

# *Pietermaritzburg Gold*

## *The Natal Camp*

### **Reaching for riches**

Gold permeates the dreams of mankind and gold-fever was very characteristic of the nineteenth century colonies. It was certainly true of the early inhabitants of Pietermaritzburg, when many, but disappointingly meagre, deposits were being discovered throughout Natal. When *The Natal Mercury* published a booklet about gold in our region the areas around Mfongosi were typically, but misleadingly, said to be promising. It was at about this time, with a world economy based on gold, that resources of the metal in the world were becoming scarce. There were even moves to supplement the Gold Standard with silver. It was then that the early Natal mining camp on the Witwatersrand was encouraged to work a group of particularly profitable mines, a rich zone, able to feed news of useful profits through to the new Pietermaritzburg Stock Exchange.

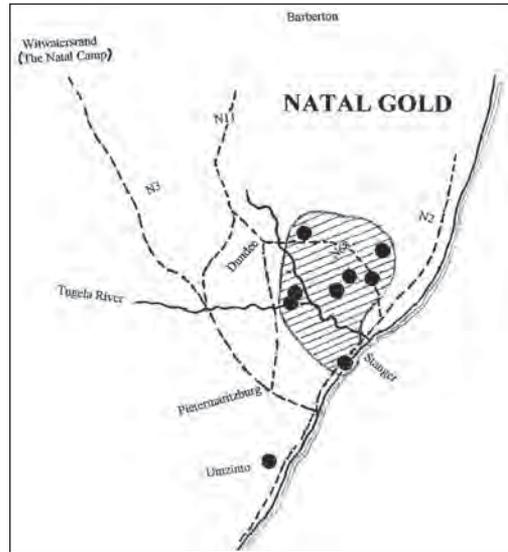
The original Natal Camp was noticeably better ordered than the other rough mining camps of the nascent Johannesburg, and the townships which the Camp spawned subsequently became shopping and social gathering centres for the ordinary residents of the new town. The area to the west of the new railway line began to resemble a suburb of Pietermaritzburg, housing many families of mine workers who had come from Natal. These Natal people in the Camp were to contribute much to the establishment and enrichment of Johannesburg, and continued to provide a labour force when the move into extensive deep-level mining to the south of Johannesburg took place, and the suburbs of Jeppestown and City & Suburban eventually overtook the early camp settlements.

### **Gold mining in Natal**

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, numerous finds of gold were being explored in Natal. They were mostly scattered in the north of the colony, but also at Umzinto in the south, and by 1886, mining ventures were proliferating along the Thukela river, just to the east of the Thukela Ferry area, along the north bank of the river, from the Mfongosi river towards the village of Ngubevu (some 20km to the east of the Greytown-Helpmekeer road), and in the spectacularly rugged gorges, towards where the Buffalo

river joins the Thukela. In November 1868 *The Natal Witness* reported rather vaguely on these discoveries. The resultant euphoria was shortlived but had revived a little by 1890, and today we have only confused records of the ventures.

Apart from the mines around Ngubevu, there were some sixteen other gold-mining ventures in northern Natal. There were companies and syndicates such as the Golden Eagle Mine, where grains of clearly visible gold had been pointed out by a Msinga tribesman at a footpath over the Ngubevu stream. An impressively large nugget was found at a bridge site near to Nondweni (east of Nqutu). Greytown became the focus of enthusiasm. Closer to Pietermaritzburg, the



Inspector of Mines reported that Messrs. Ekstein and Co. drove an adit 200 metres into a reef which had been discovered close to Table Mountain, east of the city.

