

97. The Montagu Gold Mine

The Montagu Gold Mine joins the long list of interesting stories in the history of Montagu. Documentation and word of mouth stories about the mine have been collected over the years from various sources with each piece of information bringing with it a new insight.

During 2018 local Montagu resident Richard Knipe arranged for the Montagu Historical Society members to visit the mine.



Emile Badenhorst (left) Richard Knipe (right) Patrick Henderson (foreground)

The Montagu Gold Mine and Frederick David Phipps – Are they connected?

Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa (2001) 56. (1), 44 – 48.

S.A. Craven

During the nineteenth century the western world was tied to the gold standard. This ensured that, although the price was fixed, all gold was readily sold; the market was never sated. This is admittedly an over-simplification of the Victorian economic system, but the result was that the non-European world was scoured by charlatans and honest prospectors alike who were anxious to profit from the exploitation of precious

metals, especially gold.

The Montagu district was no exception. Some years prior to 1871 a gold nugget was allegedly found by a simple unsophisticated Boer in the back country between Montagu and the Zwartberg.



Entrance to the gold mine 1890

'The enthusiastic newspaper reporter concluded that' more must be found whence it came from but no payable deposit was ever found. Indeed, in 1888 the Montagu Prospecting Syndicate, managed by Dr. J.W. Castles, pessimistically reported that 'indications of the existence of gold have been found, but not such as would lead to the belief that metal exists in payable quantities.

About two kilometres south-east of Montagu, in the angle between the old and new Barrydale roads, there is a solitary farmhouse called 'Goudmyn. Being in a part of the Cape where mines are not notable, further investigation was indicated. Accordingly on 16 December 1982 Anthony Hitchcock, Chris Larkin and I found and surveyed a level in an outcropping quartz vein on the south side of a low ridge to the east of the farmhouse. After a mere 89 metres we found a 10m deep pitch which terminated almost immediately in what was obviously the working face (Figure 1)

Because the history of mines is often that of failed and fraudulent enterprises, we provisionally concluded that the short length of the mine reflected a similar fate. Enquiry of the then Curatrix of the local museum elicited an

uncorroborated story of an unknown prospector who arrived in the town during the Transvaal gold rush of the 1880s, drove the level, salted the mine with gold dust, floated a company, sold shares in the mine and promptly absconded. This was an oral history, but should have been verifiable, being of recent origin.

The mine, but not the farmhouse, is situated at the western extremity of the original farm *Derdeheuvel* no,149, granted in 1825 to Florus and Hermanus Theodorus Kriel. The resurveys of 1880 and 1912 make no mention of a *goudmyn*.

A subsequent visit to the Montagu Museum in 1999, and an interview with Mrs. Esther Hofmeyr, produced a photograph of the mine entrance with the legend written on the back '1890 Entrance to goldmine (Montagu Dist.) engineered by Phipps.' The provenance of the photograph is unknown.

Subsequent archival research revealed that in 1860 Frederick Phipps was deemed to be a fit and proper person to store gunpowder. He was a shopkeeper by trade and, having knowledge of gunpowder, might well have been responsible for the mine. He died on 28 March 1883.

On the other hand he did leave three minor children, one of whom was Frederick David Phipps who, in 1902, applied to the Montagu Municipality for permission to prospect on the town commonage which was contiguous with the farm *Derdeheuvel*. This was approved subject to the payment of 7½% commission and renewed in 1903 *et seq.* In 1905 Phipps was reprimanded by the Town Clerk because he had not been closing his unproductive prospecting shafts, thereby endangering the locals and their animals. A final warning was issued the following year In 1906 Phipps was shopkeeping, suggesting that prospecting was a side-line. In 1913 he was again permitted to prospect on the Municipal Commonage, provided that he accepted responsibility for filling the disused shafts. These repeated renewals of his prospecting licence, despite his reluctance to fill the

abandoned holes, suggest that there was little, if any, competition for the prospecting rights. Eventually the agreement lapsed, and in 1918 the concession was granted to Richard William Maximilian Teubes of Krugersdorp for a fixed fee of £100 for the second year only.

