

# Hout Bay's Heritage Day – 15 yrs. on.

2016-09-18

## What is Heritage?

In essence, Heritage is what one generation leaves to the next. We cannot change the events of the past neither can we control where our heritage sites were created and remain today. One cannot “make” heritage, heritage sites “develop” over many years and are created continuously; future generations will judge their heritage value. The importance of understanding their message, the morality and ethics of times gone by, good and bad, is vital to all Nations. Without such understanding the lessons of history we risk experiencing past errors and history has the habit of repeating itself!

## The back-cloth

Hout Bay is the third oldest surviving formal settlement in South Africa, only Cape Town and Simon's Town are its seniors. Its early existence was largely due to its abundance of timber, however, that valuable resource disappeared within 30 yrs. of van Riebeeck's arrival and agricultural activity was quickly established as a sustainable living for those who settled there. Around the turn of the twentieth century Cape Town's and Wynberg's sustainable water resources were exhausted resulting in the eventual construction of 5 dams which took most of the perennial water from the Hout Bay River and in 1966 the Apostle tunnel took the balance of the rest of the water rising from above that point. The result was the slow but sure death of agriculture and finally Kronendal farm ceased commercial operation as the oldest working farm in the country in 1995.

## Our Major Heritage Assets

Hout Bay was, and to a large extent still remains, **one of the most beautiful places on earth** but its administration and fractured planning has side-lined its potential to date. It is richly endowed with natural heritage; it has a beach, potentially the safest swimming beach along the Atlantic seaboard, and it is surrounded by a National Park with magnificent mountain scenery which in turn forms part of a World Heritage Site. It contains the only intact riverine ecosystem rising from Table Mountain, which could be largely restored. Its source, upper reaches, flood plain, wetlands, estuary, beach and sea, form an intact ecosystem contained within one municipal ward. It is the only one of five rivers rising from Table Mountain that has not been extensively canalised in concrete.

Hout Bay is also rich in cultural heritage with its working harbour and several other historic sites worthy of conservation some of which are of international significance.

In fact, Hout Bay has all the ingredients of a magnificent Heritage Tourism Destination but its potential is being destroyed by the neglect of our heritage authorities and misdirected planning. Cultural heritage sites are the factual and tangible evidence of our past, the fundamental basis of our modern history. If they are preserved they are potentially great assets but once they are lost their value is confined to that of historical records.

## The modern changes

In 1999 the New National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) was promulgated following our new democratic dispensation promising to widen the then previously narrow scope of heritage legislation. Sadly, the NHRA was too late to save Kronendal Farm, which ceased to operate commercially in 1995 as the oldest working farm in the country. The farm could have been preserved for posterity as an Historic Children's Farm with unique tourism potential and greater job creation. The heritage agencies of the day failed to convince their political masters that it should be saved and its loss changed the heart of Hout Bay's unique rural ambience forever.

The National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) No 25 of 1999 very clearly outlines the responsibilities of our Heritage Authorities. Their Mission is to protect and conserve the “National Estate” comprising of its natural and cultural heritage assets. However, in our case, it would appear to be more or less toothless when one tries to apply the Act to heritage sites on public land, this includes Hout Bay’s most threatened heritage assets. They comprise of our harbour, our river corridor and beach, East and West Forts as well as the WWII Apostle Battery. Fortunately, our most important other historic buildings are privately owned, such as Kronendal Homestead, Moddergat Farm buildings and some of the old buildings along main Road, and have been sensitively conserved and sympathetically adapted for commercial use. Clearly our most vulnerable sites are either in our National Park or on Government owned land and they are by far the most threatened being subject to fire, theft, vandalism and neglect.

### **Does the State care?**

Clearly in Hout Bay, the State has fallen far short in its duty to discharge its duties imposed by the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) No 25 of 1999. Page 1 of the of the NHRA states that the intentions of the Act are: -

*“This legislation aims to promote good management of the national estate, and to enable and encourage communities to nurture and conserve their legacy so that it may be bequeathed to future generations;.to enable and encourage communities to nurture and conserve their legacy so that it may be bequeathed to future generations .....”*

Sect 42 of the Act allows for the participation of volunteer community based “Conservation Bodies” by means of “Heritage Agreements” to help conserve and create viable business plans to support the sites but Hout Bay’s Heritage Assn (an approved Conservation body) has experienced the total indifference of our heritage authorities in response to their requests for such an agreement which would fulfil the legal requirements and help conserve the sites in question.

In the case of our historic coastal batteries, the oldest dating from c.1781 – WWII, West Fort, East Fort, and the Apostle Battery, are all owned by the Department of the Defence. East Fort and the Apostle Battery were appropriated to SA National Parks when the Park was established in 1998 who tacitly accepted responsibility for its cultural as well as its natural heritage. However, a few years later as “Table Mountain National Park” (which covers 75% of the Peninsula) it became part of a cluster of 9 sites (proclaimed by UNESCO for their unique biodiversity) as the second smallest component of a “World Heritage Site”. It would appear that at that stage many of the cultural heritage sites fell off the agenda and whilst they remained on paper in their successive 5yr development plans, with few exceptions elsewhere, Hout Bay’s cultural heritage conservation fell off the agenda.

