

130.Montagu Leiwater

Updated: 07/05/2025

What is Leiwater?

Leiwater is water channeled from source(s) (rivers and dams) through canals and/or pipes to supply irrigation water to properties in a town or farming community. The water is directed by a system of valves, taps and sluice gates, which are manually operated. Most systems, including Montagu's, are gravity fed.

Leiwater is an Afrikaans (Dutch) word – *lei* means to lead, guide or direct. Leiwater is guided through canals. In English this would be “channeled water” or “canalised water”, but we use the Afrikaans word in English as well, not an English equivalent.

Each property with leiwater access has a beurt (turn) every week. Many of the properties in Montagu are smallholdings supporting working farms (olives, pecan nuts, citrus, sheep etc.). Most members have a water-collection point too (dams, tanks, fish ponds) to store water for the rest of the week. All water not used goes back into the river, so none of it is wasted.

While collecting information for this article it was realised that Montagu actually had a second leiwater system (possibly more). Further investigation revealed that the second system was somewhat of an engineering feat and it has been included as part of this story

Part of Montagu since its inception

by Heinie Heydenrych

Montagu Mail September 2001

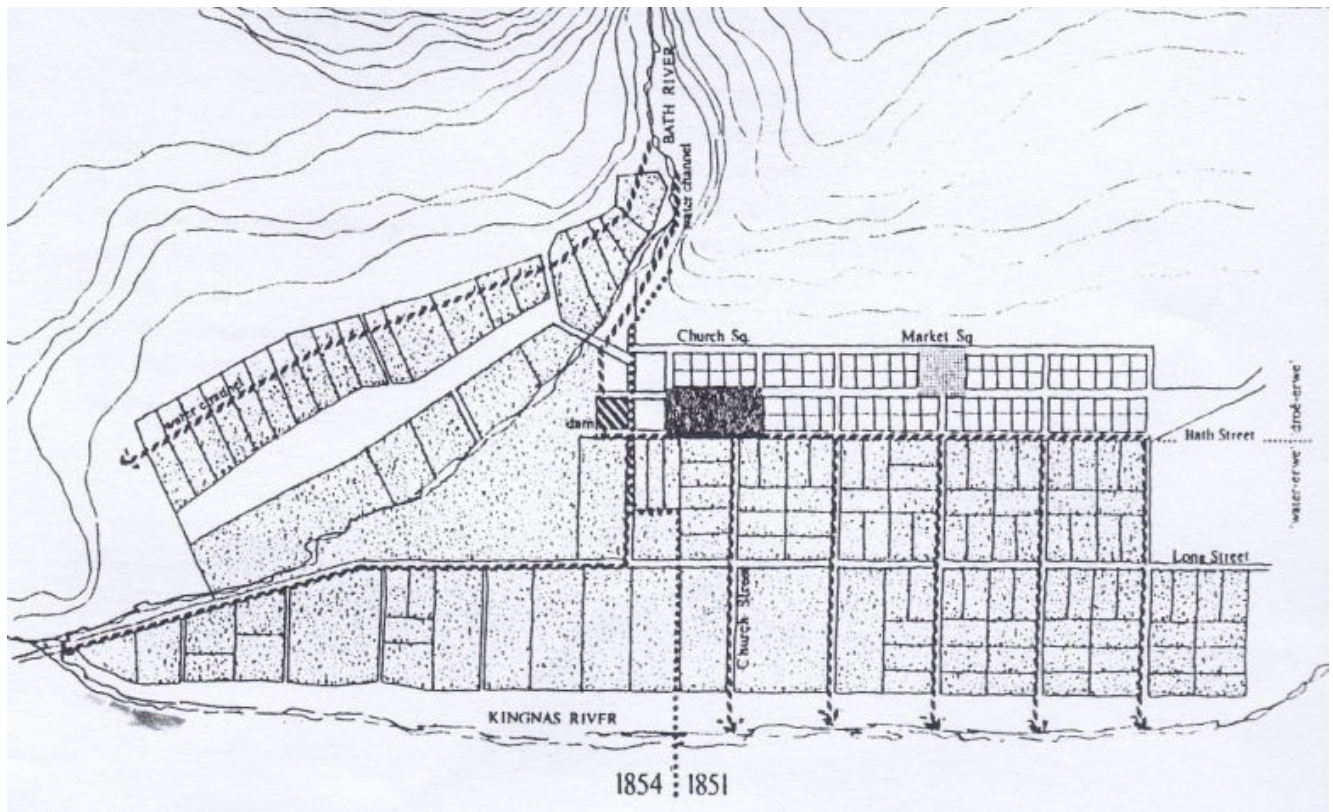
The lei-dam on the corner of Bath and Barry Streets has played an important role in the history of Montagu ever since its inception. As a matter of fact, the dam was the pivot or axis around which the existence of the little settlement revolved.



Most of the town erven which came into existence as a result of the subdivision of the farm Uitvlucht in 1851 and 1854,

were mainly dependent on the dam for irrigation water. The Keisie River was chosen as the source of the irrigation water since the Kingna River often dried up during the winter months.

