



AN INTRODUCTION TO OU AR DE VRIES A MONTAGU RESIDENT WITH A STORY

The story of Ou Ar de Vries was brought to the attention of Montagu Stories by Baden farmer Abraham Joubert. This led to a discussion with son Ar de Vries who is retired and lives in Montagu. The story focuses on Ou Ar's passion for **GEOLOGY** and his hobby when he retired. The undated document below (retyped) was found in the Montagu Museum and summarizes both contributions made by Ou Ar.

Mnr. Abraham Hermanus de Vries, 14 van Riebeeck Street, Montagu South, 6710, a retired farmer from the Warmwaterberg area (near Barrydale) and an amateur paleo botanist and geologist whose researches into fossilized flora, fishes, etc attracted the attention of experts, resulting in a local example of fossilized plants being re-named in his honour. (vide Plumstead, Edna – A Now Phytontatigraphical Devonian Zone in Southern Africa which includes the first record of Zosterophyllum: Transactions of the Geological Society of South Africa No.80 (1977) Pages 267 & 277; also Annals of the South African Museum Vol. 81 Part 3 – Devonian Fish and Plants from the Bokkeveld Series of South Africa – page 157)

Mr. de Vries handcrafts a variety of kieres from the Tabakhout Bush/Tree (officially declared a noxious plant) and makes them available to the Montagu Museum for sale to assist in raising funds for the Museum

The document below is a short autobiography written by Ou Ar. himself and cannot better describe a large portion of his life. Ou Ar was an Afrikaner and it is somewhat unusual that he chose to write his story in English. His son Ar made the document available to Montagu Stories.

A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT OF THE PERSON ABRAHAM HERMANUS DE VRIES,

Undated

(14 Van Riebeeck Street, Montagu, 6720. Telephone: 661.)



14 Van Riebeeck Street Montagu



I was born on that part of the original farm Lemoenshoek, which bordered on Poortfontein and Uitvlug, and called "Die Poort That was on 15th November 1909. It was in the district of Barrydale.

I was the eldest of eight children and my parents were poor. Since my early boyhood, I had to do work around the house and on the farm and I liked it, especially when I could work with adults, and I enjoyed their conversations. Most people around there, were regarded as poor, and have now drifted away from the platteland

I entered the Lemoenshoek Primary school in 1919, when I had just passed the age of 9. The distance to the school was 7 miles and the authorities inaugurated a conveyance service for those living down the Doorn River a "skoolkar" drawn by horses, and I had to wait till some younger children, including my younger brother, had reached the age of 7, so that there could be at least 6 children, for whom to start the "skoolkar".

In 1925 I passed my Std.VI and then entered the Barrydale Secondary school, for stds. 7 and 8, which I passed in 1927.

I was then also a well-seasoned farm hand, who could handle all farm implements, could work with horses, oxen and donkeys, partook in transport riding, delivering, produce to buyers, etc. I and another man once took 8 or 9 casks of neatly distilled brandy for my uncle, Mr. H.de Vries, from the farm "Kent" in the Tradouw to the K.W.V. in Montagu. That trip took us a full week, from Doorn

River and back. That was in 1924 or 1925.

I was also well groomed in herding sheep and goats. I was once put in charge of a herd of goats, for a full month, while the regular shepherd attended to the lambing ewes. For this purpose I had to live out in the veld at Dassiesfontein, with the shepherd and his family, where there was only one room in the house for all souls. The whole family had to sleep there. I was fortunate to have a little bed to myself.

Every day I cut out a mark on my "kierie", so that I could know the day and week of the month. What a pity, I have not kept that "kierie" for a remembrance.

In 1928 I went to the Montagu High School for further study, and matriculated there in December 1929.

In January 1930 I entered the employ of Van Zyl & Hofmeyr a firm of Solicitors, in Montagu, as an articled clerk.

When my contract of Articles was submitted for registration, it was noticed that one of my matriculation subjects, Afrikaans literature, was not recognised by the Matriculation Board as a prescribed subject. For that purpose I had chosen bookkeeping and commercial arithmetic.

As an articled law student with the firm, they were allowed to pay me £3 per month, for pocket money only. My parents were too poor to assist me financial and I had to make other provisions.

I was allowed to stay in the school hostel, free of charge, on condition that I did supervision work. So I managed for some months, at £3 per month.

Some months later the position of secretary at the local Hospital Board became vacant and I was allowed to apply for same, which I did with success. The salary was £5 per month, and I could pull through with £8 per month, and free boarding.

After a year or so, Mr. De Villiers the Secretary of the local School Board, suddenly died, and applications were invited for the post of Secretary.

I discussed the matter with my principal, Mr. Andrew Hofmeyr, who was always very kind-hearted towards me. His attitude was that they would be sorry to lose me, but he could understand my predicament and left it to me to decide about my future.

I applied and was successful.

The other partner, Mr. Danie van Zyl, was an intimate friend of mine and I admired his wit and humour, but I cannot remember whether I had spoken to him about the matter. He however told a mutual friend, Mr. Joubert, that he was glad I got the appointment, for now I would not leave Montagu soon.

In 1938 I married Miss. Dorothea van der Merwe, of Montagu and we had 5 children.

In 1942 my cousin, Mrs. F. du Plessis, (born Le Grange), visited us, and stayed for the night. She told us, inter alia, that her husband was now spending most of his time on his own farm, in the Riversdale district, and that her inherited farm, near the Warmwaterberg Baths, where they lived, was now going to the dogs.

For this reason she had now given Attorney Brink of Barrydale, instructions to sell her farm for a certain amount. I thought the amount reasonable from a purchaser's point of view and asked her a few questions. She confirmed that she had signed; a paper (Power of Attorney), Mr. Brink had prepared.

