

# Cockscomb History

At 1768m above sea level, Cockscomb is the highest peak in the Groot Winterhoek range. Cockscomb is an eye-catching proud mountain peak that is visible from some parts of Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth) and Jeffreys Bay. Cockscomb is approximately 49km from the sea as-the-bird-flies. For mariners in previous centuries, Cockscomb was the grand landmark when returning from India, or the east. Cockscomb would generally have been the first land they would have seen after weeks at sea <sup>48 49</sup>.

## Bushman

The Bushman name for Cockscomb was *Cuncungwa*<sup>1</sup>, which means misty peak. There are Bushman paintings scattered all along the Groot Winterhoek range on both sides of the ridge. There are two caves with paintings on the ridges to the north of Cockscomb peak. The closest known paintings are in *Echo Cave*, about 440m in altitude below the summit and 800m to the northwest. *Tokolosh Cave* is on the path on the ridge up the northern side between *Pinnacle Gorge* and *Grootbosrivier Kloof*. *Tokolosh Cave* is about 480m in altitude below the Cockscomb summit and about 800m from Cockscomb peak. There are numerous caves that would have provided shelter for Bushmen on the ridges and in the valleys below Cockscomb. They would have hunted eland and smaller antelope on the high plateaus on the Winterhoek ridge. The Bushman may have migrated to the coast at certain times of the year using various migration paths over the Winterhoek ridge. It is highly likely that the Bushman made the first ascent of Cockscomb peak.



Some of the Bushman paintings in *Tokolosh Cave*. The figure to the right is the “Tokolosh” where the cave gets its name. The long-arms and huge penis suggest that the “Tokolosh” may be a person in a state of “trance” or under the influence of psychedelic drugs. The other figures appear to be carrying potion containers on their waists.

Before European settler times there would have been plentiful game on the Groot Winterhoek. H.A. Bryant recorded in about 1889 that a dazzle of zebras was seen running on the slopes on Cockscomb. He said that herds of elephants, buffalo & kudu wander free and undisturbed upon the slopes of the Winterhoek Mountains <sup>51</sup>.

## Colonel Gordon 1786

Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon, who was Dutch of Scottish decent, made five journeys in Southern Africa between 1773 and 1786. These journeys were on horseback accompanying an ox wagon party. He kept detailed journals in Dutch on his travels <sup>2</sup>. Charles Lennox Stretch <sup>1</sup> recorded in his journal that Gordon had ascended Compassberg and Cockscomb. Apparently, Gordon left his spy glass in a fissure on Cockscomb, *where it still remains*. Gordon's ascent could be the first recorded ascent. Colonel Gordon did make various high point ascents which are recorded in various of his travel journals. He mentions what could have been Cockscomb variously through his journals and records the correct height. He also records Cockscomb on his map <sup>3</sup> and in illustrations <sup>4</sup>.

*Note from scribe: A conclusively record of an ascent of Cockscomb could not be found in any of Colonel Gordon's journals or letters that are available online.*



Colonel Robert Jacob Gordon 1743 - 1795

## Charles Lennox Stretch 1829

Charles Lennox Stretch <sup>1</sup> recorded his own ascent of Compassberg and Cockscomb in his journal. This ascent in about 1829, with an escort of local farmers, was made for the purpose of taking measurements with a compass and theodolite. It is not known from which side Stretch climbed to the summit. Unfortunately, high wind on the summit prevented Stretch from making any measurements. Stretch was born in Bristol in 1797. He served in France in 1815, during the latter days of the Napoleonic wars and was deployed to Cape of Good Hope in 1818. He moved to the Eastern Cape in 1819, where he took part in the Battle of Grahamstown. In 1823 became a land surveyor in Graaff-Reinet. He served as a Captain in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of Provisional Colonial Infantry (a Khoekhoen unit) during the 1835 frontier war. He served as a Resident Agent to the Ngqika (Xhosa tribe) for eleven years. Between 1854 and 1873 Stretch represented several constituencies in the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council of the Cape Colony.



Charles Lennox Stretch 1797 - 1882

## Walter Stanhope Sherwill 1840

Walter Stanhope Sherwill recorded in his journal and a newspaper article in the Graham's Town Journal an unsuccessful attempt to climb Cockscomb from the northern side in 1840. Sherwill who came from a military and mountaineering family was an officer in the English East Indian Company. He reached at least the rank of Captain, but was employed by the company as a revenue surveyor and economic geologist. Based in Calcutta, he rose to professor of surveying at the Civil Engineering College.

Cockscomb was the first land that Sherwill saw after a long voyage from India. Even while still at sea he longed to climb her slopes. On landing he asked around for people who had climbed to the summit or any information on Cockscomb. He could not find anybody who had heard of anybody summiting and most people had not even heard of Cockscomb. Eventually he found a wagon driver who had been to the base of the mountain. At the time of Sherwill's attempt to climb Cockscomb he understood that he would be the first human on the summit of the peak.

