

# **The Residential Development on the Farm Vluytjes Kraal Noord, Orania**

## **Heritage Report**

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## **The History of Orania**

The reconstruction of the past is never complete. Nevertheless, archaeological knowledge and historical resources can provide sufficient facts to write something meaningful about the people who lived over thousands of years in the area now known as Orania. It is also possible to recognize different periods of human occupancy.

### **Prehistoric people**

The area where Orania is established has been visited as long as 30 000 years ago by Stone Age hunter-gatherers with a nomadic lifestyle who spent short periods of time there. Evidence of their stay is typical artefacts of the middle stone age type. Large quantities of these artefacts are scattered on the hills above the Old Dairy Farm and the Bush camp. Here, the creators of these artefacts had a panorama view of the Orange River. The Orange River is the largest river in South Africa and one of the world's largest. Certainly it was a major reason for the presence of humans and animals. This factor also applies to a modern Orania.

Late Stone Age people (San/Bushmen) have also found Orania's appealing. Besides rock artefacts hundreds of engravings on dolerite rocks were found of the hill which stretches in western direction from the Orange River. A comparison with studies of prehistoric engravings elsewhere in the Northern Cape indicated that the same techniques were used in the Orania's engravings. The dark brown surface of a dolerite stone were scratched with a sharp stone so that the light brown undercoat of the subject appears clearly displayed. It is the oldest technique and is known as fine line and it is dated elsewhere in the Northern Cape to about 4000 years ago. Some fine line engravings are found in Orania from which a small zebra is a good example. With time, the lines of this type of engravings have browned completely and the visibility is often difficult. Younger techniques, the pitch and scraping techniques, are in the majority and most of the engraving art belong to this technique. Subjects with these techniques show different degrees of browning depending on age and exposure.

Orania's prehistoric engravings contain a wide variety of topics including some human figures, animals that were found in the area including: eland, giraffe, hippos, rhinos, zebras, elephants, ostriches, a leopard, a fish, and other unidentified game. Although the artists portrayed in their engravings what they were eating, their engravings often also contained messages of their religious beliefs and cultural symbols. The eland has played an especially important role in the San religious life and were mostly used as subject.

The arrival of the white hunters, trekkers and Griquas has put the San cultural structures under great pressure. Confrontation with commandos in the second half of the 1700s led to the collapse of all resistance and led the disappearance of the art.

## The historical period

The San group have, after the destruction of their resistance against the occupation of their hunting areas, became friendlier with the farmers and were also employees of the farmers. For some time they still continued with their nomadic lifestyle. The earliest indication of white man's presence in the area today known as Orania is a date, 1762, along with other engravings but a different technique than that of the San. A white deserter of hunter was probably responsible for it. L. Louw was already in 1810 in the Vluytjeskraal area and he engraved the date on a rock with eland engravings. Many farmer families have moved seasonally back and forth across the Orange River in search of better grazing. Eventually they permanently lived across the river. In an attempt to stop the process, the Cape's borders moved in 1824 to the Orange. It did not help. The Farmer's motives were primarily land and no opposition against the Cape government.

The map of Rawstone dated 1842 shows numerous drifts through the Orange River, including Zoutpansdrift and the farm Vluytjeskraal. A later map shows a relaxation area at the ford where Vluytjeskraal's hill was easily accessible. White visitors to Vluytjeskraal, like the San hunters in the past, felt the need to engrave something of their presence on the stones. Names, dates, interesting phrases were engraved in many places, sometimes next to older engravings and even over them. Graffiti from the Anglo-Boer War include names of British soldiers, an armoured train and engraving on a stone on which a Boer marksman kept score of his victims (53 vertical stripes).

The Vermeulen family has a long association with Vluytjeskraal. In 1882 Stephen Ockert Vermeulen (SO) bought the farm after he earned enough money as a transport driver. The engraved deal is neat and clearly readable, in the Dutch from the time, on a stone. Every 10 years, he confirmed on the stone that he still occupies the farm. His words are given here because it is symbolic of his love and affection to the ground:

S. Vermeulen het deze plaas

gekoop in het jaar 1882 voor de

zomme van 3952 - 4 - 5

alle koste bei

en was nog hier in 1892

en ook nog in 1902

“ “ “ “ 1912

“ “ “ “ 1922

“ “ “ “ 1923

“ “ “ “ 1924

“ “ “ “ 1925 Oupa dood 12 April 1925 B.V. (gravering deur Baby Vermeulen, 'n kleindogter)

