



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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10. Explorers of the South Peninsula

(K. Dugmore Ström)

First encounters

The Cape's South Peninsula calls out for exploration. The peninsula can be awe-inspiring, with crashing waves and precipitous cliffs. It also offers gentler nooks, like the quiet beaches at Boulders, or the soft, fynbos-clad uplands. Hiking the many paths of the peninsula to enjoy stunning views and the very special fauna and flora is a fine getaway; a voyage of personal discovery that locals and tourists alike regularly enjoy. The mountains are the favourite haunt of hikers. Each attests to the joys of their own preferred routes.

One specialty that has long lured hikers looking for something a bit thrilling is the series of caves to which the mountains play host. Peers Cave in Fish Hoek is one such cave. A popular hiker's destination, it also provides an imaginative linkage back to man's ancient roots. The exact age of human remains found at Peers Cave is uncertain, but around 12 000 years is given as a good enough estimate (some say far older). The cave can be reached by eager hikers willing to take on one of two routes, both involving some tough leg-work in places. One is the road more travelled; the other meant for "aficionados". Those who enjoy Peers Cave can use it as a door into discovery of other peninsula caves. Over 100 caves, some very small, some more voluminous, and many tunnels are to be found tucked and twisted into the cliffs.



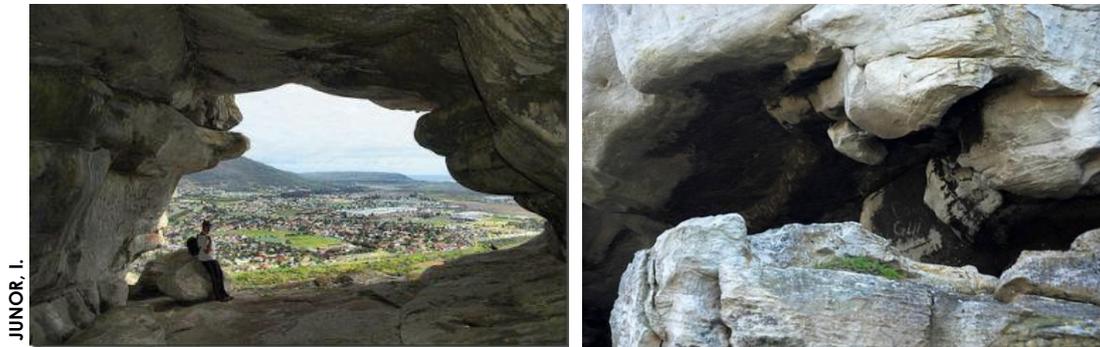
A 'caver' emerging from a cave tunnel in Kalk Bay. Recreational caving is a popular activity in the South Peninsula, but should be done with a guide (contact the Cape Peninsula Speleological Society (CPSS)).

... and first explorers

The Peninsula's cave system was known to our early human ancestors as one of the more hospitable natural features of the area. In its own way, the peninsula had Eden-like qualities for early humans. The ocean offered abundant food in protein form, supplemented by small animals, such as rodents and buck on land, while plants offered many edible bulbs, roots, leaves and fruit found in the fynbos ecosystem.

Archaeologists are not entirely in agreement on how long the peninsula had been inhabited when it came into the ambit of sea-faring explorers from the Mediterranean countries. Vasco da Gama on rounding the Cape of Good Hope in 1497 was likely more intent on looking out for dangerous rocks than for local people as he sailed past the sites of today's hamlets of Misty Cliffs and Scarborough. But the fact that he didn't report seeing locals there doesn't mean there weren't locals who saw his ships go by! First-hand reports from early sailors tell of meetings between locals and sailors from the earliest days of European navigation in the peninsula environs, circa 1500 and onwards. Jan van Riebeeck's journals established his party's contact with locals who called the Fish Hoek valley their home in 1659.

