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van natuurlike kleur; 2de, in sil-
wer, 'n man op 'n perd van swart
wat deur 'n dubbel gekanteelde
rooi poort gallop; 3de, in groen,
'n Kaapse huis met gewel van
natuurlike kleur; 4de, in rooi,
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daarbo die V.O.C.-monogram,
alles silwer.

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Verskoning word gemaak vir die swak toestand van die Wapen.
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Redakteur
N. A. Coetzee.

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THE CASHAN COUNTRY

A CENTURY AND A HALF AGO

(by D.G. van der Byl)

A hundred and fifty years ago the Magaliesberg Range in the central Transvaal was known as the Cashan Mountains to the black tribes inhabiting that area and to the early white visitors such as the Rev. Robert Moffat, Dr. Andrew Smith and Captain Cornwallis Harris.

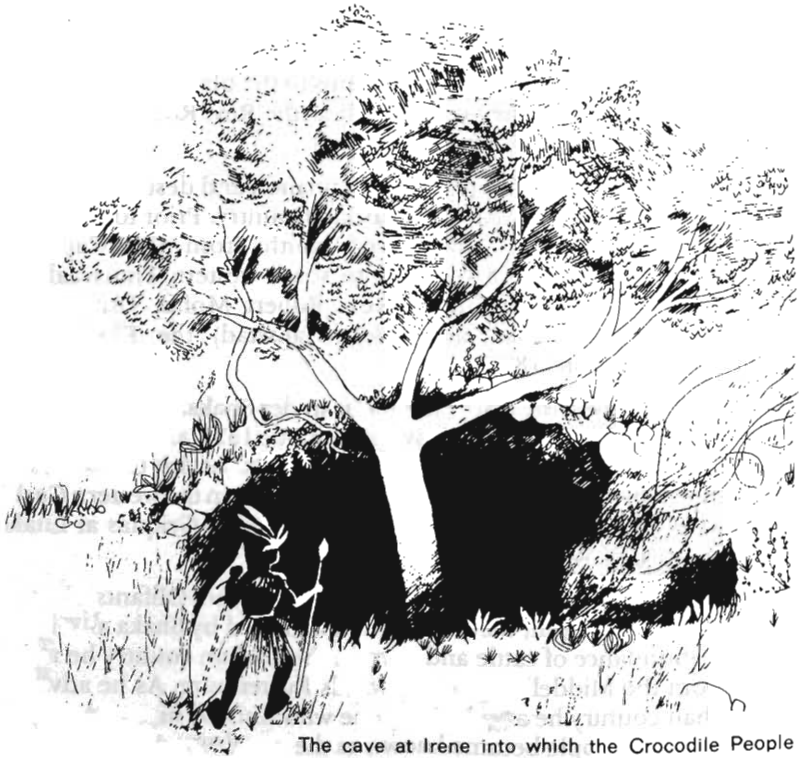
The period 1825–1837 was a long decade of turmoil and destruction for the Highveld and Magaliesberg area – the Cashan Country. Prior to 1825 white explorers and missionaries had moved north from the Cape into Bechuanaland (Dr. Burchell 1813), close to south-western Transvaal (Rev. John Campbell 1813), at Kuruman (Rev. Robert Moffat 1819) and at Makwassie (in the Transvaal near Wolmaransstad) the Rev. Messrs. Broadbent and Hodgson (1823).

After breaking away from the rest of the Zulus under Shaka, Mzilikazi and his Khumalo followers entered the Transvaal in about 1823 and laid waste the villages of the Sotho tribes in the Middelburg district. At this time Mantatisi and her Wild-Cat people destroyed the Bahurutsi tribe in the western Cashan area; they were later defeated by Nicholas Waterboer's Griquas at Litakoo with the assistance of Robert Moffat.

In 1824 Mzilikazi ravaged a large area adjoining the upper Olifants River and in 1825, due to the drought, the fear of being attacked by Shaka and having heard of the abundance of cattle and corn in the Cashan country he moved westwards from the Middelburg area towards Rustenburg. As he advanced into the Cashan country he attacked anyone who resisted him and so it was that at this time his people became known as the Matabele – the people who 'sank out of sight' behind their large oxhide shields to evade enemy assegais.

At this time the Cashan country was inhabited by the Bakwena, or Crocodile People, one of the largest and most prosperous of the Sotho tribes. The Bakwena villages were encircled by stone walls and the plastered walls of their rondavel-type huts were decorated with attractive designs. Some such villages

were situated in the area where Irene now is and it was here, in the autumn of 1825, that the Matabele who had set about subjugating the Crocodile People and were chasing a crowd of refugees down the Hennops River valley were amazed when their quarry disappeared from sight. On further inspection the Matabele discovered that hundreds of Crocodile People had taken refuge in a large cave whose entrance was secluded beneath a big tree not far from the Hennops River about a kilometre south of Irene. Mzilikazi ordered that fires be made in the mouth of the cave with the result that most of the unfortunate victims were asphyxiated whilst those who dared to emerge were assegaied.



