

THE CASE FOR LANDSCAPES (and trees) AS PART OF OUR

Durbanville CULTURAL HERITAGE

Prepared by Durbanville Heritage Society

1 Introduction

In preparing this document it became evident how little research has been done around the heritage impact of this wonderful tree rich settlement that contributed significantly in the development of our nation through its founder farming entrepreneurs, its role as “uitspan” and route to the interior and its people

This could well have contributed to a lack of understanding and empathy by planners of the immense cultural value of our tree heritage. Fortunately this has been recognized by concerned and informed persons on a national level (the National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999), Local Authority level (City of Cape Town Heritage Advice Pamphlet no 3, Cultural Landscapes and Historic Vegetation) and several researchers (see sources cited).

2 National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999

Section 2

(vi) “**cultural significance**” means aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, linguistic or technological value or significance;

(viii) “**development**” means any physical intervention, excavation, or action, other than those caused by natural forces, which may in the opinion of a heritage authority **in any way result in a change to the nature, appearance or physical nature of a place**, or influence its stability and future well-being, including—

- (a) construction, alteration, demolition, removal or change of use of a place or a structure at a place;
- (b) carrying out any works on or over or under a place;
- (c) subdivision or consolidation of land comprising, a place, including the structures or airspace of a place;
- (d) constructing or putting up for display signs or hoardings;
- (e) any change to the natural or existing condition or topography of land; and
- (f) any removal or destruction of **trees, or removal of vegetation or topsoil**;

(xvi) “heritage resource” means any **place** or object of cultural significance;

(xxxii) “place” includes—

- (a) a site, area or region;
- (b) a building or other structure which may include equipment, furniture, fittings and articles associated with or connected with such building or other structure;
- (c) a group of buildings or other structures which may include equipment, furniture, fittings and articles associated with or connected with such group of buildings or other structures;
- (d) an **open space**, including a **public square, street** or **park**; and
- (e) in relation to the management of a place, includes the immediate surroundings of a place;

Section 3

(2) Without limiting the generality of subsection (1), the national estate may include—

- (a) **places**, buildings, structures and equipment of cultural significance;
- (b) **places** to which oral traditions are attached or which are **associated with living heritage**;
- (c) historical settlements and townscapes;
- (d) **landscapes** and **natural features of cultural significance**;
- (e) geological sites of scientific or cultural importance;

(3) Without limiting the generality of subsections (1) and (2), a place or object is to be considered part of the national estate if it has cultural significance or other special value because of—

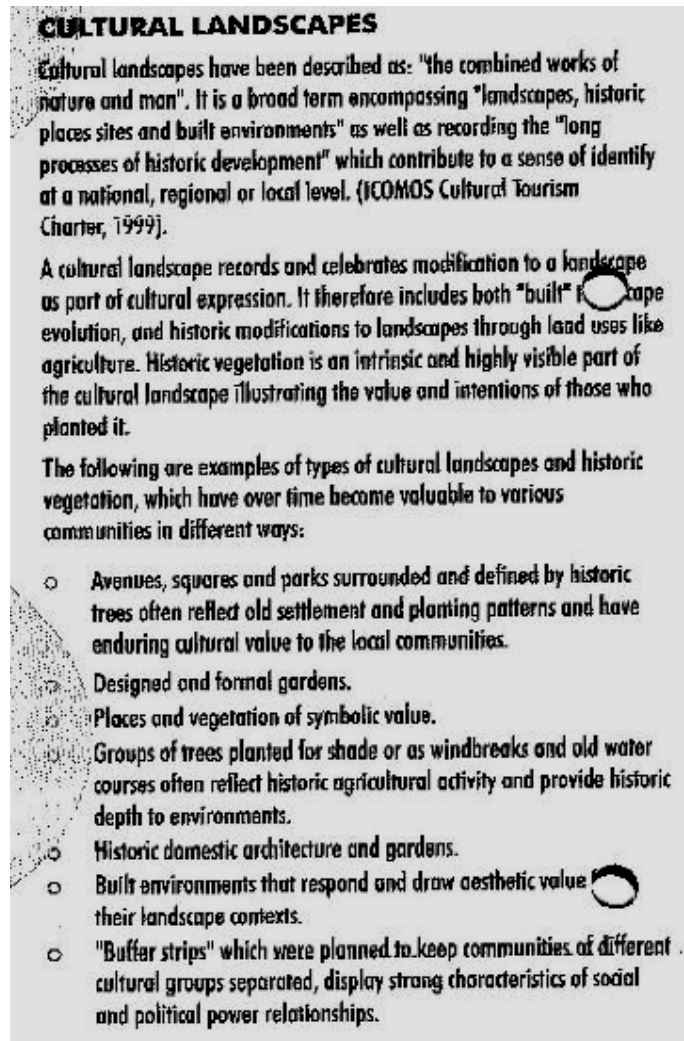
- (a) its importance in the community, or **pattern of South Africa's history**;
- (b) its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of South Africa's **natural or cultural heritage**;
- (c) its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage;
- (d) its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class of South Africa's natural or cultural places or objects;
- (e) its importance in **exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group**;
- (f) its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period;
- (g) its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- (h) its strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in the history of South Africa; and
- (i) sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa.

