Harbour to hinterland

CITY OF CAPE TOWN ISIXEKO SASEKAPA STAD KAAPSTAD

THIS CITY WORKS FOR YOU

The first order of priority as far as service delivery for the newly elected City Fathers in 1882 was to ensure an adequate supply of water. In 1886 the Molteno Reservoir was completed adding some 41,000,000 gallons (220,000 megalitres) of capacity.

Molteno Reservoir c. 1895

The next year an ambitious scheme was launched to draw water from the catchment area of Orange Kloof, behind Table Mountain, via a tunnel and pipeline through the Twelve Apostles - from Disa Gorge to Slangolie Ravine. From here the cast-iron pipeline followed what is today known as the Pipe Track above Camps Bay to Kloof Nek and then down to Molteno Reservoir and the city below.

The pictures immediately above are of the Disa Gorge entrance to the Woodhead Tunnel and gleaming new pipeline as it was laid along the 'pipe track' to Kloof Nek c. 1891 Courtesy: National Library of South Africa, Cape Town

To the left is a picture of the Disa Gorge entrance to Woodhead Tunnel - as it appears today.

Thomas Cairncross was appointed City Engineer in 1886 amidst a growing clamour for service delivery. With what was now expected to be an adequate supply of water, Cairncross directed his departments energies towards the provision of a water-bourne sewerage system. In 1888, a leading sanitation Engineer from Britain, Mr. Edward Pritchard, arrived at the Cape and over the next three months prepared plans for a city-wide sewerage system.

One can easily imagine the consternation that arose when, with some eight miles of sewer lines already laid as part of the Pritchard scheme, the Mayor of Cape Town, David Pieter de Villiers Graaff, received a cable from no less a person than the then Premier of the Cape Colony, Cecil John Rhodes, from London.

A site inspection of work in progress on the Woodhead Tunnel and pipeline by Cecil John Rhodes c. 1890. Rhodes at this time (fourth from the right) was 37 years of age, Premier of the Cape Colony (1890-1896) and his company, De Beers Consolidated Mines, was supplying 90% of the world's diamonds. Seated is Resident Engineer on the project, Mr. R. Esdon.

Courtesy: National Library of South Africa, Cape Town

By this time Cape Town had assumed the importance of not only the main port of entry and supply centre for southern Africa but also the *de facto* commercial, financial and administrative capital of the Cape Colony. The slow rate of progress made in providing the essential municipal services necessary for Cape Town to meet these challenges was a growing concern for Rhodes - not only in his capacity as Premier but towards realising his own personal ambitions for the future of southern Africa as part of the British Empire.

Rhodes was thus prompted while in England to conduct his own investigations into modern water-bourne sewerage systems and arising from these, summarily informed the Mayor that he had engage the services of another leading British sanitation and drainage engineer, Mr. Clement Dunscombe of Liverpool - who he was dispatching to the Cape, forthwith.

Dunscombe arrived in Cape Town on the 20th of March,1891 and worked till the 21st of May developing his sewerage works scheme. It is on this foundation that the modern water- bourne sewerage system of central Cape Town was developed.