The erven of 1851 and 1854 can clearly be seen on the map (below) from Derek and Vivienne Japha's book *The Landscape and Architecture of Montagu, 1850-1915*. The erven of 1851 are to the right of the dark line and those of 1854 to its left. The subdivision of 1851 was the first since D.S. van der Merwe had bought the farm in 1844 with a view to laying out a town on it.



The dotted lines show the town leiwater canal/pipe network

The erven north of Bath Street were known as the droëerwe (dry erven) because they were situated on too high ground for the irrigation water which was brought south from the Keisie River by a channel or furrow. The erven between Bath Street and the Kingna River and some erven south of Berg Street in Montagu West were known as the watererwe since they could be irrigated by means of irrigation furrows.

The channel running southward is still to be seen along Lovers' Walk next to the cliff. It was badly damaged during the flood of 1981, but rebuilt afterwards. This channel deposited the water in a dam which corresponds with today's (2001) lei-dam. However, it is still uncertain whether the lei-dam already existed in 1854, since the dam was drawn in on the map after then. On a map of 1856 from the state archives, no dam appears, although the water channel is clearly indicated. It is therefore possible that the dam came into existence a few years later.



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Bath Street was built more or less parallel to the Kingna River in such a way that it had a gradual eastward slope from the dam site where the water arrived from the southern furrow. A new furrow was built during the 1850's along the whole length of Bath Street, with secondary furrows from it along each of the street blocks between Bath Street and the Kingna River.



The present water furrow runs underground for large sections and often finds



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At an early stage a water furrow was built from Donkerkloof to the Keisie River to supplement the water in the river, and was replaced by a pipeline in 1950.

Every residential stand sold in 1851 and 1854 had a clause written into its title deed stating that it was entitled to on hour's irrigation water. That is why these erven still have irrigation rights (le beurte) today. Later, half-hour irrigation turns were given to some erven, as the number which had to be supplied with water multiplied, and also since some erven were smaller residential stands. Today (2001), after some 150 years, the lei-dam still supplies water to the resident's erven and smallholdings between Bath Street and the Kingna River.

Update on Leiwater

Montagu Mail November 2005

The history of Montagu's leiwater (irrigation) system dates as far back as 1851 according to a map (page 10 of the Dutch Reformed Church's commemorative book, 1854-2004) researched by Heinie Heydenrych.

For over a 150 years, the owners of many of the older properties in Montagu have enjoyed the benefits of this unique and, up until now, free watering system.

The National Water Act of 1998 made water a national resource, which means that the water rights included in many title deeds where people had ownership rights to water, have fallen away.

What is the Gebruikers-vereniging/Association?

Montagu's leiwater is a private system (not administered by the municipality), and all users are members of the Montagu Leiwater Gebruikersvereniging. The Leiwater Committee make sure that it runs smoothly by checking all sources and inlets, carrying out repairs and maintenance (including flood-damage repairs), and communicating with the members.

The Leiwater system is divided into five sections. Each section has a Section Rep who is the first point of contact for queries and help.

There is a Schedule of all the beurte so that all users know when their beurt is, who comes before and after them, and how to contact the other users.

A registered User Association, the Montagu Leiwater Verbruikersvereniging (MLV), chaired by Richard Knipe (2024), has now been formed and holds monthly meetings to administer Montagu's leiwater. A constitution has been drawn up and the leiwater will in future be allocated on a yearly basis. The committee has, as far as possible, taken into consideration previous water rights, but has also allocated water to some properly' owners who have never had access to leiwater before.



The Montagu town leiwater champion. Richard Knipe has for many years been involved with ensuring that Montagu has an operational leiwater system.

The objectives of the Association are not only to maintain, man and regulate the leiwater, but also to ensure cleanliness, quality measurement and the efficient running of the leiwater. The MLV is a non-profit organisation and to meet these objectives, it now has no choice but to impose levies on leiwater users in order to raise funds. The water allocations and levies will be reviewed annually each winter.

Richard Knipe says that throughout the years that Montagu has had leiwater, a fairly good neighbourliness has existed in

Montagu. The sluices run through many properties that do not benefit from the leiwater (as far as a weekly allocation of leiwater is concerned), but the owners are nevertheless obliged to co-operate with neighbouring properties who benefit from the leiwater and to allow access to their properties to the appointed workers who maintain the sluices and regulate the flow of the water according to the weekly timetable.

Richard and his committee hope that the co-operation and smooth running of the irrigation system that has existed to date will continue. There are several laws and regulations that govern leiwater nationally, but it is hoped that it will not become necessary to have to enforce them here. A small compensation to the owners who have sluices running through their properties – but who are not included in the leiwater register – is that they all have what is called skepregte (water may be “bucketed” from the sluices at no charge) to irrigate their gardens.

While it cannot be guaranteed – as the register is virtually full – there could still be a slot or two available for anyone (with a leiwater sluice running through their property) who wishes to apply to be included in the leiwater register.