Sherwill set out from Port Elizabeth on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1840 in an ox wagon with Eden Baker. They took four days to reach *Wellige Fontyn*, the farm of Field Cornet Hendrik Petrus van Staaden. *Wellige Fontyn* is immediately north of Cockscomb and is

probably the farm now called *Willige Rivier* (Willow River). Sherwill, Baker and a hired guide proceeded up a route that is probably similar to the “jeep track” which is to the east of what is now known as *Momentum Gorge*. They reached the top of Winterhoek ridge roughly where the “jeep track” reaches the top. From there they traversed west to the ridge that runs up the eastern flank of the eastern peak of Cockscomb. At this point Baker was exhausted and declined to go further. Sherwill left Baker with the guide and continued alone up the eastern ridge of the east peak (to the east of *Shepherds Cave*). He did not manage to reach the summit of the eastern peak. In his journal Sherwill makes a loft description of what he saw from the point that he turned back in the late afternoon. *Scribe’s note; some of what Sherwill said he saw from his high point is unlikely or over stated.* Baker fired a shot to remind Sherwill to descend in time. Sherwill responded by waving his handkerchief on a stick to show his location. Baker’s fired a second shot as acknowledgment. Sherwill started his descent and the party made it back to the farmhouse intact <sup>15 48 49</sup>.

## *William Atherstone 1849 & 1971*

William Guybon Atherstone, born 1814 in Nottingham, England. He moved with his family to the Eastern Cape in 1820. After qualifying in medicine (MD) in Heidelberg, joined his father's medical practice in Grahamstown, in 1839. He was the first doctor in South Africa to administer an anesthetic. A man of many interests, Atherstone is best known as a geologist. He was one of the pioneers of South African geology and a founder of the Geological Society of South Africa at Johannesburg. He was also the first geologist to identify a diamond in South Africa (1867), a white pebble that had been found by Stephanus Erasmus Jacobs, the son of a farmer near Hopetown. Later named the *Eureka Diamond*. Atherstone collected palaeontological material and named many fossil reptilia from the Karroo beds, presenting specimens to the British Museum in London. He also collected South African plants and sent material to a number of European botanists. *Strychnos atherstonei* Harv. in the Loganiaceae is one of a number of plants named after him, sometimes treated as the distinct genus *Atherstonea* Pappe (1862). <sup>56</sup>

Atherstone made his first ascent of Cockscomb on 14th October 1849. Atherstone’s ascent was from Elands Rivier on the southern side & would have been roughly the route taken by the current *jeep track*. The Winterhoek was covered in snow on the day of their ascent. The party consisted of Atherstone, George White and Mr Erasmus, who would likely be from the farm *Erasmuskraal*. Atherstone was aware of a cave that they could sleep in if benighted. This would probably have been *Echo Cave*, as this is the most prominent & provides the best shelter. Atherstone was aware that Sherwill had not reached the summit of the main peak. It is unknown the exact route Atherstone followed up to the peak from the ridge, but his account sounds like the route up the northern side or a variation that starts in the saddle on the east side & moves to the northern side.

In 1871 Atherstone made his second ascent of Cockscomb with George Shone. This ascent was from the south starting at Groot Rivier Poorte, past Roode Geevel & then past Van der Walt Hoek. It is unknown what their exact route would have been. They overnighted in a cave on the way back to the farmhouse. <sup>16 55</sup>

## *Robert Pinchin 1870*

The “Pinchin party’s” successful summit was in response to a challenge laid out by The Eastern Province Herald. The party consisted of Easter holiday excursionists from Port Elizabeth, Robert Pinchin, Thomas Worlmaid, S.F. Fairbridge, George Chase and W. Armstrong. They were joined by locals from the northern side farmer L.D. Erasmus, Lodewyk Kleinhans, Henry Rudman, Thomas Rudman, John Rudman and two Khoikhoen farm workers, who were employed to carry up provisions. Mr Erasmus who was lame and walked with a crutch, rode his horse, Klinker, to the saddle at the base of the scramble on the northern side. He then very ably climbed to the top using mostly his upper body. Erasmus was one of the best, if not, indeed, the best climber of the party. The party succeeded in scaling Cockscomb on Good Friday 15 April 1870 <sup>54</sup>. They spent the night on the summit and descended at noon the following day <sup>32</sup>. Pinchin wrote an account of their ascent that was published in The Eastern Province Herald <sup>34</sup>. Pinchin and Thomas Worlmaid were the engineer Robert Pinchin and the town clerk Worlmaid who were involved with the Van Stadens River Water Works. Robert Pinchin constructed the first weir on the Van Stadens River in 1865. <sup>33</sup>.

