Site Category: Building

Directions:
19.5 km from turn-off, along gravel road.

Site Comments:
Archive Import History: Far to the north of Beaufort West stretch the hard, parched plains of Williston and Canarvon. On many farms in that area corbelled houses or so-called klip rondawels may still be seen. These dwellings are interesting examples of the ingenuity of the earliest White inhabitants in the area and important landmarks in the cultural history of South Africa. They also represent a special phase in the history of vernacular architecture in this country. When the first settlers moved into this treeless environment, they found it devoid of timber for building houses. It did not take the ingenious farmers long to solve the problem of building their houses with the only material available to them, stone: they built rondavels and, sometimes, rectangular huts of stone without the use of timber. The walls, often 76 centimetres thick, were built vertically to a height of two metres; then the successive courses of flat stones were laid overlapping inwards, the opening gradually becoming smaller as each course was laid, until it could be closed by one large flat slab. To facilitate maintenance without the use of scaffolding, stones were allowed to project outwards at suitable intervals to provide stepping-stones for the repairer. This corbelling technique resulted in beehive-shaped 180 rooms about five metres in diameter and seven metres in height. Originally the floors were of clay mixed with the blood of animals; they became stone-hard and, polished regularly, they acquired a reddish-brown glow. The doorstep was raised well above ground level and in the back wall, opposite the door, was a window with a wooden shutter. The windows were intentionally small and sometimes set at an angle in the wall so that if Bush men should attack, they would not be able to shoot arrows easily or directly into the rondavel. Shelves were built into the walls and the rough, crooked roof-ties placed at the level where the corbelling began were used to dry biltong and hang up items of domestic equipment. At first a farmer would build a single rondavel; later he or a successor might add a second or a third, or a rectangular room. In this way each corbelled house acquired its own individuality. In order to preserve this interesting building technique, in itself a part of our architectural heritage, the Historical Monuments Commission has proclaimed five examples of the houses, each carefully selected on account of its particular features. They are situated on farms along the road between Williston and Carnarvon, at varying distances from the road. They are, in order when travelling from Williston: (1) Grootfontein: About 24 kilometres from Williston, a road turns to the north. The house is on the left of this road, about 16 kilometres from the turn-off. (2) Arbeidersfontein: This rectangular hut is about 35 kilometres from Williston and some kilometres from the main road. (3) Schuinshoogte: A few hundred metres to the left of the road and about 40 kilometres from Williston. (4) Gorras: Beside the main road, 64 kilometres from Williston, just before one reaches the Gorras railway siding. (5) Stuurmansfontein: About 110 kilometres from Williston and 26 kilometres from Carnarvon, a road turns off to the north. Stuurmansfontein lies 29 kilometres along this road. Proclaimed 1964, 1965, 1966 Visual Description: Circular stone corbelled building, with adjacent flat-roofed extension. Roughly plastered and whitewashed. Colours: Site Features: Condition: Fair Interior requires maintenance. Construction Date: Materials: Catalogue: Corbelled buildings, No: , Significance Category: Damage Types: