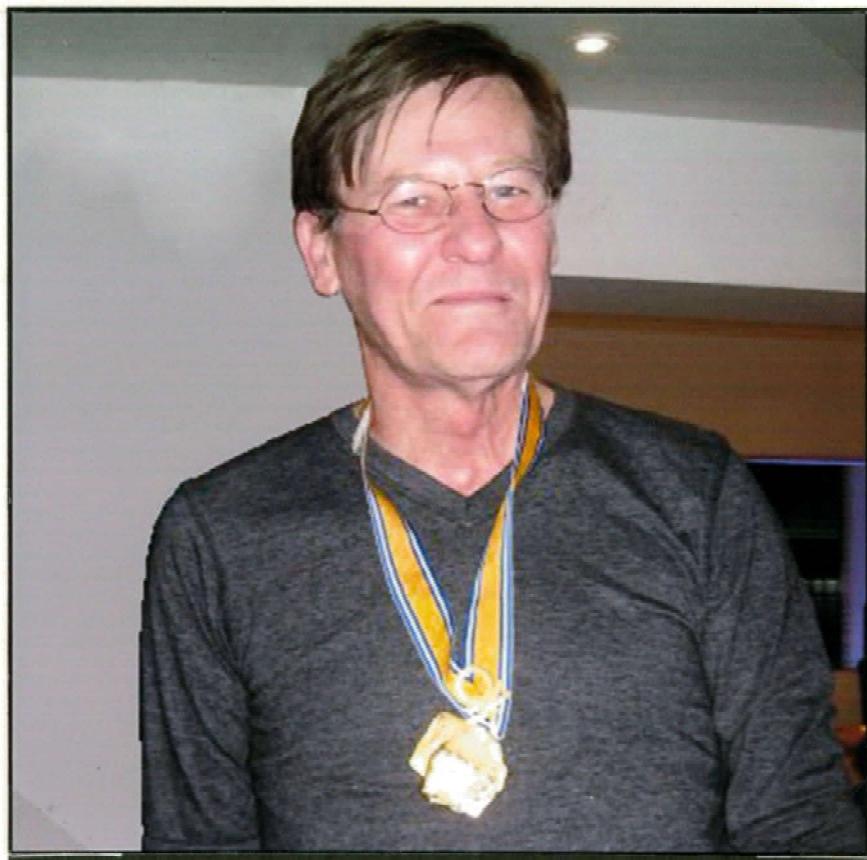


# 'DORSLANDTREKKERS'

by

Paul Van Zeyl RDPSA (1950 - 2024)



2019. Meriden. A friend, colleague, SACS member and wonderful dealer.



1974. Airmail Cover. ORANJEMUND '30 XII 74' to ENGLAND.  
SWA 1974 Centenary of the Thirstland Trek (3x4c) + 1973 Succulents 3c comprise 15c Airmail rate.

## Some Notes on Paul's Display

In 2024, I bought Paul van Zeyl's Dorsland Trekker (Afr. 'Thirstland trekker') display from Kenny Napier Auctions. His display of South African social and postal history covers a relatively obscure subject outside of popular philatelic tastes. I thought it should be kept intact on-line as a tribute to Paul and his work.



FIG. 2

*A Curious Omission from Paul's display!*

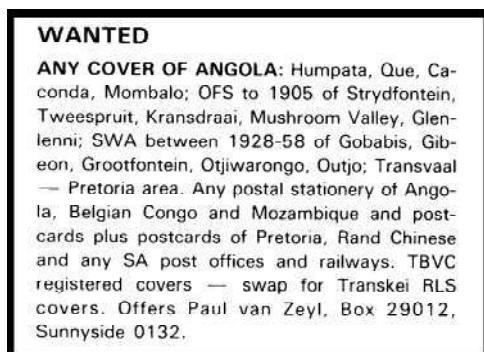
*The 1974 SWA 4c Centenary of the Dorsland (Thirstland) Trek.*

*Wagons roll across the Kalahari from the ZAR to Angola.*

The purpose of Paul's Dorsland Trekker display was to record the exodus of the Boers / Afrikaners from the ZAR (Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek / Transvaal). Starting in 1874 in several groups of varying size they crossed the arid Kalahari Desert of Bechuanaland in order to find land, first in Ovamboland before it became a part of German SWA and eventually in Portugal's southern Angola. It is a tale of faith, endurance and folly, one that is now archived as an accessible PDF file on the South African Philately Club website.

Paul had scored 73 points with this 80-sheet Open Class exhibit at both Australia 2013 and at Marpex (Hilton, Natal) in 2024 where he was awarded a Large Silver. I imagined I could build on Paul's work by adding more postal history to it. However, I underestimated just how scarce Dorsland Trekker material is. As a respected specialist dealer of long-standing Paul had advertised for and accumulated much of what little postal and documentary material existed on a migration that began in 1874, ten years before the rudiments of a postal service were introduced into the vast and remote areas which the Dorsland Trekkers crossed.

This first few pages are my introduction to a well-received presentation that I gave to the South African Collectors Society in November 2025 in which I used the best of Paul's material to provide a 30 sheet overview of his Dorsland Trekker display. I was surprised that so many thought this rather shabby but scarce material was so remarkable. But then I had forgotten that it had been put together by Paul, fondly remembered by many as a wonderful dealer / historian. My display included a few of my finds by way of an introduction to his. Foremost among these items of mine are FIG. 1, (page 1), a modern Airmail cover showing the 1974 4c 'Centenary of the Thirstland Trek' commemorative stamp, as well as two further uses of this issue as a map, FIG 2 above, and FIG 3 (control block, page 5) with exhibition card.



*1995. Advertisement. South African Philatelist.*

*Paul advertises for Dorsland Trekker material - and much more!*

*Contact [editor@southafricanphilatelyclub.com](mailto:editor@southafricanphilatelyclub.com) if you have such material for sale.*

## **Going for Gold**

If this display is to be a serious contender for a Gold award, it needs to add more relevant postal history within a sharper, more attractive layout. It needs more original Dorsland Trekker postal history in the form of covers, postcards, postmarks and stamps. This material is as rare as hen's teeth and Paul has done his best to flesh it out. I know there are some Angolan postcards sent from Humpata to the OFS in about 1895 that have been recorded. They would be very useful here. I will keep looking. It may take forever. What I have noticed about Paul's display is that he did not make the best use of some of his material. There are a few useful items that came with Paul's display which he had not yet written up or had ignored. One day when I have the time I will use his and any new material I find to present this display in a new format.

## **A Good Sudden Ending**

Those who get to the end of Paul's display may notice that it comes to a rather more sudden and abrupt end than he intended. This is because section 8, 'Angola's War of Liberation' is missing from the display that I purchased having been sold off. Only two pages remain with this display. This is not a bad thing. Perhaps the foremost reason for the sale of the lost material is the opinion of Gerhard Kamffer RDPSA, the Marpex 2024 Jury Head, who says in the 'Jury Report' that "*the last item is not relative to the story and should be omitted*". Presumably he means section 8, 'Angola's War of Liberation'. As most collectors aspire to winning a Gold Medal rather than a Large Silver, (here a 12 point difference), the opinion of the Jury about how a 73 point Large Silver can be turned into a 85 point Gold is useful. In this case, the Jury has suggested the removal of items they regard as irrelevant ie. section 8, 'Angola's War of Liberation'. This is so much easier to do than being told that the display needs more and better material!

## **How to Improve this and other Displays**

Judges are not always consistent in their rulings. Despite this, their opinions count. The best way to find out what they think of your material is to put it into a competition where it will be judged. Failing that, show it to colleagues who have won awards and ask them for their advice. If you know philatelic judges show it to them privately to get their thoughts. The downside is that large parts of your beautiful display may require a rewrite! How you respond to their criticism is up to you. Many philatelists do not enter competitions because they are unwilling to submit to the rules and subjective whims of judges ruling on issues like layout. However, if you can find out what they think is good, bad or ugly you will be in a much better position to make important changes that will give you a head start at competition time.

## **Jury Report**

I have included the Jury Report (next page) which states their recommendations as to how his display can be improved. Some things are simple and obvious, like having a heading on every page, a description of the item - a postcard or a cover - and not having too much text. This is always a negative in any competition. However, what Paul has to say is insightful and the reason I like this display so much. What I dislike most about it is his presentation, something not directly criticised in the Jury Report which awarded him 3 / 5. Perhaps I am also guilty of being subjective! The fact is I know what I like and I do not like Paul's layout, such as it is. It could be much improved. First impressions are important. The protective sheets of Paul's display are old, thin, grubby, poor quality polyfolios. They create the impression that the display is unloved by its creator. New and or better quality polyfolios will create a much more positive impression.

Paul's display has room for easily achieved improvement based on the jury's recommended changes. This could result in it quickly becoming a relatively easy achieved 75 point Vermeil. A Gold is probably an award too far given the paucity of this material and the need to add good new examples for such a result. Still, one never knows what tomorrow and the day after that will bring at the next stamp fair and auction....

Steve Hannath,  
Email: [editor@southafricanphilatelyclub.com](mailto:editor@southafricanphilatelyclub.com)  
10th January 2026.  
Cambridge.

PS: I will buy material related to the Dorsland Trekkers in Angola. Please email me if you are a seller.



## MARPEX 2024

### Jury Report

11-Jul-24

Name:

**Van Zeyl, Paul**

Frame No:

**148 - 152**

Exhibit Title:

**Dorslandtrekkers**

Description:

	Achieved	Max	Points required for award
<b>Title &amp; Plan</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	90 = Large Gold
<b>Treatment</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>20</b>	85 = Gold
<b>Philatelic Knowledge &amp; Research</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>20</b>	80 = Large Vermeil
<b>Non-Philatelic Knowledge &amp; Research</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>15</b>	75 = Vermeil
<b>Condition</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	70 = Large Silver
<b>Rarity</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>20</b>	65 = Silver
<b>Presentation</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	60 = Silver Bronze
			50 = Bronze
			40 = Certificate of Merit
			00 = Certificate of Participation

Points Achieved: **73**

**Large Silver**

Jury Head: **Kamffer, Gerhard**

Jury Report:

**No material has been indicated as rare while a few rarer items were noticed and should be highlighted.**

**The exhibit would improve with the use of headings on the pages to help one through the story.**

**Too much text while the last item is not relative to the story and should be omitted.**

**There is no statement of the material used e.g., photographs etc.**

**Many rare covers which are not indicated as such and not discussed.**

**Large open spaces and also only single items on some pages which needs to be balanced between space and material.**

This frame card proudly sponsored by



**SPINK**  
WHERE HISTORY IS VALUED

# 148 - 152

Van Zeyl, Paul  
Pretoria Philatelic Society  
Dorslandtrekkers



**FIG. 3**

Top: 2024. SPINK-sponsored Marpex frame card showing displays frames No. 148 - 152.  
Bottom: 1974 13 November. Cylinder control block of 6 SWA 4c Centenary Thirstland commemoratives.

## The Dorslandtrekkers of Angola

### **Purpose:**

The exhibit records the exodus of Boers/Afrikaners, called *Dorslandtrekkers*, from the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek/Transvaal* into Angola and Ovamboland (in German South West Africa); details their lives in the region until their first mass withdrawal from Angola in 1928/29 and settlement in northern South West Africa/Namibia; and briefly traces the declining circumstances of the remainder of this group till the end of the War of Liberation in Angola.

### **Scope and structure:**

This is a summary of the history of the *Dorslandtrekkers* or Angola-Boers/Afrikaners, covering the whole gamut of their economic and religious desires and needs. It is designed to bring awareness of this minority group which refused to relinquish past lifestyles no matter how badly they served its needs. It has also been designed to facilitate reflection on the underlying humanity of these Boers/Afrikaners, in an environment where this population segment in South Africa is required to adjust to transformed socio-political circumstances.

It is structured as follows:

	<u>Page</u>
1. <b><i>Motivations of the Dorslandtrekkers in leaving the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR)</i></b>	2/1
2. <b><i>Main Treks &amp; routes</i></b>	5/1
3. <b><i>Relationships with Angolan Portuguese</i></b>	27/2
4. <b><i>Economic opportunities</i></b>	30/2
5. <b><i>Church affairs &amp; education</i></b>	43/3
6. <b><i>1928 Repatriation</i></b>	48/3
7. <b><i>1958 Repatriation</i></b>	63/4
8. <b><i>Angola's War of Liberation</i></b>	72/5

### **Highlights:**

A detailed letter from a skilled Cape Coloured hunter-trader, Will Jordan, describing the impoverished situation of the 1870s trekkers; an early cover (1895) from the Boer settlement at Humpata to the Orange Free State; evidence of *Dorslandtrekker* support for the ZAR in the Anglo-Boer War; photos from a Dutch settler (Van der Smit), initially the only person in the group who possessed a camera; post cards of the Angola Boers' economically-vital ox-wagons, and the local tribes; documents reflecting church affairs; and covers and illustrative material detailing the process followed for the 1928 exodus.

### **Bibliography:**

1. Jordan, W W, part letter attributed to him, probably sent to a Cape of Good Hope newspaper, ca 1880s
2. Stassen, N, "Afrikaners in Angola; 1928-1975", Protea Boekhuis, Pretoria, 2009
3. *Lantern*, van der Merwe, Rev WP, "Dorslandtrek", Feb 1990
4. Van der Smit, GD, "Pieter van der Smit; kort samevatting van sy loopbaan" personal notes, 6/06/1989
5. Dias, G & Guerreiro, M, Report of the 1957 Campaign (Mozambique & Angola), Centre of Political & Social Studies Investigative Committee, Lisbon, 1958

### 1. Motivations of the *Dorslandtrekkers* in leaving the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR)

WW Jordan<sup>1</sup> first met a group of trek-hungry Boers in 1874 along the Crocodile River north of Rustenburg. The Boers (from Dutch for "farmers") were people of the soil, traditionally living off mixed farming and hunting. Jordan was a regional trader who *detailed the early Trek causes* in a lengthy letter, probably to a Cape Town newspaper for which he reported on socio-political developments in the wider South West African region. His summary of the ZAR/Transvaal Boers' ("these unfortunate narrowminded people") Trek causes was:

- "Burgers was President", and he was perceived as having unacceptable liberal views;
- "they knew the English Government was going to take the Transvaal." In the event, this happened on 12 April 1877 by Shepstone's unopposed annexation of the ZAR;
- "because in the Transvaal they had no ground": the "Trekboer" class had begun to experience economic pressure because their unsustainable nomadic lifestyle with their cattle. In fact, about half of the *Dorslandtrekkers* of the First Trek from the Rustenburg area were *bywoners*/squatters on farms there;
- "the Transvaal was but a resting place for them for a time, and they, like the children of Israel, will have to cross the river Jordan", into Canaan, the "land of milk and honey". This cause may not be as extremist in a religious sense as it appears because it aligns with and legitimises the "trekgees" (the spirit/desire to move about) which had been part of Boer society since the times of the Cape Colony's 1<sup>st</sup> Governor, Simon van der Stel, namely the late 1600s.

It needs to be mentioned that the *Dorslandtrekkers* did not uniformly share these views. For example, several were, in fact, farmers of substance. However, of the early Trekkers, mostly members of the *Gerefomeerde Kerk*, the so-called "*Doppers*" (because they espoused abstinence from drink/*dop*), there was an almost collective dislike of Pres/Rev Thos Burgers.

on various, Some left because Burgers was President, Others again say they knew that the English Government was going to take the Transvaal. Others again because in the Transvaal they had no ground, so they trekked to look for a place where they might call a piece of ground their own. One van der Merwe told me he trekked because the Transvaal was too thickly populated. Gen Alberts again said that his father prophesied that the Transvaal was but a resting place for them for a time, and that they like the children of Israel will have to cross the river Jordan.