Cockscomb saw numerous local ascents after 1870. These ascents were from the north and the starting point was from the Rudman's farm Willow River. From at least the 1890s onwards the Rudmans ran guided trips up Cockscomb <sup>5</sup> and would collect aspirant submitters from the Kleinpoort Train Station for an additional fee. C. B. Rudman, in 1920, said that he had made fourteen trips to the summit, mostly with school groups from Uitenhage. Apparently, the Rudmans provided farm workers who led aspirant hikers and donkeys laden with their comforts up to the saddle. From there the hikers scrambled up standard easy route on the northern side. This is called *Gardener's Corner* <sup>8</sup>.

## Surveyor Parties

Sapper D McDonald of the Royal Engineers and his party of surveyors made an ascent of Cockscomb on 31st May 1860. They camped on the summit for three weeks while making observations for the trigonometrical survey of the Cape Colony <sup>15</sup>. Captain Bailey and a survey party made an ascent in 1861 <sup>34</sup>. This party camped on the saddle at the base of the scramble on the northern side, where the Pinchin party found their tent pegs 9 years later <sup>54</sup>.

Colonel William Morris, a surveyor with the Royal Engineers, built a stone beacon on the summit in 1890. He was accompanied to the summit by a forefather of the current Rudmans who live at *Willow River* <sup>5 15</sup>.

The stone beacon was replaced with a concrete beacon in 1919 by an assistant to the surveyor Martin E. Smuts <sup>5</sup>. The assistant, who was "colored", is only referred to as "G" (*Scribe's note: it is unfortunately that we do not know more about G. In those days' writers did sometimes only record the first letter of a name. It was not a practice specifically reserved for non-Europeans*). G traveled ahead of Smuts and built concrete beacons for surveying. On Cockscomb G was assisted by 20 laborers, 15 of whom were brought from Steytleville as there was a shortage of farm labor. Materials for the beacon were transported to the saddle on the northern side by donkey train. From the saddle the materials were carried by the labors up the steep scramble to the summit. G's beacon team dug holes to catch water under boulders 20m to the south of the summit. These are still used occasionally by hikers and climbers to quench thirst. *Note from scribe: one of these holes had drinkable water in 2003, where poor planning found this scribe on the summit after 10pm, exhausted and dehydrated after a long day of rock climbing.*

In September 1920 Smuts, G, four laborers and six donkeys went to the summit for the actual survey. The party followed the bridle path that started out from behind a shop at the Rudman farm at Willow River. In those days there was a "good" shop at Willow River. The bridle path <sup>5</sup>, cattle track <sup>7</sup> or jeep track <sup>11</sup> route followed by early ascents would be approximately the same as the dirt track to the east of *Momentum Gorge* that continues down to Elandskroon on the Elands River on the south side. On the Winterhoek ridge they would have contoured westwards to the final scramble up the peak of Cockscomb. Smut's account indicates that they camped on the saddle exactly due north of the summit. On a steep part of the scramble, they found some iron pitons that were placed by Colonel Morris in 1890. On the summit Smut's team erected an observation tent over the beacon. His observations were delayed by mist and were only made the following day. Under the summit boulder Smuts found a bottle with scraps of paper recording names and dates of previous ascents <sup>5</sup>. An article in the EP Herald says there was a small notebook in a glass jar on the summit that recorded that Smuts and a "native" had made the ascent in exactly 3 hours <sup>37</sup>.

*Note from scribe: Car to summit in 3 hours is quite a feat! Would be interesting to see the notebook and scraps of papers from the summit jar.*

In 1910 Elizabeth Frazer-Grant, Miss Bale, Miss Gairdner and a guide provided by the Rudmans, made it to the summit expecting to be the first women to summit <sup>18</sup>. They however noted in the summit book that there had been two women in 1888. The names of these two women have been lost.

## Heliograph Record

There is a bit of a legend about a heliograph record being set during the Anglo-Boer War, where messages were flashed by heliograph from the “Cockscomb mountain” to Compassberg (202km) or Nardouwsberg (148km). The stone wall on the top of the peak is supposedly the remains of a British heliograph station. However, normally a heliograph would be little more than a set of tripod mounted mirrors. There would not be a building or any permanent construction. It would be a specific location used for transmissions when required. The site would be occupied for a few hours or several days depending on what type of communication was required<sup>23</sup>. Long distance and long-term heliograph networks required significant manpower, organization and logistics to be effective<sup>19</sup>. It may be that the signalers built the wall for shelter from the wind and to pass time.

*Note from scribe: Despite a number of contemporary mentions, on the internet, of the above record being made during the Anglo-Boer War, no conclusive evidence of a heliograph record set during the Anglo-Boer War involving Cockscomb could be found. This may be a distortion of a similar record as per below.*

The Eastern Province Command Signal Unit can trace its history back to the early 1900s. They claim a world heliograph distance record for a message sent on a 5-inch mirror. The message was sent in 1911 by Captain Sadler of the Natal Carbineers from Compassberg to a Major Home on the “Cockscomb Mountains”<sup>23</sup>. The record is specific to the size of the mirror<sup>23</sup>. There are longer heliograph distance records made with larger mirrors. A 5-inch mirror had a normal working range of about 85km in good sunlight<sup>22</sup>.

