

CHAPTER 5

THE TRANSGARIEP AND THE MALOTI-DRAKENSBERG

In stealing cattle, Mercury himself could not have been more expert, or cunning, than the Bushmen.

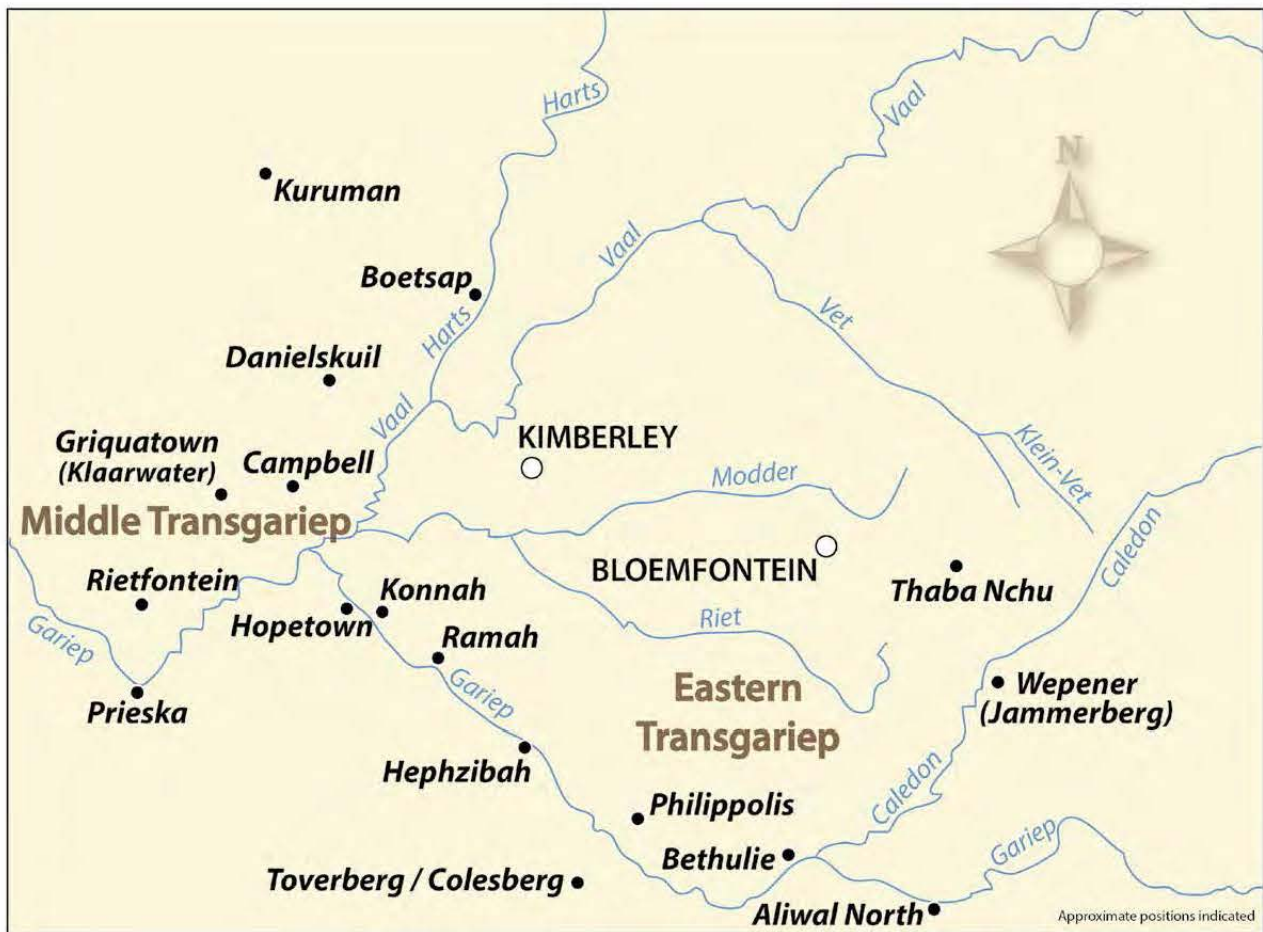
William Burchell

When Lichtenstein passed through the Bokkeveld and Roggeveld in the early years of the nineteenth century he found that many San had moved from the Lower Bokkeveld to the Roggeveld from where they continued to attack the farms of the Colonists. "Nothing was to be heard but complaints of the Bosjesmans", remarked Lichtenstein. A similar situation prevailed at the Bruintjeshoogte. San bands inhabited the more remote and mountainous areas of the north-eastern frontier districts and many of the raids made by these people seem to have been politically inspired as Lichtenstein remarked that San frequently raided, not to plunder, but "through mere wantonness" - which suggests that a political motive underlay their actions. Certainly, many of the Khoe-San who raided these farmers were known to be ex-servants, and it is clear from the records that, in a great many cases, the cruel treatment of Khoe-San servants by their masters led to the former's deserting the farms and enlisting with the Khoe-San "guerilla/raider" bands who occupied the surrounding mountains.

