

# **History of the Overberg, George, Knysna & Tsitsikamma Forests**

## **Pre-modern history to 2011**

**By Ryno Joubert**

**Email: [rynojoubert2@gmail.com](mailto:rynojoubert2@gmail.com)**

**(2021)**

## Pre-modern history

The Outeniqua region was inhabited by the Khoi (Hottentots) and San (Bushmen), collectively known as Khoisan, who lived off the land for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans. The San were semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers. They occasionally visited the forests, but did not dwell in or exploit them. Groups of San hunters occasionally smoked animals out of the forests during hunts, and this could have been the cause of some forest fires in the past which possibly contributed to the fragmentation of the forests. The Khoi people were pastoralists and frequently burned the veld to obtain grazing for their cattle. The coastal plains and forests teemed with wildlife, including large numbers of elephants and buffalo. Khoisan hunters had a small impact on the wildlife due to their small numbers and primitive weapons. When the Europeans arrived, the clans gradually disintegrated, and ended up in the employment of farmers. The densely forested Tsitsikamma region further to the east remained sparsely inhabited until the late nineteenth century. A thinly scattered Khoi population known as Strandlopers (*Beachcombers*) lived in caves along the rugged coast (Van der Merwe, 2002).

### 1630-1795

The first known Europeans to inhabit the area were a group of Portuguese seamen that were stranded in Plettenberg Bay (*then known as Bahia Formosa*) when their ship the Sao Goncalo was wrecked in 1630. The survivors lived in the Piesang Valley for 8 months, and were the first Europeans on record to cut wood from the southern Cape forests. The wood was used for the construction of huts, a church and the building of two small boats. They planted seeds and harvested it, and lived off rice and other supplies found in the wreckage whilst their boats were being built. They also exchanged metal for sheep and cattle with the indigenous Khoi people. The survivors praised the fertility of the soil, and also the wealth of wood, fresh water and wildlife (Sleigh, 1993).

The Dutch knew about the Overberg forests as early as the seventeenth century. During his journey in October 1688, Simon van der Stel travelled through the kloof between the Bergrivier and Sonderend River. He visited the forests at the last mentioned river, and saw that it was well supplied with timber. During the following year Isaq Schrijver travelled south of the Langeberg Mountains, and noticed that the mountains were overgrown with huge forests in the area of the current Swellendam (Appel, 1966).

The closing of the Mauritius outpost in 1709 dried up the small supply of timber and wagon-making wood from that area and aggravated the existing problem in the Cape. The natural Cape forests like those in Hout Bay, 't Paradijs (*Newlands*) and De Hel was mostly worked out, and the European trees that were planted by Simon and W.A. van der Stel among others were too young to utilize (Sleigh, 1993).

The "Politieke Raad" held a meeting on 11 March 1710 in order to discuss the condition of the Cape wood supplies. All members of the "Raad" were asked to report on possible solutions to combat the wood shortage in the Cape. Captain Adolf Jan van der Laan and merchant Willem van Putten, who personally visited the forests, reported that there was enough firewood. Landdrost S.M. de Meurs and master gardener Jan Hartogh told about various indigenous forests occurring east of the Hottentots Holland Mountains which contained good trees that could be used for timber, construction wood, wagon-making wood and also firewood. A short report from the burgher Andreas Finger, who travelled through the southern Cape as a soldier whilst on official trading expeditions, was also submitted. He knew about the occurrence of large tracts of forests at the Sonderend River, "Outeniqualand" (*George and Knysna*) and "Gamtouweland" (*Tsitsikamma forest*) (Sleigh, 1993).

These reports, however, were not the results of thorough investigation. It was necessary to get the correct facts before the exploitation of these areas could commence (Appel, 1966). At the same meeting of 11

March 1710, Van der Laan and Van Putten were appointed to inspect and explore the forests found further inland. In the report, they firstly mentioned “Land van Waveren” (*Tulbagh*) as a place where a good quantity of different wood-types could be found and that felled wood could be fetched by wagons. They also mentioned the Sonderend River where good timber and wagon-making wood could be obtained for a good number of years. But the wood would have to be transported overland to the Cape over rivers and mountains where there were no roads as there was no appropriate port. The nearest forests were situated a number of miles from the sea. Moreover, the wood could not be floated downstream as it was too heavy. It would not have been worth it to acquire the wood with small river vessels (Appel, 1966; Sleight, 1993). In view of these problems, the “Politieke Raad” decided not to further investigate the possibility of water transport until a better method could be found (Appel, 1966).

The “Raad” again appointed Van Putten and master gardener Jan Hartogh to thoroughly inspect the Sonderend River forests on 13 April 1711. They had to report on the distances, wood types, transport issues etc. They handed in their report on 16 March 1712, and reported on two forests in the area, a small forest and large forest. Van Putten and Hartogh crossed the Sonderend River at ‘t Ziekenhuijs (*Het Ziekenhuis*) and reached the small forest in 2 hours. It contained various timber and wagon-making wood trees, such as “Geel Assegaeije wit, en roodt Peere Elsen Ijser, en Stink houten bomen...” Most trees were 12, 2 to 15, 2 m (40-50 feet) high, with a width of 25, 4 to 76, 2 cm (10-30 inch). It was thus very suitable for the sawing of 8” × 10” and 10” × 12” beams, as well as other size beams. If the Company should use this forest, the waste-wood could be used for crossbars, spars and purlins. There was a perennial river near the forest where a water-driven saw mill could be established. The forest was about 3 to 4 hours travel on horseback in circumference and almost all the trees grew in ravines. According to Van Putten and Hartogh wagons should be able to reach the small forest easily. From ‘t Ziekenhuijs they travelled an hour and a half and went through another drift. After another hour they were at the entry point of the kloof where the large forest stood. It seemed about four times bigger than the small forest, and contained the same tree types. It was also easily accessible for wagons and had various suitable places for the establishment of more than one saw mill. They also mentioned that all the wagons needed at the Cape could eventually be made here. It could then transport a load of wood to the Cape, after which the oxen were driven back to repeat the process. It was predicted that it would provide wood to the VOC for 100 years (it did not even provide for 50 years) (Appel, 1966; Sleight, 1993).

Furthermore, Van Putten and Hartogh made a few recommendations. To make transport easier, the best woodcutters, blacksmiths and wagon makers should be placed at the small forest as it was the nearest forest to the Cape. If a Company’s outpost should be established in the Overberg, the small forest would be the best place for it. A master woodcutter and deputy, with 10 or more woodcutters could look after the post. Their first task should be the preparation of timber for the building of a saw mill (Appel, 1966; Sleight, 1993).

Governors W. Helot (1711-1714) and M.P. de Chavonnes (1714-1724) abandoned the task, afraid of the Hottentots Holland Mountain, which stood like a wall between the Cape and the forests. Transport issues made the exploitation of the forests impossible, and the need for wood needed to be more demanding and more serious before a solution was required (Sleight, 1993). In the meantime, some colonists settled in this region to make a living out of wagon-building. However, they could hardly earn their food. That was the reason almost nobody requested permission to fell wood in these forests. If there was any benefit, permission would often have been requested in light of the shortage of wood according to the Governor (Appel, 1966).

In 1724, 12 years after Van Putten and Hartogh handed in their report on the Sonderend River forests and reported about the transport issues relating to timber extraction, a copy of the report was sent from the Netherlands to the Cape, with an order from the Lords XVII to Governor M.P. de Chavonnes to again inspect the economic worth of the forests. Acting Governor J de la Fontaine received the letter, and Landdrost Martinus Bergh and Johan Tobias Rhenius were appointed to thoroughly investigate these forests (they also had to trade livestock and oxen). They handed in their report on 24 October 1725. Bergh and Rhenius left the Cape on 17 September 1725, and after their two wagons and baggage were carried 4

over the Hottentots Holland Mountain, they drove over a very rocky road, over the Palmietrivier and Knoflokskraalrivier (*Kromrivier*), until they reached Houwhoek. From there, the wagons were restrained by the brakes while going downhill, until they reached Botrivier. Later, at “Jan Boontjes Craal” (*Boontjieskraal*) drift, they also crossed the Swarte Rivier (*Swartrivier*), and reached “Warme Water” (Caledon) where the people and cattle rested. Thereafter they crossed the Sergeantsrivier (Serjeants River) and reached the Sonderend River on 26 September and crossed it at “Ganze Craal” (*Ganskraal, the closest drift to the forests*). A few days were spent here trading cattle before they visited the forest on 1 October. There was a 300-step grass embankment/hill which separated the large forest from the smaller forest. Both these forests were located in kloofs against the mountain slopes and had an abundance of high and thick trees such as yellowwood, assegai, white pear, red pear, hard pear, white alder, red alder, ironwood, stinkwood etc. Bergh and Rhenius mentioned that, if these trees were located at a more suitable place or closer to the Cape, it could have been used for timber and wagon-making wood, and would have been very useful for the VOC (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993).

With regard to the transport possibilities, the report was extremely unfavorable. The road over the Hottentots Holland Mountain and Houwhoek was virtually impassable for wagons. From the river to the forests it was relatively bad. The possibility of transporting the wood down the river was slim. There were many rocky outcrops in the middle, and many water accelerations occurred after the river’s junction with the Breede River, where the water poured high onto the underlying rocks. This would have crushed everything. Most of the indigenous wood-types were too heavy to float. Another issue was the large amount of oxen needed to drag the wood out of the forests. During that time the Company had an oxen shortage. In the future they could no longer depend on the trade with the nearby Hottentots (Khoi) as the latter’s cattle died in large numbers. In addition, they were robbed by Bushmen (San). The Hottentot population was also largely obliterated by the smallpox epidemic of 1713. With all these issues taken into account, the transportation of the wood, according to Bergh and Rhenius, would be very difficult and a financial loss for the VOC. The main obstacle in the exploitation of the Sonderend River forests was therefore the transportation problem (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993).

Meanwhile, timber that had come from the outpost Rio de Lagoa (*Mozambique*), established in 1721, was exported to the Netherlands to be tested as a trade item, but the quality was so poor that it could only be sold as firewood. Attempts by the Post holder at Rio de Lagoa to find wagon-making wood further inland was prevented by the indigenous people (Sleigh, 1993).

As time went by the VOC began to use the forests near the Sonderend River for its own benefit (Appel, 1966).

In 1726, about 8 months after the (then) acting Governor J de la Fontaine had reported to the Lords XVII about the difficulty of transporting wood from the Sonderend River forests to the Cape, he none-the-less decided to establish an outpost at ‘t Ziekenhuijs on the southern bank the Sonderend River, about 20 kilometers west from the town Riviersonderend for reasons that had nothing to do with woodcutting. However, the main reasons for the establishment of the outpost were for cattle bartering with the Khoi and cattle breeding. Furthermore, it protected the Khoi and their cattle from thieves and forced bartering by Europeans (Sleigh, 1993). The outpost started to deliver semi-prepared wood to the Castle in Cape Town from 1728, and for this reason the population of the post was enlarged from seven men to fifteen men the following year. They also had to protect the forest from the destruction and waste caused by the burghers (Sleigh, 1993). According to French naturalist Francois Le Vaillant, the outpost had the additional function of serving as a quarantine station for sick animals (Burrows, 1994).

The directors of the VOC decided to utilize the Overberg forests as an alternative after what happened at the Rio de Lagoa outpost. The new Governor, P.G. Noodt (1727-1729), was asked by the “Raad” in 1727 to lay out a road (*with the use of explosives*) over the Hottentots Holland Mountains toward the strategic forests of the Sonderend River. After a very short visit, he reported that the transport distance was too great, that the trees could only be taken out of the ravines with difficulty and that the road from the river

to the forests was very bad. He was convinced that the VOC could not exploit the forests economically. Noodt's report was thus in stark contrast with the report of Van Putten and Hartogh in 1712 (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993).

The authorities in the Netherlands were not pleased with Noodt. He failed to give detail about the transportation of wood from the Sonderend River to the Cape, and did not investigate the area thoroughly (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993).

The VOC established another two outposts close to the Sonderend River called Zoetemelks Valleij and Tijgerhoek. The Zoetemelks Valleij outpost was established in 1727 and was situated on the northern side of the Sonderend River, about 3 km from 't Ziekenhuijs. Its main functions were seasonal cattle grazing, cattle bartering, protection of the Khoi and cattle, dairy farming, and woodcutting. The Swedish botanist, Anders Sparrman, stayed at the outpost in September 1775, and considered woodcutting as the post's main function. The Tijgerhoek outpost was established between 1727 and 1729 and was situated near the present day town of Riviersonderend (Sleigh, 1993). Its main functions were cattle bartering, dairy farming and the making of butter. According to Burrows (1994) wood was acquired from the Oliphants Bosch (situated in the Olifantskloof, near the town of Riviersonderend). From Tijgerhoek, which was situated closest to the drostdy in Swellendam out of the three outposts, wagons were sometimes used to assist the magistrate with transport, such as shipping cargo, cannons or crew from a stranded ship from the Southern Cape coast. Letters, handbills and barter items that had to be sent from the Cape to the magistrate were also helped along by Tijgerhoek's wagons. Tijgerhoek, due to its distance from Zoetemelks Valleij (about 18 kilometers), had its own caretaker, who was locally called the Post holder although he was under the authority of Zoetemelks Valleij's Post holder. All three outposts next to the Sonderend River were under the control of one Post holder, seated at the Zoetemelks Valleij outpost, and were known under one single name, the Rivier zonder Eijnd (Sleigh, 1993).

By 1730 the first "Trekboere" reached the eastern side of the Groot Brak River, and many were already settled along the south coast by the mid 1730's (Appel, 1966).

The new Governor J. de la Fontaine visited the "Outeniqualand" forests between 30 July and 5 August 1734. He was impressed by the size and number of trees, but also saw that it was no benefit for the VOC as the wood could not be transported to the Cape (Sleigh, 1993). European hunters and illegal cattle traders were close behind the tracks of the VOC. In view of this the Governor suggested to the "Politieke Raad" to give the settlers, who lived in the area of the Sonderend River forests, permission to cut wood for their own use. The VOC could then get an income from the permission letters that enabled burghers to cut wood. De la Fontaine's suggestion was accepted by the "Raad" in 1734, and the forests in the area of the Sonderend River were thus now placed under the control of the VOC. The burghers were now allowed to cut timber and wagon-making wood in the forests for their own needs, provided they pay the specified fee for a permission letter (Appel, 1966).

The contact point for cattle trade with the Khoi was moved eastwards to a new outpost called Riet Valleij, aan de Buffeljagtsrivier, in 1734. On a modern map, the location of the former outpost is indicated by the farm name Rooipoort, 3 kilometers west of the village of Suurbraak and 1 kilometer south of the Buffeljags River, approximately 16 kilometers east of Swellendam. The post was in fact not on the Buffeljags River, but on a tributary river named Kompanjies River. Its main functions were seasonal cattle grazing, cattle trade, bartering, exploration expeditions, bartering expeditions further east, and the extraction of timber from the Grootvadersbosch from 1735. This forest was located 5 hours on horseback to the west of the outpost, south of the Langeberg Mountain, which the Post holder had to exploit and protect for the VOC. (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993). A wagon load of wood for the Company was sent to

the Cape every three months, and according to Thunberg it consisted mainly out of poles, planks, beams, agricultural tools and doorposts (Sleigh, 1993). The colonists cut wood here for their own use or for sale (Appel, 1966).

Burghers were allowed to cut wood in the Sonderend River forests from September 1734, but because of waste and damage (they cut more wood than their permission letters allowed them to), the burghers were no longer allowed (prohibited) to cut wood from any VOC-forest from September 1741 onwards. In 1743 the settlers in the area complained to the Governor, and said that they were in desperate need of timber, they wanted to have permission to cut timber again. The “Politieke Raad” therefore lifted the ban in May 1743. As for the Sonderend River forests, the ban was maintained, but in other forests situated further inland the burghers were once again allowed to cut timber and wagon-making wood for own use and to transport it from there (Sleigh, 1993). But it had to be done discreetly (Appel, 1966). This hastened the migration of burghers to the so-called “Outeniqualand” and further east (Sleigh, 1993).

According to contemporary evidence, some trees in the nearby Sonderend River forests were 80 to 100 feet tall. Large pieces of timber such as beams were dragged out by oxen with the greatest difficulty. The smaller pieces, such as wedges, ax handles, and wood for wheels and axles, were shaped before being taken from the forest (Appel, 1966). From the Sonderend River forests, a load of processed wood was sent to the Cape every three months. About 30 years after the establishment of the Rivier zonder Eijnd outpost, the best wood was used up and only low quality wood was left. Governor Tulbagh complained in 1760 about the poor quality of wood from this forest (Sleigh, 1993)

Exploitation of the surrounding indigenous forests in the Knysna area started around 1763 and continued for over 200 years.

Secunde J.W. Cloppenburg travelled through the Colony in October 1768 and made a few recommendations. The waste which he saw in the area of Swellendam made him very upset. He suggested that permission letters should no longer be issued for the cutting of wood in these forests anymore, except where the applicant could prove that he had planted a forest of Oak trees on or near his farm. The government should also take part in this. The naked ridges in front of the forests should be planted or sowed by the Landdrost with ‘Bergeyken’ or young trees from the forest two months before the start of winter (Appel, 1966).