Van Riebeeck's search party reported finding a settlement of three reed huts, the typical movable dwellings of the Khoikhoi people, whom the Europeans then called "Hottentots" (the preferred self-given name for Cape natives is Khoikhoi, which is in common use today). Van Riebeeck's search party reported that they had "come upon the encampment of three reed huts, in which were 18 able-bodied men, in addition to approximately the same number of women and children".²⁴



Peers Cave is an exciting day hike. The beautiful view outwards from the cave encompasses the town of Kommetjie: Palaeolithic-era people would have enjoyed the same view, without the buildings! Right: Entry to the cave. The cave's links to ancient history were established by an amateur father/son team by the name of Peers, 1926/7.

²⁴ Rosenthal (1968).

Food would have been the primary reason for the Cape region's locals from the earliest times to move about the peninsula mountains. The natives encountered by the first European settlers in the 1500s to 1600s lived partly off the area's abundant seafood supply and the offerings of the veld, but they were also cattle herders who migrated for pasture with their



The interior of Peers Cave. The cave provided a draught-free, cosy and capacious natural living room.

animals. In their meanderings with their herds, they became the Cape region's first known explorers of over-mountain routes. The craggy mountainous territory of the peninsula is not easy travel terrain, and they became skilled in using oxen both as pack animals and, occasionally, as mounts. But, generally, they travelled on foot. The routes that many current roadways follow were long ago pastoralists' migration paths.

Mountain men (and women) of the Cape Peninsula



Portion of map of part of the South Peninsula. Early routes, including smaller mountain throughways, were carefully mapped. By Cornelis van der Graaff (Barbier, Thibault and Van der Graaff) 1786.

In contrast to the Khoikhoi explorers, who walked the peninsula to make the most of what their world offered them, using many of the old Khoikhoi routes is a leisure pursuit for today's walkers and climbers. Recreational exploration of the mountains of the Cape Peninsula became an official pastime with the founding of the Mountain Club of South Africa in 1891. Initially, the eponymous "Mountain" in the club's name referred principally to their main focus of exploration – Table

Mountain itself. As the years passed, however, Mountain Club luminaries from time to time found their rock-face yearnings directed southwards towards the peninsula mountains. Today, rock climbing is a very popular sport in the South Peninsula, with the slopes of Muizenberg, Silvermine and Elsie's Peak being favoured spots or, in rock-climber speak, 'climbing venues'. The sport started out as primarily a male preserve, but from early on, and increasingly over the years, women have held their own on the rock faces.

Mountain climbing is a sport that venerates 'firsts' – new climbs in the Peninsula mountain chain continue to be opened, whilst the names of achievers of the past, such as one George Travers-Jackson, are regularly celebrated in local climbing lore, not least the excellent *Mountain Club Journal*. Travers-Jackson started rock climbing as a boy in the early 1890s – by 1907, he had opened over 50 climbing routes in the Cape mountain ranges. This incredible feat is still lauded today, especially as the equipment available at the time was rudimentary, with hemp ropes liable to fraying. John Yeld, writing for the *Independent News* in 2011, had this to say about Travers-Jackson: "Not everyone described as 'a legend' is always deserving of the honour, but one figure who definitely qualifies for the moniker of rock climbing legend is George Travers-Jackson, whose extraordinary exploits on Table Mountain in the late 19th and early 20th centuries are still admired today."²⁵

Exploring the Cape Peninsula on foot always offers the rewards of superb mountain and sea scenery: Mountains provide elevation, and elevation provides opportunities for broad, expansive views. At certain points, it is possible to see 50 m out to sea from the Cape's 200 m high cliffs. The horizon is ever-present on the island-like peninsula. Certain vantage points have their own draw, and visiting viewpoints with timeless genius loci is a means for us to feel connected to people down the ages, staring out into the ageless seas, where once were to be seen the wooden vessels of the passing Portuguese, and where we now watch container ships heave by.



The beach at Millers Point, with False Bay and its encircling mountains beyond.

²⁵ <http://www.iol.co.za/scitech/science/environment/adventure-and-terror-on-the-mountain>.