Farmers in the Tarka, Stormberg, Koup and Nieuweveld, too, were troubled by San raiders for many years after the first concerted attempts were made to pacify the San. The high hills surrounding the Tarka continued to shelter San robber bands and the whole of this area lay deserted during the early years of the nineteenth century. George Thompson reported that San were still troubling farmers in the Cradock area in 1823 and more than 100 San had been shot by commandos in this district in the previous year. Many San bands also found refuge in the Stormberg, and raids were mounted from these mountains up until at least 1824. And in the Beaufort District in 1829 more than 40 farms were abandoned in the face of a threatened "invasion" by a band of San about 400 strong. Commandos were mounted against all these raider San groups of the earlier years of the nineteenth century, but there was now a shift towards capturing, rather than exterminating, these people. In these later commandos, many more San were taken prisoner than were killed.

Although pockets of resistance thus continued on the north-eastern frontier, by the 1830s the San within the Colony were, nevertheless, essentially a defeated people. Most, as we have seen, had been subjugated and incorporated into the rural labour force. While the so-called "Bushman problem" was therefore largely, although certainly not completely, under control within the Colony by the 1820s, the situation north of the upper reaches of the Gariiep and in KwaZulu-Natal was very different. Here new frontiers were being opened up, and the arrival of immigrant groups, including European traders and farmers, was to be followed by extensive San raids on the livestock of these people.

The middle and eastern Transgariep frontier



The middle and eastern Transgariep.

After a map in Schoeman (2003).

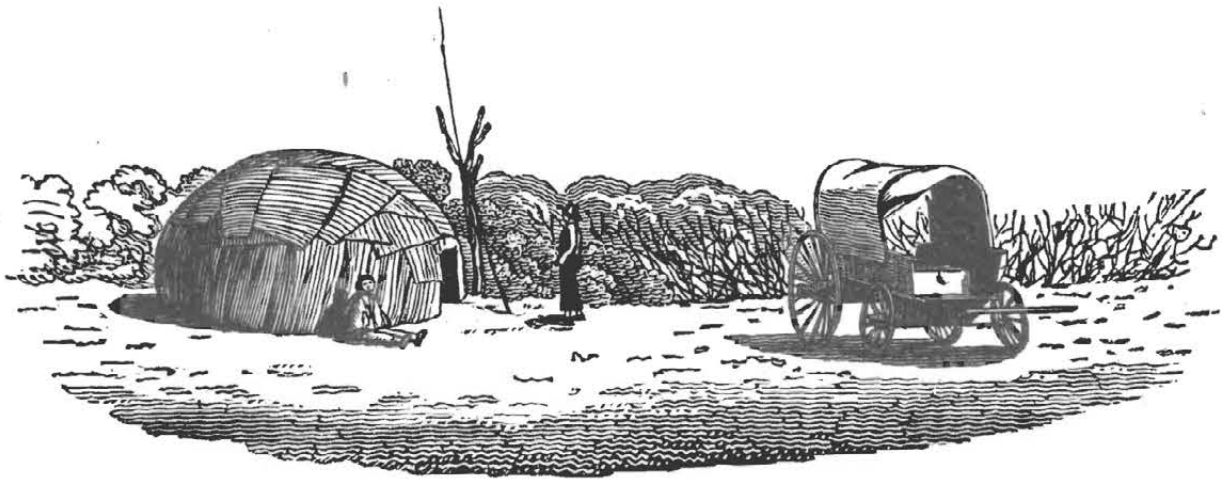
Previously occupied only by San and Sotho-Tswana, the middle Transgariep (the area north of the Gariep and west of its confluence with the Vaal) and the eastern Transgariep (the area north of the Gariep and east of its confluence with the Vaal - roughly the southern section of the present Free State) began to be occupied by other groups as the nineteenth century progressed. Although for quite a number of years before 1800 occasional hunters armed with guns had apparently made forays from the Cape into the southern portions of this region, areas populated almost exclusively by the San, it was only with more permanent settlement of the area that serious conflict developed between its San inhabitants and the newly arrived immigrant groups.

Shortly after the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Griquas (a multi-ethnic group founded by the manumitted slave Adam Kok I primarily from members of the Charugriqua/Grigriqua Khoë, but also many members of fringe groups who wished to be free of the influence of the Cape authorities, and known generally as Basters, or Bastaards) moved into the more easterly areas of the middle Transgariep. This was a response to the establishment in 1805 of an LMS mission at Klaarwater, later re-named Griquatown, under the LMS missionary William Anderson and his assistant Cornelius Kramer. It is unclear how many Griquas (who only assumed this name in 1813 at John Campbell's suggestion) settled there, but they may have numbered as many as 500. They were under the leadership of Cornelius Kok, son of Adam Kok I, as well as a Baster chief, Barend Barends. Cornelius's son, Adam Kok II, sometimes acted for his father. Later, in 1820, a catechist of San descent, Andries Waterboer, was elected chief of the Griquas at Klaarwater, by then known as Griquatown.



A view of Klarwater, c.1810.

Source (original): Burchell, W.J. (1822/24). *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*. 2 vols. London: Printed by Longman et al.



