

Cruising Up the Kowie

on 21 November 2024, by Lyn Brown and Heather Howard

The morning dawned misty, and rain was falling as I arrived at the Wharf at 8:30 and met Raymond, barge owner Graeme Kelbrick's son and righthand crew member, who was busily cleaning the windows of the boat. We quickly got the tables set with cloths and mugs for tea and coffee to be enjoyed before our departure.

The weather cleared and we were treated to a sunny day. After a warm welcome from Chairman Mary Ritchie and thanks to Heather Howard and Dave Hawkins for their help in organising the cruise, we departed the Wharf for our cruise to Black Rock, with Graeme at the helm.

Dave pointed out the two original wooden posts used for tying up the boats, still standing firm after 200 years. Next came Berrington's Cove, the rounded-out area of the river where the boats used to turn. Dave explained that the early sailors named the area the Bay of Biscay, as it reminded them of a similar turning point in a Spanish port. He recounted the story of a paddle wheeled tug *The Buffalo* which was scuppered in the area and led to the reckless skipper losing his licence. The wreck remains there still.

As we glided quietly between the riverbanks beyond all habitations, Dave and Heather pointed out a clearing where, years ago, there had been a tea-room and a dance floor. Passengers from the Kowie were delivered there on board an old wooden cabin cruiser with a canopied roof, to enjoy alfresco tea and dancing (though there was an open-sided barn for shelter from the sun or rain). The boat would come back for them later; they always knew when it was approaching, because the boat owner had a powerful voice, and they could hear him singing from way downriver.

Presently, the Riverview Waterfront Estate materialised. Heather related how the developer, Justin de Wet Steyn, had described to her the history of the property:

“It is situated on 310 hectares of land with about 6km of frontage on the Kowie River. Only the first 130 plots, where the old Caravan Park was situated, have been developed and serviced so far. The remainder of the property will eventually be developed.

The area accommodates about 30 giraffe, many bushbuck, nyala, impala, southern reedbuck, duiker, blesbok, waterbuck, warthog and a host of bird species (about 125), including fish eagle, martial eagle, crowned eagle, jackal buzzard, nerina trogon.”

Justin explained that his wife Annie’s plant nursery, known as “Clivia Wonders”, houses the most comprehensive collection of clivia in the world. At the western end of the Estate near “Cob Hole” is the area where, it is claimed, the well-known English explorer, William Burchell, identified and removed the world’s first *clivia nobilis* plant on 25 September 1813. The name *clivia* was given to the plant later by the wife of the Duke of Northumberland. She was a sister of Clive of India, who played a major role in establishing a British presence in India, eventually colonising that land, including what is today known as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

According to the title deeds, the area including the Riverview Waterfront Estate, was previously owned by the well-known 1820 Settler William Reed and family, whose original land extended to Salt Vlei and included Forest Downs and all the land between it and the Golf club.

One of the sections once belonged to a well-known gentleman by name of Henry Nourse who was himself not a Settler but a wealthy English businessman who successfully lobbied the British Parliament to sponsor the 1820 Settlers. Nourse owned businesses in Grahamstown and Port Alfred, [as well as Hope Farm and the land on the West Kowie on which Richmond House now stands - Ed]

More or less opposite Centenary Park you will see a disturbed cliff face. This is the site of the last quarry used by the old Dept of Railways and Harbours to obtain stone material for the final extension to the Western Pier at the mouth of the Kowie. Work stopped at the outbreak of the second World War. *“The foundations housing the old stone crushing plant were still visible when Annie and I purchased the five properties from the Reed family in 2005.”* (Justin de Wet Steyn)



Home and Dry! LAHS members disembark from *Lady Biscay* after an enjoyable river cruise. (Photo: Sue Gordon)

Our arrival back at the Wharf was filled with happy goodbyes and compliments to the organisers of our very pleasant day. There were also a lot of comments as to repeating the outing in the future! Photographs were taken by Sue Gordon of the members of LAHS and of the LAHS committee members on the dock before we all headed for home.