View of the Cape of Good Hope (not Cape Point!) from the cliffs at Cape Point, showing the rocky headland of the Cape of Good Hope enclosing the one end of Dias Beach.



GIANLUIGI GUERCIA

View from Chapman's Peak Road over Hout Bay towards Hout Bay harbour, with the harbour shrouded in mist.

Seafarers and ship-watchers

The distant horizon is an ever-present holding curve from any beach or mountain on the island-like Cape Peninsula. For a local Khoikhoi gathering shellfish on the shores of the Cape's South Peninsula some 500 years ago, in about 1500, the sighting of a ship on that horizon would have been exciting and worth noting, but at the same time, such a sighting would have become a fairly common experience – a far more likely event to witness than it would have been for his grandfather 50 years previously. The European ships of 500 years ago would have been unlikely to be making shore – although navigation was a rather imprecise science, and they very often came aground without intending to – in which case meeting a hunter-gatherer was a more appealing prospect than meeting with the ocean's floor.

Arrival by boat was certainly foreign in the world of the Khoikhoi – they were not a sea-faring people themselves. For these Khoikhoi of the Cape, the sight of a ship likely provoked both opportunity and anxiety. Sailing ships soon came to be associated with trade. Sailors sometimes bartered items such as cloth, coin and beads for cattle in a friendly manner. But the sight may well have also generated fear. Some sailors were thugs, known to seize cattle, sometimes with violence. Sailors also came to regard the pastoralists with alarm, since locals had shown their ability to fight back attack fiercely. Several well-documented accounts of clashes gained legendary status amongst the sailing fraternity on the Europe-to-India shipping run.



Carrack of the India Armada of 1507. 'Carrack' was the name given to merchant ships sailed by Mediterranean countries during the 1500s and 1600s.

The earliest vessels that rounded the Cape tended to stay within sight of land. The route of a sailing vessel has always been reliant on wind conditions. The exact route past the Cape of Good Hope and the distance from the shore varied for each voyage. Ships that sailed too far into the south, away from the Cape landmass, could meet with heavy winds, or alternatively become becalmed. These more dangerous seas to the south became popular in the 1800s. This was named the 'clipper route', after the clipper ships that were built to sail with the strong winds that ran from east to west – the 'roaring forties'. By the 1850s, the clipper route, the speediest link between Asia and the European markets, was popular, but it did not replace shipping on the safer, more coast-hugging route of the earlier years. The clipper route is still used today by recreational sailors, and provides exciting yacht-racing opportunities.



"Massacre of Viceroy Francisco d'Almeida, 1510" by Angus McBride, 1984.

In the period 1500-1510, ships passing the Cape of Good Hope numbered around 15 a year, hailing mainly from Portugal, as excellent documentation kept by Portuguese authorities of the times tells us. Over the centuries, the Portuguese ships were supplemented and, eventually, replaced by Spanish, Dutch and English ships, as this sea-highway route to India via the land of the Khoikhoi and Xhosa grew busier and busier.



1635 map titled "Aethiopia Inferior, vel Exterior" by cartographers Willem & Jan Blaeu.



The 1507 world map by Martin Waldseemüller is considered to be one of the world's most important maps. For the first time, this map, labelled "America", showed the continent as a separate land mass. The map is often referred to as America's 'birth certificate'. Yet, for all the importance of the discovery of the Americas, the map-maker gave the Cape point of Africa the place of greatest visual prominence in his depiction.

The Cape of Good Hope occupied the imagination of global explorers and traders, both European and Asian, and their financiers for many generations. The 1507 world map by Martin Waldseemüller (depicted above) is poetically and practically illustrative of the importance of this southern point of Africa. Note how the map-maker placed the Cape of Good Hope as the major obstacle to reaching the Indies. An apt name for this map might be 'Renaissance MONOPOLY', as in the board game: The map could be the board game, where the Cape takes on the status of a place of significance in the game of life of the sailor or trader. The map duly emphasises the importance of the Cape of Good Hope, as it is the only landmass significant enough to break the map's beautiful decorative border.

