

XHOSA HISTORY AND CULTURE: 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

The historical record of the Buffalo City area is one of movement and change. By the 19th century, the southern Nguni, Xhosa-speaking people occupied the Eastern Cape. In some cases the Khoi had been displaced, in others they had been integrated with the Nguni, forming groups, such as the Gqunukhwebe, who occupied a large part of the present Buffalo City area, when the first Europeans arrived. The arrival and influence of the missionaries brought changes into the black communities with some embracing the ideas of the new religion. Many however, clung firmly to their culture and retained traditions and loyalties throughout the 1800s and 1900s. The long struggle with the expansion of the white settlers took its toll and the Cattle Killing tragedy was a response to the erosion of control.

There are many sites which are held sacred and others which were the scenes of prophecy and importance in the Buffalo City area, as well as Great Places and graves of important figures in Xhosa history.

Sites selected

Graves – Nonthetha Bungu, Velile Sandile, Mgolombane Sandile, Walter Rubusana, Clements Kadale, SEK Mqhayi, Cattle Killing victims, Nonkosi, Khayalabantu Cultural Village
Visit to an authentic village suggested.

The East London and Amathole Museums have excellent displays on this topic.

THE CATTLE KILLING MOVEMENT 1856-1857:

Introduction

In 1856, a young girl, Nongqawuse, saw visions, which were relayed and elaborated on by her uncle, Mhlakaza. The message was that the people were 'tainted' and sacrifices would have to be made to cleanse them. All cattle should be slaughtered and there should be no cultivation. The dead would then arise and bring cattle and render assistance in driving the white men out of the land. Those who believed followed this and the result was that thousands died of starvation. This is a sensitive and complex part of history and snap judgements should not be made.

“The Xhosa Cattle Killing movement suggested in the first instance by the lung-sickness epidemic of 1853 tapped a deep-seated emotional and spiritual malaise resulting from material deprivation and military defeat”

[Péires, J.B., The Dead will A rise, 1989, p138]

NONKOSI'S POOL:

Introduction

Nonkosi was a prophetess in Ndlambe Chief Mhala's land. Nonkosi, the daughter of an old Xhosa doctor, Khulwana, used to play near a pool in the Mpongo River. In January 1857, when she was about 11 years old, she saw strangers at the pool. She came back with similar predictions to those relayed earlier by the prophetess Nongqawuse. Nonkosi proclaimed that

people should slaughter all their cattle and on an appointed day fat new cattle would appear and old heroes would be resurrected from the dead.

Followers of the cattle-killing prophecy of Nongqawuse, such as Mhala, embraced Nonkosi's reassuring prophecies. Mhala even slaughtered sacred cattle which should have been left to die a natural death. The result was mass devastation with thousands of people starving to death and being forced to leave their land to find employment in the Cape Colony.

In late September 1857, Nonkosi was taken from her home to Fort Murray, near King William's Town, for interrogation. She and Nongqawuse were sent to Cape Town where they were held in a defunct pauper's Lodge being used to house female prisoners. The Lodge was broken up in August 1859 and it is not sure if Nonkosi was returned with the female prisoners to East London.

Physical Description

The pool was about 30 meters from the Mpongo river when last seen by Burton. According to Burton it appears that the pool was once part of the Mpongo river. The river pool was said to be "over a 100 yards long and at least 30 yards wide". (Burton 102).

Location

The pool is situated about 3 kilometres south east of Macleantown.

Access

Travel along the N6 from East London towards Stutterheim. The site is on a privately owned farm.

Condition

The site was "covered with long grass" when seen by Burton (Burton 102). The pool was once deep but has since largely dried up with soil from adjoining ploughed lands washing into it.

Capacity and Constraints

The area can accommodate large groups. There are no ablution facilities nearby.

Recommendations

Permission must be sought from the landowner to gain access. Any signage, site maintenance etc must be negotiated with the farm owner.

GRAVES OF THE VICTIMS:

A sad reminder of this event can be seen in the graves of some those who died in the King William's Town area.

Location

Adjoining the old cemetery.

Recommendations

These graves have recently been identified by the Amathole Museum. Encouragement should be given to get the site proclaimed and signage erected.

MGOLOMBANE SANDILE:

Introduction

Mgolombane Sandile was born near Burnshill in the Eastern Cape in 1821. He was the son of Ngqika, the paramount chief of the Rharhabe. On the death of his father when only 9 years old, a regency was formed with his half-brother, Maqoma. The latter led a war against the colonists in the 1830's in which Sandile remained neutral. Sandile received support from the Cape and succeeded Maqoma in 1840.