The matjieshuis of Adam Kok II at Klarwater in 1811.

Source (original): Burchell, W.J. (1822/24). *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa*. 2 vols. London: Printed by Longman et al.



Griquatown in 1813.

Source: Campbell, J. (1815). *Travels in South Africa*. London: Black and Parry.

The spring at Klaarwater was taken from the San band who were based there, and this was followed shortly thereafter by the appropriation of a long chain of springs running for about 50 miles south-west and north-east of the settlement. The Griquas, who were peripatetic stock farmers and hunters, used all these springs, camping close to them while on their grazing and hunting rounds, but Klaarwater, with its mission, became the capital of the infant Griqua “state” - with two main outposts, at Campbell and Hardcastle. Tensions developed between Kok and Andries Waterboer, and the former moved with his followers to Campbell, and subsequently, in 1826, to the LMS mission at Philippolis, while Griquatown continued to be occupied by Waterboer and his followers.

In the years following the establishment of the Klaarwater/Griquatown mission other multi-ethnic groups, not always easily distinguished from the Griquas, or from each other, also entered the area, grazing their livestock at the springs. By the early 1820s there may have been between 2,000 and 3,000 people of mixed descent who were occupying the middle and eastern Transgariep and who belonged to groups such as the Korana (with their many adherents, including Tlhaping), the Basters, and the Griquas (or dissident offshoots of this group, like the Hartenaars and Bergenaars). They lived by a combination of stock-keeping, agriculture, hunting, trading and raiding, and were to form a range of relationships with the San during the nineteenth century, ranging from extermination to patron-client relationships and intermarriage.



A Korana horseman.

Source (original): Arbousset, T. and Dumas, F. (1842). *Relation d'un Voyage d'Exploration au Nord-Est de la Colonie du Cap de Bonne-Espérance*. Paris: Bertrand.



Andries Hendricks, a Bergenaar chief. By Charles Davidson Bell.

Source: Museum Africa.

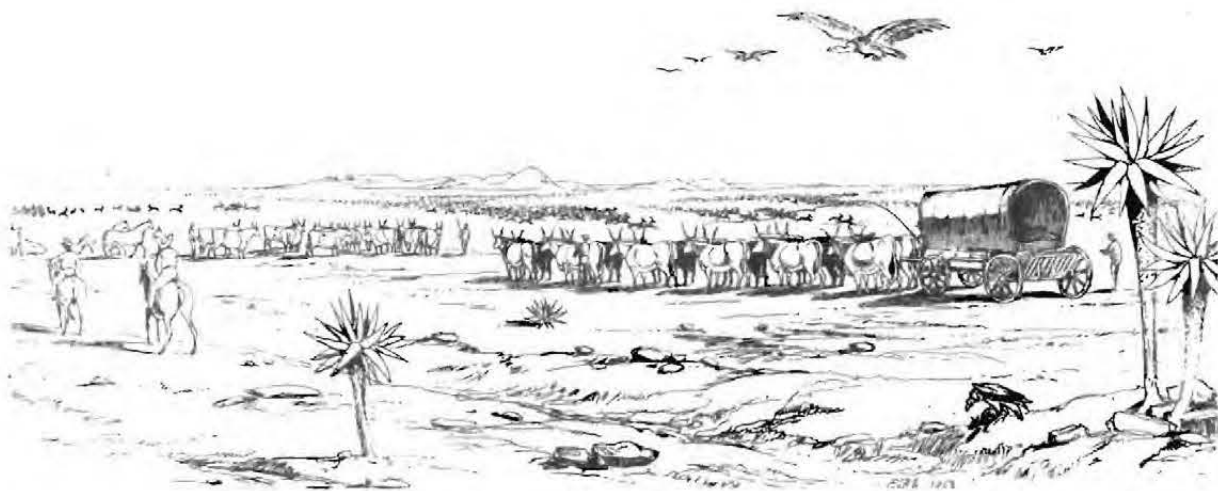
All these immigrant groups were equipped with horses and guns, and many lived as raider-pastoralists, preying on weaker, less well-armed groups, particularly the San. The Hartenaars, for example, who had moved from Griquatown to the Harts River in 1814, raided the San for cattle and children at this time. The situation worsened for the San when Boers from the Colony began to cross over into the eastern Transgariep. Expanding in population and suffering from the drought in the Colony and the shortage of grazing south of the Gariiep, from about 1820 they began to make occasional expeditions across the Gariiep, roaming for longer or shorter periods in central and eastern Transgariep, before returning to their farms south of the river. These expeditions were initially conducted against the orders of the Colonial government, but in 1825 they gained the official sanction of Stockenstrom.



A Boer of the Transgariep. By Charles Davidson Bell.