Sailors used the point known as "the Cape of Good Hope" as a waymarker on the route to India. The Cape marked, for sailors, the position at sea where ships had to shift their course from southerly to a more easterly direction to make for Africa's east coast. Ships that missed this 'turn' could find themselves swept into the Indian or southern oceans, on course for Australia or the Antarctic. Thus, early ships sailed, for the most part, within view of land around the Cape's rocky shores. By choice, rounding of the Cape was done in daylight hours to have clear view of the coast and to avoid associated dangerous off-shore rocks. Africa's underwater continental shelf stretches way south of the Cape, with rocky outcrops with which early sailors only slowly became familiar during early years of the trade routes. With daylight sailing within view of the coast the norm, landings on the peninsula were uncommon during the first 160 years of this shipping run (known as *Carreira da Índia*, or 'the India run'). The pastoralists of the craggy Cape and passing sailors knew each other mainly by far-off sight.

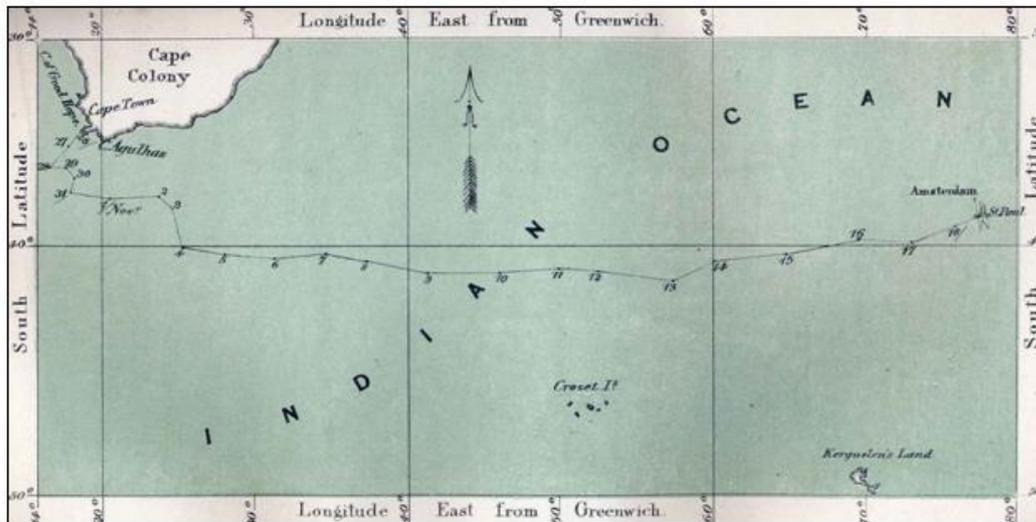
Meeting up

Meetings between natives of the Cape and the passing Europeans remained occasional, until Jan van Riebeeck and his party famously decided, on the instructions of their Dutch overlords, to up the status of Dutch use of the Cape from an occasional place to run aground whilst passing, to permanent refreshment station. The status of Van Riebeeck and his party went up accordingly, and they became explorer-discoverers, often called 'founders' in the annals of history. They joined the indigenous inhabitants of the Cape as new settlers. Van Riebeeck and his party declared themselves the de facto rulers of a geographically indeterminate territory. Once landed and settled, Van Riebeeck and his party soon wished to understand their surrounds better, and so began the first of many generations of exploration of Africa from the southern point landwards to the north, east and west.

