

EARLY VISITORS
TO THE EASTERN CAPE

BY

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No universally acceptable definition of geography has yet been formulated. So diverse are its interests, so wide and varied its fields of enquiry that it is unlikely that any short statement will ever satisfactorily express its scope and aims. Much has been written on this theme, and methodologists have expounded upon it in closely-reasoned essays. Their conclusions tend to vary according to their respective backgrounds of interests and specialisations. Yet, common to their beliefs is their agreement that geography is concerned with the differences in relief, climate, minerals, flora and fauna, and in their modes of utilisation by the human groups in their respective environments. The description and explanation of these differences is certainly at the core of geographical enquiry. The existence of these differences has been a prime attraction to the movements of individuals, of tribes and of peoples. They have led to the wanderings of hunters and gatherers, herdsman, explorers, colonists, traders and naturalists. A study of these movements is universally acknowledged as falling, at least in part, within the sphere of geography.

In search of different productions and of different opportunities the Eastern Cape was discovered, explored and developed. Our purposes are therefore to see what manner of men certain of our early visitors were and under what circumstances they came to the Eastern Cape. We shall also examine those of their tales that will best serve to illustrate what information

about it they gave, and what was available at the times when they were written. To define our terms—our travellers comprise explorers, castaways, traders, hunters and naturalists. By Eastern Cape we mean the regions east and north of about the present position of George in what was at one time known as Outeniqualand.

THE DISCOVERERS.

The first record of a European to set foot in the Eastern Cape was probably a member of Bartholomew Diaz's expedition, João Infante, captain of the ship *São Pantaleão*, who in 1488 led a landing-party ashore at the mouth of the river thenceforth for centuries to be called after him the Rio do Infante. This has long been identified as the Great Fish River but in fact is more probably the Keiskama or the Kowie, according to Professor Eric Axelson.

This was the moment when the history of the Eastern Cape began, when the first White man leapt into the surf, steadied the prow of his boat, and sword in hand waded ashore upon the firm dazzling sand. Offshore lay Diaz's "doom-burdened caravels" which were to be forced to retreat by near-mutiny amongst the sorely-trying crews. Thus we must visualise a second landing several days later at the modern Kwaihoek, near Kenton-on-Sea. Here the great stone cross-surmounted pillar was erected, significant symbol of militant Christendom's expansion, the Padrão of São Gregorio, farthest milestone on the long ocean route to the Indies. At this culminating event there would have been solemn ceremony, with as much pomp and panoply as their storm-battered equipment could provide. And so we can think of them assembled there in orderly ranks, beneath their crucifix, their pennons, banners and standards; with all rust burnished from their armour, and relief in their hearts at the knowledge that they had turned back. After the religious ceremony of dedication to Saint Gregory, came the formal words proclaiming the sovereignty of Portugal in the neighbouring waters, and then the terminating stridency of trumpets. On parchment maps the new-found coastline was drawn southward to the Cape of Good Hope and then eastwards,

where it ended with the resounding legend—"Thus far came the Portuguese".

Ten years later Vasco da Gama completed the work of his pertinacious forerunners, sailed his galleons around southernmost Africa to the west coast of India, and brought them back thence, treasure-laden in triumph to Portugal.

During the next century and a half southern Africa was regarded simply as an obstacle on the way to the East. It had nothing to attract mariners other than the opportunity of obtaining fresh water, lean stunted cattle and fat-tailed hairy sheep. Probably because of massacres of Portuguese visitors by Hottentots, chief amongst which was that of the returning Viceroy, Francisco d'Almeida and eighty of his men at Table Bay in 1510, no Portuguese settlement took place along our coasts. They were not even supposed to call anywhere here, except in the direst necessity. Misunderstanding, dishonesty, mistrust, truculence, all probably played a part in initiating the quarrels with the Hottentots, from which arose bloodshed and massacre. Thus from a number of initially trivial incidents flowed the profound consequence that the Portuguese shunned these shores, whose annexation would have put them in possession of the entire seaboard of southern Africa from the mouth of the Congo through Angola, Angra Pequena (Luderitzbucht), the Cape of Good Hope, Natal and Mozambique.

EARLY PORTUGUESE WRECKS.

Thus before Van Riebeeck settled in the Cape in 1652, Portuguese castaways on our coasts made northwards for Delagoa Bay or beyond. The first attempt at permanent settlement at Delagoa was only made in 1721, and then by the Dutch. Before that time it was only used irregularly as a port-of-call by Portuguese, and later Dutch, English and French ships, from whom shipwrecked crews could expect succour.