*Note from scribe: this might not be Cockscomb peak specifically, but somewhere on the Groot Winterhoek ridge.*

The Anglo Boer War came within 45km of Cockscomb. General Jan Smuts and the Rijk Section, which included Deneys Reitz (author of Commando), came from the direction of Zuurberg and reached Glen Connor on 02 October 1901 before turning north. This “invasion of The Cape” by Smuts’ commando is known as *The Long Ride*. They skirmished with the British at Bothaskraal close to Glen Connor. Three young Boers were killed on the Brakkefontein mountain just north of Glen Connor. The British had thousands of soldiers along the railway line between Blue Cliff and Jansenville. General French was using the railway to maneuver his forces to block Smuts’ passage. Smut’s movements and coordination of British stopper groups troops was communicated via telegram, but this was often cut by Boer forces or sympathizers<sup>20 21</sup>.

*Note from scribe: While it is possible that the British may have been coordinating intelligence and the movement of troops via a system of heliographs, that may have included a station on Cockscomb or on the Groot Winterhoek range, the scribe could not find a record to support this.*

## Eastern Province Mountain Club

In December 1950 Desmond Polak placed an advert in the Port Elizabeth Herald inviting people to join him to climb Cockscomb<sup>11 14</sup>. Over the New Year’s long weekend 30 December 1950 to 1<sup>st</sup> January 1951 Desmond Polack, Dennis Moore and Stella Smith summited Cockscomb from the north, via *Waterfall Cave* which is on the northern side of the Groot Winterhoek ridge in the upper reaches of *Momentum Gorge*<sup>14</sup>. During the climb Dennis Moore conceived the idea of forming a mountain club<sup>14</sup>. On returning Polak advertised a meeting to form a mountain club that would be held in the Athenaeum Club in Port Elizabeth<sup>14</sup>. Thirty-two people attend this meeting and the Eastern Province Mountain Club was formed on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1951<sup>11</sup>. Fred A. Magennis aka “Pop Magennis” was elected President, Desmond Polack was the first Chairman, Dennis Moore the first secretary and Stella Smith became treasurer<sup>11</sup>. The Eastern Province Mountain Club official became a section of the Mountain Club of South Africa on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1954<sup>9</sup>.

The first official Mountain Club meet to Cockscomb was led by Frank McLachlan up the cattle track on the northern side<sup>11</sup>. Joy & Frank McLachlan had walked up Cockscomb on a few occasions between 1945 & 1949<sup>53</sup>. At this stage the cattle track

(variously called the bridle path, cattle track or jeep track) was the only known and most used path up Cockscomb <sup>11</sup>. The paths that are currently used up the northern ridges past *Tokelosh Cave* and past *Echo Cave* were cairned out between 1951 and 1970 <sup>11</sup> by the *Nearly Friday Club* <sup>25</sup>. The *Nearly Friday Club* was an EP MCSA splinter group that met at the King Edward Hotel <sup>26</sup>. From the mid '50s till *Echo* and *T'Numqua Caves* took over in popularity, *Dassie Cave* was the cave that the EP MCSA and *The Nearly Friday Club* camped in on trips to Cockscomb. When *Dassie Cave* became too small for larger parties, the club used *Echo Cave* <sup>29</sup>. The first proper roped rock-climbing route up Cockscomb was *Coronation Buttress* on 1st June 1953, the day of Queen Elizabeth's coronation. Arthur Harlow led this party to the summit <sup>10</sup>.

With the formation of EP MCSA, walking up Cockscomb became very popular. At a stage the EP MCSA was making weekend trips to the summit at least once a month. Cockscomb and the land on all sides of the peak was privately owned land. Although the members of the EP Section had good relations with the farmers and foresters, they desired to own a portion of land on the summit that would secure access and conserve the peak for future generations. To this effect they started to negotiate the purchase of what became Portion 1 of Afgunst 255. Afgunst 255 is the farm to the northeast of Cockscomb. Portion 1 is 51 hectares, shaped like a slice of pizza, making up approximately a quarter of the summit, includes the top portion of *Pinnacle Gorge*, *Echo Cave* and *Dassie Cave*. This section of summit land was (perhaps still is) hugely desired by the Mountain Club, but ultimately, with much angst the purchase fell through <sup>11</sup>.

## *Frank McLachlan*

McLachlan spent the last years of the Second World War operating in the Apennines in Italy. With the collapse of German forces, his unit moved across the plains of Lombardy to Turin, where McLachlan saw the snowy peaks of the Alps. A military trip to climb Mont Blanc was organized & McLachlan unsuccessfully applied to join. This was the start of Frank's' love of mountains. Soon after getting back to Port Elizabeth, McLachlan and Graham Properjohn made a trip up Cockscomb. By more luck than any skill they found their way to Willow River to the north where they slept the night. The following day they summited & returned to Port Elizabeth. Prior to 1949, when their son Anton was born <sup>29</sup>, Frank made another trip up with his wife Joy & a friend Johan Eggers. Frank was invited to the inaugural meet of the Eastern Province Mountain Club by Fred Knight. Frank was a founder member, served on committee as a treasurer, secretary, chairman and finally as president from 1993 till 1998. He was made an honorary life member in 1992 <sup>53</sup>.