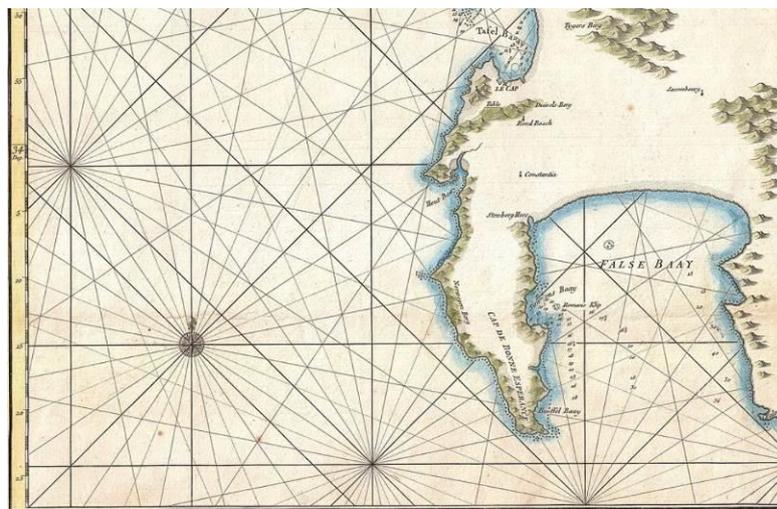
Van Riebeeck and his party had been instructed to set up not as a colony, but as a kind of independent Dutch supply station to provide food for passing ships. As the meat they hoped to supply came from the locals' sheep and cattle herds, cultivating good relationships with the Khoikhoi tribes-people was essential: Van Riebeeck's men were soon bartering, if not on friendly terms, with the locals, whom they called Hottentots ("Hottentotten"). One hundred years later, these two groups of people were to be found living as uneasy neighbours, agriculturalists in a small world, still with no boundaries, but taking its name from the dramatic 'Cape' that marked it in the seafarer's mind. By 1757, the so-called Hottentots and the varied Europeans who went under the name 'Dutch' (because they worked for the Dutch East India Company) lived in a fragile truce. The naming of a map of the area in 1757 as "Das Land Der Hottentotten" ('The land of the Hottentots') illustrates and recognises that, at least in the minds of some, the Dutch were still the interlopers. Yet, these two groupings also often joined forces to set out and explore the interior of Africa, including the roads and paths that linked the main town of Cape Town to the Cape of Good Hope.



Charles Bell (1813-1882): Imaginary painting of Jan van Riebeeck and company's arrival in Table Bay in April 1652. Bell was probably adequately familiar with the appearance of the locals, whose descendants were still to be found amongst the people of Cape Town in the 1800s, to have attempted to draw up this relatively peaceful scene – which centralises the Dutch group and fades in the locals as part of a 'backdrop'. This emphasises the former's role as the 'explorers'. A current world view that favours being 'at one' with the environment is more likely to be



Portion of Map, 1857. "From the Cape of Good Hope to St Pauls Island", Plate IV from the Narrative of the Circumnavigation of the globe by the Austrian Frigate Novara, In the Years 1857, 1858 & 1859. Volume 1, by Karl Ritter von Scherzer, E-book, 2011 (EBook#38456) Produced by T. Kontowski & H Gardiner. The sea route shown is the southerly route, named the "Clipper route".



1775 Manneville Map of the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa. This portion of the map shows the South Peninsula in its ocean context, the shore reduced to outline, and the peninsula a place defined mostly by its coast – the interior a 'blank' in the mind of the map-maker. It also emphasises the relatively 'green' (read: lush) nature of the peninsula, alongside the sandy Cape flats.

Making maps

With the coast of Simon's Bay mapped repeatedly from the time of earliest colonial settlement,²⁶ False Bay came increasingly to the fore as an area of special interest for explorers and mappers after the Dutch suffered losses in the Table Bay harbour, and started serious enquiries into the likelihood of anchoring elsewhere in winter months. By the late 17th century, there was a growing concern in Dutch East India Company circles about the lack of information available regarding False Bay, and efforts to map the area grew in intensity. Because a great number of ships belonging to the Company were wrecked during the worst storms each winter at the established Table Bay anchorage, correspondence about finding an alternative winter port increased. Consequently, Governor Simon van der Stel was ordered to explore the coastal edges of False Bay and to survey the bay itself. A number of expeditions were launched, the first of which was in 1682, with few results. A similarly ineffective attempt followed in 1683.