2 City of Cape Town Heritage Advice Pamphlet no 3, September 2002 ISBN 1-874924-83-X: Cultural Landscapes and Historic Vegetation

2.1 Background

This pamphlet offers one definition of the role of vegetation in cultural landscapes:

“Historic vegetation is an intrinsic and highly visible part of the cultural landscape illustrating the value and intentions of those who planted it.”



CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

Cultural landscapes have been described as: "the combined works of nature and man". It is a broad term encompassing "landscapes, historic places sites and built environments" as well as recording the "long processes of historic development" which contribute to a sense of identity at a national, regional or local level. (ICOMOS Cultural Tourism Charter, 1999).

A cultural landscape records and celebrates modification to a landscape as part of cultural expression. It therefore includes both "built" landscape evolution, and historic modifications to landscapes through land uses like agriculture. Historic vegetation is an intrinsic and highly visible part of the cultural landscape illustrating the value and intentions of those who planted it.

The following are examples of types of cultural landscapes and historic vegetation, which have over time become valuable to various communities in different ways:

- Avenues, squares and parks surrounded and defined by historic trees often reflect old settlement and planting patterns and have enduring cultural value to the local communities.
- Designed and formal gardens.
- Places and vegetation of symbolic value.
- Groups of trees planted for shade or as windbreaks and old water courses often reflect historic agricultural activity and provide historic depth to environments.
- Historic domestic architecture and gardens.
- Built environments that respond and draw aesthetic value from their landscape contexts.
- "Buffer strips" which were planned to keep communities of different cultural groups separated, display strong characteristics of social and political power relationships.

As examples of such cultural landscapes, the pamphlet refers to avenues, groups of trees planted as windbreaks. It also sites various current places where such examples might be viewed.

2.2 Examples of cultural Landscapes

EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

The Cape is blessed with a rich scenic, natural context, which together with the variety of patterns of historic settlement create a cultural landscape of scenic drama and historical interest. A cultural landscape contains a relationship between the built and the "natural" modifications. The following are examples of environments that contribute to this landscape:

o Designed landscapes:	Rhodes Estate, Devils' Peak
o Historic and designed domestic gardens:	Weigelegen Mowbray
o Trees, historic amenity spaces:	The Glen, Camps Bay
o Wetlands used for amenity purposes:	Khayelitsha Wetlands
o Historic water channels and watercourses:	Government Avenue, Company's Garden, CBD
o Significant avenues of trees:	Rosemead Avenue
o Historic settlements, forms and agricultural patterns:	Rural Phillippi
o Scenic routes and areas of outstanding cultural value:	Boyce Drive, Kalk Bay
o Promenades:	Gardon's Bay

2.3 Protection of exotic trees in Durbanville

THE PROTECTION OF SIGNIFICANT EXOTIC TREES

There are few indigenous tree species in the Cape that can cope with the harsh climatic conditions outside protected ravines. Over time, exotic tree, which were able to grow and thrive in a mediterranean climate were introduced.

Some of these exotic trees have been an integral part of the cultural landscape since their introduction to the Cape, in some cases, as early as the 17th century and now have heritage value.

Some examples of trees that were introduced early in the history of the cape colonial settlement and which add amenity and iconographic value to the cultural landscape of the Cape Peninsula and environs are the following:

Stone Pines (*Pinus pinea*), Oaks (*Quercus sp.*), Plane Trees (*Platanus x acerifolia*), Blue Gums (*Eucalyptus globulus*), Poplars (*Populus sp.*), Norfolk Pines (*Araucaria heterophylla*), Palm Trees (*Washingtonia robusta*), Camphor Trees (*Cinnamomum camphora*).

These trees are not invasive and important groups and avenues of such trees as well as individual specimens contribute significantly to the cultural landscape of the Cape and are protected.

Please note that the Cape Town City Council pertinently acknowledges the cultural landscape value of tree avenues.

2.4 Importance of Trees in Durbanville

THE IMPORTANCE OF TREES AND VEGETATION

Deliberately planted vegetation is an integral part of the cultural landscape. Different cultures have had different cultural, aesthetic, use and amenity requirements and this is reflected in the different trees and historic vegetation which were planted over time.