At Grootvadersbosch, Cloppenburg observed that no new trees had been planted in the worked out areas since the VOC had started to exploit this forest 34 years ago, and that the woodcutters wasted a lot of wood with their messy working methods (Sleigh, 1993). Cloppenburg suggested that the Post holder at the Riet Valleij, aan de Buffeljagtsrivier outpost should plant young trees from the forest and Oak trees on nearby hills and plains with lots of water in the area of Grootvadersbosch (Appel, 1966). There is no evidence available to show that these recommendations were followed. Between the Riet Valleij, aan de Buffeljagtsrivier outpost and the forest were 4 burgher farms, and the Secunde recommended that the farms should be taken back by the VOC. The outpost could then oversee and protect the forest in a more effective way and keep burghers out of it (Sleigh, 1993).

When Cloppenburg visited “Outeniqualand” he was worried about the settlers’ injudicious exploitation of the forests. The Secunde recommended that permission for the cutting of wood in “Outeniqualand” should only be given after 3 years and only to those who had planted a forest (3 morgen in size) of Oak trees or other usable trees. Cloppenburg believed that the woodcutting had to be regulated before the forests were destroyed. A caretaker over the area’s forests was urgently needed (Appel, 1966).

The timber resources of the Cape were under significant pressure as early as the 1770’s.

Encouraged by VOC Governor Baron Joachim van Plettenberg, a Swedish naturalist, Carl Peter Thunberg, did a reconnaissance of the eastern and southern Cape in 1772 and produced reports of lush forests and an abundance of wildlife. Thunberg came via the Attaquaskloof Pass; linking the area around Mossel Bay with Kannaland in the vicinity of Oudtshoorn. The Attaquaskloof was used by elephants until the official pass was built (Plettenberg Bay, n.d.; SA Venues, n.d.).

During the 1770's permission was frequently given to burghers to cut 12 loads of timber and wagon-making wood east of the Hottentots Holland Mountain. J.S. Jurriaansz in 1772, A. Trouts in 1773 and H. Detlefs in 1774 got permission by the Governor. They were not allowed to cut wood in the Sonderend River forests. Permission letters needed to be first presented to the Landdrost in Swellendam. Records suggest that 9 permissions were given, which means that 108 loads were cut (Appel, 1966).

After the establishment of the Swellendam drostdy (*in 1747*) the VOC started to look at the forests of the Langeberg Mountains in order to provide for the local wood needs. Three forests were investigated. Two of them could be easily seen from the Landdrost's house (*Koloniesbos and Duiwelsbos*), and the other forest, the so-called "wagen makers bos" (*Wamakersbos*) was further up towards the Appelbosrivier. The other forests were not very attractive to the burghers, as they were only found high up in the smaller kloofs. The burghers in the area received permission letters that enabled them to cut 12 loads of timber, but without an added timeframe. As a result, lots of fraud, damage and waste occurred in the forests (Appel, 1966).

Anders Sparrman explored the southern Cape in 1775. He estimated the number of elephants at between 400 and 500, and noted that they had been driven into the forests by relentless hunting. He predicted that the establishment of a suitable port and the transportation of forest timber to Cape Town by sea would be more profitable, which turned out to be true. He also described the few Khoisan clans and hardy European pioneers, who by that time had already settled on the open coastal plains and in the forests at intervals of twelve to twenty miles. The farmers were generally wealthy, had many Khoisan servants, large herds of cattle and sturdy homes. Forest dwellers and the early woodcutters, on the other hand, were impoverished (Van der Merwe, 2002). According to Sparrman, the area between the Kaaimans River and the Keurbooms River formed the core of "Outeniqualand" (Appel, 1966).

It seems that most woodcutting and waste that Cloppenburg saw in "Outeniqualand" during 1768 had taken place without the permission or knowledge of the Government. The first instance where permission was given by the VOC to cut wood in "Outeniqualand" was in the same year that Sparrman visited the area (1775), when three burghers were each given permission to cut 12 loads of timber from the forests (Sleigh, 1993).

H. Swellengrebel (son of a former Cape Governor) travelled independently through the Colony and visited the Grootvadersbosch and "Outeniqualand" forests in 1776. Swellengrebel described the Grootvadersbosch and stated that it was stretched out between ravines about 1 to 2 hours on horseback wide. The timber was already worked out, and all that was left was crooked and useless trees. There still were 4 farms between the outpost and the forest, and the burghers acquired their wood from the forest (Sleigh, 1993).

In "Outeniqualand", P. Cloete (Swellengrebel's travel companion) described the big, heavy trees of which most were already cut out. Between the ocean and the forests there were about 14 farms, where the owners made a living from the cutting, transportation and sale of wood. They over-exploited the forests, and the falling trees damaged new forest growth (Sleigh, 1993). Cloppenburg also documented these 14 farms in his journal when he travelled through the Colony in 1768 (Appel, 1966).

Three months after Swellengrebel and Cloete's visit, and possibly because of a conversation between them and Post holder Lorens at Zoetemelks Vallei, a first attempt was made to place the "Outeniqualand" forests under the command of the VOC. Lorens wrote to the Landdrost in Swellendam that the forests at the Sonderend River were worked out. Even a forest that was left to rest for 18 to 20 years, was worked-out within 9 months when it was exploited again. The remaining trees could only still be found at dangerous, unsafe places. The contracted woodcutters to the VOC became afraid and worked for local burghers as servants instead, which meant that the VOC lost some of its best workers. Another wood source was needed, and Lorens therefore suggested that the VOC must begin to use/utilize the "Outeniqualand" forests. Governor of the Cape of Good Hope, Baron Joachim Ammena van Plettenberg, received the information in February 1777. A couple of weeks later a few contracted woodcutters were transferred over to the "Outeniqualand" forests (*area of George*) from the Riet Vallei, aan de Buffeljagtsrivier outpost and the outposts next to the Sonderend River. Van Plettenberg first wanted to gather information such as where the best places were to harvest wood for wagons and carriages before a VOC outpost could be established (Sleigh, 1993).

The establishment of a Woodcutter's Post at the Zwart River (*Swartrivier, near present-day George*) was approved in July 1777, and three loan farms were resumed by the VOC for this function. The section of forest between Madagascarscraal and the Kaaimans River was closed for the public, as they could find an abundance of wood at other places (*Madagascarscraal was probably the loan farm next to the Swartrivier, furthest from the ocean. The names of the other two loan farms are unknown. They were thus situated between the Kaaimans River and Madagascarscraal*). Commandant J. Muller was appointed as Post holder of this outpost (*called Outeniqualand*), in charge of 16 men who cut and transported wood for the VOC overland to Cape Town. The scarcity of timber and wagon-making wood in the VOC's other forests was the reason given for the establishment of the outpost, and these forests needed time to recover. Large sections of the Sonderend River forests were thereafter closed in order for them to recover and re-grow (but these forests never 'rested' as wagon-making wood was still cut from these forests during the following years) (Sleigh, 1993).

The road, simultaneously constructed from Swellendam to the George area, paved the way for many enterprising immigrants from the western Cape who arrived soon after the 'official' woodcutters. They eagerly participated in the new timber boom, settling on the plains between George and Plettenberg Bay. Their primary activities involved cutting wood and transporting it to Cape Town. The early woodcutters employed grossly wasteful and destructive techniques. They randomly selected the best trees in the most accessible parts of the forests and utilized only the most suitable stem sections. The devastated portions of the forest were burnt down to obtain grazing land. Other parts of the forests were also burned to smoke out game and collect honey (von Breitenbach, 1972).

Lieutenant William Paterson visited "Outeniqualand" in November 1777, and wrote about the extent of the forests as follows:

*"The woods are very thick, and produce some of the tallest trees I have ever beheld...The mountains are extremely steep, and many of the most stately trees grow out of the naked strata of the rocks...These woods have their beginning to the north of Mossel Bay, and extend about 120 miles to the east, ending at a place called Sitsicamma. Between the woods and the Indian Ocean lies an extensive plain well inhabited by Europeans, who traffic mostly in wood which they bring in planks to the Cape."* (Plettenberg Bay, n.d.)

In 1778, Governor van Plettenberg travelled to the north-eastern borders of the colony and, on his return, visited the area of Plettenberg Bay. He decided to name the bay after himself and erected a possessional



stone on the hill that overlooks Central Beach, indicating to all that the Bay would belong to the VOC from this time on (Storrrar, 2001).

The 1770's forest policy established by the VOC for the forests of Swellendam, Mossel Bay and George reached the forests near Plettenberg Bay in 1778. Briefly the policy was this: Servants of the Company worked under contract and were placed at Woodcutters posts, under command of Residents or Landdrosts, whose duties were the felling, conversion, and transport of timber required the Company's use at Cape Town. The fellings were not entirely uncontrolled, the attention of the authorities was focussed on the supervision of forest irregularities and mismanagement. Even the outlying burghers were not given their own way, they were held responsible for any acts of vandalism traceable to them (Phillips, 1963).

The VOC signed a contract with the burghers in "Outeniqualand" in 1779 for the delivery of Assegai wood that was used to make gun-carriages. This was apparently one of the Outeniqualand outpost's main functions (Appel, 1966).

The early European explorers and travellers tended to avoid the Tsitsikamma area for a long time, because of the deep gorges and dense indigenous forests. It was only after 1780 that timber was exploited between the Soutrivier and Groot River (*Nature's Valley*) (GRNP: State of Knowledge, 2014).

French naturalist Francois Le Vaillant explored "Outeniqualand" for nearly six months during 1782, and made Plettenberg Bay the eastern most point of his journey. His visit to the region is described in his five volumes of *Travels Into the Interior Parts of Africa by Way of the Cape of Good Hope*. Written in a lively, entertaining style, his books were widely read, even though they contained many inaccuracies. Le Vaillant shot many game, including elephants, and added dozens of birds to his collection. He also discovered the beautiful Narina trogon, a forest bird that he named after a Khoi woman (Narina) whose beauty he admired. Le Vaillant was critical of the poor conditions of the woodcutters he encountered and was full of suggestions for the betterment of the whole area. He saw magnificent forests in the vicinity of Plettenberg Bay and told that the forests could be cut down easier than anywhere else; as the forest was found in mountains that were not too steep, where it was difficult to search for timber. Le Vaillant said that the Bay's waters were deep enough for the largest vessels, and that a port could be established. The timber could then be transported to the Cape and goods could be shipped from the Cape to Plettenberg Bay that would contribute to the happiness of life of the society. He was convinced that the Bay's natural resources could not have escaped the eye of the Governor on his visit four years previously, but that Van Plettenberg simply failed to make any effort to develop them. Le Vaillant apparently had a low opinion of Governors in general (Storrrar, 2001; Van der Merwe, 2002).

Le Vaillant's gratuitous advice about opening up the forests and improving the conditions of the woodcutters in the vicinity of Plettenberg Bay appeared in print too late to influence the development of events there. The first two volumes of his books were published in 1790, but Governor Van Plettenberg, whose name he had so abused, had not been idle during the years following his visit in 1778 (Storrrar, 2001). On his visit to the area, Van Plettenberg was worried about the Dutch settlers' enthusiastic destruction of the natural surroundings, especially the forests. He was alarmed at the condition of the forests and the attitude of the colonists, especially those in the area between the Knysna and the Keurbooms River (von Breitenbach, 1972). On his return to the Cape he proposed to the Lords XVII of the VOC that a timber port and control post be erected to prevent the over-use of natural timber in the area (Plettenberg Bay, n.d.). But it was eight years after Governor Van Plettenberg's visit before any positive official action was taken...

The transportation of wood overland from the Outeniqualand outpost at Zwart River to Cape Town was very difficult and expensive. The VOC wanted a cheaper and faster way to transport the wood, and also had a shortage of wood in the Cape (*as the forests which originally grew in profusion around Cape Town were mostly exhausted*), especially for the building of a new hospital which needed large supplies of timber. Most of the timber needed for the construction of the hospital had to be imported, but the Lords XVII asked in July 1785 whether it will be possible to at least acquire one portion of the required timber from one of the Cape's bays. The "Politieke Raad" discussed cost-saving methods in January 1786 and decided that the shipping of wood from Plettenberg Bay to the Cape would be the best method (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993).

Landdrost M.O. Woeke of Graaf-Reinet inspected the availability and transportability of wood from the Plettenberg Bay area early in 1786. He also visited the Outeniqualand outpost where he ordered Post holder Muller to transfer a portion of his woodcutters to Plettenberg Bay where they were to start with woodcutting immediately. Landdrost Woeke's report was discussed on 4 August 1786 by the "Politieke Raad". Woeke recommended that an outpost be established on the farm of Cornelis Botha next to the Piesang River, as it had plenty of water and was well situated. He also reported that there was a detached forest (*De Poort; now known as the Harkerville Forest*) with a circumference of about six hours by horseback, abundant in timber, wagon-making wood and furniture-making wood. He also recommended a Post holder who is a wood expert, and that a woodshed was needed (Sleigh, 1993).

An official commission (J.G. van Reenen, A. Holtzhausen and H. Mulder) was sent to Plettenberg Bay to make a survey and to identify those settlers who were interested in producing grain for the VOC (the commission did the same in Mossel Bay earlier in 1786). The burghers of Plettenberg Bay told the commission that the soil and weather were not suitable and that they would rather supply the government with wood (Sleigh, 1993).

A second commission (F. Duminy, E. Bergh and J. G. van Reenen) was sent to Plettenberg Bay to finalise an agreement with the burghers (who were already felling wood in these parts) to cut and supply wood to the government on a contract basis, to investigate the safety of the bay for ships, and to determine the best season for the shipping of wood (so that, if possible, the grain from Mossel Bay and the wood from Plettenberg Bay could be fetched on the same trip). The commission also had to determine the best location for the woodshed, draw up the building contract with a local contractor and arrange that the necessary timber was cut and prepared for him. They also had to determine the duties of the Post holder. They also had to arrange that a number of the Outeniqualand outpost woodcutters were transferred to Plettenberg Bay, and had to ensure that the burgher woodcutters did not destroy the forests and waste wood (Sleigh, 1993).

The commission's suggestions were discussed by the "Politieke Raad" on 27 December 1786. They cordoned off 25 plots next to the Piesang River and Wittedrift River (*Bitou River*), where burghers who wanted to participate in the wood supply (woodcutters) could establish themselves. The woodcutters had to work under contract for the VOC (beams and planks were to be delivered to the VOC at tariff rates) and they were required to renew their contracts with the Governor each year. However, they did not accept the Government's proposed tariffs for wood. The commission calculated that it would not cost the VOC very much to keep its own woodcutters in Plettenberg Bay, but then the Government's aim, to provide the burghers of the area with a stable life, will not be achieved. The burghers would then continue living an indolent, lazy and nomadic cattle farming life. The Government therefore agreed to pay the burghers higher tariffs. The commission also recommended that the detached forest at De Poort, which was mentioned by Landdrost Woeke, be divided in two by a wagon road. The VOC would cut wood from the part closest to the beach, and the burghers' the other part. The plan for the division was to thin out the forest evenly (Sleigh, 1993).

A Poster dated 27 December 1786 authorised the contracted woodcutters to start with the cutting and delivering of wood, whilst all other residents in the area were forbidden to sell wood to ships. Contracts were renewed each year (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993).

Johann Jacob Jerling, a local farmer living east of the Keurbooms River, was contracted by the commission to build a woodshed (*for storage of wood prior to shipment by sea*). The outpost at Plettenberg Bay enabled the VOC to ship the wood from the Bay's harbour to Cape Town. The Government wanted the building of the shed to be completed by the end of December 1787, but it was only finished in October 1788 (Sleigh, 1993).

Johan Friedrich Meeding was transferred from the downsized Outeniqualand outpost to take over command as the Post holder of the newly created Woodcutter's Post at Plettenberg Bay and signed the "instructie" in February 1787. He can be regarded as the first forest management pioneer in South Africa. One of Meeding's main tasks was to try and curb the rate of exploitation in the Knysna and Plettenberg Bay forests. He was directly in charge of the extensive forests around Knysna and Plettenberg Bay, where a number of contracted woodcutters were active. The woodshed was built under his supervision close to the bay, where the wood was loaded on to ships bound for Cape Town. Meeding ensured the orderly and profitable exploitation of the forests, and his strictly enforced protective measures greatly diminished the wasteful and destructive practices of the woodcutters (Sleigh, 1993; Van der Merwe, 2002). Unfortunately controlling and limiting wood harvesting to a 'sustainable' level in the southern Cape forests was a long and difficult task as woodcutters were a stubborn race to deal with. During Meeding's term in office, he succeeded in providing satisfaction to four different superiors – the Dutch from 1787 to 1795, the British from 1795 to 1803, then the Dutch again from 1803-1806, and finally the British when they re-occupied the Cape in 1806 (Van der Merwe, 2002).

On request by the "Politieke Raad", the burghers who wanted to deliver wood to the VOC in 1788, had to provide the "Raad" with the amount of wood loads they were planning to deliver. This needed to be done before the middle of March (18 suppliers promised 279 loads of wood). The woodshed in Plettenberg Bay was not completed yet, which meant that the wood needed to be kept outside where the sun and rain damaged it. The appointed Cape officials that were sent to Plettenberg Bay informed that there was enough wood for a full ship cargo, but because of only one available coastal ship (*Meermin*) for the Cape, it was uncertain when the wood could be fetched (Sleigh, 1993).

The first shipment of wood left Plettenberg Bay for Cape Town at the end of August 1788 onboard the *Meermin*. The ship was commanded by Captain Francois Duminy. The second shipment of wood was shipped by the hired *Jonge Franck* and *Duijffe* in August 1789, and the third by *Sterrenschans* in 1790 (Sleigh, 1993).