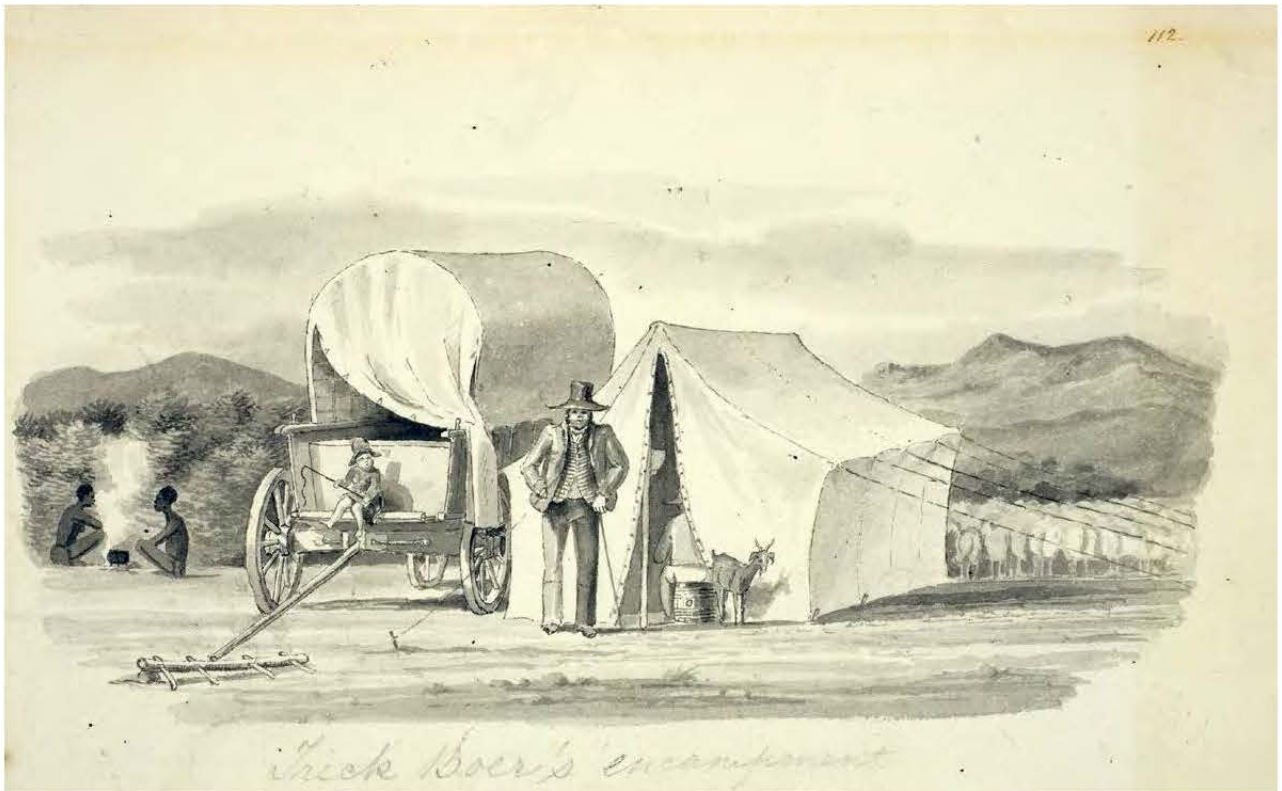
Source: Bell Heritage Trust, UCT.

Reluctantly, recognizing that “the spirit of expatriation” which ruled amongst the Boers was unlikely to lessen, Stockenstrom gave permission for European farmers from the Colony to move northwards and cross the Gariep to the better-watered areas in this region. This was granted under strict (albeit unenforceable) conditions, including a commitment by the farmers to return to the Colony once the drought eased. Stockenstrom was particularly concerned about the effect that the movement of the Boers, and the other frontiersmen, such as the Griquas, would have on the San living in Transgariep. Hundreds of Boers now moved to the Transgariep. Initially they built temporary houses, and most returned regularly to their farms south of the Gariep, but by at least the mid-1830s many had settled permanently or semi-permanently along the Caledon, Riet and Modder Rivers. In 1834 there were about 1,500 Boers in the Transgariep. The closure of the San missions and the attacks on San communities of the Great and Upper Riet Rivers and the Modder River by the Boers and Griquas in particular, put severe pressure on the San in the region.



