Caledon - Town of the hot springs

Contributed by S.J. Du Toit

Legend has it that the earth shares its healing power with mankind by letting hot water bubble up through earth’s crust. Hot springs still give relief to many ailments today.

Thousands of years ago, the hot spring in the Overberg was used by the indigenous people living in the area. When the Dutch explorers first discovered the Overberg in 1694, they found the hot spring and its healing waters. The establishment of the town of Caledon was directly connected with the hot spring which gave much relief and healing to travellers over the following three centuries. The earliest European farmer living at the hot spring, and caring for guests was Ferdinandes Appel.

He moved to the small farm with his family and built a guest house at “badshoogte” (the hill at the spring). Commissioner Cnoll was the first known European who visited the Cape, stayed at the bath and had amazing relief from asthma.An entire century slipped by after Appel’s stay on the little farm before the town was established. Four farmers, Wessel Wessels, Philippus de Bruyn, Johannes Marais and Hans Swart requested the government to build a drostdy (landdros or magistrate’s residence) and a church.

The Dutch Reformed church was built in 1813 and 17 plots surveyed in Mill and Church Streets. The new town was known as Klein Zwarte Berg (Little black mountain), and in 1813 was named Caledon in honour of the British Governor at the time, the Earl of Caledon. The village grew very slowly in the beginning.
It was only in 1930 with the development of sheep farming and especially with the introduction of the merino sheep that Caledon developed. Municipal status came in 1840. The hot spring flourished after 1805 when Dr Haezsner came. He constructed new buildings and helped many with diseases who came for hot water therapy. After his death in 1821, various tenants took over, but with little growth or success.

The Walsh family bought the springs in 1897 and developed it to international reputation. The bath hotel and sanatorium attracted many visitors. Unfortunately the whole complex burnt down in 1946. After that, chalets and a caravan park developed, until 1990, when the new Overberg Hotel was built. Today the new spa and casino at the hotel is redolent of the earlier glory days of the old hot baths.

Caledon is a tranquil town with approximately 9000 residents. It has an extensive agricultural region with products like wheat, barley, canola, onions, wool, wine, fruit, etcetera. The town has a large number of historical houses and buildings, especially from the Victorian era. These are mostly beautifully restored, lending a special character to Caledon.
The town offers many services, sporting amenities, well-known schools, the famous veld flower shows and tourism. The little village that sprung up around the hot springs has developed over 200 years into a leader in many fields. Caledon is also famous for one of the oldest and most interesting botanical gardens in die Western Cape.

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