

LOCATION of the WATERFALL

Below the S bends of Barry Hertzog Avenue in Melpark, adjacent to the CSIR Laboratories and Melville Koppies, is probably one of the

BEST KEPT SECRETS OF GAUTENG.

Thousands of people pass this point every day and none are aware of this site of Social, Historical and Ecological importance to the people of Joburg.

The waterfall is situated on the Braamfontein Spruit, which rises in Barnato Park, (adjoining Hillbrow) on the property which belonged to Barney Barnato. His house became the Johannesburg High School for Girls and is now Barnato High School

The Auckland Park tributary, now fully canalised, arises beneath the Gas Works in Milner Park and joins the main spruit at Sans Souci Hotel built c 1891..

A canalised section of the Spruit was built in stone in the years of the 1933 depression, and provided employment for many at that time. This stone work is an example of exceptionally beautiful craftsmanship.

Long before the arrival of settlers in S.A., the Waterfall was one of the sources of water for the inhabitants of the area, those people who built the iron age furnaces on Melville Koppies and smelted the iron which they obtained from the Parktown and other Ridges.

The waterfall surrounds were later to become an “uitval grond” on the wagon road to Pretoria and Rustenburg (hence Rustenburg Rd.)

This is one of our Historical areas which, together with the stone canal, should become a Heritage site.

Prior to and after the establishment of Melville as a suburb in 1896, this waterfall was a favourite picnic spot for the residents of Johannesburg.

Later market gardens, a dairy, a Nursery, and the RAND STEAM LAUNDRY which was nearby in Richmond, (replacing the ZULU laundry on the banks of the Spruit) were established.

From an ecological point of view, the site is the eastern extremity of the Melville Koppies, and would have been the main water supply for animals living in the area. The site would also have been one of the water sources for the Iron Age settlement on the Koppies. The site is still home to many indigenous plant species and has a sense of place unique to the area.

The recent history of the waterfall is not as romantic. The building of Rustenburg Road at the turn of the century, and more recently Barry Hertzog Avenue isolated the area, which was relegated to a rubble dump site. The canalization of the Braamfontein Spruit changed the flow rate of the river, with an impact of the ecological system and the isolated nature of the area led to the development of an informal settlement around the waterfall. This site was socially unacceptable, and the settlement was closed.

The isolated nature of the site and misuse of resources led to the degradation of the site. As a result of dumping and disturbance of the vegetation, the site has become invaded with proclaimed weeds and large alien invasive plants. The recent settlement of the area has resulted in large amounts of discarded building material and other pollution. The site has recently been fenced to prevent re-invasion of the area. Indigenous church groups currently use the area.

The area has however, the potential to become a site of social cultural, ecological and importance. The proximity to high density residential areas, the Melville Koppies and major arterial routes in Johannesburg, and the historical and ecological nature of the area make this area a prime site for rehabilitation, and a flagship of redevelopment and empowerment in Gauteng.

