



# Green Point Common



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The area of Green Point Common was home to Stone Age hunter-gatherers for millennia. Early callers at the Cape referred to these people as 'Bushmen' or 'Sonqua' but they are known more respectfully today as the San.

Then around two thousand years ago Khoekhoen pastoral herders migrated to the Western Cape in search of grazing and assured sources of water for their herds of sheep and cattle. The area of Green Point Common was one of their main summer grazing and camping sites for generations before Dutch and English ships began to arrive regularly at the Cape in the early 1600s.



Iziko Museums

When the Dutch East India Company established a refreshment station at the Cape in 1652, competition for grazing soon became a source of conflict between the settlers and Khoekhoen. Increasingly the Khoekhoen were excluded from their ancestral land - taken over first as grazing for the herds of the Dutch East India Company and then as commonage for the livestock of a growing number of Cape Town residents and occasional visitors from the hinterland.

Meanwhile Green Point remained a generally wild and unsettled place. Nowhere is this better evidenced than in the journal entry of first Commander Jan van Riebeeck for 30 August 1659. Here it is recorded that a soldier, Louijs Labé, had been granted permission to, 'catch some rock-fish along the shore below the dunes at the foot of the Lion Mountain', and having gone missing was presumed lost. Then on 12 September the journal records:

*Today the clothing skull and various bones of the soldier given up for lost on the 30th of last month were found at the extremity of the Lion Mountain about 30 roods from the beach. The cranium was half bitten off, so it is presumed that he was devoured by a lion.*



Extinct Cape Lion (*Panthera leo melanochaitus*) drawn by Dutch artist Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. c.1650-52 Louvre, Paris

## Green Point Common Urban Park



You are here

Green Point Common remained grazing land into the 19th century even as the Atlantic seaboard suburbs developed around it. The two most important stimuli leading to development along this side of the peninsula were the provision of a dependable supply of water to individual homes in 1862 (from springs that rose in the 'Glen' above Camps Bay) and the establishment of a regular public transport link in the form of a tramway service, also in 1862. The Cape Argus newspaper at that time remarked:

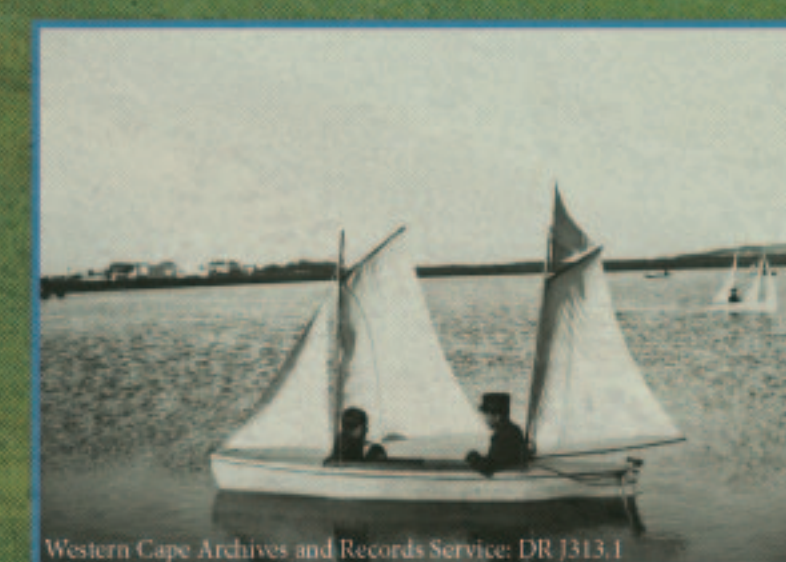
*If the tramway company is worked the way it ought to be, it will be the means of doubling the population of Green Point in three years...Green Point will be to Cape Town what Brighton is to London.*

This proved to be the case as it became both cost and time effective for people of more modest incomes to settle in the shadow of Lion Mountain and still commute to work in Cape Town.



