

Nature's Valley Celebrating 60 Years! 1953-2013



Photo 1 : View of Nature's Valley



2013 is an auspicious year in the annals of the Valley, and this evening we are celebrating the proclamation of the township of Nature's Valley 60 years ago in June 1953.

The fact that the residential area was established 60 years ago, is also of particular importance to the owners of homes that were built before or during 1953. These charming and simple cottages that typify the essence of the early built environment of Nature's Valley and portray the holiday lifestyle of 60 and more years ago, have achieved heritage status and protection that the Heritage Act affords them.

Most importantly this evening is also a celebration of what this small but committed community has achieved over the relatively short period of 60 years.

Before that, a brief overview of the era that preceded the establishment of the township, provides fascinating insight into earlier times. As it is impossible to do justice to the many wonderful stories both told and unrecorded in this short presentation, I shall keep to the bare bones. For this I wish to acknowledge the information gleaned from the story of Nature's Valley by Nora and Chris Sinclair.

Photo 2 : 1930 view of NV showing farming area



Initially Nature's Valley was known as Groot Rivier and Lot 1 of Groot Rivier which is the Valley, was owned by Hendrik Barnardo who lived in the valley all his life; raised 3 families here and died in the Valley in 1948 at the age of 86.

He was a legendary figure who knew these forests intimately – an excellent marksman and great hunter who it is said accompanied the Prince of Wales on a hunting trip in the Tsitsikamma to hunt buffalo and elephant. But he was also a man who stood guard at a massive yellowwood tree with his shotgun, threatening to shoot the engineer if he intended to chop down the tree that was in the way of the road that was being built in the Groot River pass. It is said that the road bypassed the tree which remained unharmed.

In about 1880 he built his house of yellowwood planks at the entrance of the Valley where house Libertas now stands and farmed the Valley. He sowed wheat, planted pumpkins, sweet potatoes and mealies and bred ostriches and longhorn cattle (I wonder how he managed the baboons!).

One can say that the story of Nature's Valley unfolded in the early 1900's when Hendrik Barnardo gave Bill von Bonde permission to spend their summer holiday camping at the lagoon. Soon other families followed also spending summer holidays camping at the lagoon, while other families chose to camp on the banks of the river near the drift that crossed the Groot River. This was known as Swann's Camp.

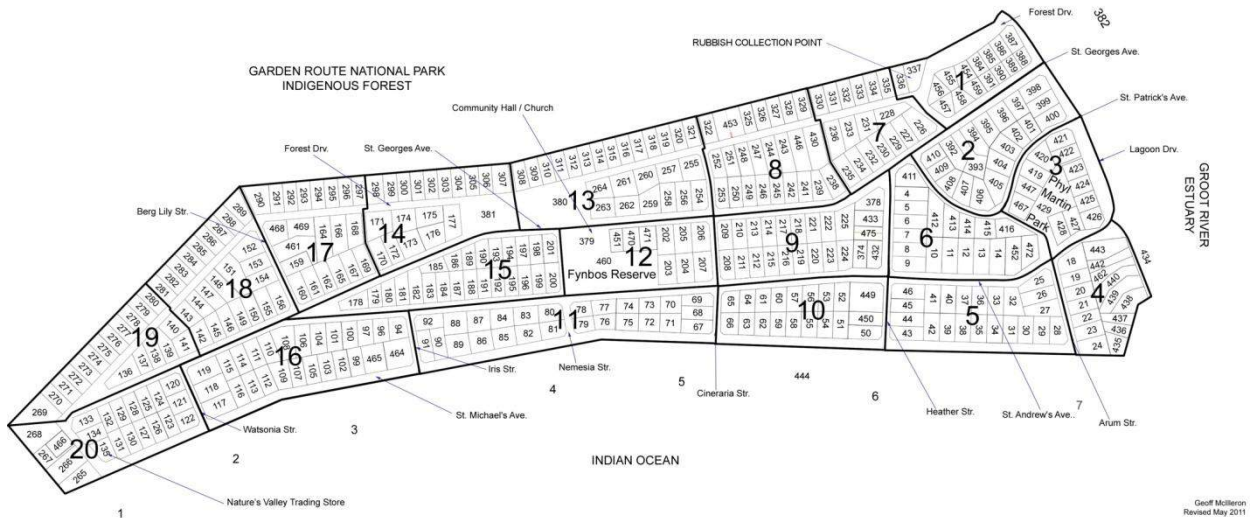
The families who regularly spent their holidays camping at the lagoon often begged Barnardo to sell them the small portion of his farm on which they camped. Eventually Hendrik agreed, and in 1941 Frank le Roex surveyed this section and in 1942 1,6963 morgen was transferred to the original 9 Syndicate families. The authorities allowed them to buy the land as one unit but they could not get individual ownership of their respective plots as they were not part of a township. Thus the name Syndicate by which these group of properties are still known.