After the establishment of the Plettenberg Bay Woodcutters' outpost, the Lords XVII showed a lively interest in the exploitation of the forests. They were especially interested in the types of wood that could be found. They asked Governor van de Graaff in December 1788 to send samples of the different wood types utilized at the southern Cape outposts, with a description of the characteristics and the best usage of each type. But it took a while, and was only exported in November 1790, when the VOC was so weakened financially that the directors could not benefit from the information. Relations between the Lords XVII and the Cape Governor, C.J. van de Graaff, had deteriorated so much that his total order of Dutch wood was denied. The directors were annoyed about his ill-considered demand for Dutch wood, where two ships would be needed to transport everything, and advised him to use the southern Cape forests as a source of wood instead (Sleigh, 1993).

After the beginning of the timber industry in the area, the settlement of Plettenberg Bay showed rapid signs of growth (*which Governor Van Plettenberg had hoped could be established*); arrangements to control the depletion of the forests became necessary. Huge trees were being felled, the length of bole required for a specific order cut while the rest of the trunk and the mighty crown were left to rot where they fell, very often killing off 15 to 20 of the surrounding trees (Storrar, 2001). Certain measures were proposed in March 1790. The forests from Mossel Bay needed to be divided into sections ("vacken"). The

cutting had to start in the first section, and had to be exploited until it was exhausted or left with only young trees. Thereafter the woodcutters had to move to the following (second) section. The outpost had to be moved simultaneously to an adjacent bay. In this manner, section after section had to be exploited until it became undesirable to move the cutting further away from the main outpost (*settlement*). Then the cutting had to return to the first section (it was unlikely that it would happen within 50 or 100 years) by which time the young trees would have reached mature growth. *This was an early attempt at systematic forestry, based on sustainability of supply, by working through the forests in a systematic way, on a rotational basis* (Appel, 1966).

The woodcutters were also instructed to process all the remaining wood; lots of treetops and branches were usually left unprocessed in the forests. The “Raad” mentioned that the destruction of these forests could only be avoided if management stayed under the direct control of the appointed commission, and future commissions (Appel, 1966).

By 1790 it was no longer necessary to cut wood in “Outeniqualand” (*George*) for the production of gun-carriages, and the “Raad” considered abolishing the Outeniqualand outpost. One of the reasons for the mentioned consideration could be because of the fact that the forests of the Sonderend River had, by this time, regrown reasonably well. It was decided in October 1790 to rather downsize the Outeniqualand outpost as the VOC did not need to use the George forests anymore. The reason why it was downsized instead of being abolished was because the Outeniqualand outpost was the VOC’s only wagon-maker and smithy in the southern Cape, and therefore essential to the Government’s seven outposts and two drostdys east of the Hottentots Holland Mountains. The Post holder and a few woodcutters were given the task of protecting the forests and maintained the VOC’s authority in the area (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993).

The VOC started closing outposts in 1791, but out of all the woodcutters posts only the Riet Valleij, aan de Buffeljagtsrivier was closed due to the Grootvadersbosch being worked out. This decision did not have an effect on the government’s wood supply. A Post holder and two workers were appointed at the Riet Valleij, aan de Buffeljagtsrivier outpost from January 1792. They had to ensure that the burghers did not cut or damage new and young trees in the nearby forests (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993).

Because of the downsizing of the VOC’s activities in the Cape at the beginning of the last decade of the eighteenth century (*1790’s*), the import of wood from Europe could be reduced. But it was because of the VOC’s financial decline and not because of an improvement in the long-neglected availability of wood. The free woodcutters became totally impoverished due to the reduced demand from the biggest consumer. The VOC’s other woodcutter posts Zoetemelks Valleij, Outeniqualand, Von Kamptz Baaij, Hout Baaij and Plettenberg Baaij were considered strategic assets and their abolishment was not considered (Sleigh, 1993).

Financial cuts during the final years also had an effect on the Overberg forests. Because of the closing of outposts, the VOC could only get little or no benefit from these forests. The “Raad” instructed Landdrost Faure of Swellendam in December 1791 to determine how these forests could be exploited and protected in the best and cheapest way. With regard to the exploitation of the forests, Faure proposed that the burghers who applied to cut timber and wagon-making wood in the “Outeniqualand” forests should be allowed to do so, but only if they had a permission letter given to them by the Swellendam Landdrost (Faure). The permission letters had to be issued at 10 Rijksdaalders for 12 loads instead of the usual 3 Rijksdaalders. The wood was then sold to the VOC in order to make a living. The “Raad” decided in January 1792 that permission would be given from then on for the cutting of one load of wood in “Outeniqualand” for the price of 1 Rijksdaalder. The other suggestions made by Faure were approved (Appel, 1966).

The burghers in the Overberg rejected the provision, and it was repealed in December 1794. The price of 3 Rijksdaalders for 12 loads was re-instated. The “Raad” also decided that Post holders were not allowed to cut wood for themselves or for others (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993).

When the Commissioners-General Nederburg and Frijkenius arrived in the Cape in July 1791 on their cost-saving inspection trip, the Plettenberg Bay outpost was one of the few outposts which still existed, and it drew their attention. They were forced to investigate if the wood trade-and transport from Plettenberg Bay and other forests could be handed over to the burghers, so that the VOC could be freed from labour costs and other expenses, whilst the burghers could enjoy a stable life and regular income. They found that the profit made did not make the current situation worthwhile, as the VOC was no longer able to provide sea transport for coastal trade, as most ships that were used for the wood and grain trade were hired. The Commissioners-General announced on 26 September 1792 that the VOC will open free merchant shipping along the east coast of Africa and further to India for the burghers, and that the transport of grain from Mossel Bay and wood from Plettenberg Bay henceforth also be handed over to private businessmen. The contract between the burgher woodcutters of Plettenberg Bay and the VOC which had been signed in October 1786 was cancelled. They advised the “Politieke Raad” to lease the VOC buildings (in Plettenberg Bay) to burghers who established themselves in coastal shipping (Sleigh, 1993).

The Commissioners-General appointed a commission on 26 November 1792 to investigate how the VOC could use the bay and the forests of the area to their biggest advantage into the future. The commission consisted out of E. Bergh, F. Duminy and A. Faure. Their report was handed in on 2 November 1793 and accepted by the “Politieke Raad” on 4 February 1794. It was decided that the burghers could cut wood in the forest under certain conditions. It was no longer necessary to have a contract with the government, but they needed a permission letter from the Landdrost at Swellendam in order to cut 12 loads of wood at a cost of 12 Rijksdaalders. The government received a direct income from the selling of permission letters, whilst the woodcutters received raw trade items (wood) in order to take care of their families. The woodcutters had to give the permission letters to the Post holder, who had to protect the forest (frequent inspections) and prevent corruption (fraud) with the letters. Persons (woodcutters) who broke the rules were to be banned from cutting wood in the VOC managed forests. The Post holder had to choose a number of trees for the woodcutters and mark them. No other trees were allowed to be felled. For each marked tree, the Post holder received six Stuivers from the government, and also received a commission for each wood load that was delivered by a burgher to the Cape. The commission additionally recommended the promotion of Post holder Meeding to the position of bookkeeper. The proposed personnel for this role included eight individuals: four workers, a carpenter, a blacksmith, a wagon maker, and a mason (Sleigh, 1993). It was decided not to lease the VOC buildings in Plettenberg Bay to burghers (as advised by Commissioners-General Nederburg and Frijkenius). When they inspected the woodshed, the commission saw a variety of artillery parts, stinkwood, yellowwood planks, yellowwood beams etc. stored in the woodshed. The “Raad” did not expect the wood in the shed to be loaded and transported to the Cape in the near future (Sleigh, 1993).

These new regulations did not result in the intended welfare of the burgher woodcutters. The price of 12 Rijksdaalders for a permission letter for 12 loads of wood was too high. They also found that trees that had been barked by the Post holder, were sometimes unusable after cut down. They submitted a complaint to the Landdrost and asked for an improvement in the situation. The “Raad” received their complaint in September 1794, and on 12 December discussed how they could accommodate the woodcutters without compromising the VOC. The price for 12 loads of wood was reduced to 3 Rijksdaalders. Post holders were not allowed to cut wood for themselves (or allowing others do it for them) with a fine of 200 Rijksdaalders for an offence (Appel, 1966; Sleigh, 1993).

The exploitation of the Plettenberg Bay forests provided for a great demand in timber and wagon-making wood. Due to the prevailing economic situation in the Colony (during the early 1790's) a large portion of this provision, and the participation of the burghers in it, was disrupted. With this large scale exploitation

taking place, the value of the wood types of the mixed yellowwood- and broadleaf forests on the south coast were undoubtedly recognized (Appel, 1966).

The destruction of the forests in the district of Graaff-Reinet aroused particular concern as the area was mostly devoid of indigenous forests. Reports of wanton destruction forced the local Landdrost in November 1794 to ban all burghers from the district from cutting wood in the forests of Elandskloof at the Swartkops River if they did not have specific permission to do so (Appel, 1966).

Because of suggestions made by Meeding in March 1795, the “Politieke Raad” decided not to sell the forests and VOC buildings in Plettenberg Bay, and ordered Meeding to keep the buildings in a good condition (Sleigh, 1993).

There was a big demand for wood by the Government and burghers in June 1795, and the ship *Castor* was sent to the Plettenberg Bay outpost to load and transport the stored timber and artillery-wood (Sleigh, 1993).

The British occupied the Cape for the first time on 16 September 1795...

## 1795-1856

During the first British occupation (1795-1803) Plettenberg Bay was also used as a source of wood. Johan Meeding was retained in his post as Post holder of the Plettenberg Bay VOC outpost. In 1797, B. S. Lourens (lookout) and J. H. Baum (woodcutter and labourer) worked with Meeding. The presence of only one woodcutter indicates that burgher woodcutters sold wood to the Government. The wood was transported to the Cape by British ships (Sleigh, 1993).

In March 1797, Anders Stockenstrom (the Secretary of the Swellendam Drostdy), gave an order from the British head of Government in the Cape to W. Ackerman (*caretaker of the forests in “Outeniqualand”, the area around present-day George*) to repair the house at the Outeniqualand outpost. Sergeant G. S. Fend was the Post holder from 1799 to 1828 (Sleigh, 1993).

A naval yard was built at Simon’s Town in 1798. Lord Earl Macartney adopted a policy of utilisation of timber from the forests of Plettenberg Bay for naval requirements in England and Simon’s Bay (*it was intended that timber extraction should be concentrated around Plettenberg Bay simply because it could be easily shipped from there to Cape Town*). This stimulated a certain degree of interest in the forests, and also the extension of a very nominal form of protection. It would seem, however, that a great deal of irregular felling did take place between 1795 and 1801 (Phillips, 1963).

In April 1800, Andrew Barnard (*then Secretary to the Cape Government*) gave an instruction that no timber was to be cut by any person whatsoever for any purpose out of the forests under Meeding’s charge, without a written permission from the Government. Two months later the Landdrost of Swellendam was instructed to enquire forthwith into the considerable damage that had been done by some “ill-designed” persons to the Government forests in the area of Plettenberg Bay by setting fire to the forests and burning it to the extent of 20 miles (Storrar, 2001).

In January 1801, Governor Sir George Yonge issued a Proclamation authorizing the appointment of permanent Commissaries with complete authority to supervise, guide, and manage various forests in areas, including George, Knysna, Plettenberg Bay, Mossel Bay, Algoa Bay, and all other forests and woodlands within the Colony. The Proclamation specified that the powers granted to the permanent Commissaries should not extend to allowing any of the woodlands hereinafter mentioned to be cut, sold by license, or otherwise exploited in any part of the woodland that extended in a direction almost East by West from the Great Brak River along the mountain range towards Formosa Peak near Plettenberg Bay. The Commissioners and their officers were explicitly instructed to safeguard the entire mentioned woodland from cutting, spoilage, or waste. To prevent any part of it from being cut, burned, or otherwise damaged, they were directed to prohibit such activities through public notices and enforce strict punishment for any offender against this directive. In addition to their other powers, the Commissaries were empowered to select and appoint specific surveyors and inspectors. It was the duty of these appointees to oversee the woodlands, visit them regularly, and prevent the waste, destruction, or burning of the said woodlands, as well as to protect the young timber (Phillips, 1963).

The Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser reported the same month that the creation of a sawmill on the banks of the Keurbooms River was sanctioned by the Government (Phillips, 1963).

The Dutch occupied the Cape again in the form of the Batavian Republic from 1803-1806.

When the British withdrew in 1803, General J. W. Janssens (*the first and only Governor during the brief rule of the Batavian Republic*) visited the Plettenberg Bay outpost and, like the British before him and the Dutch governors before them, he came to investigate the potentially lucrative forests in the area. He set out from Cape Town in April 1803 with Captain Paravicini di Capelli, Doctor Passet, burgher Dirk Gysbert van Reenen and van Reenen's son, Daniel, as company, guides and interpreters. The Governor and his party inspected the tiny settlement and the forests nearby the Bay from 23 April to 26 April. The whole tone of their report was calmly optimistic. They decided that a new sawmill was needed and that the best place for it would be on the farm Doukamma (*north of Wittedrif*). Van Reenen reported that the forests are so situated that there is a level approach to the timber with the wagons and, with the loads, a downhill return to the Bay (Storrar, 2001). Governor Janssens ordered Post holder Meeding to build a warehouse out of wood. He also recommended that Meeding keep all the buildings on the outpost (*except for the woodshed*) in good condition. The Governor inspected the wood, taken over from the British, and arranged for it to be taken to the Cape. He asked Meeding to cut the most beautiful Stinkwood tree as a gift from the Colony to Commissioner De Mist. When he returns to the Netherlands, De Mist would make "fraaije meubelen", which could trigger interest in Cape wood and lead to orders from the Netherlands. Meeding also had to prepare a block of each type of wood that De Mist could take along to make an inlaid table (Sleigh, 1993).

Commissioner-General J. De Mist visited Plettenberg Bay in December the same year. The reason for his visit was to inspect the outpost and to estimate the economic possibilities of the Bay. Apparently the Bay was not a suitable port because it was exposed to the south-easterly winds (Hulbert, 1817). The ships had to be anchored far from the beach, and the wood had to be dragged on floats behind rowing boats. The surf was heavy, the landing site was difficult and dangerous, the drinking water was scarce and the wind was either too strong or completely absent. The forest was about fifteen minutes from the outpost, in a northern direction. The Government's carpenter's was building a new woodshed (Sleigh, 1993). De Mist asked Meeding to collect the skeletons, heads and skins of all four-legged animals and to send it to the Cape, from which it will be shipped to the Netherlands. The Cape Government would then compensate him on a fixed amount, from 20 Rijksdaalders for the head of an elephant or a rhino, to 1 Rijksdaalder 4 Stuivers for a baboon (Sleigh, 1993).

The Batavian Republic demonstrated a concern for forest conservation. Due to significant timber extraction in the George forests by 1805, explicit instructions were given to the Landdrost (*Resident*) at George in 1805. The directive emphasized the need to protect and expand the forests through tree-planting initiatives. Unfortunately, the annexation of the Cape by Great Britain in the subsequent year brought an end to the well-intentioned efforts of the Batavian Republic (Phillips, 1963).

In 1806, when the British returned to the Cape, Johan Meeding was formally re-appointed to his post at Plettenberg Bay but was now designated Superintendent, not Post holder. He was informed that the Commander-in-Chief was prepared to honour the contract entered into by the Dutch, that he was to order the several contractors to continue preparing their timber for sale as before, and that he was to inform the Governor's office as soon as it should be ready so that a ship could be dispatched for it (Storrar, 2001).

By May 1809, 22 years after his appointment, Meeding had decided that he would like to resign and asked the Governor if he might have a pension. The Governor rejected Meeding's request and he continued in his post another four years, arranging with the woodcutters for a supply of timber "on the most reasonable terms and with the utmost expedition", then arranging storage for it until a vessel could be despatched from the Cape to receive it (Storrar, 2001).

Lt.-Col. Richard Collins was dispatched to tour and report on the Colony in 1809. On his visit to the Knysna region, he reported that the country was almost covered in forest for about 12 miles east of the Keurbooms River, and that excellent timber may be found, especially between the Shipwood River (*Groot River at Nature's Valley*) and Bloukrans River. According to Collins, a more favourable opinion about the forests seemed to be in existence, but their price was unreasonably high. He said that it would not be worth the inconvenience to make any alteration in the mode of procuring the small quantity of timber that was brought from Plettenberg Bay during that time, but should circumstances require for timber to be exported from the Cape, he was convinced that the Government should be able to take the matter into their own hands (Phillips, 1963).

After the British occupied the Cape for the second time (in 1806) it was decided that the Swellendam magistracy was too large and needed to be sub-divided. George was chosen because of the availability of good water. In 1811 George was declared a separate district and Adriaan Geysbertus van Kervel was appointed the first Landdrost (*magistrate*). The town was proclaimed by the Earl of Caledon, governor of the Cape Colony on St George's Day, 23 April 1811, and named after the reigning British monarch, King George III. The Outeniqualand outpost became the chief administrative centre and the town was established around it (ShowMe, n.d.; South African History Online, 2011). The establishment of the town of George resulted in renewed and increasing demands for timber.