Sandile supported cattle raids and following numerous confrontations with the British, his territory was annexed to the Cape Colony in 1866. He was drawn into the final Frontier War of 1878 in which he was killed and beheaded by a British soldier.

Sandile's body was taken to the homestead of a German, Schuch, in the Isidenge Forest. He was buried in the garden of the homestead between two British soldiers.

Location

His grave is in Isidenge Forest near Stutterheim

Access

Take the N6 from East London to Stutterheim. Take a left turn onto a secondary road. The route is signposted.

Condition:

The grave is maintained by the Isidenge Forest station?

NDLAMBE'S GREAT PLACE:

Introduction

Ndlambe's Great Place is situated close to Macleantown near the Xinira River. A group of boulders "Elitya ka Ndlambe" at the site are said to be part of the throne on which Ndlambe once sat (Burton 101). On the death of Ndlambe's father, Rharhabe in c.1787, Ndlambe was made regent over his nephew Ngqika. During his ten years of regency he succeeded in establishing himself as a powerful leader. In 1796 Ngqika insisted on taking over leadership. Numerous leadership struggles ensued. Ngqika was recognized by the Cape authorities as the only legitimate Rharhabe leader which only made Ndlambe more bitter and increasingly hostile towards the Cape colonists. Ndlambe died in 1828.

Location

Take the N6 towards Macleantown. The site is 10-15 kilometers from Macleantown near the Xinira River.

Condition

The site is overgrown at present.

Capacity and Constraints

The area can accommodate large groups. No ablution facilities.

Recommendations

The site requires clearing. Signage from the main road is needed.

NONTETHA BUNGU:

Introduction

Nontetha Bungu was a Xhosa prophetess and religious leader in the early 1900's. She was born around 1875 and grew up in Toyise location near King William's Town. She started prophesying in the rural areas of King William's Town, Middledrift and East London after recovering from the influenza epidemic of 1919. She and her followers attracted much attention. Growing uneasiness among the authorities concerning the gathering of followers in the aftermath of the Israelite Church skirmish at Bulhoek near Queenstown, Nonthetha Bungu was detained for "seditious activities" She was committed to the asylum at Fort Beaufort where she was repeatedly visited by followers demanding her release. This resulted in her removal to Weskopies Mental Hospital in 1924. Despite repeated visitations from followers, prominent family members and others all attempts to have her released came to nought.

On 20 May 1935 she died of carcinoma of the liver and stomach. She was given a pauper's burial. Various attempts over the years to have her remains exhumed and reburied were unsuccessful. With the aid of Robert Edgar, a researcher of African religions, the Eastern Cape Government, Rebecca Street Cemetery, Department of Anatomy and University of Pretoria, her remains were located and identified, and reburial took place at a church at Khulile near King William's Town on 25 October 1998.

Physical Description

Grave with headstone.

Location

Khulile near King William's Town.

Access

Take the N2 from King William's Town

Capacity and Constraints

The area can accommodate large groups.

WALTER RUBUSANA:

Introduction

Walter Benson Rubusana was born in 1858 at Mnandi in the Somerset East district. He was educated at Lovedale College. He was ordained in the Congregational Church in 1884 and became a minister at East Bank Location in East London. He participated in the establishment of the newspaper, *Izwi Labantu* (The Voice of the People), while in east London. He authored "History of South Africa from the Native Standpoint" and collected many Xhosa praise poems which he later published.

In 1910 Rubusana was elected to a seat on the Cape Provincial Council representing the Thembu people. He was the only ever black elected to such a position. Rubusana was one of the founder members of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) which later became the ANC. Rubusana played a key role in protest politics, joining two protests to London, one against the proposed Union Constitution in 1909 while in 1914 he joined a SANNC delegation to protest the Natives Land Act.

Walter Rubusana died on 19 April 1936 in East London at the age of 85.

Physical Description

The grave and headstone of Walter Rubusana lies with three other graves of members of the Rubusana family.

Location

The graves are situated in a graveyard next to a sportsfield below the Assemblies of God Church established by Bhengu in 1957. The graves are situated with graves of the Siyo family. Fikile Siyo was a former cabinet minister in the Sebe Government of the former Ciskei and a rugby selector in Duncan Village.

Access

Travel from Cambridge Cemetery to Union Avenue (M1). Take the Amalinda Highway (M4) towards the Frere Hospital. from the Museum. Turn left into Braelynn. Turn in Azalea Street and continue straight across the three way stop. At the bottom of the hill is the sportsfield. The area opposite the field is what was the old East Bank Location.