Gold was found to occur primarily in quartz veins through very ancient slate, initially yielding as much as a very impressive eight ounces per ton of ore crushed. But these early windfall yields decreased. And, as occurred later on the Witwatersrand, the ores at some depth suffered from refractory amalgamation with sulphides (pyrites), such that they yielded up their gold only with great difficulty. By late 1886 the mining facilities provided by as many as 25 companies and syndicates were rather primitive. When gold in the ore they managed to crush was extracted, by allowing it to be taken up in an amalgam with mercury, this amalgam had then to be sent via Pietermaritzburg to Pretoria for the gold to be actually recovered. There were rich pockets which even included patches of visible gold, but disappointingly, by 1887 the yields had diminished and even by 1920 an average of only a single kilogram of gold per year was being recovered in Natal, which compares unfavourably with the 3 000 kilograms a year in the very earliest years of the Witwatersrand. The Natal Mining Company had installed expensive equipment such as a 10-stamp ore-crushing battery in Natal but had to stop operating by 1890 when less than one intermittent ounce per ton was being obtained. Also, by then the Witwatersrand goldfields were absorbing all the willing and available labour. Thus by 1900 the Natal Mining Commissioner had to report that 'the output of Gold in Natal [was] insignificant'. Nevertheless the Wonder Mine situated in what is now the Ithala Game reserve near Louwsberg, was reported to have produced profitable returns during the years between 1908 and 1911 and Nancy Gardiner says that the Golden Dove Mine was in operation as late as 1951. Another mine was in operation near Ngubevu until the 1940s.

The ambitious plans for the developments at Mfongosi were abandoned, along with whatever heavy machinery had been installed. From then on, and into the 20th century, gold mining ventures along the Thukela have been largely restricted to an intermittent and

very dangerous, frequently fatal, ‘pig-rooting’ of tunnels dug by Msinga tribesmen along the river banks. Some gold seems still to be there for the finding in KwaZulu-Natal.

The very ancient geologies in Natal seemed similar to those of the then booming Barberton fields in the Transvaal Republic, and it was largely the relatively poor returns of the Thukela ventures that towards the end of the 1800s precipitated a rush from Natal into the Transvaal. The year 1886 was the momentous one during which the new eldorado of gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand, over large farms, across grass plains that had been occupied by Voortrekker families since the 1850s. In July 1886 *The Natal Mercury* had described these as ‘farms which are nothing more than veritable gold vaults’.

### **The Witwatersrand geology and the discovery of gold reefs**

The Witwatersrand gold reefs had, some unimaginable two thousand million years ago, been deposited, like a filling in a sandwich cake, in a large basin, the edges of which dipped down sharply from a long, somewhat broken east-west line of an intermittently visible outcrop. From early winter in 1886 prospectors were wandering over the bare, treeless veld in an optimistic search for this new and barely understood source of great riches. In the Ferreira’s Camp, the present Ferreirastown in Johannesburg, the stretch of the main reef was visible, outcropping at the surface, and it became the focus of further exploration. Dr Hans Sauer from Kimberley, referred to by his friend Cecil Rhodes as a ‘genial ruffian’, combined a medical practice with prospecting on Rhodes’s behalf. A



*Johannesburg, 1886. (From the photograph album of Max Nicholls, now in the German House Museum, Royal Showgrounds, Pietermaritzburg.) Nicholls’ father, Horace W. Nicholls, was one of Johannesburg’s early photographers. In 1899 he had the Goch Studio in Pritchard Street. He later moved to Pietermaritzburg where he had his studio in a double-storeyed building on the corner of Longmarket (Chief Langalibalele Street) and Fleming streets. Bramhill Building now encompasses the site.*

son of the widow Petronella Oosthuizen (the exploited owner of a farm at Langlaagte out to the west, on which the main gold reefs had first been discovered) guided Dr Sauer hopefully eastwards from the Ferreira's Camp outcrop of the main reef, over a kilometre or two of ground where the main group of gold reefs was hidden, undiscovered, under a layer of red soil. They then found themselves in a dip through which a small, marshy stream (to be named Natal Spruit) had cut its way down from the surface through the overburden of the soil, revealing again the reef where there was a small waterfall over the exposed outcrop of the main reef and its accompanying main-reef leader. Oosthuizen thought then that the country to the east (the whole of the fabulous East Rand) was wild and not worth bothering about, and presumably Dr Sauer accepted her opinion. This was one of the many unsung and momentous blunders of Witwatersrand history associated with that colossus Cecil John Rhodes.

It is also recorded that Frank M. Wolluter from Natal was actively prospecting in the area before 1886.

### **John Charlton's initiative**

Another of the Natal entrepreneurs was John Charlton, a building contractor in Pietermaritzburg. Building operations typified business entrepreneurship in the city at that time, and according to Eric Rosenthal the restlessness of gold-hungry sons in Pietermaritzburg had resulted in at least one family construction business being abandoned. John Charlton, concerned by the Mfongosi disappointments, was during 1886 on his way to explore possibilities, on behalf of a Pietermaritzburg syndicate, in the Barberton area of the eastern Transvaal where impressively payable gold was being mined from very ancient geologies. These geologies, as mentioned, seemed to be remarkably similar to those at Mfongosi. The railway did not reach the central Transvaal until 1895, and Charlton's journey was long and slow, largely by ox-wagon. But according to T.V. Bulpin, he had the good fortune *en route* of falling in with Veld Kornet J.P. Meyer. Meyer had grown up on the *Klipriviersberg* farm just south of Johannesburg and had found himself by default, in the role of a government mining commissioner in the Transvaal Republic. He was busy spreading the word of the new sources of riches on the Witwatersrand.

Dr Sauer had been excited to find confirmation of the existence of the group of gold reefs at the Natal Spruit stream by identifying the presence of a set of the indicative shale and quartzite rocks at Jeppestown, known subsequently as the 'Red bar', underlying the gold strata. Interestingly, Sauer was pre-empting the use during the 1930s of the iron content of these strata below the gold reefs, in locating the fabulous West Rand gold fields. Rhodes was, however, in strangely cautious phase and ignored his friend's find at the Natal Spruit. He was concerned by the relative sparseness of gold returns on the Witwatersrand—perhaps one or two ounces of invisible gold per ton of ore being mined at Ferreira's Camp—whereas in the eastern Transvaal, and even at Mfongosi, patches yielding several ounces to the ton were being found. There were even visible streaks and nuggets, such as were generally not seen on the Witwaterstand. And Rhodes was concerned also that the nature of the Wwatersrand deposits was strangely different to anything elsewhere in the world. He was not then aware that the amazingly extensive and consistent nature of the deposits would more than compensate for their relative

sparseness. The consensus of opinion at that stage was that the discovered outcrop of the Witwatersrand main reef was simply the edge of an essentially narrow, ancient, tilted river bed containing limited alluvial gold deposits. The possibility of an extensive basin of gold reef was not considered.

Despite these doubts, however, and being Cecil John Rhodes, he was not long in climbing back on to the wagon of opportunity.

At about this momentous stage of 1886 John Charlton arrived, explored, and was able to report back to his syndicate in Pietermaritzburg on the presence of 12 'parallel reefs' across the few metres width of the Natal Spruit outcrop, in the area which became the Natal Camp and which is today in Johannesburg's suburb of Jeppestown. These reef outcrops were in fact all simply broken fragments of the fabulous main reef group, exposed (as Dr Hans Sauer had discovered) at the marshy little stream. Following the surge of Natal hopefuls, the area was named the Natal Camp. Charlton's confusion as to the scattered nature of these reef outcrops was perhaps because he was expecting to see something akin to the very ancient, rich and confused geology of the Barberton and Mfongosi deposits.

### **The location of the Natal Camp**

The Natal Spruit had its origins in the (later) Harrow Road gap in Johannesburg before running across the future suburb of Doornfontein into a marshy area at Ellis Park and thence through the present Jeppe dip, before dropping sharply over the strike of the main reef strata outcrop, a few hundred metres north of the present E-W M2 highway (Henry George Harrow was the driver of the first passenger train from Pietermaritzburg to reach Johannesburg). Water was essential to mining and human subsistence, and was a scarce commodity on the Witwatersrand. Therefore, this place being near water and at the visible outcrops, early prospectors gathered in numbers along the banks of the stream (on which a dam was subsequently to be built) and Meyer's Camp came into existence. As mentioned, these pioneers were largely financiers and explorers from Natal, and the camp thus subsequently became known as the Natal Camp. The road to Heidelberg and on to Natal ran from the Camp down from the present End Street at the edge of Jeppestown. Maritzburg Street in present Jeppestown also ran as a track down alongside the spruit, and on to the Heidelberg road. It crosses Durban Street, and runs parallel to Berea Street. Johannesburg's Jules Street was originally named Natal Street.

The area of the Natal Camp was thus just to the north of the present M2 motorway and extended for about 1km eastwards from the present Heidelberg Road-End Street interchange in central Johannesburg. Most dwellings were located to the east of the Natal Spruit, but very little trace of the camp and its mining activity can now be found. There are the low remains of a couple of ore dumps; the canalised route of the Natal Spruit through the Jeppestown dip; scattered mounds of rock at the site of the Meyer & Charlton Mine (on the left bank of the stream) and the City & Suburban Mine (on its right bank); and streets which follow the route of an east-west track which led along the outcrop of the main reef group; and tracks which were the forerunner of the modern Main Reef Road. There are also streets which follow the north-south route of the tracks from the Jeppestown dwellings down to the Meyer & Charlton Mine; and the roads



which came in from Natal. Johannesburg's Main Street developed from a rough track where the present Albert Street led off towards Ferreira's Camp.

**The Maritzburg Stock Exchange**

Eric Rosenthal remarked on the fact that Pietermaritzburg, though then quite a small place, in those times had a stock exchange which ranked in importance just behind Johannesburg and Kimberley. It was established during 1888, opened at 242 Church Street next to the old Presbyterian Church, and was subsequently in Chancery and Change Lanes. The distance to the Transvaal had been bridged since the late 1870s by a telegraph line and in 1881 a postal service using 200 horses was instituted. Then by 1885 the rail link was in place. Later, in 1894 when the railway line from Durban reached the Witwatersrand, in exchange for permission for the line to pass through the Jeppetown Camp area, all passenger trains were obliged to stop at the Jeppetown halt (Johannesburg's first suburban train station).

Said Robert Richards, a Pietermaritzburg attorney: 'Trade is on all sides brisk and the unemployed have disappeared from the streets'. In jovial mood, the *Natal Witness* was pleased to refer to its financial correspondent as its 'Joker-Broker'.

The very early 1880s had seen a transformation into prosperity in Pietermaritzburg following the presence of the military after the 1879 Anglo-Zulu War, but by 1883 stagnation had set in, resulting by 1886 in a severe slump. Then came the Witwatersrand gold bonanza and during 1889 alone Pietermaritzburg floated more than 23 mining companies, compared perhaps to the total by 1887 of 68 at the emerging Johannesburg financial market. One of the Pietermaritzburg companies, incidentally, had failed in one particular mining enterprise, but this had resulted in the establishment of Johannesburg's prestigious Houghton suburb. The Houghton Estate Gold Mining Company of Pietermaritzburg (the Wolhuter Company/Houghton Syndicate) hoped to mine what was referred to as the Randfontein Reef and had reportedly sunk shafts as deep as 400 feet at the foot of Houghton Ridge, to no avail.

The Pietermaritzburg Stock Exchange eventually closed in 1931, at a time when prosperity had vanished.

### **The people of the Natal Camp**

People whose names were to be written into the history of Johannesburg, many of whom would have been Natalians, wandered across the wide, empty veld into the Natal Camp area, during the exceptionally cold winter of 1886.

T.V. Bulpin notes that the young Julius Jeppe from Pretoria, searching across the bare, treeless, winter veld in order to visit his brother Carl, was able from the empty Hillbrow ridge one cold night, to see camp fires in the far distance. One of these turned out to be that of his brother whom he found in the company of Veldkornet Jan Meyer, discussing such matters as the pegging of claims and all-important issues of water rights. Carl's tent was at the site of the reef in the locality of the future Meyer & Charlton Mine, just to the east of the Natal Spruit— its address: Tent No. 1, Reef.

Carl Jeppe (an attorney), H.B. Marshall and Henry Nourse, persuaded Meyer to mark off 200 claims along the reefs, adjacent to the spruit, which in the autumn of 1886 they did in an untutored, somewhat unconventional manner, in the dead of night. It seems that their action led to a near-lynching by a group of other prospectors who felt they had been excluded. In terms of the Transvaal mining laws, claims were each to be 150 feet east to west along the direction of the outcrop, and 400 feet in the southerly direction of the dip of the reef (46 by 122 metres). Any duly licensed prospector was entitled to take possession of any vacant claim on condition that it be mined continuously. The same law did not permit mining underground beyond the boundaries of a claim. With the reef dipping down at sharp angles of about 60 degrees, it subsequently became necessary progressively to extend by pegging further claims in the southerly direction in which the Reefs dipped.