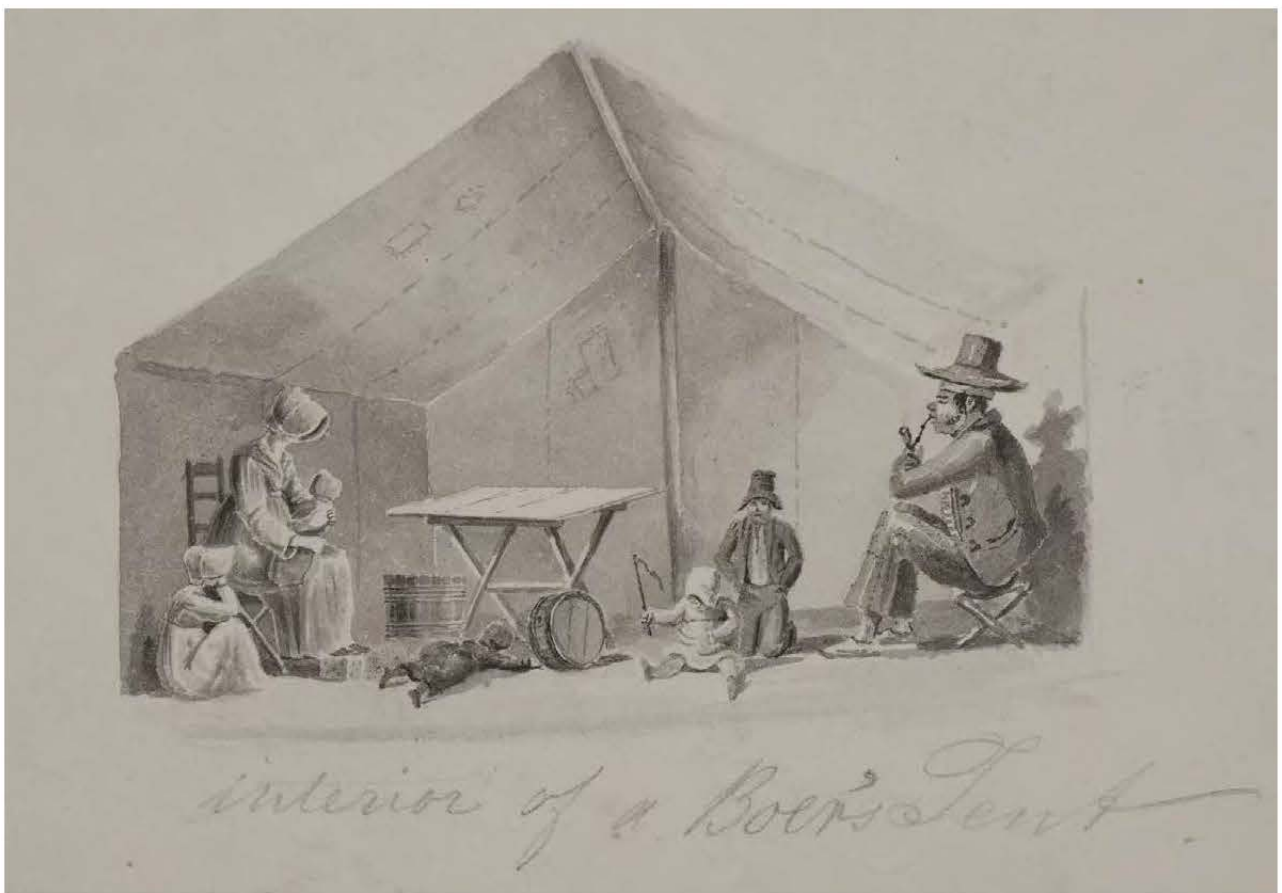
A wagon train in Transgariep.

Source: Backhouse, J. (1844). *A Narrative of a Visit to the Mauritius and South Africa*. London: Hamilton Adams.



A trekboer's camp in Transgariep. By Charles Davidson Bell.

Source: Museum Africa.



The interior of a trekboer's tent in Transgariep. By Charles Davidson Bell.