S.O. Vermeulen changed his routine after 1922 of every tenth year of engraving and engraved again in 1923 but he made an error and wrote 1922. He tried to change the 2 to a 3 but he wasn't very successful. He engraved the following year and again in 1925, the year in which he died. The numbers of those last 3 years were shallow and more unclear than the previous. Apparently his health wasn't good and he knew he was going to die. Apparently it was important to S.O. that the descendants should take note of the years he owned Vluytjeskraal. On the eastern side of the hill there is still a rock with his name engraved on and every year from 1881, when he apparently came to live on the farm, till 1902 and after that a single date, 1910. According to a relative of S.O., he those the place of his grave. His grave and his house are both visible from the hill where his engraving is.

S.O. Vermeulen was married to Catharine de Wet, and they had four children. According to family legend, he supplied horses to Gen. Christiaan de Wet during the war. An action that should have earned him the wrath of the English government. During that time he also assisted the residents in the concentration camp at the Orange River Station. S.O. was apparently quite wealthy and he became the owner of the first car. On his first attempt to drive, apparently without training, he landed the car in a hole and the windscreen fell out.

After S.O. Vermeulen's death the original farm were split between the couple's four children. The town of Orania and the neighbouring farm is on the part that Phillipus Rudolph (born 1881) received. The original home of S.O. still stands today and is in a beautiful restored condition. In 1942, Douw Vermeulen purchased a part of Vluytjeskraal from his father's estate. He engraved the deal on his grandfather's stone. With this act he confirmed the importance of the family to own the farm. Douw and his family's house stands in an altered state of the old dairy farm. A road has connected the two houses.

There was mainly sheep farming and Douw bought the first karakul sheep in 1946 into the neighbourhood. In 1950 Vluytjeskraal was sold for 5 pounds per acre to Gideon Botha.

## **The Department of Water Affairs build Orania.**

On 23 March 1964 Mr. P.K. Le Roux, Minister of Water Affairs, announced the Orange River Scheme in the Senate: "The desert will be a paradise." In 1964 Vluytjeskraal was expropriated by the Dep. Of Water Affairs for the construction of houses for workers to build the canal system south of the Orange River Scheme. In 1965, Orania was built as a complete town with five other construction camps elsewhere. By the end of 1965, 65 families lived in Orania. During the 25 years that Orania was managed by the Dep. Water Affairs, employees and their families had, by their own accounts, a good quality life. Former residents have contact with each other and visit Orania occasionally. Children who grew up and attended school also arrive there.

There was a church build by the residents themselves as Water Affairs did not want to because the residents belonged to several churches. The residents attended church together. There was a white and coloured school, a shop, shooting range of Hopetown army cadets and a rugby field (Orania had two teams and had played in the Conroyliga). There was also provision for basketball, Jukskei, squash and tennis and a swimming pool. Concerts were held regularly and there were a bioscope in the community hall. Wrestling promoter, Bull Hefer had presented a tournament with wrestler John Wilkens on the rugby field. The women did the homework after which they sat under the trees and talked until it was time to prepare supper.

According to the legislation of the time there were separate houses for white, coloured and black workers. Every evening at 9 o'clock the siren announced that the gate will close to the coloured neighbourhood, Groot Gewaag, and the black hostel and residents had to be back. The current Orania, east and west, were known as East and West Berlyn. Houses were pre-manufactured according to established standard floor plans include H, L, T, U shapes. Concrete was used generously for foundations and the town's roads.

Although Orania was a complete town, Water Affairs associated the life span of the town to the completion of the Orange River Scheme. The southern channel system has never become a reality and there were two attempts to close Orania. In the period 1979-1982 they tried in vain to offer the town to other government departments, and again in 1989 but without success. Water personnel were transferred to larger towns and the town was empty except for a number of coloured families. Squatters began to move in and vandalism and neglect contribute to the deterioration of the town. Property received lot numbers, still visible in some places, to sell and be demolished. Farmers in the area bought houses for R5 000.00. Especially Orania West has gone through severe deterioration and there are still open stands where the foundations are visible. In a further development, the Department of Public Works and Land Affairs received Orania to sell it. Mr. J. Pretorius of Broadway, Johannesburg bought the town for R1 050 000.00 on behalf of Vluytjeskraal (Pty) Ltd (not registered). He could not obtain the necessary funds

and Orania were sold to Orania Management Services, with Prof. Boshoff as chairman, for R1 300 000.00.

