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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Contents

9. Fishermen of the South Peninsula

(M. Attwell)

The story of the fishermen of the South Peninsula coastline has been one of a constant struggle to wrest a livelihood from the sea. Dangerous working conditions, fishing quotas, depletion of fishing stocks, the Group Areas Act, poverty and marginalisation, and competition from commercial fisheries were all part of their struggle.

Yet, few groups have contributed more to the historic growth and the development of the enduring character of the area, particularly at Kalk Bay, where the fishermen maintained a vibrant community. The Kalk Bay harbour is quite justly a focal point of the coastline. One of the great charms of a visit is to watch the fishing boats come into the picturesque harbour, accompanied by a great movement of seagulls.

The harbour and fishing boats of Kalk Bay

Some fishermen still working in False Bay can no longer afford to live along the coast, but commute. As fishing becomes more marginal, others have moved away and sought lives and opportunities elsewhere.

However, their enduring legacy lives on in the history of the area, the people who established and led the communities and, of course, the fishermen's tales of adventure and battles against the odds.

A visit to the South Peninsula is not complete without a visit to the Kalk Bay harbour to buy a snoek or another local fish fresh from the boats coming in from the sea, or to visit one of the local restaurants serving fish caught the same day. The South Peninsula's link with fishing is palpable and contributes to its character and sense of place.

The rich fishing grounds that existed in False Bay, Muizenberg, Kalk Bay and Fish Hoek were important in the history of the area. Kalk Bay had a sheltered inlet and was protected from the worst of the storms, so it was natural that a permanent fishing settlement and, later, a breakwater and a harbour should occur here, making it the centre of local fishing activities.

Transport was difficult beyond Kalk Bay until the late 19th century because of the steep and rock outcrop beyond Kalk Bay called 'Die Trappies' as well as the soft sands near the Silvermine river, where horses floundered. Goods were often transported to Simon's Town by boat from Kalk Bay.

The railway arrived in Kalk Bay in 1883, linking it more efficiently to Cape Town and allowing fish and other goods to be transported efficiently to the city centre. It also opened up the South Peninsula to early mass tourism and the growth in the residential holiday environment, which was ultimately to clash with the interests of the Kalk Bay fishermen.

The fish of False Bay

Fish formed the protein component of the local diet from pre-colonial times and for the fishermen until the 1940s. By then, commercial companies had made it difficult for local fishermen to compete, and fish stocks were beginning to show signs of depletion.

Historically, False Bay abounded in fish. Stompneus ('stumpnose') and red roman were very common, the latter to such an extent that Roman Rock was named after it. The explorer Robert Gordon wrote about trying to catch red roman on his journey along the False Bay coast in 1777 and 1778. The British military expert Colonel Robert Percival also documented an enthusiastic description of the variety of fish in the bay in 1812. He wrote: "All kinds of fish peculiar to the Cape are found in this Bay … many of them excellent and very agreeable to the palate. The most common is the Roman fish, so called from its being caught about the rock of that name; it is of a deep rose colour and of the perch kind. The other species of fish found here are the large Red and White Steen-brassen." He also noted the abundance of shellfish, with the shells used for the production of lime: "Muscles (sic), shrimps, sea nautilus and many others … The shells of these, with other marine productions, are often collected by the Colonists, to whom they afford the only kind of lime used here."

Indeed, the variety was endless. The galjoen was to be found close to the surf along the lee shores; the kabeljou (Cape cod) was to be found in warmer water, sometimes at Cape

Hangklip. Seasonal visitors included the steenbras, which came into the bay in the summer months, as did the yellowtail.

There was the snoek, a barracuda-like fish with dense flesh, which fed on pilchards in False Bay. The snoek was, and still is, extremely popular, forming the basis for vernacular dishes still made today. The snoek catch was important to the fishing community. At the opening of the snoek fishing season, the priests of the Catholic and Anglican church would conduct a ceremony to bless the fleet.

The processing of fish catches at Kalk Bay harbour.

Also present in the bay were the yellow-fin tuna and, of course, the sharks that fed off the seal population at Seal Island. Their menacing presence remains in False Bay beyond the breakers, at places such as Swartklip and Fish Hoek. Other sea visitors included the southern right whale, for which False Bay is justly famous, and dolphins.