Rev Thomas Francois Burgers graduated as a doctor of theology from the University of Utrecht in 1859, whereafter he became minister of the *Gereformeerde Kerk* ("Doppers") in Hanover, Cape of Good Hope. He was invited by the ZAR's Volksraad/Parliament to become the State's President. He held this post between 1872 and 1877, mostly under difficult and controversial circumstances. He was especially opposed by the "Doppers". In this regard, and especially in regard to church developments in Angola, it should be noted that *Gereformeerde Kerk* leaders appear to have had little ability to influence adherents to adapt their thinking on the tenets of Christianity. For example, when Rev NJR Swart of Pretoria's *Gereformeerde Kerk* (Doppers) became Burgers' State Secretary, he felt he had to resign from his church. It should be also noted that preceding civil wars in the ZAR had limited national coherence. Accordingly, a lack of respect for non-Dopper leaders and teachings would explain why almost 80% of the *Dorlandtrekkers* (Thirstland Trekkers) of the First Trek (May 1875) were members of this church and came from the Pretoria and the nearby Rustenburg regions.



*Photo of Burgers, on reverse of which  
is a soul-note from him bequeathing  
two "staatsponden" ("Burgers pounds",  
presented to him by the ZAR) to his son;  
his admonition to his son reflects his  
perceived liberalism: "Herbert! Be  
faithful, honest & courageous.  
Preserve your freedom of body,  
mind and spirit. Be **human** in all  
circumstances. God's Blessing. The  
Blessing of Nature be upon you. B"*

Will Jordan established himself at Rehoboth in 1871, becoming the partner of John Gunning in trading and hunting activities. He was the son of Patrick Jordan and his Coloured wife, Margaret, born in the Cape in 1849. Well educated, as is evidenced by his fluency in English, his ability to speak several languages, his clear handwriting, and his knowledge of medicine.

Last-mentioned was put to the test when it came to assisting the destitute *Dorslandtrekkers*, which the letter indicates occurred as early as 1878. Jordan's anti-German and anti-Herero sympathies reflected in reports to Cape publications constrained his abilities to assist the Boers, which assistance was in fact instrumental in his murder by an Ovambo Chief on 30 June 1886.



Post card of likenesses of traders Will Jordan (crouching, dark complexion) & John Gunning (seated) shown trading with an Ovambo tribe

## **2. Main Treks & Routes**

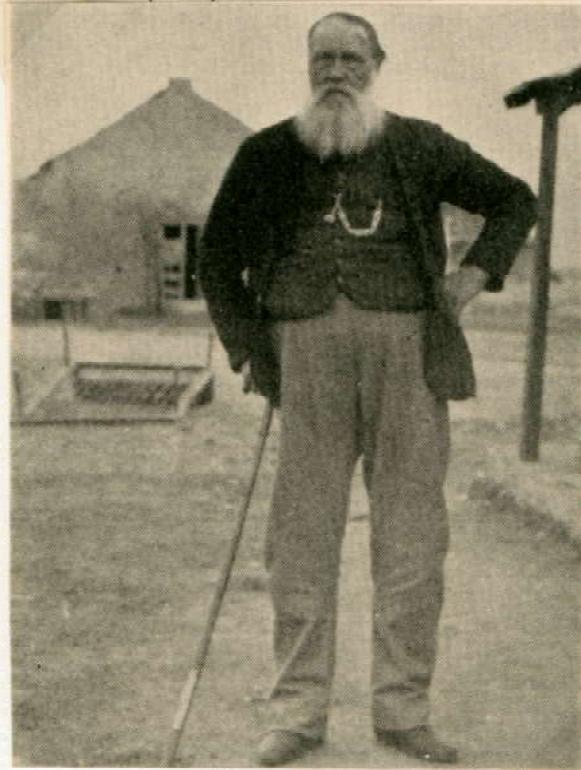
### **2.1 First Trek:**

In May 1875, eleven families (some 50 persons) under the overall leadership of *Cmdt Gert van der Merwe* and *Gert Alberts* left North-Western ZAR (Groot-Marico) in three groups. It would appear that they had no specific destination in mind.

### **2.2 Second & Third Treks:**

The **Second Trek** left in April 1876 from Zoutpanslaagte alongside the Apies River, base Pretoria. Initially, *Jan Greyling* was elected *Kommandant* and *Louw du Plessis* elected *Veldkornet*. However, internal divisions and weak leadership caused leadership positions to change on several occasions. For example, *Jan Geyling* was ousted when *Khama III* refused the Boers to proceed through his territory when he learnt that *Greyling* was their leader; and *D Erasmus* was also elected *Veldkornet*. This was the largest of all the treks. It consisted of 480 persons (about 100 families and 128 ox-wagons), excluding servants (the so-called "mak-volk", their naming reflecting both their subservient position and some warmth of association), almost 2 000 trek oxen, some 7 500 head of cattle and many other farming animals (reflecting a substantial capitalization of this group). Its size was to pose serious problems in crossing the Kalahari desert of Botswana.

The **Third Trek** – a small one of eight families (some 40 persons) – took place in mid-1877 from the Rustenburg region. It fell under *Cmdt JF (Koos) Botha*'s leadership.



*Jacobus Frederik Botha, commandant of the "Joint Trek", and marriage officer at Humpata till 1910; this photo taken in 1912*

The Second Trek in particular experienced severe suffering from *dors en koers* (thirst and fever). While giving permission to the trekkers to pass through his land, the Bamangwato Chief Khama III (Chief from 1875, and then the ruler of the region's largest tribe) warned them of the tribulations which they were likely to face.

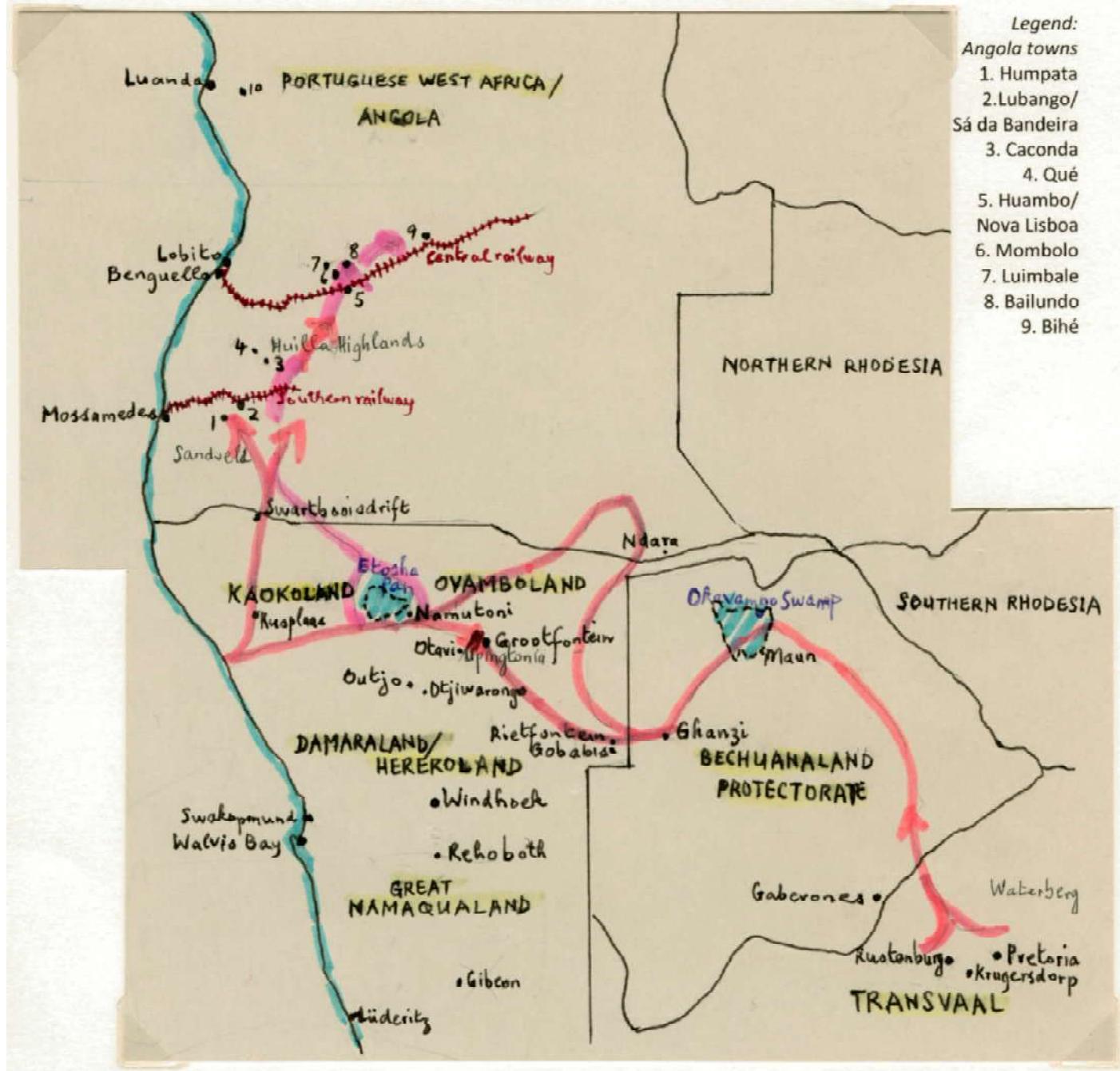
Parties were then at the Crocodile river. Some however had managed to pass Bamangwato, and gone onto Riffontein "between Ghanze and Kameraland." After Gutz Albert's party was about two years at Riffontein, the Greyling party took up their tents at the Crocodile to follow them going by some river (the Makalapxi) to the N.E. of Bamangwato as they were afraid of an attack by Khama. Khama on the other hand says he had no intentions to molest them, but that he wanted to give them a bit of advice, who! though not a favourite of mine I quite believe him here. A few days to the north of Bamangwato hundreds of oxen belonging to them, ran away suffering from thirst and would not be turned. Some was even so unfortunate to loose their last oxen. What must their feelings have been.

Khama's missionary, Rev James Hepburn of the Ngami Mission, even saw to the provision of water and draught animals at a time of Trekker need after they decided to proceed. Regarding Greyling's leadership, Jordan writes: "... the Boers in their ignorance were misled by Greyling, and they have already seen this."

such as their own property. Two fellows who are pretty well known over the country for this deed, took some of the cattle to the Praveraal Advertising what should be done with the cattle while they had about half the number placed out of the way as their own, those branded by people at Damangwato were restored by command of Khama. who was rather indignant when he heard the way in which our English brethren were going on. Mr. Hepburn missionary of Damangwato who was at Lake Ngami about this time did much towards the suffering people. Had water taken to them, The Boers speak very highly in the way in which he acted towards them, I must confess that the Boers in their ignorance were misled by Greyling, and they have already seen this telling them

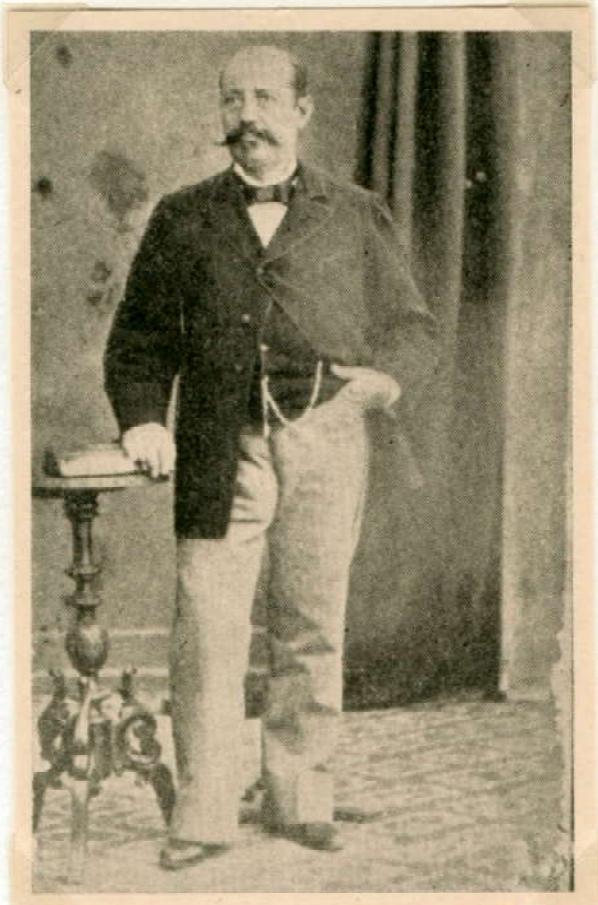
After a series of miscalculations leading to many Trekker deaths and the destruction of most of their animal resources, the three Treks came together at *Rietfontein* on the Botswana/Namibia near Gobabis. A "joint Trek" was established, which moved painfully along the tsetse fly-infested Okavango River. This brought them in contact with the Ovambo tribes as well. Further trekking within northern Ovamboland/Namibia followed till mid-1880.

MAP: CHIEF DORSLAND TREKS & BOER AREAS OF RESIDENCE



The Dorslandtrekkers then decided to move on to the fertile highlands of Huíla and Humpata in Portuguese West Africa/Angola. This is variously attributed to the recommendations of Jordan and missionary priest, Father Carlos Duparquet. After negotiations by a delegation of nine Boers with the Portuguese Governor of Moçâmedes, Sebastião Nunes da Matta, an agreement was reached whereby land would be allocated to the Trekkers provided they deferred to the Portuguese authorities and their laws. Around January 1881, the joint Trek, now comprising only 270 Boers (57 families) and some 50 servants, 61 ox-wagons, 840 trek oxen and some 2 000 cattle, reached the well-watered highlands of Angola at Humpata. Some trekked further northwards to Caconda.

The welcoming arms of the Portuguese authorities can be explained by their altered policy to advance the colonization of the Angolan hinterland. Having (formally at least) ended slavery as the driving force in the Colony's development, the Boers had unexpectedly appeared as a *deus ex machina* for the process. The Earl of Mayo (DRW Burke) said of them in 1882: "*A finer set of men I have never seen. Without doubt, during that terrible journey it was a case of the survival of the fittest.*"



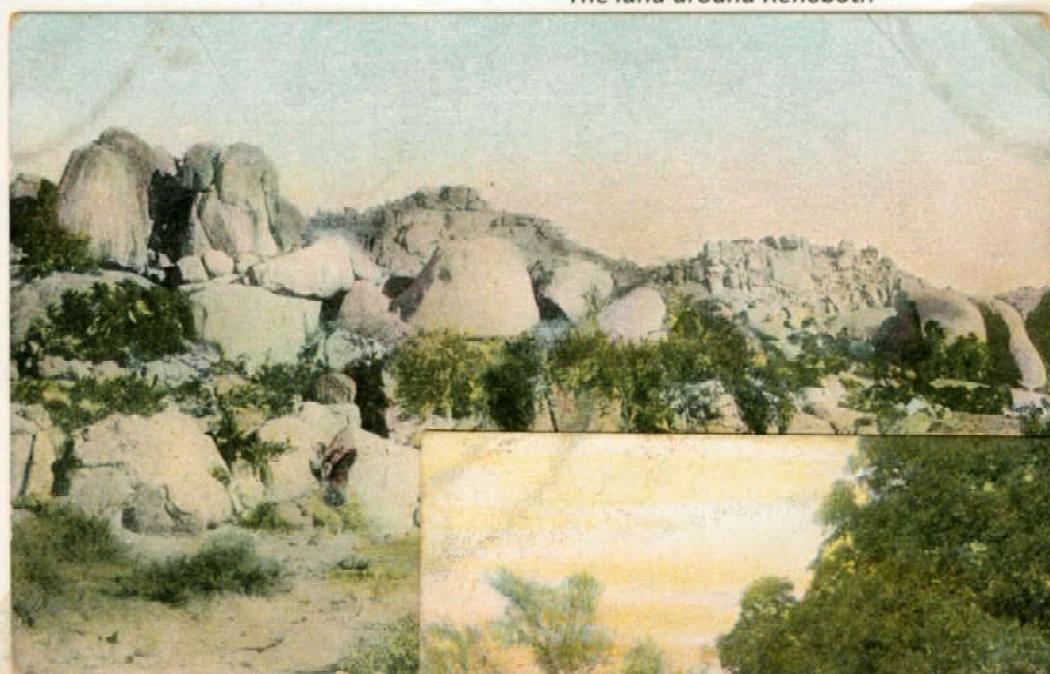
Sr. Sebastião Nunes da Matta, the Portuguese Governor of Moçâmedes, with whom a Boer Deputation of the 1880 Joint Trek concluded a settlement agreement

### 2.3 Trek from Angola back to Ovamboland

Nonetheless, there were several Boer families who were not satisfied with conditions in Angola. Jordan's attempts to negotiate land (some 500 farms) at the prime agricultural area around Rehoboth with the Swartbooi (Namaland) tribe in 1884 were frustrated by the German authorities, who were apparently aware of his objective of linking Walvis Bay (a Cape possession) with British-controlled Mashonaland.