Naval interest in the forests was revived in 1811, and Captain Jones R.N of the Royal Navy was assigned in October that same year to report on the forests in the vicinity of Plettenberg Bay, and the possibilities of the forests as sources of naval timber. He spent 12 months in the area to draw up a detailed report. His report was the first authoritative document on the forests and rather depressing reading it must have made for the authorities after all the high hopes of a few years previously (Storrar, 2001; Phillips, 1963). Here is a summary of his report (dated 1 November 1812):

- The consensus was that good timber was scarce and that the forests were not as extensive as has been reported. Meeding said that the forests were between 300 and 400 miles in length, which was not true. Captain Jones found that they commence at some distance on this side of the Gouritz River, and extend eastwards to the Erate, or first river, situated directly under Pic Formosa, or the Grenadier's Cap, in the Tsitsikamma range, about 120 miles in a straight line. They are confined between a chain



- of mountains parallel to the sea, and distant from it in a mean, between 8 and 9 miles. Between the Gouritz and Knysna Rivers they are generally no more than a belt at the foot of the mountains, from half a mile to a mile in breadth, and very large tracts of naked land often interpose. In some parts there are patches between the mountains and the sea, and along every river they continue for a small breadth on either side to the sea, which, as the timber approaches it, becomes less. They are very inconsiderable, either in extent or size of the timber, till near the Kaaimans River in “Outeniqualand”, between which and the Knysna River in Plettenberg Bay district nature has placed insurmountable barriers to the removal of heavy timber (Storrar, 2001).
- The report contains a description of the kloofs, deep ravines and precipitous river banks which impede the removal of trees from the forests by floating them downstream, and particularly the difficulty of transporting them to Plettenberg Bay, to which it had to come for shipping out. The rivers in this area, far from being beneficial to the removal of timber, form the greatest impediments, because of the steepness of their banks and the ruggedness of their channels. They are nothing but torrents of water, the mouths of which are blocked with bars of shifting quicksands (*the Keurbooms River is the exception*). Stinkwood, which will not float because of its weight, is the most troublesome of all to transport (*timber cut up near the Keurbooms and Bitou Rivers was floated down to the lagoon at their confluence near the mouths, which poured into the sea*) (Storrar, 2001).
  - In addition to all these disadvantages, reports Captain Jones, the anchorage at Plettenberg Bay is not considered safe and the Knysna lake, which would be a more secure place for ships to load and unload, is out of the question because of the hidden bar between the Heads, which makes the passage in and out impracticable (Storrar, 2001).
  - From the Bay the nearest point to the forests was 10 to 12 miles. East of the Keurbooms River there is a forest at the foot of the mountains about a half to three-quarters of a mile (1, 2 km) broad. Here there are still some tall, good trees (Storrar, 2001).
  - In the vicinity of Plettenberg Bay itself, however, Stinkwood has been relentlessly cut out for the past 25 years, and to a great extent much of that which remains is either decayed, or would not suit the purposes then desired. Very thick planks and of great parallel breath were required by the Batavian Government, and in order to obtain the planks, the very best trees were sought after and felled (Phillips, 1963).
  - No formal system has even been put in place in order to control woodcutting. Woodcutters pitched up at any place they pleased and commenced with the cutting of trees. The whole extent of the forest in the neighborhood of Plettenberg Bay has been at once made use of, and the consequence is that good timber is getting scarce. A system must be put in place in order to prevent the overuse of the timber resource. To a casual observer there appears to be a great number of trees in every direction, but experienced woodcutters will pass them by as only trees with good and useable timber are felled and used (Phillips, 1963).
  - The fall of one large tree in the forest causes much destruction to neighboring trees, and the remaining timber (*which is not used*) prevents young growth (*succession*) (Phillips, 1963).

From the mention made by Captain Jones that no formal system has ever been put in place regarding the cutting of timber, it can be concluded that the same system of unsupervised, uncontrolled, reckless “Jardinage” in its worst form took place in the forests of George and Knysna until 1874; and to those of the Tsitsikamma until the introduction Captain Harison’s improved method in 1866 (Phillips, 1963).

Governor Sir John Cradock’s proclamation of 20 October, 1811, stated that the forest tract between the Knysna and the Keurboom Rivers will be reserved for use by the Government only. Forests immediately to the east and west of George were sacrificed to uncontrolled public use in an attempt to ease the pressure on the Knysna forests. Another consideration was the deep ravines to the east of George, which made the transport of timber from the Knysna forests very difficult. The proclamation was also aimed at the termination of the present wasteful practices and at giving time for the almost exhausted tract of forest in the area of Plettenberg Bay to recover. Magistrates were empowered to proceed according to law against any persons who may be found encroaching within the limits of the above mentioned forest tract (Phillips, 1963).

The persistence of George Rex at Knysna persuaded the authorities that the great natural barrier between the Heads could be overcome. From 1817, when the *Podargus* triumphantly broached the passage between the heads, the emphasis of timber and shipping largely shifted from Plettenberg Bay to Knysna (Storrar, 2001). From this time onwards Plettenberg Bay dwindled in importance, because the vast forests pressed closer to Knysna and because of the greater ease with which ships could be loaded from a jetty there. Shipping continued, however, to come and go at the Bay, often to avoid the hazardous bar at the Knysna Heads when weather conditions were unfavourable. The felling of timber too, although it diminished, continued to furnish some sort of livelihood for men at the Bay for many years to come (Storrar, 2001).

The felling operations remained comparatively well regulated while under the control of the naval authorities (Royal Navy). There is no record of how things were managed during the era of the Admiralty's control, but judging from what had occurred before and what took place after, it may be concluded that "Jardinage" was possibly less reckless (*as the practice was controlled to a certain extent*). Nominal protection and regulated exploitation by the Admiralty continued until 1820 (Phillips, 1963).

In 1817 Sir Jahleel Brenton (Commissioner for the Admiralty) visited Knysna, and was so impressed with the possibilities of obtaining timber for the Royal Navy that he did an experiment. Woodcutters needed to fell and convert a quantity of timber, which was brought to Simon's Bay by the brig *Emu*. The result was apparently encouraging because thereafter shipments of timber left Knysna for the naval arsenal in Simon's Town, and on several occasions for dockyards in England. Experimental shipbuilding was tried by Brenton, but it proved to be a failure. Before long, it transpired that the timber sent to the English dockyards was found less serviceable than Oak and consequently it was not in demand (*despite this the coasting trade in wagon wood and planks increased with Cape Town*) (Phillips, 1963).

Wastage and maltreatment of the forests persisted until 1818, however, in February that year, the Colonial Secretary, Colonel Bird, drew the attention of the Landdrost of George (A. G. von Kurvel) to severe irregularities. Here is a summary of an abstract from his letter:

Bird highlighted the importance of preserving the forests. He said that regulations should be put in place which would prevent the waste of felling timber, and prevent the public from having timber supplied to them cut at improper times. Bird said it is essential that the Stinkwood trees in the forests adjacent to Knysna should only be used by the Government, and that no other individuals should be granted permission to cut them. He proposed that when officers of the Royal Navy have contracts with woodcutters for any quantity of Stinkwood, it should be necessary for the woodcutters to submit the agreement (contract) to the Landdrost. Woodcutters were previously granted permission to cut any tree, particularly in the forests of Leeuwenbosch (*the name of the original loan farm in the area of Rheenendal*) and Springfield, or in any of the other forests adjacent to Knysna (Phillips, 1963).

In 1820, the English dockyards reported unfavourably on the Knysna timbers, and Admiralty control ended that same year. For a time afterwards, the naval requirements of the arsenal at Simon's Bay continued to be satisfied by the Knysna forests until 1825 (Phillips, 1963).

When naval control ended, the Cape Government abandoned the monopoly of the timber trade. The forests were opened at a fee to licensed woodcutters which was controlled by Justices of Peace in the earlier years and Civil Commissioners later as a part-time responsibility. This led to a period of weakened control of the exploitation of the Knysna forests by woodcutters who were totally dependent on the

forests for a livelihood. It amounted to a laissez-faire policy, for these officials lacked the necessary training and dedication for this task (Phillips, 1963).

The carelessness that characterises the period from 1826-1846 is pointed out by Mr. John Rex (son of George Rex) on 5 April 1841. Regarding the alienation of forest, he wrote that the original survey and grants for the portioning-off of farms and allotments took place shortly before Knysna was discovered navigable (1817). The Government did not take the forests into account whilst the survey took place, and this meant that the margins of Government forests were in several instances 'measured in' as part of the farms and allotments. This circumstance was chiefly responsible for the minimal revenue that entered the public coffers (treasury), despite the exploitation the forests suffered annually. Mr. Rex also noted that of the estimated total population of the region (some 1000) the majority were woodcutters entirely dependent on the forests. The woodcutters felled timber chiefly in the Government forests which they either delivered to Knysna or Plettenberg Bay for shipment to Cape Town and Fort Beaufort, or transported it with wagons to Graaff-Reinet, Beaufort, Somerset, etc. (Phillips, 1963).

A reference to the condition of the timber trade about 1825-1830 exists in a memorial presented to parliament in 1855 by George W. Dutton and three others, petitioning the re-opening of the George forests (*which until 1858 included the Knysna forests*). In this memorial Captain Sewell of Plettenberg Bay drew attention to the vandalism that was prevalent in the treatment of the Crown Forests near Harkerville and Kaffirkop, but this warning apparently had little effect (Phillips, 1963).

Dutch farmers started leaving the Cape Colony from 1836 to escape British rule during the Great Trek. The demands for wagon timber greatly increased as a result (Van der Merwe, 2002).

During the 1840's exploitation in the uncared-for forests of Knysna, Tsitsikamma (*east of Storms River*) and George took a greater toll than ever before. It appears that little or no supervision over the Crown forests of the Colony was exercised by the government during this time. And until 1820 almost no revenue was obtained from the forests, more expenses occurred in connection with them. By 1847 the acts of irregularity had increased to such an extent, especially near George, that Government action was demanded by indignant members of the public in Cape Town (Phillips, 1963).

The subject was taken up by Mr. J. Montagu, then Colonial Secretary. He gave serious attention to the condition of the Crown forests, and the way that they were managed. In October 1846 several forest lots were up for sale in the then District of George (which until 1858 included Knysna), but not all the lots were sold (Brown, 1887). Then, in May 1847, another Government notice was issued. The Government, thinking that private ownership would allow for better control, surveyed and divided the whole of the forests in George and Knysna into lots and offered these lots for sale by public auction. A list of 25 forest lots, varying from 300-700 morgen in area, was appended (the upset prices varied from 5s to 15s per acre). All Crown Forests were declared closed, and no felling licenses were issued anymore (Phillips, 1963). To ensure their protection, John Kentell Haswell was appointed as Conservator of Forests, and assisted by four forest rangers, who were tasked with the protection of the Crown Forests in George and Knysna (Phillips, 1963). Only a comparatively narrow belt of forests which were still in a better condition on the higher plateau portions and along the lower mountain slopes between the Kaaimans River and the Keurbooms River was reserved as Crown Forest (von Breitenbach, 1972). The sales of these forest lots were slow and the selling of them did not have the effect which was hoped for by the Government, owners of forest lots continued to over exploit the forests (Phillips, 1963).

There is little on record regarding the period 1847-1855. By December 1853, 158 lots of forest land had been surveyed in the forests of George, and only nine lots were sold. At Knysna the alienations were few, while of the 85 lots surveyed for sale at Tsitsikamma only five were sold in 1855 (Phillips, 1963).

Fortunately, before many lots had been sold, the Colony was granted Representative Government by Great Britain in 1853, with the first Cape Parliament elected the following year (Western Cape Provincial Parliament, n.d.; Evans, Grimshaw, Philips, & Swain, 2003). In 1855 the Hon. Major Hope was appointed as a special Commissioner to visit some of the forests. He was unable to do so, but he consulted with the Civil Commissioner of the George District, and with J. Haswell, the Conservator of the Crown forests in that district in December 1855 (Phillips, 1963).

## 1856-1874

As a result of Hon. Major Hope's discussion with the Civil Commissioner and J. Haswell, he proposed a series of regulations, which were sanctioned by the Governor, and published in the Government Gazette on 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1856. The regulations stipulated that the selling of forest lots should be stopped, and that the Crown Forests should be re-opened (but under strict controls). The Crown Forests were opened for exploitation again in 1856, and put under the control of the Conservator of Forests who, assisted by his four forest rangers, was now authorised to issue felling licenses. They were also tasked with the supervision and protection of the Crown forests of George and Knysna. The Conservator was to account for all license fees paid to the Civil Commissioner (Phillips, 1963).

A second Conservator of Forests was appointed at Witte Els-Bosch (*Tsitsikamma*) in 1856. He was a retired Army officer, Captain Christopher Harison, a man with no forestry training, but with remarkable aptitude for his new career. He told the government that these forests needed to be preserved and protected for the people of South Africa. According to him exploitation in the forest was common in eastern Tsitsikamma (*from the Storms River eastward*) before his appointment as Conservator (Phillips, 1963).

Knysna was up until this time a Field-cornetcy of the District of Plettenberg Bay in the Magisterial Division of George, but in 1858 Knysna was declared a separate Magisterial Division; bounded in the west by the Swarttrivier; the east by the boundaries of the Division of Humansdorp, north by the Outeniqua Mountains and south by the Indian Ocean (The Heritage Portal, 2015).

The Forest and Herbage Notice of 1859 strengthened the power of the Forestry Staff. It provided legal protection of forests against irregular fire damage. Although the Act also regulated the illegal cutting of timber, it was poorly enforced. The Notice remained in force until 1883 (Phillips, 1963).

Normally the conclusion to be drawn from these facts would be that at least the forests had entered upon a new era of better protection and of controlled exploitation in accordance with a definite system. Unfortunately, this was not the case, as is shown later. Licenses certainly were issued, some revenue did enter the public chest, some supervision of the forests was provided, but little was accomplished toward improving the methods of working the forests. "Jardinage" continued, to the harm of much of the forest estate (Phillips, 1963).

Until about 1860, fellings were nominally controlled as to place, but in reality were allowed anywhere and everywhere (Phillips, 1963).

The first Colonial Botanist, Dr. Pappe, having explored the forests of Knysna, Tsitsikamma and Kaffraria (*southeast part of the present-day Eastern Cape*) in 1861 wrote the following: "Among the most common

and striking instances of injury done to the woods...may be ranked the wanton and indiscriminate felling of trees, at all seasons, and the carelessness with which useful and sound cut timber is frequently left to rot in the forests.” (Phillips, 1963).

Mr. John Blake, Civil Commissioner and Conservator of the Knysna forests, reported in 1864 that he was painfully struck with the waste of timber he saw there. He said that there were hundreds, if not thousands of pounds worth of timber rotting on the ground. The Conservator of the George forests advocated the sale of the forests as their sole salvation from destruction (Phillips,1963).

Because of pressure and complaints from existing private owners and woodcutters, sections of forest were again sold to private owners from the 1860’s onward.

Christopher Harison introduced a modification of the French ‘Tire et Aire’ method in the Tsitsikamma forests in 1866 according to which a definite area is harvested at a specific time. The New Forest (east of the Bloukrans River) had been the scene of Harison’s first application of his own interpretation of the “Section System” in practice. It was practically clear felling, equal patches (about 1000 yards square) being felled annually in the order in which they followed each other on the ground so that all trees without distinction were felled at the same age. When one patch was devoid of full-grown timber (*worked out*) it was closed and felling moved to the next patch. An entire forest was treated as a single working circle. It seems that rotations of 80 years were envisaged. It must be noted that his system was in accordance with the Regulations issued in 1856 (Phillips, 1963).

Harison’s application of the modified French “Section System” attracted the interest and attention of Dr. White. White suggested in 1866 (when a motion was put before the House to approach the Governor to appoint a Commission to acquire about the condition of the forests) that the same system used by Harison in the Tsitsikamma forests should be used in the George and Knysna forests. The forests should be divided into sections, and only one of these should be allowed to be open for felling yearly. The sections should be harvested by woodcutters (with felling licenses) on a rotational basis to ensure sustained timber yields. Once a section is harvested (*worked out*) it should be closed and given time to rest and rehabilitate for the same number of years as there are sections (Phillips, 1963).

The Governor appointed Thomas Bain and Christopher Harison as Commissioners in 1867 to acquire about the condition and management of the forests (Phillips, 1963).

Christopher Harison and Thomas Bain submitted their interesting informative report in May, 1868. They found that the conditions of control in the Conservancies of Knysna and George were appalling and that the forests were suffering from many abuses. Their recommendations were:

1. The forests of George, Knysna and Tsitsikamma should not be sold;
2. Captain Harison’s “Section System” (carried out by him in the Tsitsikamma) should be applied in Knysna and George. One Conservator of the three divisions, with Rangers under him in each, should be appointed with an appropriate salary;
3. locations of villages for the woodcutters squatting in the forests should be laid out at the Poort (Harkerville), Krantzbosch (*Kransbos*), Yzernek (*Ysternek*), the western bank of Hoogekraal River (*Hoekraal River*) and at Foure River (*Sanddrift River*); and
4. the completion of a road from George to Humansdorp (Brown, 1887).

Unfortunately, this advice was ignored until 1874, when much of it was put into place.

The “Section System” of Harison was authorised for trial in the forests of George and Knysna in 1868 by Dr. White (Phillips, 1963).

Harison had a few concerns regarding his “Section System”, and explained his obviously correct criticism of the system in 1868. He indicated that under the current regulations, there was a high degree of waste under his “Section System”. It was argued that this system would produce better results than that of “Jardinage”, such as less irregular fellings and less wastage of timber, but Harison’s experience proved this to be incorrect.

His experience was a forerunner of what Forest Officers of a later day found so profoundly difficult: the disposal of many less-valuable species and of poor stems of the best species. Harison complained that the wider inspection of the worked areas was prevented, and it contributed to the waste of timber. The main defect of the “Section System” was that it neglected all consideration of the varying requirements of different tree species (Phillips, 1963).

