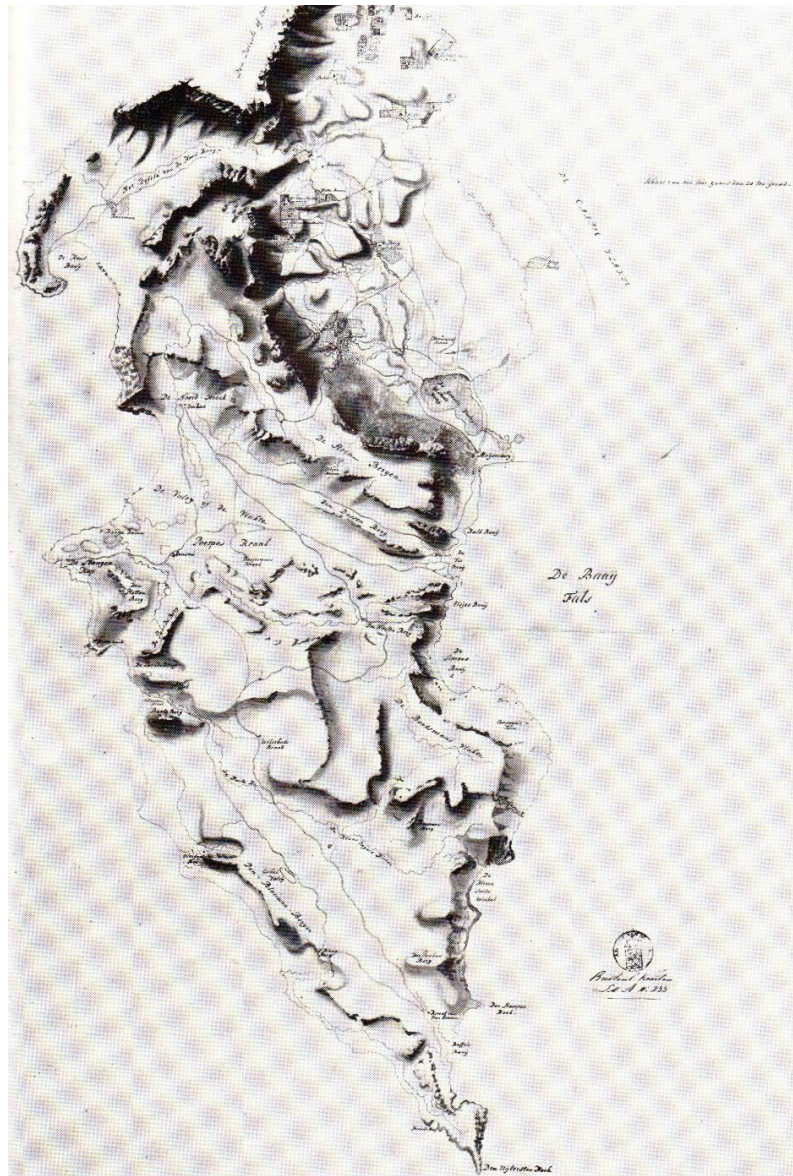
4. The lure of the sea

(C. Postlethwayte)

Looking south from the Muizenberg mountains or Noordhoek Peak, seaside villages hug the shores of the southern Cape Peninsula, overlooked by Table Mountain National Park. This represents a treasure trove of recreational places to explore, from the False Bay coastline, Muizenberg to Kalk Bay, through Fish Hoek to Simon's Town, Cape Point, and then up again along the Atlantic coastline through Misty Cliffs and Kommetjie, to Noordhoek and beyond. Here are warm waters and sandy beaches, secluded coves and rock pools, sun and sea breezes, secluded coves and rock pools, sun and sea breezes, whales and sharks, seals and penguins, surfing for the beginner or the adventurous, harbours and historic villages, spectacular drives ... a paradise to play in.



