

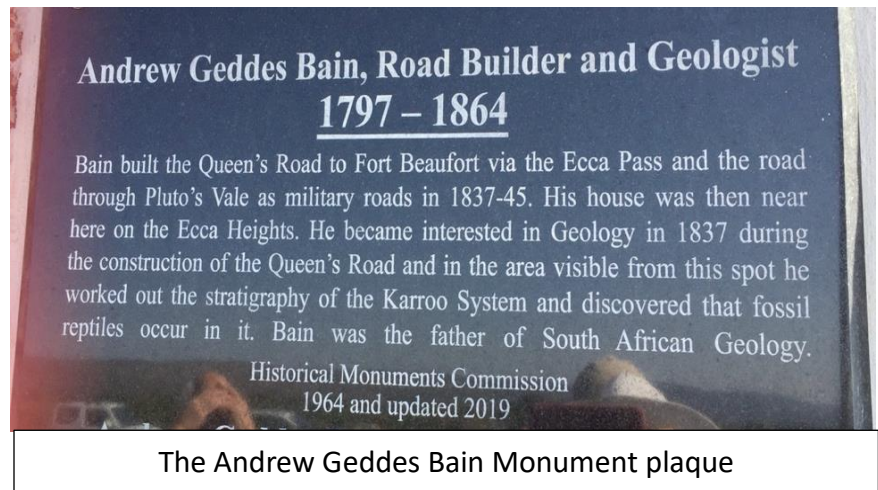
SEPTEMBER TWO-DAY OUTING

Overview by Gwynn Crothall



LAHS members at the Andrew Geddes Bain Monument

The Lower Albany Historical Society's annual two-day outing in September 2022 saw some 28 members gather to travel to Stutterheim and environs in the Border region of the Eastern Cape. The trip included visits to the Hertzog Church and Thomas River before overnighing at the Manderson Hotel just outside Stutterheim. En route we visited the monument and plaques at the Andrew Geddes Bain Monument (see above and right).



The Andrew Geddes Bain Monument plaque

The Queen's Road

This reserve, lying on the old wagon road from Grahamstown to the north, has considerable significance regarding the history of transport in South Africa. The first posting stage was at Botha's Ridge, 2¼ km behind this plinth, where the original hotel with its unique corbelled cooling house still stands. Andrew Geddes Bain was appointed by the military authorities in 1837 to construct a properly engineered road from Grahamstown to Fort Beaufort, approximately parallel to the new frontier along the Keiskamma River. Forty six miles long and of strategic importance, it was the first major engineered road in the Eastern Cape and one of the earliest in South Africa. When near completion in 1845 it was called the Queen's Road by Cape Governor Sir George Napier. Although the original road was repositioned during upgrading in the 20th century, part of the original Queen's Road is accessible from the lower plinth.

The Queen's Road plaque

The Grahamstown to Fort Beaufort road is referred to as the 'Queen's Road' because construction of this road began in 1837, the year of Queen Victoria's coronation. It was the first South African 'highway' extending for more than 72km and was completed in 1842. Andrew Geddes Bain constructed 'The Queen's Road', his first venture into road building, he then went on to become a great engineer of roads in the Eastern and Western Cape. We also stopped at the grave of the Khoikoi victim of the 'Kleintjie' incident, which can still be seen at the spot where he died. [See Daphne McNeill's article]. We continued to Balfour and thence to Thomas River where Jeff Sansom, owner at the time, gave us a guided tour of this historic village.



The following day we were joined by William Martinson, Chairman of the Border Historical Society, who is extremely knowledgeable about the area. He showed us the fortified Gangers' Cottages (built in 1878), now sadly in ruins.

Left: In the Stutterheim area: what is left of the Gangers' Cottages, built for Irish railway workers and their families
(Photo: Sue Gordon)

We then travelled to the Mgwali Mission Church where William spoke about the mission and particularly the history and architectural background of the church. This was followed by a drive along some rather challenging gravel roads to a bridge on the river Kei, and back to Port Alfred, passing some interesting historic trading stores along the way.