The said farm was well known to me and that night I could not sleep well. It was my chance to buy the farm, if only I could raise the money, without delay.

Early next morning I approached Van Zyl & Hofmeyr. Yes they will advance me the money on a mortgage bond. Thereafter I went to Barrydale and signed a Deed of Sale, as buyer. Little had I known how much trouble was in store for me.

The seller's husband was very dissatisfied and upset. A few days later, when we went there to make a rough inspection of the property, the seller's husband was not at home, but somewhere on the farm. So we went on our way, in the direction of the cultivated lands, etc. Then a man was approaching us, with a rifle in his hands. He started cursing and swearing.

Fortunately we kept calm and sort of ignored him. I told him I had bought the farm from Mr. Mike Brink and we are now inspecting the property to see whether it is worth the money. If he wants to interfere, we shall call in the Police. Then we proceeded with our inspection and ignored him.

The money was advanced by Van Zyl & Hofmeyr. The purchase price was paid and transfer was passed in my name in January 1943 but this was only for a nine-tenth share in the property, belonging to Mrs. F.M. du Plessis.

There was still a one-tenth undivided share bequeathed to a minor heir, with the name of Naomi de Villiers. She promised to sell her share to me at an appropriate amount, as soon as she become of age.

The seller, with her family, moved to her husband's farm and we moved in, early in 1943; and we found everything in a neglected and dilapidated condition.

The farm had a fairly good water supply, but there were no orchards or vineyards, or anything that could provide a permanent income. Only cash crops were cultivated, in which there was little money, and we were in need of money right from the start.

Fortunately old friends were willing to assist. I needed money to buy a flock of sheep from Mr. P. Cilliers. Mr. P.A.Euvrard of the firm of Van Zyl & Hofmeyr, advanced me the money on a promissory note.

Then Miss. N. de Villiers got married and became of age, as a result of her marriage, and her one-tenth share in the farm, was now on the market. I soon learned that my two adjoining neighbours were each on his own and secretly negotiating with the lady, with a view to buying her one-tenth undivided share in my farm.

It was now clear that I must act quickly. So I went to Mr.J.A. Crafford, a man I knew, and told him of my predicament. He said we must go and see the lady's father-in-law, Mr. Jacs. la Grange, who indicated that he will accompany us to his children's house. The lady and her husband, Mr. Corrie le Grange, immediately agreed to our proposals.

A writing pad was brought in and I wrote out a Deed of Sale which was duly signed.

The purchase price was advanced to me by Mr. M. Hofmeyr, a junior partner of the firm of Van Zyl and Hofmeyr on a mortgage bond. Transfer was registered in my name on 29/5/1944.

I was now the proud owner of a farm, but my wife and I had it to work very hard to make ends meet and to pay our debts. Fortunately most things turned out successfully.

Under pressure of the local public, we opened a small, farm store. This brought extra work and trouble for us both, but the venture was successful.

Later a Mr. H. Fourie came to live on the farm as "bywoner". He was experienced in stock farming and had a flock of sheep of his own. We leased veld, which was lying idle, from a Mr. I.L. Willemse and from a Mr. L.J. le Grange. The rent had to be paid in advance, but we did well and the venture was successful.

In 1944 I also bought the properties, Lot. G3, (on which I was born as well as lot D3 and De Brak, from a Mr. P.A. Cooke.)

A GREAT EVENT IN MY LIFE WAS WHEN I MET LESLIE KENT, MSc. FROM THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OFFICE, IN 1947. HE WAS AN EXPERT IN GROUND WATER AND WAS DOING WORK IN MY AREA, FOR THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OFFICE, PRETORIA.

To put it mildly, this man brought a change in my life, 'by creating an interest in geology, which remained with me to this day, and is the inducement of the biographical note of myself, I am now preparing.

We discussed numerous points concerning geology, while I accompanied him and sort of assisted him in his work and he was always ready to reply. After he had left, we kept up a correspondence, which lasted for many years.

He afterwards obtained his doctorate in geology and later became Director of the Geological Survey of S.A.

Through his inspiration I started studying geology. At first I obtained some of the Memoirs of the Geological Survey from the Government Printer Pretoria. Thereafter I obtained lists of books on geology from the University Printers and Publishers of the University of Stellenbosch, and I ordered those I liked.

Over many years I read Geology during the long winter nights on the farm. Later I came in contact with other geologists and even assisted students who had come to the area to prepare examination thesis's. In this way I came in contact, inter alia, with Prof. G. Söhnge, Principal of the Department of Geology of Stellenbosch University, at that time he was a member of the Council of the Geology Society of S.A., and he advised me to fill in an application form to become a member of the Society. All I needed he said, was the signature of two members of the Society on the form, for recommendation. He promised to be one. So I had to look for the other. I did not feel inclined to apply at the time, as I feared it would interfere too much with my farming activities. Later I changed my mind however, and asked for an application form.

For sentimental reasons I thought of asking Dr. Kent to sign my form for membership, with Prof. Söhnge, who had sent the signed form back to me. So I sent it to Dr. Kent with a request for his signature.

When after some weeks I got no reply from Dr. Kent, I made enquiries about his whereabouts and learned that he was away in Australia. So I had to wait.

Then at last I received a letter dated October 30th 1973 which starts as follows: "I received your very welcome letter of 13th August only last week when I returned to Pretoria....."

"Last Saturday morning we had a meeting of the Council of the Geol. Soc. of S.A. and I was thus able to personally lay your application before the Council. I am pleased to say you're you were accepted as a member unanimously....."

And so, another mile-stone in my life had been reached.

Having in mind that the late Dr. A.L. du Toit, South Africa's greatest geologist of the past, was also interested in fossils I also thought it fit to examine rocks for fossils, while walking in the veld.