The cave at Irene into which the Crocodile People fled (1825).

Mzilikazi destroyed almost every settlement of the Bakwena in the Cashan country. The campaign was completed in 1826 and the Matabele then became prosperous and Mzilikazi ordered the construction of a number of military kraals: one of the principal kraals was close to the Apies River, a few kilometres north of Irene and was known as enKungwini – the Place of Mist.

The arrival of the Matabele from the east in the Cashan country coincided generally with the arrival of the white man in the same area from the south. Andrew Geddes Bain's expedition including John Biddulph and their families and John Kift left Graaff-Reinet in May 1826 and found two Wesleyan missionaries, the Rev. James Archbell and Mr. Hodgson near the south-western tip of the Transvaal. About this time Robert Schoon, a trader, was trading in the Marico district. In 1827 the Matabele, when pursuing Jan Bloem's 'Bergenaars' towards the Orange River were repulsed by the Boers there.

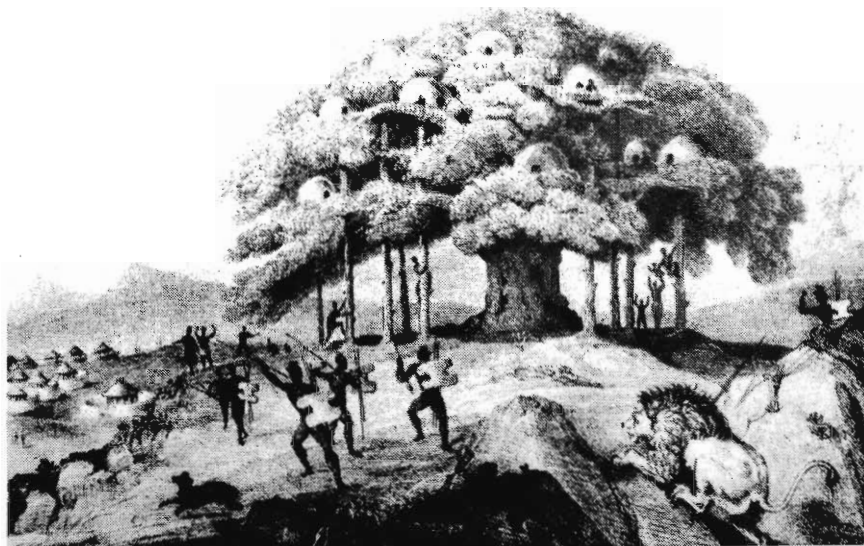
In 1828 Mzilikazi was again residing at enKungwini. His cattle herds were still being increased by raiding the Sotho tribes on the Highveld and the Matabele were now able to reap their crops, thresh their corn and harvest pumpkins, melons and beans in the warm winter sun.

The next winter, 1829, now one hundred and fifty years past, found Robert Schoon again in the Cashan country, this time with his friend and fellow Scot, William McLuckie. They were invited to visit Mzilikazi at enKungwini which they approached from the west and were impressed by the variety of game and the manifold evidence of the slaughter of the Crocodile People, some areas being deserted. The wretched surviving Bakwena were now terrorised by wild animals and in one area were compelled to live in trees or in houses on stilts in order to escape the lions and other wild beasts. Schoon shot a five-metre crocodile and found the remains of a man and a dog in its stomach. The Matabele, on the other hand, were enjoying the prosperity of good crops including cane and their cattle grazed in luxuriant pastures where streams and fountains abounded.



A wagon of one of the early travellers in the Cashan Country

Schoon and McLuckie met Mzilikazi at enKungwini in July 1829 and stayed in the Cashan country until October during which time they hunted elephants in the Magaliesberg until their wagons were loaded high with ivory; they also bartered their goods for ostrich feathers and hides. At his request they demonstrated the use of their 'sticks of thunder' to Mzilikazi who was bewildered thereby. The two Scotsmen left the Cashan country at the beginning of the rainy season and on their way south called on the Rev. James Archbell at Platberg near the Vaal River.



The inhabited tree on the slopes of the Cashan Mountains (1829)

Archbell was keen to visit Mzilikazi and made immediate preparations to do so and, together with David Hume and Barend Barends, set out within a few days for enKungwini by travelling up the Vaal River valley. Schoon and McLuckie proceeded to Kuruman whither they escorted the envoys whom Mzilikazi had sent with them to ask Robert Moffat, the missionary, to visit Mzilikazi.