Origins of the fishing activities in False Bay

Following Governor Simon van der Stel's trip along the False Bay coast in 1687, the Dutch East India Company's council of policy acceded to a petition to allow fishing in False Bay. Colonists took advantage of the opportunities in the rich fishing grounds. There was a shifting population of people along the coast, sometimes also including slaves who undertook fishing and shellfish gathering in the early years of the Cape.

The trade in fish between the False Bay coast and the Cape settlement resulted in increased wagon traffic, and the road from Cape Town to the coastline was improved. The instruction to use Simon's Town as winter anchorage in 1743 improved the routes between Cape Town and Kalk Bay, which, in turn, aided the trade in fish and lime. The sea harvest was not only needed locally, but large amounts were transported daily to meet the food requirements of Cape Town itself. By 1740, for example, two donkeys were kept at Fish Hoek specifically to carry back fresh fish to the governor at the Cape.

Fish Hoek has been known for its excellent fishing grounds since the Dutch East India Company times. In fact, it was named after that fact. Fishing at Fish Hoek was commercial and successful from the start. The wide beaches and tranquil bay allowed for trek netting (fishing with nets), which ensured good catches. Trek netting was also undertaken along the beach at Muizenberg, and Simon's Town had good access to the southern fishing banks, which gave rise to a fishing community in the town.

Fish Hoek was subject to a land grant in 1818, which allowed free access of fishermen to the coastline. A condition attached to this grant is still in force in its town planning requirements today. It was feared that the fishermen's love of a drink would attract public canteens to the area. Therefore, the grant conditions expressly forbade the presence of a public house in Fish Hoek. It stated that the grant holder was "not to keep a Public Winehouse, and that the right of Fishing shall be free as heretofore, and the strand itself open to the public". Today, there are still no pubs and liquor outlets in Fish Hoek.

COBERN, J.

Trek fishing on Fish Hoek beach, 1910.

The calm and generally wind-free waters of Kalk Bay were ideal for the landing of small boats. The harbour itself was built in 1917 only, although the fishermen had been using the shoreline to store, maintain and launch their fishing boats.

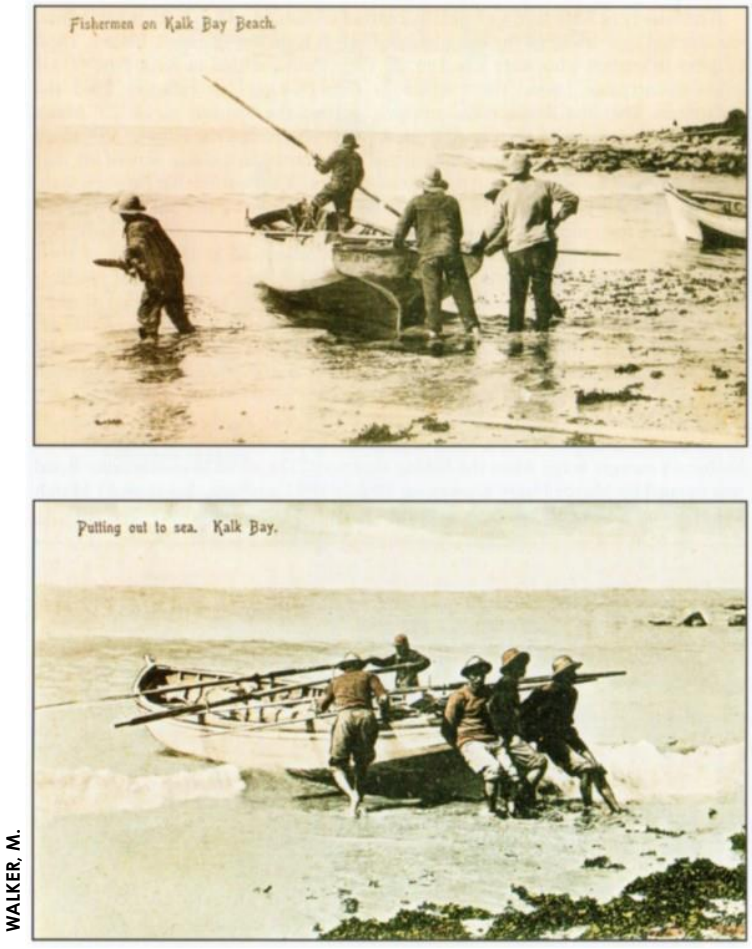
WESTERN CAPE ARCHIVES

Kalk Bay circa 1880, with the boats drawn up on the beach beyond the high-water mark.

Fishing

Pre-colonial and early colonial fish traps existed along the coastline. These allowed for the sea to wash fish into rock pools, where they were trapped when the tide went out, and harvested. Shellfish too were plentiful and the shells provided for lime, which was burnt along the coastline in kilns. The name 'Kalk Bay', previously known as 'Kalkhoven Bay', refers to the lime that was produced there.

Fishermen used lines for certain fish and nets on other occasions. They used boats to reach the fishing grounds in False Bay. Boats were small, varying in length between five and seven metres,[19] and open to the elements. When the weather was bad and going out to sea was not possible, the fishermen also undertook rock fishing. This was skilled work, and the Kalk Bay rock-fishermen were regarded as the finest in the Cape Colony.



Fishermen heading out to sea in small boats.

19 Walker (2010) p 16.

Beach and harbour circa 1900.

The Cape fishing beach boat was a favourite among the False Bay fishermen. Originally from Holland, they were manufactured in the then Cape Colony from the 1890s onwards. They were stout open boats with a large spritsail and jib. Generally, they carried five oars. They were heavy and, at the end of the day, had to be hauled up the beach by the fishermen. Once fishing boats with engines were introduced to the False Bay coast, it was inevitable that the days of the traditional Cape beach boat were over.

The Cape fishing beach boat, 1909.

Fish were plentiful, until trawlers began operating the bay from about 1906 and the delicate balance between fish stocks and fishing activities was upset. Tommy Carse, who wrote about the fishermen at Kalk Bay and collected their stories, was told that the trawlers "caught thousands and thousands of small fish and the fish banks were broken up". Without the mackerel and sardines, there were fewer large fish in the bay. Sometimes, frozen bait was used as a last resort, but a skipper called Jimmy Edwards[20] claimed that snoek did not really

20 Carse (1999) p 68.

like frozen sardine bait. When there were shoals of sardines, it was very easy to catch large numbers of snoek. He himself claimed to have caught 200 snoek in a single day when there was a large shoal of sardines in the bay.

The range of new fishing boats with engines was greater, and new, rich fishing banks were discovered off Cape Hangklip and in the very deep waters of False Bay. The fishermen gave these banks wonderful names, such as "the gold mines" and "honderd bos", meaning a fisherman could catch up to 100 bunches per person. The skippers would have knowledge of the banks and identify them using a personal set of landmarks.

Fishing in a bay known for tempestuous seas and sudden changes in weather was dangerous work. Tommy Carse was told by an old Filipino fisherman called Tom Eustasquio Fernandez of a sudden storm and two boats that were in mortal danger on the same day. The story he told sums up the skill and courage of the fishermen and the dangers they faced on the sea.

Fernandez was fishing beyond the breakers at Muizenberg, with the sea "as calm as bath water", when the conditions suddenly changed, and soon the waves were as "big as houses". He and the crew rowed out to sea to escape the worst of the waves, but could soon see they needed to use all their strength to get to the safety of Kalk Bay: "As we arrived at Kalk Bay, I took my chance and when I saw an opening in the rocks, I gave the order to row for all we were worth for the gap. A number of other boats in the Bay made it to safety. The [boat] Palestine was less fortunate. It capsized and washed upon Danger Beach. The skipper, Ballie Gomez, and his crew were fortunately strong swimmers and after struggling with the huge waves, made it to shore."

The second boat was seen helpless drifting in the bay. Fernandez and a skipper called Andrew Francis and five other men set out to sea in a light fishing boat, despite the pleas of the assembled crowds. They manoeuvred the boat towards Fish Hoek in the face of enormous waves towards the two men. Fernandez said: "I will never forget the defenceless expressions on the faces of the two half frozen men." The men were rescued thanks to the bravery and skill of their fellow fishermen.