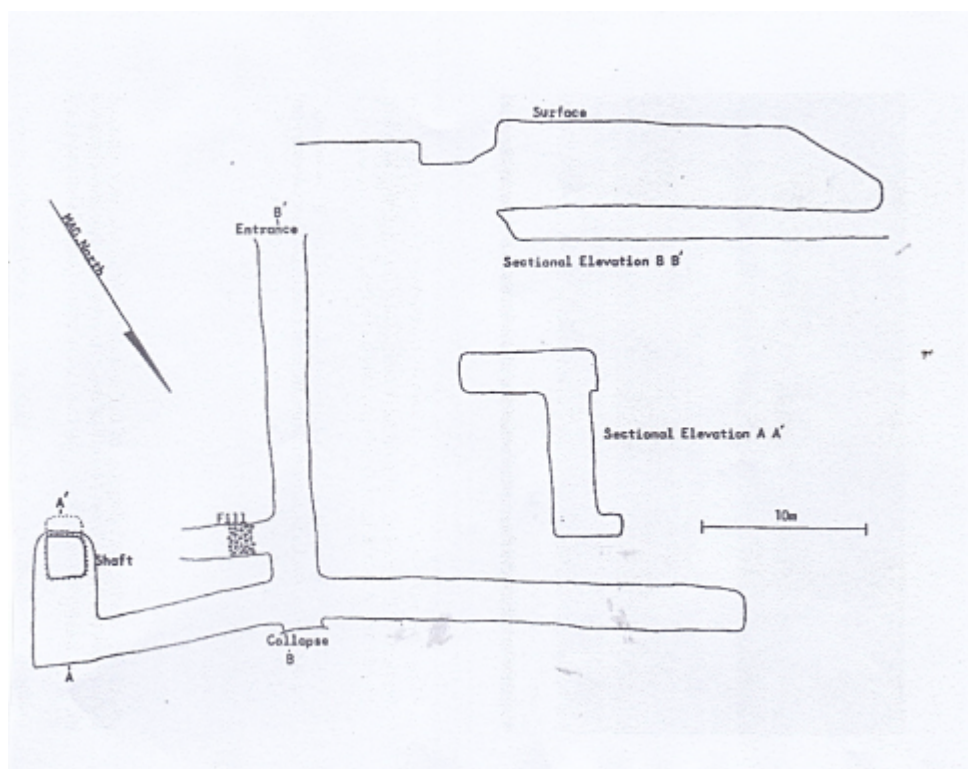


Figure 1

Survey of The Montagu gold mine, 1982 (A. Hitchcock, S. Craven and C. Larkin.)

*(Editor: *On the 1st May 1865 JOHN GAMEWELL BEATTY and FREDERICH PHIPPS – trading under the style or form of “Beatty and Phipps” purchased one half part of Lot no 16 Montagu from ELSIE MARIA LOMBARD, widow of the late WILLIAM CHRISTOFFEL SWANEPOEL. Beatty and Phipps traded there as General Dealers. On 6 October 1866 Frederich Phipps sells his 50% of the property back to John Gamewell Beatty. The property in question is now part of the KVV Trust in Long Street.)

Conclusion

The only evidence linking the Montagu Gold Mine, which does not lie on the Municipal Commonage, to Phipps sen. is the

legend and date written on the back of the photograph The archival evidence reveals that Phipps jun was legally prospecting on the Municipal Commonage between 1902 and 1913, i.e alter the date of the photograph. Should readers have further information, I will be grateful for its receipt. My e-mail address is sacraven@mweb.co.za.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Mrs. Esther Hofmeyr of the Montagu Museum for the photograph, to Peter Coates for the introductory references, and to the Cape Peninsula Speleological Society for the survey.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

 Wim Buijze was born in Batavia (now Jakarta) in 1929. He spent his early years in the then Netherlands Indies and was detained during the war in Japanese camps. In 1946 he moved to the Netherlands, where he was employed as a lecturer in physics at the Technical University of Delft, but also for a short while at the Moluccan University of Pattimura at Amboina. He currently publishes on the history of the Dutch East India Company and in particular on Rumphius.