A typical notification to Leiwater users on their allocated time slots

mmuseum@lando.co.za

From: "Tielman de Villiers" <tielman@lando.co.za>
To: <mmuseum@lando.co.za>
Sent: 13 December 2005 12:08
Attach: leiwaterbeurte.xls
Subject: Leiwaterbeurte

Maryke,

Julle leiwaterbeurte is as volg:

Maandag 07:30 tot 08:15 M.Toerisme/M.Museum 614-1950 Badstraat24
erf254/255/256 tydsduur 00:45

Dinsdag 08:40 tot 09:00 Museum Langstraat41 erf 1377 tydsduur 00:20

Woensdag 10:30 tot 11:00 Joubert huis (Museum)614-1950 Langstraat25 erf
1005 tydsduur 00:30

Ek heg ook die hele lêer aan. Julle beurte is in geel ge-highlight.

Groete.

Tielman

Tielman & Corrie de Villiers

AIRLIES B&B *****

Montagu, S.A.

Tel/Fax: +27 23 614-2943 (int); 023 614-2943 (nat)

e-mail: info@airlies.co.za

internet: www.airlies.co.za

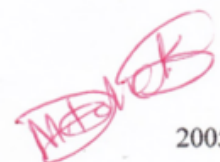
Members of:

Montagu Tourism Bureau,

Stellenbosch Tourism Bureau,

Oudtshoorn Tourism Bureau,

Tourism Grading Council of South Africa.

 13.12.05
2005/12/13

MONTAGU
BADSKLOOF WATERKOMITEE : LEIBEURTE

Bron	Dag	Vanaf	Tot	Gebruiker	Tel no.	Adres	Erftno.	Tyd	Opmerkings
		14:40	15:00	N.J. Grobler	614-3305	Langstraat 7	3831	00:20	
		15:00	15:15	WSJ Blom	614-3978	Badstraat 6	1111	00:15	
		15:15	15:40	N vd Merwe	614-1486	Rosestraat 8	291	00:25	
		15:40	15:50	Dr Holland		Rosestraat 6	157	00:10	
		15:50	16:05	Rita Fouche	614-1923	Rosestraat 4	292	00:15	
		16:05	16:25	Lawson	0217125950	Rosestraat 2	293	00:20	
		16:25	17:00	T Scott	614-1684	Langstraat 13	294	00:35	
								10:00	
Sloot	Donderdag	06:00	06:40	Aanloop na Du Toitstraat				00:40	
		06:40	09:00	SJ Joubert (nms Hoërskool)	614-2224	Landboutuin, Du Toitstraat	947	02:20	
		09:00	09:15	J Verreyne	614-2396	Du Toitstraat 2	138	00:15	
		09:15	09:25	Aanloop na Markstraat				00:10	
		09:25	10:00	F Visser		Markstraat 5	914	00:35	
		10:00	10:30	S Fourie		Markstraat 3	915	00:30	
		10:30	10:50	J de Kock	614-2251	Markstraat 1	1752 (9177)	00:20	
		10:50	12:00	D Thornton		Langstraat 55	912	01:10	
		12:00	12:30	A. Hazeleger	614-1301	Markstraat 2	1750	00:30	
		12:30	12:55	T. Piunkett	614-1109	Langstraat 59B	3734	00:25	
		12:55	18:00	K Knipe Trust	614-1977			05:05	gewysig
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Dam	Donderdag	07:00	12:15	Peter Sinovich	614-2619	Langstraat 24	3705	05:15	of 11h elke 2de Don
		12:15	17:30	Leon Dekker	614-2007	Langstraat 26	3514	05:15	of 11h elke 2de Don
		17:30	18:00	A.R. Allan (Sandy)	614-3879	4 Bougain Villas, Barrystraat	4358/4369	00:30	alt met Flemming op Ma.
								11:00	
Sloot	Vrydag	06:00	07:00	aanloop				01:00	
		07:00	18:00	K Knipe Trust	614-1977	Cross straat 3	535+3582+5168	11:00	
				WLV Price		Avalon Place 1			skepreegte
				JF Venter		Avalon Place 2			skepreegte
								12:00	

Leiwater knou boerdery

Montagu Mail March 2002

Weens die ongekende droogte in die distrik Montagu en die Koo is selfs die leiwater van die dorp aangetas.

Die water bevat 'n hoe konsentrasie braksoute wat braksensitiewe plante soos wingerd en appelkoosbome aantass.

Mnr. Philip Hoffman van die wynplaas Bloupunt in Langstraat is vanjaar amper die helfte van sy oes kwyd nadat brak leiwater sy pragwingerd kwaai geknou het. Bloupunt produseer gehalte chardonnay-druiwe en die helfte van die wynstokke is aangetas.

Die drag van sake wek groot kommer onder veral dorpenaars met pragtuine en die wat klein groentetuine vir eie gewin bedryf.

Mnr. Richard Knipe van die Leiwater komitee van Montagu sê hoewel die konsentrasie van braksoute in die water beslis skade aan plante aanrig, is daar egter steeds groente en ander

boere op die dorp wat leiwater met sukses gebruik.