Dr. Hannes Theron of Bellville, Cape, who obtained his doctorate with a thesis on the Bokkeveld Beds, told me that he had great hopes of finding fish in the Bokkeveld, where other marine fossils were plentiful, but without success. So he encouraged me to look for "fishes".

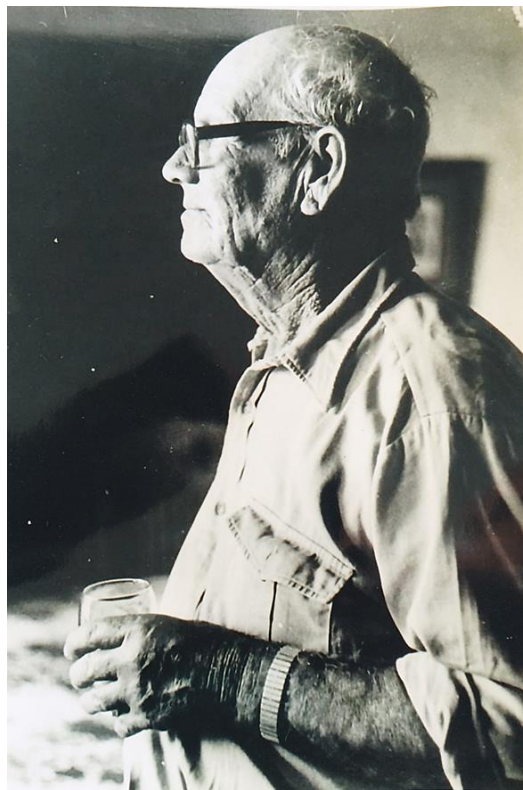
As he was stationed in Bellville, as chief of the office of the Geological Survey of the Western Cape, contact with him was easy. He often visited me on the farm. So we arranged that should I find anything new in the line of fossils, he will arrange to have same identified by experts.

The trouble is that one does not know how these fishes that lived over 300 million years ago, had looked like. However, my hunting and searching went on unabated. Strange little impressions were found by me, but no fish. Many letters were exchanged between Dr. Theron and me, and then at last there was fish.

I also discovered a new plant, under the auspices of Dr. Edna Plumstead, of Wits.

The fish and plant fossils were described by some London expert in ANNALS of the South African Museum, Cape Town, in Volume e 81, Part 3 of February 1980. But the plant was already described by Dr. Plumstead in the Transactions of the Geological Society, No.80, of 1977, and she named it **Zosterophyllum de -vriesii**, after me the finder.

Then the S.A.Museum came in 1980 and in its publication said the plant was named after Dr Edna Plumstead and the fish after Dr Theron, my two collaborators.



Ou Ar in a reflective mood

Photo: Ar de Vries jnr.

In reply to invitations by the Editor of PAL MEWS, the Editor wrote a note on a report I made in Volume 3(1), of June 1982, which reads as follows:

"The South African Museum was asked to comment on Mr. de Vries 3 report. Their reply is:

"The South African Museum administered the loan of a collection "of fossil fishes and plants donated to us by Mr. de Vries, to "specialists at the University of London and British Museum for study "and description. Although the resulting paper, dealing with both "fishes and plants, appeared in the ANNALS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MUSEUM" (1980: vol.81, part 3), Museum staff were in no way involved in its "preparation. The authors of the publication were for their "part entirely dependent on South African sources for locality and "collection data, and cannot be held responsible for any omissions, "or the nomenclatural duplication that occurred. The South African "Museum was from the start led to believe (incorrectly, it now seems) "that the original collector wished to remain anonymous).

The only thing I can think of that could have led the S.A.Museum to believe that I wanted to remain anonymous, was the following: When the fossil was identified as fish, the Director, Dr. Barry, wanted to make a statement to the press. So he rang me up on the telephone, he, inter/aliam read out to me a script he had already prepared for handing over to the press. Therein my name was mentioned as the discoverer. I objected to the mentioning of my name, as I did not want to be pestered by lime light Lizzies or souvenir hunters, etc. I would not have objected to being mentioned in scientific papers. The public at large do not read such papers.

It was also strange to me that the S.A.Museum had no knowledge of the paper published by Dr. Edna Plumstead, in 1977, in the Transaction of the Geologic Society, in which the new plant was called after me. So they named it after Dr. Plumstead herself "who has contributed so much to our knowledge of South African Palaeozoic plants"!

--oOo--

'n Ou Familie vriend Paul Fouche onthou (2023)

Ek onthou oom Ar baie goed. In 1968 was ek een Saterdagmiddag saam met Ar junior op oom Ar se plaas. Ons het gaan soek na 'n silinderkop vir 'n VW-kewer tussen Ar se onderdele wat nog in die waenhuys agtergebly het. Oom Ar het met 'n steeks masjien van 'n waterpomp gesukkel, maar selfs Ar, reeds 'n gekwalifiseerde motorwerktuigkundige, se pogings om die masjien aan die gang te kry, was dié middag onsuksesvol. Ons is darem met 'n bruikbare silinderkop daar weg en Merien Stipp, Robertson se KJV-voorsitster, later mev. ds. Ackerman, se Kewer het minder aamborstig geklink. Ar junior se vaardigheid het my ou tjorre jare lank aan die gang gehou. Sy uitsonderlike talent mis ek daagliks!

Mnr Hein Joubert
Curator
Montagu Museum
Joubert Huis
Langstrasse 25
MONTAGU

Dear Mnr Joubert,

20th February, 1997

I am writing to bring you up to date with progress in our research project on fossil material from the Montagu collection (H. de Vries collection).