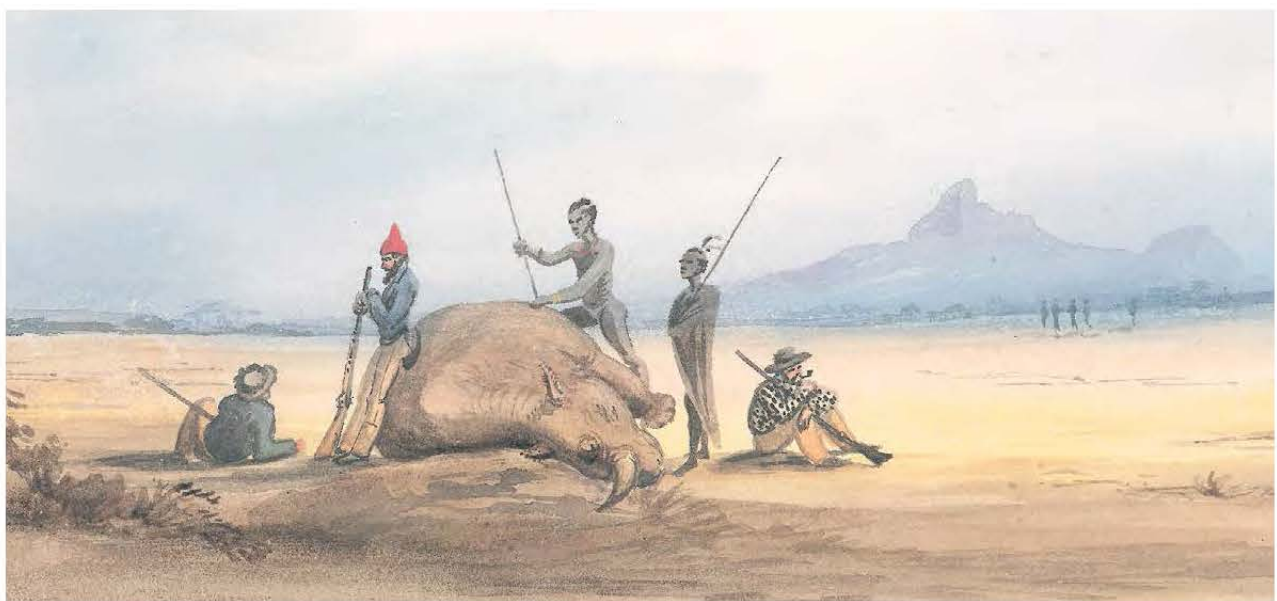
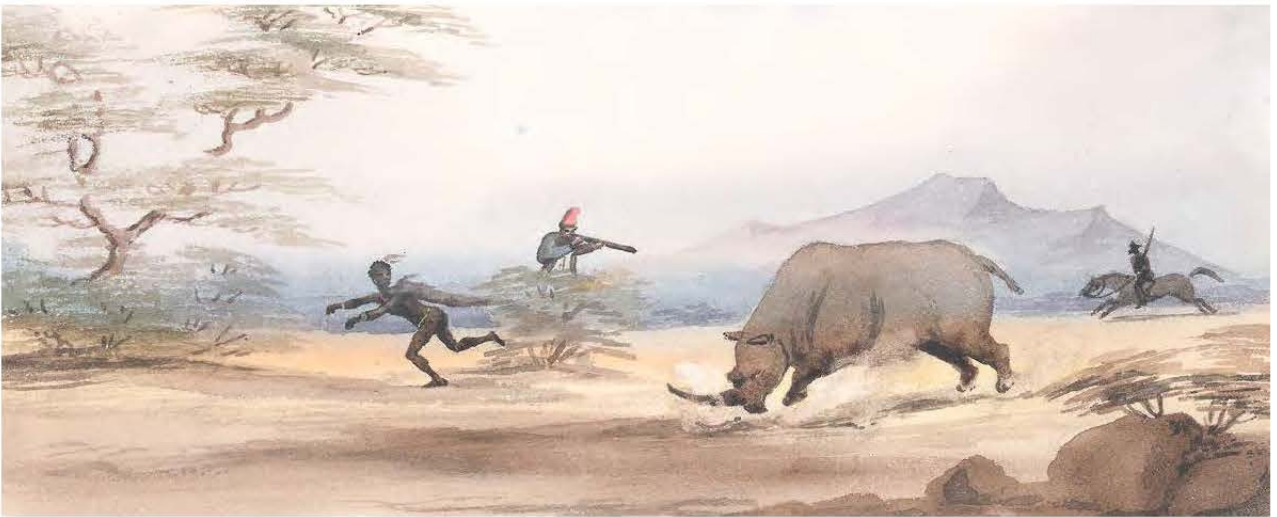
Source: Museum Africa.

The Boers, like the Griquas and other stock farmer groups in the area, grazed and watered their cattle at the springs, forcing the San into more arid zones, as well as into areas further to the north within the present Free State, where they sometimes came into conflict with the Sotho-Tswana who occupied these areas. The farmers' cattle had a detrimental effect on the wild plant foods in the area, trampling the veld and destroying the "uintjies" (bulbous plants) on which the San subsisted. Overgrazing also caused the destruction of plants on which the game grazed. It is possible, too, that, as occurred in some other areas such as the Seekoei River valley, plants used by the San to make their arrow poison were destroyed, so that the San were no longer able to hunt larger game. Certainly, hunting was carried out by the immigrant groups on a scale hitherto impossible as a result of the extensive use of guns and horses, resulting in a rapid decrease in the amount of game. Both the Boers and the Griquas were avid hunters, and subsisted to a large extent on game. Unlike the San, they were able with their guns to kill far more animals than they were able to eat at one time, and there are many accounts of the wholesale slaughter of eland and other antelope by the farmers. Game that was not shot out moved to other, less-intensively occupied, areas, forced there by the settlers' appropriation of the water holes at which they drank, or scared off by the reports of the hunters' guns. Although the San were sometimes allowed to share in the spoils of these hunts, ultimately the long-term effects of these hunting expeditions were to prove disastrous for their hunting and gathering way of life.



Disguised San hunters stalking game.

Source: Bell Heritage Trust, UCT



Hunting out the game with guns and horses.
Source: Bell Heritage Trust, UCT.