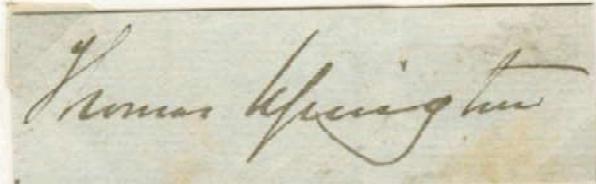
But he was successful in obtaining land more north between Otavi and Grootfontein from the Ovambo Chief *Kambonde ka Mpingana* in 1885 using his own resources. This would have provided the Ovambos a "buffer zone" between them and the more warlike Herero tribes. Accordingly, some 300 farms became available to the Boers. Led by George Diedrick Prinsloo as *President*, DP Black as *Veldkornet* and BD Bouwer as *Kommandant*, some 20 Trek Boer families now occupied this land.

*The land around Rehoboth*



*Otavi area, showing Herero village*

Clearly designed to ingratiate this group with the Cape's 4<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister, Thomas Upington (who had come to power in 1884 via Afrikaner Bond backing), Jordan titled the "state" *Upingtonia*. It should be noted, since it highlights the "closed group" nature of the Boers, that despite his incredible caring for and hard support of the Boers, Jordan never became part of their decision-making process. To some extent, this was true for other "outsiders" such as Dutchman Pieter van der Smit who was to join them during the Anglo-Boer War, despite having fought for them and even marrying a Dorslandtrekker. He was also attached to the *Hervormde Kerk* and, accordingly, not optimally suited to teaching *Gereformeerde Kerk* children.



A photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Thomas Upington", enclosed in a rectangular frame.

*Signature of PM Upington*

Boer occupation of this territory was increasingly resisted by the Hereros through Chief *Maharero*. Further, Ovambo pressure on Chief *Kambonde* led to him regretting his decision to permit Boer occupation of the land. He allowed his brother, *Nehale*, to murder Jordan on 30 June 1886 near the mission station *Omandongo*, after which the new state began to crumble. By 1888, this Boer group had returned to Angola as well as to the ZAR.



*Herero tribe (Matime's kraal) in the area*

## 2.4 Treks in the 1890s

2.4.1 Fourth Trek: The Willem Prinsloo Trek (actually two Treks) took place between 1891 and 1892. Another group followed by ship for Humpata. This relocation totaled perhaps some 40 families, mostly from the Rustenburg region.

2.4.2 Fifth Trek: The Koos Hamman Trek of seven households took place in November 1892 from the Bethal area. They arrived at Humpata in November 1893.

2.4.3 Sixth Trek: During 1893, Boers from the Eastern Transvaal Highveld and the Rustenburg area – some 100 families – trekked westwards. This group later split into two: about 70 families went to Angola, the others to German South West Africa. The trekkers in this group were regarded as being quite *independent* personalities compared with the more conformist behaviours shown by the earlier groups. And because they settled in the more central area of Angola, at Bié, Cubal, Mombolo and Que, they became geographically and culturally estranged from the Boers at Humpata. This is important to note as it (1) explains both the reason why the majority of Boers who remained in Angola after the 1928 exodus to South West Africa came from these areas, and (2) highlights the importance of having some or other *quantum* to preserve cultural identity.



1894 German discussion evening in Berlin on the "Boerentrek" to German SWA; & picture of Boer farm "Uitkomst" at Grootfontein

The importance of keeping family/group and thereby cultural contact has received little attention by writers and researchers. From the point of view of the Boers/Afrikaners in the ZAR and Orange Free State and, later, the Union of South Africa, it appears that the *Dorslandtrekkers* were simply relegated to a footnote of Boer/Afrikaner history.

Perhaps the facts that (1) the *Dorslandtrekkers* had turned their backs on the problems of their states (disgruntled families from the Orange Free State were also trekking to the more northerly and westerly "foreign-culture" territories) and that (2) the nationalism which had (finally!) come to the ZAR after their successful First War of Independence against the English colonists (1880/81), had no effect on them, caused emotional separation. In addition, they were not particularly fruitful as a group, and there was even criticism of them that they were decimating the wildlife in Angola. Further, the fact that they received but limited religious and schooling succour from their brothers, as will be discussed, was clear evidence of marginalisation by their root stock.

Rev SJ Strydom put it poetically in 1923: "an Afrikaner plant has been planted in Portuguese soil, which is slowly bearing its own fruit."



*Piet Smit en vrou vir  
Dierus se personeel*

Photos of Boers in  
Angola; photogra-  
pher: Pieter van  
der Smit, circa 1905



*Jan Verwoerd en familie*

14  
15/1

It appears that even during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), when British imperialist objectives combined with corruption in the ZAR's Volksraad and the state's intransience regarding the issue of the *Uitlander* (foreigner) vote provided motivation to invade the gold-rich state, the Angola Boers maintained contact with family.

An example is a cover addressed from Humpata to Lucas Johannes van der Merwe, a Prisoner of War of the British at St Helena. His wife and child were shot by British troops during the War, probably the motivation for him to trek to Angola in the post-War or 7<sup>th</sup> Trek. The Van der Merwe's were a large family grouping in Angola.



Cover sent from Humpata on 26/04/1901, endorsed "Via Madeira Via Kaapstat" (either!), addressed to St Helena POW, LJ van der Merwe; & "Souvenir" post card reflecting the ZAR's change of government

## 2.5 Seventh or post Anglo-Boer War trek

This Trek was occasioned by Boer losses, physical and emotional, suffered during the Anglo-Boer War. It was, in fact, the first diaspora of Boers, as many families left for Argentina/Chile, British East Africa, German East Africa, German South West Africa, Madagascar, Mexico, New Mexico/Texas and Rhodesia.

This Trek departed from Palapye, Bechuanaland Protectorate (Botswana) in May 1905, arriving at Belmonte, Bié in May 1906. It consisted of 12 families (58 persons) and 13 ox-wagons.

From this time onwards, there were no further large Treks to Angola because the Portuguese authorities were not in favour of these anymore. This was caused by problems the Boers in Angola were experiencing in adapting to Portuguese settlement requirements.



Post cards of (1) a Boer family returning to a destroyed farm; & (2) consenting to signing the Oath of Allegiance to the British Crown

## 2.6 Foreign individuals joining the Dorslandtrekkers

A number of individual also came to live amongst the Boers and marry into them. The largest groups were Germans (eleven) and Dutchmen (six, notably Pieter van der Smit). There were also a few English-speaking South Africans, particularly William (WJB) Chapman and T Cockley.

Their importance lay in the fact that they were an intellectual stimulus as alternative opinions in the highly conservative Boer community, and they had some complementary skills such as road construction, school teaching and photography. Genetically, of course, they helped to counter the problem of inbreeding in this relatively small and widespread community. In this regard, the local Portuguese settlers and officials were also a factor. In cases where Boer women faced poverty and/or community/Church exclusion, co-habitation with Blacks from local tribes occurred, an inconceivable disaster for the Boers then.

The Portuguese actually welcomed racial mixing as it was viewed as a way to a non-racial society. This did not, however, mean that *mestiços /mestiças* (M/F) were given Government posts in preference to new immigrants from Portugal, even if the former were better educated. However, they only totaled some 3 000 persons in 1900 (0,06% of the population). But this was to become an increasingly serious problem as they were later to become leaders of the independence movements.



A *mestiços*, a racially-mixed male

## 2.7 The special case of Dutchman Pieter van der Smit

This micro-review serves as an introduction to the broader picture of the fortunes of the Angola Boers. It reveals a multi-talented man, one who was prepared to throw in his fortunes in with the Trekkers, but whose potential was not fully realised.

### 2.7.1 Service to Boers in the ZAR

Van der Smit was born in South Holland in 1878, where he qualified as a teacher. His "wanderlust" led him to the ZAR, and he accepted a teaching position in 1898 on the farm *Waaikraal*, which housed a Post Office, near Bronkhorstspruit.

He found himself with Boer Commandos on the Natal border a month before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War. After the Siege of Ladysmith, he fought the retreat to the Transvaal, where he found himself guarding British POWs at the Waterval Camp near Pretoria. He was imprisoned when the capital capitulated in June 1900. Since he was still a Dutch citizen, the British deported him to the Netherlands.



Engelsche Krijgsgevangenen te Waterval. (Nederlandia, Aug 1900)

*Cover from the PO at a farm school cancelled WAAIKRAAL, 12/07/; & "Nederlandia" (newspaper) cutting of the Waterval British POW camp north of Pretoria (Van der Smit wrote for this Newspaper)*

18  
1972

In Holland he organised "Transvaalaande", meetings to discuss the War and to raise funds for the Boer Republics. He left Rotterdam on a Woermann Liner for Angola on 1 May 1901, disembarking at Benguela rather than at Mossamedes, the closer port to his destination, the Trekker centre at Humpata.

# Transvaalvoordracht.

P. v. d. S.

RUYS & Co., Cargadoors en Expeditours.  
Rotterdam - Amsterdam - Zaandam - Antwerpen - Marseille.

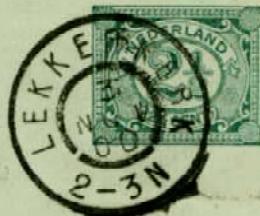
✓ ROTTERDAM, 10 April 1901.

Mijnheer,

In antwoord op uw briefkaart van gisteren moeten wij u tot onzelijks spijt mededeelen dat er zo goed als geen uitsicht bestaat dat het 30 dagen van hier vertrouwen de s/s Kurt Hoermann Mossamedes aandoet!



BRIEKAART



Transvaalvoordracht  
P. v. d. S.

AAN den Heer P. van der Smit,  
gewoon onderwijzer der R. S. R.

Reeuwijk

Dutch postal stationery post card being a positive reaction to a speaking & fund raising request at a church; Card advertising "Tvl evenings"; & Card with information on Van der Smit's trip to Angola

While little is known about the total income generated by his funding request, it's clear that Van der Smit was fully committed to his task, public or private sector funding.



### **2.7.2 Residence amongst the Angolan Boers**

After talks with the local School Commission, he opened a school at Palanka, where Gert Alberts of the 1<sup>st</sup> Trek was Chairman. A year later he married Martha Maria Prinsloo, daughter of WJ and Susanna Prinsloo. His schooling activities were apparently not supported, which appears suspect given his formal training in Holland and actual practice in the ZAR, his ability to also speak English, German, Portuguese and some local tribes' languages. He could play several musical instruments as well. Perhaps his constraint as a teacher amongst the Angolan Boers was that he was a member of the *Hervormde Kerk* rather than the *Gereformeerde Kerk*, the majority religion in this conservative community. Perhaps, too, he was unable to unshackle his Dutch roots, remaining an "outsider" despite his marriage into the group.

Accordingly, he relocated to *Que-Caondo*, opening a dairy and a retail shop there. The stocking of his shop was a problem, so he showed initiative in travelling to the Netherlands in 1906 to secure supplies. He became aware of Angola's economic opportunities, and was a regular contributor to the Dutch paper, "*Nederlandia*", promoting trade and investment in Angola.



*Incoming cover cancelled Utrecht, 10/12/1902 addressed to Vd Smit at Humpata & with Lisbon, 14/12/1902 + MOSSAMEDES, 19/01/1903 backstamps; & copy of photo of Vd Smit with (Gereformeerde) pupils & parents at opening of Palanka school*

An artistic person, Van der Smit had acquired a tripod camera in 1901 in the Netherlands with which he not only photographed his family's development, but also, importantly, documented several of the important events in the Angolan community. Without this insight and skill (he also developed his negatives), very few early images other than that of Trekker patriarchs would be available today. He also assisted in drawing up wills.



## Testament.

Aan allen, die dese openbare  
akte zullen lezen of hooren lezen  
wij het kennelijk, dat wij onderge-  
screkenden Johannes, Jacobus Vil-  
joen en Martha, Maria van  
den Berg, echkeleden, gehuwd in  
gemeenschap van goedeien, zijn over-  
eengekomen over onse, met den dood

*Joint testament for Johannes Viljoen & Martha van den Berg, neatly laid out on Angolan revenue paper & dated 1908*

22/2

He photographed his 1911 relocation to Saconjimba-Bihé as well as his family and trading environment there. The couple had 12 children.



over den Ceve kruisende



Hangende brug over Ceve.



Winkel Sacon-Bihé

Relocation across the Ceve River showing oxen transversing the swollen stream; goods being carried over a hanging bridge; & his supply store in this vicinity

23/2

Pieter van der Smit & children ... first five ... then eight ... later 12



Via Lisboa & Benguella

Almo. Mr. P. van der Smit

Portug. West. Africa



Bihi  
Sacanjima

Cover addressed to Vd Smit ex Reeuwijk, backstamped Lisbon 27/03/1912, transit BENGUELA, 17/04; & BIHÉ, 25/04

Whilst residing here, Van der Smit took a leadership position, motivating (Jordan-like!) some Boers to consider trekking to the Belgian Congo. However, his correspondence with the relevant Belgian Minister did not bear fruit. But there is evidence of business dealings.



Lacangimba 9 São

A pagarei V<sup>a</sup>phia por esta minha  
única via de Let. a minha ordem a quantia  
de  
valor de mincadorias

Ao Sr.  
Pagavel a

*Dr. Smit.*

meus honorarios e honorarios de advogado em Lí-  
anda no processo de concessão de terrenos que o mes-  
mo regnem, cujo total era de 50000, tendo eu já an-  
teriormente recebido 20000.