The planning of the “Passes Road”, which was meant to connect the towns of George and Knysna, started in 1868.

Disaster struck “Outeniqualand” early in February 1869. Bush fires had started all over the area during several weeks of exceptionally hot weather. On the ninth of February a hot Bergwind from the north swept the fires through the mountains, gorges and lower coastal plateau (Van der Merwe, 2002). From Mossel Bay in the west to Humansdorp in the east the country was ablaze.

One branch of the fire swept down a gorge and raced through the hills towards Knysna. Then, by a miracle, the wind changed and saved the town from certain destruction. The rural people were less fortunate. In the Humansdorp district alone 27 people died and many homes were razed to the ground. The Barringtons of Portland Manor and the Darnells of Westford escaped with their lives, but lost everything they owned. People took refuge in dams and rivers, covering themselves with blankets against the falling cinders (Van der Merwe, 2002).

The fire failed to penetrate the belt of main forests along the upper coastal plateau, for fire seldom penetrates deep into moist forest (only the margins/edges of the main forests were burned). Small patches of mountain forests, forests along rivers, forested valleys and dry coastal forest (scrub forest) were, however, destroyed. Soon after the fire there was strong agitation for the sale of Crown forests by individuals who greatly exaggerated the damage. The fire had quite an opposite effect on the Cape Government. Shaken by the events, the Government launched an investigation, which would lead to strengthened control over the forests from 1874 onward (Van der Merwe, 2002).

As an outcome of the Report of the 1868 Commission and of Harison’s correspondence with the Colonial Secretary, a Government Notice was released in 1871 stipulating that there should be measurement as soon as a tree is felled (this ensured the presence of Rangers) and that the wastage of timber should be stopped. The regulations stipulated in the Notice achieved their purpose in the Tsitsikamma, but the same did not hold at either George or in Knysna. Waste and destruction continued in these forests until 1874. It is interesting to note that these forests were open all year from 1856 until 1868. Harison, supported by the 1868 Commission, succeeded in obtaining authority to close the forests to felling on the 31st August of each year from 1868 (Phillips, 1963).

Even in 1872 the western Tsitsikamma between the Salt River (Soutrivier) and the Storms River was relatively unoccupied. The reason for this was that the extraction of timber was very difficult, and very expensive on oxen/wagons due to the huge river gorges (Phillips, 1963).

## 1874-1881

The year 1874 saw the amalgamation of the three Conservancies of George, Knysna and Tsitsikamma (Midland Conservancy) under Conservator Captain Harison, resident at Knysna, supported by a strengthened staff of Mounted and Station Rangers. Under centralised control vested in an enthusiastic Conservator, supported by some trustworthy, better-salaried, subordinate officers, forest management greatly improved. The clauses of regulations pertaining to felling licenses were carried out, resulting in more satisfactory control of the woodcutters, as well as more adequate protection of the forests against theft, fire and mistreatment. Unfortunately, the maltreatment of the forests continued. Public pressure and the increased Government intervention for timber to open up transport and communication demanded by the Millwood gold rush during the 1870's frustrated the efforts of the foresters, but on the whole a better era had dawned. Gone was the ineffectual control by the little-interested Civil Commissioners.

The system of management applied was, in essence, that form of the "Section System" which Harison had introduced in 1866 at the Tsitsikamma and which had been followed in name only in the George and Knysna forests from 1868. The trial authorised by Dr. White never came to be, although the Conservator of George in 1871 did attribute the increase in revenue from timber in some degree to the introduction of the system of Harison (Phillips, 1963).

Soon after the newly-appointed Conservator of the three divisions (Midland Conservancy) assumed office in Knysna (1874), applications were made to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works for the sale of forest lots in the Conservancy (despite recommendations made in 1868). The Government requested a report from Harison, regarding the advisability or otherwise of sale. Clearly this was strongly indicative of the unstable foundation of the revised policy. The idea of ready revenue for the public coffers (*treasury*) appears to have impressed the authorities at the time (Phillips, 1963).

On reply to the Colonial Secretary's question, Harison pointed out that the sale of forests at this time was especially undesirable. He said that the high price of timber rendered forest property one of the best investments of the day, and that speculators were straining every nerve to secure vacant lots. Regarding Knysna, Harison said that the Knysna forests would be sacrificed if they were sold as applied for. For instance, some lots sold a few years ago in the magnificent tract of forest opened up by the main road to the interior, for a few hundred pounds, are now worth thousands. He said that if the Government wanted to get rid of all their forests, they must be resurveyed and advertised for sale both in England and the Colony. But, if on the other hand, the Government decided to retain the forests and wanted to restore and improve them, the forests needed to be protected, and private rights should not be allowed to obstruct any scheme for the public good. These remarks did not apply to George where the forests to the west of the Touw River were cut out and nearly destroyed by fires. According to Harison these forests might be disposed of. Harison imagined that, should the Government decide to restore the more valuable forests, the work of restoration would be confined to Knysna and Tsitsikamma, and should not be done on a too extended scale, and not to embrace all the detached kloofs along the mountain ranges (as they are certainly not worth the expenditure of £215 a year necessary for their protection) (Phillips, 1963).

The Conservator (Harison) wrote to H. Newdigate, Esq., of "Forest Hall" in May 1874 requesting his assistance in preventing undue killing of game in the vicinity of his farm. Harison wrote that there can be no objection regards to fishing, but the Government objects to the wanton killing of buffalo and elephants (Phillips, 1963).

By July 1874 the Government made no reply regarding their decision about the sale of forests (Phillips, 1963).

A committee was appointed by the Cape House of Assembly in August 1874 to enquire into the situation of the forests. The members appeared to have been concerned about the Government's financial loss regarding the conservation of the forests, and were also displeased with the waste of timber, despite the expensive forestry staff appointed to control the fellings (Phillips, 1963).

One suggestion put forth was that the forest should be sold in small lots to poor men, and a price per acre was proposed, but Harison pointed out that the proposed price for an acre of virgin forest was too low. Harison defended the expenditure on conservation by stating that the loss was comparative only. What was expected on the improved supervision was repaid by the preservation of timber to the country, and that the waste spoken of must have occurred under the "old system". He said that, under the present system, waste was reduced to a minimum (Phillips, 1963).

The policy of "fell then sell" (*clearing forests of valuable timber and selling them*) was clearly favoured by the authorities, to whom the forests presented nothing but continuous trouble. The desire to sell the forests was increasing more and more, and it is evident from the Conservator's (Harison) letter of 4 December 1874 to the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works. Here is a summary of the letter: Regarding the wishes of the Government with respect to the 'worked-out' Crown Forests, the Surveyor-General and Harison recommended the sale of the whole of the George forests. Another suggestion by Harison was to keep the George forests closed, except for telegraph poles. In December 1874, the mounted Ranger-in-Charge gave a definite instruction to sell the George forests. By January 1875, the sale of "worked-out" forest had been extended to the forests of this class (*worked-out*) in Knysna. Thereafter Harison wrote a letter to the Surveyor-General and said that there was no re-survey of the Knysna forest lots made, which meant that there were no boundaries, and this will bring endless disputes between owners. He begged the Surveyor-General to mention this issue to the Government (Phillips, 1963).

In February 1875, Harison advised the Civil Commissioner of Knysna to not approve all applications for the hunting of buffaloes. Harison told him that the buffaloes were numerous, but they were not destructive to property and an annoyance to the public. Their skins were, however, valuable and that was the reason for the repeated desire to obtain specimens. He said that it must be kept in mind that when a permit is given for one buffalo it generally entails the destruction of many more. Harison said that the number of buffaloes would justify the annual killing of a few, and to meet the wishes of the sporting public he suggested a heavy license fee. There was suggested that licenses of £5 be issued to shoot one buffalo, and £5 more for each specimen unavoidably killed in excess of the license up to three. If the total exceeded four specimens, a license fee of £10 per head was suggested. Harison said that this method would prevent their wholesale destruction for the sake of their skins, whilst the true sportsman would have a fine field open to him (Phillips, 1963).

Unfortunately, without a sound protective policy which could have prevented the destruction of these animals, the last buffalo was killed at Bloukrans River in 1883 (Phillips, 1963).

Harison, in his first annual report for the "united forests", once again made a strong appeal for the forests under his control. Here is a summary of the report:

Harison said that the present method of dealing with the forests is very unsatisfactory. They were cleared of valuable timber and then sold, and he mentioned that there was no provision for the future. He said that the Conservator's efforts are only for the benefit of speculators who demand, and remove, thousands of young Yellowwood trees which should have been preserved. Harison said that this reckless system will leave the area without trees in a few years. He said that forests in the hands of an intelligent man will be taken care of, but such is rare, and judging from the fate of lots sold in the Tsitsikamma and some in Knysna, the forest will soon make way for the "mealie" garden. Harison urged the Government to decide on some sort of system with respect to the forests. He also suggested that some forest portions should be



sold, but portions that are suitable for restoring and improving should be retained as a Government forest (Phillips, 1963).

Encroachment upon Government forest land was always taking place, and if it was not for the efforts of Harison and his rangers more forests could have been lost by the Government. Harison and his rangers halted encroachments and made examples out of wrongdoers, this tended to keep the evil practice in check. Unfortunately, the Government acknowledged on several occasions prescriptive rights of certain private owners, and by this means lost several thousand acres of valuable timber land (Phillips, 1963).

In August, 1875, a new series of regulations was approved by the Government. Many of Harison's suggestions are included in these regulations. The new regulations were almost the same as the regulations issued in 1856, but this time it ensured the protection of the forests (by providing the forest officers with a certain degree of legal power) and prevented the waste of timber. The regulations also stipulated that the Crown Forests shall be open to the public throughout the whole of each year, provided that licenses shall be issued to fell only the description of timber, which are known by the officers in charge of the forests to be in season at the time when applied for, and no other (Phillips, 1963).

Shortly after the regulations of 1875 had come into force, the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works pointed out to Harison in a letter the desirability of planting and propagating trees and enquired what could be done in the direction of Knysna. Harison replied by saying that he supports the idea, but that he can do nothing without funds. He also stated that the continued selling of the forests to private owners will leave little room for forest extension (Phillips, 1963)

Evidence that woodcutters as far back as 1875 were in the habit of petitioning Government for consideration is set forth by a record "that a petition from the woodcutters residing east of the Keurbooms River had been presented to Parliament by Mr. Falter, praying that the forest east of the Keurbooms River may be opened for them." (Phillips, 1963)

Trees such as the giant *Podocarpus falcatus* (Outeniqua Yellowwood) evidently were not sold regularly, as the woodcutters found them difficult to work with because of their size. In 1876 permission was given to rangers to encourage the woodcutters to fell large Yellowwoods, and to allow 25% more on a license when the wood harvested was genuine and in accordance with regulations. The felling and transportation of such large trees required more labour and worked up at considerably more cost. The reason for the scarcity of these majestic trees in most forests today (1923) could be because of this (Phillips, 1963).

The pleas by Harison about the selling of the forests were heard in August, 1876, when the sale of Government (Crown) forests seemed to be viewed with less favour than previously (Phillips, 1963).

In September, 1876, Harison proposed a policy for the forests of Knysna. He proposed that the Knysna forests must be closed as it has been exploited without any system, from all directions. He found that it was too late to introduce the rotation system of working them. Harison said that with the exception of the tract marked Lots T and U on the general plan, the forests are being rapidly cleared, especially of Stinkwood. He proposed that all the full-grown timber should be entirely cut out, thereafter they should be closed to allow them to rest and regrow. Tokens T and U can be opened for the trade of Knysna, and the forests beyond the Salt River (Soutrivier) can be worked by the people of Plettenberg Bay (Phillips, 1963).

In October 1876, the Thesen family purchased a well forested 1,079 morgen piece of Crown Forest Land known as Lot RR at that time known as Modderhoek which was registered in the name of Rolf Thesen (see Map B). They immediately set about establishing a sawmill on the site. The farm Modderhoek was 1000 morgen in extent, and in 1890 was regarded as the most accessible section of the forest (The Heritage Portal, 2019).

In 1876 Harison inspected the forests of George and said that it would be unwise to alienate (sell) land, and, although unproductive at the time, might develop into a public asset under the plantation scheme (a proposal to plant the best indigenous species in exploited forest) (Phillips, 1963).

The question regarding the sale of forest lots was still unsettled. Harison said that it is a question for the Government whether the forests and forest lands are to be sold, or whether it is not high that the future should be thought of at the expense of the present generation. He said that, until now, revenue has been the criterion of forest management, and proper conservation is sacrificed to attain it. Harison thought that every care and attention should be paid to repair the reckless destruction of the forests, and an end should be brought to the advised sale of the limited forest resources. He proposed that the welfare of the forests must be studied (*it should be the primary consideration*), without regard to the revenue they produce. He also proposed planting whenever suitable land is available (Phillips, 1963).

Harison's plea was met by the Commissioner's consent to the closing of the forests east of the Kaaimans River (Phillips, 1963).

Jack Hooper, a farmer in Ruigtevlei, discovered a gold nugget on his farm in 1876, in a tributary of the Karatara River. News of the find spread and prospectors poured in from all over the world. The Cape Government however would not approve prospecting rights before the prospecting capacity of the field could be assessed, but failed to act against the prospectors who invaded the forest creeks. By 1885, 2000 claims had been pegged and some 200 diggers lived in tents around Millwood. The search for gold increased when the first gold-reef was discovered in the quartzite-veins above the creeks. This caused Millwood's population to increase further and the establishment of the Millwood town proper. In 1886 the Cape Government ordered the prospectors to leave as they were trespassing, which almost caused a riot. This forced the government to submit to the miner's demands and Millwood was officially declared a gold-field in January 1887. By then almost a thousand people were living in Millwood. The Millwood fields lay in the Outeniqua Mountains, closed off at the north by high ridges and in the south by lower hills and dense forest. The promised massive gold-fields never materialised and Millwood became a ghost town overnight as prospectors left for the Witwatersrand. This ultimately led to the unsuccessful exploitation of the gold fields. Mining for gold finally ended in 1905. The gold fields were finally deproclaimed in 1924 (P. Caveney, personal comm., March 2016).

In May 1877, the Government directed the Commission to instruct Harison to avoid, as far as possible, the issuance of timber felling licenses in areas where such activities could compromise the protection of river headwaters and strip the crests of major hill ranges of their vegetation cover (Phillips, 1963).

In 1877 sanction was given to close the George forests for a number of years, to restore, replant and extend them, while funds were granted for the plantations at Concordia for the experimental raising of exotic species such as gums, blackwoods and pines (Phillips, 1963).

Between 1877 and 1880 there is nothing fundamentally different in the policy to record, except that public interest has stimulated Government to be more active in their conservation. Alienation (selling)

became rarer and rarer, the policy of “fell then sell” died a natural death, and some attempt to extend the forests by means of plantations of exotics really was intended (Phillips, 1963).

Thomas Bain began to build a road from the western end of Tsitsikamma in 1879. *“What is interesting is that the passes along this road followed the ages old elephant tracks through the river gorges. A portion of this elephant trail, which connected up with the eastern Cape, can still be seen alongside the old Stormsriver Pass south of the current N2. It is a deep furrow worn out by countless elephant feet.”* (T. Stehle, personal comm..., 5 April 2016)

Soon the woodcutters’ petitions became more numerous and more irritable and the policy adopted again was one of compromise. The instruction to the Conservator from the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Public Works, in July, 1880 was to treat the woodcutters with as much consideration as you can. The hands of the forest officers were thus tied by higher policy. The policy during this period aimed at conservation, restoration and extension, but, in reality, it accomplished little.

But gradually the authorities realised that radical change was essential to progress. The weaknesses and the lack of direction, the misapplication of former policies and the unsatisfactory foundations of the present had to be put forever aside. A fresh outlook was needed as the forests were a national heritage for which the Government was responsible (Phillips, 1963).

The first step forward was the realisation that the appointment of a scientifically-trained technical head was necessary to the welfare of the Forest Department and of the forests it sought to manage. It was an important day in the annals of South African forestry when, on the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1880, the House created the office of the first Superintendent of Woods and Forests and appointed Count de Vasselot de Regne (a professional French forest officer) as incumbent. He introduced the first real efforts towards conservation (*the goal was not conservation of the forests, but rather to keep the forests in a long term productive state for its timber*). Under his supervision the first relatively quick-growing softwood timber plantations were established to increase the inadequate supplies from the indigenous forests. The Forestry Department was developed and professional forestry officers were appointed who played important roles in the development of forest management in the region and rest of the country for decades to follow (Phillips, 1963).

Among the trained officers on De Vasselot's staff was Colin McNaughton, who started with experimental forest research and drew up a scientific plan for forest management. Henry Fourcade, who joined the Forest Department in 1882, was perhaps the most talented and versatile of the young professionals. For some years he was engaged in surveying and sectioning forest areas. Before the turn of the century he invented and started applying stereoscopic photography and projective geometry to topographical mapping. Fourcade completed the first checklist of trees and shrubs in the southern Cape forests at the young age of twenty. In later years he became well-known at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Kew and at the Bolus Herbarium as an outstanding botanist. Fourcade was awarded Honorary Doctorates of Science by the Universities of Cape Town and of South Africa in 1930 and 1947 respectively. He died at Witelsbos in his beloved Tsitsikamma region in 1948. His name is commemorated in the names of 27 plants (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004; Van der Merwe, 2002)

In 1881, under Ministerial instruction, De Vasselot carefully inspected the Crown Forests in the Colony for the first time, and the result of the inspection was the preparation of his report of 1882. He made a series of recommendations in that paper, the survey of the forests and their better conservation by an efficient and larger staff (Phillips, 1963). He summarised his proposed policy under three main heads:

- The first was to be “the application of the best possible treatment to the existing forest lands”.
- Further he had in view “the introduction of timber trees among the bushes”.