Full-length accounts of eight of these early Portuguese wrecks on the south-eastern coasts of Africa were written, have survived and have been translated into English. Of these we shall

describe only one coastwise march, a story similar in outline to the tales of dreadful sufferings endured by the survivors of all these wrecks. On 29th September, 1622, the homeward-bound vessel *São João Baptista* grounded near the mouth of the Keiskama River, only about 60 miles east of where Grahamstown now stands. Aboard were 300 people, of whom 289 reached the shore alive, and set out upon their journey to Sofala, only 30 miles from where Beira is now situated. The northward march began in a disciplined column, including women, infants and invalids carried in litters by slaves or seamen. But as food ran short and the weaker began to lag, discipline deteriorated and the column disintegrated into straggling knots of desperate people.

In general the Natives were understandably hostile in their attitude towards the ravenous castaways, ripe for instant plunder if peaceful overtures for barter failed to produce food immediately. Inevitably as the litter-bearers weakened they could no longer shoulder their burdens, in spite of the great rewards of gold and jewels offered them. Such riches were useless here, and every man for himself became the first consideration. A beautiful and wealthy girl was one of the first to be abandoned, though the ship's captain and all the noblemen actually carried her litter themselves for some time, after all offers of payment had failed to retain her litter-bearers. And so she threw herself upon the ground and covered herself with a mantle of black taffeta; and as the people passed by she cried, "Ah! cruel Portuguese who have no compassion upon a young girl, a Portuguese like yourselves, and leave her to be a prey to animals; our Lord bring you to your homes!"

The chronicler tells of their distress when they reached a swamp and found that it contained no frogs for their sustenance. They ate dogs and finally even resorted to cannibalism. But still they grew weaker, so that the time came when it was decided to leave behind all the women. The Narrative says, "All that night was spent in tears, lamentations and taking leave of those who were to be left behind. It was the most pitiful sight ever witnessed, and whenever I think of it I cannot restrain my tears.

Beatriz Alvares remained with two of her three boys and a girl two years old, a lovely little creature. We took her youngest son with us, though against her will, that a whole generation might not be left to perish there." No ship was found at Delagoa Bay, so the journey was continued to Sofala which was eventually reached by only about 30 men after a march of over 1,000 miles that had lasted nine months. "The trail of their tortured dead was hundreds of miles in length."

The tales told by the survivors of this dreadful journey must have given a highly unfavourable impression of the Eastern Cape. They had found it an unproductive wilderness inhabited by hostile savages, yielding none of the luxuries desired in Europe such as precious metals and jewels, spices and finely-woven fabrics.

THE SÃO GONÇALO.

Another early Portuguese wreck was that of the *São Gonçalo* in Plettenberg Bay, 1630, which is a rather different story from that which has just been outlined. Homeward bound, she became waterlogged and put in to the Bay Formosa (i.e. the Beautiful Bay, as they appropriately named it) to effect repairs. In getting at the leak three men died of suffocation from the overpowering fumes of wet pepper with which valuable commodity the ship was laden. Then whilst still at anchor the ship was wrecked in a storm and the 130 people who had remained on her were drowned. The 100 who had established themselves ashore set about building two smaller vessels with timber salvaged from the wreck and also cut in the fine forests behind the bay. They planted gardens, caught fish and exchanged metal objects for cows and sheep from the Hottentots. They actually erected, "a kind of church", evidently a temporary structure, for they would not have had time to build in stone. It is uncertain how long they remained, but before leaving they erected a cross on a hill overlooking the bay, and nearby cut an inscription in a stone which is now in the South African Museum, Cape Town. The two boats then were sailed away in opposite directions, to Portugal and to India respectively. The former in Table Bay met a Portuguese vessel to which they

transferred, but this foundered on the bar at Lisbon. The other boat eventually reached Mozambique and then India in safety. These men had certainly discovered or confirmed that our coasts had a healthy climate, a fruitful soil and good timber. But these were no attractions to settlement, as the Portuguese were interested in trade with the ancient civilizations of the East, not in colonization by farmers, foresters and graziers.

1688 GUILLAUME CHENUT.

Of all the involuntary early sojourners in the Eastern Cape, perhaps the strangest tale is that of the French lad Guillaume Chenut. He was a Huguenot of noble birth who at the age of twelve left France with his uncle to escape religious persecution. How or why they made their way to the island of Madeira is unknown, as is also the fate of the uncle. But Guillaume sailed from Madeira as a cabin-boy in the English ship *Bawden*, bound for India. In a fierce engagement with French pirates off the Cape Verde Islands eight of the crew including the captain, were killed, and the crippled vessel was many months before rounding the Cape.

They were short of food, so a boat was sent ashore to see what could be obtained by barter. Amongst the crew of seven was young Guillaume, and they landed somewhere between the mouth of the Great Fish River and the Buffalo River. There they were attacked by Natives and all were killed except the little French boy, whose life was probably spared because of his tender years. The *Bawden*, caught in a flat calm, drifted helplessly south-westward and never regained the place where her boat had gone ashore. This was in February, 1687, so the Natives amongst whom Guillaume Chenut now found himself were probably the Kaffirs or Xhosa as we now call them.