Oorbesproeiing van tot 30% met leiwater verminder die braksoute. Die antwoord is amper altyd om die grond te bevloed in plaas van dit te besproei. (Op Bloupunt is dit egter nie moontlik nie aangesien die helling van die grond dit nie toelaat nie.)

Mnr. Knipe meen dat indien die droogte voortduur, boere in die toekoms hulle toenemend op ander gewasse soos lusern en bome soos olywyn sal moet toespits. Die plante en bome asook dalle pekanneutbome is bra! water-bestand.

Op Montagu kan 'n groot verskeidenheid gewasse en bome gekweek word en boere sal dalle moet wegbeweeg van wingerd en hul toespits op nismarlete soos dié vir olywe, sê mnr. Knipe.

Love and war

Lovers' Walk and the canal were constructed by Boer prisoners of war during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). There are two stories, which may not be mutually exclusive, as to how this came about.

Story one goes that Roelf du Toit farmed with horses. When the British military wanted to seize his horses for military purposes during the Anglo-Boer War (which they could do in terms of Martial Law that existed at the time) he refused. He was arrested and he and his son had to help build Lovers' Walk as part of his punishment. It would not have been possible to construct the leivore if Lovers' Walk was not there because the water has to run downhill. A case of *No Lovers' Walk, no leivore*. The photo below shows a group of POWs on their release in 1902. The gentleman on the left holding keys is Mr Hubbe, their jailer.



Story two: It was towards the end of 1900 that eight farmers from the Montagu district were taken into custody and sentenced to hard labour because they had failed to report the fact that they had seen, assisted or been aware of Boer Commandos in the area. These farmers were Dawid Burger, Josua Joubert, Muisvoël, Giepie Joubert, John du Toit and Boy du Toit. They are pictured below with their guard, Daantjie Beets, in the background.



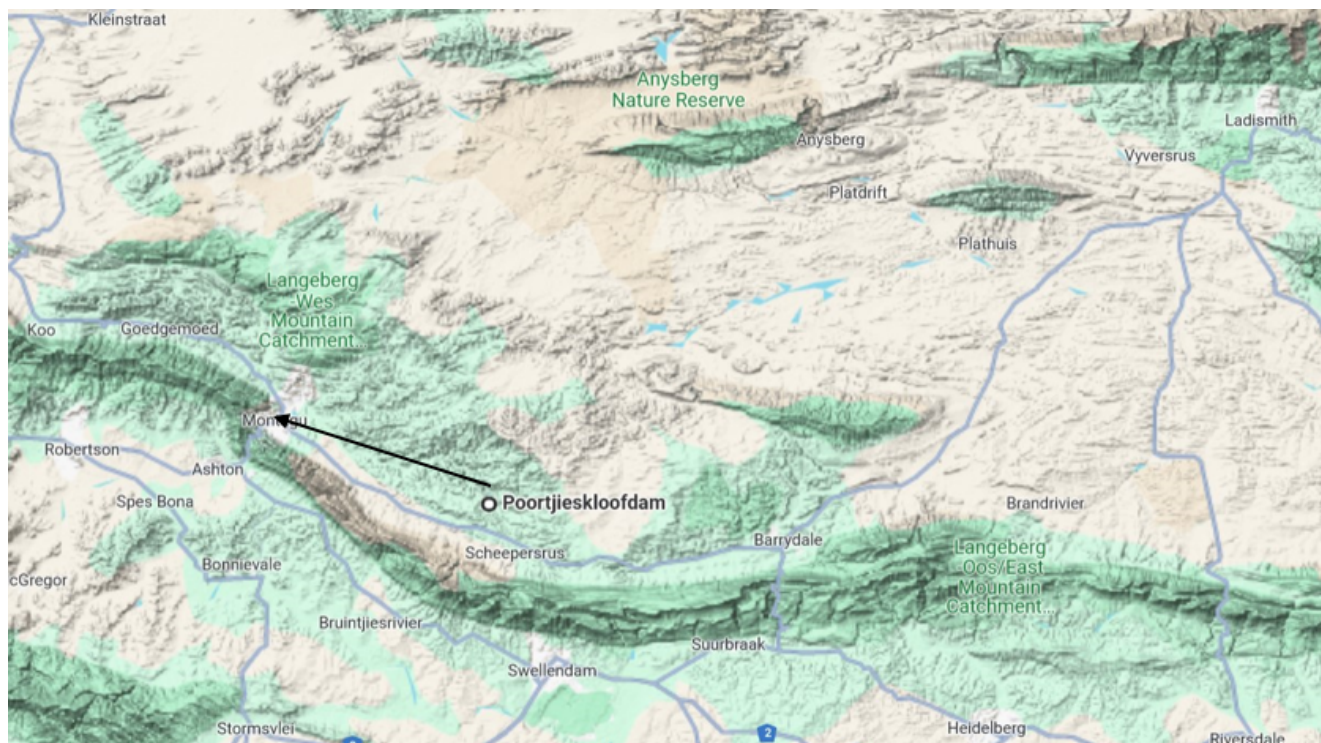
You can see that these photos appear to picture the same men. The photos are from the Montagu Museum archives. You can read

more about the history of Montagu, and specifically the construction of Lovers' Walk on their site.