- Finally, he aspired to “planting trees on lands where forests are necessary”.

De Vasselot also mentioned the Regulations of 1875 in his report. According to him the Regulations of 1875 brought about a great improvement, but silviculturally the forest was not assisted in any way. The Count proceeded to compare the “licensing plan” (*as he termed the working of the forests according to the Regulations of 1875*) with a system somewhat akin to this method, namely “Jardinage”, consisting of clearing away, here and there, the oldest trees, those decaying, diseased or withered, and those of mature growth. With regards to the future of the forests, this system (*Jardinage*) is far preferable to the licensing plan, since it at least clears the soil of mature trees, and this provides space for those trees not fully grown (Phillips, 1963).

Harison’s criticisms of the “Section System”, as he knew it in 1866, closely coincided with those of Count de Vasselot (Phillips, 1963).

By 1881, the road built by Thomas Bain, was passable as far as Bloukrans (*25 km east northeast of Plettenberg Bay*). The Bloukrans Pass was completed in 1882 (*1883*), and by 1884, the road reached Storms River at the eastern end of the forest belt (*50 km east of Plettenberg Bay*) (Skead, 2009).

## 1882-1890

In 1882, the two villages of Newhaven and Melville, plus “the wedge”, a triangle of land between the two villages, being the remaining portion of the farm Eastford, had been amalgamated to form a municipality, known as The Knysna, taking its name from the Knysna River (The Heritage Portal, 2015).

Very early in the period of De Vasselot’s control he decided upon the introduction of his notable “Section System” into the forests. By 1866, Harison had introduced his own very simple “Section System” in the Tsitsikamma forests, whereby he divided the forests into “patches”, separated by natural boundaries as far as possible, and opened blocks for the felling of selected trees by license on rotation. In 1868 the Conservator and Thomas Bain, as mentioned earlier in the article, had suggested the application of this method of management to the forests of Knysna and George. Harison, according to his statement of 1876, later had found it very difficult to apply, because indiscriminate fellings had already been allowed everywhere (Phillips, 1963).

Between Harison’s “Section System” and the system introduced by De Vasselot there was, however, great disparity, not only in procedure and mode of application but also in objective. Harison’s system only had one objective, the localisation of the fellings to facilitate supervision. The Count’s system, in addition, had the introduction of order where hitherto chaos had reigned. Most important of all, it aimed at the management of all forests upon the sound technique and principles of systematic forestry, leading towards the continuing welfare of the forests. Revenue as the main objective was replaced by the welfare of the forests and the consummation of their providing a yield in perpetuity. Silviculture and management played the leading role (Phillips, 1963).

De Vasselot revived the “Section System” and put it into operation by incorporating it into the Forest Regulations of 1883. His system was based on the management of the forests in a healthy, balanced state in which they could be exploited for their timber on a sustainable basis. In other words, it allowed for timber to be removed at a rate that matched the growth of the indigenous forest.

A shelterwood silvicultural system was to be introduced with an initial conversion and regeneration period of 40 years. During the initial 40-year working period the existing stock of over-mature, mature, defective trees and undesirable species was to be gradually removed. Young growth largely consisting of desirable species, *Podocarpus* spp and *Ocotea bullata*, on each section were to produce even-aged crops

to be managed on an 80-year rotation. Successful implementation of the intended system was hampered for a number of reasons, resulting in its periodic modification.

First, the woodcutters remained the sole arbiters of the trees to be felled. They picked out the trees they desired to purchase and left the remainder. Second, the flourishing railway sleeper business effectively confined timber extraction to *Podocarpus latifolius* and *P. falcatus* in the sections worked for sleepers. The selective exploitation *Podocarpus* spp. and *Ocotea bullata*, apart from being unsustainable, precluded any attempts to maintain the forest in a desired state, particularly regarding the removal of the old overwood. The intended improvement fellings and the cutting of undergrowth did not happen and, after the first few years, the whole silvicultural side of De Vasselot's system of management was abandoned. As a further complication, the number of woodcutters who were dependent on the forests for their livelihood had increased considerably (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

The original silvicultural system changed from a shelterwood to a selection system. De Vasselot himself was guiding this gradual transformation by way of continual modifications, which culminated in the revised Forest Regulations in 1891. At this stage the sections became annual coupes of selective felling within a projected 40-year cycle, and stipulated minimum harvest diameter limits (The trees with acceptable diameters for harvesting were marked by officials). The diameter limits below which trees were not to be marked were fixed at about 60 cm for the *Podocarpus falcatus*, 50 cm for *Ocotea bullata* and 40 cm for most of the other species (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

The Cape Forest Act was passed in 1888, which made demarcated forest inalienable (unsellable). This gave a greater degree of protection to the forests, and provided for the proclamation of forests on private land as protected areas (Phillips, 1963).

## 1891-1913

During his term as acting conservator of Knysna, James D. Cooper initiated the outright section system (from 1891) according to which a contractor would purchase all trees marked for felling on a particular section. The main advantage claimed for this system was that all marked trees would be purchased as opposed to only sound trees of certain species in public sections in the hope that the large majority of woodcutters would then be employed by the outright section licensees, thereby also resulting in better control of felling operations. This expectation was not, however, realised and an excessive yield was taken from the forests as both 'public' and 'outright' sections were operated at the same time (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

After the abolishment of De Vasselot's office in 1892, the administration of the southern Cape indigenous forests was delegated to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, and the demands for revenue again took precedence over the need for systematic forestry (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

With a large increase in administrative responsibility, the Conservator of Forests and his senior officers came to leave the actual marking of forest sections more and more to subordinate officers. In certain cases this led to the adoption of minimum felling diameter limits as the only method of selecting trees for felling; resulting in over-exploitation, especially of those forest portions that were heavily stocked with large- sized trees (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

Larger and more permanent sawmills were established. In 1892, George Parkes founded the Knysna Forest Company. He came to South Africa in 1891 to visit some of his customers. During the visit he learnt that an indigenous forest and a sawmill situated in the centre of the town were up for sale. The natural forests he bought off P.C. Metelerkamp and H. Stoebel. His purchase included a house, machinery and a sawmill. The sawmill (the Knysna Steam Mill) was established in Knysna in 1875 by William Lloyd. He owned the mill until 1880 when it was sold to the Knysna Steam Saw mill Company, managed

by Thomas Taylor. This company was liquidated in 1889, subsequently bought by A.L. Blackburn, with Andrew Blackburn as manager. Andrew Blackburn bought the company soon afterwards and changed its name to the Newhaven Steam Saw-Mills. George Parkes bought this company in February 1891, along with a sawmill at Veldmanspad owned by Shepherd & Williams. He registered his company and named it the Knysna Forest Company. In 1902 it was renamed George Parkes & Sons Hardwood Timber Merchants (Parkes & Williams, 1992; P. Caveney, personal comm., Jan 2020; SA Forestry online, 2017).

In 1904, Carl Westveld, started with the construction of an unique 2-Ft. narrow gauge railway (*known locally as the Coffee Pot Railway*) which were used to transport timber (*mostly Yellowwood*) from Diepwalle to Knysna. The railway was about 22 miles in extent from the jetty through the town with small branch lines and sidings to the Parkes and Thesen mills, Coote Noble and Templeman's Stores and yards, along the edge of the lagoon, crossing the Heads road at what was then known as Keurdrift, across Melkhoutkraal up the hill and following Fountain road in Hornlee forming "the Horseshoe", coming out on the Noetzie road to Bracken Hill and then on to the Main Forest to Veldtmanspad and ending at the terminus at Diepwalle (Parkes & Williams, 1992). The train continued to work from 1907, until it closed down, in 1949 (Knysna Museums, n.d.).

The outright section system was abandoned in 1913, with the passing of a new Forest Act. In order to safeguard the interests of those woodcutters dependent on the forests for their livelihood, the Act provided for a "Registered Woodcutter System" that was introduced in 1913. Existing woodcutters up to the age of 65 had to register in order to receive permits, and no new woodcutters were allowed to register, which meant that they could not cut timber in the Crown Forests. The registered woodcutters had to draw lots for demarcated forest sections, where they could fell marked trees selected by forestry officials. Since all registered woodcutters had to be supplied with sufficient timber, heavy over-exploitation continued (Phillips, 1963).

## 1914-1939

After earlier successes with plantation projects, a programme of afforestation with exotic species (mainly pines and *Eucalyptus* spp.) was undertaken between 1917 and 1939. The plantations were to provide for future timber requirements and to combat poverty and unemployment. The exotic species were mainly planted in George from 1917 and in Knysna from 1922 (Phillips, 1963).

However, even under the "Section System" forest destruction continued because the demand for indigenous timber made the woodcutters exceed the recommended volume to be removed. A forest inventory done conducted from 1927-30 indicated that the maximum quota per woodcutter which could be justified silviculturally for the period until all the woodcutters had died, or had reached age 65 (when they became entitled to an old-age pension) was only 8.5 m<sup>3</sup> per year. This was considerably less than the annual quota of 19.8 m<sup>3</sup> per woodcutter which was authorised at the time (*The woodcutters were able to pressurise the Forest Dept. to increase the volume of timber sold to them each year, this was obviously the most important factor in the management of the forests at this time. Any attempts by the staff of the Forest Dept. to prevent the destruction of the forests were regarded as bureaucratic attempts to repress the unfortunate woodcutters*). The average net income from the working of 19.8 m<sup>3</sup> of timber per year was estimated to be a mere 25 pounds and a reduction of the quota to 8.5 m<sup>3</sup> was obviously not viable. The "Registered Woodcutter System" was brought to an end in 1939, when all of the registered woodcutters were de-registered. The very old (>65 years) and disabled woodcutters were pensioned off. The remaining fit and able woodcutters were given an annuity of 25 pounds which paid out every year from 1939 until the woodcutter turned 65 and retired. They were employed by the Government Forestry Dept. in exotic plantations and some were used for controlled timber harvesting of dead/dying trees in the forests (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

During this period some promising research and planning work had taken place with regard to the indigenous forests. McNaughton's pioneering research work since the turn of the century heralded an era of systematic ecological and silvicultural study, which gained impetus when John Phillips was appointed as Forest Research Officer at Diepwalle Forestry Station in 1922. He was the first South African to receive a doctorate in the field of forest ecology, from the University of Edinburgh. His thesis, entitled *Forest Succession and Ecology in the Knysna Region*, was published as a memoir of the Botanical Survey of South Africa in 1931. Phillips' research into the ecology of the southern Cape indigenous forests culminated in the formulation of forest types for differentiated silvicultural treatment.

Phillips' concept of forest types was further developed by his successor at Diepwalle, FS Laughton, who incorporated it into his working plan for the Diepwalle forest. This plan represented a highly intensive form of yield regulation (*single-tree selection*) based on the increment determined by periodic full growing stock enumeration and the correction of the growing stock towards a normal one. A normal growing stock is one in which stocking levels, diameter class distributions and species composition have been manipulated towards values believed to enhance maximum sustainable timber yields. However, Laughton's form of yield regulation was never implemented, although it did lay the foundations for further development and implementation in 1967 under Dr. F. von Breitenbach (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

The Department of Forestry closed the forests to all exploitation from 1939 to 1964 except for the cutting of dead and dying trees and the working of windfalls in more accessible forest parts. The Government agreed to give the de-registered woodcutters six months' employment each year (*those who were still able and willing to work*) on the felling, preparation and extraction of timber from the forests to be sold annually by auction (*annual auctions were introduced after the abolition of the woodcutter system*) (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

### **1940-1963**

The exploitation of plantation-grown *Acacia melanoxylon* intensified towards the latter half of this period, and the felling of indigenous hardwoods now primarily served to supply the minimum requirements of small furniture workshops and local timber industries.

By this time there was no longer a specialised staff in the service of the Forestry Department and plantation officers were fully occupied with the management of their exotic plantations. Marking indigenous trees for felling was usually done by a foreman who interpreted the "dead and dying" felling criteria loosely so that any conveniently placed mature tree could be felled. The indigenous forests had become of secondary importance to plantation management (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

### **1964-1983**

An Indigenous Forest Management, Planning and Research Station was established at Saasveld, near George in 1964. After 1964, under the leadership of Dr F. von Breitenbach and assisted by Messrs. G.H. von dem Bussche, K. von Gadow and C. J. Geldenhuys, a comprehensive system of indigenous forest management was developed (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

After extensive negotiations between the National Parks Board and the then Secretary of the Department of Forestry and his Minister, the Tsitsikamma Coastal and Forest National Park was proclaimed in December 1964 to establish South Africa's first marine protected area and conserve the associated coastal forests of the region (South African National Parks, 2014). The size of the park has changed over the years, with the following changes:

- In 1983 the seaward boundary of the park between the Groot - and the Bloukrans rivers was extended to three nautical miles offshore.
- On 18 December 1987 De Vasselot Nature Reserve was added to the coastal park.
- The small Tsitsikamma Forest National Park was deproclaimed in 1989, and the name of the coastal park was shortened to the Tsitsikamma in June 1996.
- In October 1991 a 30-year lease was signed with Rand Mines Properties Limited to contractually manage the Soetkraal area, and in 1997 Soetkraal was proclaimed a contractual park in terms of the National Parks Act, 1976.
- In April 1996 the seaward boundary of the De Vasselot section was extended 0.5 nautical miles (0.9 km) offshore, and in December 2000 the marine section of the park (excluding the above De Vasselot marine area) became the Tsitsikamma National Park Marine Protected Area.
- In 1995 Erven 382, 444 and the Remainder of Erf 434, Nature's Valley were proclaimed as a contractual section of the park, followed in 1996 by (Buitenverwachting) Portion 1 of Farm 299 and Portion 3 of the farm Matjies River 295.

The recovery of the Knysna forests had progressed sufficiently for the commencement of limited timber harvesting for the furniture industry from 1965 onwards. Controlled harvesting through a sophisticated and conservative single-tree selection system was implemented for the first time in about 20 per cent of the forests. A single tree selection system was adopted as this most closely resembles the natural disturbance processes. Harvesting takes place on a 10-year felling cycle, which represents a compromise between the cost-effectiveness of management, which favours long felling cycles, and the prevailing disturbance regime, which favours short felling cycles. Timber was sold by public auction (South African National Parks, 2014).

The first completed indigenous forest management plan (*Groenkop Management Plan*), based on multiple-use conservation management, was put into operation in the Knysna forests from 1967 onwards. This forest management system was thorough both in concept and implementation (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004). It was characterised by the following features:

- A management classification system formally introduced and provided for the principles of multi-purpose conservation management. These classes included forest areas set aside for production (timber harvesting), protection, conversion (forest reconstruction), recreation and research (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).
- The silvicultural system involved a selection system (*single-tree selection system*) based on the normal forest concept (see above), and timber yields were a by-product from removals aimed at achieving normality of the forest growing stock (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).
- Numerous silvicultural operations such as culling of specified non-useable trees, enrichment plantings, slashing of undergrowth (*Trichocladus crinitus*), climber cutting and tending of regeneration, were stipulated in an attempt to improve the productivity of the forest (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

The specialised Indigenous Forest Management unit was disbanded in 1971 and the execution of work in the indigenous forests again rested with the plantation management units; although partially assisted by an indigenous forest planning section which continued to operate. Support for the high intervention, intensive silvicultural system of indigenous forest management progressively eroded away and was not replaced by a satisfactory alternative. Timber harvesting continued according to the selection system in those forests or which management plans existed, but gradually degenerated into exploitation of



opportunistically interpreted “dead and dying” trees, thereby partly reverting back to the situation of 1939-1963 (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

This unsatisfactory state of affairs resulted in a meeting (July 1981) to discuss the future management of the indigenous forests. At this meeting, later known as the MANINFOR meeting (Management of the Indigenous Forests), problem issues were discussed and decisions taken to investigate, devise and implement a new approach to forest management (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

The Wilderness National Park was proclaimed in 1983 to protect the unique lakes system of the area, with subsequent additions made in 1986 (Swartvlei System), 1987 (state lands in the Wilderness National Lake Area), 1991 (Rondevlei and lands between Rondevlei and Swartvlei Lake), and 1997 (lower Duiwe River) (South African National Parks, 2014).

