Struisbaai

Walking along the endless stretch of snow-white sand at Struisbaai, it is difficult to imagine its history. There is a legend that the name Struisbaai comes from a Dutch word meaning “big”. However, according to historian Jose Burman, the name Vogelstruisbaai has been in use since 1673. The bay stretches from Struis Point near Waenhuiskrans (Arniston) to Northumberland, 6 km from Agulhas. The first Dutch or Portuguese sailors who visited these shores must have encountered some ostriches.

The fishing community, whose members lived for many years at Hotagterklip, gradually became part of the town of Struisbaai. At the entrance to the town, there are some restored fisherman’s cottages that have been declared national monuments. Hotagterklip (left-hind stone) originates from the ox-wagon era. If there happened to be a stone embedded in the middle of the road, the left-hind ox had to pull very hard to get the wagon-pole to pass to the left of the stone.

Struisbaai used to be a primitive camping area where people came to make merry under the milkwood trees, to swim in the sea and to angle from the rocks. Before 1950, the only buildings were a boarding house and a small shop. Holiday homes were only built after 1950. The Coloured settlement grew as the camping site expanded. Some of the Coloured people came from Spitskop to settle at Struisbaai after the former had been declared a nature reserve. With the arrival of running water, a motel and some rondavels, development attained momentum, especially after Struisbaai had been declared a town,. The safe swimming beach and the 24 km stretch of rockless sandy beach all the way to Waenhuiskrans, contribute greatly to Struisbaai’s popularity.

The Anglican church at Struisbaai has been restored and declared a national monument. Struisbaai has an exceptionally small harbour which was built in 1959 and enlarged and deepened in 1990. After tourism, commercial fishing is the most popular economic activity at Struisbaai. Apparently, dancing has always been the most popular pastime in town – initially dances were held in a dry cement dam and later in the “Shed” which catered for teenagers. At present, dances are held at “Cheers”, which is licensed to sell liquor and where old and young come together.

Struisbaai was hard hit by oil pollution in 1971, when the Liberian oil tanker, Wafra, ran aground. Despite efforts to prevent this happening, the beach between Agulhas and Struisbaai was badly polluted by oil. The ship was eventually towed 170 sea miles out to sea, where she was bombarded by the Air Force. Her cargo blazed for days before she finally sank. In 1974, another oil tanker, the Oriental Pioneer, ran aground at Struisbaai.