In 1943 Baron Ulrich Behr of Kurland bought Groot Rivier from Hendrik Barnardo in order to develop the farm. In association with Leighton Ashmead, a property developer from Cape Town, the Nature's Valley

Development Corporation was formed and the establishment of the Nature's Valley township promulgated in 1953.

Clifford Harris was the engineering firm responsible for infrastructure.

Photo 3 : Residential Area



As I said at the start of the presentation, this evening is a celebration of what the community has achieved. The map of the residential area is that of Nature's Valley today.

Photo 4 : Residential Development 20 Erven



But the original approved layout of the residential area in 1953 that comprised 399 erven, included the subdivision of the ecologically sensitive island in the Groot River into 20 residential erven. It took almost 30 years of concerted and sustained efforts by a group of owners before these erven were expropriated by the government in 1988 and the island earmarked for inclusion into the then Tsitsikamma National Park.

Photo 5 : Hotel and service station site



The same original approved layout of the residential area also included a large site on Lagoon Drive reserved for an hotel and service station. That this beautiful area was earmarked for commercial development was of great concern to a group of owners. Subsequently they bought the whole site and had it subdivided into single residential erven. When this commercial site had been subdivided an odd star shaped piece of land remained. The became the Phyl Martin Park. So in a manner of speaking the story that the park was donated by anonymous owners is true. The subdivision of this site also explains why the erf numbers of the subdivided site differ so completely from those surrounding it.

The major developments that could or would have had disastrous consequences for Nature's Valley and its surrounding natural environment had to be faced and acted against.

Photo 6: Coastal highway

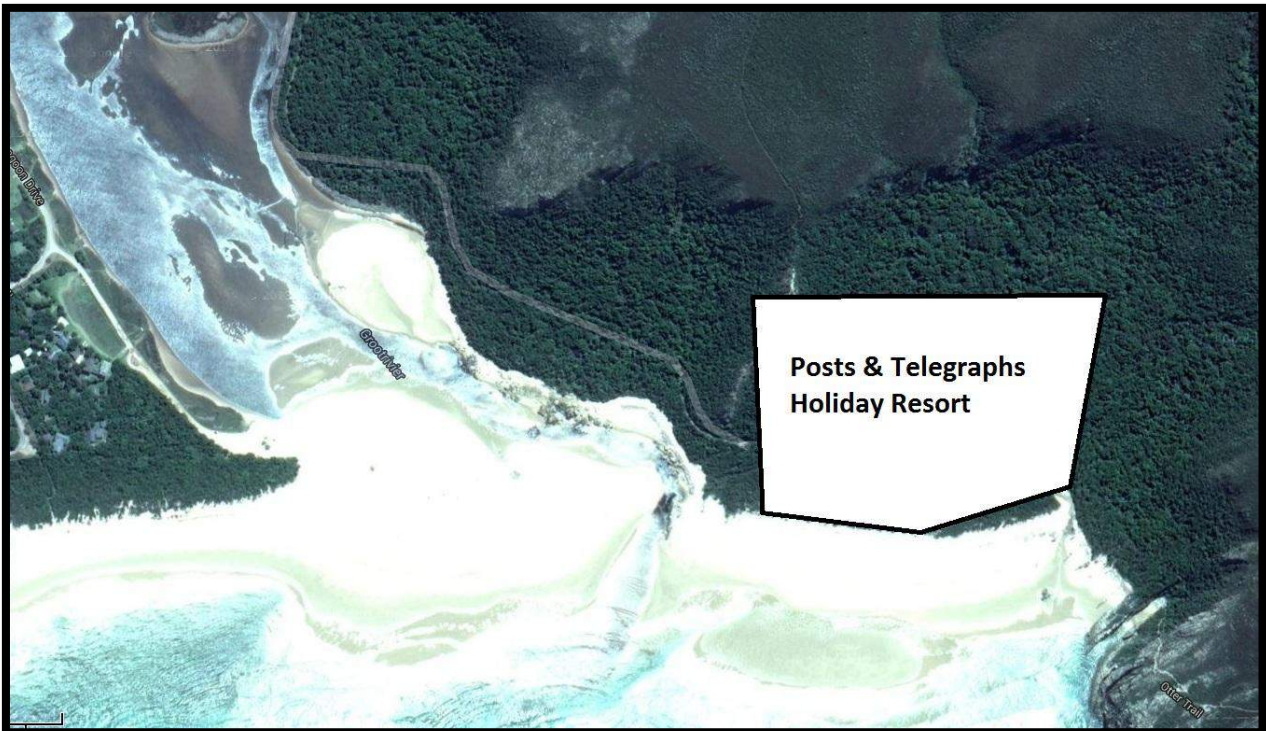


The then National Roads Board spent several years investigating alternative routes for a new highway to PE that would bypass the old narrow and dangerous N2 that snaked through the Groot River, Bloukrans, van Staden's and other minor passes.

