

Fighting the drought in Stoffelton

THE drought in Natal has affected many communities with whom AFRA works and a drought facilitator has been employed to advise communities about whom they can approach for assistance. Even communities in high rainfall areas have experienced severe drought-related problems. The community of Stoffelton, near Bulwer, is an example.

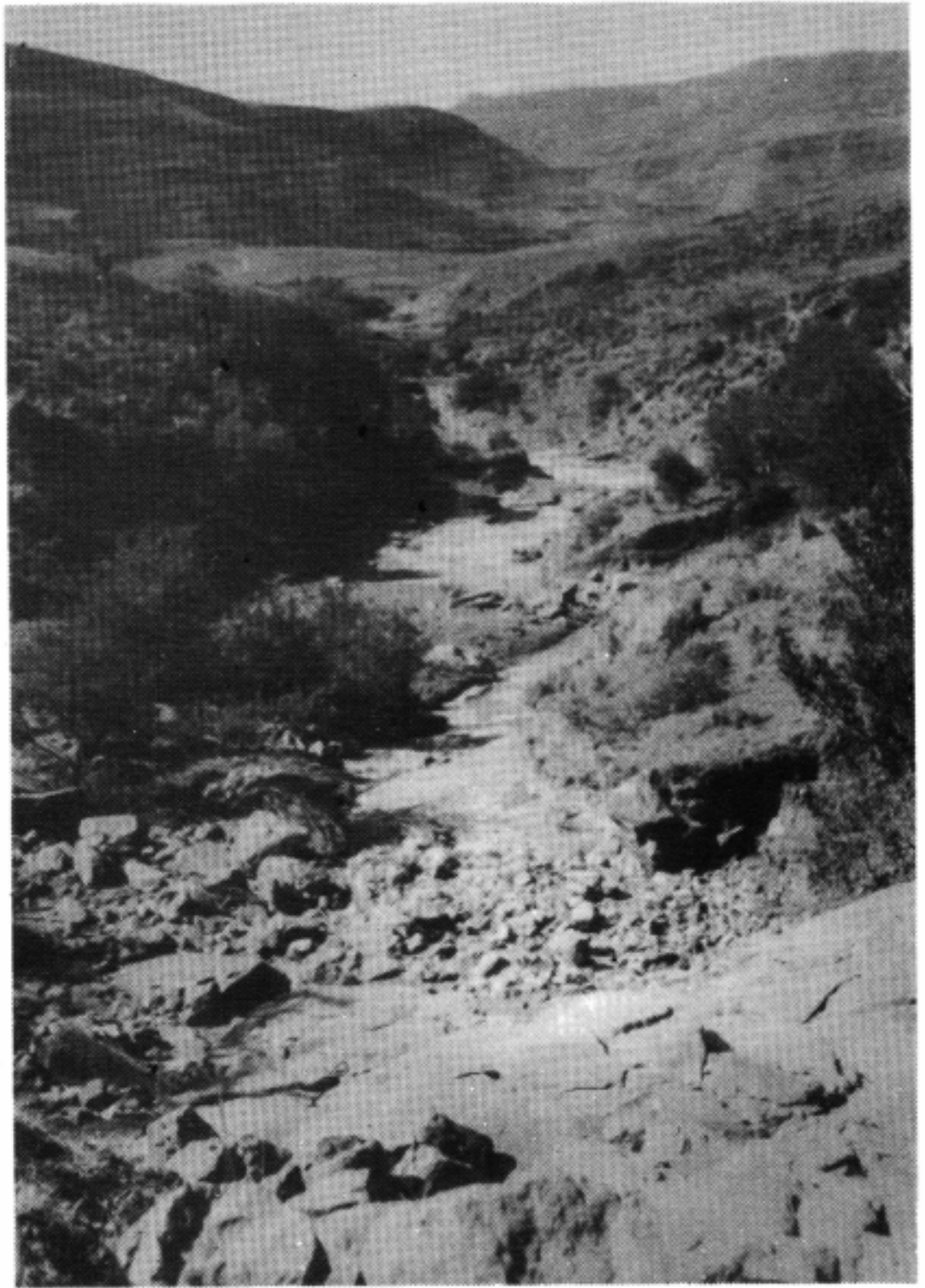
Good rains last fell in Stoffelton in January 1991.

Usually, Stoffelton gets 754,2mm of rainfall a year, but in 1992 only 510mm fell. This is about 40% less than the average. This shortage of rainfall has caused many problems in the community.

During 1992 no crops were harvested. Last January the whole crop of potatoes, beans and maize was lost through lack of rain and severe heat. People had to buy food at high prices from the shops to survive. Prices of all necessary goods increased. The price of an 80kg bag of mealie meal rose from R60 to R95.

Cattle also died because of poor grazing and lack of water and almost every family reported the loss of some of their cattle. One family lost five.

But the worst problem is that springs have dried up. Some springs that had water for the last 50 years, have dried up. Since August 1992,



A dried up stream in Stoffelton.

almost all the springs have had no water and people had to drink stagnant river water. This caused illnesses in the community. Adults and children became affected by bilharzia and dysentery. The NPA health service reported one severe case of typhoid in Stoffelton.

During this time, the community got no help. In November 1992 AFRA asked the Joint Services Board (JSB), KwaZulu and the Natal Provincial Administration (NPA) for help with emergency water. After discussions with the community, the JSB and KwaZulu agreed, in December, to transport

water to the community by tankers. The JSB financed 10 4.5 kilolitre tanks and KwaZulu offered to fill the tanks by tanker.

The community identified the sites for the tanks, constructed bases and set up committees. Meetings were held with people in the different areas of Stoffelton to discuss how the community would share the water from the tanks. People were also advised that the water in the tanks needed to be treated before use because it was polluted water from nearby rivers. The first time people received water was on January 10 1993.