

Arniston / Waenhuiskrans (by SJ du Toit)

Contributed by SJ du Toit

(Waenhuiskrans - Wagon house cave) Driving south from Bredasdorp, the road of 24 km runs into Waenhuiskrans, originally known as "Holkrantz" (hollow cave). Wagenhuiz Kranz originated from the size of the cave, where people believed a wagon and span of oxen could turn.

Eventually it evolved into Waenhuiskrans. One of the biggest shipping tragedies took place here in 1815, when the troopship Arniston carrying a large number of sick men en route from Ceylon to England, went down and 372 lives were lost. Only six men survived. The parents of four children who died in the wreck, placed a memorial stone at the scene of the tragedy. This memorial was later moved to a place near the beach and the village also became known as Arniston.

The fishing hamlet on the outskirts of the village is called Kassiesbaai (kassie = wooden box). Legend has it that lots of paraffin boxes washed up on the beach in earlier years. Residents built homes from these boxes and plastered them over with clay. Roofs were made of thatch. In later years, fishermen used sandstone for building. In 1975, a group of Capetonians started the "Save Arniston" project and they helped to restore these houses. Kassiesbaai, which was declared a National Monument, is very popular with artists and photographers.

Near Waenhuiskrans is the Struispunt beacon which was built at the beginning of the 1900s. It has a sandstone base with a huge bronze ball on top. This beacon serves as extra warning for ships and was built after the luxury liner Queen of the Thames was wrecked on her maiden voyage. Visitors often walk to the beacon, five kilometres south of the village. When Waenhuiskrans was established in 1905, the fishing community applied for the protection of their fishing rights. This led to a 200 foot (66 metre) red line above the high water mark being registered. This unique servitude is still valid.

The popular Arniston Hotel, an art gallery and crafters' centre are some of the attractions for holiday makers and residents. The quaint fishermen's cottages are much photographed. The Post Office considers Waenhuiskrans as the correct name for the village although Arniston is accepted as a de facto alternative owing to the widespread use.

This story was originally published in "The Overberg - Historical Anecdotes", written by SJ du Toit. The book is available from bookshops and tourism bureaux in the Overberg or from the author:

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