Belém, 26 de Novembro de 1914

Amílcar Barca Maia



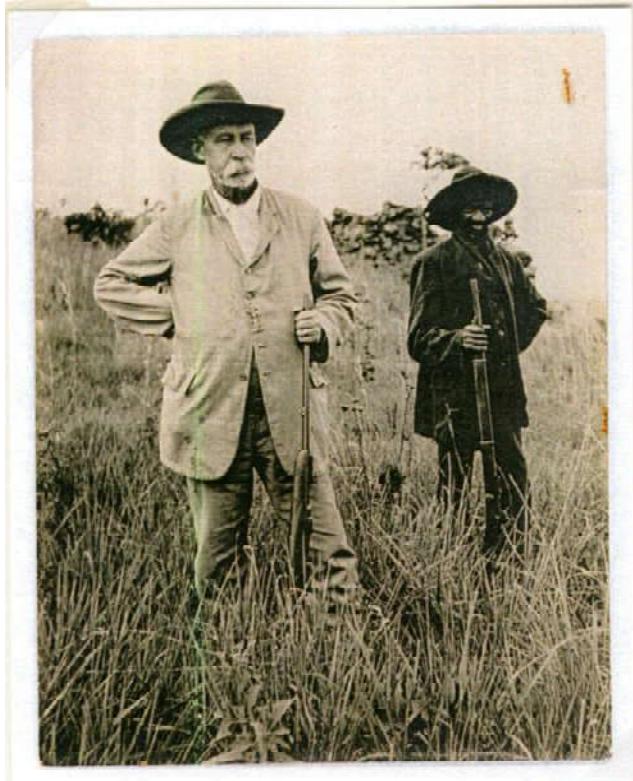
Examples of Vd Smit's financial instruments

Early in 1915, Van der Smit's family relocated to Mombolo. Here he only farmed, selling cheese into the region. He was later (1919) a founding member of the *Hervormde Kerk* in Mombolo. Two years later, Pieter van der Smit died at the relatively early age of 42.



Copy of "Death notice"; self-portrait; & mourning envelope to his **widow** ("Mevrouw de Wed."), backstamped MOSSAMEDES, 22/07/1921

There were two Englishmen who became part of the Boer environment in Angola, namely William (WJB) Chapman & T Cockley. The former readily took to hunting activities, and became Protestant.



T. Cockley

*Hunter Chapman with old Duiker, his gun bearer for many years; Duiker was a Berg Damara from SWA who accompanied Chapman to Angola; & Cockley with family*

### **3. Relationships with Angolan Portuguese**

Through to the 1920s, the Boers were an insular community. Acceptance into the group was only possible if one married into it and accepted the Protestant faith. Close association with another skin colour like those of the Portuguese or indigenous Africans resulted in expulsion from the group. This would explain why such a supportive and passionate pro-Boers as Will Jordan (a Coloured) was never allowed into their decision-taking *lagers*.

#### **3.1 Good beginnings**

Initially, the Boers were heartily welcomed by the Portuguese authorities to southern Angola and were granted lease land for settlement purposes. These Boers were the genetically strong survivors of a natural selection process which had lasted years. The Portuguese objective was the assimilation of Portuguese settlers from both Madeira and Portugal, who they subsequently settled in between the Boers, with these Boers. On the other hand, the Boers were intent on retaining their cultural identity and Protestant religions.

The Administrator of the Municipality of Humpata, Artur de Paiva, played an important role in developing positive relations with the Boers, even marrying Kommandant Koos Botha's young daughter, Jacomina, in 1881. He was also instrumental in mobilizing Boer Commandos to suppress the tribal uprisings.



*Artur de Paiva as Lieutenant (left) & as Colonel (right); when he died, a valuable ally of the Boers was lost*

### **3.2 Differing objectives & cultures come to the fore**

The fact that the Boers were not "melting pot" material was soon apparent. Culturally, too, they differed considerably, both in nature and class. The Portuguese were naturally jovial people and shrewd businessmen, in contrast to the Boers who were somewhat austere and preferred close-to-nature lifestyles. Further, the early Madeira and Portuguese settlers were of a particularly low class, and were therefore held in low regard by the Boers. Clearly, too, the Boers wanted their own schools for purposes of their own language and religious instruction. And they did not want their children sitting on school benches with Black children for fear of promoting racial mixing.

This separation as a group yielded concern for the Portuguese authorities, as they became aware of the Boers' military prowess during the course of the assistance they would periodically offer. They therefore became concerned at the possibility of losing the southern half of the colony to the new settlers from the ZAR. Additionally, they expressed concern at the Boers' continued semi-nomadic lifestyles, charges that they were stealing cattle from the indigenous population, and that they showed no respect for the authorities. In lastmentioned regard, the treason of Piet du Plessis who co-operated with the German South West African forces under Maj-Gen Victor Franke to destroy the Portuguese fort, Naulila, on the southern border during WW1 served as the example to distrust all Angolan Boers.



*Corps de garde à Lusambo*

*Portuguese prison/military facilities*

### 3.3 Portuguese measures to counter the Boers

In 1894, the Portuguese authorities took a decision not to make land available to groups of Boer settlers anymore, which decision was confirmed in 1907 (after the 7<sup>th</sup> or last Trek had arrived). Licenses for weapons were also withheld from a number of the more difficult Boers in southern Angola. Between 1907 and 1910, Boer autonomy to regulate their affairs in Humpata was ended (despite the two agreements of 1880 which guaranteed this), and hunting as well as trading with the indigenous population was curtailed in southern Angola.



Indigenous population of Southern Angola, including Chiefs & trader types (top card cancelled at HUMPATA, 9/08/1904 & Lisbon 12/09 transit)

#### 4. Economic opportunities

##### 4.1 Mixed farming & hunting

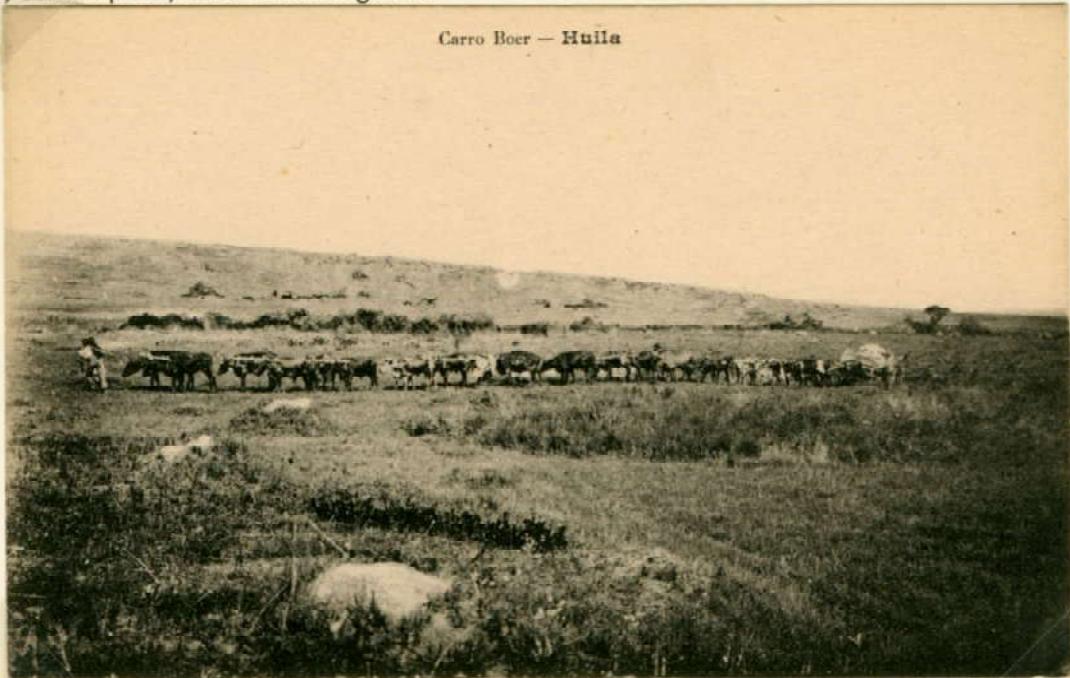
Traditionally, the Boers had survived on a combination of mixed farming, i.e agricultural produce - much for own use - and cattle, and hunting. In Angola, the indigenous population competed cost-effectively on local markets, marginalizing the Boers economically. In central Angola, cattle diseases limited herds, which had in any case been decimated by the treks from the ZAR. Cattle farming was possible in southern Angola (the *Sandveld*), but the soil was poor, leading to migratory farming and unsettled lifestyles.

Accordingly, profit margins on agricultural produce were such that the hiring of labour at market rates could not be envisioned. Since the Angola Boers continued their agricultural practice of earlier times, namely to leave the "hard work" to their Black labourers, the kwasi-slaves they had brought with them through the *Dorsland*, the so-called "makvolk", and slaves they acquired subsequently (slavery continued in Angola until after the end of WW1), were important assets in promoting the development of the areas where they resided.



Post cards of (1) a Boer ox-wagon in the Humpata district, hand-dated 9/11/1905; & (2) sorting potatoes by a "makvolk" member dressed up in Voortrekker clothing & a labourer, possibly a slave (cancelled at LUANDA, 20/12/1913, received at Lisbon, 13/01/1914)

After WW1, the depreciation of the local currency was a significant blow to residents. By 1923, Angola's high inflation rate had left cash holders substantially poorer. And few were geared to take advantage of the consequent sharply rising prices for agricultural exports from the Huila Highlands via the railways to the key central ports, Lobito and Benguela.



Boer ox-wagon on the Huila Highlands; & uprated postal stationery post card sent from CACONDA on the Huila Highlands on 12/09/1911 to Pretoria

Upated postal stationery post card written from & cancelled at HUMPATA, 5/02/1910, backstamped MOCCAMEDES, 9/02; & LOANDA, 14/01 (!); & Boer ox-wagon at nearby Lubango (Sá da Bandeira), cancelled LUBANGO, 5/07/1911 & received Portugal, 3/08



9 Lubango. Carro boer passando o rio Cacoluvor



Hunting was both an economic activity and a (time-consuming) sport for Boer men. Areas along the Cunene River and certain areas in the central and eastern parts of Angola initially had high concentrations of wild-life and, accordingly, the Boers were attracted to live in these areas. The protein portion of Boer diets consisted largely of wild-life *biltong*.



Egersdorfer post card reflecting Boer joy at hunting; and self-fashioned awl used for making holes in skins/leather products

#### 4.2 Transport riding & infrastructure development

The Boers were initially required to provide infrastructure for their own development, not only in respect of housing and farming but also for roads to facilitate ox-wagon transport. In Angola they initially had a monopoly on the provision of transport. Wagon-wheels and wagons drawn by oxen were unknown to the Portuguese. They used indigenous people as pack carriers (*carregadores*) or sledges without wheels (also drawn by oxen but in a different manner) before Boer ox-wagons came onto the scene as a reliable and effective alternative.

Ox-wagons (*carros boers*) were heavy vehicles with four wheels, which were pulled by 16 to 20 oxen. The wagons could carry between 1½ to 2 tons of goods over poor terrain, a weight which could be matched by some 80 *carregadores* more cheaply and quickly. But the indigenous population was hardly ever available to undertake the task, and could not be relied upon in wars against local tribes.



Views of a Boer ox-wagon ready to off-load at Benguella; & rail unloading onto a ship docked at nearby Lobito

35/3

The closest port for the Boers in the southern region of Angola was Moçâmedes, some 300km from early Boer centres at Humpata and Sá de Bandeira (Lubango), and the further on-line (km 589) town of Vila Artur de Paiva (Vila da Ponte). After Boer transport riders commenced these lengthy service distances by ox-wagons imports and import duties from Moçâmedes increased substantially.



Mossamedes

Carro de Boers

Oceano,



COLLEÇÃO MOREIRA - LOANDA

MOSSAMEDES — Caes e praia

49



Editora Oceano — Loanda — Editor

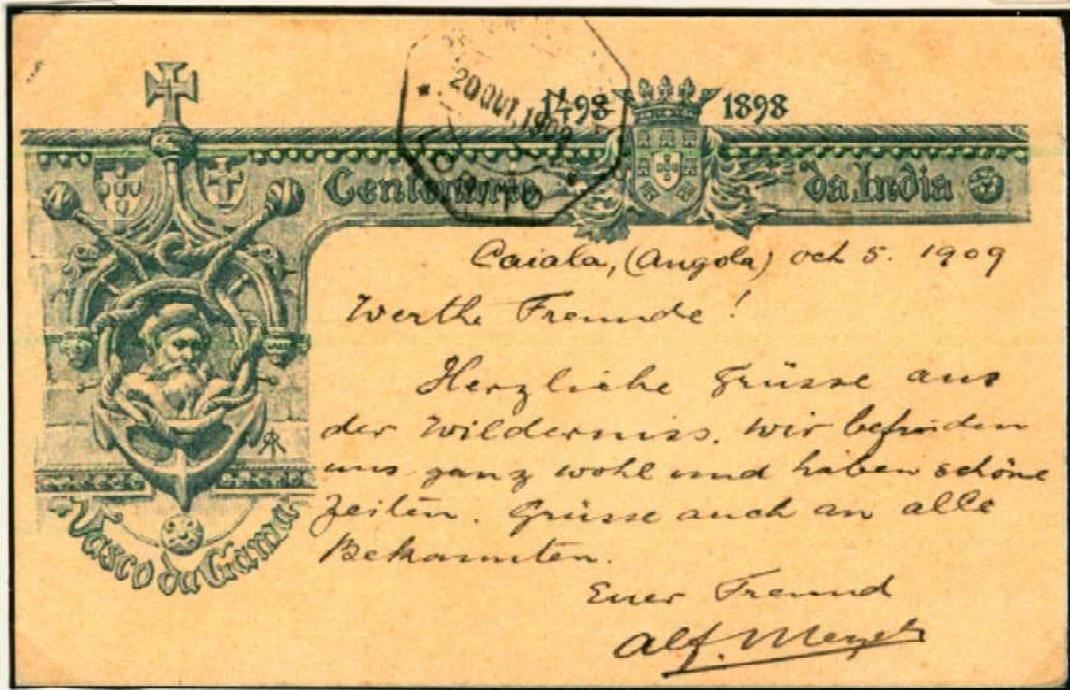
375. Lubango

Carro Boer atravessando um rio

*Loading goods for inland at Moçâmedes; the port's pier & customs building; & Boer ox-wagon from Lubango en route to Moçâmedes*

36/3

For the many Boers scattered at towns such as Cubal (km 198 on the railway line), Nova Lisboa/Huambo (km 426), Silva Porto (km 628) and off-line settlements such as Sacanjimba across the central Angolan Provinces of Benguela and Huambo, there were two adjacent import and export ports, namely Lobito and Benguela.



Up-rated 20R postal stationery post card written "aus der Wilderniss" at Caiala (5/10/1909), cancelled at both BENGUELLA &, on reverse, LOBITO, 20/10 – as per instructions on front

For military reasons, the most southerly railway line development, namely the *Moçâmedes Railway* (initially a 60 cm gauge), was planned as early as 1890. Work on this state railway commenced in 1905 after authorization by Royal Decree. The recorded chronology of development is:

- 1907 line open to km 67
- 1912 open to Vila Arriaga, km 169; altitude 905m
- 1923 open to Lubango (Sá da Bandeira), km 248; altitude 1 770m
- 1955 open to Matala at the Cunene River Bridge & Salazar Dam

In the absence of economic adaptations, the opening of railway lines in the 1910s through 1920s spelled hardship for the Boers whose transport business was their economic mainstay, and clearly would have been a contributing factor for their first repatriation in 1928.

Mossamedes



Mossamedes Caminho de ferro de Mossamedes  
Construção Fornecimento de água

*Views of the development of the rail infrastructure at Moçâmedes*

The origin of Angola's most important (privately owned) railway line in the country was the rich mineral deposits in Katanga (Belgian Congo/DRC) and Rhodesia. The initiative came from Robert Williams, who was prospecting in Katanga on behalf of Cecil John Rhodes in the 1890s. In 1902, Williams obtained a 99-year lease from the Portuguese authorities to develop and run the railway line as a private concern. The development cost had to be shouldered by the concessionaires, formed into Companhia do Caminho de Ferro de Benguela.