But this was not always the case. As the Cape was colonised and the winter anchorage of Simon's Town established in the mid-1700s, the shortcomings of this region – rugged, arduous, and rather short on comfort and amenities – were frequently remarked upon by visitors: “Simon's Town is so miserable a place, that a stranger at the first view is tempted to form a poor opinion of a colony so often and so highly spoken of in Europe, as being of the first importance to England.”⁷



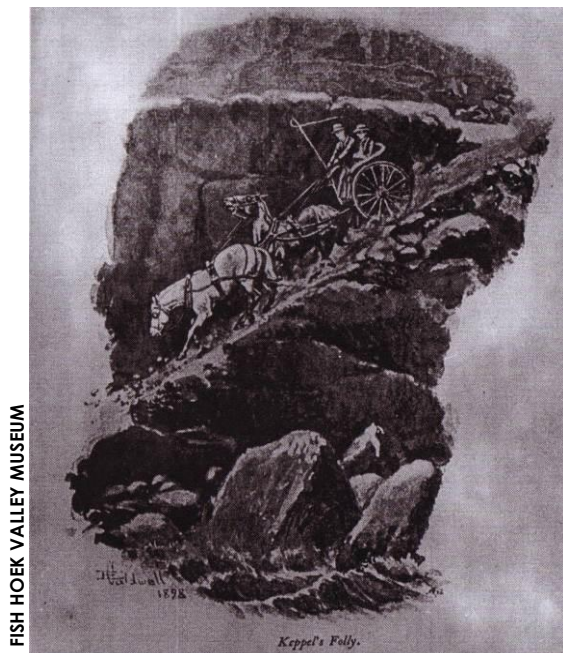
WESTERN CAPE ARCHIVES

Dutch map from the 1780s, showing the roads between Cape Town, Muizenberg and Cape Point very clearly.

For many years, despite its strategic importance, Simon's Town remained an isolated settlement. Access between it and Cape Town along the coast was very poor, and remained so for many years. The only other inhabited places at the time were the fishing station of Fish Hoek, a Dutch East India Company post at Muizenberg, and a little later, Kalk Bay, which also developed as a fishing and whaling station. Early descriptions of the journey

⁷ Brock, Brock & Willis (1976), p 101.

along the False Bay coastline to Simon's Bay show a distinct lack of admiration for natural scenery, not awakened probably due to the rigours of travel guarded by mountains and shifting sands: It truly was a 'road of adventure'. The difficulties started at Muizenberg, where mountains came down to the sea, and the road was a stony track hacked out of the mountain. Wagons had to be hauled over ridges and manoeuvred through streams, sprayed by the sea. Then, round the sandy curve of Kalk Bay to the most dangerous "Trappies" ('little steps'), onto the sand of Fish Hoek bay, where sand quickly became waterlogged by the Silvermine river and 'man, beasts and wagons could be sucked into the quick sands if they were not very careful'. There are stories of horse and riders sucked into the quicksands, never to be seen again.



FISH HOEK VALLEY MUSEUM

The terrifying descent at the "Trappies" between Kalk Bay and Clovelly. This is the only known painting, dated 1898, but the incident depicted here – Midshipman (later Admiral) Keppel, the driver, and his colleague, Waley Armitage, on the return to their ship in Simon's Bay – happened in 1828. Now, the hill at the base of which the Trappies lay – Trappieskop – provides both excellent sport climbing routes and a wonderful scenic walk that is not taxing.

Andrew Spaarman, who was required to reside in Simon's Town in 1772 over winter ("the bad season", as he called it) was eloquent in his description: "... [T]he south-east wind which prevails at every other time of the year makes this bay in many respects inconvenient, blowing with such violence ... The road between the Cape and False Bay is very heavy and tedious and even sometimes dangerous ... [T]he sea even at its lowest ebb at some places rises up to the foot of the mountains, ... so that one is obliged to travel for a long way (as it were) below the shore, though the breakers as they are called or surf of the sea often rises above the nave of the wheels and even into the body of the wagon. Nay, it sometimes seems as if it would carry out to sea wagon, horses and all. ... (P)eople sometimes even drive a little below the seashore, as the sands there are pressed down and even, whereas higher up, they are loose, deep and heavy. In a large plain that closes up the north side of False Bay, there is a considerable field of sand through which this road is carried. This the violent rains that fall in the winter season joined to a higher tide than usual are wont sometimes to lay entirely under water so that travellers are in danger of getting up to the middle in holes and pits."⁸

Our experience today of the South Peninsula – the ease with which we can access and enjoy our leisure – is also then the story of the development of roads, rail and the transport industry. The white sands and surfing breaks of today's play were the sources of yesteryear's 'disagreeable and fatiguing' travel; the dramatic and scenic drop of the mountains to the sea were yesteryear's rugged, rocky ascents and descents, so insurmountable and perilous that wading through the dreadful surf was sometimes more preferable. But it is also a reflection of shifting attitudes towards nature,

⁸ Brock, Brock & Willis (1976) p 98.

the sea and shore in the 19th century (in Europe and the colonies) and the concomitant history of tourism. Before then, the seaman often saw land as dangerous to ships, and landmen feared the water. The so-called habits of pleasure really gained momentum with European travellers on the Grand Tour, the idealisation of the sea by Romantic poets at the time, the development of a common code of what was considered a picturesque landscape, and the growth of the popular seaside resort in their wake.