## Echo Cave and Ben Loots Hanekam Private Nature Reserve

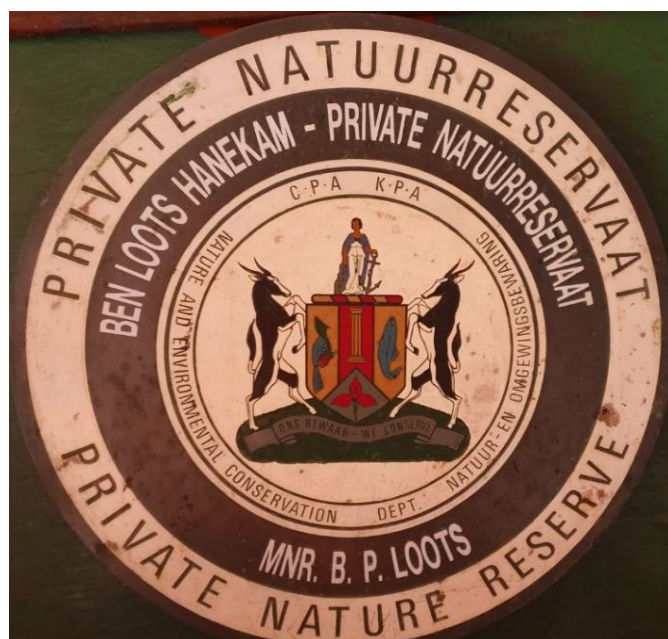


The Bushman painting in *Echo Cave*. Possibly a man playing a musical instrument. Photo courtesy Werner Illenberger collection.

*Echo Cave* was “discovered” by Les Armer and Charles Haynes in the mid ‘50s<sup>11</sup>. There are a number of faded Bushman paintings in *Echo Cave*, but one is still quite easily visible. The original name for *Echo Cave* was *Dance Floor Cave*, this may indicate that there were still signs of wear left by Bushmen during their dance ceremonies when the cave was “discovered” by Europeans, but may also indicate the huge size of the cave. Directly under *Echo Cave* is a deep low cave that extends for about 10m. This low cave is in a band of red ochre and may have been where Bushmen collected (mined) ochre. Red ochre was primarily used as body paint, possibly for rituals, decoration or simply to prevent sun burn. Red Ochre was also used in painting.

*Echo*, also called *Eggo*, has a good view of Cockscomb from the northeast and gets the name *Echo* because any noise made in the cave returns from the steep gorge opposite in the form of an echo. In the ‘60s and ‘70s this was where majority of parties stayed on the mountain.

Ben Loots, a prominent magistrate in Port Elizabeth, purchased Portion 1 of Afgunst 255, a 51 hectare portion of land that included *Echo Cave*, *Dassie Cave*, *Shepherds Cave* and the northeast quarter of the Cockscomb summit. The Loots family have over the years made a considerable effort to make *Echo Cave* surprisingly comfortable. The first challenge was to get an easily accessible water source for *Echo Cave*. The closest natural water is in the stream at the top of Pinnacle Gorge about 300m steepish walk from *Echo*. The first attempt at solving the water situation involved building a small earthen dam about 100m southeast of *Echo*. When this proved unsuccessful, Ben Loots devised a plan to pipe water from *Arch Waterhole* into *Echo Cave*. *Arch Waterhole* a natural permanent water source on the most eastern minor peak of Cockscomb was discovered Erik Manson in 1956<sup>11</sup>. This is about 500m west of *Dassie Cave* on the same contour. The water source was modified to include a catchment trough which was piped more than 500m into water tanks in *Echo Cave*. The pipe is very discreetly buried so that there is no sign of it today. This must have taken considerable labour and effort. The water tanks are connected to a convenient tap in *Echo Cave*. There is also a flush toilet about 30m below the cave and a shower about 40m from the cave. Most of the materials were carried from the jeep track approximately 3km away. Some of the larger items like the picnic table were flown in by air force helicopter in about



The plaque and coat of arms of *Ben Loots Hanekam Private Nature Reserve*. The *Disa uniflora* (red flower) at the heart of the coat of arms is also the emblem of the Mountain Club of South Africa. Perhaps this symbol signifies that the Mountain Club was foundational and central to Ben Loots’ heart? We can only guess. Photo courtesy Werner Illenberger collection.