Town water

The Leiwater canals delivered water for all purposes until 1894 when leiwater was split from household water. Dorpswater (town water) came from Fonteinkloof (above the hospital in Montagu South). Because this source did not provide sufficient water for domestic use, another source was tapped in Keurkloof in 1899. (Water demand outstripped supply by 1919 and another source was tapped on the farm Het Kruis to the northeast of Montagu. Some of these three sources still serve the town with municipal water, plus a couple of others.)

1950s – Solutions



There was a furrow from Donkerkloof to the Keisie which was replaced with a pipe in 1950. The Kingna dried up in the winter months after Poortjieskloof Dam was constructed (completed 1955). The dam was too small, and the wastage too

large, for earthen furrows, so the farmers built a **concrete canal, from the Poortjieskloof Dam to Montagu**, in the late 1950s with the help of a loan from Water Affairs. (The dam wall was raised in 1968.)

Water and leiwat from the Kingna serves farms along the river but not the town of Montagu.

Some additional information on the Poortjieskloof canal

One of Montagu's community champions J.P. Viljoen who was born in the De Doorns district and moved to Montagu in 1954 where he bought the farm 'Knipeshope A'. It did not take long for him to realise that there was a big problem concerning irrigation water. The biggest reason he had moved to Montagu was because of the Poortjieskloofdam that had just been completed. The main motivation behind this new dam was to improve irrigation in the area under the dam. Unfortunately the building of this dam left the Kingna River completely dry. He went as far as suing the Minister of Water Affairs because the building of the dam had adversely affected the natural flow of the river and requested that a canal be built from the dam to the town. **Due to this Minister Paul Sauer ordered that the now well known "Poortjieskloof canal" be built.** He kept on campaigning and finally Minister P.K. le Roux ordered that the dam wall be increased in height by 4,5 meters so that it could capture more water during the periodical floods. By now irrigation was much better but still not good enough for long-term successful farming.

Under the leadership Johan Viljoen several possibilities to bring irrigation water to Montagu were considered. Initially the so-called 'Skotlandskloof' contour canal as well as Dwariga dam schemes were investigated. Due to different reasons neither of these schemes realised and early in the 1950's a plan was considered to utilise water from the newly

build government dam, Poortjieskloof. After completion it was found that the river supplied less water than before and was inadequate for irrigation purposes. Shortly after this a canal was built from the dam to the town. This plan brought relief but the water was still not enough for sustained feasible agriculture. About a year later the dam wall was elevated by 4,5 meter to increase storage capacity but the water still wasn't constant enough. All the above- mentioned efforts until 1969 were solely to provide the Derdeheuvel and Agter Langeberg districts with water.

Poortjieskloof Leiwater Canal Gallery

Photo's taken by Lea-Anne & John Alexander

Thank you to local resident Mike Worthington Jones (retired civil engineer) who scouted the canal route with his bicycle and was able to point out many interesting construction aspects used by the canal builders.

