

A Brief History of the Farm Bosch Hoek

The farm *Bosch Hoek* is situated in the lovely midlands of Natal amid grass-clad and undulating, timbered hills which are often shrouded in mist. In the old days, many of these hills were covered in bush which also grew abundantly along the banks of the numerous streams, flowing through fertile acres and cascading over rocks to form waterfalls. These natural features of the countryside, which teemed with wild life, were reflected in the descriptive names which the first white settlers, the Voortrekkers, gave to their farms. One such name which has survived in its original Dutch form, is *Bosch Hoek*, meaning 'bush corner'.

There were several *Bosch Hoeks* in the County of Pietermaritzburg. The subject of this historical sketch is situated about 38 kilometres from Pietermaritzburg, 29 kilometres north of Howick, and about eight kilometres from Balgowan railway station, near Michaelhouse school.

Bosch Hoek is distinguished from its namesakes on old title deeds by the qualifying phrase, 'near Houtbosch Rand'. Today, it is simply 'Balgowan, district Lions River'. These names are evocative of the early history and colourful personalities who lived in the district. As one travels along the national road today in either direction, the turn-off to Curry's Post leads to the road which passes the main gate to the farm. Curry's Post was the first centre in the district and was named after Sergeant-Major George Curry, who had retired from the local garrison. Here at Houtbosch Rand, on the side of the road, he established a staging post. It also boasted two hotels, a blacksmith's shop and a few stores. Curry's Post retained its central position until the main Durban-Johannesburg road was relocated and the railway station erected at Balgowan. The latter was named after a village in Scotland by a certain James Ellis. He and his brother-in-law, John King, were the first British settlers in the area, and they and their descendants were well-respected Natalians. The last lion in the district was shot in 1856 near Lions River. Near *Bosch Hoek* and Balgowan, is the Nottingham Road area which took its name from Fort Nottingham. The latter was one of the military outposts established in the 1850s by the 45th (Nottinghamshire) Regiment to curb Bushman raids on isolated farms.

Bosch Hoek was among the Voortrekker claims to be settled in the early 1850s. It was granted on perpetual quitrent to Jan Abraham (Abram) Naudé and Lucas Cornelis Jansen van Vuuren on 1 October, 1852. There is no record of an earlier title deed having been issued or a claim filed by either or both these gentlemen. Neither is it known what their exact relationship was, although they may have been related by marriage. Their claim clearly fell

into Class 1, as defined by Commissioner Cloete, that is, 6 000 acres. They were, however, granted 5 863 acres, slightly more than the average grant of 5 675 acres which was the standard in the County of Pietermaritzburg. The original grant, no. 1219, describes *Bosch Hoek* as 'situate on a stream flowing into the river Umgeni, in the division of Pietermaritzburg, district Natal'. As Natal was still a dependency of the Cape, it was regarded as a district within the settlement of the Cape of Good Hope. The name *Bosch Hoek* appears on the grant, but it is not clear whether it originated with Naudé and van Vuuren or an earlier owner. The name was not uncommon and would have been descriptive of the natural features of the farm.

There were several conditions attached to the grant. Firstly, it was subject to the payment of an annual quitrent of £2.18s.8d which was by no means the highest levy on a farm of this size. Secondly, the grantees had to undertake ' . . . to have the boundaries properly traced out, and the land brought into such a state of cultivation as it is capable of . . .' The average cost of surveying a piece of ground in those days was estimated at £11.10s, which had to be paid by the grantee. No grants were registered until the survey had been completed. The surveyor's diagram of *Bosch Hoek* is dated August 27th 1850, and bears the interesting annotation, 'Copied by me, Alfred Watts, Government Draughtsman'. His map of the Colony of Natal (1855), on which *Bosch Hoek* appears, has become a rare item of Africana.

Bosch Hoek is depicted on the survey diagram as being seven-sided. It is described as bounded on the north-east by Lot 68 and 69, south-east by the farm *Geelhout Boom* and south-west by the farms *Bosch Fontein* and *Wilde Als Spruit*, and west by Lots 70 and 72.

One does not know to what extent Naudé and van Vuuren cultivated the farm, but they would have had to clear the ground of bush before ploughing. The land was suitable for crops of Indian corn, wheat, oats and turnips. Like most Voortrekkers, they probably owned a small herd of cattle and a flock of sheep. Jackals and wild dogs were, however, a menace to the farmer's livestock in those days, as were marauding Bushmen.

It was customary, at the time, for farmers to make the journey to Pietermaritzburg roughly every six months to barter their produce for supplies of groceries and other provisions. The wool clip, which was sold in the spring, was worth about fourpence per pound. Cheese and butter, which had been made during the summer months, was sold in the autumn. If the potato crop had been good, it would sell for three shillings a sack. The farmers would have supplemented their food supplies by hunting and the skins of the animals would also have been put to good use. The twice-yearly visits to Pietermaritzburg provided the only opportunity for social intercourse for these farmers who were almost completely isolated on their farms.

Their living conditions would have been rather primitive and the dwellings unpretentious. Not for them the elegant Cape Dutch gabled homesteads of the affluent Western Province farmers. The majority of the Voortrekkers were from the Eastern Cape where they had pursued a simple life-style. They lived initially in their wagons or tents, sometimes erecting a few rondavels (thatched huts) which served as kitchens or storerooms. Their first houses, known as the *hartebeeshuisies*, were built of sticks and reeds and plastered with clay and cow-dung. Their furniture was simple. In the *Cape Monthly Magazine* series, "Life at Natal", by a Lady (in reality the youthful

Sir John Robinson) is a description of a visit to a Boer farm in April 1865.

The farmstead consisted of a low, stone, one-storey house with small windows, and a double door in the centre, a stoep in front, no verandah, a circular enclosure for cattle on one side, a few peach-trees on the other, a brightly-painted wagon drawn up in front, and about ten acres of ploughed land, surrounded by a sod-wall. I am not sure whether there is a stable or not. This represents the whole evidences of habitation and cultivation upon this farm of ten thousand acres. There are, of course, some fine cattle and a few sheep . . .'

The only light in these houses was provided by home-made candles until 1859 when paraffin came into use. The British settlers initially also lived in wattle-and-daub houses. Whin-stone, quarried in the neighbourhood of Pietermaritzburg was available for stouter dwellings and a poor quality brick which sold for twenty-five shillings per 1 000 in 1850 was being made in Durban. Pantiles, manufactured from clay deposits found to the north of Pietermaritzburg, came on to the market at seven pounds per 1 000 in 1853. Timber, particularly the indigenous yellowwood and sneezewood, was available for construction and furniture manufacture. Several of the British settlers had brought their saw mills and water-wheels with them to Natal.

The way of life of the first owners of *Bosch Hoek* would probably have closely followed the pattern described in the previous paragraphs. A third condition which their grant imposed on Naudé and van Vuuren was 'that the land hereby granted shall not be sold, alienated, mortgaged, or let to hire, at any time before the Fourteenth day of November, one thousand eight hundred and fifty seven, unless there shall have been first paid to the Treasurer-General the sum of one penny per acre, upon the same, or such part thereof as shall be so sold, alienated, mortgaged, or let to hire . . .' Undeterred by the conditions imposed on the sale of ground before 14 November, 1857, van Vuuren sold half of *Bosch Hoek*, 2 934 acres in extent, to a certain P.J. van der Westhuysen on 19 January, 1857 (T. 15). This portion became known as Lot or Subdivision A of *Bosch Hoek*. Van der Westhuysen's ownership was of short duration and he sold this portion to Jan Abraham Naudé and his new partner, Johan Lambert Wilhelm Brukerhoff on 22 October 1857 (T. 362). Thus, within less than five years of the original grant, *Bosch Hoek* suffered the fate of so many large farms, namely, continuous subdivision and a succession of owners who disposed of the ground almost as fast as they had acquired it.

Our story is concerned with the subsequent fate of the portion known as the Remainder of *Bosch Hoek*, that is, literally the remainder of 2 934 acres of the original grant which Jan Abraham Naudé retained, after Lucas Cornelis Janssen van Vuuren sold off Lot A. Life probably continued normally for Naudé until the 1860s when he seems to have been affected, like so many others, by the severe economic depression which Natal was experiencing. The price of land dropped to half-a-crown per acre, and even lower, and many farmers in the County were forced to surrender their land. In 1868, Naudé mortgaged *Bosch Hoek* to Johannes Stephanus Boshoff for £150. Two years later, on 8 June 1870 (T. 196), it became the property of Edward Way, originally of Great Yeldham, Essex, England. The year of his arrival in Natal is not known, but he was a bachelor of twenty-five when he married a local girl, Gertruida Johanna Erica Landsberg, on 3 December,

1868 in Pietermaritzburg. Five daughters were born of the marriage. His wife died sometime between 1878 and 1881, when he remarried. The notice of his marriage to the widow, Frances Elizabeth Edwardes (née Norman), originally from England, describes him as a widower. His eldest daughter was eleven at the time and the youngest was three years old. The second Mrs Way had one daughter of eight from her previous marriage.

After twenty-two years on *Bosch Hoek*, Way decided to sell off some of his land. One does not know the reason for this decision, but it is possible that he was influenced by the land boom which Natal was experiencing and the rise in the price of land in the early 1890s. This led to the subdivision of many of the original large Voortrekker farms and, in nearly seventy percent of the sales, one pound or more was paid per acre. Subdivision B, known as *Norwood*, was sold to Stephen Thomas Nurden on 12 November 1892 (T. 1139) for £805.18.0d. *Norwood* was 805 acres 3 roods and 20 perches in extent. Way, therefore, realised a pound per acre. This demonstrates the increase in the price of land. The entire farm consisting of 2 934 acres was valued at £1 467 a mere decade or so earlier, according to a valuation roll which has been preserved in the Natal Archives.

If *Norwood* appeared to be a rather small farm, it must be borne in mind that advances in farming techniques and animal husbandry had promoted the creation of smaller units. The majority of 'new' farms, resulting from similar subdivisions, were under 1 000 acres, particularly in the Natal midlands where dairy farming and wattle plantations came into vogue in the 1890s. The quitrent on *Norwood* was apportioned at 8s. 6d. per annum.

After the sale of *Norwood*, Way was left with 2 128 acres and 20 perches which he transferred to his step-daughter's husband, George Hildebrand Burgmann, on 2 September 1902 (T. 2038). The process of subdivision was continued by Burgmann and subsequent owners until 1947, by which time, Naudé's original 2 934 acres had been reduced to 1 668 acres. This portion of the farm, referred to as the Remainder of *Bosch Hoek*, was purchased in 1951 by Mr Charles Sydney ('Punch') Barlow, a Johannesburg businessman and industrialist, from Mrs Ingrid Olga Moller (née van Schwerin).

Barlow, who had previously owned the historic Cape farm, *Vergelegen*, and *Ehlatini* in the Karkloof, enlarged *Bosch Hoek* to form one unit of just over 4 000 acres. Between 1951 and 1968, he judiciously purchased portions of adjacent farms, including subdivisions of *The Wolds*, *Norwood*, *Spencer Farm* (portion of Lot A1 and Lot A of the original *Bosch Hoek*), *Geelhout Boom* and *Dornoch*.

When Punch Barlow purchased *Spencer Farm*, nobody could have foreseen the turn of events which would link the Barlows' business interests with those of a relative of the former owner of the farm. It had belonged to Sir Charles Smith's sister-in-law for over thirty-four years, from 14 March 1912 until her death on 5 December 1946. Mabel Mathilda Smith (née Reynolds), an Australian by birth, was the wife of Sir Charles's brother, Herbert Holdsworth Smith, who predeceased her in May 1933.

In 1980, Barlow Rand, Limited, acquired the influential Durban-based C.G. Smith & Co., Limited, founded by Charles George Smith in 1888. An interesting parallel existed between his early business career and that of Ernest (Billy) Barlow (Punch's father), founder of Thos. Barlow & Sons in Durban in 1902. Both men established one-man businesses which grew from

humble beginnings into powerful companies. Thos. Barlow & Sons developed into the powerful Barlow Rand group of companies, of which Punch Barlow was chairman until his death in June 1979.

Bosch Hoek became an important part of Barlow's life. Determined to create a model farm, his many improvements included the building of dams, which he stocked with trout, and the introduction of modern farming methods. Pig farming became an important part of his operations as well as beef raising, land cultivation and timber, but the indigenous yellowwood trees were preserved. At *Bosch Hoek*, he was transformed into the true farmer, conversant with everything that happened on the farm. He rose early and traversed his land with his managers, recording in detail everything that was happening in a little notebook which he always carried with him. However, *Bosch Hoek* was also a place of relaxation, where he enjoyed playing golf, fishing, and entertaining family and friends.

After Punch Barlow's death in 1979, *Bosch Hoek* became the property of his stepson, Peter Gallo.

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