### **To whom does our heritage belong?**

It belongs to all South Africans. Some of our heritage is good and inspiring and some is bad; non the less it should not be ignored. Today possibly one of the World’s most notorious World Heritage Sites is the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp in Poland. It hosts thousands of tourists each year and portrays an evil period of history that must never be repeated. Rome was built on slavery and so was much of North America. South Africa is no exception; every town has some sort of ‘skeleton in the cupboard’. For example, until the mid-nineteenth century, Hout Bay’s farms were dependant on slave labour which today is abhorrent and unthinkable.

Whilst we should be proudly hosting tourists to visit our state-owned heritage sites, which should be showpiece attractions for tourists all year round, instead we have to apologise to them that they are

in ruins and tell people to go elsewhere. No wonder braaing sausages and chicken is a more attractive way of celebrating “National Heritage (Braai) Day”. Have our heritage authorities lost the plot?

## What went Wrong?

Is it the legislation? Is it our Heritage Agencies, is it bad management or their staff? Or is it the old perennial (which is often true) .....“We don’t have the money or staff”? Should we just tick the box for "All of the above" and go home?

Well the legislation is widely acclaimed as good. In our case HWC seem to have good qualified staff and consultants around to handle the regulatory aspects of their responsibilities – so it must be something else! However, perhaps the recipe is wrong?

## Section 9 of the NHRA states: -

*9. (1) All branches of the State and supported bodies must give heritage resources authorities such assistance in the performance of their functions as is reasonably practicable.*

It goes on to say: -

*(3) Each State department and supported body must—*

*(a) maintain and conserve the heritage resources under its control in accordance with standards and procedures set out in regulations by SAHRA in consultation with the Department of Public Works;*

This certainly does not happen in Hout Bay!

## A world-wide syndrome with a possible solution.

The scenario is not unusual. Many countries have faced similar challenges where socio-economic imperatives outweigh their heritage conservation needs. ‘Heritage Tourism’ worldwide has a large following but it has not appeared on our Governments Agenda until recently and even if it declares its support it could be many years before communities see any benefit which we believe is the crux of the problem. The solution is intense cooperation between our tourism and heritage agencies together with Communities which, up to now, has not happened on a significant scale.

HWC boast that they have over 2500 heritage listed sites in their inventory, and whilst some have been established tourism destinations for many years, careful analysis of all their sites by assessing their tourism potential could reveal many more “Heritage Tourism destinations” to stimulate the economic benefits and employment opportunities which communities desperately need.

However, many nations have listened to the few small voices coming from within communities having rich natural or cultural heritage sites. They have created volunteer community based Conservation Bodies which are distanced from government and rely largely on volunteer help emanating from the communities where heritage sites exist. The UK’s National Trust is a shining example of how such groups can be united under one banner. Today it is the largest private landowner in Britain and it is registered as a charity putting hundreds of millions of Rands into conservation and education projects every year. We can never expect to get into that league but it could be possible to mobilise volunteer conservation bodies on a regional scale. Countries like Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zanzibar and Even St Helena have followed that path.

Today there is a family of over 60 or more organisations world-wide listed as members of the ‘International National Trust Organisation’ (INTO) of which HBHA is an associate member. INTO is an apolitical organisation established to harness the synergy of their members to help countries to develop structures to suit conditions and circumstances similar to ours. It would be worthwhile for readers to look at the UK National Trust’s website at [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk) . The breadth of their interests is mind boggling, however, it was established over 100years ago by three people of vision.

Today it is the largest private landowner in Britain and it is registered as a charity. It is now time for South Africa to follow a growing trend an 'jump on the train' we have to start somewhere!

Membership of INTO (<https://intoorg.org/>) entitles us to draw on the vast experience of 40 or more countries.

It has often been said that Hout Bay is a microcosm of South Africa and so there is no better place to stimulate interest in a "Cape of Good Hope Heritage" umbrella body representing volunteer groups, first here in the Peninsula and eventually all over the Western Cape. One day I hope that at least part of my wish may be granted and that the Cape of Good Hope Region of the National Trust of South Africa could become a reality. With the help of Hout Bay's residents it could happen.

If you are concerned and want to help, contact us at [HB.Heritage@zsd.co.za](mailto:HB.Heritage@zsd.co.za) and you can help us lead the way.

Dave Cowley

Hout Bay

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The above was written for publication on our website for Heritage Day in 2016. Since then little has changed. However, On the 9<sup>th</sup> Oct 2017 the writer was privileged to participate in a Workshop at SAHRA's Cape Town HQ, convened by consultants "URBAN-ECON DEVELOPMENT ECONOMISTS", from Pretoria. They have been commissioned to formulate a plan to identify problems and suggest ways in which the overall effectiveness of our heritage agencies will be improved for the benefit of all. The discussion was lively, uninhibited and encouraging.

DC 2017-10-11

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