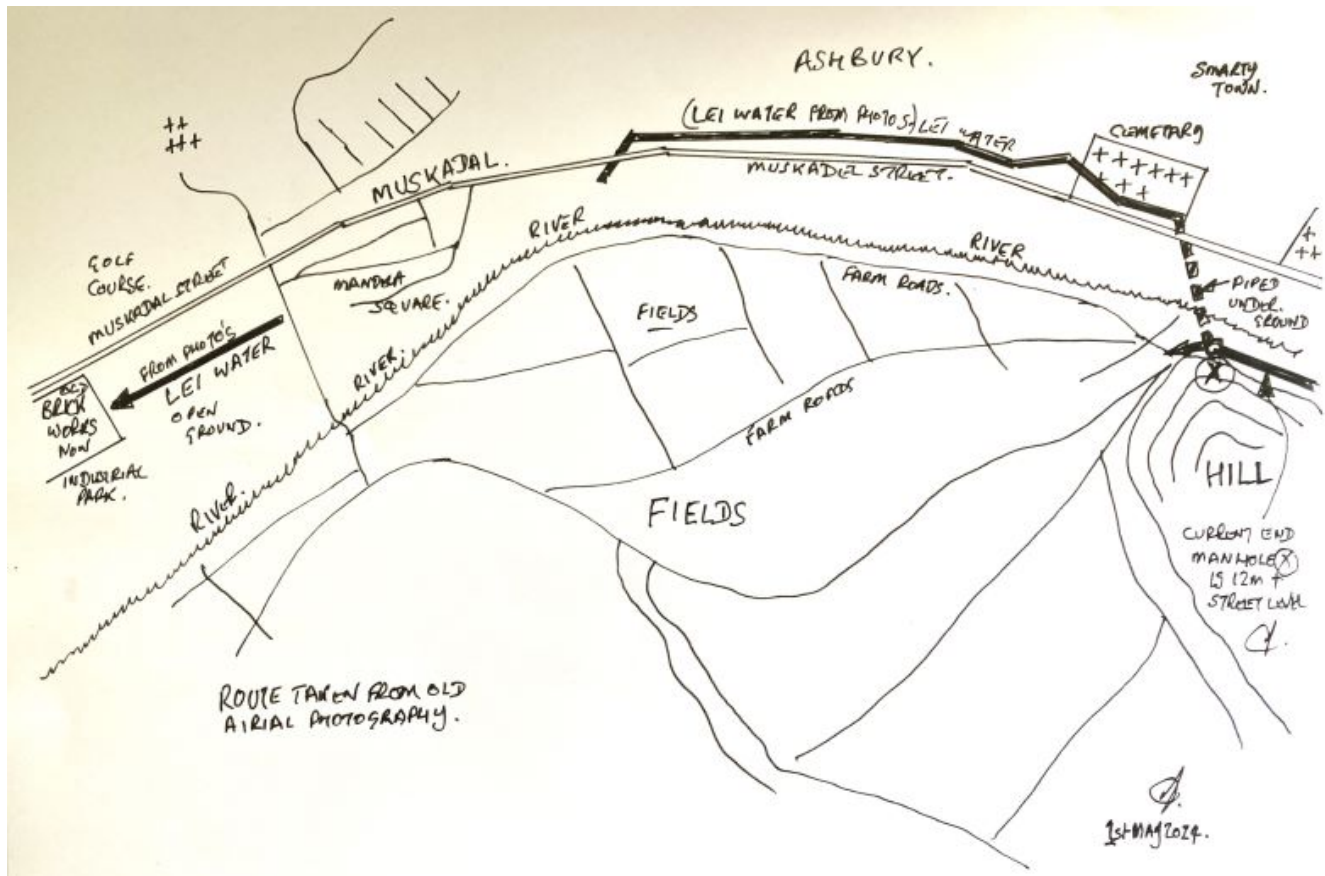
Mike comments: The leiwater canal is 26kms long starting at an elevation of 346m and ending at 240m....106m fall....4 meters fall in a kilometre.....The skill of the surveyor, at these figures **is outstanding**.....half a percent fall!!!!!!!

The introduction of the CBR water scheme outdated the need to maintain this leiwater system and today (2024) the system is only functional in certain sections. The CBR system provides an all year round supply of water whereas the Poortjieskloof dam which feeds this leiwater network is affected by local drought conditions.