Further collection of fossil plant, fish and mollusc specimens from the Warmwaterberg area was undertaken in September 1996 by Fiona Evans (University of Stellenbosch) and myself in conjunction with fish experts from the JLB Smith Institute, Grahamstown (Dr M.E. Anderson), the Geological Survey, Pretoria (Patrick Bender) and the Museum of Western Australia, Perth (Dr J.A. Long), as well as the geologist Dr J.N. Theron. Later in September our preliminary results were presented by John Long and myself at the 9th Biennial Conference of the Palaeontological Society of South Africa at Stellenbosch. An abstract of our talk is enclosed. A preliminary paper will be published in the conference volume which should appear later this year. Eric Anderson and John Long will be presenting a paper at a conference (CAVEPS) in Australia in July putting the South African finds into the context of other Palaeozoic fish faunas from Gondwana.

A further, more detailed, multi-authored account dealing with the Warmwaterberg fish fauna will be compiled during the coming year. We will need to retain the collection for another six months to one year so that we can continue to photograph and latex cast important specimens as the work progresses. I hope that an extension of our loan is satisfactory to the Museum Trustees and Management, including yourself. Copies of all papers concerning your collections will, of course, be provided once they are published. The fossil material is safely housed in the Geological Survey collections at Bellville. The specimens were already numbered by Fiona and myself at Montagu (with the exception of 23 plant fragments) with the prefix MM so that they are readily identifiable.

Fiona Evans and I, as well as our other research colleagues, are very grateful to the Montagu Museum for the opportunity to study this scientifically important collection.

Yours sincerely,

John E. Almond
Dr John E. Almond
Palaeontology Section,
Council for Geoscience.

Document: Montagu Museum

DIE OMGEWING VAN MONTAGU:

'n Landskapstudie

deur Ar de Vries

Daar bestaan onder ou Montaguers die wanopvatting, dat hier in die omgewing waar vandag die dorp aangelê is, eers 'n groot meer was en dat op 'n sekere dag die berg oopgeskeur het, om 'n pad te baan vir die rivier wat daarna die groot meer gedreineer het.

'n Mens hoor hiervan soms in gesprekke en die storie kom al van ver af, want in die Hoërskooljaarblad van 1930, word die gebeurtenis dramaties beskrywe deur Carel van der Merwe: "Toe ou Montagu nog jonk was". En die skrywer lewer selfs die "Bewyse" vir sy bewering, soos die volgende: "Uit 'n put gegrawe in die tuin van mnr. Millin is jare gelede die fossiel

van 'n voëltjie gehaal wat deur deskundiges gerangskik word onder 'n soort wat in die wordingsuur van ons ou aarde naby binnelandse mere gewoon het." (Aan hierdie fossiel twyfel ek, want "in die wordingsuur van ons ou aarde", was daar nog nie voëltjies nie). En dan noem die skrywer op, "tesame met die honderde skroefklippies op die gholfbane, wat die fossiele is van 'n spiraalvormige seegras, die versteende skulpies op mnr. Frits Joubert se plaas en teen Kanonkop, die sandduine by Derdeheuvel en die koue lawa in Joubertspark is die letters van ou Montagu se kronieke en lê daar oop en klaar vir ons om maar net te lees".

Ek het nog nie die "skroefklippies" gesien nie, dus kan ek nie oordeel nie. Wat die "versteende skulpies" betref: wel dit kom voor in die Bokkeveldlae, ook hier in Montagu, maar is daarin opgeneem toe die lae in die oersee afgeset is, en daar kom sommer nog baie soorte fossiele in die Bokkeveldlae voor! Dit het niks met mere te doen nie.

En dis ook nie die eerste en die laaste verhaal oor die "oopskeur" van Cogmanskloof nie. In die skooljaarblad van 1956 lewer Marianna Thomson ook 'n opstel daaroor onder die opskrif "Montagu 200 000 jaar gelede". Daarin vertel sy hoe Aken daardie tyd in die bek van sy grot gesit het, "waar Aasvoëlkrans vandag oor Montagu troon". En toe: "die grond skud geweldig en hy hoor 'n harde skeurgeluid en toe 'n gedonder van water". Toe hy die volgende oggend wakkerskrik sien hy "die meer is weg en in die berge is 'n yslike skeur waardeur die moerasse se water besig is om weg te syfer".

Hierdie verhaal omtrent die meer en die oopskeur van die kloof, bevat nie 'n krieseltjie waarheid nie, want hier was nooit geen meer nie. Die twee bergpunte teenoor mekaar by die ingang van die Cogmanskloof pas net so min by mekaar, amper soos 'n "een-voet slipper" en 'n "ander voet velskoen". Die suidelike een is die berg se noordelike flank met sy tipiese swaaiplooie, wat

Brink Broers

BADSTRAAT MONTAGU
Telefoon 41160

//////
HOU HIERDIE RUIMTE IN

VOLGENDE MAAND SE UITGAWE

DOP, VIR ONS GROOT

SPEZIALE

KERS-AANBIEDINGE
//////

BESOEK GERUS ONS

KONTANTWINKEL

EN VERSTOM USSELF MET

ONGELOOFLIKE TRANSAKSIES.

teenoor 'n punt met daardie tipiese vertikale lae, soos wat dieper die kloof in en by Kalkoennes opgemerk word. Hoe na hulle oorspronklik teenoor mekaar was, is moeilik om te sê, omdat die rivier dit in die loop van tyd wyer kon gevreet het. Een ding is egter seker: hulle was nooit aanmekaar geheg nie.

'n Groot vraag is: Hoe het die rots en grond uit die Montagu-wyk verwyder geraak voordat die rivier oop was, ten einde hier 'n meer te vorm?

Deur skeppingswerk", sal sommige waarskynlik sê. Dit is ook korrek, maar onthou daar is baie elemente en agente in die natuur wat skeppingswerk verrig, soos die weer, wind en water, die diereryk, waaronder die mens die belangrikste is, die goeie boer en ook die swak boer wat deur sy doen en late sy grond laat verspoel.