The early sandy track to the southern Cape Peninsula constrained development of the almost uninhabited region, until control of the Cape formally passed into British hands in 1814. With the establishment of the British fleet at Simon's Town, Governor Lord Charles Somerset made construction of the Simon's Bay road from Muizenberg (then called Military Road) his public works priority. Despite a number of improvements, first under the charge of famous architect, land surveyor and engineer Louis Michel Thibault, and later under Charles Mitchell, first Surveyor General and Civil Engineer at the Cape, road maintenance was insufficient and the journey remained a miserable one.

Nevertheless, Capetonians began to discover the delights of the area, and a few intrepid families began to spend camping holidays at Fish Hoek and Kalk Bay. Queen Victoria's son, Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, on his visit in 1867 remarked on the scene: "The morning was very lovely. Looking to seaward was the Cape of Good Hope, Cape Hangklip and the high broken shore of Hottentot's Holland, seen over the clear blue water of the bay. The horses, carriages, escort with their drawn swords, all dashing at a rattling pace along the sands in the bright sunshine, and the long lines of small breakers on the beach, were one of the most exhilarating sights imaginable. In places, the cavalcade emerged from the sands up to where the road skirts along a rocky shore, and where, at this season of the year, beautiful arum lilies and other bright flowers were growing in the greatest profusion. About four miles from Simon's Bay, we passed a small cove called Fish Hoek Bay (so spelt), where a few families of Malay fishermen reside. A whale they had killed in the bay the evening before lay anchored, ready for 'cutting in'. The small flag, called by whalers a 'whiff', was sticking up in it. We could see from the road that it was one of the usual southern right whales, which occasionally came into Simon's Bay, and are captured here. After crossing the last of the sands, we reached Kalk Bay, a collection of small houses, where the people from Cape Town come to stay in the summer ...".⁹ Among those who went to Kalk Bay and Fish Hoek in those days to camp was the late "Ouma" ('grandma') Smuts, later wife of the prominent statesman General Jan Smuts, who is reported to have said that she never went again after the railway was built in 1885, as it had spoilt the place.

⁹ Rosenthal (1968).



Military (now Main) Road across the sandy flats at Mackerel Bay, Glencairn.



Military Road, Kalk Bay. (The harbour is now situated in the bay to the left of the photo.)

The advent of the steam train was to change this area forever. Not only could fish and provisions be more easily transported, but people (particularly the less wealthy, who were unable to afford a horse and trap) could now more easily take their leisure at the seaside, and even began to move away from the madding crowds of the southern suburbs. The railway line was extended to Muizenberg in 1882, to Kalk Bay in 1883, and then to Fish Hoek and Simon's Town in 1890. Day-trippers began to come in their thousands to the beaches of False Bay, and the railways offered one-day picnic specials and put on additional trains when seaside entertainments were offered.



WALKER, M.

The Daimler omnibus struggling through the sands at Fish Hoek.

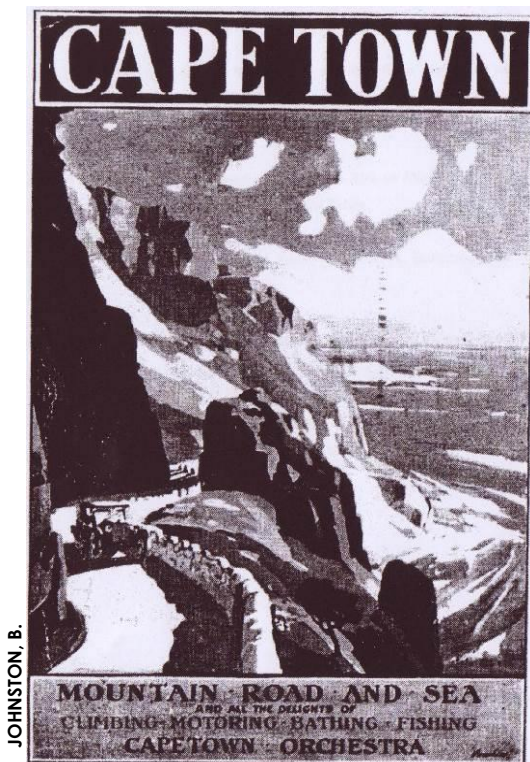


WALKER, M.