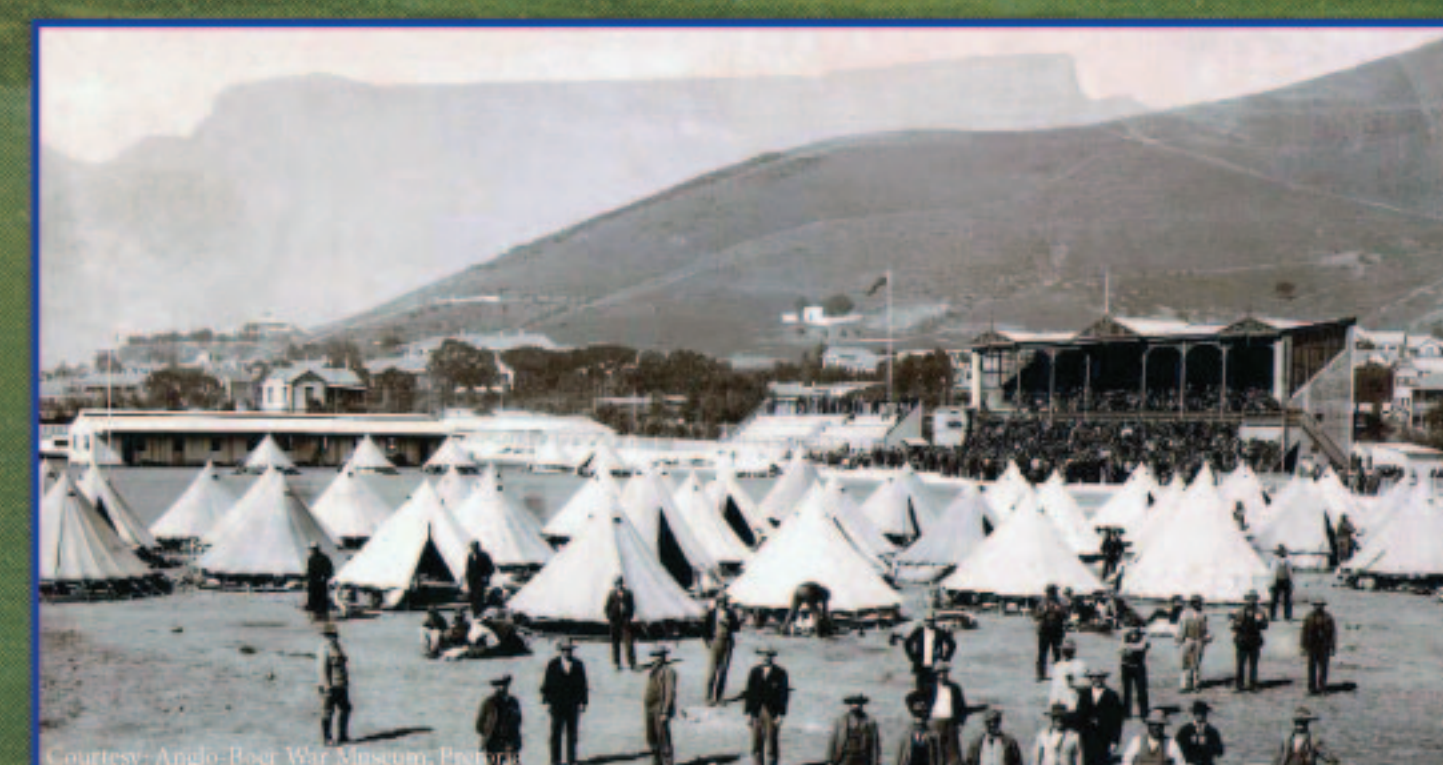
This painting by Thomas Bowler displays St Andrew's Square in 1864. Note the horse-drawn tram of the Cape Town and Green Point Tramway Company established just two years earlier.

With the average resident relieved of the need to have their own draft animals for transport and thus grazing land in close proximity, one may have thought the level fields of Green Point Common would have become earmarked for development. Instead it became an even more highly valued public recreation and sporting area by surrounding communities and was thus spared from developers.



Western Cape Archives and Records Service: DR1313.1

A natural depression on the Common would fill with water every winter and it was here that young sailing enthusiasts established the Green Point Amateur Boat and Canoe Club in 1887. In 1889 the Municipality deepened and extended this vlei to become a water body nearly two kilometres in circumference and two metres deep. Sadly this feature on the Common lasted only ten years before it was drained and filled to prevent stagnant water - that resulted as the season wore on - from becoming a health threat to the military and Boer prisoner-of-war camps, established here during the South African War.



Green Point Track, Boer prisoner-of-war camp c.1900.

Into the 20th century the general trend was towards greater alienation of the average member of the public from the Common - a situation summed up by local historian Marischal Murray below. The City of Cape Town is endeavouring to redress this in its plans for the future development of Green Point Common.



*In 1945 the war came to an end. Four years later bulldozers set to work levelling the Common, and today it is crisscrossed by asphalt roads and fenced as the preserves of various sporting bodies. To talk of the 'Common' now is to talk of something that no longer exists. The Common of bygone days has vanished entirely and for ever.*

Marischal Murray, author of *Under Lion's Head*, writing in 1964

## The City of Cape Town's future vision for Green Point Common

'To transform what was a dysfunctional public open space commonage into an integrated, dynamic and strategic metropolitan public amenity linking the sea with the mountain through a system of mutually reinforcing public squares, public open spaces and pedestrian linkages within the City Bowl spatial context.

To create a quality multipurpose open space and sports precinct that will accommodate a range of sports codes and sporting facilities of both an international and local status as well as local facilities meeting metropolitan and local recreational pursuits and providing relief to the inner-city inhabitants.

To ensure that the Urban Park is transformed into a significant space for intercultural social integration, serving the broader Cape Town community and visitors now and in the future.'

