

## Wilderness Names

by Hugo Leggatt

### Place Names

#### **Wilderness.**

Early in 1877 George Bennett bought the unoccupied land known as Lot H, or Barbierskraal, at the mouth of the Touw River. When he rode out with his young wife, Henrietta, to have a look at his purchase, she exclaimed "Oh, what a wilderness!". The name stuck and they named the farm which they established "The Wilderness". This officially changed many years later to just Wilderness.



**Kleinkrantz, or Klyne Krantz,** is the name of the large, roughly triangular farm, which stretched along the coast east of Wilderness. Originally granted in 1818, its one boundary post is at the corner of Freesia Avenue and Waterside Road, with the north-east corner in the hills halfway along Langvlei. Nowadays, the name applies mainly to the coastal village on the east flank of Wilderness.

**Hoekwil** started its existence on the State Land known as Olifantshoogte. About 1914 this land was granted for the establishment of small agricultural holdings in a settlement known as Olifantshoek. As time went by the postal authorities found confusion with another Olifantshoek in what is now the Northern Cape. In the late 1950s Hoekwil took over as the name of the village. It is said to be derived from the "Hoek" of Olifantshoek and the "Wil-" of Wilderness, but there is a 1944 sketch map showing Hoekville where Hoekwil now stands.

### Geographic Features

#### **Kaaimans River.**

The name appears in all the early literature on the area, but with varying spelling : *Quaimans*, Thunberg 1772; *Kayman's*, le Vaillant 1782; *Kaaymans*, Paravicini 1803; *Kaimans'*, Lichtenstein 1803.

It has been suggested that *Kaaimans* derives from *Keerom* since wagons had to turn around here because of the steep sides. This seems an unlikely derivation and le Vaillant clearly thought the name had to do with crocodiles as he commented " I cannot think why, as I never saw a crocodile or cayman in the whole area." Lichtenstein thought that the word referred to the Leguan or Water Monitor, rather than the crocodile.

Since crocodiles have never been present in the southern Cape, a more likely explanation comes from the beliefs of the Khoisan peoples who inhabited the area when the European settlers arrived. Stories of mythic watersnakes featured widely in their folklore. In the Nama language *Kei* = great, and the Great Snake would be *kei aus*. However, for fear of attracting the snake's attention, it was believed

safer to use another description, such as Great Man = *Kei aob*. In explaining this, in either Dutch or English, this could readily become *Kei man* – or the modern Kaaiman.

### **Touw River.**

Here the early writers clearly struggled with how to render the spoken Khoi clicks into written words. Spellings varied from *Krakakou*, through *Trakatakauw*, to *Tradutiku* and other renderings. Fortunately we know that the meaning was the Girl's Ford or the Maidens' Drift. This seems to have referred specifically to the crossing point upstream from the bridge on the Seven Passes road.

In the nineteenth century, as the Khoi language was lost in this area, the name became corrupted to *Trek-aan-die Tou(w)* [*Pull-on-the Rope*] – a name full of significance to the wagon drivers of the day. Finally, we are left with *Touw*.

### **Leentjiesklip.**

The name of this landmark rock has now spread to include the western end of the Wilderness beach, as well as the property bordering on it.

At the end of the nineteenth century, few people lived in The Wilderness, as it was then named. Life was not easy and the sea provided an important source of food, both fish and shellfish.

The story goes that a young woman, known to us as Leentjie, the diminutive of Lena, worked as an oyster gatherer on the rocks at the end of the beach and around the point to the mouth of Kaaimans.

She had a boyfriend, whose name is lost. As sometimes happens, he jilted her for another woman. Leentjie, shattered by the news, drowned herself from the rocks which ever since have borne her name.



Remember poor Leentjie when next you are near her rocks. It must have been a sad, lonely end.

### **Street Names.**

Most street names in Wilderness have obvious origins. Waterside, Sands, Lake, Heights and Hillside roads need no explanation. There is the mind-stopping dullness of First, Second, Third etc. Avenues, but you will search in vain for Ninth – and Tenth isn't where you'd expect it. But there are a few names which might need some explanation.

Several are named after prominent people in the development of Wilderness :

**White's** Road after Montagu White, owner of The Wilderness property from 1905 until his death in 1916. He built the road to accommodate the coming of the motor car, in preference to the old Heights track with its straight up-and-down line which suited the ox wagons.

**Owen Grant** street commemorates Owen Grant, OG, as does Grant's Place in Wilderness East. Across the N2 Peters Road and Anne's Place are named for Grant's eldest son and youngest daughter respectively. Grant's name was practically synonymous with the Wilderness from 1921 when he and

Jack Raubenheimer founded Wilderness (1921) Ltd until 1956 when Grant sold the company to Roland Krynauw.

**Roland Krynauw** street on the Dunes is named after the retired brain surgeon who bought The Wilderness company from Grant and owned it until 1968. He also restored the old Fancourt house in Blanco.

**Dumbleton** and **Buxton** lie on either side of the N2 at the turn off to the SANPark camp and Eden Adventures. Both commemorate Buxton Dumbleton, one time owner of Fairy Knowe Hotel. Buxton built his home on the dune overlooking the hotel.

**Leila's** (pronounced Leela's) Lane commemorates Leila Barwell whose home stood at the northern end where Sanctuary leads off to the west. Leila is said to have come to The Wilderness for six months – and stayed until her death some thirty years later.

And, finally, **George Road**. This is the main road through the village but, if there is any sign to tell you that, it is very cunningly hidden. It runs from the traffic circle at Waterside Road at the north-west corner of the Village Green, turns westward past the bowling green, passes the tourism office and the restaurants and eventually reaches the N2. Before 1950 it continued on to Kaaimans River and eventually George – hence the name. The N2 obliterated much of it, but left us with our main commercial street, and an isolated little bit containing the houses on the north side of the N2 as one drives up the hill towards Dolphin Point.