12.1.04
 The Kommetjie's Ltd Motor Bus + Party
 before leaving St James for the Kommetjie
 where we spent a jolly day on the 27.12.04.
 The journey takes about 4 hours.

The Kommetjie-Muizenberg bus at St James.

The automobile was introduced to the Cape in 1898 (the first motorists had to import their own petrol!) and enthusiasm for this form of transport was encouraged by Automobile Club runs, including its inaugural "merry spin to Kalk Bay". The poorly maintained cart track beyond Kalk Bay to the sandy wasteland of Fish Hoek prevented the run from going any further. But this did not seem to deter Kommetjie Estates Ltd from setting up, in 1902, the Cape Peninsula's first bus service from Kommetjie to Fish Hoek and, on weekends, to Kalk Bay and Muizenberg to cater for visitors to the beautiful, isolated beaches of Kommetjie and Noordhoek. Unfortunately, the bus got stuck in the sand so often that passengers grew tired of pushing themselves out, thus hastening the demise of the service in 1905, when ox-wagon and cart once again became the order of the day until the roads gradually improved.



Cape Peninsula Publicity Association postcard circa 1930.



On the road to Cape Point

Access to the South Peninsula was given a boost by the 1913-1923 construction of what was then called the 'All Round the Cape Peninsula Road', a marine drive intended by the Administrator of the Cape to promote the outstanding beauty of the area. This is now the scenic route that takes one from Simon's Town to Cape Point and back to Kommetjie, linking then to Chapman's Peak. The Cape Peninsula Publicity Association began to promote the area as a motorists' paradise, and overseas tourists would even bring their own cars with them on board ship.

Let us take a quick journey, then, along the seaside, from Muizenberg on the western arm of False Bay to Chapman's Bay in Noordhoek, first taking the train and then the 'All Round Road'.

Muizenberg was initially merely a halt on the long road between Table Bay and Simon's Bay, a turnpike/toll (the first in the country) and a military watch. The small, rather shambolic, but historically pivotal Battle of Muizenberg in 1795 led to the British taking initial control over the

Cape from the Dutch (finally cemented at the Battle of Blaauwberg). The remnants of the fort of that battle can still be visited. But it was only in the 1820s that the establishment of an inn of rather dubious repute began the transformation of Muizenberg to the holiday resort it became. Called Farmer Pecks Inn, it became an important stopover for travellers on their way from Cape Town to Simon's Town, and raised the entertainment profile of the area. They put up the first bathing box. Other private bathing boxes began to appear (the strict social codes of bathing were a far cry from the casualness of today) and, with the arrival of the railway by the late 1800s, land was sold for residential development and people were thronging to the white sands of Muizenberg, immortalised by regular visitor Rudyard Kipling in his poem 'The Flowers': "Buy a bunch of weed/ White as the sand of Muizenberg/Spun before the gale".

Added impetus was provided by Cecil John Rhodes, who built a house there and encouraged his friends and colleagues to do the same. The arrival of the new mining magnates from Kimberley and Johannesburg provided a shimmering seal of approval, and many of their mansions can still be viewed along what was then known as Millionaires Row.



Muizenberg beach circa 1890, from the station. Farmer Peck's Bathing House in the middle distance.

After the Anglo-Boer War, the area was considered a good tonic for soldiers, and the town began to pay proper attention to its popularity with new bathing boxes, pavilions and a handsome new Edwardian railway station befitting its status. In 1911, the first aeroplane to deliver mail in South Africa made its maiden voyage to the postmaster at Muizenberg. The village was transformed.

Now, the sand and sea are as attractive as they were then, although the resort lost its premier status in the 1970s. It retains much of its village charm, and many of the historic buildings remain. However, a major attraction nowadays is the surfing: Muizenberg was recently voted one of the top 20 surfing towns by National Geographic. Considered a very long, mellow wave, and especially good for those learning to surf as well as for the long-boarding fraternity, it follows the traditions of being the birthplace of prone surfing on

wooden belly-boards in South Africa in 1910, and then the first stand-up surfing in 1919. It became so popular that the municipality hired out surfboards for a while. Mystery author Agatha Christie visited the beach in 1922, surfing in her green wool bathing suit. Famous Irish playwright and author George Bernard Shaw was photographed surfing at Muizenberg in 1932, at the age of 75!



The white sands of Muizenberg circa 1904.