2005. The circle of rocks in the neck to the east of *Echo Cave* marks the helicopter landing spot<sup>30 31</sup>. The hut in *Echo Cave* was completed in 1977. Years ago a redwood tree was planted a few metres to the west of *Echo*, a group of flowering gums and blackwood were planted within a 100m of the cave. Apparently, these were for firewood. In 1988, Portion 1 of Afgunst 255 was proclaimed a private nature reserve known as *Ben Loots Hanekam Private Nature Reserve*.

## Shepherds Cave

From 1981 Ben Loots allowed the *Voortrekkers* to occupy and make improvements to *Shepherds Cave* (also known as *Herdersgrot*). The *Voortrekker* movement was founded in 1920. They are an Afrikaans Christian youth group that is similarly militaristic and roughly equates to *Boy Scouts*. The *Voortrekkers* made various improvements including a water catchment system with a 220 litre tank, a longdrop toilet and a cooking area. The actual work was done by the *Verkenners* (ages 13-17) and the *Staatmakers* (ages 18–30). The official handover of *Shepherds Cave* was done by Ben Loots on 22 June 1985. A visitors' book in a nice wooden box with the *Voortrekker* symbol (wagon wheel with a flaming torch) on the lid, was left in the cave<sup>45</sup>. It is unknown what became of the visitors book. The *Voortrekkers* still use *Shepherds Cave* when they do an outing to Cockscomb every 3 years<sup>46</sup>. The *Voortrekkers* may also have made "improvements" to *Dassie Cave*.



Voortrekkers in *Shepherds Cave* Photo courtesy Adri Steyn.

## Dassie Cave

Bill Clarke and Dennis Thomas moved to Port Elizabeth in 1957. There wasn't a climbing scene in Port Elizabeth in those days, so they started "The Nearly Friday Club". This "club" met on Thursday evenings for a beer at the King Edward Hotel. *The Nearly Friday Club* consisted of Bill Clarke, Dennis Thomas, Merwyn Chappel, John Damant, John Dixon, Lew Leathwhite, Tim Robertson, Geoff and Mike Streeter. This crew called themselves *The Nearly Friday Club*, as often a beer turned into five (or more) and they mostly came home when it was nearly-Friday. *The Nearly Friday Club* was a loose association of like-minded rebel climbers that was never part of the MCSA. In no time many of these new climbers found themselves hiking up the long hot slog on the south side of Cockscomb. In those days climbing parties on Cockscomb nearly always stayed at *Dassie Cave*. They slept in *Dassie Cave* when opening the *South Face* route, and most other routes opened in the '50s and '60s. These days *Dassie Cave* has extensive "improvements" that include a wire and wooden lattice work, that would have taken some effort to build. There are a couple of star shaped petroglyphs and quite a lot of debris from previous parties.

## T'Numqua Cave

After the purchase of Portion 1 of Afgunst 255 falling through, the EP MCSA members began in earnest to look for an alternative accommodation cave and to purchase another section of summit land. Frank McLachlan asked a local farmer and school friend, Lance Bosman<sup>29 53</sup>, to assist the MCSA to approach Corneels Joubert, the owner of the farm Bosch Riviers Berg 256. Bosch Riviers Berg 256 is the wilderness farm, that contains *Grootbosrivier Kloof* to the northwest of Cockscomb peak. Bosman, McLachlan, Peter Heugh, Tim and Crystal Robertson negotiated the purchase of a section of the summit, that also included *T'Numqua Cave*<sup>11</sup>. After lengthy negotiations, in 1969 the MCSA offer to purchase a 30-hectare portion of Bosch Riviers Berg 256, for R600, was accepted. Finding surveyors willing to survey the rugged and remote terrain that the MCSA



desired presented some difficulties. Ken Rollo and Robert Myrdal undertook the survey <sup>11</sup>. Their equipment was transported up the jeep track. From there it was carried in by Tim Robertson, Peter Heugh and George McAll. They stayed at *Dassie Cave* and the survey took four days. Ben Loots' Portion 1 of Afgunst 255 was surveyed at the same time which allowed for a reduced survey fee. Interestingly the cost of the survey of Portion 1 of Afgunst 255 was only R306.50 <sup>28</sup>. The MCSA received the official title deed to Portion 1 of Bosch Riviers Berg 256 in November 1970 <sup>11</sup>. The land, shaped like a slice of pizza, includes the main scramble up the summit from north and an eighth of the summit.

*T'Numqua Cave* where most modern parties accommodate when overnighing on Cockscomb, was discovered by Peter Heugh while taking a party to *Eland Cave*, which is about 700m further into *Grootbosrivier Kloof* <sup>11</sup>. It was only on a re-visit in 1968 that *T'Numqua* was deemed a suitable shelter cave. *T'Numqua Cave* is a large cave that can accommodate up to 50 people. It has a flat floor and an entrance that is partly screened with trees. Unfortunately, the closest running water is about 1km away at the top of *Pinnacle Gorge*. Fortunately, Tim Robertson discovered an intermittent water drip about 40m east of the cave. The drip falls from an overhang at least 10m off the ground, which makes it difficult to capture. Peter Heugh came up with a plumbing scheme to provide a convenient permanent water source. On the next trip Frank McLachlan, George McAll, Geoff Mandy and Peter Heugh, carried in a 75-litre asbestos water tank, weighing 14kg and set up the plumbing system. Drips were caught on a plastic sheet that formed a catchment basin; the water was then piped into the tank and then on to a conveniently placed tap. All the plumbing work was hidden by well stacked stones <sup>11</sup>.