In 1687, Van der Stel accomplished the detailed survey of False Bay that the Company really wanted. The investigation had an added purpose beyond seeking anchorage. Since the slave population of the colony had increased, it was now determined that the Governor should ascertain the availability of fish that could be supplied for slaves. The survey that Van der Stel then instigated is considered to be a highly distinctive investigation for its time. Van der Stel personally oversaw the taking of soundings to establish the depth of the seabed at many points in False Bay. The expedition also ventured into several small bays along the False Bay coast. At today's Kalk Bay, Van der Stel noted that he found suitable agricultural soil and enough fresh water and firewood available for ships to consider anchoring there. The investigation of Ysselsteyn Bay, later known as Simon's Bay, showed that a number of ships would be able to lie at anchor there, safely sheltered from the southeasters. The expedition also determined positions of several large rocks in the bay (including the distinctive 'Noah's Ark' off today's Simon's Town). On their last stop before leaving the bay, the expedition party came across what is today called Seal Island (and was known as Malegaseneiland in the 18th century).

Upon returning to the Castle, Van der Stel plotted a comprehensive map of his findings. The mapping of the geography of False Bay contributed greatly to safe passage for boats in False Bay. However, only after some 80 years had passed, and many more shipwrecks littered Table Bay, did the Dutch East India Company eventually really take Van der Stel's work to heart, declaring Simon's Town as the Company's official winter anchorage. The year was 1742.

²⁶ The mapping of False Bay is comprehensively described in Bekker (1987).

The Gordon chronicles

Van der Stel's first-rate work on exploring the geography of False Bay was elaborated on some 110 years later by another remarkable map-maker, the explorer Robert Jacob Gordon. Gordon's working life is a tale that starts on a high note and ends on a low note. Both the start of his outstanding career as Southern Africa's greatest early explorer and his tragic death by suicide are inextricably woven into the Cape's South Peninsula narrative. His first exploratory effort in Southern Africa was a journey over the mountains of the peninsula, while events focused on the peninsula later led to his untimely death.

Gordon left for posterity extraordinary mapping, illustrations and journal records of his extensive travels, ranging from Cape Point in the south, out far into the north, east and west of what was then uncharted territory. His view of the False Bay coastline from vantage at sea ("Depiction of Simon's Bay and Surrounds in 1777") is a hugely comprehensive visual aid to providing us today with an impression of what this coast was like 237 years ago. The drawing is highly accurate, as were all Gordon's efforts, and the information is further enhanced by many notations in Gordon's own handwriting. Simon's Town Museum has a large black-and-white copy. The copy should be supplemented by an even larger-scale colour copy, which could do justice to the artistry and interest of what is simultaneously a scientific study and a work of art.



Small portion of Robert Jacob Gordon's panoramic view of the coastline of False Bay from the sea, 1777.

Robert Gordon first arrived at the Cape in 1772. In 1773, he undertook with two others the first of his six 'journeys' – a hiking trip over the mountains from Cape Town to False Bay. On this journey, he displayed his remarkable facility for engaging with locals. By the time he returned to Europe in late 1773, he had learned to converse ably in the language he called "Hottentot". He was later to become fluent in more than one Hottentot dialect, and to learn Xhosa, alongside his fluent Dutch, German and English.

While the world of the Cape Colony became under its British rulers a world of many nations ruled by a far-away British king, and the notion of 'Britishness' increasingly came to the fore in social relations at the Cape after the 1795 Battle of Muizenberg, with Great Britain tellingly called the 'mother country', Gordon was made of different material. Gordon's mixed background, Scottish and Dutch, clearly had a formative effect on him, and may well have established within him the ability to traverse and understand many societies he encountered on his travels as equals. He danced with the Xhosa, sang their songs, and taught them his songs and dances in return.