With his captors he remained, until astonishingly enough, a party of thirteen Dutch sailors arrived on foot, southward-bound from the Bay of Natal (now Durban) where the previous year (1686) their ship the *Stavenisse* had foundered. With this party Guillaume threw in his lot, and all of them were rescued at that prominent headland Cove Rock, some eight miles south-

west of East London. They managed to attract the attention of the *Centaurus*, a ship sent in search of them from Cape Town, where news of the wreck of the *Stavenisse* had by this time been received. Thus it was that in February, 1688, almost exactly a year after Guillaume had gone ashore in the Eastern Cape, he reached Cape Town safely. His remarkable story having been passed from the Cape to Europe, his eldest brother, who held an influential position in Anhalt (a state in central Germany) wrote to the Commander of the Cape, Simon van der Stel, asking for the lad's return. Accordingly Guillaume sailed for Europe in June, 1689.

FIRST CLASH WITH KAFFIRS, 1702.

The foregoing very early fragmentary accounts of the Eastern Cape are all concerned with shipwrecks. Probably the earliest recorded tale of an overland visit to the Eastern Cape from the west (i.e. from Cape Town) is dated 1702, during the Governorship of Willem Adriaan van der Stel. It is also the first record of a meeting between White colonists of the Cape and people of Bantu stock, the Xhosa. A party of 45 Whites and 45 Hottentots crossed the Hottentots Holland Pass and proceeded eastwards to obtain cattle and sheep by barter (which was then legal) from the Hotten'ot tribes. For exchange they took tobacco, dagga, beads, copper, bracelets of brass and of iron, assegai- and arrow-heads. The route they took and the length of journey they made cannot be accurately ascertained. But they were said to have been away for as much as seven months and to have travelled from the castle "More than 120 Dutch miles", i.e. more than about 550 miles, which would certainly have allowed them to reach or closely approach the Great Fish River. The Hottentot tribes that they encountered are named, but they probably then dwelt west of the positions where later travellers met them. In other words the Hottentot tribes were slowly moving east as White colonists from the west progressively encroached upon their traditional grazing-grounds. For example, the 1702 party records having met the Gamp-touwers, but we cannot be certain that this tribe then dwelt by the river named after them, the Gamtoos, some 35 miles west

of Port Elizabeth. Eventually our travellers were attacked by 500 or 600 "Cabucquas or Great Caffers whom they met going out on a marauding expedition" three or four days west of the boundary of the Kaffir territory.

One narrator describes the battle thus. "At daybreak when we called our Hottentots to pack our oxen, Jacobus van Hof called out, 'Men, men, seize your guns, there they come,' viz the Caffers armed with shields of hides and assegays. They came from the high ground to the low where the narrator and his comrades were standing by the fire. Daylight growing brighter, the Caffers standing in a line, attacked them again; one of them coming on as captain." The Dutch then fired upon them and battle was joined for three hours or more, when the Kaffirs fled leaving between 20 and 40 dead behind them. This then is the first recorded clash between Boer and Bantu and it may have taken place in the Somerset East district, where Xhosa tradition asserts that it occurred.

On their return journey the Whites were said to have committed numerous crimes in killing and robbing Hottentot tribes for their cattle and sheep. At one kraal alone it was said that the expedition drove off 2,200 cattle and 2,500 sheep. The story leaked out, as many of the party squandered their share of the booty in dissipated living, and enquiries were instituted at the instance of Governor Willem Adriaan van der Stel. At this time, however, feelings between him and the colonists were running so high, that all the allegations made against the expedition cannot be regarded as necessarily true. It is only certain that a deep thrust eastward had been made, enabling men to know that in that direction good grazing-lands and timber were to be found in the coastlands, in sharp contrast with conditions northwards from the Cape. And that in the east there dwelt tall black men who fought with throwing-spears and used large ox-hide shields.

HERMANUS HUBNER, 1736.

The first expedition from the Cape of which we have records that indubitably penetrated beyond the Great Fish

River, was made in 1736 by Hermanus Hubner and ten companions. As a result of the alleged misdeeds of the 1702 expedition, bartering of cattle had become illegal, so the avowed objective of this party was to barter and hunt ivory. They also probably hunted hippopotami whose fatty flesh (or *zeekoespek*) was then much in demand, as nearly all other kinds of game yield lean meat. Their farthest east was beyond the Great Kei River, in which remote district they met with three Englishmen who had been shipwrecked there many years before, and were living in all respects like Bantu, having numerous wives and children.