Met die vloed van 'n paar weke gelede het daar weer honderde tonne grond met die rivier deur die kloof gegaan. Maar onthou die rivier is nou oop, tog toe hier 'n meer sou gewees het en geen rivier nie, wat het toe van die sand en grond geword wat in die meer gespoel is?

(Ek sal in die volgende uitgawe 'n bietjie meer oor Cogmanskloof uitwei.

Groete
Ar de Vries

Mar de Vries het hier 'n baie interessante aspek aangeroei. Ons hoor graag van u. Red.

Salon Beté

Markstraat, Montagu

TELEFOON 41720

TOT U DIENS

vanaf

VRYDAG 11 NOVEMBER 1983

Corien van Wyk

Ten volle gekwalifiseerd

en vertrouwd met die

jongste style.

(Voorheen van die Strand)

SPESIALE AANBOD

vir die maand November

SILKY SHINE

PROTETENE

PERMANENTE GOLWING

teen uiters verlaagde pryse



A typical article written by Ou Ar for the local Montagu news sheet of the day in 1983



City of Johannesburg

Public Library

Our Ref.: Mr P Burger
 Your Ref.:
 Date: 20 March 1984

Market Square
 Johannesburg
 2001
 Telephone
 836-3787

All communications to
 be addressed to the
 City Librarian

The Curator
 Montagu Museum
 Long Street
 MONTAGU
 6720

Dear Mrs Badenhorst

I should like to thank you most sincerely for
 the tabakhout kierie made by Mr Abraham
 Hermanus de Vries, of the Warmwatersberg area.

This kierie is an interesting addition to the
 Africana Museum's collection of walking sticks.

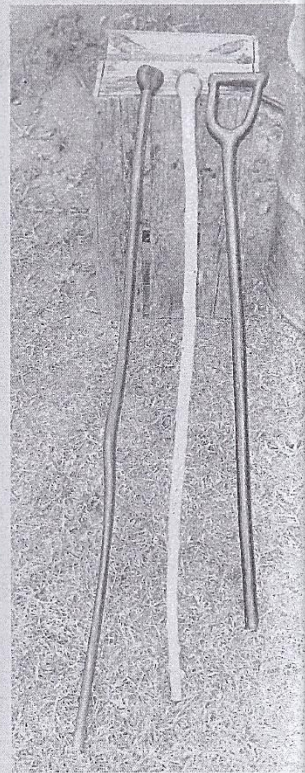
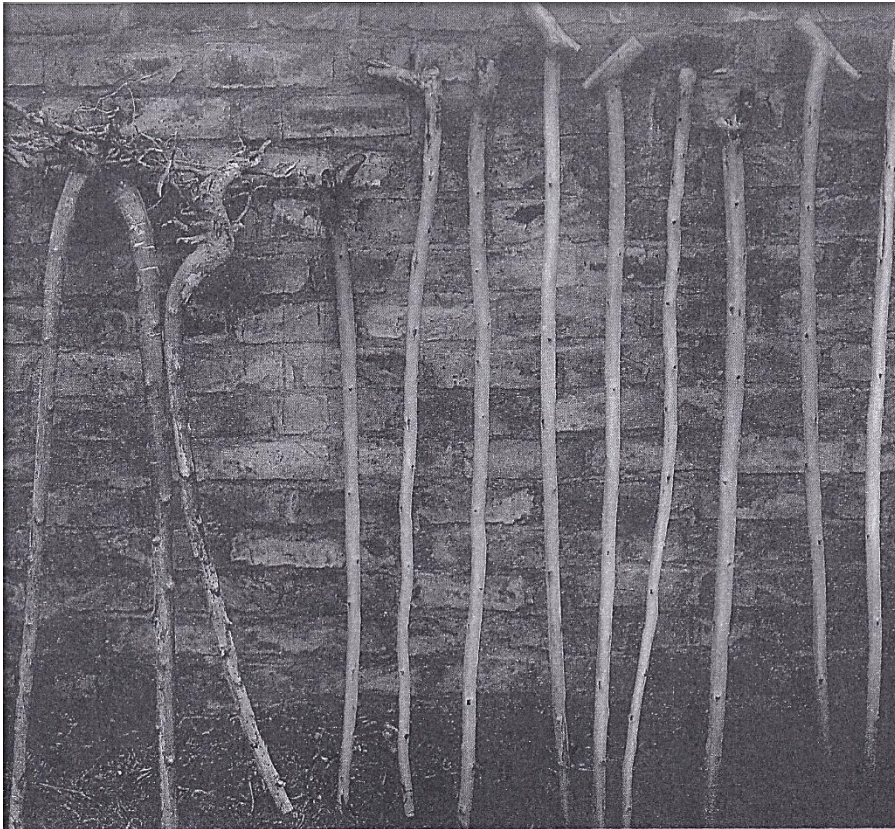
Your interest in the Africana Museum and your
 generosity are much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