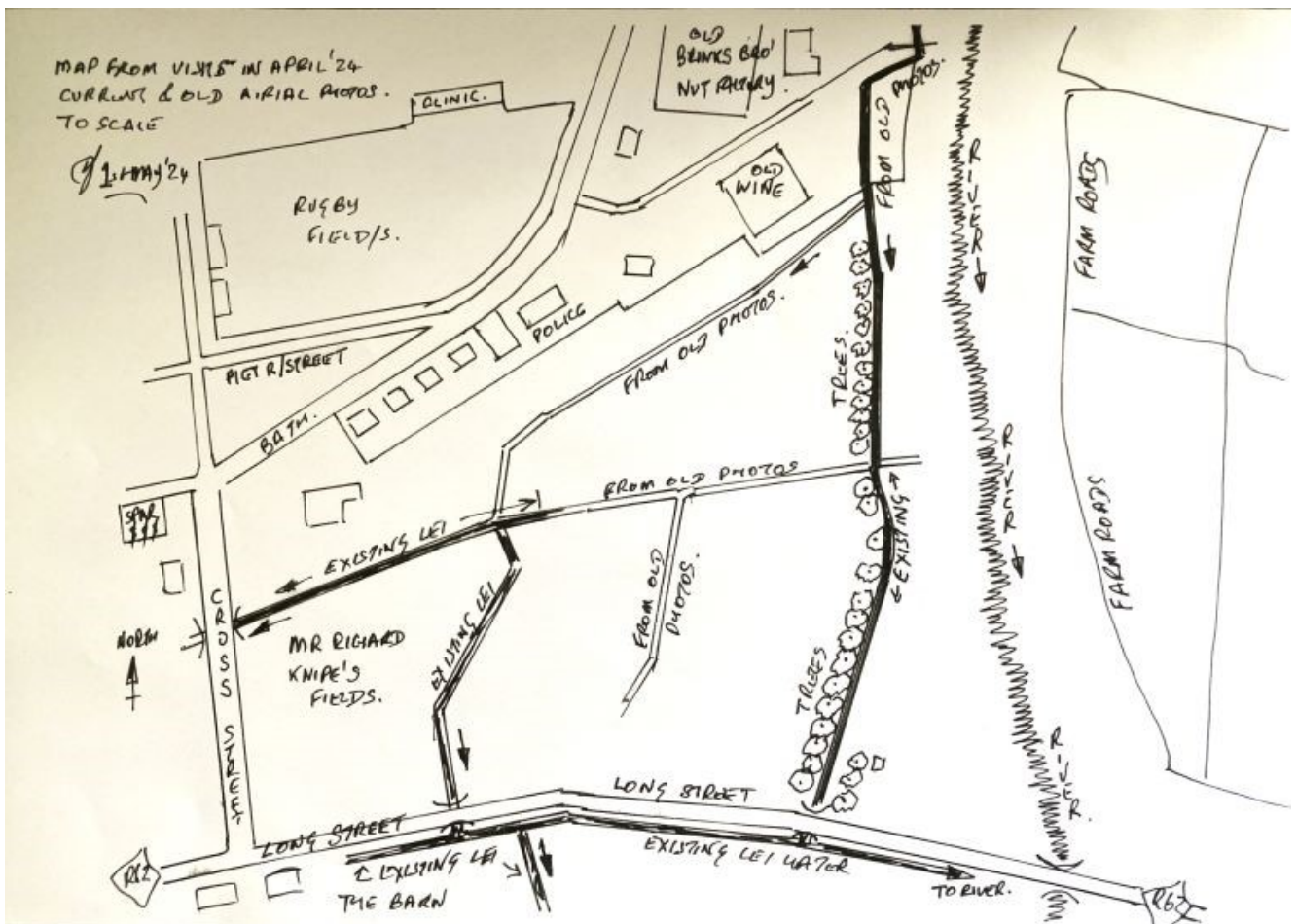
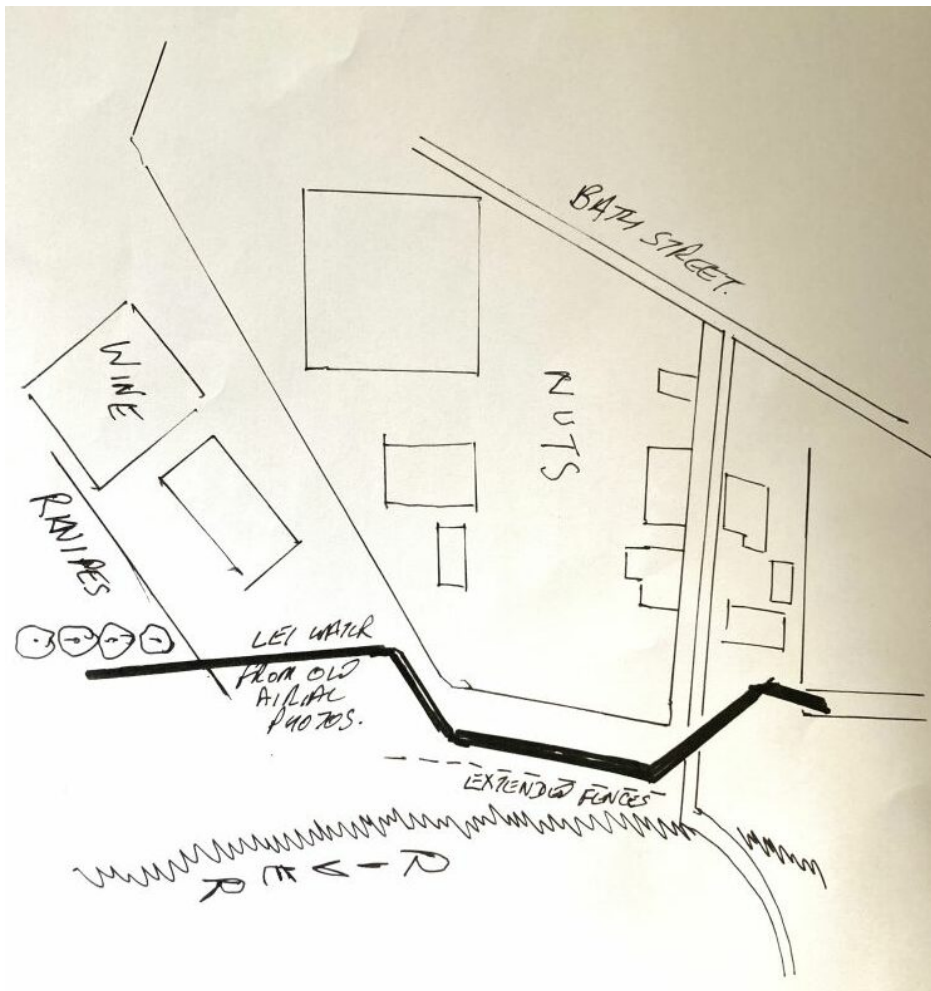
Remnants of the old Poortjieskloof irrigation system can still be seen on both sides of the R62 in the vicinity of Long and Bath Streets Montagu. This is where the canal system ended.

The sketches that follow trace the old leiwater network from Ashbury to its end on the Kingna river side of Long Street. The sketches were drawn to show where the canals once ran. Today (2024) parts are buried and not visible and other parts

are still visible but not in use.



The canal ran from the right hand side of the sketch just below the word HILL



The end of the old Poortjieskloof canal. The old section on The Barn side of Long Street has been used as pipe trenches for new irrigation networks.