The fishermen

Historically, the fishermen of the False Bay coast were culturally mixed and polyglot. There was a racial and class hierarchy: The skippers were generally European, while the fishermen themselves were composed of many people from different parts of the globe. There were Malaysians, Javanese, Filipino, Madagascan and the local fishermen of the South Peninsula, some of whom were descended from freed slaves.

Many had decades of experience and were skilled fishermen. All depended on the sea for their livelihood. Very often, the boats were owned by the local Europeans, who built up crews of local fishermen and allocated them a share of the catch.

The life of a fisherman was hard and dangerous. Medical records show that the hard physical labour took its toll, and many suffered from heart and severe back conditions caused by the hard physical labour of hauling heavy boats above the high-water mark. Some boats weighed as much as 900 kg and had to be hauled up over the beach at Kalk Bay at the end

of a day's fishing. Such work would require the combined strength of 16 men.[21] The boats also required sand ballast, which had to be collected on the beaches and hauled to the boats. The fishermen's lives were made more difficult when the railway line viaduct was built across the shoreline, and they were not able to haul all the boats through the narrow arches. Their problems were mitigated to some extent by the building of the breakwater and harbour facilities at the Point in the period 1917-1919. Land and fish trading activities transferred themselves to the harbour, where they have remained to this day.

Gradually, the fishermen, the early settlers of Kalk Bay and the surrounding areas, gave way to shopkeepers, traders and, eventually, people who visited for recreational purposes. The coastline became a holiday destination with hotels and holiday residences. The fishermen were increasingly marginalised. This process accelerated when the popularity of Muizenberg, St James and Kalk Bay as holiday destinations increased during the 1920s and 1930s.

Today, fishing at Kalk Bay has a strong recreational aspect, and men and their sons (and women!) can be seen along the breakwater at weekends with a hook and line or a fishing rod, enjoying a sense of connection with the sea.

Professional fishermen today, Kalk Bay harbour.

Founders of the fishing industry: the Filipino fishermen of Kalk Bay

Filipino fishermen were the first to establish a permanent fishing settlement, at Kalk Bay. They were skilled fishermen using small rowboats, sometimes under extremely adverse conditions. Their presence in Kalk Bay is muted now, but lives on in the presence of the Catholic church and an overgrown graveyard on the hill slopes.

Their origins are mysterious. It is assumed they were shipwrecked or were deserters of ships arriving at the Cape. Whatever the original motivation, they established a strong presence at Kalk Bay in the 19th century and made a significant contribution to the skills base of the fishing industry. They showed fishermen how to preserve their lines using blood, and how to attract snoek using dried shark skin as bait.

One of the first fishermen at Kalk Bay was Felix Florez, who became a trader and encouraged other Filipino fishermen to join him. Others who arrived were Filipinos from passing ships, and possibly those fleeing an uprising in the Philippines in 1872. Names such as Fernandez, De la Cruz and Pepino show how the Filipino identity became part of the identity

21 Walker (2010) p 16.

of Kalk Bay. They married into the local community and, while some returned to the Philippines, many stayed and established deep roots in the fishing community. Eighty years after they had settled in Kalk Bay, elements of the Filipino dialect and vocabulary were still present. By 1900, there were few Filipinos in Kalk Bay, and those who remained married into the coloured fishing community. They suffered from the same marginalisation and discrimination that others did.

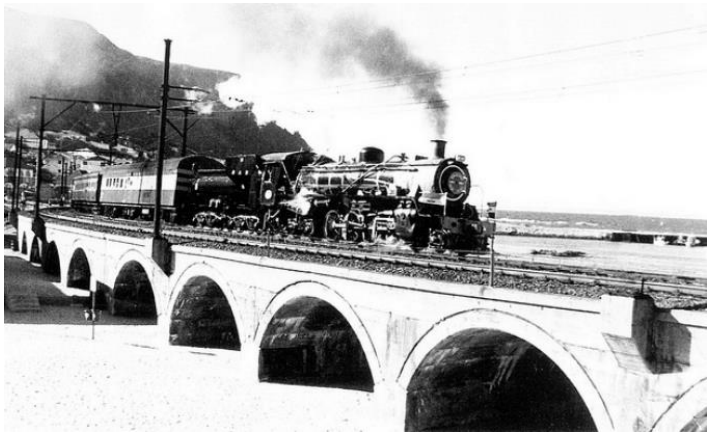
The Filipino community and Father Duignan