Trouble of unknown origin then arose between the expedition and the Xhosa, and this led to the killing of four Europeans (including Hubner) and a number of their Hottentot servants. This is said to have occurred some ten miles S.W. of the present Butterworth. Some waggons which had been abandoned were then set alight by the Xhosas, probably to obtain the iron in them. They gathered around the blaze, ignorant of the danger that in one of the waggons had been left three kegs of gunpowder which soon exploded with destructive violence, killing and wounding a large number of the Xhosas. The surviving Europeans and Hottentots of the ill-fated expedition fled westwards, fighting off the vengeful Xhosas until the pursuit eventually ceased.

It is most unlikely that this was the first expedition to cross the Great Fish River, or the only one to have crossed it between 1736 and 1752, when the next crossing of that river is recorded. Hubner's expedition is known, not so much because of the distance it penetrated but because it led to the death of four Europeans, and their deaths had to be explained to the authorities at the Cape. Had no deaths occurred, the expedition would probably have gone unrecorded, as no doubt have a number of similar journeys into Kaffirland at that period.

ENSIGN BEUTLER, 1752.

In the centenary year of the foundation of the settlement at the Cape, 1752, Governor Rijk Tulbagh despatched a large

exploratory party eastwards to bring back information of economic importance about the regions in that direction. It was organized on military lines and led by Ensign A. F. Beutler who commanded a contingent of about 36 soldiers, two surveyors, a surgeon, a botanist, a blacksmith and a waggon-builder, the entire party numbering 71 persons in eleven waggons. They came east to Mossel Bay and then through the Long Kloof to Algoa Bay. They crossed the headwaters of the Kowie River only a couple of miles downstream from Featherstone Kloof and Woesthill, and six miles from where this University is now situated.

I myself followed Beutler's route in many parts and made long walks of investigation over terrain whose essential character has remained unaltered since his waggons passed this way. And there in the sunshine and solitude of the veld, the unchanged scene evoked a picture of two centuries earlier, when over that selfsame ground jolted the wheels of the east-bound caravan. Across that grassy glade in the thornscrub must have passed the long column, led by horsemen and followed by uniformed soldiers, Hottentot voorlopers, plodding spans of oxen, white-tilted waggons, trudgers, driven cattle and dogs. And so they passed from view into the bush, and after many days reached their turning-point in the vicinity of Butterworth, where Hubner and his companions had been killed 16 years earlier.

Here the two surveyors found themselves in an unexpected quandary. They had plotted their positions largely by dead-reckoning, aided by a traverse in which directions were ascertained by compass, and distances estimated by the speed of waggon-travel. Yet apparently when they used their own figures to plot their turning-point, they found themselves out at sea on the trace of the coastline with which they had been supplied. This had probably been enlarged from a small-scale atlas-map of Africa drawn by one of the celebrated cartographers of Holland. All such maps at that time showed Southern Africa a good deal narrower than it actually is. The world-wide authority of the atlas-makers in Holland was of far greater weight than that of two unknown surveyors on the spot. In

deference therefore, to cartographers of international reputation, Beutler's surveyors had to adjust their route westward and northward to keep their turning-point from falling out at sea. It is a source of considerable satisfaction to me two centuries later to vindicate the observations of Beutler's two humble surveyors.

Beutler's instructions were that when he had proceeded sufficiently far to the north-east, he was to strike due west into the interior and press on until he viewed the Atlantic Ocean near the copper-deposits of Namaqualand, thus performing a vast triangular traverse. These orders had obviously been given in complete ignorance of the distance and difficulty involved in performing this trans-continental trek, and it is not surprising that Beutler got no further than Cradock in attempting to follow his instructions. He was not short of water, as he was following the Great Fish River, but his trek-oxen were worn out and he had no means of bartering more, as the sole inhabitants of these regions were then Bushmen hunters and gatherers.

Though the report and the magnificent map of Beutler's expedition long remained secret documents, no doubt the journey was much talked of at the Cape. It probably gave an impetus to the eastward expansion of the colony into regions of increasing promise, where grass brushed the horseman's stirrups and where the larger streams were never quite without pools.

WRECK OF THE DODDINGTON, 1755.

Now we return briefly to involuntary visitors, when we record the wreck of the outward-bound English East Indiaman *Doddington*, on Bird Island at the eastern end of Algoa Bay in July, 1755. Of the 270 souls on board only 23 men gained the shore. Here they spent seven months, keeping themselves alive on a staple diet of seabirds which, to their surprise, they found that they could kill with sticks. Seals, fish and birds' eggs were welcome variants to their unappetizing menu. They worked at building a 30 ft. sloop from the wreckage, and patched up a dinghy that had been washed ashore.

After about seven weeks on the island three of them set off in the dinghy to row to the shore, where they thought they had seen signal fires in response to their own. It was a flat calm, the inshore current carried them eastwards and after rowing about ten miles they probably came ashore near Cape Padrone, some seven or eight miles south of Alexandria. The dinghy was upset in the surf, drowning one man. The two survivors reached the shore soaked and exhausted, and destitute of supply except for a small keg of brandy. That night these two early visitors to the Eastern Cape lay beneath some branches on the beach.