(MRS) E B NAGELGAST
 CURATOR

PE/JG

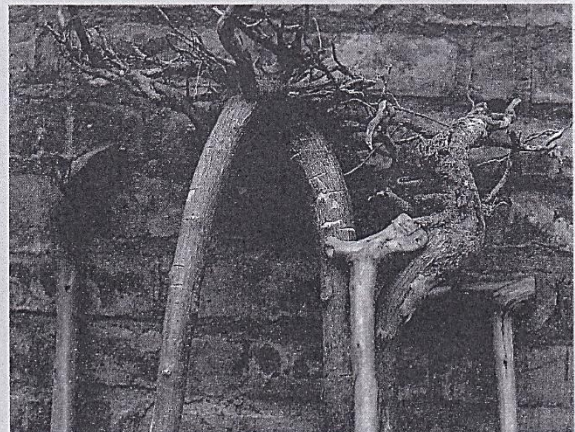
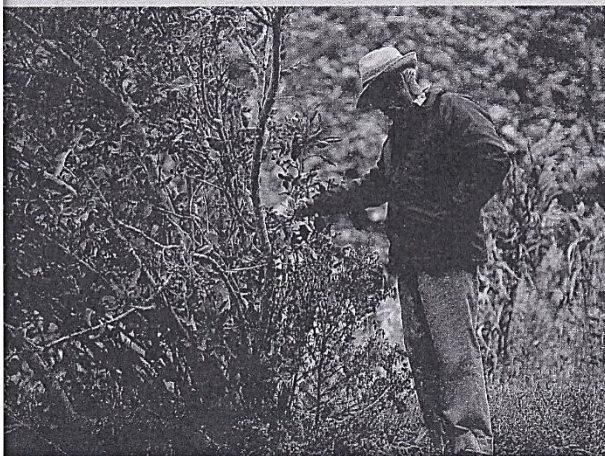
Die brief sal in die ander amptelike taal aan u gestuur word indien
 u dit binne sewe dae na die briefdatum hierbo skriftelik versoek



HIERBO: Regs is kieries wat nog 'n bietjie son nodig het om die regte kleur te kry. Wildetabakstamme het 'n natuurlike kieriehandvatstel waar dit uit die wortels spruit. REGS: Twee kieries van swart-olienhout, met 'n kareekierie in die middel. Veral swart-olien is deesdae baie skaars.

KIERIES VAN ONKRUID

Wildetabak, 'n Argentynse onkruid wat wyd versprei is en ook hier voorkom, het ideale takke om ligte kieries van te maak. 'n Afgetrede boer benut hierdie eienskap deeglik.



OM WILDETABAK vir kerie maak te gebruik, word die plant met wortel en tak uitgehaal. Wanneer droog, word die meeste wortels afgemaak. LINKS: Mnr. De Vries by wildetabak. Die hol stamme lewer ligte kieries wat veral by vroue gewild is.

MNR. Abraham de Vries, 'n afgetrede boer van Montagu, het 'n nuttige gebruik vir die onkruid wildetabak gevind. Hy maak kieres daarvan. Dit sal nou seker nie 'n danige duik in die onkruidprobleem maak nie, maar dis darem 'n bydrae.

Mnr. De Vries maak al die afgelope drie jaar kieres van die plant. Dit word aan die museum en Joubert-huis op Montagu, asook die Bolandse Opelug-plaasmuseum op Worcester verskaf. Die vraag is baie keer groter as wat hy kan voorsien.

Een van die redes vir die kieres se gewildheid is dat hulle baie lig is, omdat die plant se stam feitlik heeltemal hol is. Veral vroue koop sulke kieres graag. Heelparty kieres word deur oorsese besoekers gekoop.

Mnr. De Vries het ook onlangs begin om langer kieres vir bergklimmers te maak. Hulle is amper so hoog soos die hele wildetabakplant (*Nicotinia glauca*).

Die plant, inheems in Argentinië, is vandag 'n wyd verspreide onkruid. Dit is reeds se-

REGS: Mnr. De Vries is ook 'n amateur-argeoloog. Hier staan hy by twee fossiele wat hy onlangs in die omgewing gevind het.

deur **HUGO LOCHNER**

dert die vorige eeu in Suid-Afrika bekend. Mnr. de Vries trek dit met wortels en al uit. Normaalweg neem hy net droë plante, maar soms ook groentes.

Natuurlike knop

Al die sytakke word afgekap. Die vlak wortelstelsel wat knopperig uit die hoofstam groei, sorg vir die gerieflike knop bo-aan die kieres.

Nadat die bas afgestroop is, word elke kerie met rou lynolie behandel. Daarna sit mnr. De Vries dit in die son sodat dit mettertyd 'n mooi kleur kry en die olie goed intrek. Dit keer dat die kerie later kraak.

Hy het al kieres begin maak terwyl hy nog geboer het. Saans, ná die dag se werk, is kieres van karee- en swart-olienhout gemaak. Sulke kieres is wel swaarder, maar sterker



as dié van wildetabak.

Hout vir hulle raak nou baie skaars; veral swart-olienhout is feitlik onverkrygbaar. Die kieres van hierdie hout wat mnr. De Vries het, is van ou heining-pale gemaak.

Mnr. De Vries, wat ook 'n amateur-argeoloog is, soek ook fossiele in die berge rondom Montagu. Hy het onlangs twee ontdek. Een was 'n gefossiliseerde plant, en die ander 'n vis.

Kieres uit wilde tabak



MNR. DE VRIES loop hier met van die tabakplante in die veld buite Montagu.

MONTAGU. – Mnr. Abraham de Vries is nie net bekende amateur-argeoloog nie, maar weet ook hoe om onkruid met die spreekwoordelike wortel en tak uit te roei – veral as dié onkruid wilde tabak heet en dit as 'n verklaarde onkruid bekend staan.

Oom Ar, soos mnr. De Vries bekend staan, is die afgelope twee jaar al besig om kieres van die wilde tabakplant te maak. Die kieres word verskaf aan die Montagu-museum en die Joubert-huis hier, asook die Bolandse Opelug-plaasmuseum op Worcester.

En die aanvraag is groter as wat Oom Ar baie keer in kan voorsien. Een van die redes waarom die kieres so gewild is, is omdat dit so lig van kleur is. Die kieres is ook só lig dat veral vroue dit graag koop. Heelparty van dié kieres word aangekoop deur oorsese besoekers.

Die kerie bestaan uit feitlik die hele wilde tabakplant (*Nicotiana glauca*).

