

The Great Waterfall of Meiringspoort



The Great Waterfall

One of the great sites in Meiringspoort is that of the waterfall. About 12 km from De Rust the waterfall is well hidden in a deep ravine. This spectacular fall with water that streams down a 60 meters smooth rock face, ends in a 9 meters deep rock pool. In 1925, when the then Prince of Wales visited South Africa, a pathway with shallow steps was hewn from the rock face for the Royal visitor. The pool with its crystal clear waters is a great attraction to picnickers, swimmers and divers. According to legend, a Jewish pedlar, who frequently travelled by cart and horse through Meiringspoort, always paused to wash himself in the pool at the waterfall.

Late one afternoon, arriving at the outspan, he set off for the waterfall, leaving his animals in the care of his young assistant. The pedlar never returned. The next morning other travellers found the young boy, shivering with cold, but faithfully on guard. They immediately searched the pool and soon found the man's body.

The mermaid of Meiringspoort

Although many stories abound of travellers stranded in the Poort, picnics at New Year or leopards shot and killed, nothing stirs the imagination as much as the story of mermaids in the Poort.

Legend has it that a mermaid lives in Meiringspoort. Her home, they say, is the pool at the bottom of the waterfall half way through the Poort. Unless she's both spoiled and respected by humans, she wreaks havoc with the road they have cut near her home.

And wreak havoc she has. Since the first road was built in 1858 it had been washed away several times. Most years the Groot River trickles gently through the deep gorge, making it a beautiful environment which has attracted visitors and campers for the past 150 years. Before that it was impenetrable. Its caves and ravines home to the San people who had lived there undisturbed for centuries.

Once or twice a decade-sometimes more, sometimes less – heavy rains turn the trickle into a terrifying torrent which becomes impossible to cross, and destroys every touch man's hand has made.

One of the big floods was in 1996. The road was destroyed and repair work impossible. A new road had to be built and other solutions found to compensate for the wrath of the angry mermaid basking in her pool at the waterfall.



After the floods the story spread that the mermaid had gone too far and had also been washed away. Her body, local lore has it, was caught in a net by a fisherman in Mossel

Bay and taken to the CP Nel Museum in Oudtshoorn where she was kept in a tank of spirits.

The museum's curator says staff had a tough time keeping the crowds at bay and the switchboard jammed as people phoned to find out if the story was really true.

To pacify the crowds a doll was given a mermaid's tail and laid in the clock tower where more than 2000 people filed past to see "the mermaid".

Eventually the curator had to phone the police and asked them to ceremoniously take the mermaid back to her home.

As the new road was nearing completion the mermaid, clearly not dead and still angry, struck again. This time "little floods" washed away some of the new road, setting the project back by months and costing millions more to repair.



Nowadays there are nice thatched toilets and an information centre where the weary traveller can stretch their legs, have a picnic or just enjoy the exceptional surroundings Meiringspoort has to offer.

Just make sure you remember the Mermaid!

August, 2022