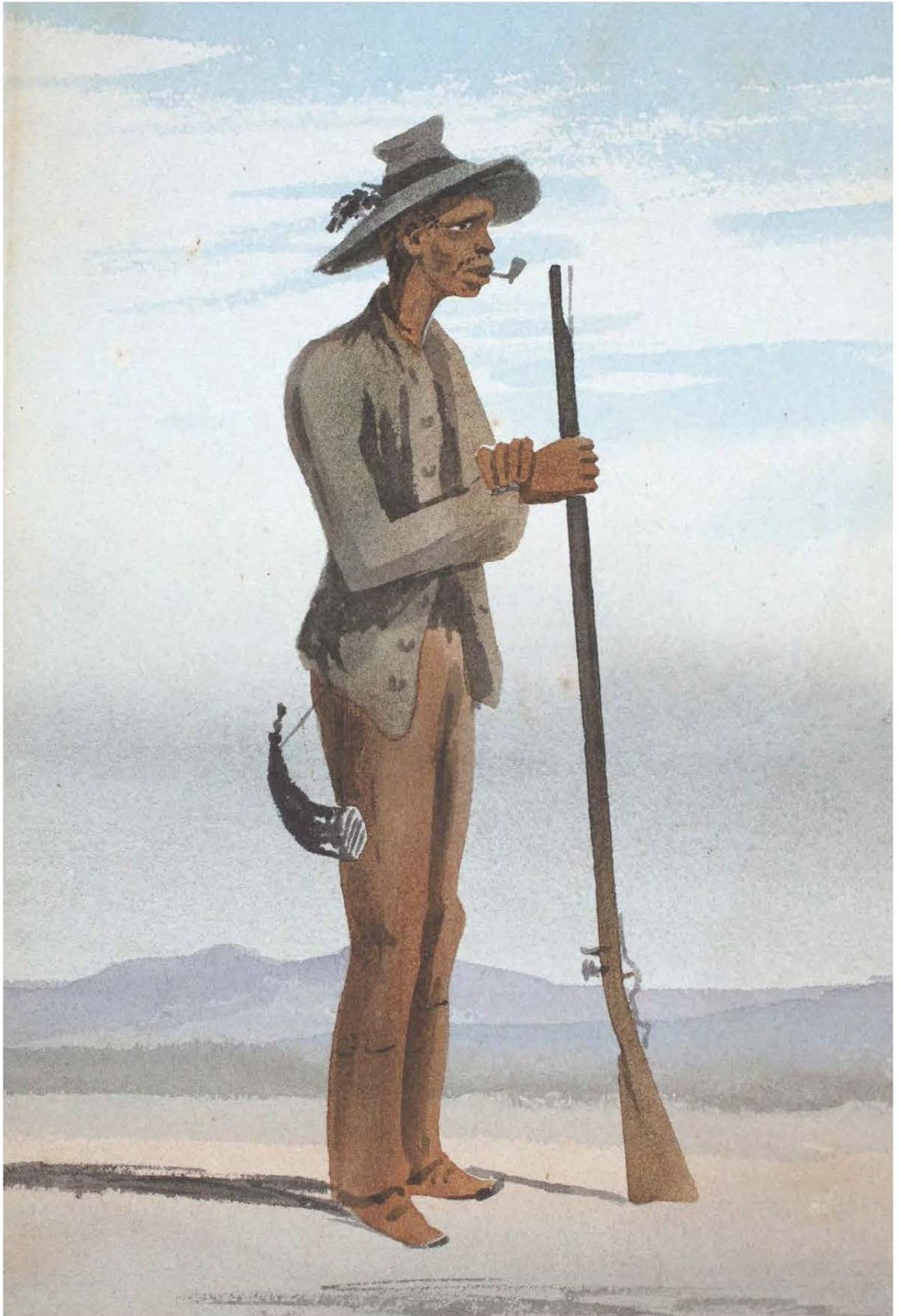
Hartebeests being hunted.

Source: Butler, H. (1841). *South African Sketches*. London: Ackermann.



A Khoehunter. By "W.J.".

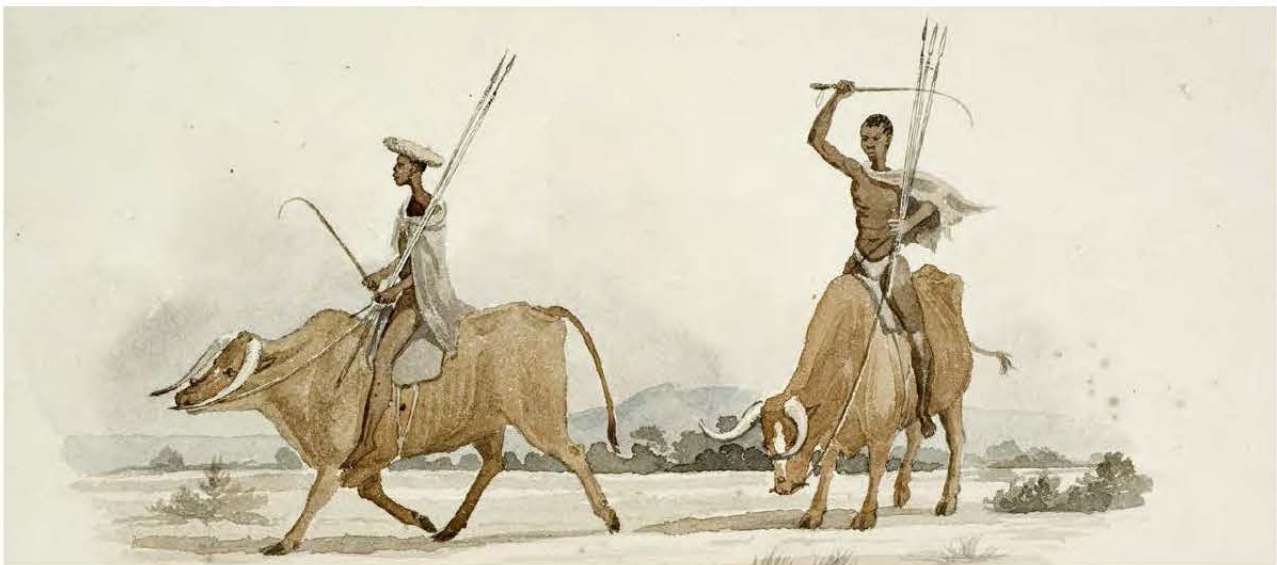
Source: Library of Parliament.