Many trees planted in historic areas were exotic trees intended to prosper in a Mediterranean climate, like stone pines and oak trees.

The hybrid or composite qualities of historic vegetation and indigenous vegetation enriches the unique Cape cultural landscape.

Existing mature trees and vegetation in Cape Town, particularly in Heritage Areas need care and proper management to ensure protection and conservation. Besides their cultural and historic value, mature trees have much to offer. They :

- Provide shade.
- Soften the urban landscape and provide a human scale.
- Define urban space, provide focal points and define urban spaces
- Create memorable places and spaces.
- Provide a habitat and food for urban wildlife.
- Support outdoor recreational activity and promote health and well-being.
- Create aesthetic pleasure and reflect the changing seasons.
- Have symbolic and/or landmark significance.
- May form part of cultural and religious rituals.
- Provide a filter for air and noise pollution.
- Promote tourism by beautifying scenic routes and thoroughfares to the city and inside the city.
- Promote investment by upgrading and improving the urban environment.
- Provide scientific interest i.e. rarity.

Trees in particular increase in significance when they:

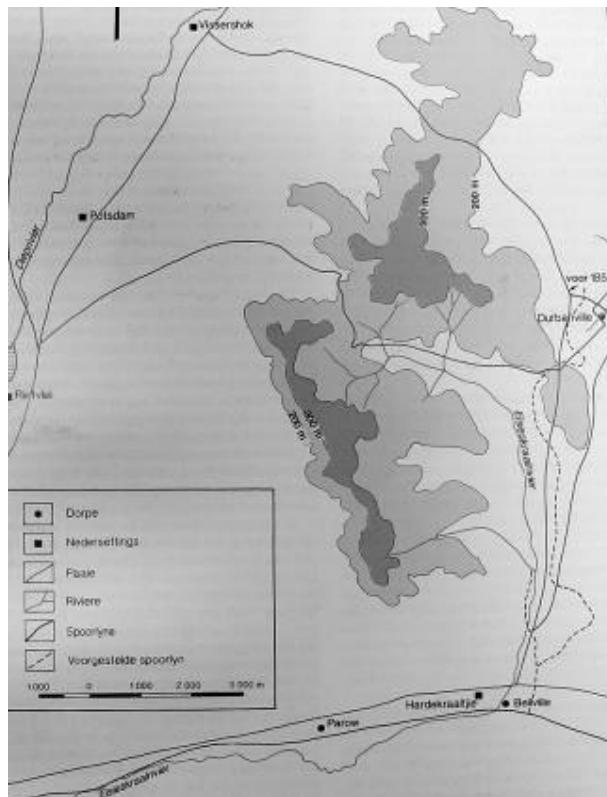
- Are very old and rare
- Have large canopies and trunks
- Are associated with important people or events
- Define historic settlement or movement patterns
- Are non invasive

In the extract above the pamphlet refers specifically to trees that “define historic settlement or movement patterns. I believe that the tree avenues in Durbanville along the major and minor routes certainly do qualify to be recognised for the historic settlement patterns which they delineate as well as the movement patterns which they acknowledge (in the sense that many avenues which are framed in this way have been the routes along which people traveled for many decades (more than 60 years) and in some cases very likely for more than a century. Unless the age of such a lane is thoroughly researched and it can be proven that such lane is not older than 60 years, it would be contrary to the spirit of this guideline of Cape Town City Council to simply eradicate the trees along such an avenue.

3 The history and impact of Durbanville's trees

To understand the value of our trees it is important to understand the critical role of transport. Wagons and oxen was the best transport system in the Tygerberg region with it's poor roads. What was needed was water for the animals and rest. The fountain at Durbanville (Pampoenkraal) provided such an opportunity. Trees were planted along such routes and at the "outspan".

As the first travelers moved eastwards from the Castle around Tygerberg, their wagon trails soon flowed together to form main routes. The six main roads are shown in the diagram below.



Two important features can be recognized. The old Durbanville Road ("the main road to the interior and hence in Durbanville becoming Wellington road) ran next to the DRC church. The blue gum tree lane in front the church became part of this route.

The second feature was the new Durbanville Avenue built in 1853 build by Andrew Geddes Bain (see below). The once famous blue gum avenue was started in 1886 and was considered by the monuments commission in 1927 for potential to be proclaimed as National Monument. By the end of 1970 it disappeared forever the sake of so called development.



The last comment (there are many more) relates to so called old postal tree. This tree where many of the traders gathered where destroyed when the “Sanlam” complex across Spiro’s was built. From the promises to preserve this tree came nothing.

Clearly we need more research before anyone can even attempt to make decision about destroying any of these import cultural heritages of Durbanville,

5 Sources Consulted

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