Historical Festivals

Flipping through the annals of Overberg festivals, one is amazed at the influence and cultural impact they have had in the region. The person who had a strong drive in this was a hardworking farmer from the Farm Karsrivier in the Bredasdorp district — Hercules Wessels.

In 1988 the tricentennial celebration of the arrival of the Huguenots in South Africa was held country-wide. In the Overberg it started with the historical trek across the Gantau. This alone was a mammoth task. The terrain had to be cleared, and with this the Voortrekker youth movement lent a hand. The animals and wagons had to be transported in big trucks to the starting point and over tarred roads between towns, and from the final destinations back to the farms.

The home of Dr Con de Villiers, native of the Overberg and Huguenot descendant, was the focus point of the Overberg festival. Each town took part in festivities as the procession of wagons and carts travelled through. The farmstead on Dunghye Park was quite dilapidated and the Caledon-Riviersonderend Co-operative (CRK) undertook the restoration. The trekkers’ route included Grabouw, Vyeboom, Greyton, Soetmelksvlei and ended at Dunghyepark where a large group of people awaited the festival procession.

Incorporated in the Huguenot Festival, Overbergers also celebrated the Great Trek, 150 years before. The Dirkie Uys wagon which was used in the Great Trek centenary in 1938, was again used in the three month trek north, with Hercules and Elza Wessels as trek leaders. They reached Pretoria in December where the main commemorative festival took place at the Voortrekker Monument on 16 December 1988.