On 9th November Moffat set out for the north, not intending to go all the way to enKungwini, but the Matabele indunas beguiled him to do so and in the result he travelled northwards to Mosega (near Zeerust) and thence generally eastwards along much the same route as Schoon and also came upon the tree-dwellers with whom he shared a meal of locusts high up in a Mimosa tree. Moffat found the Cashan country teeming with game and he had frequently to walk ahead of his wagon with his gun in order to prevent the oxen taking fright at the charge of a rhinoceros or buffalo. He, too, was amazed at the richness of the country and the appalling destruction done to its towns and people.

Moffat travelled along the foot of the Cashan mountains, the country to the north being beautifully studded with ranges of little hills interspersed with conical features. The soil of the valleys was of the richest description, some ten to twenty feet deep, and it was evident that grain, water-melons, pumpkins, kidney-beans and sweet reed had once flourished. He found a few houses which had escaped the flames of the Matabele; the plastered interiors appeared to be varnished and the walls and doorways were neatly ornamented with architraves and cornices showing much taste. The houses were circular and conical, surrounded by verandahs to afford shade, and stone walls, up to seven feet high, surrounded the villages.

Travelling in summer Moffat's party was at times delayed by rain and thunder storms. Before reaching enKungwini he met firstly Barend Barends hunting (near Hartebeestpoort Dam) and then James Archbell with his wife Elizabeth and David Hume whereafter they travelled together to meet Mzilikazi who in due course received them in his huge military kraal lined with a thousand warriors. Mzilikazi did not make Archbell very welcome, probably because he had arrived uninvited, so he did not stay long, but Moffat remained for some time with Mzilikazi and they became friends and this friendship lasted for many years. Moffat returned to Kuruman as soon as he was able to take leave of Mzilikazi. Archbell described the Cashan country as being particularly interesting to the botanist mentioning that he had seen ten species of vine, that there was much ground in cultivation and that corn was plentiful and water most abundant.

In April 1830 Dingaan, who had succeeded Shaka by assassination, sent a Zulu army to do battle with the Matabele, but they failed to surprise Mzilikazi who halted their advance not far from enKungwini, but the Zulus took many of the Matabele cattle back to Natal. The Zulus came again in 1832 when there was another indecisive battle and in the same period there were numerous other forays by the Matabele in various directions including the destruction of Barend Barends' commando at Moordkop in June 1831.

During the period 1831-33 David Hume, accompanied by a Mr. Muller, travelling through the Cashan country succeeded in penetrating as far as the Tropic of Capricorn. In March 1832 the missionaries Lemue, Rolland and Pellissier set up their mission at Mosega and the latter visited Mzilikazi who began fortifying the Marico district in 1833 which project was completed early in 1834. Later that year the Matabele attacked Andrew Geddes Bain in the upper Molopo and made off with his wagons.

Early in 1835 Dr. Andrew Smith's party arrived at Kuruman. In his party were Robert Schoon, David Hume, Robert Moffat and Charles Bell, the artist. On

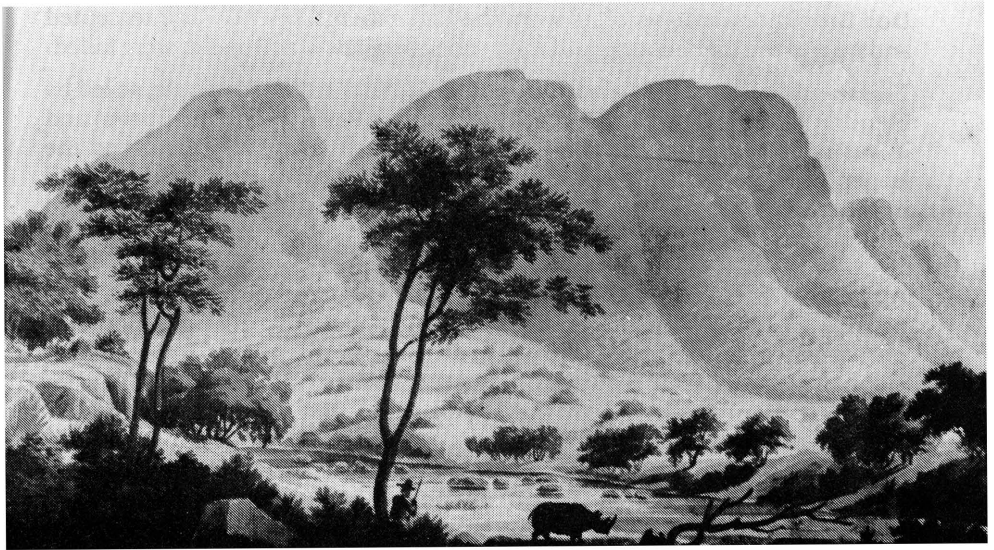
9th June they met Mzilikazi at Tolane near the Marico River and obtained permission to travel in the Cashan country and so, in June and July, his party explored the Hartebeestpoort Dam area and fortunately Charles Bell executed a number of excellent paintings of the Oorie (Crocodile) River in the Cashan mountains.