A summary of developments:

- 1903 a private limited construction contract with George Pauling Co concluded; & token work begins
- 1905 Catumbela Bridge completed; line open to km 14
- 1908 open to Cubal, km 199
- 1912 open to Nova Lisboa (Huambo), km 426
- 1924 open to Silva Porto, km 629
- 1929 official opening of Benguela Railway Line, frontier at km 1 349



Views of the challenging interior from Lobito, posted locally to Brussels on 21/08/1931; & Catumbella Bridge under construction, posted ex Lobito to Lisbon in 1908

#### **4.3 Mercenaries & self-defence**

The Boers were critically important for the Portuguese in their attempts to "pacify" local tribes. The Boers' reputation of toughness in dealing with resistance by indigenous populations had preceded them, so they were, initially at least, welcomed by the Portuguese military forces. In fact, attacks by tribal groups on Portuguese military garrisons and towns such as Moçâmedes ended soon after the Boers arrived on the Huila Highlands. The Boers were also important in the "taming" of the various Ovimbundu and Ovambo tribes in southern Angola.

In fact, Boer forces were involved with the Portuguese military in 22 wars against indigenous tribes in the first 40 years of their residence in southern Angola. The last war took place during the early part of WW1 when, in 1915, the Kwanjama tribe under Mandume was driven across the South West African (Namibian) border.



*Boer volunteers who took part in the Cuamato expedition of 1907, the so-called "Wenkommando"*

As mercenaries, Boers received daily payments between 4/6 and £1 each. They rented their horses and ox-wagons to the Portuguese as well. Another major benefit was that they could take half of the cattle booty.



A Boer Commando - The Roll Call



Photo taken at Fort Roçadas of PJ van der Merwe who acted as a sharpshooter in the Portuguese campaign against the Okuamati tribe in 1907; & a typical Boer Commando roll-call

The Angola Boers were liberal in their adjudication of the legality of some of their activities. As has been mentioned, they were particularly guilty of breaking hunting laws; and trading liquor (particularly to blacks) and diamonds illegally.

Their relations with the indigenous population was also bedeviled by the fact that they practiced slavery (as did the Portuguese). To some extent there was actual trading in slaves, but it was mostly for own use, and the Boers gave them their freedom at the customary time of marriage. After WW1, the slave trade began to ebb.



Familia de Muhilas — Huila - ANGOLA



Habitante da Hila em sua casa — ANGOLA

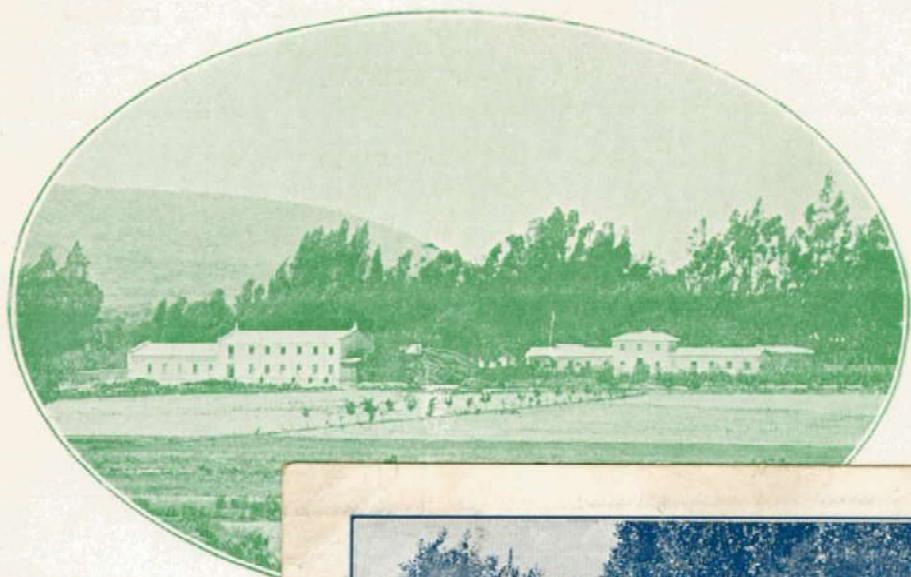
*Views of indigenous people at their huts on the Huila Highlands; it is possible that these were slaves as well*

## 5. Church affairs & education

One could not expect people who gave as a cause for leaving the ZAR their President's liberal interpretation of the Bible that they could be positively inclined to the Roman Catholic faith of the Portuguese.

### 5.1 Mission stations

There was, however, an excellent relationship between the (conservative) Protestant Boers and Fr Duparquet and his staff at the Roman Catholic Mission Station at Huila. In fact, a number of Boer children attended this mission school.

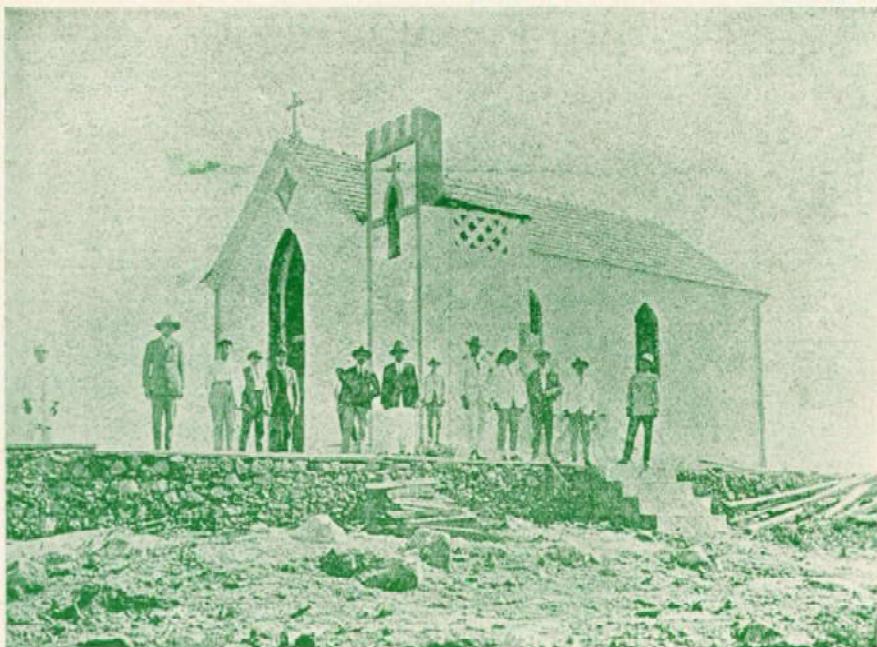


Colheita de laranjas — Missão da Huila

*Roman Catholic Huila Mission station & plantation, the bottom card used in Portugal in 1935*

43/3

*Further Roman Catholic Mission Stations, the top cards reflecting the Huambo/Nova-Lisboa set-up*



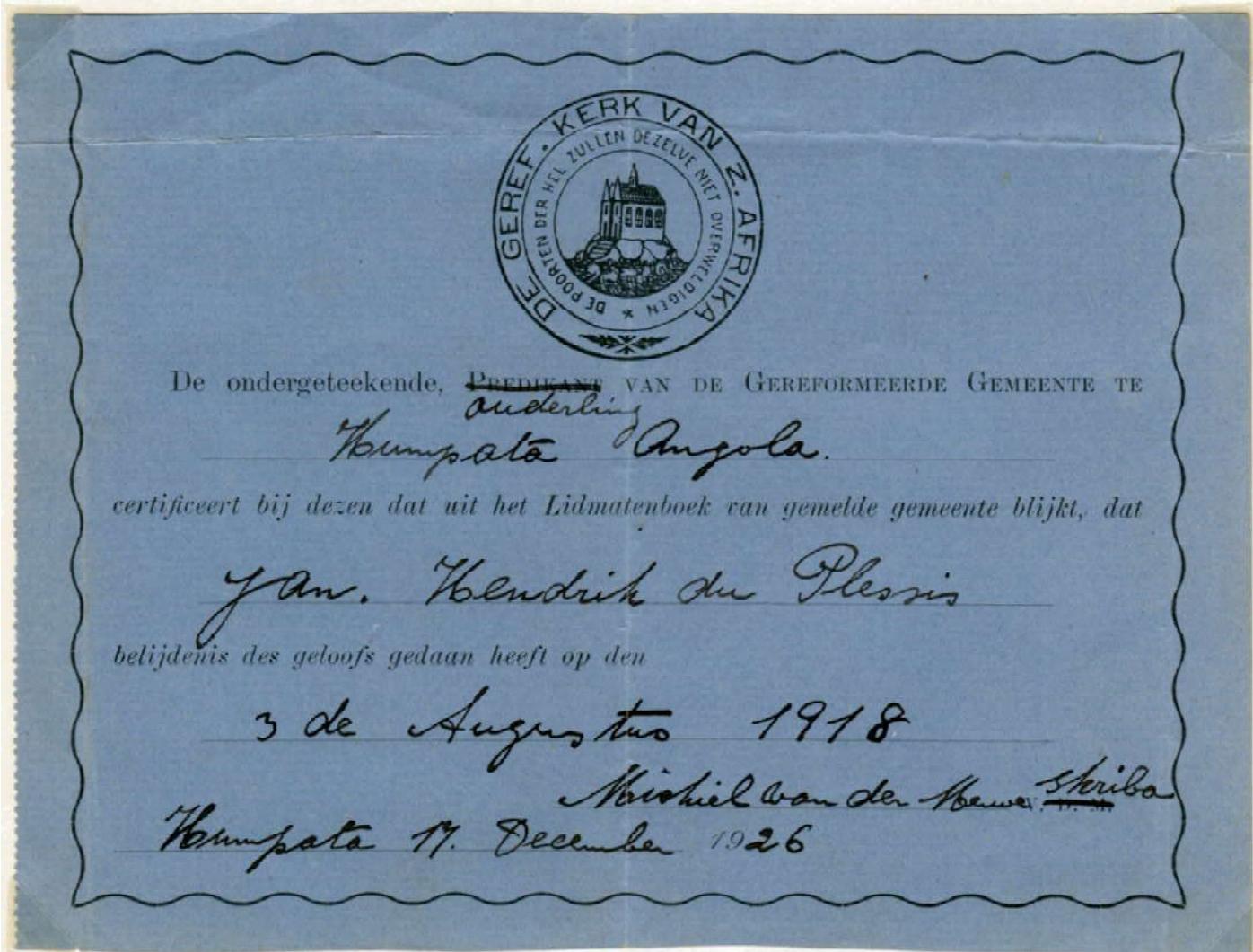
*Protestant missionaries undertaking a mass baptism at Bihé*

### 5.2 Relations between Boer churches

Church affairs cast the spotlight on the negative trends of the Angola Boers.

Prof Jan Lion Cachet established the Gereformeerde Kerk congregation at Humpata as early as 1881 for both the Boers and their Afrikaans-speaking Black/Coloured servants. The next visiting missionary was Rev M Pelser, who arrived in 1884 really only assisted the Grootfontein/Upingtonia Boers to leave Angola.

In 1889, Rev Dirk Postma arrived at Humpata. He left but a year later because of ill health. The background hereto was that Rev Postma wanted to serve and administer to the Boers' "Makvolk" as well, but while he had been given permission to do so by the Church Council, the Humpata Gereformeerdes would not accept this.



*In the absence of regular, longstanding missionary support for the Angola Boers, persons with the status of "elders" had to certify religious activities, as per the example of Michiel van der Merwe*

### 5.3 Hervormde Kerk established

The 1908 rift in the *Gereformeerde Kerk* at Humpata led to the establishment of the *Hervormde Kerk* at Humpata. Persons who had resigned from the *Gereformeerde Kerk* sent Willem Venter to South Africa to find a pastor for them. He managed to get Rev P van Drimmelen of Zeerust to establish the *Hervormde Kerk* at Humpata. Rev Van Drimmelen died there in 1918.

Gedoop in die Sandveld die 5<sup>e</sup> Sept. 1926  
op skriflike verlof van die Kerkraad van die  
Nederduits Hervormde Kerk alhier.

Johanna Adriana

Gebore 12<sup>e</sup> Augustus 1926

Onse: Dillem Ebius Oosthuizen

Anna Catharina Venter

Get: Stephanus Jacobus Oosthuizen  
Hendrina Francina Oosthuizen  
Maria Magdalena Johanna Oppel

G. J. Brants

vdm  
Geref. kerk. Raap Prov.  
4 Sept. 1926

Birth certificate reflecting co-operative arrangements between the Boer churches after Rev Van Drimmelen's death

#### 5.4 Schooling attempts & restrictions

Boer Protestant children were expected to be able to read their Bibles to fulfill their religious duties. Accordingly, despite the primitive conditions Boer children often had to endure, they could at least read and write to some degree. In Angola, the Boers faced even greater challenges, namely Government schools taught in Portuguese, were Roman Catholic in nature, and were integrated racially.

There were persons who could teach and were prepared to do so. But particularly after the break between the key churches (*Gerefomeerde Kerk* and *Hervormde Kerk*) in 1908, there was little schooling co-operation between them, and there were even instances of little schools for the *Gerefomeerde* and *Hervormde* groupings being established in close proximity to each other.

Both groups only taught "Christian education", namely reading and writing, guided by the Bible. The teaching of other subjects such as science and geography was strictly forbidden. Around 1920, it did occur to teaching (church) authorities that it would be useful to learn Portuguese at school as well since it would assist them to understand communications from official sources. Later, it was the turn of the Portuguese authorities to forbid Afrikaans being taught at schools.



P. VAN DER SMIT

OOM GERT GROESBEEK EN 'N KLAAS VAN  
54 SKAASKINDERS. ANGOLA 1911.

Class of 1911 led by Gert Groesbeek, who was also the local wizard

### **6. 1928 Repatriation**

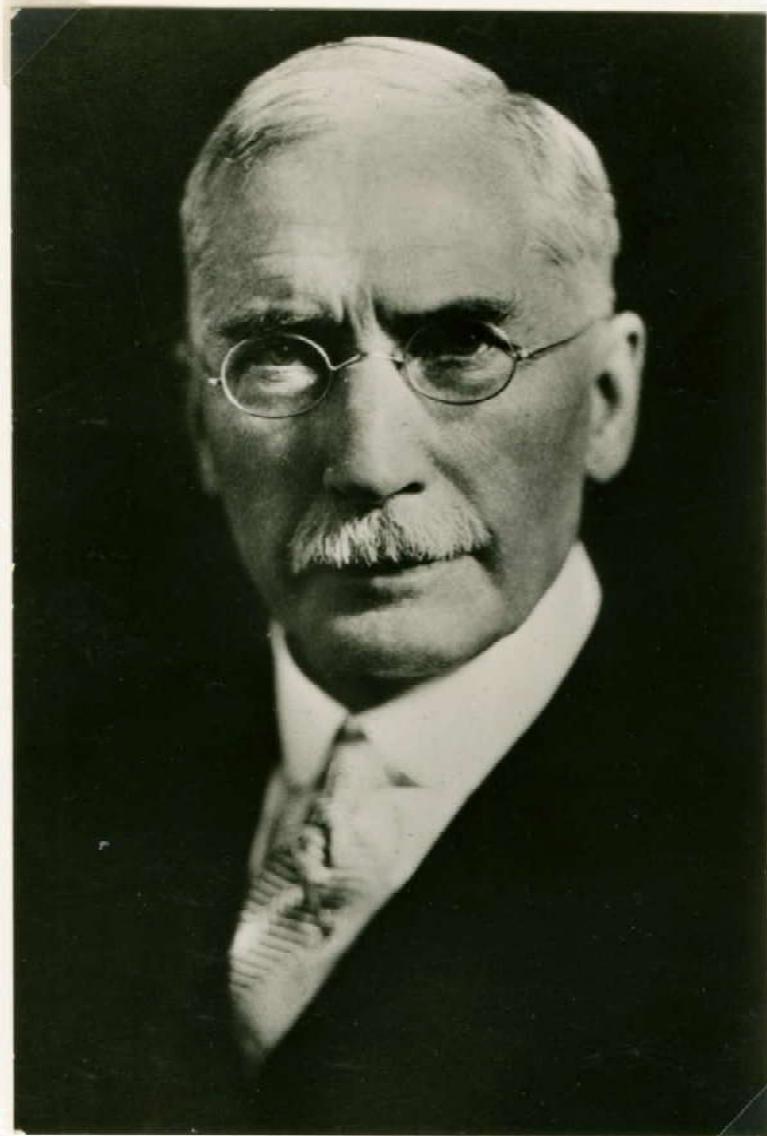
This Portuguese integration pressure coupled with a marked deterioration of economic circumstances, including soaring post-1923 inflation, created an environment conducive to the abandonment of the Boers' new homeland. From this year, the financial unit, the *Escudo*, declined steadily, culminating in the financial crisis of 1928, after which the local currency could not be converted to another currency. Further, the local currency then had to be converted into the new currency, the *Angolar*, at a 20% depreciation in value.