Die plant is inheems in Argentinië en vandag wydverspreide onkruid. Dit is reeds bekend in Suid-Afrika sedert die 19de eeu.

Oom Ar kap al die sytakke van die plant af. Die vlak wortelstelsel wat knopperig uit die hoofstam groei – met al sy verskillende fatsoene – sorg vir die gerieflike knop bo-aan sy kieres. Nadat dit met rou lynolie behandel is, het dié kieres 'n sieraad vir mnr. De Vries se eienaar geword.

**Two VIP Montagu customers
with their Ou Ar kieres**



Blackie Badenhorst with her kirie

Picture: Taken 2020



Esther Hofmeyr with her kirie

Picture: Amanda Haasbroek taken 2020



The kerie king

Text:
LINDA POLONSKY
Pictures:
GLYNN GRIFFITHS

HE'S the kerie king, is 75-year-old Abraham de Vries. Day after day he sits on an old wooden folding stool, in the back garden of his home in Montagu in the Cape, carving patiently away at his sculptural wooden walking, and climbing, sticks.

"I can't sit idle. I must do something with my hands," he says in an attempt to explain his unusual hobby.

The keries are "lekker for fighting", jokes Oom Abraham. But in fact the strong tobacco or karee woods from which they're made are so light that the chances of achieving a knock-out victory with one of them are remote.

Oom Abraham knows all the secrets of kerie craft. The wood he uses must come from the trunk of a very dry tree. And dry tree trunks are scarce commodities. In fact the trees he uses are actually dead — he simply removes the whole tree from the ground, using the roots as organic-shaped tops.

He knows exactly where to find trees at the correct stage of dryness. "That one comes from the Brakrivier Dam," he says, pointing to one of his extra long "berg-klin keries".

"Die Brakrivier dam is a vrek lekker dam, waar die meisies hulle hare was en kam," crackles Oom Abraham's voice, as he breaks out into song.

Now Oom Abraham quotes the poet C J Langenhoven. He recommended the centre of the Brakrivier Dam as the ideal place in which to seek a cure from asthma as it is the driest place he knew. Hence the presence of dry tobacco and

**Above: Abraham de Vries
saws down a dead tobacco
tree in the veld near
Montagu.**

**Right: Keries for Africa
from the hand of kerie
king, Abraham de Vries.**

karee trees in this same dam.

It takes Oom Abraham two days of intermittent work to complete his hand-made keries: shaving off the bark, carving the stick into the desired shape, sandpapering it for that satin-soft finish and finally oiling it with a mixture of linseed oil and turpentine.

His "work bench" consists of an old wooden vegetable box while his tools consist of a carefully selected collection of pocket knives, rasps, tiny saws and kitchen knives.

He can't remember how long he has been making keries — all he knows is that it was after he started farming in Warmwater Berg, near Barrydale, in 1943.

For the last two years his keries have been sold at the Montagu Museum. And at R7 a stick they've got to be one of the best buys around.

Articles: All above articles were found in the Montagu Museum

Contributors: Blackie Badenhorst, Ar de Vries jnr en Paul Fouche

--oOo--

Good News

(05/06/2023)

This information came to light after the Ou Ar Storie was posted

**Mr Abraham de Vries and his ancient fish from the Warmwaterberg
receive new recognition**



Mr Abraham de Vries was a remarkable man who lived a simple and traditional farming life in the dry valleys of the Farm Warmwaterberg near Barrydale. During the 1970s he enjoyed spending time alone in the valley at the back of his farm, from which he would return with impressions of strange plants and other curious things, embedded in the hard brown rocks that weathered out at the foot of the hills.

Later he showed some of them to visiting geologist Hannes Theron who was very excited, for these fossils dated back about 385 million years to the mid-Devonian Period, when the rocks making up the hills of the Warmwaterberg were accumulating as mud on the floor of an ancient, now gone, sea called the Agulhas Sea. Not much was known about life during these times in what is now South Africa, which then was close to the South Pole. Abraham de Vries donated some of his specimens to the South African Museum in Cape Town. From there some of them were loaned to scientists overseas, who recognised that they were previously unknown to science. In the early 1980s a strange new armour plated

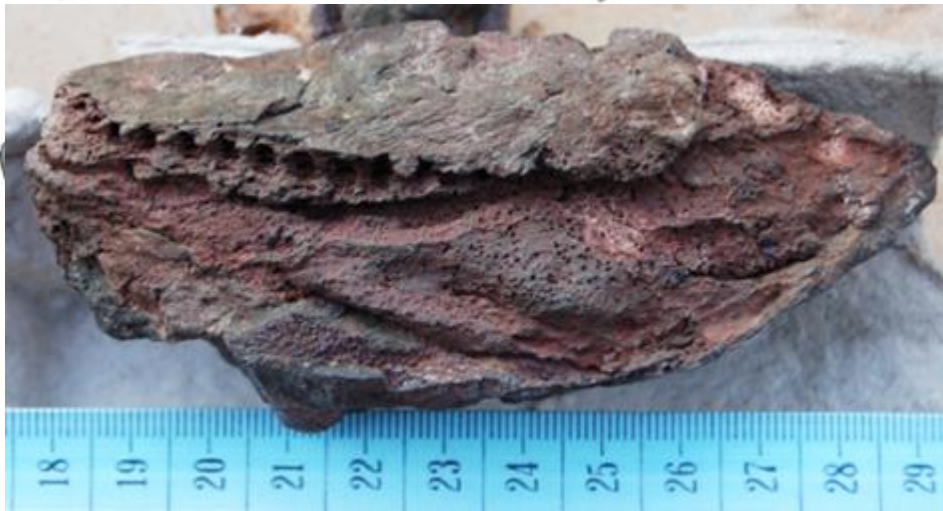
fish was named *Barrydalaspis*, based on one of the specimens. A new kind of plant, *Archaeosigillaria devriesi*, was also named in his honour.