### **Orania “Afrikaner” Home**

In the 1980s it was already clear that the writings were on the wall for “Afrikaner” management in South Africa. The only hope for the “Afrikaner” nation survival was its own land. The Northern Cape with its low demography and large spaces, were suited for this, according to researchers from SABRA. Nevertheless, the birth of Orania as “Afrikaner” Home was not premeditated, but the result of a combination of circumstances where opportunities often arose when it appeared that the process failed. Prof. Carel Boshoff stated that the birth almost was a miscarriage. In retrospect we realize today that the Almighty was at the helm of our destiny. On 13 April 1991 Orania was officially opened as “Afrikaner” Town and National State Growth Point. The first step was given to the ideal of a homeland for “Afrikaners”. The town was neglected and partially demolished. The original infrastructure, however, survived and the newcomers could immediately start with the establishment of an “Afrikaner” Community.

There are two main periods in Orania's development history distinguished viz. an establishment phase until about 2000 when the Supreme Court on 4 December ordered that Orania's Transitional Representative Council with all its powers will continue with a view to negotiations regarding autonomy. Afterward's rapid growth in all aspects of community life that occurred and continues to this day.

The first 10 years of Orania's can be reviewed as follows: The first town council is composed of shareholders of OBD but was soon succeeded by an elected town council of board members of Vluyteskraal company shares (VCS) and a representative of OBD. Jery Pelser was the first mayor. Renus Steyn, town manager of the first years and still remaining active in town affairs, told tales of a stormy time with interesting personalities. In June 1991 the Volkskool opens with Julian Visser as head. Significant is an investigation of the Northern Cape Department of Education at the school that shows an unusually large number of children, which were tested, were gifted or highly intelligent. A number of church congregations were established to provide for the historical diversity in “Afrikaner” circles. They began to interview prospective residents. They had to relate to the society's ideal of freedom and they had to sign the Constitution. Everyone had to understand meaning of the term "volkseie arbeid" (their own labor) and execute it. Farm 272 was purchased and a 9-km pipeline to an irrigation scheme was constructed. Vegetable production begun and also mass pecan plantations. Experimental plantings of olives and almonds were done. In April 2000 the first Volkstaat Fair were held and had a turnover of R60 000.

The above mentioned are but a few events of Orania's first step toward freedom. There were a lot of prophets of doom and emulation, but gradually there was more

understanding and even admiration for Orania as a pioneer community developed. After 2000, Orania's institutions increased and began to show a sustainability which were seen by the media and particularly by academic researchers. Orania's Development Forum, which represents Orania's institutions, acted as a brainstorming forum for ideas, and played a major role in this regard. Institutions that showed a particularly strong growth were the Orania CVO- and Orania Volksskool with increasing numbers of children from outside Orania visiting the school and making use of the Volksskool's distance learning facility. Orania is unique and is newsworthy and it is not surprising that our town is increasingly included in tourism programs. A large number of journalists from a wide range of countries visits our community annually and represents our town to their readers.

The purchase of land remains a priority and Kambro co-operative played a major role in this by the purchase of several other farms. Orania's population increased to 850 with an associated increase in demand for properties and an increase in land prices. Orania's Ora currency is sought after by collectors of bank notes and is a symbol of local economic vitality and creativity. Currently there are about 100 economic sectors of different sizes operating in our town. Orania has its own flag as a symbol of their identity and political level, the Orania representative council had discussions with the Northern Cape government on our municipal status. In 2010, an Integrated Development Plan (IDP) was accepted. It is designed after an intensive investigation of all aspects of Orania's community life, by Louw van Biljon (a town planner). In order to execute the plan, the Town Council's structure has been customized to make provision for a chief executive supported by departments with their heads. Development is now a priority. By holding conferences on topics that affect "Afrikaner" freedom and expert use of media have Orania's recipe for "Afrikaner" survival become more acceptable in South Africa.

On March 16, 2011 prof. Carel Boshoff died in his 83rd year of life after his wife Anna passed away three years earlier. Prof. Boshoff as former chairman of SABRA contributed to the development of the Volkstaat concept as the only long-term plan for the "Afrikaner" assertiveness. He has realized this ideal with the creation and sustainable growth of Orania as "Afrikaner" home.