## 1984-2011

The period from 1984 onwards saw the reinstatement of specialised indigenous forest management under the leadership of Messrs. A.H.W. Seydack and D. Willems, assisted by Messrs. T.C. Stehle on the management side and D. van Dijk and W.J. Vermeulen as planning section leaders. Subsequent to the MANINFOR meeting, new strategies and approaches for indigenous forest management were developed and became operational in 1984 through the Forest Act 122 of 1984. Further developments resulted in a series of modifications to the yield regulation system (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004). Four management features characterise this period:

- The actual implementation of principles and prescriptions over the complete forest area was facilitated by a specialist indigenous forest management unit (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).
- Conservation and utilisation requirements were fully harmonised with the aid of a modernised management classification system, which also provided for a network of strict nature reserves (*timber harvesting, protection recreation and research*). Such strict nature reserves serve the purpose of protecting representative examples of ecosystems (*forest types*) in a naturally dynamic state for scientific study (*monitoring*) and for wilderness-based recreation (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).
- Developments in the approach to yield regulation represented a movement away from interventionist forest manipulation towards pursuing the objectives of timber use in alignment with natural forest dynamics. The yield regulation system for sustainable harvest levels is based on species-specific productivity data (*increment, ingrowth, mortality*) and congruent with prevailing features of forest dynamics (*absence of silvicultural manipulations*) (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).  
The yield regulation system used in the Garden Route forests is a single-tree selection system that was developed locally, known as the Senility Criteria Harvesting (SCH) yield regulation system. Timber has been harvested according to this system since 1992, which is based on natural mortality patterns (South African National Parks, 2014). Harvesting is limited to forest types and sites that are the least ecologically sensitive. The system aims to pre-empt, and thus utilise natural mortality, resulting in the harvesting of the most senile trees. Individual trees are selected for harvesting by applying selection criteria that are based on external, visible signs of senility, declining vigour and low future life expectancy. The criteria are described for each of the main canopy species, and are calibrated to the natural senility patterns as determined by long-term research results. Trees falling within the selection criteria are marked for removal by trained markers if they can provide marketable utilisable timber. The maximum yield level currently achievable according to the SCH yield regulation system is approximately 5 m<sup>3</sup>/ha every 10 years, or 0.5 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/yr. All harvestable trees (i.e. meeting selection criteria and with utilizable timber) with dbh ≥ 30 cm of all canopy species would have to be removed to achieve this (8 – 12 trees per ha every 10 years from the same areas). However, due to market demands only real yellowwood (*Podocarpus latifolius*), black stinkwood (*Ocotea bullata*) and

hardpear (*Olinia ventosa*) are currently harvested to full potential. The actual annual yield is about 0.2 m<sup>3</sup>/ha/yr, which is approximately 40% of total forest productivity (SA Forestry Online, 2010).

- Ongoing monitoring of, and research into, aspects of forest dynamics provides the basis for continuing improvements in indigenous forest management (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

With the logging technologies and methods presently in use only about 6500 of the 9276 ha of the Timber Harvesting Management Class (*forest which is suitable for timber utilisation*) are effectively subjected to harvesting, primarily due to conservation constraints requiring terrain restrictions (*no harvesting on steep slopes and in moist patches*). Innovative alternative harvesting approaches (*e.g. involving on-site conversion of logs to beams or planks*) would probably allow the harvestable area to be extended to over 12000 ha (*extending into suitable parts of Management Class B areas*) (Seydack & Vermeulen, 2004).

The Knysna National Lake Area was proclaimed in 1985 in order to protect the Knysna Estuary (South African National Parks, 2014).

In 1993 State forest land was transferred to the newly created South African Forest Company Ltd (SAFCOL) to place the State's forestry activities on a commercial footing. Major indigenous forests were excluded from the land transfer. Management of the Knysna forests remained with the Chief Directorate of Forestry of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) (Van der Merwe, 2002).

It was decided in 2005 that about 97 300 hectares of state forests, formerly managed by the Department of Water Affairs & Forestry (DWAF), should be transferred (*under the National Forest Act, 1998*) to SANParks. The transfer included 35 756 hectares of indigenous forests (the Farleigh, Diepwalle and Tsitsikamma estates), about 35 638 hectares of mountain catchment area (*mostly fynbos in the Outeniqua and Tsitsikamma mountains*) and about 25 900 hectares of land under pine plantations. The plantations will be clearfelled, rehabilitated and transferred to SANParks. The transfer process started in 2005 and will be completed in 2020 (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, 2005).

The Garden Route National Park was declared on 6 March 2009. The Tsitsikamma National Park and Wilderness National Park were included into the Garden Route National Park on 11 February 2011. SANParks is responsible for the management of the GRNP, which includes the previously DWAF managed indigenous state forests and mountain catchment areas in the Outeniqua and Tsitsikamma Mountains, as well as the established Wilderness National Park, Tsitsikamma National Park, and the Knysna Protected Area (*Knysna National Lake Area*) (South African National Parks, 2014).

On 22 July 2011 45 former state forest land parcels ("*DWAF properties*") adding up to 120 566 ha was proclaimed as national park. Twenty-two more state forest areas (11 789.6 ha) in respect of which the transfer will be done progressively but immediately following the termination of plantation forestry on these areas, will still be proclaimed in future. The land stretches from Saasveld east of George to East of Storms River village (150 km), often from the crests of the Outeniqua and Tsitsikamma mountains south to the farming or plantation areas and up to the coast in some areas (*Harkerville State Forest*) (South African National Parks, 2014).

## **Acknowledgements:**

I would like to thank the following people who gave their input/ advice with my research:

- George Parkes (Former Director at Geo Parkes & Sons)
- Izak van der Merwe (DAFF Scientific services)
- Jolanda Julyan (Lived in Knysna for 20 years, and her father was a forester in the area for 47 years)
- Philip Caveney (Chairman of the Knysna Historical Society)
- Theo Stehle (Retired from DAFF; formerly District Forest Manager of the Indigenous Forest District)

## Bibliography:

- Appel, A. (1966). *Die geskiedenis van houtvoorsiening aan die Kaap, 1652-1795* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from: <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/17408>
- Brown, J. C. (1887). *Management of Crown Forests at the Cape of Good Hope under the old regime and under the new*. London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co
- Burrows, E.H. (1994). *Overberg Odyssey: People, Roads and Early Days*. Swellendam: Privately printed in co-operation with the Swellendam Trust
- Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. (April 2005). *Press Releases*. Available at: <https://www.dwaf.gov.za/Communications/PressReleases/2005/ForestsHandover1Apr05.doc> [Accessed 21 June 2017]
- Evans et al. (2003). *Equal Subjects, Unequal Rights: Indigenous People in British Settler Colonies, 1830-1910*. England: Manchester University Press
- Hulbert, C. (1817). *The African Traveller; Or, Select Lives Voyages and Travels, Carefully Abridged from the Original Publications of Bruce, Barrow, Campbell, & Park, Etc*. Shrewsbury (England): C. Hulbert
- Knysna Museums (n.d.). *The Coffee Pot Railway*. Available at: <https://www.knysnamuseums.co.za/pages/the-coffee-pot-railway/>
- Parkes, M. & Williams, V.M. (1992). *The Tale of a Timber Mill: A century of saw-milling, 1892-1992*. Knysna: Geo. Parkes & Sons (PTY.) LTD.
- Phillips, J. F. V. (1963). *The forests of George, Knysna and the Zitzikama - A brief history of their management, 1778-1939*. Government Printer, Pretoria.
- Plettenberg Bay. (n.d.). *The history of Plettenberg Bay*. Retrieved from: <http://www.plettenberg-bay.co.za/plett-history.html>
- SA Forestry online. (October 2010). *Natural Forests*. Available at: [http://www.saforestryonline.co.za/articles/natural\\_forests/timber\\_yield\\_regulation\\_in\\_the\\_indigenous\\_forests\\_of\\_the\\_garden\\_route/](http://www.saforestryonline.co.za/articles/natural_forests/timber_yield_regulation_in_the_indigenous_forests_of_the_garden_route/) [Accessed 3 April 2017]
- SA Forestry online. (May 2017). *Celebrating 125 years in the timber business*. Available at: <http://saforestryonline.co.za/articles/celebrating-125-years-in-the-timber-business/>

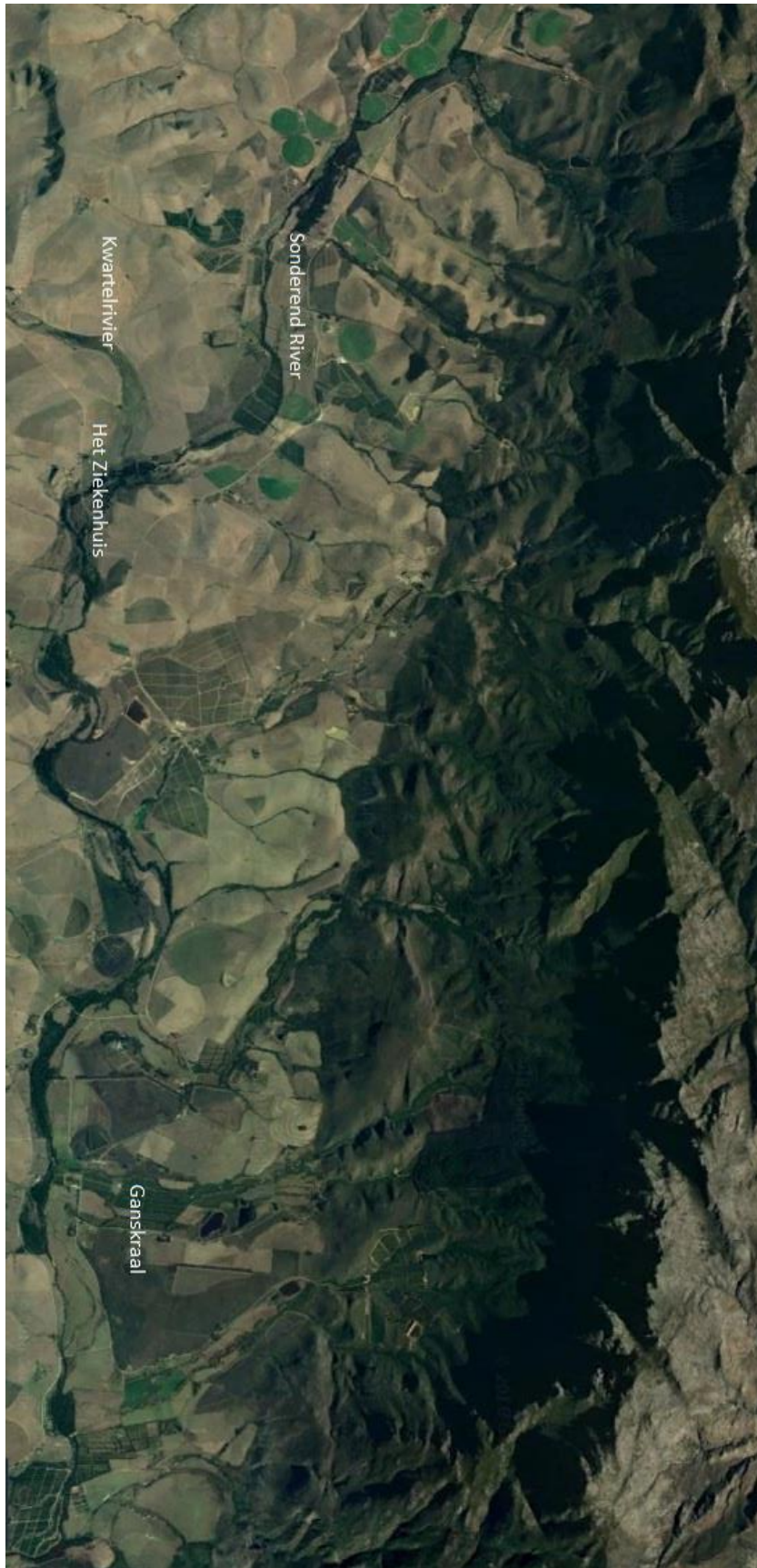
- SA Venues. (n.d.). *Attakwaskloof Pass*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.sa-venues.com/attractionsgr/attakwaskloof-pass.php>
- Seydack & Vermeulen (2004). *Indigenous Forests and Woodlands in South Africa: Policy, People and Practice*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press
- ShowMe. (n.d.). *A History of George*. Available at:  
<http://showme.co.za/george/tourism/a-history-of-george/> [Accessed 19 June 2017]
- Sleigh, D. (1993). *Die Buiteposte*. South Africa: HAUM Uitgewers
- South African History Online. (March 2011). *George*. Available at:  
<http://www.sahistory.org.za/places/george> [Accessed 19 June 2017]
- South African National Parks. 2014. Garden Route National Park: State of Knowledge. South African National Parks unpublished report.
- Storrar, P. (2001). *Plettenberg Bay and the Paradise Coast*. Craighall: Trevor McGlashan, TJM Publishers
- The Heritage Portal. (October 2015). *A Brief History of Knysna from 1770 to 1890*. Available at:  
<http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/brief-history-knysna-1770-1890> [Accessed 21 June 2017]
- The Heritage Portal. (December 2019). *The Thesen Homes of Knysna*. Available at:  
<http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/thesen-homes-knysna>
- Van der Merwe, I. (2002). *The Knysna and Tsitsikamma Forests: Their history, ecology and management*. South Africa: Chief Directorate Forestry
- Von Breitenbach, F. (1972). *Indigenous Forests of the Southern Cape*. Forest Research Institute: Pretoria
- Western Cape Provincial Government. (n.d.). *History of the Western Cape Provincial Government*. Available at: <http://www.wcpp.gov.za/history> [ Accessed 4 September 2017]

# MAPS

## A

### Sonderend River (Riviersonderend) forests

Source: Google Maps



## B

### Langeberg Mountain forests

Koloniesbos, Duiwelsbos and Wamakersbos



Sources: Google Earth & Marloth Nature Reserve

# Grootvadersbosch



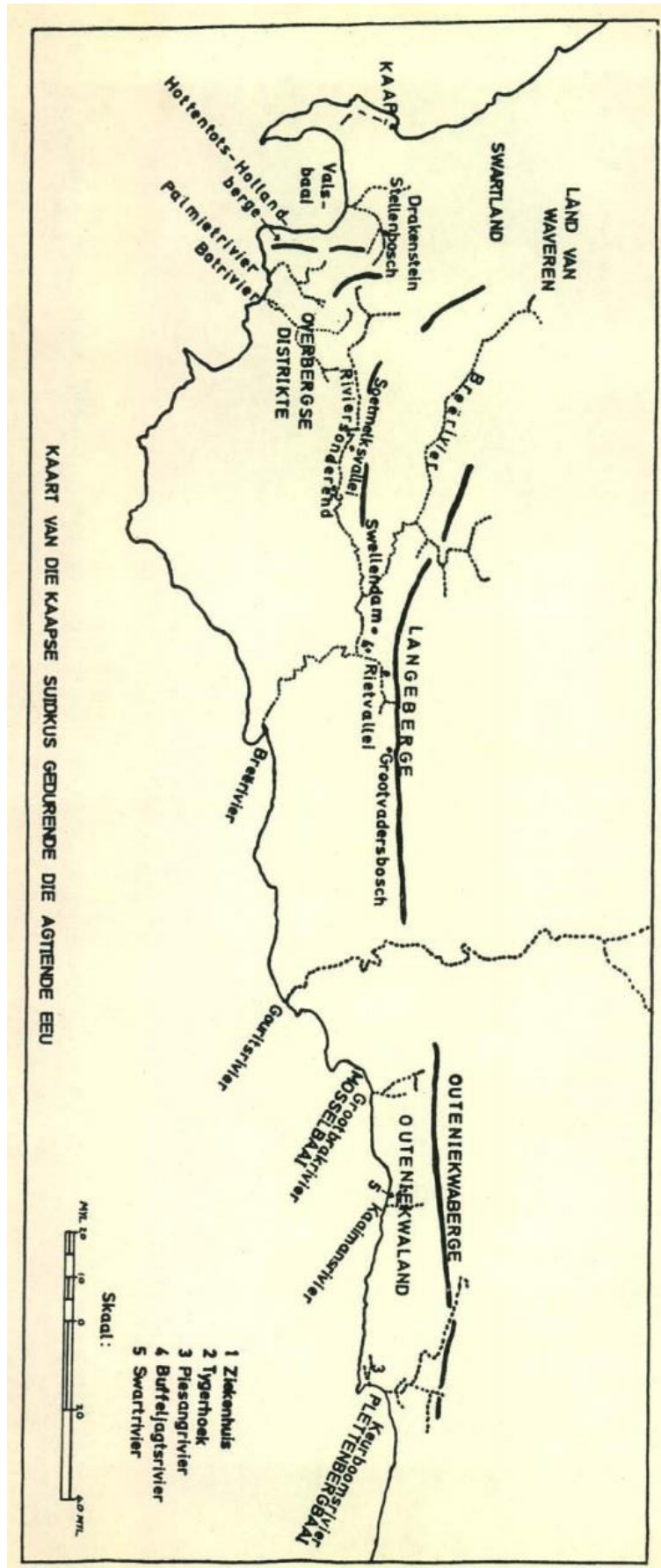
Source: Google Earth



# C

## Map of the Cape south coast during the 18th century

Source: Appel (1966)



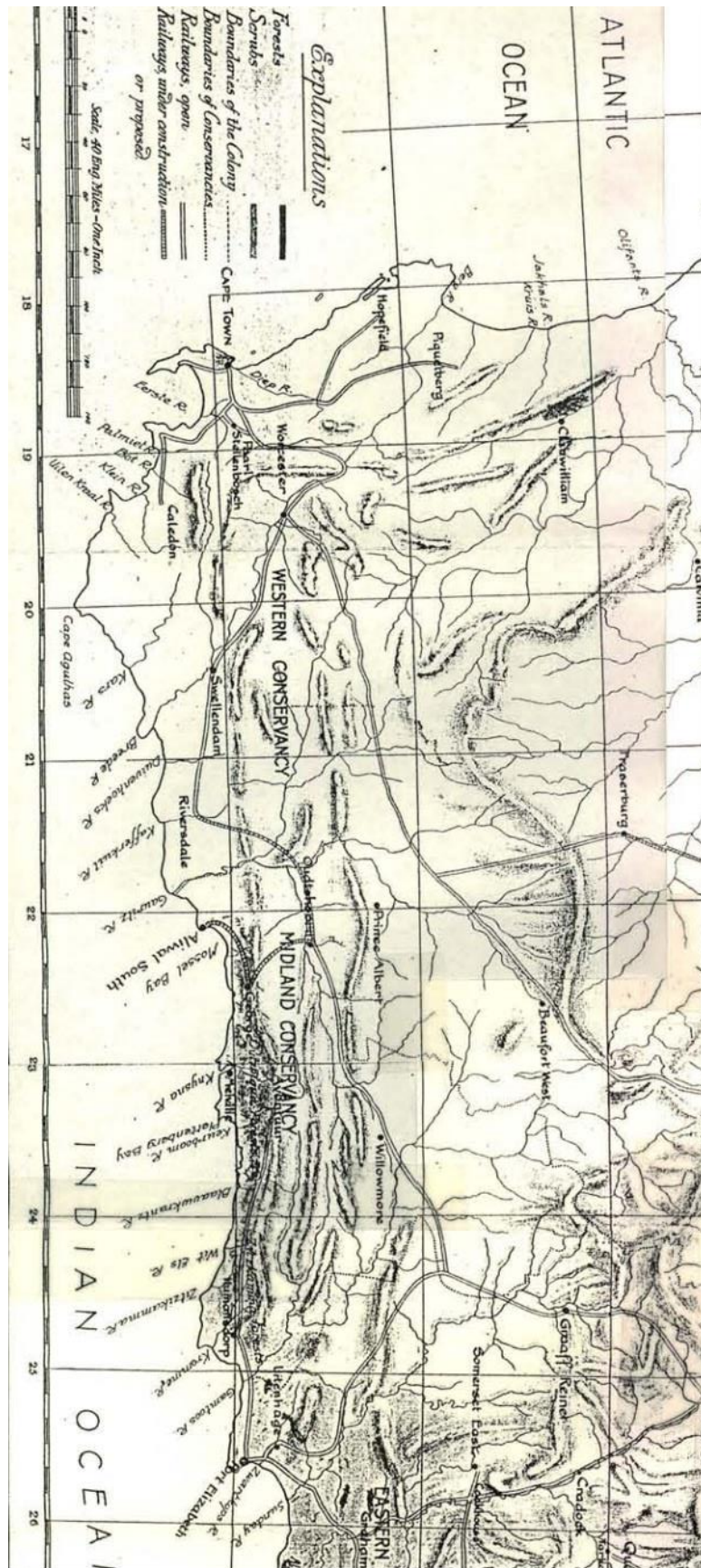


# E

The Colony of the Cape of Good Hope: Showing approximately the position of the forests and scrubs

Drawn by: T.R. Sim in July 1906

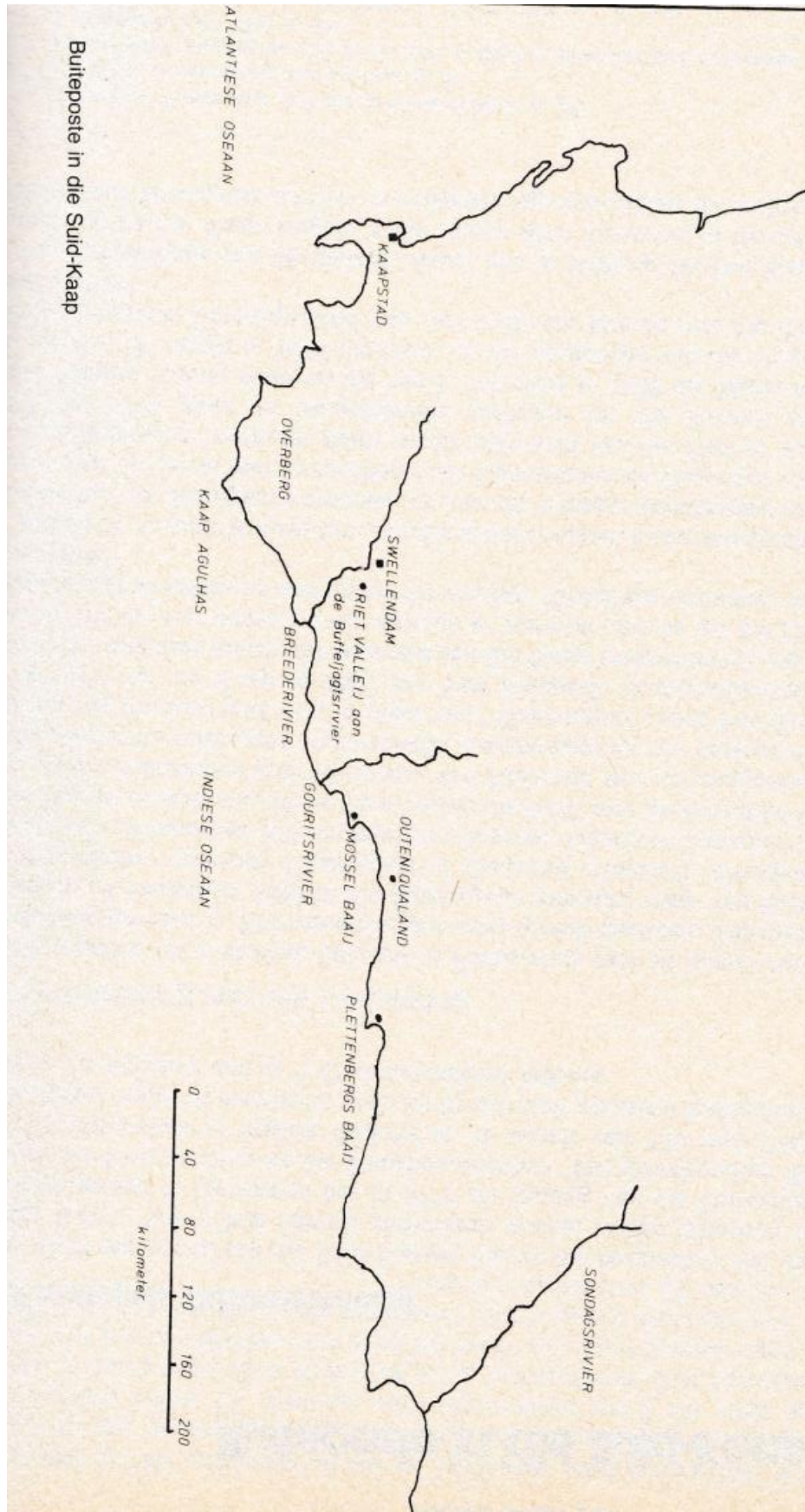
Source: Appel (1966)



# F

## Outposts in the Southern Cape

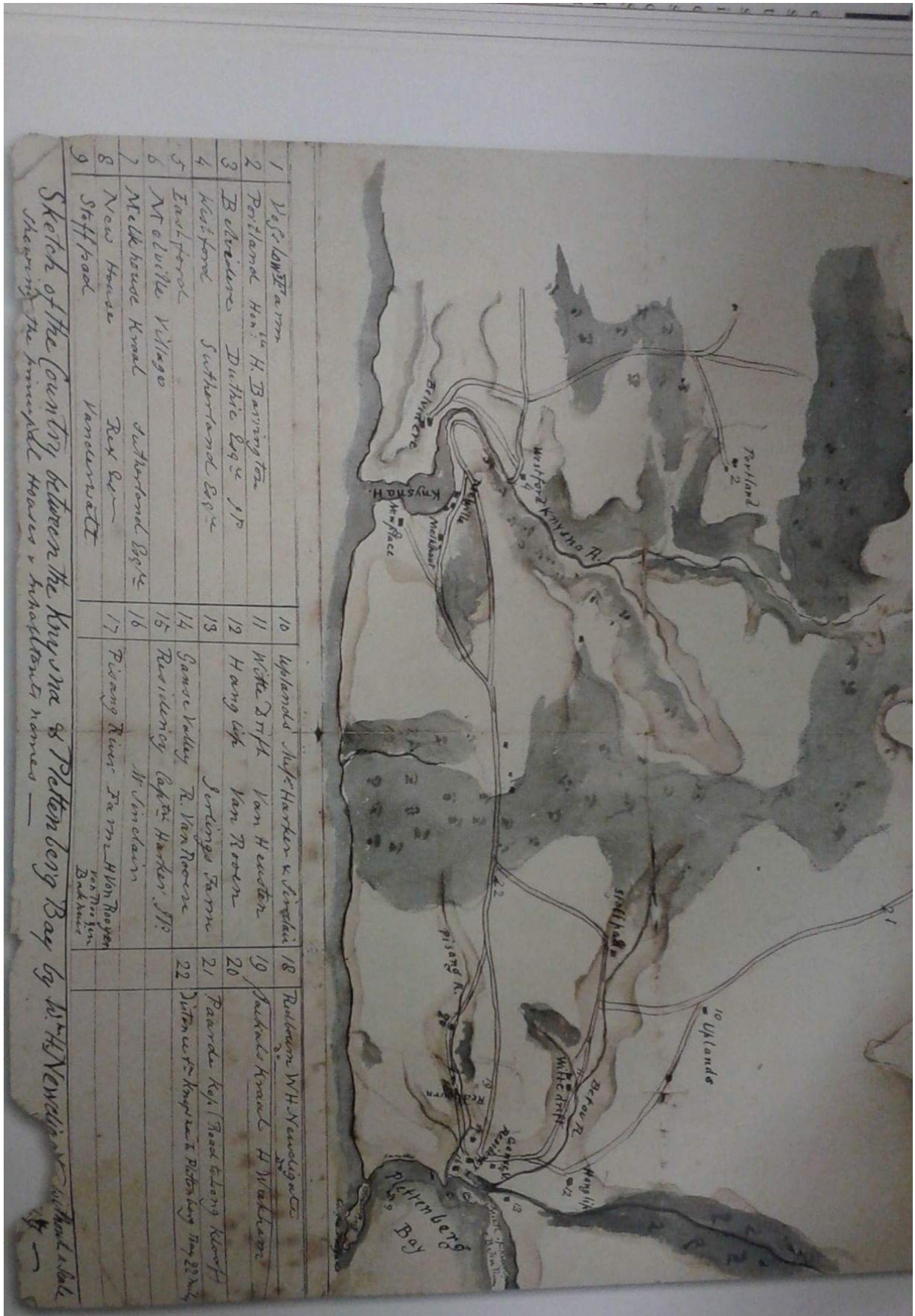
Source: Sleigh (1993)



# G

## Map of the Plettenberg Bay-Knysna districts drawn by William Henry Newdigate (circa 1850's)

Source: (Storarr, 2001)



# H

## Fisanthoek Forest

Extract from James Rawbone's 1885 map showing the sections of the Fisanthoek Forest

Source: The Woodcutter Settlements of Knysna: A tale of forests, woodcutters and hardship (Caveney, 2018)



# I

## Knysna Forest Lots (circa 1860) by JH Ford

Map showing private ownership of forests and dates of transfer

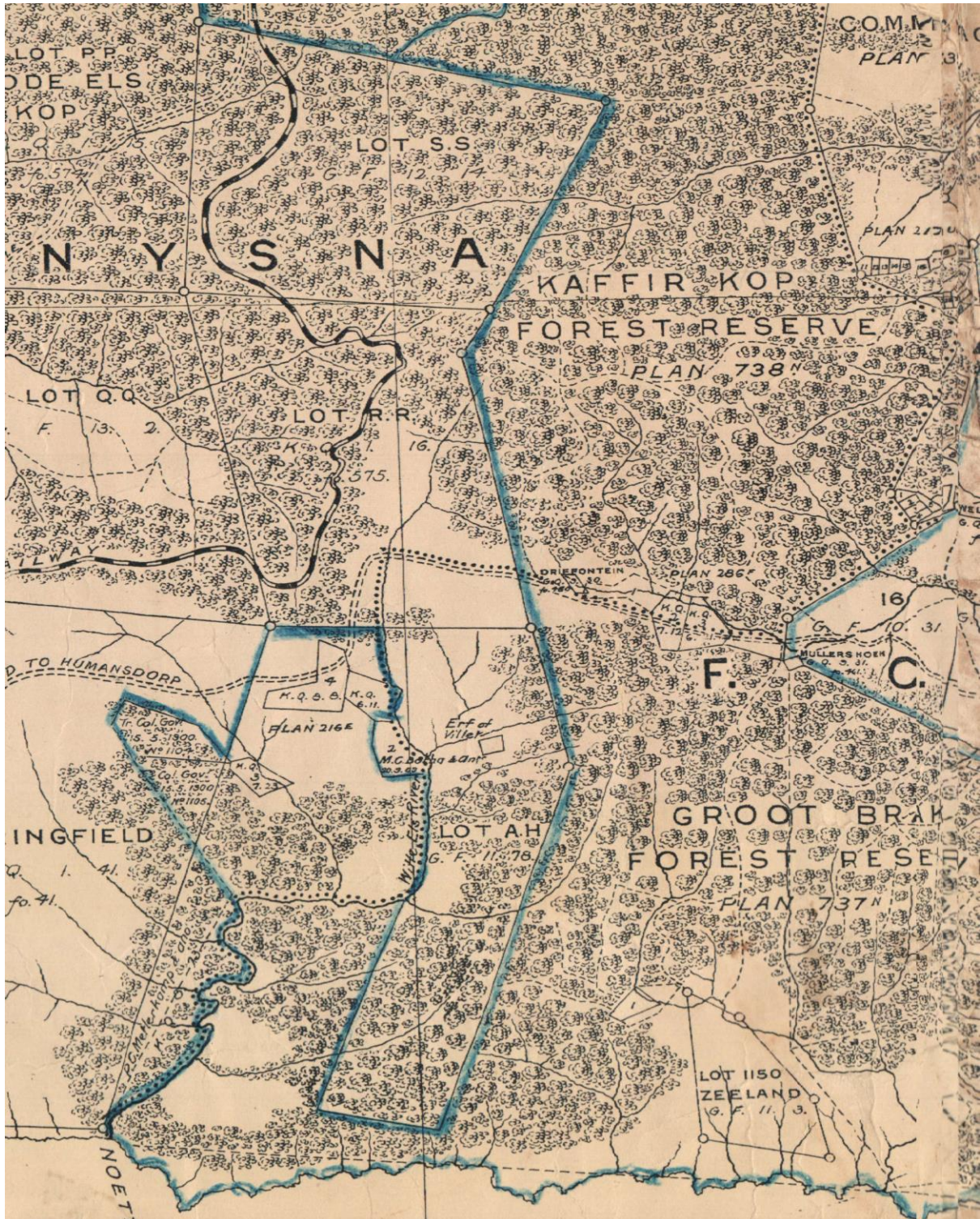
(Rolf Thesen bought Lot RR in 1876 (Modderhoek farm) now known as Bracken Hill)

Source: DAFF Knysna archives



Knysna Forest Lots drawing extract (circa 1910)

Source: DAFF Knysna archives





# K

## Map of Karatara (1874)

The map below was copied from the: "Plan of Forest Lands in the Divisions of George and Knysna prepared by Surveyor Hollands Compilation of Surveys by Surveyors Ford, Petersen and himself"

Source: DAFF



# L

## Forestry diagram showing woodcutter allotments at Kraaibosch and Sour Flats (1891) drawn by Henry Fourcade

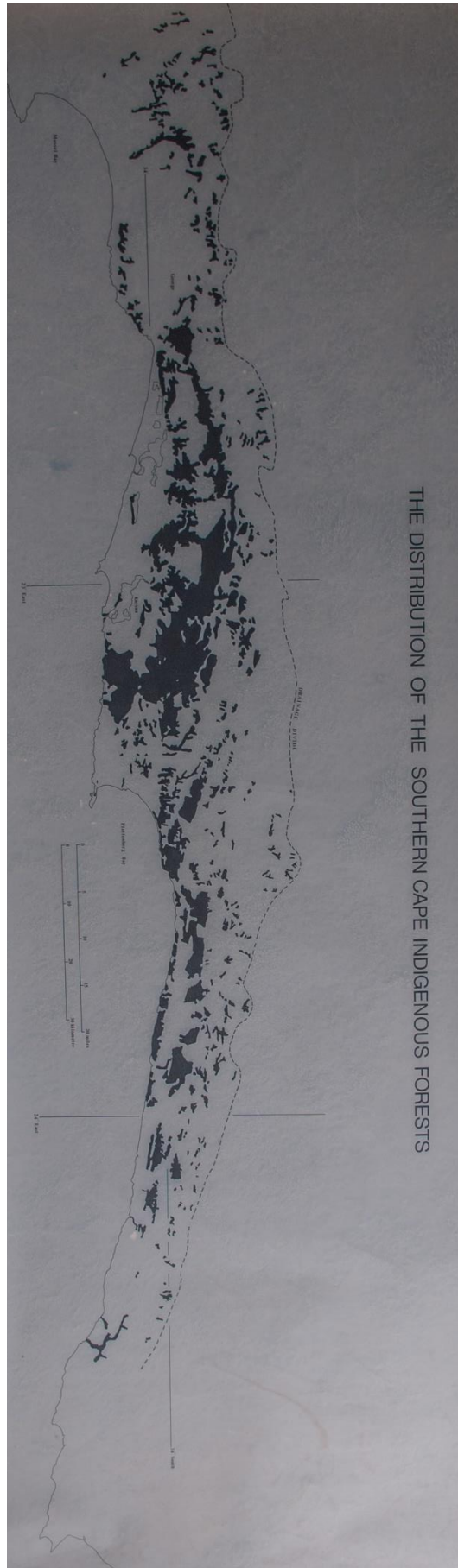
Sour Flats was known later as Balmoral and today known as Bibby's Hoek

Source: Philip Caveney (Knysna Historical Society)



# M

Map drawn in 1985 by Dave Reynell



N

# Garden Route Vegetation Map

Source: SANParks