The Crocodile (Oorie) River at the Poort in the Cashan Mountains
(Charles Bell, 1835)

Dr. Smith noted that the spoor of elephants and rhinoceroses were found on top of the Cashan hills. There were grass fires burning almost continuously, perhaps started by hunters. There were several large springs in the hills. One of the party, a Mr. Piet Botha, shot a 'sea-cow' and on 4th July they passed over Commando Nek and found thick bush on the banks of the Oorie River, where Hartebeestpoort Dam now is, and shot seven sea-cows there. On 8th July they climbed the Cashan mountains, shooting an eland on the way and saw many other species of game. From the summit they could see the site of Mzilikazi's previous kraal. From this point Dr. Smith's party travelled in a north-westerly direction, rounding the Pilansberg before returning to Tolane whence they journeyed northwards to the tropic which they reached on 4th September and then returned in stages to Kuruman.

Late in 1835 Mzilikazi allowed three American missionaries to resuscitate the



The Cashan Mountains across the Urocodile (Oorie) River
(Charles Bell, 1835).

mission station at Mosega; they were Dr. Wilson, Mr. Lindley and Mr. Venable and their wives.

Early in 1836 the vanguard of the Trekkers (emigrant farmers), Louis Trichardt and Jan van Rensburg, crossed the Vaal River into Matabele territory, but managed to escape the attentions of Mzilikazi's patrols. They travelled east of the Magaliesberg and through Trichardt's Poort at Renosterkop on their way northward to the Soutpansberg. The Trekkers J.G.S. Bronkhorst and H. Potgieter, after crossing the Vaal early in June, came to a ridge which they named the Suikerbosch-rand (west of Heidelberg). They then trekked via the Olifants River to the Soutpansberg where they found Louis Trichardt.

The Trekkers were now reaching the Vaal in greater numbers and were penetrating in small parties across the river into Matabele territory. One of these was Stephanus Erasmus who went deep into Mzilikazi's country on a hunting trip. When he returned to his wagons he found them being attacked by the Matabele. His two sons together with Karl Kruger and Jan Claassens were all killed, but Erasmus escaped with Piet Bekker to warn the Botha and Steyn families camped near the Vaal who were thus able to set up a laager in time to repel the Matabele who attacked for several hours. Less fortunate was

Dolf Bronkhorst who set off to warn the Liebenbergs, but he was intercepted and he and the Liebenbergs and their schoolmaster, MacDonald, were killed.

This was now war. The Boers feared a further attack by the Matabele, so led by Hendrik Potgieter, they formed a large laager at Vegkop (near Heilbron) and it was not long before six thousand Matabele, led by Kalipi, attacked the laager on 15th October, 1836, and were repulsed with heavy losses numbering hundreds, but they nevertheless removed the Boers' horses and cattle.

At this time Captain Cornwallis Harris, Royal Engineers on leave from India, arrived at Mosega on a hunting trip and, strangely enough, obtained permission from Mzilikazi, who was at Kapain near the Marico River, to hunt elephants in the Cashan country. On the way thither Harris met Kalipi's army returning from Vegkop with the stolen cattle, but escaped molestation. Despite the unsettled situation Harris enjoyed two months of excellent hunting in the Cashan and as far north as Capricorn. He was also an artist and has left many colourful paintings of the people, the animals and the scenery he found. His most celebrated hunting success was the finding and the slaying of a magnificent specimen of *Aigocerus Niger*, the sable antelope, which became known as the Harris buck, it not having been identified previously.

Harris came upon a small herd of stately sable antelope whilst hunting elephants on the south side of the Cashan mountains on 13th December 1836 and resolved to shoot one and to pursue it to the world's end if need be; so for three days he followed his quarry on horseback over hills and through valleys and spending one night in a cave near the summit of the great range amidst a wide variety of other game. Harris intercepted the buck "in a tangled labyrinth of ravines which terminated in an impenetrable defile", but having wounded a fine specimen it escaped by dashing into a scrub of flowering proteas. Eventually, when at bay, the great antelope charged Harris twice before it was finally overthrown and slain. Harris exulted as he found himself "actually standing over the prostrate carcase of so brilliant an addition to the catalogue of game quadrupeds – so bright a jewel amid the riches of Zoology!" Fortunately Harris has immortalised this particular 'swart bok' in his excellent paintings.

"At noon then on the 16th December, bidding a final adieu to the enchanting forests of Cashan, we turned our face to the southward, and having crossed a small range of hills, which were all that divided us from the vast plains of the Vaal River, entered upon a new region." (These hills must have been the Witwatersrand). As Harris proceeded southwards past Irene he was at