*An attractive home at Mombolo, that of Manie Potgieter, just before the 1<sup>st</sup> Boer exodus from Angola*

### **6.1 Negotiations with the SA Government & churches**

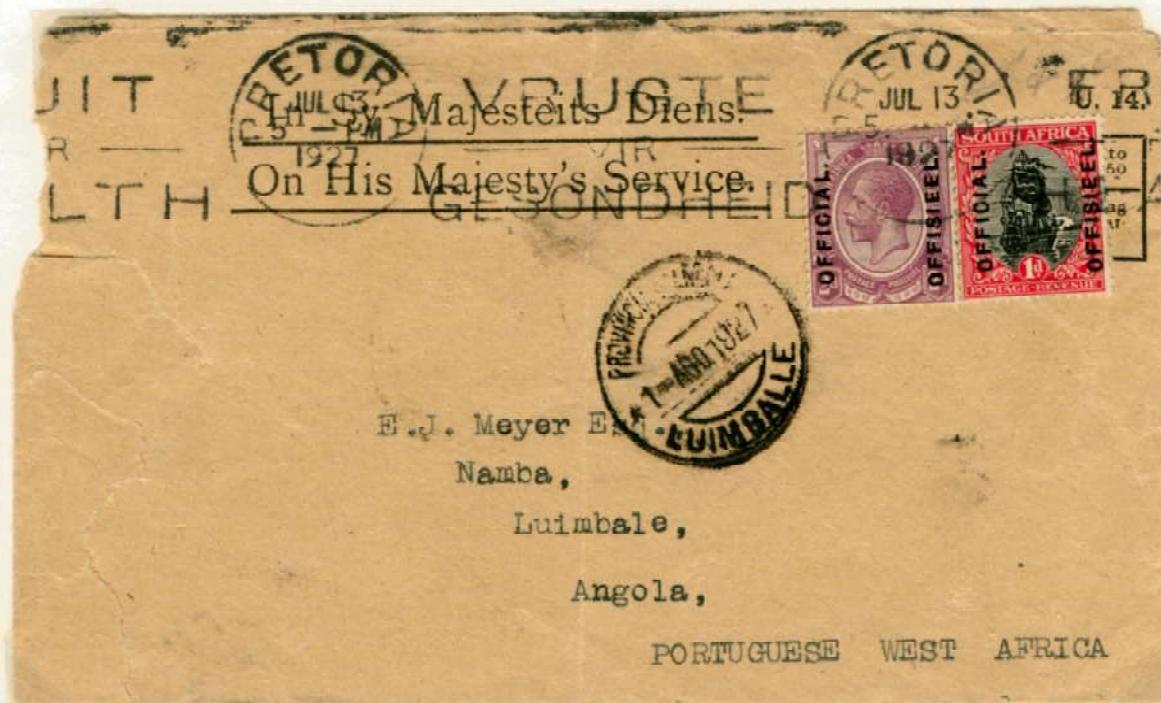
The South African political dispensation had, fortunately, become more favourable for Angola's Boers. A new pro-Afrikaner government led by Gen JBM Hertzog had come into power there in 1924. Initial discussions with Angola leaders centred on South African assistance to get title to their land and to retain their culture in Angola.



*South Africa's Prime Minister from 1924 to 1939,  
James Barry Munnik Hertzog*

49

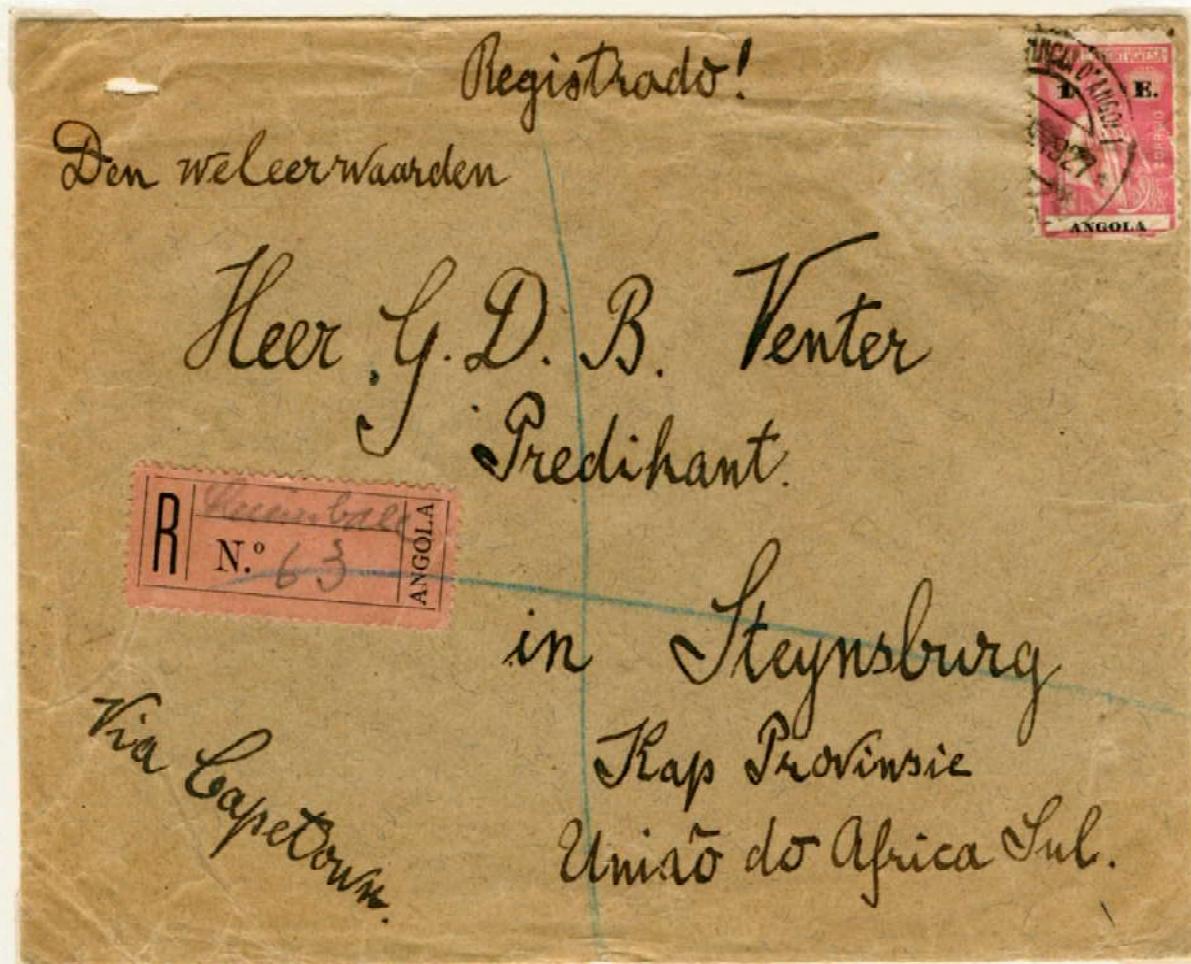
As a result of the Prime Minister's backing, Ernest Meyer, who had gone to Angola from the Transvaal after the Anglo-Boer War, was appointed South Africa's first Consul in Angola. Especially in the southern areas, the call for wholesale repatriation back to South Africa came strongly to the fore.



OHMS cover addressed to Ernest Johann Meyer on his farm "Namba" near Luimbale (note variation in spelling of town's name), possibly containing his appointment notice

50  
49/4

The Angola Boers had also approached other persons to garner support for their relocation to South Africa. One of these was Rev Douw Gerbrand Venter, a *Gereformeerde Kerk* minister at Steynsburg (1924/47), who played a role in the cultural revival of Afrikaans. He visited the Angola Boers in 1926, which resulted in continued contact between them. Rev Venter in fact continued to play a role in Boer repatriation from foreign lands, e.g. the Boers of Argentina, and the 1959 Angola Boer returnees' placement at Krugersdorp, where he was then situated.



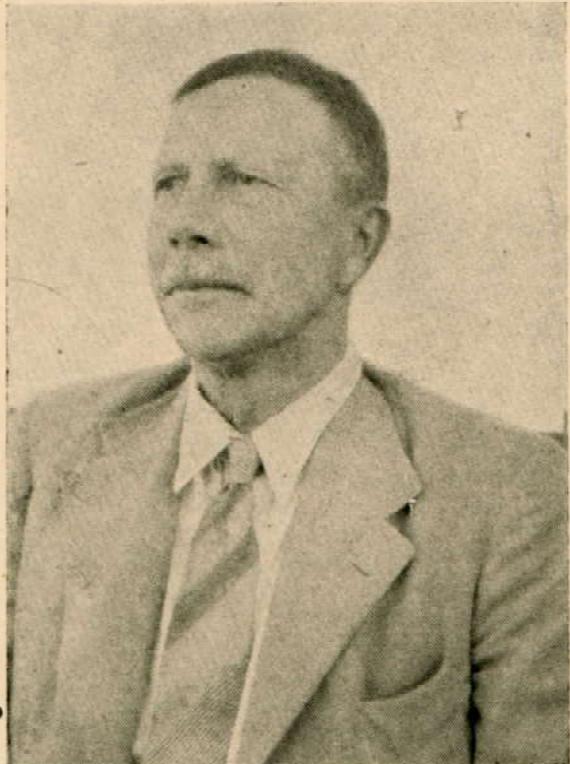
Registered letter to Rev Venter from JH Wilhelm, Concordia, PO Luimbale with four pages of detailed social content relevant to this interesting period (on reverse of exhibit page); backstamped BENGUELLA

Two further letters to Rev Venter show that the Angola Boers were thinking broadly at this time. The envelope containing two letters (all on reverse of this page), are from:

**1. Michiel van der Merwe** (Jamba farm, near Humpata; dated 4 October 1927), expressing -  
\*concern that South Africa's Consul in Angola (Ernest Meyer) might in fact prohibit the proposed mass repatriation; and  
\*the need for church matters to be addressed after repatriation.

**2. Lou du Plessis** (same area; dated 10 October 1927), who details -

\*church problems around Rev Biewenga at Mombolo; and  
\*pressure the Portuguese authorities were placing on their group.



*Michiel Wilhelmus v d Merwe who was the first Boer at Humpata to promote the wholesale repatriation concept*

Finally, in January 1928, Michiel van der Merwe, representing Humpata and the Northern Boer areas, and Andries Alberts, representing the Sandvelders, negotiated a support agreement with Gen Hertzog in South Africa.

Back in Angola they met with the Boers in Humpata in May, and resolved to meet the Administrator of South West Africa, AJ Werth, and South Africa's Minister of Lands, Piet Grobler, at Swartbooisdrift on the Kunene River on 10 June to finalise the trek details.



2003 photo of Swartbooisdrift, the Kunene River being dry at the time but usually flowing from right to left, and showing the hills of Angola in the background

#### **6.4 Repatriation preparations & journey**

In the south-bound trek, almost all the *Hervormers* move to South West Africa. The Boers who stayed behind were mostly *Gereformeerdes*; and some of the more isolated families who had not been contacted. The Boers were required to sell their cattle for fear of transferring diseases, and those who had businesses were required to dispose of them.

The South African government was only prepared to repatriate "pure" white families. Accordingly both the "Makvolk", the Boer slaves/domestics who had been with them for a few generations, and all Boers who had children from relationships with indigenous persons, were required to remain in Angola.



"Makvolk", Jan Slagveld van der Merwe & his wife, still in Angola when this photo was taken in 1957

The 1928 trek was divided into 65 groups consisting of an average of five families each. Some groups were held back in temporary camps in Angola until circumstances permitted their crossing into South West Africa. The trek lasted from 22 August 1928 to 27 February 1929.



Dutch family at arrival at  
Namutoni after a trek from  
Portuguese Angola. 1928

*The last convoy which came out of Angola through the Kaokoveld, the Trek Secretary, Herman Smit, accompanying the last truck; & a family arriving at Fort Namutoni*

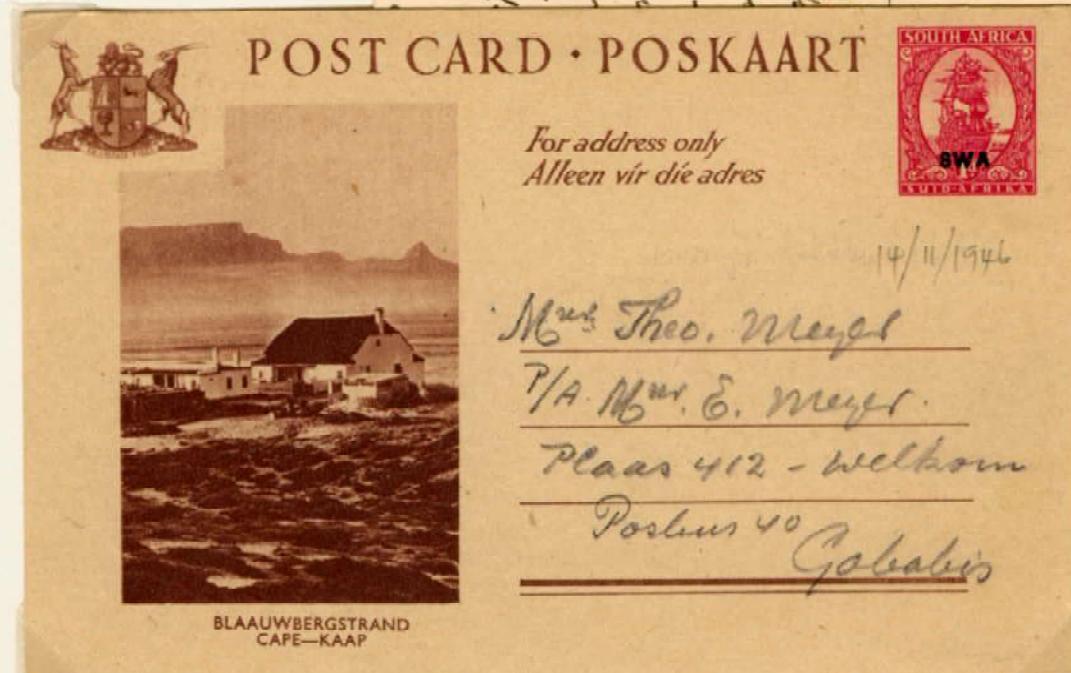
According to the so-called "Trek certificates" which were issued, 420 families intended emigrating from Angola, namely 152 from Mombolo and Bié, 119 from Humpata, 74 from the Sandveld, 47 from Cubal and Caondo, and 28 from Que. In the end, 373 families actually emigrated, almost all of whom were *Hervormers*.