The Filipino community was devoutly Catholic, and their settlement at Kalk Bay began a long association with the St James Catholic Church and their mentor, Father Duignan. Father Duignan was an Irish Catholic priest who served the Catholic community of Kalk Bay. He established a strong bond with the Filipino fishermen and became their champion and mentor. He learned the Filipino dialect of the Spanish language in order to minister to the community. He encouraged their education and established a mission school. He also built the St James Catholic Church in 1900 with the proceeds of the sale of the first Catholic church when this land was acquired by the railways.

Father Duignan was a tireless worker in the building of the church together with his Filipino work force. He sourced the sandstone behind the new church and would set out with his horse, helping to bring the stone down together with his many Filipino helpers. Father Duignan was a formidable figure in Kalk Bay. He was devoted to his horse called Bessie, with each succeeding horse having the same name.

The loss of residential rights: Apartheid, the Slums Act and the Group Areas Act

By the late 19th century, the fishermen faced another battle – this time, on land and for the right to live near the harbour. The South Peninsula coastline was becoming a popular recreational and holiday destination. The area was easily accessed by rail. Day trippers were followed by those establishing holiday homes. Given the economic class and racial stratification of the Cape, it was inevitable that the fishermen would struggle to maintain their economic foothold and their homes along the coast.



The impact of the railways: A steam train over the Kalk Bay viaduct, date unknown but probably mid-20th century.

Like nearly all other areas in the country at the time, Kalk Bay was a community segregated by race and class. Such differences increased as property value increased and the fishermen became poorer. The fishing community found itself in a difficult situation, as most lived in rented accommodation and rent went up. Most lived at "Die Land", south of Clairvaux Road, in corrugated-iron houses on the mountain slopes. They lived in poor conditions, as services were minimal to non-existent. Washing was

undertaken at the wash house near "Die Dam". Conditions were overcrowded because of the small size of the housing stock.

Several buildings in the area were declared slums in the 1930s, but not the whole area. This was fortunate, as "Die Land" was viewed as valuable land and eminently developable.

Kalk Bay harbour, with the fishermen's flats on "Die Dam" in the distance.

The city engineer who was involved in slum clearance elsewhere in Cape Town wished to remove the fishermen from "Die Land" and resettle them at new municipal housing at Steenberg. The public, the media and the fishing community resisted this proposal, however. The Housing and Slum Clearance Committee, faced with general concerns and objections, recognised the fishermen's historical links to Kalk Bay and decided against the removal.

Instead, in 1938, the city council decided that new accommodation should be built on "Die Land" for the fishermen. This is the origin of the fishermen's flats. The flats are now something of a landmark when viewed against the mountains in Kalk Bay. Apart from one remaining cottage, all houses on "Die Land" were demolished and replaced by flats. There are 54 flats in total.

The Group Areas Act posed a further threat to the fishermen presence in the 1950s. The fishermen were classified as coloured, and Kalk Bay was proclaimed a white group area in 1967. People of colour, who were no longer allowed to live in the area, were given a year to find alternative accommodation. As a result of protests and negotiations, there was a partial reprieve, most notably for the fishermen's flats. Others were not so fortunate: Fishermen living close to the wash house near "Die Dam" were affected and had to move away. Bohlin[22] estimates that before the rescinding of the proclamation, about 120 people were forced to leave Kalk Bay as a result of racial classification. This amounted to about 25% of the fishing community at the time – an enormous loss to such a tight-knit community.

Today, a few fishermen still live in Kalk Bay. Their livelihood is further threatened by diminishing fish stocks and a recent controversial decision by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Sea Fisheries to withhold fishing licences to long-established crews. [23] Their contribution to the history, character and economy of the South Peninsula, however, remains undimmed.

22 Bohlin (2000) p 109.

23 The decision is currently the subject of negotiations.

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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