Above sketches by Mike Worthington Jones

The Poortjieskloof leiwater canal is managed by the **Kingna Water Users Association** (WUA) which plays a crucial role in water management within its designated area. Gert den Engelsman is the current (2024) water fiscal for this water network and it is his job to ensure that the working part of the canal is in good repair and he is also responsible for releasing water from the Poortjieskloof dam into the irrigation canal.



Gert den Engelsman





Running parallel with Long Street



Crossing under Long Street. The blue pipes were not part of the original scheme.



The old canal system running towards Long Street



The canal winds along the side of the mountain and is clearly visible from the road. Right is towards Montagu and left is towards the dam



Above pictures were taken from Muscadel Road Ashbury

Somewhere between Ashbury and the dam



The canal emerges from an underground section



A sluice gate outlet



A creative solution ensures water continues to flow



Construction has stood the test of time



Water on its way to irrigate



An abandon sluice gate



The canal enters an underground section



Water being released from Poortjieskloof dam.



The canal follows the road in a number of places



A bridge crossing can be seen in the distance.





The canal emerges from under a road crossing



All sections of canal still in use are extremely well maintained



A disused sluiceway



One of the storage dams in the leiwat canal



An off gridder with the leiwater canal in his backyard.
Getting closer to the dam wall



The dam wall with the leiwater control point













Foundations of the Poortjieskloof dam builders dwelling is still visible

For more information on an epic engineering feat to supply Montagu with water visit the CBR Water Scheme Story which is in English and Afrikaans by clicking on the appropriate link below

[100.CBR Water – Scheme \(English\)](#)

[100.CBR Water – Scheme \(Afrikaans\)](#)

Back to the Montagu leiwatër system 2008

The flood of 2008 covered the leiwatër canals in thousands of cubic metres of sand. After long drawn-out deliberations with the local authority (which came to naught) and great expense to the members of the Vereniging, the members managed to get the water furrows cleared and repaired. There is now a flood fund for future flood-damage repairs.

2018 Drought & fire

Four years into the drought, fires swept across the Langeberg including Bloupunt and Donkerkloof.

These two images of Bloupunt on fire were taken on 14 and 17 January 2018. You can see the fire was still burning after four days!



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2015-2021 – The Great Roadworks Saga

The Western Cape Government (WCG) decided to refurbish the TR31 between Ashton and Montagu. The contractors were scheduled to start work on 24 July 2015 and complete the work by June 2018 (36 months). They started in October 2015 and assured the Leiwaterr association that Long Street would be fully operational by June 2017. The job was finally completed in 2021.

How does this affect the leiwaterr? Well, all the canals in Long Street had to be basically rebuilt. They run under the road and pavements. Work was started but not completed because of the roadworks contractors' various delays, bankruptcies, thefts, bureaucratic red tape and the lockdown. The users in Long Street have had to make all sorts of Heath Robinson contraptions to open and close water including sandbags and dustbin lids. They are an adaptive and innovative lot and made sure their leiwaterr ran strong and true. Though there were times when the water had to be stopped so as not to flood

roadworks.

The water runs through pipes now, and the stormwater and leiwater systems have been split – which is brilliant! (Stormwater dumps loads of silt and rubbish into our canals. Elsewhere in town, the leiwater canals still serve as stormwater drains as well.) The junction boxes in the pavements were left open for several years, but are mostly complete now.



Roadworks in Montagu's Long Street (R62). The pipes in these pictures are for stormwater not leiwater.

Photos are from the Langeberg municipality site.

2019 – Hailstorm

On the night of 11 March 2019, the western section of Montagu dorp was hit by a massive hail storm, with hailstones the size of golfballs!

The resultant rain and flood caused large sections of Donkerkloof to wash away and mud- and rockslides down the steep sides of the kloof. The leiwater source pipe was broken up and washed away. Because the pipe runs under the road in Donkerkloof, we had to wait for the municipality to rebuild

the road before we could relay our pipe.

Luckily we had strong flow from our Keisie River source to supply all our leiwater during this time. At the end of April 2019, the road repairs were finally underway.



Thank you very much to J.D. Stemmet for doing such a fantastic job of reconstructing the road!

Once the road was completed, we hired J.D. Stemmet's digger to dig trenches for our new pipeline. We also hired Jerome Simonis's machine to lay the new pipe. Thank you very much to Richard, Gert, Jannie, Jan, Dylan, Mooi and Karel for doing such a superb job.



All photos by © Richard Knipe.

It took a couple of weeks to find all the leaks and make sure the pipe was strong enough to handle just about anything Mother Nature might throw at it in future. Donkerkloof water now swells our volume again!

2023 – Flashfloods

Montagu once again experienced the effects of both the Keisie and Kingna rivers in flood. The Keisie causing much damage to the Leiwater in especially in Lovers Walk.....?.

Contributions: Thank you to the **Montagu Leiwater Gebruikers-vereniging/Users' Association** for allowing Montagu Stories to use information and pictures from your website