Dr. S.A. Craven is a medical practitioner in Wynberg, He is also, among other things, Vice-President of the South African Speleological Association, member of the Advisory Board of the International Journal of Speleology, and committee member of the International Speleological Union.

The Editor (Peter Coates) was for 36 years a member of the staff of the South African Library and the National Library.

Candy Malherbe has combined teaching with historical research – particularly into the life experience of the Khoesan people of the Cape.

Karel Schoeman is a prolific researcher and writer on a wide

range of topics, and former Head of the Special Collections Department at the South African Library.

END NOTES

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CTA: 3/MTU 8/1.

Picture Gallery of visit to the mine by members of the Montagu Historical Society

(2018)



A view from on top of the mine looking towards the Barrydale Road



Members discussing the obstacles in getting to the mine entrance

***The
ad-
ven-
ture
starts***

***The
mine
entrance
20***



The discovery challenges. Sand build up at entrance to mine

From inside the mine looking to



On the way to the shaft. Sand build made crawling necessary before standing was possible

the entrance



Looking towards the shaft



On the way to the shaft



The shaft



Disturbing the local residents



The return journey

MONTAGU SE GOUDMYN

Deel 1

Deur Heinie Heydenrych

Verskyn in die Montagu Mail : Februarie '02

In die negentiende eeu is daar op baie plekke in Suid-Afrika na goud gesoek. Die Montagu-distrik was geen uitsondering nie. Op Maart 1871 berig die *Cape Argus* dat 'n goudklont vroeër gevind is "in the back country between Montagu and the Zwartberg".

Die geesdriftige verslaggewer het tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat dié vonds op die teenwoordigheid van meer goud moes gedui het. Daar is egter nie enige verdere tekens van goud gevind nie. So laat as 1887 is daar in 'n amptelike verslag oor die goudvelde by Knysna en elders in die Kaapkolonie nog geskryf dat *Montagu Prospecting Syndicate*, onder bestuur van Dr J W Castles, gerapporteer het dat "indications of the existence of gold have been found, but not such as would lead to the belief that the metal exists in payable quantities".

Nogtans is daar by *Derdeheuvel* langs die pad na Barrydale, skuins oorkant die afdraai na *Geelboslaagte*, 'n plaas met die naam *Goudmyn*. Dit vorm deel van die oorspronklike plaas *Derdeheuvel No. 149* wat in 1825 toegeken is aan Floris en Hermanus Theodorus Kriel. Teen 'n heuwel op die plaas is daar 'n horisontale mynskag en vandaar die naam *Goudmyn*. Die horisontale skag is ongeveer 1.4m hoog en net so wyd. Die lengte is onbekend want die einde van die skag kan nie van die ingang af gesien word nie. Sowat 25 meter is wel vanaf die ingang sigbaar. Volgens 'n opmeting van die myn wat in 1982 deur dr S A Craven en twee ander persone gemaak is, is daar aan die einde van hierdie gang twee sywaartse gange sodat die skag 'n T-vorm aanneem.

Dit is nie duidelik wie vir hierdie myn verantwoordelik was nie. Daar bestaan wel mondelinge oorlewering dat daar gedurende die Transvaalse goudstormloop van 1880's 'n prospekteerder op Montagu sy opwagting gemaak het. Hy sou volgens oorlewering 'n skag begin graawe het en toe die myn met goudstof besprinkel het om die indruk te wek dat daar wel goud teenwoordig was. Daarna het hy aandele in die myn verkoop, maar spoedig met die aandeelhouders se geld verdwyn. 'n Foto van die ingang tot die mynskag is wel in besit van die Montagu Museum met die byskrif agterop: "1890: entrance to the goldmine (Montagu Dist.) engineered by Phipps"

Deel 2

Verskyn in die Montagu Mail : Maart '02

Die naam van ene Frederick Phipps word inderdaad soms in verband met die mynbedrywigheide gebring. Phipps was 'n winkelier van beroep en het ook 'n kennis van buskruit gehad. Dit het die vermoede laat ontstaan dat hy dalk vir die mynskag verantwoordelik was. Phipps is egter in Maart 1883 oorlede en dis nie duidelik of hy wel by die myngravery betrokke was nie. Daar is geen bronne wat die byskrif agterop die foto bevestig nie. Dit is sover ons kennis van die mynstreek.