The most favoured option was a coastal highway that along its route would have traversed the front coastal dune of Nature's Valley with a bridge crossing the Groot River mouth.

High powered intervention by Nature's Valley owners among others, saw to it that this option never became a reality and eventually the new N2 highway was built much higher up.

Photo 7 : Posts and telegraphs



Another major development that would have destroyed the natural environment east of the Groot River mouth, was the proposal to establish a holiday resort for the employees of the then Dept. of Posts and Telegraphs in the area.

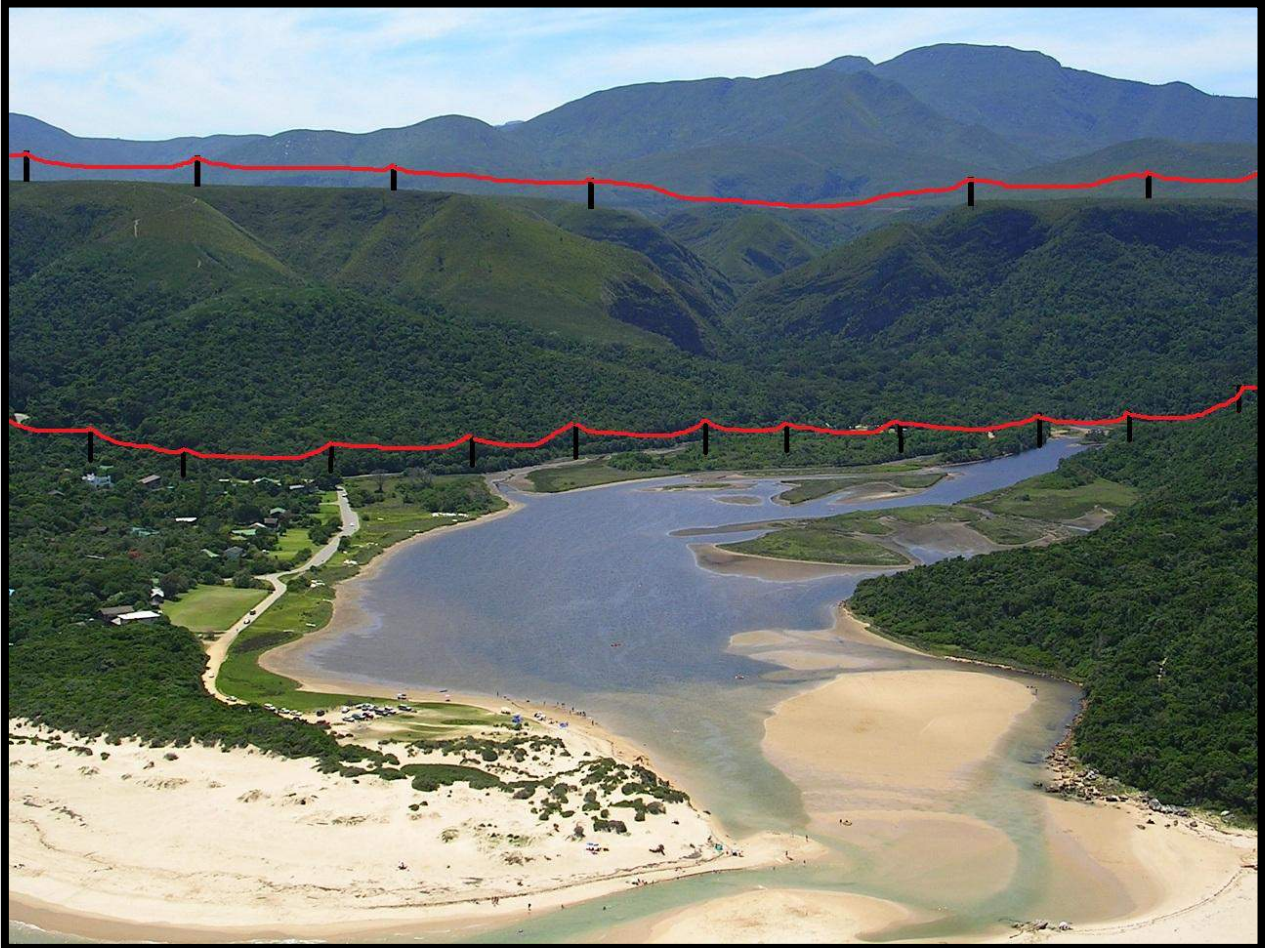
Again high powered action by members of the community went a long way to ensuring that this proposal never materialised and that this pristine section of the beach with its indigenous vegetation and trees has remained unchanged and is protected as part of the Tsitsikamma Section of the GRNP.