In the morning they saw a man, probably a Strandloper, who fled at their approach. They found that the body of their luckless companion had been washed ashore and then torn to pieces by some wild animal. Though unknown to them, this was probably that cowardly carrion eater, the strandwolf or beach hyaena. Thinking that this animal would attack them, they tried to return to the island immediately, but their boat was again upset in the surf and they crawled out exhausted upon the beach. That night they slept beneath their overturned boat for shelter. Peering out from beneath it, they were horrified to see prowling about their refuge several animals which in their ignorance they believed were tigers, but were probably hyaenas.

In the morning the two sailors were fortunate in finding some wild fruit which they ate without ill effects. Then appeared a large band of Hottentots who stripped the men of their clothing and robbed them of their only weapon, a pistol. Worse still, they then began to attack the dinghy for the iron it contained. The loss of their craft would have been the final calamity to the wretched sailors. They implored and remonstrated against its destruction, and strangely enough these frenzied supplications caused the Hottentots to desist and depart. The two men spent another night beneath their boat, and the next day, aided by calm sea and an easterly breeze, they managed to get through the breakers and regain Bird Island after rowing at least ten miles.

This story of the landing is the more interesting because it is corroborated quite independently in the book by Sparrman,

who was here just twenty years later in 1774 (as we shall see). From some colonists he heard that about twenty years before, smoke had been seen on Bird Island. To quote Sparrman: "A farmer of the name of Vereira who at that time was hunting of elephants in this district, had bought of the Hottentots a pistol and a piece of red cloth, which they said they had got of some people who had come to them from the sea." The red cloth would have been from a garment stripped from the two wretched seamen. Sparrman's mention of the elephant-hunter Ferreira is interesting, as we can confirm that men of this name were amongst the earliest settlers in the Algoa Bay region.

We must, however, take a final glance at the men on Bird Island. In seven months they completed building their sloop in which they eventually reached Delagoa Bay, where they found an English ship that took them to Bombay.

C. P. THUNBERG, 1772-74.

C. P. Thunberg, a young Swede, who has been called "The Father of Cape Botany", came to S. Africa in 1772, twenty years after Beutler's expedition. Thunberg made four long journeys into the interior, two of them into the Eastern Cape. The first of these was to Plettenberg Bay and the Gamtoos River; the second to Algoa Bay, the Zwartkops saltpan and the Sundays River near Addo. On the latter journey he was accompanied by another botanist, the Scottish collector Francis Masson. Thunberg's book, in two volumes, is informative and thoroughly reliable, but seems to consist of his field notes hurriedly assembled for publication. It certainly has no pretensions as a literary work, but this in no way detracts from its value as a tersely objective account of travel in these parts.

Searching in his pages for the unusual in Cape travel-works, this is certainly supplied by his graphic account of how he suffered, as many still do to-day and will no doubt continue to do in future. In December, 1773, he went botanizing at the mouth of the Zeekoe River near Jeffrey's Bay. To quote: "I walked about for several hours quite naked, as well for the sake of bathing as collecting insects and shrubs, with nothing

but a handkerchief about my waist, not suspecting that the sun beams would have any bad effect on me. But in a short time, I found that all that part of my body which was above water was red and inflamed. This disorder increased to such a degree that I was obliged to keep my bed for several days, and could not even bear a fine calico shirt on my body till I had anointed myself with cream in order to lubricate my parched skin." (And we may note that by cream he meant the genuine dairy product and not the modern cosmetic which is often derived from the same base as diesel oil.)

In the vicinity of Knysna he describes how he and his two companions encountered a large, old and extremely angry buffalo bull who in a few minutes had killed two of their horses. He concludes thus: "I could neither see nor hear any thing of my fellow-travellers, which induced me to fear that they had fallen victims to the first transports of the buffalo's fury. I therefore made all possible haste to search for them; but not discovering any traces of them in the whole field of battle, I began to call out after them, when I discovered these magnanimous heroes sitting fast, like two cats, up the trunk of a tree, with their guns on their backs loaded with fine shot, and unable to utter a single word."

Of South Africa as a whole he had a poor opinion, and represented it as lacking in both natural and civilized amenities which he enumerates in a gloomy catalogue that now seems almost ludicrous. To quote: "This country has no lakes, no navigable rivers, no other fisheries than those that are near the shores of the ocean or the mouths of the rivers; no woods of any consequence or real utility, not even one pleasant grove; no verdant nor flowery meadows; no chalk hills; no metals worth the labour of extracting them from the ore; no looms nor manufactures; no universities nor schools; no post, no posthouses nor inns; nay, in so extensive a country as this there are still many places wanting both judge and courts of judicature, both clergy and churches, both rain from the heavens and springs from the earth." Many of these deficiencies have now been remedied: and though we still cannot conjure rain from the heavens, we of this land where Thunberg once wandered,

persist in an optimistic conviction appropriate to its name of happy omen, the Cape of Good Hope.