Now, the town hosts an annual Earthwave event, an attempt to break the Guinness World Record for the most surfers riding one wave simultaneously.



Earthwave 2009, Muizenberg.

THE THREE DEGREES OF SURFING

G.B.S.'s INITIATION



Thanks to his habit of early rising, Mr George Bernard Shaw has the usually-crowded Muizenberg beach to himself for his initiation into the delights of surfing.

Armed with the first surf-board he has handled in his crowded seventy-five years of life, Mr Shaw poses for the photographer



A few minutes' practice, and he becomes as adept at the exhilarating sport as many of its younger devotees.

[We are indebted to the Cape Peninsula Publicity Association for the photographs on this page.]

G.B.S. originally intended to stay for only a fortnight in South Africa, but to such an extent did the attractions of the Cape Peninsula appeal to him that he delayed his departure for six weeks. He then motored along the Garden Route to Knysna, where the peaceful seclusion and delightful climate so fascinated him that he decided to stay in South Africa for a further month.

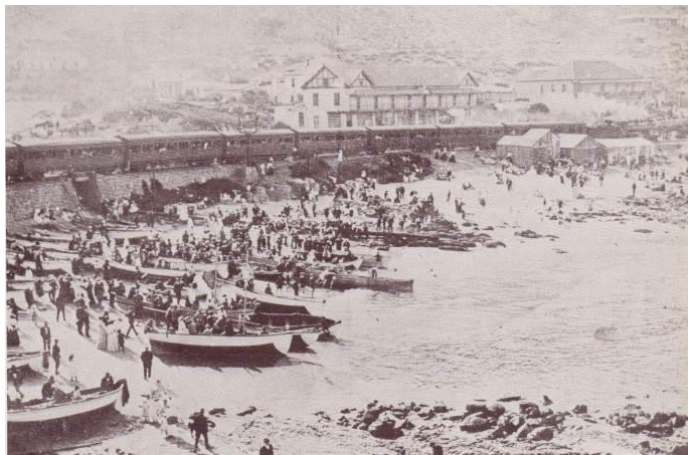
Moving south down the railway track, we pass St James. Initially, it formed part of Kalk Bay, and was largely uninhabited but for the 1858 erection of the Catholic Church of St James for the Filipino fishermen of the area, who otherwise had to travel all the way to Simon's Town (often by boat to avoid the road) to attend Catholic services. The area gradually became fashionable as the wealthy families of Cape Town bought property there – so much so that, by popular request, the railway authorities decided to build a railway station between Muizenberg and Kalk Bay. They selected the site upon which the church was built and, somewhat reluctantly, Father Duignan agreed to exchange the site for another, on condition that the station was named St James. And thus, the village gained a new identity. The sheltered pools made it popular, and by 1903, bathing boxes and a tidal pool were built at St James beach. The rock pools are now popular places to explore marine life; the tidal pool is especially popular among those with young children, and the bathing boxes are still in use, making for a particularly charming beachfront. It is also linked to Muizenberg via a magnificent walkway that is so close to the sea, it is frequently washed over by the waves and offers the perfect spot to view dolphins, whales and even sharks. The historic houses up the steep mountainside provide the backdrop, and include some of the original whaling cottages along Main Road.



The picturesque bathing boxes at St James beach.



Kalk Bay Fishery beach circa 1875, before the railway line bisected it. Note the whale oil vats in the foreground.



Fishery beach circa 1910, with the train passing before the breakwater.

Just down the line, Kalk Bay was known as the Brighton of the Cape in the mid-1800s. Its origins lie in fishing and whaling, with a significant Filipino community who settled there, joined by emancipated slaves. The fishing boats were hauled up on the sheltered Fishery beach. But when the railway line was extended to Fish Hoek, the railways built a stone viaduct straight through the centre of the beach, and many fishing boats were smashed against the posts at high tide or in stormy weather. This motivated the building of a breakwater and harbour infrastructure in 1919. The harbour became attractive in its own right for its colourful fish auctions and polyglot community, which until today forms the basis for harbour activity, especially when the snoek come in. But, as occurred up the line, the railways brought prosperity and change, and the community profile began to change as wealthy landowners moved in and leisure became a significant part of the local economy. Hotels and boarding houses became commonplace, sea