Een van Phipps se kinders, Frederick David Phipps, was later wel by prospekterwerk in Montagu betrokke. In 1902 het hy by die munisipaliteit aansoek gedoen om toestemming om op die dorpsgrond aangrensend aan die plaas *Derdeheuvel* te prospekter. Dié versoek is toegestaan op voorwaarde dat kommissie betaal word. Die toestemming is die daaropvolgende jaar en verskeie kere daarna hernu. In 1905 is Phipps deur die stadsklerk aangespreek omdat hy nie sy onproduktiewe skagte toegegooi het nie aangesien dié oop skagte 'n gevaar vir plaaslike inwoners en hulle diere ingehou het. In 1906 is 'n finale waarskuwing tot hom gerig. In daardie jaar is Phipps se beroep as dié van winkeleienaar aangegee, dus was sy prospekterdery slegs 'n deeltydse aktiwiteit.

In 1913 is hy weer toestemming gegee om te prospekter, mits hy verantwoordelikheid aanvaar vir die opvul van die ongebruikte skagte. Die herhaalde hernuwing van sy prospekterlisensie ten spyte van sy traagheid om die gate te vul, skyn daarop te dui dat daar weinig, indien enige, mededinging om die prospekterregte was. Uiteindelik het Phipps se ooreenkoms met die munisipaliteit verstryk en in 1918 is die konsessie aan R. W. M. Teubes van Krugersdorp toegestaan. Dit is nie bekend hoe lank hy met prospekterwerk voortgegaan het nie.

Dit is dus seker dat daar wel vir goud by Montagu geprospekter is. Hoe vroeg dit begin is, is egter onduidelik

en die prentjie rondom Montagu se goudmynbedrywighede bly 'n baie onvolledige een.

*Die inligting in hierdie bydrae is afkomstig van 'n artikel van dr S A Craven in die *Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa*, September 2001

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN DR CRAVEN AND MRS ESTHER HOFMEYR REGARDING THE GOLD MINE

7 Amhurst Avenue
NEWLANDS 7700
20 November 2000

Mrs Esther Hofmeyr
Eerstepos
Kerkstraat 18
MONTAGU 6720

Dear Mrs. Hofmeyr,

THE MONTAGU "GOLD" MINE

Further to my letter of 20 December last year, I have at last been able follow up the legend on the back of the photograph which you kindly gave me. I have written a few words which I intend to send to the Editor of the Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of S.A. In the meantime I enclose a copy for your Museum archives, and will be grateful if you will kindly comment thereon.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

Dr S.A. Craven

Enc.

Enclosed: 1 Reproduction of
Montagu 1st XI 1906-1907

Eersteopos
Kerkstraat 18
MONTAGU 6720

27 March 2001

Dear Dr. Craven,

THE MONTAGU "GOLD MINE"

Many thanks for your letter of 20 November 2000. I was greatly interested in: "The Montagu Gold Mine & Frederick David Phipps which I am sure you have by now sent to the Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of S.A.

The copy for our Museum Archives is most welcome. It is fascinating and sheds fresh light on this enigmatic matter. We thank you sincerely for your interest in this affair, for your profound research, and I am sure that it involved much of your valuable time.

I spoke to various elderly people, to ones that might have some knowledge of the matter. The only person who seemed to have some "passed on" thoughts on the Gold Mine was Mr. Tokkie Busse. But he was born in 1911, and yesterday he was buried on what would have been his 90th birthday. He chiefly remembered that Phipps was the Gold Mine man, and that his elders were both astonished and amused by the fact that most sensible people had been so gullible that they actually bought "shares" in the gold mine from Phipps!

However, when I recently visited my husband's old firm "Van Zyl & Hofmeyr" (attorneys) Mr. Schalk Esterhuyse showed me a portrait of the 1906-1907 Montagu Cricket team.