A. SPARRMAN, 1775-6.

Andrew Sparrman, a young Swedish zoologist, in 1775-6 made a long journey into the Eastern Cape described in two thick volumes which tell in faithful detail of the country, its inhabitants and animals. His farthest point was Agter Brintjes Hoogte where the town of Somerset East is now situated. By his account the White inhabitants of that region led an existence akin to that of the lotus-eaters or the lilies of the field, who toil not neither do they spin. Of them he genially observes: "That they might not put their arms and bodies out of the easy and commodious posture in which they had laid them on the couch when taking their afternoon's siesta, they have been known to receive travellers lying quite still and motionless, excepting that they have very civilly pointed out the road by moving their foot to the left or right Among a set of beings so entirely devoted to their ease, one might naturally expect to meet with a variety of the most commodious easy chairs and sofas; but the truth is, that they find it much more commodious to avoid the trouble of inventing and making them." These and other similar comments certainly reveal in their lives an easy indolence, in strange contrast with the expected rugged vigour of the hardy denizens of what is now sometimes termed "the pioneer fringe".

Sparrman is one of the few to favour us with an account of his appearance upon his travels. Hunting the hippo in the Great Fish River near Cookhouse on Boxing Day, 1775, he described his attire thus: "I had a beard which had not been touched since the end of the preceding month, without a stock, and my waistcoat open at the breast. My hat flapped, my hair braided into a twist, my side-curls hanging down strait and fluttering in the air; a fine thin linen coat with a white ground variegated with blood, dabs of gunpowder and spots of dirt and grease of all kinds—but at the same time decorated with fine gilt buttons, a third part of which were fallen off, and a

great part of the remained dangled about loose in readiness to follow their companions." His breeches, for coolness, were turned up at the knees, and for the same reason his stockings hung loose around his feet on which he wore Hottentot shoes.

His companion, handsome young Mr. Immelman from Cape Town, also had a five-week beard and, "figured on horse-back in a long night-gown, with a white night-cap, large white boots" and no stockings.

Regarding their beards he remarked whimsically: "This ornamental excrescence may possibly prevent colds, eruptions in the face and the tooth-ache in cold nights", and it also "serves to defend the face from the scorching rays of the sun". He concludes thus: "As to our beards, we had both of us in a merry mood, formed a resolution not to touch a hair of them, either with razors or scissors till we should either get into company again with the Christian lasses, or should have the opportunity of dissecting a hippopotamus." These curiously contrasted alternatives might seem to represent the aspirations of gallant and scientist respectively, but since this is not expressly stated, it can be assumed that Sparrman felt that he had an equal interest in either eventuality.

Light-hearted passages such as these are rare, however, in his two volumes of solid information and sound observation, which qualities give them a lasting value in that long and distinguished series of works on travel in South Africa that they initiated. Though he travelled after Thunberg, his book appeared before the latter's. Sparrman's book made available a store of knowledge of the geography of the Eastern Cape regarding which practically nothing had been known previously in Europe.

H. SWELLENGREBEL, 1776.

No better picture exists of life on the frontier at that time than that given by Hendrik Swellengrebel, son of the Governor of the Cape of the same name, who visited these parts in 1776. The younger Swellengrebel was aged 42 at that time, and travelled as a private individual of influence, means and education. The purpose of his long journey seems to have been to

investigate whether the colony could support more settlers, and possibly to further his own claim to be considered for the post of Governor of the Colony in succession to Van Plettenberg. But this is far from certain.

From his account of conditions in the Camdebo, which is roughly the lowland area of the eastern Karroo around Aberdeen, the following passage depicting housing-conditions is particularly interesting. "Though they live here at most four or five stages from the forests, and thus could build good houses, their dwellings here consist of a wall of clay raised to a height of three to four feet; no chimney, so that the smoke goes out through a hole in the wall or roof; a door of reeds is tied with a rope, and there is a square hole for the window; the bedsteads are only separated from each other by a Hottentot's mat so that sleeping arrangements are pretty sociable; the floor is of clay mixed with dung. On this everything stands in confusion together; butter churn, freshly slaughtered cattle, bread, etc.; whilst amongst them a menagerie of hens, ducks and little pigs runs around; and the doves actually nest in the roof. The furniture is appropriately a small table, or lacking that, a wooden box, and three or four campstools whose seats are of hide. These barns that are scarcely 40 ft. long and 15 ft. broad, held on some farms three families and their children. Thus cleanliness was not considerable. One sees here practically no slaves. The Hottentots serve and are paid in cattle, and make the households not more attractive but more smelly. (*niet brillanter maar wel nog stinkender*)."