bathing became popular, and a pavilion (now part of the Brass Bell restaurant) and tidal pools were built. Kalk Bay still makes for an enjoyable day out: its historical charm and beauty remain largely intact, and fishing and tourism live side by side. Uniquely for Cape Town, the infamous Group Areas Act, which caused the removal of most of Cape Town's coloured and black communities to the harsh wasteland of the Cape Flats, never managed to remove the fishing community of Kalk Bay through local community action, which gives the area a wonderful multicultural flavour. Perhaps because of its long associations with the local fishing community, the Kalk Bay harbour beach (Fishery beach) has always been very popular with holidaymakers from the Cape Flats. It is accessible by rail and was a declared 'non-white' beach in terms of the then apartheid legislation – one of the very few along this coast. Vincent Cloete remembers how, on Boxing Day and New Year's and Second New Year's Day, many people would come from the Flats on the last night train at 01:00 to find the best spots on the beach. "When the first train arrived at 05:00, the stream would continue, and what a sight to see – mothers, fathers, three to five children, each carrying a bag, a tin, a paper bag, etc., all containing food, cool drinks, etc., also a blanket and some short poles in some cases to put up a shelter from the sun. Those that were early enough would tie up the ends of the blanket to the railway fence. Even at first light, the trains would arrive filled to

bursting point and people just spilled out in a mass."¹⁰ The highlights of the day were the boat rides: The fishing boats would be decked with bunting, the bigger boats would have space for musicians who would arrive back from what was then called the Coon Carnival (now the Cape Town Carnival), and the singing and dancing passengers would be taken out on short sea trips.



An early Kalk Bay harbour scene when the fish come in.

Next stop along the line is Fish Hoek, the last along the line to have 'grown up'. With its origins also in fishing and whaling, as its name implies, it was also important in the very early provisioning to the Simon's Town seafarers. The first land grant made included an unusual condition that there should be no public wine-house, that fishing should be free, and the beach open to the public. The first condition was to discourage seamen from delaying their return to ship by stopping at alehouses on the long journey back to Simon's Town from Cape Town, and from contributing to general lawlessness and possible mutiny. Long afterwards, when Fish Hoek had become a small village, the local community invoked this clause to prevent the granting of any liquor licences, and even to this day, Fish Hoek remains dry of liquor stores, although one can buy in restaurants (the infamous battle of the bottle)! During an early lull in the drinks battle, the conditions of the grant were invoked again in 1919, this time to protect the shoreline from subdivision. Although the case made by the community was not successful, they did ultimately manage to retain the beautiful long stretch of beach, which, together with Jager's Walk, makes for a splendid bathing and walking beach. The quicksands at Clovelly are still said to exist, but they pose no risk to travellers.

Simon's Town is the last stop along the line, in front of Long Beach, also one of the few beaches on the Peninsula designated 'non-white' during the apartheid era and still popular amongst "trek netters" (seine fishers) when the fish are running. From there, take the All Round Road, past Seaforth and the renowned Boulders Beach, where the penguins compete for beach space; past Miller's Point, with its campsite one of the Cape's best-kept secrets; the diving sites along the coast to Cape Point, and around past the settlements of Scarborough and Misty Cliffs (a great place to surf). And then, round into the Kommetjie-Noordhoek Valley. With a reputation for an alternative, laid-back lifestyle, this valley, set within the magnificent amphitheatre of the surrounding mountains, is the most recent of the

¹⁰ Cloete (2000) p 55.

South Peninsula to be developed. The farms of Imhoffs Gift (initially called Slangkop) and Noordhoek were granted in the mid-1700s to provide the ships of Simons' Town harbour with fresh provisions. Unfortunately, with farming no longer viable, its remote, rural charm is fast disappearing. But the bay is fringed by the 8 km stretch of Noordhoek beach and offers the best surfing conditions in South Africa, in environmentally pristine conditions. These include the world-renowned Long Beach and Outer Kom, where the surfing competitions are held; Sunset Beach, which provides some of the biggest rideable waves on the planet, and 365s at Soetwater, a break that is said to get 5° rounder than 360°! Truly magazine-cover territory.



HOBBS, G.

Noordhoek beach towards Kommetjie.



WAGENER, M.

Surfing against the backdrop of Chapman's Peak.

And so ends our journey along the beachfronts of the South Peninsula: Go for the ride.

Acknowledgements and disclaimer

The history of Cape Town's South Peninsula has been very ably and comprehensively recorded by many of its residents, and we wish to acknowledge and give thanks to all those quoted as references. These stories are intended for popular consumption, and the traditionally detailed referencing that would be expected of historical research was therefore not regarded as appropriate for this purpose. However, all references utilised have been listed.

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