In partnership with Charlton, Meyer was able to establish the very profitable Meyer & Charlton Mine at the Natal Camp, which was subsequently to be described as the 'Jewel of the Rand'. With an estimated life of 13 years— a remarkable figure at the time— it actually continued in existence as a venture for some 40 years and its original head-office was in Pietermaritzburg. John Charlton had come to Natal from Scotland, and had some engineering knowledge, whereas Meyer had recognised a need for technical assistance. Charlton was in fact to be active throughout the Witwatersrand, and became wealthy but ultimately lost his wealth and returned to Pietermaritzburg.

The Jubilee Mining Co. was also floated in Pietermaritzburg in 1886, and in 1887 set up a three-stamp battery alongside the Main Reef at the Natal Spruit. This venture was subsequently enlarged to accommodate a ten-stamp battery. The Wolhuter Mine, to the east of the Meyer & Charlton, was established by Frank M. Wolhuter and it was still operating in 1924. Wolhuter hailed from a cottage in Pietermaritzburg (at the site of today's General Post Office). Thence, via a short financial career on the Kimberley diamond fields, to the Witwatersrand. The Wolhuters were amongst the very first inhabitants on the goldfields and were said to be popular hosts. Their home at the Natal Camp was a meeting place of the leading personalities of the time.

Apart from these people, other (some possibly recognisable as Natalians) settled residents of the original camp were: Mr William McCleod; the butcher Mr Malherbe; C.G. Oosthuizen; Julius Jeppe; George Edward Fawcus; and John George Auret. Mrs Charlton, Mrs McCleod and Mrs Wolhuter accompanied their husbands. In an early tragedy the McCleod's son was one of those who died in the camp, reportedly of the prevalent 'camp fever' (typhus). Julius Jeppe (later Sir Julius) had joined his brother Carl Jeppe and lived in a tent. They were the sons of the prominent Transvaler Julius Jeppe Snr who died in 1893.

Carl Jeppe was subsequently to be the chairman of the Chamber of Mines. H. Griffin (a representative of a Pietermaritzburg syndicate who later became Mayor of Pietermaritzburg) was elected by a camp committee to manage the camp affairs. Mr Alexander William McIntyre, of the Meyer & Charlton Mine, was also a member of this Diggers' Committee.

Other Natal people who had associations with the camp were George Hedley Murray, Bussey (a hotelier, and of the Natal Syndicate), W.J. Scott and T. Yeo Sherwell. These latter two lent their names to the Johannesburg suburb of Yeoville and to Scott Street in Jeppetown. Miners from the Mfongozi goldfields who were to play prominent roles in Johannesburg included Edward Button and H.B. Marshall. Carl Hanau was a director of the Wolhuter Gold Mining Co. He became fabulously rich before descending into poverty. Streets in Jeppetown carry the names of Hanau, Betty Jeppe, the surveyor Auret Pritchard, Albrecht Jeppe, Julius Jeppe, and Thomas Maddison.

A Natalian soccer club was founded by messrs Ridgeway and Harvey.

Other concerned parties in the camp were Col. E.M. Greene from Natal and the very prominent financier Sir Lionel Phillips. George Albu, who held significant control over the rich Meyer & Charlton Mine, was a prominent person. He had come to the Witwatersrand from Berlin, via a trade in diamonds at Kimberley. It was in later years that he founded the powerful General Mining & Finance Corporation. Herman Eckstein (of the Corner House mining giant) became in effect the owner of the Natal Camp's City & Suburban Mine, which had originally been owned by J.P. Meyer, H.B. Marshall and others.

When the ZAR's Mining Commissioner Carl von Brandis visited Johannesburg during 1890, he was presented with a welcoming letter signed by 80 persons from the Natal Camp area. By 1896 an estimated number of 10 000 for the population in the Jeppetown and City & Suburban townships was to be published on the 'Residents and Strangers' plan of Johannesburg. By 1893 there were reported to be over 400 buildings in the vicinity of the Natal Camp.

**Civic structures and authorities**

The original Natal Camp consisted of a scattered collection of tents and rough houses, the latter mostly built of sun-dried mud bricks (known as ‘green Kimberley’ bricks) with thatched roofs. Amongst these houses were those of the Wolhuters (boasting a tennis court) and Julius Jeppe, who had built during the dry Kimberley-like winter of 1886 with raw brick and thatch. His house subsequently collapsed when the rains came in the summer of 1886-87. This lesson led subsequently to the lining of the bricks with corrugated iron. Floors were of the wood from packing cases. Meyer and Marshall occupied tents, Marshall’s being reed-fenced. There were also the Meyer & Charlton Mine buildings — mine offices; the stamp battery; the amalgamator’s quarters; later cyanide works; and the inclined shaft structure of the mine. The City & Suburban Mine had a similar set of structures.

The Natal Camp was decidedly superior in character to Ferreira’s Camp over to the west, which was populated by a somewhat rougher crowd from the mining world of Kimberley. The Natal community was largely without its own businesses, or liquor and entertainment outlets, such facilities being accessible about half-an-hour’s walk away, at Ferreira’s Camp and in central Johannesburg. There was from the beginning a valuable suburban community spirit in the Natal Camp and it was noted that lonely, single mineworkers were entertained in the houses of families. It was nevertheless said not to be safe to walk around unarmed at night in the Natal Camp.



*The first house built by the digger community at Johannesburg in about 1887 — was destroyed by the heavy rains of Dec. 1891. The house stood on the City and Suburban Township Lands. (From a painting by the late J.W. George. George was in South Africa by the time of the diamond rush. Two of his paintings, ‘Sorting and washing diamonds at Pniel, 1870’ and ‘The beginning of the Kimberley mine, 1871’ were reproduced in the 1970s for the South African Permanent Building Society’s calendars, as were three Transvaal scenes, viz. Two of the Magaliesberg area (c. 1890) and a work depicting the cottage where Dr L.S. Jameson and his officers were incarcerated in 1896.) From the Thomas O’Byrne collection.*

Authority in the Natal Camp was originally given to an elected Committee of Diggers pending the appointment of an official 'Sanitary Board'. This latter had the authority to lay down rules such as those forbidding thatched roofs, the emptying of slop water into the streets; the riding of bicycles at speeds exceeding 6 mph, the driving of carts, carriages and wagons in a 'furious' manner, etc. Property rates were set at 1% of valuations.

By 1890 the Jeppetown suburb had been established across the area of the camp, providing all facilities necessary to serve the mines of the eastern region. e.g. the Grand Station Hotel in Main Street, incorporating Norman's Grill which was still a well-known restaurant until the mid 20th Century. McIntyre Street ran down from Jeppetown to the Meyer & Charlton Mine area.

The Johannesburg suburb of Wolhuter was established adjacent to the Natal Camp (and Jeppetown) during 1895, and by 1898 a horse-tram (and later electric) service ran between Market Square in Johannesburg and a terminus at Wolhuter. This form of transport earned a Johannesburg music-hall commendation:

Ag this is the place for me, Jannisburg  
Where the likerish lights always shine,  
And the ricky-tickey trams run by Jeppe  
And the mine hooters tells me the time.

Despite recommendations during 1962 for the urban renewal of the area, the buildings lining the streets of Jeppetown are now (2007) somewhat derelict, but are nevertheless the oldest extant commercial premises in Johannesburg. These shops and other facilities served the needs of the Natal miners and also of the upper-class households being established to the east beyond the railway line.

The route of the original local railway (known as the Rand Tram) through Jeppetown was established in 1890 to carry coal from deposits near Boksburg to a coalyard for the mines at Jeppetown. Main Street in Jeppetown subsequently crossed this railway line via a subway.

The whole of the Natal Camp area was declared to be a mining-freehold area, over the Doornfontein Mijnpacht owned by F.J.Bezuidenhout, the Bezuidenhout family having owned the farm *Doornfontein* since the early 1850s. This farm became the whole eastern side of early Johannesburg.

In later years, when the City & Suburban suburb streets were laid out around the Natal Camp, the upper part of the Camp area was declared to be a public park named the Portplein (also known as C&S Square), fenced as part of the City & Suburban township in 1895. It has since been built over. John Charlton was instrumental in establishing this township after 1889. The present City & Suburban industrial stands were not added until 1929. Another park, Gilfillan, was established below the railway line, above the Wolhuter Mine, apparently on the site of Wolhuter's original house and tennis court. At the lower end of the central park a dam was built across the Natal Spruit.

With the location and nature of the urban stands, the gold deposits were becoming refractory with depth and were judged to be tightly and irretrievably bound into pyrites. Thus it was deemed that there was no assurance that they could be payably mined for longer than about another five years. Consequently the stands and streets were designed to be temporary and economically small, and little provision was made for public space. This latter lack was soon rectified by the residents who fenced off an area to become

the Portplein referred to above. There was also an open area to the west of the camp, adjacent to Greene Street (named after Edward Mackenzie Greene of Pietermaritzburg, later to be the Minister of Railways and Harbours) which was used for such excitements as sports, balloon flights and visits by a circus.

Horse racing had since the 1850s been important in Pietermaritzburg life and it was not surprising that a race course was set up in the Natal Camp, complete with a small grandstand, near the Wolhuters' tennis court. This was up towards the railway line, where a small park was subsequently included in the layout of the Jeppetown suburb. A Pietermaritzburg man Alexander William McIntyre of the Diggers' Committee was prominent in this racing venture and it is recorded that a Dr Rosenthal organised a race and sports meeting here during late 1886. This Natal-inspired racing initiative was later moved to its current location at Turffontein.

What of the view from far-off Pietermaritzburg? People thought of all those 'tin shacks with golden cellars', and of the facilities where small armies of labourers were housed and fed in rough compounds, where mining was hard, debilitating and dangerous. The poet William Plomer wrote:

Perhaps it was a fall of rock. Two miners trapped  
Up to the waist in dirty water. All the care  
That went to keep them fit!  
Concrete bathrooms and carbolic soap  
A balanced diet and free hospitals  
Made them efficient, but they die alone,  
Half stunned, then drowned.  
They might have lived on in the sun  
With miner's phthisis, silicosis  
A gradual petrification of the lungs.

### **Mining methods**

Outcrop mining of the reef at the Meyer & Charlton and the City & Suburban Mines was initially accomplished by means of shallow trenching along the outcrops of the reef, but by 1887 inclined shafts were being driven down southwards into the sloping plane of the reef and the reef ore was being scooped out ('stoped') from either side, to the east and west of the shaft, and lifted to the surface by manual winching from a platform. By the end of 1886 the Meyer & Charlton shaft had reached down 20 metres, and by the end of 1887 had reached some 200 metres. But as the reefs continued to dip away beyond these depths it became impractical to follow them in this way, and deep vertical shafts were commenced a kilometre or two to the south, such that the Natal Camp mines spawned the vast City Deep deep-mining complex. Expensive machinery, the fact that any actual gold recovery had to await the completion of the shafts, and the costs of processing the refractory ores obtained at these depths, demanded large capital investment. This effectively removed the roles of the modest mining companies of Pietermaritzburg into the hands of the amalgamating giants which were emerging in Johannesburg. The financier George Albu had a hand in initiating these expansive ventures when the City & Suburban Mine achieved an early distinction by installing a fifty-stamp ore-crushing battery. This was necessary because, in order to extract the



1886—Surface workings on the reef. (From the photograph album of Max Nicholls.)

gold, the ore first had to be crushed into a very fine powder. In the early days of the Natal Camp, and until the ores at depth became refractory, the affinity of mercury for gold was effectively used to lift the ore out of the crushings.

At the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902, the Meyer & Charlton and City & Suburban Mines were not among those few mines which the Boers allowed to continue production, probably because they were suspected of having Natalian, imperialist sympathies. They were not even allowed to prevent the inevitable destructive flooding of their workings. When on 31 May 1900 General Lord Roberts led the central column of his conquering army through from Elandsfontein (Germiston) into Johannesburg, they passed a dismally empty Natal Camp. The mines had closed, the population had fled, and gold production had dropped to 2% of pre-war levels. Nevertheless they were able to reopen after the war, with a champagne bottle broken against the stamp batteries and an address by Sir George Albu.

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1886—One of the first pithead gears on the reef. (From the photograph album of Max Nicholls.)

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