"The limited traffic in their products causes the activity of these people, who moreover from their earliest days love to live by hunting in the veld, to diminish in proportion to the time they have spent there; and it may be prophesied that these people will wholly sink back into savagery. (*een geheel verwilderde natie zal worden*)."

Swellengrebel was unduly pessimistic in this opinion. Those dwellers in the Camdebo were actually living in conditions very similar to peasants of some other countries at that time, such

as in the Highlands of Scotland or in the Hebrides. And they certainly enjoyed conditions far superior to those which were to be endured in the next century, by countless slum dwellers of the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe. Hardships were inevitable upon an expanding colonial boundary, but these were salutary in their effect in strengthening the spirit and intellect of these resolute frontiersmen and women.

His gloomy assessment of their prospects is understandable. Life there was then hard and unremunerative and little remedy was in prospect. It is not surprising that he failed to foresee how an increasing population and the march of technical invention would stimulate economic progress in the Colony, thus enabling the virile frontiersmen to cope with cumulative success with their intractable environment. Nearly two centuries have passed since Hendrik Swellengrebel trekked across the Camdebo and laagered his waggons in the vales of Kaffirland. What little promise he saw in these lands has been fulfilled for beyond his expectations, and achievements have immeasurably surpassed his dreams.

W. PATERSON, 1778-9.

William Paterson was only 22 when he reached the Cape in 1777 and began his four journeys into the interior that totalled more than 5,000 miles; and he must have long retained the record for sheer distance travelled by a visitor. He was the son of an ordinary gardener, and it is unknown how he was educated and why he should have been selected by Lady Strathmore to collect plants for her at the Cape. In a varied career that followed he fought in India, lived on Norfolk Island (1,000 miles E.N.E. of Sydney, Australia), explored in eastern Australia, was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society and became Lieutenant-Governor of New South Wales.

His third journey in S. Africa was into the Eastern Cape in 1778-79. He passed through Noutoe, the present Table Farm, seven miles north-west of Grahamstown. The region hereabouts he described as: "A pleasant country though quite uninhabited. There are numerous herds of quadrupeds to be found here of the

different species which have already been described. The grass was so high that it reached our horses' bellies. This part of the country is agreeably diversified with little pleasant woods upon the declivities of the hills."

In one of these wooded declivities Grahamsown now lies, with here and there specimens of two ornamental trees associated with Paterson and with that remote oceanic isle where he was to sojourn for over two years during 1791-93. One is the tall tiered Norfolk Island Pine; and the other, also from there, *Lagunaria patersonii* which was named after him. The foliage of this tree has a silver-grey appearance, and the purple flowers about one inch diameter resemble those of the hibiscus.

Paterson crossed the Great Fish River near Trumpeter's Drift and ended his journey at the Keiskama River. In the region between the present positions of Peddie and Hamburg he wrote that he was "allured by the pleasantness of the country", whose soil "is a blackish loamy ground, and so extremely fertile that every vegetable substance, whether sown or planted, grows here with great luxuriance. It seldom rains except in the summer season when it is accompanied by thunder and lightning. The country is, however, extremely well supplied with water, not only from the high land to the north which furnishes abundance throughout the year, but from many fountains of excellent water which are found in the woods. From what I observed of this country I am induced to believe that it is greatly superior to any other known part of Africa." This is an early recognition of the promise of our region whose present development provides abundant evidence of the correctness of his opinion.

Although his book is disappointingly terse, his observations are always reliable and correspondingly valuable. It certainly fulfilled its author's modest aim expressed in his introduction that, "it would add a few facts to the general stock of natural and geographical knowledge."

F. LE VAILLANT, 1782.

François le Vaillant was a young French bird-collector who travelled in the Eastern Cape in 1782 and described his journey

in two volumes. These differ greatly from those of his predecessors, in that they are written in a romantic and even at times in a flamboyant style. Some of his passages are worthy of quotation to illustrate his more remarkable effusions. Near George at a spot named Pampoenkraal where the forestry school Saasveld is now situated, he chopped a recess in the dense bush and camped in this cavity. Of this retreat he wrote: "It afforded me a delightful and cool retreat when, harassed and covered with sweat and dust after my hunting excursion in the morning, I retired from the heat of the day and the scorching rays of the sun. When fatigue had sharpened my appetite what delightful repasts! When sleep stole upon me, what voluptuous and gentle repose! Ye sumptuous grottoes of our financiers! Ye English gardens twenty times changed with the wealth of the citizen! Why do your streams, your cascades, you pretty serpentine walks, your broken bridges, your ruins, your marbles and all your fine inventions, disgust the taste and fatigue the eye, when we know the verdant and natural bower of the Pampoen Kraal?" This passage is a fair example of his extravagantly romantic writing, and it ends on a note of ludicrous bathos.