The 75-litre asbestos water tank proved adequate till the severe drought in 1972, when the drip stopped completely. The tank emptied, leaving a party of Rhodes University climbers in dire distress. A 300-litre heavy duty plastic tank was procured. A discussion at a Rotary lunch between George McAll and Dr Hoskin, the operations officer at the local helicopter squadron, led to the tank-delivery being recognised as a suitable training exercise for the squadron. On a Friday afternoon in September 1973, a helicopter picked up Peter Huegh and the tank from Willow River. It was a misty afternoon and the pilot did not find the indicated landing area above *T'Numqua Cave* suitable. Heugh, his backpack and the tank were summarily deposited on a flat spot in the valley below *T'Numqua*. Heugh spent the rest of the day manhandling the tank up into *T'Numqua Cave*. The following day Tim Robertson and John Abel, who had joined Heugh during the night, fitted the tank to the plumbing system <sup>12</sup>.

The other plumbing system that should be noted, the first longdrop at *T'Numqua Cave* was built by Raymond Packwood, Peter Heugh and John-Lew Knight. It was later upgraded with a box and seat built by Rudi Goosen. This was flown in by the air force and fitted by Rob Mac Geoghegan, Mark Terblanche and Alan Gibb <sup>30</sup>. This box was replaced in 2022. Terence Trevaskis built the new box & a party consisting of Trevaskis, Derek Marshall & Lizelle Niit carried in the new box. The stones that elevate the longdrop were unpacked. Niit & Marshall emptied out the content of the long drop completely till rock was reached. The content was dry, mostly composted & did not smell.

*Scribe's note: This was grim work. There was a lot of non-degradable plastic in the hole, mostly components of period pads & tampons. These were collected up into three shopping bags & later burned.*

In 1961 Bill Clarke, Ben Loots, Jack and John Wallace opened *The Spiral Route*, which is a non-rock-climbing route up the south side of the summit <sup>11</sup>. On the walk-in from the south side there is *Erie Cave* that was discovered by Jack Wallace in about 1960 <sup>11</sup>.

## Elephant Cave



The 1987 first day cover with the vultures from *Elephant Cave*.

Another popular cave about 3.5km to the southeast of Cockscomb peak is *Elephant Cave*. *Elephant Cave* has a compact, symmetrical shape and is about 10m deep, but only 8m wide and 3m high at the highest point. It is a densely painted cave with over 300 images, including 81 human figures, 112 animals, at least 94 handprints and 14 finger dots. The most prominent of the animal paintings is a single large elephant and nineteen large stylistic birds that are likely to be vultures. These are prominently placed on the smoothest and cleanest painting surface on the ceiling above the viewer in the centre of the shelter. The elephant, which has a white tusk visible, is somewhat stretched or elongated. This is an indication that it may represent a mystical animal. Elephants have very sensitive smell and are able to smell rain fall at huge distances. This makes them one of the first animals to migrate towards areas that have received fresh rain. Elephant must (breeding) is connected to peak rainfall periods. Elephants in Bushman painting are often associated with rain, rainmaking and possibly procreation. The complex



Left, the elephant and vulture painting in *Elephant Cave* on the south side of Cockscomb. Photo thanks to Werner Illenberger.

Above, the 1987 stamp with the vultures in the right-hand lower corner.

superimposition of rain symbols, rhebok antelope, Bushman male figures, handprints and hunting scenes, painted in an isolated high-altitude shelter, suggests that this site could have been used for Bushman male initiation ceremonies<sup>50</sup>.

Elephants are also simply a good meal for a Bushman. Apparently, to Bushman, elephants contain all kinds of meat and are known as the father of meat.<sup>35</sup>

A portion of the vultures painting was used in the design of the South African Post Office 1987 20c stamp and the envelope of the first-day-cover<sup>14</sup>. The vultures, on the lower right-hand corner of the stamp, are not exactly reproduced and require some conjecture to see, but the first-day-cover clearly depicts 8 of the ~20 vultures.

*Elephant Cave* was originally called *Abel's Cave*, after Ludwig Abel, a popular president of the EP MCSA for many years. The paintings in the cave were first recorded and traced by Alex Willcox in 1963. The shelter is also notable for a number of handprints made with red pigment. Willcox suggested that handprints might be regarded as 'signatures' to the Bushman art<sup>47</sup>, but these days the common thought is that the handprints connect the Bushman to the unseen world behind the surface of the rock. It is however more likely that the handprints are a simple by-product of the Bushman practice of smearing their bodies with red ochre and fat. Elephant Cave also contains some very fine bichrome paintings of a red and white rhebok.