In his easy manner of mixing with and learning from people who were enormously different from himself, Gordon was a non-conformist for his times, presaging the kind of racial accord that has only really started to find a firm hold in the Cape since the democratic elections in South Africa in 1994. Gordon was not alone in his curious, non-antagonistic attitude to the natives of the land that Europeans colonised. Other examples can be found, for instance, in the early years of settlement in India. Notably, in all these cases, sceptics raise the question of whether socialising across the usually antagonistic racial divide was a more sophisticated method for learning the ways of the locals, the better to exploit them.

Motivations

The varied companies set up during what is now called 'the Early Modern Age', from 1400 onwards, to ply the trade from Europe into the vastness of the world beyond, clearly had the aim of making money. The Europe from where the travellers set out was not the Europe of today. More than 90% of people in 16th-century Europe would be judged by today's standards as devastatingly 'poor'. But escape from poverty may have been only one motive. Like many people today, weary of bad tidings that overwhelm us in the media daily, tired of the antics of politicians, academics, journalists, experts and a good sprinkling of charlatans, they may have felt the urge to leave wars, catastrophes, deadly diseases, disasters and boredom behind.

In our time, travel and tourism are a means of balancing life's extremes of pleasure and excitement. The 'Cape of Storms' – once legendary as a place to be feared – is now an exhilarating form of leisure. Where sailors once made profit from pepper, cinnamon and other spices, it is now possible for seafarers to make a living out of sharing their skills with others.

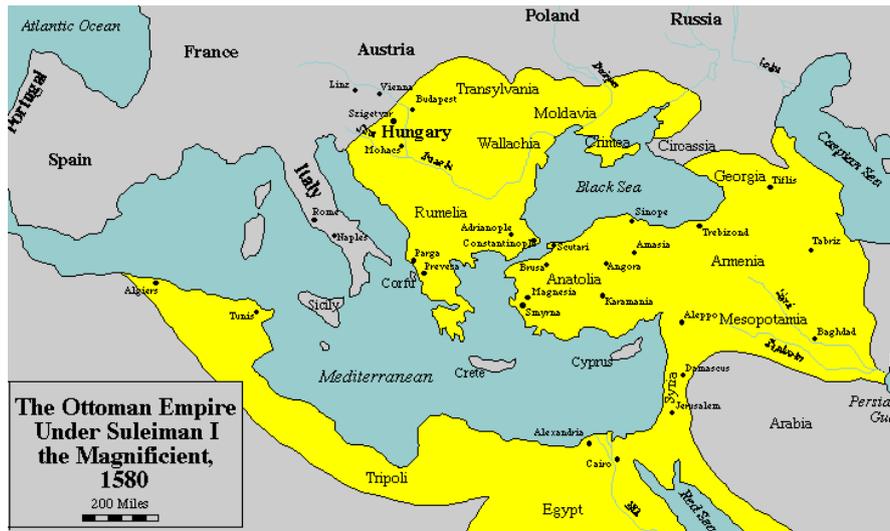
In their marketing material, Night Jar Travel Guides tell us: "Despite its harsh reputation among early navigators as a 'Cape of Storms', the Cape of Good Hope is also a place of gentleness, tranquillity and alluring beauty. In 1580, Sir Frances Drake proclaimed Cape Point



Rounding the Cape of Good Hope on a calm day.

to be 'the fairest Cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earth'. Few people have argued with that statement, and there is something profoundly humbling about being out in the wide-open Atlantic Ocean on a small sit-inside kayak, dwarfed by the cliffs of Cape Point and surrounded by an abundance of sea life. In order to do this paddle, the weather has to be close to perfect – clear and bright with hardly a breath of wind."

The world has altered drastically since the armadas set out to find a way out of the impasse caused by the stranglehold on world trade caused by the Ottoman empire's total control of the eastern Mediterranean. By 1400, anyone in Europe who had no Ottoman friends started to suffer from a drying up of business opportunities that they had become used to enjoying the profits of 'the old Spice Route'. They also missed the products – spices, unguents, fine fabrics – that this trade had brought. It is strange to think that the events at the far north of Africa wrought such great changes for those at its southern tip.



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. It is the duty of the City of Cape Town to sort and verify copyright issues.

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