When he reached the Swartkops River a few miles below where Uitenhage now stands, he heard that marauding bands of Kaffirs were in the vicinity. Resolved to take no chances in such a perilous situation he caparisoned himself in war-like trappings thus graphically described: "I was completely armed. In the side pockets of my breeches I carried a pair of double-barrelled pistols; I had another pair of the same kind at my girdle; my double-barrelled fusee was slung at the bow of my saddle, and a large sabre hung from my side, and a poinard or dagger from the button-hole of my vest. I could therefore fire ten times almost in a moment. This arsenal considerably incommoded me at first, but I never quitted it." Indeed, he must have been so festooned with firearms and cutlery that considerable adroitness would have been necessary to clear his weapons for action. Fortunately no hostilities were forced upon him and his broadside of ten barrels was never discharged.

Of course it would be unfair to this enterprising traveller to leave you with the impression that all he wrote was equally

overcoloured. Moreover, I must emphasize that his reputation will be considerably enhanced by a work on his life, writings, travels and drawings shortly to be published by the Library of Parliament. There is a great deal in his book that is accurate and valuable, but the temptation has been overwhelming to quote him at his most irresponsible.

THE GROSVENOR, 1782.

And now finally we look coastwise again at our interminable white beaches backed by high dunes, with occasional river mouths that are either tide-scoured torrents or sand-barred saline lagoons. Here now stand our cities and our fashionable seaside resorts. Then it was an ocean-washed wilderness, providing the barest minimum of food, fresh water and shelter.

Along this pitiless shoreline in 1782 trudged the desperate stragglers of the crew of the *Grosvenor*. Stranded on the Transkei coast some 240 miles N.N.E. of Grahamstown on 4th August of that year, of the 140 souls aboard few indeed had the hardihood and fortune to survive. Of the fate of the hapless passengers, including gentlewomen and their children, nothing detailed is known, though two expeditions were despatched from the Cape in search of them.

Only those of the strongest constitution and most dogged tenacity, toughened moreover by life before the mast, could tramp out the long leagues to eventual safety. They subsisted on shellfish, on carrion washed up on the shore and on occasional wild fruits and berries. Aided by logs they swam river-mouths, holding aloft a smoking brand with which to kindle fire at each sundown bivouac. A notched tally-stick was their calendar, an indomitable resolution to survive their greatest asset. One by one they gave up the struggle, sank down upon the sand and died. Possibly it was one of these unfortunates who brought thus far the 1,038 rough diamonds found near the mouth of the River Kei in 1927.

A favourite with the seamen was a child amongst the passengers, a boy eight years old, Thomas Law. Due to the unfailing attention and selfless devotion of the ship's steward,

Henry Lilliburne, this child was actually brought as far as the vicinity of Cape Padrone at the eastern entrance to Algoa Bay. There he died in his sleep on 4th November after a terrible journey of about three months. The heroic and kindly steward only survived his young charge by a few days.

Now only six were left. They crossed the mouths of the Sundays and Zwartkops rivers, and then struggled on until they found a spring by the Baakens River mouth, presumably the same that still bubbles up beneath the *E.P. Herald* Building in Baakens Street. There they left two of their number to gather fuel and keep the fire going, whilst the other four retraced their steps along the North End beach to provision themselves from the stranded carcass of a whale that they'd seen there. The two sailors left by the fire saw approaching the spring a herd of cattle accompanied by two Dutch colonists. Language was no barrier to an instantaneous comprehension of the situation, and the four set off at once to find the others, who were gouging chunks of flesh from the revolting carcass. In all the history of Algoa Bay there can scarcely have been a more dramatic rescue than this. The date was 29 November. The survivors' epic 400-mile march of nearly four months' duration had ended, their troubles were over and their terrible privations remedied by the care lavished upon them by the hospitable colonists.

The tale would be incomplete without stating that three other white sailors also reached safety near Algoa Bay, having struck inland separately at the Kowie or Bushman's rivers, and were well treated by the Hottentots. Three black males, probably Lascars or Indian seamen, and two black maids, probably Indian ayahs, also reached safety by taking this inland route on the last stages of their journey. So the survivors were nine whites and five non-whites, a total of fourteen, or 10% of the *Grosvenor's* complete complement of 140.

It is impossible to sum up adequately in these few paragraphs the story of this shipwreck and its aftermath, that has been more written about than any other disaster upon our coasts. To those of you who would wish more about it, I can

warmly recommend a perusal of the three books on this subject written by Professor P. R. Kirby.

CONCLUSION.

These then were some of the people early upon the scene in these parts. They are merely the few who wrote, or were written about. Besides them countless others, to a greater or lesser degree, played a part in making known or in fashioning the geography and history of the Eastern Cape. To all of them, these our forerunners, we acknowledge our gratitude with the valediction, "Salute to Adventurers!"