Type specimen of *Barrydalaspis*, collected by de Vries on his farm Warmwaterberg - impression of the belly of an armour plated (phlyctaeniid, placoderm) fish.

Abraham de Vries subsequently collected more interesting fossils and when he retired to Montagu in the 1980s he donated them to the Montagu Museum for safe keeping. As there was nobody, at the time, studying Devonian fish and plant fossils in South Africa they were packed in peach boxes in a store room and almost forgotten. A group of palaeontologists including Dr John Almond examined them in the mid 1990s, and made latex peels of some of them, but they didn't publish any scientific information, and the fossils resumed their long rest.

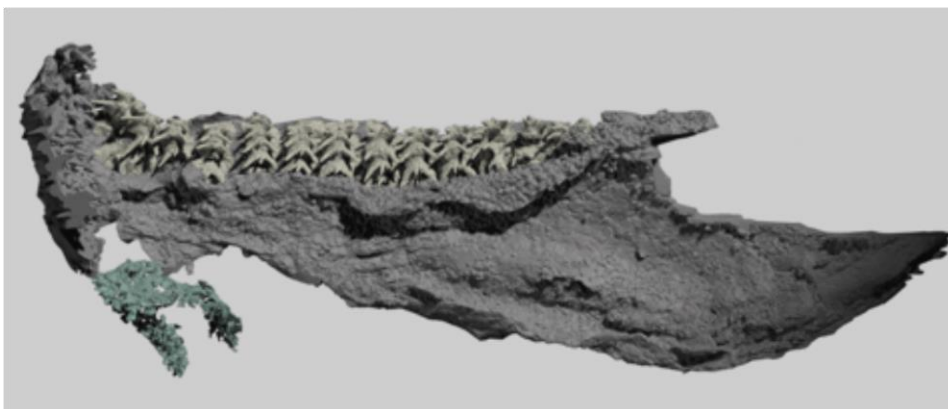
One of the biggest challenges regarding the fossils is that, in a sense, they are not so much fossils as air spaces, or moulds left in the rock where fossils used to be. They cannot therefore be prepared out of the rock for study.



Stone with a fossil impression collected by the observant Abraham de Vries.

was delighted to locate the specimen in a box deep in the depths of a former wine vat in the K WV building. Still, the means to properly study the fossil was years in the future. When years later Wits University obtained a micro-CT scanner that could peer inside rocks his mind immediately turned to the jaw in Montagu Museum. He borrowed the specimen and had it scanned. After many days had been spent by a colleague translating the digital slices into a 3 dimensional model of the space inside the stone, he could hardly believe his eyes. The image showed almost the entire jaw of an ancient shark with all its teeth in place. When it is published by him and his international colleagues he plans to name the new species after Abraham de Vries.

By now Dr Rob Gess is a world-renowned expert on Devonian fish and plants and directs a lab called the Devonian Ecosystems Project in Grahamstown. There he has assembled South Africa's largest collection of Devonian Plant and fish fossils which he actively researches with post graduate students and top international colleagues. At last South Africa has the expertise and technology to decipher the clues to Devonian life, locked in stones like those collected by the inquisitive Abraham de Vries.



High tech digital image of the specimen obtained by Dr Gess by scanning the air spaces inside the stone, showing an ancient shark jaw with all the teeth in place.

When South African Dr Rob Gess was studying for his doctorate on Devonian fish, in 2007, he became aware of the collection when Dr Almond showed him latex casts of some of the specimens. He was particularly interested in what appeared to be the outside of a shark jaw, similar to a slightly younger one that he was studying from near Grahamstown. He then visited Montagu and

The Montagu Museum is delighted to loan the Devonian Ecosystems Project the collection so that it can finally be properly scientifically studied, and Abraham de Vries' and his collection can receive the recognition and renown that they deserve. Early in June Dr Rob Gess came to Montagu to carefully pack the specimens currently in the old K WV building, for safe transport to his

lab for careful and meticulous study. Watch this space over the coming years for news of their discoveries.

--oOo--

The Contract

Montagu Museum
Montagu
7 June 2023

Loan Agreement for De Vries collection, between Montagu Museum and the Devonian Ecosystems Project, Albany Museum

This Loan Agreement is made and entered into on 7 June 2023 between The Montagu Museum, Montagu, Western Cape and The Devonian Ecosystems Project, Albany Museum, 87 Beaufort Street, Makhanda, Eastern Cape.

In consideration that the Devonian Ecosystems Project is the South African centre for the study of Devonian plants, fish and associated invertebrates, and that it is also the largest repository thereof, the Montagu Museum agrees to loan the De Vries collection to the Devonian Ecosystems Project for curation and research purposes.

The Devonian Ecosystems Project undertakes to sort and curate the material, as long as is feasible for the Albany Museum and/or until such time as the Montagu Museum may have adequate facilities to provide the collection with collection facilities in line with accepted guidelines. At such point in time the collection (or agreed upon portions thereof), will be returned to the Montagu Museum in the condition in which the material was loaned.

The Project agrees to use the Collection with the utmost care and diligence and to preserve it in the same condition as it was received from the Montagu Museum.

The Project will acknowledge the Montagu Museum and the late Mr A. de Vries in all publications or research findings that result from research using the Collection. They will furthermore provide the Montagu Museum with copies of all publications or research findings. Published specimens will, be provided with Albany Museum numbers for reference purposes and safeguarded within the Project's type store until such time as the Montagu Museum has type material storage facilities in line with NSCF guidelines.

On behalf of the Montagu Museum, Montagu

On behalf of The Devonian Ecosystems Project

Dr Robert W. Gess

--oOo--