A Khoer hunter. By Charles Davidson Bell.

Source: Museum Africa.

After allowing the Boers into the Transgariep on a temporary basis, Stockenstrom, to his credit, did his best to shield the area's original inhabitants from the effects of this action. He conceived a comprehensive, long-term, but ultimately unsuccessful, scheme for solving the problem of the occupation of the San's land by other groups. Realising that it would be impossible to reclaim the land in the Colony that had been seized from the San by the Boers, he aimed to keep the Boers out of the Transgariep, once the drought had broken, and make the area a haven for the San. He marked out areas in the Transgariep, specifically the Philippolis area, where the San from both sides of the Colonial border could be settled. Here, under the supervision and protection of the missionaries, he believed, they could learn to become self-supporting cattle-herders, with cattle being provided by the Boers in the Colony as a form of insurance against San raids on their own cattle. He recognized that he needed the co-operation of the Griquas in protecting the San, and in 1827 he extracted a promise from Adam Kok that he would ensure that the San in Transgariep were not maltreated, either by his own people or by other groups. Somewhat naively, therefore, and supported by John Philip, Stockenstrom rested his hopes for this scheme's success on the ability of the missionaries and the Griquas to protect the San, and the willingness of the European farmers to provide the San living at or near mission stations with livestock.



Griquas on their riding oxen. By Charles Davidson Bell.

Source: Museum Africa.



Griqua women. By Charles Davidson Bell.

Source: Museum Africa.

This was not to be. While some Griquas had formed good relationships with San, others, as has been mentioned, were at least as rapacious as the Boers in their dealings with them - claiming somewhat disingenuously, in some cases, that they knew little better, having been instructed in these ways by the Boers. Campbell, who visited Griquatown in 1820, had already noted the treacherous and cruel manner in which the Griquas treated San who had been driven by hunger to raid their cattle:

“One party shot one of the Bushmen while he was in conversation with one of their number. Another party chased some of the Bushmen with their wives and children into a cave, which they were afraid to enter or was difficult of access. They sent down a tame Bushman who was with them to invite his countrymen in the cave to come out, for they wanted to make peace with them. On this the credulous Bushmen left their strong-hold and they all sat down together to eat, after which they butchered the men, women and one child, in a savage manner.” (They were killed by having their heads beaten to pieces on stones and the surviving children were distributed as servants among the commando members.)

In this case, the actions taken against the San were strongly disapproved of by the Griqua Council, and some of the perpetrators of the massacre were expelled from the church at Griquatown. And in one case at least, the Griquas appear to have received “divine punishment” for their cruelty towards the San. Campbell reported:

“Some Griquas hunted in the morning a lion, which they killed after its having bitten Jantje Kok (mortally). It is remarkable that the lion when attacking Jantje passed two men, just as if he sought him (in particular) ... About three years ago the same man met a Bushman in the fields who drove a cow which he had stolen. Jantje having retaken the cow without meeting any resistance from the Bushman, shot him.”

Jantje, it seems, was unaware that some San shamans transformed into lions while in trance.

Stockenstrom also reported on Griqua massacres of San groups, comparing their behaviour unfavourably with that of the Boers. (While he was instrumental in having legislation for the protection of San servants drawn up by the Colonial government, Stockenstrom, at times, acted as an apologist for the Boers, and attempted to justify their occupation of San territories in Transgariiep, as well as the taking of San women and children into service on their farms and the subsequent harsh treatment of these people). In 1830 Stockenstrom travelled in the Transgariiep collecting evidence on the reported massacre of two kraals of San people by Griquas, who said they had been aided and abetted in this by the Boers and Korana. He found clear evidence of the massacre, and of the Korana's involvement, but little or no evidence that the Boers had been involved on this occasion.

However, it is also clear, as we have seen, that many of the Boers were on very poor terms with the San. They resented the fact that maltreated San servants, including San who had been forced off their land by the farmers, took refuge at the missions, sometimes raiding their cattle in revenge for the appropriation of their land and the manner in which they had been treated. As has been mentioned, they harassed the San at the missions, and, like the Griquas, often treated them exceptionally cruelly. Despite assurances from Stockenstrom that steps would be taken to prevent the San from raiding their cattle, therefore, the Boers were not prepared to provide gifts of livestock to the San at, or near, the missions.

Faced with intense competition by other groups for their land, some San now went to work on farms in the Transgariiep as well as in the Colony. Others attached themselves in small groups to the Griquas,