*Scene at the Swartbooisdrift transit camp showing the wagons & goods loaded onto trucks*

A recent estimate by Stassen put the figure of Angola Boers remaining behind as high as 473 persons, divided into 99 families and 40 single persons. Most of these were situated at Bié (59 families), Cubal and Caconda (42 families) and Humpata (28 families).

Coupled with a lengthy drought and the Great Depression, "returnees" found circumstances very hard in South West Africa. GD van der Smit, a son of pioneer Pieter van der Smit, evaluated the repatriation sharply: "We moved straight from the frying pan into the fire" (personal communication in Afrikaans). Accordingly, pressure soon built up to move back to Angola!



### 6.5 Settling in on SWA farms

The Angola Boers were settled in four areas in South West Africa, namely:

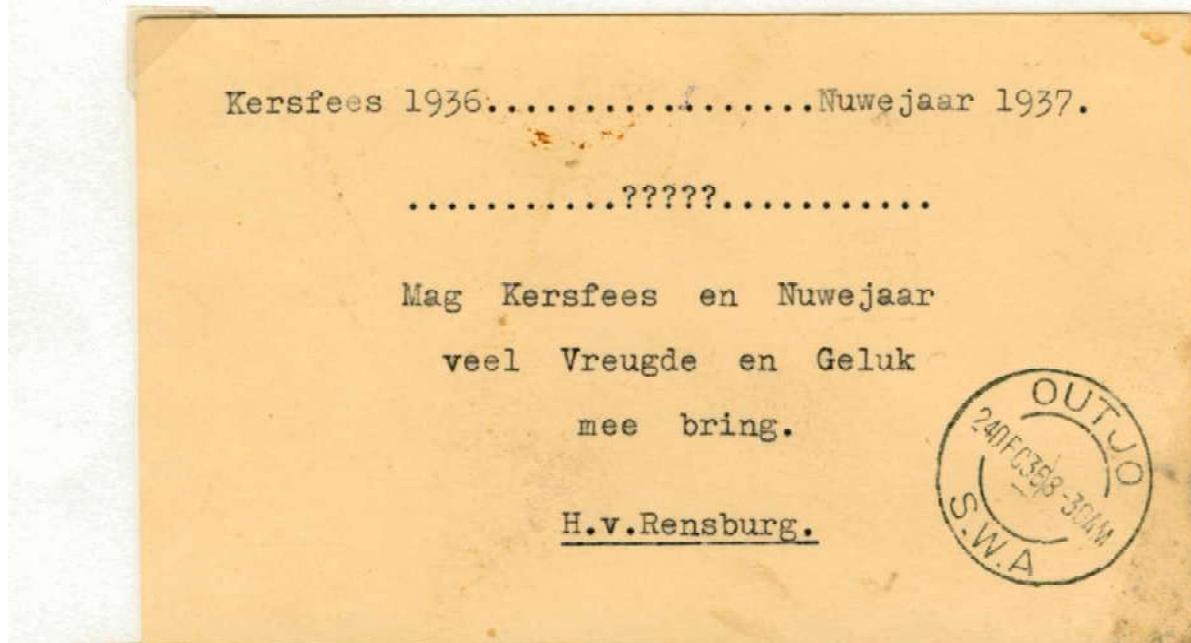
1. **Gibeon**: 32 farms in the Aranos vicinity were allocated to 47 Boer families. General SG (Manie) Maritz was the Superintendent here. Small stock adapted well, and farmers were relatively successful.
2. **Gobabis**, also known as the Hertzog bloc. It was divided into 87 farms, and these were made available to 121 Boer families. Ernest Meyer was appointed Superintendent of this settlement. Animal diseases were a major problem: by 1936 only 4 000 of the 4 400 head of cattle which had been allocated to this group by the SWA Administration in 1929 had survived.



Registered letter to the Superintendent of the Angola Boers at Gobabis

3. **Grootfontein**: 24 farms were made available to 37 settler families. This was the least successful re-settlement area.

4. **Otjiwarongo**, also known as the Osire bloc: 49 farms were made available to 69 Angola Boer families. In 1937, the SWA Administration transferred some of these farmers to **Outjo** because of the hardship they were experiencing. Nevertheless, several farmed successfully here.



Postal pieces to a member of the large Van der Smit family, who struggled to survive the initial years

### 6.6 Integration into SWA

In 1938, there was a renaissance in Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa. The key for this was the Great Trek 100<sup>th</sup> commemoration organised in main by the Afrikaanse Taal & Kultuurvereniging (SAS&H). The Angola Boers were also re-motivated by the event.



*Photos taken at the Gobabis commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Great Trek (top); & the old men there who as young boys had survived the Dorslandtrekke (bottom)*

Commemorative Voortrekker Centenary cover addressed to the re-settled Chapman family, back-stamped the Monument slogan canceller of 14/12/1938 & a GOBABIS, 23/12/1938 receiving mark



*Further signs of settling down: a daughter marrying a Windhoek resident; & a postal stationery post card noting the joy had whilst on holiday at Swakopmund*

Mr. and Mrs. ERNST MEYER

*cordially request the pleasure of your presence  
at the marriage of their daughter*

QUEENIE

and

PAUL "SONNY" KÖSTER

*of Windhoek, S. W. A.*

*in the Dutch Reformed Church Gobabis*

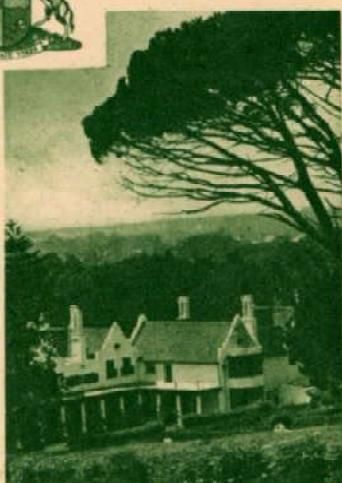
*on Monday 18th March D. O.*

*at 7.30 p.m.*

*Telegrams:*  
Box 40, Gobabis.

*Reception:*  
Farm "Welkom", Gobabis.

POSKAART · POST CARD



GROOTE SCHUUR, RONDEBOSCH  
KAAP-CAPE

*Alleen vir die adres  
For address only*



Mr & Mrs Ernst Meyer  
Welkom  
"Gobabis."

### **7. 1958 Repatriation**

By the 1950s, the Boers remaining in Angola – some 85 families or about 500 persons – suffered further sharp declines in living standards. Their housing structures became primitive, comparable to those of the indigenous people; their diets became inadequate; and religious services from South African sources almost died up. In fact, they lost their feared reputation amongst the indigenous people, and the Portuguese settlers started looking down on them, with the exception of two aspects.

The Portuguese witnessed that Boers' lifestyles had become more nomadic (about two years' residence on average), yielding primitive shelters; only about 5% of those persons remaining had value for the Angolan economy; the Boers held strong and unbending religious views, and similarly, they wanted "complete freedom" – they were chained to a traditional way of life; they were also unwilling to undertake pastoral or any other hard work; they continued to look down on the Portuguese and were not inclined to keep their company; and there was no mixing with the indigenous people and the racially mixed at any level.

However, the Angolan Portuguese found Boer women very attractive; and the Boer men skillful tradesmen despite their lack of training.



*Attractive Boer women in Angola*

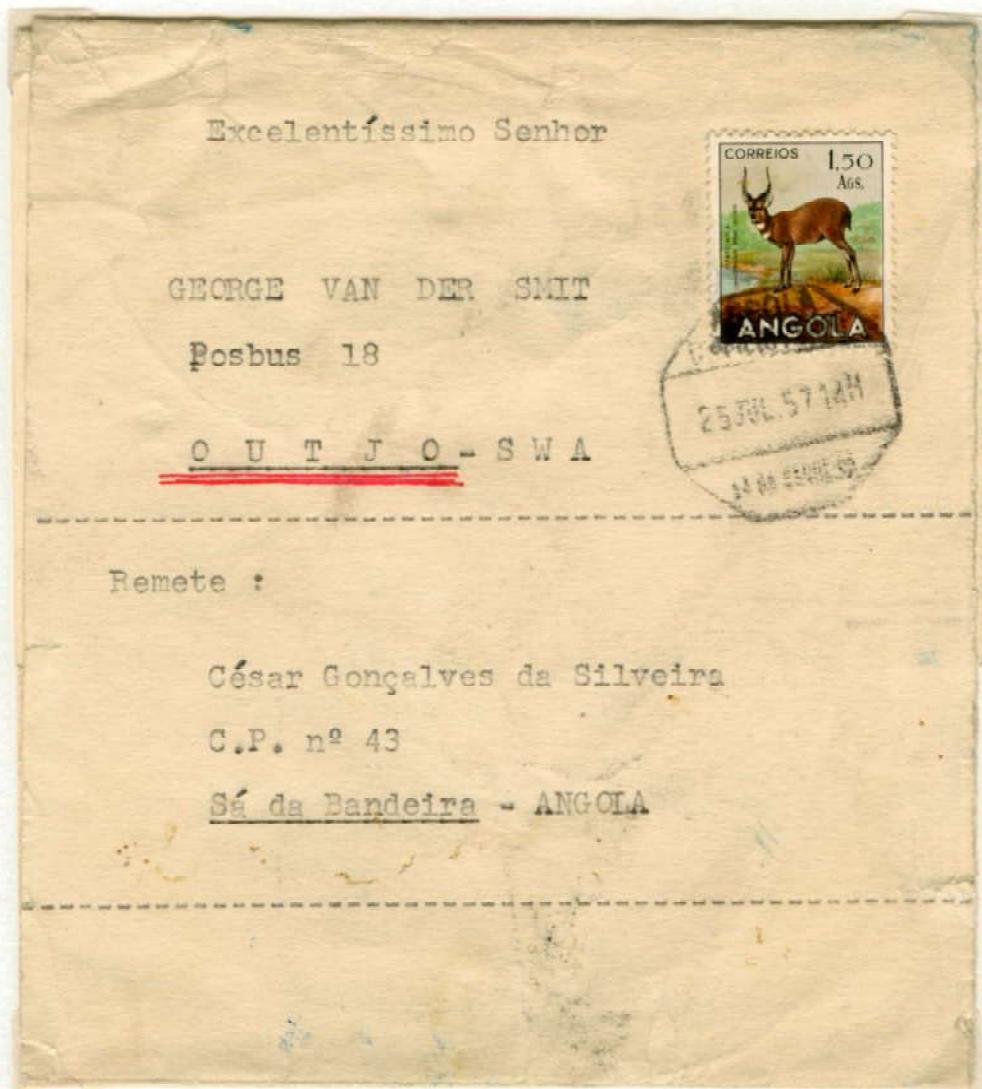
It's significant that the families of the Angola Boers continued to honour their Trekker roots by organizing memorial gatherings at places of historic significance. Five were held in the 1950s as well as five at later times, namely:

- At Rusplaas, Kaokoveld on 10 October 1950 (Pres Kruger's birthday)
- At Rietfontein, near Gobabis, 1951
- At Swartbooisdrift, Kunene River, June and July 1953
- At Rietfontein, Etosha Game Reserve, 10 October 1955 , where a small monument was unveiled at the grave of Johanna Alberts
- At Humpata, Angola, 5/8 July 1957
- At Swartbooisdrift, Kunene River, 1969
- At Swakopmund, April 1988
- At Swartbooisdrift, August 2001, August 2003 and August 2008



*Grave of Johanna Alberts in front of small monument unveiled on 10/10/1955*

The memorial visit to Angola in 1957 was organised by the "Rusplaas-Dorslandtrek Feeskomitee" under the leadership of *George Diederick van der Smit*. The journey was undertaken in a convoy of 90 vehicles (400 people). At Humpata they erected a monument in honour of the Dorslandtrekkers and restored three graves. The ceremony was attended by the Portuguese authorities, who took the monument into safekeeping.



*Postal item ex Sá da Bandeira evidencing the follow-up work relating to the ceremony*

*Memorial programme for the 1957 ceremony at Humpata, Angola*

**MAANDAG, 8 JULIE 1957:**

Net na sonop vroeëoggenddiens.

9 v.m.: Samekoms by monument.

Toespraak deur Sy Eksellensie, Manuel da Cruz Gaspar, Exmo Administrador, namens die Portugese Owerheid.

Marmersteen met Portugese bewoording word deur Sy Eksellensie onthul.

Toespraak deur mnr. H. S. van der Walt, Landdros, Outjo, namens die Unie-regering en Suidwes-administrasie.

Onthulling van ander drie stene, elk afsonderlik.

Wegbère van fles met dokumente en toemessel daarvan.

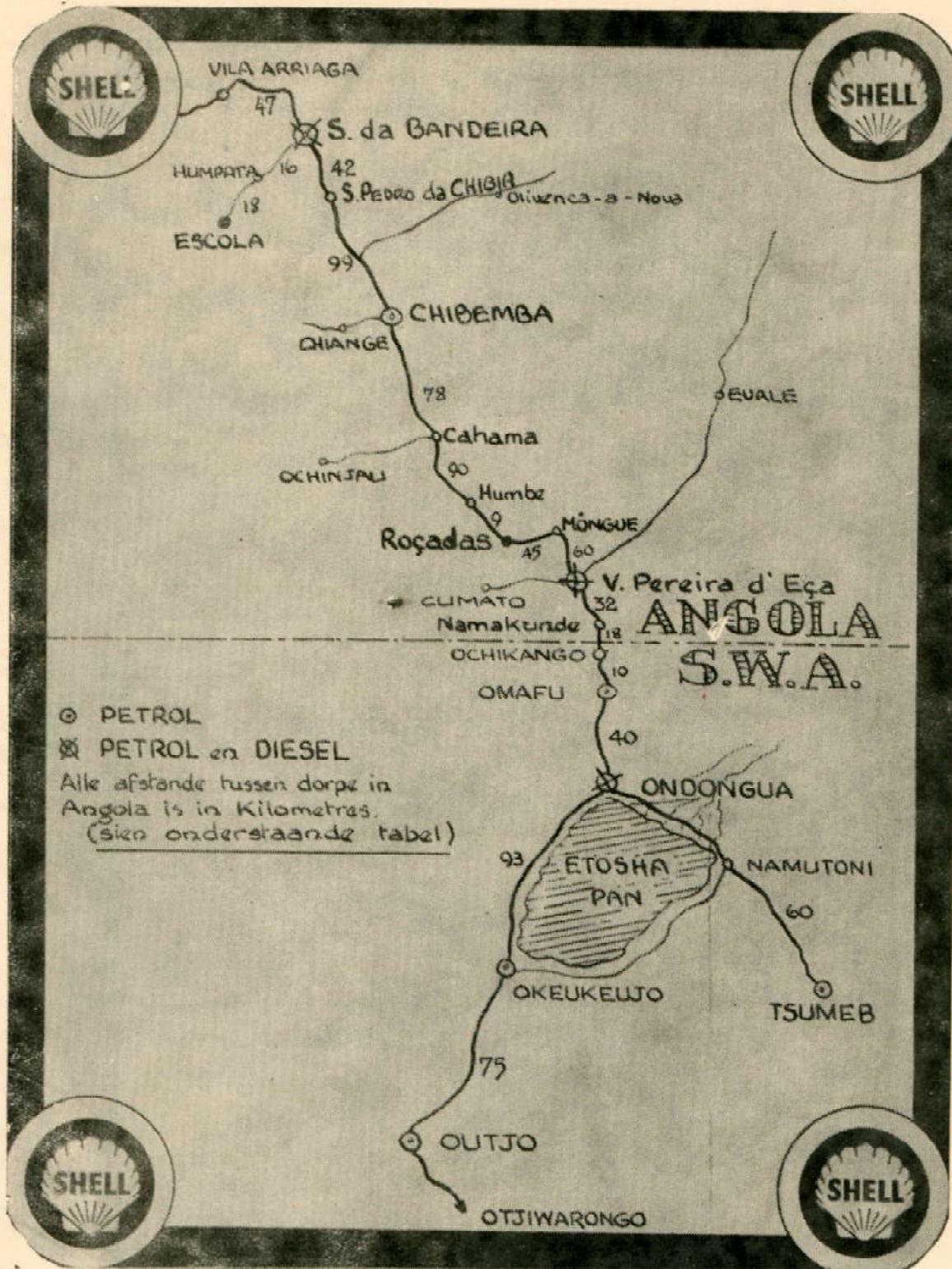
Oorhandiging van monument aan Portugese Owerheid vir veilige bewaring.

