

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/064/0003/001
	Site Name	Post office tree area, Bartholomeu Dias Museum
	Date	Complex, Mossel Bay
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-34.180486, 22.141394

Page No: 1 **SiteAutoID:** 28139

Site Category: Natural

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: A romantic tale centres round this tree in Munro Bay Road, about one kilometre from the Mossel Bay railway station and 350 metres from Santos Beach. Nearly two and a half centuries before the white colonists found their way with difficulty over the mountains and along the coast to Mossel Bay, the first European to set foot on South African soil, the Portuguese discoverer Bartholomew Diaz landed here. A spring near the shore provided water for his ships and the bay soon, perhaps even at the time of Diaz's voyage, became known as the watering-place of São Bras. It retained this name throughout the Portuguese period, for it was only in 1601 that the Commander of the Dutch fleet, Paulus van Caerden, renamed the bay Mossel Bay because the only food he could find there consisted of mussels. Here, just as in Table Bay, visiting sailors left messages for one another. Best known of these is the one that the Portuguese Commander Joao da Nova found on 7th July, 1501, in an old shoe tied to a tree. This message had been written by one of the captains of Pedro Alvares Cabral's fleet. After the discovery of the route to the East by Vasco da Gama in 1498 and in view of the hostility with which da Gama was regarded there, the King of Portugal sent out a powerful fleet under command of Cabral in March, 1500. Bartholomew Diaz went with him to organize the gold trade with the East Coast of Africa at Sofala. Cabral's fleet encountered a terrible storm in the South Atlantic, in which several ships, including that of Diaz, were lost. Even before Cabral's fleet returned to Portugal, another under Joao da Nova was despatched to the East. It was on this voyage that, on arrival at Mossel Bay, Da Nova found the letter referred to, left for him in an old shoe tied to a tree by one of the captains of Cabral's fleet on his return voyage. In this letter Da Nova was informed of the conditions in the East, of the fact that the death of Diaz by drowning had made it impossible to establish a factory at Sofala, and of Cabral's visit to Cochin; in conclusion, he was warned not to put in at Calicut. Later a small hermitage was built near the tree in which the shoe had been tied, and Da Nova also left some so-called "Post Office stones" there. One of them, on which Da Nova had engraved an inscription during a visit in 1505, is preserved in the South African Museum; a cast of it can be seen in the public library in Mossel Bay. According to tradition it is this old milk-wood tree, now known as the "Post Office Tree", that played such an important role in this romantic historical incident.

Proclaimed 1938" Visual Description: White Milkwood (Sideroxylon Inerme) 5 m tall Colours: Site Features: Condition: Construction Date: Materials: Catalogue: WinterBauman, No: PB 11, Significance Category:

AdminComments:

According to legend, Pedro D'Ataide, a commander of one of the Ships in Cabral's fleet which followed Da Gama and Dias in 1501, left a letter in a navigators boot hanging under a milkwood tree. This contained a report of a disastrous storm that had hit h Bibliography archive:

Damage Types: