

"The Story of De Rust "

The Gateway to the Klein Karoo

Introduction: At the southern end of one of the most magnificent passes in South Africa, De Rust is a small village at the gateway to the Klein Karoo, South Africa. It is located at the foot of the Swartberg Mountain Range on the N12 National Road between Oudtshoorn and Beaufort West.

Long before the village of De Rust was established the area with its perennial springs and abundant wildlife had been inhabited by the indigenous San people. Following the movement of settlers inland from the Cape it became a favourite place to "outspan" near a mountain spring and rest before tackling the challenging route through the gorge. Thus De Rust (literally translated as "**The Rest**") was established in 1900 on a portion of the farm belonging to a certain Meiring (more about that later). Today it is a quaint and serene village that boasts a number of historical buildings and various tourism related establishments.

Although it is small, De Rust is a surprisingly convenient travel base. From here you can do all manner of day trips to places like Prince Albert, Oudtshoorn, the Cango Caves, Klaarstroom, the Swartberg Pass, Meiringspoort and beyond. It will also be well worth your while to visit De Rustica Olive Estate, Doornkraal Padstal and 2 Doorn Equine, Excelsior Vlakteplaas, Domein Doornkraal and various walking and cycling trails through the mountains and surrounding farmlands.

So if you would like to have an exceptional experience, stay for at least a couple of nights visiting all the interesting places. In town there are various restaurants, coffee shops and accommodation to choose from and to make your stay a pleasurable one. De Rust is the home of the **Meiringspoort Challenge**, a 19,5 km , 31 km and 61 km mountain bike race and also a 9,5 km and 20 km trial run. This event takes place in the beautiful surroundings and farms around De Rust in May of each year. This is not the only attraction, in October there is the **Meiringspoort 21km and 12,5 km run** that takes place in the beautiful Meiringspoort. This should definitely be on your bucket list. On the 1st Saturday of the month there is the **De Rust Country Market** at the Sunset Caravan Park. Organic vegetables, pancakes, coffee, clothing, books, hand-made crafts, antiques, jams and home smoked bacon are available.

	
Rain Flower on the De Rust Koppie	Tortoise on the De Rust Koppie
	
Acacia Karroo Photo: Alexey Yakovlev	Wild flowers on the De Rust Koppie

De Rust has a special koppie: The habitat of this koppie is completely unique. One can spend a whole day strolling along the koppie and find up to 300 different plant species. Almost one for every day of the year. Currently **Cape Nature** are working with the Oudtshoorn Municipality to have it declared a "protected area". **Also see the section on [Eco-Tourism & Heritage](#) on this website for more detail on the "De Rust Koppie".**

History: Where did it all begin?

In 1765 Johannes H. Schoeman was allocated the farm De Rust "**Aan d' Olyphants Rivier**". This same farm was later in 1775 allocated again to the same J.H Schoeman, 1779 - 1787 and R. Van Jaarsveld in 1787. This farm was probably one of the so called "leningsplase" that was allocated to farmers by the then Colonial authorities. It is safe to say that in the vicinity of De Rust other farms were also allocated but this is the first mention of De Rust as a farm. In all probability, although in the hands of Mr. Van Jaarsveld



in 1809, the farm was already occupied during the latter part of the 18th Century.

After Mr. Van Jaarsveld the farm became the property of Marthinus Bekker who received the transfer of the farm in 1812. He was wealthy, a large property owner.

The well known Petrus Johannes Meiring (Meiringspoort was named after him) came to De Rust with two friends, Marincowitz and Benecke on horseback from Worcester. He got work as Foreman with Marthinus Bekker and when Marthinus died he married the widow Bekker and in 1832 became owner of De Rust and neighbouring farms.



After the widow Bekker died he married Catherina Helena Geldenhuys. They had 10 children. This was the days of the true "Voortrekker" life. The nearest town was George and they had to eke out an existence with transport and livestock. Wild dogs and wolves (probably brown hyenas) were plentiful and predators dangerous. He was however a precise and enterprising farmer.

The so called "bridle path" through Meringspoort was one of his undertakings. With Joseph Anthony he was responsible for the old Watermill and he was also responsible for the road through Blomnek, so named because his nickname was "Blom".



After his death in 1876 the children from the two marriages namely "Widow Bekker and C. H. Geldenhuys" had differences and therefore an auction was held where all of the movables and the farm De Rust west of the Meirings River (Groot River) was rented to a Mr. O.P. Hoole. He became the owner shortly thereafter while the portion east of the river namely Meiringsriver (Varkenskraal) and De Hoop respectively became the property of Maurice Meiring and P.W. de Vos.



The graves of Johannes Jurgens Schoeman who died on 7 August, 1917 and his wife and that of S.D.P. le Roux. These gentlemen purchased the original De Rust Farm on 8 March, 1899 and then obtained permission for the establishment of the town of De Rust on 19 April, 1900.