Photo 8 : SAAF resort



In the 1970's yet another proposal for a major development that would have destroyed the natural environment west of Nature's Valley reared its head, namely the establishment of a holiday resort for the employees of the then SAAF in the forested area stretching from Blue Rocks to Sinkers Bay. And again concerned groups from the community rallied and opposed the proposal at high level, which went a long way in ensuring that the holiday resort never became a reality and that this beautiful stretch of coastline is protected as part of the Tsitsikamma Section of the GRNP.

Photo 9 : Eskom power lines



In the early 90's Eskom had to erect a power line to supply electricity to the new Tsitsikamma Toll Plaza. The planned route would have seen concrete pylons carrying the lines traversing the upper reaches of the Groot River thereby permanently scarring the pristine forest environment and forever marring the uninterrupted panoramic views of river and mountains seen from the lagoon. Successful negotiations with Eskom resulted in the route being changed and the power lines being erected higher up out of sight from the lagoon. Eskom also planned to erect a power line much lower down which would have traversed the estuary, and again would have resulted in the permanent visual scarring of this pristine natural environment. Again successful negotiations resulted in the power lines being laid out of sight under the forest.

Photo 10 : Composite



This composite photo incorporates all the proposed developments that could or would have taken place in and around Nature's Valley if not for the major and prolonged efforts and actions of the community. I have dealt at greater length with these earlier achievements because perhaps not so many present owners know of this history, but the following more recent achievements are just as compelling.

Photo 11 : NV Residential area with contractual national park area



In 1980 The Association of Ratepayers of NV was formed to serve the interests of owners and in 1990 the Nature's Valley Ratepayers' Association followed to serve the interests of ratepayers. Major aims of the NVRA are to retain the single residential status of the township; to retain the open spaces and to oppose inappropriate developments.

The importance of the work done by the association has evolved to such an extent that the NVRA has a permanent office managed by a fulltime office manager and a liaison officer.

In 1986 when Eskom supplied electricity to Nature's Valley, far sighted negotiations and stipulations by the community resulted in the power cables being laid underground and no street lights being installed in the residential area.

In 1994 another milestone was reached with the promulgation of the Nature's Valley Contractual Park Area and the 30 year agreement between the NVRA, SANParks and Bitou Municipality to manage the area. In accordance with the proclamation highest conservation status has been awarded to the front coastal dune (erf 444), lagoon frontage (erf 434) and flood plane (erf 382).

In 2000 the Nature's Valley Trust was established and in the 13 years it has achieved remarkable success focussing on conservation in Nature's Valley and its surrounds; establishing and expanding a model environmental education programme, receiving awards for its community involvement and recently embarking on ecological research projects with Dr Mark Brown as full time project director.

In 2004 the Nature's Valley Conservancy was formally registered with Cape Nature thereby giving formal recognitions to the urban area of NV as a site of conservation significance.

Although the NVRA, NVTrust and NVConservancy are separate entities, it is crucial to understand that they work very closely together on many issues of mutual concern to NV and that they all serve the interests of the NV community.

In 2008 the community obtained a court interdict preventing the sale of the only three municipal service erven in the Valley, and in 2011 after successful negotiations, the municipality resolved to retain erven 335, 336 and 337 for future service delivery purposes.

In 2009 the NV Spatial Development Framework was completed after being commissioned by the community and in 2013 an abbreviated version has been submitted to Bitou in the form of a Local Area Spatial Plan.

Finally the following two photos most clearly illustrate what we as a community have achieved.

Photo 12 : 1930



This photo taken in the 1930's shows the Valley as Hendrik Barnardo's farm with no indigenous vegetation and comprising large tracts of sandy ground.

Photo 13 : Obie's photo



This extraordinarily beautiful photo by Obie Oberholzer and placed with his permission, shows a lush, vegetated and forested residential area that melts into the surrounding indigenous forest of the national park with minimal impact on the natural environment.

Conclusion

As a community we must continue the fight to preserve this beautiful place – Nature’s Valley – of which we are the custodians. And we must continue to support the organisations that we have created to do this work on our behalf.

Written and presented by Jeanne Biesenbach at the 2013 AGM.

Photos and inserts by Dr Mark Brown, NVTrust