Bedankings.

**DIE STEM VAN SUID-AFRIKA.**

**Die komitee se dank vir u opkoms en bydrae tot die sukses van die fees,  
en ons wens u 'n voorspoedige terugreis toe.**

Inside back page of "Huldigingsfees" document showing route taken to the 1957 ceremony at Humpata



## 7.2 Repatriation preparations & journey

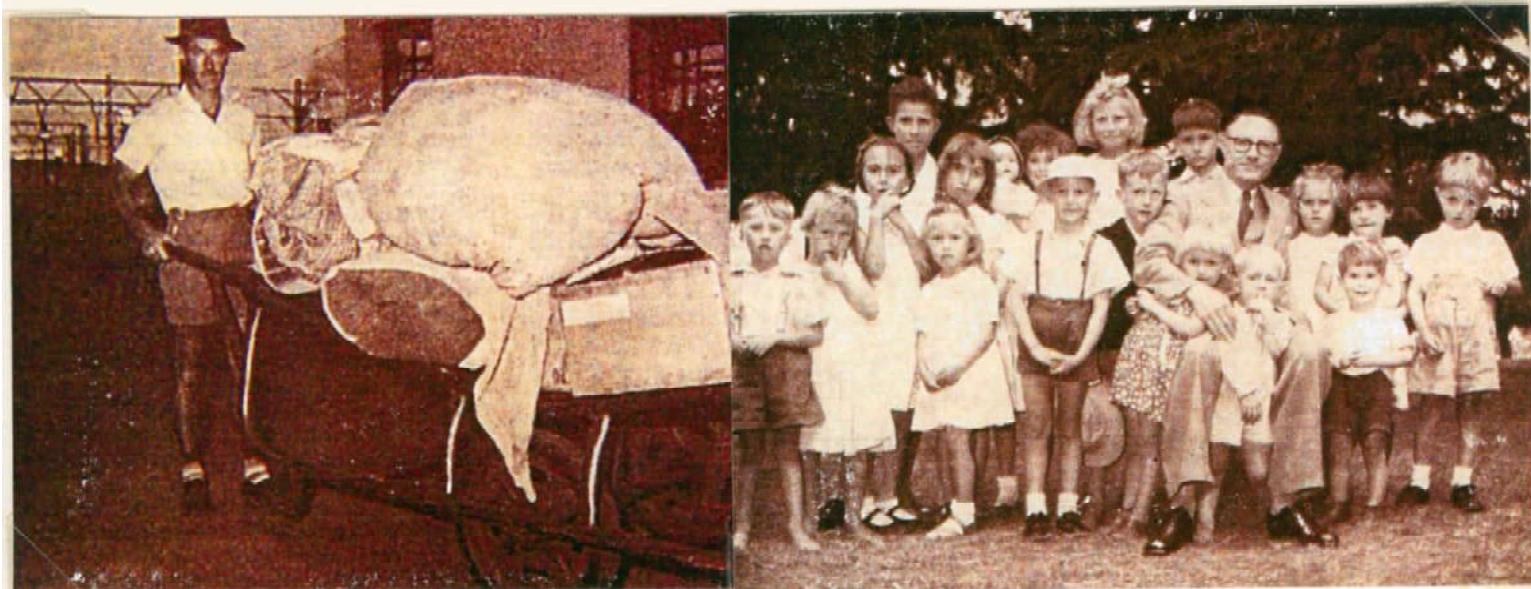
The Humpata memorial celebrations were an eye-opener for the Boers who had remained behind in Angola. They saw the relative wealth (the motor cars) of the persons who had left in 1928, and increasingly swung over to the idea that not just *support* but *repatriation* was the only way they could escape from their economic, cultural and spiritual/religious morass. A South African relief committee, the *Volkskomitee vir Angola-Boere*, was established to undertake fund-raising and organizational matters. The Union's Prime Minister, Adv JG Strijdom, responded positively to the repatriation request.

This 3<sup>rd</sup> group of Angola-Boers – initially some 155 persons were placed in South West Africa in 1958 and then a further 117 persons resettled in South Africa because they were, effectively, not capable of meeting the demands of an independent new start anymore.

Together with South Africa's Department of Labour, the South African Railways and the *Hervormde Kerk*, low-skill jobs on the railways and on farms were found for several of the families who were relocated to Krugersdorp in November 1958. Several Angola Boers complained about the low level of work they were required to undertake but, in fact, they had few commercially-useful skills in their new environments.



SA Railways Parcels stamps for three of the railway stations where the 1958 Angolan returnees were able to be placed, namely Krugersdorp ("KGR"), Kroonstad ("KDR"); & Springfontein ("SFR")



Bringing back the few possessions in blankets & boxes, 1958/9 returnees; & Dr J Albert Coetzee with repatriated children

Further examples of items made available at Dorslandtrekker celebrations, namely that at Swartbooisdrif in 1969

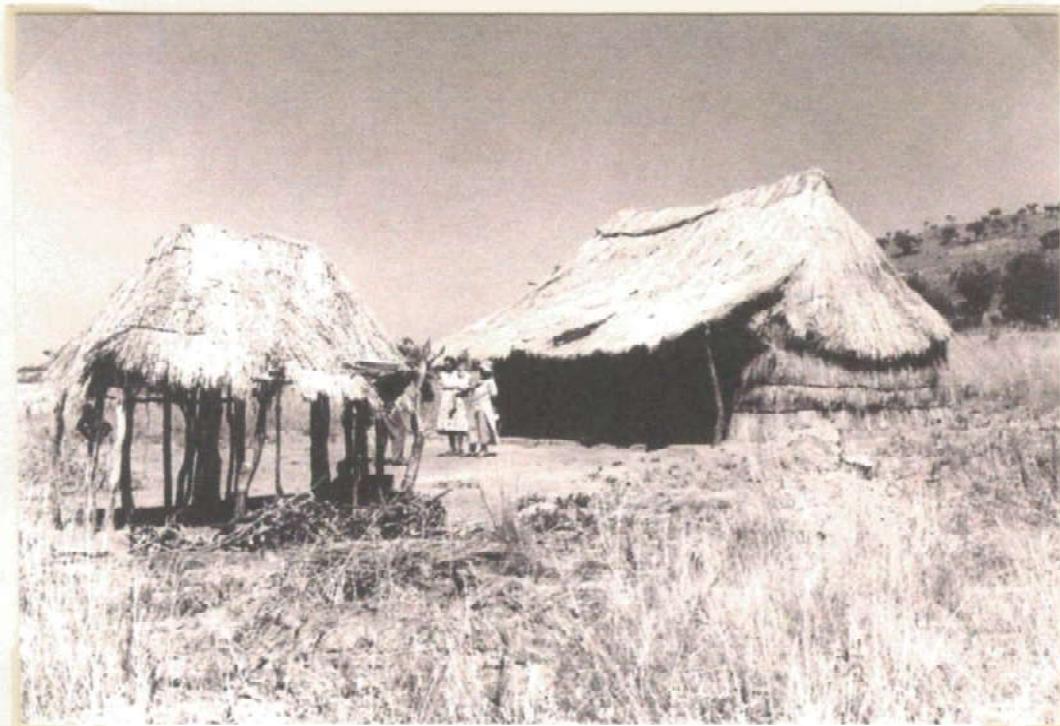


### **8. Angola's War of Liberation**

From the end of the 1950s, the “winds of change” swept colonial Africa. Angola’s northern neighbour, the Belgian Congo became an independent state on 30 June 1960. This meant that the part of the historically united Bakongo tribe situated in the Congo was free of colonial rule, while those in northern Angola were not. Accordingly, at the end of the 1950s, the myth of a non-racial Portuguese integration model started disintegrating.

#### **8.1 Rationale of remaining Angola Boers**

The Boers who had remained behind during the 1958 (2<sup>nd</sup>) exodus spoke highly of the country where they resided, but requests for assistance to maintain their culture continued. In fact, the post-1958 period witnessed a marked swing to acceptance of the indigenous groupings’ housing, food and clothing standards, up to the level of accepting co-habitation. The sharply negative colonial terms for this were (English) “going native” and (Afrikaans) “verportugesing”. The independent existence of the *Hervormde Kerk* in Angola ended in 1958.



*Primitive grass-built Boer housing & food preparation area (in front) at this time*

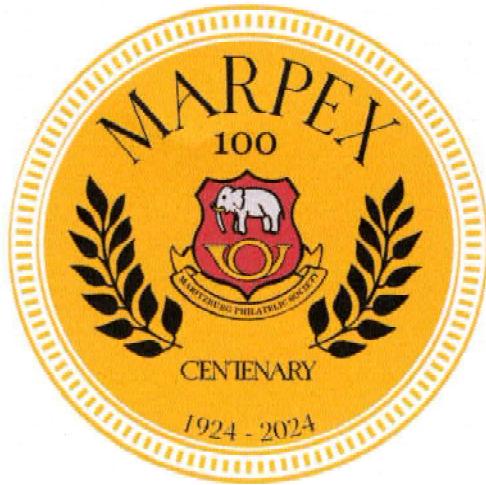
Will Jordan's 1880s letter-report is possibly the best end to this societal summary. It reports extensively of suffering, much caused by reckless stupidity, but it also recounts moments of great strength and courage to see out the battle to the end. It is not a tale about heroism, it is just the tale of humanity under pressure. It is a tale which, the viewer will hopefully become aware, has much applicability today.

25

The management entirely devolved upon Mr van Voore who with two widows were left to look after the children of which there were about 12 suffering from the effects of Fever I after having visited the camp and to the give a proper description the waggon were all drawn together facing north while on the east towards the land built about 20 yards from them buried the some 3 in one grave just rolled in a sheet or blanket (The best way these poor women & children could do it some graves being not more than 3 or 4 feet deep, All the animals they had left were 10 head of oxen cows, & calf and 3 donkeys the rest having died fly-struck, Also these remaining died afterward I am informed All the assistance we

Random choice of a page from Will Worthington's 1880s account of the Dorslandtrekkers' passageway to "the land of milk & honey"

# The End



*National Philatelic Exhibition*  
*South Africa*

*Awarded to*

*Paul Van Zeyl*

*Pretoria Philatelic Society*  
*for*

*Dorslandtrekkers*

*Class*

*Open Class*

*Score*

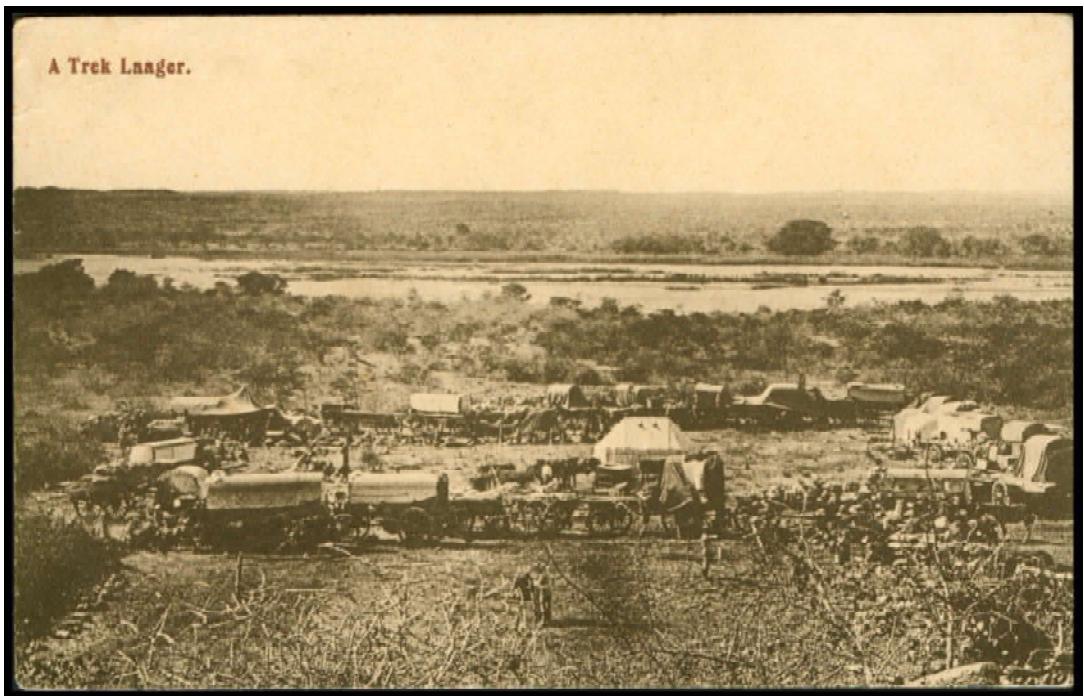
*73*

*Large Silver*

*Jury Secretary*

*Hugh Amoore*  
*Jury Chairman*

## Additional Material not used by Paul in his Display



1913. Postcard. MOOI RIVER NATAL '3 DEC 13' to GB. (John G. Bain, Cape Town.)  
At the end of a Day's trekking, Boer's invariably formed a defensive laager.

Every story about a Trek should include an image of a laager, the Boer's bastion against man and nature.



1927. Cover. HUMPATA '10 10 27' via LUANDA to STEYNSBURG, CP, SA.  
This cover contained two letters, one each from Michiel van der Merwe and Lou du Plessis.  
Both expressed concerns that repatriation under SA Consul E. Meyer might not happen.  
These two men were prominent in the Humpata Trekker community and church. See Page 55.

George Diederik van der Smit  
Potchefstroom  
14/1/1999

## HULDIGINGSFEES

TER ERE VAN DIE

## DORSLANDTREKKERS

GETREK UIT TRANSVAAL NA ANGOLA

IN DIE JARE 1874 EN DAARNA

(Eerste Trekkers op 4 Januarie 1881 op Humpata aangekom)

HULDIGINGSFEESTE REEDS GEHOUEN

OP 9 JULI 1957 IN POTCHEFSTROOM

ONSE VADERLANDS VRYHEIDSKRIG

ONSE EER HUL NAGEDAGTENIS

Nakomelinge, Vriende en Belangstellendes.

1957. Program. Commemoration Festival (Monday, 9th July 1957).  
Signed by its Chairman, George D. van der Smit, in Potchefstroom, 14 / 1 / 1999.