On the 8th of March 1899 Mr. James A. Foster of Oudtshoorn, instructed by a Mr Hoole, auctioned the farm De Rust and sold it to Johannes Jurgens Schoeman and Stephanus D.P. le Roux. The advert in “Die Oudthoorn Courant” carried the following interesting description of De Rust at that stage:

- “De Plaats, DE RUST, is 1550 morgen, 402 vierkanten roede groot, 100 morgen benat, terwyl groote uitgestrektheid op dit eigendom nog kan bebouwd worden. De Plaats “ De Rust” met haren nimmer ophoudende stroom water is een der beste zoo al niet de allerbeste zaaiplaats in die Zuid Westeliken Distrikten. Zy ligt aan den ingang der Meiringspoort, en uit een commercieel oogpunt beschouwd, zal zy een allerkosbaarst eigendom worden, daar zy voorzeker de verzendingstatie zal worden van al de goederen voor de groote uitgestrektheid lands aan den anderen kant der Meiringspoort”.



Furthermore it was mentioned that on the farm there was a farmhouse (later the house of S. D. P. le Roux), outbuildings, a blacksmith's shop along the highway, a profitable store on the hill next to Kleinen Meiringsriver and a watermill that milled 50 bags of wheat in 24 hours.

This description shows that at the time there was no rumour or talk of the existence of a town. The two owners were however very eager to make De

Rust the centre of a new congregation. No stone was left unturned and already in April 1899 permission was granted for secession from the Church Council in Oudtshoorn, and shortly after that from the Colonial Government to start a new town. Also in the course of 1899 a Mr. Adley, surveyor from Oudtshoorn, surveyed 100 water plots and 200 dry plots. The sale of the plots by auctioneer B. J. Keyter took place on **19 April 1900.** This in effect was the birth date of the youngest town in the Klein Karoo.



Interestingly enough most of the plots were sold on that Friday in the new town De Rust. The water plots were sold for £40 to £85 each, mostly to farmers from around the District. One allotment of 6 plots in the middle of town was set aside for a parsonage, church and Village Square. One of the terms and conditions of sale was that on 24 plots, mainly in the vicinity of the church properties, no sale of wine and stronger liquor was allowed. No entertaining or exercises were allowed without the permission of the Church Council of the Hollandsch Gereformeerde Kerk of De Rust.

In the mean time Maurice Meiring and P.W. de Vos would have liked a share of the development of the new town. In The Oudtshoorn Courant of 30 April

1900 there was an advert of a new town, Meiringspoort East that offered 400 water plots and any number of ordinary plots. In the subsequent advert the water plots were decreased to only 200. The prospective developers also offered the Church Council a plot on which a church had to be built without delay. This whole undertaking failed mainly because no approval was given by the Government but also according to tradition because certain conditions regarding water rights namely that the relevant property could not be subdivided. The two men therefore could not guarantee sufficient water for the town's requirements.

Some Key Dates in the 1900's:

- **November 1906:** Because most of the owners were farmers that stayed on their farms this was the date the first Town Management was constituted. They had to look into roads, water capacity, sanitation and the building of new houses. The house's rooms must be no less than 8ft by 8ft by 8ft and windows no less than 2 by 3 ft.



- **1907:** Property hired for £2 per month was obtained from Mrs. J.J. Schoeman and S.D.P. le Roux for the housing of coloured people where they could build their own houses. This was at the "Ou Lokasie". The

first Management of the Village had their first problems with the relocation of the coloured people when Reverend Blazey from the Independent church in Dysselsdorp, who owned several plots in town, allowed several families to stay in small huts on the property. It was only in 1907 when the Management were able to move the families to "Ou Lokasie" through the strict implementation of building regulations in the Village.

- **1912:** Development speeded up and almost 80 plots were built on. Town Management decided that the boundaries of the town be extended to include a portion of the farms Meiringpoort and De Hoop. Because of reasons not mentioned in the minutes and that could not be explained according to tradition, this effort failed.
- **1949:** Water was still obtained from furrows causing illness and fever. The Village Council started to talk to the owners of the farms to build a dam from which a pipeline could be built. Heavy traffic in the Main Road (now the R12) caused dust problems and in **1949** the Divisional Council of Oudtshoorn assisted with the tarring of the road. No electricity was available at this time.
- **May 1968:** New office buildings were obtained from a new bakery.
- **September 1965:** Water was made available, through a pipeline, 65 years after the founding of the Village.
- **March 1971:** Electricity at last. Only in 1971 was electricity made available.

During the major part of the 1900's De Rust was recognised as an independent Municipal Area with a Mayor, Municipal Council and Member of Parliament. The village developed as a central place for the community to meet. During the late 1800's and early 1900's, before modern highways, travel was both arduous and time consuming, travellers eventually arrived at their destination hot, tired and covered in dust. Thus most journeys involved at least an overnight stay.



De Rust Historical Walk: For more information explore this website including the section on ["The De Rust Historical Walk"](#).

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