RIETFONTEIN
Rietfontein aan Zandberg

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Rietfontein is one of the original and oldest Strandveld farms. Its history goes as far back as the 1740s when the first Europeans moved into the Strandveld. *Rietfontein aan Zandberg* was awarded to Petrus Arnoldus Gildenhuyzen in the 1740s for animal husbandry. Matthys Rostock Lourens received grazing rights on Rietfontein in 1755 and also used the farm as a loan place. At the time he was already living on neighbouring Ratelrivier. Rietfontein always was used for grazing for the different owners’ flocks of sheep and was never used to plant crops. The managers ploughed small fields where possible to sow grain for own use. Flowers were harvested in the late 20th century.

As with all the other old Strandveld farms the inhabitants of Rietfontein easily made a living from living off the land. Rietfontein had a big vegetable garden, kept chickens and a few cows. The vegetables were grown for own use. The sea is very near and in those days all old *werwe* had a fish-drying rack. *Haarders* was dried and pickled and *Perlemoen* and *Alikreukel* were part of the regular diet of the Strandveld people. *Springers* from the vleis were caught for own use. The spot on the coast where the river enters the sea was called *Waaiplek*. The river flows from Geelrug via the salt pans and *Haarders* were caught from this river as well. *Rietfontein se Baai*, about 4km from the *werf*, is a favourite fishing spot for local anglers.

Through the years there always lived a Lourens family member on Rietfontein and *oom* Piet Lourens, the last inhabitant, lived on the farm for 52 years. In 1839 the Cape Government registered the land formally in the name of Dirk Gysbert Van Breda and from then on Rietfontein always had a strong historical connection with its neighbour, Ratelrivier. The Albertyn family bought the farm in 1917 and sold it to SANParks in 2003.

The buildings sadly burnt down completely in 2003, but were restored in 2009. Unfortunately at the end of 2009 a devastating fire roared through the Park and Rietfontein *Langhuis* burnt down again. It was completely restored in 2011.

LOCATION
Rietfontein is situated on the southern slopes of Soetanysberg, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and the coastal line, in the Overberg Sandstone Fynbos. It has a panoramic view of the Ratel River plains and Quoin Point to the west and the Agulhas dune field to the east.

BUILDINGS
The farmstead consists of a typical *Langhuis* and a barn, enclosed by a stonewall. It was built with limestone in the 18th century with thatched roofs.

*Langhuis*
The house is a typical *langhuis* built according to the local Strandveld vernacular style with limestone, clay bricks, wolf-end gables and a thatched roof. The house was extended on both sides over time as was the practice when the family grew bigger. The
eastern section of the house up to the chimney gable in the middle of the structure is the oldest. The house has no doors on the sea side, only windows.

From the eastern side the first room was the Milk room, also called the separator room. The back window was originally a side-hung window. The ceiling was made of reed, hessian and clay. The next room was the Buitekamer (outside room). The back door was walled in and a door was put in the front wall. The next room was the Kleinkombuisie (small kitchen) which was the original kitchen of the oldest section of the house. It had a built on baking oven. The kitchen with the chimney is as it was used by the last inhabitant, Oom Piet Lourens. The kitchen had a reed ceiling and a stable door with four glass panes in the upper door. The front door also was a stable door with four glass panes in the upper door. Originally it was a solid door.

After that, followed the Voorhuis (lounge), Bedroom and the big Bedroom which was used at the time, by the owner of the farm. He fitted the ceiling with wooden planks which were sourced from an old church. A bathroom and toilet was also added at a later stage. The last room on the western side was the Meelkamer (flour room).

A wooden ladder was used to get to the loft.

The barn
The barn is thought to be older than the house and is more than 225 years old. Memory has it that the date c1786 is carved on the front wall on the eastern front corner but, is unfortunately covered. It is built with limestone, sandstone and clay bricks on a koffieklip outcrop. It also had a reed ceiling and thatched roof. On the mountain side was the Horse stable and a stable for the stallion, which dated from the time the farm belonged to the Van Bredas. Both had troughs. On the side of the house were a hay room (Strooikamer) and a fodder room (Voerkamer). The one room had chicken nests in the inside wall. The wagon shed on the eastern side had a big wooden door.

Worker’s house
The worker’s house, a few metres from the werf, was built in the 1960s by the Albertyn family. It was destroyed in the 2009 fire, but completely restored in 2011.

OTHER STRUCTURES

Stonewall
It is believed that the stonewall is the oldest structure on the werf, also more than 225 years old. It is dry-packed with limestone. The wall follows the contour of the mountain. A gate in the wall on the mountain side leads to the old footpath over the Soetany Mountain to Geelrug, SoetenSuur and Hangnes, old farms on the northern side of the mountain.

Horse paddock
The paddock is packed in the corner of the werf as part of the stonewall. It was first used for horses and later the cattle that grazed freely in the veld were herded to the paddock to receive medicine for animal diseases.

Graves
There are six graves covered with limestone outside the stonewall on the eastern side. Four graves are possibly those of shipwreck people. There are also two graves of a farm worker and his son nearer to the mountain.
WERF

Vegetable garden
A big vegetable and fruit garden was situated at the back of the Langhuis. It was irrigated with a water furrow from the small dam which was fed from the fountain under the milkwoods. On the eastern side of the garden grows an old Cape mulberry. It was most probably planted in the 1800s. Pomegranate hedges and fig trees are still growing in the garden.