MONTAGU 1ST XI
 WINNERS OF VAN EEDEN CUP
 1906-1907



Back L/R: J. Stemmet, P. Brink (family of the Brink Brothers empire), D.A. van Zyl (partner in local firm Van Zyl & Hofmeyr), F.D. Phipps, A. Stevens (son of local magistrate), D. Ackermann (local attorney) Middle: Y. G. Burger, F. vd Spuy, J. Kriel
 Front: A. Hofmeyr (acting skipper) and J. Thomson

In the back row is F.D. Phipps, and the dates (1906-1907) clearly coincide with the dates you mention.

One can surmise. But your valuable research and this photo throw fresh light on the puzzling past as far as the "Gold Mine" was/is concerned.

As a mere matter of interest: Some years ago, perhaps in the 1970's an old Montaguer visited our town after years of absence. Being a man of personality, he caused quite a stir by propagating his intention of building an absolutely unique restaurant housed in the old "Gold Mine"! But nothing came of it, and I can well remember that when I gently sounded him on the matter, his reply was: "Is a man not entitled to his dreams!"

On behalf of the Montagu Archives I thank you most heartily for this most valuable addition to our knowledge of the past.

With kind regards (and apologies for the belated reply!)

Yours sincerely

Esther Hofmeyr

7 Amhurst Avenue
NEWLANDS 7700

10 April 2001

Mrs Esther Hofmeyr
Eersteopos
Kerkstraat 18
MONTAGU 6720

Dear Mrs. Hofmeyr,

THE MONTAGU "GOLD" MINE

Thank you very much for your letter of 27 March 2001 and particular for the photograph of Phipps Junior. By coincidence the Hon. Editor of the Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library called on me last week shortly after I received the photograph. He was delighted to have it, and promised me that the Montagu Gold Mine will feature in the June 2001 issue. I will post you a copy as soon as it appears.

Many years ago a historical friend who dabbles in more distant history told me that he had a paper cutting about the mine. Many years (and beers!) later he still has not found it. Montagu did not boast a local newspaper, and I do not have the time to systematically read the Cape Times & the Argus.

I have my doubts about Phipps selling shares in the mine. He was an established local resident with tangible assets. The victims of any fraud would have had both criminal and civil recourse – a good deterrent.

The proposed restaurant of the 1970s would not have passed the health inspector! Nevertheless the Mammoth show cave in the USA (where else?!) which boasts over 500km. of the surveyed passage has for many decades had an underground restaurant. But that cave is on the grand scale!

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. S.A. Craven



Wat sê Paul Fouche

Gedurende die Junie-skoolvakansie van 1965 het prof. Philip McLachlan, eertydse leier van die Stellenbosch universiteitskoor, se seun, Jacobus, by Jacobus Kloppers in Montagu-suid kom kuier. Oom Kosie Kloppers, Jacobus se pa, was voorligtingsbeampte op Montagu. Die twee Jacobusse het mekaar leer ken toe oom Kosie nog op Stellenbosch gewerk het. Ek en Jacobus Kloppers het albei in geskiedenis en politiek belanggestel en gou oor en weer gekuier. Jacobus Kloppers het van die myn te wete gekom en ons moes opsluit, maar sonder ons ouers se medewete, dié wonderwerk gaan verken. Dis mos nou avontuur op sy beste! Vroeg een oggend is ons per fiets myn toe, prospekterhamer, koplamp en al. Sonder bewyse van goud kom ons nie terug nie! Ons het tot by die skag gevorder en was ernstig op soek na goudriwe toe 'n gedaante by ons verbystorm en nog geluide in die duister verdere verrassings belowe. Wie eerste uit was, kan ek nie onthou nie. Allermens of ons handeviervoet uit is. Al wat ek kan onthou – alles het met bekwame spoed geskied. Helaas was ons prospektering en drome van rykdom daarmee heen. Jacobus Kloppers het as bankouditeur uitgetree en behartig 'n tuindienste-onderneming op Robertson. Jacobus McLachlan het as taalpraktisyn en voormalige voorsitter van die Taalraad afgetree, was al dikwels Sondagoggende om elfuur Ina Strydom se gas op die RSG-program, Die tale wat ons praat. Deesdae is hy beter bekend as Tom

McLachlan en geniet sy aftrede op Onrusrivier.

Contributions: Alf Boyley, Schalk Esterhuyse, Richard Knipe,
Irma Jordaan