

1. Rock Advertising of Yesteryear in Cogmans Kloof

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Inaugural post on Montagu Stories webpage

Montagu Museum Manager(2018) Emile Badenhorst explores painted advertisements 'on the rocks' in Cogmans Kloof in the first of our Montagu Stories.

Evidence that the town of Montagu really only started to blossom and bloom after a decent road was rigged, shovelled and blasted through Cogmans Kloof, was recently 'discovered' in the archives of the Montagu Museum.

From the earliest times, explorers, big-game hunters, traders and farmers had been trying to find safe passage through Cogmans Kloof – the short, but dangerous portal to the pretty town of Montagu. Almost like one of those dusty frontier towns from the old West, Montagu was cut off from the lucrative trade business in Cape Town for a very long time. With the result that opportunities and developments came at its own pace...fuelled by reluctance in some sectors to invest in commerce and the rich and fertile lands that surrounded the little town. In fact, it took as long as 150 years after the first farmlands were granted for the local folks to finally get a taste of what the word 'prosperity' meant.

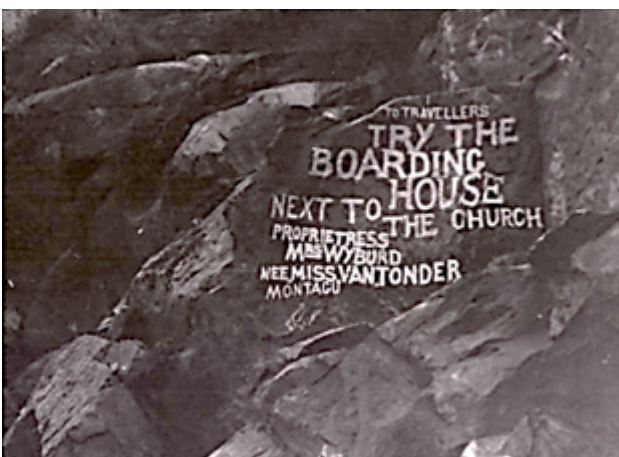
Still, access did not come easy. The original road, or rather path through the kloof simply followed the flow of the river – which the wary traveller had to cross eight times. For long periods, there was simply no road due to the floods which busted often through the kloof – a narrow gorge at places where the fierceness of water and the stubbornness of rock clashed in all its fury. No wonder that the opening up of businesses and the starting of farming activities were risky

enterprises for anyone with a bit of sense. While the rest of the Cape Colony was enjoying the fruits of its labour, the folk of the town of Montagu had to endure the temper and mood swings of the restless Kingna-and Keisie-rivers, that slumbered and toiled on its doorsteps. Eventually, after twelve lives were lost in the kloof during the 1867-flood, the authorities, under pressure from local threats and demands, realised that tough action had to be taken. Although previous attempts were made (and failed) this time around they knew that success was imminent. In due course, legendary engineer Thomas Bain, his foreman Charles Handy with thirty-two labourers were given the go-ahead to proceed with their mandate to build a proper road through Cogmans Kloof.

One can read from the journals of Bain that this was no easy task. But he had his work cut out for him, and 141 years ago, on 28 February 1877, the people of Montagu were granted proper access to the profitable markets west of the kloof. No doubt that business was soon booming in the town. Entrepreneurs started moving in, which led to new and more businesses opening up, enabling new products to be delivered to new far-off markets. The kloof-road that Mr. Bain built was thus largely responsible for the rapid development of the town of Montagu and surrounding district. Periods of gloom were soon replaced by a jubilant feeling of excitement and joy. Signs of prosperity were soon evident, the success of new beginnings for all to share in.

Shortly after being appointed as the new manager at the Montagu Museum on the 1st February 2018, I was called to the museum archives by enthusiastic museum-volunteer Irma Jordaan. Part of her weekly duties include the sorting of boxes with mixed content into properly labelled files for easier future reference. There were a number of fascinating documents and letters in this box on Cogmans Kloof, but what caught my eye was an old black-and-white photograph with words painted in white on the rock panel right next to the narrow gravel road

winding through Cogmans Kloof. With a ghostly transport-rider standing in the old Bain-road just before entering the tunnel on the Ashton-side. Behind him, the distinctive cliffs of *Kalkoennes* in the background. The words on the rock face clearly reads: *TO TRAVELLERS. TRY THE BOARDING HOUSE NEXT TO THE CHURCH. PROPRIETRESS MRS WYBURD, NEE MISS VAN TONDER, MONTAGU.*



I could hardly contain my excitement, for at home I have a postcard, also taken at Cogmans Kloof, but on the Montagu side of the tunnel, with the words *TRY MAZAWATTEE TEA* clearly painted about halfway between the roof of the tunnel and the fort. This was found in the attic – letters, postcards and

photographs belonging to the Millin family who built the house in Joubert Street in 1902. Furthermore, and most importantly, this is proof that once the old road had been replaced by the Bain-road, business really was beginning to flourish in Montagu.





By looking at these photographs, there can be no doubt that there must have been a number of these advertisements in the kloof at the time. Initial investigations has made it quite clear that information on the subject of painted advertisements on rocks faces in mountain passes seem to be on the scarce side. However, it would be somewhat naive to gather from this lack of more evidence that these signs were solely painted in Cogmans Kloof. There is so much to get excited about – one would always look at these rock faces differently from now on – would traces of these ‘billboards of yesteryear’ still be visible today? Maybe behind that Gwarrie-bush up there, where the paint would have been concealed from the sun for all these years? I could not help but think of another site near town where we recently came upon the vanishing letters painted in white on a huge boulder next to the walkway. Could this also have been an advertisement of yesteryear? What it definitely is not – is graffiti, for the letters were much too neatly painted, almost stencilled. I will have to go back there for another look...

Two more pieces of information came to light on the rock art advertisements.

1. Colin Johnson the author living at Die Ou Tolhuis in Cogmans Kloof stated that his early family also placed rock adverts for the sale of motor vehicles. His early family sold second hand cars from Die Tolhuis.
2. A picture was found in the Montagu Museum showing

another rock art advertisement at the entrance to Cogmans Tunnel.



Rock advertising by the Koonin brothers at the Cogmans tunnel. Closer inspection has revealed that in all probability the inscription across the top reads Koonin Bros. and down the side Watchmakers with the word Jewelers across the bottom. The Koonin family were a prominent Jewish family in the early Montagu days.

From information available it appears that the rock faces along the road from Die Ou Tolhuis to the Cogsmans tunnel were used extensively by the enterprising business people of Montagu to advertise their offerings.

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