Condition

Graves are maintained by the Municipality

Capacity and Constraints

The area can accommodate large groups

Recommendations

The sports field is not used. The field was originally built for Black sportsmen but not used because of the grave sites. It was hoped that the Indians in the area would use the field when the blacks declined. However the Indians refused in solidarity with the blacks. Possibly this could be converted into a Garden of Remembrance for cultural heroes or heroes of the struggle?

SEK MQHAYI:

Introduction

Samuel Edward Mqhayi was born in the Tyume valley near Alice in 1875. He was educated at Lovedale College and worked as a teacher and journalist. He published many books and Xhosa poetry and praise. He composed seven verses of Nkosi Sikelel' I'Afrika. He was the imbongi who delivered the address to the prince of Wales in King William's Town in 1925. He died on 29 July 1945 and was buried near Berlin. A tombstone was erected over his grave on 26 March 1951. He is one of the most studied and respected figures in Xhosa literature.

Physical Description

Tombstone erected in memory of Samuel Mqhayi by a church group. The grave of his son and an unmarked grave are nearby.

Location

The gravestone is situated on a dolerite ridge outside Berlin near the Roundhill waste site.

Access

Travel along the old Mount Coke Road. One leaves the main road near to a railway crossing. The grave site is situated at the foot of the hillock known as *Ntab' azuko* (The Mountain of Glory).

Condition

The site needs to be cleaned up and maintained.

Capacity and Constraints

The area can accommodate large groups. There are no ablution facilities. Signage is non-existent. The roadway from the old Mount Coke Road to the grave requires attention.

Recommendations

Signage directing tourists to the site is needed. Information boards should also be erected

CLEMENTS KADALIE:**Introduction**

Clements Kadalie was born in Malawi in the 1890's, the exact date unknown. He was educated at a Scottish mission school and later became a school teacher. He left Malawi in 1916 and settled in Cape Town where in 1919 he established a trade union, the Industrial and Commercial Worker's Union, among dockworkers. This urban-based union flourished, but disputes over funds and leadership resulted in a loss of support in the Cape. Attention was turned to the rural areas of Transvaal, Natal and Orange Free State to mobilize a mass support base. By the end of 1927 there were more than 100 ICU branches with 100 000 membership around the country. Continued financial problems and leadership struggles led to the demise of the party. In 1929 Kadalie left the party and established the Independent ICU based in East London from where he led strike attempts, attempted to prevent the final disfranchisement of Cape blacks in 1936 and generally concerned himself with non-white trade union and political interests. A hall in the former East Bank Location was named after him.

The mobilizing of mass support, and the use of rallies and strikes for political and economic ends by the ICU shaped the way in which black political organizations in South Africa developed in the future.

Clements Kadalie died on the 28 November 1951. He was buried in a graveyard in Duncan Village. His wife, Eva Kadalie, was buried next to him following her death on 16 December 1974. Neglect resulted in the exhumation and reburial of remains in the Cambridge Cemetery in 2001.

Physical Description

Grave with headstone

Location

Cambridge Cemetery, East London

Access

N2 from King William's Town. Take the M1 off ramp and turn right into Western Avenue. Turn right under Cambridge subway at the Devereux Avenue intersection into Kingsway Road.

Condition

The grave site is maintained by Cemetery staff.

Capacity and Constraints

The area can accommodate large groups.

Recommendations

Signage demarcating the grave site and hall should be erected. Tours to the cemetery should be organized in negotiation with the Cemetery manager.

KHAYALABANTU CULTURAL VILLAGE:

This is specially constructed "Xhosa Village". Guided tours are available and dancing can be organised.

Location About 30 km from East London in the Mooiplaas area. Signs off the N2.

Access: By appointment. Tel 043-851 1011 or 083 9816336.

CULTURAL VILLAGE:**Recommendation:**

This area is in the fortunate position of having people still living in villages and having a rural lifestyle, which would be of great interest to tourists, many of whom would prefer 'the real thing'. One tour operator who had initial success when she organised that rural women entertained a group of tourists in their huts, provided food and told stories. The tourists were delighted. Unfortunately on a later visit, some men appeared demanding brandy. This indicates potential, but would have to be carefully organised.

EAST LONDON MUSEUM and the AMATHOLE MUSEUM:

Both these museums have exceptionally good exhibitions, which depict both the historical record of the indigenous peoples, display artefacts from their material culture and illustrate many of their traditional rites of passage.