Fountain
The fountain is under the milkwoods at the back of the werf. Generations did their washing on a washing stone (wasklip) in the fountain. Water is pumped from the fountain to the house with the wind-pump. The fountain stopped with the big 1969 earthquake, but started flowing again in 1979 after heavy rains.

Earth dam
An earth dam west of the fountain was dug to store water from the fountain. The dam is overgrown with bulrush and reeds.

Furrow
A furrow was dug from the earth dam passing the house on the west to irrigate the vegetable garden. A natural vlei west of the furrow takes the overflow of water down to the plains. This vlei is usually overgrown with arum lilies which porcupines love to eat.

Bore-hole
A bore-hole of 20 feet was sunk when the fountain stopped after the 1969 earthquake. It is not used at the moment.

VEGETATION TYPE
Rietfontein is situated in the Overberg Sandstone Fynbos (Mucina & Rutherford; Mustart, Cowling, Albertyn). It consists mainly of proteoid and ericaceous fynbos containing species such as Protea compacta and Leucadendron xanthoconus occurring on deep acid soils which overlay Table Mountain sandstone. It is distributed irregularly from Bot River and Hawston in the northwest to the Soetansberg, Bredasdorp mountains and Agulhas hills in the Southeast. It is the least threatened vegetation type with a conservation target of 30%. Only 6% is statutorily conserved in Agulhas National Park and other conservation areas. About 6% is transformed by cultivation. Typical specimens are Botrivier protea, Protea compacta, Sickle-leaf cone bush, Leucadendron xanthoconus, Erica tenella, Paasfeesblom, Erica filipendula; Rooistompie, Mimetes cucullatus, Rooi sewejaartjie, Cape everlasting, Phaenocoma prolifera, Luise, Speldekussing, Pincushion, Leucospermum cordifolium.

ANIMAL LIFE

Birds
A list is available.

Small game
To be identified.
IMPORTANT FEATURES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Soetanysberg
Soetanysberg or Soetanys Mountain, is one of Agulhas National Park’s most iconic spots of interest and an important botanical site which makes it an important node for fynbos conservation. It derives its name from the Anysboegoe, Agathosma cerefolium which grows abundantly on the mountain and its foothills.

Described as a steep coastal mountain, it reaches an elevation of 248.6m above sea level and is the highest point in the eastern section of the Park. This is also the guiding height for the limitation for use by aircraft of 2,500 feet (762m) above highest point over the current Agulhas National Park. The flight height is thus 1010.6m or 3315.5 feet. It is ± 16km NW of the Southernmost tip. The mountain consists of sandstone and quartzite of the Table Mountain Group. Soils derived from these rocks are acidic and highly infertile. Soetanysberg is part of the Hagelkraal land system with shallow well drained grey calcareous sands.

The Soetanysberg area as a botanical site is approximately 100km² and supports seven different fynbos types. Four of these - Limestone proteoid (restricted to limestone substrata), Elim asteraceous fynbos (unique to the Agulhas Plains), (Wet) Restioid fynbos (closely associated with vleis and drainage systems) and Neutral sand proteoid fynbos (confined to colluvial sand derived from limestone) are endangered in the Cape Floristic Region. Patches of the threatened Elim asteraceous fynbos grows in the Soetanysberg area. Together with, Heuningrug, Elim (24 x 28 km) and Soetanysberg, more than 60 Red Data Book plant species were identified, of which at least 15 are threatened.

Soetanysberg features one of the Strandveld’s most unique and secret cultural historical structures namely the stonewalls. These stonewalls were most probably packed between 1780 and 1820. It is about one metre high and very visible on the mountain. It was the borders between the different farms, but also was meant to keep the different Van Breda merino sheep flocks from each other. Most of the land belonged to the Zoetendals Valle Van Breda family in the 17th century. It is not known who packed these walls. The eastern side of the mountain was cultivated extensively for fynbos planting in the seventies and eighties. The disturbance of the natural seedbed could clearly be seen after the big 2009 fire. The re-growth in these areas differs dramatically from the neighbouring natural veld and will take time, if ever, to recover.

Soetanysberg provides the most extraordinary views over the ocean to the south and the Agulhas Plains to the north.

Pans and vleis
To the west of Rietfontein wert on the plains are a series of natural pans and vleis. What is Vispan today, was called the saltpans in the old days. Wasvlei is situated further inland and Drievleitjies in between the two. A big furrow was dug from Dirk Uyskraal River which passed Wasvlei and which was diverted when Wasvlei was dry. Salt was harvested on the saltpans and oom Piet Lourens harvested 20 bags of salt at times. Only the Rietfontein inhabitants harvested salt on this pan. Nachtwacht farm’s flocks of sheep grazed Rietfontein’s veld. During shearing time the sheep was washed in Wasvlei and then transported with donkey wagons or horse carts to Nachtwact to be shorn. Shearing time was in September and washing the sheep was done until early in
the 20th century. The flocks consisted of 200 to 300 sheep. A special enclosure at the saltpans was called the rams' paddock (ramkamp).

The water that fed these pans came from Geelrug during the rainy season and filled the plains. It was channeled into a furrow at a later stage to control and to lead the water to the saltpans. The entrance road to Rietfontein crosses the furrow at the lowest point on the plain, passes Melkbospan and then down to the pans and vleis.

The vleis and pans were also filled from the sea at the spot called Waaiplek, with high tide and brought the springers. This happened in the winter months from June. The plains were flooded regularly in the 1950s, but from the 1960s it rained less and there was less rain.

Melkbospan is a very good seasonal birding spot.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & SOURCES

Persoonlike herinneringe
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Other
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