In the '70 Anton McLachlan lead the MCSA search and rescue team. He and Dave Thompson were flown to the summit of Cockscomb in an air force allouette on a midweek training exercise. Thompson briefly exited the helicopter onto the summit in his business suit with tie<sup>29</sup>.

In 1986 Dave Thompson started the MCSA EP Section newsletter. It was originally called *Beacon Snippets*, but later it was changed to *Cockscomb Chronicle*<sup>14</sup>. Issues of the *Cockscomb Chronicle* were published every quarter till 2009, when it made a slow fade into history.

In November 1961, six Jansenville area locals succeeded in summiting Cockscomb. While they were up there, they formed a wee club "The Jansenville Coxcomb Club". Apparently, the club lasted for more than two hours before being dissolved. All six summiteers were made presidents of the club, there were no vice-presidents or anything inferior like common members were accepted into this exclusive club<sup>51</sup>.

## Cockscomb Names

Cockscomb has been referred to by many different names. Charles Lennox Stretch recorded the Bushman name as *Cuncungwa*<sup>1</sup>, which means misty spitz (peak). Stretch used the spelling *Cock Comb*<sup>1</sup>. Colonel Robert Gordon's journal from his 5th Journey<sup>2</sup>, 7th February 1786, referred to Cockscomb as *Festoonberg*. On Gordon's *Great Map*<sup>3</sup> of Southern Africa, he recorded the various names that Cockscomb was known by. The navy (must be Dutch Navy) calls it *Gefestoneerde Berg*, the English call it *Craggij Mountain* and by the Khoekhoen as *Hommoequa* which Gordon says means "Blaauwe Wolk", which is Dutch for blue cloud. In Gordon's *Panorama of Algoa Bay*<sup>4</sup>, Cockscomb is simply labelled *Winter Hoek*. James Wyld's map of South Africa in 1844 uses the names Kuruka Berg or Winter Berg<sup>38</sup>. L. Hebert's map of Cape of Good Hope calls the peak Kuruka or Winter Peak<sup>41</sup>. John Tallis on his Map of Cape Colony 1817-1876 gives the name as Winter Peak<sup>40</sup>. Henry Hall on his map in 1856 gives the name for the peak as T.cmumumqua<sup>44</sup>. French cartographer, Rigobert Bonne, in 1762 gives the name for Groot Winterhoek Mountains as Mount De Pouilloen<sup>42</sup>.

Reverend Charles Pettman in *South African place names: past and present* gives the names for Cockscomb as *Craggy Mountain, Grenadier's Cap, Four Sisters*. C. J. Skead records in *The Algoa Gazetteer* that Khoekhoen name given as meaning "the mountain in the mist" is derived from the Khoekhoen word *!homi* meaning mountain and */nanuxa* meaning covered with cloud. Nienaber and Raper in *Hottentot (Khoekhoen) Place Names 1977* give the Khoekhoen spelling as '*Nu-m- !hom-gu-a* with means *Wolkberge* or *Cloud Mountains*'<sup>36</sup>.

Walter Stanhope Sherwill in his article in *Graham's Town Journal* spells the name *Cock's Comb*<sup>49</sup>. Dr William Atherstone, in his journals used the spelling *Coxcomb*<sup>15 55</sup>. August Petermann's trigonometrical survey map of 1867 also gives the spelling as *Coxcomb*<sup>43</sup>. R.R.W Nixon in 1970 records that the Khoekhoen name for the peak as *T'Numqua*, which he says means mountain of mist<sup>11</sup>. *T'Numqua* is the name the MCSA uses for the accommodation cave on their property to the northwest of the peak. Andy Patterson says it is possible that the Bushman in the Groot Winterhoek area were called the *T'Numqua*, which today would be translated as '*People who are the owners of n/um*', that vital energy that connects all living entities<sup>50</sup>.

A list of peaks in the 1932 MCSA Journal gives the name "*Cockscomb = Hommoequa, Craggy Mountains, Gefestoneerde Berg*", their source is listed Surveyor General<sup>6</sup>.

Afrikaans speakers refer to Cockscomb as *Hanekam*<sup>12</sup>. The current Mr Rudman of Willow River calls the peak *Hanekam*. Ben Loots called his portion of the peak *Hanekam Private Natuurreservaat*. Xhosa speakers call the peak *iNtaba kaVuba*<sup>36</sup>. *Miller's New Map of British South Africa* gives the spelling as *Cockscombe*<sup>39</sup>.

**This history is a work in progress and can be edited easily. Please send old photos, changes, correction, comments and additions. All will be appreciated.**

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<sup>5</sup> Martin E. Smuts MCSA Journal 1922, Page 56

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<sup>7</sup> J. Whitworth MCSA Journal 1943, Page 34

<sup>8</sup> Robert Stevens MCSA Journal 1951, Page 41

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