

LIMEHILL REVISITED

Selections and Comment

by Peter Brown

One of the last things Cosmas Desmond did before his recent departure from South Africa was publish the results of a survey into the present situation at Limehill. The survey (*Limehill Revisited – A case Study of the Longer-term Effects of African Resettlement*) was carried out under the auspices of the Development Studies Research Group of the University of Natal. It presents a picture of Limehill ten years after the first removals to that place occurred, an event which, through the efforts at that time of Mr Desmond and others, was widely publicised, in all its grim detail, in South Africa, and further.

The following extracts from Mr Desmond's report show that life at Limehill in 1978 is in few respects less grim than it was ten years ago and in some respects more grim. The difference is that a situation which in 1968 might have seemed to be only a passing catastrophe, to be followed by better days, has now clearly become permanent. For the African people whom apartheid moved to Limehill the future promises a life whose grimness will never end.

These extracts from the study are supported by a large number of tables giving details of the responses to the questionnaire on which Mr Desmond's report is based, and which the quotations we have chosen below summarise.

"The Survey

Limehill was chosen as the subject of this study because the history of the settlement and the background of the people involved were well known to us personally and have been well documented. The timing of the survey was influenced by the fact that 29th January 1978 marks the tenth anniversary of the first removals from Meran to Limehill.

A full-time interviewer, who has had considerable experience in similar field research, spent five weeks at Limehill in December 1977 – January 1978 interviewing individual representatives of 101 households and filling in a questionnaire in respect of each. Households were selected at the discretion of the interviewer.

The number of households covered by the survey represents approximately one-third of all those moved to Limehill in 1968/9; those who have been resettled there more recently were excluded.

In evaluating the effects of the resettlement at Limehill and the findings of this study it should be borne in mind that the people concerned did not come from impoverished, broken-down communities. They were from stable, well-established communities and were relatively prosperous compared, for example, to many of those removed from white farms. Virtually all of them had land and cattle and many were able to do occasional work in Wasbank to supplement the income from their migrant workers. The fact that they were a healthy, prosperous community, (many of them had savings

to fall back on), probably accounts for their surviving as well as they have done.

General Description

Our interviewer, who has been familiar with the settlement since its establishment, reported, 'There is very little improvement at Limehill. The only new thing is that they built an office'. This office, however, was unable to furnish him with accurate population figures for the settlement.

There are now approximately 350 houses, of which about 40 are occupied by more recent residents. The average family size was found by the survey to be 5.3, which gives an estimated total population of 1850.

The original residents have now completed building their own houses. It took them on average 3 years to do so, with 5% taking 6 years. The vast majority of the houses are built of mud (83%) a few of blocks (14%) and even fewer of bricks (3%); roofing is of thatch (63%) or corrugated iron (37%).

Many of the mud houses are showing considerable signs of wear and tear. This is attributed to the fact that the people were forced to build in an exposed place and thus the houses have no protection from the wind and the rain and the presence of termites in the soil.

The dirt 'road' that runs through the middle of the settlement is potholed and corrugated, while some of the side 'streets' are now completely overgrown. There is thus a general air of dilapidation, desolation and isolation about the place.

Facilities may be described as follows:

Water is obtained from taps in the 'streets', though by no means in every 'street'. We were able to locate only 10 taps in the whole settlement, i.e. one tap to serve 35 families.

There is now a clinic with a resident nurse, but no doctor. Since there is no phone and no ambulance the nurse has no means of communicating with a hospital or a doctor in an emergency. Private doctors hold surgeries at the clinic. The fees are:

30 cents for a visit to the nurse
R2 for a visit to the doctor
R5 for childbirth

There are two primary schools, which also serve other parts of the complex. The main problem is overcrowded classes. One teacher, for example, is responsible for 120 children in a double session.

There are two general dealers and one cafe/store. These have limited stocks and, owing to transport costs, prices are higher than in the towns. Nevertheless most people (94%) do at least some of their shopping in Limehill, since the high cost of bus fares makes it uneconomical to go to Ladysmith, Dundee or Wasbank except for major shopping.

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRES

Arrivals and departures

88 of those interviewed arrived at Limehill in 1968 and the other 13 in 1969. They came from places considerably nearer to the neighbouring 'White' towns of Wasbank, Dundee and Ladysmith than Limehill is.

11% of the children who were aged 5 years or less at the time of the removal are now dead.

Some young people have gone, either as individuals or as family units, to settle elsewhere — presumably illegally; others have simply 'disappeared' and their families have no knowledge of their whereabouts.

Present population

(i) Children born at Limehill

Almost 20% of the children born at Limehill have not survived until the survey date. If children born in the last two years, who have not yet survived the danger period for infant mortality, are excluded, the percentage is slightly higher at 23%. This is considerably lower than the infant mortality rate in some 'homeland' areas, where it is estimated that 40% of children born do not reach the age of five. But there is no reason for judging Limehill by this norm. As has been mentioned, the people at Limehill were not from an impoverished community and, although their standard of living is falling, they have not yet sunk to the same level of deprivation that prevails in some 'homeland' areas. The mortality rate, which is excessively high by any civilised standards, takes on an added significance in the light of the low total number of births.

No figures on the mortality rates in the former places of residence are available. But it can be established that either the mortality rate was considerably lower and/or the birth rate considerably higher, since the ratio of children under 10 to women in the child-bearing age group (assumed to be all those between 16 and 50) in 1977 was half what it had been in 1968/69.

(ii) Present population

The high mortality rate and the low birth rate have produced an obvious imbalance in the present composition of the population. Whereas one would expect the 0-10 age group in any community to be the largest of all ten year old cohorts, in Limehill this group is considerably smaller than the 11-20 age group — i.e. those who were 0-10 at the time of the removal.

(iii) Growth Rate

The annual rate of growth for the Zulu population group for the years 1970-1977 was 2,7%. In Limehill, over the past ten years, it was at most half of this; i.e. if one assumes that all those who have emigrated, married or disappeared are still living.

School attendance and employment

The one positive fact to emerge from the survey was that those children who manage to survive do attend school. Only 5 children out of 104 in the 6-14 age group were not attending school.

Places of work

There never has been, and there is not, any intention on the part of the government to provide employment opportunities in or near Limehill. The nearest border industry area is Ladysmith, from where they have been moved **further away**. Limehill is just over 50 kms from the Ladysmith border industries.

None of those interviewed were employed in Limehill itself. 2 were employed by the Kwazulu government in Uitval, about 5 kms away, and 1 in the tribally owned area of Tholeni, about 5 kms away in the opposite direction. For the rest, 58% of the men were long-term migrant workers in Johannesburg, Durban, Pretoria, Vryheid, Newcastle and Estcourt; the other 38% were daily or weekly commuters to Wasbank, Dundee or Ladysmith. One of the women was a long-term migrant worker; the others commuted to the towns mentioned. (Those who commute to Ladysmith leave at 5 a.m. and return between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. Many, therefore, 'prefer' to return home only at weekends).

Problems experienced and their possible solutions

The most frequently mentioned problem was the absence of job opportunities and the distance from places of possible employment — 45 times. Only fractionally less frequent were such stark statements as 'hunger', 'poverty' 'we have no food' — 44 times.

3 respondents described life at Limehill as 'good'; another 4 considered it 'fair'.

The vast majority described it as a 'place of suffering', 'a land of sorrows', (34) a bad and difficult place to live in, (19) as causing increased deprivation, (23).

One respondent commented: 'I do not think there is anyone who does not know that Limehill is a place of suffering'. Another: 'Life at Limehill is half-prison'. A more biblically-minded person: 'Life at Limehill is half Egypt for us'. 'Limehill is the land of the outcast people and we feel it'.

In the light of the above it is not surprising that 84 respondents said that they would return to their former place of residence if given the opportunity; 14 said they would not; 2 questionnaires were incomplete."

The facts presented by Mr Desmond's study, based on the answers given to his questionnaire, by people who know from bitter experience just what a Blackspot removal means, explode two more Nationalist myths. The first, propagated amongst others by the late Minister of Bantu Administration, Mr M. C. Botha, is that 'the Bantu people like being moved'. The second is that once the initial shock and hardship of a removal have passed the people concerned prefer living where they are to where they were before. This survey shows just how insubstantial that cynical claim always was. □

NEWS RELEASE —

LITERARY PRIZE AWARDED TO BOOK UNDER EMBARGO

The second annual Mofolo-Plomer Literary Prize has been awarded to Dr J. M. Coetzee for his novel, *IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY*. The judges were Prof. André P. Brink and Mr Peter Strauss, both well-known South African writers.

The Mofolo-Plomer Prize, named after two distinguished South African authors, is awarded annually to an unpublished literary manuscript in English by a Southern African writer.

IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY was published in the United Kingdom in June 1977, but was eligible for this year's Mofolo-Plomer Prize as the closing date for entries was 31st May, 1977.

The British edition of the novel has been embargoed by the South African customs, and the censors are at present considering it.

Dr Coetzee lectures in the department of English at the University of Cape Town. He has published a previous novel, *DUSKLANDS* (Ravan Press, 1973).

The Mofolo-Plomer Prize was instituted by Nadine Gordimer, the South African writer, in 1976. The prize money of R500 is donated jointly by Miss Gordimer and three Johannesburg publishers, Bateleur Press, Ad. Donker and Ravan Press.

Entries for the 1978 competition must reach the Mofolo-Plomer Committee, c/o Ravan Press, P.O. Box 31910, Braamfontein, 2017, by 31st May 1978. Further details may be obtained from the committee.

PETER RANDALL
for the Mofolo-Plomer Prize Committee

P.S. THE BOOK HAS NOW BEEN CLEARED BY THE CENSORS

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